

INDIAN OCEAN - A ZONE OF PEACE

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Abstract

In the region of Indian Ocean, many countries try to establish their supremacy on power and trade. India is the ancient maritime power of this region from the early period of history. In the 19th century, European countries dominated in the Indian ocean and captured the trade and power. In the 20th century, many countries around the Indian Ocean got their freedom from colonial rule and tried to seek their economic prosperity and political stability. The end of cold war between the super powers in the last decade of twentieth century reduced the tension in the Indian Ocean. Every country embracing the Indian Ocean must aim to restore peace and cooperation in this region.

Keywords: *trade, power, economic, peace, information, freedom*

“Washing the shores of Asia in the North Africa in the west and the East Indian Islands and Australia and Tasmania of the east, the Indian Ocean is the third large of the oceans”¹. There are thirty six littoral and hinterland states² embracing the sketch of the Indian Ocean³. Informations are available about the navigation in the Indian Ocean even during the time of the Pharaohs⁴. While India was an ancient maritime power from the early period of history⁵, during the seventh century A.D., the commercial navigators of Arabia had seaborne trade contacts with China and Indonesia. Anyhow the Indian Ocean was under the control of India till the advent of the Portuguese⁶. Then the Chinese maritime activities were also prominent of Indian Ocean between the 13th and 15th centuries⁷.

The landing of Vasco da Gama at Calicut in May 1498 not only put an end to the supremacy of the Chinese in the Indian Ocean but also paved the way for commercial as well as colonial rivalry among the other European powers like the Dutch, Danes, English and French. “The first American expedition to the Indian Ocean dates back to 1784 A.D.”⁸. Such entries were mainly for the obvious that one can enjoy commercial supremacy and economic superiority.

At the dawn of the 20th century most of the colonies of the South East Asia were bubbled with the spirit of nationalism and that caused their independence subsequently. Such a position enabled them to seek their economic prosperity and political stability either individually or only depending upon some developed neighbouring nations. Simultaneously the undeveloped, the underdeveloped and developing nations of the areas of Indian Ocean were forced to feel the reactions of the cold war tensions that were operating after the II World War. Beyond this the rivalry caused by the production of nuclear and atomic weapons among the major powers also threatened these countries. Again it is clear that “the American’s desire to acquire from foothold in the Indian Ocean, not because it is threatened by the Soviet naval activity, but because of its location to the south of the

Soviet Union, ideally suits them for the placement of their underwater long range missiles”⁹.

The rivalry among those two major powers grew gradually but steadily. The enormous growth of Soviet trade with the third world countries during the fifties of the 20th century¹⁰ and the availability of abundant natural resources in the states of Indian Ocean also complicated the issue. At this critical juncture United Kingdom and United States of America have naval and air bases in Goa Island, Diego Garcia, Asmara, Maria, and Bukharin islands, North West cape and Cockburn sound¹¹. The selection of Diego Garcia, “the Malta of Indian Ocean”¹² by America as is base, after deep survey in the Indian Ocean¹³, will testify to the commencement of the problem of peace in the zone of Indian Ocean.

Further in April 1965 Aldbra Farquhar, Destroches and Diego Garcia were grouped together in the name of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). In December 1966 when U.S.A and U.K. agreed to use those territories for military purposes for a period of 50 years it led Mauritius to part with Diego Garcia island while she achieved independence during March 1968¹⁴. Such a critical position allowed Mauritian Prime Minister Ramgoolam to sign a fishing agreement with U.S.S.R under the good intention that it will never yield any military issue¹⁵. Thus Mauritius became the centre of attraction for “the military man oeuvres of the terrible two”. The major powers with mistrust among them began to create a tension, tangle and tussle.

While the things were getting from bad to worse, in the first non-aligned summit met at Belgrade in 1961 it was stressed that the power blocs should bring under control their arms building up¹⁶. It also expressed its heartfelt belief over nuclear tests and cold war rivalries. The second non-aligned submit met at Cairo in October 1964 gave much importance to the economic prosperity of non-aligned nations. As no fruitful measures emerged to avoid the misdeeds which affected the peace in Indian Ocean zone in 1967 America got the right to sue the Maha Island in the Seychellar group of Satellite tracking and telemetry facilities¹⁷.

