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STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF INDIAN OCEAN REGION

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by

Brigadier A. K. Sen Gupta, AR

Colonel Neil S. Hock, MI
Project Adviser

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ABSTRACT

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The paper analyzes the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region and its applicability to world powers. The essay has been broadly dealt with under the following heads:

- o Brief History of the Region.
- o The Major Sea Routes.
- o The Economic Importance.
- o Superpower Interest.
- o Regional Perspectives.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

About two decades ago, two events of considerable significance occurred in the history of the Indian Ocean region. First, in January 1968, the British government announced its decision to withdraw its military forces from the region east of Suez. Secondly, both the superpowers, i.e., the Soviet Union and the United States moved in to fill up the gap. Most scholars and policymakers from both the littoral and interested Western States agreed that these two developments would have an impact on the regional power balance. Some observers argued, however, that while these events were perhaps significant for the region itself, they were of marginal importance for Western security. Others disagreed and stressed the global importance of these regional developments.

The Indian Ocean has become an area of acute tension--a peril zone with conventional and nuclear vessels of the major powers staging a permanent presence in the area. Naval task forces, because of their inherent mobility, can constitute a powerful projection of military might. That is why the nonaligned countries of the Indian Ocean are exercised over the threat posed over their national security from the high seas. They can hardly forget that the powers that dominated and colonized them for centuries came to the area via the high seas. They also remember that, even in the decades since the second World War there have been several glaring instances of naval might being used by the Big Powers to exert military pressure in almost every ocean. The concern expressed by nations who do not want a return to gunboat diplomacy and domination by military forces is, therefore, indisputably legitimate.

Rivalry and competition are not new trends in international affairs or in the Indian Ocean. They were imported into this ocean by the colonial powers, when they sought to oust one another from enjoying the fruits of colonization.

Today, they exist in the Indian Ocean area for a variety of stated and unstated reasons.

When the 26th Session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 1971 a resolution proclaiming the Indian Ocean "a zone of peace for all times," people in many countries heaved a sigh of relief. Those countries whose merchant vessels plied the Indian Ocean hoped that a zone of peace would guarantee their security and enable them to develop economic contacts with different countries of the world. For champions of peace throughout the world demilitarization of the Indian Ocean would mean elimination of one of the world's most dangerous hotbeds of tension. This however, did not happen. The safeguarding of vital interests of the Big Powers provided to them enough justification for an unprecedented escalation of military presence in the area.

There was a time when the "vacuum theory" was universally peddled by the Western powers and their mass media. It postulated that the withdrawal of British naval power from the Indian Ocean would create a void which if not filled by the United States and its allies would invite Soviet presence. The nonaligned countries felt very strongly that if at all there was a vacuum, it should be filled by the littoral states, who alone would be responsible for security of their water. Though the vacuum theory is seldom mentioned now, the quantum of the Big Power naval forces in the Indian Ocean has steadily increased.

Given the perspective of two decades of superpower naval rivalry in the Indian Ocean, it is proposed to analyze strategic importance of this region and its applicability to the powers of the region as well as the superpowers, viz the United States and the Soviet Union. Such a review of superpower interests and naval missions in the Indian Ocean basin should help to clarify some of

the key determinants of U.S. and Soviet policy in this increasingly important region.

This paper will be dealt with in the following parts:

- o Historical Background
- o The Major Sea Routes
- o The Economic Importance
- o Superpower Interests
- o Regional Perspectives.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of seafaring in the Indian Ocean unlike in the Atlantic and the Pacific, dates back to very early times. This is especially true of the northeastern area between Egypt, the Horn of Africa, Persia and the West Coast of India--the very area in which international interest is particularly concentrated today. Very early in recorded history, trading links, colonization and conquest all began to conform to a geographical pattern which still forms the basic structure underlying the situation there today. The western and eastern parts of the Indian Ocean underwent separate development. In the west the Egyptian and Persian empires in the two thousand years B.C., also extended their influence seawards later giving way to the Roman and Arabs while in the east, from about the beginning of the Christian era, it was the Indian, the Malaysians and the Chinese who traveled the sea.¹

The most significant turning point in the history of the region was the arrival of Vasco de Gama around 1500. In sailing around the Cape of Good Hope the Portuguese formed the vanguard of the European penetration of the Indian Ocean region, which was to last for centuries. However, the Portuguese encountered stiff opposition from the Arabs around Africa and their control of

the Malacca Strait was threatened by the Sultan of Sumatra. In 1841, they were driven out of Malacca by the Dutch who were interested in the Malay archipelago the Spice Islands. The Dutch also established themselves firmly at the Cape of Good Hope, in Mauritius, on the coast of India and in Ceylon now Sri Lanka. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch were not interested in political and ideological considerations. They were mainly interested in commerce.

In the course of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese retreated considerably, while France and England, competing with one another, were advancing. In the middle of the eighteenth century, England (the East India Company) succeeded in penetrating important areas of the Indian subcontinent. The French directed their interests in the Western Indian Ocean and took over Mauritius. The East India Company gradually formed a pattern on the basis of the motto "the flag follows trade." The turning point came with the Treaty of Paris in 1815 at which England was awarded the Cape province, Mauritius and Ceylon while the Dutch secured a hold on their Indonesian possessions. England, in the following decades, forged its Indian Empire, founded its Singapore colony to safeguard the Malacca Strait, conquered Burma and took over the protectorate of the Malay Peninsula. Australia had been British since the beginning of the century. In the Western Indian Ocean, near the entrance to the Red Sea, Aden became a British possession in 1839 and the significance of this foothold increased greatly with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Britain then occupied Egypt and thus secured the shortest sea route to India. Likewise by the end of the nineteenth century Britain completed its domination over the whole of the Indian Ocean region by taking Sudan, annexing the Orange Free State and the Transvaal to secure the Cape route, by creating a protectorate in Zanzibar and by colonizing Kenya. In

1885, France took over Madagascar, the Comoro Islands and Djibouti. Therefore, of all the littoral states at that time, only Ethiopia and Siam now Thailand, remained independent, while all the other states found themselves in varying degrees of dependence on one or other of the European powers. The only other significant event of the era was the discovery of oil in 1890 in the Persian Gulf. Both Britain and Russia showed interest because of its potential as energy to drive machines and ships. An armed conflict seemed inevitable. However, the defeat of Russia by the Japanese in 1905 permitted Britain to consolidate its position in the Gulf, and the Russo-British Treaty of 1907 divided Persia into spheres of interest. In the period between the two World Wars, Britain was able, in spite of her other commitment, to make further gains. She was helped by the German and Turkish defeats in 1918. However, at this very time, in India, in the heart of the colonial empire, the political movement that was ultimately to bring the whole colonial age to an end was already taking root. The Second World War also altered the whole balance of power through the region, the outcome of which continued to unfold in stages into the 1960's.

