

# NAVAL ASPECT OF INDIAN DEFENCE

## INTRODUCTION

With a coastline of 2000 miles and 90% of its trade being carried on through the sea<sup>1</sup>, India is very vulnerable to an enemy offensive at sea. Our trade routes are in fact our life lines, which must be protected as a matter of our survival. Unfortunately, however, the naval aspect of our defence has never been fully appreciated in our country. We are basically land oriented and often tend to neglect this aspect of our defence. The reason probably is that while on land we have been constant victim of aggression from times immemorial we have never before in history faced a threat through the seas. In fact the Indian Ocean which remained a "zone of peace" before the arrival of the Europeans on the scene, was considered a source of natural protection against external aggression. Till then if at all there was a country with, what could be termed as, colonial interests, it was India itself. Even the European invasion of the sub continent from the sea was too "peaceful" to highlight our vulnerability at sea. After the British conquest of India, the responsibility for the protection of trade and defence against external aggression became that of the British. As the British Navy was strong enough to shoulder this additional responsibility by itself, Indian contribution towards this aspect of defence was not sought for as was done in the case of defence against the threat on land. At the end of the British rule, therefore, free India neither inherited any worthwhile naval force nor the awareness of the new and added responsibilities in the seas.

The 1962 debacle after Independence shook the country's defence planners just enough to make them realise the vulnerability of our land frontiers. The 1965 and 1971 wars that followed have, no doubt, shown us a war on land can spill into the sea, but due to the limited nature of the actions that were fought against not too strong an enemy, the impact of such a lesson does not seem to have been full. If the current (1977-78) budget allocation (capital) of about Rs 100 crores<sup>2</sup> for the development of such a capital expenditure oriented service as the navy is any indication, there still appears to be a hesitancy, so characteristic of our defence planners, in as much as meeting our naval requirements is concerned. It does not require much fore-sight to realise the nature of the threat at sea, or the fact that the enemy can bring about our collapse on land by strangulating us at sea. There is, therefore, a requirement for a proper blend of our strategy on land and that at sea in our Grand Strategy for Defence of our country. Such awareness is, probably, there in the country. What seems to be lacking is a sense of urgency. We now have sufficient experience to know that wars can break-out at short notice; too short, in fact, to allow any elaborate preparations. Our naval forces may have grown many fold since Independence but its pace of growth still lags behind that of the growing threats. This should be a cause of great concern to us.

The many wars that have been fought in the world since after WW II, (and which appears to be the trend for the future also), have amply demonstrated that while a country may expect sympathy and material support from its friends, it must fight its own wars. Least of all can one Super Power be expected to intervene actively on the side of some regional power for fear of retaliation by the other Super Power. It is in this light that our Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union must be viewed, before it begins to produce in us a sense of complacency. With the Super Powers balancing each other the chances of a world conflagration over a regional issue have greatly diminished and regional or local wars appear to be emerging as the new pattern of international conflict. India cannot ignore its responsibility in maintaining regional balance of power for ensuring peace in its region. In fact the maintaining of regional balance of power should form the basis for India's defence policy, both for land as well as the sea.

With our dominating geographical position on the Indian Ocean and the natural gift of all the other factors that go to make a great sea power, India has the potential to fulfil its obligations at sea. All that is required is the **will** to do it. The greatest single factor that shakes the will of our nation to become an effective sea-power is its financial implications. Much of the fear of the financial implications would, however, appear to be more psychological than real. It is based on the lack of understanding of the nature of the threat and the consequent requirement of our navy. There are many who feel that our

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<sup>1</sup> Dr N M Ghatate, *New Sea Power in the Indian Ocean*, United Services Institution of India (USI) Journal Oct- Dec 1969 p 363

<sup>2</sup> Strategic Analysis, *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)* Vol I No5 Aug 1977 p 5 Rs 100 Crore estimation only. Details in Chapter VII.

requirement is that of filling the “vacuum” that has been caused by the British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean<sup>3</sup>, while there are some who feel that our requirement is that of matching the naval might of the Big Powers at present established in the Indian Ocean. To them our requirement would naturally appear to be out of our reach. However, a proper analyses would show that our requirement is not to compete with Big Powers, but only to maintain a regional balance of power which is well within our reach. In any case where is our choice? We have so far been taking the security of our life-lines at sea for granted and have got away with it. We can continue to do so only at our peril.

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<sup>3</sup> Raju GC Thomas *Indian Navy in the Seventies*, Pacific Affairs reproduced in Strategic Digest, IDSA pp45.

## GEO-STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Admiral Mahan, the famous exponent of the modern philosophy of sea power, is believed to have said "whosoever controls the Indian Ocean controls Asia. This Ocean is the key to the seven seas. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters"<sup>4</sup>. This he said some seventy to eighty years back and today, looking at the developments in the Indian Ocean, one might think that his prophesy is going to come out true. It is, however, doubtful that he could have made this prophesy on the strength of his foresight of the present naval technological developments or the present political world order that characterises the present day Indian Ocean rivalry. What seems to have urged him to say this was obviously the geographical importance of the Indian Ocean, which must have been as clear to him then as it is to us today.

For the study of its geography the Indian Ocean may be divided into two parts – the southern and the northern – because of the vast differences in the characteristics of the two. The southern portion is the one lying south of the line joining the southern tip of Africa and the south eastern tip of Australia. This portion is of very little geographical importance, other than that it provides an entrance into the northern part. The northern portion, (north of the line described above), is the one that is geographically important. As a matter of fact when a reference is made to the Indian Ocean, it is generally this portion that is being referred to. This portion is shaped like a gigantic bay<sup>5</sup> bounded by large continuous, (more or less), land masses on its three sides. These land masses allow through them only two entrances – one through the Red Sea through the Suez Canal and the other through the Straits of Malacca. The only other entrance to it is through the open south, but due to the detour around the land masses involved, and due to its open nature this entrance is not as significant strategically as the other two. The routes through the Suez Canal and the Straits of Malacca form the shortest links between Europe and South East Asia on the one hand and Europe and Australia on the other. The strategic importance of these two routes also lies in their being "narrow waters", which can be easily controlled<sup>6</sup> from land and even blocked if necessary. The other areas of strategic importance in this part of the Ocean are:

- (a) The Persian Gulf, again because of its "narrow waters"
- (b) The Indian Peninsula, the southern tip of which reaches out to the centre of the Indian Ocean "Bay" and thus completely dominates both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal; and
- (c) The southern tip of Africa and the south-eastern tip of Australia that control, even though to a limited extent, the south-western and the south-eastern entries into the "Bay".

The geographical location of the Indian Ocean makes it the centre of world trade routes. It washes the shores of some 36 states<sup>7</sup>, which between themselves contain a population of about one billion<sup>8</sup>, (about 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the total population of the world population). These countries also contain a wealth of minerals and raw materials which are required so much by industrially developed countries. They are the world's richest sources of wool, jute, tea, tin, rubber, gold, diamonds, uranium and magnesium<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand being under-developed themselves, they make excellent market for the industrial products of the developed countries. The mutual dependence of one on the other makes ideal conditions for trade to flourish. But one factor that lends importance to the trade that is carried on through the Indian Ocean, is the quantity of oil that flows through it from the Middle Eastern countries to practically all the countries of the world. The quantum of such trade may be gauged from the fact that nearly 200 tankers a day pass through the Straits of Hormuz alone, on their destination to Europe, America, Japan and others<sup>10</sup>. Stoppage of this flow of oil can be catastrophic for those countries that have none or little oil of their own. It is of importance to note that, besides the known oil wealth of the region, there are prospects of

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<sup>4</sup> Major General Ali Moertopo "Indonesia and the Indian Ocean" IDSA(India) Journal Jan-Mar 1977 p 199.

<sup>5</sup> MK Chopra "India – The Search for Power" Lalvani Publishing House p 80

<sup>6</sup> KM Panikkar "India and the Indian Ocean", George Allan and Unwin (India) pp 20-21

<sup>7</sup> Commander V Kulthara "India and the Indian Ocean".United Services Institution of India (USI) Journal Jul-Sep 1975 p230

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p 226

<sup>9</sup> Maj Gen Ali Moertopo IDSA(India) Journal Jan-Mar '77 p 100

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

discovery of much more oil within the seas and off the coasts of many other littoral states of the Indian Ocean<sup>11</sup>.

The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean also bears a relationship with the strategic importance of Africa as a whole<sup>12</sup>. Strategically Africa is termed as the back yard of Europe. It is indeed important for attacking and defending Europe. The big power rivalry in carving out sphere's of influence in Africa is, therefore, not for reasons of trade alone. The Indian Ocean that washes the entire eastern shore of Africa provides to the outside world an easy access to the large number of African countries. This access is most convenient for Russia and China (as eastern powers) who are making the best of the fertile revolutionary conditions of these under-developed and poor countries<sup>13</sup>.

Besides its importance to the rest of the world, the Indian Ocean is of special geo-strategic importance to India. India is a large peninsula, (with a coastline of some 2000 miles), centrally located in the Indian Ocean and so dominates it that Ocean had to be named after this country. It would therefore, be naive to suggest, as was done by an American diplomat once, that there is no real basis for the naming of the Indian Ocean as such and that it may as well have been named as the "Madagascar Ocean"<sup>14</sup>, if only to belittle Indian interests therein. In any case what is of importance to us is not the name but the fact of our dominant geographical position in the Ocean. India's peninsular shape, its central location and the character of its coastline, (providing adequate harbouring facilities), gives it wide and free access to both the seas – the Arabian sea and the Bay of Bengal – and thereby to a large number of countries on the periphery. The economic benefits of such an access (trade and commerce) are invaluable. On the other hand the length of its coastline gives it a claim over a large continental shelf and its immense stocks of natural resources that abound thereon.

India's dependence on the seas for trade is also not a matter of choice but that of geographical compulsion. Although it has huge land frontiers, not much trade can pass through them. The Himalayas and the two hostile neighbours that sprawl along practically the entire length of our land frontier stand barriers to any trade by land. No wonder that 90% of our trade is carried on through the sea. No country can ever be so self sufficient as to survive without trade with others, particularly during war. This is more so for a developing country like India, which is so much dependent on other countries – not only for war material but even for food. India is, therefore, very vulnerable to the enemy offensive at sea. In fact, our enemies could bring about a collapse of our defence on land by just strangulating us at sea. It is this fact that makes the Naval aspect of defence equally, if not more important than land aspect.

