Chapter IV

SUPER-POWER RIVALRY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: RESPONSES OF INDIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

In the previous Chapter, we had briefly described the economic and strategic interests of South Africa in the Indian Ocean region. The reigning super-powers of the world, in the peak period of the Cold War, had their own economic and strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, which occupied a centre-stage in their foreign policy perspectives. This is the subject matter of this Chapter.

1. Introduction

In pursuit or in defence of its interests in the Indian Ocean, the United States was very active especially during the Cold War period. It established its bases and deployed its air-force and navy on a substantial scale to ensure that its rival super-power, the Soviet Union, did not jeopardize its interests. In the face of the US postures in the Indian Ocean, it was difficult for the Soviet Union to remain a passive spectator and to allow its interests to suffer by default. Therefore, the Soviet Union also took various measures to defend its own interests and to counter the aggressive measures taken by the United States.
Almost as a rule, the response of one super-power to the actions of the other introduced great power rivalry.

The Soviet Union was, no doubt, a bit late in framing its Indian Ocean policy. This was because, during the Stalin era, she was not very enthusiastic about the Third World countries. Even after the Second World War, when the Soviet Union emerged as the second super-power and assumed leadership of the communist countries, its primary concern was to gain ascendancy in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the question of adopting a policy for the Indian Ocean, a Third World backwater at that time, did not emerge. After Stalin's death, the new joint leadership of the USSR by Khrushchev and Bulganin brought about a change in the policy towards the Indian Ocean states.

The attention of the Soviet Government turned towards the Asian continent, as a good chunk of its territory was also situated therein. The growing Sino-Soviet rift seemed unbridgeable, and so the Soviet Union started thinking seriously about establishing a military presence in the waters around China in order to contain her.

Apart from the above-mentioned fact, the Czar of Russia, Peter the Great, had long ago remarked that the Soviet Union needed "warm water ports" and that the Indian Ocean was the only ocean among the oceans of the world, which did not freeze for most part of the year.
Scholars like J. Cottrell and R. M. Burrell have commented that the 'Soviet interest in the Indian Ocean was the extension of the old Czarist desire for an outlet to the South, dating from the time of Peter the Great.' However, the Soviet Union realized the importance of southern states gradually, and, in due course, its attention turned towards the Indian Ocean also. As one writer puts it, "the Soviet Union's policy has been motivated by her support to the cause of national independence in erstwhile colonies and to strengthen the forces of anti-imperialism, since these countries, engaged in the task of socio-economic emancipation, had generally been anti-imperialist. There has emerged a solid basis for friendship and cooperation between the newly independent nations and the Soviet Union."

The entry of the Soviet Union into the Indian Ocean set off what is commonly, and perhaps erroneously, referred to as super-power rivalry. Was it really a 'rivalry' or were the two super-powers safeguarding or protecting their varied interests? We should summarize the interest that the U. S. was trying to protect and for which a heavy deployment of troops was regarded by her as absolutely necessary.


2. United States’ major Interests in Indian Ocean

In the late 1940s, the immediate concern of the United States was to check further expansion of communism in any part of the world. As a result, the United States signed the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) pact in 1959 to check the southward expansion of the Chinese which was a close ally of Moscow at that time. However, the main concern of the United States since the end of the Second World War had been the containment of the Soviet Union. Charles E. Bohlen gives four reasons that contributed to the enhancement of the Soviet threat in the American minds and played a major role in the United States’ decision to go in for a massive military build-up in the Indian Ocean to counter the Soviet move. These are: Soviet Union’s enormous size and population, its military strength, its totalitarian regime, and its belief that “everything that is not Soviet is ipso facto an enemy.”

Secondly, the US policy to establish its military presence in the Indian Ocean was also influenced by the Soviet Union’s growing friendship with Libya, Somalia, and Mauritius and her fast improving relations with South Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand which were till then pro-western countries. This objective was

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clearly incorporated in the Truman Doctrine on which American future policies were based in the immediate post-war period.

The Soviet naval power began to develop substantially after 1960. In the first half of 1968, a small Soviet Union task force consisting of one ‘Sverdlov’ class cruiser, accompanied by a guided-missile destroyer, one submarine and one ‘Pevek’ class oiler, visited ports in Aden, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), India, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf and Somalia, adding further to the United States' suspicion. Alarmed by this development, the United States evolved a calculated long-term politico-military strategic plan of having bases and satellite regimes in the Indian Ocean region.

Thirdly, the Americans were also very much disturbed by the fact that the Soviet Union had been provided port facilities and bases in several Indian Ocean countries like Somalia, Egypt, Sudan, Tanzania, Aden, Iraq, the two Yemens etc. The possibility that the Soviet Union would be able to deploy naval forces in strength in the Indian Ocean when the Suez Canal was re-opened led to the development of Diego Garcia as a major war base.

Fifthly, the Western countries, particularly the United States, were interested in keeping the sea channels open so that it could

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receive uninterrupted supplies of oil and indispensable minerals from the African countries. It was equally interested in protecting the massive investments that the Western multinationals had made in the oil sector in the Gulf countries.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that by 1964 the Indian Ocean had definitely entered into America's strategic calculations. After the British withdrawal from the East of Suez in 1968, the Soviet Union made an impressive entry into the Indian Ocean. This was viewed by the United States defence planners as a grave threat to its interests in the region. It was feared that the efforts of the Soviet Union to expand her political influence in the countries bordering the Indian Ocean might, at some future date, result in a Soviet-inspired disruption of the Persian Gulf oil-flow through sabotage of the oil-fields and refineries of this area and blocking of the vital sea-lanes.

The American concern for the safety of the Ocean’s sea-lanes was vital for two of her allies also, namely West Germany and Japan. Broadly speaking, the United States' military presence in the Indian Ocean was intended to act both as a deterrent to actions that might be adverse to her interests and as an encouragement to developments that were likely to enhance her interests.

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3. Soviet entry into the Indian Ocean

Since the end of World War II, both the Soviet Navy and the merchant marine had been developing in general at an unprecedented pace. Beginning just as an arm of the Red Army, the Soviet Navy had developed to acquire an autonomous character by 1960. The rise of the USSR as a sea power is often traced to the U.S. blockade of Cuba in 1962. The main explanation for the development of Soviet shipping lies in the growth of Soviet trade with the West and countries of the Third World, both in volume and in geographical extent. This trade rose very rapidly from the mid-1950s onward.7 Thus, the 1968-69 Indian Ocean visits of Soviet naval ships were either in connection with escorting commercial ships or for carrying out oceanographic exploration. During these visits the Soviet navy was able to familiarize itself with the conditions in the far-off sea. By 1971 end the Soviet Navy had made about 50 visits to 16 countries on the perimeter of the Indian Ocean. Soviet warships passed through the Straits of Malacca in January 1971 when the Commonwealth Conference was going on in Singapore. The object of these cruises was to gain experience of sailing in distant waters under different climatic conditions and training in escorting cargo ships—a legitimate function of the navies of all countries.8 However, there was no permanent deployment of Soviet

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8 ibid., p. 31.
Navy in the Indian Ocean at that time.

In due course, the presence of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean increased. The increased Soviet activity and interest in the Indian Ocean could be explained by its growing dependence upon the sea route through the Indian Ocean for the movement of goods between the east and the west coast of the country. The trans-Siberian rail route had reached its saturation point and the northern route through the Arctic Ocean gets frozen in winter. The Indian Ocean was also important to the USSR on account of the sea-borne support of the various space explorations. Since 1967 Soviet Space supporting ships were continuously deployed in the Indian Ocean which served as an emergency sea recovery area for Soviet space ships.9

The Soviet naval activities in the Indian Ocean, however, did not seem to pose any threat to the Western interests in the region or to the security of the Indian Ocean countries. An authoritative study by a retired commander of the U. S. Navy published by the US Naval Institute found the "current Soviet naval strategy an essentially deterrent and defensive one."10 Commander Herrick dismissed the notion about the Soviet "capability for transoceanic invasion of large continental areas" as sheer fantasy. He wrote: "Present Soviet naval

9 ibid., p. 33.

