

June 14, 1977

THE INDIAN OCEAN:  
ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

SUMMARY

In recent years, the U.S. and the USSR have both become increasingly involved in the Indian Ocean. Their activities in this region have included the deployment of naval and military forces and the extension of political and diplomatic ties to the "littoral states" of the area. At the present time, the USSR probably is the most powerful external actor in the area and is stronger by far than any local state. The Indian Ocean is important to the Western world for strategic, economic, and political reasons. The closed nature of the ocean allows it to be easily controlled by a determined superpower. The wealth of natural resources in the area, particularly crude oil but also other minerals and the likelihood of future developments in the area, make it of increasing economic importance to the West and a potential target for Soviet aggressors. The undeveloped and unstable nature of many of the littoral states render them especially vulnerable to outside influence and conflict among themselves.

At present, the U.S. occupies the small island of Diego Garcia. It has recently approved construction of expanded facilities for the island, but these are still inferior to those of the USSR. The U.S. has also recently been ejected from its bases in Ethiopia and Bahrain.

Various motives for the Soviet expansion in the Indian Ocean have been given, but there are objections to almost all of these. A more likely explanation is that the USSR seeks to control the trade routes from the ocean via the Red Sea-Suez Canal and the Cape of Good Hope in order to be able to interdict Western oil shipments at some future date, thereby disrupting the economies of the Western world and Japan. The expansion of Soviet facilities around the Persian Gulf and Red Sea points to this interpretation.

Whatever the true explanation of Soviet intentions in the Indian Ocean, the U.S. at present is outstripped by its power there. A demilitarization of the area, as Carter has suggested, is

probably not feasible if it involves local demilitarization, nor would the USSR be amenable to such a policy. An alternative to demilitarization and to the present inadequate level of U.S. military and political preparations in the Ocean is a careful expansion in strategically located states and further military and naval deployment designed to counter Soviet power in the area.

### THE ISSUE

On March 9, 1977, President Carter stated that he favored a complete "demilitarization" of the Indian Ocean. Subsequent statements by the President and by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance have confirmed the direction of American policy toward a limitation of the U.S. and Soviet presence in this area. Soon after the President's statement, Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny indicated that his country would favor turning the area into a "Zone of Peace." Secretary Vance has established a group to explore the possibility of demilitarization and to connect it to the arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union.

While the current Administration thus seems certain to pursue a policy of withdrawal or "demilitarization" in the Indian Ocean, it is probable that this policy will attract much opposition in Congress, the military, and the press. Controversy will probably center around the desirability of the U.S. presence on Diego Garcia, the intentions and strengths of the USSR in the area, and the relationship of the U.S. to various "littoral states" in the area, as well as the general problem of the importance of the Indian Ocean to the U.S. and the Western world. An overview of some of these issues is therefore timely.

### RECENT HISTORY OF THE AREA

Prior to the late 1960s, the dominant power in the Indian Ocean was Great Britain. As several of her colonies gained independence and as her balance of payments problems worsened, the Wilson (Labor) government announced in January 1968 that it would withdraw all British forces "East of Suez." This decision caused grave concern among the Western states interested in this area, for the British, through 80,000 troops in Malaysia and 30,000 more in Aden, provided security for the West in this area. Since 1947, when India became independent, Great Britain had been involved in about twenty distinct and substantial military operations East of Suez. The Labor government announced that by 1971, British military forces would be withdrawn from all points other than Hong Kong and Fiji and that naval and aircraft carrier presence would also be withdrawn. However, the Heath (Conservative)

government reversed to some extent this complete withdrawal, and until recently the United Kingdom maintained six naval vessels and some aircraft in the area. Further pressures on Great Britain from the Icelandic "cod war" caused her to withdraw some forces and to cancel plans to deploy others.

The withdrawal of British military and naval forces from the area created a vacuum into which the Soviet Union quickly moved. Following the announcement of the Wilson government in January 1968, the USSR dispatched a flotilla of several warships from the Pacific fleet to the Indian Ocean. It cruised the Ocean from March to July, and a second cruise from November to April 1969 followed. These cruises were repeated several times. By October 1970 the USSR had about twenty vessels in the area: five guided missile ships, six supply ships, three submarines, and several intelligence ships and other types. Soviet diplomatic activity also intensified: a fishing agreement with Mauritius in 1970, and a mutual defense treaty with India in 1971. Other Soviet agreements may have been concluded on a less public level involving Soviet usage of port facilities in the area, particularly at Aden and on the island of Socotra, on which the Soviets have established a communications facility. They have also laid down a chain of deep-water buoys in the area of the Seychelles and other places to be used as fleet supports and rendezvous points.

