Chapter I

ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

It is proposed to discuss in this Chapter the economic resources and the strategic and economic importance of the Indian Ocean which washes the shores of both India and South Africa besides many other countries. The political interests of the West in the Indian Ocean in the post cold war phase will also be briefly analyzed in this Chapter.

1. Introduction.

The Indian Ocean is the third largest of the four major oceans in the world after the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. It covers approximately 20 per cent of the total area of water in the world, and includes, amongst others, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Andaman Sea.¹ Although its waters border three continents of the world – Africa, Asia and Antarctica, it is believed to constitute a distinct region in itself.²

---


A special feature of the Indian Ocean is that it is virtually surrounded by land on three sides: in the West by the eastern and southern parts of Africa and the south-western part of Asia; in the north by southern Asia; and in the east by south-eastern Asia and Western Australia. It is only the southern part of the ocean which easily links up with both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. The Indian Ocean is the only ocean of the world which is known after the name of one of its littoral countries, that is India.

The Indian Ocean resembles an inverted 'W'. Its apex is the Indian sub-continent comprising India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Its eastern leg is represented by Burma, Malaysian peninsula, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesian archipelago and the Australian continent, while its western leg includes Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and the African continent. In its south lies the continent of Antarctica. All these features impart the Indian Ocean a unique characteristic of being a landlocked sea.³

For political reasons, the geo-political position of the Indian Ocean has enabled it to acquire the importance of being an integral link between the eastern and the western parts of the globe.⁴ This is evident from the fact that more than 95 per cent of the world's trade passes

⁴ Somm Dutt, "Indian Ocean", *Seminar* (Delhi), January 1963.
through various oceanic routes passing through the Indian Ocean. Moreover, as K. M. Pannikar points out, "the whole Ocean area is strategically of the greatest importance as it is the highway of European nations to India, the Far East, Australia, Africa, and now even Antarctica." Most of the experts agree that the Indian Ocean, broadly speaking, consists of four major parts namely, the Ocean itself, the African shores, Asiatic waters extending up to East Indies, and the island territories.

Since the current trend in international politics is to exercise power and influence by controlling strategically placed islands, a brief mention of the main island territories of the Indian Ocean would not be out of place here. These include Malagasy, Comros, Seychelles, Chagos archipelago, Scotra, Indian Coral stoll, Lacadives, Sri Lanka, about 219 island spots of Andaman and Nicobar stretching from southwestern tip of Burma, the northern end of Sumatra, Mrgui archipelago and the Ccacao islands, all hanging upon the world map like pearls of necklace around the neck of Asia. Besides islands, the Indian Ocean cuts across the mainland at various places, thus forming a large number of gulfs like the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Aden Aquaba,

---


6 K. Madhu Pannikar, "Islands in the sun", *Indian Express* (Delhi), 18 October 1971.

7 India has a total 1175 islands out of which 667 are located in the Bay of Bengal and 508 in the Arabian Sea.
Suez and Canbay which are strategically of great significance, particularly to the littoral states.

The Indian Ocean is open at various places which makes it approachable from the Atlantic Ocean either through the traditional Cape of Good Hope route, or through the Gibraltar Strait, Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and then through the Strait of Beb-al-Mandeb.

With regard to the area and the constituents of the Indian Ocean, divergent estimates have been put forward by eminent scholars, geographers and naval strategists belonging to different countries. In Richard Hass' view, the area of the Indian Ocean is approximately 28,969,600 square miles. Villiers believes the area of the Indian Ocean to be 27,000,000 square miles. On the other hand, Valaux believes it to be just a lake of 16,362,742 square miles. According to the authors of Comptim's Pictured Encyclopedia, the total area of the Indian Ocean should be about 28,356,200 square miles.

---


2. Is Indian Ocean a region?

There is considerable debate among scholars and statesmen on the question whether or not the Indian Ocean should be regarded as a "region". As the Indian Ocean has become very important and the countries of the Indian Ocean have become aware of its importance, some world powers are not prepared to regard it as a region and, therefore, they are not prepared to support the demand that the Indian Ocean be declared as a "zone of peace".

Scholars like Berry Buzan reject outright the case for the Indian Ocean being considered as a region.\(^{12}\) The problems of omission and superficiality, which arise from the scale and diversity of the area, are not offset by the weak and tentative linkage which the Indian Ocean framework provides. A US study also reached the same conclusion, when it stated that the Indian Ocean region lacked common religious, political, economic and ethnic traditions, coupled with bitter divisions and diverse local interests, and was vulnerable to disruption from within and without.\(^ {13}\) An Australian scholar, T. B. Miller, remarked: "There is no such thing as the Indian Ocean (region), except as a cartographic

---


expression. It has no coherence, no unity: economic, cultural, political and strategic."\(^{14}\)

These issues raise two fundamental questions: what is a region in international politics? And what are the pre-requisites of an area entitled to be considered as a "region"?

If the definitions available are analyzed, it may be stated that, in the international sphere, a "region" may be said to consist of a group of nation-states possessing a common culture, common political interests and often a formal organization.\(^{15}\) It has also been observed that "a region is invariably an area embracing the territories of three or more states. These states are bound together by ties of common interest as well as geography. They are not necessarily contiguous, or even in the same continent."\(^{16}\)

Scholars like F. A. Vali, on the other hand, consider this area as a region. Vali observed that, for geographic and geo-strategic reasons,

---


the Indian Ocean region should be treated as one unit, in spite of divergence of ethnic, cultural and economic considerations.

An analysis of the region on the basis of the four criteria: geographic, political, strategic, economic and social, would be quite relevant at this stage.17

Geographically, the Indian Ocean represents the states which are almost contiguous in a ring shape. Except Australia, all other states are part of Asia (25 states) and Africa (21 states). These 46 littoral and 11 hinterland states are well connected with each other through easy communication via sea, land or air route.

In political and strategic terms, both from the "external perspective" of the various powers and the "internal perspective" visualized by the Indian Ocean states, the Indian Ocean stands out to be a single unit or a region. All the external powers, for their policy decisions, have treated the area as one region. Littoral states too have many common values, common experiences and common aims and ideas.

At the first glance, the homogeneity of economic conditions of Indian Ocean states is not readily apparent but, if observed closely, it becomes evident that most of the countries have narrow economic base, highly

vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the global economic system. Their economic condition provides for unity in two forms – first, in the form of protest against the international economic system, and, second, in the form of an effort towards more and more regional cooperation to preserve the independence and welfare of their masses. Out of 46 countries, with the exception of only six countries – India, South Africa, Singapore, Pakistan, Australia and Indonesia - all are non-industrial states having a narrow economic base. They have to face severe economic challenge from the prevalent global economic system. All the states of this area face similar problems, have similar interests and aspire for similar objectives in the international system. Cultural linkages between the Indian Ocean states are varied and very old. Racial intercourse between different peoples of this region provides another important source of linkage in this area. This analysis proves that the Indian Ocean fulfils all the requisites to be termed as a region. Non-alignment pursued by the states of the Indian Ocean region and the demand for a “Peace Zone” by those states also provide distinct identity to this region.

