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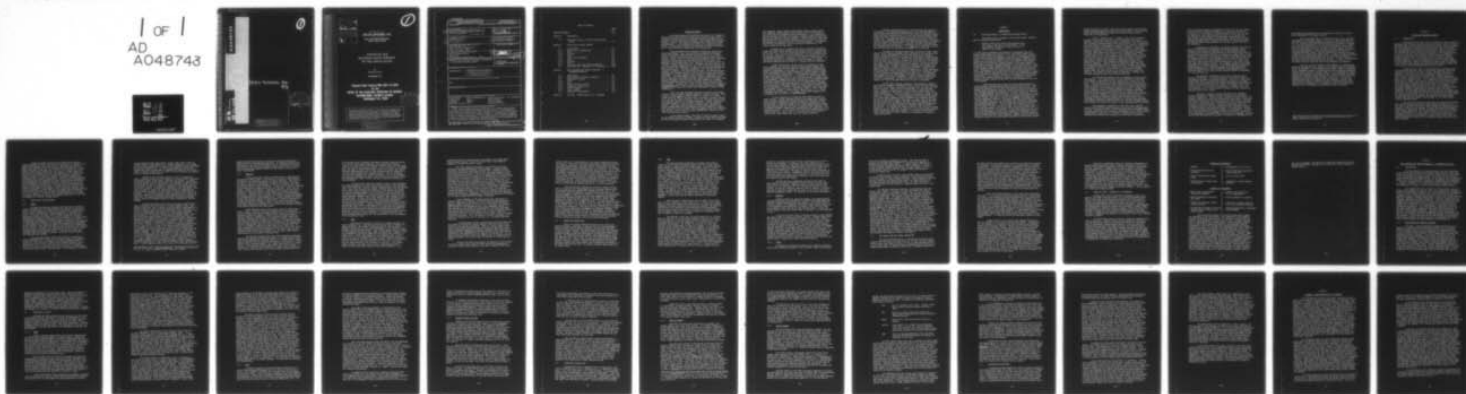
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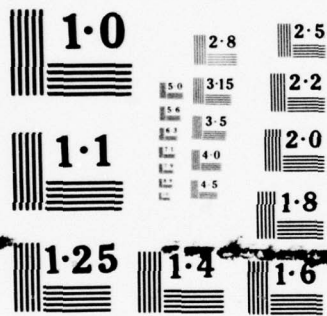
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**DELEX SYSTEMS, INC.**  
 Suite 700, 8150 Leesburg Pike  
 Vienna, Virginia 22180

**POTENTIAL FOR  
 REGIONAL NAVAL CONFLICT  
 IN THE INDIAN OCEAN**

by  
**Robert M. Burch**

**SEPTEMBER 1977**

**Prepared Under Contract MDA 903-77-C-0035  
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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) This report examines existing potential for a regional naval conflict occurring in the Indian Ocean during the next decade. It identifies the political and military factors which determine the interplay of forces which will be decisive, if conflict becomes a reality. The analytical framework rests on three considerations; (1) the Indian Ocean as a conflict-promoting entity, (2) South Asian political relationships and threat perceptions, and (3) naval ambitions, capabilities, and shortcomings.		

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines the potential that exists for a regional naval conflict occurring in the Indian Ocean during the next decade. It identifies numerous political and military factors and emphasizes the interplay of forces which will ultimately decide whether that potential becomes a reality. The analytical framework rests basically on three considerations: (1) the Indian Ocean itself as a conflict-promoting entity, (2) South Asian political relationships and threat perceptions, and (3) naval ambitions, capabilities, and shortcomings.