10 Robert Waring Herrick, Soviet Naval Strategy: Fifty Years of Theory and Practice (Annapolis, Maryland, US Naval Institute, 1968), p. 143; also p. XV.
strategy, it must be concluded, does not support the popular view that the Soviet Union is bent on the build-up of military forces essential to any aim of world domination by force.

As to the prospects of the Soviet Navy developing into an instrument of offence, the above-mentioned American naval authority, found evidence in support of the view that the "Soviet naval strategy will remain defensive for the foreseeable future."

At the International Conference on the Indian Ocean held in 1971, Professor Oles M. Smolansky of the Leigh University said:

The Soviet Navy moved reluctantly into the Indian Ocean in spite of the fact that it was operationally ill-prepared for such a move. The Kremlin's decision was heavily influenced by Washington's initiative in supplementing the Polaris force deployed in the Mediterranean with units operating in the Arabian Sea.

It was not the "Western withdrawal" but Western actions (specifically the introduction of the Polaris-Poseidon fleet into the Indian Ocean) which impelled the establishment of a Soviet naval presence in the area. Smolansky concluded: "Thus, far from the

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11 Ibid., p. 144.
12 Ibid., p. 147.
aggressive intent so frequently ascribed to these recent Soviet moves, Moscow's main concern seems to have been military defence.\textsuperscript{14}

The U. S. objectives in the Indian Ocean were, on the other hand, far from defensive. The presence of the US Navy in this region exposed the USSR to attack from the south. It imposed on Moscow the need to provide for necessary defensive measures. The communication facilities in the Indian Ocean area enabled the United States to send patrols of Polaris (A-3) and Poseidon strategic submarines. It concluded that "geographically the northern part of the Indian Ocean area (particularly the Arabian Sea) could be used by the United States to deploy strategic missile submarines offensively against the Soviet Union, but a similar offensive use of the Indian Ocean by the Soviet Union against the United States is not possible at present."\textsuperscript{15}

That the Indian and Pacific Ocean operations played a secondary role in the Soviet military strategy was recognized by leading Western experts. It was highly unlikely that the Soviet Indian Ocean squadron was intended for action against Indian Ocean routes, or to cut off Western oil supplies.

\textsuperscript{14} ibid.

On the other hand, the Indian Ocean had begun to figure in the military strategy of the United States as early as the early 1950s. In an interview, Admiral McCain, then Commander of the US Pacific Fleet claimed to be the first US senior officer to call for an American squadron in the Indian Ocean as early as 1959.\(^\text{16}\)

The US Navy first appeared in the Indian Ocean in November 1963 in connection with the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) naval exercise *Midlink*, held off Karachi in which the U. S. carrier *Essex*, participated along with some submarines and other vessels. On 5 April 1964, a US Navy task force consisting of the carrier, *Bon Homme Richard*, four destroyers and one fleet tanker steamed into the Indian Ocean. This task force spent about six weeks in the region conducting various exercises including air-dropping of 2,300 US troops in South-West Iran.\(^\text{17}\). In early 1970, the United States Congress voted $ 5.4 million for building a base on Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago in the middle of the Indian Ocean, about 1,400 miles from the Indian Coast.


\(^{17}\) K. R. Singh, n. 4, pp. 24-25.
strategically important points in the Indian Ocean.

In December 1979, a US military delegation headed by the Assistant Secretary of State Murray visited Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kenya and Somalia. Through prolonged negotiations America is reported to have acquired access to military installations on the territories of these countries. Thus, in Somalia, the US armed forces could use the naval base and airfield in Berbera as well as the port facilities of Mogadishu. In Kenya, the US got access to the sea-port of Mombassa and the military installations in Embakazi and Nadyuki on whose modernization more than $100 million were spent. In the Sultanate of Oman, the United States secured access to the El-Sib military airfield, the bases in Tamrida and on Masira island, and the ports in Muttra and Salal. The acquisition of Ras Banas naval base in Egypt had an important bearing on the strengthening of the US military position in the Indian Ocean.18

By and large, what brought the super-powers into the Indian Ocean was their desire to ensure that their economic interests were not harmed by the rival super power. They feared each other, and they did not seem to trust each other. The U: S. and its allies thought that if they did not safeguard the sea-routes, the USSR, any time in the future when their relations worsened and brought them on the brink of another world war, might deny them oil from the West Asian countries.

18 Devendra Kaushik, n. 7, pp. 41-42.
Likewise, the USSR thought that the presence of the US naval power in sufficient strength might threaten its security and territorial integrity. So it was their mutual fear and their mutual lack of trust that had brought them to the Indian Ocean.

4. India’s Response to Super-Power Rivalry in the Indian Ocean

There is no doubt that nations, both from within and outside the Indian Ocean region, have important vested interest in the security of the Ocean because it is a highway of international trade. Any threat to its security will adversely affect their trade which must pass through the Indian Ocean. Although a number of nations border on the Indian Ocean, none of them is more vitally interested than India in its security. Five countries bordering on the Indian Ocean, namely, Burma, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are exclusively dependent on the Indian Ocean for their international trade.\(^\text{19}\) Out of the five countries India has the longest shore washed by the Indian Ocean. More than half the population living on the shores of this Ocean is of Indian origin with whom India has both cultural and historical links. India’s interests are directly affected if any social or economic changes are forced on that population. Anti-Tamil violence and riots in Sri Lanka towards the end of July 1983 are an example of India’s concern about the events in that island country. Almost all the littoral states have undergone the pangs of colonization. India, through its own independence, inspired

them in the historic struggle for achieving independence, besides giving them moral and material support. The continuance of colonial rule in any part of the African continent was not in India's interest and, therefore, India threw its weight behind the freedom struggles in African countries.

The influence of the Indian Ocean is far greater on the security of India than on any other littoral country. Other littoral countries, due to their own domestic problems and size, are not in a position to meet the challenges of the great powers in the Indian Ocean. In view of its dominant position in the region, India is the only country which may be able to bring together other nations in an effort to counter the growing influence of super-powers in the region. The dangers to peace in its immediate neighbourhood and also to the world peace have been the cause of increasing concern to India. The security of the Indian Ocean and free and unhindered navigation through it is of vital importance for India.20

Geographically, India occupies a central position in the Indian Ocean, second only to Australia, having an area of 3,217,782 sq. kms. Surrounded by the Arabian Sea in the West, by the Bay of Bengal in the East, and by the Indian Ocean in the south, India has 6080 kms. of coastline with about 1200 islands and islets – 578 along the west coast

including Lakshadweep, Minicoy and Aminidive in the Arabian Sea and 667 along the East Coast in the Bay of Bengal including the Andaman and Nicobar group.\footnote{J. P. Anand, "The Law of the Sea: India and the Indian Ocean", \textit{IDSA Journal} (New Delhi), vol. 14, no. 1 : July-September 1981, pp. 142-44.} Besides, there are several artificial islands – oil and natural gas platform complexes on the continental shelf as well as new emerging islands.\footnote{J. P. Anand, "India's Islands and other Ocean territories: Strategic environment", \textit{Strategic Analysis} (New Delhi), vol. 12, no. 1 : 6 May 1988, p. 169.} In addition to border security, India has all these strategic island possessions to defend, including the Andaman and Nicobar islands which are separated by over 700 nautical miles from the mainland.\footnote{Amita Agarwal, \textit{Indian Ocean and World Peace} (New Delhi, Kanishka Publishers, 2000), p. 86}

Against this background of the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean, we may now analyze the impact of big power rivalry in the Indian Ocean region on India's security. As stated before, India's economic interests are inextricably interwoven with what happens there. India accounts for half of the population of the entire region. The peninsular character of the country with its extensive and open coastline and a littoral which is extremely fertile and rich in resources, makes India heavily dependent on the Indian Ocean. Historically, the Indian Ocean has provided the passage for India's trade with the external world. Its importance increased after the oil crisis of 1973 when Indian imports of crude oil from the Gulf region increased to two-
thirds of its total oil imports. India has also to defend an economic zone in the Indian Ocean, which covers an area of 1,830,000 sq. kms. The total sea surface available to India, including its continental shelf (which in the Bay of Bengal alone is estimated to be 1,152,000 sq. kms), is nearly half the country's land area or almost 4.1 million sq. kms.\textsuperscript{24} The importance of the Indian Ocean to India was succinctly summed up by Panikkar when he wrote: “Whoever controls the Indian Ocean has India at his mercy.”\textsuperscript{25}

To India, the security of this region is of paramount importance, as the oceanic routes across this Ocean carry bulk of its overseas trade. As a developing country, with an ever-increasing industrial sector, India relies heavily on sea trade. India imports a large amount of petroleum, minerals, hi-tech items and food. In return, it is increasing its exports of numerous industrial and agricultural products, cashews, fish and low-tech items. For this a secure sea-trade is a must. If these routes come under the influence of countries not friendly to India, it would very seriously threaten not only its economic and industrial development but its very independence also.\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{25} K. M. Panikkar, \textit{Asia and the Western World Dominions} (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 94.

