SUPERPOWERS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN:
THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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Superpower Interest in the Indian Ocean

During the mid-1960s, the US and the USSR began to identify the Indian Ocean as an area where their own military forces might be needed to promote and defend national interests, by the end of the decade. Both introduced naval forces to the Indian Ocean and sought supporting naval facilities. These developments were only marginally influenced by the activities of the other side in the Indian Ocean waterspread. While in times of crisis, such as during the 1971 South Asian war or the 1973 Middle East conflict, when surge deployments by one superpower affected the other, there is no pattern indicating a strategic or long-range pattern of action and reaction in the Indian Ocean waterspread itself. The US and the USSR were each in the Indian Ocean for its own sake and would be there even in the absence of the other. Their decision to deploy was influenced largely by perceptions of opportunities and dangers arising from inter- and intra-state tensions among the sub-regions bordering on the Indian Ocean. Both sides were particularly concerned that sea lanes remain open to protect important economic and strategic objectives.

The USSR, having achieved an approximate nuclear parity with the US by the late 1960s, was more confident that the US would not challenge Moscow's deployment of military force in Asia and Africa. By this time, the Soviet naval expansion program undertaken a decade earlier provided Moscow with the capability to project its power at long distances from the homeland. The tensions among Indian ocean littoral states provided Moscow (and still does) with opportunities to enhance its political influence at the expense of the US, Western European states, Japan and China, to reduce the opportunities of the Western powers to establish
forward positions closer to the Soviet homeland, and to establish for itself a role in the management of international conflict. Leonid Brezhnev in 1971 justified this new assertiveness by remarking to the Twenty-fourth Party Congress that the USSR would pursue "a line in international affairs which helps further to invigorate the world-wide anti-imperialist struggle" and "the active defense of Peace.""

The US for its part saw in the tension a potential threat to western access to critical resources, especially oil, and a threat to the unimpeded use of the sea. A naval presence would demonstrate a potential US capability to act on behalf of those interests. At the end of the 1970s, the US became alarmed by the prospect of the Soviet Union, in part through Afghanistan, exploiting the uncertain domestic situation in Iran to establish a government in Tehran closely allied with Moscow. The deterrent strategy devised to counter this possibility required establishing US naval predominance in the Indian Ocean and the acquisition of facilities for prepositioned equipment and for logistics and communications support. This buildup was not a reaction just to potential Soviet naval activities, but primarily to counter the challenge from Soviet land armed forces to the north of Iran.

Both the US and the USSR have worried about the other gaining a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean region. The USSR since the mid-1960s has expressed concern regarding a possible US deployment of submarines capable of launching nuclear ballistic missiles (SLBMS). The US development of communications facilities on Diego Garcia and at the Northwest Cape in Australia prompted the Soviets to charge that the US was about to do so. The US for its part worried about Iran falling within the Soviet orbit either by direct aggression or subversion. The fall of the Shah in 1979 shattered the assumption of the Nixon Doctrine that powerful regional states could defend the US interest in stability around the Persian Gulf. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan later that year brought home to the US that the USSR is the most powerful Indian Ocean hinterland state and that Moscow is prepared to use force against its southern neighbors to promote Soviet interests.

Contrary to much analysis regarding the superpower naval deployments to the Indian Ocean, the two countries have never been naval rivals. The US did not challenge the predominant position of the Soviet navy in the late 1960s and early 1970s since the Soviet naval presence was not perceived to be a threat to vital US interests. The US was confident that it could surge into the area during a crisis to neutralize the Soviets. The US decision to establish a continuous and predominant
naval presence in 1979 was not a reaction to any Soviet naval activity, but to a possible threatening Soviet movement over land. The USSR for its part has not sought to match the US deployment, though it has maintained naval force levels established in the early 1970s. A significant expansion of the Soviet Union’s Indian Ocean fleet would be a waste of resources. The USSR could not match the fire power of the US Navy, nor could it match the capability of the US navy for operating in the distant waters, though the USSR is expanding its projection capacity. Moreover, the US is likely to control the choke points to the Indian Ocean in any crisis. But the USSR does not need to strengthen its naval forces in the Indian Ocean to maintain the power equation adjacent to the northern rimland of the Indian Ocean. Moscow has powerful landbased forces both in Afghanistan and in the Trans-Caucasus. Indeed, the Soviet Union’s two most important military operations in the Indian Ocean region – the military backing to Ethiopia in late 1977 and early 1978 and the occupation of Afghanistan in late 1979 – were carried out with the fleet playing a marginal role.

Just as regional tensions have led the superpowers to dispatch military forces to the Indian Ocean (and to its hinterland), so it has also structured the responses of the littoral states to the military presence of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean. Many of the states around the Indian Ocean are unstable and poor. A consensus on fundamental economic and political questions is lacking in many of them, giving rise to the fragmentation of local power structures. Insurgencies and secessionist movements are a common phenomena. Internal ethnic and religious conflicts are divisive and often spill across national boundaries. Almost every subregion is affected by unresolved conflicts between neighboring states. The resulting instability has made the various subregions vulnerable to outside penetration.

While the governments in most of the littoral states are apparently wary of superpower military assistance, many of them have nonetheless sought superpower assistance either against domestic opponents or against subregional antagonists. They continue to do so because such help has often been perceived as vital to the recipient states’ domestic and subregional security.

However, this very success tends over time to undermine the influence of the superpower both in the subregion generally and within the recipient state. When one subregional state establishes security links with a superpower, its subregional rival will usually respond by seeking ties with the competitive superpower to balance the power equation in
the subregion. When a subregional state is more confident regarding its security, superpower patronage is no longer as important. A superpower which tries to entrench itself firmly in a littoral state runs the risk of triggering a counterveiling resistance from the other superpower, from the recipient state itself and from the subregion as a whole. If strategic objectives begin to diverge, friendship can quickly sour. Consequently, the superpowers have often found it difficult to sustain a close working relationship with the littoral states. In addition, the complex interplay among domestic and subregional forces in a highly unstable setting can quickly undo a relationship. Close ties can also unravel quickly if the recipient state determines that its patron has not provided the support expected – i.e., has not “fulfilled its commitments.”

Relationships have tended to persist when the recipient state believes that it is confronted by the long-term prospect of domestic and subregional challenges and that it has no other outside source of assistance. But even in this case, the littoral states feel uneasy about a dependent relationship with a superpower.

Neither superpower is likely to entrench itself by a colonial style occupation, since such a step is counterproductive in most instances (Afghanistan could become a prominent exception). Indeed, the littoral states generally do not fear such direct action. Rather, they worry most about superpower support of subversion and superpower support to an antagonistic neighbor. Nonetheless, the USSR as the near-by land power is far more likely than the distant US to maintain and expand its political control over neighboring states. Moscow’s proximity also makes it more likely to interfere in the affairs of its neighbors. The Soviet Union, and Czarist Russia before it, have a history of absorbing nearby areas in the name of national security.

Both superpowers have so far tried to manage their involvement in subregional affairs so that such involvement does not challenge the vital interests of the other. Among those interests are a mutual desire to keep sea lanes open for the transit of warships and commercial vessels. Both superpowers have also tended to use naval diplomacy only when convinced that the other side would not challenge it.

Some of the states in the various subregions have joined together into cooperative arrangements aimed at reducing intra-state tensions and thus make the subregions less vulnerable to outside penetration. They have not had much success, with the exception of the ASEAN states, so far on either score in large part because key actors in almost every subregion are not included in the cooperative arrangement. Indeed, the par-
ticipating states in some of these subregional groupings have major security problems with the non-participant state(s). Further, these subregional groupings have not developed an effective security relationship, again with the exception of the ASEAN states, because of wide differences of threat perception among the partners themselves.

Periodic calls for the reduction, or even elimination, of superpower naval forces and their supporting facilities have received almost total public support in principal from the Indian Ocean littoral states. The question of facilities is particularly emotive since it conjures up images of the colonial past. But in practice, many states want one or the other – or even both – superpowers to remain in close proximity, either as insurance against a hostile neighbor or against direct threats from the other superpowers. Some of these states have granted them the use of support facilities. As long as littoral states see the need for patrons to protect them against subregional threats, it is highly unlikely that any meaningful zone of peace proposal will get very far. Indeed, there is no consensus regarding the substance of the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace proposal first formally proposed in 1971. Many littoral states fear each other much more than they fear either the US or the USSR. Consequently, any arms limitation agreement in the Indian Ocean involving the superpowers will probably be the result of bilateral negotiations between the US and the USSR, and will address their perceptions of how the Indian Ocean should fit into an acceptable international balance of power.

The Superpowers Enter

For two decades after World War II, neither the US nor the USSR saw the need to use military power in the Indian Ocean region, largely because it was considered a region peripheral to their vital interests. In any case, the USSR did not have the capability to project power, and it also lacked strategic confidence to assert itself. The US for its part maintained a minimal military presence at Bahrain: three warships designated the MIDEASTFOR which signalled a generalized interest. The US relied on the British military presence as the guarantor of Western interests and was reassured by the Fleet at its Philippine base and ANZUS. During this period, the two sides were minimally involved in regional affairs.

The principal reason for the Soviet Union’s initial involvement in the Indian Ocean region can be traced to Moscow’s desire to counter the Western containment policy along its long southern flank, especially the
Baghdad Pact. After the death of Stalin in 1954, the USSR began to court several newly independent states with economic aid, arms sales and rhetorical support for non-alignment and national liberation movements. In 1955, Moscow sold arms, by way of Czechoslovakia, to Egypt, the first such post-war sale of arms to a non-Communist state. The sale was prompted by Western diplomatic efforts to establish the Baghdad Pact. The sale of arms soon became an important tool in building influence. It was a commodity in high demand by governments. Perhaps the most dramatic example of the use of arms to build influence was the Soviet decision to replace the US and Great Britain as the major arms supplier to India, after those two states declared a moratorium on arms sales to South Asia in the wake of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war.

By 1960, the USSR began to provide more direct support to potential friends. The first instance was the air lifting of troops supporting the beleaguered government of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo. In the Indian Ocean region, Soviet aircraft and ships between 1960-62 transported arms first for the Laotian government and then to the Pathet and Laos and the North Vietnamese. The USSR provided a small number of military advisors to President Sukarno of Indonesia in the late 1950s during his confrontation with the Dutch over Irian Jaya. The Soviet Union transported a small contingent of Egyptian troops to North Yemen in 1963 during the Civil War there. Not long after, the Soviets began to project its military power to demonstrate its support. In the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the USSR sent a squadron of TU-16 bombers and warships on visits to Egypt. As a result, the USSR portrayed itself, with some success, as a power whose military presence could deter the US as well as the regional adversaries of Soviet friends. One tangible payoff was the Egyptian agreement to provide the USSR with naval and air facilities.

