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United States Department of State
Bureau of Political-Military Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20520-6817

RELEASED IN FULL

March 13, 2000

Mr. J.C.R. Gray
Counselor, External Affairs
British Embassy
3100 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Gray:

Assistant Secretary Newsom has requested that I respond to your recent letter concerning a possible feasibility study relating to the Chagos Archipelago. We of course defer to HMG regarding the requirement for a feasibility study as described in your letter and very much appreciate the opportunity to comment on it, given our shared interests in the region and in the strategic military importance of Diego Garcia. In that context, I wish to call to your attention a number of concerns about the proposed study and any resolution of the issue that would not be in keeping with the 1966 Exchange of Notes which, as you know, reserved the Archipelago for the exclusive use of our two governments for defense purposes.

The United States attaches major importance to the military facilities on Diego Garcia as an essential strategic platform for the maintenance of security throughout the region. As HMG is aware, current modernization plans anticipate the potential for an increase in the tempo of operations of U.S. forces on Diego Garcia in future years.

Part of the strategic value of Diego Garcia derives from its isolated location. Consequently, as we have expressed to HMG before, civilian settlement on the outer islands carries the risk of serious compromise of the current and future strategic value of Diego Garcia and the remainder of the island chain. For example, a resident civilian population on the islands creates the distinct prospect for introduction of clandestine radars or other monitoring facilities which, even from the most distant of the outer islands, could endanger or compromise U.S. and U.K. operations from Diego Garcia.

In addition, the implication in the draft terms of reference, that commercial or tourist projects on the islands

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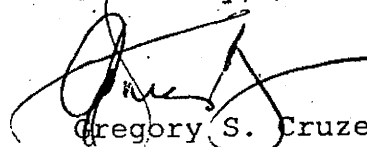
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could be implemented without serious interference with military operations, appears open to question. In this connection, we attach considerable importance to item twelve of the terms of reference and urge that the work of the consultants in stage one also be made explicitly subject to that paragraph. It appears to us that the impact of military requirements on any potential settlement could well exceed the restrictions established in item twelve. For example, the needs of naval forces to operate through numerous and changing shipping lanes inevitably would conflict with plans to base a given island's economy on fishing or tourism, and would make those activities more hazardous.

With respect to tourism, fishing and many other forms of possible economic activity, the assumption that residence on the smaller islands could be made viable without ties to Diego Garcia, its airport, and its other infrastructure and services also appears questionable. Demands for ingress/egress for tourists, medical and other emergency services, air freight transit and other uses of Diego Garcia's facilities appear to us as likely were civilian settlements established anywhere in the area. Your government's decision to open up Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island to civilian flights in order to promote tourism and economic development appears instructive in this regard. Our concern is magnified by the fact that, as we understand it, the number of those affected by the proposed settlement could be as high as five thousand. In this connection, I must advise that the United States would not be prepared to share or reimburse any part of the costs of establishing or maintaining civilian settlement on the islands of the Chagos Archipelago.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed terms of reference for this study. If at all possible, we would be grateful for the chance to comment on the full study once it is completed, should you decide to proceed with it. In the interim, we remain ready to discuss the matter with you further.

Sincerely,



Gregory S. Cruze
Director

Office of International
Security Operations

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