

C. The chances of any genuine movement toward a modus vivendi between the Arabs and Israel are slim indeed, except possibly in response to strong pressure by the US on Israel and by the USSR on the radical Arabs. Meanwhile, the war has given new stature to the fedayeen, and the present pattern of raids by these free-wheeling commando organizations and Israeli reprisals seems likely to perpetuate a situation of chronic violence between the two sides. This could develop—by accident or design—into broader hostilities which could in turn lead to a direct confrontation between the US and the USSR.

D. The war and its aftermath have greatly reduced US influence in the Arab world and increased that of the USSR. So long as Arab-Israeli tensions remain high, Soviet influence is likely to remain strong, particularly among the radical Arabs. It will be limited by Arab resistance to external dominance and by the likelihood that the USSR will continue to support the existence of the Israeli state. But the ability and will of the radical Arabs to resist Soviet pressures are less than they were two years ago.

[Here follows the 8-page Discussion section of the estimate.]

Indian Ocean

33. Airgram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom¹

CA-7176

Washington, January 21, 1964, 10:47 a.m.

SUBJECT

Indian Ocean Talks with British

REF

Embtels 3248,² 2379³ and previous messages.

State-Defense message. Attached is the preliminary talking paper on Indian Ocean islands which the British requested from us before beginning discussions in London on this subject. The Embassy is requested to review this paper and make any modifications deemed advisable. Substantive changes should, of course, be referred to Washington for State-Defense approval before submission to the British. Otherwise, you should present this paper to the Foreign Office, stating that we are ready to begin discussions in London on February 25 or 26.

There have been several developments concerning the Indian Ocean since these talks were first proposed, including the proposed visits to the area by a carrier task force, and the transfer of theater responsibilities to CINCSRIKE/CINCMCAFSA. Any discussions with the British on the Indian Ocean will logically relate these various elements in an integrated approach to overall US-UK future intentions in the area. Therefore, while we have kept the attached talking paper focused on the original subject of possible small island bases, we have also inserted some language at the end of it which would permit us to expand the scope of the talks to the extent that we and the British are prepared to do at the time.

Rusk

¹ Source: National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1964-66, DEF 1 IND. Secret. Drafted by C. Arnold Freshman and Winston Lord (G/PM) on January 20; cleared by Gatch (DOD/ISA), Officer in Charge of UK Affairs Thomas M. Judd, FE Office of Regional Affairs Politico-Military Affairs Adviser Captain Robert B. Wood, AF Office of Inter-African Affairs Politico-Military Adviser Eric E. Oulashin, NEA Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Regional Affairs Officer in Charge of Politico-Military Affairs Colonel Donald W. Bunte, and Office of UN Political Affairs Officer in Charge of Dependent Area Affairs Richard V. Hennes; and approved by Office of Politico-Military Affairs Director for Operations Howard Meyers. Repeated to New Delhi, Karachi, CINCSRIKE for POLAD, CINCPAC for POLAD, and CINCLANT for POLAD.

² Dated January 15. (Ibid., POL AFR)

³ Dated November 15, 1963. (Ibid., DEF 15 UK-US)

Attachment

DEFENSE PROBLEMS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA

The United States interest in exploring certain aspects of the US/UK military posture in the Indian Ocean area arises from an essentially simple proposition. On the one hand, we note a variety of threats to the political stability and security of the area. Among these factors we would include the existence of massive communist military power north of the Indian Ocean periphery with the added prospect of Communist China attaining a nuclear capability in the foreseeable future.

We are also concerned that dissidence among and within the nations of the periphery could produce local disorders, offering the communists attractive opportunities for various forms of influence and intervention. In the Arabian Peninsula, the United States has important interests in Saudi Arabia and has pledged its support to the reformist-minded Faisal regime. Arab nationalism in the Persian Gulf Shaykhdoms, which are under varying degrees of British protection, is becoming a threat to Western interests, particularly the British. This, coupled with the fact that the Persian Gulf area is the largest source of petroleum available to the West on financially acceptable terms, makes the Peninsula a key area which warrants our joint attention. There is also the problem of Malaysia.

We assess these threats against the acknowledged interest of the West in maintaining the general stability of the area and the independence of its governments from Communist Chinese and/or Soviet domination. Since the end of World War II the UK has provided the predominant Western military forces in the area, and it is expected that this will continue. The US, however, believes it is desirable to examine ways and means of improving, even on an austere basis, the overall Western military posture in the Indian Ocean.

