



A United States Air Force stealth bomber takes off from Diego Garcia during 2001. KC-135 aerial tankers prepare for take-off while B-52 bombers are readied for missions over Afghanistan.

The United States military experience on Diego Garcia

At the height of the Cold War, the United States found itself without a base between Thailand and Greece, and approached the UK for permission to use Diego Garcia to counter the growing Soviet presence in the region. An agreement for joint military use of the island was reached in 1966, and in 1971, US Navy SEABEES began construction of a vast air and naval base. Over the next 15 years, a small city for 3,500 souls was built, with world-class harbour and anchorage facilities, an airport suitable for the world's largest aircraft, a global communications complex, and space surveillance systems.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the US Navy used the island to support its Carrier Task Forces in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea monitoring the Iraq/Iran war, and to track Soviet submarines and other Naval Forces. With the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the US Navy's pre-positioned equipment fleet sortied from the lagoon and provided the first coalition ground combat forces on the Arabian Peninsula. US Air Force B-52 bombers deployed to Diego Garcia and conducted air attacks on Iraqi forces for 44 days.

For the next decade, US Air Forces on Diego Garcia were involved in several campaigns to enforce UN mandates in Iraq, while the pre-positioned fleet sailed to support several humanitarian missions to East Africa, including Somalia and Kenya.

Following the attacks on New York and the Pentagon in September 2001, Diego Garcia became the primary base for US and NATO air attacks against terrorists in Afghanistan, launching over 650 missions against al Qaida and the Taliban. Operations continued until August 2006, when bomber operations were moved to the Persian Gulf area. The Naval Support Facility, the Naval Communications Station, and the Space Command facilities have continued their never-ceasing support of US and allied operations in the region.

Diego Garcia's location and isolation make it a critical component of America's strategic defense planning. The basing of pre-positioned equipment on ships in the lagoon, fleet support activities, and a variety of air and space operations are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. It is estimated that over 100,000 US military personnel and contract employees have served on Diego Garcia since 1971.

The **Chagos Conservation Trust** is a charity (Registered in the UK No. 1031561), whose aims are to promote conservation, scientific and historical research, and to advance education concerning the archipelago. The Trust is a non political association.

If you would like more information on the publications or membership, please contact the Secretary (simonhughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk).

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