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Research Memorandum

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

RAF-39, August 16, 1965

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *Thomas L. Hughes*

Subject: Political Climate in Islands of the Western Indian Ocean:
Implications for Strategy

Joint US-UK planning for their future needs in the Indian Ocean is taking place amidst the awakening national consciousness of the islanders of that area. This paper examines the evolution of political forces on seven major island clusters and assesses political attitudes towards Western plans.

ABSTRACT

Western Security Plans and Political Change. Joint US-UK planning for the security of the vast region from Southeast Asia to the Arabian peninsula and East Africa envisages the development of certain Indian Ocean island facilities for landing, refueling, communications, and other logistical support purposes. These plans bring the obscure island world of Mauritius, Réunion, the Seychelles, the Comoros, the Maldivé Islands, Zanzibar, and Madagascar into a prominence which most of these remote outcroppings have not enjoyed since the 18th and early 19th centuries. The emergence of nationalist forces in the islands, however, already is complicating Western strategic planning and could significantly limit the projected use of this region.

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Political Vulnerability of the Islands. Viewed in terms of international security, the islands in the Western Indian Ocean have certain common attributes. All, excepting Zanzibar, remain tempting targets for insatiable "liberation" and "anti-neocolonialist" crusades, sometimes with communist sponsorship. Strewn sparsely between the Asian and African land masses, they also represent convenient stepping stones for expansionist-minded powers. Important local Indian and Chinese communities could be manipulated to further the objectives of India and Communist China. Local nationalists have begun actively to seek multiple international ties outside their respective metropolises. Socio-economic inequities provide additional fertile ground for radical exploitation. Moreover, some of the very factors which hinder political consensus within individual islands -- e.g., ethnic diversity, economic feebleness and social rivalries -- also impede the formation of larger, more viable groupings among them.

Wide Disparity in "Emergence." The movement of the several major islands toward independence has been very uneven, and the prevailing attitudes toward the West vary widely.

Madagascar is independent and pro-Western, but its close ties to France, including military arrangements, are subject to attack by opponents of this form of "neo-colonialism and by a communist-infiltrated political opposition. The Tsiranana government, which favors quiet deployment of US-UK naval forces in the area, is apprehensive over the emergence of tiny, weak, and radically disposed nations in its oceanic neighborhood.

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Zanzibar is a case in point for the Malagasy. Rent by inter-communal animosity and communist-influenced, Zanzibar is not only unavailable for Western strategic uses but could influence Tanzania (and possibly other East African) attitudes against us.

The Maldiv Islands became independent on July 26, 1965, but the sultanate is faced with dissident agitation. The UK air base at Gan has been guaranteed under the independence agreement with the Maldivian Government, but the base is to be restricted to Commonwealth defense purposes and does not form part of the joint US-UK strategic complex.

Mauritius, despite UK encouragement toward independence in the immediate future, is an increasingly turbulent battleground. Although commanding a virtual majority of the population, the independence drive of the economically depressed Hindu community is bitterly fought by various minority groups seeking some stabilization of the status quo which will guarantee their vested interests.¹ Detachment of the remote Chagos archipelago from Mauritian administration for use as a naval technical facility will probably prevent neutralist-minded nationalists from blocking US-UK strategic plans, but at the cost of furnishing ammunition for radicals in Mauritius.

The Comoro Islands remain a retarded dependency of France, subject to intensified exile nationalist campaigns. This agitation, apparently aided by Egyptian and communist sources, could spread to neighboring Madagascar and Portuguese Mozambique and could pose some security problems for France.

1. See RAF-40 for a detailed discussion of the implications of Mauritius' approach toward independence.

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The Seychelles remain behind the other islands in political development despite signs of political awakening -- some of them induced by US and UK military, technological, and aid activity.

Réunion is an Overseas Department of Metropolitan France, but administrative integration, although accepted by most Reunionnais, has manifestly not eased the island's grave economic and social problems. An active Communist Party exploits this malaise, and recent riots had to be suppressed by French paratroop intervention.

