

5a

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE UNDER SECRETARY

~~TOP SECRET~~

September 6, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KOMER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Attached is a copy of the memorandum on the Indian Ocean Carrier Task Force which I mentioned to you on the phone yesterday. It was prepared by a Naval Officer who is assigned to the Far East Bureau on the exchange arrangement with the Pentagon. Because it represents a "green bowl" point of view he is naturally sensitive that it should not receive official distribution, especially as it involves implicit criticism of a friendly sister branch of the Service.

The aspect of the memorandum which I think will be of interest to you is the conclusion that this Task Force, if created, would have significant implications for Southeast Asian countries, especially Burma, Thailand and Malaya.

Bill
William H. Sullivan

Attachment:
Memo re Indian Ocean.

~~TOP SECRET~~

SEP 7 1963

NLK-05-205a
DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6
By MPP NARA Date 1/06

NSF, Box 422, India, Indian Ocean (IOTF) 1963

ATTACHMENT I
~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

To: FE - Mr. Hilsman

August 29, 1963

From FE/Plans - Robert B. Wood

Subj: Indian Ocean/SEA Carrier Task Force

IOTF

Attached is a letter from the Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense proposing that an attack carrier task force in the Indian Ocean area could be a powerful constraint in inter-regional disputes to countries with whom we maintain friendly relations; that the introduction of such a force could well help allay some of Pakistan's real fears regarding India and would enhance our quick response capability; have a direct effect against external aggression and give additional credence to our intent to support friendly nations in time of crisis.

The Secretary further pointed out that there might be considerable advantage in "our having a nuclear presence in the area before Communist China attains a nuclear capability; while the introduction after that event might be interpreted as an attempt to redress the balance of power." He requested SECDEF's views "both as to feasibility of this type of task force or other alternative means of enhancing our political objectives in the area."

While Secretary Rusk addresses himself primarily to the establishment of an Indian Ocean Carrier Task Force, such a force would have significant impact on the political, psychological and military situation in Southeast Asia. In fact, tactically speaking, the attack carrier force, in my view, would have a greater potential capability against ChiCom encroachment into SEA than in the NEA area because of the operational characteristics of the embarked carrier aircraft in the light of the geography of the South Asia/SEA area. The Far East Bureau, therefore, has a significant interest with regard to any decision reached with respect to this proposed concept. Additionally, we have a direct interest in insuring that Pakistan remains an effective, participating member of SEATO.

I have been following closely the staffing in the Joint Staff and the Navy, of a response to the Secretary's letter. A draft was furnished George Muller G/PM for his comment. In brief, this draft proposed sending a Carrier Task Force to the Indian Ocean Area from the Seventh Fleet on a rotational basis, one month out of six, and the development of certain logistic facilities on an austere basis at the British owned island of Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago. Such a deployment, of course, would not be fully responsive to the Secretary's proposal; in that it would not establish U.S. military presence in the area on a permanent basis; would not go far toward reassuring the Pakistanis against an Indian attack; and would not establish a nuclear force as an offset to the ChiCom explosion of a nuclear device. Consequently, it probably would not be effective in accomplishing the goals outlined by the Secretary. G/PM, in response to this draft, expressed reservations along these lines.

~~TOP SECRET~~

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED
EO 12858, SEC. 3.6
DATE 05-20-05
BY 006

TOP SECRET

My own view of the Secretary's proposed concept is that a carrier task force is the sole means by which we can introduce a significant and apparent force, in the form of tactical air power, into the power factor of the Indian Ocean/SEA area without paying a significant political price. Our experience with carrier based tactical air in the SIXTH Fleet in the Mediterranean and the SEVENTH Fleet in the Far East has amply demonstrated the capability of the Carrier Task Force to maintain the peace. No other force approaching the capability of the Carrier Task Force could be introduced or operated in the Indian Ocean/SEA area without great political as well as monetary cost in gold. Additionally, it affords perhaps the one means of introducing an apparent nuclear presence in the Indian Ocean/SEA area as an offset to the "Chicom nuclear explosion."

