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THE INDIAN OCEAN : A ZONE OF PEACE OR A ZONE OF CONFLICT ?

The past two decades have witnessed the gradual transformation of the Indian Ocean region into an area of turbulence and tension and a focal point for crises of all descriptions. Prior to 1968, the Indian Ocean was a peaceful 'British lake' and was not considered to be an area of prime significance in political or strategic terms. As soon as the British withdrew from the east of Suez, a power vacuum was created in the area. However, the vacuum did not last long as the superpowers rushed in to fill the void by establishing their naval presence in the area. From then onwards, the competing strategic, political and economic interests of the great powers have led to a rapid buildup of both conventional and nuclear arsenals in the region. Successive developments in West Asia—the oil crisis of 1973, the fall of Shah in Iran, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war, were instrumental to the intensification of rivalry between the superpowers. As a corollary, a fierce arms race has been unleashed in the Indian Ocean region, turning it into the epicentre of world tension. An "arc of crises"¹ stretches along the shores of Indian Ocean, characterized by instability and growing crises.

The majority of the littoral and hinterland states of the Indian Ocean are strongly opposed to the presence of warships or bases of

1. The term was coined by President Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. In its wider dimension it can be said to extend from Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh to the Horn of Africa, or even to the Cape of Good Hope.

superpowers and demand that the Indian Ocean should be a "zone of peace", free from conflicts and rivalries of external powers. In spite of the repeated attempts by the littoral and hinterland states to establish the Indian Ocean region as a zone of peace, extensive militarization is underway, posing grave threat to the peace and stability of the littoral states.

Over the years after the zone of peace concept exuded the littoral states' hopes for demilitarization, the region has witnessed anything other than peace and stability. What are the factors that led to the transformation of the Indian Ocean into a theatre of the confrontation? What are the imperatives for militarization of the region? What are the impediments to the realization of the zone of the peace concept? How divergent are the views of the concerned parties? How far the idea is viable? What then are the prospects of peace in the region? These are among the questions that will be dealt with in the present paper.

The Indian Ocean : Its Political Economy

The Indian Ocean, the third largest Ocean of the world, has an area of 28,250,000 square miles.² It is landlocked in the north, surrounded by the continents of Asia, Africa and Australia, while in the south, it extends to the Antarctic Ocean. Five narrow stretches of water guard its eastern and western entrances and these are considered to be of great strategic importance : the cape of Good Hope, the Suez Canal and the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, Hormuz and Malacca.

The Indian Ocean and its littoral comprise the largest chunk of the developing or the third world and that is why it is often called the Ocean of non-alignment and of the developing countries. Among its thirty six littoral and eleven hinterland states, there are no great powers. Except South Africa, Australia and Israel all are developing countries and excepting the above three and Thailand, the rest are all nonaligned nations.

2. Chandra Kumar, "The Indian Ocean : Arc of Crisis or Zone of Peace ?" in *International Affairs* ; Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1984, p. 236.

The Indian Ocean is a region of great diversity in religious and cultural backgrounds, traditions, economic structures, resources, area, population and levels of development. For instance, India with a population of 700 million is the most populous country in the region, while Seychelles, with a population of 66,000 is the least. Economic condition ranges from one extreme to the other. The UAE and Kuwait have the highest GNP per capita in the world—US\$ 24,660 and US\$ 20,900 respectively. Incidentally two of the poorest countries in the world, Bhutan and Bangladesh with per capita GNP of US\$ 80 and 140 US\$ respectively belong to this region.³ Likewise, there is a wide disparity in power potential of these states. On the one hand there are states like Australia, Indonesia and India, which have considerable military power, resources and the will to play an effective role in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, countries, like Botswana, Lesotho, the Maldives, Oman, and Swaziland are very weak and poor.

