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 E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
 TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MV
 SUBJECT: British Withdrawal from RAF Gan: Maldivian Reaction
 ACTION: Secstate WASHDC
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1. SUMMARY: Senior Maldivian officials are disturbed over status of employees and facilities at former RAF staging facility ~~on~~ on Gan Island which have become their problem with final British withdrawal March 31. Hopes that British would provide money to maintain operation ~~have~~ have not been realized nor do prospects of converting Gan into tourist complex appear good. President Nasir ~~claims~~ claimed GOM cannot maintain burden over time and Vice President Maniku noted that Soviet Union had expressed interest in Gan, presumably for military purposes. Neither Nasir nor Maniku

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CLEARANCES:

DATT:Cdr. Cutchen (info)

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but possibility that ruled/such use might be granted. We are not certain GOM would in fact come to agreement with Soviets but we recommend Washington examine how Soviet military use of Gan might affect U.S. interests.

END SUMMARY.

2. During Ambassador Van Hollen's April 14-15 fare-well visit to Maldives, discussions with senior Maldivians brought out deep concern over problems arising from March 31 final British withdrawal from RAF Gan. At start of Ambassador's call on President Nasir, President raised Gan noting that although other economic prospects for his country had improved, Gan had become difficult problem. He said GOM had to maintain work force of 140 men merely to keep facilities in working order with no return to Maldivians. Nasir mentioned possibility that Gan might be turned into tourist complex but then noted that business would be seasonal, would require large annual investment for limited returns during tourist months and he doubted whether charter tour operators would be willing to cover yearly costs. Only solution, according to Nasir, was to work out some type of agreement either with commercial organizations or with some other country. In reply to Ambassador's direct query whether agreements would be in tourist context rather than military use, President was

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non-committal and did not rule out third country use for military purposes.

3. Subject of Gan arose again during ~~present~~ Ambassador's call on Vice President Ali Maniku who has been carrying on negotiations with British regarding Gan withdrawal. Maniku stated problem in these terms: although British had left ~~assets~~ assets on Gan in form of facilities and equipment worth over 11 million pounds, GOM will have to spend 46,000 pounds per year to maintain facilities in running order, cost which GOM cannot sustain over time. Talks have been held with various groups with view to developing Gan as tourist complex, but nothing concrete has come out of them. Maniku insisted that ~~present~~ present situation could not continue. He said ~~although~~ Maldivians would ~~prefer~~ prefer not to have to turn to any major power to solve Gan problem. However, ~~to~~ to maintain Gan at no cost to GOM, and employment found ~~some way must be found~~ some way must be found for trained labor from RAF Gan who were now out of work and who had been used to higher British salaries. Maniku implied British had left workers in lurch and he made it clear that GOM no longer considers defence treaty with HMG valid.

4. When asked by Ambassador ~~xxxxx~~ whether Gan's use for other than for tourist purposes would ~~xxxx~~ be ~~xxxx~~ contemplated, Maniku said GOM would have to solve

If
problem in whatever way was open to it, ~~and if~~ British/
Americans refused to accept responsibility for
maintaining Gan, and if no group was interested in
developing Gan as tourist complex, then GOM would have
to turn to ^{whomever} ~~whomever~~ might help. He said Soviets had
expressed interest in Gan but did not go into details.
When Ambassador suggested Indians might not ^{necessarily} be pleased
with Soviet use, Maniku reiterated that Soviets had
shown interest and suggested that Indians, who he
pictured as being heavily under Soviet influence,
might be planning some sort of joint use with Soviets.

5. COMMENT: Problem of what to do with Gan is
obviously ~~is~~ weighing heavily on minds of many senior
Maldivians. It is difficult to judge whether they
would, in fact, turn Gan over to Russians, ^{although} ~~although~~
neither President Nasir nor Vice President Maniku
would rule out this possibility. In view Maldivian
requirement that programs ^{or} ~~are~~ projects should pay
their own way, GOM might well be tempted to enter
arrangement with Soviets, Indians or others for military
use of Gan facilities if it felt price was right.

We recommend that
5. ~~Recommendation~~ Action Recommended: ~~That~~
Washington agencies promptly take another close look
at Gan and ~~carefully~~ consider (A) degree to which its use
by unfriendly power would adversely affect U.S. interests,

particularly with reference to its proximity to Diego Garcia and U.S. objectives in Indian Ocean and (B) alternatives for U.S. policy.

CVH
VAN HOLLEN