

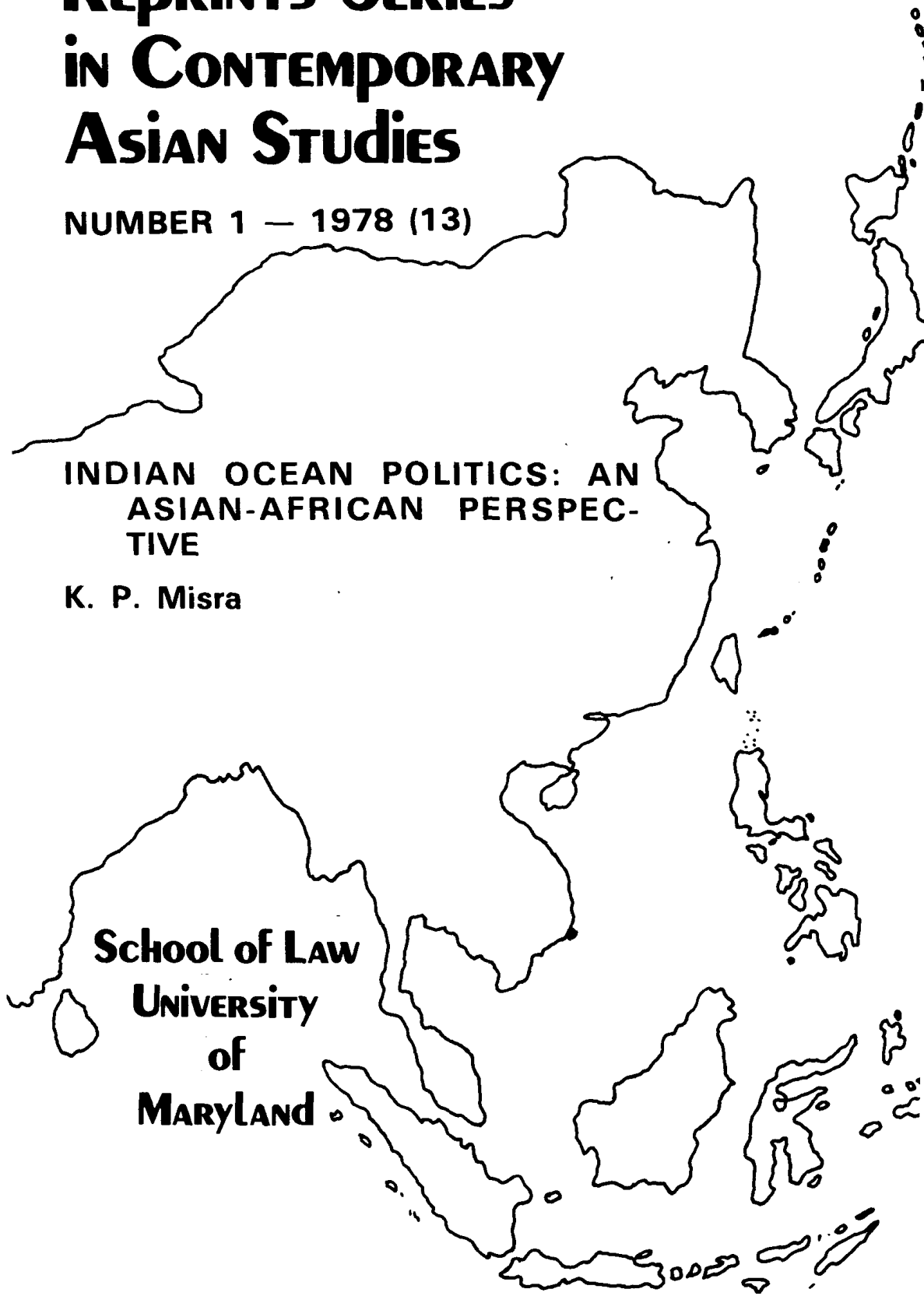
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**INDIAN OCEAN POLITICS: AN  
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# OCCASIONAL PAPERS/REPRINTS SERIES IN CONTEMPORARY ASIAN STUDIES

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## INDIAN OCEAN POLITICS: AN ASIAN-AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

K. P. MISRA\*

The Indian Ocean area, comprising the world's third largest body of water and its littoral and hinterland, is vast and is of crucial significance when we consider the water space it covers, the countries and populations which it includes, the varied potential resources which it is either already known to possess or likely to have, the important transit routes of trade and commerce which it offers, and the political and military strategy which it calls for. All these factors have, during the last ten years or so, aroused unprecedented interest among scholars and men of public affairs, who are exploring and researching the various facets of the area. This trend is likely to continue in the coming years. The fact that developments in the area have engaged some of the most important organs of the United Nations since 1971 is a further indication of its significance.

An outstanding feature of the situation in the Indian Ocean area is that none of the littoral countries has a sizable naval force. This is true of the present as well as of the past. Australia and India have no doubt large navies, but compared with the navies of the major powers outside the area, they are capable of performing only minor roles. The Indonesian Navy, is not only small, but is in poor condition at present. Some of the West Asian countries, notably Iran and South Africa, may develop navies of some consequence, but at present they are insignificant insofar as their relative strength is concerned. Thus, apart from Australia, India, and Indonesia, none of the littoral countries is a maritime power even of a minor kind if the global naval balance is kept in view.

Thus, the littoral countries are not in a position, either singly or collectively, to influence the course of events in the area decisively insofar as their naval power is concerned. In respect of other varieties of power also, their position is far from strong. All in all, the Indian Ocean area is weak and undefended if one or more major outside powers decides to interfere militarily in the affairs of the area.

The temptation among the major outside powers to influence the course of events in the area in a manner that would strengthen their own roles in world politics is thus strong. These

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powers are well aware of the instances in history where powerful countries have taken advantage, often undue, of the weakness prevailing in other areas.

Sea power and power on land are inextricably interwoven in practically all situations, and the Indian Ocean Area is by no means an exception to the general rule. This is confirmed by the sequence of events since ancient times. For instance, activities in the Indian Ocean were dramatically increased and continued for many centuries after the consolidation of the empire of the Mauryas in India, leading to substantial political, cultural and commercial contacts between the Mauryas and many parts of Asia and Europe.

A study of the history of sea power in the Indian Ocean<sup>1</sup> would show that, because of the enormous size of the Ocean, it was not possible for any power until a couple of centuries ago to establish a decisive overall influence. Different countries have no doubt dominated its different sectors or parts, particularly in the ancient period. The modern history of the Ocean begins with the coming of Vasco Da Gama in 1494, at a time when neither any littoral nor outside power was of any consequence in the Ocean. The Portuguese possessed a shrewd sense of politics and strategy and therefore, gave attention to both major sectors, east and west, of this vast expanse of water. But in spite of this they could not hold on for more than about a century. The Dutch entered the scene in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The French and the British initiated their efforts and competition in the following decades.

Without going into the power struggle in detail in the Indian Ocean between these European powers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, we may note here that, under the peace arrangements made in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, Britain's sway over the Indian Ocean became more or less complete, a situation which continued for a century and a half. This is not to say that under *Pax Britannica* things always went smoothly. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, a project accomplished by the French without British participation, the element of competition and rivalry increased, and British dominance was impaired.

Notwithstanding some strains, the British power in the Indian Ocean continued until the end of the Second World War. The latter half of the 1940s witnessed a turning point in the

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1. For an excellent treatment of the subject, see Auguste Toussaint, *History of the Indian Ocean* (Chicago, 1969).

history of international relations in general and of this area in particular. A variety of factors combined to herald an era of decolonization. The period witnessed the termination of British power in many areas. Its central piece, the subcontinent of India, came into its independence in 1947. This was followed by the emergence of a number of sovereign states around the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean obviously could not escape the effect of these fundamental political changes which were taking place in its coastal areas. These changes also profoundly affected the British position as a power in the international relations of the post-war period, not only in political terms but in economic and other related fields as well. The British land and air forces had to be either completely withdrawn from most of these coastal areas of the Ocean or substantially reduced. There was some diminution in the naval strength also. But in spite of these developments, the British naval power was a decisive military factor, particularly in Southeast Asia, in the balance of power in the Indian Ocean. The British persisted in maintaining this posture ostensibly on the ground that it would protect their vital economic interests in the area.

