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January 30, 1986

National Security Decision
Directive Number 208

UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD THE SOUTHWEST INDIAN OCEAN (U)

The Southwest Indian Ocean area includes the four island nations of Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius and the Comoros, the coastal areas of Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and the French Department of Reunion. The four island countries are in various stages of economic development and look to the West for economic and development assistance. With the exception of Mauritius, these island nations are also potentially unstable, with present leadership based more on personality than on traditional or constitutional institutions. (C)

Overall US interests in the region are relatively modest. However, the area is strategically important to the US because it serves as a zone of transit for Western military and commercial vessels, including oil tankers moving between the Persian Gulf and Western Europe or the U.S., and secondarily because of the presence of valuable mineral resources in Southern Africa and Madagascar. Moreover, the area is surrounded by regions of significantly greater US strategic interest -- the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa and the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the US needs to obtain and/or maintain military access to certain countries; e.g. Kenya, Seychelles and Mauritius, for support of current or potential operations, while at the same time denying use of the region to the USSR for similar purposes. (S)

The US has successfully maintained a significant but limited military presence in the region.

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The U.S. has visitation privileges in both Mauritius and Seychelles for military ships and aircraft, and the US maintains a USAF Tracking Station in Seychelles. Our most important facility in the Indian Ocean is at Diego Garcia which provides communications, a safe harbor, an airfield, and general logistical support for naval operations in the Indian Ocean. (S)

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In contrast, Soviet military operational access to the area is limited to ship visits to the Seychelles by the Soviet Indian Ocean Naval Squadron. While not one of high priority, the Soviets have nonetheless pursued an active policy in the region. All four island nations and three mainland littoral states are well placed for support of Soviet naval forces and for surveillance of US combatants in the Southwest Indian Ocean. The Soviets' primary instrument for maintaining and expanding their influence in the region has been the provision of military equipment and training. Soviet economic assistance is meager. All of these nations, however, continue to resist Moscow's requests for naval and air facilities, and few changes are anticipated in Soviet tactics and strategy over the near term. (S)

Several other Western nations, particularly France, are active in the Southwest Indian Ocean. With military bases in Djibouti, Mayotte and Reunion, France is expected to remain a strong military presence in the area. It also retains many economic ties to the region, particularly to Madagascar and Comoros, as well as to its own Department of Reunion. British influence is far more limited and largely restricted to Kenya and Seychelles. Although its military forces are relatively limited, Australia recently demonstrated increased interest in becoming more actively involved, politically and militarily, in the Southwest Indian Ocean. In contrast, South Africa has publicly stated that it is no longer able to take responsibility for defense of the sea lanes around the southern tip of Africa. (S)

Seychelles

US interests in Seychelles are focused on the continued operation of the Air Force Satellite Tracking Station whose lease expires in 1990. The continued operation of this facility will remain desirable for the indefinite future, even after other facilities are brought on line in Diego Garcia and the United Kingdom (projected for 1989). Soviet political influence in the country is strong, however, and political instability could provide opportunities for President Rene's Marxist advisors to increase their influence. A more pro-Soviet regime could pose a serious challenge for future access and jeopardize continued operation of the Tracking Station. Soviet influence is likely to be constrained, however, by Seychelles' economic dependence on Western tourism and economic assistance. (S)

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Madagascar

US-Malagasy relations have improved since 1980, but the US remains concerned about the continuing high level of Soviet activity and influence on the Malagasy government and military. By 1983 the Soviets had established three signal intelligence sites in Madagascar, but under US pressure President Ratsiraka dismantled them in early 1985. The Soviets have sought access to Malagasy naval and air facilities, including Antsiranana, but Ratsiraka has not waived from a policy of denying access to combat vessels from non-Indian Ocean littoral nations. It is in the US' interest to support this policy because, with the US already established at nearby Diego Garcia, it is more important to deny the Soviets access to Malagasy military facilities than to obtain additional access for US naval forces in the region. The US also wishes to maintain commercial access to Madagascar's considerable mineral wealth. (S)

Mauritius

The US enjoys excellent relations with Mauritius, a third world showplace where democracy and free enterprise work. The US wants to maintain access to Mauritius for US naval vessels and aircraft and to encourage Mauritius to continue to take a low key approach towards its claim of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, which includes Diego Garcia. (S)

Comoros

The Comoros is strategically located at the northern entrance to the Mozambique Channel. Here also we seek to deny Soviet access to the country's limited port and air facilities. President Abdallah is pro-Western and pro-US, but his hold on power is tenuous, and he remains dependent on both European mercenaries and French economic support for political survival. US interests in the Comoros largely parallel those of the French, who are in a position to ensure that any replacement for Abdallah is acceptable to the West. Therefore, the US should continue to coordinate with the French, without abandoning a recognizably independent policy.

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US Regional Goals

Our paramount interest in the Southwest Indian Ocean area is to maintain US access, while at the same time denying Soviet naval and air access. US interests are largely complemented by those of its allies, particularly France. US strategic goals include:

- Maintenance and expansion of Western political, commercial and military access to and influence in the area;

- Protection and preservation of the sea lanes for commerce and military contingencies and;

- Curtailment or at least containment of Soviet political and military influence in the area. (S)

Other major goals include the promotion of regional political and economic stability and the encouragement of pro-Western or at least genuinely non-aligned policies. Although the US has limited political and economic influence in the region, the continuing need of each country for economic assistance does provide some leverage. The US should remain prepared to take advantage of political opportunities as they arise and to respond, within budgetary limitations, with relatively small increases in military and/or economic assistance. (S)

US Policies

Pursuant to these goals, US country-specific policies are to:

Madagascar

- Support continuation of Madagascar's policy on ship visits to ensure that the Soviets do not obtain operational access to Malagasy military facilities;

- Whenever possible, without compromising the foregoing, take advantage of opportunities to increase US military access by modest amounts, consistent with operational requirements and constraints;

- Capitalize on opportunities, consistent with resource limitations, to liberalize the economic and political system. (S)

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Seychelles

- Maintain the USAF Tracking Station;
- Prevent Seychelles from being used as a military facility by the Soviets. (S)

Mauritius

- Maintain naval and air force visiting privileges;
- Seek moderation of Mauritius' claim on the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia;
- Remain sensitive to Mauritius' trade concerns and to its need to demonstrate economic benefits from its de facto acceptance of the US presence on Diego Garcia. (S)

Comoros

- Reinforce, in coordination with the French, the pro-Western attitude of the Comoran government;
- Encourage Comoran suspicion of the Soviet Union to ensure that the Soviets do not obtain military access to the Comoros. (S)

 Ronald Reagan

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