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CHANGING GEOPOLITICS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA

If geopolitics is concerned primarily with “the struggle for space and power”—to adopt the subtitle of a well-known book on the subject, published during World War II¹—the 1980s open with the ominous prospect of being a highly geopolitical decade. Relations between the two superpowers are changing, and are again becoming more conflictual and confrontational. The United States seems to be declining in strength and influence, whereas the power and influence of the Soviet Union seem to be increasing. They still remain the only real superpowers in today’s world, although this situation too may be changing. In any event, while their power and influence are far greater than those of any other state, their position in the changing international system is becoming less central and less dominant, as the system becomes more pluralistic and as other actors—individual nations, regional groupings and non-national actors such as multinational enterprises, terrorist

1. Robert Strausz-Hupé, *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1942).

movements, international organizations, etc.—begin to exert greater weight.

In February, 1980, an Indian commentator wrote: "In the eighties the Third World will see keen Soviet-American competition for influence with a possibility of movement toward collision."² This competition in the Third World has been building up for some time, and it has obviously escalated into even more threatening dimensions in the late seventies and early eighties. And it is only one phase, perhaps not even the most alarming phase, of a competition that is global in nature and in potential impact. Moreover, as the same Indian commentator pointed out, "Two other sets of conflicts—the Sino-Soviet one and the North-South one—are also likely to aggravate the East-West competition... all three are getting dangerously enmeshed with one another."³

As rival global powers, it is quite understandable that both the United States and the Soviet Union conceive of their relationships, whether conflictual or cooperative, as global in nature, and that all aspects of their evolving relationships are looked at from a global perspective. In a sense, therefore, it is difficult for global powers to develop regional or bilateral relations which convince regional or local powers that their interests and perspectives are being given due consideration and that they are not in constant danger of becoming victims of

2. B. K. Wariavroalla, "Soviet-American Rivalry: Focus on Third World Countries", *The Times of India*, February 8, 1980.

3. *Ibid.*

superpower rivalries. This is particularly true of the countries of Asia and Africa, including the countries that border on the Indian Ocean —countries that comprise one-fourth of the membership in the United Nations and that include nearly one-third of the world's people. From the point of view of most of these countries, both superpowers are suspect, because of their vast power, their past record, their present dangerous competition that threatens the peace of the world and the survival of mankind, and their many forms of "intervention" in and pressures on weaker countries.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union seem to agree that, in the words of a distinguished Soviet strategic analyst, Professor H. A. Trofimenko, "In the Asian and Pacific region the situation...is less settled than in Europe."⁴ They probably also agree that recent changes in the internal situation in many states of the region and in regional power balances and relationships, have made the region even more unsettled than in the recent past, and that the outlook is for even greater instabilities and imbalances. But obviously each differs sharply regarding the roles, policies, responsibilities, and motives of the other in this vast region, as elsewhere. According to Professor Trofimenko, the "growing tension" in the Asia and Pacific region has been "caused by local conflicts and the military measures of the USA and China."⁵ According to President

4. H. A. Trofimenko, "Military-Political Situation in the Asian and Pacific Region and Prospects of Its Evolution", unpublished paper prepared for and presented at the Third Joint American-Soviet Conference on Asia, Santa Barbara, California, December 10-15, 1979, p. 16.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Carter the blame rests largely on the Soviet Union. In his State of the Union address to the second session of the 96th Congress, on January 23, 1980, he referred specifically to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as "a radical and aggressive new step" that "could pose the most serious threat to the peace since the Second World War."

Whatever the extent of their basic disagreements regarding their relative roles and intentions, both countries probably agree with Professor Trofimenko's assessment that "From whatever national or 'geopolitical' angle the situation in Asia is viewed, all of us, I think, will agree that the present tendencies in the development of the military-political situation in the region are not favourable to detente."⁶ It should be remembered, however, that the prospects for detente were quite gloomy even before Professor Trofimenko and President Carter made the statements quoted above, and that this unfortunate situation was not due mainly to developments and conditions in the Asia and Pacific region.