3. People of the Indian Ocean region

The people inhabiting the countries bordering the Indian Ocean are diverse and varied. About 23 million Swahili-speaking Africans live in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. Ethiopians speak a language called
Amharinay. In India, there are 15 major languages and 800 dialects. In Somalia, Bantus, Arabs, Ethiopians and Indians all live side by side. The Arab peninsula is the home of Semitic people. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma and Indonesia contain some of the most densely populated regions in the world where people of numerous ethnic compositions live together.

Most of the Indian Ocean littoral and hinterland areas are bound together by common, cultural, linguistic and religious ties. Thus, Islam is one of the main religious and cultural influence in the north-west – in Arabian peninsula, north-east Africa and in Iran and Pakistan. It also exercises a pervasive influence in the south-east – in Malaysia and Indonesia, and is predominant in Bangladesh. In India, too, it has a sizable following. India is predominantly Hindu, but followers of other religions also live there in sizeable numbers. Followers of Hinduism are spread over all parts of the region from Nepal to Malaysia, Singapore, East Africa, South Africa, Mauritius and Seychelles. The third religious and cultural group – Buddhism – has its stronghold in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Buddhist influence may also be seen in the Himalayan northern areas of the Indian sub-continent. The fourth major religious-cum-cultural group – Christianity – exercises a dominant influence over the people of Australia, South Africa, part of East Africa, Madagascar and Ethiopia.

---

4. Economic Resources of the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean contains more than two-thirds of the world's oil resources, 60 per cent of uranium, 40 per cent of gold, and 98 per cent of the world's supply of diamonds. If the oil deposits of the African coast and Indonesia are added, the oil wealth of the Indian Ocean region may work out to be around three-fourths of the world aggregate. The world reserves of oil and gas may be seen from the following Table:

**Table A**

**World : Oil and Gas Reserves**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oil Billion Barrels</th>
<th>Gas Trillion cubic feet</th>
<th>Reserves/Oil Ratio</th>
<th>Production in years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>258.7</td>
<td>185.4</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>100+</td>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>205.1</td>
<td>100+</td>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total OPEC</td>
<td>772.1</td>
<td>2020.4</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total World</td>
<td>999.1</td>
<td>5016.2</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India as % of the world</td>
<td>77.28 %</td>
<td>40.28 %</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.59 %</td>
<td>0.51 %</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Abu Dhabi are the major oil-producing countries in this area. Japan imports more than 90 per cent
of its oil needs from the Indian Ocean region, Italy 84.5 per cent, Australia 69 per cent, Britain 66 per cent, West Germany 62 per cent, France 51 per cent, and the United States 8 per cent.\textsuperscript{19}

Besides oil, the region abounds in 20 out of 40 raw materials of strategic importance largely imported by the Western countries. Forty out of the 54 types of imported raw materials used by American industry are supplied by the Indian Ocean region. These include uranium, lithium, beryllium, thorium, coal, copper, iron, manganese, tin, mica, bauxite, chromites, nickel, cobalt, antimony, asbestos, vanadium and phosphates etc. Jute and rubber are two other major products of the Indian Ocean region exported to the West. One-fifth of the world’s arable land lies in this area producing rich crops of wheat, rice, cotton, tea and coffee.\textsuperscript{20} The Indian Ocean region is predominantly an agricultural zone; its industrial base is rather weak. Its overall food production is not adequate enough to feed its large population.

The Indian Ocean is believed to be quite rich in its marine resources also. The continental shelves covering about 4.2 per cent of the total area of the Indian Ocean are reported to contain enormous mineral deposits. Recent oceanographic surveys have revealed that the narrow shelf south of Sumatra, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea are

\textsuperscript{19} Devendra Kaushik, n. 11, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{20} ibid.
rich in oil, tin, gold and sea-food.\textsuperscript{21} Ferro-manganese nodules of 2.5 cm. size and appreciable quantities of nickel and cobalt, besides 15-30 per cent manganese, have been sampled from various locations in the deeper part of the Indian ridge and west of it at 20° south latitude in the south-east Arabian Sea. The offshore presence of calcareous deposits suitable for chemical and cement industries have been reported from the Andaman and Lakshadweep zones. Phosphate nodules and barium concentrations have been recorded off the west coast of Lakshadweep. The production of offshore oil from Bombay High, which began in 1970, has been increasing ever since.\textsuperscript{22} The polymetallic nodules in the deep sea-beds are a rich source of metals containing manganese, nickel, cobalt, copper and uranium.

The Indian Ocean is also an important area for navigation and trade. Maritime trade in this region is highly intensive; about one-fourth of the entire cargo is carried in world marine trade, and about two-thirds of oil are loaded or unloaded in the ports of the Indian Ocean. The main cargoes comprised of oil, iron-ore, pit coal, kernel, bauxite among others. According to the available information, 56 per cent vessels passing through the Indian Ocean belong to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries (in absolute figures about 40,000 vessels). Up to 20,000 vessels sail through the Red Sea and Suez


\textsuperscript{22} ibid., p. 64.
Canal in two directions annually. During the closure of the Suez Canal, the intensity of shipments passing around the Cape of Good Hope reached, for instance, 70 ships a day, that is 25,500 ships per year, and even now about one million tons of oil is carried everyday through this route.\textsuperscript{23}

As stated earlier, the Indian Ocean area is predominantly agricultural in nature, the industrial base being still very bleak. The overall food production is still inadequate and much of the vast mineral resources are still untapped. The total picture of foreign trade shows the dominance of the industrially developed countries over the littoral states. Almost 90 per cent of the littoral trade in the Indian Ocean region is oriented to the United States, Eastern and Western Europe, and Japan. The intra-regional trade between states situated in the region is, however, insignificant.

To the big powers, the Indian Ocean region offers excellent prospects for economic exploitation. Apart from their natural wealth, the developing countries of the Indian Ocean region also constitute large markets for the finished products of the industrialized nations.

Although oil resources from the sea-bed are expected to increase in the coming years, yet it can not be denied that the West

\textsuperscript{23} ibid.
Asian countries would continue to maintain their virtual monopoly over the supply of oil, and the developed countries would have no option but to remain dependant upon the supply of oil from these countries. The extent of their dependence can be gauged from the fact that, in 1976, America, Japan, Britain, former West Germany and Italy imported approximately 37.6, 75, 70.8, 78.3, and 81.6 per cent respectively, of their crude oil from the West Asian countries. It was believed that the American oil imports would increase substantially in the years to come, as the trends at that time suggested. This proved to be true as the Petroleum Intelligence Weekly confirmed later that from 1975 to 1980 the demand for oil did, indeed, go up by 28 per cent.

The demand for energy in the world increased considerably from 5,913 million tones in 1973 to 6,432 million tones in 1983, and 7,804 million tones in 1993. During the 1983-84 - 1992-93 period, the global demand for energy increased at an annual rate of 1.95 per cent. This is expected to increase at the rate of about 2.6 per cent annually from 1995-96 to 2010-11, when projected global energy consumption is


26 Jasjit Singh, ed., Bridges Across the Indian Ocean (Delhi, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 1997), p. 162.
estimated to be around 12.169 million tones.\textsuperscript{27}

The projected global demand in crude oil is expected to increase from 3,121 million tones to 4,607 million tonnes in 2010. While crude oil is expected to retain its dominance as the single largest source of energy fuel in the world, its level of dominance is expected to decrease slightly from 40 per cent in 1993 to 38 per cent in 2010. Natural gas, meanwhile, will continue to account for the third largest source of energy fuel (after oil and coal) with its share of the world market continuing to remain at about 22 per cent in 2010.\textsuperscript{28}

In the Asia-Pacific region, the demand for crude oil is expected to grow at a higher rate of around 3.0-3.5 per cent annually. With the demand for crude oil in Asia-Pacific expected to grow from 710 million tones in late 1995 to 1,058 million tones in 2005, along with only a minor increase in regional production, the extent of crude oil import in the region is expected to increase from 56 per cent in 1993 to 67 per cent in 2000, or nearly two-thirds of the total demand of the Asia-Pacific.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} S. N. Jha, "Outlook for new Refining Capacity in India 1995-2005", \textit{IOGC}, 24-25 September 1995, p. 1 and Table I.

