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**The Challenge of Security in the Indian Ocean  
in the 21st Century: Plus ça change...?**

by

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# The Challenge of Security in the Indian Ocean in the 21st Century: Plus ça change...?

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Contrary to the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, the Indian Ocean has not so far developed an overarching security system that could meet the challenge of maritime security. Based on the findings of a research project<sup>2</sup>, I will give an analysis of the current post-Cold War security environment in the Indian Ocean in the perception of leading members of its epistemic community: Is the current security environment in the Indian Ocean conducive for the development of a maritime security system as suggested in the literature? Is there any real interest in such ventures? And, is the Indian Ocean perceived as a 'region' at all? I am of the opinion that all these questions have to be answered in the negative for the time being.<sup>3</sup>

Most books and articles on International Relations nowadays start with remarking how dramatically the world has changed after the end of the Cold War

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<sup>2</sup> The research project Panchayati Raj in the Indian Ocean – Towards a Maritime Security Regime was funded by Fritz Thyssen Foundation, Cologne, from January 2000 to December 2001. Members of the author's research team were Ms. Maïke Tüchner, Mr. Karsten Frey M. A. and Mr. Hendrick Lehmann M. A. . Supervisors were Prof. Dr. Subrata K. Mitra and Prof. Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema. The author and his research team would like to thank Prof. Mitra and Prof. Cheema for their unfaltering support and Fritz Thyssen Foundation for making the project possible.

<sup>3</sup> In some respect, the article will try to carry the work done by Booth and Dowdy dated 1985 a little further, thus showing what has changed in the span of seventeen years, how it has changed, why it has changed and what the implications are for the near future. See Booth, Ken/Dowdy, William L.: "Structure and Strategy in the Indian Ocean Naval Developments: Taking Stock, in Dowdy, William L./Trood, Russell B (eds.): The Indian Ocean. Perspectives on a Strategic Arena. Durham: Duke University Press 1985, pp. 80-97.

in the beginning of the nineties. Of course, the authors of those books and articles go on to argue that these changes manifested themselves differently in different regions of the world – more positively in regions like Europe, more negatively, or at least: less positively in regions like the Asia-Pacific. But only very few authors would argue that there has been no impact whatsoever on their respective region of research. But still, one can enumerate some regions of the world where the impact of the end of the Cold War and the demise of one superpower has had only a marginal – or at best: ambivalent – effect on the regional security environment. This article is dealing with one of these regions, the Indian Ocean.

#### Map: The Indian Ocean Area<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection: "Indian Ocean Maps", University of Texas at Austin, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/islands\\_oceans\\_poles/indianoceanarea.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/islands_oceans_poles/indianoceanarea.jpg) (Download 11/11/02).

With approximately 74 million square kilometres and roughly 20 per cent of the global ocean, the Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean after the Pacific and the Atlantic. Geographically, it is situated between the two bigger ones, thus serving as a natural "transit lounge" for most of the traffic from the Atlantic to the Pacific and vice versa. Two key characteristics distinguishes the Indian Ocean from the Atlantic and the Pacific: First, only one fifth of the total trade is conducted among the countries of the Indian Ocean themselves,<sup>5</sup> 80 per cent of the trade is extra-regional (for example, crude oil to Europe, the USA and Japan). In the Atlantic and the Pacific, the proportion is exactly vice versa. Second, contrary to the Atlantic and the Pacific as "open" oceans, the Indian Ocean can only be accessed through several choke points: From the West via Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Madagascar, from the North via the Bab el-Mandeb at the end of the Red Sea and the Straits of Hormuz at the exit of the Persian Gulf, from the East via the Straits of Malacca, the Sunda and Lombok-Straits and the Ombai-Wetar-Straits.

The modern history of the Indian Ocean is a history of perennial regional conflicts – a struggle for power in the Persian Gulf, a bitter conflict in South Asia (the Indo-Pakistani wars), wars and unrest in Southeast Asia (e. g., the so-called *Konfrontasi* between Indonesia on the one side and Malaysia and Singapore on the other, and, nowadays, secession of East-Timor from Indonesia and communal clashes within Indonesia itself), seemingly endless war at the Horn of Africa and – until very recently – in Southern Africa. Because of the possibility of an interruption of the *Sea Lines of Communication* (SLOCs), these conflict always have the potential to acquire an international dimension as well. For the most part of modern history, the Indian Ocean has been a 'British Lake', the security of which was guaranteed by ships of the Royal Navy until the termination of all security commitments 'East of Suez' in 1971. From the mid-sixties onwards, a steady increase of superpower presence paralleling the decrease of British presence was noticeable. Although this power shift made a difference in the perception of several Indian Ocean Rim states since they felt the danger of being drawn into the superpower conflict, it did not make a difference in the overall security of the Indian Ocean itself: The possible power vacuum created by the British was effectively filled even before it developed, so that naval ambitions of regional states had no change to be put into reality – although they were formulated nevertheless.

#### THE INDIAN OCEAN: STILL AN INSECURITY 'COMMUNITY'

Writing in 1985, Ken Booth and William L. Dowdy argued that because of the plenitude of military, economic, religious and racial insecurities and threats, the Indian Ocean "might be dubbed a kaleidoscope of crisis, and not merely an 'arc'".<sup>6</sup> I

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<sup>5</sup> Porter, Ian W.: "The Indian Ocean Rim", *African Security Review*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 1997 (<http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/ASR/6.6/Porter.html>).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

argue in this article that this still holds true – the end of the Cold War and the superpower conflict notwithstanding.

On the military level, a plethora of conflicts exist along the all-important SLOCs: from the Bab el-Mandeb and the Straits of Hormuz along the coastline of South Asia to the Straits of Malacca and – by way of geographical extension – to the South China Sea. At the Horn of Africa, consisting of Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti and Kenya, the hapless citizens are virtually living in a Hobbesian environment formed by seemingly endless civil wars and streams of refugees fleeing from here to there and back. In the Gulf area, conflicts are far from being settled: Iraq continues to defy UN resolutions<sup>7</sup>, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members are again quarrelling with each other and Iran is busily acquiring new military muscles with an emphasis of beefing up its navy. In South Asia, the Sri Lankan civil war and the Indo-Pakistani conflict are far from being solved, too. With the introduction of 'real' (contrary to previously only 'imagined') nuclear weapons, the latter conflict has the potential to grow into a hot – and even nuclear – war since both parties have not yet developed a set of nuclear safeguards comparable to those in force between the USA and the former USSR. In Southeast Asia, we watch Indonesia slowly drifting towards a civil war and perhaps even disintegrating in the process: the transformation from the authoritarian "orde baru" (new order) of Suharto towards a more democratic form of government has been stalled, radical Islamists are on the rise and the once all-powerful military seems to be unable to make a new bid for power to save the nation again. The only sub-region which can boast of an improvement in regard of the security environment is Southern Africa, where the end of the South African apartheid regime has paved the way towards normalization of interstate relations and towards the formation of a nascent security community via the Southern African Development Council (SADC).

