

## **INDIA'S STRATEGY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN**

### **Indian Aims and Interests in a Historical Perspective\***

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The past two decades have witnessed a great upsurge in superpower rivalry and tensions in the Indian Ocean as well as a steady increase in the *quantum* of naval forces maintained by both the powers in the ocean. These large and powerful naval task forces have provided the superpowers with additional capacity to interfere in the affairs of the Indian Ocean littoral states most of which, in pursuance of their own interests, have reacted to these developments by supporting, with varying degrees of conviction and ambiguity, the concept of 'zone of peace' in the ocean.

The aims and interests of India, the largest and most powerful state in the South Asian Region (SAR) and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), have, therefore, to be taken into consideration in any discussion pertaining to the Indian Ocean. This paper seeks to contribute to that discussion by looking at India's policy in the Indian Ocean. The discussion, however, would not be very fruitful if India's Indian Ocean Strategy (IOS) was looked at in isolation. It is an integral component of India's foreign and defence policies, especially as they apply to South Asia. Therefore, the analysis that follows is set in a historical framework within the wider context of India's foreign and defence policies, as well as economic interests and expectations.

It is pertinent however, to mention right at the outset of this analysis the parameters fixed by geography which play such a pivotal role in determining strategic options and policies.

### **1. Geo-Strategic Parameters**

The IOR with its militarily highly-vulnerable entry and exit passages to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and bordered by Africa, the Middle East, South Asia,

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South-East Asia, and Australia, consists of 36 littoral states and 11 hinterland states<sup>1</sup> which not only vary dramatically in size, population, resources, economic strength, political stability, and military power, but are also variously involved in conflicts with each other and/or non-IOR powers. The only common denominator of the region is the shared legacy of colonialism.

India, the pre-eminent power in the SAR which abuts in the north a superpower and a burgeoning superpower (the Soviet Union and China) and bestrides the sea routes connecting the two constituent parts of the IOR (the Middle East and South-East Asia) of vital strategic interest to the two superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union), occupies a pivotal position in the IOR. The sub-continental peninsula of 1.2 million square miles has a 3,750-mile coastline with a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone running coterminally that brings under Indian jurisdiction a huge area the size of almost 60 per cent of India's landmass rich in minerals, energy, and food resources. India's central strategic position at the head of the IOR, equidistant from the Far East and Europe and with easy access to the littoral and hinterland states of the IOR, is enhanced by the Indian islands of Andaman and Nicobar in the Bay of Bengal and Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea.

## 2. India's Indian Ocean Strategy

Given the geo-strategic parameters already outlined it may be argued that

while to other countries the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas, to India it is a vital sea. Her lifelines are concentrated in the area, her freedom is dependent on the freedom of that water surface. No industrial development, no commercial growth, no stable political structure is possible for her unless her shores are protected.<sup>2</sup>

This observation made towards the end of the Second World War just prior to India gaining its independence from British colonial rule is axiomatic in the IOS of the state of India. In a nutshell, India's IOS is that part of its operational foreign policy which seeks to ensure that the Indian Ocean is not used by a state or states, be it or they from the IOR or from outside of it, in any way that may

1 Chandra Kumar, "The Indian Ocean: arc of crisis or zone of peace?", *International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 2, Spring 1984, p. 236.

2 K. M. Pannikar, *India and the Indian Ocean* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945), p. 84.

affect adversely the interests of the state of India as those interests are interpreted by the Indian national bourgeois leadership.

## 2.1 Indian Leadership's Perspective

A clearer understanding of India's IOS is gained by setting it within the framework of the historical development of Indian foreign policy and considering the perspective by which the Indian leadership shaped India's role in international relations.

In a broadcast from New Delhi (7 September 1946) Jawaharlal Nehru, as Vice-President of the Interim National Government of India, outlined three general principles of independent India's foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> They were:

1. non-alignment;
2. anti-colonialism/anti-imperialism; and,
3. anti-racialism.

In order to understand how these principles evolved in practice, it would be necessary to go into the historical background of the independence movement stretching back to the founding of the Indian National Congress (INC), an undertaking beyond the scope of this paper. However, the antecedents of contemporary Indian foreign policy are to be found in the views and attitudes expressed in the various deliberations of INC and in particular the contributions of Nehru who was not only the chief architect of India's foreign policy but also had been largely responsible, since 1927, for giving direction and shape to the Indian nationalist movement's outlook on international affairs.

