

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. The Setting

"The history of the postwar transformation of the industrial world begins in rubble. Never before had political dreamers had such a chance to create a global order as the American president seemingly had at the end of World War II. Unlike the other belligerents, the United States had escaped devastation. The collapse of the old empires of the victorious Allies, Britain, France, and Holland, the sudden death of Hitler's upstart order and the eerie conquest of Japan with two atomic bombs, had left America richer than ever and supreme among nations. The new president, A Missouri politician of hitherto modest accomplishments, and the lawyers, bankers, and generals who advised him, proceeded to make the key decisions to put into place the political, economic, and military structures that have defined the postwar world. For the first time in more than a thousand years hegemonic power on the Continent of Europe (except for a substantial eastern slice taken by the Soviet Union) passed into the hands of a non-European nation. The successor to Napoleon's France, Victorian England, and Hitler's Germany was Truman's America. But America's moment of global supremacy turned out to be puzzlingly brief. Even as the

alliance that symbolized American might grew, the extraordinary power of the United States was slipping away.

The waning of Pax Americana is traceable as much as the actions and policies of America's friends and allies as to its adversaries. Though number one among nations, as her presidents liked to proclaim, the United States always had to accommodate its protectorates. Even as American officials held the power of life and death in occupied Germany and Japan, Konrad Adenauer and Shigeru Yoshida, two acerbic septuagenarians, so mastered the diplomacy of weakness that they were able to create the conditions for their nations' spectacular recovery. The leaders of the United States seemingly held all the cards, but they could not always get their way. More often, as we shall see, America found her influence diminished because her leaders, unaware of the surprises lurking in their most beguiling dreams, had their wishes granted.

Over the four decades since the United States struck its original bargain with Europe and Japan, the world capitalist order had been transformed. There is little resemblance to the period of the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War when the alliance was forged. Trade wars within the aging alliance are growing more intense. American, European, and Japanese outlooks on a variety of world problems are increasingly diverging. The common defense is becoming more problematical. Domestic consensus for the alliance in the member countries is eroding. Twilight is descending on the familiar postwar world'.¹ This rather lengthy citation from Richard

¹ Richard J. Barnet, The Alliance: America-Europe-Japan, Makers of the Postwar World, New York, 1983.

Barnet's study of the triangular relationship between America, Europe and Japan, captures rather vividly, though from a relatively narrow perspective, of the origins and the political environment relating to the competition for power and influence between the United States and her allies and the Soviet Union and its partners.

Indeed, a dominant feature of the post Second World War international political system until the collapse of the international communist order in 1990, was the superpower rivalry between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. This political tension coloured almost every international crisis, political struggle, diplomatic contest and armed conflict, both within nations and between nations.

At the end of hostilities associated with the Second World War, the new antagonism between the Soviet Union and the United States of America, rapidly filled up the power vacuums left by the withdrawal and ebbing of the great colonial empires of France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium and other European powers and Japan. Associated with the dissolution of the European colonial empires, was the emergence of a whole group of newly independent nations in Africa and Asia, who were to constitute "The Third World." According to Daniel S. Papp,

"Many Third World states share the experiences and heritages of a colonial past; sharply opposed internal social and economic classes; and economic underdevelopment and poverty. These shared experiences and heritages often influence Third World states to have similar if not identical outlooks on issues as diverse as superpower rivalry in the Third World, the New International Economic Order, and multinational corporations. Even if the

diversity of the Third World is immense, this similarity of outlooks is one of the factors that legitimises labeling this group of states the Third World."²

Very often, the Third World nations became the focus points of the superpower struggle by proxy. Indeed, for much of the period, 1945 to 1990, the Third World provided the arena for the struggle of the two postwar political and military giants and very often, both the internal political process and external policy were often distorted by the impact and influence of the so-called 'Cold War'.