Since the Second World War, new outside forces had begun to make an impact along the autochthonous aspirations to independence in the colonized regions. By its dramatic activity in the war, Japan had shown the world the hurricane-like destructive potential of an Asian power. In the course of the decolonization process there was no lack of accompanying circumstances that were both dramatic and generative of further conflict--India and Pakistan, Indo-China, Iran-Iraq War are such examples. Today, therefore, the region is again fragmented just as it was before the Europeans arrived on the scene. In this area, further conflicts seem likely as widely differing concepts of an

ideologically preconceived world order confront each other, such as communism and Islam, or state planned versus free enterprise economies.

MAJOR SEA ROUTES

General

The major focal points of entrance to the Indian Ocean are through three waterways: the Straits of Malacca and Singapore; around the Cape of Good Hope; and the Suez Canal. Other routes are through the Straits of Sunda, Lombok and Makassar and other narrow Indonesian waters and around Australia--Cape York in the northeast and Bass Strait in the southwest. The detour around Australia, however, would add another 3,000 nautical miles to the sea journey.²

The Straits of Malacca and Singapore

The straits lying between the Malaya Peninsula and Singapore to the east and Indonesia to the west are 400 nautical miles long and vary in width from 20 miles at its southern end to 150 miles at its northern end. Its narrowest portion between Singapore and Riau Island of Indonesia is hardly eight miles wide. Passage through these straits provide the shortest route between the Andaman Sea and the South China Sea. An alternative but longer route for the deepest draught traffic is through the Straits of Lombok and Makassar. This route adds 1,000 nautical miles to the journey.³ The straits at some places are difficult to negotiate due to shallowness and congestion, and have been recharted and dredged to ensue smooth passage for larger ships, tankers and bulk carriers. The governing depth of only 25 feet makes passage of submarines hazardous and the straits unsuitable for oil tankers and bulk carriers over 20,000 tons. This waterway is used by over 40,000 vessels annually. The waterway is regarded as an international strait by its major

users--Japan, China, the United States and USSR. It is a vital economic and military artery.

The Cape of Good Hope

The closure of the Suez Canal in June 1967 for eight years highlighted the importance of the Cape route with its intensive use by international shipping. Movement of ships from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea is limited to smaller vessels, the larger vessels namely the aircraft carriers, the mammoth oil tankers and bulk carriers transit around the Cape and across the Mozambique channel. Around 3,000 ships use this route annually. South Africa and its friends advance the argument that the Cape route is a strategic waterway--a pivotal life line of the West.⁴ Described as the Gibraltar of the South, Simonstown controls the sealanes around the southern tip of Africa. About 70 percent of Europe's oil supplies still go around the Cape despite the reopening of the Suez Canal.

Suez Canal--The Red Sea Route

The 103 mile long Suez Canal opened in 1869, links Port Said on the Mediterranean with the Suez on the Red Sea. The Suez Canal has been described as the economic and strategic artery--one of the most important water routes of the world. It provides the shortest maritime route between the Atlantic, Indian and Western Pacific Oceans. The chief feature of traffic through the waterway is oil movement from the Persian Gulf and other merchandise between South Asian and European ports. The waterway which remained closed since the Six Day War between Israel and the Arabs in June 1967, was reopened on 5 June 1975 after the removal of explosives, sunken ships and wrecks by American, British and Soviet teams. The canal authority is proceeding with the widening and deepening plan to take on bulk carriers, super tankers and aircraft

carriers with Japanese assistance. The opening of the canal brought immediate relief to the countries whose sea routes were stretched after the closure of the canal. It reduced the cost of operations and created a 30 percent surplus tonnage. The voyage between European, Arabian and Indian sea ports was reduced from 35 days to 15 days. The canal revenue averages over two million dollars daily and over 60 ships pass through the canal daily.⁵

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

Raw Materials Including Oil.

The countries around the Indian Ocean possess raw materials including oil, which are vital for the growth and development of the major manufacturing industries of the big powers. Malaysia and Indonesia are the leading producers of natural rubber in the world. During the eighties, the average production of rubber in the Indian Ocean region was 87.41 percent of the world production of which about 75 percent was exported to the West European and American markets.⁶ Southeast Asia, especially the equatorial belt, is an important timber producing center of the world. Japan, France, West Germany and a number of other countries depend upon this region for supplying timber and logs. Indonesia exported timber worth 78 million dollars to these countries in 1986, while those of Malaysia were worth 750 million Malaysian dollars, Thailand worth 1,000 million baht deposit and those of India 16 million dollars. The Indian Ocean region also contains huge deposits of mineral wealth. About 70 percent of tin ore of the world is produced by the region, with Malaysia as the largest tin producing country in the world, followed by Indonesia and Thailand. About 79 percent of the world's gold is produced in the region with South Africa and Australia as the leading producers. These two countries are also the leading producers of Uranium with

37 percent of the world's resources. Twenty-eight percent of the world's manganese, 32 percent of chromium, 16 percent of iron ore, 12.47 percent of lead, 11.32 percent of tungsten, 11.02 percent of nickel ore, 10.29 percent of Zinc and 30.26 percent antimony are being produced in this region. Thorium, an essential radioactive metal, useful for nuclear reactor fuel and fuel cells is imported by the United States entirely from Malaysia and Australia. The United States depends on several Australian raw materials for its industry; chief among these are zinc, tungsten, titanium, manganese, lead and iron ore. Australia supplies about 65 percent of titanium, vital for U.S. space industry, missile production and aircraft industry. South Africa is the major supplier of strategic minerals such as corundum, lithium and amosite asbestos to the United States. Besides South Africa, some of these minerals are to be found only in the Soviet Union. Oil is the most vital mineral of the region which is crucial for the industrialized world. Saudi Arabia is the single largest crude oil producer in the world and Japan the single largest importer of oil accounting for 43.5 percent of the total. The United States imports nine percent of its consumption of crude oil from the region, while Japan and India import 90 percent. Nearly 45 percent of the world's oil reserves are in the Middle East.⁷

Market for Big Power Industrial Surplus

Most of the countries around the Indian Ocean are politically young. Though the countries of the region have the necessary raw materials, they lack the scientific know-how and the industrial base to compete with the industrial world. They are, therefore, dependent on the import of sophisticated machinery and manufactured goods from the developed countries at high prices. As a result, most of the countries of the region have huge trade deficits

except for the oil exporting countries. In the case of the oil exporting countries, the United States, France and Britain, recycle petro-dollars by selling large quantities of arms to them, since the Arabs themselves do not have the capacity to manufacture modern weapons. According to U.S. sources, the 144 billion dollars Saudi Arabia five year development plan provides 24 billion dollars for arms. In 1976, in a period of six months, Saudi Arabia contracted for the purchase of arms from the United States worth five billion dollars. Similarly, U.S. arms sales to Iran in the 1972-76 period totalled 10.4 billion dollars. Among other Western countries, France, U.K., West Germany and Italy also supply a substantial quantity of arms to the oil producing countries of the Middle East, as well as other countries around the Indian Ocean.⁸

