Chapter Four

Strategic Importance Of The Indian Ocean

Politico-Strategic Perceptions

There are many important islands and territories of extreme strategies importance in the region, namely Djibouti, Reunion Island, Socotra and the British Indian Ocean Territory including Diego Garcia. Besides, the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and the Malacca-Singapore straits are the most heavily trafficked of the may channels, gulfs, seas and straits that interconnect with the Indian Ocean. The above islands and waterways are plying an increasingly important role in the strategic calculations of power blocs and international trade. The waterways, to an extent, can be considered as 'choke points' on the movement of strategic forces, vital fuels and essential raw materials of various countries, specially the industrial giants. Consequently intense rivalry to influence and control these areas has existed between the super powers.

The ethnic and religious composition of the nations of the Indian Ocean region is varies and includes Africans, Arabs, Indians, Malays, Chinese, Indonesians and Europeans with diverse religious denominations of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and

Christianity. The islands also reflect a heterogeneous character which was moulded by past colonial and cultural influences.[1] Nearly a third of the world's people live in the 44 countries bordering the Indian Ocean. Only Australia and New Zealand are white, developed and Western societies. South Africa, which is partially white, is a well-developed industrial nation. Nearly all the other littorals are Afro-Asian and are at different levels of political, social and economic development.[2] As can be expected, the area includes diverse and distinctive cultures with varying politico-economic systems. Most of these countries are starkly faced by Malthusian catastrophe, which, coupled with difficulties of international trade and economic factors like increase in the cost of imports, serves to inhibit the development of their economies. On the other hand, the oil-producing States of the Gulf are enjoying fabulous wealth and its attendant problems.[3] An overall assessment of the region reveals that the problems afflicting the poorer nations, such as a population explosion, inadequate food production and faulty distribution systems, heavy dependence on imports of essentials and a widening gap between poorer and affluent nations, create explosive conditions for a crisis of global dimension. Many countries of the Indian Ocean have adopted borders set by former colonial masters which have

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1 *Indian Ocean* Central Intelligence Agency Publication, 1974, p. 23.

2 *World Bank* *Population, per Capita Product and Growth Rates*, Washington, D.C. World Bank. p. 5

3 W.A.C. Adie, Oil, *Politics and Seapower: The Indian Ocean Vortex* New York, 1975, pp. 50-57

little regard for ethnic and geographic considerations. This only adds to the existing complexities and vulnerabilities of the areas.

Due to a variety of reasons, the Indian Ocean during the last two decades has assumed a strategic significance not previously accorded during the 20th Century. The continuing instability in West Asia, uncertainty of assured oil supplies, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, emergence of numerous tiny island States with self-evident problems, development of Diego Garcia as a military base by the US, and the deployment of increasing naval forces are some of the indications of high strategic stakes involved in the area. Some writers have summarized the geo-political importance of the Indian Ocean in a concept akin to Mackinder's heartland theory. It is argued that between the super powers, the state that can wield influence on the peripheral countries would hole prime political power in the world. According to Alvin Cottrell, due to a series of political and economic considerations, the Indian Ocean is too strategic for the world.[4]

Economic Strategic Importance

Strategic raw materials of the Indian Ocean area are transported to the importing countries via oceanic routes both within and outside the region. Japan's total oil supplies and the bulk of its raw materials and finished products traverse the Indian

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[4] Alvin Cottrell, "Control of the Indian Ocean", *Sea Power*, 14 March, 1971, p. 11.

Ocean in one direction or other. Similarly the UK, France, West Germany, Australia and many other countries carry large portions of their raw materials, fuels and trade products across the Indian Ocean.[5] Control of the Indian Ocean sea lines would thus give a major power a perfect tool for influencing not only the littoral states but aiso the industrialised countries of the world.

Many of the Indian Ocean countries suffer from a shortage of food. Amidst this scarcity the Ocean itself offers excellent hope to supplement of deficiency through fishing harvests. As against a UN estimate of a yearly potential of 15 million tons, only about one fifth is being utilized at present.[6] The bulk of the non-communist world's proven oil reserves are located near the Indian Ocean. Despite problems of the question of ownership of the international seabed, the high cost of development and the conflict of vested interests, great potential has been shown for exploring for oil and extracting important high grade minerals such as manganese, iron, nickel, cobalt and copper from the seabed.[7] Realising the vast potential of the continental shelf and seabed and growing concern with the exploitation of living marine and other resources, most countries have declared extended their territorial sea up to 12 miles and economic zone up to 200 miles. Many outside countries, especially the super powers, have high

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5 A.G.L. Hutchinson, *The Strategic Significance of the Indian Ocean* Alabama, 1972, p. 2.

6 *Indian Ocean*, op.cit., p. 15.

7 Ibid., pp. 16-17.

economic stakes in the Ocean area. By a conservative estimate, US investment in the Indian Ocean is said to be well over $15,000 million. The US based multinationals have control over most of the transportation and sales of the oil resources of the area. Nearly half of Japan's seaborne trade, that is about $105 billion, is carried along the Indian Ocean route.[8] It is an important source of strategic raw materials to burgeoning Japanese industry and to Western Europe. Soviet fishing fleets carry away a large portion of the fish harvest annually. The superpowers have successfully maintained multi-billion dollar arms sales annually in the Indian Ocean region.

There is little doubt that the Indian Ocean has assumed a position of great importance in world politico-strategic and economic activities. The growing prominence of the Indian Ocean area leads one to believe that global strategy in general and the strategic intents of the super powers in particular have begun to focus on the Indian Ocean, which is emerging as the ocean of the 21st Century.

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8 Narasimha Murthy, "Japan and the Indian Ocean Basin", *Indian Quarterly* New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, January-March, 1981 , p. 36.

Play Power

'...[Soviet's] territorial aspirations centre south of the national territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean.

USSR secret protocol during
1940 Molotow-Ribbentrop talks.

'...if U.S. interests are to be protected, it is essential that American defense planning be geared to the specific challenges likely to emerge in the Indian Ocean area.