On the economic sector, the Indian Ocean region is still to be called a community of weak states: Most Indian Ocean Rim states still fall under the rubric of "Low Developed Countries" (LDC) with an average annual GDP per head ranging between US \$ 230 (Mozambique) to US \$ 30.000 (Singapore).<sup>8</sup> Even the former "tiger cubs" Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines have witnessed a (temporary) end of the "Asian Miracle" and are still in the throes of the Asian economic crisis. Whether the new *Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation* (IOR-ARC), founded in 1996 at Port Louis, Mauritius and obviously patterned after APEC, will be able to ameliorate the economic problems of the region remains unclear at the moment.

On the religious and racial level – often interconnected – we find a civil war in Sudan conducted by the dominant northern Muslim part of the country against the Christian tribes in the South. In parts of South Asia and Southeast Asia, we observe

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<sup>7</sup> The article was finished in July 2002, but the Iraqi defiance did not have come to an end shortly before it was published end of November 2002.

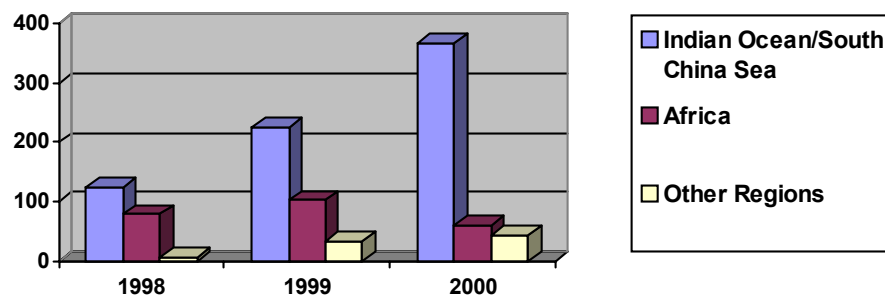
<sup>8</sup> See Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: *Enhancing the Trade and Investment Environment in the Indian Ocean Rim Region. Full Report*. Canberra: ASARC/RSPAS/Australian National University December 2000, pp. 158-177.

communal clashes between Muslims and Hindus (India), Muslims and Buddhists (Sri Lanka) and Muslims and Christians (Indonesia). Iran and Afghanistan – even after the end of the Taliban regime – are still being accused of exporting Islamic-fundamentalist terrorism into neighbouring states, thus destabilizing both the internal order of these states as well as international relations. For the very same reasons, even Taliban-friendly Pakistan temporarily entered the list of possible "rogue states" in the aftermath of September 11 and the botched attack on the Indian Lok Sabha on December 19, 2001. On the positive side, we note that at least open racism has ended with the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

So far so bad, one is tempted to say. But this rather negative security environment in the Indian Ocean Rim still has potential to grow considerably worse, since most of the conflicts just mentioned already went beyond the borders of their 'original' sub region. This spill-over effect means that some of the conflicts could acquire an Indian-Ocean-wide relevance. However, the regional potential for conflict resolution – or at least: conflict amelioration – is considerably less developed than the war fighting capabilities of the states involved. Since most conflicts and civil wars are still fought with small arms mainly, those warring states do not even need a sophisticated arsenal – Somalia and the humiliation of the UN forces tasked with "restoring hope" is a good case in point.

Some non-military threats to security did already acquire a trans-regional dimension: drug-trafficking, gun-running, fish-poaching and maritime piracy, more often than not connected with organized crime. Hotspots of piracy for example are first, the Bay of Bengal, the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea, and second, the Arabian Sea off the Somali coast. The following diagram gives an impression of the dimension of this problem, which threatens the security of the most important Indian Ocean sea lines of communication (SLOCs):

**Diagram 1: Rise of Piracy in the Indian Ocean and Other Regions<sup>9</sup>**



Therefore, from a political science point of view, it is quite surprising that up to now, no collective security regime has been created in the Indian Ocean that could

<sup>9</sup> Diagram prepared by Mr. Hendrick Lehmann for the Panchayati Raj Project, data compiled on the basis of International Maritime Bureau (IMB) publications.

have been able to ameliorate such conflicts. Unfortunately, the newly established *Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation* (IOR-ARC) does not include a military security dimension, just some rather fuzzy provisions for comprehensive security. The exclusion of a military dimension in IOR-ARC seemed to be reasonable at least for the initial phase of the new regime – a phase in which potential member states usually seek to keep the costs of accession as low as possible. However, the question of a military component of IOR-ARC in the shape of a naval collective security regime will resurface rather sooner than later, given the conflicts in this region.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that during the nineties, members of the *Indian Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses* (IDSA) published a score of articles in magazines like *Strategic Analysis* or *Maritime Studies*, which dealt in one way or another with the creation of a regime of naval cooperation of intraregional navies in the Indian Ocean.<sup>10</sup> One author fittingly called his proposal "Panchayati Raj" for the Indian Ocean.<sup>11</sup> The original Panchayat system is part of the traditional Indian communal self-government. This "Council of Five" (this is the translation of Panchayat) not only took decisions in the name of the village, but tried to ameliorate and accommodate caste interests within the village. Today, the Panchayat concept belongs to the political language of South Asia as a metaphor<sup>12</sup> for cooperative conflict resolution and decision-making between partners with equal rights. In this sense, the expression is used for the proposed naval security regime.

Like so many innovative ideas, these Panchayati Raj plans have not (yet) found an official echo in the higher echelons of politics for reasons that will be elaborated later in this article. However, these plans of a naval Panchayat can be seen as a creative attempt to transfer confidence- and security-building measures, Indian style, to naval forces. That alone makes it worthwhile to analyse the ideas concerning their feasibility. Even more important is the fact that such plans are coming from India, where many hard-liners are still dreaming of a "mare indicum" reaching from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca and from the shores of the Arabian Sea or the Gulf of Bengal to Durban and Perth. It is possible to argue, then, that the Indian economic problems, which at least delay the modernization of the Indian Navy for several years, may have created a "window of opportunity" favoring a naval collective security regime.

