

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

28 JAN 1976

Honorable Robert Taft, Jr.
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Bob:

In the course of our meeting prior to the hearings on my **confirmation**, you raised the question of the relative military presence of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean. This is an issue which has attracted considerable attention over the past several years as part of the discussion concerning the proposed expansion of U.S. support facilities on Diego Garcia. Let me summarize the features of and reasons for the U.S. military presence in the Indian Ocean.

In the wake of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the United States adopted a policy of more frequent and more regular naval deployments to the Indian Ocean. In practice, this has taken the form of periodic deployments of several ships from the Pacific Fleet, averaging approximately one day out of three over the past 18 months, with a carrier present in the Indian Ocean about 20 percent of the time. This presence is, of course, in addition to the three ships of Middle East Force which have operated routinely in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean for nearly 27 years. The Soviet naval presence has been considerably greater than our own in terms of number of ships and the length of time they remain in **the area**. At the present time, for example, the USSR has approximately eleven combatant ships in the Indian Ocean, including a nuclear submarine with cruise missiles, while we have only the two destroyers of Middle East Force. Despite the disparity in numbers, however, we feel that U.S. naval forces are suitable during those periods when a carrier is deployed to the region.

The U.S. has not attempted to match the USSR ship for ship, nor do we have any intention of establishing a permanent Indian Ocean fleet such as they have done. We believe that our demonstrated capability to deploy military forces rapidly to the region will serve as a deterrent to any nation or faction which might be tempted to interfere with the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf or otherwise to disrupt the stability

Indian Ocean

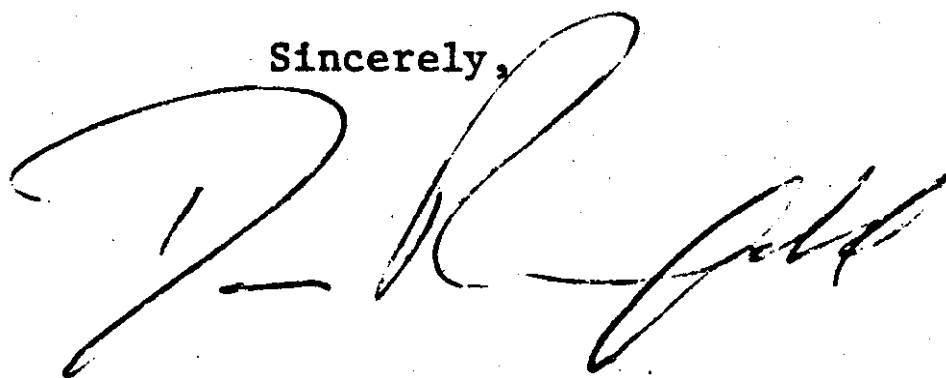
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of the area. However, our deterrent ability is dependent on being able to support those forces which we choose to deploy. Thus, the Administration has requested the limited expansion of facilities at Diego Garcia in order to provide an independent regional source of logistics support for U.S. naval forces so that they will **not** have to rely either on the resources of the littoral states or on a lengthy supply route extending back to the Philippines.

I share the view that the United States should not unilaterally bear the costs of defending the interests of other nations. However, the Administration's view is that the limited U.S. presence which has been maintained in the Indian Ocean area over the past several years is consonant with the level of our own national interests **in** the stability of the region. Moreover, as you are aware, the British cooperate closely with us in matters relating to **the Indian** Ocean -- including joint operation of the facilities on Diego Garcia -- **and** the French regularly maintain a naval force in the region which is larger than our own. With cooperation, the forces and activities of the U.S., U.K., and France are sufficient to protect our mutual **in-**terests. At the present time, the working relationships which we maintain with both the British and French are adequate to **ensure** the necessary cooperation. The Indian Ocean, however, **is** a region of significance, and U.S. policies there are subject to continuing scrutiny and review in light of changing economic and political circumstances.

Sincerely,





OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

29 December 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: **Followup** Letters on Secretary of Defense Pre-Confirmation
Visits and Confirmation Hearings

Attached at Tabs A-G are letters to various Senators responding to questions that were raised either during your pre-confirmation visits or during your confirmation hearings. A summary of the nature of the questions/concerns is as follows:

FROM PRE-CONFIRMATION VISITS

<u>Senator Visited</u>	<u>Topic Discussed</u>	<u>Draft Prepared by</u>	<u>Tab</u>
Robert Taft, Jr. <i>Indian Ocean 323.3</i>	Concerned over the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean and with the lack of parity with the American presence.	ISA	A
John Culver <i>Indian Ocean 323.3</i>	Concern over our construction in Diego Garcia and the need for U.S. -Soviet negotiations on the Indian Ocean. Wants to make sure that the natives from Diego Garcia get a fair shake and that such an event is not repeated.	ISA	B

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FROM CONFIRMATION HEARINGS*

<u>Senator</u>	<u>Nature of Question/Concern</u>	<u>Draft Prepared by</u>	<u>Tab</u>
Stennis** 430	Concerned with reports on GI use of food stamps and impli- cation of inadequate compen- sation.	M&RA	C
Stennis** 250	Requests SecDef look into reports that labor unions are attempting to unionize the Armed Forces.	Gen. Counsel	C
Taft 320.2 Marines	Concerned with reports that some in DoD would change role/ size of USMC. Questions SecDef attitude toward changed USMC role.	PA&E w/ USMC Coordination	D
Scott 240	Concerned that rising military retirement costs are absorbing too much of the Defense budget.	M&RA	E
Culver A-381	Request SecDef thoughts on first use of SLBM in support of, theater nuclear war in Europe.	PA&E	F
Leahy .110.01	Concerned about large out-year projections of Defense budget made by Dr. Schlesinger. Re- quests SecDef thoughts on need for such a large budget in the out-years.	PA&E/ Compt.	G

Recommend signature on the attached letters. All of these have been coordinated with OASD (Legislative Affairs).

Alan Woods
The Special Assistant

Attachments

* Copy of hearings included at **respective** Tabs
** Response to both in one letter