These divergences contribute to the erosion of the spirit of unity and evoke intraregional rivalries making room for external involvement. The more so, because as an aggregate, the Indian Ocean region is rich in natural resources, minerals, and raw materials. The region contains about 60 percent of the world's crude oil reserves. Iran,

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Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Abu Dhabi are the major oil producing countries in this area. Japan imports more than 90 percent of its oil needs from the Indian Ocean region; Italy 84.6 percent, Australia 69 percent, Britain 66 percent, West Germany 62 percent,

3. *World Development Report*, 1983. The World Bank, p. 148,

France 51 percent and the US 8 percent.⁴ Besides oil, this area abounds in 20 out the 40 raw materials of strategic importance imported by the Western countries. This category includes uranium, thorium, coal, iron, copper, manganese, tin, mica, bauxite, chromite, nickel, cobalt, antimony, asbestors, vanadium and phosphates etc. It is estimated that the region contains 60% of uranium, 42% of gold and 98% of the world's supply of diamonds.⁵

The Indian Ocean region is predominantly agricultural in nature. One-fifth of the world's arable land lies in this area producing rich crops of wheat, rice, cotton, tea and coffee. Jute and rubber are the major agricultural products of the Indian Ocean region, exported to the West.

The resources that this region contains, are extremely vital for the rest of the world, especially the industrialized world. It is, therefore, in the interest of the Western world that the sea lanes and oil supply lines in Indian Ocean remain open and safe. The Indian Ocean has attained more importance due to the prospects of finding sea-bed minerals, fisheries and off-shore oil. The fact that nearly a billion people live in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, further adds to the political importance of the Ocean.

To the big powers, this region offers excellent prospects for economic exploitation. Apart from its natural wealth, the region also constitutes large markets for the finished products of the industrial nations. Weak industrial base of the majority of the countries coupled with inter-state and inter-regional rivalries provide the big powers with opportunities to heighten the dependence of littoral states on them for economic support and military assistance which embroil them into big power games.

Militarization of the Indian Ocean

Since the close of the 15th century, the history of the Indian Ocean was one of colonial rivalries and armed struggle among the western

4. Devendra Kaushik, *The Indian Ocean. A Strategic Dimension*, Vikas Publishing House, Pvt. Ltd. 1983, p. 2.

5. *Ibid*, p. 2.

powers. The Portugese were followed in the Indian Ocean by the Dutch, the English, the Danes and the French. It was not until the consolidation of the British power by the end of 18th century, that a single power dominated the Indian Ocean region. By 1900, the Indian Ocean was turned into a 'British lake' with military control established over all the important approaches and exits. However, this undisputed mastery of the British over the Indian Ocean dismantled in the period following the Second World War which witnessed an upsurge of national liberation in the Indian Ocean area. With the emergence of independent and sovereign states in the wake of the process of decolonization, Britain was forced to review its role in the international system and gradually reduced their commitments in the Indian Ocean region. The British withdrawal from the east of Suez after 150 years of exclusive domination was to be immediately followed by the movement of superpowers into the Indian Ocean. Indeed the Soviets, showed their interest as early as in 1967 when their strategic publication *Military Strategy* for the first time included South and Southeast Asia in the Soviet sphere of interest and in its search for new facilities for Russian naval vessels and along the shores of the Indian Ocean.⁶ In February 1961 the Soviet naval Chief Admiral Gorshkov, visited the Indian naval establishments in Bombay and Visakhapatnam. In March 1968 a Soviet flotilla called at a number of ports in India, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Somalia and South Yemen.

As soon as the US, on its part realized that Britain would no longer be able to continue its traditional policing role in the Indian Ocean, increasingly turned their attention to the Indian Ocean region. Taking the growth potential of the Soviet Navy into account and and their diminishing power in the Indian Ocean, Britain welcomed the firm involvement of the US navy in the Indian Ocean. As early as in 1963 British and Americans jointly began investigating the possibilities of putting various Indian Ocean islands to strategic use.

6. B. B. Vivekanandan, "The Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace: Problems and Prospects", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, No. 12, December 1981 p. 1238.

As a first step they decided to develop Diego Garcia atoll located in the Chagos archipelago jointly with the US into a naval communication centre.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was involved in a desperate race with the United States for attaining military and strategic parity. To exercise the role of a world power and thereby gain the right to a say in all matters of major importance, a powerful and versatile navy was required, something which the United States had long possessed. So in the 1960s the Soviet Union undertook a building programme to this end. Around 1970 it met with some success, the evidence being the SALT I.