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<sup>11</sup> Raju GC Thomas p 15 (see note 3)

<sup>12</sup> Chester A Crocker "The African Dimension of Indian Ocean Policy" in *Orbis* (Fall 1975) reproduced in the Strategic Digest of IDSA May 1977 p 19

<sup>13</sup> Commander V Koithara "India and the Indian Ocean" *USI Journal* Jul-Sep '75 p225

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from memory

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORY OF POWER STRUGGLE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The early history of the Indian Ocean shows that the Indians were a sea-faring nation from the earliest times; much before the Europeans took to the seas.<sup>15</sup> References to voyages by sea have been made in the Vedas, while evidence of the colonisation of the Pacific islands by the Hindus provides clues to the extent to which the Ocean had been explored and navigated as far back as the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC<sup>16</sup>. The importance attached to the seas by the Hindus is reflected in the works by Manu (about 2000 BC) and Kautilya's Arthshastra (about 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD)<sup>17</sup>. The Chinese and Arab traditions of oceanic navigation are equally old and the ships of all the three nations are known to have plodded the Indian Ocean from times immemorial. However, there does not appear to have been any rivalry between the three in the use of the Indian Ocean, which was mostly for trade. Even the colonising activities of the Hindus did not produce any rivalry because, perhaps, there was none at that time to challenge their might.<sup>18</sup>

It is ironical that the first naval conflict in the Indian Ocean was between the Hindus themselves; between the Hindu kings of South India and the kings of the Hindu Empire of Sri Vijay (modern Malaysia and Indonesia). The Sri Vijay kings proved to be the stronger and held sway over the eastern Indian Ocean for about five centuries (from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD).<sup>19</sup> In the early 11<sup>th</sup> Century, however, their might was again challenged by the Chola King, Rajindra, when he attacked and captured Kedah, which formed the eastern base of his successors, who were to continue the struggle for the supremacy of the eastern region of the Indian Ocean.<sup>20</sup> The struggle lasted nearly a hundred years before the supremacy of the sea once again passed on to the Chola Kings.<sup>21</sup> The struggle had, however, left the Chola Kings weak and they were not able to hold on to their conquests for long. The final end of the Hindu supremacy of the Indian Ocean came by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>22</sup> In spite of this struggle among themselves, the entire period of Hindu supremacy – both of the Cholas and Sri Vijay Kings – was marked by the complete freedom of navigation and trade for all.<sup>23</sup> With the decline of the Chola dynasty by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, while the Indians retained their control of their coastal waters, the control of the High Seas had passed on to the Arabs. The Arabs were, however, as peaceful as the Hindus and maintained the tradition of the freedom of the seas for all during the two hundred years or so of their control over the Indian Ocean.<sup>24</sup>

The rivalry, in the present sense of the term, started with the Europeans coming on the scene at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. The first of these to enter the Indian Ocean were the Portuguese under Vasco-da-Gama who arrived at Calicut in the middle of 1498.<sup>25</sup> This visit was of an exploratory nature and was quickly followed by an expedition under Cabral with the intention of extending the claim of the self appointed "Lord of the Seas" over the Indian Ocean.<sup>26</sup> In pursuance of this aim, Calicut, (which had been assessed by Vasco-da-Gama as the main hurdle in the Portuguese quest for supremacy in the Indian Ocean), was attacked but the fleet of the Zamorin of Calicut, not only beat back the attack but also forced Cabral to withdraw from the Indian Ocean in too decent haste.<sup>27</sup> The third Portuguese expedition arrived in the Indian Ocean in 1503.<sup>28</sup> This fleet, commanded by Vasco-da-Gama, was much stronger and as a demonstration of the might of the "Lords of the Sea", Vasco-da-Gama seized some unarmed ships of the Arabs and, after looting their cargo, set fire to ships to let

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<sup>15</sup> KM Panikkar "India and the Indian Ocean" George Allen and Unwin (India) p37

<sup>16</sup> Ibid pp31-32

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p 30

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p 8

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p 33

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p 34

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p 35

<sup>24</sup> Ibid p 36

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p 38

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p 40

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> ibid

the crew and the passengers to perish in them.<sup>29</sup> In the encounter with the Zamorin of Calicut, however, he did not fare any better than Cabral and was forced to withdraw his fleet back to Portugal.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately the Calicut fleet was not a High Seas fleet and thus could not interfere with his withdrawal. Unable to bear the ignominy of the defeat, the Portuguese sent out another fleet, the biggest ever, to the Indian Ocean. Unable to stand up to this naval strength of the Portuguese, the Zamorin sought the help of the Sultan of Egypt. An engagement took place between the Portuguese and the combined Indo-Egyptian fleet off Diu in 1509, but due to the treachery of the Sultan of Gujrat the Indo-Egyptian fleet was unable to score a decisive victory even when it was well within reach. Disgusted the Egyptian admiral withdrew his fleet and sailed back to Egypt leaving the field free for the Portuguese.<sup>31</sup> Thereafter, although the Calicut fleet, under the famous Ali Murrakars admirals, (Kunjali III being the most famous), held its own against the Portuguese along the Malabar coast-line well over ninety years<sup>32</sup> the supremacy of the High Seas passed over to the Portuguese.

Of all the Portuguese admirals, a special reference needs to be made of Albuquerque because of his great strategic insight. Through this insight he laid the foundation of an all time strategy for the control of the Indian Ocean. He realised the importance of the control of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf and was quick to occupy Socotra, (a one time Indian colony), and Ormuz, which respectively command the routes of entry to them.<sup>33</sup> Next he saw the requirement of a secure naval base on the Malabar coast. His Cochin base would have served the purpose had it not been under the constant threat from the Calicut fleet. So when his repeated attempts to reduce Calicut failed, he decided to make Goa his naval base to fit with his scheme<sup>34</sup> – leaving the struggle for Calicut to continue. After this he turned to the eastern part of the Indian Ocean and capturing Malacca in 1513<sup>35</sup> he secured its eastern entrance. It is thus that Albuquerque may justifiably be considered as the architect of the modern naval strategy for the control of the Indian Ocean. All the subsequent struggles for the supremacy of the Indian Ocean have in fact centred around the control of these four pillars of Albuquerque's strategy.

The control of the Indian Ocean subsequently alternated between the European powers themselves, depending upon which of them was the dominant naval power in Europe. With the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the control of the Portuguese over the Indian Ocean began to loosen, (the king of Spain being the king of Portugal also).<sup>36</sup> The Dutch entered the scene in 1595 and struck the first blow to the Portuguese strategic structure in 1641 when they captured Malacca.<sup>37</sup> Thereafter they dealt successive blows, wresting Colombo from them in 1654 and Cochin in 1663.<sup>38</sup> However before they could completely step into the Portuguese shoes, they too had lost their supremacy in the Atlantic to the British and the French and so could make no further headway. Consequently the power struggle in the Indian Ocean shifted to that between the British and the French.

The French launched their struggle from their bases at Madagascar and Mauritius in 1670<sup>39</sup> when they began to make efforts to get closer to the Indian coast. By then, however, the British had already established themselves on the Indian coast and having wrested most of the strategic bases from the Portuguese, were well on their way to the complete control of the Indian Ocean. The French were a little match to the British, not only in terms of their naval strength but also in relation to the basic policies of their respective governments.<sup>40</sup> All the same the ding dong struggle between the two continued for well over a hundred years before the control of the Indian Ocean finally passed over to the British. During their struggle for supremacy not only had the British to face the French but also had to deal with the formidable Maratha naval power that appeared on the Konkan coast in 1683.<sup>41</sup> For 66 years the Marathas with their base at Gheria remained in undisputed control of the coastal

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid p 41

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p 43

<sup>32</sup> Ibid p 44-48

<sup>33</sup> Ibid p 51

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p 52

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p 53

<sup>36</sup> Ibid p 55

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p 56

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p 57

<sup>39</sup> Ibid p 64

<sup>40</sup> Ibid p 65

<sup>41</sup> Ibid p 59

waters from Cutch to Cochin in face of opposition not only from the British but also from the Portuguese and the Dutch. The name of the Maharatha admiral Kanhoji Angre shines in the Indian naval history for having the honour of defeating the combined Portuguese and British naval fleet in 1722, besides having defeated all the European power individually in a number of encounters with them during his life time.<sup>42</sup>The Marathas finally gave way in 1749.

In 1805 when the French fleet was annihilated at Trafalgar, the last traces of their challenge to the British naval force were removed and, with the establishment of their bases at all the strategic points the Indian Ocean virtually became a British "lake".<sup>43</sup> It remained so till 1941 when the British supremacy of the seas was challenged by Japan. Japan broke open the eastern gates of the "Lake" (Malacca and Singapore) and with this crumbled the strategic structure (Albuquerque model) built by the British over the years for the control of the Indian Ocean.

The British were unable to regain their control of the Indian Ocean even after they had recovered their possessions after the War because by then two great naval powers – Russia and the US – had emerged to replace Japan and with an economy shattered by war it was impossible for Great Britain to match the naval strength of the Super powers. The subsequent power struggle in the Indian Ocean after World War II and its impact on the naval aspect of our defence is dealt with in the next chapter.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid 61-62

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p 72

## **PRESENT BIG POWERS RIVALRY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN**

In the previous chapter we have seen what great influence sea power had on the history of India in the past. We have seen that while the control of the Indian Ocean alternated between the European powers, depending on which of them was the dominant sea power in Europe, the control over the Indian Empire was directly related to the control over the Indian Ocean. In fact “the true appreciation of Indian historical forces will show beyond doubt that whoever controls the Indian Ocean has India at her mercy”. It was only when the British converted the Indian Ocean into their private “lake” that they were able to completely subjugate India. It is in the light of the lessons of the past that we must view the present day power struggle in the Indian Ocean.

### **The Vacuum**

Before we go on to analyse the interests of the various powers engaged in the struggle for the control of the Indian Ocean, it would only be appropriate to discuss the most talked about Vacuum, that is said to have been created as a result of the British withdrawal from their bases in the Indian Ocean. A proper understanding of the situation created by the British withdrawal is necessary for us to make a correct assessment of our interests and tasks in the Indian Ocean.

As has been explained earlier the British were not able to regain their earlier position in the Indian Ocean even after they had recovered their possessions (bases) after the War. Bases are only a means for establishing control and not the end by themselves. Bases without requisite naval strength are in fact useless. It was after this realisation – though rather late – that the British, who had been reduced to a third-rate naval power after the War, decided to abandon their bases in the Indian Ocean. This makes mockery of all the talk of a power vacuum having been created after the British withdrawal. It was termed as a vacuum probably to give the Americans a pretext for establishing their bases; for vacuum implies that it must be filled.