Policy Implications for the US

Given the economic and political weaknesses of these islands, present day leaders who accept the establishment of Western military and technical facilities on their territory may thereby run the risk of providing radical and neutralist elements with an issue they can exploit in challenging the existing leadership. US-UK Indian Ocean strategy is being portrayed by hostile and militantly nationalist elements as an attempt to compromise local "non-alignment" policies. This campaign of distortion will intensify as our presence becomes more immediate; specters of "atomic peril" will also continue to be raised in hopes of stimulating popular resentment against our projects. This vulnerability probably cannot be entirely eliminated. The impact of such charges might be reduced, however, by encouraging understanding of the benefits which certain countries would obtain from our naval presence. For example, Madagascar might gain some reassurance against Chinese Communist expansionism. Both Kenya and Madagascar might find a Western military presence

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relevant to their internal security preoccupations. The same could well be true of minority groups on the Indian Ocean islands themselves (e.g., Moslems on Mauritius).

Those agitating the issue of Western presence will have the support of Moscow and Peiping, whose main aim in this area appears to be mobilization of popular sentiment against our strategic presence. The communists already have several footholds -- notably in Zanzibar, but also in the opposition parties of Madagascar, Réunion, the Comoros, and the Seychelles. The foundation is being laid for a communist presence in Mauritius and the Maldives as well. (Soviet delegates in the UN Committee of Twenty-Four began denouncing US-UK "rocket-base" plans for Mauritius and the Seychelles as early as April 1964.)

Responsibility for the economic and social development of these islands clearly rests with the French and the British; their resources, however, and indeed their motivation, may prove unequal to the task. Consequently, the US may ultimately have to provide greater economic and cultural assistance than now envisaged in order to ensure its own interests. This contingency could become particularly pressing if our important NASA and Defense tracking stations in the Republic of South Africa become politically untenable, either through continued South African harassment on racial issues or as a result of domestic or African pressures on the US. (Our NASA tracking facilities in Zanzibar were transferred to Madagascar after the radical Zanzibar revolution of January 1964.) Any significant expansion of our Indian Ocean facilities beyond present needs might require

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considerably greater collaboration from host governments (e.g., in Madagascar and Mauritius themselves) than now envisaged, thus possibly raising the political and economic asking price. A more remote contingency could raise similar problems if, like the US in Ceylon, we had to decide to transfer at least part of our present military facilities from Libya, or communications equipment from Ethiopia, to positions in the Indian Ocean.

The role of France in the development of Indian Ocean strategy is probably incalculable at this time, as are ultimate French intentions regarding Réunion, the Comoros, French Somaliland, and in a sense, Madagascar. France has acknowledged interests even in Mauritius and the Seychelles, where it maintains resident consulates. The congruence of basic Anglo-US objectives and current French interests in the area might provide grounds either for active cooperation from Paris, or at least a modus vivendi guaranteeing non-interference.

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Evolving Strategic Importance of the Area

Consigned to colonial obscurity for decades by 19th and early 20th century innovations in transport technology, the scattered islands of the Western Indian Ocean are at present being awakened to change through new political as well as scientific stimulation. Military strategy and space science, together with developments on bordering continents, have caused the outside world to begin to take interest in this oceanic backwater and its principal island outcroppings of Zanzibar, Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion, the Seychelles, Comoros, and the Maldivé archipelago (see map).

The Indian Ocean islands were once strategically important beads on the string of commerce between Western Europe and the Far East. This was especially true in the 18th and 19th centuries, when "control of the seas" was essential for trading nations like Great Britain and France, and revictualling, refitting, coaling and shelter stations were the keys to maritime dominance. Technological innovation and the relative security of European imperial interests in the Western Indian Ocean were responsible for the decline in the islands' strategic importance. Political change, which has brought with it fundamental transformations in the Western military position east of Suez, has now revived the strategic significance of the islands. The rise of nationalist movements and the waning of European dominance in Africa and Asia ended the secure imperial situation. Military overflight and landing rights in most of North and East Africa as well as the Near East are now difficult or impossible to obtain. Neutralism and non-alignment have precluded even provisional use of most erstwhile bases. Moreover, political instability has rendered a number of states problematical as staging areas for the West.

