
Maritime Security East of Suez
Sustaining the U.S. Role as the Key Policeman
in Times of Change

Geoffrey Kemp



September 2012

CENTER FOR THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The Center for the National Interest is a non-partisan public policy institution established by former President Richard Nixon shortly before his death in 1994. Its current programs focus on American national security, energy security and climate change, Iran's nuclear program, maritime security, and U.S. relations with China, Japan, Europe, and Russia. The Center also publishes the bimonthly foreign affairs magazine *The National Interest*. The Center is supported by foundation, corporate and individual donors as well as by an endowment.

Copyright 2012 Center for the National Interest. All Rights Reserved.

Maritime Security East of Suez: Sustaining the U.S. Role as Key Policeman in Times of Change

By Geoffrey Kemp

Center for the National Interest

1615 L Street, NW, Suite 1250

Washington, DC 20036

Phone: (202) 887-1000

Fax: (202) 887-5222

E-mail: info@cftni.org

www.cftni.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction . . .	1
II. The Rise of the Indian Ocean . . .	5
III. The Growing Importance of U.S.-Indian Cooperation . . .	19
IV. China in the Region . . .	33
V. Conclusions . . .	41

INTRODUCTION

At the height of America's postwar power, in the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. Seventh Fleet was able to sustain an unchallenged presence "East of Suez" to embrace the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, the Indonesian Straits, and the South and East China Seas as well as the Western Pacific. Today the U.S. remains the dominant maritime power in this vast area, especially in the region to the west of the Straits of Malacca. However, in the region closer to China, the growing power projection and sea denial capabilities of China's military raises questions about the future ability of the United States to operate with immunity in an area China increasingly believes is part of its own patrimony. Although the United States has many allies in the region, especially Singapore, Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and increasingly Vietnam, the trends in military spending and force deployments suggest the U.S. will have to increasingly rely on cooperation with allies if there is to be a balance against China's maritime aspirations. The downside of this is that the U.S. must avoid being drawn into the many bilateral disputes between China and its neighbors and must try to play a conciliatory role rather than taking sides. This will inevitably mean that the U.S. will have to play a different role from the one it became accustomed to during its days as the undisputed hegemon. The U.S. will still remain the key policeman in the Indian Ocean and Gulf regions, but will have to adapt to a different role in parts of the Western Pacific and southeast Asian waters.

Furthermore, since this project began in 2009, a number of other important international developments have strengthened the basic themes of the study. Asian states are becoming even more important players in the Middle East, but at the same time they are facing new challenges at home and with their neighbors. The United States must address major financial constraints as it continues its role as regional policeman of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It

Maritime Security East of Suez

remains the dominant maritime force, but it will have to embrace increased power-sharing, both with the Middle East and with Asian countries. The clearest evidence of the ongoing Asian influence in the Middle East is in the Gulf states, who provide increasing amounts of fossil fuel for all the Asian economies. In return, the Gulf states have the financial resources to buy Asian products, expertise, and labor. The Arab awakenings that began in Tunisia in December 2010 have led to turmoil along the Mediterranean coast, from Libya to Syria, and in Yemen, but so far (with the exception of Bahrain) the Gulf states have avoided significant acts of violence or major interruptions to their phenomenal growth. For instance, while tourism to Egypt has been severely curtailed, the success of the key Gulf air hubs like Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai demonstrate that their plans to make them significant players in world aviation has so far been a success.

Other major developments relate to the decision by the United States to end its military operations in Iraq and eventually to draw down and end its combat presence in Afghanistan in 2014. This decision has intensified the debate about the future of American power and presence in Asia, which for many years has been unchallenged. But with the rise of China and India and an exceptionally belligerent relationship between Iran and the United States, questions about the future commitment of the United States to the protection of the Gulf and the sea lanes in the Indian and Pacific Oceans have been raised. This has coincided with a more assertive, even aggressive, posture by China towards its neighbors around the China Seas. China has shown a willingness to support Iran and Syria and has opposed U.S.-backed UN Security Council economic sanctions, and has stated that it will not be pushed into supporting policies that aim, in its view, to change regimes. However, one outcome of China's more assertive politics, especially in Asia, has been resolve by the other regional powers to increase their defense budgets and work more closely with the United States on an array of strategic issues, especially maritime security cooperation.

In response to concerns that the United States might be contemplating a drawdown from its Asian commitments, President Barack Obama announced in 2011 that the U.S. would strengthen its forward presence in the region, including developing a Marine Corps training base in Darwin, Australia. While Darwin is thousands of miles from the China Seas, and therefore does not directly impinge upon China's naval capabilities, the base will provide the Marines with a huge training area with no significant local population to worry about. Interaction with local peoples has been a problem for the United States at other bases in Asia, especially Okinawa, Japan and Seoul, South Korea.

A third factor that has become more visible in recent years is the large number of resource disputes between the Asian countries, and related worries about the

impact of climate change on the regional environment. Changes in the water flow from the Tibetan plateau could affect the main river arteries of Asia, and potential rising sea levels in the Indian and Pacific Oceans could put island states such as the Maldives and Kiribati in danger of literally disappearing. An even greater concern is the impact that rising waters will have on the coastlines of South and Southeast Asia, where millions of people live in subsistence conditions and where surging sea waters can destroy agricultural land. India has built a huge and expensive fence along part of its border with Bangladesh, nominally to keep out smugglers but, many believe, as a deterrent to future mass migration caused by environmental catastrophes.

The other feature of the region that has become more troublesome is the growth of ungovernable spaces—whether in Somalia, Yemen, or the wilds of India and Pakistan—where central governments simply do not have the power to control their own borders or coastlines. These spaces allow increased activities by well-organized groups of pirates, smugglers, dope traffickers, and terrorists. In Central Asia rivalries between some of the major states provide obstacles to economic integration. Thus while major infrastructure projects linking East and West Asia will continue, some will be delayed or even discarded due to political unrest and financial constraints.

Thus, while there are fundamental geopolitical changes occurring in the Middle East and Asia, with Asia becoming more of a fixture in the Middle Eastern scene, there remain many obstacles to any one Asian power that would wish to exercise power and influence in the Middle East. No Asian power is capable of assuming the mantle of the United States as the regional policeman. However, the financial crisis in the United States will require a major reappraisal of U.S. capabilities. This will need greater cooperation among all the key players, including China.

This report is organized into three major sections. The first section provides background on how the Indian Ocean became such an important theater. It draws upon a study done for the Center for the National Interest (then known as the Nixon Center) by Justin de Rise, which we are publishing separately. We believe this study, especially the extensive database that supports it, makes a unique contribution to our understanding of the large number of maritime confrontations that have taken place in the Indian Ocean over the last 70 years. It provides a most useful tool for analysts to work with, given the extraordinary amount of data we have assembled and the use of new Google Maps interfaces. The database is best viewed online (<https://sites.google.com/site/indianoceanconflicts/>).

Maritime Security East of Suez

The second section focuses on one of our key findings, namely the growing importance of the U.S.-Indian maritime relationship. It includes the summary of a workshop held in New Delhi in February 2011 which drew together American and Indian maritime specialists, and has been published by the Center separately in expanded form under the title *Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region*.

The report concludes with a summary of the emerging maritime environment and the challenges for all Middle Eastern and Asian powers, the United States, and others such as Britain, France, and Australia.

THE RISE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Strategic analyses of the Indian Ocean often suffer from two major misconceptions. First, until recently they have treated the Indian Ocean as a “strategic backwater,” ignoring the numerous naval conflicts which have taken place in its waters since World War II. Second, they view future conflict in the Indian Ocean predominately through the lens of land-based asymmetrical threats: terrorism flowing from Afghanistan, counter-insurgency operations in Iraq, or the continual specter of instability in Pakistan.

While emerging threats such as terrorism or domestic insurgency present compelling challenges to the region’s security, to only focus on the non-traditional aspects of conflict ignores the crucial role that *naval power* plays in maintaining the stability of the Indian Ocean. The unparalleled naval supremacy enjoyed by the United States allows it to secure global trade flows, contain hostile countries such as Iran, and maintain a significant regional presence despite experiencing significant difficulties in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

Similarly, coordination between major naval powers is necessary to deal with transnational issues such as natural disasters and piracy. By streamlining their maritime interdiction policies, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore were able to significantly reduce instances of armed piracy around the Malaccan Straits. Similarly, during the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake, a coordinated rescue and relief operation involving 127 ships from over twenty nations helped to blunt the tragic effects of the tsunami. Here, the Indian Navy was central to relief efforts, dispatching over 16,000 troops, 32 warships, 41 planes and a floating hospital to engage in humanitarian assistance. The United States, also a major contributor, dispatched 25 ships, including the USNS Mercy which cared for over 6,500 patients during the disaster.

Conversely, a lack of naval coordination allows transnational issues to fester. Piracy off the Gulf of Aden continues to rise, in large part because of the lack of coordination of the naval powers in the region and the fact that Somalia is a failed state. In late 2008, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Denmark, Australia, the GCC states and Pakistan, created the 45-ship Combined Maritime Force (CMF) to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea.

As geopolitical power continues to devolve towards emerging countries such as India and China, the Indian Ocean and its surrounding littoral states will increasingly become a center of global economic, diplomatic, and ultimately military attention. The Indian Ocean is strategically located next to hotspots in East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf and South and Central Asia. It borders approximately 35% of the world's population, and is home to four of the major chokepoints for international maritime trade: the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Straits of Malacca. Through these chokepoints flow over 39.8 million barrels of oil per day (bbl/d), or about 47% of the world's total oil production and 92% of its seaborne oil trade. These chokepoints that not only define the Indian Ocean as a major transit route for international trade, but also unify its disparate sub-regions into a coherent geopolitical theatre.

Since access to the Indian Ocean is constrained on each side by four major maritime chokepoints, crises occurring around one side of the Ocean will significantly affect nations on the other. As a fifteenth century saying put it, "Whoever is the lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice." If pirates in the Gulf of Aden manage to disrupt maritime trade, the economies of nations such as India or Japan will be adversely affected. If America and China were to engage in a conflict over Taiwan, China would have to deal with the possibility of the US intercepting its energy shipments through sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean. Of course if a nation such as Iran were to make good on its threats to close the straits of Hormuz, the repercussions would be global and severe.