There has, in fact, never a period of vacuum in the Indian Ocean. In the past it has just been a case of ascendancy of one power over the other – of the British over the Portuguese, of the Japanese over the British and finally of the US over the Japanese. In the present context vacuum is an impossibility. While vacuum implies that it must be filled it also implies that once filled by a power, the use of the Ocean is denied to others. Such a situation cannot be imagined in the present times. There has been a big change in the nature and extent to which control over the Ocean that any power may exercise. The absolute control of an Ocean by a single power is now no longer possible. This is because Albuquerque type of strategy is now difficult to implement. The present world order does not permit occupation of foreign kinds for this purpose. The entrances to the Indian Ocean are today controlled by the respective sovereign, independent littoral states which have become immune to attack by even the biggest power, due to the existing global balance of power. Moreover due to the technological developments in the naval equipment, bases are no longer as important as they used to be in the past. A naval power may now make its presence felt in an ocean where it has just one or two bases and even where it has none at all. In any case the fluid state of relationships between the big powers and the littoral states, make it difficult for the Big Powers to depend on the bases provided by these states. Under these changed conditions, therefore, no power can prevent or even restrict the operation of another in any ocean; including the Indian Ocean. Where then is the question of a vacuum and the necessity of filling it? What the requirement really amounts to is the maintenance of balance of power on sea, as is done on land. It is important for us to understand this as it absolves us of the responsibility of filling the vacuum; the very thought of which has made many in India to shudder.

### **Naval Presence**

In order to understand the present peace time Big Powers rivalry in the Indian Ocean, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the different missions that are performed by naval forces during war because their peace-time activities are related to their war time missions. Some of the missions during war are: -

- (a) strategic deterrence;
- (b) sea denial and sea assertion; and
- (c) projection of power ashore.



Strategic deterrence implies the ability of the navy to deliver nuclear weapons deep inland in enemy territory. This capability would deter an enemy from using his strategic atomic weapons. Sea denial and sea assertion are forms of sea control. The sea denial mission imposes on the naval forces of nation the responsibility of preventing the enemy from performing his tasks in the sea, while assertive sea control implies an ability of a naval force to launch attacks on enemy shores. Sea control is also a prerequisite for projection of power ashore. The gaining of sea control is, therefore, the main concern of naval forces during war.

The control of the sea may be categorised as (a) Absolute Control, where only one side has the freedom to operate; (b) Working Control where a dominant side can operate with a high degree of freedom, while the other side may operate only under great risk; and (c) Control in Dispute where both sides operate under great risks. In the situation of Control in Dispute, arises the necessity of establishing Working Control in limited areas, for limited periods, in order to conduct specific operations.

During peace, or shall we say cold war, the main task of the naval forces is, what is known as naval presence. This is the activity that, in fact, concerns us today. The main aims of naval presence are as under: -

- (a) To make a show of a country's readiness for decisive action and also its capability of performing its missions of war.
- (b) To deter the adversary from pursuing activities hostile to ones country through the threat of retaliation implied in naval presence.
- (c) To improve one's international authority.
- (d) To influence local wars.
- (e) To make visible demonstration of force for putting political pressure on other states; as a coercive aspect of "gun boat diplomacy".
- (f) Assure support to friendly countries.
- (g) To make contact with other countries for winning friends and mutual relations for furthering one's trade interests or for the establishment of spheres of influence. This, in fact, forms the civil aspect of naval presence.

The results of naval presence are not always tangible and are, therefore, difficult to appreciate. It is, however, very important to understand the potentialities of naval presence; not only for organising one's own naval presence, but also for a proper assessment of the intentions of others.

In pursuance of the policy of naval presence, there arises the requirement for naval bases in the area of operations. This is more so applicable to outside powers. Stressing the importance of bases, Admiral Mahan writes that ships of nations without adequate over-sea bases were like "land birds unable to fly far from their shores". Although land bases do not have the same importance today as they had during the days of Mahan, due the vast improvement in the endurance of the sea vessels and also in the techniques of supply and replenishment, they are still important in as much as they add to the economic and administrative convenience of a naval power. Lack of bases may not have, for instance, prevented the Soviet Union (Russia) from making its naval presence in the Indian Ocean, but the maintenance of its floating bases or the necessity for long train of tankers and other administrative ships to accompany its task forces must be extremely inconvenient to it. Little wonder that one of the major aspects of Big Powers rivalry in the Indian Ocean is the general scramble for base facilities.

### **American Interests**

The main American interest in the Indian Ocean appears to be that related to the protection of oil that flows through it. Referring to the Gulf in its Annual Strategic Review, (1975), the US Defence Secretary explained the US interests as keeping the area "out of unfriendly hands". Further highlighting the importance of the area to the United States, Mr Henry Kissinger is reported to have said: "There are no circumstances where we would not use force, if the oil producers threatened the strangulation of the Industrial world". These intentions demand that the United States adopt policies of sea denial and sea assertion and even that of projection of power ashore (against the recalcitrant oil producers) during the war. Consequently, there becomes the requirement of their naval presence during peace. In fact, this is how the presence of the United States naval forces in the Indian Ocean is being officially justified. As the US commitments and interests in the region are likely to bring it into

clash with the Soviet Union on the other side, the United States is striving to make its naval presence such that it gives it the capability of deploying large forces at short notice.

This, however, is not the only reason for the American naval presence in the Indian Ocean. The United States certainly has political aims for this naval presence. One such aim is exerting political pressure by “showing the flag”. This role of the United States naval force became clearer during the Indo-Pak war of 1971. Such naval movements were also made during the Arab-Israeli wars.

Naval presence in the Indian Ocean is also important for the United States for the strategic deterrent mission of its naval forces. Earlier due to the limited ranges of the nuclear ballistic missiles fired from the submarine, such weapons had to be located in the Arctic Ocean, in order to bring targets in the Soviet Union within range. Now with the development of the Poseidon and Polaris A3 missiles, which have much larger ranges, submarines for firing them on to targets in the Soviet Union, can be located in the more convenient warm waters of the Indian Ocean. To ensure the reliability and dependability of such a strategic deterrence, it is but natural that these submarines be located around bases which are free from political complications. Whatever the Americans may say about their aim in establishing the Diego Garcia base in the Chagos archipelago, it is quite obvious that it is meant to provide a secure base to such submarines. The security of the Diego Garcia base lies in the fact that it has no native population, (whatever little there was having been evacuated to other islands), and it is therefore, not susceptible to nationalistic upsurges, as are other bases in the region.

The United States also claims to be the protector of its allies in Europe. Their interests must, therefore, automatically become American interests. These countries have interests not only in the security of their oil supplies but also in Africa. Africa is strategically and economically, (as sources of raw material), important to Europe. So important, in fact, that Karl Haushofer, the great German geopolitician, while dividing the world into self contained “pan-regions”, for sharing the gifts of nature more equitably than is permitted by the present nation-state system, had clubbed Africa with Europe. Today Europe is threatened with Africa going under the influence of China and Russia. By exploiting the anti-colonial feelings in Africa and the general appeal of communism to the poor, Russia and China have already out-matched the efforts of Britain and France to retain their hold over Africa. The control of the Indian Ocean, which provides to Russia and China easy access to a large number of African states, is important for the Western powers. The influence of Russia and China could be considerably curtailed through control of the Indian Ocean by Western powers: which really means control by the United States. Even if the Americans have no interest of their own, as apparently they do not seem to have, they must keep up their naval presence in the Indian Ocean, if only to serve the economic and strategic interests of Europe in Africa.

Besides interests in Africa, America has vital interests in the Indian Sub Continent. The countries of the Indian Sub Continent are important to it from the point of view of its “containment” (of Russia and China), policy as envisaged in the Truman Doctrine. They are also important (especially India) from the global balance of power point of view. America knows too well, as, indeed, do Russia and China, that the influence in the Indian Sub Continent by an external power is directly related to its control of the Indian Ocean.

The United States’ naval forces for the Indian Ocean form part of the Seventh Pacific Fleet, operating from the Subic Bay in the Philippines. Although the United States have a number of friends among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, the only bases to which her forces have a free access is Bahrain in the Persian Gulf and, of course, Diego Garcia. The facility at Bahrain is being withdrawn in view of the responsibility for the protection of the Persian Gulf being taken over by pro-west Iran. The base at Diego Garcia (as good as its own territory) is being developed to such an extent as would make it capable of supporting, by itself, all the United States’ naval missions in the Indian Ocean. As part of the global communication net-work, the United States had set up communications at Asmara (Ethiopia) and Woomera (Australia). The Asmara station is being wound up – apparently voluntarily. Probably the one they now have in Diego Garcia has made the one in Asmara redundant. South Africa is believed to have offered to the US the use of its naval base at Simon Town, which was previously being used by Britain under an agreement that has since lapsed. Although the offer has been declined due to political reasons, the base is always available to the United States’ naval forces for use in event of an emergency.

## **Russian Interests**

In a letter to the UN Secretary General in June, 1974, the permanent representative of the USSR explained the Soviet interests in the Indian Ocean thus: -

“The Soviet Union has never had, has not had established and is not now establishing any military or naval bases in the Indian Ocean ..... It must be borne in mind that the transit routes from the European part of the USSR to the Soviet Far East pass through the Indian Ocean and that accordingly in order to ensure the safe passage of ships and vessels, the Soviet Union is conducting scientific investigations in the region”.

There can be little doubt that the prime Soviet interest in the Indian Ocean, (and a fully justified one), is the security of the vital link, (through the Indian Ocean), between their Western and the Eastern fleets. But that their activity in relation to this vital interest is confined only to “scientific investigations in the region” is difficult to swallow. For this a more appropriate strategy would be naval presence during peace to indicate Russia’s resolve to keep this vital link intact, (through sea assertion), during war. This would appear to be what the Soviet Union is aiming at with the present naval presence in the Indian Ocean – the statements by its officials to the contrary notwithstanding. It is also natural that the Soviet Union should be seeking base facilities among the littoral states for its naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately for her she does not seem to be making much headway in this regard. It is possible that its support to the demand of the littoral states for the withdrawal of all foreign bases is for this reason. Evidently the Soviet Union is prepared to surrender what it does not have.

The naval presence of the Soviet Union also becomes necessary because of the obvious American intentions, (or the mere capability), of deploying nuclear ballistic missiles carrying submarines in the region. The other strategic requirement of the Soviet Union, that is being sought to be fulfilled by her naval presence in the Indian Ocean, is the keeping of the entrances to the Indian ocean open; against the threat of closure not only by the United States but also by the littoral states having sovereign rights over them. The claims of Malaysia and Indonesia of sovereign rights over the Straits of Malacca is an example of this problem faced not only by Russia but all the other outside powers, including the United States. Interestingly the Soviet Union and the United States are acting united in ensuring the neutrality and freedom of use of these important waterways.