In the new power landscape on the international level, there was clear disharmony between British power and the desperate attempt by Britain to maintain defence forces at the level at which they had been maintained during the days of the empire. Among other things, this caused grievous domestic economic problems at home. The Labour Party had a sharper and more objective perception of the situation. Thus, when Harold Wilson came to power in the middle of the 1960s, he seriously attempted to come to terms with the new realities of the situation. His Government, soon after assuming office, criticized its predecessor, saying that it had made "no real attempt to match political commitments to military resources, still less to relate the resources made available for the economic circumstances of the nation." In its judgment the defence forces it had inherited were "seriously overstretched and in some respects dangerously underequipped." Referring to its commitments outside Europe, the new Government unambiguously proclaimed that "it is neither wise nor economical to use military force to seek to protect national economic interests."<sup>2</sup>

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2. For details, see Cmd Paper No. 2592, presented to Parliament in February 1965.

In a way this statement by the new Government was a culmination of the development of enlightened public opinion. An example of the growing public

The Labour Government undertook an extensive review of the country's defence capabilities and obligations especially in the light of domestic economic resources and potentialities. Subsequently an announcement was made that British overseas forces east of Suez would be reduced by a third in the next four years. At the same time it was also stated that Britain would continue to play a military role in this area notwithstanding this decision. This announcement was further reinforced by certain decisions taken a couple of years later. In January 1968, the extent of Britain's interests in the world outside were spelled out. It was now clearly laid down that British military forces would withdraw east of Suez by the end of 1971. The cumulative effect of all this was that Britain had decided practically to retire from several areas, including the area east of Suez, by 1971. As *The Economist* pointed out, this amounted to "much more than a geographical shift in Britain's foreign policy. It was an abrupt narrowing of the area of Britain's concern in the world."<sup>3</sup>

What were the implications of the British withdrawal? It was stated that since the British had virtually controlled the Indian Ocean in the preceding one-and-a-half centuries, their withdrawal would amount to the creation of a power vacuum in the area. This approach was responsible for a conceptual framework which provided foundational material for the policy structures of certain outside powers. Hence it merits closer examination.

To start with, it may be argued that the theory of a power vacuum was based on an assessment of dubious validity as regards the importance of Britain to an area which had been politically transformed in a fundamental manner. Instead of being made up of pockets and parcels of territory belonging to imperial powers, the area now had multiple polities which were sovereign, self-respecting members of the community of nations and which brooked no interference by outside powers. In the transformed situation the British role was inconsequential. Even if Britain had not wanted to withdraw, it would not have been possible for it to play any major role. An army of 70,000 men, supported by small air and naval power, could not play any significant role in an area as huge as the Indian Ocean. A few

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opinion in favor of withdrawal from the regions east of Suez is the following editorial comment in *The Observer* (London) of 22 November 1974, which said: "Defence Planning has continually proved to be out of touch with political realities . . ." Also, "How much of these vast sums of money is wasted on trying to keep up a figure in the world which is no longer compatible with our resources or needs!"

3. *The Economist* (London), 20 January 1968, p. 17.

instances are sufficient to substantiate this point. More than once the British troops suppressed violence in Mauritius which was by no means a major military operation, but when it came to bigger situations, Britain was more or less helpless. It was effectively powerless when violent eruptions occurred in Aden, or when conflicts between India and Pakistan broke out. Thus it must be clearly understood that the real power of Britain was in its territorial possessions, and once these achieved their political freedom, such military strength as it continued to retain in some parts of the coastal areas of the Ocean, indeed in the Ocean as a whole, became a matter of marginal significance from the political and strategic standpoint. Any talk, therefore, about the emergence of a power vacuum in this area as a consequence of the total withdrawal of British power is out of tune with the realities of the situation.

Rooted in the traditional theory of power and balance of power, the power vacuum concept suggests that the new nations of Asia and Africa on the Indian Ocean are economically so poor and politically so vulnerable as to be unable to defend themselves from within as well as from without. A typical Western view representing the above position is to be found in an editorial of the *New York Times* which said:

The harsh reality is that a complete British withdrawal. . . . would leave a dangerous power vacuum over a vast and volatile area which the United States' and Britain's other allies would find it extremely difficult to fill — a vacuum that would serve neither Britain's long run interests nor its stakes in world peace and stability.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of the rivalry between the superpowers, this line of thinking has certain implications.

First, if, taking advantage of the weak and inadequately defended area, one of the two superpowers were not to act, it would lag behind the other. Besides, forbearance would entail a number of disadvantages, for the other power would then take

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4. *New York Times*, 12 January 1968. It was an interesting coincidence of international politics that while the West was worrying about the power vacuum in the Indian Ocean area and the Soviet Union was accusing it of attempting to move into the area, the People's Republic of China, along with the West, was charging the Soviet Union with trying to fill the vacuum by stepping up its naval activity in the Indian Ocean. The *New York Times*, 19 and 20 May 1969, carried reports about these charges, and said that these charges had been repeated in several Chinese papers like *Jen-min-Jih-pao* and *Hung chi*.

advantage of the situation and initiate the necessary moves to promote its interests in the area and so create an unfavorable balance of power situation in this part of the world. This belief arises out of the general power politics attitude and is, therefore, applicable to similar situations in other parts of the world.

Second, related to the first implication, though somewhat different from it, is the implication that the littoral countries need some sort of a guardian or caretaker in the area to protect them from possible mischief from the influence-seeking outside powers. This is supposed to be in the interest of the countries in the region because, if left unprotected, they would succumb to the pressures of outside powers equipped with far superior economic and military might.

Third, the potential for conflict in certain parts of the littoral provides a tempting pasture for the outside powers, particularly for those powers which feel that their interests and obligations extend into this area. This is so because the littoral is particularly conflict prone: in the southern part of Africa, for instance, there have been clashes between the white minority who hold crucial positions and members of the overwhelming black majority; in West Asia there has been a continual armed confrontation between Israel and the Arabs, and a situation of "no war, no peace" still persists; in South Asia there have been conflicts between India and Pakistan, which, though local, were among the most serious of their kind; in Southeast Asia, apart from Vietnam, several conflicts have occurred and more may recur in the future. In all these conflicts the superpowers have been present by proxy. Their resources, economic and military, have played a role in sharpening conflicts. According to the power vacuum theory, if one superpower is attempting to influence the course of events in a conflict, the other superpower should also enter the race by aiding and supporting the rival party in the conflict, so that a disadvantageous balance of power situation may not be created for itself. Thus the theory assesses conflicts in terms of their implications for the real or imaginary interests of outside powers.

Finally, in international relations it is well known how the superpowers have at suitable times endeavoured either to support regimes which, whether or not representative or legitimate, are, according to their calculations, convenient to them, or to subvert regimes which are inconvenient to them. A very interesting feature of this subterranean activity is that these powers have always disclaimed it. Hence, though it is not clearly and openly articulated, implicit in the power vacuum concept is the desire of



the outside powers to influence the domestic situation in littoral countries if that situation turns out to be unfavorable to them and if, in their judgment, the cost of influencing does not outweigh the benefits.

Thus, the power vacuum theory, generating an artificially created atmosphere of competition and contention in the area, has domestic, regional and international ramifications. Of course, if one goes by the experience of the recent past, one finds that the activities of the superpowers cannot neatly be put into any one of these categories. Often the area is presented with a combination.

In the context of the power vacuum theory, it is instructive to note how the Western press, especially the American press, as well as the scholarly studies on the subject, have openly talked about the so-called vacuum and stressed the need to take effective steps to fill it or, at any rate, to counterbalance the alleged Soviet naval build-up. For instance, the *New York Times* editorially stated soon after the British announcement in January 1968:

The harsh reality is that a complete British withdrawal within three years would lead to a dangerous power vacuum over a vast and volatile area which the U.S. and Britain's other allies would find it extremely difficult to fill, a vacuum that would serve neither Britain's long term interests nor its stake in world peace and stability.<sup>5</sup>

Some military strategists have greatly exaggerated the significance of Soviet naval activity in the Indian Ocean, and have said that the Soviets might soon "own" the Indian Ocean<sup>6</sup> and that there is a "Red star rising over the Indian Ocean."<sup>7</sup> Writing in *Atlas*, Guido Geroso emphasized that "the shadow of hammer and sickle today extends over the entire Indian Ocean. The Russian bear has replaced the British lion: a Tsar's dream has, by an historical paradox, been realized by the humdrum bureaucrat Brezhnev."<sup>8</sup>

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5. *New York Times*, 12 January 1968.

