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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #00118-85
8 January 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: [Redacted]
Assistant National Intelligence Officer for Africa

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SUBJECT: Southwest Indian Ocean

REFERENCE: Memo for NIO/Africa from DCI, dated 4 Jan 1985,
Subj: Comoros Islands

1. The Southwest Indian Ocean Islands of Mauritius, Madagascar, the Seychelles, and the Comoros remain an area of relatively low-level competition for influence between the West and the Soviet Union. We have no evidence at present that the Soviets have embarked on or are preparing to embark on a major effort to radically upset the current balance. More likely, in our view, the Soviets and their surrogates will continue to show the flag, provide diplomatic/political and military support to friendly governments such as the Seychelles, press wherever possible for increased military access while denying the same to the US, and expand economic cooperation without making major commitments of economic assistance. Furthermore, in our view--supported by a recent joint DOD/CINCPAC working level conference on the area--the Southwest Indian Ocean is likely to remain an area of relatively low strategic priority to the Soviets and that logistic difficulties alone make it unlikely that the Soviets will devote major resources to the area. For their part, the economically beleaguered islands are likely to continue to swing back and forth between East and West in an effort to maximize economic and military assistance from all donors.

2. The Business Week article--along with other recent articles in Newsweek, Le Point, The Economist, and Jack Anderson's column--correctly notes leftist President Rene's dependence on the Soviet Union, North Korea, and others for security and military assistance; this dependence is longstanding, however, rather than a recent development. The US Embassy notes that these articles (some of which probably are plants by

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the London-based opposition to Rene) along with an attempted coup last Fall have placed the already jittery Rene on the political defensive at home and abroad. In recent months the Embassy reports that Rene has attempted in public and private to tilt the "other way" in an effort to prevent any fall off in the critically important tourist industry or cutbacks in essential western economic aid (both of which his government cannot live without), and to dispel the image that he is beholden to any foreign power. For example, the Soviet presence was reduced by at least 14 advisers who left when their mission was completed, Rene has allowed for the first time a senior army officer to accept an offer of US training, and the local press has taken a slightly more balanced approach to the US. At the same time, initial moves suggest that Rene would rather successfully renegotiate a treaty on the US tracking station that gives him more money rather than score political points in some circles by closing it down.

3. Mercurial, pro-Western President Abdallah's decision to accept 13 Soviet scholarships probably is designed to quiet leftist politicians in the Comoros, to vex the French, and to demonstrate his "nonalignment" rather than to serve as a precursor of a turn to the East. The Soviets probably will continue to attempt to gain inroads by focusing on continuing French control of the island of Mayotte, claimed by the Comoros. The planned establishment of a US Embassy in the Comoros, however, should reassure Abdallah and help convince him to continue rebuffing Soviet overtures.

4. The Community currently is producing two estimates that assess Soviet policy, actions, and prospects in southern Africa and the Southwest Indian Ocean. [redacted] -details the evolving Soviet position in southern Africa (particularly in Angola and Mozambique) over the next two years. The second--Memorandum to Holders o [redacted] -in part updates recent Soviet activities in the Southwest Indian Ocean and assesses the region's strategic significance. This Estimate is being done in conjunction with the current IG on the Island nations.

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Remarks PIs provide comments to DCI.

Executive Secretary
4 Jan 85

Date

ER 85-017

4 January 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Intelligence Officer for Africa
FROM: Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT: Cormoros Islands

In addition to this bit about the Seychelles, Jeane Kirkpatrick expressed concern to me about the Cormoros Islands. She said this is the only pro-Western position along the southeast coast of Africa and she says it is under external pressure.