It is also difficult to believe that the Soviet Union has no political interests among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean for which her naval presence in the Ocean becomes necessary . Admiral Gorshkov, the commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy has in his writings high-lighted the political benefits of naval presence – the most important being that the naval visits could carry the truth about communist ideology and culture and the Soviet way of life to the people of other states. The littoral states being mostly underdeveloped, and their people being the poorest in the world, contain the most fertile conditions for the spread of communism. It is difficult to believe that the Soviet Union is not making the best of the situation. That the Soviet has, in fact, this aim in view is evident from its efforts to gain influence among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, particularly the East African states. Some facilities in these countries could be more depended upon if bound by ideology that otherwise and the Soviet Union is definitely trying to establish this bond. Ironically the challenge to the Soviet Union in its efforts for gaining influence in these countries comes not from the Western Powers but from China. As a matter of fact, with the handicap of their past record of exploitation and their continued support to the white minority, the Western Powers are running a losing race in Africa. But China’s ideology and its willingness to help the African countries in their development programmes poses a challenge to the spread of Soviet influence among these states. Control in the Indian Ocean is necessary for Russia to protect its interests in Africa.

If the Indian Sub Continent is important to the United States in the implementation of its global strategy against the Soviet Union, the Indian Sub Continent automatically becomes important for the Soviet Union too. Consequently the control of the Indian Ocean, on this account alone, is as important for the Soviet Union as it is for the United States or China, the other contestant in the Big Power rivalry on the Indian Sub Continent.

The Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean, are reported to be operating from Vladivostok. There is little denying the fact that although the Soviet Union is making all out efforts to secure base facilities in the littoral states, she has not met with much success because of the unstable politics of these states. This is apparent from the fact that much of the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean is in the form of oilers and support ships. For base facilities the Soviet union is still mostly

dependent on her "floating bases" ( a network of mooring buoys). The only worthwhile foot-hold in the littoral states that the Soviet Union has acquired is at Berbera in Somalia where she has constructed a communication centre and which the Western Powers feel is likely to be converted into a military base for use by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is also believed to be trying to gain access to Mozambique's well developed port facilities. Most of the Soviet naval presence is centred around the Horn region of Africa, because of its command of the Suez route and also probably to keep the American nuclear ballistic missiles carrying submarines from getting too close to the Soviet Union. It could also be a reaction to the American naval concentration in this north western region of the Indian Ocean.

### **The Chinese Interests**

Although the Chinese, till now, have no presence in the Indian Ocean, there can be little doubt that they have plenty of interests in the region. The reason for her absence in the Indian Ocean is probably that her navy even though growing at a rapid pace, is not yet in a position to take on the task of naval presence here.

The Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean are primarily political, but as a cover plan they have made out a case for their strategic interest also. A bogey of a threat from Russia has been created as a justification for naval activity in the Indian Ocean. The Chinese believe, or want others to believe, that the Soviet Union is following a policy of encirclement of China and the Soviet Union efforts at gaining control over the Indian Ocean - particularly the eastern entries - form part of this encirclement. While China today lacks the naval strength to challenge the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean directly, she is pursuing an indirect strategy to accomplish her aim. The open opposition to the freedom of the High Seas, support to Indonesia and Malaysia in the controversy over the Straits of Malacca, diplomatic recognition of the strategic Islands of Mauritius and Maldives, and her diligent efforts at cultivating her influence in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean through economic and military aid in competition with the Soviet Union are all part of this indirect strategy.

It would appear that the Chinese interest in the Indian Ocean stem mainly from her political interests in Africa. In this context the words of the Vice Premier Ten Hsiao ping in his speech before the United Nations General Assembly session in April 1974, are worth noting. Speaking of the strategic and intrinsic worth of the developing countries, he said: -

“ These countries cover vast territories encompassing a large population and abound in natural resources ..... they constitute a revolutionary motive force propelling the world of history .....we have every reason to unite more closely.....”

It is this interest in the developing countries of Africa that has brought her in conflict with the Soviet Union, (which has similar interests), and not any threat of encirclement, as she is trying to make out.

The bogey of encirclement is apparently being created to justify what would otherwise appear to be her expansionism. Indeed, she has the covert ambitions of becoming a world power, and sea power is one of its prerequisites. In keeping with China's declared policy of fomenting world revolution, (meaning, in fact, domination by Peking), China also knows that the control of the Indian Ocean is necessary for her to be able to influence events in the Indian Sub Continent. Counter encirclement is being used as a pretext for expanding her naval force so rapidly as she is doing.

### **The Sum Total**

The balance sheet of naval presence in the Indian Ocean is heavily in favour of the Western Powers. Their greatest advantage is the base at Diego Garcia, which is as good as American territory. They also have the solid support of Australia and South Africa, which countries are not susceptible to political fluctuations. Besides these, Iran, Pakistan and a good many Arab countries are decidedly pro-West. In comparison, Russia is still struggling for bases and friends among the littoral states. She has developed some influence in East African countries like Somalia and Mozambique but the relationships still appear to be volatile.

The capabilities of each of the Big Powers must not, however, be judged by the quantum of its naval presence, or the number of its bases in the region. The naval presence, as has already been

explained, is only meant to threaten and to show the intent and resolve of a nation to use its naval force for protecting its interests. The quantum of force that is threatened to be used, is not merely what constitutes the naval presence, but the entire naval strength of that nation. The bases may also be acquired by force at the start of the war, which none of the littoral powers are in a position to resist. The capabilities of each of the Big Powers must be seen in this context. What is going to decide the issue in the Indian Ocean is not the number of ship-days, (number of ships multiplied by the number of days they spend in the Ocean), that each of the Big Powers has to its credit, (as representative of its naval presence in the Ocean), but the general global balance of power between them. In view of the global balance of power that exists today, neither side can expect to gain anything more than 'Control in Dispute' in the Indian Ocean, their present state of 'Naval Presence' notwithstanding.

With the Super Powers balancing each other, the chances of a world conflagration have greatly diminished and regional or local wars appear to be emerging as the new pattern of international conflict. This is equally applicable to the Indian Ocean region. Only the maintenance of proper regional balance of power can, therefore, ensure regional peace in the Indian Ocean.

## INDIAN INTERESTS

Admiral AT Mahan, the famous exponent of the philosophy of sea power, has said that sea power is vital to national growth, prosperity and security. Obviously, sea power has been used here in its broadest sense to include both the capability of exploiting the sea for economic ends as well as of providing national security. However, while every country strives for national growth, prosperity and security, not all countries are bestowed with geographical factors that go to make a sea power. We in India are fortunate to have been favoured by nature in providing us with all the factors that go to make a sea power; the geographical location, the physical conformation, (the character of the coastline and the inland soil), the extent of territory, (supported by population, resources and other factors of power), population and national character, (desire for trade and sea faring). All that is required is government support to complete the list of factors as enunciated by Mahan.

Our defence interests in the Indian Ocean, therefore, emerge mainly from our economic interests. Our major defence interests are protection of our trade routes and the protection of our maritime activity connected with the exploitation of the sea for food, oil, minerals and some day even energy sources. With our land routes completely blocked, we are very vulnerable to an economic strangulation at sea. We must, therefore, keep our sea routes open at all costs. Equally important is the protection of our sources of oil supplies. In event of a war, when the Arabs would probably stop our oil supplies, our own oil at Bombay High and the prospective oil fields in the Palk Straits and the Bay of Bengal, would remain the only sources of our supply ( or at least the major sources of our supply). Oil being vitally important, not only for the economy but also for sustaining the war effort, protection of our oil interests in the Indian Ocean would, therefore, form a major defence interest. Our defence interests must also include the security of our coastline. Because of the dominating position of India, her coastline provides ideal naval bases for the control of the Indian Ocean. We need to secure our coastline, not only for our own use but also to prevent the enemy from using it by force. The coastline has also to be protected to prevent the enemy from using it for launching an attack on the mainland from the sea in conjunction with his offensive on land.

What all our defence interest involve is the development of a capability for the control of the seas, to include Sea Assertion as well as Sea Denial. It will probably not be possible for us to achieve Absolute Control but Control in dispute would not serve our purpose either. The degree of the control of the sea that we would require for meeting our defence requirement would have to be at least Working Control in our favour. This would amount to a colossal task but we have no other alternative but to achieve it.

While on the subject of Indian interests in the Indian Ocean, it would be appropriate to discuss here firstly the effects of the so called vacuum on our naval defence preparedness, and secondly the concept of Peace Zone in the Indian Ocean, which India is championing along with other littoral states and see how far this is able to serve our national interests.

### Effects of Vacuum

In the last chapter we have seen how the boggy of a vacuum having been created after the British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean was cooked up to give America an excuse for filling it. Unfortunately the so called vacuum has also had some effect on the thinking of some in India and somewhat confused the correct appreciation of our tasks and responsibilities in the sea. There is a school of thought which, believes in the vacuum theory as a reality, and advocates it being filled by India to ensure our security at sea. There is another school of thought which, probably terrified by the colossal task of filling the vacuum, advocates a purely defensive strategy "strictly coastal and shore based". Both these schools of thought appear to be completely off the mark.

The withdrawal of the British from the Indian Ocean has not created any new situation for us. For us the situation changed in 1947 itself after we attained freedom. The responsibility for the security at sea passed on to us when the British left the Indian Sub Continent; just as did the responsibility for our defence on land. That over the years after Independence we continued to take the British protection at sea for granted and got away with it, does not in any way prove the soundness of our naval policy. Today, (as it has been since the day of our Independence), what is pertinent to our formulation of naval policy is not the so called vacuum but our obligations towards the establishment of a regional balance of power in the Indian Ocean which alone can ensure, not only our security, but also the freedom to exploit the economic benefits of the sea. The concept of vacuum

(if at all there is one) is relevant only to the Big Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean and should in no way affect us.

It is also not clear what is exactly meant by the "strictly coastal and shore based" naval strategy. In its literal sense it would aim at giving a purely defensive character to our strategy. It must be remembered that we not only have to protect our selves against invasion from the sea, but also have to use the sea ourselves. A strictly coastal and shore based strategy would not permit us the freedom to use the sea. The concept of Defence as known to the army is not applicable to the navy. It would be a sad day for India if it were to start thinking defensively at sea.

### **Peace Zone Concept**

The proposal to declare Indian Ocean as a zone of peace can be traced to the conference of non-aligned nations held in Cairo in 1964. The concept has since then made its appearance in all the subsequent conferences of the non aligned nations as also the various communiqués issued at the end of the bilateral meetings of heads of states of non aligned countries. The climax was reached when the non aligned countries were able to get the resolution, entitled "Consideration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace", passed in the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1971. The Resolution called upon the great powers to consult the littoral states of the Indian Ocean with a view to: -

- (a) halting the further escalation and expansion of their military presence in the Indian Ocean;
- (b) eliminating from the Indian Ocean all the bases, military installations and logistic supply facilities, the disposition of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction and any manifestations of Great Power rivalry.

The Resolution is excellently worded fully meets the wishes of the littoral States. But wishes are not horses and so the beggars cannot ride. Even after over six years of its passing the Resolution is yet to be implemented. As a matter of fact the Big Powers to whom the Resolution is addressed have shown scant regard (if not total contempt) for it.