Seabed Resources and Fish

The rapid development of deep-sea research in the technically advanced nations for the exploitation of seabed resources is another factor in the economic exploitation in the Indian Ocean region. Developing countries are not, for the most part, in a position to carry out, unaided, exploration and extraction of ocean resources, particularly in cases where deep-sea mining is required. Reasonably large deposits of manganese, which also contain nickel, cobalt, copper and iron have been detected in the Indian Ocean, especially in the eastern part, and also in the Western Indian Ocean, off the coast of India, Mauritius, and Madagascar. Commercially useful deposits in the seabed, such as zinc, copper, lead, silver, vanadium and molybdenum have been found in the Red Sea at a depth of about 2,000 meters. A Saudi-Sudanese-West German consortium is planning to exploit these resources; in typical fashion, a West German company, Preussag, is providing the technology and Saudi Arabia the finance, while Sudan is placing its waters at their disposal. In 1970, only

17 percent of the world oil production came from offshore while at present more than 50 percent comes from offshore, of which 40 percent of world offshore oil production is from the Indian Ocean coastal states. Apart from those in the Persian Gulf, promising areas for further offshore oil supplies have been discovered around the Indian subcontinent, off Northwest Australia, near Mauritius and around South Africa. Besides, the Indian Ocean abounds in fish. Marine food is and will continue to be an important factor in the efforts of the countries of the region towards attaining self-sufficiency in food production. At present approximately 2.5 million tons of fish is caught each year.⁹ Although a greater proportion of this catch is taken by the traditional coastal fisheries and is destined for immediate consumption, the share taken by modern industrial fishing fleets from outside states such as the Soviet Union, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, is fast increasing.

SUPERPOWER INVOLVEMENT
UNITED STATES INTERESTS

During the past 15 years, many Western analysts of Soviet national security policy have stressed the military significance of the Indian Ocean, within the context of Washington's effort to maintain a stable strategic nuclear balance, as one of the key factors explaining U.S. interests in the region.

The Indian Ocean Region was a low intensity area during the Second World War. Soon after the war the main focus of the cold war rivalry was Europe and the Far East. By the mid-fifties Europe was stabilized with regional groupings under NATO and the Warsaw Pact. These were not only two military alliance systems but also represented two well defined politico-economic systems which, despite some differences, continue until today. In the Far East, the end of the Korean War coincided with the emergence of China as a

strong regional power. The United States appeared in the region with the construction of the Dhahran air base in Saudi Arabia in the context of the Truman Doctrine and in 1950's with John Foster Dulles' policy securing multilateral and bilateral agreements such as the ANZUS, CENTO and SEATO to keep the Soviet and Chinese influence away. This was followed by the Eisenhower Doctrine as well as the direct or indirect intervention in Iran in 1953, Lebanon in 1958 and the Vietnam War. Whereas Britain's power in the region was fast declining, the United States was able to project itself as the most powerful nation, economically, politically and militarily by 1960. The most important factor of the early 1960's which influenced U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean was the development of a submarine-launched ballistic missile system which made it possible for U.S. deployed nuclear submarines in the Arabian Sea to hit significant targets deep within European Russia.¹⁰ The joint investigation by the British and U.S. began in 1963, of the possibilities of putting various Indian Ocean islands to strategic use. It marked the development of communication facilities on Diego Garcia and Northwest Cape of Australia.¹¹ The closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 and the decision by Britain in 1968 to withdraw all its bases from the region lent greater support to the naval lobby for increased U.S. presence. Another category of American interest centered around the U.S. Navy's traditional use of the Indian Ocean as a transit route for naval ships steaming from the Atlantic to the Far East.

The main policy of Britain in the past, and the United States now, is of not only denying its adversary, the USSR access to the littoral states, but also to acquire base facilities on the littoral and its periphery, so as to function as an effective sea power in a given region. The politico-military linkages between the regional powers and the great powers, therefore, need to

be seen in this context. The confrontation between the sea power and the land power was initially directed in the Gulf and Southeast Asia. The bilateral and multilateral alliances between the United States and its allies such as the CENTO and SEATO have to be understood in this context as also the support to pro-Western regimes like that of the Shah of Iran, aimed at containing the Southwards expansion of Soviet influence. The Shah of Iran played the role of proxy for the United States in their coercive diplomacy when he undertook to be the policeman of the Gulf. At this time, at the heart of the Nixon Doctrine lay a narrower definition of national interest, on the basis of which it offered selective support to allied or friendly states which were willing to make a significant contribution to their own security. In Nixon's own words, "accommodation to the diversity of the world community is the keystone of our current policy."¹² With this concept of greater aloofness from regional conflicts, the Navy and the Air Force acquired heightened significance. Allies of the United States, such as Japan and Australia, were expected to contribute economic assistance to the underdeveloped states of Asia. Regional associations of states such as ASEAN were fostered and given support. Asia, the Middle East and Africa were, as far as possible, to be kept away from the center of confrontations between the great powers. The demands of the Vietnam War were also to an extent responsible for the reduction of U.S. political involvement in the littoral states.

However, the India-Pakistan War of 1971, leading to the creation of Bangladesh caused tension to mount sharply to the point where, in addition to its opposition to a littoral state, namely India, the United States came into confrontation with the Soviet Union. The move of the Seventh Fleet during this conflict is another example of coercive diplomacy. It needs to be pointed out that it was the first occasion on which U.S. and Chinese interests

ran parallel, when during the Bangladesh conflict, the Sino-Soviet controversy was manifested in the U.N. Nixon's visit to Peking in 1972 consolidated the relationship which developed into a constant feature of the decade "to contain the influence of the Soviet Union." The "China factor" of the early 1970's became the "China Card" during the decade. Yet over and above this new constellation of forces in Asia, it was the world energy crisis that soon made the State Department's 1971 assessment of the comparatively minor global significance of the Indian Ocean obsolete. The first energy crisis, in the wake of the Middle Eastern War of October 1973, suddenly brought the issue of oil supplies from the Persian Gulf into the forefront of western priorities. After the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the Persian Gulf subregion thus became the center of U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean. During the October War in 1973, it also became clear for the first time that Arab states of the Gulf were prepared to join the front against Israel and use "oil" as a weapon. From 1972, Iran had stood in the center of U.S. commitments to this region, and it subsequently proved even more valuable to the United States by refusing to be a party to the oil boycott. After a while, Saudi Arabia followed Iran's example, and from 1975, its relations once again improved with the United States. In the years that followed, Iran and Saudi Arabia were the chief "forces of moderation" on which U.S. based its policy. The other conclusion which the United States was to draw from the Arab-Israel War of 1973 and which remains valid into the 1980's is that the United States in its capacity as the protector of Israel would meet with disapproval of even moderate Arab States and since 1979 has also had to face the hostility of Iran. Even more serious was the unreliability of its European allies and Japan in a conflict which affected Israel's security. The difficulty experienced by the United States during the 1973 War in moving supplies from the West to Israel further

increased the significance of the eastern route and hence of Diego Garcia. The United States as part of the Carter Doctrine initiated negotiations with the Soviet Union with a view to mutual force limitations in the Indian Ocean in 1975. These talks laid emphasis on the other arms limitation talks already in progress and referred to the littoral states demand for the "Zone of Peace." The reason for the breakdown of these negotiations was the full-scale intervention by the Soviet Union and Cuba on the side of Ethiopia at the end of 1977. The United States regarded the nature of Soviet action and the way it was conducted as an infringement of the basic rules of competition between the superpowers. In addition to its position in Ethiopia, the United States also lost its most important ally, Iran, in 1978. In Southeast Asia, the rapprochement between China and the United States, and the tension between Vietnam and the ASEAN states following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia led to a distinct polarization between pro-U.S. and pro-Soviet forces, further reinforcing the estrangement between the two superpowers themselves.