In a further comment on "the present tendencies in the development of the military-political situation in the region" Professor Trofimenko observed: "Far from contributing to long-term stability, they serve to tie a new knot of contradictions and rivalry, and, in the final count, to produce another major armed conflict."⁷ It is conceivable, unhappily, that the region could become the theater for producing "another major armed conflict;"

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

but if this proves to be an accurate prophecy, the causes will arise to a far greater extent in superpower rivalries and general global circumstances than in local and regional instability and rivalries in the Asia-Pacific region, although these regional conditions may weaken the capacity of the states and peoples of the region to avoid becoming a theater of conflict and may make the region a tinder box for the sparks that may ignite a larger conflagration. This overarching danger is a real one, although let us hope that it is less likely than Professor Trofimenko's gloomy warning suggests.

In an interdependent age the countries and peoples of the Indian Ocean area—and in fact of the entire Asia-Pacific region—have a continuing and complex series of relations and interactions with external powers, organizations, and enterprises. The interaction is, in fact, a mutual one, involving not only the “challenge” of the West and the “response” of the East, to use Toynbee's terms, but increasingly the “challenge” of the East and the “response” of the West. Thus it is a shifting, and presently unstable and uncertain pattern of relationships which presents both great dangers and great possibilities. It is by no means wholly, or even primarily, a confrontational or conflictual relationship. The more positive aspects could gain in strength if the countries of the region could make greater progress in their struggle for political, economic and social integration and development, if they could find ways to co-operate more effectively with each other and to make their

collective voice more influential in international relations, and if the external powers would give greater consideration to the views and needs of the countries of the area and would not try to impose their own rivalries and priorities on this part of the world.

Unhappily present trends seem to point in the opposite direction. In recent years, a whole series of developments—many of which have even greater impact because they are so enmeshed and interrelated—have contributed to the changing, and generally more dangerous, geopolitical situation in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific region. Mention has already been made of the competition between the superpowers and the present deterioration of their already conflictual relations, and of the Sino-Soviet dispute and the whole gamut of issues and cross-purposes subsumed in the telescopic term “North-South” relations. Still within the realm of external developments, centering on the roles of great powers, mention could also be made of the consequences of the British decision, announced in 1968, to withdraw most of its effective power east of Suez, the American involvement in and then withdrawal from Vietnam, and the role of the United States, the Soviet Union and other external powers in the Arab-Israeli dispute. More recently, attention has been focussed on the actions and rivalries of the United States and the Soviet Union in unstable areas in Africa and the Middle East.

Whatever the causes or the constructive potentialities of the many changes that have taken place in the countries that border the Indian Ocean, the general

picture is one of increasing instability and of growing crisis, internally and regionally as well as externally. While the "arc of crisis" seems to reach its peak in Southwest Asia, in its wider dimensions it can be said to extend from Cox's Bazar to the Horn of Africa, or even to the Cape of Good Hope. As the eighties opened, the center of concern was in Iran and Afghanistan, but the spillover possibilities and dangers of the situation in both countries were definitely a part of that concern. Hence, even if the focus was mainly on two countries, one a middle power in a strategically and economically important location, the other a small country that had received relatively little international attention, the developments in these two countries had considerable geopolitical significance. The dangerous spillover possibilities were all the more worrisome because further internal changes in both countries were almost certain in the relatively near future and because there was a continuing danger that the combination of internal instability and external intervention might lead to larger conflicts, or even to a major military confrontation involving the superpowers.

In Iran the pulls of the past and the needs of the present and the future were serious problems in themselves, which would tax the capacity of any developing society, even if the leadership was enlightened and if it had a broad base of public support. However, sincere or effective the Shah was in his belated efforts to introduce economic and social reforms, he was not willing to yield significant political power; and eventually his

repressive regime was overthrown by a combination of forces that had become increasingly hostile to him and increasingly entrenched in influential sections of the society. Under the direction of the fundamentalist Shi'ite religious leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, the new regimes in Iran tried to reform the society and turn the country into an orthodox Islamic state; and they also tried to reject foreign influences and habits, with the United States labeled as the chief "satanic" power and the greatest enemy of all that the "revolution" stood for.