6. Anthony Harrigan, "Soviets may 'own' Indian Ocean if US Does not Make Countermove," *Navy: The Magazine of Sea Power* (Washington, D.C.), Dec. 1969, p. 15.

7. Anthony Harrigan, "Red Star over the Indian Ocean," *National Review* (New York), 20 April 1971, p. 421.

8. *Atlas* (New York), November 1970, p. 21. Also see a letter to the editor by Philip K. Crowe, former American Ambassador to Sri Lanka, in the *New York Times*, 26 May 1968, Sec. IV, p. 19.

The Soviets have, at least in theory, denounced the concept of a power vacuum without reservation and have characterized it as a "notorious thesis." A Soviet commentator wrote in *Izvestia* in 1971 that "a vacuum is an airless void, a term quite inappropriate when speaking of our planet today. Hardly any political 'blank spots,' by which I mean places without independent states are left."<sup>9</sup> Thus the Soviet Union appears to be in sympathy with littoral sentiment that the idea of a power vacuum smacks of imperialist thinking.

It would, however, be relevant to examine whether there is harmony between Soviet theory and practice with respect to the situation in the Indian Ocean area. While it is true that the Soviet Union has denounced military or naval bases and does not attempt to have any, in the sense in which the Americans are trying to have them, it would be wrong to conclude that it is a silent spectator to the developments in the area. In order to protect its vital economic and political interests and to maintain a type of balance of power situation which would not be disadvantageous to it as a global power, it is bound to act. In fact it has acted, although the pattern of its activity and initiative has been different from that of the United States. The manifold increase in its activity in the Indian Ocean, beginning with 1968, and its initiatives in the littoral states are evidence of its active interest in the area.

In a nutshell it may be said that in practice the responses of the outside powers, particularly the superpowers, to the emerging situation in the Indian Ocean area are basically similar. The Soviet rejection of the theory of a power vacuum is more an exercise in semantics than a reliable guide to its actions. In essential respects the policy objectives of the two superpowers seem to be similar although the pattern and timing of initiatives and the concrete instruments used to achieve objectives have, no doubt, been different. Because of this broad similarity in their approaches, they have, in the Indian Ocean as well as in the littoral countries, escalated tensions through their various acts of omission and commission. Fortunately for the area, the tensions have remained at a relatively low level so far. How they are going to be in the years to come is hard to tell. Present trends do not encourage us to be sanguine.

The whole concept of a power vacuum and its implications are repugnant to the vast number of Asian-African countries. It is the

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9. V. Matveyev, "Stuffed 'Vacuum'," *Izvestia* (Moscow), 28 May 1971.

considered view of these countries that the concept is contrary to the philosophy of nonalignment; that it is a negation of their national hopes and aspirations; that it may undermine their independence; and that, finally, it would retard their socio-economic development.<sup>10</sup>

The unfolding of the disagreeable developments caused concern among those countries which were directly affected by them. They were well aware of the "handsome" contribution that the contention and competition between the superpowers had made in different parts of Africa and Asia to the generation of tensions and conflicts, including about a dozen major armed conflicts in West Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia during the last two decades or so. Hence they could not remain silent and helpless spectators to the developing situation.

In order to raise their voice against the escalating possibility of tension, the littoral countries did not have to try to search or discover a common approach and/or ideology. Most of them had been broadly wedded to the theory and practice of nonalignment, which consisted, *inter alia*, in keeping the power politics of outside powers out of their affairs lest it do multiple damage to their development. This umbrella came handy to them in their effort to deal with the outside instigation of tensions.

It is interesting that the beginning of the efforts and initiatives by outside powers in the Indian Ocean area were coincidental with the discussions between the littoral state at different levels and forums. However, this is not to say that the former was not the cause of the latter.

Perhaps the first indication of the general approach of the countries in the area to the problem was articulated in the second nonaligned conference held in Cairo in 1964. The Conference welcomed the proposal to denuclearize Africa and Latin America and recommended "the establishment of denuclearized zones covering these and *other areas and oceans of the world*, particularly those which have been hitherto free from nuclear weapons."<sup>11</sup> There could be two possible explanations for suggesting that the Indian Ocean area should be made a denuclearized zone and not a peace zone. First, the horrible implications of the various types of nuclear weapons had become quite evident in the early 1960s. Hence there was an effort to save

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10. For a widely shared view of the nonaligned countries, see the speech of the Prime Minister of India in *The Times of India* (New Delhi), 29 April 1973.

11. *Conference of Heads of States and Government of Non-aligned Countries* (Cairo, Ministry of National Guidance Publication, 1964), p. 350.

as much part of the globe as possible from the evil effects of nuclear weapons. Second, at the time of the Cairo Conference the nature and extent of the activities of outside powers in the Indian Ocean area had not yet given cause to the littoral and immediate hinterland states to suspect that peace was going to be in danger. The idea of making this area a peace zone had not thus become an attractive proposition at that stage.

The closing years of the 1960s, however, witnessed qualitative change in many respects in the area. The change resulted from three factors: (1) efforts to establish some sort of a base in Diego Garcia in the middle of the Indian Ocean especially by the Americans; (2) movement of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean; and (3) supply of arms by the British to the South African Government under the Simonstown Agreement.<sup>12</sup> The first two factors had wider and deeper significance than the third.

The implications of the change were recognized by the countries of the Indian Ocean area. By the time the third nonaligned conference met in Lusaka in 1970, the former "British Lake" had already become a victim to the strategy and tactics of outside powers. Consequently, in Lusaka the subject came up for reflection and decision more specifically and in relative detail. Many heads of state and government expressed themselves on the subject in their formal speeches, although, of course, some were more interested in the subject than others. For instance, expanding upon the implications of the third factor mentioned above, Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi observed:

We have been deeply disturbed by the reported intention of the United Kingdom and other Governments to supply arms to the Government of South Africa. This dangerous and retrograde step will threaten the neighbors of South Africa and also the Indian Ocean Area. . . . We would like the Indian Ocean to be an area of peace and cooperation. Military bases, of outside powers, will create tension and great power rivalry.<sup>13</sup>

The Prime Minister of Ceylon also drew the attention of the delegates to the emerging problem. She reminded the Conference

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12. This development ceased to be of importance subsequently because, in June 1975, the two countries formally cancelled the agreement. There are, however, press reports that South Africa may enter into some sort of an arrangement with the USA.

13. *Review of International Affairs* (Belgrade), no. 491, 21 September 1970. Paragraph 18 of the text of her speech is reproduced on pp. 21-23.

of her earlier statements in Cairo and elsewhere, and pleaded that "the Indian Ocean area be declared a nuclear free zone. We urge that all countries bordering the Indian Ocean should join us not only in giving effect to this proposal but also in keeping the Indian Ocean as an area of peace."<sup>14</sup>

She therefore proposed a comprehensive plan for a peace zone, which included the concept of a nuclear-free zone among many other points.

As an organized body of nonaligned countries, this Conference for the first time passed a formal resolution on the subject. It pledged to work for the adoption of a declaration by the United Nations on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. It urged that "a declaration should be adopted calling upon all states to consider and respect the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace from which Great Power rivalries and competition, either Army, Navy, or Air Force bases, are excluded. The area should be free also of nuclear weapons."<sup>15</sup>

This resolution marked indeed a very significant step in the efforts of the nonaligned group, which consisted substantially of the littoral and hinterland states of the Indian Ocean. The significance lay not so much in its being the first resolution of its kind as in the basic thesis which it attempted to propound. In effect, the resolution had three strands. The first was addressed implicitly to the United States and its Western allies and made it clear to them that their military bases — present as well as prospective — were unwelcome. The second in effect communicated to the Soviet Union that its naval activity, especially that of the preceding couple of years, was not to the liking of the area. Finally and positively, all nuclear powers were asked to keep this zone free from such weapons.