The US for its part considered the Indian Ocean more peripheral to its interests than the USSR, whose borders were relatively close to it and which had a historic security interest in the Gulf. The US could be somewhat relaxed about development in the Indian Ocean region because of the strong British, French and Australian military presence there. Nonetheless, the US did supply arms to Iran, Pakistan and Iraq as part of the containment policy; the US also actively supported the creation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, though it was not a formal member of the Pact. On the other side of the Indian Ocean, the US, along with Great Britain, France, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand became participating members of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organiza-
tion signed at Manila in 1954. This agreement was initially proposed by
the US in response to the deteriorating French position in Indochina. The
British actively supported US involvement because it achieved its long-
standing aim to get the US committed to the territorial security of South-
east Asia. At the southeastern reaches of the Indian Ocean, the US was
also a member of the ANZUS Treaty, since signed by the US, Australia
and New Zealand. The exclusion of the British reflected Australia’s and
New Zealand’s apprehensions regarding a diminishing British interest
east of Suez. ANZUS also underscored the desire of Australia and New
Zealand to establish a security linkage with a powerful outside power
against potential threats from the north. (e.g., Indonesia, China and
Japan).

While both British interest and capabilities east of Suez were de-
clining, London remained the predominant military power in the Indian
Ocean region until the late 1960s, though the French maintained a
powerful presence in the area. It had primary responsibility for the
defense of Aden, the Persian Gulf, protectorates and colonies in South-
east Asia, East Africa, the Indian Ocean island as well as involvement in
the Baghdad Pact (transformed into CENTO in 1958) and SEATO. It also
had the right to use the Simonstown Naval base in South Africa. Great
Britain was relatively active supporting friendly regimes against
insurgencies and against regional foes. In 1957, it supported the Sultan
of Oman against an insurgency. In July 1961, the British swiftly
dispatched warships and marines to deter a threatened Iraqi move to
absorb Kuwait. Along with the US, it responded favorably to a Thai
request in 1960 for military supplies which might be needed to blunt a
possible incursion of Communist Lao troops across the Thai border, and
to exert pressure on the Communists in Laos to participate in a coalition
government. During the Chinese incursion into India in October 1962,
the British and the US again responded to requests for arms. After the
cease fire, the British government publicly announced that it would
respond sympathetically to an Indian request for troops against any
further Chinese aggression, and in early 1963 a Commonwealth/US
team visited India to consider the Indian request for an air umbrella. In
1963, the British also responded to the Sultan of Brunei’s request for
help against the rebels who had at least the rhetorical support of
Indonesia.

By 1963, it was clear that the endemic tensions around the Indian
Ocean would severely tax British military capabilities and become a
major financial burden. Indonesia had declared its confrontation policy
regarding Malaysia; there were disturbances in Aden and East Africa, and the political situation in Laos was deteriorating. Consequently, the British encouraged greater US involvement in the security of the region. Early in 1964, US and British defense officials discussed the feasibility of jointly establishing a number of staging posts in the Indian Ocean to complement the British bases at Singapore and Aden.

The Kennedy administration had a growing interest in taking a more active role in the Indian Ocean after the Chinese attack on India in late 1962. Besides responding to the Indian request for arms, the US had dispatched the U.S.S. Enterprise aircraft carrier to the Bay of Bengal to provide air cover to Calcutta, though the announcement of a cease-fire led to its recall. In 1963, the U.S.S. Essex and a naval task force participated in the first annual MIDLINK exercise with CENTO members. In 1964, President Johnson sent a carrier task force on a short-term mission to the Indian Ocean to underscore a US interest in the region.

Given this enhanced American political interest, the US navy began to look for a facility in the area that was both strategically located as well as relatively immune from nationalist pressures. With Chinese invasion of India in mind, the State Department supported the proposal for such a facility on the ground that the US needed military muscle to back diplomatic initiatives in South Asia. But a major constraint on any American presence in the Indian Ocean was the reluctance to spend large sums of money where US interests were not seen as directly threatened. Secretary of Defense McNamara, largely because of Vietnam, was initially wary of funding a facility because that could lead to a further stretching of the resources of the US Navy. He did agree to back a limited project when it became clear that the British would continue to play an active role. A survey was carried out in 1964 (and again in 1967) to locate site(s) suitable for a facility. In November 1965, the Secretary of State for Colonies announced that several islands in the Chagos archipelago, which includes the atoll of Diego Garcia, the eventual site of a US base, and certain other British-governed islands in the western Indian Ocean would get their own colonial administration (i.e., the British Indian Ocean Territory). In December 1966, the US and Great Britain signed a fifty-year agreement (with a provision for a 20-year extension) envisaging a modest communications facility. The US cancelled some $414 million in the British contribution to research and development costs for the Polaris missile system, which had been part of the British obligation toward costs associated with the missile under the arrangements between the US and Great Britain.
From 1964, the British military presence east of Suez came under increasing criticism within Great Britain. The Labor Party, returned to office in October 1964, had many members wary of spending the money necessary for maintaining a peace-keeping force in a region as unstable as that around the Indian Ocean. The problem was reflected in the 1965 White Paper reviewing the British defense program.

The US for its part was concerned by the prospect of a British pull-out both for strategic and diplomatic reasons. Secretary of Defense McNamara did not want an American military presence there both for domestic and diplomatic reasons. Secretary of State Dean Rusk wanted at least one major ally to share the global undertaking of the US. But the concern in Great Britain about the costs of such involvement was becoming more intense. A 1966 White Paper pronounced that Great Britain would not unilaterally undertake major operations of war outside of Europe, would not accept a defense obligation to another country unless it provided facilities, and would not itself maintain defense facilities in another country against its wishes. In addition, the base at Aden was to be abandoned when South Yemen became independent. On January 16, 1968, the British government announced that British forces would be withdrawn from East Asia and the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971 and that the British would retain no special capability to reenter (i.e., carrier forces) after 1971.

The reactions from the US and from many of Britain’s allies in the area were negative. However, the US for its part made no plans to fill the “vacuum”. Indeed, President Nixon, while on a tour of the South Pacific in July 1979, stated that the US, while honoring treaty commitments, expected regional countries to handle their own problems of defense. Given the rising domestic opposition in the US to overseas military operations, it is highly unlikely that any US administration would have accepted the British responsibilities. Moreover, the financial costs of such an undertaking were considered prohibitive. Moreover, no vital US interests were considered to be in such jeopardy that military forces were needed.

The Superpowers Enter – The USSR

Two months after the British announcement to withdraw east of Suez, the Soviet Union dispatched three warships (two destroyers and a cruiser) for a good-will visit to India. Two of these ships remained to visit
ports in Somalia, Pakistan and the Gulf before rejoining the Pacific Fleet in July. Later that year, in November, Soviet warships visited ports on the Horn of Africa, the Gulf and the Red Sea and East Africa, with the last recorded visit to Mauritius on April 6, 1969. A larger Soviet contingent returned to the Indian Ocean in November 1969 for port visits. Since then, Soviet warships have been present in the Indian Ocean on a virtually permanent basis.

While the Soviet ship visits in 1968 occurred soon after the British announcement of its east of Suez policy, the Soviet decision probably had little to do with filling a British "vacuum". The Soviet bureaucracy had undoubtedly considered such a move long before the British announcement on January 16, 1968. Indeed, at the time of the first set of ship visits, there was no "vacuum" at all. Rather, the major reasons seem to have been related to a desire to demonstrate Soviet power in pursuit of political objectives and to reduce the chances of a deployment of US submarines capable of launching nuclear missiles. A major deployment and an assertive use of Soviet warships at that time might have caused the British to alter their announced policy and/or give the US greater incentive to commit naval assets to the Indian Ocean, two developments Moscow wanted to avoid.

Regarding submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), such a Soviet deployment might have been intended both to make the Indian Ocean a less attractive location for such a deployment and lay the groundwork for a US-Soviet agreement to abstain from deploying nuclear weapons to the Indian Ocean region. Such a US deployment could bring Soviet targets within the range of US strategic weapons, while the Soviets would have no comparable strategic advantages. Indeed, Soviet policy since the mid-1960s has been to prevent the deploying of nuclear weapons to the Indian Ocean region.

With the introduction of successive versions of the US Polaris ballistic missiles in the early 1960s, the defense planners in the USSR probably calculated that the Arabian Sea had become a potential site for US SLBMs, particularly after the A3 version (with a range of 2500 NM) was tested (October 1963) and became operational (September 1964). The A3 could target important industrial sites in European Russia from the Arabian Sea; it would complicate Soviet ABM defenses; it would make more difficult Soviet ASW deployment patterns; and it would have the advantage of operating in an ocean whose bathythermal conditions (steep temperature gradients and a high salt content) would reduce the range and frequency of low-frequency ASW sonar equipment. Soviet
defense planners have looked closely for signs that the US was preparing to deploy SLBMs to the Indian Ocean, and they may have concluded that the US decision to upgrade its communications capabilities in the Indian Ocean signalled such a possible deployment. The US had reached an agreement with Australia in 1963 to develop a communications facility at the North West Cape and another agreement was reached with Great Britain regarding Diego Garcia in 1966. Both decisions came in the wake of the development of the A3 ballistic missile.

The regular Soviet deployments to the Indian Ocean starting in 1968 probably were intended in part to give the Soviet Navy area familiarization. Denial and interdiction were probably not missions of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean then (or now). The Soviets lack the capability to do the former. Carriers give the US sea control whenever the US seeks to impose it. Regarding interdiction, such an act would risk a war with the US, something which the Soviets have tried to avoid. Moscow would surely seek to avoid an area where their forces are so vulnerable. In addition, the Soviets could not long maintain an interdiction even were they to try to do so. The deployments may have been intended to give the Soviets a bargaining chip to get the US to the negotiating table to talk about prohibiting nuclear weapons in the Indian Ocean region. Indeed, the USSR has actively sought some kind of agreement to denuclearize the Indian Ocean. The first concrete proposal in this regard was a Soviet proposal in December 1964 (three months after the A3 missile became operational) that the Indian Ocean be declared a nuclear free zone.\textsuperscript{10} The proposal evoked little interest at the time, though it was the base on which some of its later efforts were based. Ironically, the only actual negotiations regarding disarmament of the Indian Ocean was an American initiative proposed by President Jimmy Carter soon after coming to office in 1977. The proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by the Soviets.\textsuperscript{11} The resulting Naval Arms Limitation Talks in 1977-78 even got to a draft agreement, but the talks broke off when the USSR stepped up its assistance to Ethiopia and increased the number of warships in the western Indian Ocean. The US concluded that such a build-up was inconsistent with the aims of the talk.

Despite Soviet concerns regarding US SLBMs, the Soviet deployment probably had much more to do with efforts to gain political influence among littoral states. The Soviet SLBM concern is highly speculative and the US has officially denied such deployment to the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{12} The closest operating base capable of supporting a US SSBN is Guam in the western Pacific Ocean and Rota in Spain, both such a great distance
that transit times to and from the Indian Ocean would significantly reduce the on-station time for each submarine. The newest Trident SLBM (the D-5) admittedly removes this constraint in theory, but it will also enable the US SLBM force to strike at the USSR from behind a protective screen close to the continental US.