Concomitantly, the growth of communist influence among the new nations and the breakdown of the postwar US-Soviet bipolarization of world power, have posed new issues and challenges. The eruption of conflict in Southeast Asia and on the borders of India, the communist -- especially Chinese Communist -- presence in Tanganyika and Zanzibar, and the potential for communist mischief among African groups seeking the "liberation" of southern Africa have given the Western Indian Ocean a new importance. The US and UK, in particular, are faced with a need for secure access to this intermediary region between Africa and Asia, as a zone where Western aircraft may land, naval vessels may refuel, and bases may be established for logistics and communications support. What had been an oceanic void is becoming a potentially valuable and far flung theater of operations necessary for the rapid deployment of Western forces in the event of crises in Eastern Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, or the fringes of the Asian mainland.

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US-UK Regional Planning

Current US-UK planning calls for the introduction of Western naval and air power into the region between East Africa and the Philippines on a regular basis. Given an adequate level of local political acceptance for our increased presence, an Indian Ocean naval force with air support and a network of island bases could play the traditional peace-keeping role assured from the late 18th century to the outbreak of World War II by the Royal Navy based in India. Inserted into an already volatile situation marked by inveterate conflicts in Southeast Asia, Malaysia, and the borders of India, this role is transformed today into a mission of deterrence, of goodwill, and of containment. Its importance is emphasized both by the emergence of Communist China as a major Afro-Asian power and by the inherent problems of stability in Eastern Africa, which tend to draw in outside forces.

Communications, refueling, and other technical needs are to be met according to present planning, by the location of small stations on a number of UK-held islands. These include Diego Garcia, a 13-mile-long atoll in the Chagos Archipelago, approximately halfway between Ceylon and Mauritius and now under the administrative jurisdiction of the latter. In order to reduce the political problems contingent on an eventual grant of sovereignty to Mauritius (including possible revocation of base rights by an independent Mauritius government), the UK intends shortly to detach the Chagos group from Mauritius, resettle its tiny "population" of migrant Seychellois plantation workers, and place it under direct British administration. A similar administrative measure is to be applied to the Aldabra Islands, now at the southwestern point of the Seychelles group, for eventual development as a UK air base. Thus, in the near future, US-UK security and/or technical facilities in the Indian Ocean will comprise:

1. Communications and some supporting logistical facilities on Diego Garcia, constructed at US expense and operated with the collaboration of the UK;
2. Air staging facilities maintained by the British on the Aldabra Islands;
3. Another staging post in the Cocos/Keeling islands, Australian possessions situated due south of Sumatra (Indonesia);
4. The US Air Force missile tracking station already mounted on Mahé, the principal island of the Seychelles group;
5. An important non-military NASA tracking station now functioning at Tananarive, Madagascar, by agreement with the Malagasy Government;

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In addition, there are or may be an array of undertakings in support of: space science (search and recovery detachments have been stationed on Mauritius under the NASA Gemini project); oceanographic and meteorological exploration (US Weather Bureau vessels participating in the International Indian Ocean Expedition have paid frequent calls to many of these islands); and other scientific, military, and even commercial fields (Americans have present or potential interests in sugar, vanilla, spices, essential oils, copra, fish, and other products of the area).

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Political Movement on the Islands

Strategic considerations are being pursued at a moment when the island populations of the area are undergoing their own political awakening. Sporadic and uncertain in most cases, these transformations have been stimulated perhaps more by nationalism in South and Southeast Asia as well as Africa than by any spontaneous upsurge of indigenous nationalist impulses. Nevertheless, the awakening is a fact and self-determination a goal encouraged by both Britain and France in these last colonial outposts. Containing heterogeneous /^{political} ethnic, and social factions, the islands may not all be hospitable to Western forces. To the extent that the political climate of the region is involved in the US-UK mission, it may be that nationalism, neutralism, and anti-colonialism will be allowed to impede implementation of strategic planning. In determining for themselves whether Western power is beneficial or harmful, the emerging island nations become potential keys to the durability of our military presence in their area.