Both superpowers now have naval facilities at different parts of the Indian Ocean. The US has two facilities, the USAF satellite tracking Station at Mahe, staffed with USAF and NASA personnel and the base at Diego Garcia. Among the outstanding features of the Diego Garcia base are, a highly classified intelligence and communication facility, a 12,000 ft. runway capable of taking in four engine transports, a large natural harbour which is protected on three sides by coral formations and which can accommodate an aircraft carrier task force. It also includes fuel storage capacity of 380,000 barrels of aviation fuel and 320,000 barrels of fuel oil for ships (enough to fuel a carrier task group for about 30 days) and anchorage and 500 ft. berthing for loading and unloading fuel.⁷

Besides Diego Garcia and Mahe, the US maintains a three-ship MIDEAST FOR Contingent in the Gulf based in Bahrain. The US has acquired access to facilities in Berbera in Somalia, in exchange for arms aid worth \$ 40 million. Access to facilities of the former RAF base in Masirah off the coast of Oman has also been agreed upon. US P-3 reconnaissance aircrafts make use of limited landing rights at Mombasa in Kenya and Singapore in their patrol flights to

7. Congressional Research Services, "US Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations, (1979)" p. 96, cited in K. Subramanyam, "Indian Ocean", *IDSJ Journal*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Jan-Mar—1982, p. 340.

track ships and submarines. In the case of an emergency, the US could also use some ports in Saudi Arabia (Jubail and Yanbo) Israel (Eilat) Bahrain (Manama) Oman (Muscat). The Australian government has offered the US, the use of its ports and bases, including Cocos (keeling).⁸ Washington has also negotiated an arrangement with Cairo that would allow the use of the Egyptian strategic air base at Ras Banas for the American Rapid Deployment Force (RDF). The RDF is pre-eminently a force to deter and, if deterrence fails, to block Soviet military intervention in the initial stage since it would be capable of getting on the ground first. The RDF has a marine amphibious force together with the necessary amphibious shipping to move its 50,000 men integrated air-ground team. These could commence movement when early warnings are received and could be positioned off-shore, independent of bases, when and where needed. By 1980, there were seven maritime pre-positioning ships on station in the Indian ocean loaded with the heavy equipment and supplies needed to support a 12,000 men marine amphibious brigade during an initial period of operations.⁹ The Reagan administration's strategic planning and defense policies reflect the high priority it places on establishing maritime superiority over the Soviet Union. In this regard the US Navy has proposed a vast programme of adding ships and aircrafts. The naval expansion programme includes two nuclear powered aircraft carriers, 14 attack submarines and nearly 1900 airplanes.¹⁰ The Indian Ocean deployments of the US Navy would in particular be strengthened by the naval development programme.

The two successive developments in the Indian Ocean region—the anarchy in Iran and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan had powerful impact upon the US strategy in the area. The current US strategy in

8. Chandra Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

9. Paul X. Kelley, "Putting Lethal Teeth" in US Foreign Policy, "*The Christian Science Monitor*", August 20, 1980. p. 22.

10. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 4, 1951, pp. 1–5. cited in Rasul B. Rais, "An Appraisal of US Strategy in the Indian Ocean", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXIII, No. 9, Sept. 1983, p. 1049.

the region recognizes naval deployments as an essential element in the defense of US security interests. US strategists view that the offensive capability of US naval forces, sea-based tactical air superiority and at sea sustainability of the US fleet may compensate for the Soviet proximity to the Ocean.

Between thirty and forty US combat and support ships are believed to be permanently in the Indian Ocean with Diego Garcia, in the centre of Indian Ocean as the main base for this activity. B-52 bombers are operating from bases in Australia, from Guam in the Pacific and from the extended runway in Deigo Garcia.¹¹ The US has succeeded in setting up a string of bases at strategic locations and establishing vital communication links between them.

The Soviet Union has also not lagged behind in building up its strength in the region. Although it does not have as many bases as US, it has built up a formidable naval fleet. The 5th operational squadron of the Soviet Pacific fleet, which includes Kresta class cruisers, Kotlin guided missile destroyers, submarines (several nuclear powered), Krivak class guided missile frigates, minesweepers, oil tankers and supply and maintenance ships, along with the small aircraft carrier Minsk, patrols the Indian Ocean from time to time. The Dahlak archipelago in the Red Sea is the main base for Soviet naval operations in the Indian Ocean.¹² The Soviet Union has a major base at Socotra in South Yemen. The Ethiopian Red Sea ports of Massawa and Assab are also being developed by the Soviet Navy. One of the most spectacular Soviet successes recently in this context has been the grant of rights by Vietnam to Soviet use of the bases of Cam Ranh Bay and Danang. Moscow is also bringing pressure to bear on Vietnam to allow Soviet use of the Kampuchean base at Kompong Son, which is very close to the Straits of Malacca.¹³