Violent Soviet activities in Afghanistan from the end of 1979 were also a consequence of U.S. neglect of that country since the mid 1960's. The United States had withdrawn still further after the overthrow of President Daud in April 1978 and the subsequent assassination of the U.S. ambassador in Kabul, leaving the country subject to overwhelming Soviet influence. The United States classified occupied Afghanistan as a "threat to the Persian Gulf" and accorded it a high level of significance. However, the way in which the Afghanistan crisis was handled by the Islamic states, whose interests were bound to run parallel to those of the west, soon made evident the strong degree to which the Arab-Israeli conflict overlay the whole issue, especially with the United States. It had become apparent once more that the United States was unable to exert enough pressure on Israel to bring about a greater

willingness to compromise over the issues of Palestinian autonomy and the status of Jerusalem. Thus at the beginning of the 1980's the United States found itself in several ways excluded from the politics of the Persian Gulf, the area which, since 1973, had been the main focus of its interests in the Indian Ocean. The United States was regarded by Iran as enemy number one; it had no diplomatic relations with Iraq; and it was criticized on account of Israel by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. Only the Sultanate of Oman still dared to adopt an openly pro-American stance. The armed conflict between Iran and Iraq which began in September 1980 has altered this picture somewhat, albeit only superficially. However, the United States has to exercise restraint in its overtures towards Iraq, since this would lend to an upgrading of Iran's relationship with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates realized the value of a United States guarantee to keep the Strait of Hormuz open.

Diego Garcia and the Strategic Positions in the 1980's

Since the end of the 1970's, the nature of involvement of both the superpowers in the Indian Ocean Region has undergone a qualitative change in the direction of stronger military postures. Symptomatic of the increased importance attached to the military aspect was the decision by the United States to diversify the functions of the Diego Garcia base. This decision followed the Iranian crisis and was reinforced by the Soviet involvement with troops in Afghanistan.

Diego Garcia is a horseshoe atoll, approximately 25 km long and 8 km wide. It lies in the center of the strategically important northern half of the Indian Ocean.¹³ It is 1,800 km from India, 3,300 km from both the Bab el-Mandeb and Malacca Straits and 4,200 km from Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. It belongs to the Chagos group of islands which form part of the

British Indian Ocean Territory established in 1966. In a treaty with Britain, the United States specifically obtained the right to use the island for military purposes, while Britain is entitled to maintain a small military staff there. Around 10,000 inhabitants, who made a living from fishing and coconut products on Diego Garcia and the surrounding islands, were resettled in Mauritius, which received 1.8 million dollars in compensation. Between 1970 and 1972, 20 million dollars were allotted to set up a communication center on the island which came into service in 1973 as a link in the worldwide chain of such installations. Its principal function was to close a gap in the high frequency belt and to transmit satellite information to the Navy and Air Force. By 1976, another 20 million dollars had been spent to improve and construct port facilities, an airfield, a fuel dump and barracks. In 1977, there were 1,400 U.S. troops including construction parties and 25 British military personnel on Diego Garcia and further improvements were in progress. The hostages affair in Teheran in November 1979 and the invasion of Afghanistan a month later cleared the way for the United States to commit itself fully on Diego Garcia on account of the danger which, it was assumed, these developments constituted for the Gulf region. Diego Garcia was now of pivotal importance in the military and strategic measures--some short term and others medium term--such as the securing of the rights to use military facilities in littoral states, the deployment of Marines, and advance storage of arms on ships for use by the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF).

Once and for all, former constraints limiting offensive capabilities on the island were dropped. Beginning with 1981, 2,000 million dollars over a period of five years, was earmarked for the region to ensure the desired buildup.¹⁴ At the United States Navy's base on the island of Diego Garcia, the RDF now maintains 17 giant military container ships loaded with enough

tanks, rocket launchers and amphibious armored personnel carriers to enable 12,500 U.S. Marines to fight for 30 days without resupply.¹⁵ Therefore, the military buildup in the Gulf and Indian Ocean region received even greater priority, after the Reagan administration came into office both within the United States, in the form of naval programs, the creation of new transportation capacity and the accelerated preparation of the RDF, as well as by seeking to improve the facilities offered by Egypt, Somalia, Kenya and Oman, as also those on Diego Garcia. The military aid program was extended, especially for Kenya, Sudan, Egypt, Oman and Thailand. A new program of 3.2 billion dollars was prepared for Pakistan. Pakistan was now given the status of a frontline state, Indian objections notwithstanding. A "Trip Wire" plan was prepared to overcome logistical problems in the event of a Soviet invasion of Iran or any other state of the region, particularly in the Gulf. It aimed to bring a few hundred U.S. soldiers to the area of conflict in the shortest possible time and should they be attacked by the Soviet forces, the United States, thereafter, was free to retaliate in a place of U.S. choosing. In the present context, there is little doubt, that Iran is an area where a direct military clash between the superpowers is most likely to occur.

Trouble in Persian Gulf waters and attack by Iran on neutral unarmed shipping has posed a political dilemma. The United States wants to keep these sea lanes open and oil flowing to safeguard its own as well as its allies interests. But they also want more. They want to minimize Soviet influence in the area. This is the reason why the United States so readily agreed to reflag the tankers because the Kuwaitis were going to ask the Russians to do it.

In addition to the above the United States wants to prevent Iran from becoming an even more piercing thorn in the side than it has been for the last

decade. That means supporting the moderate governments of the Gulf states, whose oil supplies are vital for the United States. However, too much confrontation with Iran could be counterproductive as it will certainly result in increase in Soviet influence in Iran, which the United States can ill afford.