### 2.1.1 India as an "Independent Centre Of Power"

One need not look far beyond *The Discovery of India*, where, in 1944, "Nehru sought to analyse the various influences on the totality of his thought",<sup>4</sup> in order to understand how Nehru conceptualized independent India's international role.

3 Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946 - April 1961* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961), p. 2.

4 Arthur Stein, *India and the Soviet Union: The Nehru Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 20.

... looking ahead, India emerges as a strong united state, a federation of free units, intimately connected with her neighbours and playing an important part in world affairs. She is one of the very few countries which have the resources and capacity to stand on their own feet ... The Pacific is likely to take the place of Atlantic in the future as a nerve centre of the world. Though not directly a Pacific state, India will inevitably exercise an important influence there. India will also develop as the centre of economic and political activity in the Indian Ocean area, in south-east Asia and right up to the Middle East. Her position gives an economic and strategic importance in a part of the world, which is going to develop rapidly in the future.<sup>5</sup>

And in December 1946, Nehru declared in the Constituent Assembly that

... what we are going to do in India will have a powerful effect on the rest of the world, not only because a new free, independent nation comes out into the arena of the world, but because of the fact that India is such a country that by virtue not only of her large size and population but of her enormous resources and her ability to exploit those resources, she can immediately play an important and a vital part in world affairs.<sup>6</sup>

In a similar vein, Nehru expounded his view of India's international role on the occasion of the Asian Relations Conference (Delhi, March-April 1947). Vigorously disclaiming any pretentious claims to regional (let alone world) leadership, Nehru nevertheless dwelt upon India's pivotal position in the world in general and Asia in particular.

It is fitting that India should play her part in this new phase of Asian development. Apart from the fact that India herself is emerging into freedom and independence, she is the natural centre and focal point of the many forces at work in Asia. Geography is a compelling factor, and geographically she is so situated as to be the meeting point of Western and Northern and Eastern and South-East Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Such an approach to the international role of independent India was by no means restricted to Nehru. It was shared by many an Indian nationalist, Con-

5 J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 535-536. Even 10 years later Nehru's optimism remained undimmed. Thus, in a debate on foreign affairs in the *Lok Sabha*, he said: "Leaving these three big countries, the United States of America, the Soviet Union and China, aside ... if you peep into the future and if nothing goes wrong - wars and the like - the obvious fourth country in the world is India."

J. Nehru, *India's Foreign ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

7 Cited in Bimla Prasad, *The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy: The Indian National Congress and World Affairs, 1885-1947* (Calcutta: Bookland Pvt. Ltd., 1960), Appendix 8, p. 214.

gress and non-Congress, alike. Thus, for example, Sir Mohammed Zafrullah Khan, a future foreign minister of Pakistan, who led the Indian delegation to the Third Unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference (London, 1945), declared in his opening speech that

The war has brought to India a forcible and vivid realisation of her own strategic importance and indeed of her own potential strategic domination in all the vast area of oceans and lands that lie between Australia and the west coast of Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, Asaf Ali, the deputy leader of INC, envisaged as early as 1946 an independent India capable of functioning as the policeman and arsenal of the East.<sup>9</sup>

Independent India's foreign policy, as it came to be shaped by Nehru with the help of others representing a number of different political tendencies, was predicated on hopes of establishing some kind of Indian pre-eminence in Asia and influence in the world out of proportion to India's importance as an international power.

### 2.1.2 Policy of Non-Alignment

Throughout the struggle for freedom, the national leadership of the Congress had developed an aversion to India becoming entangled in great power politics for a number of reasons, not the least among which being the safeguarding of its national goals. Nehru's belief that Europe had been the prime cause of most of the wars in contemporary history, and that capitalism which led not only to imperialism but also to fascism was at the root of war,<sup>10</sup> fortified his determination not to join a Western pact, i.e. a pact of imperialist powers. This, it may be pointed out, had very little to do with Nehru's socialism, because many Indian nationalists who could not be regarded as socialists by a long shot shared Nehru's sense of distaste at the prospect of joining international political and military clubs dominated by erstwhile colonial powers.

8 Cited in Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 26.

9 *Ibidem*.

10 See J. Nehru, "Whither India?" and "Presidential Address to the National Congress, Lucknow, April 1936", in *India's Freedom* (London: Unwin Books, 1962), pp. 20-49; and, also B. Prasad, *op. cit.*, Appendix 3, pp. 284-291.

