

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT:

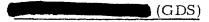
Reply to Letter from Sri Lanka

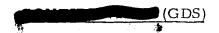
Prime Minister

At Tab B is a letter to you from Prime Minister Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, expressing concern over US-British plans for the expansion of naval facilities on the British-owned island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. A proposed reply is at Tab A.

As you are aware, US-British plans for the expansion of our joint naval communications facility on Diego Garcia call for the development of ship and aircraft support facilities and the construction of additional barracks and fuel storage capacity. The purpose of this expansion program, which will cost the US about \$29 million, is to provide improved support facilities for our naval forces in the Indian Ocean region in order to reduce their dependence on faraway US support facilities in the Pacific.

Mrs. Bandaranaike's letter expresses her government's "grave anxiety" and "deep concern" over the Diego Garcia expansion, and urges that it be reconsidered. Her position is not surprising; she has long been personally committed to the concept of a demilitarized "zone of peace" for the entire Indian Ocean (a concept which we have not supported because of its impracticality and its inconsistency with broader US policy objectives). In addition, she probably wants to avoid being attacked by the many influential Ceylonese politicians within and outside her coalition government who periodically accuse her of being too friendly toward the United States. She remains anxious to maintain good relations with the US, however. Therefore, she has handled the matter through a personal letter to you rather than by turning it into a major public issue. Her letter is generally restrained and avoids making any threat or suggestion that our bilateral relations will be damaged. Meanwhile, her government has been minimizing the amount of publicity being given to the Diego Garcia question in Sri Lanka's largely government-controlled press.





The proposed reply at Tab A stresses that our naval presence in the Indian Ocean is consistent with our interest in peace and detente and is designed to help maintain a military balance, particularly in view of the expanded Soviet access to the region that will result from the prospective reopening of the Suez Canal. The proposed reply focuses on these points because the Ceylonese are uneasy over growing Soviet strength in the region and particularly over what they fear could be Indo-Soviet collusion at the expense of smaller states.

RECOMMENDATION: That you sign the proposed reply to Mrs. Bandaranaike at Tab A. (Text approved by Mr. Gergen's office.)



THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON

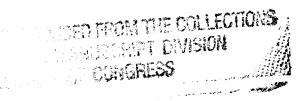
March 1, 1974

Dear Madame Prime Minister:

I have read with care your message of February 11 regarding the expansion of the Anglo-American facilities at Diego Garcia. I appreciate your confidence in writing directly and frankly to me on a subject that I know is of great concern to you. I believe direct correspondence on such a matter is more productive than a debate through the public media.

The decision to expand facilities at Diego Garcia does not represent any diminution of our strong interest in detente and in the consolidation of world peace. We earnestly look forward to the day when military facilities and weapons can be reduced worldwide. As you know, we are pursuing this objective in such negotiations as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks and the talks on force reductions in central Europe. Arms limitation is a goal of major importance—one which I know is central to your own policies. It is also one which will take time to achieve.

In the meantime, we believe that the maintenance of a general military balance is necessary for the preservation of peace and for the establishment of an environment in which meaningful and balanced force limitations can take place. It is in this spirit that the decision to expand the facilities on Diego Garcia was made. This decision does not envisage the basing of military units on the island. The facilities to be established there are to provide logistical support for the operation of US naval ships when they are in the area. We believe that this capability is particularly



DECLASSIFIED A/ISS/IPS, Department of State E.O. 12958, as amended October 11, 2007 important in light of the prospective reopening of the Suez Canal, which will give other world naval powers greatly shortened lines of communication between the Indian Ocean and their homelands.

Finally, I want to emphasize that the United States is not seeking to establish a position of special privilege in the Indian Ocean region. I also want to reassure you in the strongest possible terms that the expansion of facilities at Diego Garcia is not directed in any way against the interests of Sri Lanka or other countries in the region.

With warm personal regards,

Sincerely

Her Excellency
Sirimavo Bandaranaike
Prime Minister of the Republic of Sri Lanka
Colombo