Such disturbing trends were openly opposed at the General Assembly of the U.N.O by the Ceylonese Delegate on 8, October 1969, by Dinesh Singh, the Indian External Affairs Minister on 18, December 1969, and by Adam Malik, the Indonesian Foreign Minister on 7, March 1970¹⁸. The Lusaka non-aligned summit appealed to the powers “to keep the Indian Ocean a nuclear free zone”. Soviet Russia readily obliged to the call of the non-aligned Afro-Asian States and expressed that “the promotion of the establishment of nuclear free zones in various parts of the world as one of the basic concrete task of the struggle for peace and international security”¹⁹. The same stress was reiterated by the Indo-Soviet joint statement issued on 29, September 1971 by Braznev and Mrs. Indira Gandhi during the latter’s visit to U.S.S.R. But in 1971, U.S.A made all possible endeavours to establish a Naval communication centre at Diego Garcia Ashmara in Ethiopia. Thus the Indian Ocean policy of America was the “maintenance of sufficient military forces, capabilities, base rights and facilities to support U.S. Foreign policy, strategy and economic independence”²⁰.

Further for an effective employment of her nuclear strategies during April 1971, U.S.A conducted a five day naval exercise in the Indian Ocean²¹. It should be remembered here that America supported Japanese ambition of becoming a leader in the Far East and South East Asia by the New Security Treaty signed between them on 19, January 1960²². The introduction of the term “Non-Communist Pacific Asia” (NOCPA) by the Japanese Prime Minister Sato in 1969 and the importance assigned to “Asia and Pacific Council” (ASPAC), an organization for the economic development of Asian countries, came into being during June 1966, also will explicate the mounting tension. Thus the peace of the Indian Ocean was disturbed by some major power or other with certain ulterior motive to express their hatred against each other.

The treatment of Diego Garcia as “a staying pest for the development force”, the instability in Iran, “the Soviet Quest for Warm water port corroborated with their intervention in Afghanistan” and the repeated signs of the warships of the super powers in the Indian Ocean have also affected the peace of the Indian Ocean. The “South West Asian Central Military Command” (CENCOM) and the U.S. Pacific command also will expose the enthusiasm of the Africa in protecting her interests. “The occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviets, the changed situation in Iran, after the fall of the Shah and the Iran-Iraq war have resulted in changed perceptions and realignment of the U.S. global strategy”²³.

In considering the Indian Ocean, a zone of peace what is the stand of India? On defence point of view the Indian Ocean problem is a crucial and vital issue for India. Further “India never lost her independence till the lost command of the sea in first decade of the 16th century”²⁴. To avoid the effects of the rivalry of the major powers it became a must for India to rule the waves of the Indian Ocean²⁵. It will be apt to have it as an “Indian Lake”. Further non-aligned India never allows any superpower to play their role in the ocean. India anyhow, condemned the entry of the U.S. seventh fleet in the Indian Ocean in December 1963. So “the naval bases in the Indian Ocean have been one of strong opposition”. During the Prime Ministership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi the Indian Ocean was treated “as an area of peace and a bridge of understanding”²⁶. In the commonwealth Prime Minister’s conference held at Singapore in January 1971 the great power rivalry was opposed by India.

On 16, December 1971, in the General Assembly of the U.N.O thirteen Afro-Asian non-aligned states proposed the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of peace. This was a major step on that line. Demilitarisation of that zone was also insisted. 61 member nations acknowledged that. During June 1972, a 15 members Adhoc Committee, comprising of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China, Mauritius, Tanzania, Zambia, Yeaman, Iran, Iraq, Madhagasgar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia and Japan was constructed. After many meetings the final report was submitted to the General Assembly in 1973. But no further steps were taken.

The non-aligned summits met at Algiers in 1973, at Colombo in 1976 and at Havana in 1979 also failed to achieve anything in this regard. The V.N. Adhoc Committee meeting held at New York on 4, February 1980 also could not arrive at any decision. The seventh

non-alignment summit met at New Delhi between 7th and 11th March 1985 also found no solutions to this issue.

The South Asian Association of Regional Co-operations summits held at Dacca and Bangalore during the 1985 and 1986 viewed this issue critically. On 27, November 1986 the Delhi declaration was published on “Principles for Nuclear Weapons Free and non-violent world”²⁷. It referred to the situation in the Indian Ocean and Stressed “the dismantling of all foreign military and naval bases in the area”. They also called for the speedy implementation of the V.N. Declaration of 1971 on making of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace.

Thus the Indian Ocean, a factor for the both the super powers and other powers, captivated the lovers of peace, peaceful co-existence, human life, economic and political independence, disarmament, individual harmonies, material and intellectual prosperity, international security and a free and non-violent world. For achieving durable peace, ability, good neighborliness and co-operation it is still necessary to have the Indian Ocean region as a zone of peace.

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