The United States also responded to the British withdrawal and, even more, to the Soviet intrusion. Prior to the British withdrawal, on December 30, 1966, the U.S. concluded a fifty-year agreement with Great Britain jointly to use the island of Diego Garcia in the Chagos chain as a communications base. With the later British withdrawal from the area, the U.S. became responsible for most activity on the island, though the British retained a small presence there. Proposals to improve and expand the facilities there have met with determined but as yet unsuccessful opposition in Congress. In 1975, Congress approved plans to construct a base and facility there. This involved lengthening of the runway, increasing fuel storage capacities, dredging of an anchorage, and construction of a pier, as well as other improvements for the airfield and other facilities.

#### THE SUPERPOWERS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: MILITARY FORCES AND POLITICAL STRENGTH

A. USSR: At the present time, the USSR is probably the dominant military and political power in the Indian Ocean. This estimate is based on its military strength and its political linkages in the area. Militarily, the USSR maintains from fifteen to twenty

vessels in the Indian Ocean. Five of these are usually surface warships, two are submarines, and the rest are support vessels. However, the USSR is capable of expanding its role in the area on a reasonably sudden notice due to the extensive facilities it maintains and the political connections it has built up. Between 1968 and 1974, the USSR expanded its number of ship hours in the area from 1,000 to 9,000.

Soviet bases in the Indian Ocean: Much of the Soviet activity in the area that is concerned with the construction of port facilities and naval stations is obscure, due to the clandestine nature of such activities and the lack of adequate interest from the American press. However, it is fairly easy to document the existence of Soviet bases in the following places:

1. Berbera (Somalia): This is probably the largest Soviet base in the area. It includes facilities for 1,500 personnel, a communications facility, naval facilities said to be directly under Soviet military control, a major runway, a missile storage and repair facility, and according to former Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, the base has the capacity for nuclear missiles. Berbera is located on the Gulf of Aden, so it is in a location commanding entrance to the southern part of the Red Sea and the approaches to the Persian Gulf. It is thus an extremely valuable site, both militarily and in geographical terms.
2. Socotra: This is an island off the coast of Somalia currently belonging to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. The terrain is extremely barren though the British maintained a naval facility here from 1876. Like Berbera, Socotra commands the Red Sea and the approaches to the Persian Gulf.
3. Aden: the USSR has the use of the harbor and a former British airbase.
4. Um Qasr (Iraq): The USSR has expanded facilities here under the supervision of Soviet technicians. The port is on the Persian Gulf and is the only Soviet facility in this location.
5. Mogadishu (Somalia): The Soviets have constructed an airfield here.
6. Fueling Rights: the USSR has fueling rights in the following areas: The Chagos Archipelago, midway between Indonesia and Africa and near Diego Garcia; Mauritius; Singapore.

7. Anchorages and Buoy Sites: The Soviet Union has established these in the following areas: in the channel between Madagascar and Mozambique, the Chagos Archipelago, and in the Arabian Sea near the Seychelles and the Maldivian Islands.
8. Soviet use of port facilities in the area: In addition to its rights in these areas, the Soviet fleet has also made use of the following ports in the area: Chittagong (Bangladesh), Vishnakhapatnam (India), Madagascar, and Hodeida (Yemen Arab Republic); the Soviets have also asked the Communist government of Viet Nam to grant them rights at the former U.S. base at Cam Ranh Bay. Though the latter is not in the Indian Ocean, it would be of major importance for the control of the strategic Straits of Malacca and Singapore. It was from bases in southern Viet Nam that Japanese planes were able to sink the British battleships HMS Repulse and Prince of Wales in 1941, an event which had major repercussions on the fall of Singapore shortly thereafter.

