

CNO EXECUTIVE PANEL

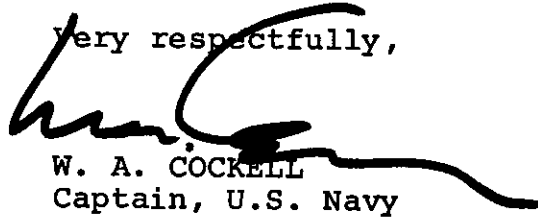
WAC/bb
19 APR 75

MEMORANDUM FOR ADMIRAL ZUMWALT

Subj: Diego Garcia

Copy of SS letter attached, FYI.

Very respectfully,



W. A. COCKELL
Captain, U.S. Navy

BUK file

sent to Schurr

Dear _____

I note that Diego Garcia has become an active issue again, with the introduction of Ted's resolution to delay improvement of our facilities until we have negotiated with the Russians.

Given the trend of events, I wonder if this is really the time to make an issue over what seems to be a rather modest improvement in our capabilities in an unquestionably important part of the world. Experts whose judgment I respect tell me that Diego Garcia could be of real importance in assuring "back door" support to Israel in the event our routes across the Atlantic and Mediterranean were denied or interfered with -- an increasingly likely contingency.

They also point out the importance of our ability to support carrier forces in the Indian Ocean during another Arab-Israeli war. The ships we put there in the fall of 1973 undoubtedly helped sober the Arabs. Given the growing military capabilities of the Gulf Arabs -- which we would not want to see transferred to an Arab-Israeli front -- it seems to make sense for us to have the capability to tie them down by posing at least a latent threat to the Arabs' eastern flank.

I also understand that if we were to come to Israel's aid in extremis, our "back door" naval forces would play an essential role in tipping the balance against Soviet and Arab forces in the battle area. This is a grim prospect; but I continue to believe the best way to keep it from becoming a reality is to make sure all concerned see clearly that we have the capability to prevail, if pushed to that point.

The arms control aspect of Ted's resolution is appealing, but I am afraid its practical effect would be to give the Russians a veto over our activity for so long as they choose to protract the discussions. They are already ahead of us in Indian Ocean capabilities, according to Schlesinger's latest statements, and enjoy the advantages of geographical proximity as well. I note press reports that they have started flying combat aircraft over the Indian Ocean from bases in the USSR and Somalia in connection with their big naval exercise now in progress, which seems to have the Indian Ocean as its focus. While my instincts would favor the arms control solution, I don't think we should let the Russians impale us on that hook at this time; and I am personally skeptical about getting them to give up their own military advantages in the region -- which they obviously think are important in achieving a variety of political and strategic goals.

From our own viewpoint, I do not think this is the time to be doing things which could significantly diminish our ability to influence events in the Mideast, or reduce the range of capabilities we can bring to bear in the event of another Arab-Israeli war. I recognize this is a tough issue, but I do believe we are headed for a dangerous period in the next few years and will want to be careful not to send the wrong signals to those who are bent on changing the shape of the Mideast.