SOVIET INTERESTS

Strategic Interests

The Soviet Union perceives itself as an Asian power, with vital strategic interests along its border, in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. At the end of the Second World War, for some time, antagonism, the result of the bipolar world system, was prominent. The principal reason for the initial involvement of the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean region was the need for reciprocal arrangements which would assist its attempts to break through the Western containment of its long southern flank, effected in the 1950's, principally through the Baghdad Pact and to a lesser extent through SEATO.¹⁶ It was to this end that the Soviet Union began to construct for itself a network--initially quite a modest one--of bilateral relations, primarily with India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Burma and Egypt. The Soviet Union policy was sharply antagonistic towards the West making use of diplomatic, economic and ideological channels, supplemented by military aid. The main feature of the policy stemmed from the Soviet doctrine that it is historically inevitable that progressive forces in the Third World states will find themselves united against reactionary forces and will subsequently ally with the Socialist camp in order to help shift the global "correlation of forces" increasingly in favor of socialism. Under Khrushchev, special importance was given to ideological considerations, leading to a preference for those states which

appeared to correspond most closely to the changing socialist concepts prevailing in Moscow in those years. Under Brezhnev and Kosygin, ideological experiments receded for a time in favor of more balanced relations with a greater number of Third World states. In the course of this development, plain utilitarian considerations of an economic and strategic nature gained an upper hand. This resulted in changes in Soviet relations with non-Arab states of the Middle East and South Asia--Turkey, Iran and Pakistan which were members of Western-oriented alliances and towards which Moscow made considerable overtures at that time.

In the first half of the 1970's, this conservatism--together with the experience of setbacks, of which Egypt was the outstanding example--appears to have led to a renewed strengthening of ideological considerations, albeit this time more orthodox ones.¹⁷ A tangible outcome of deliberate endeavors to form Moscow aligned cadres, particularly in the Armed Forces, was the creation of several African and Asian regimes with "Marxist-Leninist" orientation. A further outcome was an effective division of labor in the Socialist camp whereby friendly Third World countries--Cuba and Vietnam, and allies took over important tasks aimed at the "construction of Socialist order" in these "nationally liberated" and "socially progressive" states.

It was in connection with the strategic arms limitation talks--SALT--in 1970 that for the first time, the Soviet Union began to be treated by the United States as a world power with equal rights. Therefore at the XXIV People's Congress in 1971, Gromyko declared that now onwards no question of importance in the world could be settled without the Soviet Union's participation or in a way which would be to its disadvantage.¹⁸

The way the Soviet economic and military aid was distributed showed a clear emphasis in favor of the region bordering on the Soviet Union in the

Middle and South Asia, extending as far as the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, where Western oriented Ethiopia also received Soviet economic aid, and to a limited degree, arms. However, closure of the Suez Canal diminished the value of this geographically defined sphere of influence between the Mediterranean and Horn of Africa. In Eastern and Southern Africa and the off-lying islands there was indeed some degree of political sympathy for the Soviet Union, but Chinese competition was already emerging alongside. On the eastern flank of the Indian Ocean region in Southeast Asia the Soviet Union, after its setback in Indonesia in 1965, had very little success in attempting to gain a new foothold, aside from establishing diplomatic relations with Malaysia and Singapore. The Vietnam War, however, did offer opportunities for furthering influence in the medium term, although Australia was an indisputable outpost of the West.

In 1969 Brezhnev made the proposal for a collective security system for Asia, in connection with the plan launched at around the same time by Kosygin for the creation of a zone of economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. It had diverse aims in a long term strategy: against China and the West as enemies of Asian security; to establish the Soviet Union as an Asian as well as a European power; to alter gradually the economic and social conditions in the area in its favor; to secure a corresponding influence in the controversial Asian issues; and finally to put an end to China's and Japan's territorial claim against it. The most severe setback, for which the Soviet Union was not able to compensate during the 1970's, was Egypt's break with Moscow. Later, in early 1976, Egypt also revoked the bilateral treaty of friendship. Sudan also changed direction after an abortive coup in 1971 in which the Soviet Union had been implicated. The Arab Republic of Yemen moved away from the Soviet Union to some extent due

to Saudi Arabian influence. As a result of these developments, at the time of the reopening of the Suez Canal in 1975, the strategically significant area around the Red Sea was largely free of Soviet dominance. Soviet efforts to make a regional partner out of Iraq, replacing Egypt, were also not totally a success, although the Soviets gave Iraq the backing it required to nationalize its oil installations, and in 1972, a treaty was signed with Iraq which gained for the Soviets the right to use Iraq's airfields and dock in the Gulf harbor of Umar Qasr. The most fundamental change in the region came about as a result of the developments in Iran in 1979. The "Islamic Revolution" led to a great unrest in the Gulf region and to new alignments. The Iran-Iraq War which erupted in 1980 led to further polarization. This conflict gave the Soviet Union comparatively more opportunities for exerting influence over both parties since the United States had no diplomatic representation either in Baghdad or in Teheran. The Soviet Union's geographical proximity is a natural bonus. There is no doubt that a pro-Soviet Iran is a top priority for the Soviets, although to achieve this it will have to reckon with long term developments which will certainly include setbacks. Iran's version of Islamic rule is particularly difficult for the Soviets to deal with for a number of reasons--not least, Iran's proximity to its own Asiatic provinces.¹⁹

Victory for the leftist forces in an internal power struggle would not necessarily bring Moscow the expected gain, while a coup from above along the lines of the one in Afghanistan is more than likely to involve the risk for the Soviet Union of a clash with the United States, in this strategically important Gulf state. In the Gulf region as long as the United States position stands in the way of the overriding aims of the Arabs in their conflict with Israel to solve the Palestinian problem, the Soviet Union continues to have an important political advantage which gives it potential

access to the Gulf. Its support for the Arab aims makes it valuable as a possible ally, in spite of being handicapped by the Afghanistan issue. This was accentuated by the events in Lebanon in 1982.

By contrast, the Soviet endeavors to secure influence in South Asia fared better, particularly in India. As early as 1955, the Soviet Union had persistently taken account of India's natural preeminence. The Soviet Union not only considers its maintenance of a special relationship with India to be a cornerstone of its Asia policy but, because of India's influence in the Third World, it also supports by this friendship its policy toward the developing countries.²⁰ At the same time, the Soviet Union needs India's help in the Sino-Soviet conflict. A situation in which India requires Soviet backing against China, particularly a U.S. backed China, is thus perpetuated, and India in many foreign policy issues tends to give an impression of taking a position against China, and supporting the Soviet Union. During the Indo-Pakistan conflict in 1971, there was a trial of strength between India and the Soviet Union, on the one side, and Pakistan, supported by the United States and China, on the other. The Indian Ocean had been drawn into superpower rivalry for the first time. The United States sent a task force centered around the aircraft carrier "Enterprise" to the Bay of Bengal. The Soviet Union immediately followed suit by reinforcing its Indian Ocean fleet, and demonstrated interpositioning for the benefit of its client. Indo-Soviet cooperation also proved itself in the United Nations when China, represented for the first time, adopted a position in line with that of the United States in the Security Council and yet was unable to avert an Indian victory over its ally Pakistan. The naval limitation talks between the superpowers in 1977-78 appeared to go a considerable way towards meeting India's desire to assert its influence as leader of the Non-Aligned movement and a position of superiority.

