

# INDIA'S INDIAN OCEAN POLICY

ADI H. DOCTOR

The Indian Ocean, the third largest, and occupying an area roughly equal to Asia and Africa together, occupies a special place in today's international politics, because of its vast natural resources and its geographical, economic and military-strategic significance.

## *The Geo-strategic Significance of Indian Ocean*

The Indian Ocean fulfils the function of the main connecting link between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. The routes passing through it enable Europe to communicate with East Africa, South and South-East Asia, Far East, Australia and Oceania. The sea-routes passing through this ocean also have an extra-ordinary significance for the USSR since it provides the only round the year open marine communication link between European Russia and its Far East regions. The importance of the Indian ocean to world navigation and trade can be gauged from the fact that about one-fourth of the entire cargo (including vital items like iron ore, bauxite, alumina, pit-coal) carried in world marine trade, and about two-thirds of the oil, are loaded or unloaded in the ports of the Indian ocean. Fifty percent and more of these vessels belong to the NATO countries. Upto twenty thousand vessels sail annually through the Red Sea and the Suez canal as well as round the Cape of Good Hope in the South of Africa. In addition to these vital routes there are the many small straits of the Indian ocean which are also of great significance for world maritime navigation. Thus, about ten thousand vessels sail every year through the Bab-el-Mandeb Straits; while the intensity of movement of vessels in the Malacca Straits is 140 a day; in Muscat it is 80 to 85.<sup>1</sup>

Next, the Indian littoral states as well as the Ocean itself are tremendously rich in natural resource. More than half the world's known oil reserves are in the Indian Ocean region. The coastal shelves and other areas of its bottom thus acquire great prospecting significance. The deep water regions of the bottom of the ocean are considered to be an extremely rich source of potential mineral resources, metals, iron-manganese, phosphorites, brine and alumina. With the development of more sophisticated technologies for under water exploration the possibilities of discovering other types of minerals are immense.

Crude oil production among the gulf countries today constitutes over sixty percent of the total production of OPEC. Saudi Arabia, with 165 bn barrels of proven oil reserves, is the biggest producer in the Gulf. Kuwait with 66 bn barrels, Iran with 59 bn barrels and Iraq with 32 bn barrels come second, third and fourth respectively in terms of proven reserves. But it is not only gulf oil that makes the Indian Ocean states so important. Almost all of them are developing nations producing ninety percent of the world's rubber, tea, jute, and possessing large deposits of gold, silver, diamond, uranium, copper, manganese, cobalt, tungsten, sulphur, coal and many other rare minerals. This region particularly accounts for 80.7% of the world's extraction of gold; 56.6% of tin, 28.5% manganese, 25.2% nickel; 18.5% bauxite; and 12.5% zinc.<sup>2</sup>

Further there are virgin areas like Mozambique whose mineral deposits have hardly been touched and North Oman whose copper is only now beginning to be exploited.

#### *Western Interest and Dependence on the Indian Ocean Region*

For centuries the masters of the Indian Ocean were the erstwhile colonial powers — England, France, Holland, Portugal and Italy. The USA's political and economic penetration of this region began from the end of the 19th century.

After the second world war, the situation began to radically change with national liberation movements forcing the colonial masters to leave their overseas possessions. With the proclamation of independence by Djibouti on 27 June 1978, no more colonies are left on the Indian Ocean coast, except for a few islands that still belong to Britain and France. However, the end

of the era of imperial rule, did not mean that the West's interest in the region ceased. In the light of the Geo-strategic importance of this region this was hardly possible.

First let us indicate the Western dependence on this region, before we turn to examine the Western policy in this regard.

The West is heavily dependent on Gulf oil for its industrial and even cultural prosperity. Western Europe obtains 63 percent of its oil imports from this region. Japan is even more dependent with 73 percent of its total imports coming from the area. The USA is relatively less dependent with 31 percent of its total imports coming from the Gulf. At present the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) holds about 70 percent of the proven world resources; of this the share of the seven Gulf countries is around fifty percent. While the OCED (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) possesses only 10 percent of the proven resources of which only 2% is in Europe. The Communist world possesses from 16 to 19 percent, most of this concentrated in the USSR.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the survival of the Western economics is dependent on the assured and uninterrupted flow of Gulf oil, was twice demonstrated during the 1970s. The first was in 1973, when the Arab members of OPEC imposed an embargo on the countries supporting Israel. There was widespread panic in the OCED countries and many of them revised their stand on the question of Palestine to get the embargo removed.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to recall here that during the seventies King Faisal of Saudi Arabia attempted to assert the sovereignty of oil producers in determining both the production level and price of oil. However his policy of using oil as an instrument to achieve political ends came to an abrupt end with his assassination since his successor adopted a policy of moderation to suit the interests of the developed countries. The second occasion was the Iranian revolution of 1978-79 which sharply disrupted the supply of crude oil to the West and forced the Western nations to persuade other oil producing countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to increase their production. Even then, during that traumatic experience, the free world experienced a shortfall of about 5.5 to 6 million barrels a day for about two months.<sup>5</sup>