Yet, for all his criticism of the Western powers,<sup>11</sup> Nehru's ideas of international relations were firmly rooted in 'realist' balance of power principles and India's geo-political and geo-strategic position. Ironically, his confidence that India's security would not be endangered was anchored in his belief that none of the great powers of the world could afford to permit any *one* of them to gain a dominant position within the sub-continent. He was of the view that India's defence security problems were the creation of British imperialism.<sup>12</sup> That once freedom was achieved, there would be very little likelihood of any military danger to India from outside.<sup>13</sup> Given such a perspective, for independent India to join a military grouping could only result in an endangering of its security without any particular gains accruing to India.

Thus, when India emerged as an independent nation, its choice of foreign policy orientation was dictated by

1. the differing attitudes of the major powers to the Indian struggle for independence;
2. the perspective of the Indian leadership, in particular that of Nehru; and,
3. India's ambition to develop into a leading force on the Afro-Asian political scene.

Such was the dynamic that inexorably led India towards 'non-alignment' and compelled it to apply the principle of equidistance from the superpowers in such a manner that it has, over the years, seemed to edge gradually closer to the Soviet Union and away from the United States in the sphere of foreign relations.

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11 Suspicion of the West was an inheritance of the freedom struggle. Encapsulated within anti-colonial Indian nationalism, as it developed under the aegis of the Congress, was a deep-seated revulsion against the racism of the colonial power. Both imperialism and racialism were associated with the West - the European colonial powers in the first instance, and subsequently the United States as well.

12 At no time - either before or after independence - did Nehru entertain the slightest doubt that the Soviet Union would ever wish to expand at India's expense (*vide* J. Nehru, "The Defence of India", in B. Prasad, *op. cit.*, Appendix 2). And as far as China was concerned Nehru's attitude, initially at any rate, was governed by the awareness that it, like India, was faced with enormous economic and political problems which could only be tackled in an atmosphere of peace and stability. Moreover, he was convinced that no security *hiatus* could jeopardize Sino-Indian relations because both countries were protected by the vast Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas.

13 *Ibidem.*

To correct any possible misapprehension it must be stressed that although the Indian government's policies since independence might appear to have been consistently anti-United States and pro-Soviet Union such an impression can only be superficial. The consistency or otherwise of the Indian government's policies lies not in its attitude towards the United States and the Soviet Union but rather in its long-term aim of balancing the interests of the Indian state and the interests of the Indian ruling classes which it represents.

The Indian government has consistently followed a policy of safeguarding the interests of the Indian national bourgeoisie (and especially of its industrial component) from the encroachment of foreign and multi-national capital whose interests are in the safekeeping of imperialist powers in general and the United States in particular. India's apparently pro-Soviet inclination can be explained on the basis of its desire to build its defences in order to resist pressures from the capitalist world - pressures that are likely to threaten the independence and autonomy of indigenous capital.

It would be a misapprehension to assume that the relations between India and the United States (or the Western countries in general) have always been as the Indian government would have wished. There have been many instances of India being forced to give in and compromise (if only in order to gain time) in response to pressures from the West. Thus Indian foreign policy has acquired a dual character the single overarching purpose of which has been to ensure that the interests of the Indian national bourgeoisie would be properly safeguarded. That its dual character often makes Indian foreign policy appear to be pursuing apparently contradictory ends should not obscure the basic commitment of the Indian government to turn the entire thrust of its policy towards protecting the economic interests of the Indian national bourgeoisie.

To return to our original thread, India's foreign policy of non-alignment has been directed towards the goal of keeping

1. the SAR in particular and IOR in general, free of superpower entanglements and conflicts, and,
2. the physical presence of the superpowers out of the Indian Ocean.

But failing that, the Indian policy has also pursued the more modest aim of limiting the superpower presence in the SAR and the Indian Ocean.

India was unable to prevent the entry of the Cold War into the SAR in the shape of a United States-Pakistan Mutual Aid and Security Agreement (1954), and Pakistan's entry into the South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)

and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) alliance systems, which had the effect of not only fuelling an arms race on the sub-continent but also of confirming India's fears that the West in general and the U.S. in particular were striving to negate its natural pre-eminence in South Asia.

This was the context in which it became the requirement of the Indian foreign policy to involve the Soviet Union in the sub-continent's affairs, on India's side. It needed however India's border conflict with China and its military *débâcle* in the Himalayas (1962) to make this a pre-eminent requirement of India's foreign policy, in order to counter-balance China (and since the '70s both China and the United States together).