US official analysts themselves did not believe that the Soviet naval mission had a strategic objective. William E. Colby, formerly the director of the CIA, testified before a Congressional committee in 1974 that “the activities of Soviet naval units there [in the Indian Ocean] have not indicated an anti-Polaris mission.” He probably meant to say that the Soviet deployment was not primarily for ASW purposes, for a separate study indicates that at least 20 percent of the Soviet ships present in the Indian Ocean in 1974-75 had an ASW capability. Indeed, in those same hearings, Colby speculated that the USSR probably would enhance its capabilities for landbased air reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare (both of which were done later). Still another reason for the Soviet deployment that may have been linked to the potential SSBN threat – and one mentioned in the Colby testimony – is that the USSR might create a force that could pose a counterthreat to Western oil routes if Moscow concluded that SSBNs had become a major security threat to the USSR. However, Dolby revealed that the lack of a significant submarine capability at that time suggested that interdiction was not a major Soviet objective (and probably still is not, considering the modest submarine deployment to the Indian Ocean). Any serious Soviet effort at interdiction would probably lead to a general war and Soviet war ships would then be quickly eliminated. Consequently, any long-range interdiction option would have to depend on land-based aircraft operating from the southern reaches of the USSR (or from airbases in Afghanistan which of course makes the removal of Soviet forces there a major US objective).

The Soviets undoubtedly would have deployed ships to the Indian Ocean even had there not been a US SLBM option. Having achieved nuclear parity with the US, the Soviet Union was no longer willing to play the role of supporting cast member and acquiesce in what it perceived to be an illegitimate Western monopoly of influence in an adjacent area. For example, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, at the 24th Party Congress in 1971, declared that thereafter no matter affecting the USSR could be settled without its participation. Warships in the Indian Ocean would strongly signal that interest.

What did the USSR have to gain from increased political influence? Diplomatic support against the West and the PRC is one. Certainly
another objective was to reduce the chances of littoral states granting forward bases to the US and enhancing the chances of acquiring bases of their own. Some analysts have speculated that there were important economic reasons for projecting Soviet seapower – protecting shipping routes with the Indian Ocean states, and the routes between the eastern and western ports of the USSR, as well as the expanding Soviet fishing fleet in the Indian Ocean. In my view, these were (and are) a much lower order of concern. A very small percentage of Soviet trade transits the Indian Ocean, and the USSR, unlike the West, is not heavily dependent on the oil and mineral resources from the Indian Ocean littoral states. The desire to keep sea lanes open for commercial and military traffic is shared by the US (and others) and the two powers have generally cooperated on this issue.

Still another reason for deployment – and one strongly advocated by Admiral Sergey Greshkov – is to gain influence among political elites who had just taken power from colonial masters or who were embroiled in national liberation struggles. Soviet commentaries of the time (and to a certain extent even now) expressed confidence that such elites would look to the “sacred center” of the socialist faith for guidance. Not only would this be gratifying in itself, but the USSR might expect such elites sympathetically to consider the interests of the USSR.

The growing instability among the regions around the Indian Ocean provided the USSR with several opportunities to use its naval forces for political purposes. For example, during the first set of port calls in 1968, Soviet ships visited Aden just after the outbreak of a rebellion against the government of President Qahtan as-Shaabi. While this visit had undoubtedly been planned earlier, Moscow’s decision to go ahead with it gave the USSR an opportunity to display its navy as a symbol of recognition and support to the as-Shaabi regime and thereby strengthen relations with South Yemen, which already was the recipient of Soviet arms. The Red Sea area is strategically important and the Soviets were also cultivating the new Sudanese government of Jaafar Nimeri in the late 1960s. Soviet arms and advisers were sent to Sudan in late 1969 to help the government overcome a rebellion in the southern Sudan. In late 1969, the Soviets again signalled support to a new regime by sending warships to Somalian ports after the October 1969 coup which brought President Mohammed Siad Barre to power. Soviet ships visited Somalian ports in 1960 and 1972, the first visit taking place ten days before an announcement that a counter-coup attempt there had been thwarted. In 1971, Soviet ships, already sailing toward the Indian Ocean,
trailed three days behind the task force built around the carrier Enterprise which sailed into the Indian Ocean during the Indo-Pakistani war, enabling Moscow to gain an enormous public relations coup in India at little risk to itself. The political gain was to strengthen the impression in India that the USSR was a steady friend that would provide a shield against threats from the US and elsewhere. Indeed, at the time, several Indian commentators argued that the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean was in India’s interests. To further improve the Soviet Union’s standing in South Asia, Moscow also offered its assistance to the new state of Bangladesh by offering to clear port areas made inaccessible by the fighting during the Indo-Pakistani war.16

Soviet ships in the spring of 1973 demonstrated support to Iraq regarding its border dispute with Kuwait. Four Soviet warships visited Iraq, as did Admiral Sergei Gorschkov, presumably to commemorate the Soviet-Iraqi treaty of friendship and cooperation signed the previous year. Gorschkov’s inclusion in the visit was not announced until just days before his arrival. Later that year, during the October Arab-Israeli war, Soviet pilots made 934 flights transporting some 15,000 tons of material to Arab states. Even more material was transported on Soviet freighters.17

After 1973, Soviet actions demonstrated that Soviet military leaders were more confident about the USSR’s ability successfully to exert military power in distant places. Defense Minister A.A. Grechko, for example, wrote in 1974 that “The economic and defensive might of the USSR and the other socialist states are seen by the working people of the whole world and all progressive mankind as reliable support in the struggle for freedom and independence, for the security of nations, and for social progress. The combat power of the Armed Forces of the fraternal socialist states restrains the reactionary circle of imperialism from unleashing a new world war and new, local military conflicts.”18 Sergei Gorshkov, in his Sea Power of the State argued that “of all the branches of the armed forces, the navy is best capable of operationally ensuring the state interests of the country beyond its borders.”19 Soviet military leaders had also discovered it could provide military support on a large scale to its third world allies without necessarily having to engage in combat, as earlier had been feared. This development seemed to confirm a new doctrine on the subject worked out by Colonel-General Nikolai A. Lomov in 1965.20 This new confidence was to show up in increased Soviet assertiveness in third world states.

A sign of this greater assertiveness was the Soviet decision in 1975 to
airlift Cuban troops assisting the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the scramble for power among several contending groups. The USSR also provided military equipment to the MPLA. A similar airlift occurred in 1977-78 when the USSR airlifted and sealifted military personnel (Cuban troops and Soviet military advisors) to the Mengistu government in Ethiopia. This assistance underscored the growth of Soviet lift capacity since the mid-1960s. This demonstration of power projection altered Western conceptions of Soviet power capabilities and intentions considerably. It was the proximate cause for the delay of the Naval Arms Limitation talks and probably jeopardized the US confirmation of the SALT II accords. Neighboring states were also alarmed by the magnitude of Soviet assistance.

Western apprehensions were further exacerbated by the deployment of Soviet warships on a regular basis in the South China Sea in early 1979 and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in late 1979. Regarding the naval deployment, Soviet warships first began using Cam Ranh Bay in March 1979 in the wake of the limited Chinese incursion into Vietnam the previous month. This deployment underscored Soviet backing of the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea the previous year. At the Cam Rahn facility itself, the USSR has constructed floating piers, installed an 8500-ton floating drydock and established a telecommunications center to support submarine and air reconnaissance in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. Since 1980, BEAR D and BEAR F aircraft have been stationed at the facility for air reconnaissance over the South China Sea. In November 1983, these were joined by TU-16 medium-range bombers. In April 1984, the USSR conducted an amphibious landing maneuver near Haiphong. Between 1980-84, the number of Soviet warships in regular operation in the South China Sea has increased from seven to 25. Thus, Cam Ranh Bay has become a center for rapid operations of the Soviet Fleet in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The first visit of the Minsk, a Kiev-class aircraft carrier, took place in September 1980 and gave the USSR a projective capacity which could be used to apply pressure for political ends. On October 31, the Minsk and several escort ships sailed close to the Sattiihip naval base in Thailand at a time that Thai Premier Prem Tinsulananda was in Beijing attempting to interest Chinese leaders in supporting the anti-Vietnamese Khmer coalition in Kampuchea.

The Soviet incursion into Afghanistan brought home to the US (and others) the perception of the USSR as the most powerful Indian Ocean hinterland power. Coming in the wake of the fall of the Shah, the US now
saw the initial Persian Gulf region as a potential target of Soviet machination. Moscow, however, clearly miscalculated the level of resistance to its action on the part of the Afghans and was probably surprised by the international response. While the Soviets applied a tremendous force to establish control in Afghanistan, first against an army with negligible capability for modern warfare and then against scattered bands of insurgents, the resistance has been sustained, forcing the Soviets to increase their force levels from some 50,000 troops in early January 1980 to over 125,000 troops in 1985. Nonetheless, Soviet forces are acquiring practical experience that could be useful in any future action in Iran. The air bases in Afghanistan could be employed to strike at targets in the Gulf and further out against US warships in the Arabian Sea, or even serve as staging areas for a surprise airborne assault.

**U.S. — Gradual Development of a Vital Interest**

In the decade between the British decision to withdraw from the Indian Ocean and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US tried to protect American interests in the Indian Ocean at a limited financial cost. While there were apprehensions that the British withdrawal would produce a power vacuum that could be exploited by forces hostile to the US, there was also a strong sentiment against an expensive commitment to a region considered peripheral to vital US interests. To protect US interests, two general approaches were used during the 1970s: (1) enhancing the capacity of pro-Western regional states to provide for their own defense, and (2) regulating competition with the USSR for influence. The refusal to get directly involved in the region was based on two assumptions: developments in the various subregions were not significantly susceptible to US military pressure; the USSR, despite its increased assertiveness in the region, did not challenge vital US interests in the Indian Ocean region.

Regarding Soviet policy actions, Moscow was careful not to challenge the US. It asserted itself in those situations where it was confident that the US would take no countering action. Even during the Middle East War of 1973 when the Soviets provided extensive assistance to the Egyptians, the USSR refrained from provocative shows of force that might have been considered a challenge to the US. Generally the USSR used coercive diplomacy and arms assistance (and proxy troops) to support sitting governments and to uphold the principle of inter-
national borders and territorial integrity. In the process, Moscow did gain access to military facilities in Egypt, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Yemen and Iraq; it was able to arrange for treaties of friendship with ten littoral and hinterland states. However, except for the special case of Afghanistan, none became satellites and none of the treaty partners looked at their ties to the USSR in an East/West context. Rather, the links to the USSR were intended to buttress the domestic position of the government or the subregional standing of the state.

The Nixon Doctrine announced at Guam on July 25, 1969 provided the theoretical framework that guided US policy in the Indian Ocean region during most of the next decade. That policy has three elements: the US would keep all treaty commitments; (2) the US would provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a state allied to the US; (3) the US would furnish military and economic assistance when requested in other types of aggression, though the US would expect the threatened nation to have primary responsibility for the required manpower to thwart aggression. In the Indian Ocean region, the US was most concerned with the Gulf region and the Nixon Doctrine had its most direct application there.