11. Chandra Kumar *op, cit.* p. 237.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Some other powers are also involved in the militarization of the of the region. France maintains 8-10 combat ships and 12,000 soldiers in the Western part of the Indian Ocean. Great Britain regularly despatches 10 combat ships and support vessels on patrol missions to the Indian Ocean. In spring 1980 the Federal Republic of Germany sent its combat ships to the Indian Ocean for the first time to participate in joint maneuvers with the the US.¹⁴

The most alarming facet of this build-up in the Indian Ocean is that the area has become a theatre for nuclear rivalry between the nuclear giants. In a report titled 'United States Foreign Policy Objectives and Overseas Military Installations' prepared by the Congressional Research Service for the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1979 it has been clearly stated that the United States possesses a potential strategic nuclear military objective of deploying when necessary or convenient, ballistic missile submarines (SSBN's) targetted on USSR.¹⁵

The roles envisaged for their submarine borne systems by the two superpowers are identical: Under SALT I the US had 1,054 silobased ICBMs, 656 submarine-borne missiles and 573 bombers; the corresponding figures for the Soviet Union were 1,398, 956 and 156. Considering that all these launchers have multiple warheads, the US in 1979 had 9,200 strategic nuclear weapons and the Soviets about 6,000.¹⁶ Since SALT allows for multiple warheads for land-based and seabased missiles, the number of warheads will continue to grow.

The first eight US Ohio class submarines will be fitted with the Trident (C4) missile; this missile has now been retrofitted into 12

14. Alexei G. Arbatov, "Arms Limitation and the Situation in the Asian-Pacific and Indian Ocean Regions", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXIV, No. 11, Nov. 1984, p. 111.
15. Congressional Research Service, cited in K. Subrahmanyam, "Indian Ocean", *op. cit.*, above.
16. Michael Mac Gwire "A New Trend in Soviet Naval Development", in K. Subrahmanyam. *op. cit.* p. 331.

Lafayette class submarines. The Trident II (D5) missile, now under development, should be installed in the ninth Ohio Class Submarine, scheduled for delivery in December 1988. The D5 missile will have much greater throw weight than the C4, it will be able to carry 10 warheads and is expected in addition to have the accuracy which would make it effective in attacking Soviet Silos.¹⁷

The new Soviet Typhoon class submarine has completed its sea trials and has moved to port facility on the north coast of the Kola peninsula ; a second Typhoon has been launched at the Severodvinsk Shipyard. These new submarines are each equipped with 29 launchers for the SS-NX-20 Solid fuelled ballistic missile. The Soviet Union conducted some initial unsuccessful tests with this missile, which is said to have 6-9 warheads and a range of 8300 km.¹⁸

Imperatives for Militarization

The extent of militarization in the Indian Ocean evokes a sense of curiosity as to why a peaceful and otherwise insignificant Ocean all of a sudden became so vital to the power struggle. The reasons can be categorized into two parts. The first is an outcome of its strategic locations and resources and the second that of major changes that have occurred in the strategic perspective of the world in recent years. Since the main actors in militarization are the superpowers, their interests would be examined separately.

US Interests

The Indian Ocean did not figure prominently in the post-war global strategy of the US. It was at best concerned with the maintenance of political and economic stability of the Indian Ocean regime. It was the world energy situation that soon led to the State Department's re-assessment of the US role in the region. The first energy crisis, in the wake of the Middle Eastern war of October 1973,

17. *SIPRI Yearbook, World Armaments and Disarmament* 1984, p. 31.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

suddenly brought the issue of oil supplies from the Persian Gulf into the forefront of Western priorities. Washington's concerns centres around not only the Soviet Union's increased naval potential in the Indian Ocean, which could interfere with these supplies, but also the deteriorating situation in the oil producing region itself. The collapse of the pro-western regime of the Shah of Iran, the establishment of a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan and the Gulfwar have shaken the pro-western forces in the region. The current US strategy in the region recognizes naval deployments as an essential element in the defense of US security interests. In the opinion of some analysts, the navy presents the only means of positioning American forces near enough to crisis zones to be able to respond quickly and to the exact degree dictated by the circumstances.¹⁹

The USSR has developed good bilateral relations with a number of littoral and hinterland states of Indian Ocean—Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia and North and South Yemen. These states are all recipients of Soviet arms and Moscow is cultivating further improvement of relations with them. The Americans on their part want to deny the Russians from gaining enough political leverage with the littoral states as it may create difficulties in US relations with oil-producing countries. The US is fearful of Soviet intentions in the Persian Gulf as well as in Horn of Africa and Southern Africa. This to some extent explains the imperatives for the US militarization of the Indian Ocean.