\textsuperscript{26} Pradyot Pradhan, “Indian Ocean: Arena of future conflict”, \textit{Foreign Affairs Reports} (New Delhi), vol. 370, no. 3-4: March-April 1988, p. 15.
India's maritime security concern becomes particularly grave with respect to safeguarding its island territories lying far out in the Ocean. This aspect of the security problem came into sharp focus in 1965 (during the Indo-Pak war of September) when Indonesia offered to support Pakistan by carrying out diversionary naval attack on the Andaman Islands.\(^{27}\) The war of 1971 exposed some other vulnerabilities – the Pakistan submarine *PNS Ghazi*, which was on a mission to torpedo *INS Vikrant*, was lying in wait in the harbour channel of Vishakhapatnam port when a chance discovery led to its destruction.\(^{28}\) If to this is added the big powers rivalry for bases and their military-strategic linkages with some of the littoral powers – the US Administration's decision to move the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, *Enterprise*, to the Bay of Bengal in 1971, in support of Pakistan confirmed the importance of the Indian Ocean to India's security.

India's maritime interests in the Indian Ocean can be summed up as follows:

1. The use of sea for commerce and unhindered sea-borne trade.
2. The exploitation and protection of economic resources in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).


3. The exploitation of the high seas and the sea-bed for living and non-living resources.

4. Research and Development in the EEZ sea-bed for living and non-living resources.

5. Force projection.

6. Sea denial to adversaries; and

7. Defence of island territories.29

India's approach to the problem of security in the Indian Ocean has been, by and large, in conformity with both the traditions of the anti-colonial struggle and the country's own enlightened self-interests. India's approach has been to try to realize security largely through promoting peaceful regional cooperation among the littoral and hinterland states and to prevent the militarization of the Indian Ocean. The security of India and other littoral states of the Indian Ocean can hardly be ensured in a situation where the strategically located islands in the waters washing their shores are dotted with foreign military bases. Besides, the naval task forces of an outside great power pose serious threat to the national liberation movements. Hence, India has been insisting that the Indian Ocean should be left alone by the great powers as a sea of peace - a demand endorsed at the Lusaka Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in 1970 and at all subsequent non-aligned summits.

4.1 India’s rejection of the Vacuum Theory

In the past, western powers, which established control over part of the Indian Ocean, had dominated and colonized many littoral states of the Ocean and India was one of those victims. India has every reason to be concerned about the intrusion by other powers’ navies into the Ocean. India has categorically rejected the “vacuum theory” devised by the United States to establish herself firmly in the Indian Ocean with the help of her allies and some other Asian nations. India’s stand on the so-called “vacuum” theory in the Indian Ocean was elaborated by Swaran Singh, then India’s Defence Minister, in the Lok Sabha on 10 April 1968. In his statement which deserves to be quoted at some length, Swaran Singh said:

Government does not accept the validity of the propaganda that a vacuum will be created in the Indian Ocean on the British decision to withdraw from the areas east of Suez….It is not our intention firstly to accept the validity of this concept that any vacuum can be created. If any foreign power leaves any particular area, then it is for that area and for that territory to take adequate steps to safeguard their own security and their own country. If they ask any other country for help, that could be considered, but when even a country like the United Kingdom is withdrawing from the overseas commitment for a country like India, which has never believed in that concept, to think in these terms, is absolutely inconsistent without approach to this problem.30

Again, speaking on a call-attention motion in the Rajya Sabha on 6 May 1969 on a statement by a Naval Study Group at the Defence Services Staff College, Swaran Singh decried the talk about a “Vacuum”.\(^{31}\) He did not agree with the view that the British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean would affect India in any way. Swaran Singh stated in the Rajya Sabha that “the British presence was not in our interest.”\(^{32}\)

On another occasion, in his speech in the Lok Sabha on 8 April 1970, the External Affairs Minister, Dinesh Singh, called the British Navy “a symbol of domination in Asia.” He said that he was “surprised and in many ways humiliated when my countrymen, say 'what will happen if the British go away.'” The External Affairs Minister welcomed British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean, as part of the process of decolonization and expressed complete faith in the capacity of the new Asian countries ‘to meet the challenges that come with a measure of self-respect, dignity and self-reliance without looking to Washington or Moscow.’\(^{33}\)

India has been generally opposed to the extension of big power naval presence in the Indian Ocean and also to the establishment of

\(^{31}\) A paper incorporating the views of naval study group at the Defence Service Staff College was published in the Hamla magazine of the Indian Navy under the title "Power Vacuum in the Indian Ocean".

\(^{32}\) National Herald (Delhi), 1 May 1969.

foreign military bases there. Yet, at times the policy was allowed to be diluted in the early sixties, probably in the background of the Chinese threat. Thus, while Sri Lanka and Indonesia protested against the entry of the U.S. Seventh Fleet into the Indian Ocean in December 1963, India did not react strongly against it. Jawaharlal Nehru, while denying that India was consulted by the U.S. Government about sending their fleet, stated in Lok Sabha on 19 December 1963 that "if the U.S. Government decides to do all that we need to say today is that outside the territorial waters of India, the Ocean is naturally open to them." He tried to underplay the fears expressed in many progressive circles about an increase in tension in the region as a result of the linking up of SEATO and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through the Seventh Fleet cruiser. He stated in reply to a question that he did not think "any particular concern need be caused to the countries here" as "most of the countries in south-east Asia are more or less allied to the government."

Gen. Taylor's visit to India, his meeting with Nehru just two days before the entry of the Seventh Fleet, and the U.S. proposal for an "air umbrella" for India's defence, led to various speculations about India's tacit support to the U.S. move in the Indian Ocean. Nehru's statement in the Rajya Sabha on 21 December 1963 that "it would be quite wrong to suggest that a cruise by a few U.S. naval vessels in the Indian

34 ibid., col. 5772.
Ocean either threatens our freedom, or imperils our policy of non-alignment” – further added misgivings about India’s position.

Despite the solemn assurance given by Nehru in the same statement that “no foreign ships, troops, or aircraft would participate in the country’s actual defence”, a misunderstanding about India having a hand in the extension of the operation of the U.S. Seventh Fleet to the Indian Ocean persisted for quite some time. Prime Minister Nehru justified India’s position on the ground of “freedom of seas” and did not consider it a grave threat to India’s security.\(^{35}\)

The Soviet Union brought to the notice of Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Prime Minister of India, the fact regarding the presence of “Polaris submarines” of the United States in the Indian Ocean when he visited that country in 1965. The Indo-Soviet concern was also shown in their joint communiqué issued on the occasion.\(^{36}\)

On the question of the establishment of bases in the Indian Ocean, India’s stand, though one of opposition in general, was at times liable to be misunderstood, and left many things rather vague. Thus, when, in July 1965, the Maldives gained independence, the retention of the Gan base by the British evoked no protest from India whatsoever, and later the same year when Britain and the United States began their

\(^{35}\) Devender Kaushik, n. 7, p. 110.

preparation for setting up bases on the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), there was no strong reaction in New Delhi beyond a statement by the then Deputy Minister for External Affairs, Dinesh Singh, in the Rajya Sabha on a call attention motion by I. K. Gujral, which said that the "Government of India's policy in regard to bases in the Indian Ocean has been one of strong opposition." When members insisted on knowing about the specific steps taken to register protest at the international forum and to call a meeting of the affected countries, the Government only referred to the unanimous resolution passed at the Cairo conference of the Non-Aligned Countries condemning the setting up of bases in the Indian Ocean. Later, when the issue of these bases was raised in the Lok Sabha, the External Affairs Minister, M. C. Chagla, made a statement saying that they were meant to be "transit and refueling-cum-communication facilities." Of course, the Deputy Minister of External Affairs had earlier put a different gloss on it by stating that the government had not intended to condone those bases and was only sharing the information available to them. He declared: "We do not welcome the setting up of communication bases and we have not welcomed it."