William J. Casey

Attachment:
International Outlook, Business Week
19 November 1984

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International Outlook

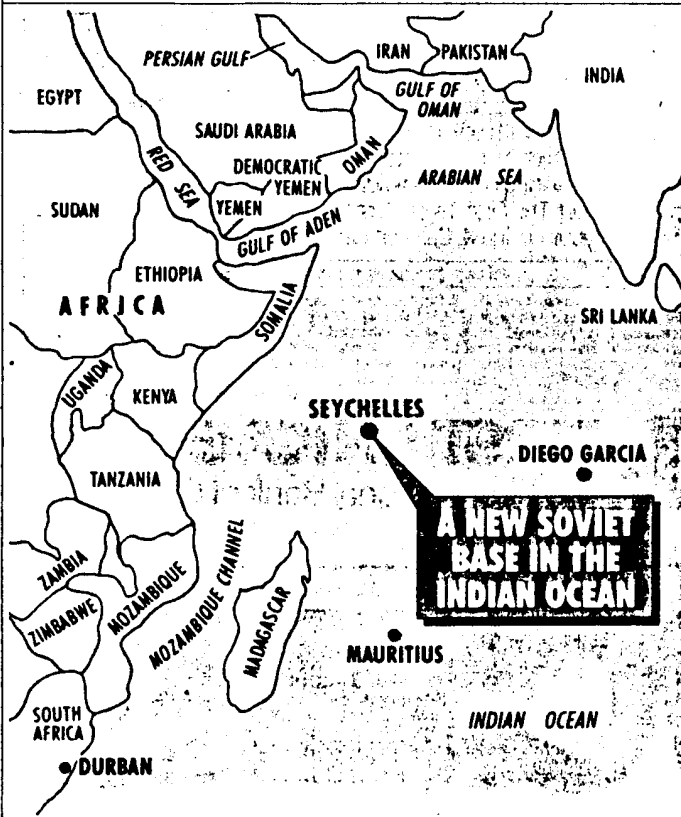
BY SOL W. SANDER

THE ISLAND PARADISE THAT'S BECOMING A COMMUNIST STRONGHOLD

The degenerating political situation in India gives new weight to concern among Western strategists over developments on the small Seychelles island group, 1,000 mi. off the African coast in the Indian Ocean. The islands lie on the supertanker route between the Cape of Good Hope and the Persian Gulf, and they can electronically keep an eye on the important U. S. naval base 600 mi. away on the tiny island of Diego Garcia.

The Diego Garcia base, which Washington keeps under tight security, is a crucial jump-off point for U. S. naval and air power protecting the Persian Gulf oil-supply routes and U. S. ships in the Indian Ocean. U. S. submarines moving through that ocean are equipped with new Trident I missiles that could strike at the Soviet industrial heartland in the Urals.

FAMOUS MERCENARY. Now Soviet surrogates—East Germans, Cubans, North Koreans, and Libyans—have moved in to back up the regime of Seychelles strongman Albert F. René and a group of hardline communist sympathizers who took over the islands in 1977. The East Germans have put up three radar units that monitor Diego Garcia. The North Koreans bolster a contingent of Tanzanian soldiers, René's bodyguard, who helped put him in power. In 1981 these foreign troops helped René foil an attempt to overthrow him that was sponsored by South Africa and led by the famous mercenary, Colonel Michael "Mad Mike" Hoare. The Cubans are supplying other support services. And the Libyans, recently thrown out of a neighboring Indian Ocean ministate, Mauritius, are handling weapons deliveries for the Soviet bloc.



Russian ships, working out of the port of Aden in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, are already using the islands for refueling as part of their elaborate maneuvers to maintain a permanent Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean. Of the Western powers, only the French maintain a permanent—though small—naval force in the Indian Ocean. The U. S. battle group in the Indian Ocean is there on a part-time basis.

The Soviets have a disproportionately large Seychelles embassy that has given René aid, including an in-progress survey of the islands' continental shelf that could be the first step in planning a Russian naval base. That could be extremely important to Moscow, since the Soviets are losing their base in the Mozambique port of Maputo. Mozambique is turning away from Moscow toward South Africa for help in ending its own civil war.

The events in the Seychelles are a microcosm of a problem dogging U. S. strategy worldwide. In the era immediately following World War II, there was a consensus in Western circles that tiny remnants of empire like the Seychelles had been rendered useless by the growth of air power and modern communications. But as the Soviets have made themselves a global naval power, these far corners of the earth have become exactly what they were in the 19th century: focal points for the expansion of empire.

Moscow infiltrates and organizes small and easily intimidated populations—often through its satellites—in an effort to establish political and then military hegemony at strategic world crossroads. Maurice Bishop's Grenada, at the Atlantic gateway to the Caribbean, was a classic example.

STAND BACK AND WATCH. The U. S. and its Western allies, which long ago gave up old-style political imperialism, either stand back and watch—powerless to halt expanding Soviet power and influence—or call the fire brigades, as they did in Grenada when the strategic threat to U. S. and Western interests grew too strong. There are at least a half-dozen potential Grenadas around the world: Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana) on the northeastern coast of South America; Guinea-Bissau (formerly a Portuguese colony) on the West African coast, and Fernando Po, an island nearby; and islands in the South Pacific, such as New Caledonia.

The Seychelles are typical of the problem. It has only 63,000 people, most of whom live on the main island of Mahé. More of the multiracial, French-patois-speaking Seychellois live outside the country in Australia and London. But the island group is undergoing the familiar chain of events. It is a country under communist rule suffering declining living standards and political oppression and supporting a growing military establishment. Some 4,000 Seychellois have emigrated since René took over. Tourism was once the mainstay of the islands' economy because of its beautiful beaches and a year-round temperature of 86°. But the political situation has frightened off South African tourists—only 2½ hours away by air—and cruise ships no longer halt in the Seychelles.

René is opposed mainly by a stalwart anticommunist Catholic bishop, Felix Paul, who runs an independent weekly newspaper. An anticommunist resistance movement dedicated to overthrowing René is headquartered in London. But it will be hard put to succeed before Moscow brings the isolated island under rigid communist control.