Maritime Conflict in the Indian Ocean Since 1939

Because of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean's waterways, it is crucial to have a thorough understanding of the region's past and ongoing naval conflicts, of which there have been many. To this end, the Center for the National Interest (then known as the Nixon Center) developed a comprehensive database of inter-state naval conflicts in the Indian Ocean from 1939 to 2007. The goal of this project was twofold: First, to provide compelling

evidence that the Indian Ocean is historically prone to naval conflict, and that more focused attention should be paid to the region's strategic maritime dimensions. Second, is to uncover the overarching trends behind the region's maritime conflicts, giving the analyst a powerful tool in its prediction and ultimate avoidance.

World War II (1939-1945)

Although many scholars assume that World War II began with the German invasion of Poland on Sept 1, 1939, some might argue that a more appropriate date would be Japan's invasion of China from Manchuria following the Marco Polo Bridge incident on July 7, 1937. By 1939, the Japanese Empire controlled areas of the Chinese mainland south to Nanjing, as well as Taiwan and pockets of territory off the South China Sea. Dissuaded from a push into the Soviet Far East by a defeat by the Red Army at the Battle of Khalkhin Gol in 1939, the Japanese instead turned their attention south, in order to capture the oil-rich Dutch East Indies and establish a defensive perimeter around the Bay of Bengal.

While the Japanese campaigns in Burma, Ceylon, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore throughout 1941 and 1942 represent a major incursion into the Indian Ocean, there were also movements by the Italians in the Red Sea, and a sustained attack on Allied shipping by the Germans (and later the Japanese) around Horn of Africa. The first military action seen in the Indian Ocean was when the German pocket-battleship *Graf Spee* sailed around the Cape of Good Hope in November 1939 in search of Allied merchants.

The Red Sea Campaign: 1940-1941

In the early years of the war, Italy maintained a small fleet in the Red Sea to support its operations in East Africa and disrupt Allied supply routes traveling through the Suez Canal. Although the Italian Army managed to initially push the Allies from Somalia and threaten the Sudan and Kenya, their navy fared rather poorly, losing a number of surface combatants and submarines. When Italian destroyers based off of the port of Massawa attacked a New Zealand convoy, the Italian ship *Nulla* was run ashore by the New Zealand cruiser *Leander* and the destroyer *Kimberley*. The *Leander* later sunk the Italian merchant cruiser *Ramb1* off the Indian Maldiva Islands in February 1941. By April 1st, Eritrea and the capital of Ethiopia had been recaptured by British and Indian troops. Massawa fell by April 8th, leading to the destruction of the remainder of the Italian fleet, save for four submarines which managed to escape around the Horn of Africa.

Maritime Security East of Suez

1940-1942: Spectacular Japanese Advances

The Allies did not perform as well in the east, however, as Japan possessed a number of strategic advantages on the eve of its incursion into the Indian Ocean in late 1941. Geographically, the Japanese conquest of Southern China in 1940 not only made it well poised to strike at the British naval base in Singapore, but also separated the British fleet from its better equipped American ally in the Pacific. Geographically, the Allies were divided, with the bulk of the force residing in the American base at Pearl Harbor, leaving the other Allied forces vastly outgunned. Once the Japanese had struck the US fleet at Pearl Harbor, they were able to bring the brunt of their navy to bear on the smaller Allied Forces in the Indian Ocean.

On December 8th, 1941, Japan declared war on the British Empire following its attack on Pearl Harbor the day before. On the 10th, the Japanese scored their first major naval victory against the British by sinking the cruiser *Repulse* and the battleship *Prince of Wales* off the coast of Malaya in the South China Sea. Churchill wrote in his memoirs that now, “there were no British or American capital ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbour, who were hastening back to California. Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked.” By February 8th, the Japanese had captured Singapore Island, and with it some 80,000 Australian, British and Indian troops. This, combined with the Japanese takeover of Burma and the Dutch East Indies in March, forced the remainder of the British withdraw to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and reconstitute themselves as the Eastern fleet. Although the British fleet now contained two carriers, they were still vastly outnumbered by the Japanese forces, which contained one fleet of four carriers arriving from Pearl Harbor, plus another carrier-group operating in the Bay of Bengal. In early April 1942, the Japanese attacked the British bases at Colombo, and Trincomalee in quick succession, sinking the carrier *Hermes*, and the Australian destroyer *Vampire* and the corvette *Hollycock*. Ultimately, the Japanese maneuvers forced the British fleet to withdraw to East Africa, leaving the entirety of the Indian Ocean open to a potential Japanese advance. Fearing the further loss of the Cape of Good Hope and the security of its convoy routes, the British initiated *Operation Ironclad* in May 1942 in order to take Madagascar from the Vichy French.

1943: War for Merchant Shipping in the Indian Ocean

Although the Japanese never made another major advance into the Indian Ocean, the Allies’ anti-submarine and convoy efforts remained under-funded. Japanese submarines and German U-boats joined forces to attack the largely

undefended shipping lanes, and the Indian Ocean was virtually tied with the Pacific for number of merchant losses early in the war.

In spite of this, the Japanese never truly pressed their advantage, instead taking a defensive position around Burma and Indonesia. Had they been more aggressive, the Japanese could have severely threatened British supply routes through the Suez, giving tangential support to the Axis powers in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean.

British Resurgence 1944-1945

Axis losses in the European and Pacific theatres allowed the British to pay more attention to the Indian Ocean. Although limited to submarines for offensive operations in 1943, the British Eastern Fleet was significantly augmented in January 1944 by the arrival of three capital ships and two aircraft carriers. The newly strengthened fleet went on to launch carrier attacks on Sabang, Sumatra in April and July 1944, Surabaya, Java in May 1944, and the Nicobar Islands in October 1944. By December 1944, the British Eastern Fleet had been transformed into the East Indies Fleet, with an additional four aircraft carriers and two battleships. In May 1945, the British, Australians, and Indians launched the amphibious *Operation Dracula* to retake Rangoon.

The Early Cold War (1946-1979)

Following victory in World War II, Britain retained the responsibility of providing security throughout the Indian Ocean. British troops in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Aden, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, along with British ships patrolling the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, maintained a tenuous grip on the *Pax Britannica* that had existed in the region since the 1820s. Conversely, the United States and the Soviet Union considered the Indian Ocean to be something of a “strategic backwater,” choosing instead to focus resources on the European mainland and East Asia. Consequently, the early years of the Cold War were relatively calm when compared to the naval campaigns of World War II or the Tanker Wars of the later Cold War era.

This arrangement, however, was destined not to last. In 1946, 10,000 sailors and 56 ships in the Royal Indian Navy revolted against British authority, refusing to follow orders, and ultimately testing the will of the British Empire to remain in India. Although the British initially contemplated a military reprisal to quell the mutiny, the risk of harsh international retaliation and civil war within India forced the Attlee government to push the independence of India and Pakistan forward to August 1947. While independence was granted, it came at a high

Maritime Security East of Suez

price, as the partition of the Subcontinent into a largely Hindu India and largely Muslim Pakistan drove both countries into recurring conflicts in 1947, 1965 and 1971.

British Withdrawal East of the Suez and American Strategic Neglect (1960-1971):

Even with the loss of India, Britain could still exercise a significant amount of influence within the Indian Ocean by controlling its strategic access points such as the Suez Canal and the Straits of Malacca. The loss of the Suez however, marked a significant turning point in the history of the British Empire. In order to meet budgetary demands, the Ministry of Defense planned to abandon its base in Aden by 1968, and then abandon all but a token force in the Persian Gulf by early 1970s. Regional security would be maintained by ad hoc arrangements between local powers and the United States. In the east, Britain would maintain a token contingent in a five-power Commonwealth defense force consisting of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. In the Gulf arrangements were much more tenuous, leaving teeming border disputes over Kuwait, Khuzestan, and the Gulf islands.

The British decision could not have come at a worse time for America. Although the discovery of vast oil reserves in the Persian Gulf prompted the US to begin construction of a naval communications facility on Diego Garcia, it was in no position to supplant the British as the guarantor of region's security. Extensive commitments in Vietnam, coupled with domestic resistance to the war effort, kept the U.S. presence in the Gulf to a small force based out of Bahrain. The 1969 Nixon doctrine reflected these realities by emphasizing that international aggression which did not threaten America's existing treaty obligations would be handled by regional powers bolstered by US assistance, rather than direct by US involvement. The practical implication of this was that security in the Persian Gulf would be handled by Saudi Arabia and Iran, rather than a permanent US presence.

The Soviets, meanwhile, concentrated on outflanking the West in the Indian Ocean. Besides providing military assistance to Egypt, Iraq, and India, the Soviet Navy began to operate in the Eastern Mediterranean, and maintain a semi-permanent position in the Red Sea, the coast of East Africa, and the Persian Gulf. Although the Soviet fleet lacked air support and was numerically inferior to its Western counterparts, it was nevertheless available to shadow American carriers and provide support to Communist groups in Africa. To support its Indian Ocean presence, the Soviet Union maintained naval bases in Berbera, Somalia until 1977 and in Aden thereafter. Naval conflict in the Indian Ocean during 1960s and 1970s remained low, however, and was largely confined to regional participants.

Regional Conflicts: The Indo-Pak Wars (1965-1971)

In spite of its strategic position in the center of the northern Indian Ocean, there were a number of factors preventing India from developing a formidable navy in the years immediately following its independence. Although their history with the British made India aware of the abstract danger of maritime invasion, India's first two major wars, against Pakistan in 1947 and China in 1962, lacked a significant naval component. The question inevitably asked by Indian policymakers was, "a navy for defense against whom?" Thus, while India embarked in a massive rearmament plan following its crushing defeat in the 1962 Indo-Chinese war, it largely neglected its navy until 1967..

Aided by an influx of Soviet aid, the 1960s saw an extensive increase in Indian shipbuilding. These expenditures were vindicated in the 1971 war. Islamabad, realizing that it could not effectively defend the East across 1,000 miles of Indian territory, opted instead to launch an attack into Western India to divert India's attention.