Roger D. Masters, in his study on "World Politics as a Primitive Political System" stated that "...four elements common to politics within a number of primitive societies and international relations deserve mention; first, the absence of a formal government with power to judge and punish violations of law; second, the use of violence and 'self-help' by the members of the system to achieve their objectives and enforce obligations; third, the derivation of law and moral obligations either from custom or from explicit, particular bargaining relationships (i.e, the absence of a formal legislative body operating on the basis of – and making general rules); and fourth, a predominant organisational principle which establishes political units serving many functions in the overall social system."³ Indeed, this analogy and the characteristics identified by Roger D. Masters in his study of world politics as a primitive political system permeate the political competition between the USSR and the USA. A new state of international

² Daniel S. Papp, (3rd. edition) Contemporary International Relations: Frameworks For Understanding, New York, 1991, p. 359.

³ Naomi Rosenbaum, Readings on the International Political System, Englewoods, New Jersey, 1970, p. 352.

anarchy was infused into the international political system by the Cold War.

In the context of the Cold War, the Indian Ocean constituted an extremely important strategic arena that was the focus of political and naval rivalry between the two countries and their respective allies, who also constituted the littoral powers of the Indian Ocean area.

In terms of weapons technology development, the First World War witnessed the crucial importance of the control of sealanes of communication and in this respect, the aeroplane and the submarine constituted vital elements of the new military technology. However, it was during the Second World War, that both these new tools of warfare came into their own. Many students of the history of military conflict see in the Second World War, the emergence of the critical combination of the surface ship, the submarine and the aircraft. The attack on Pearl Harbour and the Battle of the Coral Sea are vivid illustrations of this. The infusion of the Cold War into the Indian Ocean is a further illustration of the combination of these tools of warfare but with greater sophistication and a rapid increase in terms of firepower.

It must be remembered that the East-West rivalry was a global rivalry. For the first time in the history of international relations, two nations and their respective allies were engaged in a competition for global power and influence. Consequently, every area of the globe had a strategic and military value. Arising from this, every territorial unit was seen in terms of a zero-sum game.

B. Aims and Objectives Of Study

This study aims primarily to understand the role of the Indian Ocean within the context of the superpower rivalry of the United States and the Soviet Union. In order to ensure that this understanding be based on the fact as of history and geography that were critical in shaping the Indian Ocean as an important strategic area in the contest for power and influence between the two superpower, a brief historical survey is undertaken at the onset.

The central focus of the study will be to understand the contributory factors and elements relating to the evolution and functioning of superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean area. The study will seek to develop a framework for analysing and clarifying the global competition for power and influence between the United States and her allies and the Soviet Union and her allies but with specific reference of the Indian Ocean zone.

The broad evolution of geostrategic and geopolitical factors identifies with the origins and shaping of the Cold War and the demise and dissolution of the Soviet Union will provide the broad time frame of the study. Consequently, the study will focus on the year 1945-1990, coinciding with the end of the hostilities associated with the Second World War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism as an international ideological force.

This study seeks among other things to understand the following.

- i) The nature of the rivalry between the USA and the USSR in political, economic and strategic terms.**
- ii) The impact of this rivalry as the external policy of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean era.**
- iii) Broad shifts in the superpower rivalry and the impact that this had on the politics and security aspects relating to the Indian Ocean.**
- iv) Policy proposals and concepts to isolate the Indian Ocean from the framework of superpower rivalry especially within the context of nonalignment.**

In carrying out this study, the broad hypothesis that is being developed and examined is that the Indian Ocean has been a point of concern and one that attracted both attention and dominance by global naval powers since that so-called discovery of Asia by the European colonial powers. The hypothesis will also posit the fact that with the decline of the British Empire and the withdrawal of the British military presence of Suez, it was only natural that it became an area of contention between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The superpower context was as a matter of fact intensified by both push and pull factors. Consequently, the rivalry involved the littoral states but essentially in naval terms, it was a struggle between the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

Put in a summary form, the hypothesis would state that in the natural political order of things, a power vacuum was highly unlikely and that given the British withdrawal, it was only natural for the superpowers to stake out their claims for naval imperium in the Indian Ocean.