For strictly strategic reasons the northern part of the Indian Ocean may be important to the US as launching areas for its ballistic missiles. From this area US submarines could strike nuclear targets in the soft underbelly of Russia and China. The Polaris could target sites in the developed industrial regions of the USSR from the north-west quadrant of the Indian Ocean, though such sites could be reached from the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Pacific patrol areas as well.

19. Rasul B. Rais ; "An Appraisal of US Strategy in the Indian Ocean," *Asian Survey* ; Vol. XXIII, No. 9, Sept. 1983 p. 1045.

(The Polaris submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) A—3 has a range of 2500 nautical miles. The most recent version of the Trident SLBM will have a 6000 nautical miles range, which further diminishes any strategic compulsion to deploy submarines to the Indian Ocean).²⁰

Soviet Interests

The reasons for the Soviet moves in the Indian Ocean is to establish along the rim of Asia—from the Black Sea, the Mediterranean through the Indian Ocean, to the Far East—Soviet naval presence “consistent with its interests”. These interests are manifold. Among the military objectives much prominence has been given to the Soviet strategic concern to deter and contain in the waters of the Indian Ocean, nuclear strike forces of the US. If the existing US underwater fleet is expanded with the addition of submarines equipped with Trident I missile, the target range would be extended to 4,000 miles and subsequently 6000 miles with Trident II missiles. The entire territory of USSR would thus be exposed to these missiles.

It must be emphasised that beside its concern with the sea lanes, Soviets were also interested on the shores of Indian ocean. In the vacuum created by British withdrawal the Soviets acted promptly with the objective of attaining a ‘management role’ of the littoral nations that had just become independent from colonial rule or were in the process of gaining independence. Since 1971, the Soviet Union has concluded “friendship” treaties with a number of non-aligned countries on the Indian Ocean littoral and in the hinterland—Afghanistan, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Mauritius, Mozambique, Tanzania etc. Except in few cases, these “friendship” treaties have afforded the Soviet Union convenient means by which to control the domestic and foreign policies of these littoral states. Indeed, in some cases, the treaties have put direct and indirect limits on the freedom of the littoral countries, so much so that in spite of being non-aligned they are hardly able to take any independent position in world politics.

20. Rodney W. Jones, “Arms Control in the Indian Ocean”, *Asian Survey* vol. XX, No. 3 (March 1980) pp. 269-279.

These friendship treaties reflect the pattern of relationships that the Soviet Union wants to develop with the countries of Asia and Africa. The Soviet navy seems to have been designed as an instrument in this task.²¹

The Sino-Soviet confrontation also added inputs to the militarization of Indian Ocean. The extension of Soviet influence in the Indian Ocean region had been described by China as encirclement. Soviet Union's close links with Vietnam and thereby with Laos and Cambodia, represent a significant strategic gain in the South China Sea within reach both of the US bases in the Philippines and of the Malacca Straits in the Indian Ocean. This encirclement is unacceptable to China.²²

The major Soviet weakness in the area is the vulnerability of the land supply routes from the rest of the USSR to the Soviet Far East. There is no all weather road across Siberia and in places the Trans-Siberian Railroad runs very close to the border. A new railway, the Baikal Amur-Main line, is being built parallel to it, several hundred miles further north, but as a further insurance, the Soviets might well rely on sea transport.²³

As a result of considerable amount of trade between Soviet ports and countries in Asia a relatively large number of Soviet merchant ships circulate in Indian and Pacific Ocean waters. In case of a Sino-Soviet confrontation, these ships would be a supply resource for the Soviet far East and an easy target for Chinese submarines operating in the Indian Ocean mainly from facilities that might be provided by any one of the several Indian Ocean States that have a pro-Chinese orientation.

21. B. Vivekanandan, p. 1240,

22. Dieter Brown ; *The Indian Ocean : Region of Conflict or Zone of Peace ?* C. Hurst and Company, London, 1983, p. 57.

23. Geoffrey Jukes ; "Soviet Naval Policy in the Indian Ocean", in Larry W. Bowman and Ian Clark, *The Indian Ocean in Global Politics*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1981.