The only practical alternative to sea-based tactical air, is land based tactical air. The major difference between carrier based and land based tactical air, of course, is the character of the base system. In combat effectiveness the aircraft involved, for practical purposes, are the same. However, land based tactical air is tied to a fixed base and its radius of influence is governed by the capability, and more specifically the operating range, of its aircraft.

It is interesting to note that there are no pre-stocked land bases with adequate facilities from Adana, Turkey to Clark Field in the Philippines. Indeed, in the whole Middle East South Asia, Southeast Asia area, there are approximately eight airfields in existence today capable of receiving and supporting sustained land based tactical air operations with modern high performance jet aircraft. (My definition of an airfield that has such a capability is one which has a runway of at least 7,000 feet of hard surface, an adequate fuel storage and supply system, sufficient ramp and revetment space for at least 60 aircraft, air control and air intercept radars, and a ground air defense system.) To be specific there are, with respect to these land air bases, two in Iran, two in Pakistan, three in India, one in Burma, one in Thailand, one in Cambodia and one in South Viet-Nam. To base these installations would, of course, require much political negotiation with a concomitant political price, not to mention the adverse gold flow and military cost of stocking with adequate logistic items such as aviation fuel, aircraft spare parts, and items necessary for the health, comfort and subsistence of the crew. Further, such logistic supply would be hampered by the transportation and land communication system in the country concerned, which, considering the locale, may be expected to be marginal at best. While I do not have any idea of the cost of such an operation, it appears rather obvious to me, that we could not afford to "buy" a number of such installations, even if it were politically acceptable to the country or countries concerned. And, as I have already pointed out, our political and psychological influence is tied to a fixed radius from the base itself. Moreover, assuming we were able to establish several bases of this nature on a long range basis, we would still be tied to political winds which could change direction almost overnight with the result of the loss of a carefully developed land base tactical air capability.

TOP SECRET

Also

TOP SECRET

-3-

Also, a permanently based tactical air unit cannot be withdrawn, even though in the U.S. interest, without loss of U.S. face" and some magnitude of economic disruption in the host country, which in itself, has many political ramifications.

Finally, it is extremely doubtful whether we would consider, or any host country in the area would permit, the introduction of nuclear armaments for tactical air to offset a ChiCom nuclear explosion.

The Carrier Task Force, with its tactical air, as well as nuclear capability, on the other hand, is not confronted by the political and logistic problems extant to the fixed base. It can range with impunity throughout the whole Indian Ocean/Southeast Asia area at the rate of some 500 miles per day with its range of political/psychological influence extending far beyond. For practical purposes, this influence of a permanently based carrier force could be felt on a continuing basis from the Arabian Peninsula through the Indo China Peninsula where it could link with SEVENTH Fleet influence in the East Asia area.

The political, psychological and military influence and the effectiveness of a carrier task force is amply demonstrated by our experience with the SIXTH Fleet in the Mediterranean and SEVENTH Fleet in the EA/SPA area. At the time of the Lebanon Crisis in 1958, when the President asked the Chief of Naval Operations how long it would take to bring the carriers into effective range for possible air support operation, the CNO replied, in effect, "They are in range now, Mr. President, please tell us when to launch aircraft." Similarly, when the Off-shore Island crisis loomed last year, the SEVENTH Fleet was on hand to stabilize the situation and the crisis subsided. Carrier tactical air has proved itself time and again in these two oceans, as an effective means of exerting military as well as political and psychological force toward maintaining the peace. Consequently, it is an ideal force to inject into the Indian Ocean/SEA area and I am personally convinced it will do much to stabilize the precarious situation existing there now.

At present, we have in operation fifteen attack carriers, capable of supporting tactical air. These are deployed as follows: three to the Far East in the SEVENTH Fleet, six to the FIRST Fleet operating in the Pacific between the Coast and Hawaii, two to the SIXTH Fleet in the Mediterranean, and four to the SECOND Fleet, operating in the Western Atlantic.

