CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SECURITY LINKS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA

I. TSARIST ANNEXATION OF CENTRAL ASIA

The Russian movement into Central Asia in the nineteenth century represented a late phase of an expansion already in progress over several centuries. For a long time, Tsarist Russia did not exhibit any particular interest in annexing the Central Asian region. Ignorance of geography and the economic potential of Central Asia coupled with the remoteness of the region from European part of Russia resulted in keeping away Russia's interest from Central Asia. However, towards the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Russia not only cast away its indifferent attitude towards Central Asia, but also became alive to its obvious economic, military, strategic and political importance.

The uniting of the Russian lands and throwing off of the Mangol yoke for ensuring the overall security of the empire, were only a prelude to a succession of moves which led Russia to subjugate a number of other peoples. The Central Asian steppes and deserts, long highway for westerly movements of Asiatic peoples, now become the scene of a reverse movement as Russia extended her influence towards the south-east. The southern border of Siberia from the Urals to the Altai was inhabited by the Kazakh people. Turbulent by nature and impatient of control or restriction by any Central authority, they usually plundered native villages, drove off livestocks, sold captives in the slave market of Khiva and Bokhara. Their frequent raid on trade caravans on a long journey between Russia
and the Central Asian Khanates, 'hindered the development of trade which drew the attention of Tsarist Russia'. The peasants and Cossacks settlers along the frontier as well as native and Russian traders constantly asked the government for the security and protection against such depredations.

Another reason for the Russian advance was that the Kazakhs occupied rich lands which greatly attracted Russians for their settlements. Besides, beyond the Kazakh steppe lay the fabled wealth of Turkestan, Persia and India, offering a future vision of trade, which had excited imagination in Russia from early times. But perhaps the most important reason was the commercial and political expansion of Great Britain in the region, which greatly threatened stability of the Tsarist Russian regime.

By the early nineteenth century, Russian statesman and military personnel had begun to feel concerned about 'British commercial and political penetration in Afghanistan and Central Asia'. Their firm commitment for decisive action to guarantee Russian trade and commerce, and to bolster-up Russian prestige among the Asian peoples, coupled with a tendency to use the region as a diplomatic sphere by threatening to advance towards India in order to lessen British opposition to Russia at the Turkish Straits, caused alarm in Britain which clouded relations between the two imperial powers almost for a century. Thus impelled by provocations, temptations and apprehensions acceptable enough before a world opinion still uninhabited by questions of aggressions or disregard for sovereign rights, Russia joined the rivalry for colonial acquisitions which dominated nineteenth century international politics.

2 Ibid., p.18.
The necessity of containing the commercial and political expansion of Great Britain in the region became as important task to Russia as securing the region’s cotton for its textile industry and opening the Central Asian market for Russian manufactured articles. Thus Soviet scholar N.A. Khalfin believed that the "economic reasons in themselves were sufficient to warrant Russian penetration" in Central Asia. 3 Besides, the enormous political prestige resulting from the annexation of such a vast region and the possibility of using it as a bargaining counter for wresting concessions on the western front from its traditional rival in European politics – Great Britain – were not lost on Russia. The Russian Foreign Secretary, County Nesselrode, declared in a Cabinet meeting in 1816 that "as long as Central Asia is not ours, we cannot by any means think of conquering the whole of Asia". 4

The Russian Central Asian campaign, though it began as early as 1839, did not assume any importance until the close of the Crimean War (1853-56). Russian troops under the command of General Van Kaufmans attacked and annexed the city of Aulic-Ata on 4 June 1864, Turkestan on 12 June and Chinkent on 22 September in the same year. On 17 June 1865, Tashkent, one of the most important cities of the region, was in Russian possession. 5 In the following year, the Russian armies captured Khodzhent, Ura-Tabe, Dzhizak and Yangi Kurgon. On 2 May 1868, the famous city of Samarkand was taken over. The Khivan campaign, commenced in 1873, resulted in the humbling of that state and annexation of large tracts of territory lying on the Right Bank of Amu-Darya. The Trans-Caspian region passed into Russian hands following the defeat of the

Turkmen tribes in the battle of Goek-Tepe (12 January 1881). On May 6, 1881, this region was formally annexed to the empire. The Russian campaign of conquest in the Central Asian region was completed with the capture of Merv (January 1884) and Kushka (March, 1885).  