\textsuperscript{28} ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} "Energy", \textit{Asia 1996 Yearbook} (Hong Kong, Far Eastern Economic Review, 1996), p. 54.
It was proved very clearly by the oil crisis that the world witnessed after the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 that the oil would continue to determine, to a large extent, economies of both the developed and developing countries. It was, in fact, due to the importance of oil that nine West European countries and Japan had issued a political declaration in November 1973, calling for the implementation of the U. N. Security Council's resolution 242, which, _inter alia_, directed Israel to vacate the Arab territory under its occupation.30 While analyzing the impact of oil on the economy, it was reported by the Normura Research Institute of Japan that the increase in oil price during 1973-74 skyrocketed the consumer price index of Japan by 55 per cent, thus depressing its growth rate in that year to 25 per cent which was lowest since 1954.31 The frequent price rise by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries has led to similar trends in the national economies of almost all developing countries of the world.

Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Burma and Singapore are the major producers of natural rubber in the world. In 1970, the entire region of the Indian Ocean produced more than 85 per cent of rubber in 1971 and 90 per cent in 1973. Out of this, more than 75 per cent of rubber was exported to the West European and

---


American markets.\textsuperscript{32} Other significant agricultural products of the region are tea, coffee, sugarcane, cotton, jute, wool etc. The south-east Asian region is a major producer of timber also. In 1976, Indonesia alone exported more than 18,649,000 cubic meters of timber worth 78.1 million. Among the important mineral exports from the Indian Ocean region is tin-ore. About 72 per cent of world's total production of tin is extracted from the Indian Ocean countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. More than 80 per cent of world's gold is produced in this region, mostly by South Africa and Australia; 2.8 per cent of world's manganese, and 37 per cent of uranium is also extracted from this area. In 1973, for instance, out of world's total production of uranium, which was around 9,61,000 metric tons, more than 3,63,000 metric tons was mined in Australia (1,61,000 metric tons) and South Africa (2,02,000 metric tons). The region also produced about 32 per cent of lead, 11.32 per cent of tungsten, 11.02 per cent of nickel ore, 10.29 per cent of zinc, and 30.26 per cent of antimony.\textsuperscript{33} More than 60 per cent of the American requirement of thorium is met from Australia and Malaysia. Australia also supplies approximately 65 per cent of American requirement of titanium which is a vital ingredient in the manufacture of the spacecraft, missiles and supersonic aircraft.\textsuperscript{34} South Africa is the main supplier of strategic minerals such as eithium and

\textsuperscript{32} ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Asia Research Bulletin (Singapore), 31 March 1977.

\textsuperscript{34} Sea Power (Washington, D. C.), vol. 17, no. 2 : February 1974, p.18.
amosite asbestos. More than 90 per cent of world's known resources of chrome-ore are located in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The Indian Ocean sea-bed, in the opinion of the scientists, contains large deposits of nodules of manganese, nickel, cobalt, copper etc. They also expect that "just one square mile patch of the sea-bed could produce as much as 30,000 tons of manganese, 3,600 tons of aluminum, 2,300 tons of cadmium, 17,000 tons of iron, 400 tons of cobalt, 12,000 tons of nickel and 650 tons of copper. The price of manganese nodules extracted from one squire mile is approximately one million dollars. 36

The vast marine food potentiality is yet another vital factor determining the importance of the Indian Ocean. It has been estimated that it contains more than 12 million tons of catch fish. 37 The countries around the Indian Ocean catch only 9 million tons of fish which is about 15 per cent of world's total catch of 66 million tons. 38


5. The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

The Law of the Sea Convention (LOSC) has extended the territorial limit of a littoral state, for commercial exploitation, up to 200 miles in the sea. The LOSC holds out the promise of facilitating new industrial enterprises, reducing chronic unemployment and correcting unfavourable balance of payment gaps in the region. The states situated around the Indian Ocean are fully aware of the fact that approximately 30 million square miles of the area of the Indian Ocean contains rich economic resources which, if properly exploited, could play a very important role in their economic development.

Jurists of international law generally agree that the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is now a customary rule of law. Today, the area considered as the high seas has shrunk one-third, while the hydro-space and sea-bed under national jurisdiction of coastal states have been enlarged manifold. For example, Mauritius, with a population of 9,97,000 people, claims sovereign right to the seventeenth large EEZ in the world, or some 3,45,000 miles of the ocean. Maldives, with a population of 7,57,000, is twenty-third on the EEZ list; and the Seychelles, with a population of 68,000, controls over 380 thousand square miles of the EEZ space. India has become an

EEZ giant. It now has 8,00,000 square miles of the Ocean where it may exercise sovereign right, thus ranking it twelfth in a worldwide listing.\(^\text{40}\)

Within the newly created zone, a 200-mile corridor seaward of the base line of the territorial sea of a coastal state, a government has sovereign right to explore and exploit the living and non-living resources, as well as the duty to develop programmes designed to better manage, conserve, and utilize the invaluable resources of the Indian Ocean.

The LOSC also offers Third World states that border on ocean space an unprecedented opportunity to increase national income, raise foreign exchange earnings, and improve national diets. The policies and programmes adopted by each coastal state to maximize its benefits from the EEZ will be somewhat different, reflecting the level of industrial development, economic objectives, defence needs, and the domestic political-economic (and possibly military) effects.

5.1. Larger Area at States’ disposal for Fishing purposes

Extension of the economic zone up to 200 miles into the sea means that the littoral states now have a much larger area under their

jurisdiction for fishing purposes. Marine experts estimate that, as a result of the 200-mile rule, 99 per cent of world's fish resources are located in the ocean space under national control. The fishing states of the Indian Ocean are in as good a position as any nation in the world to take advantage of the new rule. For well established historical, cultural, and technological reasons, local fishermen traditionally have tended to concentrate their efforts in off-shore, coastal fishing rather than hundreds of miles which involves risk to their life.

5. 2. Availability of larger area for Gas Exploration

The extended economic zone also means that the littoral states can exploit enormous gas resources under the sea-bed. According to a 1973 U. N. analysis, about 87.5 per cent of the world's offshore oil reserves are located in the sea-bed of the 200-mile long EEZ. The remaining 12.5 per cent, the report adds, is located at such great depths below the floor of the high seas that it is unlikely that it will ever be recovered. In one sense, therefore, the exploration and exploitation of energy resources within a state's 200-mile EEZ, sometimes designated as the continental margin, is a domestic policy matter and involves questions that are within the exclusive purview of the local government.

