Australian Involvement in U.S. Militarisation of the Indian Ocean

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Over the last five years the countries bordering the Indian Ocean have been pressing for the establishment of a Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean which would block the escalation of great power military presence in the area. Australia and New Zealand voted for a UN General Assembly resolution in December 1972 which supported the general concept of such a Peace Zone. Over the same period modest escalation of both US and Soviet military activities has occurred in the area. The Soviet expansion has of course been continually emphasised and exaggerated in the West, while American expansion has gone largely unnoticed.

Then came the Middle East War and the Arab oil embargo, and the Indian Ocean suddenly became very important to the US. European allies had largely refused to help the US airlift to Israel, and it was obvious that in any future oil war US invasion forces would have to be routed through the Indian Ocean. At the same time, the US military was being forced out of South-east Asia. New bases, new allies and new weapons had to be found and built.

Over the same period, Australia and New Zealand have been subjected to increasing pressures to endorse this militarisation of the Indian Ocean and to become physically involved. Now, in 1976, with conservative governments, as pro-US as any in the past, we find ourselves committed to an Indian Ocean policy deplored by most Indian Ocean nations, and even by liberal elements in the US Congress. Moreover, we are likely to be dragged into another war - in the Middle East or in Africa - fighting for the US and against the people who should be our friends. The situation is disturbingly similar to that of ten or twelve years ago when America was soliciting our participation in the war against Vietnam.

This article examines the Soviet "threat" in the Indian Ocean, the US military "response" to that alleged threat, and America's real objectives in the Indian Ocean.
THE SOVIET NAVAL BOGEY

In recent months our news media and governments have made frequent allegations about a massive Soviet military buildup in the Indian Ocean. However, documented facts and statistics do not substantiate the allegations.

The military situation in the Indian Ocean up until 1974 has been usefully summarised in a report commissioned by the UN Secretary-General and released in May 1974. (1) This report describes how the Soviet Navy first moved into the Indian Ocean in 1967 when a space tracking ship appeared. Since then, the Soviet presence has been fairly continuous, building up from 529 “ship days” in 1968 to 2487 in 1973 (fighting ships only). By 1973 the flotilla typically consisted of three to five small warships, two or three submarines, two minesweepers, two oilers, two to four supply ships, and maybe an oceanographic ship - about twelve ships in all. The flotilla has never been particularly active, apparently being constrained by lack of shore facilities and resupply problems, so that the ships spend much of their time moored to buoys in the central ocean.

There have been occasional bursts of activity, in particular during the Bangladesh war in 1971 and in the October 1973 Middle East war. For a while after the Bangladesh war there were up to ten Soviet minesweepers clearing Chittagong Harbor; their presence was used in the West to boost to twenty the alleged number of Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean.

Since the UN survey, Soviet ship numbers have begun to decline. According to retired Admiral Gene Laroque, the Soviet flotilla was reduced from twelve to five or seven vessels, of which the biggest is a destroyer. (2) More recently still, according to a US Defence Department spokesman, the Soviet presence has been reduced to only four combatant vessels. (3) It should be remembered that Soviet minesweepers “are technically classified as combatants”. (4) So at present the Soviet flotilla is the third biggest in the Indian Ocean. France, with eighteen vessels has the most, and the US, with eight, is second biggest. The US presence is the most powerful, however, because as described below, it includes larger ships with greater fighting capability.

The figure of four Soviet vessels has been accepted by diverse publications from Newsweek to the New China Newsagency. While reduced in numbers, the Soviet flotilla has been upgraded to some extent in that it
now includes a modern Krivac class guided missile destroyer.

Alarm has also been generated in the West by claims that the USSR has numerous military bases in the Indian Ocean and is acquiring more. At various times it has been alleged that the Soviet Union had bases at Berbera (Somalia), on Socotra, near the Chagos Archipelago, at Umn Qasra (Iraq), at Aden, at Chittagong, in Mauritius, Zanzibar, at Trincomalee (Ceylon), Vishakapatnam (India) and elsewhere. The Australian Liberal-Country Party once even claimed that Singapore had become a Russian base!

In fact, the most that has ever happened at any of these places with one exception is that Soviet naval ships have made port calls there. Soviet ships have occasionally put into Singapore for repairs on the same commercial basis as have ships of other nations. Near the Chagos and Seychelles Islands, the Soviet Navy has mid-ocean mooring buoys, but no shore facilities of any kind. There is no other factual information to support the other claims.