But oil is not the only resource for which there is a scramble of big powers in the Indian Ocean region. In fact oil dependence has been so highly publicized (and even exaggerated) that it has relegated other forms of Western dependence on this region to near neglect. Admiral Robert Hanks of the U.S. navy, while pleading against any kind of naval limitation agreement with the Soviet Union, highlighted a number of US economic interests in this region. Making a frank admission Admiral Hanks said, "First and foremost is the plain fact that the U.S. is not now and probably never has been — self-sufficient in raw materials. Today we are heavily dependent — in some instances totally so — on imports from overseas, and no reversal of this trend is conceivable." Admiral Hanks next proceeded to cite the specific instances of this dependence viz. for chrome ore on Rhodesia and South Africa where no less than 90 percent of the world's known reserves (of chrome ore) are located; for cobalt, copper, corundum and columbium on Zambia and Mozambique; then moving eastwards across the Indian ocean, sugar in Mauritius; tea and cinnamon in the Seychelles; tea, rubber and coconut products in Sri Lanka; rubber, tin and palm-oil in Malaysia; petroleum, rubber and tin in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> These imports run annually into hundreds of millions of dollars.

USA's economic prosperity not only depends on obtaining these critical raw materials but also on the exports to this part of the world, exports of not only consumer goods and consumer durables but also sophisticated production technologies. In fact in the early eighties, the U.S. trade with this region had overtaken its economic interactions with EEC and accounted for 25 percent of all U.S. foreign commerce.

Finally, shrewd observers of the Western scene note that it is not only economic prosperity of the West that depends on the free flow of trade and control over the Indian Ocean trade routes; but that very much more is at stake. As General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff observed in the 1981 US Military Posture Statement, "I believe the potential impact is far more fundamental than reduced standard of living. As I indicated last year, I am deeply concerned that the values and institutions of free nations could be in grave jeopardy in the event of major damage of their economies."<sup>7</sup>

*Western Policy and Strategy in Indian Ocean*

The Western Policy and Strategy in the Indian Ocean is primarily dictated by the Western dependence on the natural resources of this region. The Western policy and strategy is considerably facilitated by the fact that most of the countries of this region are, in turn, dependent on exports to the West of their raw materials (esp. minerals) to sustain their developing economies. In other words, there is a mutuality of interest between the developed western nations and the Indian Ocean littoral states.

This mutual dependence was built into the colonial experience of these countries. After independence, the economic linkages between the former ruling class and the elites of the newly independent states continued, and to a large extent prevented, or rather inhibited, the development of independent perspectives on security and development. Thus today, almost all the littoral states are pre-occupied with "modernization" which in practice has come to stand for the adoption of science and technology as developed in the West.

The western policy is to convert the former colonial dependency relationship to that of inter-dependency between the developed nations and developing nations. To sustain this system of mutually inter-dependent relationship, the west seeks to create popular participation in the system and to ensure that there is no intervention from third parties to disrupt this special relationship.

As part of its strategy to make the Gulf states in particular dependent on the West, the OCED countries began the policy of uninhibited induction of arms in the Gulf region, especially from 1973 onwards. The fact that in most of these countries the decision makers were educated in the developed countries made things easier since it enabled the ruling elites in developing countries to easily share the threat perceptions of the developed nations. The total arms imports of the Gulf countries increased from dollars 2,200 mm in 1968-72 to over dollars 13,700 mm during the years 1973-77. The USA, UK and France together supplied more than 80 percent of Gulf arms during 1973-77 with the USA alone supplying more than 60%. Iraq was the lone

exception importing over 65% of its arms from the USSR because of its special relations with the country.

The Western policy of gaining political influence and military facilities in the Indian Ocean region goes back to the 1960s. In the late sixties Britain announced its decision to withdraw forces from the region. At the same time the USA began to deploy its newly developed Polaris A-3 sub-marine launched missiles in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. The USA justified this on the grounds that it had both a conventional as well as a strategic nuclear military interest in the Indian Ocean region viz. of balancing Soviet forces in the region and attaining superiority in a crisis.

