CHAPTER THREE:

THE GEOGRAPHY AND GEOPOLITICS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

A. THE GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The Indian Ocean is an enormous body of water engulfed by the continents of Africa, Asia, and Australia. Only below the latitude 35 to 45 south, is it open towards the Atlantic and the Pacific. While the boundaries of the Indian Ocean are well defined in the north, the determination of its southern boundaries depends on whether one accepts or rejects the concept of a separate Antarctic Ocean. If the separate existence of an Antarctic Ocean is disregarded, the Indian Ocean reaches out to the Antarctic continent.

Generally, the Indian Ocean is only that gigantic bay north of the imaginary line between the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Leeuwin, the southwestern tip of Australia. While it opens in the south, it is closed toward the north. This distinguishes the Indian Ocean from the other two bodies of oceanic water, the Atlantic and the Pacific, which stretch from the North Pole to Antarctica.
Another characteristic of the Indian Ocean involves the northern portion - historically and geostrategically the most important. This part of the ocean is accessible from the west and from the east only through very narrow straits. In the west, these narrow straits lead to two culs-de-sac, the Arabic Gulf and the Red Sea. The latter lost its sackline character in 1869 when the Suez Canal was completed and the Red Sea connected with the Mediterranean Sea.

The Arabic Gulf and the Red Sea are gulfs of the Indian Ocean and, therefore, belong to this oceanic system. On the eastern side, the Indian Ocean is separated from the Pacific by the Indonesian island chain and the narrow passages between these islands and the Australian continent. However, whether the Timor and Arafura Seas (between the Indonesian Islands and Australia) belong to the Indian Ocean, or rather to the Pacific system, is a matter of more or less arbitrary choice.

In the north, the Indian Ocean is bordered by the Asian landmass; the Indian subcontinent, and like a huge tongue, lashes out into its waters and divides its northernmost portion between what is known as the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.¹

¹ The choice of geographic names is often fortuitous. Why the Arabian Sea is a "Sea" and the equally large gulf of Bengal is a "Gulf", or why the Arabic Gulf is a "Gulf" and the Red Sea is a "Sea", is a matter of historic tradition than a rational choice of names.
The Indian Ocean is the smallest among the three main oceans of the world. Even if measured by its largest dimensions (including the Southern Sea, that is, the ocean approximately between parallel 45 south and the Antarctica), it extends over only 30 million square miles, while the Pacific covers 60 million and the Atlantic (without the Arctic Ocean) 34 million square miles. In its more usual narrower meaning, the Indian Ocean covers only 16 million square miles. Even so, it is too large to connect culturally, economically, and politically all the countries washed by its waters as, for instance, the Mediterranean Sea did in the past and still does. Even the "counteroast" impact - the mutual impulses and sense of reciprocal dependence - which developed on both sides of the North Atlantic is much less in evidence here. Still, some very strong mutual impacts operated in the northern most sector of the Indian Ocean, from Arabia to what is now Indonesia, across the Indian subcontinent, and in the reverse direction.

The question of how justified we are in considering the region around the Indian Ocean as a unit, from the political and strategic viewpoint, will be discussed later. Here we just wish to point out that this ocean is a gigantic water basin which separates, but at the same time loosely unites, the various lands which girdle its waters.
From time immemorial, the northern section of the Indian Ocean has been a much-frequented waterway, second only to the Mediterranean in the period before the discovery of the Americas, and after that momentous event, a close third behind the North Atlantic sea route. Both coastal and high-seas navigation were much favored in those waters by the climatic conditions prompted by the "closed" character of the ocean.

As life and civilization in Europe was aided by the warmth brought to them by the Gulf Stream, so monsoon winds and currents served to foster the growth of vegetation, the flow of navigation, and cultural exchanges in the northern section of the Indian Ocean region. The peculiar phenomenon of the monsoon,\(^2\) alternation according to the seasons of the year, made deep-sea, in the time of sailing ships, a relatively simple "sailing with the wind" operation.

North of the Equator, the winter monsoon winds blow from the northeast, and the summer monsoon winds from the southwest. This made possible a regular shuttle movement of sailing vessels between the Arabian and East African coast, on the one hand, and the Indian and Indonesia coast, on the other. The winter monsoon is dry and conveys coolness, whereas the

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\(^2\) The original meaning of "Monsoon" in Arabic (Mawsim) is "Season". From this the Portuguese renamed it "Moncao" and the Dutch termed it "Monssoon". Eventually, in English, it came to be called "Monsoon".
summer monsoon draws abundant moisture and heat, thus providing for the necessities of agriculture.

Along the Equator, a regular flow of trade winds, alternating between the easterly and westerly directions, also furnished a dependable source for ship movements. Further south, in the "roaring forties" (along parallel 40 south), ships were able to move quickly from the Cape to the Australian west coast and then north to the Spice Islands.

Winds and currents affected shipping and also the migration of some peoples. The coming of Malay-Indonesian ethnic groups to Madagascar, on the east coast of Africa, probably is due to these phenomena. Atmospheric and hydrographic manifestation even today have a bearing on navigation and continue to have political-strategic-significance, as, for instance, in the case of the Agulhas current near the Cape.