Anthony Harrigan
'America's Deteriorating Defence Posture' Modern Age 15, no. 2 (Spring 1971, 160).

Although no super powers inhabit the Indian Ocean coastline, all of them have important interests there. Indeed the ocean has retained its historical role as an arena for external trade. In addition, the last decade has witnessed an unprecedented increase in superpower naval presence and the creation and strengthening of bases to support military activity. The region powers of the Indian Ocean, acutely appreciative of the enhanced importance of the ocean, while protesting against the superpower presence, are themselves busy strengthening and expanding their naval forces. The tiny island States have become pawns on the chessboard of superpower rivalry and powerplay. Extensive debate took place in the early and mid-seventies as to which of the superpowers was responsible for the general build-up and nuclearization of the Indian Ocean region. It is an irrelevant

issue now, in view of the fact that substantial naval build-up and support facilities have already been created by the superpowers.

The situation in the Indian Ocean area is dangerously explosive, reminiscent of the historical situation in which colonialism took place. Superpower rivalry, ocean-based nuclear strategy, the lure of oil and other resources, the technologically exploitative lead of the other powers and the weaknesses of the Indian Ocean states have led to an enhancement of the military presence of the super powers in the region. The attention of the superpowers is presently focussed on the Gulf.[9] Though there has been an increased in the military capability of the littoral states, numerous divisions and dissensions among them reduce the strength of any independent stance. Besides the superpowers, the UK, France, West Germany, Japan and China demonstrate an active interest in the Indian Ocean.[10]

The magnitude of the importance the global powers attach to this 'arc of crisis' is evident from the formidable build-up of forces within the area. A permanent carrier task force of the US Navy operated from Subic Bay and supplemented by the facilities in Diego Garcia has been presented in the region. Several ships of the Soviet navy and French naval contingents are also regularly

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9 P.K.S. Namboodri , The Indian Ocean , Strategic Analysis , New Delhi VOL . V. August - September , 1981 , pp. 196-205 .

10 M.V. Kamath, "Great Power Interests and Policies in the Region", Report-Seminar on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, New Delhi, January, 1981 .

operating in the Indian Ocean. In the winter of 1980, the Arabian Sea witnessed the biggest ever naval armada of Western powers assembled since the days of the Second World War. Within this sector also occurred the biggest ever deployment of Soviet troops outside East Europe.[11]

Another danger arises out of the vast arms transfers to the region. The value of arms transfer as a percentage of total defence expenditure in the region rose from about 7 percent in 1971 to over 16 per cent in 1977. The main importers of arms were in West Asia and the main suppliers of arms were the United States followed by the Soviet Union, France and Britain.[12]

American Interest

A modest American naval presence preceded the Soviet appearance in the Indian Ocean. The Soviet presence was, however, no response to United States presence; nor can the Diego Garcia base or periodic naval visits in strength by American warships be considered to be direct riposte to Soviet activities in the area. Naturally, political developments around the periphery of this ocean influenced Washington's short and long-range decision making in regard to the region, but the Soviet presence, in itself, was hardly the trigger which induced this policy. For

11 P.K.S.Namboodiri, op.cit, p . 198 .

12 T. Sreedhar, "Arms Transfer to the India Ocean Region", *Seminar on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace*, New Delhi, January, 1981, p. 19.

the United States the Indian Ocean region, generally speaking, is not one of the areas closely associated with its vital interests. As expressed by a spokesman of the Department of State. "The Indian Ocean area, unlike Europe and Asia, is one which has been only on the margins of United States attention. Never considered of great importance to the central balance of power, it has been on the edges of great power rivalry."[13]

Nevertheless, the elements which stimulated limited American interest in the region are as complex as those which stimulated the Soviets. They may be thus described:

1. The United States feels that it has an interest in the stability and economic development of the countries in the region. It believes that instability, conflicts between regional Powers, and a major change in the local balance of power would serve the interests of the Soviet Union or China and therefore would tilt the world military balance in its disfavor. In other words, Washington considers that it is, generally speaking, in its interest to maintain the status quo; of course a change of the states quo which would favor allies or friends of the United States would not be unwelcome.

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13 Statement by Ronald I. Spiers, Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, Department of State, before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the Committee on Foreign Affairs; see United States, House of Representatives, *The Indian Ocean*, hearings. p. 162.

2. In the decades following World War II, the United States has provided billions of dollars in economic and military assistance to countries of the region. apart from this political-military "investment," the United States economy has over $10 billion of commercial investments in the area, including about $3.5 billion in oil. Exports to and imports only about 10 percent of its oil requirements from the Persian Gulf, Western Europe imports over 60 percent of its oil and Japan nearly 90 percent of its oil from the Gulf. Naturally, Washington cannot disregard this vital interest of its allies.

3. The Untied States has a historic interest in the maintenance of the freedom of the seas, the freedom to keep open for navigation not only the high seas but also international straits. The peculiar character of the Indian Ocean, with its funned-shaped entry areas and choke-points, demands special attention in this respect. While passage through the Indian Ocean is less vital to the United States than to Europeans, Japanese or Australians, it should be remembered that 20 percent of world shipping takes place in the Indian Ocean.

4. For strictly strategic reasons, the northern part of the Indian Ocean may be important to the United States a launching areas for its ballistic missiles. If, as a result of the Soviet-American nuclear arms agreements, the relative strength of United States submarine-based missiles is to be increased, it is most likely

that their partial deployment in the Indian Ocean will be considered inevitable.

There is no doubt that the Indian Ocean has a low-priority interest if compared with the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans of the Mediterranean Sea.[14] If we could define the United States interest on a scale from 0 to 10, the Indian Ocean would lie in the 2-3 interest range, while the Mediterranean would be in the 7-8 and the North Atlantic and eastern Pacific in the 8-9 range.[15] As a result of Vietnam War and the so-called Nixon Doctrine, Washington has officially lowered its ranking of interest in Asia and, consequently, in the Indian Ocean as well. But the western-Pacific, East Asia, and even Southeast Asia must still rank higher than the Indian Ocean, in general.