The naval war was punctuated by the same geographic divide. In the Arabian Sea, the Indian Navy destroyed several Pakistan Navy vessels before launching attacks on Pakistani shipping and oil storage. In the east, a task force led by the carrier *INS Vikrant* effectively blockaded East Pakistan, destroying a number of small craft and bombarding port installations to prevent a massive Pakistani exodus. The blockade played a major part in ending the war on December 16, and establishing Indian strategic dominance over Pakistan and the subcontinent.

On December 11, 1971, America sailed the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* into the Bay of Bengal to deter further Indian aggression and reassure their newfound Chinese ally. The move sent shockwaves through the Indian foreign policy community, raising for the first time the possibility of conflict with a superpower and providing a lasting justification for a navy with blue-water capabilities. By 1975, the Indian navy was comprised of 30,000 men, manning 8 Soviet-made submarines, 2 cruisers, 3 destroyers, 26 frigates, 17 missile and coastal patrol boats, and one aircraft carrier. What started in the 1950s as a bare-bones coastal defense force had developed into a navy designed to dominate the Pakistanis and provide a minimum deterrent against possible superpower incursion.

Regional Conflicts: The Yom Kippur War and the Arab Oil Embargo (1973)

There were a series of events in the mid-to-late 1970s which changed the Indian Ocean and from a "strategic backwater," best maintained by regional powers, to

Maritime Security East of Suez

an “arc of crisis” demanding the direct attention of the United States. The 1973 Arab oil embargo which followed the Yom Kippur War was an early indication of US vulnerability. When the United States decided to provide military aid to Israel during the conflict, Arab oil producing countries responded in 1973 by issuing an embargo of oil flowing to the United States, many of her European allies, and Japan. The embargo led to price controls in the US, increased political tensions between America and its allies, and a new sense of Western vulnerability surrounding the security of its energy supply. In response, the United States began to contemplate a more direct role in the region. The frequency of naval patrols into the Indian Ocean was increased in late 1973, while expansions were planned at Diego Garcia to eventually accommodate a carrier task force.

Regional Crises: Iran and Afghanistan (1979)

The Nixon Doctrine as it applied to the Indian Ocean region essentially unraveled when the Shah of Iran was overthrown in February 1979. The United States lost a key ally against regional instability and Soviet incursion. Iran ceased to be a close ally and reliable supplier of energy, while the revolution demonstrated the impotence of the United States in responding to political instability of its allies. In spite of the presence of two aircraft carriers in the Arabian Sea, the United States was unable to rescue the 63 hostages taken on the November 4th storming of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Similarly, Khomeini’s populist anti-American message was a significant threat to the Arab regimes which depended on the United States for economic and military support. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, prompting worries that Washington was rapidly losing influence in the region.

The dual crises in Iran and Afghanistan brought an end to both the détente between the superpowers, and the Nixon Doctrine’s dissuasion to direct US intervention in the Gulf. In response to the Soviet invasion, the United States issued sanctions on grain sales to the USSR, and began to provide Pakistan with dramatically increased military aid and advanced F-16 fighters. Additionally, President Carter announced that control of the Persian Gulf was a “vital interest” to the United States, and embarked on a massive and permanent US military buildup in the region. Thus, the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, created in 1979, was succeeded by the permanent Central Command (CENTCOM) in January 1983. By achieving ‘maritime superiority’ in the northwestern Indian Ocean, the US aimed to prevent further Soviet advances and regional crises.

The Tanker Wars (1980-1989)

The Onset of the Tanker War (1980-1987)

The Iran-Iraq War grew out of an Iraqi perception of Iranian weakness following the disarray of the 1979 revolution. Thinking he could achieve a swift victory against a disorganized and demoralized foe, Saddam Hussein launched a three-pronged invasion of Iran on September 22, 1980. Progress was slow, however. Although the Iranians lacked Iraq's technology and coordination, they had an advantage in raw numbers, and by July 1982, had managed to not only push the Iraqis out of their country, but to begin an offensive against the Iraqi city of Basra. The Iraqi army, whose performance in Iran was lackluster, suddenly obtained a sense of purpose in defending its homeland, and soon halted the Iranian advance. The resulting stalemate was drawn out and bloody, with both sides resorting to World War I-type tactics to maintain the upper hand.

The "Tanker War" in the Persian Gulf emerged in 1984 as an outgrowth of this stalemate on land. Although the Tanker War technically began in May 1981 with the creation of an Iraqi naval exclusion zone north of the 29th parallel, it did not begin to attract significant international attention until March 1984 when the sheer volume of attacks showed the potential to threaten the flow of oil. For Iraq, the purpose of these attacks was two-fold: First, to damage Iran's ability to export the petroleum needed to run its already beleaguered economy, and second, to bring third parties into the conflict to pressure Iran for a ceasefire. For Iran, however, the effort was more defensive: By attacking merchant ships heading to Iraqi, Kuwaiti and Saudi ports, mining Gulf shipping routes, and threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz, it hoped to stem the flow of Western arms to Iraq and dissuade Western navies from taking a more prominent role in the Gulf region.

The overarching effect of the Tanker War was mixed. On one hand, the sustained attacks cut Iranian oil exports by half, and reduced Gulf shipping by over 25 percent, forcing the US, British, French, and Soviet navies to step up patrols in the Gulf. On the other hand, neither side was able to marshal the force necessary to deal a decisive blow to the other's economy or war effort.

This reason the Tanker War did not have an even more devastating effect was because of significant deficiencies in the strategies and capabilities of both belligerents. While Iraq was able to maintain sustained attacks on Iran's oil distribution network, forcing Iran to eventually move its terminals deep into the Southern Gulf, its weapons lacked the power and homing capabilities to reliably sink the supertankers it was targeting. Similarly, although Iran was able to

Maritime Security East of Suez

mount low-tech speedboat attacks on Gulf ports, and make use of asymmetrical techniques such as mine-laying, the increasing presence of Western navies prevented it from truly capitalizing on any initial tactical advantage.

The Arrival of the US Navy (1987-1988)

Iran's situation was further complicated by the growing presence of the U.S. navy. On one hand, there was a belief that, following the withdrawal from Lebanon after the 1982 Marine barracks bombing, America was unwilling to sustain casualties in another Middle East conflict. On the other hand, however, any direct confrontation with the U.S. navy ran the risk of entrenching America more firmly on the side of Iraq, thus further hampering Iran's war effort. Thus, the Iranians relied on mines to both deter further US involvement in the war and promote a guise of plausible deniability in the face of US and neutral casualties.

The plan backfired, however, as the conflict became more intense after 1985. In November 1986, Kuwait announced that it would seek international protection for its ships. In March 1987, the Reagan administration agreed to re-flag 11 Kuwaiti tankers to receive U.S. naval protection. That May, an Iraqi aircraft fired two Exocet missiles at the *USS Stark*, killing 37 sailors and severely damaging the ship. Ironically, the United States blamed the situation on Iran, and increased the frequency of its patrols. When Iranian mines struck the *Bridgeton* in July 1987 and the re-flagged tanker *Sea Isle City* in October 1987, the Americans retaliated by destroying the Resalat and Reshadat oil fields. The real "smoking gun," however, came on September 19, 1987, when the United States discovered the *Iran Ajr* laying mines in the Persian Gulf. After US Navy helicopters disabled the ship with rockets and machinegun fire, a Navy SEAL crew secured the vessel, displaying its cargo of mines to the world.

In April 1988, the *USS Samuel Roberts* was disabled by an Iranian mine. Although the Reagan administration ruled out a direct attack on land, they nevertheless decided that a major Iranian warship should be "put on the bottom." In ensuing engagements, Iran lost one ship and saw another critically damaged. The operation convinced Iran of America's resolve to defend its interests in the Persian Gulf, and firmly established the United States' role as the predominant naval force in the region.

US Dominance and Iraqi Containment (1990-2001)

Following the naval buildup of the 1980s and its subsequent victories in Operation Praying Mantis and the 1991 Gulf War, Washington enjoyed an

unparalleled naval supremacy in the Persian Gulf region as it attempted to contain Iraq and maintain stability in the Gulf. The major exceptions to this occurred in the Red Sea, where Yemen and Eritrea engaged in a protracted conflict over the Hanish Islands, and the North Arabian Sea, where India effectively blockaded the Pakistani port of Karachi following the onset of the Kargil Conflict in 1999. Ultimately, America's victory in the 1991 Gulf War enabled it to refocus its efforts from a Cold-War stance of open-ocean conflict with a rival superpower, to a post-Cold War stance of regional containment of littoral belligerents.

The Persian Gulf War (1990-1991)

Much like the Iran-Iraq War was precipitated by the 1979 Iranian Revolution, so too was Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait a product of the unsatisfactory results of its performance in its eight-year war with Iran. Although ostensibly a stalemate, Saddam Hussein failed to achieve a number of concessions from Iran that his people had come to expect. Aside from the 70,000 Iraqi prisoners of war who were still in Iranian hands, Iran continued to block the strategic Shatt al-Arab waterway, drawing Iraq's reconstruction of its port in Basra to a standstill. While he had numerous reasons for turning on Kuwait, one was that the annexation of Kuwait or at least the capture of the key islands of Bubiyan and Warbah could make up for the strategic loss of the Shatt al-Arab.

Although initially caught off guard by the Iraqi invasion, the United States and her Western allies were quick to react. On the day of the invasion, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 600, condemning the invasion of Kuwait and demanding the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces. Four days later, it backed up its demands by authorizing stringent trade sanctions on Iraq, while on August 25, the Security Council authorized member nations to use naval force to enforce the sanctions.

The naval armada built up to support these sanctions was nothing short of massive: By August 22, the United States had two carrier battle groups and two recommissioned battleships within aircraft striking distance of Iraq; by the middle of January 1991, this number had grown to six carrier battle groups.