The Soviet Union however, has a major compulsion to deploy part of its space-operations task force in the Indian Ocean. The Surveillance satellites of both the US and the Soviet Union are placed in polar orbit. When they are over the northern hemisphere these satellites are tracked and monitored from main land US and USSR. In the southern hemisphere the US has satellite tracking stations at Mahe in the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, in Alice Springs in Central Australia and a standby station in South Africa. The Soviet Union does its satellite tracking with a task force of ships stationed in the Southern Indian Ocean. These global Satellite systems are essential components of the two superpowers' national technical means of verification to assure them that the other is not violating the arms control arrangements.

There are a number of economic reasons for Soviet moves into the Ocean. Protecting shipping routes between Soviet Europe and Soviet Asia is one of them. According to S Koslov, the Novosti Press military correspondent ; "In view of its geographical position, the USSR needs a large fleet in order to maintain the necessary internal contacts with remote parts of country vitally important communication routes linking the European with Asiatic and Far Eastern parts of the USSR pass through the Mediterranean and across the Indian Ocean,²⁴ It is quite clear that the existing land routes cannot be any substitute for these more economic and convenient sea routes.

Attempts at Demilitarization

Intensive militarization of the Indian Ocean region has resulted in a number of proposals for unilateral, bilateral and multilateral agreements for demilitarization. These have originated from the littoral countries as well as the major powers. The proposals fall primarily into two categories. The first comprises the bilateral limitation agreements between the superpowers over general arms supply and access to the Indian Ocean. The second is the zone of peace proposal

24. B. Vivekanandan, *op. cit.*, p. 1240.

mooted by several of the Indian Ocean nations and adopted by the United Nations.

Strategic arms limitation proposals have been made by both the United States and the USSR at different times during the period 1960-79. The first proposal came from the Soviets in the early 1960s at a time when the USSR was yet to reach the strategic parity with the US—suggesting that a nuclear free zone be established in the Indian Ocean. The idea was a counter to the deployment of US nuclear submarines and aircraft in Indian Ocean waters. In 1970s discussions regarding possible demilitarization began between the two superpowers. In 1976, the US became seriously interested in a strategic arms limitation agreement that would curb the dangers of a naval arms race and lessen the prospects of escalation. This was a dual response to absorb the Vietnam debacle on the one hand and to deter the expansion of the Soviet and Cuban military presence in Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa on the other. The Russians were also alarmed about Deigo Garcia and negotiations began in June 1977. However the talks were recessed in February 1978 because of Soviet buildup in Ethiopia and there have been no further meetings.²⁵ The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 added fuel to the US apprehension about Soviet military advantage in the region. They wanted to close the gap between itself and the Soviet Union and as such the reasons for negotiating naval arms limitation, ceased to exist.

The second category of proposals was initiated by the littoral and hinterland states of the Indian Ocean region. Awareness among the Indian Ocean littoral states of the dreadful implications of the increased military and strategic activities of both the superpowers in the second half of the 1960s underlay the Indian Ocean peace zone initiative. Most of the littoral states were for centuries ruled by external powers, with naval access to the region, so the widening arms race of the superpowers in their vicinity led to a strong reaction and

25. George W. Shepherd, Jr. "Demilitarization proposals for the Indian Ocean", in Larry W. Bowan and Ian Clark, ed. *op. cit.*, above, p. 238,

gave rise to the idea of a peace zone. The countries were broadly in agreement that the region should be protected from the East-West conflict. The basic elements of the Indian Ocean peace zone were formulated for the first time at the Non-aligned Summit at Lusaka in 1970. In 1971, a Sri Lankan motion in the General Assembly of the UN was adopted and in Resolution 2832 (XXVI) the Assembly stated that "the Indian Ocean within limits to be determined, together with the air space above and the ocean floor subjacent there to, is hereby designated for all times as a zone of peace".