Some strategists see an amorphous symmetry to Indian Ocean-South Asian affairs. They view the area as a geographic-strategic entity and proclaim common interests and destinies for all littoral nations. Section One explores this proposition and concludes that it distorts reality, tends to foster misleading judgments, and slights more important, complex political influences on the area's future. But geographic and strategic factors are important to conflict analysis of the area in other interrelated ways. Geography gives the area whatever intrinsic strategic significance it has, acts as one key determinant of naval missions, and influences the range of policy options exercised by South Asian nations. Political competition is at the heart of all strategic concerns, as are borders and resources. The related security interests and strategic concerns of Indian Ocean nations, and outside superpowers to a lesser degree, either overlap or intermingle in significant ways. Although numerous littoral countries (especially South Africa, Indonesia, and Australia) exhibit great interest in Indian Ocean naval developments, only India and Iran seem launched on a possible political-maritime collision course, one that could erupt into armed naval conflict. Whether this in fact occurs, however, rests squarely on the political state of mind of these two powers regarding the changing balance of forces there and whether their ambitions run afoul of their capabilities.

One of the most meaningful balances to observe in the above context is the one between national goals and security interests. When a nation's goals exceed its basic interests, it must, in a crisis, either fight for what is less than vital or retreat to another position. It is the age old theme of whether, or how far, the reach should exceed the grasp, and policy is its visible expression. Another variation on this theme develops in the distinction between actual and perceived threats. Logically, policies ought to address basic interests and actual threats rather than overextended goals and exaggerated threats. But with nations as with people, what they think is often more important than what is. Section Two of the paper adopts these concepts to the South Asian political setting.

As its dominant power, India sets the tone and tempo of many of the region's political currents. Recently, through symbolic gestures and solid initiatives, Indian foreign policy has sought to accommodate

with neighbors, compose regional differences, extract maximum benefit from superpower relationships, assure regional primacy, and possibly parley the last into leadership of the non-aligned -- all orchestrated with the interest and hope of acquiring an accepted global stature that permits the exercise of global influence. Although the major powers and not Pakistan are India's global reference point, Pakistan is critical to the equation as a potential spoiler of Indian ambitions. How these two resolve their differences will be a significant determinant of the future in this part of the world.

History and oil, security and status constitute the dominant themes that shape Iran's foreign policy and give it both a regional and global dimension. While its policy must always reflect contiguity with the U.S.S.R., Iran's primary focus presently is on the Persian Gulf and its maritime approaches. Concern over territorial integrity and self determination questions in politics to the east run a close second. The Shah blends major policy considerations into the mosaic of Iranian nationalist mythology and converts it to domestic political advantage.

Perhaps predictably, the net result of an analysis of how India, Pakistan, and Iran view threats and perceptions suggests that the threats are more perceived than real, which makes the perceptions equally as significant, if not more so. After assessing major foreign policy considerations and threat perceptions, several sources of potential naval conflict seem possible. Of the numerous elements of competition, three sources stand out: (1) Pakistan, (2) Indian Ocean naval presence and ambitions, and (3) Law of the Sea disputes. However, there is no evidence to suggest that either individually or collectively these competitive elements need drive India and Iran inexorably toward war. Even Iran's Indian Ocean ambitions need not threaten India's interests. On the contrary, an impressive number of shared, common interests exist. The combined impact of elements fostering convergence rather than competition between India and Iran is significant enough to caution against accepting the prospect of armed conflict between them as a sure thing, as anything but conjectural. The trends toward either competition or convergence will be critical to what eventuates.

In the interaction of trends one often finds the seeds of armed conflict. Another important trend in the subject under investigation is that associated with naval postures and ambitions. Section Three provides a comparative analysis of missions, capabilities, and shortcomings; it discusses trends in their naval modernization programs and what these portend for the future of Indian-Iranian relations. Two overlapping strategic categories or considerations are beneficial to the analytical process: (1) the Indian Ocean itself and related issues as a cause/occasion for conflict and (2) the Indian Ocean as an arena for conflict over other issues which had their genesis elsewhere.



Numerous similarities exist in Indian-Iranian naval ambitions and postures. Both have developed impressive coast defense capabilities, making them essentially dominant within their own immediate spheres. India's posture transcends this; it is also the dominant regional Indian Ocean naval power, while Iran aspires to radiate such power beyond the Persian Gulf. Geography and policy determine naval missions; Indian and Iranian policy decisions have been made committing both navies to augmented roles in support of national goals. The goals envisage naval presence and power projection missions to be performed by their respective navies for political and other purposes. It is this policy shift that convinces many observers that the two nations are headed for a collision.