Under the Nixon Doctrine, which was announced in Guam in the summer of 1969, the conventional defense in the Asian theater is the responsibility of the country directly concerned, with the United States assisting its allies where "United States interests are involved." Insurgencies are best handled by the threatened governments by means of police, paramilitary action and economic and social reforms. "New commitments by the United States will be viewed in the light of careful assessment of U.S.

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14 See Howard Wriggins, "US Interests in the Indian Ocean," in *The Indian Ocean*, ed. A.J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell New York, 1972 , pp. 360-362.

15 On the scale of Soviet interest, the Indian Ocean would rank higher than on the American, possibly 5-6.

national interests, specific threats to those interests, and U.S. capacity to contain those threats at an acceptable risk and cost."[16]

While the United States is intent upon showing a modest profile in the Indian Ocean, its activity there reflects a contingency planning which recognizes the present low-ranking interests of the region but seeks to be potentially ready to meet possible crises which require a higher degree of American attention. Even if the relative degree of concern may differ, Soviet activities largely demonstrate a similar determination: to prepare for potential future developments.

This raises the question of whether there exists between the two superpowers an acute rivalry for influence and domination in that part of the world, as is oftentimes alleged, or whether their reciprocal presence in the region is compatible with a mutual recognition of coexistence and with the much-heralded detente which is said to guide and contain their political aims and endeavors.

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16 U.S. Department of State, *Background Notes, Thailand*, Washington, D.C., January 1973. This is an official interpretation of the Nixon Doctrine.

Role of Diego Garcia

To uphold its interests, US strategy for the Indian Ocean has come to centre around the tiny atoll of Diego Garcia. Appreciating the dangers of shore-based facilities located among the Indian Ocean countries, the US planners formulated a strategic island concept for basing their naval might away from problematic land bases.[17] In 1960, the US persuaded London to detach the Diego Garcia atoll from its mother colony, Mauritius, to form part of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). By the early sixties the Indian Ocean came to attract wider attention in the strategic thinking of the United States. After much opposition and debate both within and outside the US the communications station became operational in Diego Garcia in March 1973. This installation here became an important link in the Department of Defense's Worldwide Military Command and Control Systems.

Prompted by the Yom kippur war experience, the US defence policy-makers expanded the existing communications facility into a logistics facility, the scope of which was to include an anchorage, airfield, support and supply elements and ancillary services, personnel accommodation and transmitting and receiving services. The wide V-shaped atoll is centrally located, and its

17 Sami Al-Jundi, The Super Power Conflict In The Third World Affairs Eygpt. 1979, p . 118.

prominent location makes it the Malta of the Indian Ocean. In 1969, its importance was summed up as follows:

> Diego Garcia is where the US should seek a base if we mean to contest the Russian bid for supremacy.[18]

According to the reports, Diego Garcia has a 3,600 metre runway, a 640,000 barrel fuel dump, underground ammunition depots, a large submarine bay, repair and supply facilities and a communications station. Extension of the runway from its original plan for 2,400 metres is considered significant, as that enables not only heavy transport aircraft like C-141 and KC-135 tankers to operate, but it also provides a base for nuclear-capable B-52 strategic bombers and F-111 tactical bombers. In addition, access to other facilities such as Masirah Island off Oman, the Egyptian air-naval base Ras Banas, Mombasa in Kenya and Berbera in Somalia has considerably enhanced the quantum of forces the US would be able to muster for a military contingency in the Indian Ocean.[19]

As a vital ancillary to the US Rapid Deployment Force, Diego Garcia also has become a vital part of US defence. Several supply ships have already been propositioned in Diego Garcia. The Pentagon has said that these ships could supply a marine

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18 G. Ali Murad , The American Policy Development In The Arab Area, LaPanan, 1975, pp. 62-65.

19 Ibid., pp. 66.

amphibious brigade of about 10,000. It appears that the US plans to station a small contingent of marines on Diego Garcia as a deterrent to likely troubles in the Gulf, capable of reaching any point in 72 hours. Diego Garcia, free of encumbrances and population, offers an excellent base to meet varying logistic needs of the US military in the Indian Ocean, to provide surveillance and communication facilities and to a degree, to neutralize the immediate effect of a blockade of the Gulf and Malacca Straits ingress points. For the foreseeable future, Diego Garcia is likely to remain the centre point of all US military and naval activity in the Indian Ocean area.

American Presence

The Indian Ocean is the most remote major sea from the United States; its center is located on the antipode of the globe's Northern Hemisphere as seen from the center of the United States. Its has been pointed out that Trincomalee, the historic naval strongpoint on the east coast of Ceylon, is 11,500 miles distant from New York in the easterly direction and also 11,500 miles distant from San Francisco in the westerly direction.[20] On American world maps the United States is placed in the center and

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20 Howard Wriggins, "United States Interests in the Indian Ocean. An Introductory Essay," Appendix to United States, House of Representatives, *The Indian Ocean. Political and Strategic Future*, hearings before the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 92d Cong., 1st sess., July 20-28, 1971, Washington, D.C., 1971, p. 206.

the Indian Ocean is divided at both ends of the map, thus providing a distorted perspective of its expanse and shape.

American naval presence[21] in the region was prompted by the gradual erosion of British supremacy. The primary and most visible interest lay with oil investments in the Persian Gulf area. This interest was expressed by the establishment in 1948 of the modest Middle East Task Force (MIDEASTFOR), consisting of a small flagship - a converted seaplane tender - and two destroyers assigned on a rotational basis from the Atlantic Fleet, and based at the British naval station on Bahrain Island. On the Arabian mainland, with the consent of Saudi Arabia, the United States maintained a Military Airlift Command base at Dhahran Airfield.

During the 1950s, in addition to economic aid provided to many countries in the area, Washington sent military advisory and training missions to Ethiopia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Bilateral defense agreements were concluded with Iran in 1950 and with Pakistan in 1954, connected with the first's membership in the Baghdad Pact (later to become CENTO) and the second's participation in SEATO.

