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January 21, 1966

UK DEFENSE REVIEW

January 27, 1966

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Position Paper

Indian Ocean Island Base Plans

Recommended US Position:

It is in the US interest for the UK to maintain a credible presence 'East of Suez' with the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) playing an important role in a support capacity.

Although the US has no immediate construction plans, we should welcome any indications of a British intention to establish such facilities as a fuel depot in Diego Garcia and an air staging base on Aldabra, with priority on the latter.

With regard to the latter, the Defense Department would be willing to contribute to construction costs of an RAF station in return for joint usage rights.

Anticipated UK Position:

The British are caught between a need to reduce Defense expenditures as well as the atrophy of political acceptancy of so-called foreign bases on the one hand, and the necessity to protect their own interests in the area (as well as those of the West) on the other.

They may be expected, therefore, to seek the general US attitude regarding the development of these islands for defense purposes, and more immediately and precisely,

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if we are interested in joining them in any projects such as the air staging facility on Aldabra.

Background:

There are no known immediate firm construction or usage plans on the part of either the US or UK for the BIOT.

At one time the US was considering construction of an austere communications station and supporting facilities on Diego Garcia; however, this is not the case at this time. (HMG has been so notified).

The UK has recently alluded to an interest in developing a POL depot on Diego Garcia.

Within the respective Defense Establishments of both governments there have been indications of an awareness of the potential value of an air staging facility on Aldabra.

The future utility of the BIOT may well be surfaced in the context of British plans 'East of Suez', i.e., withdrawal from Aden, consolidation in the Persian Gulf, reductions in Southeast Africa, and even as a specific alternative to Singapore.

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