In pursuance of this goal the USA established a VLF (Very Low Frequency) communication base at North West Cape in Australia for the purpose of establishing communications with submerged submarines. Then in 1965, before granting independence to Mauritius and Seychelles, the British detached three islands (Farquhar, Aldabara and Desroche) from Seychelles and one (Diego Garcia) from Mauritius to form the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) and began negotiations with USA for establishing an Anglo American base in BIOT. Eventually Diego Garcia was chosen for this purpose. Mauritius was given a compensation of three million pound sterling and an additional one million for the rehabilitation of some 1,200 natives (Diego Garcians) in Mauritius.

In 1973 the imposition of an embargo on oil deliveries to the USA by Arab countries in the wake of the Arab Israel War, compelled the USA to react to this alleged attempt to "strangulate the industrialised world" (words of Dr. Henry Kissenger, the then Secretary of State) by upgrading the facilities on Diego Garcia and by sending periodic naval task forces into the Arabian Sea-Gulf region.

It was however the Indian revolution of 1978-79 that proved a major turning point in the Western policy towards Indian Ocean states. The revolution not only demonstrated the vulnerability of the economies of USA and its allies (West Europe and Japan) to any disruption in regular oil supplies but also drove home the fact that the West must develop adequate interventionist capabilities to ensure uninterrupted oil and other essential

raw materials supplies. So long as oil and other supplies remained uninterrupted, the West looked upon internal dissensions, turmoils and local wars with indifference (after all local wars meant greater Western dependence to rebuild the shattered economics and replenish arms); but once a threat to supplies emerged, the West effectively intervened to ensure essential supplies. The earlier policy (Nixon doctrine) of pursuing US interests through "regional influentials" (like the Shah of Iran) had to be abandoned in favour of a policy of direct intervention wherever and whenever Western interests were seriously threatened. The crucial elements of this new interventionist policy were to build, where possible, strategic co-operation relations with allies and create a Rapid Deployment Force and for this purpose acquire base facilities in the Indian Ocean region. The USA was particularly keen to build up a strategic co-operation relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Although the USA spoke frequently of the Soviet threat (Already twice in the late seventies the USA rushed military equipment and deployed naval forces in the area to assist Saudi backed North Yemen in conflict with Soviet backed South Yemen), it was quite obvious, that the West was equally perturbed by threats from within the Gulf region itself. Threats posed by internal political turmoil, fed by frustration and discontent against ruling pro-West elites leading to political instability; or aggression by local powers unfriendly to the West. In most of the developing states, precedents for orderly change in political leadership are lacking, raising risk of sudden, unexpected developments or turmoil. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and radical nationalism have further added to Western fears. In such a situation, the USA felt that a peace time presence of maritime forces in the Indian ocean, would not only signify Western interest in the region, but also enable friend and foe alike to measure the depths of US commitment by a demonstrated capability to respond rapidly and effectively to perceived threats.

But for an effective interventionist capability in the Gulf, two things were essential: one, willing co-operation of the countries in the region to accept the basing of foreign troops on their territory or at least in the vicinity; and two, the pre-positioning of troops with appropriate facilities for early action, and as a follow-on, adequate air and sea mobility for the rapid deployment of a main force.

### *The Creation of a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF)*

Rapid Deployment Force, as such, is an old concept in US military strategy.<sup>8</sup> It was originally evolved by Professor Henry Kissenger of Harvard University in 1958 but remained for long an academic concept. The basic Kissenger idea was to add considerable mobility to US forces for their deployment in far away theaters of war by means of augmenting air-lift and sea-lift capabilities. It was only after the fall of Shah of Iran in 1979 that the US finally decided to put into action the RDF plan. According to S.N. Kohli, today, a separate Indian Ocean Command has been set up and an RDF of 230,000 men (conceived in 1980 after Soviet intervention in Afghanistan) has been put in operation. There are also plans to acquire 14 roll-on roll-off (RO/RO) ships and new CX transport planes which would carry heavy tanks even without refuelling upto distances of 3000 miles. The goal is to enable within 48 hours the first battalion of air-borne troops to land in the zone of operation. Suitable cover would be provided by the latest fighters and air surveillance by AWACS. Two aircraft carrier battle groups already operate in the Indian Ocean. Besides, the USA has a marine amphibious unit (8000 men) and pre-positioned cargo and tanker ships at Diego Garcia. In addition, forces have been based primarily in the USA (Mac Gill Airforce base, Florida) for early commitment to S.W. Africa in times of crisis or conflict.