The quest for improved capabilities, evidenced in their respective naval modernization programs, lends substance to the revised policy thrust. Heavy, contemplated or actual arms acquisitions generally reflect new ambitions which can trigger new definitions of relations and cause new points of friction. Some of this has already occurred between India and Iran, but once again, trends will prove decisive. Few analysts give Iran much chance against India should a naval war erupt in the next five years. Some even expect the gulf is widening. But several things could change this. Neither of their naval modernization programs are absolutely assured of smooth sailing into the future. India's could falter on several shoals, such as Soviet generosity or fiscal constraints. Each program has serious shortcomings to contend with; admittedly, some of Iran's seem more insurmountable in the short term. In discussing naval capabilities and shortcomings with people who watch Indian Ocean developments, one notices a tendency to overrate India's capabilities and Iran's shortcomings. Perhaps Iran should not be taken quite so lightly, and India's problems should not be quite so minimized.

As with their policies, nothing in their present or planned naval postures suggests a predestined clash. Presently India wields the real power in the region, possesses the premier navy, and need not view Iran as a threat. Since Iran is more important to India than vice-versa, nothing is automatic about a naval conflict between them from India's perspective. Provoking a naval war with India is hardly in the Shah's best interests. This could expose the superficial nature of some aspects of Iranian power. More importantly, such provocation followed by a defeat would jeopardize Iran's legitimate Gulf interests and risk exposure of the Shah's fragile power base -- perhaps even sow the seeds for an overthrow of the regime. The real test of his dynasty will be the skill with which the Shah achieves the proper balance between goals and interests. So nothing portends an automatic clash from Iran's perspective. The prospects for peace or war will rise or fall in direct proportion to the interaction of trends associated with foreign policies, threat perceptions, and naval postures -- and in the extent to which these trends establish whether elements of convergence or elements of competition prevail.

## SECTION 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 THE INDIAN OCEAN AS A GEOPOLITICAL-STRATEGIC ENTITY

The renowned naval strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, reputedly made the following observations:

Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia.  
This Ocean is the key to the Seven Seas. In the  
21st century, the destiny of the world will be  
decided on its waters.

It is the type of grandiose, philosophical pronouncement that 19th century intellectuals were fond of making, that almost leaves a 20th century reader initially speechless. (It seems so obviously profound!) We can only speculate what arguments Mahan would have presented in its defense. As a student and admirer of British seapower, Mahan may have viewed South Asia and the Indian Ocean in the context of the British Empire and its lifelines--and perhaps presumed an eternal lifespan for colonialism and Western European dominance. He was keenly aware of the political and military competition between Britain and Russia for control of the northern reaches of the South Asian subcontinent from Persia to India. Strategists in both centuries have seen a grand design to the South Asian policies and actions of both Czars and Commissars--an attempt to link the Russian heartland directly to the Arabian Sea-Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, it is difficult to resist the interpretation that Mahan's views in this instance essentially reflect an imperialist, social-darwinist, Western concept of the world, one most prevalent at the turn of the century.

After examining more closely his three premises embodied in the above quote, one might easily take issue with the first two. They hardly seem applicable to the world that emerged between 1914 and the present, given the epochal political events following two world wars and the incredible changes and advances over the past 75 years in transportation, communications, and technology. Consider premise one; it is at least arguable whether control of the Indian Ocean and dominance of Asia go hand in hand. Who wants or desires to "control" the Indian Ocean? Even the superpowers maintain a very modest presence there--and the littoral states even less. As for premise two, however one interprets that romantically-nautical term, the Seven Seas, the Indian Ocean seems an implausible key thereto. Are the Seven Seas synonymous with the world's oceans? Is there one key to them? And as for premise three, we might reserve judgment, for who knows where the destiny of the world will be decided in the 21st century? If the United States and the "Free World" are challenged to thwart Soviet attempts to consummate a continental-maritime marriage of Mackinder's and Mahan's theories, Mahan may well be correct about the world's destiny. Whether you subscribe to his strategic concepts or not, and despite centuries of almost revolutionary

change throughout the Indian Ocean area, certain existing, more mundane, patterns and developments are today clearly discernible. Moreover, they should be somewhat familiar because the situation they describe is reminiscent of a bygone era.