The one allegation of a “Soviet base” which is less easily dismissed concerns Berbera in Somalia. To bolster up its own case for enlarging its Diego Garcia base, the US has been saying a lot about Berbera. According to US Navy spokesmen and others, Berbera is a truly massive base with a fully equipped port for vessels up to 12,000 tons, facilities for the servicing and storage of sophisticated cruise missiles, a nearly completed airfield for Soviet aircraft, a long range high frequency communications centre, barracks for 1500 men, and a fuel tank farm. All this sounds very impressive, almost as impressive as what the use US is building at Diego Garcia. In fact, the reality is that at Berbera there is a Somalia port used by Soviet vessels (5); and an airfield which has once been used by Soviet marine reconnaissance planes. (6) The fuel tank farm has only one-quarter the storage capacity of that being built by the US on Diego Garcia. (7) The Berbera communications facility consists only of “two large rhomboid antennae”. (8) A rhomboid is a medium power, unsophisticated antenna that can operate in only one direction for point-to-point communications. US Defence Department intelligence photos reprinted in Air Force Magazine show the facility to be absolutely insignificant compared with the hundreds of hectares of antennae the USN has at its Indian Ocean bases (described later). (9)

Both the Soviet Union and Somalia have denied that Berbera is a missile base, and Somalia invited some US legislators to look for themselves. The senators could find no “facilities for the servicing and storage of sophisticated cruise missiles”. Senator Dewey Bartlett saw only some ancient (1959 vintage) Styx missiles of 48 kilometre range - and indeed the Pentagon had already admitted that this was all that was there. (10) Lots of navies besides the Soviet Navy have Styx missiles - including those of India, Iran and Egypt. There is no evidence that any of this constitutes a “Soviet Base” - it simply represents military equipment given or sold by the Soviet Union. It is not in dispute that Somalia has acquired USSR-made aircraft, and that there are about 1,000 Soviet military “advisers” in Somalia. (11)

Another Western technique for enhancing the scariness of the Soviet bogey is to claim that the opening of the Suez Canal will allow the Soviet Navy to reinforce its Indian Ocean flotilla with elements of its Black Sea fleet, and this will give it tremendous strategic advantage over the US. In fact, the opening of the Suez Canal has given the US even greater accessibility for its Mediterranean fleet which, moreover, is not subject to the constraints suffered by the Black Sea fleet having to pass through the Turkish Straits, where it is subject to NATO surveillance. The absurdity of this particular argument is obvious when one considers that it was the US Navy that did most of the work of reopening the canal and since its reopening it has been used by the French, US and British Navies, but not by that of the USSR. (12) William Colby, ex-CIA director, has been quoted as saying that opening Suez did not help the USSR, and that the USSR would not use it because of instability in the area. (13) It is also worth noting that the Soviet Pacific fleet’s access to the Eastern Indian Ocean from Vladivostock is similarly constrained by the narrow straits controlled by Japan and South Korea. Also the distance the Soviet fleet has to transit from Vladivostok is much greater than that which the US Pacific fleet has to cover from its major bases in the Philippines and Guam.

No Western propaganda picture of the
Soviet Navy is complete without a mention of the Soviet trawlers which, to quote one propagandist "provide the most sophisticated intelligence to any nation afloat". The USSR normally has about forty big trawlers in the Indian Ocean and no doubt some, or all of them indulge in any radio snooping that is possible. But sophisticated snooping is just not possible - shipborne antennae are too unstable, too small, and subject to too much radio interference from other onboard electronic gear. Sophisticated electronic spying is only possible with giant antennae like those of the US described later.

The magnitude of Soviet Naval activities in the Indian Ocean can best be summarised by quoting the former director of the CIA, William Colby, who in closed door testimony to the House Armed Services Committee said that the Soviet presence was "relatively small and inactive". He dismissed any threat from this force by pointing out that a number of constraints limited its effectiveness - in particular it lacked air cover and it lacked land bases. (14)

Having disposed of the Russian bogey it remains to consider why the USSR maintains the modest presence which it has in the Indian Ocean. All the evidence suggests that the main reason is simply to impress allies and potential allies. Soviet vessels "show the flag" in any port they are welcome at (no doubt intending that the flag will be plainly visible from Peking!) and indulge in a little bit of western-style gunboat diplomacy on such occasions as the Bangladesh war. There is certainly nothing commendable about this, but it is not particularly sinister either. At least the Soviet Navy has always been quite careful to keep out of real wars. The way for us to deal with the problem is to set up a zone of peace rather than start a naval arms race.