In 1968 the British government intimated its withdrawal from east of Suez, terminated its security arrangements with

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21 The Indian Ocean, however, was not an unknown sea to American shippers; in the eighteenth century New Bedford whalers frequented Mauritius as a port of call, and in the nineteenth century clipper ships crossed the Indian Ocean on their way to China.

Kuwait, began to liquidate its ties with other Arabian Gulf states, and gave independence to Mauritius (other British possessions in Southeast Asia and East Africa had already attained independent statehood). In view of the dangers and instabilities which prevailed in the Indian Ocean region, Washington also began considering its "longer-term strategic requirements" in the area.[22] In 1968 the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the setting up of a communication facility to be maintained jointly with the British on the island of Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago. American requirements coincided with those of the British, who also wished to secure communications and transit rights across the Indian Ocean. By 1965 the administratively separated and sparsely populated groups of atolls, which until then had fallen under the administrations of Mauritius and the Seychelles, were formed into the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). The Chagos Archipelago is one group belonging to BIOT.[23]

The geostrategic location of Diego Garcia is felicitous: it lies at the apex of an isosceles triangle, the base of which extends from Australia to South Africa. Airplanes placed on this island could protect tanker lanes from the Persian Gulf to the Cape and other shipping routes between the Arabian Sea and the Straits of

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22 Statement by Ronald I. Spiers of the U.S. Department of State, in *The Indian Ocean*, hearings, p. 164.

23 The right to use Diego Garcia (and possibly other islands of the BIOT) for U.S. defense purposes originally relied on an exchange of notes between the United Kingdom and the United States of Dec. 30, 1966 (U.K. Treaty Series No. 15/1967/ Cmnd 3231, London, H.M. Stationery Office).

Malacca. For these reasons, a plan of strengthening the capabilities of this station was submitted to the Congress of the United States: to deepen the harbor, to extend the runway to 12,000 feet so that it could handle reconnaissance aircraft and aerial tanker planes and be able to support a carrier task force operating in the Indian Ocean.

After 1942 the United States operated a communication station near Asmara in Ethiopia (Eritrea), known as Kagnew station. Subsequently, it developed into a relay and satellite-tracking facility which was also used for monitoring purposes. This station started to be phased out as a military facility in 1974 and ultimately will also be discontinued as a communication station for civilian use.

In 1967 the United States, in agreement with the Australian government, established a powerful very-low-frequency communication station at Learmonth, on Exmouth Gulf, south of North West Cape. The station is able to communicate with submerged submarines. In January 1974 Washington agreed to share the control of this facility with Canberra.

The United States also shared with Australia the satellite control and monitoring facility at Pine Gap (near Alice Springs in the Northern Territory of Australia) and also maintained a satellite control station at Nurrungar (near Woomera in South

Australia). Yet another tracking facility exists on Mahe Island of the British-administered Seychelles group.

When London gave up its naval base at Jufair (in the harbor of Manama, the capital of Bahrain), the United States signed an agreement with the Bahraini government in December 1971 which enable it to continue the existing facility as a homing port for MIDEASTFOR. In October 1973, under the pressures prompted by the Arab-Israeli hostilities, Bahrain denounced the agreement but subsequently consented to the continued use of the base.[24]

The units of MIDEASTFOR often participate with other unites of the United States Navy and with allied naval ships in antisubmarine and other fleet exercises in the Indian Ocean.[25] Apart from these routine exercises and courtesy visits by American warships in Indian Ocean ports, some entries into the ocean have been occasioned by certain crisis situations. In December 1971, at the time of the Indian-Pakistani war, the aircraft carrier Enterprise, heading a task force which included the amphibious assault ship Tripoli, a battalion of 800 Marines, and other smaller units, entered the Bay of Bengal; it left the Indian Ocean in January 1972. In October 1973, at the time of

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24 *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1974.

25 In November 1974 warships of the United States (including the 60,000 ton carrier *Constellation*), Britain, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey participated in the (so far) largest naval exercise in the Indian Ocean. The exercise bore the name "Midlink 74" and was conducted in the Arabian Sea. New York Times, Nov. 21, 1974.

the Arab-Israeli war, the aircraft carrier *Hancock*, escorted by four destroyers, was dispatched into the western section of the Indian Ocean; when the *Hancock* was withdrawn in December, it was replaced by the carrier *Oriskany*. In the spring of 1974, the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk* was for some time on station in the Indian Ocean.

Calculating the American naval presence in the Indian Ocean in "ship-days" (in number of days individual ships have spent in that sea), United States surface combat ships accumulated 872 ship-days in 1970, 858 in 1971, 990 in 1972, and 1,410 in 1973 (the year of the Arab-Israeli war).[26]

While there is no official information concerning the deployment of American nuclear ballistic missile-firing submarines (Polaris A3 and later Poseidon missile submarines), their presence has been assumed or accepted as real by many commentators.[27] This presence has also been listed as one or even the principal reason for the entry and stationing of units of the Soviet Navy in these waters.

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26 Report of three experts, dated July 5, 1974, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, pursuant to the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace (A/AC.159/1/Rev.1).

27 See, among others, Geoffrey Jukes, *The Indian Ocean in Soviet Naval Policy* London, 1972, pp. 4-12; Oles M. Smolansky, "Soviet Entry into the Indian Ocean. An Analysis," in *The Indian Ocean*, ed. A.J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell (New York, 1972), pp. 337-355; report of three experts, dated May 3, 1974, to the UN Secretary-General (A/AC.159/1), pp. 6-7 (omitted in the revised report).