B. United States: The U.S. at the current time maintains three ships in the Indian Ocean. It has the potential of a major base at Diego Garcia and has also maintained bases in Ethiopia and Bahrain. In addition, the U.S. has several communications facilities and space research stations in the Indian Ocean or associated with nearby states. These bases include the following:

1. Asmara and Massawa (Ethiopia): These two bases have recently been closed down by order of the revolutionary government of Ethiopia's decree of late April 1977; the order reverses a long standing relationship between the U.S. and Ethiopia. Since 1945, the U.S. has provided over \$618 million in military aid for Ethiopia under the Emperor Haile Selassie. Since the coming to power of the Revolutionary Government (the "Dergue") under the dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1974, this relationship has been increasingly strained. In recent years Ethiopia has turned toward the USSR for its military aid against indigenous right wing rebels. More recently, the Dergue has accepted Fidel Castro's offer of military aid.
2. Bahrain: The U.S. also had a base for naval vessels in this sheikdom on the Arabian coast on the Persian Gulf, but in late May 1977 the government terminated the American rights there, due supposedly to Arab disgruntlement over U.S. support of Israel.

3. Other U.S. bases and stations in the area: The U.S. has at the current time several stations in the Indian Ocean. Most of these are for research and communications purposes and presumably could not be easily turned into more militarily useful installations; moreover, it is doubtful that the terms under which the U.S. leases the bases allow more military utilization of them. These bases include the following:

- a. Mahe and Bacoa in the Seychelles
- b. Northwest Gap, Pine Gap, and Nurrungar in Australia

Both of these stations are for communications and observation, satellite tracking, and space research. While these bases could probably be used for espionage and intelligence purposes, it is not likely that they could be converted into defense or supply sites.

4. ~~Diego Garcia: The U.S. base at Diego Garcia is at the present time the most important American facility in the Indian Ocean. Some attention should be given to the base in more detail. Diego Garcia lies 1,000 miles south of the tip of India and consists of 6,700 acres. It is shaped like a horseshoe with a perimeter of forty miles. The lagoon is 5½ miles wide by 13 miles long and is 30-100 feet deep. There is no native population.~~

The present military contingents on the island consist of 1,400 Americans, most of whom are construction personnel, and about 25 British troops. The permanent personnel contingents will probably be about 600 to 700 in number.

Following appropriations for the island base in 1975, the facilities presently being constructed on the island include:

- a. extension of the runway from 8,000 feet to 12,000 feet and construction of parking areas for aircraft.
- b. construction of an oil tank capacity of 640,000 barrels for fueling of aircraft and naval vessels.
- c. construction of an anchorage for a six ship carrier force.

- d. construction of pier and storage facilities to load and unload a 180,000 barrel tanker in 24 hours; for the storage of ammunition, and for the accomodation of 309 personnel; and for additional power plant facilities.

C. Other Powers in the Indian Ocean: As noted above, Great Britain has retained a military presence in the area though of diminishing importance. France also, like Great Britain, was a major colonial power in the area, and has retained a considerable naval presence on its island possessions in the southern Ocean. At the present time, France retains a twenty vessel fleet in the area, including nuclear submarines. The People's Republic of China and Japan also have shown some interest in the Ocean, though both lack the naval resources to play a major role there. The PRC is mainly interested in containing the USSR and Japan is mainly interested in protecting its sea route to the Persian Gulf oil sources.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN: STRATEGY, ECONOMICS, POLITICS

The Indian Ocean is important to the U.S. and to various other powers for a number of reasons, which may be classified as strategic, economic, and political. The strategic importance relates to the area as a theater of conflict in the eventuality of the outbreak of war, either global or regional. The economic importance relates mainly to the area as a source of oil for the U.S. as well as for Western Europe and Japan but also of other valuable natural resources. The political importance relates to the alliances and conflicts within the region and their relationship to the world patterns of political and diplomatic development.

A. Strategic Importance: Unlike the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean, the Indian is a comparatively closed area. In shape it resembles a large crescent stretching from the southern tip of Africa to the southern tip of Australia. The crescent is perforated by the Indian subcontinent. Access to the Ocean is possible only through certain narrow sea passages or "chokepoints": the Cape of Good Hope, the Red Sea and Suez Canal, and the Straits of Malacca. The eastern approaches are more accessible than the western, since entrance can be gained through the Indonesian archipelago or around the tip of Australia, though these routes are much more difficult and expensive than the Malacca-Singapore route.

The result of this closed nature of the Ocean is that a sea power can much more easily control it than the two larger oceans

by dominating certain key points that control the entrance routes. Throughout the history of the Indian Ocean, since Portuguese entrance in the 15th century, it has been dominated by one superpower after another successfully controlling these key points. With the advent of modern radar, sonar, and communications facilities, control of these points has become much easier.