Although the Iraqi navy was all but non-existent, being effectively contained by Iran during the Iran-Iraq War and then quickly destroyed by the Coalition, the U.S. Navy's contribution to the Gulf War was crucial, performing four critical functions. First, the Navy's sea-lift and maritime prepositioning capabilities not only allowed the United States to rapidly deploy forces to the region, but also allowed other nations without such logistical infrastructure to contribute meaningfully to the war. In the seven months of the Gulf War conflict, the

Maritime Security East of Suez

Navy's Military Sealift Command deployed 95% of the armored vehicles, attack helicopters, wheeled transport, heavy weapons, equipment, ammunition and supplies needed to maintain the war.

The second major area of naval involvement was maritime interdiction, where the Coalition's Maritime Interdiction Force (MIF) played a key role in enforcing UN sanctions before and after Desert Storm. The MIF became a massive international operation, comprising over 22 nations and spanning 250,000 square miles of sea lanes in the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. By April 1991, Coalition Forces intercepted 8772 ships, which resulted in 61 boardings and 117 diversions. While the vast majority of interceptions took place in the Gulf of Oman/ Arabian Gulf, almost all of the boardings and diversions took place in the Red Sea/ Gulf of Aden. The reason for this was twofold: First, Iraq attempted to smuggle goods through the Gulf of Aqaba in Jordan, and second, the Coalition wanted to avoid military conflict in the Gulf out of a desire to protect their own shipping and prevent oil spills.

The most visible use of the Coalition's naval forces, however, was their use of sea-based air power to bombard Iraqi positions in the opening days of Desert Storm. All told, the US Navy's strike aircraft comprised approximately 30-35% of the power projection missions flown in the Gulf War. The Navy played a significant role in neutralizing Iraq's air-defense systems, engaged in countless precision strikes against Iraqi armor, and launched hundreds of cruise missiles.

A final area of naval involvement was its ability to conduct amphibious assault on Kuwait. The Coalition provided a total of 31 amphibious ships carrying over 17,000 Marines and a range of vehicles and aircraft. The amphibious assault never occurred—the risks of devastation in Kuwait and significant losses were too great—but the presence of the force compelled Saddam to devote significant resources to coastal defense.

After almost a month-long air campaign, beginning on January 17, 1991, and a 100-hour ground campaign beginning on February 24, Saddam Hussein withdrew from Kuwait and acceded to Coalition demands on February 28, 1991. America's victory in the Gulf War further confirmed its maritime dominance of the Persian Gulf region. Indeed, the United States' one-sided victory in the Gulf War was only possible because of the Navy's ability to reliably control its sea-lanes, project air and amphibious power on land, and maintain a sustained maritime interdiction campaign against the enemy's supply routes.

With its leadership role in the 1990-1991 war and its subsequent support of no fly zones over Iraq, America was in the midst of a significant departure from its

comparatively non-interventionist approach in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From relying on Iran and Saudi Arabia to maintain security in the Gulf, the US was now containing both Iran *and* Iraq through its naval presence and military commitments. To accommodate its expanded role in the Gulf, it moved its Naval Central Command (NAVCENT) to Bahrain and in 1995 reestablished the 5th Fleet to patrol the Gulf and Arabian Sea. Indeed, the focus of the US Navy now fully moved from Cold-War position of balancing against the Soviets, to a focus on combating hostile regional powers operating in littoral regions of the ocean. The United States engaged in a number of missions throughout the 1990s to enforce restrictions on Saddam's regime.

Conflict over the Hanish Islands (1995)

Unlike the Persian Gulf, the United States does not have a formal security architecture in place to police the Red Sea, relying instead on a consortium of the French, Saudi, and Egyptian navies. That calm was broken, however, in December 1995, Eritrean naval forces attacked and overran a small contingent of Yemeni troops on Greater Hanish Island, located about 65 miles north of the Bab al-Mandab strait. The roots of the Hanish conflict date back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, and involve disputes over tourism, fishing, and oil rights, as well as a zero-sum conception of national honor. Although the conflict was minor, consisting of a three-day battle between lightly armored forces, it demonstrated how quickly regional conflicts in the Red Sea could become internationalized, due to the strategic importance of the Bab al-Mandab. Eventually, France was courted to arbitrate the dispute, and was ultimately granted the role of guardian of the Bab al-Mandab. The United States ultimately welcomed this development, given its preoccupation with the Persian Gulf, and subsequent unwillingness to become entangled in further regional disputes.

The Indo-Pakistan Conflict over Kargil (1999)

Tensions between India and Pakistan rose to alarming levels following the countries exchange of nuclear tests in 1998. Although a much publicized visit by Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee to the Minar-i-Pakistan raised expectations for a thaw in Indo-Pakistani relations, they were quickly dashed when both countries began testing ballistic missiles in the spring of 1999. On May 8th, Pakistani forces and Kashmiri militants were detected on the Indian side of the Line of Control near the towns of Kargil and Dras in numbers not seen since the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Although Pakistan realized that the Indian Army was superior to its own, it assumed that the Indians would be slow to respond to its surprise movement, giving Islamabad time to consolidate its hold on Kargil and negotiate from a position of strength.

Unlike earlier conflicts with Pakistan, this time the Indian Navy was quick to respond. Springing to full alert on May 20, the Eastern Fleet sailed into the North Arabian Sea to undertake a massive naval exercise as a show of force to Pakistan. Not wanting to lose its surface combatants, Pakistan moved all of its major ships out of Karachi, focusing instead on defending its oil trade from Indian Attack. In *Operation Talwar* both the Eastern and Western fleets of the Indian Navy forward deployed their forces within striking distance of Karachi harbor. Because over 90% of Pakistan energy supplies flow through Karachi, Pakistan was left with only six days of fuel. Faced with mounting international pressure, Prime Minister Sharif publicly agreed with US President Clinton to withdraw behind the Line of Control on July 4, 2000.

Combating Terrorism, and Preventing the Proliferation of WMD (2002-2007)

Although the U.S. navy still retains an overwhelming dominance in the region, it nevertheless faces a number of traditional and non-traditional threats. The Navy played a prominent role in delivering sea-based air power for the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. While India is developing a closer relationship with the United States, escorting US ships through the Straits of Malacca as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 and participating with the US in the naval exercise Malabar in September 2007, its continual tensions with Pakistan remain a concern for the region. Disaster relief and anti-piracy efforts are also a priority.

India and Pakistan

A suicide bombing on India's parliament in December 2001 escalated tension between India and Pakistan, leading to a number of "show of force" naval maneuvers in early 2002. India's nuclear deterrent force consists primarily of SLBMs, which are by nature difficult to detect. However, India moved a portion of its fleet from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea in May 2002 in an overt attempt at nuclear "saber rattling." This posturing is not uncommon between the two nuclear powers. As India continues to rise, new opportunities will emerge, not only for potential conflict with Pakistan, but also for cooperation with the other major powers in the region.

The Growing Importance of U.S.-Indian Cooperation

As the preceding historical review suggests, the Indian Ocean has become a key strategic arena in the 21st century. One reason is the growth of the Asian economies and their increased need for raw materials, including energy from the Middle East, to provide for their economic growth. But trade is a two-way street and we have witnessed an increasing flow of Asian labor, capital, and consumer goods, particularly to the rich countries of the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, the end of the Cold War and ongoing crises in Iraq and Afghanistan have diminished the importance of the Atlantic Ocean and boosted the importance of the Indian Ocean as a conduit for Western military supplies.

As a result, traditional maritime security concerns have become more important. The security of chokepoints in the region – the Straits of Hormuz, the Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Indonesian Straits – has become a matter of great strategic importance for all maritime powers. Conflict in the Persian Gulf and piracy near Bab-el-Mandeb, due in part to the failed state of Somalia, are two issues of concern. The Indonesian Straits are presently much more secure thanks to the cooperation of the local countries in policing their waterways.

Maritime security issues, including the protection of sea lines of communication (SLOCs), are paralleled by increasing importance of the broadband communication connections between Asia, Europe, and the United States that are linked by undersea cables traversing the Indian Ocean. Ensuring the future security of the sea lines and cable routes has now become an issue for all the Asian powers. For many decades Britain, and more recently the United States have taken responsibility for Indian Ocean sea line protection. Now India,

Maritime Security East of Suez

Japan, China and others will have to assess their own growing roles in future SLOC protection.

The formidable expansion of Asian infrastructure projects is a new development that gives increased importance to the Indian Ocean. New ports, airports, roads, rail systems, and pipelines now traverse Asia from West to the East and are making access between the landmass of Eurasia and the Indian Ocean littoral much easier. This, in turn, will generate greater commercial traffic and the possibility for greater strategic competition. The questions raised by China's development of the Port of Gwadar in Pakistan are a case in point.

"Nontraditional" maritime issues in the Indian Ocean region are now on the agenda. Forced migration due to rising sea levels and polluted sea water is a problem that all Asian countries have to take seriously in the years ahead if global warming continues. This is paralleled by growing desertification in East Africa leading to food shortages, which in turn would increase migration, much of it illegal. And fishery depletion in the Indian Ocean due to poor monitoring and over-fishing has become a serious matter that the international community must address.¹

India and the United States share many of these common concerns. Both countries accept the need for greater multilateral and bilateral cooperation, but they have widely differing perspectives on the region which contribute to miscommunication on issues of both regional and international import. India, for example, views the Indian Ocean as a cohesive entity which drives diplomatic relations between countries on its periphery. Indian maritime history dates back thousands of years and the Indian Ocean has served as a cultural and religious unifier for the region in this regard. However, the Indian Ocean region has only recently become a central focus of US strategic priorities, and, even here, only in a piecemeal fashion, with American interests mainly concerned with the threats of non-state actors and state instability (as in Yemen and Pakistan). Only in the last two decades has relative agreement emerged between politicians and diplomats that maritime security in the Indian Ocean is a shared bilateral strategic interest. Rapid developments in economic globalization, to include the stability of international trade and hydrocarbon flows and the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) have contributed to this notion, in addition to the destabilizing effects of seaborne terrorist attacks over the last 15 years.

¹ These themes are addressed in Geoffrey Kemp, *The East Moves West: India, China, and Asia's Growing Presence in the Middle East*, now on its second edition.