Most of the Western Indian Ocean islands, including Zanzibar and Madagascar, have several political features in common:

- (1) They are convenient stepping stones between Asia and Africa, and as such, their strategic significance is widely appreciated by African and Asian countries as well as the Western and communist powers.
- (2) The still dependent islands are among the targets of "liberation movements" and professional foes of "neo-colonialism", many of which have communist aid and encouragement. On the independent islands, there is strong communist presence in the case of Zanzibar, and an important communist-infiltrated opposition party in the case of Madagascar.
- (3) The presence of important Chinese and Indian communities on most of the islands creates special ties with Asian countries which may have significant international as well as internal implications.
- (4) Nationalism inspires local leaders to seek international ties that will enable their countries more quickly to reach independence, and to counter the present monopoly of the metropolitan Western powers.
- (5) Strongly marked social inequities and deep racial divisions, along with economic backwardness and sluggish local administrations, invite exploitation by external champions of radical solutions.

Most of the islands are, moreover, individually weak and economically unviable in themselves. Nevertheless, the prospects for regional harmony are not bright. Racial diversity in their populations, variance in historical development and cultural allegiance, and economic competition of single-crop economies tend to provoke rivalries and suspicions among them, and between their respective metropolises as well. Although all component islands could obviously benefit from adherence to some larger and stronger grouping, federation projects and other schemes of association invariably founder on these facts of political antipathy and economic incompatibility; indeed, the barriers against cooperative effort have become strengthened as each island obtains increasing control over its affairs. Furthermore, questions of "subversion," foreign propaganda and ideology, alignment and non-alignment have already crept into the formation of public opinion and political groupings, thus dividing the populations among themselves and clouding the outlook for consensus, stability, and constructive self-determination.

A Panorama of "Emergence"

The social and political evolution of the various islands as surveyed below, has been uneven.

1. Mauritius (pop. 720,000) attained virtual self-government in 1964 and has been promised full independence once the UK is satisfied that there is a clear popular consensus in favor. A constitutional conference, normally the prelude to independence, is expected in early September 1965. Nevertheless, the vicissitudes of "going it alone" are interpreted differently by the various elements of this overpopulated, one-crop island. The majority of Mauritians are Indian (app. 350,000 Hindus, 100,000 Moslems and 40,000 Tamils); descendants of the island's original French settlers and their African and Malagasy slaves compose a bloc of about 200,000 (10,000 whites, the remainder a mixed-blood, colored population called "creoles"); Chinese residents number about 25,000. The non-Hindu minorities are organized into political parties which will be represented at the constitutional conference. The minorities also tend to include the vested economic interests of this sugar-exporting island who seek greater assurances for their holdings and their minority rights than they believe obtainable under unqualified Hindu majority rule.

In late 1963, these differences erupted in a series of increasingly bloody disorders, most recently in April 1965 during a visit of the British Colonial Secretary himself. Notwithstanding this impressive display of disunity, a strongly pro-independence, largely Indian majority still seems to hold the upper hand in Mauritius. This group's leaders in the Mauritius Labor Party (MLP), and particularly the more activist militants on its left wing, are pledged to seek an unqualified grant of full sovereignty at an early date (probably 1966).

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For its part, the UK, albeit with second thoughts, appears bound on amputating this remaining small lump of empire. The British administration has been striving for years to encourage a political consensus among the diverse ethnic, religious, economic, and other factions of the island so that the constitutional process can be brought to completion. Despite the prosperity of its intensively cultivated sugar industry, Mauritius poses too many expensive problems (communal and demographic, as well as economic) for an overburdened metropole. In the last analysis, moreover, this island has never really been "English," never attracted any number of British settlers. It remained strongly French in language, customs, and culture (even Hindus and Chinese speak a French patois). Mauritius had, after all, become a part of the Empire in 1810 only to keep it from again being used as a base from which to threaten England's Cape-to-India sea routes.

As Western military interest in Mauritius has become apparent, local nationalists, mostly in the MLP and in a number of communist-influenced groups, have registered forceful objection against such "military intrusions" into their home waters. They threaten, once they are "free," to remove any "naval base" or other installation established there prior to independence. The equally energetic anti-independence factions insist that overriding strategic interests should prevent the UK from yielding to nationalists who at best are systematically neutralist in international persuasion.