Geography provides the "infrastructure" for historical and political as well as cultural and economic developments. The Indian Ocean is no exception in this respect. A comprehensive maritime survey around the periphery of this ocean does not solely explain the historical or political developments in the region. Movements of people and of ideas, impacts of the nations on each other, clashes and conquests have taken place and are still taking place on land and often without reference to
the power relations upon the ocean itself. No monopoly should, therefore, be conceded to the oceanic outlook. However, if only for the purpose of organizing and delimiting the subject matter to be scrutinized, the Indian Ocean may be deemed to be central to the investigations pursued in this study. Such a methodological approach seems to be amply substantiated by the experiences of both geography and history.

B. DIVISIONS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

The division of the material for a study is an artificial but still indispensable tool for systematization and better understanding. For the purposes of research, the division of the Indian Ocean region to the ocean itself, which in the course of history was often quite arbitrarily divided into component parts. These divisions resulted from the successive penetrations of the Indian Ocean by travelers from the west - from areas we now call the Middle East and subsequently from Europe.

The Red Sea and the Ocean beyond the Strait of Bab el Manded (the Arabian Sea) were known to ancient Greeks and Romans as the Erythrean Sea (that is, the "Red Sea"). At times the Erythrean Sea north of Babel Mandeb was also known as Sinus Arabicus (Arab Gulf). The maritime area east of the Erythrean Sea was named Mara Prasodum (Green Sea) or even
more appropriately Mare Obscurum (Dark, or Mysterious, Sea).  

In the Middle Ages, the Islamic world gave its own divisions and names to the areas frequented by its sailors and merchants. The presently used expressions for the ocean and its constituent portions originated from the period when Europeans, beginning with the Portuguese, entered these waters in strength.

The Portuguese, and after them the Dutch, English, and French, were aiming to reach the shores and riches of fabulous India. It was only natural for them to name the sea after the land they were all striving to reach. Inlets and deep sinusitis of the ocean, as well as those parts of it separated by strings of islands, were given separate names, often quite arbitrarily. In addition to the two large inlets of the Indian Ocean in the northwest, the Arabic Gulf and the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman and the gulf of Aden covered large maritime areas in front of the Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb Straits. The Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Bengal have already been mentioned. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands divide the Gulf of Bengal from what is known as the Andaman Sea, lying before the funnel-like Malacca

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3 Ibid., Auguste Toussaint, pp. 6-11.

4 Muslim travelers divided the Western Indian Ocean region as between Sind (probably the Arabic Gulf area and the northern shore of the Arabian sea), Hind (India), and Zinj or Sang (East Africa). The name of Zanzib (originally Zanjbar) derives from Zanj.
Straits. The Timor and Arafura Seas are also extensions of the Indian Ocean; the latter ends in the Torres Strait, which divides it from the Coral sea, definitely a portion of the Pacific Ocean System.

For the purposes of our investigation, the division of the land areas around the water is more important than the divisions of the ocean itself. While using the maritime conspectus, our main concern should be directed toward the land and its people.

In a study by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, the following divisions of the Indian Ocean area were suggested: (1) East Africa and the Ocean region east of it; (2) the northwest from Somalia around to Iran, including the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabic Gulf; (3) the Asian subcontinent and the sea southward; and (4) South-East Asia and Australia.

An Indian scholar divided the region into four "pivotal areas": (1) South Africa, (2) Southwest Asia, (3) India and Pakistan, and (4) Southeast Asia and Australia. These two schemes are basically similar except that the Australian version is more precise and comprehensive.

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In view of the great importance of the western approaches to the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Arabic Gulf, the joint discussion of both these areas seems impractical and the separation of the areas around the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea from those around the Arabic Gulf appears more appropriate. For these reasons, the present study will discuss the problems of the Indian Ocean region in the context of five, instead of four, subregion: (1) the southwest, which includes southern and West Africa and the islands east of the African coast; (2) the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea countries; (3) the Arabic Gulf countries; (4) the subcontinent of India and its neighbors; and (5) the southeast, including Australia.

The disadvantage of this division is that it divides the Indian Ocean countries of the Middle East. However, the Middle East is a vague and somewhat artificial geographic concept; and while some of the problems are similar, quite evidently the questions relating to the Arabic Gulf area and those of the Red Sea-Horn of Africa area are dissimilar. The subsequent discussion of these two subregions is likely to prove this point.

These divisions of the region around the periphery of the Indian Ocean should not be viewed as watertight compartments; on the contrary, trends, policies, and interests between neighboring subregions frequently overlap. International relations are too complex to be confined to certain
predetermined areas without allowing for their impact on neighboring or even more distant nations. The geographic fact of being located along or near the shores of one ocean increases the interrelationships that manifest themselves in tangible and intangible ways.