Thus the Russian advance in Central Asia which began in 1839, in the course of less than half a century resulted in the reduction of the Emirate of Bokhara and Khanate of Khiva to vassal status – and the total annexation of the territories of the Kokand Khanate. The Russian advance beyond the southern frontiers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the region was suspiciously viewed by Great Britain as a potential threat to its 'crown's brightest jewel'.

By and large the neighbouring countries of China, India and Russia or the powers based there have had a deep impact on the politics of Central Asia. Central Asia was a key arena of rivalry between Britain and Russia throughout most of the nineteenth century, and between Japan and the Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century. Russia's advance towards Turkey and Persia during the early part of the nineteenth century (1826-28) brought it into conflict with Britain. In formulating its policy towards Persia and Central Asia, Russia found it necessary to take the British interest into account. Similarly Britain also took due note of the Russian interest in Persia and Central Asia. Both Britain and Russia were thus deeply involved in this 'Great Game' of power rivalry to establish supremacy in the region. Both imperial powers confronted each other from China to Persia in the 1880s and 1890s.

The position of Afghanistan and Persia in relation to the defence of India was of vital importance to Britain. The move made Britain in Afghanistan and Persia, as well as in Tibet roused Russia's suspicions of British designs. Afghanistan, which achieved freedom from Mughals and the Persian empire in 1747, inadvertently became involved in the 'Great Game' of the British and Russian power politics in Central Asia. About the turn of the century, Russia's position in Central Asia conferred a special advantage vis-à-vis Britain and China. When the pulls and pressures of the British and Russian empires were being felt in Central Asia, Afghanistan was embroiled in internal turmoil, with one group after another contending to seize power. Both the internal instability and the Anglo-Russian struggle for ascendancy in Central Asia eventually forced upon it the position not merely of a buffer, but of a protectorate of Britain.

The British advanced steadily and irresistibly towards Afghanistan and Persia, and the Russian advanced as steadily and irresistibly beyond the Caspian Sea, and each felt annoyed at the other getting in its way. The British, ever jealous of their vast possessions in the East, feared that the real objective behind the Russian advance beyond the Caspian Sea and towards Afghanistan was to 'deprive them of their possessions' in India. They never liked the idea of the Russian government becoming a party in the affairs of Afghanistan, for they wanted Afghanistan to preserve its integrity at all costs. To settle the status of Afghanistan, which by virtue of its geographical location was vital for the defence of India. The Russians, on the other hand, feared that under British influence Afghanistan might become a destabilising factor in the peace and stability of Central Asia. Russia, which at all costs, wanted to maintain its influence over Central Asia, and for its defence as well as for overall security of its southern...
flank, always tried to maintain stability in the region. During the period of Anglo-Russian rivalry in the region, Russia never compromised with Britain. Realising the geostrategic position of Central Asia, it tried to maintain peace and stability in the region at any cost.

In 1869 the two imperial powers-Britain and Russia-began negotiations on the status of Afghanistan and on the Central Asian question. In January 1873, they concluded an agreement in St. Petersburg concerning the northern limits of Afghanistan. By this agreement, Russia gave a positive commitment that Afghanistan would be treated as a neutral zone of territory between their possessions, and lay wholly outside its sphere of influence.

Britain had friendly relations with Amir Sher Ali of Afghanistan during 1869-73, and therefore, felt no need for any precise demarcation of Afghanistan's frontiers with Russia from the Hari Rud to the Amu Darya. The seizure by Russia of Merv in 1884 and Panjdeh in 1885, in disregard of the previous agreement of 1873, came as a serious blow to British prestige in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Britain had assumed responsibility for the conduct of Afghanistan's foreign relations since the peace treaty signed in Gandamak on 26 May 1879, and had pledged its help to Afghanistan in warding off any aggression on that country. But Britain's failure to help on this occasion reinforced the crisis of confidence. Russia, which wanted to obtain a strategical frontier south of the waterless desert, persistently maintained that the Hindu Kush, north of Chitral, and not the Amu-Darya, was ethnologically and geographically the proper boundary between its own Central Asian possessions and Afghanistan.
Following an armed clash between the Afghans and the Russians in Panjdeh in March 1885, Britain and Russia agreed on 10 September 1885 to appoint a joint Afghan-Russian Boundary Commission for the demarcation of the 350 mile long strip between the Hari Rud and the Amu-Darya bordering the Turkmen territory. The commission completed the work of demarcation from Zulfiqar Pass upto Dukchi in March 1886. Later in 1892, a joint Anglo-Russian Pamir Boundary Commission demarcated the boundary from Lake Sarikol to the Pamir, and set a definite limit beyond which Russia was not to advance in the direction of India.