The more moderate, pro-independence MLP leaders may ultimately be reconciled to US-UK strategic projects if an independence "deal" can be made in "exchange" for such acquiescence. The UK has already explained to the Mauritian Government that the facilities will not be on Mauritius proper or its principal dependency, Rodrigues, but rather on the remote Chagos Islands, detached from the Mauritius administrative complex. A development grant may also be in the offering as an inducement to Mauritian opinion.

It is not certain, however, that the moderates at whom these gestures are directed still speak for the majority of their followers. More radical Hindus dispute the right of the UK to "police" surrounding waters or to detach any fleck, however remote, from their Mauritian "patrimony." However futile this position, they may be able, once independent, to deny use of their own island and remaining dependencies as supply ports. Apprehensive primarily of suspected US designs for hegemony, they are fearful that a "Cold War" naval presence will isolate their island from India, frustrate their efforts to obtain benefits from "non-alignment," and in various ways curb an independent Mauritius's exercise of sovereignty.

Conservative elements for their part, particularly the landed and commercial minorities (French, colored, and Chinese) who oppose independence, see the detaching of strategic outposts from Mauritius as an economic disappointment, a concession to the nationalists, and a blow to their hopes of playing off Western interests against Hindu majority ambitions. Conservatives are quick to call attention to the island's attractions for communist powers and warn of unfriendly actions which an independent Indo-Mauritian government might be induced to take against Western interests.

2. Madagascar (6,200,000), largest of the Western Indian Ocean islands, was ruled by an independent indigenous monarchy before the French conquest of 1896, and became the first in the area to attain independence. Involved in the general political evolution of French Africa, Madagascar became a self-governing republic in 1958 and a sovereign member of the French Community in June 1960. Malagasy independence is hardly the model sought by militant Indian Ocean nationalists, however, for it is hedged with strong residual ties binding the entire economy, educational system, defense, and security apparatus to France. Madagascar obtains considerable French aid in return, but the country is hindered by the dominant metropolitan influence from developing relations freely with any other part of the outside world.

The large naval base which France maintains by treaty right at Diego Suarez on the northern point of the island represents one knot in the tight "neo-colonialist strings" held by the former metropole. The principal Malagasy opposition party, the Congress Party for the Independence of Madagascar (AKFM), entertains fervent hopes of severing such ties. Much sentiment outside the AKFM is also antagonistic to the maintenance of existing French "privileges," particularly in the area of security.

Nationalist resentment against continued French domination over Madagascar has provided the major opening for communist influence on the island. The AKFM central committee is controlled by a handful of disciplined, pro-Soviet communist militants whose anti-western propaganda is transmitted energetically by the party's press, youth, and labor affiliates. In recent weeks, these organs have taken to attacking US-UK Indian Ocean policy, together with their traditional French military targets. One of the AKFM's favorite arguments is an appeal to Malagasy apprehensions over the "atomic peril" which a Great Power military presence entails for the island.

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1. In the parliamentary elections of August 8, 1965, the AKFM won only 3 of the 107 seats, the remainder going to President Tsiranana's party. For further details on the AKFM see RM-RAF-19, Communism in Madagascar: Cuckoo in the Nationalist Nest, May 13, 1965, ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~, NO FOREIGN DISSEM, CONTROLLED DISSEM

The pro-French forces of President Tsiranana, on the other hand, have fought all nationalist ventures against "neo-colonialism", and oppose recent Paris initiatives to withdraw or diminish French troop strength. Tsiranana's government also encourages a discreet US naval presence in the area as insurance against communist expansion. Whether or not Diego Suarez will or should be incorporated into an integrated Western security system in the Indian Ocean is bound up in crucial European and Atlantic-alliance relationships. For the anti-communist Malagasy, at all events, any Western build-up in the area is a stabilizing, hence beneficial, step, so long as it does not implicate Madagascar itself too deeply, and thus over-expose Tsiranana's "Cold-War" partisanship.