However, the US was on unfamiliar territory in the Gulf. This area had been a British responsibility. From the early 17th century, British interests in the Gulf multiplied and intensified to the point that British supremacy in the Gulf was recognized by the 1920s. As a result, the British developed close political relations with the area’s ruling families. The growing dependence on oil from the Gulf in the 20th century made the region an area of vital importance. Great Britain virtually dictated the defense and foreign affairs of the smaller littoral states and exercised political influence in Iran and Saudi Arabia. These interests were protected by maritime patrolling of the Royal Navy as well as by close British involvement in the internal security of several of the states. The US began to make an impact in World War II when US Air Force planes and crews shared British airfields. In the aftermath of World War II, the US influence in the two major Gulf states, Iran and Saudi Arabia, began to supplant the British. US pressure was responsible for the removal of Soviet troops from Iran in 1946. US companies had the major role in the oil development of Saudi Arabia. However, partly because of the Vietnamese experience, it was not possible for the US to take over the policing role once handled by the British. Indeed, the US did not want to take over the British role, and hoped that the status quo could be maintained by the two countries in the Gulf with whom it had the closest ties.
Iran and Saudi Arabia became the "twin pillars" that the US hoped would provide the regulation needed to maintain stability in the Gulf. The US pledged to assist Iran and Saudi Arabia in the development of their military in order to protect common security interests in the area. Saudi Arabia was important because of its possession of the world's largest oil fields, its paramount position among the states of the Arabian Peninsula and its emerging influence in Pan-Arab politics. Iran, with a much larger population, a more developed economy and a more powerful military, was the more significant of the two pillars in the maintenance of stability. Thus the US became closely linked to the Shah's efforts to make Iran a military power that could both stabilize the region and check any expansion of Soviet influence. President Nixon in 1972 offered to sell the Shah a massive quantity of arms and assured him of preferential treatment regarding deliveries and military advisers. With the rapid rise of oil prices in 1973, the Shah had the means to acquire vast amounts of equipment, and he did so. The Iranian role in crushing the Dhufar rebellion in western Oman in the mid-1970s was perceived as a successful application of the US policy. Several thousand Iranian troops, along with American-made F04 Phantoms and destroyers assisted the Sultan of Oman to put down the rebellion led by the leftist National Democratic Front of the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (NDFLOAG). In this case, Iran assumed the defense role of the British, who in 1970 assisted Oman to contain the activities of the NDFLOAG.

The USSR for its part did not challenge the Shah's efforts to exercise a predominant role in the Gulf area. Indeed, it lived rather amicably with Iran when it was a military partner of the US, even selling weapons to Iran. The overriding aim of the USSR then (and now) was to keep Iran specifically, and the Gulf states generally, out of the Western camp. This was reflected in the Soviet support for the 1975 Iran-Iraqi agreement that, among other things, brought an end to Iranian support for the Kurdish insurgency in exchange for an Iraqi clamp-down on anti-Iranian acitivity on Iraqi soil. Despite the arms support given to Iraq, Moscow's interests were not served by a continuation of hostility that could polarize the region and increase the chances of greater US involvement on behalf of the Shah. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the USSR also has tried to prevent close security relations from developing. Toward Saudi Arabia, the USSR has tried to demonstrate that Moscow is reliable on Arab issues, and that ideological and religious differences need not obstruct proper if limited diplomatic relations.

The other area of the Indian Ocean where the US had important and
long-lasting interests was Southeast Asia where the US had treaty obligations through SEATO to Thailand and the Philippines. But the related debacles in Vietnam and Kampuchea in 1975 cast doubt over how reliable the US was in case of security threats. By mutual consent of its Western and Asian affiliates, SEATO was dissolved in 1977. Two years later, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) vanished in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. While the US never seriously considered pulling out its navy from the South China Sea, several Southeast Asian states feared that it might do so in the wake of Vietnam. The US did pull out its military forces from Thailand in 1976, although Washington also opened talks with the Philippines regarding revised terms for the use of air and naval bases in that country. These negotiations were concluded in January 1979, the same month that Phnom Penh fell to Vietnamese forces. These discussions were evidence of a continuing US strategic interest which extended throughout Southeast Asia into the Indian Ocean. Indeed, the US ability to surge quickly into the Indian Ocean and establish naval supremacy depended on retaining the bases in the Philippines. In February 1979, President Carter, in a visit to Thailand, reaffirmed the US commitment to the Manila Pact of 1954. In July 1979, the meeting of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance with ASEAN foreign ministers underscored a heightened US interest in the whole of ASEAN in the wake of the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea.

US policy toward Southeast Asia conformed to the Nixon Doctrine, even after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. The US expected its regional allies to be militarily self-reliant vis-à-vis Vietnam. It also expected them to take the lead in handling regional security problems. The US generally followed their lead, for example, regarding the Kampuchea situation. The Soviet naval presence in the South China Sea did not directly threaten vital US interests, though it does provide Moscow with the ability to surge into the Indian Ocean more quickly during a crisis and to maintain better surveillance of US ships operating out of Subic Bay. The mission of the Soviet Navy, however, seems to be directed more toward China than the US. Moscow probably expects that China will deal more cautiously with Vietnam. The Soviet warships also give Moscow the capability of exercising coercive diplomacy in Southeast Asia, as it did in 1980 and 1985 with Thailand. But as long as the US maintains a powerful naval presence, far stronger than that possessed by the USSR in the South China Sea, the USSR is unlikely to challenge the US directly.

Until late 1979, the US did not have a continuous naval presence in the
Indian Ocean, nor did it possess naval and air facilities, except for the modest facilities for the MEDEASTFOR at Bahrain and the communications facility on Diego Garcia. Until the mid-1970s, administration officials did not look at the Indian Ocean as sufficiently significant to justify the expenses needed for enhanced facilities within the region. In 1971, Ronald I. Spiers, then Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs in the Department of State, listed *inter alia* major US interests in the Indian Ocean: concern for the growing Soviet influence around the choke point to the Red Sea; regional instability that might adversely affect Western access to Persian Gulf oil, and the continued right of free passage for US commercial and military traffic. He noted that "It is to our interest that countries of the area not pass under the control of forces hostile to us. Specifically, we would be concerned if Chinese or Soviet influence in the area extended to control of the water areas of significant parts of the littoral. *We do not envisage an immediate threat of this nature, however*".\(^32\) Robert J. Pranger, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) testifying along with Spiers added that the US was apprehensive about the reduced time that it would take for the USSR to augment its military presence in the Indian Ocean once the Suez Canal was reopened.\(^33\)

In his testimony, Spiers noted that Congress had appropriated $5.4 million in the FY 1971 Military Construction Bill to establish a communications facility on Diego Garcia.\(^34\) He pointed out that such facilities were not merely a response to increased Soviet naval activity in the Indian Ocean, but were needed to fill in a communications gap then existing in the south, central and northeast portions of the Indian Ocean which could not be covered by existing US naval communications stations. In response to questioning, he stated that the US planned to construct on Diego Garcia a small logistical POL storage facility to meet needs of the communications facility and an 8000-foot runway capable of handling C-130 and C-140 transport aircraft and a turning around basin in the channel of the atoll.

The record indicates that US officials had no serious plans for Diego Garcia beyond that of a very modest communications facility. The administration still considered the Indian Ocean and its littoral marginal to core US security interests, a view that did not alter until the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the 1973-74 oil embargo. For example, Joseph Sisco, Undersecretary of the State Department, told a Congressional committee in May 1973 that US interests in the area were "‘marginal’, that ‘the Nixon Doctrine is quite applicable – namely, we ourselves don’t want to become involved [in the area].’"\(^35\)
This complacent view regarding facilities was soon to change markedly. About one year after Sisco’s remarks, Rear Admiral Charles D. Grojean, Director of Politico-Military Policy Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, requested substantial additional funds for Diego Garcia from a Congressional committee as a support facility for the growing number of US ships in the Indian Ocean. He stated that such a support facility was needed “if we wish to have the capability to move or maintain our ships in the area without degrading our posture in the Western Pacific ...” The number of US ship days in the Indian Ocean increased from 1,246 in 1970 to 2,154 in 1973. (The comparable Soviet increase was from 4,930 ship days to 9,000 ship days.) In response to the uncertainty aroused by the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the US instituted periodic deployments from the Pacific Fleet (usually three per year) with every other deployment to include an aircraft carrier. In March 1975, President Ford declared that facilities on Diego Garcia were “essential to the national interests of the United States,” the first high-level statement to indicate that the “essential interests” of the US were involved. The Arab-Israeli war, as noted earlier, convinced many Americans that the US needed a facility of its own in case of another Middle East conflict, since NATO allies and others had refused to permit refuelings or overflights during that conflict.

However, Congress pressured the administration to delay any new construction at Diego Garcia until it had pursued all possible avenues that might lead to a naval arms limitation agreement in the Indian Ocean, and to report back the administration’s findings. The Ford Administration did report back to Congress in April 1976 that such talks would pose several technical problems, but that such problems were not sufficient to negate talks, a formulation that clearly indicated a major internal debate over the question.

The debate in (and out of) Congress in the mid-1970s regarding the funding of facilities on Diego Garcia revealed a lack of consensus over what US interests were in the Indian Ocean, and whether the Soviets, or the littoral states, posed a significant threat to US interests. Some argued that the Soviet navy in the Indian Ocean was inherently too weak or too vulnerable to threaten US interests. One critic of an expanded US naval presence pointed out that the USSR (at least in the mid-1970s) had a number of weakness vis-a-vis the US, among which were the lack of fixed-wing aircraft to provide protection to Soviet warships, Western control over most of the choke points (making wartime reinforcement to the Indian Ocean very difficult for the USSR), and the lack of reliable and
secure shore-based facilities. But the argument of most of those opposing a countervailing US presence went further than mentioning potential technical and logistical problems faced by the Soviet navy. Many argued that the display of Soviet force would inevitably fail to bring it political advantages, and the USSR would get bogged down in local controversies that would prove to be a heavy drain on the Soviet economy and Soviet prestige. Underlying this conclusion was the analogy to the US experience in Vietnam.

But the most significant arguments against a US build-up in the Indian Ocean was that military might could not significantly alter developments in the region. Again, the example of Vietnam tended to structure thinking on the subject. Still others argued that whatever local changes occurred would not, over the long run, threaten the US interest in raw materials and open sea lanes, because subregional states, regardless of how revolutionary, would not terminate trade that brought needed funds for development.

On the other side of the debate were those who argued that the Soviet presence was a real problem because of the Soviet effort to gain political advantages vis-a-vis the US. Soviet behavior since 1968 indicated that the Soviets were prepared to use their military forces to gain such advantages, inasmuch as the deployment of Soviet warships to distant waters strengthens the USSR’s image as a great power and thus elicits the appreciation of nations wanting to use a close relationship with the USSR to support their own foreign policies. The USSR would be encouraged to step up its activities to weaken the position of the West (and its regional friends), unless the US maintained a countervailing presence to induce caution on the part of the USSR. Even granting that the activities of the USSR were not an immediate danger, it has already established bases astride key choke points, which provide the USSR the capability to serve as the managers of affairs in the Indian Ocean unless the US possesses a countervailing presence.

Still another line of argument was that the US would find itself unprepared to respond to a future crisis unless it established facilities of its own at key points around the Indian Ocean. Such facilities could not be put together overnight and their absence would limit the US’s ability to respond to a crisis, whether from regional states or from the USSR. If the threat came from Soviet land forces exerting pressure on states along its southern borders, the US would lack a credible deterrent to restrain Soviet behavior.