India was the first to raise alarm about the ominous implications of British Indian Overseas Territory (BIOT) though, in the then

prevailing circumstances following the 1962 war with China and the September 1965 war with Pakistan, the matter was taken up with the British and American governments, which showed the sensitivity and also the sagacity of India’s policy towards developments in the Indian Ocean.

The British government explained to India in 1967 that, in view of its defence commitment to Australia and Far East, transit or staging and refueling facilities were required for the British and the U.S. aircrafts. Moreover, the British government assured India that Diego Garcia would not be developed as a major military base. The United States, responding to India’s concern, informed in November 1968 that the proposed facilities on the Indian Ocean islands could not be considered as military bases since there was no intention of stationing any combat troops there. Subsequently, also on similar occasions, the U.S. authorities insisted that Diego Garcia would be used for modest communications purpose and that the U.S. had no plan to use it as a base. Even in January 1971, a senior U.S. Government spokesman denied that Diego Garcia would be the nucleus of a future major military establishment.  

The U. S. plan to further expand Diego Garcia by spending another US$ 1,000 million was particularly in violation of the U.S.

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assurance that it would not expand Diego Garcia as a staging post was confirmed by the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher herself, when she said that, as a result of developments in the West Asia, "...there has been a very large movement of U.S. ships and aircrafts of many types to and from Diego Garcia."°° India's persistent opposition to Diego Garcia, which is the most visible and potentially the most dangerous manifestation of external intervention in the Indian Ocean, had to be understood in this background.

The Soviet Union too did not miss the opportunity and started sending its task forces in the region from 1968 onward. With their arrival on the scene, Indian apprehension came true which anticipated that the presence of one super-power would invariably attract the other super-power. Russian entry into the Indian Ocean was exaggerated by Western military strategists°° to get excuse to strengthen their own position and to prepare a favourable psychological climate in the region to accommodate the United States and its joint collaborators. The coming up of the US-UK military base at Diego Garcia and the arrival of the task forces of the two super-powers in the Indian Ocean, stirred up India to the stark realities of big power rivalry for gaining influence and hold over the region which could prove to be prejudicial to the freedom and sovereignty of the littoral countries and ultimately

°° The Times of India (New Delhi), 3 May 1980.

adversely affect their security. Thereafter, India's policy started taking a purposeful shape. It gave up its softer attitude and started strongly opposing the alien presence in the Indian Ocean.

Swaran Singh, the then India's Minister for External Affairs, expressed his government's opposition to the foreign presence in the Indian Ocean in terms of their warships and bases, and pointed out its firm commitment to the Lusaka Declaration of the Non-Aligned Countries of September 1970 which had called upon the big powers to keep their hands off from the Indian Ocean. Jagjivan Ram, the then Defence Minister of India, spoke in the Lok Sabha on 14 December 1970 and in the Rajya Sabha on 9 June 1971 and expressed India's opposition to the presence of foreign warships in the Indian Ocean. He described the presence of the foreign warships in the Indian Ocean as "unnecessary as that was likely to create tension in the region." The Parliament had shown its due concern over the deployment of the task force of the U.S. Seventh Fleet in the Bay of Bengal at the time of Indo-Pak war 1971. India's External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh, on 30 November 1972, explained that India's policy was to keep the Indian

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43 In the Reports of the External Affairs Ministry, Government of India, from 1966 to 1969, there is no mention of the Indian Ocean developments. One gets indirect reference in the report of 1970-71, but since 1971 onwards there has been a regular mention of the Indian Ocean in the External Affairs Ministry's Reports.


Ocean free from big power rivalry, free from foreign bases and free from nuclear weapons.

The entry of U.S. nuclear power aircraft carrier, *Kitty Hawk*, in the Indian Ocean was also resented in the Lok Sabha in March 1974. Swaran Singh, while seeking support of the opposition to make voice more effective to oppose such U.S. moves, assured the House that the Government of India would mobilize world opinion against American bases in the Indian Ocean.

During the period of Janta Party rule in India (1977-80), a slight change was visible in the policy of the Government of India on the question of the Indian Ocean. It was that "India would return to true non-alignment. It would deal with the United States and the Soviet Union with even-handedness." Prime Minister Morarji Desai said that there should be equal treatment for both. While the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty remained in force, the Prime Minister agreed that the Soviet Union had also "its sphere of influence" in the area and "this could not

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47 ibid., col. 180.


be denied. The External Affairs Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, told Lok Sabha in 1977 that, while India was deeply interested in making the Indian Ocean a "zone of peace", it was really for the United States and the Soviet Union to come to some agreement on this question. He assured the House that India would not be satisfied until the Indian Ocean was made a "peace zone and would continue all possible efforts towards this end."

When President Carter visited India in January 1978, the joint communiqué issued at the end of the visit contained no mention whatsoever of the different positions the two countries had on the question of Indian Ocean. Six months later, when Desai visited Washington, the two leaders again showed moderation in their stand on the question of the Indian Ocean. The Prime Minister was quoted as hoping that "these discussions that were going on between the United States and the Soviet Union on the stabilization of their military presence in the Indian Ocean" would continue and result in the eventual removal of all great power military presence in the Indian Ocean. On the whole, the Indian response during the Janta Party rule was not very impressive as the atmosphere of the Indian Ocean region became quite tense following two events during 1977-79, viz.

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51 National Herald, 13 July 1977.

52 Dietor Brauen, "India's Non-Alignment and Superpower Rivalry" in Bowman and Clark, n. 48, p. 53.
the fall of the Shah regime in Iran and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

While the earlier Congress Government had not accepted the presence of Soviet bases in the Indian Ocean region, the government of Indira Gandhi held the opinion that the Western powers' involvement in the Indian Ocean region was responsible for the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, though India was not in favour of Soviet presence in Afghanistan. W. Averell Harriman, a prominent member of the U.S. Committee on Foreign Relations, also expressed his fear that American presence in the Indian Ocean would definitely attract the Soviet Union there.

In 1980, due to several developments the situation in the Indian Ocean region deteriorated again. The Diego Garcia base underwent an accelerated modernization programme with a planned expenditure of $159.9 million for the fiscal year 1981-82. The advent of the 1980 also witnessed a more critical Indian appreciation of the importance of India's security. India tended to believe that her "security parameter" was far wider than her own frontiers and that the developments in the

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55 View of Senator Avrell Hariman expressed in the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Relations with Communist Countries, 93rd Congress, 2nd session, 15, 20 August and 10, 12, 16, 19, 24 and 25 September, and 1, 8, October 1974 (Washington D. C.).
Indian Ocean posed a threat to her security interests. Within the subcontinent itself, the pro-U.S. proclivities of Pakistan became a worrisome factor for India. India's relations with the United States worsened and Indo-Pak tension increased as a result of the US decision to arm Pakistan with sophisticated weapons. The U.S. began to treat Pakistan almost as a Front-Line state against the Soviet Union. She reviewed the security relationship with Pakistan and sold it a massive 3.2 billion dollar worth of military hardware including F-16 aircrafts. Pakistan also had nuclear ambitions. Some U.S. circles believed that an Indo-Pak détente should be encouraged to counter the growing Soviet influence in south Asia. The U.S. argument that the build-up in Pakistan was directed against the Soviet Union did not convince the Indian policy-makers. Moreover, in the specific context of the Indian Ocean, there was the possibility of Pakistan's integration into the US Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) strategy. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas Moore, made a strong plea for the US access to Pakistan facilities, particularly the Gwadar port and the Peshawar air base.\textsuperscript{56} There was also the possibility that Pakistan could serve as an "important entropot for an RDF moving into the Persian Gulf from the East."\textsuperscript{57} With the increasing security nexus between Pakistan and the Gulf regimes, there was the possibility of

\textsuperscript{56} C. Raja Mohan, "Evolution of a security mismatch: India, the Ocean and the United States" in Robert M. Cruder & Manoj Joshi, eds., \textit{New Perspective on America and South Asia} (New Delhi, Chanakya Publication, 1984), pp. 139-40.