It would appear that the idea of preserving the Indian Ocean as a Zone of peace is nothing but a political gimmick and at best wishful thinking on the part of militarily weak littoral states. Who would not want to have a Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean but is it possible? If it were possible to establish peace zones then why only in the Indian Ocean and why not all over the world in all the oceans? The concept is obviously impracticable. It envisages the withdrawal of all the bases in the Ocean which are occupied by outside powers. But would they oblige. Even if the outside powers were to oblige and vacate, it would not mean that they would lose their capability to re-enter the Ocean at will during a war or a crisis. The move of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet (or a part thereof) from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean during the Indo-Pak war of 1971 is but an example of this capability. Nor would their withdrawal prevent a war in this Ocean. Any war between the Big Powers elsewhere is bound to spread to the Indian Ocean; as indeed it would to all the other regions of the world. The security of the Indian Ocean is, quite obviously, linked with the security of all the other regions of the world and cannot, therefore, be considered in isolation.

The Peace Zone concept appears to be based on the impression that presence of armed forces causes tension between nations and increases chances of a war. Under this impression it appears logical to assume that tension would ease with the withdrawal of armed forces. In fact, however, it is the other way round. Tension comes first with clash of interests and is followed by the armed forces into that region. If, therefore, tensions between nations are removed, the armed forces would automatically vacate. As long as tensions, (even those that have nothing to do with the Indian Ocean as such), between Big Powers remain, it would be impossible for them to isolate the Indian Ocean from their global strategy. The recent talks between the United States and the Soviet Union over the Indian Ocean must be viewed in this light and too much must not be expected from them. Neither side is likely to give way till major world issues between them are solved.

In any case the presence of the two super powers in the Indian Ocean does not in any way effect our strategy, as both tend to balance each other. If the US Seventh Fleet did not intervene against India during the Indo-Pak war of 1971 as threatened, it was more because of the Sixth Russian Fleet, which rushed in to our support, than any US goodwill towards India. The real sources

of threat to us are some regional powers and not the Super Powers. So even if the concept of Peace zone in the Indian Ocean could be put into practice, it would not solve our problem of security in the region. It would also not eliminate the threat from China which, though not a regional power has the capability of operating in the Indian Ocean and of carrying any war with India on land into the sea. The biggest danger of our belief in the concept of Peace Zone in the Indian Ocean lies in it making us complacent in our efforts to develop our sea power. We may, if we so wish, pursue this high ideal in the hope that someday it might be realised, but it must not prevent us from preparing against the realities of today. There are no short cuts in security and development. The only way for India to look after its interests in the Indian Ocean is to develop its sea power as enunciated by Admiral AK Chatterji thus: -

“A flourishing merchant fleet, a sea-faring community, a commerce minded people, and a navy capable of defending our shipping at sea.”

### **Balance of Power for Peace**

All nations engage themselves in serving their economic and political interests and human beings and nations being what they are, such pursuits are bound to lead to clash of interests. Clash of interests in turn gives rise to international disputes. In the absence of an International authority that could not only arbitrate but also enforce its verdicts, war remains to be the only means for settling such disputes. However war will not break out unless one of the parties to the dispute feels (a) that the national interest involved is so important that war would be worthwhile and (b) that it has a good chance of winning the war. The only way of preventing a war, therefore, would be for them to develop mutual deterrents for war, which would ensure success to neither side and make wars not worthwhile; no matter how important the national interests involved. Balance of power between contending parties is a method of ensuring this deterrent. Whatever peace that exists today is because of the balance of power that obtains between potential enemies. Conversely all wars result directly from military imbalances between parties at dispute. All countries, therefore, base their defence policies on the concept of balance of power. Indeed many cases of international behaviour that are otherwise inexplicable become easier to understand when viewed in the light of the concept of balance of power.

What is good for others should be good for us also and our defence policy should also be based on the concept of balance of power; both on land as well as at sea. However unfortunately for us if there is anything that evokes general indignation in our country, it is a reference to the concept of balance of power. No wonder that our defence policy has all along been so unrealistic. This became more than evident during its greatest hour of trial in 1962. The Chinese literal walk over was due to the complete failure of our defence policy. The statements of our leaders, (who were responsible for shaping our defence policy), in Parliament and elsewhere, to explain the causes of the national disaster only go to prove that our defence policy was basically wrong. We had completely ignored the great imbalance of power that existed between us and the Chinese – an imbalance that was a virtual invitation to the Chinese to attack us. Statements like “we had prepared for a particular strength of the enemy but the enemy came in greater number” and “we were stabbed in the back” only reflected the hollowness of our defence policy. Had we based our defence policy on the concept of balance of power, we would have prepared against the correct strength of the enemy and the question of the Chinese stabbing us in the back would not have arisen.

We have certainly moved a long way since that fateful year and in the right direction too, but hesitancy in defence preparedness, so characteristic of our defence planners still persists. This is more so marked in preparedness in the naval aspect of our defence. No doubt our naval forces have successfully fought two wars since then, but having been successful so far does not necessarily mean success under all the other sets of circumstances. Can we for instance be sure that our naval policy will stand the test of the circumstances of a more positive collusion between Pakistan, China and Iran? It would appear that our naval policy is far from being based on the concept of balance of power with our potential enemies at sea. One reason for that could be our lack of understanding of the concept and the consequent hatred for it. Balance of Power is generally associated with the Imperialistic wars of the past, and, therefore, shunned. In absence of the basis of balance of power, the threat to the security of the country, (including that from the sea), tends to be assessed on the basis of the political situation existing at that



time and the defence effort is allowed to wax and wane with the changes in the political situation. The other reason probably is that our naval policy, when viewed in the light of the concept of balance of power, shows up such deficiencies in our preparedness as would require a colossal effort to make up and the easier course of avoiding the problem is, therefore, followed. With the Super Powers balancing each other the chances of a world war have greatly diminished. The chances of regional wars can likewise be eliminated only by creating a regional balance of power. India's interests in the Indian Ocean, (as they do on land) lie in seeking to establish a regional balance of power both for security as well as peace. Are we going to wait for a debacle at sea to appreciate this basic concept of defence?

The concept of balance of power implies that the armed strengths of potential enemies be so balanced as to deter one to take recourse to war for settling disputes with the other. The forces being balanced, decisive victory is assured to neither ; making wars pointless. The balance of power not only makes the chances of victory 50:50, but also threatens to cripple the marginal victor, if any, so badly that neither side is tempted to take a chance with war. This forms the basis of the Risk Theory as propounded by Admiral Tirpitz – of making one's navy so strong as to make it risky, even for the strongest (hostile) force to try and destroy it. In our case "the strongest force" pertains to our potential regional enemies only. Balance of Power is, therefore, the only policy directed towards peace and must form the basis of defence policies of all peace loving nations – most of all India.

It must, however, be borne in mind that balancing of naval power is not just a numbers game. A purely quantitative comparison would not give the correct picture of the balance or imbalance. It is more a comparison of capabilities of the opposing forces in relation to their respective tasks or missions. Working out the exact strength and the type of naval equipment that would be required for striking a balance of power with our potential enemies is, therefore, a highly technical matter which is best left to naval experts. What has been attempted in succeeding chapters is a very broad assessment of the nature of the threat and our general requirement for meeting this threat.

## THE NATURE OF THE THREAT

Although many countries are seen to be taking active interest in the Indian Ocean, their presence need not, in all cases, be taken to mean a threat to us. Threat arises only when there is a clash of interests. So the countries with whom we have no clash of interests do not pose any threat to us. We have, for instance no clash of interests with Britain or France and they are likely to remain neutral in our conflicts with any of our potential enemies. The two Super Powers, on the other hand, are likely to play their usual role of suppliers of war materials to their respective sides and of keeping the war localised by providing each other with mutual deterrents.

The threats against which we have to prepare comes to us, as things stand today, only from our chronic rivals on land – Pakistan and China. For, by now we should have known that, with the nature of modern wars being what it is, threat on land is automatically a threat on the sea. In a war with Pakistan while Pakistan may expect active support from her regional friends, we must be prepared to fight all by ourselves. In our war with China, which is a source of menace to many other countries, we are, however, likely to have sympathisers and friends. But how many of them would risk a confrontation with China for our sake is a matter of conjecture.

### Pakistan

It would appear that due to political compulsions Pakistan must remain a perpetual source of threat to India. The fact is that having been founded on hatred for the Hindus, this hatred is still a very convenient handle in the hands of the poor Pakistani leadership, to drive their people with. No amount of Simla spirit will help as long as the Pakistani politician has no ideology to offer to his people. Due to the political instability in the country, the Pakistani politician seems to have no other way out either. Leadership in Pakistan has changed hands so many times, but each time her rulers have had to take support of the boggy of a threat from India. 'Jehad' in Kashmir has been tried by some of them to earn for themselves permanent rulership in Pakistan. Now when the people are still smarting under the ignominious defeat at the hands of the Indians in 1971, the promise of revenge, has been used by the politicians as a means for staying in power. In fact this formed the basis for political power of Bhutto. In this regard his remarks at an interview with the Washington Post after the 1971 war, that "the last war was a freak of history" and that "any one who [in India] forgets the invasions from the mountains of the north on the plains of Delhi does so at his peril" are very significant. Bhutto is famous for playing to the gallery. His remarks, therefore, signify the mood of the people Pakistan which its leadership was out to exploit. It is too early to comment on the political situation in Pakistan under General Zia ul Haq. If he is able to set up a stable political setup, the Pakistani attitude towards India might change. The fact, however, still remains that we cannot afford to lower guard.

As per the latest information the Pakistani Navy comprises of: -

- (a) 3 submarines Daphne class
- (b) 5 submarines SX -404 midget
- (c) 2 Light Cruiser (Training ship)
- (d) 4 Destroyers
- (e) 1 Frigate
- (f) 19 patrol boats (ex Chinese, 7 Huchwan Hydrofoil, 12 Shanghai class)
- (g) 7 Coastal Minesweepers.

Having lost her commitments (East Pakistan) in the Bay of Bengal, the entire fleet is now available to her for operation in the Arabian Sea. Compared with the Indian naval strength the Pakistani naval strength is not much but with its strength of 8 submarines, it does possess an appreciable sea denial capability in the Arabian Sea. Furthermore her geography enables her to unite with her allies - Iran and some Arab countries – without a threat of interference from India. Together they effectively control the northern part of the Arabian Sea.