Soviet Presence

While earlier American interest in the Indian Ocean region was only commercial, Tsarist interest was linked with Russian penetration into Central Asia and conflicts with Britain over influence in the Middle East and the border areas between India and Russian Asia, especially in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tibet. Russia's often invoked desire for "warm-water ports" was unlikely to be aimed toward the distant shores of the Indian Ocean, except the Persian Gulf, which, in case of a total collapse of the Ottoman Empire, might have been within the reach of a Russian advance.[28]

After the Bolshevik take-over, Lenin was interested in carrying revolution into colonial Asia, but the question of whether the revolutionary struggle for liberation from the colonial yoke was to be made a "one stage" operation by introducing a Communist system directly or a "two-stage" operation by adopting first a national-bourgeois system could never be decided. Stalin came to believe that the leaders of the independence movements, such as Gandhi, simply were capitalist stooges. When the countries around the Indian Ocean gradually

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28 During the German-Soviet negotiations in November 1940, the German draft of a secret protocol offered to recognize Soviet aspirations "south of the national territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean," and the Soviet counterdraft spoke of "the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf," which Moscow asked to be recognized as the center of its territorial aspirations in Asia. See Ferenc A. Vali, *The Turkish Straits and NATO*, Stanford, Calif,. 1972, pp. 225 and 228.

obtained their independence, Moscow continued to consider them as still dependent on their former colonial masters for some time. It was the task of Khrushchev to accept non alignment as a foreign policy compatible with the aims of the socialist world.[29]

After 1954 Moscow became more closely interested in some countries around the Indian Ocean, particularly those of the Indian subcontinent and Indonesia. The "special tie" between the Soviet Union and India was first demonstrated when Khrushchev and Bulganin visited India in 1955. Soviet military and economic aid began to flow to this country and also to others in the region, often competing with the assistance the United States was abundantly providing. But Soviet relations with India and other regional states had their high and low points during the following years; as the Sino-Soviet rivalry grew in intensity, Chinese competition and attempts to establish diplomatic-political footholds rendered Moscow's status more difficult.

Whether the announcement by the British government of the decision to liquidate its positions in the area east of Suez prompted the Soviet move to send naval units into the Indian Ocean must remain moot. Whether the deployment or potential deployment of American Polaris-type submarines has been the principal motivation must equally remain doubtful.[30]

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29 Geoggrey Jukes, *The Soviet Union in Asia*, Berkeley, Calif.: 1973 , pp. 7-17.

30 Geoffrey Jukes connects the dispatch of Soviet naval units into the Indian Ocean with the emergence of U.S. ballistic fleet submarines and , in

However, it may assumed that the arrival of Soviet warships in the Indian Ocean was coincident with the stage of growth which the Soviet Navy reached in the mid-sixties. After Stalin's death (he had ordered the construction of large "cruisers" of the *Stalingrad* class), a much better balanced building program was adopted, first with an emphasis on smaller surface ships and submarines. By the late 1950s the strength of the Soviet Navy surpassed that of the united Kingdom; it became the second largest navy after that of the United States.

In the later 1950s and early 1960s the Soviet leaders smarted under the evident inferiority of their navy in comparison with that of the United States. The American landing in Lebanon in 1958 and the humiliation suffered in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 brought home to them the shortcomings of their oceanic capabilities. While refraining from the construction of aircraft carriers (that would have slowed down the building of small craft), they concentrated on guided missile-carrying cruisers, frigates, and destroyers and on nuclear-powered missile submarines.[31] By the mid-1960s the Soviet Navy evidently

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particular, with the increases in range and payload of the successive versions of the Polaris missiles; The Indian Ocean in Soviet Naval Policy, p. 5. On the other hand, T.B. Millar notes the "coincidence" of the British announcement with the increased Soviet interest and involvement in the Indian Ocean; *Soviet Policies in the Indian Ocean Area*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No.7.

31 For details see Norman Polmar, *Soviet Naval Power. Challenge for the 1970's*, New York, 1972, pp. 27-43.

possessed the strength to venture out in strength beyond the seas surrounding Soviet or Soviet-controlled areas: the Arctic waters and the eastern North Atlantic, the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the western Pacific. Since 1964 Moscow has maintained naval units in the Mediterranean in ever-increasing numbers, especially during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli hostilities.

The first ostentatious appearance of Soviet warships in the Indian Ocean occurred in the spring of 1968. Units of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, a *Sverdlov*-class cruiser and two guided-missile destroyers, visited India; the cruiser and one destroyer called on ports in Somalia, in the Persian Gulf, and Pakistan before returning to Vladivostok.

In the following years, the deployment of Soviet naval vessels was systematically continued; the average strength of the squadrons consisted of one cruiser and two destroyers with a number of supply ships. But at the time of the Bangladesh War (early 1972) their number increased to thirteen combat surface ships. In the spring of 1974 one cruise, three destroyers, and two minesweepers sailed in the Indian Ocean. While the number of these warships has not grown considerably, the later arrivals mustered more modern types (such as the *Kynda*-class cruisers armed with eight Shaddock surface-to-surface missiles). In mid-1974 the Black Sea-based Soviet helicopter carrier *Leningrad* entered the Indian Ocean from around the Cape of Good Hope.

It should be remembered that long before the regular presence of Soviet warships in the Indian Ocean, these waters had been visited by large numbers of Soviet fishing vessels and some oceanographic craft. Soviet merchant ships crossed the ocean in considerable numbers; during the Vietnam War supply vessels sailed through the Suez Canal and after the closure of the canal in 1967, around Africa to reach Hanoi.

The Soviet warships call on many ports of the region, and while they frequent certain countries, they prefer to omit others; but no direct political differences necessarily need be drawn form the geographic distribution of these visits.[32]

There is no evidence that the Soviet Union possesses an official (overt) treaty which secures any sovereign or leased naval or air base in the Indian Ocean area. From the auxiliary craft accompanying the Soviet warships, it may be inferred that these units rely to some considerable measure on floating support. But it also appears will substantiated that these warships enjoy extended shore-related support in some ports.