Pakistan's armed forces serving as a US proxy force in the Gulf.\textsuperscript{58} Whether Pakistan would actually accept the U.S. "kiss of death" by agreeing to serve as a U.S. proxy was perhaps a debatable issue, but there was no doubt that it gave an extra edge to the Indian concerns on the Indian Ocean region.

With the coming into force of the new Convention of the Law of the Sea, India's stakes grew in the economic and commercial exploitation of the Ocean resources in its exclusive economic zone. The need to protect this vast territory did not lose sight of India's policymakers. Hence, the next two years saw a spurt in the Indian efforts in the Ocean development. The two expeditions to Antarctica, the plans for deep sea-bed mining of manganese nodules and acquisition of "pioneer investor" status under the Law of Sea Convention were indicative of the increased Indian activity in the Indian Ocean.

5. Peace Zone proposal before International Fora

In the non-aligned forum, India supported all those resolutions which opposed the big power presence in the Indian Ocean. As early as 1964, in the Cairo Non-Aligned Summit, the member-states viewed with concern the entry of the U.S. task force in the Indian Ocean and called it a "calculated attempt to intimidate the emerging countries of

\textsuperscript{58} ibid.
Africa and Asia and an unwarranted extension of neo-colonialism and imperialism.\textsuperscript{59}

At the Lusaka Non-Aligned Conference in 1970, the consensus among the member countries was in favour of the Indian Ocean being treated and declared as a "Zone of Peace", free from big power rivalry and competition, their military bases and nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{60} Speaking at the NAM Summit in 1970, Indira Gandhi said: "We would like the Indian Ocean to be an area of peace and cooperation. Military bases of outside powers would create tensions and great power rivalry."\textsuperscript{61} Addressing the 90-nation Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Conference in February 1981, she underlined two major tasks before the movement – "restitution of détente and reduction of the big power military presence in the Indian Ocean."\textsuperscript{62} In the final Declaration of the Conference "removal of foreign bases and the military presence from the Indian Ocean was mentioned."

At the Commonwealth Conferences also, India opposed the big power presence in the Indian Ocean. In the Singapore Commonwealth


\textsuperscript{60} For details, see ibid., p. 183.

\textsuperscript{61} For the text of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's speech at Lusaka Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Nations, see \textit{Review of International Affairs} (Belgrade), no. 491, 21 September 1990, pp. 21-23.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{The Tribune} (Chandigarh), 10 February 1981.
Summit in January 1971, India supported Sri Lanka's memorandum expressing concern over the growing militarization of the Indian Ocean. The then External Affairs Minister of India, Swaran Singh, condemned the step-by-step transformation of the Indian Ocean into an area of big power rivalry and tension much to the detriment of the interests of the littoral states.\(^63\)

In the United Nations, India played a key role in mobilizing public opinion in favour of the peace zone proposal. India was the co-sponsor of the resolution moved by Sri Lanka regarding "Peace Zone" in the Indian Ocean and gave unqualified support to this concept during the debate in the United Nations culminating into the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a "Zone of Peace", vide its resolution 2832 (XXVI) on 16 December 1977.\(^64\) The Indian representatives, while giving support to the proposal, emphasized the need for consultation for arriving at a consensus on the basic points of the proposal.\(^65\) To impart further momentum to resolution for peace zone, India and Sri Lanka jointly sponsored the same resolution for the consideration of the U. N. Political Committee in 1972. India was also a member of the 15-

\(^{63}\) For details, see "India in the Strategic Environment", Annual Review (IDSA), vol. 11, 1970-71, pp. 737-38.


\(^{65}\) ibid., p. 71.
member Ad Hoc Committee to further study the "Zone of Peace" proposal for implementation. K. Subrahmanyam, Director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, was one of the three members asked by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to prepare a factual statement regarding the big powers' military presence in the Indian Ocean. Ever since the acceptance of the concept of "Zone of Peace" in the Indian Ocean, the United Nations has taken up this issue almost every year but nothing worthwhile has come out so far due to the indifference of the great maritime powers.

The United Nations decided in 1974 to convene an "Indian Ocean Conference" but this could not happen because none of the permanent members of the Security Council such as USA, USSR, France, and UK showed willingness to attend it. Instead, their naval presence in the Indian Ocean kept on increasing day by day, showing utter disregard to the popular U. N. resolution regarding the "Zone of Peace". The UN Ad Hoc Committee which was later enlarged to 46 members faced difficulty in functioning as a preparatory committee for the conference due to the differences among the non-aligned and East European

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66 Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Yemen and Zambia were also members of the Ad Hoc Committee, vide Resolution 2992 (XXVIII) of 15 December 1972. The membership of the Ad Hoc Committee was raised to 46 by June 1982.

67 The growing popularity of peace zone movement in the UN General Assembly could be seen from the following. In 1971, the votes cast in favour of the resolution were 61 with 55 against and 10 abstentions; in 1976, they were 106 in favour, 25 against and 0 abstentions. For countrywise voting in the UN General Assembly from 1971 to 1976, see K. P. Mishra, n. 64, Appendices A to F, pp. 135-54.
countries on the one hand, and the western countries, on the other. The latter insisted on harmonization of different views and the improvement of political and security climate in the region as a pre-condition.68 India was not much hopeful for the success of the Conference without the cooperation of the super-powers.

Providing bases to the big powers by the countries of this region was not in the over-all interest of peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region and was contrary to the concept of "Zone of Peace". It could provide strong incentive to other big powers to step in and acquire similar base facilities somewhere else in the region. In consequence, the Indian Ocean would be converted into a "zone of conflict, competition and rivalry." Owing to the presence of extra-regional powers in the region, the intra-regional countries were not free to decide policies for security, commensurate with their needs and resources. These countries acted as pawns in the hands of the big powers and served their strategic interests in the region instead of promoting their own security and other national interests.

The cardinal point of Indian Ocean policy rested upon the "Zone of Peace" approach which opposed the military presence of extra-regional powers in any form in the Indian Ocean and tried to forge

more meaningful development ties with the region. Though there was not much success in this approach, yet it seemed that there was no better alternative to this approach. The increasing number of big powers' armada in the Indian Ocean, their continuous search for bases in the region, growing intra-regional rivalries and arms race, non-cooperation of big maritime powers to accept the peace zone concept, varying perception of the Indian Ocean countries regarding the presence of the big powers in the region and double standard followed by some of them in this respect forced by their foreign and domestic competitions, were the few reasons which could be attributed to the failure of this approach. Some scholars started calling it a "dead horse" and the "utopian concept" which could hardly be implemented.

At the seventh Non-Aligned summit held in New Delhi that concluded on 23 March 1983, the chairperson, Indira Gandhi, while expressing concern over the militarization of the Indian Ocean, said: "We can not do very much except raise our voice and try to see that these voices become stronger." Later, when Mrs. Gandhi visited the Soviet Union in 1984, a joint Soviet-Indian Declaration was signed, in which it was stated that the two sides called for the early implementation of the decision of the United Nations General Assembly to convene a conference on the Indian Ocean in the first half of 1984. Both the nations reiterated their support for the just claim of Mauritian
sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago including Diego Garcia. It was very discouraging that the United Nations Conference on the Indian Ocean was postponed year after year with the result that people ultimately gave up any hope of its being held at all, at least in the near future.

During his visit to Port Louis, Mauritius, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi again gave a call to keep the Indian Ocean free from great power rivalries to ensure peace in the region. These words fell on deaf ears.