The British who had always looked upon the northern and western boundary of Afghanistan as constituting the real frontier of India for defence against aggression by any power from the north or the west, were never really able to obtain any solid footing in Afghanistan despite continuous diplomatic and military efforts.

However, from 1894 onwards, Britain and Russia came to terms with each other, and finally the Anglo-Russian Convention of 31 August 1907 set forth their respective “Spheres of influence” in Central Asia and Afghanistan and settled all their differences in the Middle East as well as Tibet. Thus the negotiations which began with the aim of creating a buffer state, ended up in the carving out of spheres of influence.

Besides Afghanistan, the other frontier, where the three powers – China, Britain and Russia – confronted one another was the region of eastern Turkestan. Britain and Russia, who had both special interest in Eastern Turkestan ever since

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10 Ibid., p.35
the first half of the nineteenth century, pursued an active forward policy from the 1860s onwards. Their interest in Eastern Turkestan (now called Sinkiang) in 1870s led to their recognition of its independence from China. During the decline of the Chinese Empire, the two imperialist powers – Britain and Tsarist Russia competed with each other to gain strategic control over eastern Turkestan. After the Russian Revolution, the British concentrated their efforts on checkmating the spread of Soviet influence in Sinkiang. However, in the early 1930s, Sinkiang fell into the economic orbit of the Soviet Union. In the mid 1930s, the Soviet Union pursued certain politico-military objectives in Sinkiang and Sinkiang became practically an outpost of the Soviet Union.

The spread of Soviet influence in Sinkiang had multiple dimensions, which the British Government in India could hardly ignore. The Soviet Union was forced to divert all its attention and energy to its war with Germany, which began in the summer of 1941. The Soviet Union entered into an agreement with China towards the end of 1942, which empowered the latter to take over regular control of Sinkiang. The Chinese communists ‘liberated’ Sinkiang in October 1949, and made it an integral part of their unitary state, that is, the people’s Republic of China. On 1 October 1955, the Chinese Government reorganised Sinkiang as the Sinkiang-Uigur Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China.  

Yet despite the withdrawal of the Russian from eastern Turkestan, the long border of Russia with China still remained disputed. Soviet Union always tried to keep china away in the border disputes of Central Asian states. To secure the stability of the border and security of Central Asia, it always tried to check the growing interference of Chinese government. The Sino-Soviet border conflicts in 1969 was the outcome of the policies of Soviet Russia to maintain the stability in the border territories of Central Asia.

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During the first half of nineteenth century, Russian move towards Iran was aimed to consolidate its powers in Central Asia. By the Treaty of Gulistan on 12 October 1813, signed between Russia and Persia, 'all the Persian territories between the Caspian and Caucasus\textsuperscript{12} were handed over to Russia. The Russo-Persian war of 1826-28 resulted in further loss of territory of Persia in Armenia and Azerbaijan. By the Peace Treaty of Turkmenchai on 22 February 1828, the sovereignty of the Caspian Sea passed to Russia, and thus the Sea became an exclusively Russian inland sea. This treaty made the Aras river the boundary between Russia and Persia.

Thus from 1828 onwards, the increasing influence of Russia in Persia made the British uncomfortable. They suspected Russia's hand in the Persian siege of Herat in 1838-39, and feared that Russia's influence might in time extend to Afghanistan, and pose a threat to their prized possessions in India. By 1864, the year of the Sino-Russian Protocol concerning Sino-Russian boundary in the Turkestan sector, the Russian frontier extended along the line of the Syr-Darya upto Chimkent, Issik-Kul to the formidable Tien-Shan mountains. By another sweeping advance in 1865, Russia captured the entire territory between the Syr-Darya and the Amu-Darya upto Afghanistan.

After the Treaty of Askhabad on 20 February 1926, on the utilisation of frontier rivers, Iran and the Soviet Union finally agreed in principle to sign a boundary agreement on 6 May 1957, which sorted out many long standing border disputes in the Bojnurd area. But Soviet-Iranian relations became deeply strained when Iran signed a bilateral defence agreement with the USA, allowing establishment of US naval bases on its territory in the spring of 1959.