Alvin J. Cottrell and R. M. Burrell, two of the most astute students of the Indian Ocean area, observed recently that in some important respects the littoral scene is reminiscent of the 16th century, when intrepid Portugese mariners first arrived there. This is especially true with regard to trade patterns, regional naval postures, conflicting territorial claims, and traditional political rivalries. During the period of European dominance many potential sources of conflict were submerged, suppressed, or controlled. As European power and domination declined, these sources once again reached or broached the surface. Following the decline, history seems to have repeated itself. Intra-regional trade is still less important than the external patterns that crisscross the area to richer markets beyond the littoral. Outside major powers continue their measure of technological and military superiority--a factor which sometimes tempts them to meddle in area political intrigues. Littoral navies are generally weaker and more poorly equipped than those of the major powers. No major global power yet touches the shores of the Indian Ocean, India to the contrary notwithstanding. In all of these respects, a 16th century Portugese captain might feel right at home if he sailed into the Indian Ocean tomorrow. One wonders to what extent his geographic, strategic, and political perceptions might have paralleled our own.

In one important respect, that of geography, we are much more knowledgeable. The Portugese mariner blazed exploratory trails that still demand our admiration and awe, unaware that he sailed into the world's third largest ocean embracing approximately 58 million square miles. A modern day observer, while looking at a map and pondering the number and nature of the entries and exits to the Indian Ocean, might view the area as a self-contained, geographical entity. He might conclude, therefore, that the littoral nations constitute an amorphous political entity and have common destinies, all somehow tied to the Indian Ocean and responding to shared, so-called Indian Ocean interests. Most, if not all, students of the area tend to dismiss this neat, sweeping conceptual framework because international politics are too complicated to support such generalizations. Besides being misleading, this Indian Ocean vision tends to accent only the naval strategy factor, when actually, it is only one adjunct of more important political factors.

But geography is important in other ways, aside from the purely physical features that distinguish this ocean and influence naval missions. Although it fosters no self-contained entity, geography gives the area whatever intrinsic strategic significance it has. This strategic significance of South Asia is a function of borders and resources. Countries whose borders are contiguous to Russia and/or China have a

built-in security problem, and whether they like it or not, are factors in the Sino-Soviet competitive equation. Of the area's treasury of resources, oil is obviously the most significant--as are the sea lines of communication that carry the precious cargo to the markets of the East and West. Other minerals, raw materials, and foodstuffs will likely assume added importance as explorations continue and technology enhances the opportunity to exploit the sea bed and continental shelf. And consider India's human resources if ever they could be utilized to full potential!

Geography also influences, and sometimes governs, the range of policy options a nation can exercise because the regional setting frequently constitutes the framework for its international behavior. For many years, the options and behavior of South Asian nations had one, additionally significant influence to contend with, namely that of Great Britain. If the Indian Ocean area ever assumed a strategic entity, this was perhaps largely due to the presence of the British in East Africa, the Persian Gulf, India, and Southeast Asia. This is no longer true. Three very significant Indian Ocean developments in the last ten years have upset this strategic picture: (1) a gradual phaseout and ultimate withdrawal of the British presence, (2) an almost parallel increase in Soviet presence, and (3) quantum increases in Indian capabilities. These developments more or less introduced a new dimension into the turbulent history of the area, and they certainly marked the beginning of a new political era.