Some proponents of US capabilities in the Indian Ocean argued that
Soviet submarines deployed along oil transit lanes in the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic already constituted a threat that required a countervailing Western response to ensure that the survival of enough tankers to keep adequate supplies of petroleum available if the Soviets should attempt to interdict them. Moreover, the establishment of Soviet facilities at key choke points (e.g., Bab el-Mandeb) called for a significant increase of naval forces to retain sea control in a crisis.

Along with the debate regarding US interests in the Indian Ocean and Soviet intentions, there was a related debate concerning the question of a naval arms limitations agreement with the USSR. Some worried that the instability around the Indian Ocean would suck in the superpowers, and produce a situation which could lead to a confrontation resulting in an expensive arms race. Advocates of such naval limitation talks, particularly in the US Senate, viewed a naval agreement as the best way to prevent a superpower arms race in the Indian Ocean while deployment levels were still at a modest level and thus limit the defense costs of the US.41 The Soviets, for their part, had raised the issue of mutual restraint in the Indian Ocean with Secretary of State William Rogers in the early 1970s, but Soviet lack of interest in pursuing this issue kept the question on a back burner until a US initiative in 1977. In 1976, the Soviet submitted at the UN a document on arms control that included a reference to the Indian Ocean. The document noted that the USSR was prepared to work with littoral states and other outside powers (i.e., the US) to reduce the military force levels in the Indian Ocean. But the US did not respond.42

The Nixon and Ford administration’s lack of enthusiasm for naval arms limitations talks changed when President Carter assumed office in 1977. He proposed early in his administration several new arms control measures; but the Soviets responded favorably only regarding an Indian Ocean naval arms limitation agreement, since such talks offered the obvious advantage of blocking the deployment of SLBMs by the US.43 President Carter alternately called for complete demilitarization44 and mutual restraint.45 The first talks were held in Moscow in June 1977 and the fourth and last at Bern on February 8, 1978. At that last round of talks, Paul Warnke, the chief US negotiator, stated that the US was abandoning its effort to reach a quick agreement because Soviet military assistance to Ethiopia violated the spirit of the talks.46 Before the suspension of the talks, the two sides had hammered out a draft agreement including a limitation on the size and frequency of their task forces deployed to the Indian Ocean, a limitation on their permanent
forces and facilities at the level in June 1977 when the talks began. At that time, the US had the three-ship MIDEASFOR and had been sending two to three task groups from the 7th Fleet annually to the area. The Soviet presence between 1975-77, on the average, was about 18 ships, roughly one-half combatants. During the talks, the USSR strongly advocated a ban on nuclear-armed ships and the closure of bases. The US side wanted to constrain the Soviets from acquiring additional facilities and to freeze the balance of air and naval forces there at the approximate level existing when the talks began.

The Naval Arms Limitation Talks (NALT) were virtually doomed to fail. They were not accompanied by political talks spelling out a mutually acceptable code of behavior. The US expected restraint on the part of the USSR in the Indian Ocean region, while the Soviets were in an assertive mood, prepared to exploit opportunities to enhance Soviet influence. In any case, the brief flourish of detente in the early 1970s was already wearing thin by the time the NALT were held.

In response to the Soviet naval buildup in the Arabian Sea that took place during the Soviet air and naval lift to Ethiopia, the US dispatched a guided missile cruise to serve with the MIDEASTFOR, and it conducted extensive surveillance operations in the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the connecting Strait of Bab el-Mandeb. A continued US naval buildup took place later that year in response to the deteriorating situation that led the president's national security advisor to refer to the region as an "arc of crisis." In November 1978, still another guided-missile cruiser, a guided-missile destroyer, a frigate and a guided-missile destroyer, a destroyer and a replenishment oiler entered the Indian Ocean. In March 1979, there was a major escalation with the deployment of the carrier Constellation as a show of support for North Yemen in its conflict with South Yemen. By April 6, the combined Indian Ocean MIDEASTFOR totaled 15 ships. Following the November 4 seizure of the US Embassy in Iran, still another carrier was deployed to the Indian Ocean and by the end of November, US naval strength had increased to 21 ships. The major jolt to the US, however, came with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in late December 1979. That event, coming in the wake of increasingly more assertive Soviet actions, left many in doubt about the long-range intentions of the USSR. Given the uncertainty in the region, many believed that Moscow would continue to push. The Indian Ocean had come to the forefront as the third area of US strategic concern.

However, the Soviet threat to US interests came from its capability to
threaten the states of southwest Asia from the Soviet Union itself (and after December 1979, from Afghanistan) and not from its naval presence, relatively modest and no real challenge to potentially countervailing US naval forces. The US could not possibly match the Soviet ground forces, but it could pose a sea-based deterrent to a land-based attack by the USSR. A naval buildup would signal to the USSR that the US would no longer give the USSR a relatively free hand in asserting itself in the Indian Ocean. Past experience had demonstrated that when the US has demonstrated an interest, the Soviets have become more cautious.

While the US has significantly increased its naval presence and established a number of naval facilities around the Indian Ocean since 1979, the level and quality of Soviet warship deployments since 1979 remained relatively constant. In March 1974, the Soviets, according to one report, had 1 cruiser, 7 other combatants (destroyers and destroyer escorts), 1 amphibious ship and 17 support ships. Ten years later, there were, during 1983-84, on the average, about 2-3 submarines, 8 surface combatants, 2 amphibious ships and 12 support ships. The relatively small number of surface combatants since 1974 (about 10 on an average in any given year) and submarines (2 for the same period on the average) suggests that sea denial and interdiction are not major missions.

The figures noted above do not include the relatively recent year-round deployment of the Soviet Navy to the South China Sea, where currently between 16-22 ships operate out of Cam Ranh Bay. This deployment involves, on the average, 2-4 submarines, 4-6 surface ships, 10-12 support ships, as well as TU95 BEAR and TU-16 BADGER reconnaissance and strike aircraft.

The USSR has maintained a continuous presence in the South China Sea since January 1979 and it was significantly expanded after the February 1979 Sino-Vietnamese fighting. One defense analyst, scrutinizing deployments there, concludes that the Soviet deployment in the South China Sea has an ASW emphasis directed largely against the PRC.

Acquiring facilities became an important objective after the USSR decided to deploy regularly to the Indian Ocean and it has made a concerted effort to acquire bases/facilities there. Their first overtures were to India and Pakistan in the late 1960s, but these were unsuccessful. However, Moscow was to be more successful later in countries which were in need of Soviet security assistance against either domestic or external foes.
The first successful Soviet foothold was Somalia.\textsuperscript{55} Before President Barre terminated access rights to the USSR in November 1977, the Soviet Navy used Berbera as a supply base (denied at the time by both sides, but obvious after the Soviets were ejected). The USSR added barracks, a repair barge, a floating drydock which permitted repairs and overhauling of naval ships as large as guided-missile destroyers. The USSR also constructed POL facilities and expanded the airfield near Berbera to over 12,000 feet in length, and able to handle all types of Soviet aircraft, including the TU-BEAR D long-range reconnaissance aircraft and the II-38 MAY. In addition, there was a missile handling and storage facility, and a communications station used for command and control of its Indian Ocean Squadron.

In South Yemen, the USSR now has access to port facilities at Aden, and the use of Aden International and Al Anad airfields. A large structure is now under construction in the mountains behind Aden by the USSR. According to one source, it is intended to house communications and command facilities for Soviet naval forces throughout the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{56} In Ethiopia, there is a Soviet-constructed naval base on Dahlak Island consisting of storage buildings, a floating drydock, floating piers and navigational facilities. The USSR reportedly has unrestricted use of this Ethiopian site, making it for all intents a base in the classical sense of that word. The USSR also stages reconnaissance flights from an airfield at Asmara. In Vietnam, the Soviets use airfield and port facilities at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay, which includes a floating drydock. The USSR also maintains “anchorages” at scattered locations in the Indian Ocean. Finally, it runs several airfields in Afghanistan which Moscow could use (though apparently does not do so now) for reconnaissance and ASW activities in the Indian Ocean.

The most significant Soviet challenge to US interests in Southwest Asia, however, does not come from its naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Rather, the threat comes from its air and ground forces located in the southern military districts of the USSR itself, and the potential use of airfields in Afghanistan, the closest (Shindad) located only 350 miles from the Strait of Hormuz. The US cannot match such land-based power. It is this asymmetry of land forces that has led the US to establish maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean vis-a-vis the USSR, and to establish a rapid deployment force and the US Central Command. This factor has also influenced the American (and others’) approach to the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace deliberations — that is, US interests would be adversely affected unless the larger question of Soviet hinterland
forces were brought into the discussions.

In this regard, the Soviet willingness to use troops in Afghanistan, which sent shock waves through Western capitals, and the uncertain situation in Iran (whose domestic stability might be severely strained in the wake of Ayatollah Khomeini’s death) forced American strategists to reevaluate the probabilities for Soviet intervention in Southwest Asia, either overtly or covertly. With its strong military potential along the frontiers of coastal states of the northwestern reaches of the Indian Ocean, and only a few hours’ flying time from the Persian gulf and the Arabian Sea, the USSR was suddenly perceived as the most powerful Indian Ocean hinterland state.

Stationed in the southern military districts of the USSR and facing Southwest Asia are 29 divisions, more than 800 tactical aircraft, and some 400 helicopters, not counting the troops operating in Afghanistan. According to one analyst, existing Soviet military transport resources enable the USSR to airlift two fully equipped airborne divisions (some 14,000 troops) to a country in the northern Gulf region in a matter of days. Alternately, it could lift the personnel of two motorized rifle divisions (24,000 troops) to join up with prepositioned equipment or transport a virtually fully equipped motorized rifle division. This capability might allow the USSR to seize key targets at some distance, though if challenged, their staying power would be limited.

While the units contiguous to SW Asia (excluding, of course, the troops in Afghanistan) are at a relatively low level of readiness, they are receiving more modern tanks, armored personnel carriers and other replacements for outdated equipment. Several air defense regiments equipped with older aircraft have been replaced by ground attack aircraft and airfields have been modified to handle them. The deep penetration FENCER (radius 1800 kilometers) is deployed in the southern USSR and could attack targets throughout Southwest Asia and other tactical aircraft could extend the range into the Arabian Sea by using airfields in Afghanistan. In addition, such long-range strike aircraft as the BACKFIRE (unrefueled combat radius of 5500 kilometers), the TU-95 BEAR (unrefueled combat radius of 8300 kilometers) and the soon-to-be-commissioned BLACKJACK (unrefueled combat radius of 7300 kilometers) pose a serious threat to US naval forces in the Arabian Sea.

