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DISCUSSION PAPER FOR THE PLANNING GROUP MEETING

INDIAN OCEAN TASK FORCE

I. Background

The Indian Ocean area, encompassing the countries from Iran and the Arabian Peninsula to the straits of Singapore, is a strategic region of crucial importance to the free world. The countries in this region have an aggregate population of about 650 million; they confront an external threat of strong Communist neighbors; democratic development and economic progress are impeded by domestic difficulties, principally political and social instability with all its ramifications. It has been U.S. policy to seek to deny this vital communications crossroads to hostile regimes; to help these countries cope with their internal security problems; and to assist them in raising their standard of living.

In this region there are two partially overlapping treaty organizations: CENTO and SEATO. The U.S. is associated with the former and a member of the latter. Our commitments under

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these and bilateral arrangements are to consult and plan for mutual defense in case of Communist aggression.

The U.S. is not now maintaining in the Indian Ocean any immediately available forces of any real effectiveness. We have in the area from Suez to Singapore only a minimal U.S. presence, COMIDEASTFOR (a sea plane tender and two destroyers), whose mission is essentially liaison, observation and reporting. In addition, there is a small air force unit temporarily stationed in the Arabian Peninsula. We do, of course, have the ability to bring forces into the area from outside, but we have no strong tangible presence there.

### II. The Situation

The U.S. Government has in the past periodically examined the problems involved in strengthening our security posture in the Indian Ocean area by providing for a U.S. military presence. The Chinese attack on India in late 1962 and subsequent developments have affected the situation in several ways. It is important that we take a new look at this situation considering that (1) the question of adding to the free world deterrent against ChiCom aggression has become an

immediate

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immediate and pertinent problem; (2) the change of attitude on the part of India has removed an inhibiting factor that has previously loomed large in any consideration of this issue; (3) Pakistani fears growing out of our arms aid to India have added an impelling factor by raising an urgent problem of reassurance; (4) the deterioration of the situation in Laos has undermined Southeast Asian confidence in the West's ability to prevent the spread of Communism; (5) the impending development of a ChiCom nuclear capability; (6) indications of intensified Indonesian instability and restiveness.

### III. Establishment of a U.S. Military Presence

The introduction of U.S. military power into the Indian Ocean area would serve our national policy objectives in a number of ways, primarily by providing a stabilizing and deterring influence in the area and by reducing our reaction time in mounting support operations in case of external aggression or internal conflict. In addition, it would have a profound, though perhaps at first difficult to assess, impact on political and psychological attitudes throughout the area.

Though it can be argued that we can meet any now foreseeable

military

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military situation by the speedy introduction of U.S. forces, it certainly would be more advantageous and give us greater political and military flexibility in handling a crisis to have established the principle of our military presence--even if only on an intermittent basis--before rather than in consequence of an event that might call for U.S. military intercession. Not only might such presence in itself have a strongly deterrent effect, but it would give us the option of deploying our forces with minimum publicity, should it be in our interest to obviate a heightening of tensions during a crisis in being. A dramatization of our intervention could, of course, always be achieved through publicity and other means. Without the precedent of an established U.S. military presence--occasional joint exercises with our Allies cannot be considered to provide such a presence--any U.S. intercession would necessarily assume larger, and perhaps not always desirable political proportions.

While we have a number of options to meet our security and defense objectives in the Indian Ocean area, and a combination of courses of action might indeed best suit our purposes,

a Carrier

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a Carrier Task Force seems to provide the greatest flexibility and the most effective means for accomplishing the tasks outlined by the Secretary of State in his letter of August 17 to the Secretary of Defense. In combination with the Carrier force we could 1) conduct periodic exercises of composite air strike forces (CASF) throughout the land areas adjacent to the Indian Ocean; 2) conduct joint air-ground exercises with regional forces and continue our support of CENTO exercises; 3) develop the island of Diego Garcia as an austere forward operating base; 4) develop an area sub-command of USSTRICOM for the Middle-East Indian Ocean; 5) prestock certain military items in the area, possibly at Diego Garcia and other bases to be developed.

#### IV. Capabilities of a Carrier Force

The effectiveness of a Carrier Force as a deterrent and stabilizing factor must be assessed both in terms of its military capabilities and its effect on political and psychological attitudes.