Of the fifteen attack carriers presently in commission, we have one nuclear powered carrier of 85,000 tons displacement, the Enterprise, six Forrestal class carriers of 65,000 tons displacement, three Midway class of 45,000 tons displacement and five World War II Essex class carriers of 27,000 tons displacement. Of these carriers only the five Essex class carriers can transit the Suez Canal.

TOP SECRET

A Carrier

TOP SECRET

-4-

A Carrier Task Force envisioned for the Indian Ocean/SEA area would consist of an Attack Carrier, four destroyers for support operation and an ammunition/oiler ship for underway replenishment. The aircraft loading of the carrier would vary slightly depending on the carrier class but would consist of a minimum of about 80 aircraft, including 36 dual capable (i.e. iron bomb and small or nuclear strike) attack, and 24 fighter aircraft. Each carrier would carry a small complement of long range heavy attack aircraft. Also in each carrier air group complement there are six aircraft to provide for distant air early warning and three for photographic reconnaissance. For practical purposes, the fighter (which also has a ground attack capability) and attack aircraft on board have an effective radius of action of about 600 miles and at that range a carrier can mount, on the order of 150 sorties per day. Of course, as the range to the target area is decreased, the sortie rate could be increased up to the order of about 250 sorties per day for close-in work. All carrier type aircraft have a night/all weather operating capability. A typical conventional ammunition loading of a Forrestal class carrier would be sufficient for approximately 1,400 iron bomb sorties depending on the tactical aspects of the situation in the target area. A sizeable nuclear capability is inherent in all of our carriers to meet general war SIOP contingencies. Logistically, the carrier task group carries a 90 day supply of food and under sustained operational conditions, at a speed of approximately 25 knots, the task group could operate about five days without replenishing (at this point the fuel reserve would be about 50% total capacity). A necessary adjunct, therefore, to sustained operations at sea is an underway replenishment group consisting of one combined ammunition/oiler ship (AOE) which is capable of replenishing ammunition, aviation fuel, black oil, food and some spare parts.) To replenish at sea after such a period of sustained operations, as outlined above, would require approximately five hours. However, limited flight operations could be conducted during this period. The above is a brief outline of a Forrestal class carrier capability. The Essex class capability is slightly lower. To summarize, the carrier task force is a system which is in being now, which would be injected into a critical political situation at the expense of issuing the order.

The Indian Ocean/SEA area is an ideal locale for the type operation that I have outlined. A carrier task force could range from the Arabian Sea to the Adaman Sea and provide a powerful political and psychological tool which with adept handling, could make a significant contribution to our task of maintaining the peace in the Indian Ocean/SEA area.

Therefore, I believe an Indian/SEA Carrier Task Force should be organized on a permanent basis and I am concerned that, for various reasons including financial considerations that this concept will not be fully explored.

There are four courses of action open which should be considered and which would permit the deployment of a carrier task force to this area on a permanent basis. These are as follows:

(a) Reduce

TOP SECRET

- (a) Reduce the SIXTH Fleet in the Mediterranean by one task group to form the Indian Ocean/SEA Task Force.
- (b) Reduce the SEVENTH Fleet in the Western Pacific by one task group for the same purpose.
- (c) Establish the Indian Ocean/SEA Task Force from units presently assigned to the FIRST and/or SECOND Fleet.
- (d) Recommission sufficient naval forces to make possible an Indian Ocean/SEA Carrier Task Force without dilution of the capability of the four fleets.

A fifth course might consist of some combination of the above.

Courses of action (a) and (b), of course, have international political and psychological considerations which must be examined in addition to military considerations. Dilution of the SIXTH and SEVENTH Fleets either permanently or on a regular basis may have an adverse effect on our allies in those regions and could raise doubts as to our determination to meet our commitments. I would think that this effect would be more pronounced in the Mediterranean because a new Carrier Task Force, when formed, would be more remote from that area (the distance from the Arabian Sea to the Mediterranean around the Cape of Good Hope if any types other than the Essex class were used). In the Pacific, I do not think that the adverse effect would be as great because the concept might be presented merely as a rotation of our naval forces to the south to counter an apparent change in the overall threat in the Pacific. On the other hand, by adopting either of these two courses of action we have not changed the overall or total apparent force bearing against the frontier of communism or a world wide basis. This raises the question as to whether this is justified in the light of precarious internal political situation which exists among certain of our allies, particularly in our own Far Eastern area.