The geographic vicinity creates stronger impulses between the nations thus involved; but in certain situations, the impulses affect even more distant, but geopolitically still close, communities. This ultimate truth has been poignantly expressed by the leader of an Indian Ocean nation:

The importance of a universal, intercontinental understanding of the association between nations is in no way diminished by the assertion that geography continues to remain the most important single factor in the formulation of a country's foreign policy.7

C. THE PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

It may be interesting to recall that according to one school of geologists, the Indian Ocean basin originated in the Paleozoic era from the division of the hypothetical landmass Gondwana which had earlier been separated from the landmass Laurasia in

the Northern Hemisphere. Gondwana in the Southern Hemisphere split into what are now South America, Africa, and Australia. What was to become the Indian subcontinent parted from Africa, drifted northward and collided with the Eurasian landmass, an impact which uplifted the Tibetan Plateau and erected the Himalayas. We are also told that the fracture known as the Great Rift Valley, will eventually result in the breaking off of East Africa from this continent (Madagascar is a broken-off part of Africa) and that Australia is moving north and will eventually squeeze together the Indonesian islands. All this has nothing to do with geopolitics but demonstrates the geological unity of the Indian Ocean basin.

While submitting his concept of two Indian Ocean regions, Jacques Auber also pointed out the physical unity and symmetry of the Indian Ocean area, as compared to the shapeless vastness of the Pacific and the corridorlike form of the Atlantic. Starting with the African continent, he demonstrated that South Africa faces the Indian Ocean rather than the Atlantic, as a desert stretches along its western borders. The Great Rift Valley divides East Africa from the rest of the continent along the great lakes. The Ethiopian highlands emerge between the desert and the Red Sea area. The corridor from the cape to the Sudan is thus formed by desert, jungle, and the Rift Valley.

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9 Ibid. pp. 2-4.
The Indian Ocean region is markedly separated from the rest of mainland Asia by the Arabian Desert and the mountain wall which stretches from Anatolia to Thailand: the Ararat, The Elburz Mountains, Hindu Kush, the pamirs, Karakoram, the Himalayas, the mountains of northern Burma. These long and massive chains, which include the highest peaks of the world, form the northern land frontier of the South Asian rimland.\textsuperscript{10}

The Burmese-Thai border mountains, the Malay Peninsula, and the chain of Indonesian islands, provide a natural barrier dividing the Indian Ocean basin from the South China Sea, which is a subsidiary sea of the Pacific Ocean system. Though Australia's face is turned to the Pacific rather than the Indian Ocean, it is also an Indian Ocean littoral state, as it forms the southeast pillar of the huge area, 4,500 miles distant from the southwest pillar, namely South Africa. Western Australia, the principal state on the Indian Ocean, has now become Australia's expanding western frontier."\textsuperscript{11}

K M Panikkar also emphasized the geographic unity of the Indian Ocean region. Its geographic structure is such that it is being "walled off on three sides by land, with the southern side


\textsuperscript{11} George G. Thomson, \textit{Problems of Strategy In The Pacific And Indian Oceans}. New York, 1970, p. 34

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of Asia forming a roof over it". But, the vital mark - according to him - which differentiates the region from the two other oceans "is not the two sides but the subcontinent of India which juts out far into the sea for a thousand miles to its tapering end at Cape Comorin". He concludes that, despite the vastness of its surface and oceanic character, the Indian Ocean has "some of the features of a landlocked sea".  

Thomson submits that "geography has created three Asias, one of the land and two of the ocean". Continental Asia is the huge landmass from Manchuria to the Urals; the oceanic Asias are those of the Indian Ocean and of the Pacific.

While the Indian Ocean region is a geographic unit, it is not a cohesive economic region. Economic interdependence between the countries concerned is minimal; only 10 percent of their foreign trade is regional, the rest being directed to areas outside the region. Patterns of export-import relations between former colonial and metropolitan countries have largely survived to this day. However, there exists local interdependence between certain subregions; thus Mozambique, Rhodesia, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland are dependent on the Republic of South Africa; Malaysia, and to some extent Indonesia, are still dependent on Singapore as an entrepôt.

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12 K. N Panikkar, *Indian And The Indian Ocean* London, 1951 pp. 18-19

station; Bangladesh is an economic "basket case" that has to rely on India.

The Indian Ocean is considerably smaller than the Pacific or Atlantic; but distances between its key points are still respectable. The distance between the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Leeuwin, the line closing the arc of the Indian Ocean, is 4,500 miles. The distance from England's Land's End to New York, across the Atlantic, is somewhat shorter, but that between San Francisco to Singapore, across the Pacific, is 8,800 miles. From Aden to the Strait of Malacca (the northern width of the Indian Ocean) the distance is 3,500 miles. From Aden to Colombo it is 2,100 miles (same as the length of the Mediterranean Sea).

The more compact configuration of the Indian Ocean is best expressed by its latitudinal and longitudinal extent as compared with the Pacific and Atlantic. The southern width of the Indian Ocean extends over 80 longitudinal degrees, the northern width over 55 degrees. The longitudinal reach of the Pacific, from the Bearing Strait to Antarctica, is over 130 degrees, the latitudinal span 170 degrees. The longitudinal extent of the Atlantic from the Greenland Sea to Antarctica is also 130 degrees, while the latitudinal span of both the North and the South Atlantic is roughly 70 degrees.
The narrow gateways leading to the Indian Ocean north of the Tropic of Capricorn, have been mentioned earlier. They are referred here as evidence of the "closed" character of that ocean. One may, of course, raise the objection that the Atlantic is also served by such narrow passages as the Gibraltar Straits, the English Channel, the Norwegian Sea between Scotland and Iceland, and Denmark's Straits between Iceland and Greenland. Evidently, except for the Straits of Gibraltar, these are not strategic bottlenecks such as those which lead into the Indian Ocean. It is true that on the western coastline of the Americas only the artificial water-way of the Panama Canal allows entrance. The other navigable entry from the Pacific into the Atlantic (if we ignore the difficult Straits of Magellan) is around the stormy Cape Horn, which is 20 degrees nearer to the South Pole that the cape of Good Hope. Despite some analogies, the entrances to the Atlantic (except for Gibraltar) have not been historically "sluiceways" and have not played such a role as those of the Indian Ocean, where Portuguese, Dutch, French and British vied for their control.