Several non-maritime security issues provide the contours of the relationship. First, and perhaps most critical, is the adversarial great power competition between India and China. Some analysts believe if the two countries were to ever engage in armed conflict, combat in the land and air domains would result in a stalemate, thus making the maritime arena the deciding factor in a final outcome. India is therefore apprehensive about the US-China relationship in particular, viewing it as, at times, contradictory and confusing. This confusion is enhanced by arguments like those of Robert Kaplan, who has suggested that the United States forge a stronger alliance with the Chinese while public statements from US officials have concurrently described the Indo-US partnership as their most important in Asia. Clarity on American priorities will be critical to resolving strategic mistrust and miscommunication between the US and India but may also be difficult to attain given the complexity and constantly changing nature of America's relations in the greater Indian Ocean region.

Other points of disagreement between the US and India include their respective approaches to dealings with Pakistan and Iran. India's relationship with Pakistan plays possibly the most significant role in shaping regional dynamics. This relationship is defined by numerous and major misconceptions between both parties, to include the potential for existential armed conflict, the issue of strategic depth in Afghanistan, and the intractable matter of resolving the Kashmiri territorial dispute. These misconceptions have strengthened the Pakistani army's control of the state, which the United States has supported by supplying weapons and military support for the purpose of combating transnational terrorists and militant elements which operate in the Afghan-Pakistan border region and which, in different forms, target both Coalition forces in Afghanistan and civilians in India. India views this support as naïve and shortsighted, believing that conflict between it and Pakistan is possible; a conflict which will be fought with the latter wielding American weapons.

Iran is yet another point of contention between the two states. Global concern over Iran's nuclear weapon development program, and the potential for subsequent proliferation, has driven US efforts to coordinate a coercive international sanctions regime. India, however, has a long historical and mutually beneficial relationship with Iran centered on trade, commerce, and cultural diffusion, with India currently importing significant amounts of oil from and facilitating the financing of Iranian energy companies – the targets of Western sanctions. Moreover, if the US or Israel decides to launch a preemptive air strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, it could radically upset the regional security balance in the greater Indian Ocean region. These different perspectives on and approaches toward China, Iran, and Pakistan, combined

with the dynamics of domestic politics in both countries, have contributed to the current stasis in the Indo-US relationship.

Emerging Maritime Environment in the Indian Ocean: Asian Perspectives

The emerging maritime environment is the downstream effect of geopolitical developments in the Indian Ocean region, exacerbated by the uprisings in the Arab world.

China's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean relies upon gaining access through commercial ports in littoral countries (like in East Africa and Pakistan) that are willing to risk the ire of the US and India. This satisfies its need to diversify energy transit routes through "littoral pump houses." Moreover, China supports regimes on the brink of isolation to become their only source of support with the intention of seeking great concessions in return. It has even recently purchased the sovereign bonds of Greece and Iceland in a concerted attempt to gain goodwill and influence in Europe which has subsequently lead many to wonder what will be next.

At present, India is the only Indian Ocean country with aspirations comparable to China to become a major maritime power. Singapore, Pakistan, Oman, and Iran are all capable of creating strong littoral forces, but do not seek to go beyond their immediate periphery. The United States and NATO and EU configurations have the largest forces for anti-piracy missions.

The importance of the Indian Ocean region has grown with the increase of trade and energy flows via international SLOCs. As a result, China has concurrently increased its maritime presence with activity similar to that exhibited in the South China Sea. The ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting has been successful in coordinating a response mechanism to terrorism and piracy in Southeast Asia, but doing the same in the Indian Ocean has proven difficult, due mainly to a lack of regional institutions. As a result, dialogues with Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Africa must be established.

The question of United States policy toward the global commons is relevant, given that it is not a signatory to the UNCLOS. However, it is committed to the unrestricted use of a global commons and expects that all participants will respect its use and that collective action will be taken against those who abuse it. And while it is not a signatory to the UNCLOS, the US still adheres to its terms.

Emerging Maritime Environment in the Indian Ocean: US Perspectives

In order to establish a strong Indo-US relationship, less is more. The overlap of common interests between the US and India should be the basis of their relations, especially since India's vision for the region most closely aligns with that of the US. In this sense, it should be understood that China is not the organizing principle of American strategy in Asia; it is merely the most important player in the emerging maritime environment. Problems created by Chinese diplomacy in the Western Pacific have been helpful for the US and India, and should be seen for their opportunity, especially as both countries currently lack strategic dynamism.

It is recognized the Indian military's efforts to improve its force posture along the Himalayan border in response to China's growing land presence along the Tibetan Plateau. However, India and the US must be cautious of creating, either implicitly or explicitly, an anti-Chinese entente. This could provoke a reaction which would upset the South Asian status quo and trigger a focused Chinese effort to undermine Indian hegemony in the region.

One disadvantage is that the United States has little experience addressing the Indian Ocean as a region, but rather has divided it into two distinct geo-economic basins: the East Indian Ocean Basin and the West Indian Ocean Basin. The East Indian Ocean Basin includes maritime Southeast Asia, the Bay of Bengal, and the South China Sea and contains a relatively predictable strategic environment. The West Indian Ocean Basin includes the Persian Gulf, the Suez Canal, and the Straits of Hormuz and is far more volatile. The problematic states of Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and Iran line its coast and the further deterioration of stability in the area could trigger military reactions from both within and outside the region.

Indians fear that the Chinese will interpret the global commons as allowing them the freedom to establish bases and extract resources in the region around India's periphery.

Piracy Issues: Current Status and Challenges

Why is the Indian Ocean region an ideal location for piracy? As the region has attracted more capital and tourists, pirates have simply followed the money. Open waters, coastlines that are difficult to penetrate, large distances, crowded sea lanes, and most importantly, failed states, have all created the perfect

environment for piracy. Somalia, with an ungoverned coastline as long as the US eastern seaboard, is particularly susceptible as a result. It is well known that a lack of economic opportunity and defunct governance structures provide a breeding ground for pirates. As such, the only long-term solution is to control the land from where the pirates originate. This is the central challenge.

Two-thirds of the Indian Ocean is under the threat of piracy. Challenges such as the size of the surveillance area and reaction time have hindered navies from capturing pirates, while inadequate legal mechanisms for the trial of pirates has been an issue on land. Cooperation between navies and the shipping industries and use of private security measures might deter pirates.

Surveillance costs more and is more difficult to coordinate than the simple payment of ransoms, thus creating an economic incentive for inaction and exacerbating the problems of prevention and response. Piracy is an immediate concern for India, while only a regional concern for the US, and furthermore, only one of minimal interest. It would take a major event, such as the hijacking of a nuclear transit, in order to galvanize a response from the international community. On the question of how to address piracy from land, a global convention could be held that would clearly outline the circumstances under which multilateral efforts can and should be coordinated

Protection of Trade and Energy Supplies

China is faced with a dilemma: if it chooses to outsource sea line of communication (SLOC) security, it will therefore be dependent on the United States Navy. However, if it chooses to play a more active role, it is compelled to build up a navy of its own to do so. Interestingly, with China's increasing trade in South America, it is concerned with the risk of the US closing off the Panama Canal, proving that it is also apprehensive over freedom of action in the global commons. This has provided the rationale for China to build a blue water fleet with aircraft carriers and offensive capabilities. There are constraints on the US Navy: a declining fleet which may be unable to maintain two carriers in the Indian Ocean necessary for continuous operations. Regardless, the US will continue to retain a military presence in the Gulf as long as energy needs dictate it doing so.

Despite different US and Indian approaches toward Iran and Pakistan, there are many other ways for the two to work together to stabilize the region. Neither wants to see Pakistan dominate Afghanistan, nor do the Russians, which could open the door for a Russian-American-Indian dialogue. Israel and Japan are also common allies. A model similar to that of the US and France prior to

joining NATO may work, that is - allowing each side to take the lead on issues on which the other does not want to act. It is important to bypass discussions of alliance in favor of working on issues of common security interest.

The importance of the SLOCs just off the coast of India must be recognized. These SLOCs power the world's economy with the passage of over half of the world's oil, a third of its bulk cargo, and half of its container shipment. With large increases in oil dependency in both India and China, it is important to secure these trade routes from threats such as terrorism and piracy. A maritime partnership between all stakeholders is imperative in order to combat these threats.

China faces a continuing Malacca dilemma, regardless of its attempts to diversify routes and develop pipeline infrastructure in what are relatively volatile countries of the Indian Ocean basin. China will eventually have to confront the decision of investing in its navy or participating in the collective effort to secure the global (maritime) commons, rather than its current attempt to do both. The US and India need to work together to reduce Chinese influence in Myanmar and Afghanistan, as well as smaller countries such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh. There should also be consideration to work trilaterally with the less visible ASEAN countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia.

Non-Traditional Maritime Challenges

Non-traditional maritime challenges create political, economic, and humanitarian problems and include a diversity of state and non-state actors. Moreover, whereas the hard security questions of the maritime domain remain a familiar problem set for policymakers, they have a much harder time conceptualizing non-traditional, transnational, and human security issues that do not respect national boundaries and which transcend institutional and policy stovepipes. Climate change is of significant importance for the movement of people, especially in the Indian Ocean region. Environmental problems such as sea level rise, desertification, and the submergence of islands have contributed to the environmentally-driven migration of 50 to 200 million individuals and created a new set of migrants: "environmental refugees." With a rise in environmental refugees, additional problems such as health issues, scarce resource competition, and social and ethnic tensions will surface.

This is important when examining the strategic environment of the Indian Ocean. Tensions between India and Bangladesh could increase, and could worsen when Bangladesh faces extreme environmental distress.

The effects of climate change are highly important. Rising sea levels will bring a higher frequency and magnitude of natural disasters, more complicated maritime boundary disputes, and health issues to the coastal populations as a result of water damage. Importantly, the armed forces of Indian Ocean countries should expect to bear the brunt of natural disaster response. Civilian agencies in these developing states simply do not have the capacity or resources to respond in a satisfactory manner.