### Iran

Apparently we have no dispute with Iran, but her role (recently acquired) as a protector of Pakistan could bring us in conflict with her, in case of our war with Pakistan. In order to check the further trend of her territorial disintegration, Pakistan has virtually thrown herself in the lap of Iran. Iran

is not likely to miss this opportunity of converting Pakistan into a permanent military ally, (if political vassal is too strong a word), in view of her new found ambition of regional domination. In order to become a dominant sea power, Iran needs Pakistan geographically to get out of her bottled up position in the Persian Gulf. Ostensibly Iran's quest for power is for reasons of national security. The Persian Gulf is an area of great strategic importance in view of the large quantities of oil that flow through it and thus a bone of contention in the Big Powers rivalry. The area has been so far under the protection of first the British and then the Americans, from their famous Bahrain base. The Americans now being in the process of vacating the Bahrain base, it could be argued that the responsibility for the protection of the Persian Gulf devolves squarely on Iran – the only regional power capable of doing so. There is, however, more to it than meets the eye. Evidently the Iranian build up is related to American interests – both global as well as regional. Having had to withdraw from the Gulf region, obviously under political pressure, the next best thing for the United States is the takeover of the control of this area by a friendly regional state like Iran. As a regional interest, the massive Iranian build up would tilt the regional balance of power in favour of regional American allies. The United States has realised that due to the deterrence provided by the other Super Power, she cannot influence regional wars. During the Indo-Pak war of 1971 she found herself to be a helpless spectator while the Pakistani navy was being mauled by the Indian Navy. She could not intervene even after having moved a task force into the Indian Ocean for fear of retaliation by Russia. Iran is probably being built up to do what she could not herself do. India must not allow the balance of power to tilt in favour of the Pak-Iran combination, as that would give support to Pakistan's bellicosity. Our efforts at restoring the balance would, it is hoped, not affect the good relations that exist between India and Iran.

The present ( 1977-78) Iranian naval strength is as under: -

- (a) 3 Destroyers ( 1 with sea Cat and all with standard Surface to Air Missiles)
- (b) 4 Frigates with MK 2 Sea Killer Surface to Surface Missiles and Sea Cat Surface to Air Missiles.
- (c) 4 Corvettes (ex US patrol Frigates)
- (d) 20 Patrol Boats
- (e) 5 Mine Sweepers
- (f) 2 Landing Ships and 2 landing Craft.
- (g) 2 Support Ships
- (h) 14 Hovercraft
- (i) 3 Tang Class submarines, 4 Spruance Class Destroyers, 12 FBPG with Exocet Surface to Surface Missiles and two Landing Craft are on order

It would appear that the present strength of the Iranian Navy is not such as to tilt the balance in favour of Pakistan. But Iran intends to build up a much larger force with the most modern equipment. According to reports the Iranian navy is likely to be built up to a strength of 19 most modern warships and a significant submarine task force. Iran is also contemplating the acquisition of an aircraft carrier. The action radius of these vessels is expected to enable them to reach the shores of India. As an indication of the intentions of Iran, the Shah's remarks in 1972 that the security perimeter of Iran no longer stops at the Straits of Hormuz, is significant. Of greater significance is the fact that Iran has undertaken the construction of a huge naval base at Chah Bahar near the border of Pakistan evidently to enable her to enlarge her "security perimeter"

In event of hostilities with India, Iran can use her entire naval force against her. Iran's only worthwhile rival in the region is Iraq, but with an extremely short coastline and consequently an insignificant naval force, Iraq is not in a position to pose any serious challenge to Iran. As a matter of fact Iraq's continued efforts to develop her land communications to the Mediterranean through Syria and Turkey are indications that she does not intend to stand up to Iran in the Persian Gulf. Any suggestion that Iran is building up her navy against Russia can at best be termed as naive. While considering a threat to us from Pakistan we must, therefore, add up to it the threat from the entire Iranian Navy. It is a matter of consolation for us that, in her ambition to become a major naval power in the Indian Ocean, geography is against her. On her own she may at the most dominate the northern part of the Arabian Sea and only a little further south by using Pakistani bases, but she can never dominate the entire Indian Ocean as India is in a position to do.

## China

Just as is the case with Pakistan, there cannot be a thaw in our relations with China in any foreseeable future. India's growth as a democracy and as a military power is a direct threat to the Chinese ideology and a stumbling block in their policy of expansionism through world Revolution. China knows too well that with her size and population India alone has the potential to stand up to her designs. India's growth as an independent power is also a source of strength to smaller countries in the region that are trying to resist Chinese domination. China must, therefore, keep up her efforts to check this growth. In pursuance of this policy she has gone to the extent of supporting not only Pakistan (enemy's enemy) but also Iran (enemy's enemy's friend); with which countries she has nothing in common except hatred for India. If, therefore, wars are a continuation of politics by other means" then China – India military confrontation is inevitable. We must not spurn the hand of friendship if and when it is offered by China, but such overtures must not make us complacent.

In Chapter III we have seen what interests China has in the Indian Ocean and how she is trying to develop her navy fast to give it the capability of naval presence in the Indian Ocean. The time she is likely to take in developing the capability of entering the Indian Ocean in a big way should be utilised by us to prepare against the future Chinese challenge at sea. It does not take time for wars to start but it certainly takes time to build a navy.

The threat from the Chinese comes to us not because of any clash with her global interests, but from the fact that she is likely to carry any war on land on to the sea, if her navy has the slightest edge over the Indian Navy. The Chinese navy poses a threat not only in the future but also at present. Even with its present state of preparedness it possesses some capability of operating in the Indian Ocean – particularly in conjunction with Pakistan and Iran. Its submarines possess a radius of action which enables them to operate in the Bay of Bengal even from their home bases. In fact, there have been reports of Chinese submarines having been located in the south eastern parts of the Indian Ocean; presumably carrying out naval exercises. However, while whiles preparing against the immediate Chinese threat we need not be too fearful of their large submarine force. Although the submarine force with about 67 submarines (mostly modern) is the third largest in the world, it has commitments to match. China is faced with a threat from the Soviet Union, Taiwan, Japan and even the United States; at least in as much as the United States commitments to Taiwan are concerned. So we only have to prepare against the odd ones they will be able to deploy against us. The present surface fleet comprising about 10 war ships ( destroyers) is too small a force to be of much concern for us. Geographical factors like distance from the Indian Ocean and the limited routes of entry (jeopardising surprise) go against China. It is to overcome this handicap that she is going all out make friends with countries on the periphery of the Indian Ocean in the hope of being able to use their bases for operations in this region. Till she gets a foot hold in the Indian Ocean she could carry out surprise raids on Indian shipping in the Bay of Bengal. This they could do with a conservable amount of impunity as it would be beyond the capability of Indian Navy to reciprocate by carrying the war into the China Sea – the only effective way of dealing with this sort of *guerre de course*.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE REGIONAL GEOPOLITICS

Having made an assessment of our enemies and their capabilities, the next step in evolving our naval strategy would be a study of the regional geopolitics to assess the manner in which other countries of the region would influence our war with our enemies. While their geography would indicate their strategic importance, their politics would indicate whether they would be of help to us or our enemies. The aim of this study should be to recognise our potential friends from among the strategically important countries and then to pursue defence oriented foreign policy to ensure their support during war. What must be guarded against, however, is making friends through appeasement, merely at the dictates of geography. For incorporating the support of our friends in our strategy, we would want reliable friends, and reliable friendship among nations is built only on similarity of interests. These interests may be ideological, religious, economic or defence but must act both ways. We must not, therefore, fritter away our energies on countries which, though important to us geographically, have, on their part, no interest in our friendship.

Countries in and around the Indian Ocean important to us from the point of view of defence are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

#### **The Arabs**

Geographically the Arabs are in a position to dominate the Arabian Sea. They also control the western entrance to the Indian Ocean – the Suez Canal. Having for centuries depended upon the British for the protection of the Arabian and the Red Seas, as also the Persian Gulf, they never developed their own naval strengths sufficiently enough to be able to influence any war in the region; except, perhaps, by blocking the Suez Canal by sinking a ship in it. Recently, however, an effort seems to be made by them to develop their own naval powers. The most significant being the efforts of Saudi Arabia. It is possible that the Western Powers, in order to suck back the petro-dollars being amassed by the Arabs, have sold to them the idea of developing their own armed strength. Most of them, (the Arab littoral states) are pro-West and arming them is in Western interests. Being staunch Muslims their sympathies would continue to be with Pakistan. No amount of appeasement by India will be able to win them over because while India may be interested in their oil and trade, they have no apparent interest with India – not even religious interests that they have with Pakistan. Being die-hard Muslims even the Russian influence with some of them is not likely to be any help to us in our war with Pakistan. The only country which likely to be on our side is Iraq because of its dispute with Iran, but being practically land-locked with just a small opening in the Persian Gulf, she is not in a position to assist us in our Indian Ocean strategy. It is however unlikely that the Arabs would openly use their naval forces against India. With a perpetual threat from Israel hanging over their heads, their capacity to support Pakistan actively is limited. Their sympathy for Pakistan may, therefore, take the form of their newly found Oil Squeeze Policy and also probably trade boycott. South Yemen, which is gradually coming under the communist influence, may go to the extent of allowing Chinese the facility of her naval bases against India.

How we must react to the hostility of the Arabs in the form of oil squeeze and trade boycott is beyond the scope of this thesis. What such hostility would imply from our strategy point of view is that, in that case, we would have no trade routes to defend in the north Arabian Sea. The Suez would probably be closed to us and our trade would have to pass round the Cape of Good Hope. It also imply that we should not lose our level of political support to Israel to keep the Arabs from interfering in our war with Pakistan and to keep the Suez Canal open.

#### **South Africa**

South Africa dominates the trade routes round the Cape of Good Hope. Politically our relations with South Africa are far from cordial. However, considering that there isn't much love-lost between her and China or Pakistan either, she is likely to remain neutral in our wars. She may even be prepared to help us against China but due to political considerations we are unable to accept such help. What really matters to us is that when the Suez route is closed to us we should have no difficulty in using the Cape route. Until recently her naval base at Simon Town, which commands the Cape route, was being used by the British. She is reported to have offered its use now to the United States. South Africa is decidedly pro-west and her attitude towards India will depend mostly on the attitude of

the Western Powers. It is hoped that the Western Powers would remain neutral and so would South Africa. With her 3 submarines and four Frigates, South Africa's own naval strength is not much at present (1977-78). She, however, intends to build it up further as two more submarines, two Frigates and about twelve patrol boats with surface to surface missiles are reported to have been ordered. If the western powers ever decide to intervene in the regional war they would do so effectively through South Africa.

### **Mauritius**

Mauritius is centrally located in the south-western Indian Ocean and, therefore, a source of interest to the countries that are trying to their presence felt in the region. It is a little over 2000 miles from the Indian coast on our trade routes round the Cape of Good Hope. A friendly Mauritius that would allow the use of her bases in event our war with China and Pakistan would be a great advantage to India. With a majority of Hindu Population she does have a natural affinity towards India, which could be developed and strengthened. This friendship cannot, however, be taken for granted. The threat to our relations comes from the Chinese political influence through the Movement Militant Mauritius (MMM Party) which has already begun to raise its head significantly. The growing Russian influence, it is hoped, balance the traditional British and American influence and help her to maintain her neutrality in the Big Power politics, allowing her, thereby, the regional freedom to side with India if she so desires.