The strategic significance of an area is never strictly a function of adjacency. It is more a matter of the interest shown in developments and events by competing nations. While it no longer seems conceptually sound to visualize the Indian Ocean area as a strategic entity, given the altered political picture that emerged after Britain's retreat, we should not minimize the element of strategic concern that still prevails. Major world power interests do converge in the area, but admittedly only to a minor extent at present, and the potential for regional conflict still exists.

The area is ringed by states characterized by tremendous physical weaknesses, overwhelming social problems, and substantial political instability. Ethnic, tribal, religious and class tensions run rampant throughout the countries bordering the Indian Ocean. The resultant turmoil in young and old political entities will likely be intense, and could be destructive where constitutional and other restraints lack authority or are non-existent. Fissiparous tendencies abound, and contending political rivals have demonstrated how desperately they can act when the stakes are deemed high enough. By inclination or invitation, outside major powers might be tempted with involvement. And while the Indian Ocean itself is not yet an area of contentious competition among superpowers or regional states, the accent is on not yet. Activity such as that described above introduces the element of competition, and

the causes and consequences of such competition constitute the fundamental ingredients of strategic concern.

Having concluded that the Indian Ocean area did not constitute a geographic or a strategic entity, it should not seem surprising that there can be no political homogeneity flowing from the Indian Ocean per se. For analytical purposes, the countries may conveniently be combined into various sub-regions\*, such as the one receiving the focus of this study and comprising nations in the Arabian Sea-South Asia sub-region. A look at the politics of Iran, Pakistan, and India suggests the obvious; each sub-region generally reflects problems peculiar to itself--to indigenous political, social, economic questions and forces--rather than to some sort of Indian Ocean entity factor. In each sub-region, different political issues predominate because of the peculiarly sub-regional internal and external developments that prevail. In short, these interests lie mainly upon the shore and less upon the water -- which is to say that they are mainly political rather than geographic or strategic.

Thus, if we are to establish some framework for analyzing the potential for regional naval conflict in the Indian Ocean, the political factor is paramount. One's analytical task cannot be eased or simplified by any convenient concept or constellation of forces deriving inexorably from the Indian Ocean as a physical entity or as a determinant of events. Conflicts are essentially political storms. Locally unstable conditions combine with mounting, varying external pressures to provide the classic ingredients for storms--whether climatic or political. We can best determine and assess the potential for and intensity of Indian Ocean area political storms by carefully reading the complex political barometers and the perceptions of the immediate actors, while avoiding the tempting lure of oversimplified, geopolitical entity constructs.

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\*East Coast of Africa, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea-South Asia, Bay of Bengal, Southeast Asia-Australia.

## SECTION 2

### SOUTH ASIAN POLITICAL SETTING

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The history of the South Asian subcontinent has been periodically punctuated with virulent conflicts, the last as recent as 1971. British withdrawal east of Suez precipitated several showdowns, none more poignant than the resolution of political destinies between India and Pakistan. This latter drama may not have seen its last act. Much of the future of the area depends on the political and psychological states of mind of the littoral nations with respect to each other, to the changing balance of forces in the area, and to external relationships and pressures. Except as a minor facet of the actual conduct of operations during wartime, the politics of the area have not yet acquired a significant maritime dimension. Since this potential does exist, however, Chapter II will analyze what political circumstances might promote this maritime dimension and to what degree realistically certain regional nations can or will turn a political squabble into a naval conflict.

Beginning at the Union of South Africa and proceeding around the Indian Ocean littoral, north to the Arabian peninsula, across the Arabian Sea and India to the Bay of Bengal, southeast from Burma to Australia -- there exists an array of problems, instabilities, and rivalries with a potential for disruption that sometimes boggles the mind. There is enough timber in Africa alone to provide the combustible material for a century of wars. It is sometimes disconcerting to contemplate that the Indian Ocean splashes on shores that are the most politically volatile in the world; yet, we have much of the world's present and future energy resources located in the heart of the region. In years past, because this area was torn by civil war, constantly ravaged by natural disasters, overwhelmed by population growth and social upheavals, one could predict endless toil and strife for the nations of South Asia. The key questions are whether this plethora of human miseries must inexorably erupt into war and, for the purposes of this study, what the odds are that any such conflict may acquire a significant naval dimension and what the probable outcome might be of a naval conflict involving regional powers.

