

*Blue*  
THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

17-232  
AUG 17 1963  
*Indian Ocean*

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*E/pm*  
Dear Bob:

Although George Ball and I spoke to you briefly August 15 about the possibility of establishing a carrier task force in the Indian Ocean, I want to expand somewhat on the reasons which caused us to raise this question.

State and Defense have, of course, been considering periodically the problems revolving around our desire to strengthen US and friendly nations' security posture in the Indian Ocean. Our interest in these problems has been heightened by the developments since last fall in the Sino-Indian border region and by our own current difficulties with Pakistan, resulting from US aid to India. This last aspect makes it all the more important for the State Department to have an indication of your own views, as quickly as feasible, since as you know George Ball will be leaving before long for discussions with Ayub in Pakistan from the third to the sixth of September.

While I realize that there are various means of enhancing the security and stability of the regions between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Siam, and you indicated on August 15 that there might be better alternatives to the carrier task force concept, we certainly would appreciate your views on the following.

We wonder whether an Indian Ocean Task Force, significantly larger than the small force (COMIDEASTFOR) currently in that area, built around an attack

The Honorable  
Robert S. McNamara,  
Secretary of Defense

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carrier, could not be a significant stabilizing influence throughout that area. The inception of my recent concern was, as you may know, an interest in finding some means of allaying Pakistan's fears about India, which have in part been heightened by our arms aid to India. The existence of a fast-moving and powerful Indian Ocean Task Force, which would substantially reduce our reaction time in support of the CENTO allies, could well help us allay some of Pakistan's real fears and might at least serve to moderate the use which the Pakistanis are making of this issue to try and play the Chinese Communists off against us.

Clearly, the Task Force could have a much wider deterrent effect than involving Indo-Pakistan relations. The countries in the Indian Ocean area confront an external threat of strong Communist neighbors and also have internal problems caused by social and political instability. It has been US policy to seek to deny this vital communications crossroad to hostile regimes, and at the same time to help these countries deal with their internal security problems. The Task Force could have a direct effect against external aggression through substantially reducing the time it would take the US to mount support operations in the area. It could also inhibit Communist attempts to exploit the internal weaknesses of our friends. It could be a powerful constraint in intra-regional disputes between states with which we maintain friendly relations, e.g., the Indo-Pakistan situation. Finally, the Carrier Task Force might serve as a further sign to such governments as those of Iran and Thailand that the US is determined to assure the freedom of the area.

I am convinced that the introduction of a new power factor into the Indian Ocean area and the enhancement of our quick response capability would

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give additional credence to our intent to support friendly nations of the Middle East and South East Asia in time of crises. Finally, looking further into the future, I can see a considerable potential political and military advantage to our having a nuclear presence in the area before Communist China attains a nuclear capability. Should we wish to introduce such a Task Force after that event, it might be interpreted as an attempt to redress the balance of power and we might encounter a number of complications which might detract from the effectiveness of such a move.

We would view the establishment of the Indian Ocean base facilities at Diego Garcia which we are planning to negotiate with the British as an ideal protected anchorage to support an Indian Ocean Task Force. Indeed, it is our view that this negotiation should be pursued as a matter of some urgency.

I am aware that the establishment of such a force would involve a number of logistical problems, and that it would compete against critical resources in other areas. However, I feel that the immediate and long range advantages to be derived may be so far reaching that I would appreciate your giving urgent thought as to how such a deployment could best be brought about. In this connection, I understand that a Carrier Force from the 6th Fleet will be in the Indian Ocean later this year for the joint CENTO MIDLINK VI exercises in the Karachi area. I suggest that you consider whether this force could be maintained on station for an extended period of time while the broader ramifications of this problem are being explored.

I would greatly appreciate your views on this matter and any comments which you might wish to

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make, both as to the feasibility of this type of Task Force or other alternative means of enhancing the political objectives which I have noted above.

With warm regards,

Sincerely,

*Dean*

Dean Rusk

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A true copy of signed original

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