

47. Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara¹

JCSM-226-68

Washington, April 10, 1968.

SUBJECT

Proposal for a Joint US Military Facility on Diego Garcia (U)

1. (S) Reference is made to:

a. JCSM-420-67, dated 25 July 1967, subject: "Proposed Naval Facility on Diego Garcia (S),"² which recommended funding the first increment of construction (\$13 million) in the FY 1969 Defense Military Construction Budget.

b. A memorandum by the Secretary of Defense, dated 27 October 1967, subject: "Austere Support Facility on Diego Garcia (S),"³ which deferred approval of a recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to construct a naval facility on Diego Garcia. The memorandum, however, did contain a provision for reconsideration of the proposal after a firm understanding had been reached with the British on Aldabra.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 73 A 1250, Indian Ocean 323.3, 10 Apr. 68. Secret. The memorandum indicates that McNamara saw it.

² Document 45.

³ Document 46.

c. American Embassy, London, message 3989, dated 18 November 1967 (JCS IN 24820),⁴ which advised that: (1) the present state of Britain's financial condition had made it clear that the United Kingdom would be unable to go ahead with the Aldabra project; and (2) the British intend to remain in the Far East and the Persian Gulf, though there might be adjustments in the phasing of the UK force reequipment.

d. American Embassy, London, message 5577, dated 16 January 1968 (JCS IN 40259),⁵ which reported Prime Minister Wilson's announcement to withdraw UK forces from the Far East and Persian Gulf by the end of 1971.

e. A memorandum by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, dated 15 February 1968, subject: "Determination of U.S. Overseas Military Base Requirements,"⁶ which directed that a special State-Defense study on overseas military base requirements for the period of the next decade be conducted for completion by 15 December 1968.

2. (S) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reexamined the political situation and strategic requirements in the Indian Ocean area against the background of events evolving from the Arab/Israeli war and the UK decision to accelerate withdrawal from east of Suez. At the time of the decision made in reference 1a, the prospects for a limited but effective British presence in the Indian Ocean appeared excellent. Now, however, the British financial condition and the attendant retrenchment offer little probability of future UK participation in the development or manning of any joint US/UK Indian Ocean facility. The combination of circumstances emphasizes the necessity for reappraisal of US opportunities, responsibilities, and interests in the Indian Ocean area.

3. (S) The UK presence in the Indian Ocean area throughout the years has tended to stabilize the region and constrain internal strife. The accelerated British withdrawal east of Suez will create a power vacuum which has the potential to generate situations inimical to US national interests and long-range security. The Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic (CPR) can be expected to capitalize on the opportunities made available through the British withdrawal. The large number of newly independent nations of Africa and Asia, many with unstable governments and underdeveloped economies, generates political and economic tensions which facilitate Soviet/CPR penetration.

4. (S) The Soviets historically have sought to extend their domination over the neighboring nations to the south and long have coveted

the natural resources of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean littoral. Through military assistance, various forms of political, cultural, and economic contact, visits of high officials and military units, and the provision of military hardware, the USSR has recently undertaken a more active and direct presence in the Indian Ocean area. Predominance over the natural resources of the Indian Ocean area or dominating influence over the governments of the surrounding land areas by the USSR could have a serious impact on the economic and strategic positions of the United States and its allies.

5. (S) The Chinese have traditionally exerted strong influence in Southeast Asia, and Peiping now appears bent on restoring such a position. In Africa, the Chinese communists will probably continue to concentrate on establishing closer contact with governments such as Tanzania, at the same time supporting certain national liberation movements and engaging in subversive activities against other governments.

6. (S) Expanding Soviet and/or CPR presence in the Indian Ocean area could lead to serious situations in which the interests of the United States and/or its allies would be threatened. In such cases, the United States would probably be required to deploy forces to the area for sustained operations. The ability to support operations which may be required in this area will necessitate more timely, more effective, and, politically, more acceptable measures than currently are feasible.

7. (S) The United States contributes to the security of many nations throughout the area in various ways, including the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, participation in CENTO, and announced policy. In Africa, US objectives include safeguarding of strategic interests and promoting the development of independent nations free of external interference. It is anticipated that the use of regional facilities will be necessary to meet these commitments, yet there is no assurance that former UK military facilities or resources will be available following completion of UK retrenchment or that the use of local national resources will be politically or militarily feasible.

8. (S) A joint US military facility on Diego Garcia would provide the United States with a strategically located and politically insulated logistic support and staging base in the Indian Ocean in consonance with the Strategic Island Concept, previously recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and would serve as a link in an air line of communication in the Southern Hemisphere. The base on Diego Garcia should be an austere military facility capable of supporting limited forces deployed in response to contingency situations and occasional transitors. The central location makes it suitable for support of important functions, such as scientific research, intelligence collection, strategic communications, and strategic ICBM detection and warning. Appendices A and B hereto contain specific data and rationale.

⁴ Telegram 3989 from London, November 18, 1967. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, DEF 1 UK)

⁵ Telegram 5577 from London, January 16. (Ibid.)

⁶ Not printed.

9. (S) The Indian Ocean is a critical, strategic area from which large portions of both the USSR and CPR can be targeted from a submarine. Indian Ocean-based ballistic missile systems could expose targets within a 2,100-nautical mile window along the Soviet southern border to an additional threat. This threat would compound Soviet antiballistic missile defenses and further dilute the Soviet antisubmarine warfare effort.

10. (S) Immediate development of a joint US military facility on Diego Garcia will not in itself prevent the establishment of a Soviet or CPR presence; however, continued delay in construction of the facility, until circumstances demand counteraction, will permit the USSR/CPR to seize the initiative in the area without significant opposition. While the Special State-Defense Study Group is beginning a study of overseas base requirements, which would include consideration of Indian Ocean requirements in a worldwide context, the results and decisions thereon will probably not be available for at least one year. A decision on Diego Garcia should not be deferred awaiting completion of that study.

11. (S) The Joint Chiefs of Staff conclude that the early establishment of a joint US military facility on Diego Garcia is a valid military requirement. Accordingly, they recommend the approval of immediate establishment of a joint US military facility on Diego Garcia. They also recommend that you hold early discussions with the Secretary of State to examine and develop US political and military policy in the Indian Ocean area, with particular reference to the immediate establishment of a joint US military facility on Diego Garcia.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:
John B. McPherson
Major General, USAF
Vice Director, Joint Staff

Handwritten signature: J. B. McPherson