Against this backdrop of the Anglo-Russian rivalry, for strengthening their position around the region of Central Asia, Tsarist Russia followed a strategic policy aimed at ensuring the security of the region from the external destabilising forces in the larger interests of overall security and integrity of the Russian Empire. It pre-empted the British design for annexation of Central Asia as pursued by rounds of British-Indian ‘forward policy’.

II. FROM ESTABLISHMENT OF SOVIET POWER TO THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE SOVIET UNION AND CREATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

Following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II on 2 March 1917, the imperial regime began to crack-up all over Russia. After the October Revolution of 1917, a process of intensive integration of Central Asia into a single Soviet State system began under the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This took place in stages (first stage in 1924) culminating in the year 1936 when the five full-fledged Soviet Socialist Republics of Central Asia came into existence. The seven decades of Soviet rule gave Central Asia a strong feeling of security and stability as an integral part of the militarily strong superpower. During this period it remained free from internecine conflicts, uprisings, internal ethnic fighting and felt no threat to its security from its powerful neighbours.

Although Central Asia was one of the key areas of rivalry for supremacy between Britain and Russia throughout most of the nineteenth century and between Japan and Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century, the Sovietization of Russian Central Asia in the 1920s caused grave concern to the makers of the British policy towards Central Asia. The emergence of Japan in the

During the post-World War II the security implication of the Central Asian region was deepened. The decolonisation process coincided with the Cold War and the polarisation of the North into South with the South supporting the Socialist camp. In that process, the South had to confront not only the European colonial powers but also the USA, which was increasingly assuming the leadership of the West Bloc in global politics.\footnote{Ibid., p,36. C.R. Mohan, \textit{Indian Ocean and US-Soviet Détente} (New Delhi, 1991), p,31.} Since the attitude of the Socialist Bloc, during the early phase of the Cold War, was almost hostile to the ‘non-socialist’ nationalist movements, the South had to confront the West single handedly.

During that period, while the USA was the power behind the scene, European colonial powers were retained in the forefront. Britain and France along with the USA, were members of the SEATO. But in the case of Baghdad Pact only Britain was the extra regional power involved. The USA which was the main aid giver, both economic and military, remained in the background as a member of the committees of the Baghdad Pact and the CENTO subsequently. At that time, the Indian Ocean was considered to be a British lake, or a Commonwealth lake with Britain sharing responsibilities with regional Commonwealth members like Australia, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Britain had conducted
periodical joint naval exercises along with the Commonwealth members in the Indian Ocean. In that phase of the Cold War, Soviet Union had shown no great awareness of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean, despite the rivalry and alliances on its littoral region, was still free from the Super Power nuclear strategic presence.

Politics of the Indian Ocean region took a dramatic turn since 1955 following the de-Stalinization process. The new leadership in Moscow, for the security and stability of the part of the Soviet Central Asia, ignored the earlier ideological formulations and to maintain balance of power came forward to support the South against the West. Till the early sixties, the politics of the Indian Ocean, especially great power politics, was largely confined to ensuring a monopoly over trade, trade routes and over the resources of the region. USA was gradually replacing the European colonial powers, especially in the politico-military sphere. USSR was also making increasing use of sea routes via the Indian Ocean for its growing trade and commerce not only with the littoral states but also for the growing trade between the western region and the more developed part of the Socialist Bloc and its developing part on the Pacific coast. USSR also succeeded in developing a chain of friendly non-aligned states on its vital sea route from the Black Sea to the Pacific, like Syria, Egypt, India, and Indonesia.

Although, the Indian Ocean had figured in the military strategy of the United States as early as 1950s, but it beefed up military presence only after 1960s. The US Navy first appeared in the Indian Ocean in November 1963 in connection with the CENTO naval exercise Midlink held off Karachi in which the US Carrier Essex participated along with some sub-marines and vessels. It was after this exercise that the sub-marine Ghazi was transferred to the Pakistan Navy.
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 after spending about six weeks in the region conducting various exercises including air dropping of 2,300 US troops in South-West Iran. Following these exercises, an Anglo-American team conducted a joint survey of the Indian Ocean to select islands for setting up military bases.

