

A Neo-Nixon Doctrine for the Indian Ocean: Helping States Help Themselves

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It has been suggested by some American foreign policy thinkers that the U.S. is approaching a watershed moment, comparable to the end of World War II or the Cold War, in terms of the degree to which America will need to reorient its foreign and defense policies.¹ Indeed, domestic economic weakness, the debilitating effects of two protracted counterinsurgency campaigns and the rise of new powers in Asia are challenging its ability to maintain the unrivaled primacy it has possessed since the collapse of the Soviet Union.² Echoing fears of “imperial overstretch,” where historically the economic unsustainability of extensive military commitments abroad have led great powers into decline, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff has identified America’s growing debt burden as the most significant threat to the country’s national security.³ U.S. defense spending is set to decline by at least \$450 billion, and potentially as much as \$1 trillion, over the next decade as the Pentagon adapts to what some are calling a new age of austerity.⁴ Normally, such budgetary weakness would be expected to induce a period of strategic restraint in American foreign policy, however, U.S. global commitments are not shrinking; indeed, they may expand further as the Obama Administration “pivots” towards Asia.⁵

Although arguments about American decline in the popular press are frequently overstated, in an environment of geopolitical uncertainty and fiscal austerity, attempting to do more with less requires national security strategies that identify the nation’s vital interests and clearly distinguish them from issues of secondary concern. Even a country that continues to think of itself as the indispensable nation must recognize that not every development abroad affects an important U.S. security interest. Excessive activity in a region of marginal national interest can stimulate resentment, squander scarce resources and contribute to overextension.

In light of Washington's demonstrated belief in the growing economic and strategic importance of the Indian Ocean, this article proposes an American regional strategy that matches the level of American effort with the core security interests at stake in the region. Rather than struggle against the emergence of new powers, the "Neo-Nixon Doctrine" proposed here embraces this trend by working to incorporate the Indian Ocean's emerging powers into a multipolar regional security architecture that promotes an open economic order and liberal-democratic values while minimizing the fiscal and military burden on the United States for ensuring regional stability. In doing so, this strategy prioritizes core U.S. interests by not diverting scarce defense resources to peripheral regions or issues, while furthering the regional ambitions of local partners with the goal of forming a stable and enduring regional order.

Indian Ocean: Center Stage or Regional Sideshow?

Ever since Robert Kaplan declared the Indian Ocean "center stage" for global politics in the 21st century, it has become the region du jour among U.S. national security analysts.⁶ This has led to a proliferation of workshops and reports on Indian Ocean Security from the think tanks and professional military education institutions that make up the American defense-intellectual establishment.⁷ As a tangible sign of the shift in American thinking, the current U.S. maritime strategy has reoriented the Navy and Marine Corps from their traditional two-ocean focus on the Atlantic and the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.⁸

The arguments in favor of the region's importance are well known. The thirty nations that constitute its littoral region contain one-third of the world's population, as well as 55% of the world's proven oil reserves, 35% of its gas, 40% of its gold, 60% of its uranium and 80% of its diamonds.⁹ These littoral areas also abound with important industrial raw materials, such as iron, titanium, chromate, lithium, bauxite, cobalt, nickel manganese, rubber and tin.¹⁰ Moreover, the Indian Ocean is a key transit route for oil from the Persian Gulf to reach consumers in Europe and Asia. Seventeen-million barrels of oil a day (90% of oil exported from the Gulf) transits by tanker through the Strait of

Hormuz and into the western reaches of the Indian Ocean.¹¹ In terms of global trade, the Indian Ocean is a major conduit linking manufacturers in East Asia to markets in Europe, Africa and the Persian Gulf. In addition to carrying more than 2/3 of the world's oil shipments, half of the world's containerized cargo and one-third of its bulk cargo travels the ocean's busy sea lanes annually.¹²

At the same time, stability in the Indian Ocean littoral is a particular concern as the region has a high potential for producing failed states: *Foreign Policy* magazine's 2011 Failed States Index included seven littoral nations in its top 25.¹³ Moreover, the potential for inter-state conflict remains high, as a host of unresolved maritime or territorial disputes affect a region that lacks substantial collective security arrangements.¹⁴ The littoral is also plagued by a host of irregular security threats as the very same waterways that transport goods are also used for human smuggling, drug trafficking and gun running. Moreover, the International Maritime Bureau assesses that the Indian Ocean has a high risk of piracy, particularly in the Gulf of Aden, Horn of Africa, the Bay of Bengal and the Straits of Malacca.¹⁵ Finally, in the context of the simultaneous rise of both India and China, Robert Kaplan has argued that "the Indian Ocean is where global struggles will play out in the 21st century."¹⁶