Control of the Indian Ocean by a power hostile to the U.S. would be a serious threat not only to Western trade routes but also to U.S. communications with its probable allies in the area: South Africa, Iran, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia. Communications with Israel and the Middle East could also be impaired. If the USSR decided to prohibit U.S. naval activity in the area, it would effectively be cutting the world in two, isolating the western Pacific from the Atlantic and threatening to dominate all the states bordering on the Indian Ocean.

B. Economic Importance :

The major importance of the Ocean economically is that its littoral states in the Persian Gulf area contain about 40% of the proved world reserves of crude oil. Although the U.S. will probably be less dependent on this oil in the near future, Western Europe and Japan will be more dependent on it for a long time to come. Soviet control of strategic areas on the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Bab el Mandeb connecting the Red and Arabian Seas, the Suez Canal, the passage from the Indian to the Atlantic Oceans around the Cape of Good Hope, and passage to Japan via the Straits of Malacca could interdict the supply of oil to any or all of these places. As of 1975, the U.S. imported 13% of its oil, Japan 85-90% of its oil, and Europe (Western) 70-75% of its oil from the Persian Gulf area.

Although the Indian Ocean area is a very underdeveloped part of the world, it contains a great supply of natural resources which are used by the developed world. Among these are gold (the Republic of South Africa is, with the possible exception of the USSR, the world's leading gold producer; the RSA, though it is usually thought of as an Atlantic power, is in many ways more dependent on the Indian Ocean: four of its four major ports are on the Indian Ocean, as is most of its coastline except for Namibia, and the Witwatersrand industrial complex is located close to these ports). Also important in the area are uranium (the RSA produced about 14% of world supply in 1976 and Australia is increasing its production) and tin (five of the ten leading producers of tin are situated in the Indian Ocean area, producing over 68% of world production in 1976).



The economic backwardness of the area may well conceal even richer mineral deposits; Somalia, for example, is believed to contain very rich ones. Also, the uses of the basin in the Ocean itself should be considered, not only for natural resources but also for fish, an increasingly important food-stuff for the growing population of the world.

C. Political Importance of the Indian Ocean: The Indian Ocean area touches many of the regions that are currently in the headlines of the world press: Southern and Eastern Africa; the Middle East from Egypt and Israel to Saudi Arabia and Iran; India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; and the southeast Asian countries of Thailand and Indonesia. Almost all of the countries are politically unstable, economically undeveloped, and culturally "backward" or at least very different from the social and cultural patterns of the Western world -- which is to say that they approach the normal state of affairs in human history. Even the strongest of them, such as South Africa, face an uncertain future, and in almost all of them revolution, coup d'etat, invasion, subversion, or civil war are not unlikely contingencies. The potential for conflict in this area is therefore very great and can easily be exploited by the external superpowers to promote their own ends. The USSR is doing this very thing, and it is possible that the U.S. will do so in the future. The major conflicts in the area are therefore worth examining in some detail.

From a strategic point of view, the most important areas of the region are those adjacent to the control points of the Ocean: the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf, India and Sri Lanka. Every one of these areas is unstable and in every one significant subversive movements have developed with the aid of Soviet and other Communist power.

1. The Horn of Africa (Ethiopia and Somalia): As mentioned above, Ethiopia and Somalia have been focal points of conflict for the U.S. and USSR for some time. The U.S. has supported Ethiopia under the Emperor Haile Selassie since World War II and has provided \$618 million in military and economic support between 1945 and 1975. At the present time, U.S. aid to Ethiopia is about \$18.6 million, though in February 1977 the U.S. suspended about \$6 million in aid because of human rights violations. In 1974 the Emperor was overthrown in a coup by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) or the "Dergue." The government has been unstable since that time but has increasingly come under the control of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, who has become the virtual dictator of the country. The leftward

drift of Mengistu's regime has resulted in a more pro-Soviet stance; Ethiopia signed a secret military assistance agreement with the USSR in December 1976. Estimates have placed the size of the pact at \$100-200 million, and the arrival of 20-40 T-34 Soviet tanks, an equal number of armored personnel carriers, and artillery and light arms has been reported. More recently, Ethiopia has expelled the consulates of five countries and those of the U.S.; and Cuba has announced that it is sending military advisors to its aid. An important political factor in Ethiopia is the Eritrean rebellion of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Eritrea is a province on the coast of Ethiopia that has nationalistic aspirations. Mainly Moslem, Eritrea has a 540 mile coastline on the Red Sea, thus making it of particular importance for control of the Sea and therefore of the Suez Canal. Because of its religious and geopolitical importance, the Arab states and neighboring Sudan support Eritrea. Also important is the French territory of the Afars and the Issas, scheduled to become independent on June 27, 1977. This territory contains the port of Djibouti. Somalia also wants the area because it claims most of the inhabitants are Somalis. Conflict between the two countries and connections with the Eritrean problem are therefore likely.