Consequently, maintaining maritime supremacy and a credible rapidly deployable force constitute essential ingredients of the US tripwire strategy in Southwest Asia – getting forces quickly to the scene and placing the escalation burden on the USSR. Some defense analysts
argue that it is not now necessary for the US to station troops on a permanent status in forward positions (and thus avoid the adverse political fallout from such deployment) since the US is likely to have sufficient warning time to respond to Soviet action, were it to make the political decision to do so. More than 60 percent of the Soviet troops in the Caucasus, Transcaucasia, and Turkestan are in a Category III level of readiness, and it would take some time to call up reservists, and to prepare and equip them for intervention. The Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron as now constituted has a limited offensive capability. It would need to be reinforced extensively from the Pacific and/or Northern fleets in order credibly to challenge the US carrier task forces. Such reinforcement would take 18 days to a month. The availability of US lift capability is thus the key to deterring an actual Soviet attack. In addition, a 600-ship fleet with 15 carriers, the current administration's goal, would enable the US to deploy attack carrier groups to the Indian Ocean without the same degrading resources in other potential combat theaters, thus permitting the US to establish naval superiority necessary for keeping the sea and air lanes open for troop reinforcements from the US and elsewhere. Past Soviet behavior suggests that when faced with the prospect of a resolute US response, Moscow has drawn back from taking aggressive action.

US Builds a Permanent Presence

The United States' commitment to the Gulf was asserted in the so-called "Carter Doctrine," enunciated first during the President's State of the Union Address in January 1980. Carter warned the USSR that the US would resist, with force if necessary, any attack on the area. President Reagan subsequently affirmed this doctrine, adding two new features to it: he placed the Gulf issue within the context of global US-Soviet confrontation, and he pledged US commitment to the security of friendly states. Regarding the second feature, the President noted at the time of Congressional debate over the sale of AWACs to Saudi Arabia that the US would not permit Saudi Arabia to become another Iran. In line with this, the US administration, in its presentation to Congress, unilaterally made a general policy commitment to the security and integrity of Israel and other friendly states in the area.59

The groundwork for the present US Indian Ocean policy was essentially put together during the last several months of the Carter administra-
tion. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown in his final written budget report to the Congress in early 1980 stated that "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, its foothold in South Yemen and the Horn of Africa and the Soviet naval presence in the Red Sea, only make a volatile situation potentially more explosive." He concluded his introductory remarks with the comment that "The United States may well be at ... a turning point today. We face a decision that we have been deferring for too long; we can defer it no longer. We must decide now whether we intend to remain the strongest nation in the world. The alternative is to let ourselves slip into inferiority, into a position of weakness in a harsh world where principles unsupported by power are victimized and to become a nation with more of a past than a future."

Secretary Brown listed a number of steps already taken to meet the perceived threats to the oil-producing areas of the Middle East. The US had increased the number of surface combatants under the control of the commander of the MIDEASTFOR, from three to five ships, and the number of naval battle force deployments into the Indian Ocean from three to four annually. "We will need," he added, "to enlarge our presence further."

Most of those added measures had to do with providing the US a more mobile deployment force for use in a crisis threatening access to Gulf oil. The notion of a rapidly deployable force for use outside the NATO area can be traced to an order in 1977 of President Carter to the Department of Defense to establish such forces. In July 1979, Secretary Brown stated that the US was seriously considering an increase in its security presence in the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf region and declared that the "United States would commit our forces (there) if we judged our vital interests were involved." In August 1979, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began to take steps on the five-year program of the Department of Defense, a process accelerated after the seizure of the US hostages in Iran in November 1979. In early October 1979, President Carter announced the formation of a rapid deployment force and later in the month specific guidance was given the services regarding the establishment of a command structure. On January 4, 1980, administration officials stated that the government had decided to maintain a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean as a result of the Afghanistan and Iranian crises. On January 9, it was announced that the US would seek military facilities in the region. The Carter administration informed Great Britain on January 12 of its intention to enlarge the facilities on Diego Garcia.
Secretary Brown in his last Annual Report to the Congress noted that the US had already established a Joint Task Force "to plan, train, and exercise as well as prepare selected units of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force for deployment," that he had selected a Marine Corps lieutenant general to command the new Task Force (known by its acronym as RDJTF), had designated specific units as components of it. In addition, he stated that the US planned to fund the first 2 of 14 maritime prepositioning ships to be acquired over a five-year period, as well as the equipment for three marine brigades to be placed aboard these ships, and to develop and produce a C-X aircraft able to hold outsized cargo.62

Indeed, by the end of 1980, the Pentagon had already deployed seven prepositioned ships to the Indian Ocean at Diego Garcia, increased the carrier battle group presence in the Arabian Sea from one to two, made available 300 jet transports and 500 turboprop transports for airlift and had submitted for Congressional review the purchase of eight roll-on/roll-off freight and troop carriers that could reach Suez from the east coast of the US within 11-12 days. On the diplomatic front, the US very quickly worked out access agreements with Oman (April 9, 1980), Kenya (June 27, 1980), and Somalia (August 22, 1980).

The RDJTF came into existence formally on March 1, 1980 as part of the Readiness Command located at MacDill Air Force Base; it was established as a separate unified command — the US Central Command — on January 1, 1983. It is responsible for the region surrounding the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, as well as states on either side of this region. Within its geographic purview are:

**Northern Tier**
- Afghanistan
- Iran
- Pakistan

**Arab States**
- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- North Yemen
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- South Yemen
- United Arab Emirates
Congressional testimony suggests that USCENTCOM's geographic area of responsibility was determined by a judgment of that area which during a crisis brought on by a Soviet threat to US interests in Southwest Asia might require a deployment of US forces to counter such Soviet pressures. CINCPAC maintains its unified command within the Indian Ocean itself, though USCENTCOM has responsibility for the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. It also has responsibility for managing security assistance to the countries within its geographic purview.

Committed to the Central Command are:

**Army**
1 Airborne Division
1 Airmobile/Air Assault Division
1 Mechanized Infantry Division
1 Light Infantry Division
1 Air Cavalry Brigade

**Air Force**
7 Tactical Fighter Wings\(^b\)
2 Strategic Bomber Squadrons\(^c\)

**Navy**
3 Carrier Battle Groups
1 Surface Action Group
5 Maritime Patrol Air Squadrons

**Marine Corps**
1 1/3 Marine Amphibious Forces\(^a\)

\(^a\) A Marine Amphibious Force Typically Consists of a Reinforced Marine Division and a Marine Aircraft Wing (Containing Roughly Three Times as Many Tactical Fighter/Attack Aircraft as an Air Force TFW).

\(^b\) Includes Support Forces, Does Not Include 3 1/2 TFWs Available as Attrition Fillers.
c. Control, and Refueling Aircraft Make Up the Air Force's Strategic Projection Force.


Administration officials have consistently specified three threats to US interests in the Persian Gulf: direct Soviet intervention, regional aggression by one Gulf country against another, or other civil strife within one of the Persian Gulf countries. In the first several months after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, there was a tendency to focus on the first threat, though the latter two are now discussed as the more likely contingencies that would threaten US interests. Nonetheless, the large-scale commitment to USCENTCOM is intended to serve as a deterrent to a worst-case scenario – Soviet moves against the Gulf states. In the latter two cases, Congressional testimony by administration spokesmen suggests that the US hopes to reduce the dangers of such threats by providing friendly states with the means to protect themselves, by encouraging greater regional cooperation – and using direct US force only as a last resort and only when invited to do so.63 General Kingston told a Congressional committee that “I believe in most cases it would be inappropriate for US combat power to be associated with the most likely threats.” Rather, “The most likely situation that I envision is that the United States would be asked to assist a friendly nation by providing communication and in-country transportation, namely, tactical air.”64 Defense Deputy Secretary Frank Carlucci seconded this in separate testimony by noting that “we hope to rely on friendly states to provide military forces (to meet the latter two crises).”65

The arms sales and assistance from the US to littoral states, as explained by executive officials in Congressional testimony, seem to constitute a much-modified version of the “Nixon Doctrine” – providing states the means to resist Soviet aggression and the confidence to resist Soviet blandishments. The statistics show that Saudi Arabia and Egypt, of the states within USCENTCOM area, are by far the largest recipients of US arms deliveries since 1980, again underscoring the importance that the US attaches to these two states. Arms deliveries to the seven largest recipients of US arms are (figures in thousands of dollars for 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983 respectively): (1) Saudi Arabia: 1,151,752;
To be effective, analysts argue that a response to a crisis in the Indian Ocean would probably have to be achieved within a matter of days by smaller, highly trained units. There was considerable skepticism on this score when the rapid deployment scheme was announced, but there is more confidence now that it can be done. After the Bright Star-82 exercises (which involved the transport of over 6000 US troops to Egypt, Sudan and Oman), General Kingston noted that with advance notice (4-5 days) he could expect to get an airborne brigade "on the ground" in the Persian Gulf region with 48 hours, and an airborne division within 10-14 days.66

The major objective of the USCENTCOM, according to administration spokesmen, is to serve as a deterrent — especially a deterrent against Soviet action — and decisions about its size, combat equipment and mobility are influenced by its expected impact on the international behavior of other states and groups. Hence the emphasis on lift capacity, on prepositioning and on demonstrated capability of moving troops (through regularly scheduled exercises) to crisis areas to demonstrate to others that the US could, if needed, move quickly to meet one of the three contingencies noted above. There is little disagreement that from a military strategic standpoint (though not necessarily from a political one) the deterrence objectives of USCENTCOM would be better served by a permanent military presence closer to the Persian Gulf than Diego Garcia. However, the countries of the region are presently reluctant to grant the US the right to station permanently troops on their soil.

Implication of Recent Indian Ocean Events

Since the tumultuous events of 1979 and 1980, the Indian Ocean situation has become far less threatening to US interests. First, the perception of a worsening East/West power balance has been reversed, which is bound to make the USSR more cautious. Indeed, the Soviets since 1980 have tended to assume a lower profile than previously in the Indian Ocean region, with the prominent exception of Afghanistan. One
sign of greater selfconfidence in the Gulf vis-a-vis the USSR is the recent decision of Oman, perhaps the Gulf state closest to the West, to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the only Arab Gulf state to do so except Kuwait. In the Gulf area, the dire predictions of political chaos and international oil shortages have not occurred. The international oil market has changed from scarcity to surplus. The war between Iran and Iraq had neither led to an interruption of oil supplies nor spilled over into other Arab Gulf states, as earlier feared. The fear of the Iranian revolution spilling over into the other Gulf states has proved to be exaggerated. Indeed, the domestic situation in the various Gulf states has been relatively stable. At the other side of the Indian Ocean, the ASEAN states have remained united in their opposition to the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, and the Vietnamese have not attempted to make a military push into Thailand. Along the east coast of Africa, the various states seem increasingly anxious to strengthen their economic and political links to the West, in part because the USSR has little to offer them economically. The USSR has acquired no new military facilities in the Indian Ocean region, though the Soviets have been permitted to develop naval facilities in Kampuchea. A visible sign of this lowering of tension is the reduced number of task forces (only one at a time now) operating in the Indian Ocean.

The US administration for its part has received general domestic support regarding the projection of power into the Indian Ocean to deter further Soviet adventurism. US diplomatic relations with the various states around the Indian Ocean have generally become warmer. The subregional states in the Gulf area in Southeast Asia are cooperating more closely to find solutions to their security problems. This suits US interests since instability not only threatens trade, but offers to the USSR opportunities for subversion and for developing close ties with states dependent on it for security assistance. Yet, the region remains potentially unstable and unforeseen crises could emerge quickly, which makes efforts to reduce the chances for conflict a matter of continuing importance. This leads us to a description of the proposal (or proposals) for an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace.