To what extent are U.S. national security interests affected by developments in this potentially volatile region? The Indian Ocean has not traditionally assumed pride of place in U.S. strategic thinking. Through the 1960s, American planners largely considered the Indian Ocean was a backwater. Britain's dominance at sea, combined with its imperial role in South Asia, led the U.S. to regard the region as a British preserve.¹⁷ In the early years of the Cold War, American strategy concentrated on the Atlantic and the Pacific Basin, because Western Europe and Japan were viewed as essential territory in the struggle against global Communism, whereas American involvement in the Indian Ocean littoral consisted primarily of economic and military aid, rather than the deployment of military forces.¹⁸ America's direct involvement only increased in the wake of British withdrawal from "East of Suez," in the late 1960s which appeared to coincide with increased Soviet presence in East Africa and South Asia. The overthrow of the Shah—which eliminated a key security buffer between the Soviet Union

and the Persian Gulf—and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan justified further American concern about the security of the region in the 1980s.

In the absence of the threat to the region posed by a hostile rival superpower such as the Soviet Union, the restrained approach towards the Indian Ocean from the early Cold War has much to commend it since regional developments are unlikely to have a direct impact on the United States. Despite the aforementioned importance of the Indian Ocean as an energy corridor, the U.S. itself is not significantly reliant on the region for access to hydrocarbons. Including marginal oil producers such as India, Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia, the Indian Ocean region barely accounted for 15% of U.S. oil imports in 2010.¹⁹ In contrast, many of America's allies and key trading partners are highly dependent on the Indian Ocean for energy. To the east, Japan receives 90% of its oil imports via the Indian Ocean, while 75% of China's imports and 85% of India's oil imports transit the region.²⁰ Similarly, the economies of important American partners in the Asia-Pacific such as Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan and South Korea all receive more than 2/3 of their hydrocarbon imports from the Gulf. To the west, roughly 1/3 of Europe's oil imports pass through the Indian Ocean.²¹ Although the Indian Ocean region directly accounts for only a fraction of U.S. oil imports, it can be argued that the region retains critical importance for American energy security because oil is a globally integrated commodity, therefore a supply disruption anywhere would raise prices around the world, which would harm economic growth. Sensible though this argument may seem, it is based more on hyperbole than hard fact. While generations of policy-makers in the West were undoubtedly scarred by the oil shocks of the 1970s, as Eugene Gholz and Daryl Press have argued in great detail, the industrialized world actually has sufficient oil reserves, in both government controlled stocks and commercial inventories, to weather an oil supply disruption on par with the worst in history.²² Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the American economy is significantly less vulnerable to oil price shocks today than it was in the 1970s.²³ The energy security of the United States does not turn on developments in the Indian Ocean.

With respect to the goods trade, the Indian Ocean is also a far more important conduit for the nations of East Asia and Europe than it is for the United States. The Asia-Europe shipping route, via the Indian Ocean, is the world's largest containerized trading

lane in the world. Moreover, security scholars have noted that Europe is “heavily reliant upon the timely unhindered movement of vessels in the waters between the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal.”²⁴ Nevertheless, as the world’s largest economy, analysts have suggested that United States has a strong economic interest in the security of Indian Ocean shipping since the globalized nature of commodity markets means that the American economy would feel the effects of any major tremors in the Indian Ocean.²⁵ Despite the purported effects of globalization in linking economies around the world, the actual vulnerability of the United States to this kind of threat is frequently overstated, in large part because true threats to international trade are quite small: Even in the case of a major regional war, the economic impact on a non-participating, large open economy, such as the United States, is typically small in terms of capital flows, trade, and direct investment.²⁶ Thus, economic imperatives cannot justify a major American regional commitment.