Somalia itself has long been the ally of the Soviet Union, and since 1963 the USSR has been the sole supplier of arms for Somalia. Somalia and Ethiopia have had strained relations in the past and will probably continue to do so, and this conflict could lead to problems for the USSR if it becomes involved in the area.

2. The Persian Gulf (Iran and the Arab states): Here the main power is Iran, long an ally of the U.S., but increasingly controversial because of alleged violations of human rights. Iran has shown some tendencies toward accommodating the USSR as its relationship to the U.S. has become less certain. The USSR is a neighbor on its northern border, and the Shah has shown himself to be capable of political subtlety as when he withdrew support from the Kurdish tribesmen in Iraq because of his rapprochement with that government. Another potential conflict within Iran (besides the internal dissidence of intellectuals and students) is the Baluchistan minority in the southeastern part of the country. Though this is at present a quiescent problem, neighboring Pakistan has had problems

with its Baluchi minority. The Shah has supported Ali Bhutto's regime out of fear that his own Baluchi minority will become more active as the Pakistani group insists on national rights. Because of its oil supplies and its military predominance, Iran is of considerable significance in preserving a balance of power in the area.

Saudi Arabia is the predominant power on the Arabian peninsula and is not likely to be an unstable region in the near future. However, several other states on the peninsula are less reliable. Any vessels traveling from the Persian Gulf to Europe through the Suez Canal must round the peninsula, and this route exposes them to interdiction by a hostile power in the Yemeni Arab Republic (YAR) or the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) which occupies the southern coast of the peninsula. While the former has been one of the more conservative and anti-Communist states of the area, the latter has had close ties to the USSR, as is evidenced by its allowance of a Soviet facility on its island of Socotra and its port of Aden. At the present time Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait are cooperating in a \$400 million aid program to the PDRY to woo it from the USSR.

3. India and Sri Lanka: Both these countries are important for geopolitical reasons. India, one of the world's largest countries, is significant because of its vast population and potential economic resources and military strength. Sri Lanka is important because it is able to provide ports for the control of the mid-ocean region. India, as is well known, has been under the dictatorship of Indira Gandhi for some time, but has recently escaped that fate in its March elections. In 1971, Mrs. Gandhi negotiated a defense treaty with the USSR, but the new Prime Minister has stated that he will void the treaty and return India to a policy of strict neutralism. Mrs. Gandhi was reasonably close to the USSR and tolerated the Communist Party of India, a pro-Moscow group, though she banned all other parties, including the pro-Peking Marxist Communist Party. Under Mrs. Gandhi, India went to war with Pakistan in support of Bangladesh and made strides toward the development of a nuclear capacity. At the present time under Morarji Desai, India shows the potential of becoming a more stable and peaceful state and of furthering its somewhat strained relationship with the U.S.

Sri Lanka, the former Ceylon, has been even further to the Left than Mrs. Gandhi's regime, but the approach of elections on July 21 may reverse this trend. Under the government of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Sri Lanka sought to nationalize banks and lands belonging to religious groups. It also passed legislation that placed all beggars and vagrants under detention in "rehabilitation camps." However, Mrs. Bandaranaike's former Finance Minister, the Trotskyist leader Dr. N. M. Perera and her former Housing and Construction Minister, the Communist Pieter Keuneman have broken with her and denounced her as an obstruction to Socialism. Recently, the government charged that the USSR has interfered in the elections on the side of her opponents. Political conflict in Sri Lanka seems likely in the future, as well as a change to some degree in its foreign policy that would allow for more U.S. or Western leverage in the government.