The USSR can of course justify its presence by pointing out that the US was there first (which it was). The USSR had no naval presence there until the construction of North West Cape Naval Communication Station was completed, which was taken to signify that Polaris/Poseidon submarines, with missiles targeted on the Soviet Union, were deployed in the Indian Ocean. (15) If the Soviet ships have any strategic function at all it would be to impose some check on this missile threat. However, it is generally accepted that even detecting, let alone destroying nuclear subs is not feasible. The Soviet ships show no specialisation and are not in sufficient numbers to be able to do this.

There are two other reasons why the USSR may feel an Indian Ocean presence is necessary. Firstly, the USSR has a considerable mercantile traffic through the Ocean, in particular carrying cargo from one end of the Soviet Union to the other. Secondly, about one-third of the USSR's mid-ocean fish catch comes from the Indian Ocean, and they may feel the fishing fleet needs protection, perhaps from an Iceland-style "cod war".

**GROWTH OF U.S. PRESENCE**

The US entered the Indian Ocean in 1950 with the stationing of "Mid East Force", consisting of two destroyers and an amphibious ship, at Bahrein. This situation remained fairly static until about 1959 when contingency plans were filed for the Pacific Fleet to enter the Indian Ocean if necessary and negotiations were commenced for siting a naval communication station on Australia's Indian Ocean shore. This base - North West Cape - was completed in 1967, integrating the Indian Ocean into the worldwide Defence Communications system, and in particular providing very-low-frequency communications receivable by totally submerged submarines.

The US sent a task force including the nuclear powered aircraft carrier Enterprise into the Indian Ocean in December 1971 while the Indo-Pakistan war was in progress. The next month, the Pentagon announced that the US would maintain a permanently increased presence in the region, and the jurisdiction of the Pacific Fleet was extended to include the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, the Navy was also taking steps to establish a more permanent presence ashore. Thailand already offered adequate facilities on the Indian Ocean periphery but it was decided that a more central location was also needed. Diego Garcia - an atoll with only a small human population - was ideal. Britain had purchased the atoll from Mauritius in 1965 for possible use as a joint US-UK base, a US-UK agreement was signed in 1966, and preparations for construction there were announced in 1970.
The thousand or so helpless inhabitants were removed and dumped in Mauritius where they remain to this day in abject poverty. The British Foreign Office has admitted that there was "some reluctance to move and the Mauritius government says 'it is basically true - these people are having a tough time.'" (16)

But no-one cared. The base was completed in 1973. It was described officially as an "austere" communication facility with "only" an 8,000 foot runway and about 250 men.

When the October 1973 Middle East war broke out Diego Garcia underwent rapid augmentation, with a TSC-54 communications satellite ground terminal being flown in from North West Cape. (17) The aircraft carrier Hancock was moved into the Indian Ocean and later was replaced by the Oriskany. It was announced that the US presence was to be further stepped up.

Sure enough, in January 1974, the Pentagon announced that Diego Garcia would be turned into a full-scale base with an airfield long enough to take fully loaded B52s and F111s, an anchorage for a permanent task force, a repair tender for ships and subs, marine reconnaissance aircraft, and about 600 men.

This upset just about everyone. It upset the US Senate and Congress, although both eventually approved. It upset the British who theoretically owned the island and it upset the Mauritians who had sold the island to the British on the understanding that it was to be used as a communications base only. Almost all the nations around the Indian Ocean, including Australia and New Zealand, expressed disapproval. Chester Bowles, a former US Ambassador to India said that it was "a new incursion by America into waters it does not need and cannot protect, a move whose cost benefit ratio is negligible, in an area where its armed forces have become even more unwelcome."

The size and complexity of Diego Garcia are far in excess of any needs created by the Soviet presence; even Time magazine noted that "the powerful new American air-naval base nearing completion on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia is far more sophisticated than any facilities that the Russians have yet developed along the African coast."

US NAVAL SHIPPING IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

As already described, the US has had a continuous Indian Ocean presence since 1950 and this presence has continuously expanded. It has included a number of anti-submarine exercises, some held under SEATO auspices (remember SEATO?) with Australian and NZ participation. These anti-submarine warfare (ASW) exercises are presumably concerned with preventing any Soviet sub-attacks on the US missile subs there.