The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region to the U.S. is not based on its direct impact on America, but on its importance for key U.S. allies and partners. As outlined by Christopher Layne, U.S. strategic priorities since the end of the Second World War have been to prevent a hostile peer-competitor from dominating Western Europe and industrialized East Asia.²⁷ In so far as developments in the Indian Ocean affect key allies and partners in Europe and East Asia, who depend on the region energy and trade flows, they are of importance to the United States. Therefore, the U.S. does have an interest and a role to play in promoting regional stability and security. However, given that regional developments have a far greater direct impact on the nations of Asia and Europe, the cost and effort to promote regional security must be in line with the actual scale of the economic and political costs the U.S. would bear in the event of significant instability. How can the U.S. best secure its interests in the Indian Ocean while promoting the well being of key allies and partners? By helping regional powers help themselves.

A Neo-Nixon Doctrine for the Indian Ocean

Since the vital military and political interests of the United States do not require it to play a leading role in guarantying the security of the Indian Ocean littoral, the traditional American recipe of forward deployed forces backed by nuclear security guarantees is not necessarily appropriate for this region. Instead, facilitating the emergence of a multipolar regional arrangement, with strong democratic states in leading roles, is the best means for achieving regional stability. A model for this approach comes from a prior period of perceived “imperial overstretch” in the 1960s, when the Nixon administration grappled with America’s deteriorating global position resulting from its protracted involvement in Vietnam. Popularly understood, the so-called Nixon Doctrine limited unconditional American security guarantees to smaller allies. Instead, these local partners were charged with the primary responsibility for providing for their own defense, which would be facilitated by American aid and advice.²⁸ A key shortcoming of the original Nixon Doctrine was its reliance on pro-Western autocrats, such as the Shah of Iran, whose unstable political systems proved to be a poor foundation for an enduring regional security structure.²⁹ In contrast, this proposed “Neo-Nixon Doctrine” would focus on cultivating the major Indian Ocean littoral nations that are free, democratic, and financially capable of being net providers of security in their region.³⁰

The four principal states on which to anchor the strategy are Australia, Indonesia, India and South Africa. These countries increasingly possess the economic means and military capabilities to provide for regional security, and each of these nations is also a presumptive hegemon in its respective sub-region of the Indian Ocean littoral (Oceania, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Southern Africa), which makes it natural for them to assume a leading role in regional security. In explicitly seeking to foster the emergence of a robust multipolar security structure in the Indian Ocean that can contain most security threats without direct U.S. involvement, this strategy of self-interested altruism leverages the primary geopolitical trend in the region—namely the emergence of second-tier powers. By putting liberal democracies—who share an interest in maintaining an open economic order and minimizing great power conflict—at the center of this arrangement, U.S. regional goals can be advanced by encouraging local powers to pursue their own national interests. This core of major littoral powers can also provide a foundation for multi-lateral efforts that bring both regional and extra-regional actors

together to address issues of collective concern, such as energy security and the free transit of goods.

As with the original Nixon Doctrine, capacity building of regional partners is the primary means by which the U.S. facilitates security in the Indian Ocean region. American efforts would focus on supporting the efforts of these countries to develop their own military strength in a manner that would allow them to emerge as independent regional actors. In particular, arms sales and technology transfers would seek to enhance their capability to secure their own territory, police their immediate region and deter intervention by hostile powers. This requires the development of defensive weapons systems for safe-guarding territory such as maritime surveillance aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles; anti-submarine warfare platforms; advanced air-defense systems; diesel-electric submarines; long-range anti-ship missiles, and smart naval mines. Patrolling and policing further from home would be facilitated by an expanded expeditionary capability which requires both airborne and naval tankers. Amphibious platforms have proven highly effective in regional humanitarian response situations and expanding the number of amphibious ships in partner navies should be a priority.

Grant aid, rather than arms sales, makes it significantly easier to convince a foreign partner to acquire the system or technology that America feels is most appropriate to its needs. The reality of a strategy designed to facilitate regional security provision by local powers is that they know it is in the U.S. interest to help build their capacity. As a result, they may be less likely to purchase the types of systems the U.S. advises with their own funds if they believe that the U.S. will gift it to them anyway. This kind of free-riding is less than desirable; however, it is still far more cost-effective for the United States to subsidize the military capacity of local partners than it is for America to take the lead in providing regional security itself. This is particularly true since the manpower, operations and maintenance costs of the additional military capability would be borne by the local country. In order to effectively enhance the military capacity of friendly democratic states, U.S. technology transfer rules and export control guidelines would require a restructuring.