The geopolitical significance of the specific physical features of the Indian Ocean can only be fully appreciated when viewed from the perspective of historical precedents.
D. THE GEOPOLITICAL SETTING

Derwent Whittlesley wrote in a study entitled "Makers of Modern Strategy" that "Geopolitics is a creature of militarism and a tool of war. As its name implies, it is the offshoot of both geography and political science, although it was originated and largely developed by geographers. Sometimes it is made to appear as a twin of political geography, but it is much younger, having grown up in the generation that comprises the two world wars.14 While this is not an appropriate point to discuss the origins of the concept of geopolitics, it should be borne in mind that while the term is very much associated with Halford J. Mackinder, a number of other writers have been instrumental in developing the basic concepts of geopolitics. These include, among others, Friedrich Ratzel, James Fairgrieve and Rudolf Kjellen, a Swedish political scientist.15

Political geography in general, and international political geography in particular, is very often confused with geopolitics. The word geopolitics was introduced into the English language as a loose translation of Geopolitik, which came in the interwar period, 1919-1939, to denote mobilization of areal knowledge


15 For a brief understanding of the contribution of these writers, please see Ibid, pp.388-411.
for purposes of state - in short, geo-policy. Geopolitics was associated in particular with the Institut fur Geopolitik, directed by Karl Haushofer, a general turned geographer and propagandist, who is often believed to have laid the theoretical foundations for Hitler's strategy of aggression and conquest.

The adjective "geopolitical," never as value-laden as the noun "geopolitics," was utilised sparingly in the 1930s, and increasingly in more recent years, to denote the areal aspect of any political pattern and, in particular, hypotheses that purport to explain or to predict areal distributions and patterns of political potential in the society of nations. All such hypotheses represent assessments of opportunities and limitations implicit in the properties of the interacting political communities and of the environment in which they operate.

Geopolitics describes and analyzes the influence of the geographic factor on politics in general or on the politics of certain regions or nations. While the Napoleonic dictum which states that "geography determines a nation's history", is clearly exaggerated, the constants of geography do exert a bearing. In some cases, this maybe an important determinant on the variables of both national and international politics. In other words, "the political significance of any area bears a well-defined relation to its climate, landforms and natural

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resources."¹⁶ And, we may add to this the nonphysical factors of human geography: ethnic and social, cultural, and economic conditions.

It is hardly possible to give even an approximation of the weight of the geographic factor on political developments. While some may reject the idea of geography being a main determining factor, it should be recognized that in certain situations, it was a nation's geographical location which prescribed what was possible and what was impossible. Geography even may determine what may be inevitable. The history of the Indian Ocean region provides classic examples to this effect.

The land barrier between the eastern Mediterranean and the two protrusions of the Indian Ocean (the Red Sea and the Arabic Gulf) prevented massive maritime penetration of European influence - political, military, and cultural - into the Indian Ocean area. Overland penetration by Alexander the Great was ephemeral and scanty.¹⁷

The regular monsoon winds allowed for a movement of men, goods, and ideas across the northern segment of the Indian Ocean. Before the arrival of the Europeans from around the


¹⁷ George Alexander Ballard, op. cit., p. 7
Cape of Good Hope, there was social interaction between peoples of these shores, not unlike that which took place along the Mediterranean.

The fact that Muslims in India were concentrated in the two extreme corners of the subcontinent led to the creation of two Pakistanas, namely East and West; and their ethnic, linguistic, and social differences, in turn, resulted in the partition of this country.

Movements of peoples along the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean and across its waters have had momentous impacts on its history. Military or naval conquests, political or diplomatic pressures, religious and cultural influences - have all preceded overland or from the sea. Before the arrival of the Europeans, invasions on land were predominant but by no means exclusive. Since the advent of Vasco da Gama, the history and political development of the region, in general, have mostly been determined by expeditions which emanated from Europe and reached the region from the sea. The sea power versus land power dilemma may thus be analyzed in the context of events which shaped the fate of the area in question.

The particular geographic configuration of this ocean - its shape resembling a gigantic gulf, the narrow entrances leading to it, as well as other characteristics - may give rise to fruitful geopolitical scrutiny.
But, primarily, another question has to be answered: Are we justified in discussing the Indian Ocean region as one unit, such as a single geo-political or geostrategic division? Is one entitled to envisage, for scholarly or practical purposes, the area synoptically, as one whose component parts bear significant relations to one another? This is a question which requires correct and systematic presentation as well as sound and pragmatic political thinking.