### *The Diego Garcia and Other Bases*

In preparation for the RDF the USA naturally relies heavily on its bases world wide, but particularly on Diego Garcia.<sup>9</sup> Diego Garcia has become today as important to the Indian Ocean as Malta to the Mediterranean. For a long time the entire system of military bases in the Indian Ocean had no common central pivot and consequently no strategic unity, Diego Garcia in the heart of the Indian Ocean and equidistant from all coasts, filled this gap. From here fast moving war ships can reach the farthest corner of the Indian Ocean in just two days. On Diego Garcia there are already pre-positioned, war materials, amunitions, tanks and artillery pieces, rations and cargo ships and within 72 hours these can be reached to any point in the Indian Ocean. The air base at Diego Garcia can take B-52 bombers and other huge transport planes. The submarine bay and lagoon have been dredged to accommodate nuclear submarines and air-craft carriers.



The air surveillance capability developed around Diego Garcia covers both surface and submerged ships, including nuclear submarines. Thus the evolution of Diego Garcia from a modest communication base to a fully developed launching pad for military operations against neighbouring states is complete.

But the demand for increased naval deployment in the Indian Ocean has in turn increased the demand for more base facilities — facilities for refuelling, as well as rest and recreation. As a first step in this direction the USA could persuade Saudi Arabia to accept the deployment of four AWACS planes on its soil (for record it was Saudi Arabia that requested their stationing) for purpose of monitoring the naval movement of the two Gulf combatants Iran and Iraq, so that they may not resort to disruption of oil supplies in the Gulf. The AWACS constitute an integral part of the command communication in an RDF operation.

In its Indian Ocean policy, the USA naturally expects Israel and South Africa to play key roles. The influential US Right Wing Heritage Foundation (whose recommendations have often served as the basis for US policy formulation) in its July 1986 report had urged “discreet” integration of Israel into the NATO defence system. The geo-strategic importance of the republic of South Africa (RSA) can be gauged from the fact that it is the southern most country of Africa, lying on the junction of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Some Western observers described it as the “second Gibraltar” guarding the two oceans. The short range monitoring station on the naval base at Simonstown, near Capetown, controls the entire Western zone of the Indian Ocean. In any conflict east of the Suez, Simonstown provides an ideal base not only for patrolling and observation, but also reconnaissance purposes. The USA has expressed its intention to develop Simonstown into a major naval base where 50 warships could be simultaneously anchored. Even some American military strategists have advocated the setting up of a South African Treaty Organization (SATO) in which the key role would belong to the RSA.

Pentagon has also paid a lot of attention to augmenting the US presence in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean. The USA 7th fleet calls at various South East Asian Ports and one of the

USA foreign policy goals is to strengthen the military — political character of ASEAN — the association of South East Asian Nations (Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore). The USA in 1979 concluded a military agreement with Philippines which confirms the rights of the American GIs to use the Subic Bay naval base and Clarkfield air-force base and to carry out from there military operations if necessary.

Finally in the USA's Indian Ocean strategy an important place is given to Australia and New Zealand, America's allies in the ANZUS pact. US atomic war ships call at Australian and New Zealand ports and there is talk in American military circles of extending the ANZUS pact to the Indian Ocean region.

All these developments have made the US interventionist capability in the Indian Ocean today highly credible, unlike in 1973-74, when the USA warned Arab states against using the oil weapon but no one took them very seriously.

#### *Soviet Policy in the Indian Ocean*

The Soviet policy in the Indian Ocean has been comparatively much less publicised and debated in this country perhaps largely because of paucity of adequate source material.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless the Soviet interest in the Indian Ocean, though actually on a much lower scale, is equally pervasive. If the trade routes of the Indian Ocean are important for the USA they are in fact more important for the Soviet Union since it is through the Indian Ocean that the round-the year open routes pass between the western and eastern ports of the USSR.

The USSR has always been insisting that any step aimed at setting up a Peace Zone in the Indian Ocean must not affect the right of passage through international waters of its ships, including war-ships. In an interview with the West German weekly *Forvert*, in 1971, Brezhnev made this very clear. He reminded the correspondent of the simple fact that the Soviet Union had more than 40,000 kilometers of sea border. "In these conditions", he observed, "we are bound to think about corresponding defence in this sphere too. We have set up our ocean fleet which is capable of fulfilling the task of such a defence".<sup>11</sup>