A key advantage of this strategy is that it furthers the interests of local powers while also securing American aims. U.S. aid would increase their power and facilitate

their order-producing role in their respective sub-region, both of which would boost their claim to major power status. In many respects, the U.S. would simply be encouraging and facilitating an expansion of existing behavior. For example, of its own initiative, the South African navy has undertaken anti-piracy patrols in the Mozambique gap; while the Indian Navy has engaged in joint surveillance of key waterways near the Straits of Malacca with Indonesia and Thailand, patrolled off the coast of Madagascar and Mozambique as well as in the Gulf of Oman, and worked to enhance the coast guard capacity of several small island nations in the Indian Ocean, such as the Maldives and the Seychelles.

While American partners focus on local security issues, the U.S. would concentrate on maintaining command of the global commons.³¹ This would work to ensure that local partners and U.S. allies retain unfettered access to the global trading system, beyond the reach of their individual militaries. Rather than undertake a large-scale forward deployment of forces in the Indian Ocean, the U.S. would carefully shepherd its own military power, intervening only if the leading local powers proved unable to manage regional security on their own. This does not mean that the U.S. would completely withdraw its military presence from the region. However, maritime and air-power based offshore, rather than forward deployed ground forces, would constitute the majority of the U.S. presence in the region. Joint training and bi-lateral/multi-lateral military exercises would be an important focus of American efforts both to strengthen local military capability as well as deepen interoperability with regional forces in case U.S. intervention should ever be necessary. Continued political and military engagement would also be beneficial for preserving access to a network of forward operating bases that would facilitate U.S. power projection into the region in case of a major contingency.

With respect to irregular security challenges in the region, American nuclear non-proliferation efforts would continue unabated. Ideally, regional security cooperation would extend to nuclear matters in a manner that meets the concerns of countries such as South Africa, India and Indonesia, who have previously resisted joining such efforts as the Proliferation Security Initiative. In so far as nuclear proliferation by states in the Indian Ocean region is driven by security concerns vis-à-vis the United States, a restrained U.S. posture could reduce some of that anxiety. With respect to terrorism, the

capacity-building focus of this strategic approach certainly would be extended to the counter-terrorism realm, and to more than just the democratic major powers, wherever it is recognized that the contacts, local knowledge and language skills of foreign police and intelligence services are best positioned and willing to uncover and disrupt terrorist groups. The U.S. can bolster such agencies through training, equipment and technical support, the latter of which is America's comparative advantage and can act as a key force multiplier without an overtly visible presence. Ideally, local counterterrorism efforts would be handled by local governments, but should they prove unable to act, the U.S. would be prepared to assist with air strikes or small-scale raids carried out by special operations forces stationed at low-profile remote bases in the region. To the extent that anti-American terrorism is fostered by the visible presence of U.S. forces in key countries in the region, an Indian Ocean strategy that minimizes the "footprint" of U.S. forces would reduce that source of antagonism.³²

Diplomatic Measures

In addition to strengthening the capability of individual states, the U.S. must facilitate the deepening and broadening of existing political and security relationships among India, South Africa, Indonesia, and Australia in a manner that would enable them to manage regional crises in partnership if necessary. Rather than starting from scratch, however, this effort capitalizes on the existing ties that these countries have already forged with each other. For example, India currently possesses strategic partnerships with Australia and Indonesia and has sought to deepen its defense cooperation with South Africa through joint military training, while Australia and Indonesia are each other's most important foreign policy partner in the region.

Although the United States can leverage its own bilateral relationships with these states to promote regional cooperation, the goal is not to recreate East Asia's hub-and-spoke system, with the U.S. at the center. Instead, the objective is to foster regional linkages that can enhance political coordination and contingency planning to the point where joint or multilateral operations could and would be readily undertaken in the

absence of direct U.S. leadership. This process should begin with bilateral and multilateral discussions with Canberra, Delhi, Jakarta and Pretoria. Regular multilateral exercises should be held as frequently as possible to promote interoperability, intelligence cooperation and shared threat perception. Modeled on the Milan series of naval exercises, these should include other littoral nations (Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore) and interested extra-regional actors (Japan and South Korea). Furthermore, military-to-military exchanges of officers from these target countries should be significantly increased, with specific attention given to developing bilateral ties not only between the U.S. and the next generation of military leaders in the target country, but also among the future military leaders of the major regional democracies to help facilitate a deepening of those ties as well.