### **Australia**

Australia is a major regional sea power, which has the capability of playing an important role in the Indian Ocean. She is strategically located to dominate the south-eastern Indian Ocean. With no aggressive designs and with a policy of acting purely in self defence a possible threat from the Chinese, she has a similarity of interests with India. As a matter of fact she has very friendly relations with India, which could be developed in evolving a common naval strategy for the Indian Ocean. With Australia dominating the south-eastern part of the Indian Ocean and India the north-eastern part, together they could dominate the entire Indian Ocean and check the Chinese entry into it. Conscious of the threat from China she is already a member of the Five Power Defence Arrangement (whatever is left of it), along with Malaysia, Singapore, Britain and New Zealand. In spite of this defence pact and her own open support to the American naval programmes in the Indian Ocean, she does not seem to be involved in the Big Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean in any big way. Any mutual defence arrangement with her is, therefore, not likely to involve us in the Big Power rivalry either. Even the Soviet Union, with whom we have a treaty of friendship, is not likely to resent such an arrangement as long as it is purely to meet the Chinese threat.

With the strength of 4 submarines, one aircraft carrier, 11 Destroyers (with surface to air and surface to surface missiles) and 12 attack class patrol boats, the Australian naval force is a formidable one. Two submarines, two Frigates and 15 patrol craft are reported be on order. However, the entire naval strength is not available to Australia for use in the Indian Ocean. She has commitments in the Pacific Ocean also.

### **Indonesia**

Indonesia is also geographically important as she is in a position to dominate the eastern entrance to the Indian Ocean. In fact a part of the straits of Malacca forms part of the territorial waters of Indonesia. Along with Malaysia she is claiming sovereign rights over the Straits. The possibility of Indonesia and Malaysia being able to exercise their rights in face of opposition from the United States and the Soviet Union appears remote. Indonesia, however, has significant naval strength to influence regional politics and regional wars. Her present naval strength consists of 3 submarines (ex Soviet rigs and 4 ex US Jones class), 23 coastal escorts, 12 Komar class FPBG with Styx SSI and 44 patrol craft. She has two submarines, 3 Corvettes and 4 FPBG on order. The naval strength, therefore, constitutes quite a formidable force. However, she also has her own very lengthy coast line to look after.

Although a Muslim majority country and likely to have a soft corner for Pakistan, she is also politically conscious and is likely to act more in keeping with her political bias against the Chinese, as at present, than on purely religious considerations. Which side she takes in event of a war will depend on the type of government in power at that time. During the Indo-Pak war of 1965 we saw how hostile

Indonesia (with a pro Chinese government in power), can be towards India. However the present anti Chinese tilt in her politics is likely to earn us her sympathies; if not against Pakistan, at least against China. She is a member of the Association of the South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). How much of active support we may expect from her depends on how much she stands influenced by the idea of South East Nations neutrality as advocated by the ASEAN. What type of neutrality is envisaged by these countries is also not clear. If it just means non-involvement of these countries in any war in the region then it is of no use to us. If, however, it means that the region is to be made out of bounds to all armed ships of outside countries then it would be ideal for our strategy. The plan, however, does not appear to be practical as the ban, which the ASEAN have little or no means of enforcing, can be violated with impunity in event of a war. On the other hand the sense of complacency that the idea is likely to create among the ASEAN will help China. No wonder the Chinese were the first to extend support to this utopian idea of the ASEAN.

### **Malaysia and Singapore**

These two countries are strategically very important as they control the straits of Malacca, which is the main entrance to the Indian Ocean from the east. Politically, they both have a bias against the Chinese but more so has Malaysia, because of the threat posed to her by the pro-Chinese insurgents. Both are members of the Five Power Defence Arrangement, along with Britain, Australia and New Zealand, which is mainly designed against the Chinese. Both are also co-sponsors of the ASEAN idea of neutrality. They appear to have relented in their anti-Chinese stance. However, with both facing a live threat from land, if not the sea at present, and both being members of the Five Power Defence Arrangement, they are not likely to lower guard and may be depended upon by India for support.

Malaysia's relations with India have particularly been very cordial and she has always supported us against the Chinese. India still remembers with reverence, love and gratitude, Tinku Abdul Rehman, who condemned China for her invasion of India in 1962 in no uncertain terms and as a token of Malaysia's support donated his blood for the Jawans fighting the Chinese. With a common cause we could develop the present relationship very usefully with regard to our defence requirement in the Indian Ocean. The advantages of Malaysia actively supporting us against the Chinese at sea are so great that for ensuring her support we could even consider supporting them actively against the Chinese on land. With the latest oil strikes off Sarawak in Malaysia, she may even provide us with an answer to the Arabian Oil Squeeze.

### **Burma (Myanmar)**

Burma is located on the periphery of the Bay of Bengal and is, therefore, of particular importance to us. Our relations with Burma are ideal but being a militarily weak country, particularly at sea, she is as much a liability as it is an asset. While we have no security threat from her we must cater for the defence of naval bases, (even if she does not do it herself), to ensure that our enemy does not use these bases for launching attacks on us. Burma is also faced with a threat from the Chinese on land and we could make a common cause of it to develop a more affective relationship with regards to collective security, (even if not the Russian type), than has been done so far. Burma turning Communist (pro-Chinese) would make matters extremely difficult for India. We must, therefore, help Burma to remain independent and non-aligned.

### **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is yet another country on the periphery of the Bay of Bengal, which has friendly relations with us. However, with no worthwhile naval strength of her own, she too, like Burma, is a liability in that we must cater for her defence also. Although at present the Indo-Bangladesh relations could be considered good, we cannot take her friendship for granted. If recent events are any indications the anti-Indian (and probably pro-Chinese) element is gaining strength. A hostile Bangladesh that may allow the use of her bases to the Chinese could prove catastrophic for India. We must guard against this eventuality as zealously as the United States is guarding herself against developments in Cuba.

## CHAPTER VII

### A SUGGESTED NAVAL STRATEGY

Considering the nature of the threat and the geographical factors, for India, the Indian Ocean could be divided strategically into two regions. The suggested limits of these regions are marked on the map attached. Let us study these two regions one by one and see what our tasks in each are and how best we could accomplish these tasks. As emphasised earlier in this thesis, it is not intended here to tread the domain of the naval expert. The aim here is to suggest a broad outline, leaving the details of the strategy and the requirement of weapons and equipment to be worked out by experts.

#### The Western Region

Our task in the Western Region would be three fold, in keeping with our task in the Indian Ocean as a whole – ie protection of the trade routes, protection of oil at Bombay High and coastal defence. In view of the geographical location of our potential enemies in the Western Region, our coastline is very vulnerable to their attacks and coastal defence and protection of Bombay High, therefore, assumes greater importance in this Region. Our trade which passes through this Region is mostly with the Muslim world and with Europe through the Suez Canal. In case of our war with Pakistan, the Muslim countries may boycott our trade and close the Suez Canal. The trade with Europe would have to pass round the Cape of Good Hope. The only trade routes that would need to be protected in this Region would be those passing through the southern portion of the Region, to the East African countries and to Europe via the Cape of Good Hope. It may be clarified here that by coastal defence is not meant the static coastal defence which in fact is the responsibility of the Army. It is defence in the sense that it keeps the enemy away from our coasts.

Our naval strategy for the Region would have to be, therefore, mostly “sea denial” and to some extent “sea assertion” in relation to the tasks of coastal defence, (including protection of Bombay High), and protection of the trade routes respectively. Sea denial should not be taken to mean a defensive posture. To be able to deny the use of the sea to the enemy offensive action is required with the famous motto of the navy “seek and destroy”. The “sea assertion” required for being able to use the sea for trade would be of the form of “working control” of the sea.

The strategy of “sea denial”, of for that matter of “sea assertion”, can, however, be implemented only through superiority of force vis-à-vis the enemy. It could also, probably, be done by an inferior force through superiority of tactics but here we are assuming that we are equal with our potential enemies with regard to naval tactics. The threat in this Region would, primarily be from the entire naval strengths of Pakistan and Iran – both having no other commitments. We have already noted that geography gives Pakistan and Iran the advantage of uniting their forces, with India not being able to create any strategic wedge between them. Also, as discussed earlier, there is no other country in the region that can share our defence burden against these two potential enemies. We, therefore, have no option but to acquire at least parity, if not superiority, of force vis-à-vis these two countries. Any hesitancy in this regard is likely to compel us to think defensively and that would amount inviting sure defeat. History is replete with examples of such defeats. The fact is that due to the open flanks at sea and the mobile nature of naval warfare, defence has no meaning in it. Stressing the offensive character of naval warfare Admiral Mahan has said that the true end of naval forces is to preponderate over the enemy’s navy and so control the sea. So must this be the aim of our naval forces in this Western Region.

For an offensive policy of sea denial we have a special requirement for a strong submarine task force. India has at present a total of 8 submarines. This strength, even if deployed entirely in the Western Region, is considered very inadequate for the tasks in the Western Region and our strength needs to be at least doubled, if not tripled, for this Region alone. To be able to attack in depth and for a High Sea capability we would need to base our naval force in the Region on our aircraft carrier. The present strength of our other surface ships (2 cruisers, 3 destroyers, 25 frigates, 8 Osa class FPBG with styx SSM and 8 patrol boats) is considered adequate for this Region provided, of course, it is appropriately modernised. It would, therefore, appear that our total strength of the navy modernise and augmented by 8 to 10 submarines with long range turn round, would be adequate for the control of the Western Region.



## The South and Eastern Region

Our task in the South and Eastern Region would be two fold – the protection of trade routes and coastal defence, (by keeping the enemy away from the coasts), but here the relative importance of one over the other would be reversed. With the emergence of free and friendly Bangladesh, ( at least so long as she remains so), and with Iran and Pakistan contained by the Western Fleet the only threat in this Region comes from China. Due to geographical reasons and the present state of her navy, it is not possible for China to launch a major offensive against our coast. They can only pose a threat of raids. Our main requirement in the Region would, therefore, be of preventing the Chinese from penetrating into the Region and providing of escorts to our trade convoys to cater for the Chinese submarines that may be able to sneak through. To prevent the Chinese from entering this Region, there is a requirement for dominating the eastern entrances to the Ocean. Our Andaman and Nicobar Islands are geographically well located for guarding these entrances in cooperation with Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia with who have similar interests in the Region.