The Indian response to the super-power naval presence led to some criticism from the supporters of the policies of big powers on the question of the Indian Ocean. They saw the Indian apprehensions as motivated by New Delhi's desire to carve out a domain of its own. The modernization of the Indian navy and her efforts to befriend the neighbouring countries led to a kind of phobia in some small nations of the region like Sri Lanka and Pakistan who thought that India had hegemonistic tendencies. Sri Lanka's President Jayewardene said: "If there is a change in India and there is some kind of threat to Ceylon, we might need Diego Garcia." The United States also perceived India as a major rival to its trade with the Third World countries. As such, the United States contributed to a large extent to the generation of fear.


70 *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 27 November 1978.
psychosis among the small neighbours of India. The successful development of relations of friendship and cooperation between India and the Soviet Union were held to be an important factor in creating suspicion and distrust over India's policy on the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean being India's strategic rear, she could not rely solely on the hope that sometimes in future the Indian Ocean would be free from super-power military presence. Working to her security considerations, she had maintained a balance between her approach to the Indian Ocean problems, and her naval modernization programme and other defence efforts. India's immediate objective, therefore, was to diffuse the situation and prevent it from developing into a crisis. Definitely, this did not mean that she was pursuing some kind of suicidal or adventurist policy of excessive reliance on the naval strength to gain absolute control over the Indian Ocean.

India's response to the Diego Garcia project was determined by her desire to prevent the intrusion of navies of external powers into the Indian Ocean region and their plans for building bases in the area. Besides the fact that Diego Garcia, located within 40-minutes flying distance by any supersonic aircraft from the Indian shores, was a grave threat to the country's security. India had suffered a lot during the colonial era and, therefore, the Anglo-American moves on Diego Garcia island were seen as revival of the old colonial designs. That was why India made it clear that Diego Garcia was not a bilateral issue
between India and the United States; it was a matter with which all littoral countries were equally concerned. It was a tension area for the whole of the Indian Ocean region.

India's objectives in its Indian Ocean policy can now be summarized as follows:

1. India's economic development, political stability and independence of action should not, in any way, be affected by the possible super-power actions in the Indian Ocean region.

2. India should aim at precluding or neutralizing the impact of any whimsical or wayward action against it by the super-powers.

3. India should prevent super-power rivalry in any part of the sub-continent. Despite Pakistan's pro-U.S. instance and its inclusion in the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) area, it was still a non-aligned nation. It was in India's interest to keep it so.

4. India should acquire such military capabilities as were necessary to inordinately raise the threshold of any super-power military intervention in the South Asian Indian Ocean littoral.

5. India should acquire and deploy its forces on island possessions to safeguard from hostile take-overs.
6. India should help defend, if requested, the island republics in the Western Indian Ocean Region against mercenary or commando style invasion.

7. India should prevent encroachment upon and protect the assets of the large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Indian Ocean region. These assets included the off-shore oil deposits and the oil rigs, sea-bed, rare minerals, coastal monazite sands, fishery resources etc.

8. India should ensure the right to peaceful passage for naval units and the mercantile fleet in the Indian Ocean region.

9. India should ensure the safe passage to the scientific bases on the continent of Antarctica and, at a later stage, provide for the security of the base itself. With already two permanently staffed bases of Dakshin Gagotri and Maitri and the extensive satellite communication, weather charting and research facilities, India is already an accepted member of the Antarctica Treaty Parties Consultative Group.71

10. India should protect her commercial and economic assets beyond the EEZ limits – such as the 150,000 sq. mile area demarcated in the Indian Ocean region. India should commence sea-bed mining operations as a “Pioneer Investor”. India is one of the six countries in the world and first in the Third World to have acquired this capability under

the Sea-bed Treaty provisions of the U. N. Conference on the Law of the Sea.\textsuperscript{72}

Whatever motives and intentions might be attributed to India's high posture in the Indian Ocean, the fact remains that India has vital stakes in the Indian Ocean, which warrants her attention now as well as in the future. India should make positive efforts to forge unity among the Indian Ocean countries through economic and political cooperation.

6. **South African Response to Western Powers' presence in the Indian Ocean**

The Indian and the Pacific Oceans are of paramount importance to South Africa. They represent the life-line of communication and contact with the outside world. The bulk of South African trade, both imports and exports, are carried by ships over the high seas. This means that for South Africa, free navigation and the safety of its maritime routes must be secured at all times, and at all costs. However, until 1990, the perception in South Africa was that except for the Russian design and activity in the Indian Ocean, there was no challenge or a threat of a challenge that should worry the South Africans. The prospect of a blockade by a hostile power was never taken seriously nor contemplated even at the height of international sanctions.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} Satish Chandra, n. 29, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{73} *The Star* (Johannesburg), 15 January 1990.
Nevertheless, there was a period during the eighties when the South African government was alarmed at the increased activity of the Russian naval fleet in the Indian Ocean, but even then, the conventional wisdom was that the matter should be of concern to the Americans and the Japanese rather than to South Africa. It was argued that complete freedom of navigation and peaceful communication across the Indian Ocean were needed to safeguard the passage of oil from the Persian Gulf to the Far East, mainly to Japan.\(^{74}\)

The South African government never lost an opportunity to remind the world of what would happen if the country was to acquire a government dominated by the communists. Under such a scenario, maintained the propaganda machine: "...the strongest power in Africa would tip to the Soviet Union, thus consolidating communism's hold in Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique."\(^{75}\) Another publication asserted that "an alliance of the Soviet Union and Southern Africa would control an alarming proportion of the world's minerals – about 22 per cent of its diamond production, 40 per cent of its gold production, and it would dominate world markets in several strategic minerals particularly chromium, platinum, palladium and rhodium, on which the world

\(^{74}\) ibid., 14 December 1983; 5 June 1984; 7 April 1986; and 11 September 1987.

depends to make environmentally friendly attachments for car exhausts and a variety of specialist steels.”

As far as the Soviet Union’s actual policy towards South Africa was concerned, there was mounting evidence to show that throughout the eighties Soviet policy on South Africa remained low-key, cautious, realistic and conservative, counseling a negotiated settlement rather than escalation, which Moscow could not control anyway. By early 1990 it had become clear that the Soviet Union’s top priority was to normalize East-West relations and improve its domestic economy rather than to get involved in another confrontation with the West over South Africa or the Indian Ocean.

South Africa’s geographical location binds it to developments in the Indian Ocean, and the role of the Ocean in international strategy must inevitably exert a big influence on the Republic of South Africa. At the same time, it must be recognized that South Africa’s response to the growing super-power rivalry in the Indian Ocean, during the Cold War era, could not be the same as that of India for obvious reasons. For all practical purposes, South Africa, ruled by White minority, with

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stringent apartheid laws in force, was virtually an ally of the West. Therefore, South Africa, during the apartheid years, did not have to bother about the security of the sea channels passing via Cape of Good Hope. Its security was being well looked after by her Western friends. It needs to be emphasized that the overriding preoccupation of South Africa at that time was with the defence and security of the apartheid state. ⁷⁸

South Africa, situated on the southern tip of the African continent facing the western part of the Indian Ocean, during the apartheid regime, saw no harm in the military presence of super-powers in the Indian Ocean and in the establishment of the military base at Diego Garcia by the United States. This was so because, at that time, it was governed by a white minority racist regime which was extremely pro-West. South Africa exercised control over the Cape of Good Hope which was considered NATO’s ‘back door’ or gatekeeper to the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans when the Suez Canal was closed. The Cape is vital for the protection of the Western oil supply lines. Seventy per cent of the strategic raw material comprising precious minerals and 80 per cent of oil needed by European NATO powers went through the sea-lanes around the Cape. ⁷⁹ In fact, the South African connection played a major role in the development of Western countries’ Indian Ocean

⁷⁸ ibid., p. 43.
⁷⁹ Bhupinder Singh, n. 20, p. 88.
strategy. The country's strategic location between the East and the West itself explains the strategic importance of the country for the West.