The first step toward an answer begins by asking the following: What nations located on the Indian Ocean littoral presently have, or will have in the 1980s and 1990s, a navy designed for important political missions in support of the national interest, one potentially capable of establishing a significant presence and projecting power in the Indian Ocean? Having asked this, one is led inevitably to the follow-on, more important political one -- given navies of the above caliber, what motivations, political developments, or other factors would cause the possessing nations to deploy their navy against another nation and fire shots in anger?

A study of navies in being and of current naval building programs suggests that India and Iran are the principal countries on the Indian Ocean littoral whose foreign policy objectives and political paths could conceivably cross to an extent that each might use its navy against the other in the open sea. Section 3 will discuss how a naval conflict might develop between India and Iran in the next decade and speculate on the eventual outcome. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the political scene, on whether the political crystal ball presages a future of turmoil and conflict or whether convergence and accommodation are in their constellations. This can best be accomplished by discussing and then comparing the major foreign policy concerns and threat perceptions of India and Iran, with a look also at the crucial role of Pakistan in the equation. These policies and perceptions are guided and influenced by the needs of national security, the drive for economic and industrial development, and the desire for enhanced world status and prestige. Recent events in the subcontinent strongly reinforce the overriding influence that domestic developments exert on foreign policy, for there is a corollary tying external ambitions and concerns to internal strength and cohesion as principal determinants of the focus and emphasis of a nation's foreign policy.

## 2.1 MAJOR POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

### 2.1.1 India

We begin the political analysis with India out of a sense of concession that India is the most important and powerful of the triumvirate. The astuteness and finesse of its policies will undoubtedly be the key factor in promoting or resolving tensions in this part of the world. In the past few years, Indian foreign policy reflected the dynamism and quality that bears out the above concession. Through a combination of symbolic gestures and solid initiatives, India has altered its diplomatic landscape in significant ways: an opening to China, accommodations with neighbors, improved relations with Iran, some trappings of rapprochement with Pakistan, a remarkably independent and bilateral Russian connection that keeps the bear at arms length while capitalizing on his services. Initiatives and gestures such as these, if they continue and their impact is assured, will undoubtedly alter the mosaic of relationships within South Asia and beyond. At this point in time they certainly seem well designed to preserve or promote Indian interests, both regionally and globally.

The compelling vision behind these interests, essentially since independence from Britain, has been India's quest for recognized status as a world power, in addition to being the dominant power in South Asia. It is not yet a potent factor in global politics, only a self-perceived one. Thus, one of the tap roots of India's foreign policy is to turn this self-perception into a reality, for self-perception does not really count. More important is the acceptance or bestowal

of such status by other major powers. India's major power vision was probably fueled to some extent by the complex interaction of two potent forces, a proud history and the nature of its relatively recent experience with Western colonial rule. In less arrogant moments, Indians only moderate the vision by balancing it pragmatically against a sober realization of present capabilities. But this in no way diminishes the determination to succeed in this regard.

During the more realistic moments, India's foreign policy seeks to stabilize relations with neighbors and thereby reduce unnecessary and wasteful claims on its energy, resources, and talents. It cannot claim any primacy in South Asia without first getting the regional house in order, and the latter is essential to the role India wants to play in international circles -- probably as spokesman for the non-aligned, as in the days of Nehru. By playing its diplomatic cards skillfully, India could successfully prevent the region from becoming a playground for external powers or counter the development of any so-called spheres of influence. For pursuing this goal, India has improved its military and diplomatic capacity for thwarting outside powers who wish to intrude in South Asia. By composing regional differences and assuring regional primacy, India can once again attempt to secure leadership of the non-aligned.