It seems that after Lusaka, informal exchanges of views continued on the subject among the countries of the area. In the months following the Conference, it was realized that a concerted effort on their part was called for and that, the most appropriate forum for such an effort would be the United Nations. Consequently, a few months later, in September 1971, when the Foreign Ministers of fifty-four nonaligned countries gathered for the UN General Assembly Session, they held a meeting to discuss this subject. They reaffirmed the Lusaka declaration at this meeting,

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14. For the text of her speech, see *Ceylon Today* (Colombo), September-October 1970, pp. 5-6.

15. Paragraph 8(6) of Resolution 12 of the Lusaka Declaration. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

and declared that "the participants in the Consultative Meeting recognized that, in keeping with the Lusaka declaration, the creation of zones of peace would contribute to international peace and security, and the stability of all states and peoples."<sup>16</sup> They also agreed that concrete steps should be taken at the 26th Session of the General Assembly to implement the decision relating to the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, contained in paragraph 8(6) of Resolution 12 of the Lusaka Declaration.

It may be recalled that the developments which were taking place in the southernmost tip of the African continent had created a sense of special urgency among the countries of the Indian Ocean area. Indeed, most of them had already in various regional and global forums expressed their opposition to the resumption of the supply of arms by Britain to South Africa under the Simonstown Agreement of 1955. As was indicated earlier, because of the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, the Suez Canal had been closed, adding considerably to the importance of the Cape route, which, according to the British, needed protection against the threat of growing Soviet influence in the Indian Ocean. The concern of the littoral and other nonaligned countries was genuine, and they raised it in numerous international forums: the United Nations, the Lusaka Conference, and, later, the Singapore Conference of the Commonwealth Heads of State held in January 1971.

At the Singapore Conference, the issue assumed the proportions of a crisis, and to some observers it appeared as if the very survival of the Commonwealth as an international institution was at stake. The situation was saved by the appointment of an eight-nation committee to study the question and report back to it. This Committee had scarcely begun its work when the British announced their decision to sell "wasp" helicopters to South Africa, a decision which virtually wrecked its work. As a reaction to this decision most of the members of the Committee decided to quit, which resulted in the disintegration of the Committee.

Because nearly half the countries of the Commonwealth were either littoral or immediate hinterland states of the Indian Ocean, the work of making the Indian Ocean a peace zone begun in Lusaka was resumed at the Singapore Conference. Ceylon had done its homework rather seriously, and its Prime Minister circulated a paper on the subject, the opening paragraph of which highlighted the emerging landscape in the area. It stated:

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16. Quoted in UN Doc. A/C. 1/PV. 1836, 25 November 1971.

Recent reports point to an increasing naval presence of the Soviet Union and naval fleets in the Indian Ocean. It would also appear that these fleets carrying nuclear capability, are becoming part of the strategic defence system of the world powers. Another disturbing development is the militarization of the Indian Ocean. The same reports indicate that various islands and landbased facilities are being utilized to facilitate the operation of these fleets. . . .<sup>17</sup>

The paper also contained some elements of the idea of a peace zone. When Ceylon put this proposal before the Conference, the substance of it found general acceptance. In the final communique, it was declared that the Conference "agreed on the desirability of ensuring that it [the Indian Ocean] remains an area of peace and stability."<sup>18</sup>

Thus by the beginning of the 1970s, informal discussions and some formal references had brought matters to a point where better and more organized efforts were called for. It was now considered opportune to make a move in the United Nations. Among the countries of the Indian Ocean area most actively interested in the idea of a peace zone, it was given to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) not only to take formal initiatives, but also to foster the idea. It made its first formal initiative when its Permanent Representative, Shirley Amerasinghe, addressed a letter on 1 October 1971 to the Secretary General of the United Nations, under Rule 15 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, requesting that the "Declaration of Indian Ocean a Zone of Peace," be placed on the Agenda of the 26th Session.<sup>19</sup> A week later, on 8 October, on the recommendation of the General Committee, the General Assembly decided to include this item in its agenda and instructed its First Committee to consider the matter and report back to it.

Since the inscription of this item on the agenda of the UN General Assembly in the first week of October 1971, the subject has been deliberated in all successive sessions. The subject has also been touched upon in many other bodies of the Organization, but the main debate and discussion, including the expression of views by the littoral countries, has been in the First or Political Committee. In the General Assembly, during plenary meetings and during voting on the peace zone resolutions, the views

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17. For the full text, see *National Herald* (Lucknow), 23 January 1971, p. 5.

18. For details, see *The Times* (London), 23 January 1974, p. 4.

19. UN Doc. A/8492 and Add. 1. On 6 October 1971, the United Republic of Tanzania became a co-sponsor of the letter.

expressed in the First Committee were more or less repeated. It is a very interesting and instructive exercise to study (a) how opinions were expressed in the first round and (b) how they underwent transformation, in some cases substantially and in some others peripherally. It is also noteworthy that the views of some countries have been remarkably consistent throughout.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the Indian Ocean countries, the two superpowers and other major maritime users of the Indian Ocean have declined the invitation to attend the proposed Conference on the Indian Ocean. In such a situation, it would be worthwhile for the Indian Ocean countries to consider whether a conference without these powers would serve any real purpose.

Looking at the developments of the previous years — passing of the resolution about a peace zone in 1971, establishment of the *Ad Hoc* Committee in 1972, preparation of the factual statement of the military presence of the Great Powers in 1973, the decision to convene an international conference in 1974, 1975 and 1976 further requesting the littoral and hinterland states to intensify their efforts with a view to giving shape to the various aspects of the Conference on the Indian Ocean — one must draw cautious conclusions. In terms of substance the progress made cannot by any standards be called significant. The main reason is the “total indifference” of the superpowers, which continue to augment their military strength in the Indian Ocean and its littoral. Differences among the littoral and hinterland countries, largely for this reason, are also a factor of considerable importance in the way of achieving more than what has actually been accomplished. But a sense of realism should inform us that establishment of a peace zone in the Indian Ocean cannot be isolated from the other currents of the contemporary international order. Hence, such modest results as have been achieved, through a slow and halting process, need not make one utterly pessimistic, although what happens ultimately depends upon the unity and harmony between the countries of the area and the attitude of outside powers.

The littoral response is enshrined in the concept of the zone of peace, which has been a subject of numerous bilateral and multilateral declarations, particularly since 1971. However, surprisingly little attention has been paid thus far to the problem of analyzing the fundamentals of the concept and the problem of considering it as a systematic and coherent body of thought. Some people, especially in the West, have criticized it on various grounds. An instance in point is an observation made in a recent study which characterizes the UN treatment of this problem as



marked by "oversimplification, misrepresentation, euphemism, and cant."<sup>20</sup>

A perusal of the relevant UN documents, as also of some other declarations made by leaders of the nonaligned world, would reveal that the peace zone concept has been evolving in response to the unfolding political and strategic scenario in the Indian Ocean during the last decade or so, and particularly during the 1970s. Deeply rooted in the basic tenets of nonalignment, the concept has been enriched by the contribution of several leaders of Asian and African states whose interests are inextricably linked with developments in the area.

The country that took the initiative and did most to formulate the peace zone concept was Sri Lanka. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sirimao Bandaranaike, the representatives of Sri Lanka have, in the United Nations and elsewhere, left no stone unturned to make this idea a living reality. As mentioned previously, the concept was first initiated in the United Nations by Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative, Shirley Amerasinghe, who suggested that the "Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace" be included in the agenda of the Twenty-sixth Session.<sup>21</sup>

After several rounds of discussions that took place at various levels among leaders of the littoral and hinterland states and after the exchange of ideas in the General Assembly's First Committee in October-November 1971, certain fundamentals were agreed upon among the promoters of the concept. These were set forth in a resolution passed by the Assembly during its Twenty-sixth Session.<sup>22</sup> The resolution is of the utmost significance because, of the six resolutions passed so far, this is the only one to deal with the substantive aspects of the subject. The other five resolutions are essentially procedural in nature. Hence this resolution, along with the explanations and clarifications given by its promoters when the subject was under consideration, constitutes the basic source material on the subject.

As usual, the 1971 resolution in effect had two parts, preambular and operative. The preamble deals with the rationale and circumstances which prompted the move. Though not as important as the subsequent part, it provides the philosophical

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20. See W.A.C. Adie, *Oil, Politics and Sea Power: Indian Ocean Vortex* (New York, 1975), p. 1.