These basic changes in a key Middle Eastern country had a world-wide impact, involving indeterminate proportions of religion, oil, politics, and social practices and attitudes, and raising grave apprehensions regarding the impact of the revolution on international relations and on the outlook for world order and peace. Iran became the head center for the "Islamic revival" which in various forms and in varying degrees seemed to sweep most of the Islamic world, and even beyond.⁸ It also raised questions regarding the prospects for stability and peace in other countries of the Middle East, and regarding the dangers, consequent upon the sudden transformation of Iran from what was widely regarded as one of the most stable countries of the Middle East to one of the least stable. These concerns were accentuated with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, leading to direct Soviet control of the government in Kabul but

8. See Robert Springborg, "Islamic Revival in the Middle East", *Current Affairs Bulletin* (Sydney, Australia), 1, June 1979.

also to continuing, if rather sporadic, resistance to the Soviet invaders by various uncoordinated tribal groups in different parts of the country. Afghanistan under Afghan rule was a remote country that could hardly threaten anyone; but the Soviet military and political presence made Afghanistan a possible salient for further moves that would threaten Iran and possibly other Middle Eastern states to the South and West and Pakistan and possibly other South Asian states to the South and East. This could lead to counter-intervention by the United States and perhaps other Western powers, thus introducing the prospect both of the loss of political independence of Middle Eastern and South Asian states and of escalation into a world conflict.

Here again the countries of South Asia and the Middle East seemed to be victims of great power expansionism, and to be confronted with situations and threats which were beyond their power to counteract effectively. In such a situation, the internal divisions and weaknesses of these countries and their inability to co-operate in the interests of mutual defense and survival were serious handicaps to effective resistance to outside dangers. In fact, while these countries repeatedly voiced their long-standing opposition to the dispatch of foreign troops to any country, and while most of them joined in various resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and opposing the introduction of any other external military forces into the area, even to counteract the Russian threat, they were conspicuously unable to agree on any concerted measure of a

non-verbal nature.

Indian reactions to the Soviet move into Afghanistan were much more ambivalent than were those of the Pakistanis. In fact, while it was reported that Mrs. Gandhi had told Andrei Gromyko, the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, during his visit to India in mid-February 1980, that Soviet troops should be removed from Afghanistan promptly, the joint India-U.S.S.R. communique that was issued at the end of Mr. Gromyko's visit was noticeably silent on this sensitive issue, except for this discreet and oblique comment: "The talks, which were held in an atmosphere of mutual trust and cordiality, reviewed the international situation including the developments in the region and around it." Many Indians, including Mrs. Gandhi, seemed to blame the United States more than the Soviet Union for precipitating the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and seemed to be more concerned about the possibility of limited American military assistance to Pakistan to help that country present a stronger defensive posture than with the introduction of massive Soviet military power across the Khyber Pass, and the possible spillover effects on the sub-continent. Pakistanis, in turn, were exceedingly apprehensive about the Soviet presence just across their borders, but some of them seemed to be equally, or even more, perturbed by Mrs. Gandhi's return to power in India following the seventh general elections in early January 1980.

The new super-leader of Iran, the Ayatollah Khomeini had long been an outspoken critic of the

“godless” Soviet Union, and he was deeply concerned with the danger of a Soviet drive into Iran and the oil fields of the Gulf from nearby Afghanistan; but he could hardly cooperate with his self-designated greatest external enemy, the “satanic” United States, even in preparations against a real and present danger.

One of the many alarming consequences, or accompaniments, of the recent deterioration in superpower relations and of the unsettling changes in Iran and Afghanistan has been a considerable military buildup by both the United States and the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean area. This has been an obvious possibility ever since Britain’s announcement in 1968 of its intention to withdraw most of its effective power east of Suez. This did not exactly leave a “power vacuum” in the Indian Ocean, as many observers described the new situation in the area; but it did raise the prospect of a greater U.S. naval presence, and a similar response by the Soviet Union, with the even more alarming prospect that the Indian Ocean would become a major new zone of confrontation between the superpowers.

No littoral state was able to exert more than local dominance in the Ocean. Even the Indian navy, which was strengthened considerably after the mid-1960s, could not operate far beyond the shores of the subcontinent, although its dominance of the offshore waters in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal was a factor in the Indo-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971. The Iranian navy seemed to be in the process of becoming a potentially important factor in the North-west reaches

of the Indian Ocean as well as in the Gulf; but with the radical changes in Iran, the navy has been virtually immobilized.