However, the Soviet entry into Afghanistan altered the political and strategic situation not just in the Gulf region but to an even greater extent in South Asia. Pakistan found itself directly threatened and tried out its options. However, none of them,--neither its ties with the United States, nor the Islamic Card, nor the "regional solution" as perceived by India--proved truly viable. Nor did the Non-Aligned provide Pakistan with any practical support. China certainly remained its staunchest ally, but had no means in this situation of giving effective assistance. Saudi Arabia, in particular and a few other Arab oil states did provide financial assistance. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, had many and varied opportunities for exerting pressure, and could in both the short and the long term jeopardize the continued disturbed internal situation in Pakistan with its minority problems. India is also greatly handicapped by the Afghanistan crisis. It has lost credibility with nonaligned states, as well as with the Islamic countries and in the West, particularly because of its inability to influence the Soviet Union's conduct vis-a-vis Afghanistan. India's options are clearly restricted within the triangle of forces formed by the Soviet Union, the United States and China.

The region of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea also underwent fundamental changes during the 1970's. Egypt and Ethiopia the two most populous and important states oscillated widely in their alignments. Their strategic location at the intersection of two continents and on important sea routes, were the traditional reasons for the rapid growth in outside interest in internal and interstate events there. This is connected with the flow of crude oil around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Suez Canal. Developments in Southern Africa following the dissolution of the Portuguese empire increased the strategic importance of an "intermediate station" on the Horn of Africa. The closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 was particularly

inconvenient for the Soviet Union shipping as great proportion of its supplies for North Vietnam had to go around Africa. During the 1970's, pro-Soviet governments, or those prepared to adopt socialist development models, were in power in Sudan, South Yemen, Somalia and Egypt. It was because both Moscow and Peking had perceived the potential significance of the strategic area on the Horn and the Red Sea. Even the pro-Western feudal Ethiopia had been penetrated. This pattern was first disrupted by the expulsion of Soviet military advisers from Egypt in 1972 and a short time before that by the unsuccessful coup in Sudan. But as a result of the Arab-Israeli War of 1973, Moscow once again rose in estimation of the Arab countries because of the political and military support for the Arab cause. In July 1974, it concluded a friendship treaty with Somalia with extensive rights to use its military facilities. After the new junta under Mengistu had come to power in Addis Ababa at the end of 1976 the outlook in the Horn of Africa further improved for the "Socialist Camp" and the Soviets delivered arms to Ethiopia while U.S. military staff was expelled in April 1977.

Whereas in the 1970's the political situation in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa was subject to structural change, this was not so in Eastern and Southern Africa. The dissolution of Portugal's colonial empire and Zimbabwe's independence had a permanent effect on the balance of forces within the region as well as the potential for external influence. However, at the beginning of the decade the predominant conflict--that between Black Africa and the Republic of South Africa--had already taken deep roots.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, racial conflicts provided the most suitable opportunity for the Soviet Union to show its solidarity and to win a say in issues involving the security of several Black African countries. After 1975, having parried Chinese endeavors, Soviet policy has been

predominantly directed against the West and its close links with South Africa. Assistance given with arms and training served to create dependence. Coordination with other countries in the socialist bloc, primarily Cuba and East Germany, permitted the establishment of a pattern whereby wide areas of political and social development of those Black African states with analogous political leanings were drawn in. As a result, a friendship treaty was concluded with Mozambique in 1977. Mozambique has since given valuable support to "anti-imperialist" positions adopted by the Soviet Union in international conflicts including those involving Afghanistan and Cambodia. Mozambique's relations with South Africa escalated in 1981, mainly because of its support and base facilities to South African resistance movement--the African National Congress, giving the Soviet Union as its treaty partner an opportunity of demonstrating its support by quickly increasing its naval presence in Mozambique's ports. Soviet military presence in Mozambique is likely to increase should its conflict with South Africa escalate.

The Soviet Military and Economic Interests

The Soviet Union registered its naval presence in 1968 about the time that the British formally declared their intention to withdraw from the Indian Ocean. By that time, the USSR too had developed a submarine force but the Indian Ocean, being too far away from the targets in Europe and America, did not appear to be the best place to deploy them. They were deployed in the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. The Soviet strategic interests in the Indian Ocean dictated that it should, as far as possible, try to neutralize the threat posed by the United States deployment. That was a difficult task in view of the technological constraints in antisubmarine operations. Therefore, at that time, the limited Soviet naval and air presence in the region was primarily geared towards neutralizing the SLEM threat rather than using the

Indian Ocean for its own SLEMs. Even now, the Soviet ASW capability appears to be quite limited. It is essential to remember that the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War had a very weak navy when compared to the NATO countries. The importance of the navy was realized during the Cuban crisis in the early 1960's and then onwards a concerted effort was made to improve its capabilities. During the intervening period, the Soviet Union countered the sea power strategy of the Western World by gaining access to some of the littoral states by offering them political, economic and military help. By so doing, it not only bypassed the cordon erected by the sea powers on the littoral but also maintained its politico-military presence in key areas along its own lifeline connecting the Black Sea to the Pacific via the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.²¹

The Soviets attributed their initial presence in the Indian Ocean to the exigencies of training their naval conscripts. However, having first entered the Indian Ocean for familiarization, the Soviet Union Navy has found other functions to fulfill. Another, long range element in the Kremlin's Indian Ocean calculations was the Soviet concern about the future possibility that the PRC might deploy naval forces in the basin. Even more haunting is the future prospect of the development of a Chinese SLEM capability which would enable them to use the Arabian Sea as a staging area directed against Soviet territory. Most dreaded of all is the Soviet nightmare of Sino-America military-naval collusion in the Indian Ocean area. Nonetheless, the reason which seems to take precedence over all others is the function of the navy in securing the Soviet Union claim to be a global power. Another important political function of Soviet navy in the 1970's was to provide support for any regional states threatened with "imperialist intervention." Both in the 1971 Indo-Pak War and the 1973 Israeli-Arab conflict, the Soviet fleet, after swift

reinforcement, took up positions which countered U.S. naval movements and at the same time could be considered as cases of active support for its client states.²² Even though a very small percentage of the Soviet domestic trade passes through the Indian Ocean, the significance of the maritime passage for Soviet domestic transportation could increase dramatically in the event of Sino-Soviet hostilities and the loss, or even the threatened loss of rail links between the Eastern and Western portions of the USSR. Similarly the Indian Ocean contributes the only dependable link between the USSR's three European based fleets and the Soviet Pacific fleet in the Far East. However, the Soviet Union has no comparably versatile military facilities at its disposal anywhere in the Indian Ocean. Although the Ethiopian ports of Assab and Massawa are open to its navy, these lie in Eritrean territory and hence not far from the areas of fighting. The Soviet Union also makes use of harbors in Mozambique--Maputo, Beira, Nacala--which could come to play an important role if the conflict in Southern Africa were to intensify. In India, the Soviet Union has no exclusive rights of access, but in the event of an international conflict it would most probably invoke the bilateral treaty. The possibility needs to be kept in mind, at least. Apart from South Yemen, the Soviets have base facilities for air force and navy in Vietnam, within reach of the Malacca Straits, providing a geostrategic link between its Pacific harbors and the Indian Ocean. Therefore, in any situation short of war, it is well placed, and the political dividends stemming from its open support of client-states work particularly to its advantage. On the other hand, if there were a war, the geostrategic disadvantages of the Soviet navy would immediately come to the fore, namely, difficult maritime access to the Indian Ocean, lack of air cover, and so on. Now a powerful force in absolute

terms, it does not yet match the West's greatly superior capacity to operate in distant waters.