A force composed of one attack carrier and accompanying vessels operating in the Bay of Bengal can carry out effective interdicting

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interdicting and close ground support operations for a distance of 500 miles (or further if air-refuelled) with 75 fighter-bombers, and can hit targets more than 1200 miles distant with its 12 medium-range attack bombers. In other words, carrier based planes operating, respectively, from the Arabian Sea or the Bay of Bengal could effectively reach the Ladakh or NEFA areas. In case of a Chinese attack on India through Burma, Chinese forces would also come within range of carrier-based aircraft. When operating in the Arabian Sea, such aircraft could exert force from Iraq as far as East Pakistan in the case of the medium-range bombers, while fighters could perform interdiction in significant parts of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Cities within these ranges could, of course, also be protected.

The reaction time factor must be considered from two points of view: comparison with 1) sea-based air to be deployed from the Western Pacific; 2) land-based air deployed from outside the area. With regard to 1), a carrier force present in the Indian Ocean would, depending on its location at the time operations are decided upon, reduce our reaction

time

time by four days as compared with a force dispatched from  
Subic Bay; (in the event an amphibious assault force is to  
be dispatched the time gain would be about 6-7 days.)

In case a CASF is to be deployed, the reaction time would be largely governed by the time it might take to negotiate terminal landing facilities and possible over-flight permission. An additional factor is that for operations beyond a limited air support role, which could be performed almost immediately, ground control radar equipment must be installed before a CASF can become fully effective. This equipment weighs almost 250 tons and may require 6-8 days to assemble and install.

In summary, a Carrier Force would be immediately ready to protect sea and air communications; support friendly forces in case of attack; and conduct offensive striking force operations with both atomic and conventional weapons. In addition, it could perform important good will missions through carefully calculated visits and port calls throughout the Indian Ocean area, giving visible evidence of U.S. presence and, when indicated by politico-military considerations, give special consideration to problem areas on short notice.

V. Cost

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The creation of a new Carrier Task Force for permanent deployment in the Indian Ocean cannot be accomplished within the existing carrier inventory, except by depleting other forces, and would thus be very costly. Intermittent deployment, however, could be accomplished by deploying CINCPAC's Carrier Group South from the 7th Fleet for a limited time at the relatively low cost of \$0.2 million annually for additional airlift. Those expenses would not contribute to our gold flow problem.

Intermittent deployment might be given a semblance of permanancy by designation of an Indian Ocean Fleet with the present aircraft tender of MIDEASTFOR serving as flagship. The Carrier Force would pass under the operational control of the Fleet Commander whenever it entered the Indian Ocean area. The peripatetic nature of its operation would help to camouflage the fact that its presence was in fact not permanent.

Intermittent deployment of a CASF package, not exceeding the equivalent of an 8-squadron force deployed for a three-month period, would amount to \$7.3 million of which \$6.8 million would be reimbursable transport. Deployment of an airborne brigade

brigade of approximately 1500 troops for a 30-day period to participate in combined exercises with regional forces would cost approximately \$2.1 million, of which \$1.8 million would be reimbursable transport.

VI. Reactions

a. Communist China. The known presence of a Carrier force in the Indian Ocean would undoubtedly constitute an important factor in any Chinese decision to attack India. Although it has been argued that a Chinese invasion of India from the north would present an extremely difficult logistic problem and that the Chinese pursued strictly limited objectives in their border attacks last year, the possibility of a renewal of Chinese hostilities against India cannot be excluded. Even if such attacks had again only limited military objectives, they might be undertaken to achieve important political objectives, principally to demonstrate Chinese superiority by inflicting another defeat on India and thus humiliating China's nearest competitor for Asian leadership. The possibility of swift U.S. intervention would most probably constitute a strongly inhibiting factor in any Chinese consideration of attacking

attacking India for limited war gains. It would also have an inhibiting effect on Chinese readiness to openly increase support for insurgent movements in Southeast Asia; moreover, it would provide an effective counter to Communist exploitation of the theme that sooner or later the U.S. would tire of costly involvements in guerilla wars and abandon the governments it now supports, which the Pathet Lao and Viet Cong have used with considerable effectiveness.