The majority of the states of the Indian Ocean region were strongly opposed to the presence of warships or bases of great powers, especially the superpowers, in the Indian Ocean, even though some were almost equally concerned with the prospects of naval intimidation by some littoral powers (for example, Pakistan with regard to the Indian navy). They were able to achieve a considerable degree of cohesion around the demand that the Indian Ocean should be "a zone of peace," free from the conflicts and rivalries of external powers. This demand was strongly championed by Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, and other littoral states. It was endorsed by the Non-Aligned Summit Conference in Lusaka in September 1970, the General Assembly of the United Nations (by a vote of 61 to 0, with 55 abstentions) in December 1971, and in subsequent sessions of the Non-Alignment Summit Conference and the General Assembly, as well as at other Conferences and by many governments.

From the beginning, there has been considerable difference of opinion regarding the nature and extent of the naval presence of external powers in the Indian Ocean. In December 1973, the General Assembly requested the UN Secretary General to prepare a factual statement of the military presence of great powers in the Indian Ocean area. This task was entrusted to a group of experts, headed by an Indian diplomat, L.K. Jha.

It is a commentary on the problem of determining even the facts of the case that the experts had great difficulty in agreeing on a report, and that, in a move unprecedented in the annals of the United Nations, the objections of a number of external states to the report were so strong that the group of experts, on the instructions of the UN Secretary General, submitted a revised report a few weeks after the presentation of its first report, modifying some of its findings and structures on the operations of some of the external powers in the Indian Ocean.⁹

If the absence of any great power naval presence is a *sine qua non* for the Indian Ocean as a "zone of peace," this widely supported objective, however laudable, has been an impracticable goal from the beginning. The littoral states can deplore foreign naval operations in the Ocean, but they cannot prevent them. The events of 1978-79 and subsequently have apparently made the objective even more unrealistic than ever. Recent developments in Iran and Afghanistan, and the reactions of the United States to these events, have changed the whole geopolitical situation in the Indian Ocean area, and have further thwarted the dreams of the Ocean as a "zone of peace." This point was clearly perceived and voiced by a leading Indian journalist, Girilal Jain, at the end of January 1980 :

9. See *Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace*: Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Paragraphs 6 and 7 of General Assembly Resolution 3080 (XXVIII) A/AC. 159/1, 3 May 1974 and A/AC. 159/Rev. 1. 11. July 1974.

It is difficult to say whether our policy makers have over the years sincerely believed in the possibility of converting the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace. If they have, recent events beginning with the overthrow of the Shah in Iran and culminating in the Soviet takeover in Afghanistan must have jolted them out of this dream world. There has never been a basis in reality for this belief. The Persian Gulf has been much too important by virtue of its oil reserves and geographical location to be left alone by the two superpowers competing for the domination of the world.¹⁰

Even if something far less than "the domination of the world" is the long-range objective of the superpowers, their national interests, as their policy-makers have consistently expressed them, include a continuing concern for their relations with the countries of the Middle East and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean area and with the oil and strategic location of the Gulf area. Hence, the best that can reasonably be expected of them is that they will attempt to promote their perceived national interests in the Indian Ocean region in ways that will be beneficial to the littoral states as well as to them, and that they will sustain no more than a minimal naval presence or military build-up in the region. This was in fact the prevailing situation from the period

10. Girilal Jain, "Growing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Indian Ocean Cannot Be Zone of Peace", *Times of India*, January 30, 1970.

shortly after the announcement of British withdrawal from the region until 1978. Rarely did either the United States or the Soviet Union have more than ten war-ships in the Indian Ocean at any one time, and most of these were often on temporary duty there, mainly engaged in making "port calls" in friendly countries of the area. The only permanent naval presence that the United States maintained in the region was the so-called "Middle East Command," based at Bahrain in the Gulf, which consisted of a flagship and two war-ships of the destroyer or frigate type. The only U.S. permanent facility in the entire Indian Ocean area, with the possible exception of Cockburn Sound in Australia, was on the small island atoll of Diego Garcia in the middle of the Ocean, under arrangements with the British dating from the mid-1960s. According to official spokesmen of the United States this was simply an "austere" communications and staging facility. Certainly very limited sums were expended on the development of facilities there until 1980, mainly because of opposition in the American Congress and in many of the littoral states, especially India. Occasionally, American naval and air units would participate with similar units of SEATO allies or CENTO countries. A much-publicized incident was the dispatch of a task force headed by the aircraft carrier Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal toward the end of the Indo-Pakistan war in mid-December 1971.