Since 1972, the Indian Ocean Peace Zone (IOPZ) proposal has been kept alive in the Adhoc Committee on the Indian Ocean established by the UN to study the implications of this declaration. In 1974 a resolution was passed calling for the convening of an international conference on the Indian Ocean. However this initiative was frustrated due to the non-cooperative attitude of the superpowers. A meeting of the littoral and hinterland states was held in July 1979 which called more vigorously than in earlier years, for the removal of all military installations belonging to the superpowers. It adopted, without a vote, principles of agreement for implementing the 1971 declaration, dealing with the limitations of the zone, the elimination of the great powers' military presence there, the elimination of their military bases, the denuclearization of the ocean, the non-use of force, regional cooperation and the free use of the ocean by vessels of all nations.²⁶ The UN General Assembly adopted another Resolution (04/80 B) of 11th December 1979, containing the decision to convene the conference in 1981 in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. The resolution also contained a provision for the enlargement of the membership of the adhoc committee from 23 to 46 to include all permanent members of the Security Council and major maritime users of Indian Ocean. At the beginning of 1980, the Soviet Union, the United States, France and Great Britain assented to the littoral states initiative. Their endorsement after all these years represented an important procedural breakthrough as the great

26. Chandra Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

powers now seemed prepared to co-operate. But the successive developments in the Indian Ocean region especially in Iran and Afghanistan changed the attitude of the great powers and jeopardised the diplomatic efforts of the Indian Ocean countries. The adhoc committee has been holding several sessions each year since 1981, but the international conference has not been held so far and the members have not yet resolved their differences.

Zone of Peace Concept : Differing Views

The 1971 peace zone resolution in effect had two parts—preambular and operative. The preambular which deals with the rationale and circumstances that prompted the move, emphasised that great power rivalries and military bases were bound to hinder socio-economic reconstruction and asserts that establishment in the Indian Ocean of a zone of peace “could have a beneficial influence on the establishment of permanent universal peace based on equal rights and justice for

The attempts by the littoral and hinterland states of the Indian Ocean to curb the arms race and establish a universal agreement on strategic activities in the Indian Ocean are attempts at the right direction but they bore very little.

all in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN.” The operative or substantive part of the resolution highlights three dimensions and is of greater significance. The first two relate to prohibitory use of the Indian Ocean. They declare that warships and military aircraft should not be allowed to use the Ocean “for any threat or use of force against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or independence (of the countries of the area) in contravention of the purposes and principles of the charter of the UN.” The third says that the “right to free and unimpeded use of the zone by the vessels of all nations is unaffected.” This freedom is not absolute,

it is circumscribed by the earlier provisions of international law on the other.

This is the main point which is being raised against the zone of peace proposal by interested quarters. The sponsors of the IOPZ idea, however gave an assurance that it has not been their intention to circumscribe the existing Law of the Sea in its essential respects. The peace zone concept certainly does not in any way affect peaceful uses of the sea, such as fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines or overflights. But when it comes to using the Indian Ocean for war purposes, the situation is different.²⁷ In many situations it is quite impossible to distinguish between the peaceful use of the sea and the use of the sea for war purposes.

According to the present Law of the Sea as adumbrated by the Geneva Convention of 1958, military uses of the sea are more or less freely possible. Hence the stipulation in the peace zone resolution prohibiting warships and military aircraft, not always but under certain circumstances, from using the Indian Ocean, is sure to have implications for the existing body of the Law of the Sea. Implementation of the resolution would modify the Law of the Sea in certain respects.²⁸

These issues inhibiting the peace zone concept can be removed by the discussions and deliberations on the part of both littoral states and external powers. Although many of the littoral states' commitment to the idea is skin deep there is a broad support for the peace zone idea among them. Some sensitive and controversial issues are there which involve clashes of interests. How to demarcate lines between national jurisdiction and peace zone? What criteria is to be followed in determining the outer limits of the Indian Ocean? etc. are some of the difficult problems that needs to be resolved for the peace zone concept to acquire greater meaning. The attempts by the littoral and hinterland states of the Indian Ocean to curb the arms

27. K.P. Misra, "Peace Zone Concept ; Far from the Goal", *World Focus*, January 1981, p. 8.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