Although there is a strong normative element to basing a regional security strategy around a core of liberal democracies, the goal is not to form an ideological bloc in the Indian Ocean, nor is it predicated on changing the domestic political arrangements of key Indian Ocean states. Instead, it attempts to forge a lasting regional security architecture that blends realist and idealist considerations by putting at its core the leading economic and military powers in the various sub-regions of the Indian Ocean who also share a common commitment to upholding international norms and common interests with respect to regional security, which are important for both maintaining stability in the region and ensuring long-term cooperation. Other nations from the region, or extra-regional powers who are concerned with the security and stability of the Indian Ocean, would be welcome to contribute to these efforts provided they embrace these established norms for managing the sea lanes and airspace of the littoral region.

Multilateral Security Initiatives

Although pan-Indian Ocean multilateral fora have not generally developed into strong institutions, both India and Australia have historically been enthusiastic proponents of regional organizations.³³ The U.S. should attempt to channel both countries' efforts into leadership of a regional collective security effort, by working

through an existing organization, which has the legitimacy of indigenous origins that a more blatantly American-fostered effort would lack.

One institution with particular promise is the recently established Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). This Indian initiative, open to naval chiefs from each country in the region, provides a forum for the heads of regional navies to discuss maritime security concerns. At the regional level, IONS can assist in promoting collective action among member states and can serve as a model for similar groupings of Chiefs of the Army, Air Force and even police. The United States should support IONS by encouraging Australia, Indonesia and South Africa to host future symposia to give the nascent institution staying power and a broader endorsement from the leading navies of the region.

The United States should also encourage IONS members to create a second broader forum, which included extra-regional actors as dialogue partners, to foster real discussion among key stake-holders in the Indian Ocean. An “IONS +” that included the U.S., Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, France and the UK would provide an opportunity for interested nations to focus on common concerns about energy security and piracy in the Indian Ocean. Meaningful engagement on these “small s” security issues could pave the way for a more robust dialogue which could facilitate the kind of diplomatic intercourse and information-sharing that can dampen the mistrust and doubt which presently exists among some regional and extra-regional powers. Moreover, active membership in a regional cooperative security organization would be a key way for major regional and extra-regional powers to demonstrate their benign intentions and support for the status quo.

Engaging Major Regional Powers

Implementing the Neo-Nixon Doctrine in the Indian Ocean would require American policy-makers to undertake a mindset-shift since, unlike in East Asia, the majority of the partners states proposed here are not treaty allies of the United States. Washington would have to become comfortable with the notion that these countries will

follow foreign policies based on their own self-interest, which will converge with the U.S. in some areas and possibly diverge in others. Moreover, it should be recognized ahead of time that as the U.S. succeeds in strengthening these states militarily, their foreign policy autonomy may grow. However, on balance, strong democratic states in the Indian Ocean with the military means to defend themselves and provide for regional security will foster a region that is in keeping with U.S. regional goals.

India

Within the Indian Ocean, India emerges as the fulcrum of the Neo-Nixon Doctrine because it can play a role in key sub-regions such as South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Africa and, to an extent, the Persian Gulf. With the largest indigenous navy in the Indian Ocean, as India's economy continues to achieve record economic growth, its interests in maintaining good order at sea and protecting the region's sea lanes is converging with that of other trading nations.³⁴ New Delhi has already demonstrated a desire to play a leading role in Indian Ocean security, and cooperation on regional security could be the "next big thing" to drive forward Indo-U.S. relations. In bolstering India's naval capacity, beyond the systems discussed above, the U.S. should consider sharing naval nuclear technology. Since India has already managed to construct an indigenous test-bed nuclear submarine, assistance from the United States should be actively extended to help jump start India's naval nuclear propulsion program, either by loaning a nuclear submarine for experimentation or engaging in direct technology collaboration. This would facilitate the emergence of a true blue water Indian navy which could undertake sea-lane security missions far from home. The Neo-Nixon Doctrine has a high degree of synergy with India's regional ambitions by supporting New Delhi's clear emergence as the legitimate hegemon in South Asia and the leading power in the Indian Ocean region.