In November 1965, the British Government decided to set up a new colony known as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in the Western region of the Indian Ocean. In December 1966, Britain entered into an agreement with the United States making available to the latter the BIOT for use as joint bases for 50 years. 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. The expansion of the Diego Garcia basin was justified by the US administration the need to meet the threat from the Soviet presence at Berbera in Somalia.

The Pentagon was seeking more and more new military bases and other military posts on a virtually all the strategically important points in the Indian Ocean in order to implement the new strategic doctrines of the White Houses like the "limited nuclear war" or the "primitive nuclear first strike".

Thus, the US military designs, its interventionist posture with the large-scale military presence in the Indian Ocean, and the American quest for bases in the region were considered by the Soviet regime as a threat to the stability of its

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17 Ibid.,
Central Asian region. When Soviet Union, in its capacity decided to intervene with limited presence in the Indian Ocean, on par with the large-scale military presence of the United States, the ‘Superpower’ rivalry further aggravated and threatened littoral states of the region.

Indian Ocean developed into an arena for the naval rivalry between the two Superpowers in the first half of the sixties with the induction of the nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching long range ballistic missile with nuclear warheads. This weapon system was symbolized by the POLARIS. Its deployment by the USA in the Indian Ocean added a completely new dimension to the question of Superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the entry of the US Seven Fleet-Operating in the Pacific, into the Indian Ocean in 1964 coincided with the perfection of new weapon system based upon nuclear propulsion and submerged – launched ballistic missile.

Subsequently, the US taskforce, named ‘Concord Squadron’, entered the Indian Ocean on 5 April 1964. It was composed of the air craft-carrier Bon Homme Richard, four destroyers and one fleet tanker. Apart from the aircraft operating from its flight deck, it reportedly carried long-range Regulus cruise missile, armed with nuclear war head. While the US task force was navigating the East African Coast, the USA was carrying on military manoeuvres in cooperation with Iran. Operation Dilawar began on 13 April 1964 included the landing of 2,300 US troops of the 101st Airborne Division into the Defzul area in south-west Iran. Simultaneously, two US destroyers and a converted sea-plane tender based in Bahrain representing the American naval presence in the Gulf, landed on the strategic Kharg island in the Gulf which was a vital oil part of Iran.

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The presence of the US fleet, as a permanent feature in the Indian Ocean, radically altered the balance of power in this area. There was practically no Soviet naval presence in the area at that time. The Polaris submarines of USA, operating from the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and Bay of Bengal, could cover a substantial part of the Soviet Union. Thus, under these circumstances, the entry of the US fleet resulted in the increased Cold War tensions in the Indian Ocean area. Furthermore, the Arabian sea littoral, which still had the strategic advantage of being a bridge-head on the southern flank of the Soviet Union, now became the shore-line whose control considered to be an important to dominate not only the bridge-head, but the Ocean itself, which had became the area of operations of the Polaris submarines.

Unlike the regional alliances of the fifties, which had more political than strategic bias, the objective of the new strategy was the use of nuclear weapons launched from under the surface of the sea in the context of the growing global nuclear arms race between the two super powers. Hence, it posed a different set of variables, which were seen as far more dangerous to peace and security of the region than the earlier superpower, mostly western, presence in the region. That was one of the main reasons for the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) demands for converting Indian Ocean into a peace-zone at the Non-aligned conference at Cairo in 1964.

Militarist circles in the Western countries, particularly in the United States, were now making wide use of the scientific and technical achievements in exploring the world oceans for aggressive purposes. The west was developing the most upto date types of weaponry, modernising its navies, developing special means to make it possible to conduct military operations under water, on the sea board and ocean floor, and reconstructing old naval bases and building new ones.\(^{20}\) The extension of US submarine operations to the Indian Ocean had led to the

appearance of a new seat of tension in that area and had evoked justified alarm in
the Soviet Union. The appearance of the American nuclear submarines equipped
with missile in the Indian Ocean constituted a threat both for ‘the European part of
the USSR and for the Soviet Central Asian and Eastern Siberia’.

After the following major developments in the subsequent years – the
deployment of SLBM system as well as formal despatch of the US task force to
the Indian Ocean from the Pacific, beginning of construction of the Very Low
Frequency (VLF) communication centre at North West Cape on the Indian Ocean,
US desire to acquire base facilities in Diego-Garcia, gained subsequently through
the Anglo-US negotiations in 1965 and operationalised through base in 1966,
British announcement of its withdrawal from east of the Suez by 1971, and the
closure of the Suez Canal following the June War, etc., — all these had a
tremendous impact on the Soviet union’s security perceptions in its Central Asian
region.