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<sup>10</sup> See Banerjee, Dipankar.: "Indian Ocean Zone of Peace: Need for a New Approach", *Strategic Analysis*, November 1992, p. 713-731; Bhaskar, C. Uday: "Regional Naval Cooperation", *Strategic Analysis*, November 1992, p. 733-746; Roy-Chaudhury, Rahul: "Naval Cooperation: India and the Indian Ocean", *Strategic Analysis*, June 1996, p. 319-336.

<sup>11</sup> Bhaskar, C. Uday, op. cit., p. 745-746.

<sup>12</sup> Taken as a metaphor, the original meaning of a "Council of Five" is not longer relevant. In the modern political science language, it just means "Council".

## THE PROJECT

Be that as it may, I am of the opinion that the Indian Ocean Rim Region as one of three maritime 'mega regions' does have many things in common with the Asia Pacific. Therefore, I and my research team took up the idea of a Panchayati Raj system for the Indian Ocean and tried to find ways to make it work. The working hypothesis claimed that a naval or maritime collective security regime, based on mutual trust and cooperation and mirroring the experiences of the Asia-Pacific, would be a) sensible and b) feasible in the Indian Ocean, too.

The research project can be summarized as follows: In a first step, the team collected already existing ideas from the region itself to test them in terms of their feasibility. The results of the feasibility study were used for drafting of a catalogue of confidence and security building measures. In a second step, the team introduced this catalogue to political scientists, politicians and other relevant persons from important Indian Ocean Rim states for discussion on conferences or meetings. The input of these persons were meant to form the basis for a blueprint of a naval (now: maritime<sup>13</sup>) collective security regime suitable for the problems in the Indian Ocean region at large which the team planned to draft in a third step.

### *A neorealist approach*

The theoretical foundation of this research project was a modern variant of Hans Morgenthau's *realism*.<sup>14</sup> The *neorealist* approach still perceives "power" as a basic category, but foreign policies of states are not reduced to that.<sup>15</sup> Instead, neorealists think that on the international level, states act in a highly structured, interdependent system. This system may still be basically anarchic, but there are formal and informal rules and principles which have to be observed to avoid a "pariah status". Nevertheless, many neorealists<sup>16</sup> are also convinced that conflict resolution through cooperation is futile. The basic assumptions of structural neorealism are as follows:

- States are unitary rational actors
- States give priority to improving their security
- States are parts of an international system marked by anarchy.

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<sup>13</sup> The reasons for this change in terminology will be explained below.

<sup>14</sup> Morgenthau, Hans: *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Knopf 1973 (5<sup>th</sup> ed).

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt, Manfred G.: *Wörterbuch zur Politik*. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag 1995, p. 648.

<sup>16</sup> For example, proponents of structural realism like Waltz, Kenneth: *Theory of International Politics*. New York: Random House 1979; Buzan, Barry/Jones, Charles/Little, Richard: *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*. New York: Columbia University Press 1993.



In my opinion, the "traditional" version of neorealism overemphasizes the aspect of interstate competition. Therefore, we prefer the approach of *cooperative realism*, heavily influenced by Robert Keohane's *contractualism* or *functionalism*.<sup>17</sup> This approach eliminates the bias toward competition and emphasizes the possibility of increasing national security by international cooperation. Through cooperation, the classical result of the famous *prisoner's dilemma* would be broken.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the approach of *cooperative realism/contractualism* was much more suitable for this project than the classical neorealist *balance of power* approaches.

Concerning the methodology, comparative methods as well as qualitative (contents analysis) and quantitative (statistical) methods were applied. Also, non-representative, semi-structured guideline-interviews with relevant specialists, naval officers and politicians of important Indian Ocean Rim states (i.e., India, Australia and South Africa as the potential hegemonic powers of the Indian Ocean) were undertaken to sound out official and non-official opinions towards the planned regime.

### *Development of Models*

The problem of maritime security in the Indian Ocean can be approached on three levels: a) transparency building measures, b) confidence building measures, and c) security building measures. The first two levels deal with either the conclusion of bilateral treaties or the creation of a low-key regime (in the sense, that no institutions are going to be created), the third level aims at creating a *collective security system* (an institutionalised regime). Following are several examples of measures on the three levels which have already been proposed from regional scholars.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Transparency Building Measures:**

- Advanced notice of naval exercises
- Advanced notice of movement of ships

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<sup>17</sup> For *cooperative realism*, see Keohane, Robert/Nye, Joseph: *Power and Interdependence*. Boston and London 1979. For Keohane's more modern *contractualism*, see Keohane, Robert: *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984.

<sup>18</sup> On the prisoner's dilemma, see Axelrod, Robert M.: *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books 1984.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Roy-Chaudhury, Rahul: "Naval Cooperation: India and the Indian Ocean", *Strategic Analysis*, June 1996, pp. 319-336.

**Confidence Building Measures:**

- Conduct of joint multilateral naval and coast guard exercises
- Conduct of joint naval training
- Pooling of resources/experiences in ship design, construction
- Conduct of joint naval hydrographic operations
- Joint task force for policing at sea
- Agreement on avoidance of incidence at high sea

**Security Building Measures:**

- Creation of a multilateral Indian Ocean forum for security discussions
- Annual conference on naval (or: maritime) cooperation in the Indian Ocean
- Creation of a system of checks and balances to prevent hegemonic claims of regional and extra-regional powers

Of special interest for the research team was a feasible structure or regime which could give those measures proposed some degree of institutionalization and duration. Since we were of the opinion that the Indian Ocean Rim region is – up to a certain degree – comparable to the Asia-Pacific (both being maritime regions with culturally/economically/politically very diverse rim states), we "borrowed" three different maritime security regimes from the Asia-Pacific. The models elaborated below have different grades of institutionalization and legal reach, i.e., they either belong to the unofficial "second track-diplomacy" or to the official "first track". It should be noted, however, that these models were employed first of all as a starting point for discussion. It was never our intention to propagate an uncritical transfer of one or all of these models into the Indian Ocean.

*A Naval Symposium*

A naval symposium or conference, being held annually or biannually, would form the lowest possible level for a security regime. It would have the advantage of a low grade of institutionalization and a low grade of legal obligation which would help to reduce both political and financial costs for potential members. The conference would not be a political forum, but rather a "get-together of friendly navies"<sup>20</sup> of the Indian Ocean littoral countries. Both *Milan* in the Bay of Bengal and the *Western Pacific Naval Symposium* (WPNS) could provide useful models for an *Indian Ocean Rim Naval Symposium* (IORNS). WPNS could be useful because it succeeded so far to:

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<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Defence, Government of India: *Annual Report 1999-2000*. Delhi 2000, p. 31.