E. IS THE INDIAN OCEAN A GEOPOLITICAL UNIT?

Geographers perceive areas from the concept of a "geographic region", although they often disagree as to the characteristics or requirements for an area to be considered as such.\(^{18}\) The French expression 'compage',\(^ {19}\) also used by English-speaking geographers to mean "framework" or "structure," proves this point. The 'compage' is an area interrelated by natural and societal features relevant for a specific consideration or study. Characteristics of a geographic region often overlap into other neighboring regions and as such, there exists no "total" region, that is, one which has features

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\(^{19}\) Compage is derived from the Latin (Con) Pangere, which means 'To Place Together'.
only unique to itself and not shared with other regions. Geographic regions may differ in size; they may even extend to a large sphere of continental dimensions. From the point of view of a student of a particular geographical region, what is important is that, in addition to similar features, its differing characteristics should be amenable to assimilation. Ultimately, we should keep in mind the advice of Richard Hartshorne that "Any regional division is not a true picture of reality, but it is an arbitrary device of the student ... depending on what elements appear to him as most significant".²⁰ It should furthermore be remembered that "'region' is a term of art, not science, and regions in world politics emerge only because policy-makers find within a given territorial area a number of interrelated problems that are discreet".²¹

Little attention has so far been paid to the consideration of whether the Indian Ocean area should be regarded as an independent area. Geopolitical scholars, like Saul B Cohen not only recognized the character of this area but even anticipated its eventual emergence as a "third geostrategic region". To quote him, a "geostrategic region" possesses certain "globe influencing" characteristics; the two such regions according to


this view - are at present the Western world and the "Eurasian Continental World", that is, the Sino-Soviet sphere.22

Objections against the acceptance of an Indian Ocean geopolitical region have been sporadic, and few arguments have been offered. For instance, a report of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Australian Parliament, submitted, on the one hand, an elaborate presentation on the "Indian Ocean Region," while on the other hand, it refused to recognize it an a "unit because" it constituted countries which have a great diversity of race, politics, strengths and opportunities.23

Nobody could deny that the region around the Indian Ocean is beset by diversities of all kinds. If judged solely on the basis of ethnicity, culture, and religion, one would be compelled to admit that there is no unity in this area. Still, it should be remembered that the region is not clearly divided on ethnocultural and religious grounds. There are massive centers of religious influence such as Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and also Christian. However, they are by no means exclusive; from these centers, waves of influences have branched out creating new centers as well as ethnic and religious diasporas of many shades.


23 Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Report on The Indian Ocean Region, Canberra, Dec. 7, 1971, Para 13 and 89.
Islam, one of the chief religions and cultures of the region, is predominant in the northwest: in Arabia, in northeast Africa (except for the Christian enclave of Ethiopia), and in Iran and Pakistan. It has branched out in a latitudinal direction into Malaysia and Indonesia, creating another massive centers. Bangladesh, the former eastern portion of Pakistan, is also Islamic. In addition, there are millions of Muslims scattered in all parts of India and also in many other parts of the region. Ethnically, Muslims are divided mainly between Arabs, Iranians, Pakistanis (themselves divided), Bengalese, Malays, and Indonesians, although the religious-cultural bonds between these groups are by no means negligible.

Hinduism, whose adherents outnumber Muslims in the region, is ethnically more homogeneous. India is predominantly Hindu, but followers of Hinduism also are to be found in Bali (ethnically Indonesian); the Indian diaspora has brought Hinduism into every corner of the region, to Malaysia, Singapore, East and South Africa, Mauritius and the Seychelles and other places.

Buddhism, the third major religious-cultural group of the region, is to be found in Ceylon, Burma, and Thailand. A large percentage of Chinese, who form a minority ethnic group (a majority in Singapore) in Malaysia, Indonesia, and other corners of the region, are also Buddhists. The Himalayan lands north of India and Pakistan are also inhabited by Buddhists.
Christians of all denominations are the inhabitants of Australia (overwhelmingly of British descent) and of southern Africa (both the white minorities and Bantus and coloReds); Christian majorities are to be found in the southern half of East Africa and in Madagascar; Ethiopia has already been mentioned.

Indeed, ethnic-religious differences divide the population of the Indian Ocean region. However, most of the sea is simultaneously tied together by followers of the same faith, culture, and often also language. There is division, but amidst the division there is unity.

In the social-economic sphere, differences between the peoples in various parts of the region are striking, except for Australia and South Africa, which are industrialized countries. Singapore is highly commercialised with a relatively high living standard. However, all the nations in the area can be classified as being in the "developing" stage. Wide differences do exist however between these countries; Iran, for instance, is on the threshold of the "take-off stage" of development. The oil bonanza which descended on some countries of the Arabic Gulf had created another dimension. We can now distinguish between those which "have oil" and those which "have not". The picture is therefore far from being uniform; it is highly divergent. Really, if one desired to judge the region according to
developmental and social-economic standards, a disparate image would emerge.