Tsiranana's government tends to regard the emergence of weaker and more radical independent neighbors as at best a mixed blessing for the area. This cautious approach to the smaller islands is compounded by racial and economic incompatibilities. The Malagasy spring largely from Malayo-Polynesian stock, mixed (primarily among the coastal inhabitants) with African and some Arab blood. Vigorous Indian and Chinese communities have exploited the island economically for decades and have turned the Malagasy against further intrusions by Asians; hence, their pre-occupation with both Communist Chinese expansionism and possible Indian and Mauritian designs for exportation of surplus Hindu populations. Moreover, Malagasy vanilla, sugar, and sisal compete with products from neighboring countries. Receptive in principle to regional tourist and cultural development schemes, the Malagasy are nevertheless cold to more ambitious projects of collaboration and are also discouraged by their fundamental French ties from expanding affinities with neighboring British territories.

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3. Zanzibar (over 350,000) is a case in point for Malagasy apprehensions. Racial friction, economic overconcentration, and inadequate security enforcement -- common in some degree to all the islands in the area -- helped precipitate the Zanzibar revolution of January 1964, after only a few weeks of independence. The present use of Zanzibar as a station for unwelcome foreign interests, particularly Chinese Communist, represents a significant penetration of the Indian Ocean area by anti-Western elements, and one whose effects extend to the East African mainland as well.

Many Zanzibari leaders are strongly influenced by Soviet, Communist Chinese, and East German agents, and their outlook inevitably affects the positions taken by the technically "united" government of Tanzania at Dar-es-Salaam. Thus, not only will Zanzibar itself remain outside Western security planning; its influence in East Africa can be exerted against US-UK strategic projects, calling attention, for example, to the proximity of the Aldabra Islands to the East African littoral and even possibly making an issue of Mauritian "irredentism" for the Chagos archipelago.

4. The Comoro Islands (approx. 200,000) situated between the northern tips of Madagascar and Mozambique, remain an Overseas Territory of France. The four islands of the archipelago are populated by a mixed Arab, Swahili, and Malagasy race whose language is related to all three of its origins. Comoroans are entirely Moslem; their women are devoid of political rights. The lighter-skinned high-castes tend to dominate the darker majority. With a primitive economy based on the production of essential oils for perfumes (as well as some spices and vanilla), a virtually feudal social structure, and a largely illiterate but fast-growing population, the Comoroan isles must rely entirely on French subsidies and French administrators.

Appreciating this, the figurehead Comoroan government has studiously refrained from making excessive constitutional demands on France. On one occasion when the Comoroans did request a modest increase in "autonomy," they were given to understand that, as far as Paris was concerned, the hapless archipelago could be "cut adrift" instantaneously if it so wished. The Comoros might therefore be counted among France's possessions indefinitely, and, like Diego Suarez, remain subject to French attitudes on Western security matters.

A diaspora of Comoroan nationalist agitation has grown up in Madagascar and Tanzania, however, where surplus Comoroan population has been exported since World War II. With encouragement from Cairo and Peking, this movement is causing increased trouble for the French and their local proteges. The Tanzanian-based Comoroan National Liberation movement has recently cabled UN Secretary-General U Thant requesting inscription of a Comoros item on the agenda of the Committee of Twenty-Four (on de-colonization). Malagasy President Tsiranana has revealed his alarm over Comoroan nationalists operating in Madagascar, and recently paid an official visit to the archipelago in order to determine what might be done about the problem. Mozambique is also subject to infiltration from an overflow of nationalist or radical fervor in the Comoros.

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Whatever intrinsic value Paris may attach to the Comoros, they are so situated as to involve the security of Diego Suarez, Réunion, and other more vital French assets. Thus France, Portugal and the Malagasy Republic would seem to have a joint political interest in an immobilization of the Comoro Islands. The question -- as with the Seychelles and possibly Réunion -- is whether or not the metropole assesses the trends and implications of nationalism on the archipelago in terms of the larger issue of regional security.

5. In contrast to independent Madagascar and the indefinitely dependent Comoros, Réunion (approx. 400,000), lying between Madagascar and Mauritius, exemplifies a third "solution" evolved by France for its Western Indian Ocean holdings. Returned to the French Crown by the British in 1815, Réunion subsequently came into increasing constitutional proximity to the Metropole and was integrated into the French administrative system in 1946 as one of three Overseas Departments.