Nehru's policy of non-alignment failed in its objective of keeping the super-powers out of the SAR. Indeed for a time in the '60s under the pressure of the events of 1962, India's policy was more that of bi-alignment, with both the superpowers, than of non-alignment. However, Nehru's policy of non-alignment, and as it came to be practised under the succeeding prime ministers of India, despite its elasticity, or indeed because of it, has served the requirements of India's foreign policy admirably well. During the last 40 years, India has progressively carved out a niche for itself in the international system as a power with influence quite out of proportion to either its economic or military strength. Although not yet a major regional power it is universally regarded as one in *potentia*.

## 2.2 Indian Ocean in India's Defence Orientation

### 2.2.1 From Independence to the *Débâcle* in the Himalayas: 1947-62

The framework of independent India's defence policy had already been defined by Nehru's thinking and pronouncements on the subject during the '30s. Axiomatic in his thinking was the belief that if any great power were to attack India, it would be given assistance by other powers, even if it be for the negative reasons of preventing any single power from getting control over India's vast resources. Thus, until the eruption of armed conflict between India and China over the border question defence matters were relegated to a lowly position.

In line with the outlook inherited from the colonial power, the Indian government placed great emphasis on the threat emanating from the north-west. Pakistan's military involvement in Kashmir (1948) had the effect of confirming the Indian leadership's prejudice against it, resulting from the revulsion felt at



India's partition, as the major enemy. Even today, this prejudice lies at the core of India's defence and foreign policies, and it is difficult to disentangle the purely geo-political and strategic aspects of India's apprehension of Pakistan from the psychological revulsion felt by the Indian leadership (especially its older generation) against partition.

Until 1962, the Indian government did not entertain the possibility of China launching a large-scale military operation across the Himalayas. The assumption that it had only one enemy - albeit consisting of two wings - led to a neglect of defence in the belief that Pakistan was not strong enough to pose a threat to India's territorial integrity. This basic obsession with Pakistan in the strategic thinking of the Indian military remained unaltered until the border conflict with China.

The accent of Indian defence policy, at least until 1962, was on keeping expenditure to a bare minimum. The armed forces suffered from relative neglect. During the decade 1951-52 to 1961-62, India spent no more than an average of 2 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP). Nehru gave priority to economic development over modernization of the Indian armed forces.

Notwithstanding a general acceptance among Indian leadership of the geo-strategic significance of the Indian Ocean and India's strategic role in it,<sup>14</sup> it played a very low-key role in India's policy until the late '60s. This was as much due to the legacy of the past which influenced India's defence posture in a significant manner, as to the budgetary restrictions imposed on Indian defence outlays. The Indian Navy on which eventually any active Indian role in the Indian Ocean must be predicated was during this period in practice no more than an implicit and a minor part of the West's Indian Ocean naval defence efforts.<sup>15</sup>

### **2.2.2 From the D eb acle in the Himalayas to Victory in Bangladesh: 1962-1971**

The armed conflict with China (1962) was a watershed in the evolution of India's defence policy. Henceforward, defence planning was based on the assumption that India faced two major enemies along three important fronts. The Indian military was expanded by a phenomenal extent over a relatively

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14 See L. J. Kavic, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

15 See *ibid.*, p. 123.

brief period. Defence allocations were almost doubled by 1963, but mainly to expand and modernize the army. After the India-Pakistan war (1965), expenditure on defence was kept at a proportion of roughly 3 per cent of GNP.

For the first time since independence, government and parliament, far from ignoring advice voluntarily offered, began to solicit the views of those in the top echelons of the command structure of the defence services of the country. From 1962 onwards, the Indian military was incorporated into the policy making process. And the defence portfolio was elevated from a position of relative obscurity to a front ranking position in the Indian cabinet, next only in importance to that of the Prime Minister.

A programme of expansion and modernization of the Indian Navy, hitherto the most neglected of the three services, was begun in 1966, indicating a decision to play a larger and more effective role in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia. But because of the Indian leadership's initial obsession with Pakistan and subsequent preoccupation with China, far greater emphasis was placed on the development of the Indian Army and Indian Air Force than on the modernization of the Indian Navy. India feared land attacks from its two neighbours more than naval attacks from any other source. In the following decades however, political circles in the country attached importance to the development of India's naval power.

During the '60s the Indian Ocean stayed as quite a stretch of waters as it had during the '50s. The superpowers had not yet established their presence in the Indian Ocean in any meaningful sense and it was an area still free of their confrontation. And the Indian leaders continued as hitherto to acknowledge the Indian Ocean's strategic significance and make pretentious claims to India's leadership role in it. But in terms of an effective policy and a strategy to realize policy goals in the Indian Ocean there was in practice hardly any change during the '60s.