Indonesia

Given the size, economic strength and natural role as the leading state of the Southeast Asia sub-region, Indonesia is an obvious focal point of American attention. This is particularly true in light of the democratic consolidation that has taken place there since 2004, while traditional American partners in the region such as the Philippines and Thailand have struggled with democracy and human rights. Indonesia possesses the Indian Ocean's second largest navy and shares the interests of the U.S. and other major regional powers in both ensuring the free trade of goods and suppressing piracy. In terms of bilateral ties with other leading IO nations, Australia and Indonesia each recognize the other as one of its most important bilateral relationships, while India and Indonesia have forged a strategic partnership. The Neo-Nixon Doctrine would facilitate two key goals for Indonesia: achieving closer security cooperation with the United States and playing a greater role in international affairs. While the U.S. and Indonesia share critical interests in arresting the spread of violent extremism and managing geopolitical change in the Indo-Pacific, which can provide an impetus for closer cooperation, it will take time to strengthen the bilateral partnership. Focusing on broad areas of common interest as the Neo-Nixon Doctrine does, is the best way to move the relationship forward.

Australia

Australia is a treaty ally of the United States and possesses the region's third largest navy. It has deepened security ties with Indonesia and India is its second most important bilateral link in the entire littoral region. Canberra also has a significant ability to forge partnerships with many key Indian Ocean littoral nations since it is not viewed as a threat in the region.³⁵ This puts Australia in a key position to expand the breadth and scope of its maritime surveillance and patrolling into the Eastern Indian Ocean. However, encouraging Australia to assume a more robust role in the Indian Ocean may pose some diplomatic challenges. Although Australia possesses one of the largest exclusive economic zones in the Indian Ocean, it has traditionally neglected this region in favor of the Asia-Pacific as the focus of its foreign policy. Moreover, while Australia has a strong interest in not seeing the Indian Ocean become an arena of great power competition, the country's dependence on China as a market for its raw materials has

made some of its leadership wary of actions that could be construed as contributing to the containment of China. Nevertheless, the present government has supported U.S. plans to increase its military presence in Australia and the broader Asia-Pacific region.³⁶

South Africa

Alongside India and Australia, South Africa has traditionally been a regional leader in the Indian Ocean; however in recent years its attention has increasingly been focused internally and on continental Africa. Strategically located along the Cape of Good Hope—the favorite route for oil tankers too large to transit the Suez Canal—South Africa is the only sub-Saharan African country with the ability to carry out meaningful anti-piracy operations in its sub-region. Although the South African navy has been undertaking anti-piracy efforts in the Southeastern Indian Ocean, these operations are severely restricted by current budget limitations. It may be worthwhile for the U.S. to consider partially financing South Africa's efforts to combat piracy and patrol its adjacent sea lanes. Although U.S.-South African ties are notionally cordial, Pretoria tends to support nations that take views independent from the West. Nevertheless, this foreign policy orientation poses less of a problem for the Neo-Nixon Doctrine since the strategic approach does not attempt to cajole South Africa to follow a Western agenda, but rather empower it to do what it is already doing in order to contribute to Indian Ocean security.

Regional Considerations

Eastern Indian Ocean

Coordination and cooperation among the respective navies of Australia, India and Indonesia help ensure the free transit of shipping through the vital choke points of the Malacca and Lombok Straits. The United States can encourage and support these efforts by working with the three countries to share intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) data to create a full-spectrum maritime domain awareness in the Eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean. India has already undertaken coordinated patrolling of the northern

approaches of the Straits of Malacca with Indonesia. Expanding that effort to include more regular Indian-Indonesian combined patrols, Indonesian-Australian patrolling in the vicinity of Lombok, as well as intelligence sharing and combined exercises, can help ensure that the sea lanes in the eastern stretches of the Indian Ocean are secure.

Western Indian Ocean

Although the triangle of India-Indonesia-Australia brings together the most capable nations in the region to focus on the Eastern Indian Ocean, there is no similar configuration of leading states to the West. Since Europe directly benefits from oil transiting the Cape, the EU or individual member states might be a source of financial support for the South African Navy. France in particular could emerge as a security partner for South Africa. France maintains a permanent military presence in the region—including more than a dozen naval vessels—through its overseas territories in the southern Indian Ocean and bases in Djibouti and Abu Dhabi and has been conducting anti-piracy operations off of East Africa since 2005. Paris and Pretoria already undertake joint military exercises, including anti-piracy training and are looking to deepen bilateral cooperation in the Southern Indian Ocean. Moreover, France has good relations with India—to whom it has supplied advanced conventional submarines—and has bilateral agreements with Australia which facilitate surveillance and law-enforcement operations in their adjoining territorial waters in the Southern Indian Ocean.