The question of whether the Soviet Union maintains "bases" in the Indian Ocean area has been raised on many occasions and

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32 The most frequent visits have been made to Somali ports (Berbera, Mogadishu, and Kismayu) but there have been visits also to India, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf harbors. For statistics of these visits, see Australian Federal Parliament, Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report on the Indian Ocean Region*, Canberra, 1972, Appendix L.

answered in the affirmative or negative manner.[33] The ports which Soviet warships frequently entered, as Vishakapatnam (India), Hodeida (North Yemen), Aden (South Yemen), Berbera and Mogadishu (Somalia), Umm Qasr (Iraq), and Chittagong (Bangladesh), were often listed as "Soviet bases." Singapore and Mauritius, where Soviet ships occasionally called for minor repairs or bunkering, were also mentioned, although in these cases only facilities available were used. Naturally, much of the controversy depends on the definition of the "base" or "naval base."[34]

Even if the Soviet Union does not maintain any sovereign or treaty-secured naval or air base, it appears that Moscow was able to make solid arrangements with some friendly powers for the use of port facilities in certain harbors. It appears that port where the most extensive facilities are offered is Berbera. In this Somali town a restricted port area is available to the Soviet Navy, with storehouses, barracks, a repair ship, and housing for Soviet military dependents.[35]

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33 For instance, President Ford, in his press conference on Aug. 28, 1974, mentioned that the "Soviet Union already has three major naval operating bases in the Indian Ocean." Subsequently, these bases were identified as being in Aden (South Yemen), Berbera (Somalia), and Umm Qasr (Iraq). The Soviet News Agency (TASS) promptly denied the existence of any Soviet bases in the Indian Ocean. *New York Times*, Aug. 29 and Sept. 1, 1974.

34 Baghdad Observer , Sep . 15 , 1980 .

35 See UN report of three experts (revised), dated July 11, 1974, p. 7. On June 10, 1975, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, showed aerial reconnaissance photographs to the Senate Armed Services Committee to prove that the Soviet Union established a missile storage facility, a naval

Another "Soviet base", a port with extended facilities, is Umm Qasr at the head of the Persian Gulf in Iraqi territory. This port was constructed with Soviet assistance, partly for commercial reasons (the Soviet-exploited Rumaila oil fields lie in the hinterland of Umm Qasr) and partly for the use of the Soviet Navy. However, the location of this "base" is such that it can be reached only through the narrow Khor Abdullah Channel, which is situated between Iraqi territory and the Kuwaiti islands of Bubayan and Warba. It is much too exposed and vulnerable for access by larger Soviet naval vessels unless Iraq manages to annex the two Kuwaiti islands.

There is no hard evidence that in other ports listed as "bases" the Soviet warships enjoy particular privileges (restricted quayage, storage facilities, buildings for housing of crews, etc.) not available for other visiting warships. If they can obtain certain special advantages, these are due to the particular activity which Soviet technicians perform in the area: Vishakapatnam, the Indian naval base, is the receiving port for naval vessels delivered by the Soviet Union, and therefore Soviet training crews are often present; in Chittagong Harbor Soviet dredges cleared some wrecked hulks, remainders of the Bangladesh War, and lingered in the area for over one year. The report according to which Socotra Island has been turned into a Soviet air base has proved

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communication site, and other defense constructions at Berbera; *New York Times*, June 11, 1975.

incorrect.[36] But there are fleet anchorages near Socotra and around the Chagos Archipelago which are used by Soviet warships, as well as permanent mooring buoys laid by Soviet vessels off the Seychelles Islands and Mauritius.[37]

If we measure the Soviet naval presence according to ship-days spent in the Indian Ocean, we find that their numbers are considerably higher than those the Americans. In 1970 the ship-days numbered 1,670; in 1971, 1,480; in 1972, 2,387; and in 1973, 2,487. In these years the average ships-days spent in that ocean numbered 2,006 for the warships of the Soviet Union, and only 1,032 for those of the United States - that is, about half as many for the Americans as for the Soviets. Other standards of measurement (size of ships, armaments, or port visits) would lead to a similar showing, namely, that the Soviet naval presence largely outstripped that of the United States. This raises the question of the meaning and nature of the superpowers' presence in the Indian Ocean - of what circumstances may explain or justify their entry into these waters. In other words, it appears necessary to analyze their political-military aims and objectives in the region.

36 The South Yeman goverment invited acorres pandent of the times London to visit the Island, hereported having seen no special activitie or suitable port facilities. The Times of London Jun 9, 1971

37. Un report by the three expert (revisal) July 11, 1974 P-8

Soviet Interest

The soviet move into the Indian Ocean is evidently a multipurpose operation which cannot be separated from the broader political objectives of the Soviet state. The navy's arrival was preceded by gestures and actions directed toward that region which cannot be described here in detail. There were several landmarks of these political moves: the support for India at the time of the Sino-Indian border war in 1962; the Soviet memorandum of December 7, 1964, proposing a "nuclear-free zone" in the Indian Ocean area; Soviet mediation between Pakistan and India to end the war of 1965; the proposal by Brezhnev in 1969 (repeated several times since) for the conclusion of an Asian collective security pact (interpreted as directed against China); the Soviet-Indian Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation of 1971, and the ensuing assistance by Moscow in the Bangladesh crisis.

In the context of Moscow's evident interest in the region, it appears almost natural that the successive "out-of-area" deployments of the growing Soviet Navy should reach the Indian Ocean. Still, taking this naval entry separately, there has been much speculation as to the objectives of such a move, whereby purely military objectives may be distinguished-artificially, of course - from more political goals.

1. Among the military objectives, much prominence has been given to the Soviet strategic concern to detect and oppose in the waters of the Indian Ocean nuclear strike forces of the United States (submarines equipped with Polaris or Poseidon missiles, attack carriers) which, from positions in the northwestern points of the ocean, could reach targets in Soviet Central Asia and the Urals.[38] It should, however, be remembered that Washington never admitted such a deployment and that Moscow has never directly accused the former of posing such a threat.[39]

2. Another reason for the Soviet naval presence may be the geographic necessity to maintain the communication line between the European and the East Asian parts of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Navy is divided into four fleet areas: the Arctic, the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the Pacific areas. Assured connection between the three European fleets and the Pacific Fleet can only be maintained through the Indian Ocean.[40] Larger Soviet warships are not constructed in the

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38 Geoffery Jukes , The Indian Ocean in Soviet Naval Policy , pp. 5–12; Oles M. Smolansky , op.ct , pp. 338 -346 .

39 See James M. McConnell, *The Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean* ,Arlington, Va., 1971 , pp. 1-2.