Probing the meaning of the term, non-aligned, unearths some useful revelations about the thrust of India's foreign policy. Some scholars simply see it as a synonym for self-reliance, independence, the process of taking a stand on each international issue on the basis of India's interests rather than siding with those of the superpowers. One of the most intriguing interpretations of non-alignment belongs to William Dunbar.\* He sees the concept embracing several ideas. India must remain non-aligned because it is more continent than country, embraces several regional nationalisms, contains generally isolationist populations, and has no need to align for survival since it would be virtually impossible to subjugate or assimilate -- even if defeated militarily. Besides, it is a useful scheme for managing relations with the U.S. and U.S.S.R. -- where a tilt one way invites confrontations with neighbors, a tilt the other way conflicts with traditions and institutions, and a tilt either way invites the loser to seek balancing support elsewhere. The scheme also improves India's political and economic leverage. Given the ingredients that make up this tightrope, it is easy to appreciate why India walks it. They all encourage, even require, an independent foreign policy -- whatever name you ascribe to it. Thus, a strong position -- preferably one of leadership -- in the non-aligned movement, plus acknowledged regional primacy, comprise necessary ingredients in India's road to becoming a major international power. India's regional primacy will hinge on its continuing ability to

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\*William Dunbar, 1976. India in Transition. The Washington Papers, vol. III, No. 31. Beverly Hills and London: Sage Publications.



harness the internal whirlwind of political forces and preserve the fragile process of parliamentary democracy. By developing capabilities appropriate to its size and strategic location, moderating the rivalry with Pakistan, and controlling internal forces, India can go a long way toward assuring that regional primacy and the general supervision of Indian Ocean matters.

#### 2.1.2 Pakistan

In the global arena, India's reference point is not Pakistan, but rather the major powers. But Pakistan is critical to the equation, nonetheless, as a potential spoiler of India's ambitions. The future of this part of the world, developments throughout the Indian Ocean area and certain aspects of international politics, all depend on how India and Pakistan resolve their differences. If they fail to resolve contending issues, internecine struggle can be the only forecast. South Asia can become a "cockpit for conflict", tempting outsiders to join the fray or dragging in other Asian powers in the manner of the Balkan prelude to World War I. Whenever there is change and turmoil in the subcontinent, Sino-Soviet competition comes into play. Even India's military superiority over Pakistan acts as a double-edged sword. Indians complain and become annoyed with Pakistan because the latter tends to involve third parties in area politics and problems. India wants to settle their mutual, contentious issues on a bilateral basis. While India's military superiority deters Pakistani revanchism, it also fosters and promotes Pakistan's extra-regional intrigues and involvements.

These Pakistani actions will be much easier to analyze than those of India. While the roots and imperatives of India's foreign policies required extensive elaboration above, those of Pakistan are, by comparison, much less complex. Whereas India's objectives envision regional stability, leadership of the non-aligned, global stature and influence, Pakistan's boils down to one word -- security. Wars with India have left Pakistan defeated and frustrated. Of necessity obsessed with security, plagued by a deep sense of frustration, and charged with emotion, Pakistan must chart its course with the difficult realization that it is probably destined for a secondary role in South Asia. No longer threatening to India militarily, Pakistan has had to fall back on some very basic foreign policy objectives. Its chief concern for the immediate future will be with security, with few other, more esoteric distractions as in the cases of India and Iran.

The security considerations that propel Pakistan's diplomatic gestures and initiatives have a dual thrust. One thrust embraces modest steps toward regularizing relations with India. Students argue whether symbolic gestures such as reopening embassies and air service can fundamentally alter the relationship. Yet, symbols are important to normalization. A second thrust balances that toward India with an extra-regional one. Pakistan works tirelessly to cement close relations with Iran, China, Western Europe, and the United States, mindful that this

activity gets India's attention, buttresses Pakistan's possible spoiler role toward India's global ambitions, and thus provides leverage. Disputes and controversies with Pakistan discredit India with the Moslem world and with the non-aligned movement. India can afford to be magnanimous, and ought to conduct South Asian affairs in a manner that reduces Pakistan's psychological need for arms and diminishes the temptation to invite outside intervention in regional affairs. This is especially true when one considers that military weakness is but one of Pakistan's two most acute problems; the other, more serious one is internal unrest. Both problems are closely related, and they reciprocally affect each other adversely.