The US now has about eight ships in the Indian Ocean, often including an aircraft carrier and a guided missile cruiser. Until recently the number of American ships and ship-days was always less than that of the Soviet Union - probably because of the obvious propaganda advantages that accrued to the US.

The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff has provided figures for ship-days from 1965 to 1973 (18) while figures for 1974-75 are available from the USIS. (19) These figures may be summarised as follows:

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>US</th>
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<td>800</td>
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<tr>
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<td>800</td>
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<td>1138</td>
<td>800</td>
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<td>1572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>2940</td>
<td>1409</td>
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</tbody>
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* These figures are for fighting or combatant ships only - that is they do not include supply ships, tankers, etc. Soviet minesweepers are included - they are technically classified as combatant by the US. (20)

There are two points to be noted about the figures. Firstly, that the US started this admittedly minor arms race. Secondly, that
"ship-days" are an inadequate measure because they take no account of ship age, size, or sophistication.

Thus, the US figures include aircraft carriers which maybe have twenty times the firepower of a destroyer. The Soviet Navy has no aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean. Remember also that the Soviet ships are hindered by long supply lines and their lack of shore facilities.

This still leaves the problem of whether there are American missile subs in the Indian Ocean. It is generally assumed that North West Cape base was built to provide Command and Control communications to Polaris and Poseidon subs in the Indian Ocean. Admiral Laroque in March 1974 congressional testimony said there was little doubt that parts of the Indian Ocean have been used as patrol areas. If missile subs are present they would be from the Guam squadron. As the US loses its Mediterranean bases and as Soviet ASW improves, the Mediterranean may become too "hot" for American subs, leading to increased Indian Ocean deployment. The new high-speed Trident subs with much longer range missiles will have vastly better operating economics for Indian Ocean deployment.

**US BASE FACILITIES AND BASES AVAILABLE TO THE US**

The US has a comprehensive network of bases which facilitate its military activities everywhere in the Indian Ocean area. The principal base is, of course, Diego Garcia, already described.

**Naval bases:** Until recently, the main base supporting ship operations was that of Bahrein. But since the Bahrein regime pretended to order the US out of Bahrein in the aftermath of the 1973 Middle East war, the Pentagon has been disinclined to rely too heavily on this base.

Diego Garcia will soon be supplemented by base facilities at Cockburn Sound near
Strategic waters: A new superpower rivalry for naval dominance

Military map of the Indian Ocean according to American journal, *Newsweek.*

Perth. This is a big base with berthing and repair facilities under construction for large ships and submarines. There will also be a magazine for storing naval ammunition, torpedoes and missiles and a communication facility. Fremantle and Perth provide nearby heavy engineering backup. (21)

Construction of Cockburn Sound was begun in 1971 when Malcolm Fraser, then Defence Minister, made it clear that the US was an intended user. The USN had initial plans to homeport one destroyer there, (22) but these plans had to be shelved when the Whitlam government came to power and construction was ordered to virtually cease. With a tory government back in power, Admiral Holloway, US Chief of Naval Operations, claims that the US now has the all-clear to base nuclear powered vessels (i.e. submarines?) there, allegedly to defend sea lanes between the Middle East and Japan. Admiral Holloway says there are no plans to base strategic missile submarines there. (23)

At Char Bahar in Iran, another big $600 million naval-air base is being constructed under a shroud of secrecy by American contractors, ostensibly for Iran, but presumably it will be available to the US. (24)
There are currently 24,000 US advisers in Iran.

The US has access to port and airfield facilities in Oman. (25).

The US is also expanding military port facilities at Jubail on Saudi Arabia’s east coast. The Pentagon last year awarded a $181.5 million contract to a South Korean construction company, hoping thus to avoid the ire of the US Jewish community. (26)

South Africa’s Simonstown naval base was formerly used extensively for Indian Ocean operations by the US Navy, but this had to be discontinued because black crew members were subjected to South Africa’s apartheid practices.

The US Army’s Military Review has suggested that the US should establish a naval base in the bantustan or “homeland” of Transkei. (27)

Although Subic Bay in the Philippines and Guam are geographically outside the Indian Ocean, they are close enough to service Indian Ocean operations by the US Navy, but this had to be discontinued because black crew members were subjected to South Africa’s apartheid practices.