Our requirement in this Region works out to the deployment of two task groups – one consisting of about 4 submarines (based at Port Blair) and the other consisting of about six anti-submarine and anti aircraft frigates supported by one or two submarines for escort duties (based somewhere in the Bay of Bengal. The requirement in this Region would, therefore, be of six frigates and six submarines.

## Financial Implications

In material terms the additional financial implications of the naval strategy, that has been suggested above, works out roughly as under: -

(a)	Western Region	10 submarines costing	Rs 990 crores (approximately)
(b)	South and Eastern Region	6 submarines	Rs 594 crores (approximately)
		6 frigates	Rs 150 crores (approximately)
			Total Rs 1734 crores (say 1750)

The acquisition of this equipment would have to be spread out through a minimum period of five years to allow for additional recruitment and training of personnel required to handle it. The capital expenditure would, therefore, be about \$s 350 crores a year for five years. In addition to this capital expenditure there would have to be an increase in the recurring expenditure also. This would reach its maximum after 5 years and may be expected to be of the tune of Rs 100 crores or so (at current prices).

All this expenditure cannot be considered too much when it is compared with the expenditure being incurred on the other two services. In the present defence budget of Rs 2752 crores (1977-78), the Army's share of recurring expenditure is Rs 1783.03 crores and the share of the Air Force is Rs 466.06 crores, while the navy gets only Rs 187.56 crores. The total capital expenditure on defence works out to Rs 215 crores. Allowing for 10% of the amount for manufacturing and research allocations unassigned to any particular service, the capital amount to be shared by the three services comes to about Rs 194 crores. Even if the navy gets 15%, as has been the trend in the past, its share comes to about 97 crores. In relation to cost of naval equipment the amount being spent on the expansion and development of our Navy would look ridiculous. The idea is not to start an inter-service rivalry but to plead for each service to get what it needs and not base the allotment on percentages.

The proposed expenditure on the navy would also appear insignificant when compared with the value of the trade that it would be protecting. During the five months from April to August in 1977 the total value of exports and imports came to rs 4068.16 crores. At this rate the value of such trade by the year end (financial) would be over Rs 10000 crores. The importance of protection of trade can only be appreciated during a war. Are we going wait for a war to teach us costly lessons?

## Defence Pacts

From the study of the prevailing threat and the consequent requirements of our navy, it would appear that India's task with regards to her security in the Indian Ocean is colossal. The most sound of strategy would, no doubt, be the one based on independent military strength, and that is what India

should strive for in the long run. However, apart from financial implications of the adoption of such a strategy, building up of such naval strength of such magnitude would take time. To ensure our security in the mean time, we may have to enter into some sort of defence arrangements with countries having similar defence interests as assessed by our study of geopolitics. As a matter of fact we have already made some such arrangement in the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship. Let us see how this arrangement would help us, if at all, and also whether there is a need for some regional arrangements on the bases of the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean.

### **The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship**

The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship is a treaty of friendship and would be wrong to interpret it as a defence pact. The Soviet Union being a Super Power can protect us only from the other Super Power by maintaining a balance of deterrence in the Region. In any regional she cannot be expected to render any help more than material and moral help for fear of inviting reaction of the other Super Power. No doubt active Soviet support to us in event of our war with China has little chances of inviting intervention of the United States on the other side, but such a support could spark off an all out Sino-Soviet war, which the Soviet Union is not likely to risk; not at least purely for our sake. The only use to which, therefore, we can put the Indo-Soviet Treaty is to seek Soviet assistance in building our naval strength and, probably, making use of her "floating bases" as and if required. Our growth as a naval power is in Soviet interest also. A parallel may be drawn between the United States' interests in building up the Iranian navy and the Soviet Union's interests in building up the Indian navy. Even when equipment is available navies take time to grow. So if the Soviet Union expects us to be of any use to her in establishing a regional balance with a pro-West Iran, She must start building India up now. This should not affect our policy of non-alignment in any way as what we would be doing, in fact, is establishment of regional balance of power in our own self defence; the Russian gain being incidental. By securing our friendship Russian has gained as much as we have by securing her friendship. We must not therefore, feel over obliged for the assistance that Russia gives and thereby lose our bargaining power and independence of action. With the present Government in India proclaiming "genuine non-alignment", the Russians may not feel very enthusiastic about friendship with India and we must not expect too much from them.

### **Regional Defence Pacts**

While we have considered that any direct Soviet involvement in our wars is likely to involve the united States on the other side, and may, therefore, trigger a World War, regional powers coming to each other's help do not appear to pose this danger. The West Asian wars, in which all the Arab countries have been joining up against Israel are examples of this. A regional defence pact can, therefore, be more effective than global pacts with Super Powers – like joining power blocks. However, in order that these pacts may be effective, and for them to be able to last, there must be a perfect tally of interests between the parties to the pact. From the geopolitical study of the region, we have seen that among the strategically located countries in and around the Indian Ocean, India, Malaysia, Australia, Indonesia, Burma and Mauritius have a very near perfect tally of defence interests in much as the threat from China is concerned. Of these, while Burma, Malaysia and Mauritius are important only because of their strategic location, Australia, Indonesia and India also have significantly strong naval forces, which, if joined together, could become an extremely formidable force. Australia and Indonesia do not run the risk of a war with China on land (dreaded most) in case of a confrontation at sea.

Such pacts are, however, difficult to make and even more difficult to sustain. War is dreadful and although every country seeks security from others, none is prepared to get involved in another's war. If, therefore, an ideal pact, under which one could count on the naval forces of the other, is not possible, then we could at least strive for an arrangement which would allow the use of each other's ports and bases for military purposes. For although India is strategically located for dominating the Indian Ocean, she is not in a position to reach too far out in the Ocean without the use of ports and base facilities of other friendly countries. Base facilities at Mauritius, and Cocos and Christmas Islands belonging to Australia would be of particular importance to us.

Mutual interests being the basis of all pacts, while we may find countries who are prepared to join us against China, there appears to be none that will join us against Pakistan and Iran.

While we could be interested to have the maximum number of littoral states on our side we might have to contend with some remaining neutral. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives Islands do not affect our strategy as long as remain neutral but because of their strategic location they could create difficulties by siding with our enemies. India would have to ensure that those countries remain neutral, if not side with us. This may have to be done with diplomacy or even force if necessary.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

Although geography dictates that India be a sea power, this aspect has not been quite realised in our country due to our historical back-ground. While we have been constant victims of aggression on land, we have never before in history faced, as a nation, a threat from the seas. Before the arrival of the Europeans in the Indian Ocean, this Ocean was virtually a 'zone of peace' used only for trade. The Portuguese introduced war and fighting into the Indian Ocean and also extended trade and power rivalries of Europe into it. The British invasion of India on the pretext of trade was so peaceful that it failed to appear as an invasion of the sub continent by sea. The British were assisted by the fact that at that time the defence of the coastline and that of the mainland were in different hands, which, not only lacked coordination in the defence effort but also unity in face of the invader. During the near 200 years of their rule the British did not associate the Indians with their naval responsibilities, as their own navy was strong enough to carry out its tasks independently. The British also did not need Indian help because the manpower requirements of the navy are not as great as those of the Army. The Indian Ocean having remained a British Lake for so long during this period, (and consequently a source of protection to India), that we found it difficult to appreciate our defence responsibilities at sea on gaining Independence. It was only after the British decided to vacate their bases in the Indian Ocean that some sort of a realisation with regard to the naval aspect of our defence dawned on us. The 1965 Indo-Pak war showed us how a war on land could get transferred to the sea while the 1971 2ar confirmed that a strong navy was as important as a strong army even in wars that are primarily being fought on land.

The present Big Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean does not in any way affect us as both the Super Powers tend to balance each other. We must not, therefore, get unduly perturbed over moves and counter moves of Big Powers. What we should be concerned about is the naval threat posed by our chronic rivals on land – China and Pakistan. While considering the threat from Pakistan, we must take into account the support that she is likely to receive from Iran; for Iran is bound to support Pakistan in event of our war with her. China does not, at present, possess the capability of any large scale operations in the Indian Ocean, but the pace at which her naval strength is growing would enable her to develop this capability by the end of the century. We must start preparing for the contingency now. Even with her present capability she is in a position to interfere with Indian shipping in the Indian Ocean. She, is, therefore, in a position to carry her war with us on land into the sea. Consequently we must prepare against her threat at sea with the same urgency and seriousness as we must against her threat on land.

A study of the geopolitics of the countries on the periphery of the Indian Ocean would show that while we may expect support from countries like Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia and Burma, in our war against China, there is no country that would side with us against Pakistan and Iran. The Indo-Soviet Treaty can be of help to us only in as much as supply of weapons and equipment is concerned. Because of the existing balance of power between Russia and America, Russia cannot support us actively for fear of inviting American participation on the other side. With the present Government in India proclaiming "genuine non-alignment" as its policy, it is also doubtful if the Soviet Union has any incentive left for supporting India beyond the provisions of the Treaty of Friendship. India would, therefore, have to stand on her own feet in this regard.

India's interests in the Indian Ocean are three fold – protection of the long coastline, protection of the trade routes and the protection of the natural resources (particularly oil) off her coasts. For the purpose of our strategy we may divide the Ocean into two regions – the Western Region and the South and Eastern Region. Due to the geographical location of our potential enemies the main threat is in the Western Region. We would, therefore, have to concentrate our main effort in this Region. As the Arabs are likely to impose a trade embargo during our war with Pakistan, there will not be much trade to defend in this Region; expect the trade with East African countries. The Suez Canal would also probably be closed to us, (unless Israel helps us to keep it open), and our trade with Europe would have to pass round the Cape of Good Hope. Our main task in this Region would, therefore, be Sea Denial. The main threat in the South and Eastern Region comes from Chinese Submarines, which may interfere with our shipping. As may not be possible to carry the War to South China Sea, initiative would remain with China. The strategy for this Region would have to be of a defensive character. It would entail blocking the Chinese entry into the Indian Ocean and providing escorts to

ship convoys. A regional defence pact between Australia, India, Malaysia and Indonesia would be ideal for this purpose.

As things stand today, our entire present strength of the Navy, augmented with an appreciable number of submarines, would be just sufficient for the Western Region. For the South and Eastern Region we would require a separate naval task force comprising about six submarines and six frigates. The requirement is not much and yet we seem to be hesitant in acquiring the required equipment. The only hitch, obviously, is the financial implications. Unfortunately in our country whenever we attempt a cut in national expenditure the axe, invariably, falls on defence – so unproductive is the expenditure on defence considered to be. The additional amount that would be required to be spent on the expansion of the Navy to the required strength would pale into insignificance when viewed in the light of the thousands of crores of rupees worth of trade that it would be protecting. No country can survive without trade more so during war. With 90% of our trade being carried on through the sea, our sea trade routes are our Achilles heel which must be protected at all costs.