Jacques Auber has projected concepts not of one but of two Indian Ocean regions: one which he called the "World of Cancer," north of the Equator on both sides of the Tropic of Cancer; the other the "World of Capricorn," south of the Equator parallel with the Tropic of Capricorn.24 The first "World" is the home of the three major civilizations, of the Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The second is less inhabited, mostly by immigrant populations who came from various parts of the world. Evidently, this division ignored the cultural and religious cross-currents which prevail throughout the areas. The emphasis on white South African and Australians hardly take account of Africans and islanders south of the Equator. The ethnic-religious-cultural chessboard of the Indian Ocean region provide a rather confusing but not entirely negative presentation of unity or disunity. It seems clear that the decisive answer to our questions must be sought elsewhere, in the physical-geographic structure and political-strategic realms.


and p. 431.
F. GEOSTRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

Prominent students of geopolitics of the early twentieth century were keen to distinguish between the Eurasian heartland and oceanic South and East Asia. They foresaw a confrontation between the Eurasian land power and maritime powers lined up along the Asian rimland. However, their interpretations differed greatly.: Some believed that the land power possessed a basic advantage over sea power; while others predicted that ultimately sea power would prevail over land power.

Admiral Alfred T. Mahan, writing around the turn of the century, viewed the Asian world as a zone of conflict between British sea power and Russian land power. Nicholas Spykman, writing at the time of World War II, rallied to Mahan's view except that he believed that a threatening German land power, trying to bring under its control the Eurasian heartland, would be defeated by a combination of Anglo-Saxon and Soviet forces.

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Halford J Mackinder was the principal proponent of the heartland concept. This concept was finally expressed in his often quoted axiom which predicted a command of the heartland over the "Monsoon coastland" of Asia and ultimately over the world. Mackinder wrote, "Other empires have had their day, and so may that of Britain.....The European phase of history is passing away, as have passed the Fluvatilie and Mediterranean phases." Shortly after, he expanded his ideas in a notable paper presented before the Royal Geographical Society. In this presentation he stated for the first time and with prophetic insight, that the end of the period of world-wide explorations signalized the establishment of "a closed political system" on the earth, and that mechanical transport was altering the relative strength of land power and sea power. He pointed out the possibility of "the oversetting of the balance of power in favour of the pivot state." He elaborated his thesis in a world map, supported by an explanation putting forward the concept of a Eurasian Heartland power and its potential threat to sea power. Fifteen years later, he further detailed his argument and elaborated his predictions in a publication entitled *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. His stated aim was "to

27 Halford J. MacKinder, *Democratic Ideals and Realities*, New York, 1942, p. 34


measure the relative significance of the great features of our
globe as tested by the events of history, including the history of
the last four years, and then to consider how we may best adjust
our ideals of freedom these lasting realities of our earthly
home."\textsuperscript{31}

The heartland concept as set forth by Mackinder in 1904
was eagerly seized by German geopoliticians especially Karl
Haushofer, who adapted it to serve the interest of Nazi
Germany. Karl Haushofer envisaged German-Russian
cooperation in establishing an overwhelming land power capable
of defeating the British maritime empire.\textsuperscript{32} At the time of the
Hitler-Stalin cooperation it might have appeared that his
forecast was correct. Similarly, after World War II the Sino-
Soviet alliance seemed to justify Mackinder's prophecies.
However, these predictions of Asian land power proved short-
lived. The control of the Asian rimland by offshore maritime
powers has come to an end in the post World War II period.
However, considerations of the advantages or disadvantages of
sea power over land power and vice versa have not entirely lost
their validity. They have, however, become more complicated
by the advent of airpower and nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{33} Further, the

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 1942 edition, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{32} Karl Haushofer, \textit{Weltmeere und Weltmacht}, Berlin, 1937, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{33} Gerald S. Graham, \textit{The Politics of Naval Supremacy: Studies in British Maritime
Soviet Union has ceased to be a purely land power. In the Indian Ocean and other parts of the high seas, Soviet naval power is a factor whose weight has to be taken into account in the global geo-strategic calculus.

The other geopolitical thinker who has relevance to this study is Alfred Thayer Mahan. An analyst of Mahan's ideas has stated "No other single person has so directly and profoundly influenced the theory of sea power and naval strategy as Alfred Thaye Mahan. He precipitated and guided a long-pending revolution in American naval policy, provided a theoretical foundation for Britain's determination to remain the dominant sea power, and gave impetus to German naval development under William II and Admiral Tirpitz. In one way or another his writings affected the character of naval thought in France, Italy, Russia, Japan and lesser powers. He was a historian of distinction and, at the same time, a propagandist for the late nineteenth century revival of imperialism. The fundamental thesis of Maham's three volumes dealing with the influence of sea-power upon history is the supreme importance of sea-power in the shaping of national destinies. From this basic hypothesis that sea-power was vital to national growth, prosperity and security, Maham went on to examine the elements of sea-power. In his view there were six fundamental factors that affected its

development: geographical position, physical configuration, extent of territory, population, national character and governmental institutions. Mahan's ideas had a tremendous impact on naval thought and strategy.35

Robert Strausz-Hupe in his publication on geopolitics said that Mahan was "one of the several Anglo-Saxon thinkers whose influence is most clearly noticeable throughout Haushofer's own teachings- in spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that Haushofer's own doctrine of land power is the most extreme negation of Mahan's theories."36 Mahan's global philosophy was built on a scale which was much more grandiose and daring than any other theory of expansion put forward by a European thinker. Haushofer considered Mahan a great geopolitical theoretician, a prophet who had set "the United States on the path of greatness" and who had taught American statesmen to "think in terms of world power and greater space."37

It is no longer feasible for any strategic planner to focus only on a part of the Indian ocean region in his projections and

35 The basic ideas of Mahan are contained in his three volumes entitled The Influence of Sea-Power upon History, 1660-1783, which appeared in 1890, The Influence Of Sea-Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812 which was published in 1892, and Sea-power in its relation to the War of 1812, published in 1905. These three volumes constitute one theoretical entity in which successive maritime events and developments are related to questions of naval policy, strategy, tactics and international affairs.


calculations. While individual littoral states have a primary interest in their more immediate neighborhood, they cannot, for various reasons, remain oblivious to external developments in the Indian Ocean zone. The superpowers, as well as Britain, France, or China, may be interested in special areas of the region much more than in other points.