Nor can we afford to forget that during the period when the USA was being bled to white in Indo-China, the USSR was build-

ing a seven ocean blue water navy for the first time in its history. Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean increased especially rapidly between mid-December 1979 and early February 1980. The normal contingent of approximate 18 to 20 general purpose submarines (six surface combatants and 12 auxiliaries) was increased to between 30 and 36 general purpose submarines (10 to 12 surface combatants and 16 to 18 auxiliaries). In 1980 the USSR commenced training facilities in the Gulf of Aden and Socotra Island and stationed a squadron in the Southern Red Sea.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, it has to be admitted that in comparison to the USA, the Soviet interventionist capability is limited. The Soviets have four carriers, the first two are helicopter carriers (Moskava and Leningard) and the other two are air-craft carriers but their mission is basically anti-submarine warfare and long range missile guidance. They cannot be classified as attack carriers. The Soviet Union, military observers opine, lacks adequate air support capability for any significant offensive action. However, since the Indian Ocean is of vital importance to the USSR, it is highly unlikely that the Soviet Union will not deploy, in due course, advanced submarines and build up adequate air power. Since quite some years, reports have been floating of the Soviet Union building nuclear powered air craft carriers and a 30,000 ton titanium hull submarine for likely deployment in the Indian Ocean.

Nor has the USSR lagged behind in its search for bases. It has already established bases in Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. It has access to Aden and Mogadishu in South Yemen and also facilities in Masawa and Dhalak in Ethiopia, besides the mooring buoys off Maritius and Seychelles. It had sought access to Gan island in Maldives and for this purpose offered 1 million dollars a year, but the Mali government rejected the offer.

Today, thanks to its preoccupation with major upheavals and internal transformations, the Soviet Union can be expected to adopt a low profile and operate on a low key in the Indian Ocean. However, one thing we in India should clearly bear in mind is that given the innate and intrinsic geostrategic significance of the Indian Ocean for the Soviet Union, we must take its utterances regarding declaring the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, to be kept free from super-power encroachment, with a pinch of salt.

*China and the Indian Ocean*

Having examined the role and interventionist capabilities of the super-powers in the Indian Ocean, a brief mention of China's policy is necessary before turning to examine what should be India's policy in the region.

There is much that is similar in the Chinese and American perceptions of the threat emanating from the USSR.<sup>13</sup> It has to be noted that Peking had favourably reacted to the initial US intention to build a naval base in Diego Garcia on the ground that the "main danger" emanated mainly from the Soviet Union. The Chinese have since then, on more than one occasion, justified the US presence in the Indian and Pacific oceans and called for its further augmentation.

At the same time the Chinese leaders have undertaken the task of developing a strong navy of their own. Mao Zedong in 1975 called for "an all round struggle for creating a powerful naval fleet" which would not only cover the Chinese coast but also act independently in the broad passways of the world oceans. In 1974 China occupied the Paracel islands and has not yet given up speaking about "the return of many islands captured by the enemy in this region". As of today the Chinese lay claim to more than 200 islands, shallows and reefs in the South China sea.

Since 1974 China has steadily been adding to its fleet of nuclear powered submarines fitted with non-nuclear missiles and the number is currently estimated to stand at about five. China has also in the wings a new missile frigate. The prototype is very likely being constructed at a Shanghai shipyard.<sup>14</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the consequence of a powerful Chinese fleet in the Indian ocean waters in a position to dominate the sea routes vital for many countries.

*India's Policy in the Indian Ocean region*

India has considerable interest in the declaration of the Indian Ocean region as a zone of peace, because for the states of the Indian Ocean region, peace is a must for the orderly development of their nascent economies. The USSR has at least verbally supported the Indian stand. During Prime-Minister Morarji

Desai's visit to the USSR, India and Russia issued a joint statement re-affirming their readiness to co operate for the implementation of the UN declaration on the establishment of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. India's major endeavour will therefore have to be to work with other like minded littoral states to put diplomatic pressure on the USA to work for the implementation of the December 1971 United Nations resolution. In this endeavour China cannot be fully counted on. Although many years ago, Sri Lanka took a leading role in proposing that the Indian Ocean be declared a peace zone, it is a moot point if in its present difficulties at home, Sri Lanka would be an equally enthusiastic supporter today. Some countries like the Democratic Republic of Yemen and Afghanistan are considered pro-Soviet and too close an identification with them may result in India being wrongly identified with those states seeking mainly to promote the Soviet interest in the region. India's policy should be to befriend the numerous other neutral islands and littoral states like Madagascar, Iran, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles and Indian Ocean Territories like the Comoros Group, Malagasy, Reunion Island, Djibouti etc. India, as the most significant littoral state, should play a leading role in such forums as the NAM, Commonwealth, OAU, Arab League and the UN, to bring pressure to bear on the superpowers to keep out and let the region states develop in peace.