However, as India became militarily strong its consciousness as the regional power in the SAR deepened. A high point was reached in this process at the time of India's military intervention in Bangladesh. And this had its effect on India's IOS in the '70s.

### 2.2.3 A Puissant State: Post-1971

The 1971 victory over Pakistan in Bangladesh was as much a watershed in India's perception of its own regional pre-eminence as its 1962 military *débâcle*

in the Himalayas had been for Indian defence posture. It finally confirmed what the Indian leaders had long claimed and hoped for, that India was the pre-eminent regional power in the SAR. The confidence born out of this triumph of Indian arms was very soon translated into support for India's more active regional and Indian Ocean diplomacy.

Indian Navy's spectacular although fortuitous victory<sup>16</sup> off Karachi, cutting out the sea escape route for the beleaguered Pakistan Army in Bangladesh, provided the necessary boost not only to its flagging morale as the most neglected of the Indian services but also to the Indian leadership's reassessment of the importance of naval power for India's regional and international power. The United States' attempt to threaten India by sending a naval task force to the Bay of Bengal, despite its failure to affect the outcome of the war, provided another dimension to Indian leadership's new reassessment of naval power. Indian policy-makers could not forget the fact that they had to rely on the Soviet Union to provide the necessary deterrence to the American force by sending its own warships to the Indian Ocean.

However, India, as the dominant power in the region, had no wish to let the Soviet Union play a role in maintaining its security.<sup>17</sup> It had the prescience to realize that in the long run such a development could only be detrimental to its own interest.

The '70s saw a steady build up of the military presence of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean Zone (IOZ). Whereas the Soviet Union believed strongly that the only effective way to reduce the impact of the United States in the IOZ would be by interposing itself in the area, India was against the compounding of one superpower's presence in the IOZ by the interposition of the other, thus

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16 See Ashley J. Tellis, "The Naval Balance in the Indian Subcontinent: Demanding Missions for the Indian Navy", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV, No. 12, December 1985, pp. 1197-1199.

17 It refused to get involved in any Soviet scheme for an Asian collective security system. This was as much due to its belief that all external powers, without exception, should be scrupulously kept out of the SAR as to its desire to avoid antagonizing China even further. Similarly, President Carter's initiative (May 1979) to get the U.S., the U.S.S.R. and China to jointly declare the SAR nuclear free, in support of Pakistan's proposal of a zone of peace for South Asia, was not only most unwelcome to India but also highly offensive to its ruling classes' sense of national pride.

reducing further the already slim possibility of removing outside powers from the area.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, in view of its insalubrious relations with both China and the United States, India did not have much room for manoeuvre in relation to the Soviet Union in the IOZ. As a result, Indian leaders tended to blow hot and cold on the question by condemning the United States for already having established a major military base on the island of Diego Garcia while turning a blind eye to any plan that the Soviet Union might harbour for the area in the future. Such a stance was clearly intended not to upset the Soviet good humour because, in the final analysis it is only the Soviet force and not the Indian force which might exercise a counterbalancing effect on the Western military presence in the IOZ.

During the '70s, neither the Western powers nor the Soviet Union and its allies gave their support to resolutions put forward by non-aligned countries in the United Nations General Assembly calling for the establishment of an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace (IOZP).<sup>19</sup> Even although India ardently supports the concept, first put forward (October 1971) by Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, it needs to be pointed out that India decided to do this only after it had managed to have the original proposal watered down and, furthermore, its attention focused only on threats from powers outside of the IOR and not on regional powers like India.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of IOZP has provided a convenient fig leaf of respectability for India's drive not only to establish itself as the predominant regional power in the IOR but also to remove any challenge to it from outside powers. It is no wonder then that the concept of IOZP is not welcome to all of India's neighbours in the SAR.

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- 18 India's Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao made this clear in his address to the U.N. General Assembly (Sept. 1981): ... great power presences in the Indian Ocean are unacceptable not only in the context of their rivalry, but under any circumstances whatsoever. Were they to agree among themselves to stay put in this ocean, they would still be equally unwelcome. Together or separately, we want them out. Cited in S. Nihal Singh, *The Yogi and the Bear: A Study of Indo-Soviet Relations* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1986), fn. 83, pp. 308-309.
  - 19 In 1977 the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. did enter into talks, called off in 1978, on demilitarization of the Indian Ocean which made it clear that the superpowers were interested not so much in eliminating their naval forces in the ocean as in freezing their force levels.
  - 20 See James Manor and Gerald Segal, "Causes of Conflict: Sri Lanka and Indian Ocean Strategy", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV, No. 12, December 1985, pp. 1176-1177.