The United States and the Indian Zone of Peace Proposal

The Indian Ocean Zone of Peace (IOZP) proposal has not been a major factor in American perspectives of the incredibly complex and diversi-
fied politics of this multiregional area of the world since the resolution was first introduced by Sri Lanka in 1971. The reason for this is that the IOZP, in the form proposed, has never been a viable proposition in real geopolitical terms for either the Indian Ocean states or the external powers, whatever its intrinsic merits may be, nor has it been the subject of serious and thoughtful analysis by its advocates whose interests are most affected in a variety of ways. Perhaps this conference in Dhaka will make a significant contribution to a process under which the countries and people most involved will undertake a serious consideration of the IOZP concept in more precise and specific terms, both as separate political entities with national interests to protect and as part of broader regional communities in the Indian Ocean area.

It probably is inaccurate to talk in terms of a US "policy" toward the IOZP formula since Washington has never considered it necessary to define one. There can be little doubt that the American response to the IOZP as originally proposed would, under existing circumstances, be negative. But that is because the IOZP proposal has not, as yet, been subjected to the normal processes of bargaining, compromise and consensus that is integral to peaceful approaches to the negotiation of international issues. To comprehend US views on this very elusive, if attractive subject, it is also necessary to look at more fundamental aspects of international politics in the Indian Ocean. For this reason, we will commence with an analysis of basic U.S. objectives in the Indian Ocean, and then relate these to the IOZP proposal as best we can.

Basic Objectives of US Policy

Generalizing about American foreign, security and economic policy in an area as diverse and heterogenous as the Indian Ocean, bounded by three continents, is not a simple proposition as a constant stream of new development demands novel responses. There has, however, been one common theme in all US policies in this area since at least the 1960s and that has been support for the maintenance of national, subregional and regional stability throughout the Indian Ocean and adjacent hinterland areas. While the United States can control its enthusiasm for some of the regimes in the littoral states and is critical of their domestic and foreign policies in certain basic respects, it is not attracted by the processes of destabilization and disintegration that are readily available for exploitation in some of these policies as these are perceived as counterpro-
ductive to broader US objectives in the region and, over the longer run at least, against American interests. For instance, the Khomeini regime in Iran, as one might expect, elicits very little sympathy from Americans despite the hardships imposed on the Iranian people by a long war and economic mismanagement. Nevertheless, the disintegration of the Islamic system of governance through defeat in the war with Iraq or internal upheavals would be viewed as potentially catastrophic in its consequences far beyond the borders of Iran, and thus best avoided. Similarly, we see no benefits for the US or our friends in Southwest Asia in the defeat of Iraq or the overthrow of its government despite its history of a cautious pro-Soviet tilt and its continued dependence on Moscow for military assistance. For the United States, a quick ending of the seemingly endless conflict on a compromise basis that called for no drastic changes on either side would be, on balance, the best of a rather bad collection of possible solutions.

Let us clarify one point, however. US support for stability is not necessarily, as is sometimes alleged, support for the status quo. Changes in political systems that are consequences of domestic political developments do not, in themselves, constitute a destabilizing force. Quite often, the opposite is the case. However, changes imposed on a country by outside forces, such as has occurred in Afghanistan and Kampuchea in which the governments that came in with the invading armies still lack a popular or organizational base to govern these countries in their own capacity, are another matter. Wars of National Liberation against these foreign invaders and their domestic puppets will, of course, have the sympathy of the US since stability can be restored only through the establishment of a government that has at least the tacit support of the mass of the people— not just a few urban intellectuals and professionals kept in power by alien armies.

The search for a broad degree of stability in the Indian Ocean that would allow the states on the littoral to concentrate on more important problems of economic, political and social development has not been a resounding success. Most of the major wars that have erupted since 1945 and some of the most dangerous current threats of conflict involve the Indian Ocean littoral states. There are three ongoing conflicts—the Iran-Iraq War, Afghanistan’s struggle against “foreign forces” (to use the UN’s favorite ambivalent terminology), and the Vietnam-Kampuchea struggle—in which both neighboring states and the major external power, including the Soviet Union and China, are deeply and directly involved. There are also conflict-prone situations along the eastern
African coast, from the continuing of now low-level hostilities between Ethiopia and Somalia to the increasingly explosive situation in southern Africa.

While this may be of only limited comfort to the littoral states, so far the wars in the Indian Ocean region have not been instigated by external powers nor have they involved dangerous confrontations between the major external powers – which in the Indian Ocean in 1985 include France, Britain, Japan, and China as well as the Soviet Union and the United States. There is some concern, however, that it may become more and more difficult to keep the confrontations between the major external powers limited and indirect. Perceptions of their interests and the scope of their own military involvement in the Indian Ocean has expanded over the past two decades, though it is still very limited in comparison to their allocations of forces to the Atlantic, Pacific, and the Mediterranean. But what is perhaps an even greater complication for the external power interrelationships are their important political, economic, and security ties with littoral states, some of which have a long history of hostile relationships with each other. As recent events have shown, the capacity of the external powers to prevent conflicts in the Indian Ocean littoral is very limited – e.g., the inability of the Soviet Union, United States, and China to dissuade India from its war decision in the 1971 dispute with Pakistan over Bangladesh.

It is possible, of course, for the external powers to refrain from policies and programs that would assist a regional state in launching either direct or indirect aggression against a neighboring state. This is the objective of US policy in South Asia. Washington has sought quiet exchanges with New Delhi on aid to the Al Zulfikhar terrorists in Pakistan and Tamils in Sri Lanka and, in a similar fashion, with Islamabad on aid to Sikh extremists in India. Another example in Africa is the US policy on the Ethiopian-Somalian conflict, after the 1976-77 turnabout by the Soviet Union, in which the US has sought to provide Somalia with the security it requires against Ethiopian aggression, but not enough to launch incursions of its own into the disputed territory. The rather modest US military sales program to Pakistan ($1.6 billion over six years, 1981-87, or about 25 percent of what India acquired in military supplies from abroad in the same period) was also intended to provide Pakistan with a greater sense of security against external aggression without at the same time providing it with the sense of an enhanced capacity to "redo 1965," as some Indian leaders apprehend.

As the United States has learned in the past forty years, the conflicts
between the littoral states are not subject to control or even manipulation by the major external powers, in most instances at least, and thus it is difficult to predict the impact of these conflicts on their interests. What seemed to be clear cases of advantages and/or setbacks for the outsiders can be reversed in a short period — e.g., Bangladesh from 1971 to 1976 in which the comparative status of the Soviet Union and of the United States and China changed quite dramatically — and Vietnam could well be another example on an even greater scale in the next decade.

Given these circumstances, and the uncertainty of the results over the longer ranges, it would be reasonable to assume that the external powers share an interest in discouraging conflicts in the Indian Ocean and encouraging both internal and international stability. This is the case for the western powers, and now China, but unfortunately the Soviet Union finds itself in a difficult position in this respect because of its direct involvement in Afghanistan and, more indirectly, in Kampuchea. This complicates the task of achieving a consensus among the external powers on avoiding as far as possible policies that encourage destabilization and conflict in the Indian Ocean region — an obvious prerequisite to any Zone of Peace agreement. It will be interesting to see if there is more flexibility shown on the Afghanistan and Kampuchea issues by the Soviets under their new dynamic young leader or if Moscow’s positions will continue to be an insistence that its client regimes in Kabul and Phnom Penh be accepted and recognized and that everyone cooperate in crushing the national liberation movements in both countries.

Another potentially important development in the region that could have a positive impact on an IOZP is the establishment of regional cooperative structures in which membership is restricted to the countries in a certain region and external powers are excluded, at least from direct involvement. The most notable and successful of these is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which has emerged as an effective institution for evolving consensus-based policy responses on political, economic and security issues in Southeast Asia and beyond. While it may be correct to say that ASEAN has had a pro-Western tilt, this is due largely to two factors: (1) a convergence of interests, up to a certain point at least, on Kampuchea, and (2) the cooperative economic relationship which has moved far beyond the simplistic "dependency theory" of the 1960s. In fact, ASEAN is very assertively independent in defining its position on regional or global issues and argues its case with all outsiders, including the United States, in sensible, pragmatic terms with a minimum use of jargon.
Other regional organizations in the Indian Ocean emerged in the 1980s. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) formed in 1981 as a political and economic cooperation organization, has been obliged to focus its attention heavily on security cooperation because of the Gulf State’s concern about the seemingly never-ending Iran-Iraq War. The Indian Ocean Commission, with the island states of Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros as core members, is of particular interest since it includes regimes that are sometimes defined as having slight tilts in the opposite direction in East-West politics. In the Subcontinent, after three and one-half decades of independence, the first tentative steps were taken – on Bangladesh's initiative – in the establishment of the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) forum in 1981. Despite reservations on all sides about the proper role and functions of SARC, the organization has been institutionalized in a careful and sensible manner. The first Head of State SARC meeting, scheduled for Dhaka next month, will mark, hopefully, further strengthening of an organization that is exclusively regional in composition and immune to external influence and manipulation.

For the US, this process of creating regional institutions that enhances interactions and cooperation between the countries of the region and reduces the proclivity, so evident in the past, for one regional state to look to a major external power for assistance in a dispute with another regional state is a major contribution to peace and stability in the Indian Ocean littoral and adjacent areas. It is understood that a regional organization would be unlikely to agree to a military alliance or any very precisely defined security relationship with the United States (except under the direst of circumstances, such as intervention in the region by another external power on a scale that seemed to require counter-intervention). This has been the position of ASEAN in Southeast Asia and of the GCC in Southwest Asia, and this is not a serious problem for the US government. It is understood that the US must be more imaginative and innovative in encouraging regional security and economic cooperation, and that it is in American interest to avoid complicating in any way the growth and development of independent and viable regional institutions.

But perhaps the most important aspect of American – and Western and Japanese – policy in the Indian Ocean over the longer term will be efforts to expand and improve political and economic relations with the littoral states as part of our effort to encourage stability throughout the region. This includes efforts to establish and/or expand relations with the regimes in the region that are usually defined as having a pro-Soviet tilt.
with the obvious exceptions of Afghanistan and Kampuchea, of course. There are a number of factors that motivate Washington on this issue, including an unwillingness to accept a situation in which these countries are totally dependent on the Soviet Union for economic assistance if that is not satisfactory to them. But more important once again would be the reduction in tensions and hostilities that could result. The Soviet Union interacts politically and economically with all of our good friends in the Indian Ocean; it seems appropriate that we should do the same with the good friends of the USSR as well.

The United States and the IOZP

There are several aspects of the IOZP proposal, both explicit and implicit, which require amplification and definition in reasonably precise terms that meet the legitimate needs and interests of both littoral and nonlittoral states before it can be properly evaluated by the government of the United States. If conflict resolution and a stable and peaceful society could be achieved by a formal adherence to a set of noble principles, the world would have attained a state of eternal peace and progress decades ago. Unfortunately, it is the small print in the commentaries on such declarations that are decisive in their implementation, and as noted, these questions have not yet been mentioned, much less addressed in a satisfactory manner by advocates of an IOZP. Let us look at some of these issues from one American perspective.