21. See, *supra* note 19.

22. See UN Doc. A/Res./2832, passed by the 2022nd plenary meeting held on 16 December 1971.

background and the theoretical justification for the resolution's operative clauses. History is full of instances where introductory paragraphs have been referred to in interpreting the meaning of resolutions.

A study of the six paragraphs in the preamble substantiates the claim made by Mrs. Bandaranaike that the "concept of peace zone is inherent in the concept of nonalignment. . . ." <sup>23</sup> Indeed these paragraphs restate the basic factors which have promoted nonalignment. The resolution opens with subjects of prime importance to the countries of the area, namely, the "determination of the peoples of the littoral and hinterland states of the Indian Ocean to preserve their independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and to resolve their political, economic and social problems under conditions of peace and tranquility." It then refers to the Lusaka declaration, particularly to the section emphasizing that superpower rivalries and military bases were bound to hinder socioeconomic reconstruction. Then there is a statement that military alliances entail diversion of scarce resources from urgently needed development, which, in turn, increases tensions in different societies. Finally, the preamble expresses the concern of the littoral and hinterland countries at the signs of an increasing arms race in the area, and asserts that the establishment in the Indian Ocean "could have a beneficial influence on the establishment of permanent universal peace based on equal rights and justice for all, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

The substantive part of the resolution consists of three main categories and is of greater significance. It has aroused the opposition of the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as that of some of their friends and allies. It begins with a statement of the basic position. Innocent in nature, this declares that for all time to come the Indian Ocean, along with the air space over it and the ocean floor under it, is a zone of peace. The extent of the Ocean is not defined, but this problem was subsequently considered by the *Ad Hoc* Committee, which, in its first report, said that "the question of definitions was emphasized early in the

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23. Mrs. Bandaranaike provided the foundation of the whole concept of the peace zone in her speech before the General Assembly on 12 October 1971. "The main thrust of Mrs. Bandaranaike's nonalignment policy," rightly observes a perceptive Sri Lanka scholar, "was directed to obtaining acceptance in the comity of nations of her own pet proposal to ensure that the Indian Ocean was made a peace zone." "U.S. Policy after 1956", *Asian Survey* (Berkeley, Calif.), December 1973, p. 1135. Also see UN Doc. A/PV. 1962, October 1971, pp. 10-13.

debate and involved such aspects as the limits or boundaries of the zone of peace." While stressing the need for "accurate definitions," the report indicated that an exercise of this nature was not necessary "at the initial stages."<sup>24</sup>

How the extent of the Indian Ocean should be fixed, is not a simple problem. If and when an attempt is made, some ticklish problems are likely to be encountered. For instance, what would be the relationship between the peace zone and areas of national jurisdiction? Also, what criteria does one use in determining the outer limits of the Indian Ocean, a vast and ambiguous area extending from Asia and Africa to Oceania? Keeping these various aspects of the subject in mind, the sponsors of the resolution thought that it would be sensible simply to state a principle. Once this was agreed upon, discussions could be held with a view to formulating an "accurate definition."

A report submitted by a committee of experts to the UN Secretary-General in May 1974 seems to have made a constructive contribution towards resolving the problem.<sup>25</sup> In the General Assembly debate, delegates of some countries asked who would determine the limits of the peace zone and through what instrumentality that decision would be made. The proponent of the peace zone resolution, Amerasinghe, responded: "Clearly through the process of international negotiations and consultation, and final agreement through an instrument in the form of an international treaty."<sup>26</sup> It would have been unrealistic to have attempted to solve all problems during the initial stages. Subsequently, the matter remained under consideration of the *Ad Hoc* Committee, and its second report<sup>27</sup> said that it considered it desirable to have definitions laid down of certain important terms. One of these terms is: "limits of the Indian Ocean, in the context of the declaration of the Indian Ocean, as a zone of peace." The Committee decided in 1976 to undertake to define all the basic concepts and terms.

The second paragraph of the operative part of the resolution is addressed to the superpowers and is indeed the heart of the concept. It urges those powers — none of which borders on the Indian Ocean — to consult the littoral countries with a view to

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24. *Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Indian Ocean, Official Records of the General Assembly (GAOR), 28th Sess., Supp. No. 29(A/9029), p. 2.*

25. For the text, see UN Doc. A/AC.159/1, 3 May 1974, Annex IV, p. 1. This report was subsequently replaced.

26. See his statement in UN Doc. A/C. 1/PV. 1842, 1 December 1971, p. 55.

27. GAOR, Session 29, Supplement No. 29(A/9629), para. 34.

reducing or scaling down their competition and contention, military or otherwise, in the area. It calls for a halt to the "escalation and expansion of their military presence" and categorically demands that the superpowers should withdraw from all of their military bases and installations, remove all nuclear weapons and terminate all manifestations of superpower rivalry in the area.

The supporters of the peace zone idea have pointed out on numerous occasions that the level of superpower rivalry has been gradually increasing though it is not yet very high. If, however, superpower rivalry is not controlled, it is likely to assume dangerous proportions. The representative of Sri Lanka stressed this point:

If there are regions of the world where the arms race has not yet assumed menacing proportions and where there is still even a remote possibility of preventing its intrusion, the countries in that region could best serve the cause of peace and their own interests by making a concerted effort to arrest and reverse such developments or forestall them in their region. There is one area of the world that is both historically conditioned to adopt such a policy and where actual circumstances are peculiarly favorable for the adoption of the policy that is the Indian Ocean area.<sup>28</sup>

The third part of the resolution's substantive section is addressed to three sets of countries and takes care of the important dimensions of the concept of the zone of peace. The countries are:

- (a) the littoral and hinterland states,
- (b) the permanent members of the UN Security Council, and
- (c) other major maritime users of the Indian Ocean.

Of course, the above countries constitute all those who have anything to do with the Indian Ocean, both as to territory and as to national interests. They are urged to enter into consultations so as to ensure the following situation.

The three dimensions highlighted in this part of the resolution are of vital significance. The first two relate to the use of the Indian Ocean. They declare that warships and military aircraft should not be allowed to use the Ocean "for any threat or use of

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28. UN Doc. A/C. 1/PV. 1834, 23 November 1971, p. 77.

force against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or independence [of the countries of the area] in contravention of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations." This is clearly prohibitory in nature. The third says that "the right to free and unimpeded use of the zone by the vessels of all nations is unaffected." This freedom is not absolute; it is circumscribed by the earlier provisions of the resolutions on the one hand and the norms and principles of international law on the other. In the course of the discussions in the First Committee, some countries, especially the United States, the Soviet Union and France, raised the matter of the relationship between the rules of the new regional order proposed under the peace zone plan and the universally accepted principles of the international law of the sea. They sought to make the point that the peace zone must not affect the freedom of the seas. They said it in 1971 and have repeated it since on numerous occasions. We may briefly analyze the views of the two superpowers.

The views of the U.S. delegate, though briefly stated in two interrelated points, were lucid. He thought that the resolution might adversely affect the security interests of his country and its friends and allies in the Indian Ocean area: "This [resolution] may affect the fundamental security interests not only of states compelled to maintain significant military preparedness . . . but also of states that rely on the stability created by a political and military balance . . ." He also argued that the resolution was likely to preempt efforts to create a new regime of the law of the sea inasmuch as it proposed a special set of rules for a particular area, thus setting a "dangerous precedent." "We reject the view," he declared, "that a group of states in a certain region can establish a legal regime for the high seas in that region."<sup>29</sup>

The response of the Soviet Union was not dissimilar; its representative stated:

The declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace must not lead to undermining or weakening existing generally recognized principles of international law; this measure must be carried out in full conformity with generally recognized principles of international law on the freedom of the high seas, enshrined in the Geneva Convention of 1958 on the high seas.<sup>30</sup>

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29. UN Doc. A/C. 1/PV. 1849, 10 December 1971, p. 17. For the full text of the speech, see pp. 16-17.

30. UN Doc. A/C. V/PV. 1841, 1 December 1971, p. 47.

The sponsors of the peace zone idea, clear in their minds about their objectives, gave assurance that it was not their intention to circumscribe the existing law of the sea in its essential respects. Besides, in view of the apprehensions expressed at the very initial stages, they immediately incorporated a clause (already quoted above) categorically upholding the principle of the freedom of the high seas. It is important to remember that the peace zone idea does not prohibit the presence or passage of warships as such over the Indian Ocean. The objection arises only when this activity poses a threat to the sovereignty and integrity of its littoral.