In the context of the strategic thinking of the superpowers, the indivisibility of the ocean is a fundamental principle. Neither the United States of America nor the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, is, in contrast to the situation in the Atlantic and Pacific, an Indian Ocean power from the territorial point of view. Their interest is primarily rooted in the oceanic zone. This zone is a potentially offensive field for the Americans and a defensive one for the USSR. Nuclear missiles launched from submarines in these waters may reach targets in the industrial heartland of the Soviet Union, and American land targets are vulnerable to Soviet submarine nuclear missile attack from these waters. In the nuclear strategic equation, the superpowers are locked into taking account of the Indian ocean as a critical theater of operations within the geo-strategic calculus.\(^{38}\)

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38 P. Lyon Believes that the Indian Ocean is either too big or too small to be considered a "Single Strategic Theatre". Too small for the superpowers because they are free to concentrate their navies on any ocean including the Indian; too big for conflicts between littoral powers which cannot "be construed as trans-oceanic (i.e., All Ocean) issues. "The Indian Ocean as a strategic area", in The Indian Ocean in International Politics, Southampton, 1973, p. 14.
The Arabic Gulf area, where 62 percent of the world's known oil reserves are located, is a region of immense global strategic significance. Arising from this fact, the fuel and energy resources extracted from the Gulf of Arabia zone, is shipped from various locations into the Re Sea towards Suez or around the Cape of Good Hope to Europe and the Americas. Another major sealane of communication is through the Straits of Malacca to Japan. Given Japan's importance in international trade, the Straits of Malacca constitutes a vital communication link to and from the Indian Ocean zone. Even from a global perspective, the Straits of Malacca is significant to the world economy. This arises from the fact that it is the major artery between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It constitutes the shortest route between Europe, Africa, West Asia and India and East Asia.\textsuperscript{39} Energy resources are also shipped to various points in the Indian Ocean itself such as India, Australia, and Singapore. Simultaneously, the Indian Ocean constitutes the thoroughfare for the transportation of raw materials such as tin, rubber, palm oil and various finished goods including industrial products. Consequently, the geostrategic value of the Indian Ocean area is more than obvious.

At the same time, the individual riparian powers and littoral states cannot escape from various security considerations arising from the geopolitics of the region.

\textsuperscript{39} Murugesu Pathmanathan, \textit{The Straits of Malacca; a basis or conflict or cooperation in new direction in the international relations of South East Asia - the great powers and South East Asia}, Singapore, 1973, p. 24.
India's conflict or possible future conflicts with Pakistan, involved the superpowers and China. It also involved other littoral states such as Iran, Sri Lanka, and various Arab countries arising from their feeling of solidarity with their Muslim coreligionists. Thus, even Malaysia and Indonesia are affected by the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean.

In a similar manner, violent confrontation between South Africa and Rhodesia, on the one hand, and black Africa, on the other, may envelop not only the immediate northern neighbors of the countries clamoring white supremacy but also other members of the Organization of African Unity, including the island states of Madagascar and Mauritius. The superpowers and China might, in a political chain reaction, also be dragged into this conflict.

The former colonial countries around the Indian Ocean are not signatories of any military or political pact. Their common or opposing strategic interests arise from the fact of their geographic location and from the geopolitical reality of the environment. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, includes countries which do not constitute a purely geopolitical unit. Their solidarity stems from the realization of a common danger and has been strengthened by the commitment of a military alliance arrangement. Likewise, Eastern Europe led by the Soviet Union is not a purely geopolitical entity. It is the military ties and the economic integration with the Soviet
Union that have turned it into a geostrategic unit. By contrast, the Indian Ocean region is a geopolitical entity by virtue of geography. It is an entity which is attracting increasing strategic interest and concern from various angles including both littoral and non-littoral Indian Ocean nations.

The control of the Indian Ocean sea-lanes of communication would thus provide a major power a powerful tool for influencing not only the littoral states but many industrialised countries of Western Europe and Japan. This control, though a remote possibility can be achieved. The geopolitical features of the Indian Ocean do provide the basis for this possibility. There are five control points. These are The Cape of Good Hope, at the southern tip of Africa, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, at the southern end of the Red Sea, the Strait of Hormuz at the southern end of the Persian Gulf, the Straits of Malacca between Malaysia and Indonesia and the Sundra Strait between Java and Sumatra. The first of these overlooks the shipping routes around Africa, the second guards the southern end of the Suez Canal, the third stands sentinel over the oil flow by sea from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula and the fourth and fifth control sea borne traffic into the Indian Ocean from the Western Pacific Ocean.  