---

To a greater or lesser degree, the coastal states of the Indian Ocean have been attempting, since the energy crisis of the early 1970s, to locate offshore oil-gas fields in order to cut down on costly imports. The establishment of the 200-mile EEZ has resulted in the emergence of a sizeable number of territorial disputes to extend the area of national jurisdiction beyond the traditional 3 to 12 mile range. The governments have increasingly claimed as large an area of the Ocean as possible and, concomitantly, seem to be determined to limit or cut back the ocean space that the neighbouring nation claims or utilizes. The possibility of locating oil and gas to help reduce imports in the future resulted in an indeterminate number of bilateral and multilateral disagreements over where maritime boundary lines were to be located. Because of the somewhat sketchy rules governing the establishment of the 200-mile EEZ, the Indian Ocean states laid claim to long-ignored, sometimes uninhabited, minuscule points of land, thus adding to general instability and tension in some sectors of the region.

6. Economic Interests of Developed and Developing Countries in the Indian Ocean region

From the point of view of international trade and commerce, the Indian Ocean is very important not only for big powers but also for a large number of developing countries because their imports and exports have to pass through various sea channels of the Ocean. Not only
petroleum but also a large variety of minerals and agricultural products are transported through the Indian Ocean. If the sea-channels happen to fall into the hands of some hostile country or countries, not only the Western countries but also the developing countries might suffer. Therefore, the Indian Ocean routes assumed importance both for the littoral and hinterland states.\textsuperscript{42}

The geographical position of the Indian Ocean, and its strategic waterways, provide the shortest and most economical lines of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It is not surprising to note that, according to one estimate, the Indian Ocean accounts for the transportation of the highest tonnage of goods in the world. It is, therefore, around the security of the Indian Ocean route that much American and Western strategic thinking had developed during the Cold War period, and continues to be governed by the same consideration even now when the Cold War is over.

In addition to the security of the allies in the field of regular energy supplies, the US multinational corporations have made substantial capital investments in the production, transportation and sale of Persian Gulf oil in the world market. The oil-producing countries of South-west Asia, with a petrodollar boom and ambitious development

plans, have become a multi-billion dollar market for the manufactured goods of Japan, Western Europe and the United States.

Apart from the issue of energy and security, the US dependence on foreign sources of minerals which were essential for her numerous sophisticated industries, including defence-related ones, was tremendous. Many of the most important minerals were imported from the most volatile areas of the world, thereby raising fears of the possibility of critical disruption in their supply in case the Cold War turned into a hot war. If there was disruption in the supply of these minerals to the West, a crisis of serious proportions could result in the international economy. There has been no change in this situation even after the demise of the Cold War.

7. Strategic Significance of the Indian Ocean

Before we describe the importance of the Indian Ocean from strategic standpoint, it would be appropriate to examine the concept of "strategic". The term "strategic" is an abstract, vague and often misused concept, deriving its modern connotation from the totality of the modern strategic milieu. In the modern context, the term "strategic" has been extracted from its previously purely military applicability and has of

necessity, in the nuclear age, become futuristically oriented, reducing the *ex post facto* approach to little more than historical significance.\(^{44}\)

Positions of strategic significance must be assessed against a changing situation. They are clearly different in the event of war or international crisis than at times of peace. The concept of 'strategic' significance can be defined in terms of several factors. Firstly, the strategic situation is not static but undergoes constant change.

Secondly, strategic relevance and importance of any area must be assessed in relation to the role that a region, a continent or an ocean can play in the promotion of global or regional security interests. Thirdly, 'strategic significance' can be defined only in the overall context of world security trends, prevailing moods and expectations, and interests as they are perceived by various states.\(^{46}\)

Two factors are specially important in any consideration of the strategic importance of a territory or a continent, namely its mineral resources and its geographical location. The mineral resources, especially those which are vital for the defence-related industries, constitute one of the most important factors that has made Africa strategically important for the western powers. Without those minerals, many of the important defence industries in western countries will either

---


\(^{46}\) S. C. Saxena, n. 42, p. 315.
have to be closed down or will have to curtail their production substantially. The geographical location of a country also determines whether or not it is a strategically important area. A country, because of its geographical location, is in a position to control important sea-routes which are essential for the security and defence preparedness of big powers because it is through those very sea-routes that most of their trade passes or essential supplies come to them. Any obstruction caused to the unhindered use of those see-routes would surely result in the disruption of essential supplies, sea-borne trade, and movement of warships, destroyers and aircraft-carriers.

Although there are two other major oceans – the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean – which are extensively used by big powers for trade and military purposes, the Indian Ocean has become an ocean of global importance because the western powers use it for the transportation of vital minerals from the continent of Africa and petroleum from the Middle East. At any time, for example, approximately one-fifth of Britain’s merchant marine is sailing its waters. The major trading links, however, are external rather than intra-regional. From the point of view of external countries, there are two routes passing through the Indian Ocean which are of supreme significance – the north-south route from the Persian Gulf around the Cape of Good Hope to Western Europe and North America, and the eastern route from the Persian Gulf to Japan. It is these two routes which are vital for the industrialized economies, and they are, therefore, the ones which
have the greatest international political and military significance and for the transport of petroleum, which is important both during the peace time and war. Petroleum is the one commodity which ensures that the Indian Ocean will be of truly global interest, although other raw materials and agricultural products are also far from being negligible in either value or strategic importance. The flow of oil from the Gulf will remain of supreme importance for the West as much in the future as in the present or in the past, for there is no other area in the world which is capable of meeting the bulk of global demand for petroleum. The Indian Ocean routes are important for all the littoral and hinterland states also because their entire economy depends on the export of their raw materials and agricultural products which are transported through the Indian Ocean.

Oil and gas from the Persian Gulf are sent to countries bordering on the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, which are dependent on them for their economic growth and prosperity. The vast majority of these supplies are shipped through the Strait of Hormuz to the Indian Ocean and beyond. Although the extent of dependence on Gulf oil varies from country to country, the nature of this dependence for a majority of countries is expected to increase in the future. This is due to the growing demand for oil and the shortfall in the rate of domestic production, along with their relatively limited reserves. The ability to

ensure the security of these energy supplies from the port of origin to the destination, therefore, will continue to be a critical feature of the geo-strategic environment in future.47

The geographical position of the Indian Ocean, and its strategic waterways, provide the shortest and most economical lines of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It is not surprising to note that, according to one estimate, the Indian Ocean accounts for the transportation of the highest tonnage of goods in the world. The vast majority of this trade is, however, extra-regional by nature, with intra-regional trade being on a limited scale. The Strait of Hormuz is, by far, the single most important waterway in the Indian Ocean, accounting for a vast proportion of energy supplies, as well as other commodities of trade. Some 840 tankers travel around the Cape of Good Hope annually.48 It is around the security of these Ocean routes that much American and Western strategic thinking had developed during the Cold War period, and continues to be governed by the same consideration even now when the Cold War is over.

Conflict and discord over control of the oceans of the world has been a perennial feature of the international system, especially during


48 ibid.
the last three decades, but it is particularly so in the case of the Indian Ocean. The region is distinguished by a large number of relatively weak states and also by the fact that there are no great powers bordering it.