With a population almost entirely of mixed French, Malagasy, and African blood (there are few whites and fewer blacks), and with worrisome problems of overpopulation, underproduction, and susceptibility to hurricane disaster, the Réunionnais have by and large accepted the experiment of "assimilation." French is the only language of Réunion (although it is "pidgin" variety) and the island is by and large devoutly Roman Catholic. The islanders thus naturally look to the Metropole, rather than to the more "Asiatic" Malagasy or the multi-racial Mauritians with their Hindu majority, their British allegiance, and their competing sugar industry.

Nevertheless, the Departmental status of the island is still very much on trial. Despite harassment, the Communist Party of Réunion retains its hold on a solid minority of citizens and its cleverly contrived doctrine of "autonomy, followed if desirable by independence" is vigorously supported by its Communist Party mentors in France.

Many Réunionnais hoped to see most of their problems solved as a result of their "adoption" by Michel Debré, still one of the Fifth Republic's most influential figures, who re-entered the French National Assembly from Réunion in 1963 following his surprise defeat in the 1961 general elections. Debré's intercessions in Réunion's favor at Paris have been vigorous and well publicized in the island's loyalist press. They have not as yet brought definitive corrections to the disadvantages suffered by the island through (1) its remoteness from metropolitan and other markets, (2) its retarded economic and cultural development in comparison with metropolitan standards, and (3) its special problems of overpopulation, economic stagnation, and hurricane vulnerability. That a recent outbreak of strikes and riots on Réunion has had to be suppressed by paratroopers under cover of a partial news blackout emphasizes the malaise in this Overseas Department.

6. Of the remaining vestiges of British empire in the area, the Seychelles (approx. 43,000) are the smallest and most backward. The group is composed of a collection of tiny islands, most of them atolls, few of them habitable. The population, like that of Réunion and Mauritius, is a mixture of French and Africans (with some Asians), mostly descended from 18th century French settlers and their slaves. The archipelago was retained by Britain following the defeat of Napoleon, and was part of the Mauritius complex until 1903. It remained dependent on the production of copra, guano, and oils, however, missing the economic impetus supplied to Mauritius by the introduction of sugar cane in the mid-18th century. The Seychelles must import quantities of foodstuffs as well as all processed and manufactured goods, and depend on a \$1 million annual subsidy from the UK.

Indian Ocean security planning involves the administrative detachment of the Aldabra group in the southwest corner of the archipelago for future development as UK naval and air facility. This plan, together with the resettlement of about 400 Seychellois laborers repatriated from the coconut plantations of Diego Garcia (when detached from Mauritius), will be facilitated by a development grant from the UK. A US PL-480 school-lunch program is scheduled to begin there in 1965. US Air Force missile tracking station is already in operation on the main island of Mahé.

Notwithstanding these new developments, the Seychelles, like the Comoros under France, seem destined for indefinite dependence. In contrast to Mauritius, they have not been encouraged to develop local institutions or a sense of national identity. Indeed, London seems at times to treat the Seychelles as somehow inured for a considerable time from the hunger pangs of nationalism. Moreover, the "preferred" political party headed by James Mancham (Seychelles Democratic Party) goes embarrassingly overboard in approving Western aims and espousing local vested interests.

Despite their backwardness and the limitations imposed by the colonial administration on political activity, the Seychellois have in fact begun to follow the regional pattern, developing a growing awareness of the outside world. The archipelago's other political party (Seychelles People's United Party-SPUP) is already campaigning for independence. Its leader, Albert René, is reported to be receiving funds from Communist China and Ghana. A SPUP-affiliated labor union carried out a strike in 1964 against the US tracking station, which some Seychellois regard as a military base.

Moreover, the Seychelles's highly unequal socio-economic situation (favoring the white minority and the light-skinned coloreds) will invite further trouble if the British should continue to govern the islands as though they were still submerged in their century-and-a-half of obscurity and torpor. However much reasons of strategy might seem to warrant imposing brakes on local political evolution, the very presence of modern military and technological installations on the archipelago will inevitably agitate the psychological and social climate and provoke challenges to colonial control.