"create an environment that [assists] in building confidence and enhancing cooperation through, inter alia: personal contacts, transparency, exchange of fleet programmes, observation and prior notification of fleet exercises, information sharing, port visits... and exchange of information on naval procurement and retirement programmes..."<sup>21</sup>

Milan could be useful because it shows that a regionally focused regime can be extended gradually to eventually cover the whole region. This argument will be developed more fully below.

### *A Second Track Organization as a Middle-Level Approach*

A second model which was definitely worth to be discussed in the context of the Indian Ocean is the *Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific* (CSCAP). CSCAP intends to bring together participating countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific by way of multi-sectoral member committees composed of academics, business persons, journalists, ex-politicians, elder statesmen and government officials (who participate in their private capacities only). A comparable *Council for Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean* (CSCIO) would thus basically be a semi-official forum with a low grade of institutionalization and obligation, but with a more comprehensive agenda than a naval conference.

### *A Regional Forum*

An *Indian Ocean Rim Regional Forum* (IORRF), patterned after the *ASEAN Regional Forum* (ARF), would be the most ambitious approach with at least a chance of implementation. Just like ARF, a forum in the Indian Ocean would still have a minimalized institutional structure, but it would be an official "first track" forum with a high legal reach. Such a forum would provide an opportunity for government officials at a high level to discuss political and security issues of concern and to develop cooperative measures which might be taken to contribute to peace and stability in the region. The forum would have a formal agenda, structured meetings and legalistic procedures. The consensus method would be used and decisions would be implemented as "soft law" (informal agreements).

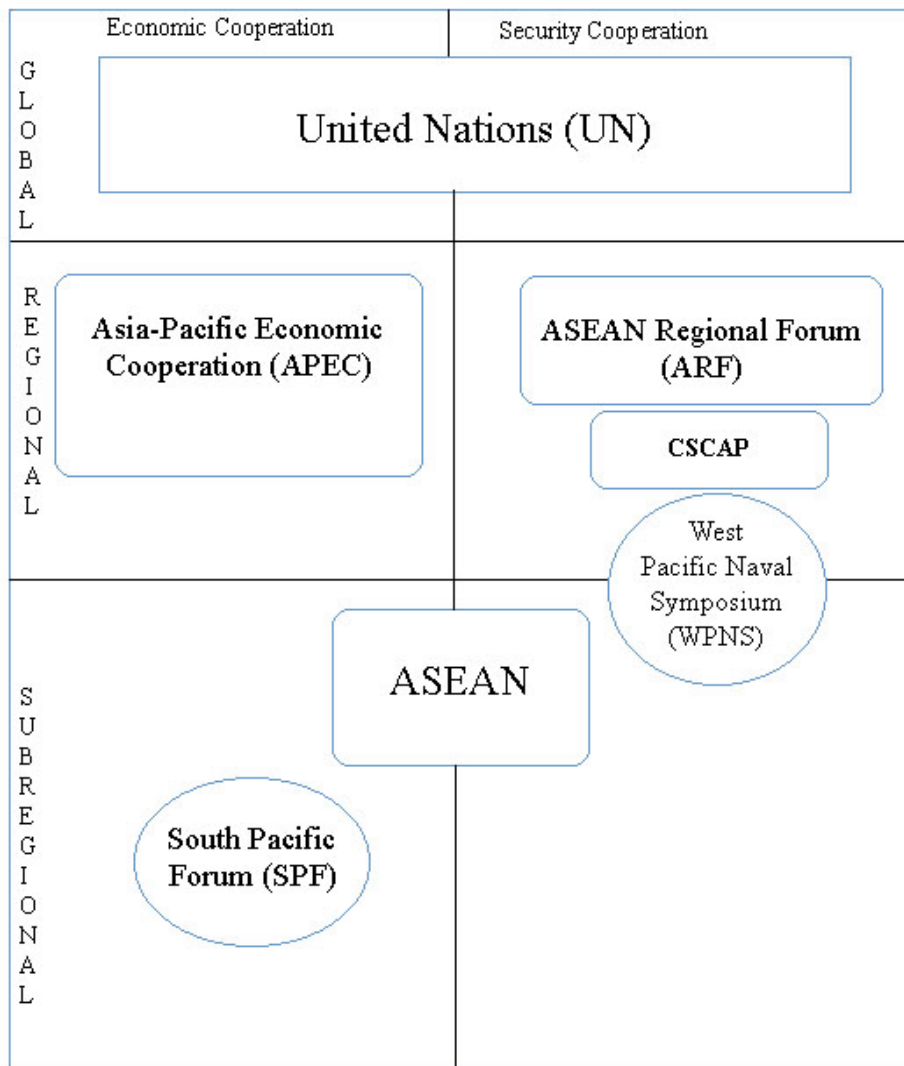
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<sup>21</sup> Mills, Greg: *South Africa and Security Building in the Indian Ocean*. Canberra 1998, p. 78.

*Some Thoughts About Possible Outcomes*

Since most of the models for a security framework in the Indian Ocean under discussion today are taken from comparable structures in the Asia-Pacific, it is of some interest to compare the Asia-Pacific's "multilateral architecture" with that of the Indian Ocean end of 2002. For brevity's sake, two graphical sketches will have to do. The first diagram gives an impression of economic and security regimes in the Asia-Pacific on three different levels:

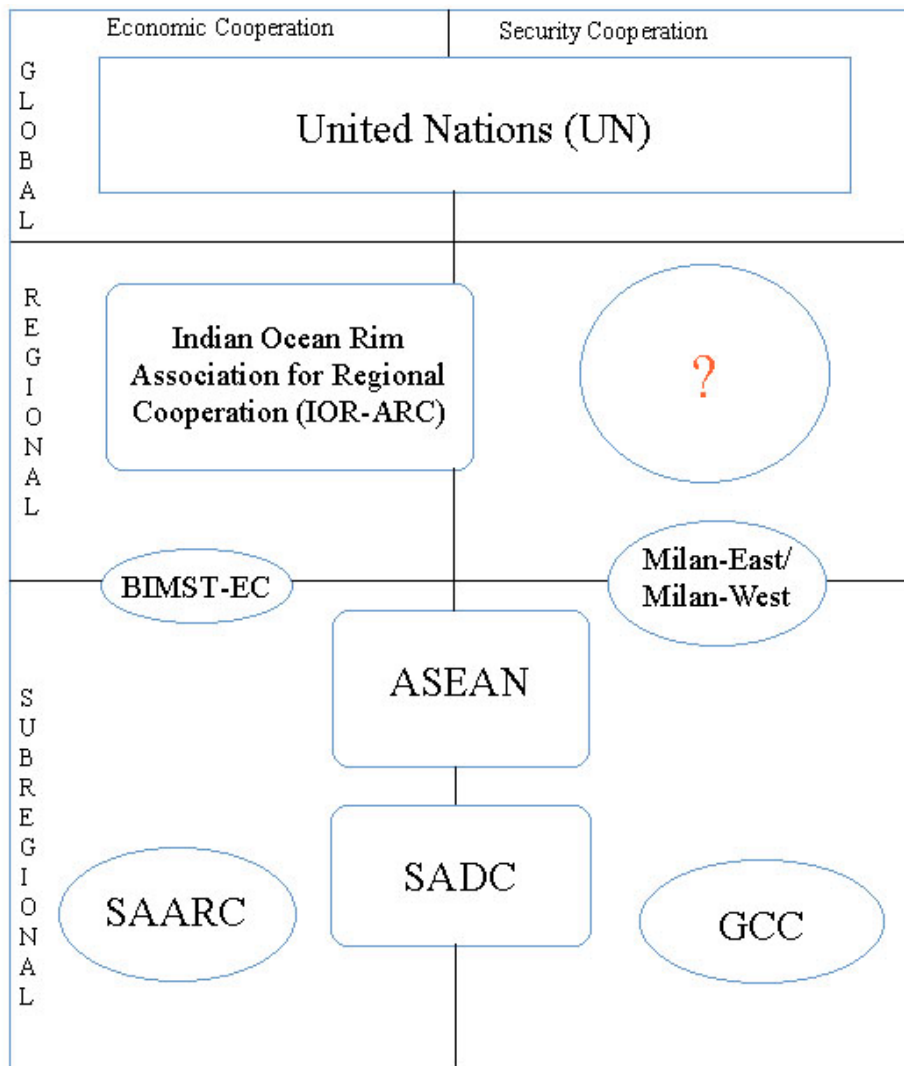
**Diagram 2: Multilateral Frameworks in the Asia-Pacific**



On the sub-regional level, we only find ASEAN with also deals informally with security matters. On the transregional level, connecting the sub-regions Southeast Asia and East Asia, there is the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) as a low-level, unofficial second track regime. On the regional level, theoretically open

for all Asia-Pacific states, we have the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)<sup>22</sup> as an official first track security framework and the *Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific* (CSCAP) as its semi-official second track. The economic regime, *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation* (APEC)<sup>23</sup> forms the role-model for IOR-ARC. In the Indian Ocean, the current situation in regard of economic and security frameworks is like that:

**Diagram 3: Multilateral Frameworks in the Indian Ocean**



<sup>22</sup> On ARF see Garofano, John: "Flexibility or Irrelevance: Ways Forward for the ARF", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 1999, S. 74-94.

<sup>23</sup> On APEC see Ravenhill, John: *APEC and the Construction of Pacific Rim Regionalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.

It is easy to see that there are more sub-regional regimes/organizations than in the Asia-Pacific, and that there is also a low-level naval symposium somewhat comparable to the WPNS, albeit both *Milan East* and *Milan West* are even more informal than WPNS and a bit shorter in their geographical reach. What is totally lacking is a regional security framework comparable to the ARF.

In my opinion, an annual maritime conference patterned according to the *Western Pacific Naval Symposium* (WPNS) but on an all-Indian Ocean basis could be the most appropriate way to get a maritime security regime under way, since this would be a very low key venture without any real institutionalization. More ambitious ventures like a regional forum might be premature for the Indian Ocean for reasons which will be elaborated below.

### *Expert Interviews*

To find out whether our assumptions about workable security frameworks in the Indian Ocean are shared within the epistemic community of the Indian Ocean or not, the research team conducted expert interviews (i.e., specialists in the fields of security studies and international relations, naval officers and, if possible, government officials) in South Africa, South Asia (with a focus on India and Pakistan), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand) and Australia. The aims of these expert interviews were first, to sound out the feasibility of a maritime security regime in the Indian Ocean and second, to work out possible items to be included in such a regime. The results of the interviews were used to sketch out a first draft for a model of an Indian Ocean-wide maritime security regime.

For the expert interviews, we developed a semi-structured guideline questionnaire developed for our interviews consists of 38 questions arranged in the following parts:

- **Common Cooperative Security Theory.** This theoretical part focuses on the applicability and usability of our Western terms of reference in the Indian Ocean Region as a non-Western setting.
- **Current Security Environment in the Indian Ocean and the Role of Navies.** This set of questions deals with the current security environment in general and the role of navies and naval power in the Indian Ocean in the perception of our respondents.
- **Defining the Indian Ocean as a Foreign Policy Arena.** In this part, our intentions is to find out whether, in the opinion of the respondents, the Indian Ocean forms a region of its own in more than a geographical sense and if yes, whether this is mirrored in the foreign policy of the respondent's home country. A second set of questions is asked to see whether there is a perceived necessity of an Indian-Ocean-wide regime.

- **Regime Structure.** This part deals with the question of how a regime should look like, if the respondent has answered positively before. While first set of questions in this part deals with the structure itself, a second set of questions (in form of a table) covers possible contents for such a regime. Possible models and contents are taken from our models explained above and from the Law of the Sea Convention (LOSC). The box below contains the questions that were asked on this most crucial part of our interviews:

1. If you were appointed by your government to develop a model for a security regime in the Indian Ocean, how would you proceed?
2. Would an annual naval conference contribute to confidence-building and conflict resolution in the Indian Ocean? If yes, is there a chance that such a naval conference could be implemented in the near future? How should it look like? (grade of institutionalization/of official character/founding members)
3. Would a semi-official network of think tanks, patterned after the Council for Security and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), contribute to confidence-building and conflict resolution in the Indian Ocean? If yes, what do you think about its feasibility? How should it look like? Which countries' think tanks should be members?
4. Would a regional forum like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) contribute to confidence-building and conflict resolution in the Indian Ocean? What do you think about its feasibility? How should it be organized? (grade of institutionalization/official character/member states)
5. A fourth model could be a "heavily institutionalized" regional forum (to be called "*Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Indian Ocean*" (CSCIO)), a "Helsinki for the Indian Ocean", so to say. Would such a large-scale organization make sense to you? If yes, what would be the time frame for its implementation and how could it look like?
6. Organizations like an Indian Ocean Regional Forum or a 'Helsinki for the Indian Ocean' can only be established as the last step of a gradual evolution of trust and confidence starting with low-key conferences on non-controversial issues as the first step. Do you agree?
7. Which decision making procedures would you prefer for the last two models we just talked about? Would you prefer a) consensus decisions, b) consensus-minus-one (the one being abstention) or c) majority decisions?
8. Regional multilateral organizations in Europe, Africa and Latin America provide for an official conflict resolution mechanism, usually in the shape of a "High Council" ASEAN however, while having such a High Council prefers to manage disputes within its membership without resorting to its High Council. In your opinion, would an institutionalized regime like the regional forum need such a High Council?
9. Now, let us talk about the contents of a security regime in the Indian Ocean. Which issues should be included in a annual naval conference, a council for security cooperation and a regional forum?