Air bases: Diego Garcia will soon be the principal US Indian Ocean air base. Other bases used or usable by the US include Learmonth (28) (near North West Cape), Cocos Island (29), an Australian possession, Gan (a British airbase in the Maldive Islands), Mahe (in the Seychelles), Char Bahar (Iran), and, until recently, Utapao, in Thailand. USAF planes make frequent use of Singapore, where the Lockheed Corporation, with Pentagon financing, has taken over the former RAF repair facilities at Changi.

Clark Airbase, in the Philippines, although geographically outside the Indian Ocean, is close enough for transports, marine reconnaissance Orions, SR-71 spy planes, and bombers to operate over the Indian Ocean.

MARINE RECONNAISSANCE

One very important factor that has not been given much consideration in comparison of US/USSR strengths and intentions is America’s complete coverage of the Indian Ocean by maritime reconnaissance aircraft - principally P3C Lockheed Orions. The Orion has an operational range of about 2300 miles. If one draws 2300 mile radius circles around the airbases from which US and allied Orions are known to operate - i.e. Learmonth, Cocos, Diego Garcia, and Char Bahar, - it is seen that the US has the practical capability of keeping the entire Indian Ocean under surveillance. According to ex-CIA Chief William Colby the Soviet Union has no equivalent capability.

America’s allies perform a large proportion of the surveillance. Australia flies Orions out of Learmonth and Cocos while New Zealand patrols into the Indian Ocean from Singapore (according to Prime Minister Muldoon, who produced photos of Russian ships allegedly taken from NZ Orions over the Indian Ocean.) Iran has also been provided with Orions by the US. All this surveillance is directed and coordinated by the USN which assigns areas of responsibility, and ‘targets’ detected in one area are passed on to the ally in the next area whenever targets progress over a boundary. All data is forwarded to and processed by the USN. The same integrated operation extends over the Pacific, with the US, Japan, Australia, and NZ each having their own areas.

South Africa flies Shackleton marine reconnaissance planes which also contribute to the overall surveillance. South Africa wanted to buy Orions but the US refused on the grounds that they might be used against insurgencies. There are still congressional pressures “to sell them the P3C aircraft to gain the intelligence that would be produced therefrom” (30)

ELECTRONIC INTELLIGENCE

The US has a world wide network of electronic listening posts engaged in eavesdropping on other nation’s radio traffic and pinpointing the location of transmitters. These listening posts rely in particular on gigantic Wullenweber antennas of up to 35 acres extent, and about 30 metres high. Being so big, they are hard to hide, and are easily identified. Wullenweber antennas suitably placed for monitoring the Indian Ocean are located at San Miguel (in the Philippines, and recently reactivated to
substitute for one closed down in Thailand), at Abu Musa (Iran), and at Asmara (Ethiopia).

The Wullenwebers are operated by “naval security groups” or USAF Security Service personnel for the National Security Agency. A Naval security group also operates at North West Cape, apparently with less sophisticated antennas. Its existence was inadvertently revealed in congressional military construction hearings.(31)

American electronic intelligence capability is currently being augmented by Iran which has hired the Rockwell International Corporation to build an additional airborne and ground based radio intercept staffed with ex CIA and National Security Agency staff. The CIA is supposed to be a beneficiary of this augmented capability.(32)

The South Africans operate a big electronic snooping base at Silvermine Mountain, near Simonstown. According to a Wall Street Journal reporter “on Silvermine video screens the Ocean areas from the East coast of South America to Bangladesh and from the bulge of South Africa to the Antarctic can be represented in their entirety or in sections. At the touch of a computer console, a watch officer can summon, for example, a geographic display of all merchant ships in any selected area, or all east-bound merchant ships, or all naval vessels.

“Having spotted a vessel on the video display, the operator can query the computer for any combination of the ships characteristics including type, size, course, speed, flag, cargo ... A touch of the keyboard also evokes similar data on all aircraft in the area.” Classified data from this system is fed through the US naval communication station at Londonderry, Northern Ireland, to the US itself. (33)

The US wanted to augment the Silvermine facility with its own radar gear to be installed under Nato auspices, but this was blocked last year by the other Nato countries.

One example of how this network is used was given by a defector from the US National Security Agency writing in Ramparts, August 1972. He described how the US used off-shore ships to “D.F.” (direction find) a radio transmitter of the Mozambique liberation forces, “then they’d correlate with our installation in Ethiopia which also had intercepted it, and pin point the source.”