Since this is the main point which is being raised against the zone of peace proposal, a brief comment on the present state of the law of the sea is in order here. Since many facets of the international law of the sea are open to differing interpretations, it would lead to a better understanding for this discussion if the existing body of law were divided into two parts, one dealing with the peaceful use of the sea and the other relating to the use of the sea for war purposes, although in many situations it is well nigh impossible to distinguish between the two. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the peace zone concept does not, in any way, affect the peaceful uses of the sea, such as fishing or laying of submarine cables and pipelines or overflights. But when it comes to using the Indian Ocean for war purposes, the situation is different. For instance, according to the present law of the sea as adumbrated by the Geneva Convention of 1958, military uses of the sea are more or less freely permissible. Hence the stipulation in the peace zone resolution prohibiting warships and military aircraft, not always but under certain circumstances, from using the Indian Ocean is sure to have implications for the existing body of the law of the sea. Implementation of the resolution would modify the law of the sea in certain respects.

This stipulation was placed in the resolution because of the continued warlike and interventionist activities of certain outside powers. The proponents of the peace zone idea became increasingly resentful of and concerned about the emerging superpower rivalry and the quickening of the pace of events, beginning in 1968. "Must the wishes of a large group of small nations," asked Amerasinghe while moving the resolution in the First Committee, "in this instance the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and the hinterland states of that Ocean, be subordinated to the interests of the great powers that wish to be free to send their vessels for any purpose whatsoever into the Indian Ocean, vessels not of peace

but their vessels of war?" On behalf of the countries concerned, he declared: "We cannot possibly in this stage and time subordinate the peaceful interests of these small states to the will, to the prejudices and to the predilection of the Great Powers. And it is that understanding that we want from them."<sup>31</sup> Keeping all these points in view, a pertinent question was asked: What is the need for the naval presence of outside powers to ensure freedom of navigation once the concept of the peace zone has been implemented?

During discussions within the United Nations, the advocates of the peace zone idea have repeatedly attempted to distinguish between two types of measures, one dealing with disarmament and the other with international security. They argue that theirs is an international security approach. In the context of the General Assembly resolution<sup>32</sup> passed at the Twenty-fifth Session, particularly paragraph 20, they highlight the appeal made to all states to make urgent and united efforts for the end and reversal of the arms race, both nuclear and conventional. Amerasinghe put it well when he said that by doing so "for the first time the General Assembly conceived the idea that *athletes run backward*."<sup>33</sup>

These efforts were to be made within the framework of the Disarmament Decade as well as through other means and it was under the latter means that the peace zone idea was being promoted.

Through these means, peace, as opposed to disarmament, was emphasized, although whether peace should come first or disarmament was like the chicken and the egg controversy. The delegate of Sri Lanka stated:

The disarmament approach to peace and security, we consider totally inadequate and some of the measures undertaken under that approach we consider to be blissfully irrelevant: blissfully because they create a false sense of security and lull the world into complacency: irrelevant for the reason that they call for the renunciation of what has already become obsolete or unnecessary, or impose limitation, or reduction that in no way reduce the arms race.<sup>34</sup>

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31. UN Doc. A/C. 1/PV. 1842, 1 December 1971, p. 57.

32. UN Doc. A/Res./2734(XXV), 16 December 1970.

33. UN Doc. A/C. 1/PV. 1904, 29 November 1972, p. 3. Emphasis added.

34. UN Doc. A/C. 1/PV. 1904, 29 November 1972, pp. 4-5.

The peace zone approach considered this way of doing things to be inadequate. Consistent with the basic philosophy of nonalignment, it emphasized the need to create an atmosphere or climate of peace that would render all manner of armament unnecessary and futile. On this view the peace zone idea was one that was meant to contribute to international security.<sup>35</sup>

An important implication of the implementation of the peace zone proposal for the littoral and hinterland countries was highlighted during discussions. This was with reference to nuclear weapons. The countries in the Indian Ocean area, in order to effectuate the peace zone idea, will have to commit themselves to a policy (a) of denuclearization or renunciation of the nuclear weapon option and (b) of refusing the use of their territories to the nuclear weapons of other states.

There is some confusion and difference of opinion about the relationship of these two points. It may be pointed out that the two ideas are not really mutually dependent. Denuclearization is part of the wider question of nuclear disarmament at a global level, whereas the peace zone idea is related to the issue of preventing superpower competition from intensifying in the Third World areas following a detente in the industrialized parts of the world.

It was felt that if these two commitments were not undertaken by the countries in the area, they would have no justification whatsoever in calling upon the outside powers not to deploy these nuclear weapons in the area. Thus, conceptually, the peace zone idea was wider in content and unambiguously included the element of the nuclear-free zone.<sup>36</sup>

Yet another commitment was a logical outcome of the implementation of the peace zone idea. This was about the use of force. It would have to be agreed that, except in self-defence, force would not be used against another country in the area.<sup>37</sup> The

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35. It may be interesting to note that the littoral states never liked this subject to be considered under disarmament items in the United Nations. See UN Doc. A/PV. 2111, 15 December 1972, p. 41.

36. Sri Lanka said that "the countries of the region, both littoral and hinterland states, as well as the countries outside the region, but militarily active in the region, would have to assume certain commitments if any stable agreement is to be reached. As far as the countries in the region are concerned, they will have to commit themselves to a policy of denuclearization which would entail permanent renunciation by them of a nuclear weapon option and the assumption of an obligation to deny the use of their territories and their territorial waters and their air space to nuclear weapons belonging to other states." See GAOR, 28th Sess. Supp. No. 29 (A/9029), p. 10.

37. *Ibid.*



acceptance of this principle posed no problem. However, when it came to implementing it in a concrete situation, the difficulties that arose appeared more or less insurmountable.

What is important about these points is that, while evolving a framework for the peace zone concept, the concept's advocates were not oblivious to their own obligations and difficulties in discharging them.

These are the various dimensions and elements of the zone of peace concept. Though these have taken shape in the background of the historical and current experience of the countries in the Indian Ocean area, they are not, and perhaps could not be, very clear-cut and precise. If and when the idea materializes, it will have to be tested on the touchstone of reality. The mood and the sense of realism of the Indian Ocean countries do not indicate that they regard these elements as sacred. The implication of this is that the littoral countries would be willing to discuss these elements with outside powers and modify their stand to the extent they deem reasonable and consistent with their basic objective.

In spite of the ever-growing support for, indeed near unanimity in favor of, the peace zone idea among the countries of the littoral of the Indian Ocean and also of others in Asia, Africa and Latin America, all permanent members of the Security Council except China and all outside maritime users of the Indian Ocean except Japan have refused to cooperate with the countries of the area. Thus, for example, the USA, the UK, France, the Soviet Union and other maritime powers (except Japan) all refused to attend the conference provided for in the 1974 General Assembly resolution. In February 1976 the United States and Britain entered into a new agreement about the expansion of naval facilities on Diego Garcia. These are the most telling examples of their attitude towards the peace zone plan. Right from the start of the discussions in the United Nations in 1971, they have taken a negative attitude. We have also shown how untenable their view is. Their attitude on the whole has hardened, although there are minor variations in their stand.

The entire movement to have a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean arose on account of the activities of outside powers, particularly the superpowers. Now if their noncooperation is uncompromising, what is the result of individual pronouncements, bilateral declarations, recommendatory UN resolutions, and even possible urgings of the conference on the subject? What means and methods are available to the advocates of the peace zone idea to persuade or compel outside powers to change their present

attitude? Theoretically perhaps one can think of levers. For instance, if all the Asian-African countries solidly join together and boycott outside powers in certain respects, it may create real difficulties for the latter. Or, more concretely, if the supply of some essential raw material as, *e.g.*, oil, which is perhaps the most important of them, is stopped, outside powers are sure to face problems not easily surmountable.

It is said that a step easier and more effective than all this is a threat by the Indian Ocean countries to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which the superpowers consider very important. It is argued that most of the littoral countries in any case do not have nuclear capability and that their withdrawal from the NPT would not create any suspicion regarding their intentions. Their continued adherence to the NPT should be made contingent on the superpowers agreeing to the peace zone idea. This course of action, others claim, is likely to provoke military response.