An important aspect of India's foreign policy will be to help the Afro-Asian (especially littoral) states to reduce their dependence on the West, particularly of the African states on South Africa. For instance, Zaire (its southern mining region) depends on South Africa for three-fourths of her food and petroleum. Similarly, more than half of the electric power that drives the capital of Mozambique comes from South Africa. Over one-third of the exports from Zambia and 65 per cent of the exports of Zimbabwe leave the continent through South African ports. Even Mauritius (which has been claiming the return of Diego Garcia and other islands) is heavily dependent on South Africa and the west. Pointing out this dependency, President Regan could argue that sanctions against South Africa would hurt the blacks as much as the whites. He said, "South Africa is like a Zebra. If the white parts are injured, the black parts will die too."<sup>15</sup> In whatever small way India can, it should help reduce this dependency. In

this regard, the former Prime-Minister Rajiv Gandhi's offer of Rs. 10 crores to enable Mauritius to import capital goods was a step in the right direction.

India must likewise keep up its trade against South Africa's imperial and apartheid policy. It must continue the Indira Gandhi policy of opposing military assistance to the South African regime. In the third Non-Aligned Conference at Lusaka in September 1970 Mrs Gandhi had very correctly observed "Any accretion to South Africa's military capability will abate its policy of apartheid and racial discrimination, and may encourage it to annexe others' territories. The argument that this is being done to protect the so called security of sea routes is untenable. We would like the Indian Ocean to be an area of peace and co-operation. Military bases of out-side powers will create tensions and great power rivalry.<sup>16</sup>

India will also have to take note of the increasing proclivity of the super-powers to intervene in the affairs of the Indian Ocean states. The fear of instability is often cited as the rationale for western intervention.

The US intervention in Indochina, Iran, Lebanon, Dominican Republic and Guatemala; the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and French intervention in Zaire are only some of the more pronounced in a long list of recent overt and covert interventions in the third world. In all these cases the intervening super power used the pretext of its rival's likely intervention to justify its own "pre-emptive" intervention. At times intervention is supported by the argument for stability or the fear of instability. This is why India has always contended that only a genuine "hands off" policy by the developed world can help remove the mutual distrust among the big powers as well as break the vicious circle in which local instability brings super-power interference which then further increases instability. India must try and persuade the littoral states realize that for the developed nations stability has become synonymous with the firm entrenchment of pervasive external influence in local states; and that whenever such opportunities are denied, those areas became areas of instability per se. India must launch a diplomatic offensive to make local rulers realize that too close an identification with outside power interests is counter productive in today's world politics.

This would imply India more vigorously championing the cause of non-alignment and of at least making the littoral states realize the advantage of not closing their options totally.

We must particularly guard against the USA attempting to make Pakistan play the role of a proxy power for its interests in the Gulf. A Rand corporation analyst, Francis Fukuyama, who visited Pakistan in 1980, had this to say in the Report he submitted, regarding Pakistan's proxy role: "Pakistan could serve as an extremely important entrepot for an RDF moving into the Persian Gulf from the East, i.e. from Diego Garcia or the Philippines". Francis goes on to speak of the number of "over-the-horizon" arrangements that could be worked out with Pakistan which would allow for the "Emergency transit of heavy equipment, air-craft, and supplies while avoiding the peacetime presence of American troops or a large military assistance advisory group". Secondly, under current RDF plans, several roll-on roll-off ships with armoured vehicles are to be stationed at Diego Garcia. If the USA could base some of these at Karachi, argues Francis, the distance and deployment time would be considerably reduced. Thirdly, Francis mentions the possibility of the Pakistan Army serving as a proxy force fighting in the Persian Gulf. (A Pakistani division is already present in Saudi Arabia) Finally Francis opines that, "For the same reason that the western colonial tradition is less bitterly resented in Pakistan than in the Arab world, nationalist reaction to the presence of foreign bases has been historically less severe".<sup>17</sup>

India must also emphasise the point that Pakistan playing the proxy role for the USA is not without risks for the USA itself. Due to geo-strategic realities it is ironical but true that the only power that can credibly underwrite Pakistan's security and integrity is the Soviet Union. Should a future set up in Pakistan opt to live under a Soviet security umbrella, the facilities USA may build up in Pakistan can become a great liability.