The Soviet Union appears to have no equivalent electronic intelligence system, apart from those ubiquitous trawlers.

The existence of such a network around the Indian Ocean allows any radio transmitter aboard ship, submarine, or aircraft to be instantly determined by triangulation. Cryptanalytic computers allow near instantaneous decoding of radio messages.

**SATELLITE SURVEILLANCE**

The US has “Big Bird” and other spy satellites in high inclination and Polar orbits, principally for photographing military facilities within communist countries and for supplying intelligence in war areas such as the Middle East. These satellites are controlled and interrogated by a world-wide network called the USAF Satellite Control System. (SCS). Indian Ocean bases for SCS are located at Mahe in the Seychelles and at Nurrungar, Australia. Until mid-1975, the US also had a Nasa satellite tracking station on Madagascar with classified military functions which probably included monitoring spy satellites. When the US was forced to leave classified documents were burned, computers smashed, and secret telemetry records, master tapes, etc. were destroyed. (34)

The advantage of having ground stations in the Indian Ocean is that satellites can be commanded to focus on particular targets, and the resulting data can be received all more or less instantaneously. The Soviet Union has similar satellites but no ground stations in the Indian Ocean area, and thus would have to wait until the satellites were over the Soviet Union to command or interrogate, so that any particular snooping operation might take several orbits, and therefore several hours, to complete.

The US has missile early warning satellites in geostationary orbits over the eastern end of the Indian Ocean, and according to some reports, over the western end as well. They are monitored by a ground station at Pine Gap in Australia. Their principal function is to detect missile launches, including test missiles, within the
Soviet Union, but they could also monitor submarine launched missiles in the Indian Ocean. Other sensors aboard these satellites are designed to detect nuclear explosions in the atmosphere and in space.

The Soviet Union is only beginning to deploy an equivalent system.

**COMMUNICATION NETWORK**

The US Navy has large communication bases at North West Cape, Diego Garcia, and Asmara. North West Cape has a two megawatt VLF transmitter, the other two have smaller VLF transmitters, all for communicating with totally submerged submarines. Other equipment at these bases, and at Mahe, Bahrein, Madagascar, and elsewhere provide ship to shore and aircraft to ground communications and also point to point communications as part of the general purpose world-wide Defence Communications System. America’s arsenal of nuclear weapons is controlled through this latter system.

The Soviet Union has no equivalent facilities in the Indian Ocean, although it does have a small communication base at Berbera.

**MILITARY AIR TRANSPORT**

The USAF Military Airlift Command operates C5A Galaxies and C-141 Starlifters over a network of routes in the Indian Ocean. North West Cape, for example, is supplied by Starlifters from Hickam AFB (Hawaii) through Christchurch (NZ), Richmond, and Alice. Diego Garcia is supplied from Hickam through Yokota (Japan) and Cocos, and also from Clark AFB. Other routes exist but are not known in detail. MAC maintains hangars, repair equipment, spare parts, and storage at various airfields including Dhahran in the Persian Gulf and Pearce in Western Australia.

These routes, airfields and depots are significant not only because they help maintain bases in operational readiness, but because they also provide a continual rehearsal of the massive airlift of troops and equipment from the Pacific to the Middle East that will be needed if the US decides to go to war in the Middle East in the event of another oil embargo. The Soviet Union flies transports to various African countries but has no ocean-wide network like that of the US.

**US OBJECTIVES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN**

Western propaganda includes a lot of rubbish about filling the “vacuum” left by British withdrawal. “Vacuum” as used here is a meaningless term and any military deficiency felt by Indian Ocean nations can easily be put right by Indian Ocean nations themselves, singly or in combination. The Indian Ocean nations do not sense any “vacuum” that must be filled, as though in response to some inexorable physical law, by the US against the expressed wishes of the local people.

Guaranteeing “freedom of navigation” is similarly meaningless. If the phrase had any meaning then every powerful nation would be justified in patrolling every ocean. In fact, piracy on the high seas just hardly ever happens.

A franker explanation of America’s motives in the Indian Ocean can be got from the testimony of Admiral Zumwalt, then Chief of Naval Operations, to the Senate Defence Appropriations Subcommittee in May 1974.