The substantial change in the strategic situation in the Indian Ocean, as is perceived in the West, since the Soviet move into Afghanistan, therefore, rests upon the fact that vis-a-vis the Gulf region, the land and air potential on Soviet territory has led to a sharp asymmetry between the superpowers.²³ The Soviet Navy which is concentrated in the Northwestern Indian Ocean is merely one supplementary factor in this configuration. As per NATO HQ assessment of April 1980, the Soviet Union maintains 850 fighter planes north of the Iranian frontier. In a crisis situation, more may be added to operate from airfields in the West of Afghanistan. Considerable reinforcement for this air power could be swiftly brought from Soviet military districts in Central Asia. A distance of about 1,100 kms separates the Baku area from Abadan/Basra. The strongest concentration of Soviet troops outside Europe--stronger than even that on the frontier with China--was at that time--according to the same NATO assessment, stationed in the military districts of North Caucasus, Transcaucasus and Turkestan.²⁴ Therefore, in this area the Soviet Union is continuing to alter the military balance of forces to its own advantage. In any case, the Soviet Union is enjoying the benefits of its natural geostrategic location and is leaving it to the West to make themselves politically vulnerable through its endeavors to obtain facilities in the Indian Ocean as well as by having to explore further extension to Diego Garcia. At present, the United States Navy finds itself unable to form an effective counterweight to this trend in the absence of secure and protected bases--although land-based U.S. air forces launched from Egypt and Turkey could weaken the Soviet advantage.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The Indian Ocean region has undergone rapid changes since the 1970's. Between 1976-77 Egypt, Ethiopia and Somalia switched their linkages with the great powers. By 1977 Iraq began to look for alternatives other than the Soviet Union. In 1978-79, the three neighboring states, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, witnessed fundamental changes in domestic and foreign policies. In Pakistan, Bhutto was removed by a combination of the military and religious-political elite. The new regime is closer to the West. In Afghanistan, the anti Daud coup ushered in a new system, which not only lacked unity and stability but also credibility, with the result that it had to invite Soviet troops to remain in power. In Iran, the downfall of the Shah led to internal turmoil in which the Islamic Republic Party, the Tudeh Party and the Fedayeen are aligned against the Mujahedeen. These domestic compulsions as well as the prolonged Iraq-Iran conflict has forced Iran to depend more and more upon the USSR. The drastic changes in the domestic and foreign policies of almost all the key states in West Asia have greatly destabilized the area. Not only the pattern of intraregional linkages but also the pattern of linkages between regional powers and great powers underwent a radical change. In most countries, there are images and political cliches about past colonization and intervention which come to the fore when a Western country talks of security facilities or of establishing bases.

Due to real or perceived threats to the established Arab regimes in the region from the forces of the so-called Shia fundamentalism, aligned to the Marxist groups like the Tudeh and the Fedayeen, and supported by the Soviets, the Arab regimes have been drawing closer to the West, especially the United States, despite their differences over the Arab-Israeli question. This is

reflected not only in the close military cooperation between states like Saudi Arabia and the United States, but also the creation of regional organizations like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). There is no sign of an end to the Iraq-Iran conflict. Nor is it possible to predict the final outcome of the contest for power in Iran between the various contending parties. In some way, both these issues are interlinked. If the Gulf gets further destabilized because of the events in Iran or in the Arab littoral of the Gulf, the pull of these states to seek outside support cannot be resisted. Thus the linkages of the regional powers and great powers will be further strengthened. While such a development would not add to the stability, peace and security of the region, it would definitely help to further consolidate and legitimize the great power presence in the region.

The great powers in alluding to the need for a code of conduct--however difficult it might appear to find one--given the existing circumstances--a potentially inflammable situation has developed. There is a need to weigh the position carefully, each step taken to support one side in the light of the effect it would have on the other. A great deal more can be achieved diplomatically to solve the Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts, which spread their poison far and wide throughout the region. Stagnation in serious Arab-Israeli peacemaking strengthens extremists of many complexions--Islamic, Arab nationalists, and communists. The end of the great oil boom and the ensuing recession have created an atmosphere of frustration and alienation. Confidence in the established order is eroding as opportunities become fewer and developments get slower, giving rise to militant religious opposition movements that challenge the political status quo. Israel is a "genuine strategic asset" for the Soviets as much as it allows Moscow to develop support within new Arab elites and in Arab public opinion in general. The

Soviet Union has made it clear that it claims a say in Gulf affairs. The Soviets have a geostrategic advantage and have demonstrated determination to deploy its navy in the region. The major danger is that, at a time when Third World conflicts are on the increase, greater naval strength creates a higher risk of clashes, accidental or deliberate. The Iran-Iraq War made it clear that because of the serious threat to the oil route through the Strait of Hormuz, Western countries were much more interested in the prompt military protection of their energy supplies than in other considerations, and indeed that the Arab oil producers were themselves dependent on this passage remaining open, since it is their economic lifeline too.

Continuing militancy in Aden has implications for South Yemen's neighbors in the Arabian Peninsula, all of whom perceive this comparatively well-armed people's republic as a potential or even an acute threat, given the active support it is receiving from several countries in the socialist bloc.

Increasingly close relations between South Yemen and Ethiopia--with financial backing from Libya are also likely to confront Djibouti and Sudan with growing problems. South Africa, besides its strategic significance because of its very efficient ports and surveillance capacity on the Cape, supplies important minerals some of which are to be found only in the Soviet Union, besides South Africa. It also imports a substantial quantity of Western industrial goods.

A significant shrinkage of this market would accordingly have unfavorable consequences in those countries which are South Africa's most important partners. Every effort by the West to compromise between Black African interests and those of South Africa have at best only gained time. Soviet block propaganda has had a easy time, giving the Soviets probably greater opportunity for more political and military openings in Eastern and Southern Africa. A more serious combination from the point of view of Western

interests could be the further consolidation of relations between South Africa and Israel, out of a common feeling that they are being treated internationally as "pariah."

In Southeast Asia, following the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam, it was not clear to what extent and in what way this great power would in the future be still committed to the region. The agreement on military bases made with the Philippines in January 1979 and later the same year, the United States decision not to withdraw any of its troops from South Korea restored the confidence of its allies. The security link with Japan and Australia will continue to be obligatory. Cambodia is a catalyst. China does not want Cambodia's incorporation into an Indo-China dominated by Hanoi. The Soviet alliance with Vietnam is now of utmost strategic importance for the Soviet Union to ensure a secure military base and to counter Chinese influence in the region, particularly in view of the growing U.S.-China cooperation.