What has led the big powers to evince keen interest in the Indian Ocean? There can be several answers to this question. In the beginning, the maritime European nations were primarily interested in the Indian Ocean as it provided passage to the countries of the east in which they had commercial and political interests. Among the reasons which have sustained the big powers' interest in the region over the years, the following seem to be important:49

Firstly, the countries washed by the Indian Ocean possess vast raw materials which are important for the growth and development of the major manufacturing industries of the big powers.50

Secondly, most of the countries in the Indian Ocean region are politically young, and, having emerged from the colonial era recently, are moving towards self-sufficiency and industrialization. The big powers have an eye on the region also because they know that their industrial surplus can find an easy market there.51

49 S. S. Bhattacharya, n. 30, pp. 805-06.
51 Ibid., pp. 267-72.
Thirdly, the vast floor of the Indian Ocean has not yet been fully explored, and the possibility that it may contain deposits of strategic minerals can not be ruled out.

Fourthly, surveys recently conducted along the coast of the Indian Ocean have confirmed that there are rich deposits of natural oil, gas and heavy minerals which are of great economic and strategic importance to the big powers.

Fifthly, the Indian Ocean abounds in fish, which is now one of the major foods all over the world, and may one day become humanity's major edible item as food resources on land are not keeping pace with the fast increasing population.

Sixthly, the Indian Ocean (except the southern part), because of its location in the tropical region, provides navigation throughout the year, thus allowing the transport of goods, military hardware and oil in the most economical way.

Seventhly, the countries of the Indian Ocean do not belong to one particular ethnic, cultural or political power bloc of the world. The political and economic conditions in most of these countries are not sound and stable; hence, their change of loyalty from one particular power-bloc to the other is not ruled out. This change of loyalty may disturb the power balance in the area and may even result in a few
coup d'etat. Hence, a continuous assurance and quick supply of military help from the big powers is very essential in countries of their interest from bases in the Indian Ocean. In this way, the Soviet Union and the U.S. became heirs and successors of the European imperial powers in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean during the Cold War period. In the past, the economic interests had lured the maritime powers of the West to enter the Indian Ocean which eventually led to the establishment of their colonial rule in Asia and Africa. Though decolonization has led to an attenuation of these interests, the economic links of big powers with the littoral areas are still strong. These considerations play a major part in the Indian Ocean politics.

It may be apt to point out here that an area, be it a country, a region, a sea or an ocean, becomes strategically important for a country or a group or alliance of countries if its vital interests are likely to be endangered if that area falls, or is in the danger of falling, into the exclusive hands of its adversary. The response of that state or that group of states would depend on its threat perception: how, and to what extent, according to its calculations, its political, economic and security interests are likely to suffer in the event of that area, country or region, land-mass or an ocean coming under the absolute domination of its rival state or an alliance of rival states. From this angle we now proceed to examine the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean for the Western countries: how they felt that their political, economic and
security interests were likely to suffer if they did not take the necessary pre-emptive measures to safeguard their interests.

In the Indian Ocean region, the US has a very wide range of interests because of the complex geo-political milieu involving a great variety of threats—both indigenous and external. The US interests in the region may be stated as follows:52

(a) to balance Soviet presence, and, if possible, reduce its influence;

(b) to promote stability and peaceful change on the domestic political and regional level;

(c) to ensure access to oil supplies at reasonable prices; and

(d) to promote regional security and advance the Middle East peace process, while guaranteeing the security of Israel.53

The first two of these interests fall in the category of political interests; the third one falls under the economic interests; and the last one falls in the category of security interests.


8. Strategic Interests of States in the Indian Ocean

Needless to say that oceanic routes all over the world are important both from economic and strategic standpoint. The importance of the Indian Ocean region from the strategic standpoint may be considered section-wise. Let us take first the southern sector of the Indian Ocean, and then take up the Horn of Africa and various islands situated in the Indian Ocean.

8.1 Strategic Significance of Southern Africa

The importance of the southern sector of the Indian Ocean, during the Cold War era, stemmed from the fact that the Cape route was used extensively by all nations, big and small, even after the opening of the Suez Canal. This is because huge oil tankers can not pass through the Suez Canal because of lack of sufficient depth. They are, therefore, forced to take the Cape route. Hence, more than half of Europe's oil supplies and a quarter of its food passes round the Cape of Good Hope. Moreover, the increasing dependence of the U. S. on the imported oil from west Asian countries has further increased the American stake in the security of the Cape route. By the year 1980, according to some estimates, 60 per cent of the U. S. oil imports was

---

being supplied via the Cape route.\textsuperscript{56} Besides, ninety-nine per cent of its overseas trade was transported by ships all over the world. Hence, any threat to the world's sea-lanes jeopardized American national security. Seventy per cent of West Europe's strategic materials also pass through the Cape route. The highly industrialized societies of the West depend on the Cape route not only for their oil supplies but also for rubber and tin of Malaysia and, in Britain's case, on foodstuffs from Australia.\textsuperscript{56}

The Cape route occupies a central place in the North-South communication network. About 70 per cent of oil and 44 per cent of all cargo traded by the NATO countries pass through the Cape of Good Hope. The Cape is also important for the reverse trade from the West to the Gulf. Most of the Gulf countries depend on the West for the import of technology, military hardware and commercial goods. The bulk cargo vessels capable of carrying them also pass through the Cape.\textsuperscript{57}

Without an effective control of the sea-lanes around the Cape, the British position in the Southern Atlantic and the Indian Ocean would have been quite untenable, and the planners of British strategy knew

\textsuperscript{56} ibid., p. 189.


\textsuperscript{57} Pierre Maurice and Olivier Gohn, eds., International Relations in the Indian Ocean (Saint Denis, Réunion, University of La Réunion, 1991), p. 161.
this very well. In World War II, Great Britain could hardly have sustained hostilities against the Axis powers in the Middle East without having control over the Cape route. When the Mediterranean was closed by the Germans, the Cape route played a very important part in the defence of the Allied shipping. Experts have estimated that out of five convoys of 1 million ton each approaching Europe during war time, four had to skirt around the Cape. Had German U-boats denied the use of the Cape route to the Allied ships, Great Britain would certainly have been hard pressed and Nazi Germany might well have had an upper hand in the war. The importance of the Cape route has continued to grow since World War II.  

Even today, NATO warships, destroyers and aircraft-carriers pass through the Cape of Good Hope on their way to the U.S. military base at Diego Garcia and the bases situated in the Far East.

8. 2 The Horn of Africa: Its Strategic Significance

The Horn of Africa protrudes into the Arabian Sea at the entrance to the Gulf of Aden through which passes the bulk of oil supply to the West. It is situated near the vital tri-junction of the three continents of Africa, Asia and Europe. Its proximity to the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden complex, with Bab el Mandeb as its key point,

---

58 L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, n. 54, p. 187.
makes it immensely important from the strategic point of view.\textsuperscript{59} The Bab el Mandeb straits, being one of the narrow arteries of Israel's life-line (described as a choke point\textsuperscript{60}), dominates a part of Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean through which oil tankers are constantly moving, and overlooks the passages where the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean converge. Through the lower end of the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa passes all the Persian Gulf oil moving to the U.S., Western Europe and Israel. All Suez traffic to and from the Indian Ocean must pass through the narrow strait of Bab el Mandeb between Djibouti and Yemen. Super-tanker traffic heading for Africa's southern tip rides off the Somali coast. Whoever controls this area would naturally control the oil flow to the western world.\textsuperscript{61} These aspects alone are sufficient to define it as a major geo-political area of the world. Any threat to it could affect the security of the world economic order as well as the balance of power between the NATO and the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War period.\textsuperscript{62} Through its first class ports of Massaava, Assab, Djibouti and Berbera, the Horn commands Bab el

\textsuperscript{59} Raman G. Bhardwaj, \textit{The Dilemma of the Horn of Africa} (Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1979), p. 12.