A Carrier Force would presumably have least deterrent value in a Chinese decision to engage in massive hostilities against India or Southeast Asia because any such decision would presume Chinese Assumption of the risk of full U.S. involvement.

b. Friends and Allies. There is widespread recognition that only U.S. power prevents the Chinese or their satellites from taking over Southeast Asia; similar factors are among the restraints against Soviet moves toward Iran and Pakistan. In addition to providing countries with which we maintain close relations with additional and unquestionably welcome evidence of our determination to assure their freedom, a carrier force could

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could be a powerful restraint and stabilizing influence in intra-regional disputes involving, for instance, Indonesia, or between nations friendly to us, e.g., the Indo-Pakistan situation. Despite recent Pakistani assertions that only a cessation of our arms aid to India would be fully satisfactory, the presence of a carrier force could provide a measure of reassurance to the Paks and reduce their strong opposition to continued U.S. aid to India. Our presence should be considered persuasive evidence that we intend to redeem our pledge to come to Pakistan's aid in case of attack from any source. Specifically, the Paks would come to understand that an Indian Ocean Task Force could 1) neutralize the Indian navy and keep open the supply lines to Karachi; 2) play an important interdicting role in the air, thus greatly improving the tactical maneuverability of Pak ground forces; 3) knock hostile aircraft out of the air over Pakistan and make up for hostile air superiority; 4) provide, if necessary, limited logistic support for Pak forces.

c. Neutrals. While a carrier force cannot be expected to have any immediately telling effect on the policies of Burma and Cambodia, it would tend to undercut the now prevalent belief that

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that sooner or later the Chinese will win out and thereby possibly also affect the situation in Laos. Indonesian reaction is difficult to predict but presumably a carrier force in the Indian Ocean would loom as a considerable factor in any Indonesian decision to engage in adventurist policies in areas where our interests or those of our allies (ANZUS) are directly involved. Neutralist predilections for seeking an accommodation with the Chinese may be correspondingly reduced. This might become particularly relevant in the event of a Chinese nuclear explosion. It might then be desirable to have U.S. nuclear power in the Indian Ocean area as a counter to possible ChiCom attempts to politically exploit their nuclear power. The prior presence of a carrier force with its dual capability would place us in the most favorable position of giving measured assurances to neutrals and allies by placing emphasis on the nuclear counterweight provided by the task force without introducing a new, "provocative," element into the situation. However, if we reacted on China's attainment of a nuclear capability by bringing in nuclear forces--especially deploying them on indigenous territory--we

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might well expose ourselves to criticism from the very countries whose resistance our move would be calculated to stiffen.

d. Political-Psychological Advantages. An important element in the likely reaction to the introduction of a carrier force would be its minimum vulnerability to leftist or neutralist agitation. While the Communists no doubt would direct their propaganda against the force, it is difficult to see how they could exploit the themes usually directed against U.S. bases, i.e., curtailment of sovereignty, storage of atomic arms on Asian territory, presence of American troops, etc., which have affected the sensitivities even of friendly governments.

VII. Conclusions

A carrier task force provides the most suitable and most flexible, though of course not exclusive, means of closing the gap in U.S. military presence in the Indian Ocean area.

Deployment--as a minimum on an intermittent basis--of a carrier force would serve immediate and long-range U.S. policy objectives in the area by providing a visible and credible

wide-ranging

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wide-ranging U.S. presence that would act as a strong deterrent against attack on friendly countries and as an important stabilizer in intra-regional relationships. It could be taken into account in CENTO and SEATO planning and would have an unquestionably favorable impact on political and psychological attitudes throughout the area by providing the kind of quiet and enduring reassurance less inherent in alternate though perhaps more dramatic means of documenting U.S. readiness to maintain the freedom of the countries ranging from Iran and the East Coast of Africa to Malaysia.

The absence of the requirement for bases on the mainland has the advantage that we 1) do not have to engage in often difficult negotiations for base rights; 2) can avoid a gold flow problem usually associated with alternative forces deployed on land; 3) are not vulnerable to political blackmail or ouster if our presence is no longer desired, yet 4) have freedom to reduce our commitment if we have to.

One of the chief advantages of a carrier force is that it would provide us with a dual capability (nuclear and conventional) presence, which would give us great political and

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military flexibility without engendering the political problems inherent in introducing nuclear weapons on territory of indigenous countries with alternate types of forces.

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