Who benefits from a zone of peace [in the Indian Ocean]? With India as the dominant power of the region and having military preponderance over its neighbours, it is natural that India will get the maximum benefit out of it. With no superpowers to deter it, India will have a free sail in the Indian Ocean, and can at times threaten the peripheral states with military muscle. It is on this assumption that Bangladesh ... should support the continued presence of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean.<sup>21</sup>

By the end of the '70s, India's strategic situation in the SAR and IOR which had appeared so full of promise at the start of the decade was beginning to be perceived with apprehension by the Indian leadership. The success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran which removed the Shah (1979), a loyal and trusted ally of the United States, and the entry of the Soviet armed forces into Afghanistan (1979), led to a shift of emphasis in American policy concerning the region.

The United States' foreign policy under the Administrations of President Nixon (1969-74) and President Ford (1974-77), in South Asia had been very heavily biased in favour of Pakistan if not entirely anti-India. However, under President Carter (1977-81) the orientation of American foreign policy seemed initially towards establishing close and friendly relations with 'regional influentials'.<sup>22</sup> In South Asian terms such a policy seemed to suggest American readiness to accept India as the pre-eminent regional power and, at the same time, to be more sensitive of its vital national interests.

But by the close of 1979, instead of improving its ties with India and showing some recognition of its regional ambition, the United States began to perceive in Pakistan a reliant and strategically more important country to check the perceived Soviet threat to South Asia and the Persian Gulf. Indeed Pakistan's regional interest in re-establishing and maintaining the balance of power *vis-à-vis* India in the SAR, which had been lost in the 1971 war, coincided with United States' global interests in its confrontation of the Soviet Union. As far as the Indian leaders were concerned these developments were a return to the Cold War policies of the '50s.

With the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF)

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21 A Bangladeshi view, cited in S. Nihal Singh, *op. cit.*, fn. 120, p. 285.

22 As President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski writes: We set for ourselves the goal of consulting on critical issues with such countries as Venezuela, Brazil, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, and Indonesia. *Power and Principle* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), pp. 53-54.

and a separate U.S. Indian Ocean Command,<sup>23</sup> Pakistan has become a crucial strategic asset in the evolving United States strategy for rapid military intervention in the Middle East and South-West Asia.<sup>24</sup> Pakistan is the American strategy's eastern, just as much as Israel is its western, sheet-anchor. The progressive harnessing of Pakistan in American regional plans and its emergence as a 'frontline' state in the United States' confrontation with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the '80s, has allowed Pakistan to receive American largesse of sophisticated *matériel* on such a vast scale<sup>25</sup> as to pose a serious threat to India's regional status. In this connection, Pakistan's efforts in achieving rapid progress towards becoming a nuclear power has added to the Government of India's worries.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the huge increase in the United States' military capabilities in the IOR has also had the effect of strengthening

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- 23 The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) established (1 January 1983) in order to control the deployment of any U.S. Forces in South-West Asia and the Indian Ocean took over the RDJTF. CENTCOM is an awesome military force which when fully deployed could involve 307, 600 personnel (*vide The Military Balance 1987-1988, op. cit., pp. 23-24*).
- 24 CENTCOM provides the U.S. Government with the ability to intervene not only against perceived Soviet 'threat' but also against any indigenous development in the countries of the region and Africa which could be regarded by the American policy-makers as endangering the interests of the United States (*vide S. Nihal Singh, op. cit., p. 110*).
- 25 In 1981, Pakistan received a total of \$3.2 billion in U.S. economic and military aid spread over the next six years. The Americans also agreed to supply 40 F-16 fighter-bombers worth \$1.1 billion, most of the money being put up by Saudi Arabia (*vide ibid., p. 177*). Also, *The Economist*, 28 Nov. 1987 and 16 April 1988, as well as P. R. Chari, "How to Prevent a Nuclear Arms Race between India and Pakistan", in Bhabani Sen Gupta (ed.), *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia, Volume 1 Perceptual, Military and Nuclear Arms Race Problems* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986), pp. 135-136). By the autumn of 1980 Saudi Arabia had given Pakistan \$7.5 billion and committed a further \$5 billion (*vide The Economist*, 13 Sept. 1980). There is a close correlation between the very generous Saudi Arabian financial aid to Pakistan and the latter's military involvement in the security of the Kingdom. There are today 10,000 Pakistani Armed Forces personnel (down from the high of 20,000 in 1983) in Saudi Arabia (*vide the Military Balance, op. cit., for 1983-1984, p. 97, and for 1987-1988, p. 169*). Pakistan hopes to get a further \$4 billion of U.S. aid, spread over the next six years.
- 26 Notwithstanding Pakistan's known nuclear ambitions and serious efforts to achieve them, and in spite of the *Symington Amendment*, the massive U. S. military aid to Pakistan has continued. In 1987 the U. S. Congress temporarily withheld granting its approval to the American aid to Pakistan for the current financial year but it (\$687 million for 1988) was reinstated (*vide The Economist*, 16 April 1988 and Strategic Survey 1987-1988 (London: The International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1988), p. 143). It has been claimed that Pakistan already possesses four atomic bombs (*vide Rod Nordland, "The Nuclear Club", Newsweek, Vol. CXII, No. 2, 11 July 1988, pp. 14-19*).