Campaigning for the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace is in keeping with our general stand on disarmament. It is one among the many aspects of the non-aligned nations initiative to achieve genuine arms control and disarmament since they realise that at least for them, arms race and tensions, hinder their progress and economic development. However there are a few scholars who

argue that the Indian Ocean issue is a dead horse. Such scholars claim that it is utterly unrealistic to pursue a policy of peace zone, when the Indian Ocean has already been converted into "a war zone". "The sooner we give up this mirage, they argue the better for our credibility".

To the advocates of such a line of reasoning, all we can say is that even if India opts for a military presence and capability in the Indian Ocean, it will be a very long time before it can develop any meaningful presence in the Indian Ocean. Hence for quite some time to come our foreign policy must aim at diplomatic and political measures aimed at creating an awareness among littoral states about the dangers of an arms race in the Indian Ocean and keep championing the cause of a peace Zone. India's initiative and campaign have already paid some dividends. Under constant pressure from littoral countries the USA and USSR did consider certain arms limitation measures in the zone during the four rounds of negotiations that took place in 1977-78. Maybe with a change in the present Soviet set up, the peace talks may resume. Again, thanks to India's diplomatic offensive, littoral countries are finding it rather difficult to go against the wishes of non-aligned states in identifying with any one power block or in granting base facilities to external navies. But, should India slacken or abandon its attempts at making the Indian Ocean a peace zone, this will certainly result in changes in the perception of some of the littoral countries and may as well facilitate outside powers in obtaining base facilities.

Some countries like Singapore, Sri Lanka and Australia have called for a "balanced presence" of outside powers in the Indian Ocean. But we cannot argue for "balanced presence" and "peace Zone" at the same time. Our argument will have to be that the only proper balance is the absence of all presences. As Mrs Gandhi had observed at the Colombo Conference in 1973, "There has been no dearth of theories to justify a military presence. One of the most inane of them is the theory of power vacuum. There can be no question of a vacuum, if we make our economies viable and our societies stable. Our common resolve to strengthen our independence rejects the orthodox power theory".<sup>18</sup>

One must also mention here the view of some of India's critics that India espoused and championed the peace zone



concept in order to camouflage its own naval expansion programme. The fact that we undertook the modernization of our naval forces in the seventies may have lent credence to this argument. But, otherwise, the argument cannot stand, because all that India has done is to take legitimate steps for the defence of its sovereignty and coast line. To impute motives to India's naval modernization programme aimed at the defence of its vast coast-line, would be to undermine an enlightened arms control policy which would benefit the entire world. While advocating arms control and Peace Zone we cannot be expected to ignore our normal defences. Besides colonial memories (we were subjected by the Europeans by sea because we were not naval power), we cannot forget that even in modern times India was subjected to threats from the Ocean front. In the 1965 war with Pakistan the Indonesian Navy had offered to assist Pakistan by carrying out diversionary attacks, according to the then Pakistan air-chief, Air Marshall Asghar Khan. However, it was the 1971 war that for the first time brought home to us the crucial role of sea defence and the kind of future threat that may emanate from the seas near our-continent. During this war the Pakistani submarine, PNS Ghazi, on a mission to torpedo INS Vikrant, was lying in wait in the harbour channel Vizag port, when a chance discovery led to its destruction. But the potentially more significant lesson of that war was the deployment of the USS Enterprise (carrying nuclear weapons) meant to be a show of force to restrain India. For the first time India was threatened by nuclear black mail from the sea. USA naval presence near our waters means not only possible use of military force, it can also mean instigating domestic crisis by supply of arms to dissatisfied elements in the island territories, monitoring and intercepting our telecommunications, blocking sea supplies etc. In fact the Bangla Desh episode made some strategists argue that till such time when India would be able to take care of naval problems on her own, some sort of underwriting by the Soviet Union would be necessary and for this purpose we should not mind some Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean.<sup>19</sup>

But a big country like India cannot afford to have its security underwritten by any big power. If the 1971 war with Pakistan drove home any lesson it was that we must rely on our own strength. In that war, thanks to the missile boats, India was able

to devastate Karachi harbour and other vital installations around it. Since the 1971 war, we have inducted three more missile boats viz. INS Veer, INS Nirbhik and INS Nipat, all built and commissioned in the Soviet Union; and also began to build the Soviet designed "Veer" class boats in the country. However, it was only as late as on 26th April 1990 that the first India built sophisticated missile boat christened "Vibhuti" (based on the Soviet design) was launched by the State owned Mazagon Docks Ltd. According to defence sources, also corroborated by the authoritative Jane's Fighting Ships, the Indian Navy plans to induct a total of 24 of these fast and lethal missile boats.<sup>20</sup>

Also we must not forget that we have an estimated 220 million tonnes of offshore oil reserves and 180 billion cubic meters of gas. Bombay High is full 100 miles away from our shores. Our navy will have to safeguard these installations. Further, India's economic zone covers an area of 71500 square miles. Effective exploration of this region calls for a developed naval capability. India can be proud that today it is the only developing country to be given the status of a pioneer in seabed mining, under the third U.N. conference on the Law of the Sea. Recognition as a pioneer will give India priority in obtaining contracts from the International Sea-Bed Authority to mine the sea-bed.