It should be borne in mind that some individual countries in the Indian Ocean area are in a position of controlling the vital choke-points leading to or from the Indian Ocean. Consequently, possible interference with vital traffic through these gateways could not be regarded purely as a local problem. Such interference or control could develop into an issue of regional or even global significance. In the eventuality that anyone of the superpowers seek to exercise control on maritime transportation within the Indian Ocean area or at the various exit-entry points or elsewhere, it would have implications for the entire zone. This situation does not prevail in the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean. It can be posited that if a situation like the Cuban missile crisis were to develop, for instance, in the neighborhood of the Hormuz Strait or the Cape, or an embargo on oil or other strategic commodities would create an extremely dangerous situation, not merely for the Indian Ocean zone but for the entire world.

The political leaders of many littoral countries have recognized the geostrategic unity and significance of the region. This is evident from various political initiatives. One such initiative is the drive to establish a "zone of Peace" in the Indian Ocean region.\(^1\) It is also pertinent to quote a Soviet

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\(^1\) It seems hardly appropriate to believe that "the Indian Ocean is now only really a meaningful political entity to the superpowers, and only because they have mutually come to regard it as important to offset the presence of the other, or use it as a means to supporting allies in the area". J. Simpson, "The Indian Ocean Area. Zone of Disagreement or Balance of Power", in The Indian Ocean in International Politics, Southampton, 1973, p. 208.
periodical which has this observation of the India-Pakistani conflict of 1971: "Statements by politicians and press commentaries devoted to these events have clearly highlighted one thought: the Indian Ocean and the countries around it are now regarded as a gradually independent geopolitical entity".\textsuperscript{42} This observation is reflective of a similar perception by other nations which have a political and strategic interest in the Indian Ocean region.

From the strategic perspective of the superpowers, the Indian Ocean is to be regarded as a single theater of operations. Considerations concerning the global strategic balance require a comprehensive assessment of the power balances of the region. The local balance of power which exists between countries around the Indian Ocean may or may not be related with the balance that the superpowers wish to maintain. The strategic interests which the superpowers may have in these local power equations vary according to their policy objectives. Their perceptions of the significance of an issue and the images that they have concerning the intentions of others may differ or may coincide from time to time. There is, however, a discreet interconnection in the web of intersecting relations and rival interests. It can be concluded that from a geographic, historic, and strategic focus, these interrelations are generally more

solid, more intense, and more transparent than in most other geographic zones of the world.

The geopolitical importance of the ocean has also increased, generally will emphasis on the defensive-offensive possibilities of the deep seafloor. It has been observed that "The nation that first learns to live under the seas will control them, and the nation that controls the seas will control the world." To cite one example, the ninety east ridge of the Bay of Bengal, one of the straightest undersea mountain ranges on earth (3,000 miles long and up to 13,000 feet high), provides an ideal place for strategic nuclear devices. It is widely expected that both missile systems and anti-ball, missile systems to counter multiple warhead missiles will eventually be deployed on the seabed.

The Indian Ocean's proximity to at least two major powers, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, increases its importance as an area of strategic interest and as an area for naval development. The possibility of strategic deployment naturally increases Moscow's concern for a counter presence in efforts to neutralize or at least to make such deployment costly. With the regular basing of the Poseidon and Polaris nuclear missile submarines, the ocean has already come

43 Arvid Pardo, "Who Will Control the Seabed?" Foreign Affairs 46, October 1968, p. 129.

44 Ibid. p. 129.
into the strategic orbits of the two superpowers. In fact, the growing geopolitical prominence of the Indian Ocean area leads many military analysts to believe that geo strategy will soon focus on this third largest body of water in the world.

From the strategic perspective of the superpowers the indivisibility of the ocean must be a fundamental principle. Neither the United States of America nor the U.S.S.R. is, in contrast to the situation in the Atlantic and Pacific, an Indian Ocean power from a territorial point of view. Their interest stems primarily from the ocean. The Indian Ocean zone is a potentially offensive field for the U.S.A. and a defensive one for the U.S.S.R. Nuclear strike missiles launched from submarines from this zone may hit targets in the industrial heartland of the Soviet Union, while no American land targets are vulnerable by submarines from these waters. In the nuclear equation, the superpowers are thus bound to deal with the waters of this ocean as a single theater of potential action.


47 P. Lyon believes that the Indian Ocean is either too big or too small to be considered a "single strategic theater." Too small for the superpowers because they are free to concentrate their navies on any ocean including the Indian; too big for conflicts between littoral powers which cannot "be construed as trans-oceanic (i.e. all ocean) issues." "The Indian Ocean as a Strategic Area," in The Indian Ocean in International Politics, Southampton, 1973, p.14.
The geostrategic value of the Indian Ocean since the end of the Second World War has been accelerated and intensified by a combination of economic, political and strategic factors. Among these, the more important have been the tremendous economic development of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean area, the collapse of the European imperial powers, the development of the super-power rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, the discovery and exploitation of the hydrocarbon resources of the region and the development of nuclear weapons technology combined with the evolution of the strategy of nuclear deterrence. Each of these factors have enhanced the geostrategic value of the Indian Ocean zone.