40 "In the first place, the Soviet Navy uses the waters of the ocean's international zone, which is open to the ships of any country in accordance with international law. These sea communications are very important to the Soviet Union since they represent the only non-freezing sea-route linking Soviet ports in the Black and Azov seas with Soviet ports in the Far East. Soviet naval ships in the Indian Ocean have no permanent bases there; for purposes of refuelling, taking on fresh water and foodstuffs, they use the ports of the Indian Ocean states in accordance with the standards of international law. Moreover, most important of all, unlike the naval ships of the United States and other imperialist countries, they do not engage in shows of force and blackmail with respect to the states of the region." V.

Vladivostok shipyards; they have to be sent to the Far East. It is only natural that Moscow wishes to familiarize its crews with the sea and its harbors where many of its warships have to pass to reach their permanent or temporary stations in the Far East.

3. Another reason for Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean - a reason often adduced by major naval powers - is the protection of Soviet merchant-shipping and fishing fleets.[41] The Soviet merchant marine witnessed a sensational increase in the last twenty-five years: from 2 million gross tons in 1948 to over 16 million in 1973. Soviet merchant ships in the Indian Ocean are numerous but not a numerous a ships of many other nations in the area.[42] Soviet trawlers visit many part of the Indian Ocean but in lesser numbers than in the Atlantic or Pacific.

4. Soviet warships in the Indian Ocean have been suspected of being there in potential readiness to interdict - in the eventuality of an armed conflict - enemy shipping, especially

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Kudryavtsev, "The Indian Ocean in the Plans of Imperialism," *International Affairs* Moscow, November, 1971, p. 117.

41 During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, Moscow felt unable to protect its merchant vessels en route to Cuba with surface warships (only submarines were in the neighborhood).

42 The traditional shipping nation of the Indian Ocean is Britain; 625 of its vessels of all categories sailed this ocean in 1971, whereas the Soviet flag was flown from only 121. Japanese, Greek, Norwegian, Indian, Liberian, Panamanian, and West German ships were there in higher numbers than Soviet. See Henri Labrousse, *Le golfe et le canal* Paris, 1971, pp. 149-151.

that transporting oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe, the United States, or Japan. The narrows through which such shipping has to pass, such as the Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb Straits, or the maritime corner around the Cape of Good Hope, have been mentioned as "choke-points" for such operations.[43] Such an interference in the freedom of navigation would be a cause of - perhaps even global - hostilities and unlikely unless as part of a general military confrontation. Even so, for lack of air support, the Soviet Indian Ocean naval forces are hardly able to implement such a blockade so distant from their bases of strength. Should oil shipments or other trade with Europe, Japan or the United States be intercepted, this could be effected by Soviet naval and air forces in more convenient places than those mentioned above - for instance, in the Mediterranean for shipping passing the Suez Canal or in the northwest Atlantic.

5. Should the Soviet squadron in the Indian Ocean participate in some action, it is more likely that such a move would be carried out in support of a "national liberation movement" or in support of one of the friendly littoral powers in order to protect it against foreign aggression. This is a possibility which cannot be totally excluded, but it might take place only when essential Soviet interests were at stake and only when Moscow could be certain that no American counteraction was to

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43 Such fears have been expressed by the British government and members of the European Community. See Anders C. Sjaastad, "The Indian Ocean and the Soviet Navy," *Norsk Militaert Tidskrift* (Oslo), October 1971 (as translated in Congressional Record, Mar. 30, 1972, p. E3145).

be expected. Probably, any such initiative will remain a "naval demonstration" only, a part of "gunboat diplomacy", which belongs rather to the area of political use of the navy than to the strictly military activity of the fleet.

The following possibilities seem to exist for the nonmilitary use of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean:

1. The Soviet Union is seeking more recognition as a super power; it wishes to obtain at least "parity" with the United States in fields beyond the nuclear arms race. Having attained the capability of maintaining warships outside its coastal waters and adjoining seas, Moscow wishes to have its presence felt in the seven seas. In this respect, the Indian Ocean could not remain an exception; on the contrary, in terms of political importance, it may surpass the western Atlantic or the Eastern Pacific.

To "show the flag" has been a time-honored device to increase influence and prestige; the Kaiser's Germany, trying to compete with the British global naval power, resorted to the same political stratagem before World War I. To demonstrate its naval strength in a manner consistent with international law and established practices, the Soviet Union undertook to advertise its superpower status by a naval presence in waters which, prior to the mid-sixties, did not see Soviet naval vessels. This "flag showing" is one objective, and certainly not

the least important, of the entry of Soviet warships into the Indian Ocean.

2. Connected with the above purpose but still to be distinguished are the "goodwill" visits performed by the Soviet naval units since 1968 to Indian Ocean ports. In no other sea (except the Mediterranean) have Soviet port calls been so frequent since then as on the littoral of the Indian Ocean. They are "an important instrument of Soviet policy." [44] They can be made as an expression of diplomatic courtesy - not only to uncommitted countries but also to allies of the Western powers without impinging on their political status. They may be interpreted as a symbolic gesture to provide help it needed or as a warning against provoking the wrath of Moscow. Goodwill visits thus provide tangible evidence of Soviet interest and help Soviet diplomacy on its endeavors vis-a-vis the host country. For countries which in one or another respect wish to rely on Soviet assistance - political, military, or economic - the visits of Soviet warships are considered to be a guarantee of the determination of Moscow to abide by its commitments.

3. Some writers have suspected the Soviet of aiming to replace Britain as the "dominant external power" in all or certain parts of the Indian Ocean.[45] However, such an objective seems hardly

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44 James M. McConnell, The Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean. Arlington, Va: Center for naval anayses, 1971

45 B.T. Millar, p. 20; G.W.Wheeler, "The Indian Ocean Area. Soviet Aims and Interests," in *Collected Papers of the Study Conference on the Indian Ocean in International Politics*, Southampton[England], 1973, p. 71.

in the mind of Moscow's policy makers. As pointed out earlier, British power depended on the territorial sovereignty which London possessed in many countries around the Indian Ocean, including primarily its sovereignty over the area of the Indian sub-continent. Any influence which Moscow might have ambition to exercise cannot rest on such an exclusive and absolute a prerogative as the United Kingdom held - and still holds, in a diminutive measure - over some islands of the Indian Ocean.