The Case of the Maldives

Rising sea levels threaten the fresh water, agriculture and eventually the Maldives Islands themselves. The islands will have to be abandoned but in the interim period outlying islands will become havens for terrorists, smugglers and pirates. Climate scientists continue to argue about the impact of global warming. While there is a broad consensus that the planet is getting hotter, opinions differ as to what is causing the phenomenon, at what rate it is occurring and what impact it will have on the environment, including worldwide sea levels. Part of the debate concerns the rate at which the Greenland and Antarctic ice caps are melting. Conservative estimates suggest that by the end of the century, water levels might rise by a meter. Pessimists put the number much higher. There are now dozens of interactive maps that can be downloaded from the internet showing which regions of the world would be most affected by different levels of rising water.

Even skeptics are now willing to acknowledge that if there are small rises in sea levels, this poses a potentially catastrophic risk for those countries with low-lying land. Consider the case of the Maldives, an island chain of 1,200 islands and coral atolls 500 miles south of India. The deposed president of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, a far-sighted democratic leader, took the issue extremely seriously and campaigned around the world to alert people to the dilemma the planet faces. In an address to the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in 2010, the then-President stated,

The Maldives is just 1.5 meters above sea level and even a small increase in sea level would really create a number of challenges... Our water table is being contaminated through sea water intrusion and therefore we have issues to do with food security. Ocean temperatures are rising and therefore fishing and fish stock and our fish catch are dwindling. We have a number of challenges and issues and if you think this is a thing to do with the Maldives, and up in Iceland or down in Australia you are safe, you are very misled.

It is possible that the Maldives archipelago could vanish this century unless monumental expenditures are undertaken to build protective walls for some of the larger islands. The cost is probably prohibitive. For this reason, Maldives leaders are talking about contingency plans to relocate the population over a number of years.

Fortunately the Maldives continues to be a haven for rich tourists who come to enjoy its tranquility and beautiful island settings. This is enabling the government to establish a sovereign wealth fund to use tourist revenues to prepare for the day when they all have to leave. But where will they go? Natural destinations would be south Asia which is close by and where they have strong cultural, ethnic, and religious ties. This means India and Sri Lanka. And since there are only 300,000 islanders, such a transfer is not out of the question.

This outcome would be ideal but in reality the process is likely to be much messier and more violent. One problem is that many of the outlying islands in the archipelago are uninhabited and under no direct authority. They have therefore become ideal hiding places for smugglers, pirates and terrorists. Those outer islands that still support population and agriculture will be vulnerable to encroaching salt water which will destroy fresh water supplies and ruin farming and interrupt fishing. In other words as the Maldives gradually succumb to rising sea water levels, the poor will be effected the most and will have to migrate to the larger islands posing social and political challenges for the leadership.

The problems facing the Maldives are just the beginning. If the sea water continues to rise by a meter, it will threaten low lying islands in the Pacific such as Kiribati and large low lying regions of the mainland of the Asian continent. Bangladesh has over 18 million living in the vulnerable, delta of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna Rivers. Where would they go? The Indians believe they will try to get into India and for that reason, have taken precautionary measures, including building an extremely costly fence along the border to prevent such an onslaught. While India could absorb the 300,000 from the Maldives, the 18 million from Bangladesh is out of the question. Such a migration would cause social tensions in India and could almost certainly trigger violence. So at this point, there is no solution to the problem.

Furthermore India's determination to be the dominant maritime power in the Indian Ocean means that it has to increasingly worry about the security of island chains such as the Maldives. India's maritime capabilities, though improved in recent years, are woefully inadequate for the task of policing the Indian Ocean. India has offered to help the Maldives with security assistance and possibly link the Maldives into its own Coastal Command network. But it is

not clear India has the resources to build a major base in the Maldives which would be one the best ways to keep track of terrorists, smugglers and pirates. India's leaders are unwilling to become a junior partner of the United States, which still has the strongest maritime presence in the region. India has settled for more cooperation with the US but there is no formal defense treaty that binds the two countries.

Concerning the broader implications from the Maldives case, a look at one the interactive maps of rising sea levels points to other regions of the world, many in the rich countries of the north that would be affected. This includes the coast of Florida, the US mid-Atlantic, Holland, parts of Southeast England and Venice. In Asia, islands in Indonesia and the coasts of China and Vietnam are all vulnerable to relatively small rises in water levels. The problem is not just the rising waters, but the combination of rising waters with more turbulent weather conditions that can lead to more typhoons, hurricanes, and tidal surges.

As a consequence, the combination of rising waters and the impact on food production and infrastructure damage will become a major challenge for the international community in the years ahead. In the past, canaries were taken down coal mines because they were highly sensitive to poison gases and could serve as a warning to the miners. The Maldives is the canary in the ocean and its dilemma is a wakeup call to everybody. Rising sea levels threaten all regions of the world that have low lying coastal areas. It is essential that the transatlantic community examine the plight of the Maldives as a case study for troubles it will also face in the future

Food Shortages

There are also challenges posed by food. Marine resources, specifically fisheries, provide nourishment to much of the Asian population. With an increase in dependency, the global catch is now in trouble – fish stocks are becoming increasingly exploited and the number that is overexploited is expanding. Increasing competition in these areas will intensify bilateral frictions as former fishermen resort to piracy for its more lucrative wages and families migrate en masse for new economic opportunities. This will cause difficulties in an Indo-US dialogue on the strategic environment, as many of the non-traditional challenges are highly sensitive issues with differing priorities for each.

The population growth rate in Asia is a key factor. There is a high potential for significant grain shortages, and challenges for Indian companies when purchasing land for food cultivation in Africa, where much of the population is starving. The port of Gwadar in Pakistan could become a Hong Kong of South

Asia and a major export hub for the Middle East. Gwadar Port is not part of a larger "String of Pearls" conspiracy, but rather the cumulative result of many economic developments. There are 25 ports in the Indian Ocean in which the Indian Navy can refuel and re-supply within 24 hours – India's own String of Pearls. India may work on labor issues to compete with China, increase foreign investment, and stimulate a domestic debate to respond to the potential economic challenge posed by Gwadar.

Politico-Military and Socio-Economic Challenges

There are two main challenges still facing India as a result of the Cold War: China and radical Islam. As populations in countries bordering India double over the next few decades without economic growth and employment opportunities, there will be an increase in the demographic profile of radical Islam. Even if India concedes their part of the Kashmir Valley to Pakistan, there will still be radicalization. India should offer economic solutions in order to combat these demographic problems, while concurrently weaning Pakistan off of its dependence on China. One option would be to develop industrial or manufacturing facilities along the border areas, opening border access, and offering jobs and other economic aid to the Pakistanis at these facilities. India would therefore be able to bypass the Pakistani government and reach out to their people directly. India and the US, building upon this rationale, should collaborate on long-term economic planning as a common national security concern.

Security policy in the Indian Ocean is dependent upon three factors: the imperatives of energy flow, national influence and power projection, and the consequences of climate change. Migration has increased and will continue to do so as a result of these factors and, combined with the expected increase in populations over the next half century, could lead to collapsed governments and civil unrest. As a result, the Indian Ocean region could experience further problems with drug trafficking and gunrunning, illegal fishing, marine pollution, and human trafficking, all of which will contribute to civil unrest and a mutually reinforcing deterioration of political and economic stability. Indians and Americans should work together to combat these problems and proposed that the Indian Navy in particular should be prepared to reprioritize its missions to address them.

The only way for cooperation to work would be through a formal treaty, though it was roundly accepted that this was not politically feasible or palatable to either country's legislature. Developing a closer Coast Guard to Coast Guard relationship is possible, but it would involve the US Coast Guard operating in a

law enforcement role, to which it is not traditionally accustomed. Additionally, US Navy/Coast Guard visits to countries that are not part of a formal alliance will send signals that China will not be the only external actor in the Indian Ocean region, as power continues to shift in Asia. This will be an opportunity for the US and India to work together and address the issue of migration, which will be a major factor in Asia's power shift.

India and the United States have a variety of issues that can be addressed bilaterally and multilaterally, such as the influence of China on the region, non-traditional maritime challenges, and piracy. However, cooperation on issues such as Afghanistan, proliferation, and illegal, unregulated/unreported fishing will be much more difficult, as both nations have differing interests in each.

Areas Ripe for Bilateral Indo-US Cooperation

- *China:* India and the US harbor shared apprehensions about the PLA Navy's acquisition trends, capabilities, intentions, and actions in the greater Indian Ocean region. While there may be divergences over each other's bilateral strategic relationship with China, this should not interrupt the increasingly transparent and progressive ties between Indian and American defense bureaucracies and navies. Doing so will ensure that extra-regional powers are unable to upset the current maritime security balance.
- *Yemen and Somalia:* Complete regime failure in either of these countries will intensify piracy and allow for greater freedom of action for non-state terrorist actors. In the aftermath of American withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, it is highly unlikely that the US leadership will be able to summon the political will to commit ground forces to stabilize ground realities in Yemen or Somalia, should these countries' internal security deteriorate further. Due to India's geographic proximity to both countries, its stake in any outcome cannot be overstated. The maritime dimension will therefore be critical to any operations and will require more robust coordination between the Indian and US navies.

Issues Which Require Multilateral Cooperation between the US and India

- *Defining "Rules of the Road" in the Global Commons:* International economic activity depends upon the free and uninterrupted flow of commerce

across the world's oceans. While other areas of the global commons (air, cyber, and space domains) will in due time require shared consensus about expectations of appropriate behavior, doing so in the maritime domain is the most urgent given the volume of commercial cargo transported by sea and the dependency of countries on this cargo for sustainable economic growth. Given India and the US's strong tradition as seafaring nations and their heft as maritime powers, they can and should work together to clearly outline "Rules of the Road" for the global commons through institutions like the United Nations or through other new international arrangements.

- *Piracy*: Understanding that piracy in the Indian Ocean is a more immediate concern to the Indians than to the Americans, the scourge of piracy is transnational in nature and therefore must be resolved through multilateral mechanisms which bring together all parties – both those which are directly impacted and those which wish to play a responsible load sharing international role in safeguarding the global commons. Initiatives at sea need to be complemented by those on land by way of legislation and stabilizing regions like Somalia.