On the other hand, we are conscious of serious potential difficulties in the application of US military influence in the area, should this ever become necessary. The circumstances in which such a decision might be taken, and the level of force required under any set of conditions, are, of course, not fully predictable. Such factors as the nature of the particular threat, the practicability of seeking concerted action under UN auspices, and the requirement for reserve capability to meet simultaneous contingencies elsewhere would all demand consideration at the time. It is clear, however, that once a decision was made to bring military force to bear, its application should be swift and decisive.

The area itself does not possess, for example, indigenous forces or support systems capable of protracted defense against a determined external challenge. This would increase the urgency of any response

we decided to make, and in this respect difficult problems can be foreseen. The difficulties lie largely in the great distances over which operational units and their follow-on support would have to travel. Even more important would be the possibility that even these long routings could not be politically assured, but might be beset by possible complications such as refusal of overflight rights, terminal air facilities, or the denial of passage through Suez.

We are currently studying various ways in which these potential difficulties might be alleviated. For a variety of reasons, we are not now considering the continuous deployment of forces or the establishment of extensive facilities within the area. We feel that such an approach is outside the scope of our present defense resources, considering the demands of other theatres. We are, therefore, focusing on less conspicuous ways of supplementing and facilitating the employment of the highly mobile air, land, and naval forces on which we would expect to rely. In this regard, studies are in progress on the possible use of vessels as floating depots in forward areas, and on the possible prestockage of equipment at key locations for subsequent marrying with mobile combat units which might be deployed into the area under various contingencies.

In this context, we are particularly interested in the potential usefulness of a number of strategically situated Indian Ocean islands under British control. It is not possible to predict, apart from the specific circumstances of a case, how various governments on the Indian Ocean periphery would react to US or UK military operations in the area. However, it is evident that strategic locations on the continental mainlands might be controlled preponderantly by regimes which were not, or could not appear to be, sympathetic to any active Western military presence. Thus, we cannot assume that in any military operation we might undertake in the area we would have adequate access to staging or support sites on the periphery. This makes it important, in our view, to keep available wherever possible those island locations which could be put to the military service of the West in an emergency without delay, negotiation, or political restraint. Such locations might then be used on an "as is" basis during a spontaneous contingency, or for the development of austere staging or other facilities in a pre-emergency period. It is believed that certain of the Indian Ocean islands under British control might lend themselves to such planned or pre-arranged use. They do not appear to us to be capable of supporting serious independence movements and probably are too remote and culturally isolated to figure plausibly in the plans of any mainland government.

Examples of the island locations we have in mind are those in the Chagos Archipelago and those administered as part of the Seychelles Colony, but lying outside the main Seychelles group (Coetivy, Ile des

Roches, Aldabra). Our concern with the future availability of such islands for possible contingency use is, of course, distinct from our more immediate and concrete interests in the satellite tracking station now operational in the Seychelles and an Indian Ocean communications station (in which regard we have requested authorization to conduct a survey of the Chagos Archipelago).

We believe that the exploration of this total problem could usefully proceed in both military and political discussions. We envisage the military talks as encompassing a joint assessment of (a) the potential military threats confronting us in the area, (b) general plans for the use of forces and facilities existing in the area, and for bringing additional force to bear as necessary, and (c) the potential military value in a contingency situation of the various Indian Ocean islands. In connection with (c), a joint UK-US military survey of promising island locations may be desirable.

At the political level we would anticipate discussing (a) the prospects for long-term retention of various of the Indian Ocean islands for use in various forms by our military establishments; (b) arrangements which it might be suitable and feasible to make now for this purpose, including arrangements to minimize exposure of these islands to decolonization pressures being exerted in and through the UN; and (c) the local political and economic impacts of any military utilization of such islands. On the latter point, we would wish initially to have the British participants, given the more extensive British experience in the area, identify the specific problems which might emerge, and suggest for consideration ways in which these problems might be handled.

We envisage that the talks will focus primarily on these islands. In addition, we would be prepared to discuss generally the related aspects of such⁴ developments as the forthcoming deployment of U.S. Naval units into the Indian Ocean and the new responsibilities of the U.S. unified command CINCSRIKE/CINCMEAFSA.

In view of the current indigenous reaction to recent unfortunate public revelations of US intent to periodically deploy an attack carrier task force into the area as well as of our interest in exploring the possibilities of providing for support facilities there, it would be hoped that the substance of the talks can be closely held.

⁴ Note: "such" includes East Africa if necessary. [Footnote in the source text.]