The United States has assumed in the period since World War II a wide range of security arrangements with a number of countries in the Indian Ocean, some of which have evolved and changed over time but which are still perceived by both sides as in their interests and are, thus, continuing commitments. This is also, of course, the case for other major external powers, in particular the Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom, but also China in a more indirect fashion through its unilateral guarantees of assistance to Thailand against Vietnamese aggression and by its quarter century of friendly ties with Pakistan.

The IOZP in no way addresses the very important and difficult issue of security relationships between littoral states and external powers. If the Indian Ocean would become a true zone of peace under the IOZP proposal, this would be of limited importance. Under the formula proposed, however, the IOZP excludes only the external powers from using military force against the littoral states by sea (not by land, as the
USSR and China can do), and places no limitations, except possibly moral injunctions, on the power and capacity of the littoral states to launch wars against each other. Since most of the littoral states entered into security relations with one or the other external power because of perceived threats from larger and more powerful neighboring states, it is difficult to understand how the IOZP serves the interests of what are usually the weaker, more vulnerable littoral states in conflict-prone situations. Indeed, this has been the experience of the US government—and presumably the other major external powers—with the Indian Ocean states with which it has security relations. After each vote in an international forum supporting the principle of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean, the US is usually quietly informed by those countries with which it has security arrangements that (1) their vote did not signify any interest on their part in changing or terminating their security relationships with the US, and (2) that under no circumstances do they want the withdrawal of US military from the Indian Ocean, at least at this time.

What can the United States do under such circumstances except reassure our friends and allies that we will abide by our commitments and maintain on either a regular or immediately available basis a sufficient military force in the Indian Ocean to provide some sense of reliance on our commitments. To accept the basic principle of the IOZP in its original—and present—form the US would, in realistic if not formalistic terms, have to end the security relationship with the littoral states except possibly for the profitable military sales programs involved. This would, of course, be welcomed by some other littoral states and might even improve our relations within the region as a whole. But this would be at the price of the states with which we had security arrangements and, in our view, they should have the greater voice in determining the future of these relationships. If they support an IOZP in a decisive vote on this issue (assuming that such a vote was possible without the cooperation of the major external powers), then the US would have to consider that as indicative of a desire on their part to end the security relationships with the United States, and we would have to act accordingly. But the pro forma “hooray for peace” votes in international forums on the IOZP that are, at best, symbolic gestures are interpreted by the US for what they are. No doubt Washington would prefer to avoid such votes if possible, given the proclivity of some littoral states to focus attention almost entirely on American forces in the Indian Ocean and ignore those of other external powers, thus giving these exercises a totally unjustified anti-American slant. And on this, it would appear that some littoral states
share our view these days, though of course for reasons of their own. Obviously it is now more clearly understood throughout the region that there are both gains and losses in any sloppily defined IOZP system.

Another important aspect of the IOZP proposal that has caused concern in the US, Western Europe, Japan and the Pacific area involves the protection of the lines of communication through the Indian Ocean. This was of vital importance in the 1970s when both Europe and Japan were heavily dependent on Indian Ocean littoral states for their primary source of fuel – oil. That situation has changed substantially in the mid-1980s with the development of oil resources in Europe, Latin America, Alaska and Canada, and the west coast of Africa, as well as increased utilization of other sources of energy. Nevertheless, access to oil, trade with the littoral states, and rights of transit continue to make ready and unobstructed access to the Indian Ocean a basic objective of all external powers, including the United States and the Soviet Union.

There are some possible problems in this respect that are derived from the easily obstructed and intersected channels of communication between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific and the Mediterranean. There is, of course, the much longer alternative routes around Africa and Australia which can be used (which in the current geostrategic context are susceptible to control by the two states in that region, Australia and South Africa, unless, of course, the naval forces of the major external powers have access to the Indian Ocean to keep the channels open, a factor which does not seem to have been considered by the proponents of the IOZP). Within the Indian Ocean itself, there have been serious threats to vital channels of communication through the Red Sea (the cooperation of the United States and the Soviet Union in mine-cleaning in this area was one example of shared interest between these two external powers) and the Straits of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. The littoral states at this time have a reasonably effective capacity to close these channels of communication and the equally vulnerable straits between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific but only a very limited capacity to keep them open without external assistance. The United States government, thus, saw no option other than to make its forces available for these purposes in certain critical strife-ridden areas in the Indian Ocean, in cooperation with the littoral states as far as possible, and also with the French, British, and, under the one occasion noted, the Soviet Union. This is considered vital to the interests of the US, the Western powers, Japan, etc., but also to the interests of many littoral states.
One other possible complication with respect to narrow channels of communication between bodies of water that could become of some importance to the IOZP proposal is the new "Law of the Seas" rules concerning territorial water rights in such straits. The US has been insistent on maintaining free and unhindered rights of passage through such waters under normal conditions at least – another issue upon which the Soviets were in broad agreement with the US – but the text of the regulations favors the rights of the states bordering the straits. This is another factor that makes the maintenance of a naval force in the Indian Ocean seem necessary to the US government if it is to have in place on time the force required to protect the interests of the United States and allied countries in a crisis situation.

There are several questions that have been raised with respect to the IOZP proposal by littoral states themselves which are controversial within the regional community and which are of concern to the United States as well. One of these is the proposal to add "nuclear-free" to the IOZP resolution, thus barring not only the development of nuclear weapon systems by any littoral state but also, presumably, nuclear-powered naval vessels. In the extreme form in which the IOZP resolution is now framed under which the naval forces of external powers would be totally banned from the Indian Ocean, this would be only of academic interest to the United States. But on the assumption that a modified IOZP resolution would merely limit the size of the external power's naval forces in the Indian Ocean and would also guarantee the right of transit for their forces through the Ocean under specified conditions, a "nuclear-free" clause would not be acceptable to the United States. It is interesting to note that on this issue at least there is a convergence of interests between the US and India, which has expressed its strong opposition to any anti-nuclear principle, while the Soviet Union finds itself in the unusual company of the other states in South Asia, most of which have expressed approval of an anti-nuclear attachment to the IOZP resolution. Nuclear politics can make strange bedfellows.

Another controversial proposed addition to the IOZP is a clause that would strictly limit the size and capacity of the naval forces of the littoral states so that dominance of the Indian Ocean by external powers would not be replaced by the dominance of one or two of the regional powers. This is considered necessary if the Indian Ocean is going to become a zone of peace in which the principle of national sovereignty and independence has any real meaning, particularly for the very small and exposed island states. Obviously this modification of the IOZP does not arouse
universal enthusiasm throughout the region.

The US could take with some sense of satisfaction a "what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander" line in view of the strong and persistent criticism of the United States on the Indian Ocean issue, by India and some other powers, but that would be small-minded and unrewarding. A more sensible approach in our view would be a reconsideration of the earlier American proposal for limiting the military forces of external powers in the Indian Ocean. But this should be accomplished on the understanding that these powers have legitimate political, economic and security interests in the region that, at this time cannot just be abandoned. In particular, security interests of the US vis-a-vis the USSR will remain an important consideration as Washington evolves a policy regarding the Indian Ocean. Any meaningful IOZP must consider a code of conduct for the superpowers, a proposition that the USSR has so far been unwilling to give serious consideration. Its proposals to date, mainly enunciated for propaganda purposes, would focus on the naval forces of the US while ignoring the land-based forces of the USSR.

Notes

4. The UK, Australia and New Zealand had earlier agreed to coordinate defense planning under the ANZAM arrangement, but this was overshadowed after the creation of ANZUS.
6. Ibid., p. 55.
8. Jukes, Ibid., page 13, notes that a guided missile cruiser and a destroyer, two submarines and two or three auxiliaries participated in this visit. An additional Soviet destroyer paid port visits during June-August 1969.
9. Jukes notes that during the first four years of the Soviet fleet presence in the Indian Ocean – 1968-71 – there were 6-10 Soviet warships in a single year, along with 2-7 submarines and 6-12 auxiliaries.
10. This proposal was included in a set of suggestions contained in a memorandum sub­mitted for consideration to the U.N., “On Measures for Further Easing International Tension” (see Soviet News [London], December 1964, pp. 145-147).

11. Indeed, it was the only disarmament proposal that they so endorsed.

12. The USSR tactically admitted non-deployment in the 1977-78 Naval Arms Limitation Talks when it agreed in principle to a freeze. The Soviets had entered the talks largely to forestall a SLBM deployment.

13. US Senate, Committee on Armed Forces, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, July 10, 11, 12, 18, 1974, p. 106.


23. Ibid., p. 66.


26. Egypt and Somalia were to terminate unilaterally both the treaties and the Soviet access to military facilities.

27. For a discussion of the Doctrine, see A. Hartley, American Foreign Policy in the Nixon Era, Adelphia Papers, No. 110, IIIS, 1975.

28. These elements were noted in the presidential report to Congress on foreign policy in early 1970.


33. Ibid., pp. 183-84.

34. The communications facility was commissioned in March 1973.

35. US Senate Subcommittee on Military Construction of the Committee of Armed Forces,
93rd Congress, 2nd Session; July 10, 11, 12, 18, 1974; p. 491.
36. Ibid., p. 138.
38. Gene R. LaRocque, whose arguments were spelled out in an issue of his The Defense Monitor (April 14, 1974) devoted to the Indian Ocean.
41. Senate advocates of such a naval arms limitation agreement also saw in an agreement a way of preventing or delaying the expenditure on Diego Garcia. Indeed, the Congress in 1977 voted to delay construction on Diego Garcia until the president assessed Soviet willingness to enter into naval arms limitations talks.
47. Most of the task groups included an aircraft carrier.
48. During the talks, the Soviets lost their use of Berbera in Somalia as a result of Soviet assistance to Ethiopia.
49. For a report of the talks, see "Indian Ocean Arms Limitations and Conventional Arms Transfer Limitation Hearings on Indian Ocean Arms Limitations and Multilateral Cooperation on Restraining Conventional Arms Transfer," House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Intelligence and Military Applications of Nuclear Energy Subcommittee, Panel on Indian Ocean Forces Limitation and Conventional Arms Transfer Limitation (95th Congress, 2nd Session).
59. For a discussion, see William R. Brown, "Middle East Policy and Gulf Defense," Middle East Insight (January/February 1983), pp. 39-44.
60. Taken from his Defense Annual Report to the Congress for FY 1982.
63. At the 1982 NATO summit at Bonn, Secretary of Defense Weinberger, referring to the RDF, stated that "The force would not be deployed unless invited; I do not see the concept as an aggressive posture but one that carried the essential message of deterrence." Quoted in George Gibbs, "NATO: A Troubled Alliance," Asian Defense Journal (9/82), p. 38.
64. US Senate, Committee on Armed Forces; 97th Congress, 2nd Session, March 5, 8, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 1982; p. 3733.
65. US Senate, Committee on Appropriations; 97th Congress, 2nd Session; pt. 3, May 6, 12, 13, 19, 20 and June 10, 24, 1984; p. 280.