Areas in which Indo-US Cooperation is Unlikely

- *Pakistan*: Major misconceptions have led to considerable problems between India and Pakistan. The United States strengthens Pakistan's army by providing military support and weapons in order to prevent terrorist attacks and the like. It will continue to do so as long as it has a presence in Afghanistan. India considers this steady US inventory supply naïve, since much of this is not terrorism specific. With the possibility of conflict always lurking between the two neighbors, India will face a military that has gained considerable trans-border capability from US support.
- *Iran*: Given the longstanding relationship Delhi has with Tehran, built on both culture and economics, India and the United States cannot expect to work together on this issue. Iran depends on Indian financial support via the import of Iranian hydrocarbons. As the US continues to lead the campaign on international economic sanctions against Iran out of concern over its nuclear program, it targets the very center of the Indo-Iranian relationship. However, an Indian participant added that the management of divergences such as Pakistan and Iran would serve

Maritime Security East of Suez

as a challenge and testimony to the resilience and maturity of the evolving US-India bilateral relationship.

The China Seas and the Role of China

The China Seas—the body of water inside the first chain of islands off the Asian mainland—are quickly becoming a crucial center of the global economy. They are surrounded by some of the world’s largest and most dynamic economies, from highly developed but slightly stagnant Japan, to massive and fast-growing China, to emerging markets like Vietnam or Indonesia. Most forecasters predict the states in this area will continue to enjoy strong economies over the next few decades, and at minimum the ongoing international financial crisis has seen emerging markets like those in East Asia perform impressively while the West has floundered. With all this size and growth comes an impressive appetite for energy and natural resources. China has led the way, and its leadership has worked to expand energy access across all means of production. Oil demand decreased from May to June 2012 by 12%, and there is speculation that oil demand on the year could be down 10.3%. Future projections on Chinese demand have varied, with some projections showing a demand increase of 50% by 2020. That said, a recent report by the IEA shows the demand increase at a more conservative 25%, from 9.913 million barrels per day to 12.2 million barrels per day by 2020. As a means of comparison, India’s consumption was 3.292 million barrels per day (mmbd) in 2011, Japan’s was 4.48 mmbd, and South Korea’s was 2.227 mmbd. One could say they are merely laying the foundations for massive growth; one could also say they are scrambling to get the energy they need to prevent politically dangerous economic slowdowns.

In this context, the dispute over the China Seas is troubling. Their waters are filled with resources that could help the region’s economies surge to new heights, but they are in disputed territory. According to geologists, the China Seas contain massive reserves of oil and natural gas. They have been described by some experts as the “second Persian Gulf” that could potentially feed China’s need for oil and natural gas for the next sixty decades. This view has

been promulgated by the Chinese with critics claiming the former are pushing the abundance of natural resources to bolster their territorial claims.² However, the actual amount of oil and natural gas that are residing in the sea is undetermined as comprehensive surveys have been prevented due to territorial disputes.³ The reality of what lies in the sea may be much less plentiful than what has been suggested by the Chinese, but could still spur even more hostilities between claimants in a race to gain greater access. Aside from the oil and natural gas reserves, the China Seas produce about 10% of the global fishing catch and sustain East Asia's need for fresh fish. China alone eats 13.6 million metric tons of fish a year.⁴ This great appetite for fish has depleted fisheries closer to mainland territories in East Asia and farther into the disputed territories (as happened with the 2012 China-Philippines incidents at Scarborough Shoal) of the China Seas causing conflicts between claimant countries. The blessing may become a curse.

Moreover, the region has a deserved reputation for poor cooperation. Many of the local rivalries go back centuries, and inspire a robust tradition of nationalism. Old wounds like Japan's colonization of its neighbors or China's invasions of Vietnam have never healed, and national leaders have often reopened them in times of political need. Natural allies like Korea and Japan, which have similar economies, similar strategic concerns, and rather similar cultures, struggle to trust one another; other states have significant security rivalries. The United States was forced to develop a "hub and spokes" alliance system when it sought to contain the spread of communism in the region because rivalries made grand alliances unworkable. Recent trends are positive—ASEAN has grown in importance, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership shows promise—but there is simply no reason to expect deep pan-Asian cooperation on crucial security matters in the near or medium term.

Like the security framework, the present legal framework around the China Seas is unlikely to produce viable agreements. China has pushed bilateral negotiations over multilateral negotiations for resolving disputes. This arrangement clearly favors China—after all, how could little Brunei Darussalam, whose economy is less than 0.2% the size of the P.R.C.'s, possibly stand up for itself in its dispute with China if Beijing forced a showdown? China's maximal

² "Fuel to the Fire." *China Economic Review*, September 6, 2012. <<http://www.chinaeconomicreview.com/fuel-fire>>.

³ Scharf, Daniel, "S. China Sea Dispute Blamed Partly on Depleted Fish Stocks," *Voice of America*, May 16, 2012. <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2012/05/mil-120516-voa03.htm>>.

⁴ "Appetite for Destruction: Asia's Love of Seafood Drives Tensions." *China Economic Review*, September 2012. <<http://www.chinaeconomicreview.com/sites/default/files/pdf/CER1209.pdf>>.

South China Seas claim, the Nine-Dotted Line,⁵ is not merely a challenge to the individual states affected. It is a Chinese attempt to set a some-are-more-equal-than-others tone for Asia.



Ideally, then, China's neighbors would see this threat, paper over their differences, and challenge China's claim as a collective. Bringing in other states with regional interests or rivalries with China—like Russia, India, or the United States—might further undermine China's current tough stand. However, things are not so simple. China's economic boom has made it a powerhouse of regional trade, giving it an additional lever of power against its neighbors. If they begin to work as a coalition, China might be able to pry off coalition members with threats of trade war. It is likely that some of the states fear China's power far more than they trust each other to work against it—a recipe for a regional pecking order, not a balance of power between China and its neighbors.

The China Seas have seen decades of tense confrontations between ships at sea, including brief conflicts; recent years have seen numerous headline-grabbing incidents. There is an intrinsic risk of miscalculation and war here; weak documents like 2002's Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (an agreement between ASEAN and China) have clearly failed to reduce the Seas' ample fodder for crisis. More troublingly, these incidents have often involved

⁵ The red line in the map below follows the Nine-Dotted Line, which is actually composed of nine specific marks along the red line—in other words, the red line is an extrapolation rather than the precise PRC claim.

⁶ Image via Menas Borders.

brash non-state actors who seem to dare other state's authorities to overplay their hand. Illegal and environmentally dangerous fishing operations demand a response from local law enforcement; aggressive incidents like rammings and even lethal violence suggest the perpetrators think they are in a watery Wild West—or think they enjoy Beijing's protection.

The latter may sometimes be the case, and a series of incidents off the Philippines shows just how dangerous this can be. In April 2012, Chinese trawlers entered the Scarborough Shoal, a disputed atoll about 140 miles off the Philippines, and began operations forbidden by Manila, including fishing and coral mining. The Philippine Navy spotted the trawlers and moved to arrest them, but Chinese patrol vessels blocked them. A standoff ensued. In negotiations, the P.R.C. agreed to withdraw most patrol vessels while the Philippines replaced the naval watch with the coast guard. However, new Chinese patrol vessels soon arrived. Analysts suggested that this was the product of competing internal forces. While elements like the Foreign Ministry worked to de-escalate, various agencies were angling for power and resources; local officials seeking revenue might have sent the fishermen to the shoal. The resulting crisis kept tensions high for weeks and gave an air of great power rivalry to preplanned American-Philippine exercises during the same period.

Similar challenges exist in the East China Seas, where (among numerous territorial disputes) China and Japan each claim the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The islands are administered by Japan, and were recently purchased from their private owners by the Japanese government to forestall a bid by the nationalist-held government of Tokyo. Historically, the islands were under Japan's authority starting in 1895 (taken by Japan from China as booty of the Sino-Japanese war) until 1945 when they transferred to auspices of the U.S. following the surrender of Japan in WWII. In 1972, the U.S. transferred power back to the Japanese as part of the abolition of U.S. civilian control of the country. During this period of U.S. control of the islands, both China and Taiwan did not issue any objections to U.S. authority. It was not until 1968-69 when extensive U.N. surveys of the islands waters estimated that there might be substantial reserves of oil comparable to the Persian Gulf area.⁷ A Japanese government survey conducted after the U.N. report, claimed to have discovered an estimated 95.4 billion barrels of oil trapped in the shallow waters.⁸ It was only after the U.N and Japanese surveys were objections raised by China and

⁷Lee Seokwoo, "Territorial Disputes among Japan, China, and Taiwan Concerning the Senkaku," via Google Books.

⁸Harrison, Selig S., "Seabed Petroleum in Northeast Asia: Conflict or Cooperation?" Wilson Center, 2005. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Asia_petroleum.pdf>.

Taiwan over sovereignty of the islands.⁹ China and Taiwan's objection resided in the failure of Japan to adhere to post-WW II arrangements in which the latter was legally required to surrender territories obtained from aggression and return them to their pre-1895 status.¹⁰ The waters are also home to extensive natural gas reserves and China and Japan were able to formulate an agreement in 2008 for a joint gas and oil exploration deal. However, both countries have yet to implement the agreement, which allows for private companies to invest and profit from development projects, nor set timelines for initiation.¹¹ China has been drilling for gas in a part of an undisputed area named Chunxiao field in the waters surrounding Senkaku. This drilling is alarming to Japan as they fear that China will drain the resources on Japan's side since the seabed rocks are interconnected.¹² Progress on this issue has not been made; rather both sides have become more entrenched in their sovereignty assertions which are embedded with strong nationalist claims. Since then a fierce dispute with China has ensued, with Chinese and Japanese demonstrators traveling to the islands (the Chinese protesters were detained and deported), large nationalist demonstrations in both states, sabotage in Japanese factories in China, and deployments of warships. The United States has maintained neutrality on the dispute, but has also informed the Chinese in high-level meetings that it considers the Senkakus to be covered by its security treaty with Japan, meaning it would defend Japan if the islands are attacked.¹³

Indeed, America's "pivot to Asia" (later renamed "rebalance" to avoid implying that America has not always had Pacific interests) policy shift will struggle with the South China Sea. The United States has a longstanding policy of neutrality on territorial disputes, but it also wishes to preserve the full independence of China's neighbors. The current U.S. policy of new presence in Asia coupled with stronger economic cooperation appears sustainable in the short term. However, there is a risk that heightened competition in the South China Sea, prompted by identification of new resources, could create incidents that tempt American policymakers to take action.