Adoption of course (c) as a solution would have a more long-range effect which would not immediately effect the political military situation in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean/Western Pacific area. This course would dilute our capability to re-enforce any of our fleets deployed on the fringes of the Communist World. This dilution might not become apparent until such time as re-enforcement to meet an actual limited war situation were necessary. From a fleet readiness standpoint, I know from my own experience in carrier operations, that this would suffer appreciably. Ships periodically have to undergo extensive navy yard overhaul for maintenance purposes and installation of latest equipment to insure their effectiveness on station. There is a constant turnover of personnel and this requires extensive training efforts periodically off our own sea coasts. Also, in peacetime at least, it is essential that opportunity be afforded for shore leave and for personnel to rejoin their families. (It should be understood that units assigned the SIXTH and SEVENTH Fleets are normally assigned for six months and are then rotated with units assigned to the SECOND and FIRST Fleets respectively.) The factors which bear on this course of action are, primarily, of a military nature.

Course

TOP SECRET

~~TOP SECRET~~

-6-

Course of action (d) is the most complicated. The considerations which bear on course (a), (b) and (c) also bear on this one. In addition, we run up against the budget ceiling of the Navy. I am told by my colleagues in the Navy who have studied this problem extensively that the price tag on this course would run somewhere between \$130 and \$190 million and would require an additional two to three carriers with some associated support ships. This is, of course, a one time cost. While I do not know what the annual maintenance costs would run, I am told that they would be comparable with the annual cost of a shore based tactical unit of about equivalent military power, deployed in a forward area. Since the cost outlined herein is probably far beyond that which could be handled within the present Navy budget ceiling, adoption of this course of action would require adjustment of force levels somewhere outside the Navy to provide the necessary funds.

Even though an Indian Ocean/SEA Carrier Task Force could be established by the simple expedient of issuing the order, there is no easy, long range solution. As I have outlined, there are a multitude of political and military problems in connection with implementation of Secretary Rusk's concept. I believe that the Department in anticipation of the reply to Secretary Rusk should start a study on an urgent basis to determine the international political and psychological ramifications incident to the implementation of one of the above courses of action. This study should be sufficiently detailed to establish the price that we are willing to pay for implementation of the Indian Ocean/SEA Carrier Task Force.

In summary, I believe that we need established in the Indian Ocean/SEA area now a permanent, quick response tactical air force with a concomitant nuclear capability to fill the power vacuum being created by the withdrawal of the British, to inhibit Communist attempts to exploit internal weaknesses of our friends, to act as a powerful constraint in intra-regional disputes between our friends, to be a bulwark of freedom which the indigenous population know is there and can depend on just as the Greeks and the Turks have come to depend on the Carrier Force of the Mediterranean, and to provide a powerful nuclear presence in the area in anticipation of the explosion of a nuclear device by the Chinese Communists. The only military force that can accomplish this task is the Naval Carrier Task Force which has proven this ability so many times over the years. We should establish such a force now on a permanent basis in the area before the Chinese explode their nuclear device and attempt to generate more instability in an already unstable area. The long range problems incident to establishment of this force should not be permitted to deny to us the great gains which a prompt establishment would generate.

I, therefore, recommend that a study be instituted within the Department to assess the political ramifications of the various alternatives open to us with respect to establishing an Indian Ocean/SEA Carrier Task Force on a permanent basis in order to be prepared to reach a prompt and sound decision as soon as the views of Defense are received.

FE:RBW:dmj
8/30/63

~~TOP SECRET~~

Clearance: FE - Mr. Nathan