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Mr Barder

SOUTH AFRICAN METEOROLOGICAL STATION ON GOUGH ISLAND

Problem

- A 1. A lease between the Government of St Helena and the South Africans allowing the latter to maintain a meteorological station on Gough Island (a dependency of Tristan da Cunha) is due to expire after 10 years on 31 March 1979. An earlier lease ran from 1964 to 1969. The South Africans will almost certainly wish to continue the arrangement. If they do, how should we respond?
- B

Background and Argument

- C 2. The South African facilities on Gough Island are of no military significance whatsoever. Some of the station's history is given in a letter dated 4 July 1977, from the Administrator in Tristan da Cunha. The gathering of meteorological data is a harmless, scientific activity and our arrangements with the South Africans can hardly be criticised on any of the usual grounds, ie:

- a) support for the system of apartheid;
- b) collaboration with the military or police authorities;
- c) direct economic involvement.

The renewal of the lease under which the South Africans would be allowed to continue using a part of this small uninhabited island for purely scientific purposes could be treated in the same businesslike manner that allowed us to conclude recently the double taxation agreement with South Africa.

3. However, we might be able to turn the grant of a fresh lease to some positive advantage. In recent years there has been an increasing need to set up some kind of

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Mr Barder

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surveillance of the waters around Gough Island where illegal fishing is on the increase. With over-fishing in South African waters in recent years, poaching may well increase further in the well-stocked waters of Tristan and in particular in those near Gough Island. Tristan obtains about one-third of its fishing royalties from operations around Gough Island, and it is essential therefore that stocks should be conserved.

4. The problems of surveilling illegal fishing in this remote area are considerable, both in terms of capital and recurring costs. The only practical solution seems to be to establish a surveillance station on Gough Island, manned by a small team of scientists and fishermen, since vessels engaged in illegal fishing have to approach within 400-500 metres of the leeward coast.

5. There are thus four possible ways of responding if, as we expect, the South Africans ask us to grant a new lease:

- a) to establish a separate British station and to allow the South African station to remain;
- b) to grant the lease subject to the South Africans agreeing to share their facilities with us;
- c) to take over the South African station but to allow the South Africans to keep meteorologists on the station as part of our team;
- d) to take over the South African station and to deny them any further presence on the island.

6. WIAD and the ODM's Economic Planning Staff consider that (b) and (c) above would be the most cost-effective

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solutions. The former, however, is likely to be the South Africans' preferred choice; and the latter would involve a change in status of the station which might attract more public attention than the former. The new lease could be similar to the existing one and the collateral arrangements could be set out in a memorandum of understanding between the UK and South Africa. Neither the lease nor a memorandum of understanding would need to be registered at the UN, published or laid before Parliament.

7. A further consideration is that Tristan da Cunha has been served in the past by South African vessels at extremely advantageous freight rates. Any move by us to eliminate the South African presence on Gough Island would probably lead to retaliation by the South Africans over freight rates, thus increasing costs considerably.

Recommendation

8. I recommend that, assuming the South African Government ask, we agree the grant by the St Helena Government of a new lease under which the South Africans are allowed to maintain a meteorological station on Gough Island provided that:

- a) satisfactory arrangements for our use of their facilities for scientific and fishery surveillance purposes can be negotiated in advance, and
- b) there is some form of commitment by the South Africans to maintain favourable freight rates for supplies going to Tristan da Cunha.

9. WIAD and the departmental legal adviser concur.

11 December 1978

P. Morrice
P Morrice
Central and Southern African Dept

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Mr Owen DTEU
 Mr Denison-Edson ^{OR} CSAD } separate copies with enclosures
 Dr D. W Hall ODM }

FUTURE USE OF GOUGH ISLAND

1. I enclose a copy of a minute dated 29 November recording a meeting to discuss the surveillance of the fishing waters of the islands of the Tristan da Cunha group and a copy of a related letter reference TCD 1/7/260 of 4 July 1977 from the Administrator on Tristan da Cunha. (Mr Owen should read these in conjunction with my letter reference HWS 175/2 of 28 October to the Governor St Helena which I copied to him.)
2. I should be grateful for your views on the options listed in para 12 of my minute.

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G J C Pirnie
 West Indian and Atlantic Department
 K228 8135

4 January 1978

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CS 19411

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13 FEB 1978

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Mr Pirnie, WIAD

FUTURE USE OF GOUGH ISLAND

1. Thank you for copying to me your minute of 4 January. From the CSAD point of view I can see no overriding objection to cooperation with the South Africans in this particular field. But the increasing political sensitivity of the relations with the South Africans suggests that a number of factors need to be thought through before taking any final decision.
2. Clearly the politically most acceptable alternative is to take over the South African base wholesale with no South African presence after next year. But, in our opinion, and provided that Ministers are fully seized of the facts of the case, there is no clear political requirement that we should go as far as this, provided that there is definite advantage either financial or administrative for opting for one of the other three alternatives in paragraph twelve of your minute.
3. At first view, I think that cooperation between British authorities and South African company is probably less sensitive than cooperation with the South African authorities. If I may say so, I think the first priority is almost certainly a thorough cost analysis of the options which you have in mind. As things stand at present, and in the absence of any Western willingness to go for economic or other sanctions against South Africa, we in CSAD would support a straight forward non political case if it was clearly in the British self interest. However there is no firm guarantee that developments over Southern Africa will not lead to a further cooling of relations with South Africa and any long term planning for Gough Island must take this consideration into account.

P W Denison-Edson
Central and Southern African Dept

1 February 1978

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