Zumwalt said that world-wide Navy mission requirements were in order of priority:

1. Assured second strike capability
2. Sea control capability
3. Ability to project power ashore

Assured second strike refers to the missile submarine’s assured capability of launching a retaliatory (i.e. second) strike in response to a first strike by the enemy. In the Indian Ocean this requirement is either not present or is satisfied by submarines patrolling from Guam, together with the communication bases which will send the firing order, and Omega navigation transmitters.

Sea control means the ability to deny the oceans to other nations in time of war. The near omniscient and omnipresent surveillance systems described above, in conjunction with maritime patrol bombers
(i.e. the Orions) and the Indian Ocean task force based at Diego Garcia will meet this requirement.

"Projection of power ashore" is the current euphemism for gunboat diplomacy - the use of aircraft carriers to threaten small nations, the ability to send the marines anywhere to interfere in other people's affairs and so on. The Indian Ocean task force, as currently configured, together with the Military Airlift Command, meet this requirement.

"Maintenance of overseas presence" means just that - defending and supplying the world-wide network of bases that serve the previous three "mission requirements".

Ultimately, of course, even these objectives are not the real concern. Basically, the Navy wants more money so it can become bigger, and the best way at the moment to get more money is to pretend that it is needed in the Indian Ocean. As the Wall Street Journal (April 10, 1974) puts it "more bases and increased naval deployments will provide the rationale for an Indian Ocean Fleet and bigger ship building budgets. The Navy has been panting on the edges of the opportunity represented by the Indian Ocean."

It is worth noting that it is virtually impossible to find any statement from US government sources which justifies the Indian Ocean build-up in terms of documented Soviet threat. Indeed, Admiral Zumwalt has even gone so far as to say that "While Soviet activity adds to the rationale of Diego Garcia, that rationale would exist independently of anything the Soviets are doing". (35)

US short-term objectives in the Indian Ocean may also be expressed, much more succinctly, as preparations for war in the Middle East and in Africa.

Ever since the 1973 oil embargo and as recently as July 29, 1976, the US has been threatening and preparing for a war "to safeguard US access to Middle East oil supplies". The battle plans for such a war were leaked to Time magazine in 1975. (36) In the last Middle East war the US had to rely on fascist Portugal for staging points on the resupply route across the Atlantic and up the Mediterranean to Israel. Now even that ally in Europe is lost. The next Middle East war will have to be fought from the Indian Ocean end with massive airlifts from Pacific bases to the US airfield at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia. Now that Thai bases are unavailable the Australian alliance may be invaluable for logistic support.

The other possibility is race war in Africa, which the US may want to be involved in to gain access to mineral resources. America has already warned the USSR that she will not tolerate "another Angola" which, translated, means that Soviet or Cuban assistance in another liberation war may be used as a pretext for US military involvement.

The conclusions to be drawn from this analysis of the Indian Ocean situation are simple:

a. Although the Soviet presence is inexcusable it in no way constitutes a threat.

b. We should demand that the Soviet Union totally remove its naval forces from the Indian Ocean if for no other reason than to give the US no excuse for escalating its naval presence.

c. Australia and New Zealand should realign themselves with the other countries of the Indian Ocean area in demanding an end to the US military presence.

d. The best way of doing all this is to endorse the concept of, and work towards the achievement of, an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace.

e. As a first step Australia must refuse to provide facilities to the US which violate the Peace Zone concept. That means Cockburn Sound, North West Cape, Nurrungar, and Pine Gap.

FOOTNOTES


5. The port is said to have been constructed by the Soviet Union in 1969 and since 1972 a barracks ship and a repair tender have been tied up there. The one intelligence photo released by the US shows no other warships in port. If Soviet ships use the port regularly it seems strange that US Intelligence is unable to produce a photo demonstrating this. The photo is reproduced in (US) Air Force Magazine, August 1975.

6. During the May 1975 “Okean” Exercise, Soviet ASW aircraft overflew Iran and landed at Berbera.

7. Berbera base accommodates 170,000 barrels. The Diego Garcia base will take 320,000 barrels of ship fuel and 380,000 barrels of aviation fuel, according to Air Force Magazine, August 1975.


9. Captioned in the photo are ‘fence’, ‘antenna area’ (9120 metres long), ‘electronic support vans’ (two of them) and a ‘storage support area’.


20. 20. See ref. 4.


28. USAF transports resupply North West Cape via Learmonth.


35. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations. Briefings on Diego Garcia, April, 1974, p. 7.