In the discussion of superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean, the concept of maritime power requires a clear statement in view of the varying interpretation of its meaning. There is confusion concerning the meaning of the terms and there is also confusion in clarifying those countries whose economic prosperity depends on ocean to certain areas of the sea and those countries which utilise the marine environment less for short-run economic survival than for the projection of political and military power.

It may be useful to make a distinction between sea or naval power and maritime power. A sea or naval power maybe a state that has formidable naval strength. This means the capability to project naval power. By contrast, a maritime power can be defined as a state that makes extensive use of ocean to the sea and maritime resources to pursue economic activities with other groups, which in turn influences its power relations with them. These economic activities can include the transportation of land-based goods and services by sea or the utilization of sea-based resources.

By virtue of these definitions, there is no need for a major maritime power to develop a naval capacity to protect its maritime interests.

In practice, however, all great maritime powers have either developed naval forces to protect their maritime assets or have been eclipsed by adversaries who either threaten their access to land-based resources and trade or challenge their commercial activity at sea by interfering with their rights of navigation. Similarly, according to these definitions, a great sea power need not be, in theory, a great maritime power, especially in the present age of nuclear technology when deploying military forces to sea can be justified entirely outside the maritime context, even though the evolution of most, but not all, of the great sea power has grown out of concern over the protection or extension of maritime activities.⁴

Kemp, Geoffrey presented a list of definitions as follows:

Maritime: of or relating to navigation or commerce on and in the sea or on the seabed.

Naval: of or relating to ships or shipping

Maritime power: no single definition is satisfactory, so there will be listed:

- i) a state which makes extensive use of the seas and sea resources to sustain its economic growth;

⁴ Geoffrey Kemp, Maritime Access and Maritime Power: The Past, The Persian Gulf And The Future, in Sea Power and Strategy in the Indian Ocean by Alvin J Cottrell. Beverly Hill, California: 1981 , P.26-27.

- ii) a state which makes extensive use of the sea and sea resources for its economic growth, its political status, or its national security, or a combination of all three;
- iii) a state which makes extensive use of the seas and sea resources to sustain its economic growth and to project its political and military power to those overseas regions necessary for its economic well-being or national security.

D. Research Methodology

The research methodology that is utilised for the purpose of this study is conventional. A substantial amount of library research and archival materials have been used. At the same time some official documents relating to British American and Soviet naval policy in the Indian Ocean region have also been consulted. Further, newspaper articles and other non-media were consulted too.

The library and research centers for this study will included the University of Malaya library, the National Library, the Universiti Kebangsaan library, the National Archives, the Institute fro Strategic and International Studies, the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore and other overseas universities and research centers interested in the political and security dimension of the Indian Ocean.

E. Limitation Of The Study

Invariably, any study such as the present one that seeks to examine a whole spectrum of issues that are found in the present topics will have limitations imposed by resource constraints, availability of official and oftentimes sensitive information.

Given the broad range of the study, it has been difficult to examine in great detail any one issue or examine the wide variety of implications arising from any single strategic or policy measure taken by anyone superpower, be it the United States of America or the Soviet Socialist Republics.

The limitation of the study can be summarised as follows:

i) Resource constraints. Due to Resource constraints, it was not possible to travel widely through the littoral states of the Indian Ocean area to broadly survey attitudes and perception related to the superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean area.

ii) Availability of Official Information. In many instances, it was not possible to obtain relevant official information from American, Soviet and other official organisation and agencies due to official restriction and policy guidelines relating to information availability.

iii) Language Constraints. In such of the literature, mainly in English, it is often the Western or American point of view that is put forward. Consequently, non-Western or American positions relating

to many issues of the Indian Ocean area are not effectively or widely presented in scholarly publication or in semi-academic and popular publication and books. However, an attempt has been made to use non-English source material in such language or Arabic and Bahasa Malaysia.