⁹ Harrison, Selig S., "Seabed Petroleum in Northeast Asia: Conflict or Cooperation?" Wilson Center, 2005. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Asia_petroleum.pdf>.

¹⁰ Kristof, Nicholas, "The Inconvenient Truth Behind the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands," *New York Times* "On the Ground" blog, Sept. 19, 2012. <<http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/the-inconvenient-truth-behind-the-diaoyusenkaku-islands/>>.

¹¹ Ho, Stephanie, "China 'Clarifies' Agreement with Japan." *Voice of America*, November 1, 2009. <<http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2008-06-19-voa41/405187.html>>.

¹² "Q&A: China, Japan, and the East China Sea Gas Dispute." *Reuters*, September 20, 2010. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/09/20/us-china-japan-gas-qa-idUSTRE68J0NX20100920?pageNumber=2>>.

¹³ "Panetta Tells China that Senkakus under Japan-U.S. Security Treaty." *The Asahi Shimbun*, September 21, 2012. <<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201209210061>>.

The opening move of the pivot—the establishment of a small Marine training base in western Australia—suggested a carefully balanced approach to increased Asian presence. America would position itself too far from China to provoke fear in Beijing, but close enough to reassure its allies that it was not abandoning them to the rising P.R.C. The U.S. would thus be somewhat insulated from any heat in the China Seas, reducing the risk of its own involvement in a conflict.

The Department of Defense still has not outlined a clear military and budgetary strategy for the rebalancing, and there one of the most common criticisms of the rebalance is that there has been no straightforward statement of how forces and resources will be shifted. One prominent China hand has even suggested the pivot may amount to “an unresourced bluff.”¹⁴ According to an independent report from CSIS, the Department of Defense needs to tackle force posture planning strategy in light of budget constraints as well as addressing security challenges in the Asia Pacific region.¹⁵ Furthermore, argues the report, the U.S. needs to align all aspects of the rebalancing (military, economic, etc) with the goal of shaping the Asia Pacific environment rather than preparing for a future conflict with China.

This might not be an accurate reading of America’s approach. The U.S. Navy stated that it will base several of its new Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore and might put others in the Philippines. Situated along the Straits of Malacca, Singapore guards East Asia’s gateway to South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. It is thus of extreme strategic and economic value to the region and the world. Given the high risk of piracy and general insecurity in the area, it is sensible for the United States to have a presence. However, the Chinese have major sensitivities about the Straits. They fear that if they take strong action toward Taiwan, the United States and its allies will seal the straits. Without oil, China’s war machine—and its economy—would grind to a halt. Given America’s naval superiority, the redeployment of a few vessels doesn’t substantially increase the threat to Beijing, and in peacetime, security and piracy prevention are nonexclusive goods whose benefits will likely accrue in greatest amount to China. Still, such a deployment lends credibility to the fears of PRC hardliners, and could inspire countermoves in the China Seas. The prospective Philippines deployment could be more troublesome. It certainly would help deter a Chinese invasion of neighboring Taiwan. However, it could lead to American involvement in the South China Sea struggle. As happened with the

¹⁴ See Freeman, Chas, “The China Bluff,” on *NationalInterest.org*.

¹⁵ “U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia-Pacific: An Independent Assessment.” Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2012.

<http://csis.org/files/publication/120814_FINAL_PACOM_optimized.pdf>.

exercises during the Scarborough Shoal incidents, all American actions in the area would be closely monitored and subject to Talmudic analysis. Navigators would have to take care to avoid sailing through areas that might lead to claims of interference—or of vindication. Captains may find themselves in the area during incidents between China and the host country—and the host navy might request their aid. Such challenging scenarios might see America struggling to remain neutral.

Indeed, new bases on the China Seas would make it difficult for the United States to stay neutral, even if they are accompanied by a host of caveats that Washington will not take a position on the region's disputes. In the language of economics, they are a subsidy on the host nation's ability to stand up for itself, letting take stronger positions than it otherwise would. This is troublesome. The United States, to put it bluntly, has no vital interest in who controls a handful of tiny and remote atolls, even if they sit on significant resources. It does have an interest in the disputes being resolved in a stable fashion. America's presence will probably help the host countries negotiate on fairer terms, but there is also a risk that they will take on new dangers. Ideally, then, they will instead come up with a framework to stand up to China as one without America's help; these nations have much more incentive for involvement than the U.S., because they do have key interests at stake. Credible multilateralism might cut need for U.S. involvement by preventing incidents in the first place—China does not want to become a leper to its neighbors. However, with credible multilateralism rather unlikely, the United States probably is needed. Extreme caution, and above all a strategic mentality, will be crucial in ensuring this does not turn into disaster.

China in the Indian Ocean

China is not only a potential challenger to America's role on the periphery of the Indian Ocean—it is also a growing power at the core. This has manifested most famously in the “String of Pearls,” a network of Chinese deals and investment projects that encircle the Subcontinent. The centerpieces of the String are port development projects in Sri Lanka and in Pakistan, which have invited rumors that they are intended to support Chinese naval presence. It is not likely that China will be able to make an effective stand against India using these bases, as each is quite close to India's shores (recall the Pakistan Navy's retreat from its own shores during the Kargil War). Still, they may allow China to increase its influence in non-zero-sum areas of regional security, like anti-piracy patrols, and more broadly it can make its presence more commensurate with its immense interests in the area's trade flows.

This, in fact, is China's chief lever in the Indian Ocean—its economic investment. This has been discussed at much length in my book *The East Moves*

Maritime Security East of Suez

West, so I will not belabor the point, but suffice to say it has played a major role in the region and can use its wealth to be a major rival of India in the region's nonmilitary aspects. Further, the emerging middle classes around the Indian Ocean represent a potential destination for the wide range of affordable consumer goods made in China.

Conclusions

Although the rise of the Asian economic powers and the continued wealth generated by the energy exports of the Gulf countries are important new features of world geopolitics, there is no country or group of countries who could, in the foreseeable future, replace the United States as the primary maritime policeman in the vast swath of seawater between the Shatt al Arab and the Pacific. Over time, China has the capacity to become the dominant maritime power in its own region, particularly the China Seas, and has the capacity to exercise sea denial against the United States in the event of a major conflict. But it will also have to manage the growing maritime power of its neighbors, with whom it has major disagreements. Japan and the Republic of Korea have the resources to develop much stronger naval forces.

For China to be able to operate freely beyond its local seas will require not only a major expansion in its blue water naval capacity, but also the acceptance that the further it extends its operational reach into the Indian Ocean, the greater the countervailing efforts of India to balance its presence. India, after all, regards the Indian Ocean as the *Indian* Ocean in the same way that the Iranians regard the Gulf as *Persian*, not Arab. There is no indication that either China or India has any intention or capacity at this time to establish a serious military capacity in the Gulf itself. The United States will therefore continue to be the key balancer in that region so long as the Arab leadership welcomes a continuation of the American presence.

But irrespective of the dynamics of what one might call the “classic components of the balance of power” around the Indo-Pacific and the Gulf, it must be concluded that perhaps the most challenging issues in the coming decades will come from non-traditional maritime threats—the impact of climate change, desertification, and rising sea levels; piracy, smuggling, and weapons proliferation; and ideological terrorism. Compounding the problem facing the

Maritime Security East of Suez

countries of the littoral of the Indian Ocean is the growing number of geographic areas that could be considered “ungovernable,” including areas of Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and even some Indian states. The first three countries are located at critical strategic junctions in the Indian Ocean that could seriously interfere with the growing traffic and increasingly profitable sea lines of communication—hence the concern about piracy. But piracy is essentially a business that can be dealt with more easily than extremism, which is based on ideology.

These developments are compounded by the increased scramble for more and more resources on- and off-shore, including oil, gas, fish, minerals, food, and fresh water. For Africa and Asia, there will be a higher premium than ever on cooperative maritime actions to deal with potential new threats. Beyond smuggling and terrorism, there are also prospects for mass migration if climate change, as expected, leads to increasing poverty and makes offshore islands and littoral areas of Southeast Asia uninhabitable. The mass migration of people by land has already raised prospects for building barriers to keep people out in anticipation of such events—an excellent example being the fence that India has invested billions of rupees in along the border with Bangladesh. It has become highly controversial and has not been completed, but the expectation is that it is designed to keep out up to 20 million Bangladeshis who might flee west in the event that their coasts are inundated.

It is these types of problems that pose the most serious maritime challenges in the future. Countries in the Indian Ocean region will have to develop more and more constabulary and coast guard capabilities. It is interesting to note in this regard that many of the officers now at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island that come from smaller countries in the Indian and Pacific Oceans seek coast guard training, and it is in this area that major investments have to be made. The reality is that if indeed climate change and unforeseen natural disasters like tsunamis and earthquakes continue in this region, military forces (and particularly maritime forces) are going to be called upon as the first responders in such crises. It’s not a mission that they necessarily sought or desire, but it remains the reality that they are the front line of defense for the foreseeable future. In this regard, United States cooperation with countries of the region at the maritime level remains a priority, and will likely continue.

Acknowledgements

The report has been supported by grants from the Smith Richardson Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. I would like to acknowledge the significant contributions to this final report by a number of CFTNI interns, including R. Christopher Farrar, Justin De Rise, and Jyothi Pocha, and especially by my colleagues Kristen Gehringer and John Allen Gay.

About the Author

Geoffrey Kemp is Director of Regional Security Programs at the Center for the National Interest. He served in the White House during the first Reagan administration as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs on the National Security Council Staff. Dr. Kemp received his Ph.D. in political science at M.I.T. and his M.A. and B.A. degrees from Oxford University.