\textsuperscript{61} Ray Wicker, "North Yemen becomes one of pivotal nations in East-West tilt", \textit{The Wall Street Journal} (New York), 2 June 1977.

\textsuperscript{62} Raman G. Bhardwaj, n. 60, p. 12.
Mandeb, the Gulf of Aden, and the Associated sea lanes that link the oil-producing countries of West Asia with the Euro-American market.\textsuperscript{63}

For the super-powers, the Horn has been important not only for the control of the north-western waters of the Indian Ocean but also for its likely effect on the east Mediterranean politics, involving the entire gamut of West Asian affairs. The Ethiopia-Somalia war showed that, despite all the maneuvers over the arid desert of Ogaden, it was Djibouti situated on the coast which really lay in the background of the war. The Eritrean coastline was the main target of the contending powers. If the Russian-dominated Ethiopia had brought Djibouti under its control, the Russians would have gained total control of one side of the Red Sea as well as the all-important Gulf of Aden sandwiched between Assab and Berbera.

8.3 Islands of the Indian Ocean: Their Strategic Significance

Some of the islands around the continent of Africa have provided strategic sites for establishing military facilities, communication and weather stations, transit posts or bases for logistic support. A number of these islands had served as operation bases, refueling stations, staging posts and stepping-stones for launching attack or for transporting troops during the First and the Second World wars for the Allies, especially the U.K.

\textsuperscript{63} ibid., p. 16.
The most important islands in the Indian Ocean region, situated close to the West Asian region, are the Comoros islands, the Seychelles islands, and the Chagos archipelago comprising Mauritius, Diego Garcia and a few other smaller islands. Since early 1970s these islands have acquired tremendous strategic significance. The major factors that appear to have contributed to the growth of geo-strategic significance of these islands are as follows.64

(a) Most of the islands straddle vital maritime routes and oil tanker lanes from the West Asian oil-fields. These routes are regarded by the major Western powers and their allies as the jugular veins of their economies in the context of the rising volume of their overseas trade.

(b) The second factor responsible for the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean islands is the stepped-up deployment of warships by the major naval powers coupled with their excessive preoccupation with the Persian Gulf-Arabian Sea region.

(c) In a situation of sea-borne foreign intervention, however remote and insignificant these islands may appear to be, their weight can add to, or diminish substantially from, the

---

quantum and nature of power projection from the Ocean waters. The islands can serve as stop-over or take-off pads for providing support to their proxies or clients.

(d) The 200-mile extended economic zone around the island republics is rich in marine resources and mineral wealth. The sea-bed minerals can be exploited only by the industrialized and technologically advanced countries.

The importance of some of these islands may be considered separately. After the closure of the Suez canal in June 1967, the geo-strategic position of Mauritius, lying off the eastern coast of Africa, aroused the interest of the maritime powers. The island has since become prominent in international commerce because of the intensive use of the Cape route and the subsequent increase in the maritime activity at Port Louis. Its closeness to the world's most important oil tanker lanes and the West Asian oil fields has specially added to its strategic value. Mauritius, despite its small size and population of about one million, has become a cockpit of big-power rivalry because of its strategic location.

The Seychelles group of 95 islands, scattered in the mid-western region of the Indian Ocean, is of great strategic significance. These islands are very close to vital international maritime routes to and from East Africa and oil tanker lanes from the Gulf oil-fields. Its strategic
location enhanced its importance in the context of the big power rivalry in the Indian Ocean. The U. S. set up a satellite tracking station manned by the United States Air Force (USAF) and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) personnel on the main island of Mahè for various space projects and metrological and seismological research. The Seychelles islands fall directly into the orbit of American and British strategic interests.

The Malagasy Republic (formerly Madagascar) is a potential 'hyphen' linking Asia and Africa. The Mozambique channel, the Western shipping lane that separates the great island from the African continent, and its proximity to South Africa, adds to its importance.

A few islets—Glorieuses, Juan de Nova, Bases da India, Tromelin—situated in the Mozambique Channel, are also of great strategic importance to France. These islands are still under French occupation. The 1970s saw a reappraisal of the overseas bases by Western defence experts, and a “new strategy map” was thereafter worked out. The emphasis was on the crucial importance of numerous small islands throughout the world as vital pieces of strategic terrain from where the big powers could undertake global staging and technical functions which they were finding it difficult to perform from the soil of

---

the newly independent developing states.\textsuperscript{66}

The strategic significance of the Comoros archipelago has been dramatized following events in the Horn of Africa, Malagasy and Mozambique, in the light of the proximity of the archipelago to the West Asian oil-fields and the stepped-up naval activity by the big powers close to the region in the north. The islands are close to tanker-lanes and international maritime routes through the Mozambique channel. About 70 per cent of Europe's oil supplies pass through the Channel. Hence, all the big powers have vital interests in the area around the Comoros which, as a result, has become the focus of East-West rivalry.\textsuperscript{67}

9. Oil: A Strategic item in Security calculations

Availability of oil in the Persian Gulf region has been the main factor responsible for enhancing the strategic importance of this region. The United States and other developed countries have crucial dependence on Gulf oil and, therefore, they are determined to keep this life-line of their economy secure so that there is no disruption to the

\textsuperscript{66} Rama S. Melkote, \textit{Political Economy of Foreign Policy: A Study of Foreign Policy of Madagascar} (Delhi, Kalinga Publications, 1994), p. 120.

\textsuperscript{67} J. P. Anand, n. 64, p. 563.
Even prior to Cold War coming to an end and, in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, the strategic emphasis in the Indian Ocean had shifted from concern on the part of the West about the designs of the Soviet Union and likewise Soviet concern about the intentions of the West, to concerns about oil security as it could be affected by developments within the Gulf itself. The decisive factor in this shift was the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88, which left Iraq weakened vis-à-vis Iran and upset the traditional balance between the two, contributing to the subsequent invasion of Kuwait by Baghdad.

The 1991 Gulf War triggered by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait radically heightened concern about oil security on the part of the industrialized nations. The Gulf War was essentially an oil war. if Iraq had occupied Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, it would have brought nearly half of the world’s known oil reserves under its control. The Gulf War also had the effect of re-emphasizing the fact that oil security was one of the most crucial international issues. It also reinforced the lesson of

---


the Iran-Iraq war that the most likely threat to oil security would come from within the Gulf rather than from some external source.\textsuperscript{70}

10. Strategic importance of the Indian Ocean from Soviet point of view

The Horn's proximity to the Middle East and its significance as an area of strategic value for both super-powers places it in the position of being caught up in the rival strategic, military and political policies of both the erstwhile Soviet Union and the United States.\textsuperscript{71} The search for military facilities, interest in establishing good relations with independent African countries that lacked a close link to a former colonial power, the desire to counterbalance each other's presence, and the desire of the Soviet Union to help consolidate new socialist regimes in Africa – all these factors played a significant role in determining the policies of great powers.\textsuperscript{72}

Even before the opening of the Suez in 1975, the Soviet Union had forged ties with the states bordering on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, namely, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, and Eritrea. Apart from this, many countries on the eastern coast of Africa – Somalia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar – seemed to have swung towards the

\textsuperscript{70} ibid., p. 64.

