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OAS, NHC, 00, 67, 0x74, 11000/2

094/c OP-90 FILES: 110 094/c

NATO MINISTERS' MEETING  
Brussels, 12-14 December 1967

BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY (BIOT)  
(Defense Brief)

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# SUMMARY

Defense Minister Healey dispatched a message to Sec Def on 18 November 1967 indicating that the U.K. will be unable to proceed with plans to construct an air staging base on Aldabra. We raised no objections to the British decision. However, we now wish to secure some indication of British thinking about future use of the BIOT, particularly British willingness to consider participation in development of an austere fleet support facility on Diego Garcia.

# DISCUSSION

The British MOD has been compelled to reduce defense expenditures for FY 1968-69 by 100 million pounds. Aldabra was eliminated from the U.K. base development program because of its "marginality". However, we have been receiving signals from middle-level MOD officials that long-term British interest in Aldabra and other BIOT atolls has not diminished. In your reply to Mr. Healey's message on Aldabra (dispatched 22 November 1967), you urged that the MOD not foreclose the possibility of a future cooperative arrangement in the BIOT. One project, proposed by the Secretary of the Navy and currently in suspense, is the establishment of an austere U.S. fleet facility on Diego Garcia.

# RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that you probe British thinking about future use of the BIOT in your discussions with Mr. Healey. We need to know the extent to which the more positive signals emanating from middle-level MOD officials reflect Mr. Healey's views. What British plans exist to find an acceptable alternative to Aldabra, and how long existing financial stringencies are likely to inhibit British efforts to maintain a presence, however modest, in the Indian Ocean? In particular, we need to know if there is any British interest in participation in the Diego Garcia project.

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7-22/7  
4 December 1967

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002145

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DECLASSIFIED ON: 12-15-01

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