Nor did the Soviet Union have a significant naval presence in the Indian Ocean. The warships it sent to the area periodically, were assiduous in making

port calls. It also constructed a large number of mooring buoys at various places in the vast Ocean. It maintained a few satellite tracking ships in the Ocean. Its extensive fleet of hydrographic and fishing vessels should also be mentioned, since many of these were equipped with sophisticated communications equipment and almost certainly were used for intelligence purposes. Whether the Soviet Union had any full-fledged bases in the Indian Ocean is a matter of debate—and of definition; but it did have special rights and facilities in a number of ports in littoral states and Indian Ocean islands, including Berbera in Somalia, Aden and the island of Socotra in the Republic of South Yemen, and Umm Qasr in Iraq.

In sum, until about 1978 neither superpower showed any strong official interest in maintaining more than a limited naval presence in the Indian Ocean area. Although the Soviet Union, unlike the United States, gave lip service to the principle of the Indian Ocean as a “zone of peace,” its actual policies and behavior clearly indicated that it intended to maintain at least a minimal presence in the Ocean. Until Jimmy Carter became President in early 1977, the United States had been cool to the whole idea of a peace zone in the Ocean. Shortly after he became President, Mr. Carter went on record in favor of the “demilitarization” of the Indian Ocean. Whatever his intentions, it soon became apparent that this goal would not be vigorously pushed, and that indeed it did not presage a new U.S. policy toward the Indian Ocean area. However, in 1977 and 1978 the

United States and the Soviet Union did engage in several exchanges and talks on limiting their naval operations and presence in the Ocean; but these discussions were broken off in late 1978 and in spite of Soviet suggestions that they be resumed, the United States had not agreed to their resumption before the developments of 1978-79 made this impossible.

Some leaders of littoral states, in spite of their advocacy of the concept of the Indian Ocean as a "zone of peace," seemed willing to accept the reality of some naval presence in their area by external powers, and a few even tried to make a virtue of this reality. Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, for example, often argued that since at least some external powers were almost certain to maintain a naval presence in the Indian Ocean, it would be better to encourage others to be present also, in order to avoid domination of the Ocean by any single external power. During a visit to India in September 1969, the Foreign Minister of the Philippines, General Carlos Romulo, expressed the view that the security of Asia would depend "not so much on the presence of only one superpower in the region as on a 'proper equilibrium' among the United States, the Soviet Union, China and Japan." "Like a bulldog," he said, "the contending powers were likely to neutralize each other and thus create conditions under which a stable peace in the region might be possible." Nine years later an Indian academic specialist on foreign affairs suggested: "Let the littoral countries for a while consider the presence of the superpowers as

something undesirable but inevitable..while accepting their presence,...let them endeavor to circumscribe their level of armament which is a tension-generating process...In this exercise they should try to secure the cooperation of the Superpowers also."¹¹

This constructive suggestion for negotiations among the superpowers and the littoral states was never operationalized, and shortly after it was advanced—not, of course, for the first time—the United States and the Soviet Union entered into a new and heightened level of confrontation in the Indian Ocean area, as elsewhere, as a result of developments in Iran and Afghanistan. One immediate consequence was that the limited naval presence of the superpowers in the Ocean was superseded by a significant escalation of strength and confrontation.

By February 1980, the United States had the largest naval force in the Indian Ocean that it had sent since World War II. It consisted of some 25 warships, including two large carrier task forces. The new defense budget in 1980 called for an expanded appropriation for the naval facilities on Diego Garcia, thus breaking the stalemate on this question that had prevailed for several years. Apparently the first increment, available during fiscal 1981, will be only about \$18 million, but an expenditure of some \$170 million is now contemplated over a four-year period.¹²

11. Quoted in the *Hindustan Times*, September 5, 1969.

12. Fred S. Hoffman, "Larger Base in Indian Ocean Urged", *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 9, 1980.

