

CHAPTER 6

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-REGIONAL POWERS

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The naval presence of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean and their influence in the region invariably captures the limelight in commentaries on the subject. There are, however, other nations which are not located on the Ocean's littoral but which have a significant role in the affairs of the region and manifest their presence in a variety of ways. Nations such as Japan, China, France and other European nations spread their influence in the littoral in pursuit of political and economic aims but their efforts do not attract the publicity or notoriety that is attributed to the actions of the superpowers. Yet in contrast the Indian Ocean region is for some of these countries far more vital economically and politically than it is for the superpowers. An examination of the issues prevailing in the region is not complete without reference to the activities of these non-regional nations.

Japan

A major economic power which has vital interests in the security of the Indian Ocean region and in maintaining good relations with the nations therein. Japan obtains 85% of its oil and some 70% of its iron ore from the Indian Ocean littoral as well as having markets there for its manufactures. The security of shipping in the Indian Ocean is critical to Japan as is access through the narrow Malacca Straits and the straits of the Indonesian archipelago, to enable oil tankers to travel the most direct route to Japan. A graphic demonstration of Japan's

vulnerability in the event of a cut off in oil supplies was evidenced by its economic downturn during the 1973 oil crisis. Japan therefore maintains very active economic and diplomatic policies throughout the littoral.

Militarily, confined to a Self Defence Force, Japan looks to the United States for assurance but pressures within Japan and the shift of United States policy, as witnessed by the 'Guam or Nixon' doctrine, may require it to take a more self reliant defence posture in the near future. Japan is also not able to remain aloof or detached from Sino-Soviet rivalry and its military alignment and economic ties with the United States affects its relations with the other two.

The Soviet Union's relations with Japan have been in many ways stalemated since the end of World War II. The two nations have not been able to conclude a formal peace treaty with unsolved matters such as the return to Japan of the southern Kurile Islands, fishing rights in the waters separating the two countries and other contentious issues. On the other hand the Soviet Union recognises Japan's wealth and technological prowess and would like to use these to exploit Siberia's natural resources even to the extent of permitting joint Japanese-American participation. Japan in turn would benefit from such ventures but with the peace treaty issues outstanding and some financial and practical problems hindering the projects it seems unlikely that a quick solution is available.

Japan also has an unsigned peace treaty with China and negotiations in 1975 and this year have failed to overcome Japanese objections to certain wording in the treaty.

It has been reported that increased Soviet naval and air activity around Japan have been interpreted by China as attempts to dissuade the Japanese from accepting the anti-hegemony (anti-Soviet) clauses in the Sino-Japanese peace treaty. Whatever the short term hinderances to growing economic ties with China and the Soviet Union, Japan's need for natural resources will lead to increasing ties with both, especially if uncertainties of supply such as the 1973 oil crisis set a precedent. Japan being deficient in many natural resources needs to develop as many market options as become available on reasonable terms. Japanese economic interest throughout the Indian Ocean littoral is widespread and penetrating and as a consequence involves it inextricably in the issues affecting the region. It is too early to predict whether nations rich in natural resources will attempt to form cartels along the same lines as the oil producing nations have, or with the same amount of success. However, there are possibilities for such moves.

China

In October 1971 China became a member of the United Nations and in the years since has increased its

global standing and has formalised or developed numerous government to government relations. Considerable steps towards improving relations with the United States have been a feature of China's foreign policy in the 1970s as have diplomatic relations with Australia and a number of South East Asian countries. Rapprochement with India and Bangladesh and the replacement of the arch rival the Soviet Union in Egypt are other foreign policy gains by China recently. The Soviet Union remains in Chinese eyes the main threat to its security but apart from some clashes on their common border the struggle between the two is for influence, primarily in the Third World and also in Japan and Europe. China has denounced both the United States and the Soviet Union as competitors for world hegemony and for practising economic imperialism.

The Committee has heard evidence that China does not see the Indian Ocean as the primary area of confrontation between the Soviet Union and the West. China believes that Europe is the potential flashpoint and that the Indian Ocean is only an attendant area of struggle. Europe with its concentration of forces and security systems is believed by the Chinese to be the main source of eventual conflict.

To China the Indian Ocean region is also an area of contradictions caused by superpower rivalry, local Third World nations vying for hegemony in the region and the class struggles within the littoral nations where bourgeoisie leaders need to be replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is towards this class war, to bring about the dictatorship of the proletariat, that China is

seeking to promote in the Third World countries through aid and assistance but without a military presence. The Chinese line in the littoral is at present essentially anti-Soviet. China actively promotes the growth of groups that will deny raw materials to the two superpowers with the long term goal of bringing about the collapse of their systems of government. In the Indian Ocean region, China sees the oil rich States of the Middle East as the most contentious area of future conflict between industrial powers, with other raw material exporting countries to follow.

Until recently the Chinese Government was not critical of the US naval presence in the Indian Ocean, nor of other nations such as Australia supporting that presence, accepting that as a counter to possible Soviet domination of the Ocean. In August 1976, in time for the Colombo meeting of Non-Aligned Nations the editorial in the Peking People's Daily, the official newspaper, called for the expulsion of both Soviet and US navies from the Indian Ocean and for the establishment of the Zone of Peace. This change of attitude to the US presence is new and probably designed for the conference, however it remains to be seen if it will be reiterated.

The death of Mao Tse-tung has raised issues that have been the subject of conjecture for some time. It is only when these are resolved that we will have some indication what internal changes and foreign policy changes may be expected from China. Recent reports indicate that there have been internal changes in the government hierarchy with the "moderate" elements suppressing the "radical".

France

France is the only other non-littoral nation that maintains a permanent naval force in the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean is strategically important to France in particular the sea lanes via the Cape which are used to carry oil supplies to France. Approximately 80% of French oil supplies come from the Gulf States, mostly passing through the Mozambique Channel and around the Cape but using the Suez Canal as well.

Apart from Re-union Island France has facilities on Fromelin and Kerguelen Islands and the strategically located Territory of Afars and Issas on the Gulf of Aden. The island of Mayotte also elected to remain French after the other Comoro Islands became independent. The Territory of Afars and Issas is due to become independent late 1976 or early 1977 and is at present of concern to France because of the frictions that exist between the Somalian backed Issas and the Ethiopian backed Afars. The strategic location of the territory makes it important to both factions and vital to Ethiopia as the only rail link it has to the sea. After independence France is agreeable to leaving a military task force in the territory to ensure that some degree of peace can be maintained.

France has expressed some concern over the stability of the Indian Ocean region and possible future unrest in the area, sufficient to warrant the stationing of a permanent naval fleet in the area with the main

interest directed towards the Gulf and the sea lanes from there to Europe. The French Indian Ocean fleet has a good working relationship with the US navy and is watchful of Soviet naval activities.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom no longer maintains a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Economically the region is still of vital importance to the United Kingdom, being the source of some 40% of its oil supplies and an important supplier of non-ferrous metal imports. There is no stated British intention of resuming a naval presence in the Indian Ocean but concern has been shown over the stability of the region and a watchful attitude is maintained. The United Kingdom is a member of the Five Power Defence Arrangement to protect Singapore and Malaysia but unlike Australia and New Zealand it maintains no military forces in the area.