Awareness among the Indian Ocean littoral states of the increased military and strategic activities of both superpowers in the second half of the 1960's underlay the Indian Ocean Peace Zone initiative. The Soviet Union's regular, if limited, naval presence from 1968 onwards followed the Anglo-American agreement on Diego Garcia. For countries which for centuries had been ruled by external powers with naval access to the region, this led to a strong reaction which in turn gave rise to the idea of a Peace Zone. Naval power seemed synonymous with rule from outside. The basic elements of the Peace Zone were formulated for the first time at the Non-Aligned summit at Lusaka in 1970. Sri Lanka introduced the tenets of the proposal in the U.N. General Assembly in October 1971. Two months later, the resolution was passed. The key sentence read: "The General Assembly . . . solemnly declares that the Indian Ocean, within the limits to be determined, together with air

space above and the ocean floor subjacent thereto, is hereby designated for all time as a Zone of Peace." The great powers were urged to enter into immediate consultations with Indian Ocean coastal states, one of the aims being to "eliminate" from the region all "military installations," while ships and aircraft were to be prohibited from using the Indian Ocean "for any threat of use of force against . . . any littoral or hinterland state." Sixty-one countries supported the resolution. Although there were no votes against it, fifty-five countries abstained, prominent among these were the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries. The events of 1977 changed this situation of stalemate. The Soviet Union and the United States met for bilateral limitation talks. These talks were hailed as a step in the right direction, and the U.N. resolution on the Peace Zone at the end of 1977 also welcomed it. In this resolution for the first time the Eastern bloc countries also endorsed the proposal. There were 123 votes in favor and 13 absentions. The negotiations were, however, a failure and from that time onwards, the Peace Zone diplomacy of the littoral states once again met with responses from both superpowers that were intended as propaganda. In the 1980's, the main conflict is between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviet Union's main demand is that the United States should vacate Diego Garcia, while the United States wants the Soviets to remove troops from Afghanistan. There can be no doubt that a lack of trust between the superpowers, between East and West, between the Soviet Union and China, but not least between the individual states in the Indian Ocean region, has deeply eroded the Peace Zone concept.

Search for a New Strategic Consensus

At the present time, most of the Indian Ocean states, almost as a ritual, profess to follow the policy of nonalignment, vote for the U.N. resolution on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, and, by and large, condemn the RDF as

well as the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. But while paying lip service to Afro-Asian solidarity, they are still bound by their old policies of seeking security through foreign support and through overt or covert linkages with one great power or the other. Earlier attempts at regional unity, such as the Arab league or the Regional Cooperation for Development, failed because while their members sought to unite they also tried to isolate themselves from other states of the region. Recent efforts like the ASEAN and the GCC have also not succeeded fully because their members also seem to operate more within the framework of a conflictual environment than on the basis of cooperation among all regional states. Thus ASEAN has become an instrument to balance Vietnam, and the GCC is developing as a counterweight to Iran. Their rationale, the grouping of a few states in a given region as a counterweight to the regional rival, not only perpetuates the division within the region but also invites foreign intervention.

This concept has to be discarded if the countries of the region have to evolve a new strategic consensus for themselves. This has to have two basic postulates. Firstly, the security of each state depends not only upon its own nonconflictual relations with other states but also upon the stability of the region as a whole. Secondly, the security of the region depends upon the regional powers evolving some consensus which will enable the region to independently stabilize itself, outside the framework of great power rivalry and linkages based upon that rivalry. After all, this is also the basis of the policy of nonalignment.

The essence of the concept of strategic consensus is the realization that the area between the Mediterranean and the Pacific constitutes an integral region. This region lies on the southern periphery of two major land powers, the USSR and China, and along the littorals of Asia and Africa, which are

vital to the major sea power, the United States and its allies. Its geopolitical importance dictates that it be treated as one single region for the purpose of evolving a strategic consensus. Undoubtedly, this region is composed of several systems and subsystems, like West Asia, the Gulf, the Horn of Africa, East Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia. But it must also be noted that each of these systems and subsystems are organically interlinked. Stability in one is vital to the security of the other. Hence, it is essential to maintain a concept of the unity of this region while evolving a strategic consensus. In the meantime, the superpowers must show restraint and the destiny of the region must be left in the hands of the Indian Ocean Peoples, to sort out their problems with methods and means best suited to the people based on their religious and cultural traditions. Mere partial arrangements for mutual restraint even when they are embodied in a treaty are bound to remain ineffective so long as deeper mutual understanding of each of the other's global political aims and of the means of achieving them is lacking.

In Afghanistan, the Soviet Union has not only brought the region great tension, but has created significant problems for itself in the short and medium terms. However, viewed in the long term, it is not unreasonable for Moscow to hope that it may ultimately succeed in pacifying the country. This hope seems all the more realistic given the unstable situation in the states which are Afghanistan's neighbors, Iran and Pakistan. Despite the size of the resistance movement in Afghanistan, which in the years following the occupation increased both in terms of numbers and calibre; it is hardly conceivable that an eventual "political solution" would fail to guarantee the most important Soviet interests and above all a regime in Kabul which is not openly anti-Soviet. Although, how much Sovietization can be accomplished

there in the long run is still an open question. In Southeast Asia, Sino-Soviet conflict has become the dominant element of outside influence in the subregion and is likely to remain so in the 1980's. A prerequisite for good relations would be for the Cambodian problem to be resolved, in such a way as to maintain a security function for Vietnam in Indo-China, yet with a compromise formula which is acceptable to China and would enable ASEAN to save face. Australia has to find an identity which is in with its geographical location, by establishing a greater degree of detachment from the United States and Britain and by increasing regional cooperation. Since the Gulf region is likely to remain highly unstable, chiefly because of internal political and social factors, it would be to its advantage, if as few additional disruptive factors as possible were brought in, particularly by the Western countries. Such factors would include:-

- o Public discussion of the need for a Western military presence in the Gulf.
- o Loud speculation as to whether the oil fields would be occupied in the event of a regional unrest.
- o Reports in the media on the instability of regimes in that region and the questioning of their legitimacy.
- o Supplying of inappropriate amounts of highly sophisticated military equipment which then has to be balanced out by equivalent deliveries to Israel.
- o Irresponsible "re-cycling" of petro dollars in civilian economic sectors, as a result national developmental plans are inflated without sufficient absorptive capacity being available.

In the coming years, the West's Gulf policy should therefore be shaped predominantly by a sense of shared responsibility for a region which can

no longer be a Western domain, but which substantially consolidates the foundations of its economics and its security. The West has an advantage over the Soviet policies and ability in that it is more willing and able to offer economic and humanitarian assistance alongside military aid.

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