

**THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**  
WASHINGTON

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Honorable Dean Rusk  
Secretary of State  
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Dean:

With reference to your letter of August 17, 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have concluded their study of the feasibility of deployment of a carrier task force in the Indian Ocean, including consideration of alternative means for bringing US military power to bear in the area. Their conclusions are that in light of the relatively lower strategic priority, the current and planned US military activities in the area (see attached exercise schedule) are appropriate to indicate continuing support of US strategic interests in the Indian Ocean area; but intermittent deployment of a carrier task force is feasible if political considerations make this desirable.

The Chiefs feel deployments in this area must be considered in the light of global requirements for maintaining a US military posture adequate to respond to possible contingencies and, additionally, make the following observations:

a. With respect to US national security, the Indian Ocean area continues to hold a strategic priority generally less than the other areas in which our forces are deployed.

b. The military situation which might require the deployment of US forces in the Indian Ocean, such as resumption of Sino-Indian hostilities or an outbreak of hostilities between Pakistan and India, does not require the continuing presence of US forces.

c. Current and planned US military activities beyond those described in the enclosure provide substantial evidence of continuing US interest. These include US affiliations with CENTO, membership in SEATO, US bilateral defense agreements, US military assistance programs, a MIDEASTFOR consisting of a command ship and two destroyers, an Air Force unit deployed in Saudi Arabia, plans for establishment of the Defense Communications System Asian Gateway Station, and others.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider the permanent deployment of a carrier task force to the area inadvisable on the basis of the forced diversion of military capability committed to support of other missions under current force levels combined with the infeasibility of increasing force levels to maintain such a full time deployment.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also have examined your proposal that the carrier group (ESSEX) participating in MIDLINK VI be maintained on station for an extended period of time. It is possible to extend this exercise deployment, but its impact in the area is limited in that the ESSEX is configured for anti-submarine warfare rather than as an attack carrier. It seems preferable not to disturb present planning which involves a similar exercise in 1964.

It is recognized that it may become necessary to increase US military presence in response to specific situations, and in support of specific political objectives. In such instances, the selection of forces to be employed should consider the capabilities of all types of forces in relation to the nature of the requirement. In each instance selection can be made by the Department of Defense from among the following feasible alternatives, collectively or individually:

a. Intermittent deployment of a carrier task force for periods not to exceed one to two months out of each six.

b. Intermittent deployment of selected elements of a Composite Air Strike Force (CASF) as required, consisting of fighter, reconnaissance and troop carrier aircraft.

c. Intermittent deployment of Army airborne forces.

We might, in fact, find that a selective escalation or intermittent deployment of US strength beyond planned exercises might be of greater political value than a carrier permanently assigned. Should political conditions call for increased activity, the Department of Defense can quickly deploy a carrier task force from the western Pacific, or air or army units, or a combination of all three, as conditions then pertaining so indicate.

Sincerely,

Encl.

Planned Jt/Combined  
Exer in or near Indian  
Ocean Area

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