## A SHORT GLIMPSE INTO THE RANGE OF OPINIONS

For the project, more than 50 elite interviews were conducted between August 2000 and October 2001. Until the end of December 2000, members of the work group traveled to Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Pakistan (Prof. Cheema) and to India, Nepal and the United Arab Emirates (Peter Lehr/Maike Tuchner). In 2001, interviews were conducted in Australia and Singapore (Peter Lehr and Hendrick Lehmann), in Australia and Thailand (Peter Lehr/Maike Tuchner) and (attempted) in South Africa (Clemens Spieß). Interestingly, the range of opinions garnered during these field trips could be divided into "Indian opinions" and "non-Indian opinions", the latter category consisting of answers from Australia, Southeast Asia, and Pakistan – that is, from all countries except India. Also interestingly, we failed to get even one interview partner from South Africa: everybody seemed to be occupied by the political transformation of the country and its implications.<sup>24</sup>

### *Indian Perceptions*

In regard of the first, theoretical part of the questionnaire, only two Indian interview partners responded. Both of them are of the opinion that the terms of Western political theory can be applied in a non-Western setting. However, they also pointed out that many of those terms, like *Confidence Building Measures* are coming with a certain 'Cold War baggage' in the sense that they may contain some negative connotations one should be aware of.

All respondents perceived the current security environment in the Indian Ocean as stable and overall positive. It was described as basically a low threat environment. Compared with the superpower conflict in the seventies and eighties, the security situation has improved considerably since the beginning of the nineties. Also, there was a consensus among the respondents that those major sea powers which are capable of disrupting the SLOCs are agreed that the Indian Ocean should remain peaceful. So, in the opinion of all Indian respondents, today, there is no power competition visible in this area. Somewhat surprisingly, both the USN and the PLAN were not seen as threatening by Indian naval officers, too. Those respondents even denied the presence of 'blue water navies' capable for power projection other than the USN.

On the other hand, non-state actors were pointed out as a possible threat to stability in the Indian Ocean. Frequently suggested were piracy (mainly in Bay of Bengal and the Straits of Malacca, the South China Sea and the coastal waters of Somalia), mercenary actions or drug trafficking, gun running and illegal migration.

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<sup>24</sup> Some Australian respondents reported the same problems.



The respondents also agreed that the Indian Navy did create some unease in the past, especially in the eighties in Australia, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh because of Indian plans to construct a major naval base at Port Blair on the Andaman island chain as part of the *Fortress Andamans and Nicobars* (FORTAN). The reason for this was, in the opinion of the respondents, partly a capability mismatch between the Indian Navy and other IOR navies, partly a misperception about Indian intentions. For this reason, a process of confidence building had been encouraged by the Indian Navy, like invitations for port visits or invitation of delegates from countries with only a small navy or no navy at all. *Milan*<sup>25</sup> in the Bay of Bengal was mentioned as a successful example of such confidence building measures. In 2001, *Milan* was successfully introduced as *Milan West* to the Arabian Sea, where naval cooperation already exists between the Indian Navy and the navies of Iran and Oman.

Concerning the Indian Ocean as a foreign policy area, the Indian respondents opined that up to now, India had not actually developed an Indian Ocean policy, not even an Indian Ocean economic policy. Despite some efforts of some institutions, the respondents doubt that there were a maritime notion as such in India. The maritime history of India is thought to be missing, and the same is said to be true for an Indian Ocean awareness. India is part of the Indian Ocean region, but that is not very important for its foreign policy, especially so since all conflicts with neighbouring states are situated at India's land borders. In the perception of the respondents, an Indian Ocean awareness began to develop because of the importance of *Sea Lines of Communication* (SLOCs) and the *Exclusive Economic Zone* (EEZ) only very recently.

The idea of establishing a maritime security regime in the Indian Ocean was received with great scepticism, even by the erstwhile proponents of a Panchayati Raj system in this ocean. All in all, the respondents did not see the possibility of a free discussion of sensitive security affairs in the Indian Ocean in the near future since the situation and the security environment was not ripe. However, it was frequently pointed out that a larger dialogue relationship was building between some Indian Ocean Rim states. Therefore, the idea of a maritime conference – albeit dealing with strictly non-sensitive, e.g. non-military, matters – was perceived as a possible way to establish such a dialogue on a regular basis. Again, *Milan* in the Bay of Bengal was mentioned as a genuine Indian initiative in this respect. But even an emulation of the *Asia-Pacific Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific* (CSCAP) was deemed to be feasible in the Indian Ocean in the long run. On the other hand, the use of the term "naval" was strongly criticized, since this term implies the coverage of sensitive issues which would make the conference idea a non-starter. Instead, the term "maritime" was recommended as a more inclusive and comprehensive term. Since this point was also raised in other countries, we concurred and dropped "naval" in favor for "maritime".

It was also pointed out to us that many initiatives would founder simply for the smaller states' lack of money to send delegates for such a purpose. This problem

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<sup>25</sup> Hindi expression for "meeting".

had to be taken under consideration when a maritime conference were to be implemented.

### *The Range of Non-Indian Perceptions*

Some dissatisfaction was expressed by many respondents over the existing security environment in the Indian Ocean. The build-up of *blue water navies* was viewed with scepticism and a certain amount of suspicion, especially from respondents from the smaller countries. By the Pakistanis, the build-up of the Indian Navy was seen as an attempt to project its power in congruence with old Indian ambitions to control the Indian Ocean from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca. Some Sri Lankan opined that the Indian attempts to build up a credible sea power indicates that India regarded itself as the heir to the British and tended to behave like them. However, almost everybody recognized India as an important actor in the Indian Ocean.

Most interviewees felt that the existing *Laws of the Sea Convention* (LOSC) needs to be improved. They do not adequately address the concerns of the smaller nations as well as those of the hinterland states. In their opinion, the LOSC could provide the much desired umbrella to the smaller regional states. Since the land resources are depleting rather rapidly, it was viewed all the more essential to devise a method that can adequately protect the share of the nations in the resources of the Indian Ocean. Many smaller nations lack the ability to assert their legitimate concerns which, they felt, could be safeguarded by the *Law of the Sea Convention* (LOSC).