race and establish a universal agreement on strategic activities in the Indian Ocean are attempts at the right direction but they bore very little. Not only do the superpowers and other great powers resist the arms limitations but also the littoral countries are divided over the application of the principles. And these diverse views contribute to the intensification of the already existing crisis. Although the littoral countries are broadly in agreement with the concept of a peace zone in the Indian Ocean region, their approaches to the presence of the big powers differ. Several of the littoral countries are obviously allied with the global powers. Australia still permits US bases on its soil. She maintains that it would be wrong to hold superpower rivalry solely responsible for instability in the Indian Ocean region and that all littoral states should begin by signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty on nuclear weapons. India and many other littoral states vehemently oppose Australia's stand, thus pointing out the prevailing differences between littoral states. In South Asia the two important littoral countries who were actively engaged in the formulating the Peace Zone concept, India and Sri Lanka—differ in their approaches to the problem. While Sri Lanka views both the superpowers with apprehension, the Indian attitude has tended to be soft towards the Soviet Union²⁹. In April 1982, there was a conference in New Delhi, sponsored jointly by the World Peace Council, the Afro-Asian Peace and Solidarity Organisation and several other pro-Soviet groupings, with 150 foreign and about 1,000 Indian participants; both Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Leonid Brezhnev sent messages. The tenor of the conference was fully in line with Soviet policy, condemning the US for threatening the national independence of Indian Ocean countries, for trying to control their natural resources, and so, on.³⁰ There are also differences between Sri Lanka and India over the basic peace zone concept itself. While Sri Lanka wants the Indian Ocean region to be a nuclear free zone, India, for obvious security reasons, disapproved of this proposal. The fact that China possesses atomic weapons is a major

29. B. Vivekanandan, *op. cit.*, p. 1243.

30. Dieter Braun, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

constraint limiting the prospect of any unilateral abandonment of nuclear options by India.³¹

Pakistan has been more troubled by the force levels and nuclear potential of littoral states, particularly India. She has consistently emphasised the need for security arrangements in the regional sphere (i.e. vis-a-vis India) as a pre-requisite for a withdrawal by outside powers. From the outset there were differences among the littoral states but these differences intensified in the course of the 1970s. Despite such differences however, the littoral states succeeded in keeping the concept alive in UN forum.

The western powers have, in general, ignored or quietly opposed the idea. Initially the US ignored the work of the UN committee to create a peace zone in the Indian Ocean. The Reagan administration has taken the line that the real threat to regional peace comes from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and from regional disputes and arms races. They stand firmly on the principle of a freedom of the seas and maintains that only the US base in the region at Diego Garcia, is on an otherwise uninhabited island and does not violate the territory of any country. The Soviet Union has sought to present itself in favour of several of the proposals for a peace zone in the Indian Ocean, yet it has constantly pursued policies that contradict them. In fact the Soviet Union as much as the other superpower was never prepared to give way on the substantive issue i.e. the critical question of limiting sovereignty over the use of the high seas, but it packaged its refusal much more skilfully.

Prospects for Peace

There are two possible ways to achieve demilitarization in the Indian Ocean. The first is an agreement between the superpowers to limit their arms transfers and naval deployments in the zone. This is unlikely as the recent developments show and moreover any prospects for such agreements dwindled after 1978. The tendency

31. B. Vivekanandan *op. cit.* p. 240.

now is for each of them to try to strengthen its military capability more.

Second, the countries and peoples of the zone have a major responsibility to stop the arms race themselves. Their present division and the regional rivalries make them extremely vulnerable to continued exploitation by the global powers. The most obvious point to begin is in the revision of their relationships with the major external powers. Collective self-reliance remains a viable option. If the littoral countries could get together and agree upon step by step ways in which they would collectively attempt to limit the acti-

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vities of the northern powers, it might have some effect. The littoral nations can possibly impose considerable restraint upon the super powers and their allies especially if they act together. The problem is to devise methods for greater regional and zone cooperation. This can best be done if the littoral countries recognize that their power lies in limiting the access of the global powers to the region through minimization of internal rivalries and disputes.

Since British withdrawal from the east of Suez in 1968, the super-powers have been constructing tribute systems that link together the regions of the Indian Ocean. These powers, acting as major patrons, provide protection and other services for the third world client states in return for trade, resources and profits. To break out of the tributary system is obviously not simple and will involve many steps. But a beginning can at least be launched by coalition of nationalist forces against the abuse of their independence by the super-powers in the selling of expensive, often unusable and dangerous weapons, the granting of basing and servicing facilities and in some

cases the waging of war in the interests of the superpowers as pawns on the giant chess board. These have resulted in their direct contribution to the spread of superpower rivalry. So, these states must first realize that they have a vital role to play in this respect. In the long run the solution may be provided by socio-politico-economic development of these countries leading to self-reliance—individually as well as collectively each reinforcing the other. Before that however they should venture to minimise the width of their divergences on the issue and join efforts in a concerted manner for the sake of their shared general objective.