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7. The Maldive Islands (approx. 95,000) a paternalistic sultanate under British protection since 1887, are technically independent under an agreement signed on July 26, 1965. By its terms the UK secured guarantees for its military airstrip on the Gan atoll and a supporting radio station on Hitadoo. The installations have become involved in internal dissidence provoked by a secessionist movement on Addu atoll; in fact, the presence of the UK installations is reported to have caused the dissidence, and the bases have been targets of sabotage and labor unrest since 1962. Moreover, the independence agreement restricts the use of the base to defense of Commonwealth nations. The Royal Air Force in the past has been loath to permit its allies (including the US) to use the Gan facility, and it is therefore unlikely to be included in joint US-UK security arrangements. Its vulnerability to local sabotage limits even further the contribution which it can make to overall Indian Ocean strategy.

Although lost in international obscurity, the Maldives have not been without outside attention. The island is ethnically, linguistically and economically close to Ceylon and trades with its larger neighbor. Prior to Ceylonese independence, the archipelago was an administrative dependency of Ceylon. More recently, Presidents Nasser and Sukarno offered "fatherly advice" to the sultanate on the question of the Gan airbase, urging the Maldivians to see that the installation was never used against any "Asian or Moslem" country. Maldivian students have returned from Al Azhar University in Cairo to take leading positions in the Maldivian Government. There has also been an indeterminate amount of Soviet and Chinese Communist activity in Malé, the Maldivian capital, although communist influence is probably less strong now than it was during the Bandaranaike regime in Ceylon.

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Policy Implications for the US

The coincidence of expanding US-UK strategic interests with the national awakening in the Indian Ocean islands raises certain implications for US policy:

1. Given the economic and political weaknesses of these islands, present day leaders who accept the establishment of Western military and technical facilities on their territory may run the risk of providing radical and neutralist elements with an issue they can exploit in challenging the existing leadership.

2. These agitators will have the support, at least on this question, of Moscow and Peiping, whose main aim in this area appears to be mobilization of popular sentiment against our strategic presence. The communists already have several footholds -- most notably in Zanzibar, but also in the opposition parties of Madagascar, Réunion, the Comoros, and the Seychelles. The foundation is being laid for a communist presence in Mauritius and the Maldives as well. (Soviet delegates in the UN Committee of Twenty-Four began denouncing US-UK "rocket-base" plans for Mauritius and the Seychelles as early as April 1964.)

3. The projected US-UK activities in the Indian Ocean, although intended to be stabilizing and "containing", can be distorted by hostile interests to appear as a Cold War affront to "non-alignment." Specters of "atomic peril" may also be raised in hopes of stimulating popular resentment against our projects. This vulnerability probably cannot be entirely eliminated. It might be reduced, however, by the potential benefits which certain countries might obtain from our naval presence. For example, Madagascar might gain some reassurance against Chinese Communist expansionism. Both Kenya and Madagascar might find a Western military presence relevant to their internal security preoccupations. The same could well be true of minority groups on the Indian Ocean islands themselves (e.g., Moslems on Mauritius).

4. While responsibility for the development of these islands clearly rests with the metropolitan powers, French and British resources, and indeed motivation, may prove unequal to the task. Consequently, the US may ultimately have to provide greater economic and cultural assistance than now envisaged in order to ensure its own interests.

5. This contingency could become particularly pressing if our important NASA and Defense tracking stations in the Republic of South Africa become politically untenable. This could occur either through continued South African harassment on racial issues or as a result of domestic or African pressures on the US. (Our NASA tracking facilities in Zanzibar were transferred

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to Madagascar after the radical Zanzibar revolution of January 1964.) Any significant expansion of our Indian Ocean facilities beyond present needs might require considerably greater collaboration from host governments (e.g., in Madagascar and Mauritius themselves) than now envisaged, thus possibly raising the political and economic asking price. A possible but more remote contingency could raise similar problems if, like the UK in Ceylon, we had to decide to transfer at least part of our present military facilities from Libya or communications equipment from Ethiopia to positions in the Indian Ocean.

6. The role of France in the development of Indian Ocean strategy is probably incalculable at this time, as are ultimate French intentions regarding Réunion, the Comoros, French Somaliland, and in a sense, Madagascar. France has acknowledged interests even in Mauritius and the Seychelles, where it maintains resident consulates. The congruence of basic Anglo-US objectives and current French interests in the area might provide grounds either for active cooperation from Paris, or at least a modus vivendi guaranteeing non-interference.