Concerning the role of navies in the Indian Ocean, it was generally acknowledged that navies could be useful instruments of foreign policy. It was specifically stressed by almost everyone that the role of a navy depends upon a country's location. Both the Singaporeans and the Sri Lankans stressed the limited nature of their own navy's role. Ordinarily the island nations tend to devote more resources and build a relatively strong navy but the Sri Lankan Navy has proven to be an exception to the generally prevalent rule. The explanation given by most Sri Lankan interviewees was that maritime traditions are non-existent in Sri Lanka. Besides, the governments in Colombo were never able to allocate adequate resources for building a strong navy despite the fact that developments in the Indian Ocean have direct impact on the destiny of Sri Lanka. It was only after the beginning of the LTTE uprising that Sri Lanka began to allocate some resources to its navy, too. The Singaporeans felt that their navy's role is mainly confined to patrolling Singapore's coastal waters and supplementing its coast guard's activities. However, Singapore and Indonesia conduct joint naval exercises (primarily anti-submarine exercises). The Singaporean respondents also stressed that India is taken more seriously than was the case in the past after the 1998 nuclear tests. Pakistani respondents on the other hand saw a much bigger role for their navy. Apart from safeguarding its coast line and protecting its sea lines of communication (SLOCs),

its submarine capability is aimed to deny any undue advantage the Indian Navy may try to exploit in a classical sea denial role.

In respect of the Indian Ocean as a region in itself, non-Indian respondents proved to be as sceptic as their Indian colleagues. The Indian Ocean is not a homogenous entity, instead, it is seen as consisting of many sub regions with their own peculiar requirements.

Being asked about a naval security regime in the Indian Ocean, all respondents agreed that cooperation in the soft areas would be more feasible than cooperation in the "hard" and sensitive areas like military security. Yet all Australians and many Sri Lankans stressed that it could be desirable to have some kind of cooperative venture even in the field of naval activities – at least at a later stage. While recognizing the difficulties involved in such a pursuit, it was highlighted that all multilateral cooperation began in a modest way and the subsequent incremental processes helped them to evolve into a very comprehensive organization.

Some of the Sri Lankans and Pakistanis suggested that cooperation may begin at a sub regional level with the expressed aims to cover the entire Indian Ocean at a later stage. Among the models and patterns for a future cooperative regime introduced to them, the general consensus was that an annual conference appeared to be more feasible. But just like their Indian colleagues, the non-Indian respondents took issue with the term "naval" and suggested the term "maritime" instead. This *Annual Maritime Conference* should be an inclusive one, in which all interested Indian Ocean Rim states could participate, including the outside powers and the hinterland states. Admittedly it would be a large organization but consensus could easily be secured in the soft areas initially and later efforts could be directed to deal with issues of hard areas.

## SOME DISCERNIBLE TRENDS

From the evaluation of our interviews and of the literature on different possibilities of cooperation in the Indian Ocean, we were able to glean the following trends, which correlated with the results of our archive and library research:

### *The Problem of "Western" Terminology*

In the preparation stage of our project we realized that some of the terminology we used was understood in a different way than we had expected by some of the specialists already contacted. Some terms were even rejected altogether. For example, from some Southeast Asian respondents, the term *Confidence Building Measures* (CBM) was discarded for various reasons in favour of *Trust Building Measures* (TBM). For this reason, we decided to include a part on terminology into our questionnaire. During our travels to South Asia and Southeast Asia, we soon found out that – with one exception – all interviewees accepted our working

definitions. Most interviewees simply pointed out that some of our definitions could contain some negative "Cold War baggage".

However, the application of the term *Naval Security* was generally criticized. All respondents suggested to drop it in favour of the more comprehensive and less problematic term *Maritime Security*.

### *Geopolitical Assessment of the Indian Ocean*

Indian and non-Indian respondents had different perceptions on the overall security situation in the Indian Ocean. In the perception of the Indian interviewees, the geopolitical and geo-economical environment in the Indian Ocean after the end of the superpower conflict is positive and stable. Security problems are posed only by non-state actors like drug traffickers, small arms traffickers and pirates, especially in the Bay of Bengal and the Straits of Malacca. Illicit fishing was also pointed out as a source of conflict, both in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. According to some respondents from the Indian Navy, there were some incidents of armed clashes between Thai trawlers and Indian patrol vessels. The trawlers involved were armed with automatic weapons and some even with bazookas.

Non-Indian respondents drew a much more negative picture of the security environment in the Indian Ocean. Nuclearization of India and Pakistan and the civil wars in Somalia and Indonesia were frequently mentioned as potential sources for conflict with Indian Ocean-wide dimensions, especially by our Australian partners who frequently pointed out the "robust response" that Australia has given in regard of the tests.

The question whether the Indian Ocean can be defined as more than a mere geographical region was met with great scepticism by all respondents, Indian and non-Indian alike. Interestingly, most respondents did agree that the Indian Ocean has been a region in its own right in the eighties. The reason for this was seen in a spill-over of the superpower conflict between the USA and the USSR from the Atlantic and the Pacific into this region. This resulted in a perception of common security concerns and in initiatives like the *Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace* (IOZOP) proposal. Now that the superpower conflict is gone, the idea of a region dissipates again. The reason behind this is, in the opinion even of the Indian respondents, a general lack of a "maritime tradition" and a general lack of knowledge about the importance of the ocean for the Indian Ocean Rim states. This could be a formidable obstacle for any kind of regime for the whole Indian Ocean.

### *The Idea of a Maritime Security Regime*

The idea of a regular maritime conference patterned after the *Western Pacific Naval Symposium* (WPNS) found general acceptance both with the Indian and the non-Indian respondents. However, nearly all respondents expressed doubts that IOR-ARC could be a feasible platform for establishing such a conference. In the

perception of our respondents, IOR-ARC already foundered for various reasons. A maritime conference or symposium should therefore be an independent venture.

All respondents also pointed out that it would be very difficult to convince responsible policy makers of the necessity of such a regime. Most respondents therefore agreed with our basic (neorealist) assumption that a maritime regime in the Indian Ocean could only be implemented when a dominant state – or a dominant group of states – would push the initiative forward. Interestingly, many Indian and non-Indian respondents named the Federal Republic of Germany in this context as one extra-regional possibility.