In addition to improving the facilities on Diego Garcia, the United States, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, entered into agreements with Oman, Kenya and Somalia for access to military facilities, including the right to store military equipment and fuel and to draw upon these resources if military operations in the area were to be implemented. The main centers for such facilities were Muscat and Masira in Oman, Berbera in Somalia (where the Soviet Union had developed an airstrip and extensive facilities before it turned against Somalia in favor of Ethiopia), and the important port of Mombasa in Kenya.¹³

The United States reacted strongly to the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. As has been noted, President Carter feared that this action "could pose the most serious threat to the peace since the Second World War." In his State of the Union address, on January 23, 1980, Mr. Carter uttered a clear warning to the Soviet Union, in a passage that came to be referred to as "the Carter Doctrine"; "Let our position be absolutely clear. An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." In the light of this new and serious development, Mr. Carter reported that the United States had "increased and strengthened our naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and we are now

13. "Three Nations Grant U. S. More Access to Facilities Near the Persian Gulf", *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 13, 1980,

making arrangements for key naval and air facilities to be used by our forces in the region of northeast Africa and the Persian Gulf." He also stated that the United States was planning to provide special assistance to Pakistan to enable that country to improve its position against the threat across the Khyber Pass: "We've reconfirmed our 1959 agreement to help Pakistan preserve its independence and its integrity. The United States will take action—consistent with our own laws—to assist Pakistan in resisting any outside aggression—I'm also working, along with the leaders of other nations, to provide additional military and economic aid for Pakistan." He also stated that "In the weeks ahead, we will further strengthen political and military ties with other nations in the region," and that "we are prepared to work with other countries in the region to share a cooperative security framework."

In mid-February 1980, the Soviet Union was reported to have 20 ships in the Indian Ocean-Arabian Sea area, but only 10 of them were combatant ships. The Soviets had access to port facilities in a number of states bordering on the Indian Ocean, including Mozambique, Ethiopia and the Republic of South Yemen. In late 1979, the United States was reported to be particularly disturbed because, according to a U.S. intelligence analysis, "The Soviet Navy has doubled its operations in the Far East this year, whereas the U.S. Navy has spread its available ships to cover crisis missions in the Indian Ocean-Arabian Sea area."¹⁴ It was also

14. Fred S. Hoffman, "Soviet Navy Is Doubled in Far East," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 29, 1979.

disturbed by reports that the Soviet Union was sending jet fighters and other arms to North Yemen, thereby adding a new element of concern in an already troubled area.

The main new source of concern to the United States, and to many other nations as well, in the Middle East and South Asia and elsewhere, was the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan, amounting to a virtual takeover of a strategically significant salient in the Middle East-South Asian region and presenting the alarming possibility of further moves, perhaps into Pakistan and/or Iran, or even beyond. The capabilities of the Soviet Union for further expansionism were all too clear. What was uncertain was the basic motivation for the first Soviet military move of major proportions into a non-Communist nation since World War II. Speculation ranged all the way from the view that the Soviet action was mainly a defensive move, prompted by the need to prop up a Communist regime in Afghanistan, to the assumption that the Soviet action was simply a first step toward the implementation of a longheld Russian aspiration to secure footholds on the Indian Ocean or even toward the alleged Soviet ambition to secure world domination. The more moderate interpretation was held by many Indian analysts and apparently by Mrs. Gandhi herself, who seemed to put as much emphasis on provocative acts by the United States and other countries that may have prompted the Soviet move and who seemed equally alarmed by the prospect of U.S. military assistance to Pakistan. At least one prominent Indian journalist, however, gave a

different interpretation of the consequences of the new Soviet behavior: "...instead of being an informal and distant ally of non-aligned countries in their struggle for genuine independence, the Soviet Union has become a contender for dominant influence in the region."¹⁵ A special correspondent of the Bangladesh newspaper, *Holiday*, in January 1980, suggested an even more immediated danger: "The Soviet troops have 'annexed' Afghanistan to their empire as a first step towards fulfilling the age-old Czarist dream to overrun the sub-continent and Iran in order to reach the warm waters of the Indian Ocean."¹⁶