the Indian suspicions still further that it is part of a calculated design to deny India regional pre-eminence.

Even although Soviet military presence in the IOR is equally unwelcome, Indian leaders recognize its necessity to counterbalance the American presence while India carries out its long-term programme of enlarging and modernizing its navy which would have the effect of providing it with a minimal deterrence capability that "might prevent a foreign power from embarking on a course of action inimical to Indian national interests".<sup>27</sup> As confirmed by Admiral A. K. Chatterji, former chief of the Indian Navy, India's objective is to acquire a

... force equal in size and competence to the naval forces of any one of the super-powers now formally operating in the area.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, command of the world's fourth largest armed forces has already provided the Indian state with the capability of acting as a regional *gendarme*-on-call. The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord (July 1987) leading to the dispatch of 50,000-strong Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) to the island and its subsequent operations there, at great cost - in lives and money, as well as the use of Indian paratroops in the Maldives (November 1988) are evidence of India's growing confidence in its own power and evolving role as the major regional power.

### 2.3 Economic Considerations

Looked at from the viewpoint of the state of India the free and unhindered passage of ships in the Indian Ocean is an absolutely essential prerequisite in the country's march towards becoming an industrial power. In this context India's trade links with the oil-rich states of the Middle East are of crucial importance not only in terms of the former's still heavy reliance on the latter for the import of critical supplies of energy, but also in terms of the growing Indian exports of goods and services to that region which earns India a sorely needed large component of its foreign exchange. Of equal importance for the industrialization of India are its seaborne trade links with the advanced industrialized countries for high-technology imports.

27 A. J. Tellis, *op. cit.*, p. 1192.

28 Cited in S. Nihal Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

The drive to achieve economic and industrial self-reliance has led to heavy Indian public sector investment in off-shore oil exploration<sup>29</sup> adding further to India's security concerns in the Indian Ocean. Although India lacks as yet the technological capacity to exploit the vast mineral and food resources of the ocean-bed in the Indian Ocean this aspect of India's maritime interests nevertheless forms an important part of the IOS in the long-term. In a world fast exhausting its natural resources yet unwilling to slow down the pace of industrialization and apparently unable to control its alarmingly rapid growth in population, the search for alternative sources to sustain the future has acquired a critical priority in the long-term planning of many a government's policy. To India with its ambitious drive to become a leading industrialized country but burdened by its teeming undernourished millions, the race to acquire the scientific knowledge both in the pure and applied realms in order to be capable of exploiting the alternative resources necessary for development, as well as establishing and protecting its claims to them, is of overwhelming and urgent concern.

### 2.3.1 The Antarctic Connection

A related aspect of India's IOS is the link between the Antarctica and the Indian Ocean. The line dividing the two is not only artificial but blurred. Indeed the 'Southern Waters' are an integral part of the Indian Ocean which extends in the south to include the Antarctica.<sup>30</sup>

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29 Leading Indian circles suspect that the oil-rich countries of the Middle East are likely to support Pakistan in any India-Pakistan conflict. That this is not altogether an unreasonable suspicion is evidenced by the close military and financial links between Pakistan and a number of Arab states. The allegations of Arab money financing Pakistan's drive to achieve nuclear status and build an 'Islamic nuclear bomb' further strengthens this Indian fear. Thus, Indian policy has attempted to ensure, at best, some sort of neutrality on the part of the oil-rich states of the Middle East on questions affecting India-Pakistan relations, but, failing that, to limit the Arab states' too active a support for Pakistan or, at the very least, too active a hostility towards India. In this context, the Indian state's heavy investment in offshore oil exploration is at a very high premium as it might not only reduce India's dependence on outside sources of energy but also as a consequence give it a greater elbow room in the practice of its foreign policy.