To conclude, our Indian Ocean policy should be two fold. Firstly, we must develop our capability to patrol the adjoining areas as well as develop adequate surveillance and reconnaissance capability. Here we must work in concert with other littoral states sharing information about external activities in the region with them and alerting them the danger of foreign fleet movements, troop deployments etc. In this regard the time has come for us to consider seriously the need to develop a naval base at the southern tip of the Nicobar Islands called the Indira Gandhi point. Secondly, we must not let our policy of developing our own naval capability hinder our general approach to the Indian Ocean being declared a zone of peace. This issue does not clash with our legitimate defence preparedness. We must, through NAM and UNO keep urging littoral countries to become genuinely non-aligned and not grant military bases. We should also encourage or persuade those who have made military arrangements with big powers to reverse their commitments. It was in keeping with this general stance that the former prime-minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi,

during his visit to Mauritius in July 1986 had made a forceful demand for dismantling of military bases in Diego Garcia and pressed for the restoration of Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius.<sup>21</sup>

### NOTES

1. Saral Patra (Ed), *Indian Ocean and Great Powers*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi 1969, p. 11. Also see, Cottral, Alvin and Burrell (Eds), *Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic and Military Importance*, Praegar, New York, 1972.
2. Namboodiri, P.K.S., Anand, J.P. and Sreedhar, *Intervention in the Indian Ocean*, ABC Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982 p. 115.
3. *Ibid* pp. 113 and 118.
4. Vide Sreedhar, "The Producers Block", *Journal of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis*, New Delhi, Volume, 7 No. 4, 1974-75, pp. 446-541.
5. Vide Sreedhar, "US — Iran Relations: The Recent Phase", *Foreign Affairs Report*, Volume 28 No. 4, April 1979.
6. Hanks, Robert J., "The India Ocean Negotiations: Rocks and Shoals", *Strategic Review*, Washington, Winter, 1978.
7. Vide "USICA Backgrounder", USIS India, 7th February 1981.
8. Vide Kohli, S.N., "Indian Ocean: An Area of Tension and Big Power Pressure", *India Quarterly*, April-June 1986, New Delhi, pp. 156-158. Also see Namboodiri, P.K.S. et al, *Intervention in the Indian Ocean*, *op. cit.*, Annexure 1.
9. Ravi Rikhye, "US Search For Bases", *Times of India*, Bombay, 14th April 1979.
10. For Soviet policy in the Indian Ocean see, Bhasin V.K., *Superpower Rivalry in the Indian Ocean*, S. Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1981; Poulouse T.T. (Ed.), *Indian Ocean Power Rivalry*, Young Asia Publishers, New Delhi, 1974; and Singh K.R., *Indian Ocean, Big Power Presence and Local Response*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1977.
11. Cited in book Saral Patra (Ed), *Indian Ocean and Great Powers*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

12. Vide "USICA Backgrounder", USIS India, 7th February 1981.
13. See Anand, J.P., "China and the Indian Ocean Area" in book Gosh S.K. and Sreedhar (Eds), *China's Nuclear and Political Strategy*, Young Asia Publications, New Delhi, 1975.
14. Dilip Mukerji, "China's Naval Build Up: India Will Need to Respond", *Times of India*, Bombay, 6-5-1987, p. 8.
15. Vide UNI Report, *Times of India*, Bombay, 24-7-1986.
16. Vide Mrs. Indira Gandhi's speech at Third Non Aligned Conference, *Review of International Affairs*, Belgrade, 20th September 1970.
17. Cited in Namboodiri et al, *Intervention in the Indian Ocean*, Op. Cit. pp. 197-98.
18. Quoted in Manoranjan Bezboruah, *U.S. Strategy in the Indian Ocean: An International Response*, Praeger, New York, 1977.
19. Jagdish Vibhakar, *Afro-Asian Solidarity and the Indian Ocean*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 74-75.
20. W. P. S. Sidhu, "Indian Built Missile Boat to be Launched", *Independent*, Bombay 25-4-1990 p. 3.
21. UNI Report, *Economic Times*, Bombay, 5-7-1986, p. 1.