From time to time various proposals have been advanced for the purported purpose of preventing the Indian Ocean—Asian region from becoming a major theater of confrontation and possible military intervention on the part of either external or littoral states. In addition to the widely-supported demand that the Indian Ocean should be declared to be a "zone of peace," these proposals include the Soviet proposal for a system of collective security in Asia, first advanced in 1969 and frequently repeated in subsequent years, including recently, with little positive response from any Asian states; the proposal of the ASEAN countries for a neutrallized zone of peace in Southeast Asia; the proposal of Pakistan for a nuclear-weapons free zone in South Asia, which India has

15. Girilal Jain, "Growing U. S.—Soviet Rivalry: Indian Ocean Cannot Be Zone of Peace", *The Times of India*, January 30, 1980.

16. "Storm Clouds Gathering", by Our Special Correspondent, *Holiday*, January 20, 1980.

consistently opposed; and perhaps one should also include President Carter's offer in January 1980, "to work with other countries in the region to share a co-operative security framework," and the suggestion that in the light of the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan the states of South Asia should develop some co-ordinated programme for mutual defense and security against possible Soviet attempts to move into the sub-continent. All of these proposals, and many more (such as the U.S.—backed proposal for a Middle East Command in the 1950s and the U.S.—backed Baghdad Pact (later CENTO), have attracted some support and considerable attention, even beyond the areas of immediate concern; but none, except CENTO for more than two decades, has moved into the stage of effective acceptance or implementation.

Even in the regional context few successful efforts for concerted security and defense measures can be identified. On the whole, intra-regional relations have been more conflictual than co-operative. This applies to such regions bordering the Indian Ocean as southern Africa, East Africa, the Middle East (both in the main arena of Arab-Israeli competition and in the area of the Gulf), South Asia, and to lesser extent, Southeast Asia. In only two of these regions has one power risen to a position of regional dominance—South Africa in the Southern African region and India in South Asia—and in each case, the dominance is still not generally accepted by neighboring states and has not always been a factor for intra-regional peace and stability. Iran under the Shah, with extensive military and other

assistance from the United States, seemed to be heading toward dominance in the Gulf region. This impending ascendancy created widespread alarm in other Gulf States and in any event was abruptly ended by the revolutionary and destabilizing developments in Iran that led to the fall of the Shah and an uncertain internal situation. The immediately prevailing leadership was in the hands of a Shi'ite religious fundamentalist who virtually dismantled the military capabilities of the nation, turned his back on the efforts at modernization and political development, and in effect tried to reject the non-Islamic world. Indonesia is the regional giant of Southeast Asia, and may in time assume a position of greater dominance, for better or for worse; but it does not now occupy this position, and few of the other states in the region—especially Vietnam, which at the moment probably exerts greater influence or at least looms as a greater power than Indonesia—seem to be interested in looking to Indonesia for leadership. Aside from Indonesia and India, the other most populous states in the Middle East-South Asia-Southeast Asia regions—Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam—are all so preoccupied with grave problems of internal development and have such limited and often strained relations with their near neighbors that they can hope for little additional protection and security by more effective regional cooperation. Possibly, however, the escalation of external intervention from stronger powers in nearby areas may provide the catalyst for overcoming some of these deeply-ingrained and long-standing

historical suspicions and antagonisms.

In recent months, the geopolitics of the entire Indian Ocean area have undergone significant changes, as a result of internal instabilities, intra-regional rivalries and tensions, and increased interventionism from external powers. The developments in Iran since 1978 and the Soviet military take-over of Afghanistan in late 1979, raised all kinds of fears and alarms. It should be remembered, however, that these startling and epochal events were prompted by a number of circumstances, in the Indian Ocean region and outside; and one can hope that in time they may lose some of their threatening spillover potentialities and have an impact that will prove to be more salutary than destructive. These events may have served a useful purpose if they prompt the states of the region to improve their internal systems and performance and their intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation, and if they force the major intervening powers to pull back and reverse the escalation that not only poses new threats in the region but also threatens the peace of the world.