\textsuperscript{71} Peter Schwab, "Cold War on the Horn of Africa", \textit{African Affairs} (London), vol. 77, no. 306 : January 1978, p. 9.

left. Consequently, the Soviet Union would have acquired a stranglehold on the oil supplies before long. The West feared that Ethiopia could be a convenient base to offer support to other regimes. The southern Red Sea complex was closer to Soviet strategic concern because of its location at the junction of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. To the West, the USSR's new strategy of denial was to gain command of the vital sea routes not only of the Gulf of Aden and the southern Red Sea complex but also of those to the Cape. The Soviet control of the sea route to the Cape would have been harmful to the West which took much of the African strategic raw material needed by NATO members and the oil supplies in supertankers too large to pass through the Suez via this route. However, the cargo bound for the West round the Cape originated from the oil depots in the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia, and the sea lanes pass very near the Gulf of Aden complex so that it could be easily spotted and threatened by the Soviet naval ships in the Horn area itself. However, the West was likely to transport all raw material and oil by smaller ships via the Suez route to cut distance and cost, and, hence, the importance of the southern Red Sea complex was growing. The Russian intention to deny oil and other raw materials to the West was clear from her efforts to radicalize the East African states. The real aim of the Soviet Union, the West feared, was not to liberate the continent as claimed by it, but to sever the vital communication links between West Asia and Africa.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{73} Raman G. Bhardwaj, n. 59, pp. 19-20.
During the Cold War, the Indian Ocean was tremendously important for the Soviet Union also. The Soviet Union had established its heavy military presence in the Indian Ocean because the United States and other western countries had already deployed their naval forces in the region and were already engaged in the process of enhancing their presence in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean was important to the Soviet Union for safeguarding its varied interests – strategic, economic and political. The Soviet Union, for obvious reasons, could not afford to be caught unprepared in case the United States, using its powerful navy based in the Indian Ocean, tried to endanger its security and harm its economic interests.

The Soviet naval build-up in the Indian Ocean could not be attributed to the imperatives of international trade because the fact was that the Soviet Union never had much international trade at any time in history. Therefore, if the United States and its allies had blocked the sea-channels, it would not have hurt the Soviet economy to a significant degree.

This does not mean that the Soviet Union did not have any economic interests in the Indian Ocean. The fact is that the Soviet Union had considerable interests in the Indian Ocean which had been its major maritime thoroughfare linking the West and East of the Soviet Union for eight months of the year. It has been found that the shortest and strategically safest route between European and Asiatic Russia
was via the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{74} The concern for the safety of East-West shipping was one of Soviet Navy's major reasons for moving into the Indian Ocean since 1960s especially for protecting military and other material going to Ethiopia, Angola, Vietnam, Mozambique etc where the Soviet Union was acting in support of friendly regimes. During the Arab-Israel wars of 1967 and 1973, the Bangladesh war and the various conflicts in the Persian Gulf, and the Horn of Africa, the Soviet Union had made full use of the Indian Ocean routes for the transportation of military and other supplies to her allies and friends.

Another economic aim of the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean could be future exploration and exploitation of the wealth of this area. The Persian Gulf, the oil-rich zone, was vital in view of the growing Soviet oil interests in the region. Though the Soviet Union was self-sufficient in oil production, still she needed imported oil from the Gulf region to use it for her domestic consumption and export its surplus for earning hard currency.\textsuperscript{75}

Apart from oil, the other vast but untapped mineral resources and raw materials of the Indian Ocean region also offered an allurement to the Soviet Union. That is why she had sizeable economic links with


some of the significant littoral countries like India, Egypt and Indonesia to extract and exploit them and to find yet more areas where precious mineral could be found.

However, the Soviet Union's presence in the Indian Ocean on a massive scale could be explained in terms of its possible needs in a future war - 'to deny oceanic transit to the Western world, thereby crippling NATO, starving Europe and Japan into surrender, and isolating the United States.' The Soviet naval strategy in the Indian Ocean was geared primarily to isolate the U.S. by cutting the sea lines of communication that connected it with its allies and its sources of vital raw material.

The entire coastline from Angola to Mozambique was strategically important to the Soviet Union because it enabled it to (a) supplant or undermine the U.S., West European and Chinese influence in the region in the political, economic, and military spheres; (b) reinforce its super-power status; and (c) obtain air and naval access to counter U.S. strategic forces, monitor U.S. military activity in the Indian ocean, and transport assistance to friendly regimes in the region.  

---

76 L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, n. 54, p. 197.

The entry of the Soviet Union in the Red Sea and the Horn area after the re-opening of the Suez canal in June 1975 transformed the Red Sea from an appendix of the Indian Ocean into a major artery, in terms of economic and strategic importance. The growing importance of the Red Sea and the Horn complex, in terms of international politics, was a reflection of the importance which the Indian Ocean itself had attained in the context of worldwide balance of power between the West and the East.\textsuperscript{78}

The southern Red Sea complex was of interest to the Soviet Union from the strategic point of view because of its location at the junction of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. As the West viewed it, the Soviet Union's strategy of denial was meant to gain command not only of the sea routes which passed through the Gulf of Aden and the Southern Red Sea complex but also those sea routes which passed through the Cape of Good Hope. The control of the sea route to the Cape could prove to be harmful to the West which took through that route much of the African strategic raw material needed by NATO members and the oil supplies in super tankers too large to pass through the Suez. However, even this cargo, originating from the oil depots in the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia and taking the Cape route, could not avoid passing close to the Gulf of Aden complex, which meant that it could be easily spotted and threatened by the Soviet naval presence in the Horn area itself. The West faced the same danger if it

\textsuperscript{78} Raman G. Bhardwaj, n. 59, p. 19.
transported the raw material and oil in smaller ships via the Suez route to save cost. Thus, whether the West transported oil and raw material by the longer route of the Cape or by the shorter route of the Suez, it could not bypass the southern Red Sea complex. That was why the southern Red Sea complex was a strategic area for the West. The Russian intention to deny oil and other raw materials to the West was clear from its efforts to radicalize the East African states.

The aims of the Soviet strategy were not difficult to discern. To the Western observers, Moscow's aim was to have access to Africa's strategically important mineral resources, including oil from the Middle East, which it could need at a later date, and to deny them to the West.

Like the United States, the Soviet Union too had to take into account the future possibilities in its strategic planning. The Soviet Union had to take whatever steps it considered necessary to protect itself against what it saw as a potential threat from the West. Moscow was also aware that arms technology was far from static and that new developments in anti-submarine warfare might, at some future date, mean that the U. S. navy could see distinct advantages in placing its submarines in the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79} S. C. Saxena, n. 42, p. 389.
Besides, the Soviet Union had other reasons also in wanting to have a free and unhindered passage through the Indian Ocean. It wished to use the Indian Ocean route for the trans-shipment of its troops and material to its far eastern territories.\(^8^0\) The Indian Ocean route was necessary because the Kremlin knew that its overland lines of communication with its far eastern territories were weak and vulnerable, and, in the event of a war, the single railway line could not move the bulk of men and materials which would certainly need to be transported. Under such circumstances, sea-links across the Indian Ocean would become vital. This was at least partially similar to the Western interest in the security of the Ocean route. The West also wanted to use the sea-routes in the Indian Ocean for the trans-shipment of its troops to the Middle East and South East Asia in case of an emergency.