Here two points need to be explored. First, if there is collective action by the countries of Asia and Africa, other powers are bound to retaliate. They have their own levers to use which are in some cases more powerful and likely to constitute a more severe blow to the interests of their opponents. A situation like this might well lead to a global economic upheaval and perhaps to armed conflict. It is not in the interest of anybody to risk such disastrous consequences. Second, a concerted effort on the part of the Asian and African countries presupposes a deep commitment to the peace zone idea and a firm determination to sink or swim together. Although there is broad support for the peace zone idea in the Asian-African world, it is doubtful if their commitment or determination is equally firm. Some countries are paying just lip-service to the idea, and their commitment is essentially shallow. A variety of complex factors, domestic as well as external, is responsible for this situation. Hence to expect a really united action is to take an overly optimistic view of the situation and to minimize the differences of outlook obtaining among the countries of Asia and Africa. The oil embargo imposed by the Arab countries during and after the October 1973 conflict had its own destructiveness and is not a reliable guide to future actions.

Also, in order to establish a peace zone regime, a series of multilateral agreements and treaties must be concluded on sensitive and controversial issues. Some of these issues involve clashes of interests. How to keep the area free of nuclear weapons, how to demarcate lines between national jurisdiction and the

peace zone, how to remove foreign bases, and how to insulate the socioeconomically weak and politically vulnerable area from superpower politics, etc., are some of the difficult problems that need to be resolved. The odds appear to be too formidable.

In the present stalemate the countries in the Indian Ocean area appear to be in sort of a blind alley. Therefore, the crucial task of statesmen concerned is to devise alternatives for preventing the superpowers from using the Indian Ocean as yet another arena for their competition and conflict. In ideological and philosophical terms the alternative presented by the 1971 UN peace resolution and supported by more and more members of the United Nations in the years since then is the most acceptable one of the countries of the area. But the negative attitude of outside powers to the idea makes it almost impossible to implement.

If the peace zone idea turns out to be unworkable, is there an alternative? The answer depends largely on whether the ruling and other elite groups in the Soviet Union and the Western world feel sufficiently concerned about escalating tension in the Indian Ocean. It is significant that at times strong concern has been expressed at the highest levels of the ruling hierarchies. Though progress has been almost negligible, some important initiatives have been taken by responsible leaders. A number of enlightened scholars have also come out with some proposals which amount to offering alternatives to the peace zone idea.

Mention has already been made of a Soviet Government memorandum submitted to the United Nations in December 1964 entitled "Measures for Further Easing of International Tension and Restructuring the Arms Race." This memorandum devoted a section to the question of establishing nuclear-free zones and proposed the Indian Ocean as one such zone. This proposal did not evoke any response from the other parties, and it seems that in the subsequent few years the Soviet efforts also became somewhat dormant.

For a variety of reasons, the Soviet Union took two initiatives in the year 1971. According to a U.S. Government spokesman, in the spring of 1971 "mutual naval restraint" was informally suggested by the Soviets.<sup>38</sup> In June of the same year, Moscow again proposed to Washington that the limitation of naval forces

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38. *Proposed Expansion of US Military Facility in the Indian Ocean* (Washington, D.C. 1974). See the testimony of J. Owen Zurhellen, Jr., Deputy Director, US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, p. 4. The indication was made in March by the Soviet Ambassador in Washington. The June proposal was made by Brezhnev himself.

be discussed. Apart from this, however, no specifics and details were mentioned. American sources disclosed that when they asked Moscow for a clarification and elucidation of the idea, they drew a virtual blank.<sup>39</sup> In spite of this, the American response was theoretically positive. It was clearly stated on behalf of the American Government that "we remain interested in any idea that might in the future develop along these [restraint] lines, perhaps, in the form of explicit understandings to avoid competition while safeguarding our respective interests in the Indian Ocean."<sup>40</sup>

The Soviet initiatives and the American responses to them have not made any further headway. Perhaps the main reason for this is the lukewarm attitude of both sides. But in the background of this rather low-key activity, some thought seems to have been given to the nature of the arms control arrangement that might be possible in the Indian Ocean. At least the approach of Washington has been broadly identified. The main features of the approach<sup>41</sup> are the following:

1. There are two main interrelated problems: actual deployment and the facilities which enable deployment.
2. From the American point of view, deployment is more important because the Soviets have an edge over them in this respect.
3. An arms control agreement is possible when there is a "general balance of capabilities" between the two superpowers. A situation like this serves as an incentive for arms control efforts.
4. By expanding facilities in Diego Garcia, the Americans are attempting to secure a "general balance of capabilities" and promote chances of arms control in the Indian Ocean.
5. An arms control agreement between the two superpowers would not by itself eliminate their naval presence from the area altogether.

This scenario of arms control arrangement between the two superpowers is of course, steeped in the traditional theory of balance of power, which is anathema to the nonaligned world. One must, however, deal with the world as it is. Hence, in spite of

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39. The American version may be quoted: "In spite of our inquiry in Moscow regarding the Indian Ocean question, we have received no further clarification of what the USSR may have had in mind nor any indication that they had an interest in pursuing this subject further." *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

41. Many of these emerged in the discussion during Congressional hearings. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-49.

its obnoxiousness, the view cannot altogether be ignored while considering either the peace zone proposal or the alternatives to it.

Although the U.S. Government's attitude is not very helpful from the standpoint of the Indian Ocean countries, several individual Americans, including members of Congress, academics and even public officials, have made suggestions which, in effect, constitute alternatives to the peace zone proposal. Elliot Richardson, when he was Under Secretary of State, urged that the USA should acknowledge and develop "spheres of restraint," particularly in areas such as the Indian Ocean, where competition had not yet become acute.<sup>42</sup> The importance of such statements lies in the fact that they facilitate the task of exploring solutions for the problem. Among academics, Howard Wriggins of the Southeast Asia Institute at Columbia University heads a section which feels concerned about the developing situation and wants to circumscribe the undesirable consequences of the present competitiveness in the area. He categorically states that the efforts by the USA to increase its naval force in the Indian Ocean are undesirable both for the USA and for the countries of the Indian Ocean area. The way out suggested by him in one of his writings is as follows:

The best way to avoid a new arms race in the Indian Ocean would seem to be to negotiate a formal neutralization agreement among the US, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and the littoral states. (If possible, the People's Republic of China could also be included. . . .) If a full neutralization of the Indian Ocean should prove unrealizable a less ambitious agreement might at least limit the numbers and types of naval vessels each Super Power could introduce there at any given time.<sup>43</sup>

These two points are included in the five-point plan of action recommended by him to his Government.<sup>44</sup> As is evident, he does not support the peace zone proposal, nor is he in favor of

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42. See speech by Elliot L. Richardson, reported in *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.), 18 May 1970, pp. 628-31.

43. See Howard Wriggins, "Heading Off a New Arms Race: Let's Try to Neutralize the Indian Ocean," *War/Peace Report* (Washington, D.C.), September 1971, pp. 7-11. He expressed similar views in some other writings also.

44. They may be reproduced here:

1. Retain its small Indian Ocean force at its present strength, but gradually replace its aging vessels with more modern ones;
2. Press upon the Soviet Union and other naval powers, including the littoral states, the desirability of an agreement prohibiting entry into the Indian

unlimited naval competition between the two superpowers in the Indian Ocean. Instead, he offers some ideas which can serve as alternatives to the peace zone proposal in the event of its being found not realizable in the near future. Similarly, William Barnds of the Council of Foreign Relations correctly diagnoses the situation when he says that the kind of new balance or equilibrium which the two powers are seeking in the Indian Ocean is "costly and dangerous." He pleads for the establishment of a "low-level balance" through some sort of arms control between the USA and the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup>

The work of Congressional leaders is perhaps the most significant in that they have greater influence with the Administration and can help mold public opinion. Congressional opposition to the naval base in Diego Garcia has, undoubtedly during 1974-76, done most to keep tensions at a relatively low level. Many members of Congress have expressed themselves against turning the Indian Ocean into another arena of the cold war. By opposing the policies of the Nixon and Ford Administrations towards upgrading Diego Garcia and by obstructing passage of budgetary proposals relating thereto, they have made a constructive contribution towards staving off a superpower confrontation.