7. Strategic Collaboration between South Africa and the U.S.

The racist South Africa was a blind supporter of Britain and the United States of America until the advent of the Black majority rule there. For all practical purposes, South Africa was an accepted member of the Western defence system, although she was not a formal member of the NATO or any other western military alliance. As an informal ally of the West, she used to receive from the West the most sophisticated military hardware, especially from Britain, U. S., France and Italy. The West did all that it could to militarize South Africa so that it could cope with the forces that were trying to destabilize it.

Under the Simonstown naval base Agreement,80 concluded in 1955, Britain and South Africa had agreed to cooperate in planning various measures for the protection of the Cape sea-route. Accordingly, British warships were bought by South Africa; a new operational headquarters for the Marine Command was built at Westlake; and two sub-headquarters were set up later at Walvis Bay and Durban. A submarine base was also built at Simonstown, which

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included a dock to handle submarines and small surface ships. The Simonstown Agreement pertained to the defence of the sea-route around Southern Africa. Britain enjoyed various facilities at Simonstown such as radio transmission and storage of thousands of tons of ammunition.

The Simonstown Agreement, also at times referred to as "Sea Route Agreement", was of indefinite duration and was to remain in force until such time as the two governments decided to terminate it by mutual agreement. Under the Agreement, Britain was obliged to replace and maintain the South African naval ships. The Agreement recognized the importance of sea communication for the well-being of both countries in times of peace and war.

In return for the British and American aid, South Africa gave green signal to their plans about the development of Diego Garcia as a military base. In view of the vacuum created by the British withdrawal from Simonstown and the Russian efforts to fill it up, a South African Minister observed that a stronger presence of the Western countries was needed in the Indian Ocean. He went to the extent of offering his own country's facilities to the United States instead of building a base

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at considerable expense, presumably a reference to the Diego Garcia base.\textsuperscript{83}

The decision of the U. S. Navy to upgrade its facilities at Diego Garcia was part and parcel of an overall strategy to upgrade American-South African strategic collaboration besides contingency planning to thwart attempts by the then adversary, the Soviet Union, to control the oil-fields of the Gulf and possible choking of the Western sea-route.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the collapse of the Shah of Iran combined in the year 1979 to expose a vast new area of vulnerability for the West. Washington's response was to initiate a wholesale strategic review that would issue in the first basic re-orientation of the post-World War II period. Southwest Asia was the new crisis point but it was soon evident that American planners were thinking in terms of a broader security regime encompassing the entire Indian Ocean region.

The Cape of Good Hope provides the principal maritime entry into the Indian Ocean. South Africa provided state of the art infrastructure (industry, communication, transport) and operational bases (reference merely to Simonstown were barely relevant). Since 1979 the United States had diligently upgraded the facilities on Diego

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{The Times of India}, 12 June 1976.
Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago. Diego Garcia, however, could only serve as an advance staging area with limited logistical-operational value, and not as a “stand-down”, repair-maintenance overhaul-refit base.

8. Threat of Soviet expansionism in Indian Ocean

The closing of the Suez Canal in June 1967 and the penetration of the USSR into the Indian Ocean, which began in 1968 when two long voyages by the Soviet navy were undertaken and friendly ports visited, not only increased the strategic importance of the Cape route but also meant that South Africa faced, and in particular, could face in future, far-reaching economic as well as political / military implications. The penetration of the USSR into the Indian Ocean could not be viewed by South Africa as solely a Soviet threat. The surfacing of Communist China in the Indian Ocean, from where its presence extended into the mainland, could unleash a race between the USSR and China to gain the favour of the countries of central, east, and southern Africa, and their intensified penetration, supply of weapons to terrorists by them could result in serious implications for South Africa.

In consequence of the closing of the Suez canal, the importance of the Cape route and the naval base at Simonstown enhanced tremendously. In this process, South Africa, from which the sea-route could be controlled and which provided the only permanent naval base
backed by a modern industry and stable government in the whole area from Australia to South America, had become a tantalizing target for the enemies of the West. Control of South Africa would not only mean control of an important sector of international trade but, by virtue of the location and dependence of the countries of southern Africa on it, would imply the control of the entire sub-continent of southern Africa.

This development resulted in an intensified threat to South Africa and to the safety of the Cape route. South Africa pointed to the mounting dangers at an early stage when its Minister of Defence stated that "South Africa could no longer make itself a target for attack because of its defence of the Cape route, unless the West was prepared to deliver ground-to-air missiles to enable the Republic to protect its harbours and industries." Arrangements were made to purchase submarines and other equipment, while the Simonstown base was enlarged and modernized. A worldwide radio communications network enabling instant contact with ships, aircraft, and submarine from South America to Indian Ocean and as far south as the Antarctic was also established.

The penetration of the USSR in the Indian Ocean could entail the following dangers for South Africa.

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First, in the light of international strategy and increasing interest shown in the Indian Ocean (in 1969, 5,500 ships from the USSR and its satellite countries sailed within sight of the Cape point), South Africa, with its strategic location, modern industry, well-equipped infrastructure, and exceptionally rich natural resources, must inevitably have been high on the USSR's strategic priority list. It may be recalled that, during World War II, Germany was expelled from North Africa by thrust from the south. Although the possibility of overt military action could not be excluded, such action would probably be used only as a last resort as other easier avenues were available to the USSR to achieve its southern African objective.85

Second, the USSR could decide that it was in its own interest to curry favour with African states and thus gain a bigger foothold in Africa, to give practical effect to the U. N. or the Organization of African Unity (OAU) decisions to hamper trade with South Africa or completely disrupt strategic supplies. A drastic step such as this seemed to be necessary to restore USSR's image in Africa after the setback following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

A prominent personality such as Alexander Stirling, Director of British shipping company, had referred to the dangers of piracy on the

high seas and the way in which shipping could be hampered. Laurence Martin also refers to the possibility of interference with shipping and says that "many believe that war at sea could go quite far without necessarily precipitating nuclear war." South Africa's own merchant navy of more than 200 vessels would be particularly vulnerable. It must be admitted that tracing specific ships would be difficult, but tankers transporting oil to South Africa were easily identifiable. Russian fleet maneuvers at strategic area could make it unsafe for shipping companies to call at South African ports. During World War II, 238 allied ships were sunk in the Indian Ocean between Lourenceo Marques (now Maputo) and Cape Town. With the larger number of ships using the Cape route, the toll could be even higher.

If the Suez Canal were to be reopened with the resultant decrease in Soviet logistic problems in the Indian Ocean, the possibility of action against free shipping would be even greater. In a paper delivered at the annual meeting of NATO in October 1969, it was stated that 'it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the Soviet Navy has it within its power to cause severe and possibly fatal damage to NATO shipping using the Cape route or sailing to and from the estuary of the Plate within hours of the Kremlin giving the signal to do

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This possibility did not appear to be a practical proposition at that time. If the USSR were to interfere with international trade in general and South African trade in particular, it would be unlikely (because of logistic considerations) to choose the southern extremity of Africa. Oil supplies could more easily be cut at source or in the Mozambique channel than at South African ports.

A greater threat for South Africa was that the USSR, through its naval presence in the Indian Ocean and infiltration in the oil-producing countries of the middle east, could succeed in persuading these countries to impose an embargo on oil supplies to South Africa. In the past, Iran was not inclined to participate in a boycott “unless it felt assured that other suppliers would also adhere to such a ban.”

This applied to western oil supplies as well, although economic considerations would make the oil-producing countries less inclined to take such a step.

Third, the biggest threat arising from the Soviet penetration of the Indian Ocean as far as South Africa and the whole of Southern Africa was concerned was that it could result in a race (especially in respect of the supply of weapons and other support for terrorists) with

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88 ibid.

China to obtain influence in east and southern Africa.

As stated above, South Africa was of the utmost importance to the USSR for military and economic reasons. With the construction of Tan-Zam rail-road and support for terrorist activities, China had gained a substantial lead over the USSR in Africa.

9. USSR Intervention in Southern Africa

South Africa's trouble did not come, however, from across the open sea. It came from the neighbouring territories in the north. South Africa regarded every state as its "enemy" if it extended support to those organizations which were determined to put an end to the obnoxious system of apartheid which had already been branded as a "crime against humanity" by the United Nations.

