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COPY NO. 19

RECORD A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT

BY THE
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

BASE RIGHTS IN GREENLAND, ICELAND, AND THE AZORES

November 25, 1947

WASHINGTON

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~~NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY~~RECORD
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At its second meeting the National Security Council:

- a. Confirmed the strategic importance of Greenland, Iceland, and the Azores as base areas.
- b. Authorized the submission to the President of the study contained in NSC 2, subject to appropriate revision by the Department of State of Paragraph 5 thereof, which described the status of negotiations.

The enclosed study, which contains appropriate revisions of Paragraph 5 of NSC 2 by the Department of State, is accordingly being submitted to the President.

SIDNEY W. SOUERS
Executive Secretary

Distribution:

The President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Secretary of the Army
The Secretary of the Navy
The Secretary of the Air Force
The Chairman, National Security
Resources Board

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November 25, 1947

REPORT BY THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

BASE RIGHTS IN GREENLAND, ICELAND, AND THE AZORES

1. It is difficult to conceive of a war in the next 15 to 20 years in which Greenland, Iceland, and the Azores would not be of extreme importance to our war effort. Present planning therefore is severely hampered by the indefinite status of our negotiations for base rights in these areas. We need such rights and feel that our government should take the strongest appropriate action to obtain them. It appears, in any case, that in the event of war it would be necessary for us to occupy those areas to prevent their use by the enemy.

2. Greenland, Iceland, and the Azores are listed in JCS 570/83 (Over-all Examination of U.S. Requirements for Military Bases and Base Rights) as "primary base areas" with base rights "required" for use by naval, air and ground.

3. The strategic importance of Greenland, Iceland, and the Azores, from an Air Force point of view, is best determined by consideration of their use for four purposes, i.e., as bases for offensive operations, as bases forming a part of the defense system about the U.S., as areas to be denied the enemy, and as bases for staging of air transport and combat aircraft. Evaluation of the subject areas is presented accordingly as follows: (Areas are listed in order of their importance under the considerations indicated).

AS BASES FOR OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS

ICELAND - This country is close to the industrial heartland of our only conceivable enemy; its logistic support is feasible; its weather and terrain is suitable for air operations; it is reasonably defensible. For offensive purposes Iceland is of greater potential value to the U.S. than any other area short of England and the Afro-Eurasian land mass.

GREENLAND - This area presents a prospect for VHS bases even closer to the industrial heartland of the potential enemy. Excepting England, the Afro-Eurasian mainland, and possibly Alaska, we would be incapable in the near future of operating directly against the potential enemy from bases anywhere other than in Iceland and Greenland. Greenland presents definite logistics and weather handicaps. These, however, are not insurmountable. As a base for offensive operations Greenland is second in importance to Iceland.

THE AZORES - Of minor importance under this consideration.

AS BASES FORMING A PART OF A DEFENSE
SYSTEM ABOUT THE UNITED STATES

GREENLAND - Greenland lies astride the most probable route of enemy attack against the most vital U.S. industrial region. Though possibly not vital to a U.S. air defense system, it would certainly form a most desirable part of such a system. Location of U.S. early warning and interceptor sites in this area would seriously hamper enemy air attacks against the U.S.

ICELAND - Of importance comparable to Greenland for defense

purposes but listed second because of its size and consequent limitations for providing broad early warning coverage.

THE AZORES - Negligible importance in this consideration.

AS AREAS TO BE DENIED THE ENEMY

GREENLAND - We definitely could not allow an enemy to gain a foothold in this region. Greenland could be used by an enemy as a base for limited operations against the U.S. proper.

ICELAND - Same remarks applicable but listed second because of greater distance from the U.S.

THE AZORES - Once established in the Azores, an enemy would hold a position directly astride our lines of communication to our most probable war area.

AS BASES FOR THE STAGING OF AIR
TRANSPORT AND COMBAT AIRCRAFT

THE AZORES - The most vital single spot in the world in this respect, exclusive of the war zone and the U.S. proper. These islands are the key to our primary air line of communication.

ICELAND - A secondary but most significant air line of communications route.

GREENLAND - Presently visualized as an alternate to Iceland for air lines of communication purposes.

4. It should be noted that the areas in question would be of considerable importance to both the U.S. and possible enemies as naval bases and for the conduct of anti-submarine operations.

5. The status of negotiations for base rights in Greenland, Iceland, and the Azores is as follows:

GREENLAND - The United States has maintained troops at various airbases and weather stations in Greenland under the provisions of a defense agreement signed between the Danish Government and the U.S. on 9 April 1941. During the last year the Danes have been exerting pressure to have the agreement abrogated, since they feel that "the danger to the peace and security of the American Continent has passed" and that U.S. military personnel should be withdrawn within 12 months as specified in the agreement. In May 1947 Secretary of State Marshall, in a press statement, said that we were ready to explore with the Danish Government a new agreement in keeping with the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations which would take into account Danish sovereignty over Greenland and legitimate U.S. and hemispheric defense requirements. In August 1947 word was received from Denmark that the Danish Minister to the United States would act as negotiator for that government, but actually Mr. Gustaf Rasmussen, the Danish Prime Minister, arrived in this country about 15 October and indicated in a statement to the press that his objective was withdrawal of our military forces from bases in Greenland. The State Department believes that this statement was made for political reasons, since he has not pursued the matter further. It is expected that discussions will proceed as scheduled, and to that end a proposed agreement on modified lines is being drafted by an ad hoc committee composed of representatives from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Department of State.

ICELAND - An exchange of notes between Iceland and the United States on 7 October 1946 terminated the Defense Agreement of 1 July 1941 and required the withdrawal of all U.S. military personnel by 7 April 1947. However, it permitted transit of military aircraft through Iceland and operation of Keflavik airfield by the U.S. Government until our obligations to maintain control agencies in Germany shall have been fulfilled or until the end of five years, in which case either government could propose a consultation for a review of the agreement. In the event no new agreement is reached after six months from the date of notification, the old agreement shall terminate 12 months later. The Keflavik airport is being operated at present by American Overseas Airlines under contract to the Air Transport Command. No military personnel are stationed in Iceland.

THE AZORES - Under terms of an agreement signed 23 November 1944 between Portugal and the United States, the airfield of Santa Maria was returned to full Portuguese control on 2 June 1946. Under a new agreement of 30 May 1946, the Air Transport Command was granted transit facilities at Lages until 2 December 1947, at which time all U.S. personnel were to be withdrawn. The Department of State has indicated that it would be politically impracticable to attempt to obtain long term rights at this time, but in order to obtain an extension of the current agreement to cover at least the period of occupation in Germany, diplomatic talks were officially begun on 3 July 1947 with the

Portuguese Government in Lisbon. On 20 August 1947 our Ambassador received categorical assurances from Dr. Salazar, Prime Minister of Portugal, that the Portuguese Government was favorably disposed toward a new agreement and that the withdrawal date of 2 December could be disregarded pending the outcome of the current negotiations. Dr. Salazar reiterated these assurances to the Ambassador on November 3. Discussions are continuing in Lisbon.