Between India and South Africa, there is a notable gap in the Persian Gulf region. In the near term the U.S. must still play an active role providing security in this zone. Achieving American security goals in the Persian Gulf, which centers on preventing major hydrocarbon reserves from being dominated by a hostile power, does not require the maintenance of forward ground forces. With the three contenders for regional leadership—Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq—all strong enough to defend themselves but too weak to mount a bid for regional hegemony, the status quo is relatively safe. If necessary, the U.S. can provide security assistance to aid local states in balancing each other to block the rise of a single region-dominating power. However, the primary security function carried out by the U.S. in the region should be to pledge to oppose any

violation of the territorial integrity of any major oil-producing state, which can be accomplished with a naval presence and intervention forces that are not stationed in theater.

America's Enabling Capabilities

The Neo-Nixon Doctrine does not require the U.S. to maintain a significant peacetime military presence in the Indian Ocean littoral region. Those assets which are forward deployed, mainly from the Air Force and the Navy, will be platforms that are key capability enablers for the local powers America is aiding. Given the U.S. military's comparative advantage in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, for example, deployment of long-range high endurance UAVs such as the RQ-4 Global Hawk and the MQ-4C Broad Area Maritime Surveillance can facilitate common domain awareness. At sea, the U.S. Navy would maintain a carrier equivalent in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, in combination with a robust deployment of guided-missile submarines that leverage the submarine tender and crew swap facilities at Diego Garcia to prolong time on station. In terms of air forces, the main focus would be on strategic airlift, long-range bombers and tankers that stage through forward bases. In the event direct American intervention was required, attack submarines would be valuable tools for seizing and maintaining command of the sea so that the U.S. could use major sea lanes to surge forces from out of theater to assist partner nations.

Preserving the capability to surge forces into the region in a contingency puts a premium on the prepositioning of equipment stocks as well as ensuring access to forward operating sites that can facilitate power projection. The U.S. already has access to facilities on the rim of the Indian Ocean, such as the headquarters of the 5th fleet in Bahrain; the Air Force's facility at Al Udeid in Qatar; a military presence in Djibouti on the African continent; and Changi Naval Base in Singapore on the far side of the Straits of Malacca. The Neo-Nixon Doctrine does not require an extensive network of permanent U.S. bases in the region; however, the ability to surge forces would be enhanced by contingency access to air and naval bases or cooperative security locations

in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India's Andaman and Nicobar islands, Australia's Cocos Islands and the Seychelles.

Diego Garcia emerges as an important hub in this regard. The island facilitates U.S. power projection through the prepositioning of Army and Marine Corps brigade sets, long-range bomber operations, the replenishment of naval surface combatants, and the strike and special operations capabilities of guided-missile submarines that can call at the atoll's wharf. The U.S. government must take proactive steps to ensure continued access to this facility after the present agreement with the British government expires in 2016.

Risks and Uncertainties

A regional strategy that empowers local actors to maintain regional security carries several apparent risks; however upon close examination, none appear so serious as to render the proposed strategy unworkable.

First, it might be the case that the leading counties of the region are less interested in assuming a regional leadership role or providing regional public goods in the manner described. This issue is most salient with respect to India, where the government has previously resisted proposals for multi-lateral security dialogues that are not based on the UN or a broad based regional grouping. As noted previously in this article, all four of the leading democratic states in the region have undertaken efforts to provide security in their respective sub-regions as well as forge strategic ties with each other. The effort required under the Neo-Nixon Doctrine is simply more of the same. Moreover, for states concerned about preserving their strategic autonomy, this proposal doesn't necessarily require a formal multi-lateral structure. At a minimum, an expansion of existing cooperation so that joint crisis response, such as the unprecedented cooperation between the Indian and Australian navies that occurred in the wake of the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, can be conducted efficiently would be sufficient.

A second related concern is that the state of bilateral relations between the major democratic powers in the region, or between those countries and the US, preclude the

kind of cooperation required. Indonesian-Australian ties, for example, have peaked and troughed over the past decade. Yet, that has not prevented the two governments from deepening their security ties over the same interval. Indeed, the opportunity to cooperate on regional security matters provides a new forum for the pursuit of common interests, which may give a jolt to bilateral relationships, such as that between Jakarta and Canberra.³⁷ U.S. ability to cooperate with and assist India over the past decade has been constrained by Washington's dependence on Pakistan for logistical support of operations in Afghanistan. However, as the U.S. moves to draw down its role in Afghanistan, the obvious divergence in strategic interests between Washington and Islamabad has become clear.³⁸ Although the U.S. will continue to require cooperation with Pakistan, the lavish military aid and support of the past ten years will not continue as Washington focuses on the convergence of interests with Delhi.