30 See Madan Mohan Puri, "Geopolitics in the Indian Ocean. The Antarctic Dimension", *International Studies*, April-June 1986.



Unlike the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans which communicate with both the Arctic in the North and the Antarctic in the South, as these are in general terminology 'open oceans', the Indian Ocean has its northern boundaries closed by landmass. Thus it only communicates with the Antarctica Ocean in the South from which it derives most of its fertility and energy - on which the economy of almost all the Indian Ocean countries is dependent.<sup>31</sup>

The continent of Antarctica is the probable resource-mine of the future. Therefore, the continent and surrounding oceans invite covetous attention from the resource hungry rest of the world. Any state interested in ensuring that its share of the potential resources of the Antarctica is not lost or usurped, either by default or through some power machinations, must possess an appropriate strategy in order to fulfil its requirements and ambitions.

This explains in part India's very active role in the '80s in the Antarctica Treaty System. India's interests in the Antarctica<sup>32</sup> and its Indian Ocean dimensions are not only interrelated but interact.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

India's policy in the Indian Ocean is part of the wider policy to fulfil the economic, military and political aims and ambitions of the Indian national-bourgeois government. In this context, the factors affecting India's defence, economic and foreign policies also have a bearing on India's IOS. Furthermore, there is a close link between India's strategy in the SAR and IOR.

The national bourgeois leadership of India has always paid due regard to the Indian Ocean's strategic significance for India's regional and global role. Yet, in terms of a concrete policy the Indian Ocean took a back seat during the first two decades of India's independence.

There is a close correlation between the emergence of India as the pre-eminent regional power in the SAR and its active interest and role in the Indian Ocean. Also, this coincides with the intensification of the superpowers' naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

In compliance with the long-standing requirement of India's foreign policy as well as with India's perspective of its own regional and global interests and

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31 S. Z. Quasim, cited in Sanjay Chaturvedi, "India and the Antarctic Treaty System: Realities and Prospects", *India Quarterly*, Vol. XLII, No. 4, Oct-Dec 1986, p. 368.

32 See *ibid.*, p. 371.

33 See *ibid.*, p. 366.

role, the Indian government would prefer the superpowers to vacate the Indian Ocean.<sup>34</sup> However, the Indian state lacks the concrete means to enable it to realize such an ambition.

Thus, India practises a two-pronged IOS. One of the prongs of this strategy is to support and further the concept of IOZP. The concept is directed against powers from outside of the IOR and would, therefore, at one stroke, have the practical effect of removing from the Indian Ocean the possible challengers (in particular the United States) to India's regional pre-eminence and, at the same time, as a consequence, strengthen India's own position in the IOR.

The second prong of India's IOS is to build up and modernize its navy to such an extent that it possesses a minimal deterrence capability. This would have the effect of raising the threshold of naval interdiction. In other words, the purpose of such an Indian Navy, besides establishing Indian dominance in the Indian Ocean, would be to inhibit any *one* superpower navy in the Indian Ocean from undertaking a mission against the national interests of India.

In the meantime, as an expression of the confidence born of India's position as the predominant military power in SAR the Indian state has adopted a forward regional policy and begun to assert its own variant of the *Monroe Doctrine*, the *Rajiv Doctrine* as it has come to be dubbed.

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34 While China has not been very active in the Indian Ocean it supports the concept of an IOZP. Financial stringency as well as the constraints imposed by limitations in naval technology and of industrial capacity have been factors of restraint in Chinese policy which sees in the concept of an IOZP a useful instrument for containing the influence of the superpowers. However, if the superpowers continue to maintain their presence in the ocean, China is likely to become more active in the Indian Ocean in future as its programme of modernization and expansion of the navy, in particular its 'blue ocean' capability, takes effect. Chinese interest and future role in the Indian Ocean is a consequence of its strategic global perspective which views the policies of the superpowers as affecting its own security. Besides, in the context of the triangular Sino-Indian, Sino-Soviet and Indo-Soviet relations China may feel it necessary in the future, for example, to station in the Indian Ocean its nuclear-fuelled ballistic-missile submarine(s) (SSBN) in support of its own strategic requirements and its closest Asian ally, Pakistan. Unless efforts at settling the long-standing dispute over border between India and China prove fructuous and lead to a *détente* between the two countries, Indian policy-makers will have to increasingly take account of China in the formulation of India's IOS in the future.