#### POLICY TOWARD THE INDIAN OCEAN: DEMILITARIZATION OR ESCALATION?

The importance of the Indian Ocean region in a number of different areas--strategic, economic, and political--have led to a competition between the two major superpowers for either dominance or at least a balanced relationship in the area. The importance of the area cannot be denied. Admiral Mahan, the 19th century American strategist and exponent of sea power, has been quoted as saying, "Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This Ocean is the key to the Seven Seas. In the 21st century the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters." But still the presence of the U.S. in the region, and especially its expanded role, is controversial. The critics of a strong American presence fear an arms race in the region and are reluctant for the U.S. to become involved in a region where it has no direct interests. Also, they frequently support their arguments against a buildup by asserting different motives for the obvious Soviet expansion there. Some of these reasons and the alternatives to them bear some comment and examination. Among the arguments given for the Soviet buildup are the following:

- A. The USSR is concerned about China and wishes to secure its southern communications route with Vladivostok and to outflank China from the south. This argument, however, ignores the almost complete lack of Chinese naval presence in the area. Though the PRC has had a close relationship with some southern African states, the USSR has more recently had a stronger one. The Soviet political activities in the region have not been directed

toward areas associated with China. The recent trip of Nikolai Podgorny, soon followed by that of Fidel Castro, to Africa shows that these two Communist powers are mainly interested in the eastern and southern parts of Africa bordering on or related to the Indian Ocean. The states they visited-- 22 between them--include South Yemen, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Mozambique, all of them littoral states of the region. The Soviets have signed a 20-year friendship treaty with Mozambique and reportedly have asked for a port on its coast. Such a presence would give the USSR a powerful position near the Cape athwart the alternate route to the West in the event of a future closure of the Suez Canal.

- B. The Soviet Union is primarily concerned about the presence of U.S. nuclear submarines in the Indian Ocean and its naval buildup is oriented toward a balance of it. But the Soviet presence is not primarily oriented toward anti-submarine warfare, nor does the U.S. at present have a major capacity to attack the USSR with SLMs from the Indian Ocean. The only SLM capable of such an attack is the Trident missile system, Polaris and Poseidon not having the range. The Trident system is not yet deployed and is not a factor in Soviet defense calculations.
- C. The Soviet Union is concerned with the Indian Ocean as a source of fish as a food source. While this may or may not be true, it remains a fact that the USSR is concerned about fishing in other areas of the world and yet does not feel the need for a large military and political drive in protection of its fleet in these areas. Nor does the size of the Soviet presence in the Ocean suggest that fishing is its main concern there.
- D. The Soviet Union's presence in the Indian Ocean is only the culmination of a long-term historic trend in which Russia has sought a warm water port. While it is true that Russia throughout much of its history has been concerned with such an objective, it is also true that this search has been associated mainly with Russian territorial expansion. A warm water port would be useful to the USSR only if it were contingent to the USSR itself. A warm water port would not be very useful if it were not on Russian territory, except as a military base.

- E. The Soviets are building up their naval and political strength in the region as a preparation for interdicting oil supplies from the Mideast. While this interpretation cannot be proved, it is one of the more plausible explanations of USSR activity in the area. Opponents point out, however, that if the USSR wanted to control this oil, it could do so more easily from its own territories in the Soviet Union. However, such an effort might involve an undesirable attack on and destruction of the oil fields themselves. Interdiction of the oil routes via the Suez Canal, Cape route, or the Straits of Malacca would produce major economic crises in the U.S., Western Europe, or Japan if it were carried out before these areas achieved self-sufficiency in energy sources.

### CONCLUSION

None of these interpretations are impossible or invalid, and it is not unlikely that all of them are of importance in Soviet military planning. The variety of motives possible for an expansion into the Indian Ocean only underlines the importance of the area for Soviet as well as for Western and U.S. interests. In the light of this value of the area, serious thought might well be given to the U.S. role in the Indian Ocean. The idea of "complete demilitarization" is one alternative. It is unlikely that this goal could be reached if it is to include the littoral states themselves. Many of these, as we have seen, have conflicts with their neighbors which forbid them from demilitarizing and which give them strong motivation for seeking military aid from external powers. The Soviet suggestion of converting the area into a "Zone for Peace" is not entirely clear; historically, the term is a piece of Marxian "Aesopian Language" designed to confuse the issue. Just as a "People's Democracy" is a one-party state dominated by the Communists, so a "Zone of Peace" is an area under Communist control, where the "class war" has been resolved by a Communist victory. Czechoslovakia is a Zone of Peace in this sense. If this is what the term means in regard to the Indian Ocean, it is clear that the U.S. cannot allow it to transpire without risk of seriously jeopardizing its interests and those of its allies in this and other parts of the free world.

By Samuel T. Francis  
Policy Analyst