The interviews also contained some unexpected answers which we found quite surprising. From these answers, given by the overwhelming majority of all respondents, we could glean the following "scientific surprises":

*The Indian Ocean is not seen as a region in itself*

In regard of a common perception of the Indian Ocean, we realized that it is being perceived as such only by parts of the epistemic community, i.e. by specialists on the Indian Ocean from academia. All other respondents – naval officers and government officials – opined that the Indian Ocean as a peaceful ocean does not draw enough official interest to be thought of as more than a geographic region. In their view, the Indian Ocean definitely is neither a political region nor an economic region:

- The attention of the political elite in India is directed West towards the long border with Pakistan due to the endless Kashmir conflict, North towards the even longer border with the People's Republic of China because of different opinions about the common boundary and East towards the border with Myanmar because of guerrilla activities and drug trafficking/gun running. In regard of the Indian Ocean, only its sub-regions Arabian Sea and Gulf of Bengal are of interest for Delhi because of its *Look West* and *Look East* policies – the Arabian Sea because of the security of Indian sea lines of communication (SLOC), the Gulf of Bengal because of its potential function as a bridge between India and ASEAN and, by extension, APEC.
- The Australian political and business establishment, situated at the shores of the Pacific anyway, is interested almost exclusively in the Pacific Ocean, APEC and ARF. Adding to the neglect of the Indian Ocean is John Howard's administration's focus on domestic issues. Consequently, the only foreign policy issues under frequent discussion are illegal migrations from Southeast Asia. It should be noted, though, that the government of the federal state Western Australia with its capital Perth at the shore of the Indian Ocean, usually is more interested in Indian Ocean matters. However, the government at Perth is not powerful enough to give the Australian foreign and foreign economic policy a pro-Indian Ocean tilt.

- The establishment of South Africa is still occupied by the political transformation within the republic and the re-establishing of its former zone of influence in Southern Africa after the termination of Apartheid rule.

In a nutshell, the Indian Ocean being a peaceful ocean devoid of potential military conflicts does not feature high on the foreign and security policy agenda of its most powerful rim states because of it being peaceful. This means for the time being, there are no incentives to look at and deal with the Indian Ocean or to try to establish a security regime there.

*Interest for a maritime security regime is restricted to the epistemic community*

For the above-mentioned reasons, only the members of the epistemic community seem to be interested in a maritime security regime in the Indian Ocean. But even the most optimistic of them are of the opinion that such a regime would not come about in the foreseeable future. One reason has already been mentioned: because the Indian Ocean is a peaceful ocean with no immediate military threat, there is no incentive to try to establish a maritime security regime for the whole Indian Ocean Rim. Non-military threats such as piracy are not seen as affecting the whole Indian Ocean. Thus they should be dealt with on an appropriate sub-regional level like the Bay of Bengal.

Another reason given reveals a certain degree of disillusionment within the circle of specialists, especially those active in second-track diplomacy. This disillusionment does not restrict itself on the Indian Ocean second track, it also covers seemingly successful Asia-Pacific second tracks like CSCAP.<sup>26</sup>

The feeling that there is an impenetrable layer between first track and second track activities in the sense that creative new ideas are not taken up by relevant policy makers themselves is, in our opinion, more dangerous for future attempts at establishing security and other regimes (not only) in the Indian Ocean: This could lead to a lack of "free floating" concepts and ideas exactly when they are needed – sometime in the future.

*IOR-ARC is considered to be already dead*

Another not so surprising result of our interviews concerns the future of the *Indian Ocean Association for Regional Cooperation* (IOR-ARC): In the opinion of most respondents, IOR-ARC does not have a future. All respondents except one expressed grave doubts about IOR-ARC's potential for further meaningful development. It was frequently pointed out that fewer and fewer delegates are attending IOR-ARC meetings. One could argue that empirical data on IOR-ARC

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<sup>26</sup> Confidential information.

suggest exactly the contrary, but if this negative perception spreads, it would be a kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In that case, it would be futile to use IOR-ARC as a platform for a future security regime – which was our hope in the early stages of the project.

## CONCLUSION

The interviews conducted showed that a maritime regime in the shape of a regular symposium comparable to the *Western Pacific Naval Symposium* (WPNS) would indeed contribute to the overall security in this region. As such, an *Indian Ocean Rim Naval Symposium* (IORNS) would be sensible. The feasibility of such a regime, however, especially for the whole Indian Ocean Rim, was seen very skeptical, at least for the foreseeable future.

But the interviews with our South Asian and Southeast Asian interview partners also contained a possible solution for this problem: creating a maritime regime in one part of the Indian Ocean "where the trouble makers are not present", as one Indian respondent quipped, and slowly and gradually extending it to other parts of the region to eventually cover the whole Indian Ocean Rim. An example for this approach could be *Milan East* in the Bay of Bengal. This "social gathering of naval personnel" from navies present in the Bay of Bengal was initiated by India as an attempt to appease concerns in regard of its naval build-up. Because of its success as a confidence building measure, India organized a similar venture in the Arabian Sea in the year 2000 as *Milan West* with the navies of Iran and Oman as participants. Since the Bay of Bengal is a part of the Indian Ocean without "trouble makers" (as defined by Indians), it could be a useful focus for either beefing up *Milan* or implementing a more ambitious symposium.

The real problem in regard of Indian Ocean security is to be found elsewhere, however: there seems to be an impenetrable barrier between non-official second track affairs conducted mainly by members of the epistemic community and the official first track diplomacy conducted by government officials. In other words: developing new ideas about ways to live together more peacefully are the easy part of the job. The difficult part is trying to get heard, by way of policy counselling and/or lobbying. Policy counselling implies an already existing access to relevant policy-makers, lobbying implies the existence of some pressure groups with a similar set of interests. Both of them imply the existence of (lots of) patience and perseverance. Jesuits are a good example for those virtues needed: if one of their ideas gets turned down by the pope, they obey. But they will get back to him half a year later with the same idea, again and again. Perhaps they will also pray for a miracle to take place, but they will not leave it at that. In the end, they probably will not exactly get what they wanted in the very beginning, but they might get what they need, and a little more.

In the Asia-Pacific, the epistemic community got its miracle by way of the dissolution of the USSR and the dawning of the new era of "globalisation" and

"liberalization", which helped to bring about policy changes in the USA which was largely responsible for the creation of first the *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation* (APEC) as an economic regime and then the *ASEAN Regional Forum* (ARF) as a security regime. Both are still working. The epistemic community in the Indian Ocean only got half a miracle which helped bringing about the *Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation* (IOR-ARC) as a feeble attempt to establish an economic regime. Since IOR-ARC has lost most of its initial steam, and since a security regime still is out of question, the epistemic community is well advised to both re-examine their geographical definition of the phenomenon colloquially called "Indian Ocean" – which is probably not workable – and to develop some patience – a virtue that is frequently lacking given the rapidly changing trends in (fundable) research subjects on international relations. The Panchayati Raj concept is simply too valuable to face such a premature death.



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