The communist threat, as perceived by the South African government, was recognized by the government in several of its White Papers tabled in the parliament. For instance, in 1982 its Defence

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White Paper stated that "in view of the mineral wealth of South Africa, the USSR strives to extend its influence to this area by assisting the so-called “terrorist organizations” such as the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO) and the African National Congress (ANC), by creating unrest and exploiting the situation and by making use of surrogate forces such as the Cubans."  

Explaining the threat further, the White Paper stated that the aim of the USSR was to tie down the South African defence force by means of a protracted terrorist war in South-West Africa (now Namibia), while, at the same time, giving increased assistance to terrorist action in South Africa itself. Although SWAPO had adopted an extremely conciliatory approach in negotiations for peaceful settlement of the Namibian problem, the White Paper described its attitude as “obstinate and unyielding”. In its view, SWAPO’s position in the negotiation was a clear demonstration of the ulterior motives of the communist governments. As part of its “total onslaught strategy” against South Africa, the aforesaid White Paper viewed with alarm the independence of Zimbabwe, totally ignoring the fact that Robert Mugabe was not pro-Moscow. South Africa feared that independent Zimbabwe would play an important role in supporting the ANC. The White Paper pointed out that, after its independence, Mozambique backed by Zimbabwe was involved in an increasing number of terrorist activities directed against South Africa.  

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93 ibid., p. 2.
The 1982 White Paper, besides referring to the Cuban presence in Angola, also drew attention to the fact that the East German and Soviet personnel were becoming increasingly involved in direct support for the armed forces of Angola and Mozambique as well as in training SWAPO and ANC military personnel and planning the so-called terrorist activities. The USSR, the White Paper pointed out, also supplied armaments including tanks and fighter aircrafts on a large scale to Angola and Mozambique, and that the ultimate aim of the Soviet Union and its allies was to overthrow the government in South Africa and to replace it with a Marxist-oriented form of government to further the objectives of the USSR and, therefore, all possible methods and means were being used to attain these objectives.94

In its 1986 White Paper, the South African government pointed out that the increasing involvement of Cuban forces, alongside the Angolan forces against National Union for the total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in Angola during 1985, indicated the willingness of the Soviet Union to provide Angola with direct military support in the form of military personnel on a larger scale than before. Significantly, the White Paper stated:

Under the influence of the Soviet bloc, the UN and the OAU, the Black states in southern Africa are striving, on the one hand, to isolate the RSA, including the implementation of intensified coercive measures and disinvestment, and on the other hand, to promote the

94 ibid.
revolutionary onslaught against the RSA, Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique especially are increasingly prepared to allow the ANC, in a clandestine way to commit deeds of terror in the RSA through, and from, their territories. During the past year, the ANC has also established and extended its military and political infrastructures in order to plan, coordinating and control the revolutionary onslaught in all the RSA’s neighbouring states (excluding the TBVC states). As far as South West Africa (SWA) is concerned, Angola and Mozambique and, to a lesser extent, Botswana serve as the most important host countries for SWAPO.95

The South African government, under the White regime, always regarded Angola and Mozambique as the chief source of threat because these countries, in their view, were acting as proxy for the Soviet Union. Angola was regarded as a threat because it provided sanctuary and limited military support to SWAPO, while Mozambique was regarded as threat because it hosted the military wing of the ANC. Through financial contributions to the OAU’s Liberation Committee, virtually all black African states supported the ANC in its struggle against the South African government. A number of South Africa’s neighbouring countries had set up an ANC radio station broadcasting to South Africa. Nearly all black African states supported mandatory UN sanctions against South Africa. The black states of southern Africa also embarked on what they portrayed as the road to their economic liberation, for which purpose they had set up Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) (now Southern Africa

Development Community). As far as Zimbabwe was concerned, Robert Mugabe, even before the independence of the country, used to be portrayed as the 'Archtype Marxist Terrorist Chief', and dire warnings were sounded in South Africa about the havoc a Patriotic Front regime would wreck not only in Zimbabwe but in southern Africa generally.\textsuperscript{96}

The independence of Angola and Mozambique was a matter of serious concern to South Africa because, during the Portuguese rule, there used to be a lot of cooperation between the Portuguese government and the South African government in all matters affecting their security. The Portuguese used to arrest the freedom fighters of Namibia and South Africa who used to take shelter in Angola or Mozambique and hand them over to the South African government. The SWAPO of Namibia was unable to make its armed struggle effective because it enjoyed no sanctuary in the neighbouring countries ruled by the white regimes. The ANC itself was not very effective in its armed struggle in the absence of any safe sanctuary in the neighbourhood. The independence of Angola and Mozambique meant that thereafter South Africa would not be able to rely on the protective shield provided by these countries. There were clear indications that the black governments in Angola and Mozambique were going to extend all possible help and support to the liberation movements, both in Namibia and South Africa. The South African policy-makers decided

that it would have to enhance and strengthen the security of Namibia for whose independence SWAPO was forced to launch the armed struggle.

The most worrying aspect of the independence of Angola and Mozambique was that the ruling black governments subscribed to Marxist ideology and enjoyed tremendous political, diplomatic and military support from the Soviet Union and the East European countries. The Soviet Union rushed enormous amount of military hardware to enable them to safeguard their independence and to deal with any efforts that might be made to dislodge the leftist, pro-Moscow, governments there. Independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 was a further set-back to South Africa because so long as White minority regime ruled there, South Africa felt fairly secure because that regime had also cooperated with it, like the Portuguese regime in Angola and Mozambique not only by denying bases to the ANC and SWAPO but also by capturing their guerrillas if and when they happened to take shelter there. Robert Mugabe, who headed the first black government in independent Zimbabwe, was a known Marxist, and he had openly extended support to both SWAPO and ANC. Thus, South Africa felt almost surrounded by Marxist, or at least pro-Marxist governments.

Before concluding this section, it needs to be mentioned that South Africa was alarmed by the fact that the USSR had supplied more than the US$ 15 billion worth of arms to the Front-Line states between
1878-83. South Africa suspected that these arms would ultimately be used against it either by the Front-Line states themselves or might be passed on to the liberation movements. South Africa never regarded SWAPO and ANC as genuine liberation movements but only as organizations promoting the interests of the Soviet Union. This is why both SWAPO and ANC were dubbed as communist organizations. The South African Prime Minister, Vorster, while refusing to deal with SWAPO, described it as an organization conceived in communist sin in Moscow.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be submitted that super-power rivalry in the Indian Ocean was the product of mutual distrust. Each super-power wanted to protect its economic and strategic interests in the Indian Ocean. Each of them thought that its rival super-power would endanger those interests at the time of some crisis that could erupt in future. No super-power wanted to take any risk and did not wish to be caught unawares and unable to cope with the dangers to its economic and security interests. It does not matter which super-power established its presence in the Indian Ocean first and which followed it. What matters most is that both super-powers acted as they did to

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safeguard their interests. The crisis point was, however, never reached during the Cold War era, and, as the situation stands today, there seems to be no possibility of its being reached in the post-Cold War era. After the demise of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, a new era began – the era of cooperation between Russia, on the one hand, and the Western powers, on the other.

As far as India and South Africa are concerned, they took different positions on the question of the Indian Ocean during the Cold War era. India, emerging as a new sovereign state after throwing off the colonial mantle, took a strong stand against the on-going super-power rivalry in the Indian Ocean because it threatened its own security and forced it to divert a substantial portion of its budget to defence at a time when most of its resources were required to be invested in development activities. However, it could not sit idle in the face of the heavy military presence of the super-powers at its doorstep. Hence, at all international fora, it called for the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a “Zone of Peace”, which implied the withdrawal of forces of the super-powers from there. However, the super-powers were not prepared to oblige it. In contrast, South Africa, during White minority rule, was a virtual ally of the West. Naturally, therefore, it could not take the same position as India had done on the question of the Indian Ocean. In fact, it provided to the Western powers a number of facilities in its ports washed by the Indian Ocean. In the post-Cold War era, however, the position of South Africa became identical with that of India.