Third, a restrained regional role could embolden a revisionist local state or an extra-regional power to challenge the status quo. Local powers may also have doubts about America's willingness to intervene in a major crisis, leading them to bandwagon with such challengers. Such concerns are valid; however, since the Indian Ocean has never been a theater of primary importance for the U.S., American restraint there would not be considered as significant a sign of American decline or disinterest as it would be in East Asia or Western Europe. Moreover, concern that local powers might bandwagon with challengers in the absence of a major U.S. presence ignores these states' own interests and capabilities. Uncertainty about U.S. intentions may actually provide incentives for them to develop their own military capabilities, an outcome the U.S. desires.

A fourth possible concern is that the "self-reliance" expected of major regional powers may lead to the development of nuclear weapons, which runs contrary to U.S. non-proliferation goals. This is indeed a possibility; however, it must be recognized that a major U.S. regional presence also has the potential to encourage other littoral countries to seek nuclear weapons. Moreover, as the U.S. tacitly acknowledged in its nuclear deal with India, the development of nuclear weapons by a democratic state for self-defense is not a threat to the U.S. in the manner that proliferation by a revisionist state is.

Fifth, it could be argued that bolstering the military capabilities of certain states in the region might provoke concern from some of their smaller neighbors. It should be noted, however, that the majority of the systems in question are defensive in nature. Moreover, the counties being assisted are democratic states which have already demonstrated the ability to be responsible stakeholders through their own efforts to contribute to regional security. While enhancing the military capability of leading states may cause some anxiety, it is certainly balanced by the reduction of tensions associated with a more subdued American presence.

A sixth potential criticism is that the United States is so far removed from the region that unless American forces were forward deployed, they would be unable to respond to a major crisis in a timely manner. However, since the first-responder role under this strategy is devolved to local states, with the U.S. intervening only if they fail, the likelihood of a crisis requiring an immediate American response is very low. Moreover, prepositioned stocks of equipment in theater, such as the Army and Marine Corps brigade sets at Diego Garcia, can speed response. Historically the U.S. has been able to deter further military action by revisionist states in the region with only symbolic “tripwire” forces, such as the elements of the 82nd airborne that were deployed to Saudi Arabia in the immediate aftermath of Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Finally, there is a concern that when the U.S. relies on other countries to advance its interests, they often end up advancing their own instead. The key fact to emphasize is that America’s regional interests are well aligned with those of the major states of the Indian Ocean region. At its core, this strategic approach is based on the belief that on aggregate, the preferences of the region’s leading democratic states will intersect with America’s foreign policy goals. Moreover, it is assumed that these states are more likely to cooperate with each other to maintain stability and provide regional public goods (such as sea lane security) in a manner that enhances collective security in a mutually beneficial manner. Although disagreement may occur over tactics or the relative priority given to a particular issue, the desired end-state is largely identical.

Conclusion

The security and stability of the Indian Ocean not only benefits the nations of the immediate littoral region, but also America's European and Asian allies, and therefore the U.S. itself. In approaching this region of extrinsic importance, the resources and effort that Washington dedicates must align with the real security interests at stake. Rather than take the lead in guaranteeing regional security, the U.S. should help the leading democratic states of the region help themselves.

Strengthening the capacities of Australia, India, Indonesia and South Africa to more effectively police their immediate regions advances America's regional goals while limiting its involvement in conflicts and crises that are peripheral to core American interests. Moreover, by supporting and strengthening the natural hegemon in the various sub-regions of the Indian Ocean littoral in their efforts to secure their own interests, American power is more likely to be viewed as a force for good. If properly bolstered by the U.S., this core of regional powers can provide a deterrent to any revisionist state that may seek to overturn the regional status quo. Cooperative security efforts channeled through an indigenous regional security organization—incorporating regional and extra-regional stakeholders—can both assist with collective efforts to respond to low-level regional instability, such as piracy, and provide a means for the major powers active in the Indian Ocean region to discuss their interests and concerns in a manner that can ameliorate tensions. The sum total of these efforts would lay a solid foundation for an enduring regional order that enhances stability and prosperity for all nations in the region and beyond.

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