

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 21, 1976

Dear Mike:

Memo to Mike

I appreciate the deep concern reflected in your letter of December 3, 1975, over maintaining peace in the Indian Ocean and preserving a degree of mutual restraint in the military activities of nations concerned in that area.

You are aware, of course, of my view that the growth of the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean is not a result of United States force presence there but rather part of the continuing expansion of the Soviet Navy toward a global "blue water" role. Our modest presence on Diego Garcia will not markedly raise the threshold of naval activity in the area, since we do not intend to station ships there on a permanent basis but merely to provide better support to our existing deployments in the region. While the number of United States naval vessels periodically present in the Indian Ocean is small, the support facility at Diego Garcia is needed to insure the independence and flexibility of even these modest deployments -- especially in times of crisis. The ability to operate effectively in this area is crucial, given the increased strategic importance of the Indian Ocean sea lanes for oil transport and our traditional concern for the freedom of the seas.

I note also your interest in discussions with the Soviet Union on a possible freeze on our respective facilities and naval operations in the Indian Ocean. In light of our experience on other arms control negotiations, we believe that proceeding with our activities with respect to Diego Garcia would improve the chances for useful talks with the USSR by contributing to the perceived balance of forces in the area -- an essential condition to any successful arms control agreement.

I can assure you that we will continue to exercise restraint in our own activities in this region and to consider seriously the possibilities for meaningful arms limitation in the Indian Ocean area.

Sincerely,

Ronald R. Ford

The Honorable Mike Mansfield
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

W.C. for the Commission from the Indian Ocean

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