The Carter Administration's efforts to seek an understanding with the Soviet Union on arms limitation in or demilitarization of the Indian Ocean are welcome. But keeping in view the realities of contemporary international politics, the Asian-African countries should not be overly optimistic about their outcome.

It is obvious that the philosophical foundations of some of these ideas and proposals are different from those of the peace zone resolution. While the former seeks to limit or control the

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Ocean of all but very limited naval vessels, and providing for only limited naval forces for coastal defense on the part of each littoral state;

3. In the event of this kind of a pact proving impossible, work towards more modest agreements on base limitations and/or the numbers and types of Super Powers vessels to be permitted in the Indian Ocean at any given time;

4. Announce our desire to establish a nuclear-free Indian Ocean, and seek through diplomatic and other channels to win general acceptance of such a proposal;

5. Recognize that the substantial world-wide naval buildup of the Soviet Union requires a measured response on our part to sustain a modern, mobile naval capability in general. However, in so far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, we should not now increase our deployment there. . . . [*Ibid.*, p. 11.]

45. William J. Barnds, "Arms Race or Arms Control in the Indian Ocean?" *America* (Washington, D.C.), 14 October 1972, p. 282.

superpower presence and rivalry in the area, the latter proposes to eliminate all activity by outside powers, including the superpowers, that holds the potential for generating tensions.<sup>46</sup> All the same, efforts of the first type are welcome because they influence public opinion within the United States in a direction away from the arms race mentality. Such efforts also facilitate the task of Soviet decision-makers as well, for the latter do want to protect their national interests in the area but without entering into an unlimited arms race to achieve the purpose. They thus strengthen the movement to create a peaceful international order in the Indian Ocean area.

Although some of the efforts and ideas about arms limitation and/or balanced forces are well-intentioned, a section of the Indian Ocean littoral opinion reads into them something which is objectionable. It finds these ideas unacceptable on the ground that if the littoral countries become a party to an agreement between the two superpowers about their military presence at a certain level, it would, by implication, confer legitimacy on foreign presence in the Indian Ocean. Also, the arms limitation idea has several practical difficulties. For instance, it is pointed out (a) how many Russian vessels are equal to one nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, to one base facility and to an alliance partner and (b) how the proximity of Subic Bay and home ports of the U.S. Sixth Fleet is to be compensated against longer lead distances for the Russians. It is also argued that an agreement on arms limitation may provide for a ceiling much higher than the force levels they deploy at present. On these grounds a defence expert pleads that "the most easily monitorable balanced presence is non-presence of all external powers."<sup>47</sup>

The countries of the Indian Ocean littoral are faced with a situation from which there seems to be no escape at least in the near future. Lack of cooperation by a section of important countries, particularly the USA and the Soviet Union, has taken the Indian Ocean countries into some sort of blind spot insofar as the peace zone efforts are concerned. In these circumstances, there seems to be no way out except to try to discover some meeting ground between the views of the littoral countries on the one hand and those of the superpowers on the other.

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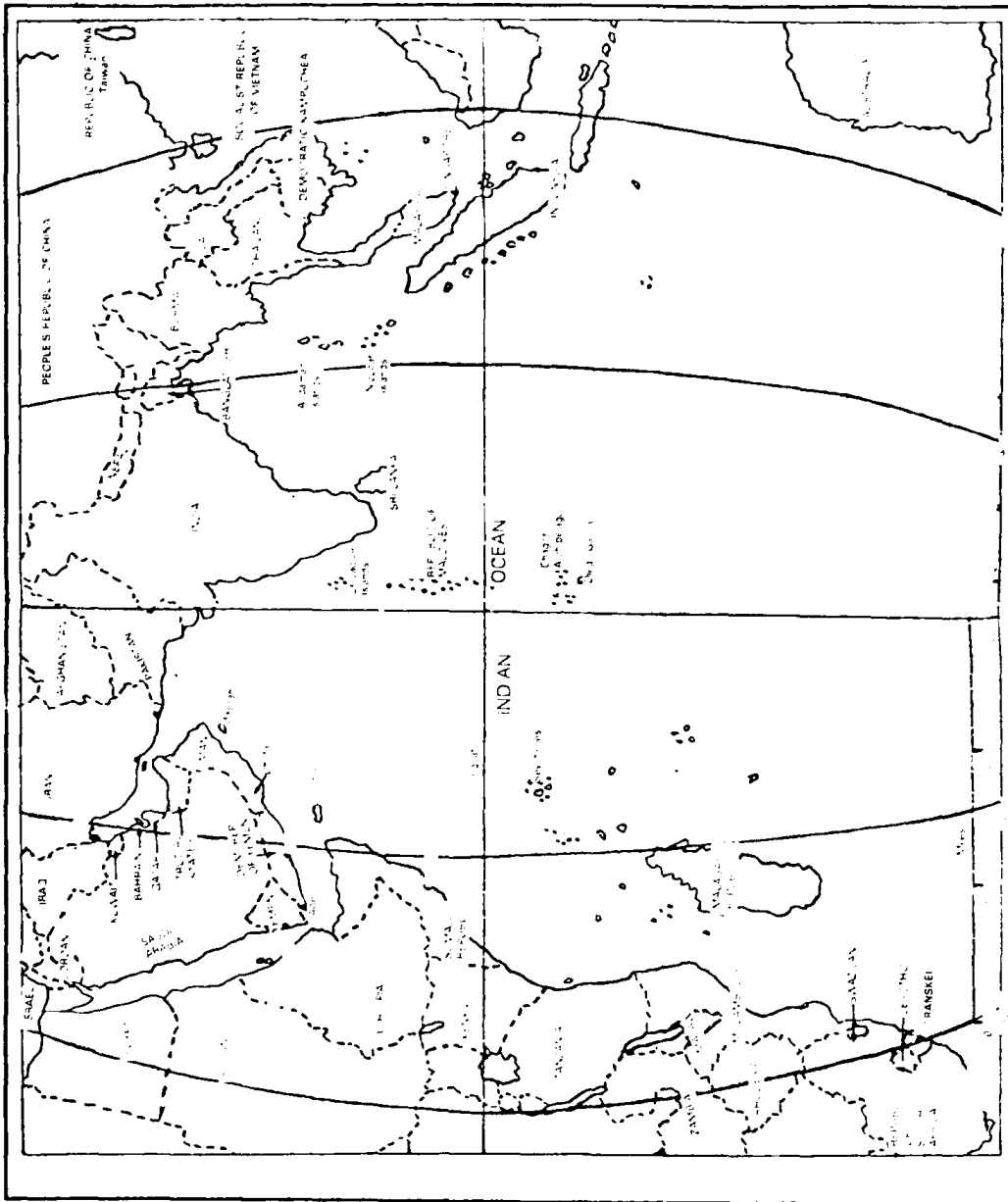
46. Foreign vessels in the Indian Ocean are not altogether excluded, according to the 1971 peace zone resolution. Only those "conceived in the context of great power rivalry" are being sought to be shut out.

47. K. Subrahmanyam in a communication to the author.

It may well be to the advantage of the Indian Ocean countries to explore the possibilities of an international order in this area which provides for an agreed arms limitation arrangement on the part of all the parties concerned, an arrangement which keeps superpower rivalry at a level which is not injurious to the socioeconomic growth of the peoples of the area. This calls for an earnest consideration of the alternatives of the type mentioned above. This could be accomplished by accommodating, within the broad framework of the peace zone concept, the philosophy of arms control, which is the crux of many proposals. The peace zone as an ultimate objective will remain immutable. If the *Ad Hoc* Committee of the Indian Ocean, in collaboration with the superpowers, is able to work out an arrangement, perhaps the peace and prosperity of the region can be secured.

The suggestion may meet with opposition from certain sections of public opinion on the grounds stated above. It may make the task of establishing a zone of peace more difficult. There is some validity in this argument. But one may ask if ideal solutions are possible in this world as it is today. The choice may be between a limited presence of outside powers and tension generating unrestricted rivalry between them. At least in the present time frame, the peace zone does not seem to be an available choice, although its realization is perhaps brought closer by the acceptance of an arms limitation agreement.





MAP OF THE INDIAN OCEAN AND LITTORAL STATES