4. Among the many reasons, and motivations for the Soviet interest and presence in the Indian Ocean, the containment of China appears highly plausible. Some countries of the region, especially India, dread China. The Soviet naval presence serves as a political sedative to assure these countries of Moscow's countervailing strength.[46] On the other hand, in many other countries of the region Moscow resents their flirtations with Peking. There is an often overt rivalry for influence between these two "Asian" powers, a rivalry in which the fact that Russians are considered Europeans proves to be an obstacle for easy and friendly rapport. Although Chinese economic and military aid is small compared to that which Moscow can and does provide, Chinese negotiators, advisers, or

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[46]This is to be distinguished from the direct military assistance which Moscow could provide for an Asian country endangered by China. In India it is expected that the Soviet Union will, in case of a Chinese threat, place pressure on that country along the Sino-Soviet border rather than by its naval power in the Indian Ocean.

trainers are often preferred to those of the Soviet Union. But China is unable to muster a naval presence in the Indian Ocean; it cannot match the demonstrative effect of Soviet warships in the harbors of the region.

Most of the above-listed Soviet objectives for maintaining a naval presence in the Indian Ocean are a correct assessment of individual considerations. But it is to be suggested that, aside and above these military and political reasons, a broader strategic motivation is the main determinant.

Soviet descent - political, diplomatic, and also naval - into the Indian Ocean region is basically motivated by geopolitical considerations which, not unlike the imperial German approach to *Weltpolitik*, dominates Soviet strategic thinking.

By way of analogy, the British approach to the European continent of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may be remembered. Britain confronted the European continent and, alternatively, had to fight the great powers which sought predominance - Spain, France, Russia, and Germany. At the beginning of the Eighteenth century, Britain established its naval presence and bases in the Mediterranean (Gibraltar, Malta, and, for half a century, Minorca and good examples) so that it could better face any of these opponents. It is important to note that this took place long before the construction of the Suez Canal which opened up the route to India via the Mediterranean.

Viewing it from England, the Mediterranean was Europe's backyard. Strategically, it was the "soft underbelly" of Europe long before Churchill coined this expression in relation to the Axis powers. By dominating the Mediterranean and being able to threaten its coastal countries, Britain outflanked Europe and was able to put pressure (diplomatic and military) from behind its potential enemies on the continent - an elementary strategic move.

This micro-European strategy is now being duplicated on a macro-Asian scale - by the Soviet Union - and is being applied to the Indian Ocean. The U.S.S.R. controls more than one-third of Asia and faces the rest of this giant continent along its southern border. It is an instinctive, if not preconceived, strategy to use the Indian Ocean area to outflank any potential Asian opponent by confronting the "soft underbelly" of Asia simultaneously from the north and from the south. The Soviet Union claims to be a "Mediterranean Power"; by the same token it could also to be an Indian Ocean power, "directly interested in insuring the security of its southern borders."[47]

Although the Soviet Union is separated from the countries of South Asia by gigantic mountain chains, the distances - as the crow flies - from Soviet territory to the Indian Ocean are relatively short: from the northern shore of the Arabian Sea, 750

47 The New York Times, Nov 28, 1968

miles, and from the northwest tip of the Persian Gulf, only 550 miles to the Soviet border. The broad strategic requirements of Moscow to have a naval force in the Indian Ocean, together with more specific political-military objectives, such as to undercut Chinese penetration and to oppose, if needed, American missile threats, may provide ample explanation for the Soviet presence. It may also be assumed that only political considerations, the distances involved, the limited number of vessels available for this purpose, and the geographic impediments to reach the area have so far prevented Moscow from maintaining an even larger force in those waters.

The Indian Ocean has assumed vital importance for the super powers for a variety of reasons and will continue to engage the serious attention of the world in years. With its enhanced politico-strategic importance amidst geographical compulsions, the area is likely to attract prime attention from the super powers in their political and strategic calculations. Consequently there are only slim chances of a reduction in the present level of military activity of the concerned nations in the foreseeable future. Due to its unique geographic location in relation to Africa, Europe, Asia and the Far East, the Indian Ocean forms an oceanic cross-roads for the world encompassed in this arc and further serves to highlight its critical importance to the world.

The economic realities that exist in the region of the Indian Ocean states and hinterland in terms of vast raw materials, oil,

fishing harvest, sea bed resources, and the heavy dependence of most of the big industrial nations on these vital items, enhance the importance of the Indian Ocean immensely. Further, with one third of the world's population inhabiting the region, it continues to offer a substantial market for finished goods. The industrial nations and multinationals have deep interests and investments in the region, rendering it economically vital to them.

The Indian Ocean, for a number of compelling reasons, presents itself as an ideal arena for power play. It is difficult to imagine the Indian Ocean escaping the effects of devalued detente and deleterious major arms transfers. In addition, old ethnic animosities and border disputes, and to an extent religious fundamentalism, are fueling new tensions and conflicts which may lead to more than legitimate outside involvement. The superpowers are likely to further strengthen their existing bases to protect their perceived interests and in the context of superpower rivalry, competitive naval deployments and enhanced nuclearization are likely to take place in the coming years. There are no villains in this scenario but cold and hard politico-strategic compulsions.

The region is likely to experience an improved and more effective Soviet naval presence, including maritime anchorages of a more permanent nature in the Indian Ocean. The US could be expected to create either a numbered fleet or a specifically assigned naval task force for the region. The Rapid Deployment

Force is bound to play an important role, both for its intended tasks and the controversy it will generate over its positioning.

For the foreseeable future, the prospects of the Indian Ocean becoming a Zone of Peace are bleak. However, the efforts of the Indian Ocean states to pursue the concept will continue. For the rest of this century, the Indian Ocean is likely to become a prime arena of superpower rivalry and power - play irrespective of the idealistic urgings of the Indian Ocean states.