

Termination of U.S.-UK Agreement on Leased Bases in Bermuda

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs
Remarks at Ceremony for Exchange of Diplomatic Notes
U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC
June 18, 2002

Good morning and welcome to the State Department. My name is Lincoln Bloomfield and I am the Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs. I would especially like to welcome today: Sir Christopher Meyer, the British Ambassador to the United States; His Excellency, the Governor of Bermuda, Sir John Vereker and Lady Vereker; Madam Premier, the Honorable Jennifer M. Smith; Minister without Portfolio, Senator, the Honorable Lt. Colonel David Birch; Secretary to the Cabinet John Drinkwater; and our own Consul General in Hamilton, Mr. Denis Coleman. We welcome you all.

The world was a different place in March 1941. I know that this may sound a bit trite; it may make some among us feel old and sentimental. But I mean it, and I say this as a reminder, because in Europe, 61 years ago, the UK was virtually alone. Only three months later, Germany invaded the USSR. And only nine months later Pearl Harbor was attacked, thereby transforming the role and outlook of the United States, and changing the world in ways that were previously unimaginable.

When the United States and United Kingdom concluded the 1941 Leased Bases Agreement, I doubt that any U.S. or British citizen could have foreseen the important benefits that this relationship would bring. The agreement helped to launch the Lend-Lease program, which was critical to the successful World War II effort.

During the war, the U.S. naval base on Bermuda supported destroyers on both escort and anti-submarine warfare patrol duty, and the army base there supported coastal artillery units and military air traffic between the United States and Europe. After the War, Washington and London built on this pattern of cooperation with the creation of NATO, a new alliance that brought democracies together to face post-war totalitarian threats. Bermuda and our bases there played a small, but important, role in that 50-year struggle. And it is also important to remember that the establishment in 1961 of a Space Vehicle Tracking and Communications Station on these bases has also provided significant benefits to both the scientific community and to American space programs.

Spanning six fateful decades, the United States and Great Britain have been the closest of allies. We fought against Nazi tyranny, joined forces in Korea, opposed Soviet oppression during the Cold War, and liberated Kuwait. We have helped stabilize the Balkans, and today are together once again in Afghanistan. Until 1995, the Bermuda bases provided key logistical support for trans-Atlantic missions by our Navy and Air Force. They allowed us to re-fuel and repair our ships and aircraft at critical times while enroute to Europe and beyond. The bases also furthered our scientific activities, as they enabled our National Aeronautics and Space Administration to function effectively on Cooper's Island. In all these years, the United Kingdom and Bermuda were great hosts, as well as good friends, neighbors, and partners. We believe that all of us, together, have benefited from this close partnership.

So now, this morning, as we exchange these diplomatic notes regarding the termination of the Leased Bases Agreement, I offer to you, the British and Bermudans, our deepest appreciation and thanks, from the heart, for these years of fruitful security partnership. In many ways we are in a situation not unlike that of early 1941. For today we are also at the front end of a profound challenge to world peace, and are mobilized to fight the Global War on Terrorism. And so I urge our colleagues in Great Britain and Bermuda to look upon this termination of agreement not as an endpoint, but as the close of one chapter in a rich history of collaboration, partnership, and political solidarity on behalf of freedom and universal principles.

To our distinguished colleagues from Bermuda, let me say explicitly that even as we bring to a close a formal relationship this morning, the U.S. is pleased to be continuing our dialogue on matters of mutual interest. I want to assure you that we fully intend to be a good friend to Bermuda, one who will look for ways to be helpful, when asked,

consistent with our own laws and constraints.

And so we look forward to maintaining the special links that we forged in the last century well into the next with both the U.K. and Bermuda; and I assure you that you can count on America's friendship every step of the way.

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