



MAIN BUILDING, WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W.1

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TELEPHONE WHITEHALL 7022

*Atul. C.*

*19c*

16th August 1967.

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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

*Dear Rob*

ALDABRA

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6  
NLI 96-156  
By CB, NARA Date 6-23-00

As you know, we have been considering for some time past the implications of establishing, in conjunction with the US Department of Defense, an airfield and other facilities on Aldabra island in the British Indian Ocean Territory. My Government have now decided that they wish to go ahead with this project, subject to agreement with yourselves on the details of development and joint financing. I am therefore writing to invite you to agree to the opening of negotiations between our staffs on the arrangements required.

2. To recapitulate on recent developments, this matter was first raised formally with your Government through the State Department last summer. The response was encouraging. In a communication of 12th August 1966 the State Department informed us that the US Government:-

- a. were prepared to accept in principle the proposal for a jointly financed air staging facility on Aldabra, on the understanding that the United States would have the right to share in the use of the facility; and
- b. were willing to join in detailed planning of the facilities required and to participate in a survey due to begin in September 1966.

Subsequently USAF representatives took part in the joint survey last September. The joint requirements of the RAF and USAF have now been more closely defined. Outline plans for the development have been worked out by our Ministry of Public Building and Works who will be responsible for all detailed planning and construction. Contract arrangements have been provisionally drafted.

The Hon. Robert S. McNamara.

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A further scientific and technical survey is due to begin this month, with US participation. Meanwhile on 30th December 1966 an Exchange of Notes was completed between our Governments on the availability for Defence Purposes of the British Indian Ocean Territory, which provides a general framework for joint projects of this kind.

3. The current estimate of cost, including a contingency provision, is £22-23m. This is higher than the £18m. quoted last year (also including a contingency provision), partly as a result of more detailed study and partly because the USAF's technical requirements, in particular as regards length of runway, were greater than our own which provided the basis of the original estimate. In addition our experts consider that it would be wise, at this early stage and for a project of this nature in so remote a place, to add a further contingency allowance of 20%, making a total of about £28m.

4. I should be grateful to have your confirmation that the US Government will be willing to bear 50% of all costs incurred by the British Government in meeting the requirements now jointly defined, subject to agreement between the two Governments on satisfactory arrangements for the planning, execution and certification of the work done, and for mutual financial settlement. I understand that it has already been provisionally agreed that the Headquarters US Third Air Force would be the USAF Executive Agent. What we have in mind is that there should be further written arrangements which would establish whatever joint machinery was needed and would include any further provisions required to cover the use of the facility in accordance with the Exchange of Notes of 30th December 1966. If this accords with your view, may I suggest that you nominate representatives to work out the details with my staff and that of the Ministry of Public Building and Works? As the latter are so closely involved, I think it would be appropriate for the negotiations to take place in London.

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5. The Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy 1967 recently issued by my Government mentions that we are continuing to examine the possibility of making a new staging airfield in the British Indian Ocean Territory, but no announcement has been made about a decision on the Aldabra project and I am sure you will agree that none should be made before the arrangements between us are complete. In reply to any enquiries in the meantime, our spokesmen here will say merely that the matter is still under examination and I hope that yours will have similar instructions. If for any reason the volume of comment becomes considerable, it may be necessary to provide further background briefing, but, if so, your staff and mine should keep in touch with each other and co-ordinate what is said.

6. We are anxious to start work on the project as soon as possible and to complete the main facilities by 1971. I am advised that, if we are to keep to this timetable we need to start work on the island in April 1968 to take advantage of the period of good weather in the subsequent months.

*For you*

*Devin*