The growing superpower interests in the Third World countries, the set
back in Cuba in 1962 and the evolution of the Cold War strategy in the light of the
proliferation of the newly emerging weapon systems coupled with a strategic
nuclear threat for the stability of its southern flank of Central Asian region forced
Soviet Union to acquire a naval presence in the Indian Ocean. The Soviet naval
power began to develop substantially after 1960s. The urgency was felt by the
Soviet Union to enhance its naval capabilities, not only to maintain a balance
between the three wings of its armed forces, but also ‘to counter the ongoing
accelerated naval programme launched by the USA’.

At that time, there was no corresponding increase in the number of
warships of the Soviet Union. The Soviet navy already possessed large number of

22 Ibid., p.58
warships. The only need was their greater mobility and increased fire-power, which could play a global role. During the same period, the Soviet sub-marine fleet also went through a modernization programme. The Soviet Union began to construct nuclear-powered submarines, and to equip them, as well as the conventional submarines, with cruise and ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads. Such a development programme emphasized the frantic effort made by the Soviet Union to counter the American threat, posed by the induction of surface vessels and the fleet of Polaris submarines.

By 1965-66 about 37 surface Soviet vessels had been armed with surface-to-air and surface to surface missiles. They were armed with Guideline surface-to-air missiles, Strela, a subsonic missile, and Shaddock, a supersonic surface to surface missiles. These ships posed a serious threat to the surface vessels of the USA. Thus with the fleet of oilers, supply vessels, missile carrying surface vessels and submarines, the Soviet Union emerged as a serious naval power capable of operating on the high seas, away from the home bases, and even independent of the overseas bases. This capacity to operate on the high seas, without the need to have local bases on the littoral, really made the Soviet Union an independent naval power capable of playing global role.

The Soviet navy first began to operate in the Baltic, the North Sea and the Atlantic, and subsequently in the Mediterranean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. They entered the Indian ocean only in the first half of 1968, when a small task force consisting of one Sverdlov class cruiser, accompanied by one guided-missile destroyer, one submarine and one Pevek class oilier visited ports in Aden, Ceylon, India, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf and the Somalia. Thus the Soviet Union maintained a naval presence in the Indian Ocean since 1968.
The views expressed by certain pro-colonial circles, alleging the emergence of the Soviet naval power in the Indian Ocean to fill the ‘power vacuum’ likely to be created by Britain’s departure by the end of 1971, was baseless. The ‘power vacuum’ concept came in handy to explain the US military presence in the Indian ocean as a counter move necessitated by Soviet desire to replace the British power in the region. Oles M. Smolansky, an American scholar, while presenting his paper at the International Conference on the Indian Ocean held under the auspices of the Georgetown University in 1971, stated that Moscow’s entry into the Indian ocean need not be viewed as ‘surprising and unexpected development’. In the 1950s and early 1960s the USSR succeeded in neutralizing the nuclear preponderance of the United States by building a sizeable stationary nuclear capability of its own and the Soviet Navy entered the Mediterranean in the mid-1960s as a defensive move against the US sea-borne nuclear striking force. Similar motivations, in Smolansky’s view, persuaded the Soviet decision-makers to expand their naval presence in the Indian Ocean as well.23

The Soviet interests in the Indian Ocean area have been governed in the post-Second World War period by strategic as well as political and economic considerations. With the development of the new strategic weapons based upon nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching medium range ballistic missiles, armed with nuclear weapons, the Indian Ocean area assumed great strategic significance for the Soviet Union. The threat from the Indian Ocean to the security of the Soviet Central Asian states increased much more when the US task force began to operate permanently from there after 1964. But Soviet Union warded off the western threat by maintaining a sufficient naval presence of their own in the Indian Ocean.

