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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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TO : G/PM - Mr. Kitchen
 FROM : FE - Marshall Green *mg*
 SUBJECT: FE Comments February Indian Ocean Talks with British

The Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs has interest in the Indian Ocean islands to the extent these islands might be useful in support of forces under CINCPAC.

Our principle interest therefore is the Chagos Archipelago which is part of the Crown Colony of Mauritius. Situated in this group of islands about 1,000 miles from India, 1,600 from Africa and Indonesia, and 3,000 from Australia is Diego Garcia, strategically located in the center of the Indian Ocean. The atoll has sufficient land mass for developing a limited air base capable of handling high performance aircraft and the large lagoon offers a sheltered anchorage with sufficient depth of water for our largest naval ships.

A preliminary study by the Navy indicated that for about \$15 million, Diego Garcia could be developed into an austere forward naval base consisting of an anchorage, limited POL storage, a pier for tankers, a 7,000 feet hard surface air strip with limited aviation maintenance facilities, and berthing, messing, and medical facilities for station personnel.

While there is no requirement at this time for a base in Diego Garcia, should CINCPAC be given the responsibility of maintaining a carrier force in the Indian Ocean on a more or less permanent basis, this island would add considerably to the capability of the force.

It is understood that there is a possibility that the Colony of Mauritius may be granted independence sometime next year. As indicated, Diego Garcia is part of this colony, but it is located some 1,200 miles away from Port Louis, the capital. The population is on the order of 500 and the economy is based on copra. Because of the strategic significance of Diego Garcia and its potential as

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a naval base, the United States should persuade the British to grant rights for the U.S. to develop a base on this island along the lines discussed herein should future operational considerations indicate a requirement.

Unless these factors are taken into consideration during negotiations for independence, the right to develop Diego Garcia as a base sometime in the future may be lost with the change of status of Mauritius.

It appears that there is sufficient latitude within the proposed draft note to develop a U.S. position whereby provision could be made for a U.S. naval base at Diego Garcia either through British retention of the Chagos Archipelago for its strategic importance or through British negotiation of base rights at Diego Garcia within an independent Mauritius as outlined herein.

Cleared in Draft:
RA - Mr. Usher *RAW*

FE:RA:Capt. R. Wood *RAW*:pg

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