11. Strategic interests of other states in the Indian Ocean in the post-Cold War era

In the post-Cold War era, many regional naval powers have enhanced their naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean. This shows that the strategic and economic interests of other states in the Indian Ocean region in the post-Cold War era have not declined.

This leads us to refer to the interests of some other powers in the Indian Ocean. As far as Britain is concerned, its interest in the Indian

\(^{8^0}\) R. M. Burrell, n. 46, p. 18.
Ocean largely coincided with that of the U. S. This is why the attitude of both powers on the question of "Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace" has also been largely identical so far.

France has vital stakes in the security of the Indian Ocean. Besides the oil factor, the French naval presence in the Indian Ocean was also intended to safeguard her islands possessions – Réunion, Mayotte, the archipelagoes of Crozet and Kerguelon, and the islands of St. Paul and Amsterdam.\(^81\) Réunion is still a department of France.

As far as China is concerned, it seems to be determined to play a major role in international arena. While China's assertive policies towards the South China Sea and, more recently, towards Taiwan, have gained international publicity, its increased interest in the sea around India has not been adequately appreciated by world powers.

Since the middle of 1992, reports have persistently indicated Chinese assistance in the construction of naval and electronic facilities in Myanmar. These essentially relate to the modernization of the naval base on Hianggyi island at the mouth of the Bassein, the construction of a signals intelligence facility (SIGINT) on Green Coca Island, and the development of existing naval infrastructure at Akerb and Mergui.\(^82\)


\(^82\) Rahul Roy Chaudhury, n. 47, p. 891.
Chinese interest in the Indian Ocean and her effort to emerge as a great power is confirmed by her activities on the strategically located Coco island, at a distance of only 30 nm from the Indian-owned Andaman chain of islands. In 1993, some Chinese naval and technical personnel were believed to have arrived on the island to install new radar equipment. This could enable Chinese military personnel to monitor Indian naval communication in the area and possibly even Indian ballistic missile tests off its eastern coast. In the past five years, China has also provided Myanmar with over $1.6 billion worth of arms.\textsuperscript{83} China has shipping interest also in the Indian Ocean.

For Australia also, the Indian Ocean is very important. In 1980, the largest proportion of its oil imports came from the Persian Gulf. Over 50 per cent of Australia’s imports and exports passed through the Indian Ocean, but only about 14 per cent of its trade was with the littoral states. Raw materials and goods from Western Australia formed a high percentage of exports to Gulf countries. Heard, Christmas and Cocos islands, situated in the Indian Ocean, belong to Australia, and this group of islands was integrated more fully into Australia’s military infrastructure, and they were also used by the U. S. air force.\textsuperscript{84} There


was also the possibility of some sort of link-up developing between Australia, China and the U.S. to counter the Soviet naval presence.85

For Japan also, the Indian Ocean has been a strategic area because a great proportion of her oil and other raw material come from the region and nearly half of her maritime trade passes through the Indian Ocean. Japan's economy depends upon foreign trade and, therefore, her most vital stake is in keeping the sea-lanes open. More than 90 per cent of the crude oil used in Japan was imported from West Asia. Japan's oil interests competed with much success with Western oil interests in the off-shore oil exploration in the Gulf region. The 1973 oil boycott by the OPEC countries was a shattering experience and revealed the weakness of her alliance with the West.86 The drop in Iranian supplies after 1979 made the situation worse. It was at this time that Japan started supporting Arab demands vis-à-vis Israel. Japan's policy towards the Indian Ocean has a special place for south-east Asia. Since the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, Japanese interests have converged with those of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) states.

85 Kamal Kumar, n. 81, p. 31.

12. Political / Strategic Interests of the West in the Indian Ocean

The US political interests during the Cold War in the Indian Ocean region related to two important goals. The first goal was to limit Soviet influence, or undermine it, wherever possible. Historically, the Indian Ocean region has been under Western influence. However, Soviet Third World diplomacy, aiming to weaken this traditional influence through a combination of diplomatic, economic and military instruments, has generated fears of domination. The attempts of the Soviet leadership to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean region was seen by the US and her regional allies as a destabilizing factor, and thus a threat to the US interests.\(^{87}\)

The second political objective of the West centered around the notion of stability which could be identified with political tranquility in friendly states and intra-regional balance or with peaceful political change, both domestically and in inter-state relations. The requirement of stability was so important for the US and her allies that the West was prepared to accept even a dictatorial regime provided it was pro-West and was stable. The US interests compelled her to support friendly authoritarian regimes that shared with her common security concerns and supported Western objectives. The US supported monarchies and sheikhdoms in the Indian Ocean because in their hands the Western interests were deemed to be safe and secure. Like the US, these

\(^{87}\) Rasul B. Rais, n. 52, p. 59.
monarchies and sheikhdoms were also interested in reducing the Soviet influence in the region. The cooperation between these monarchies and sheikhdoms, on the one hand, and the US, on the other, was, therefore, natural.

In the post-Cold War phase, the Indian Ocean continues to be within the sphere of the U.S. influence because she continues to have strategic and political interests in the region. This is despite the fact that at present there is no threat from the Soviet Union which disintegrated in 1991. It is also to be borne in mind that the U.S naval doctrine has dramatically changed. The focus on global threat during the Cold War years has shifted to one of regional challenges and opportunities. Consequently, the doctrine of open ocean war against erstwhile Soviet naval and nuclear forces is increasingly changing to one of power projection and the employment of naval forces from the sea in order to influence events in the littoral regions of the world.\textsuperscript{88}

13. Conclusion

The growing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean is linked with the rapid advent of industrialization in the Western world. The rise of the British Empire primarily along the Indian Ocean littoral and the concurrent pre-eminence of the British naval power in the world virtually

\textsuperscript{88} Rahul Roy Choudhury, \textit{India's Maritime Security} (New Delhi, Knowledge World, 2000, p. 103.)
led to the Indian Ocean being regarded as the exclusive "British waters". This gave rise to the myth of the power vacuum in the Indian Ocean when the U. K. decided to wind up its military presence in the Indian Ocean in the late 1960s as an inevitable corollary to the larger global phenomenon of decolonization. The British announcement of withdrawal from east of Suez and "discontinuation of policies that had stabilized the Indian Ocean region during the previous 150 years" was a signal for the US to step in and assume the role of an effective stabilizer, with greater capability and lesser legitimacy. It was aided and abetted by the U. K. through the creation of British Indian Ocean territories and subsequent leasing of Diego Garcia to USA. The British withdrawal from east of the Suez transformed the Indian Ocean, particularly the Gulf region, into a sort of Western fortress. It is important to note that this fortress continues even after the demise of the Cold War and the transformation of the bipolar world into a unipolar one. A Soviet reaction and counter-move was inevitable, increasing the extent and scope of the external forces in the Indian region, leading to greater potential for instability in place of the avowed objectives of the stabilization of the region.\(^8^9\)

---