By the seventies, especially since 1973-74, the focus began to shift in the context of the Superpower policies in the Indian Ocean. Now the conventional maritime naval interventionist policy – the continuation of pre – World War II policy with the USA gradually substituting European colonial powers. The nuclear strategy based upon the manned bomber, land-based ICBM and Sea-based SLBM in the Indian Ocean, which became effective since 1963-64, but by the late seventies, this dimension of nuclear strategy began to lose its previous thrust because of the increased range of SLBM from 2500 nautical miles of POLARIS to more than 4000 nautical miles in the case of Trident. Moreover, SALT II negotiations between Superpowers to control the strategic nuclear weapons systems also contributed to softening of tensions of Superpowers in the Indian Ocean. Hence the strategic nuclear significance of the Indian Ocean gradually eroded by the 1977.

The events of 1978-79 gave a new impetus to the Superpowers rivalry. In the aftermath of the fall of the Shah of Iran in February 1979, and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the year 1980, witnessed a formidable build-up of naval forces in the Indian Ocean. This period also witnessed hectic efforts by the ‘United States to acquire military facilities in the littoral region to support its naval deployment and future military plans for the Gulf region’, 24 which was considered by Soviet Union a threat for the overall security of the Central Asian parts of its territories.

In Iran, with the fall of the rule of Shah, a fundamentalist regime come to power which was not only hostile to the USA and other neighbouring Arab States in the Gulf, but also to the USSR. It was feared by the Soviet leaders that the so

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called – Islamic fundamentalism would have a domino effect in the Gulf, it might export conservative fundamentalist forces to the border region of the Soviet Central Asia, where a sizeable population of Muslims were still hostile to the imposition of the Soviet rule. It was also feared by the Soviet leaders that once the Islamic forces entered into the hostile region of Central Asia, it might destabilize the security of the Soviet Central Asia.

The same period also saw the overthrow of the Daud regime in Kabul and coming into power of the left regime there. In December 1979, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in support of the Kabul regime. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan aimed at realisation of the historical Russian dream to get a foothold in the warm waters of the Arabian sea, as well as to sustain their favourite Kabul regime against the rising power of Islamic nationalist forces. Thus, to check the growing emergence of Islamic nationalists in Iran and in Afghanistan as well as around the periphery of the Soviet Central Asia, it was necessary for the overall security of the southern flank of the Soviet Union.

These two above mentioned developments taken together, were considered a serious threat to the western interests in the Indian Ocean region. The threat was so serious that a new name was given to the region “the South-West Asia”.25 Thus, these developments once again gave an impetus to the Superpowers rivalry in the Indian Ocean – Gulf region.

President Carter, in his State of the Union Address on 21 January, 1980, highlighted the new threats to the Gulf due to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and declared that any attempts by any ‘outsider force to gain control of the Persian

Gulf region would be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America to be repelled by any means including military force. Unlike the Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957, this time the USA did not even need to be invited by a regional power. Thus, under the Carter Doctrine, the USA could unilaterally provoke a limited nuclear war in the region inspite of the wishes of the Indian Ocean littoral states. The USA also gradually began equating its naval presence in the Indian Ocean with the Soviet presence, as a land power, in Central Asia. This sea power versus land power equation once again revived the century old Anglo-Russian rivalry.

With the above politico-military development, the peace zone idea of the Indian Ocean was gradually getting eroded. The world witnessed the growing legitimisation of the US (the NATO) presence in the Indian Ocean especially in the eighties. The Iran – Iraq war, particularly when Iraq was militarily in a tight corner after 1986, legitimised the NATO presence in the Gulf through several measures like mine-cleaning operations, tanker war and reflagging of vessels, providing escorts to these ships and finally direct US participation in the war when it attacked Iranian petrol boats, oil installations and even shot down a civilian Airbus.

The presence and role of NATO in the Gulf, headed by USA, during the Iran-Iraq war and subsequently in the Gulf crisis after Iraqi intervention in Kuwait on 2 August 1990 leading to ‘Operation Desert Storm’ against Iraq when the latter defied the UN Security Council resolution – all these developments coincided with the new détente which put serious constraints on the Soviet diplomatic moves vis-à-vis the West in the region. Thus the increasing legitimisation of the NATO presence in the Indian Ocean and its Gulf parts dealt a serious blow to the defence, stability and security of Soviet Central Asia.

26 Ibid.
Since the establishment of Soviet power in Central Asia, the Soviet leadership always demonstrated its adequate concern for the security and stability of its southern territories, which formed its "soft underbelly". The security scenario, however, changed to the disadvantage of the Soviet Union following the Gulf War resulting in the Soviet acquiescence to the US led NATO naval presence in the Gulf region of the Indian Ocean.