At this writing, Pakistan's internal, ethnic protest movements have been exacerbated by a deep, significant political crisis stemming from bitter reactions to recent election irregularities, some say outright fraud. Ever since the state was founded, Pakistan has had to contend with endemic tribal problems in Baluchistan on the western border with Iran and with protest movements in the northwest frontier provinces on the border with Afghanistan. These potential conflict situations have nudged Pakistan's leaders toward some diplomatic fence mending with Iran and Afghanistan. However, the current internal unrest related to the election crisis, the ever-present ethnic animosities, and manifest military and other weaknesses, all seriously undermine Pakistan's political posture and influence. Against a backdrop of India's concerns and maneuverings, and viewed in conjunction with Soviet and Chinese involvements in the area, it is not too difficult to appreciate the imbalances and political currents that threaten the stability and tranquility of South Asia. And if there is one spark that might enflame Indian-Iranian relations, Pakistan is a good candidate. His Imperial Majesty, the Shah, expresses great concern over the implications of such developments for the security of Iran.

### 2.1.3 Iran

History and oil combine to provide the compelling themes to Iran's foreign policy. They also give that policy both a regional and a global dimension. The thread of national security ties all themes together, for security is the common denominator to all facets of Iran's external visions and initiatives. These visions require careful scrutiny for one important reason, the Shah tends to posture like a peacock. His pronouncements do not always square with the definition of reality as others see it. While Iran operates at one diplomatic level, on the basis of one set of interests and goals, the Shah sometimes thinks and postures at another, as befits his regal plumage. There is no danger in this as long as his goals and interests are in balance. But when a nation's goals exceed its real interests, it must in a crisis either fight for what is less than vital or beat a humiliating retreat -- neither of which can serve a country's true, best interests. This

principle is useful to keep in mind as we analyze in the pages ahead Iran's overall policies in the Gulf, toward India, with immediate neighbors, and with the world at large.

The Shah's memory bank records a long history of Russian aspirations and aggrandizement at Persian expense. Although current Iran-Soviet relations are probably the best ever, contiguity with the Soviet Union and stormy past relations with Czars and Commissars leave no illusions about the future. The Soviet government probably does not value relations with Iran so highly as to remain neutral on every Iranian issue; Soviet involvement and conduct will be governed by an issue's importance to the U.S.S.R., regardless of how this affects Iran. With one suspicious eye always cast toward Russia, Iran's primary foreign policy must reflect this contiguity with a superpower. The other primary focus is on the Persian Gulf and its maritime approaches. Numerous sources agree that, apart from the U.S.S.R., the principal ingredients of Iran's announced national security concerns are: (1) peace and tranquility among Gulf states, (2) security of shipping within the Gulf and its approaches, (3) Iraqi power, subversive policies, and support of terrorists, (4) Baluchi separatism, (5) territorial integrity of Pakistan, and (6) Soviet-Indian and Soviet-Afghani cooperation.

Iran's responses to the above concerns are the result of numerous trends and influences: the Shah's activist predilections in the Gulf, departure of the British, U.S. attitude toward responsible regional defense, detente with the U.S.S.R., oil wealth, the lesson of CENTO failure to aid Pakistan in 1971, and an augmented arsenal. No less important is the belief and determination of Iranian leadership that only through self-reliance can Iran be a force in regional affairs. This posture squares more consistently with the Shah's reading of international politics and the symbolic role he wants to play in Iranian nationalist mythology. Also, the domestic political advantages to be gained are certainly not lost to the Shah, as if he needed additional incentive.

A certain degree of Iran's international posturing exalts the same theme, to fortify the Pahlevi dynasty at home and to add to the mystique of the national government. There is a causal rather than a casual relationship between Iranian nationalism and the Shah's insistence on acquiring sophisticated weapons, constant clamor about Iran's responsibilities, exaggerated media coverage given to any initiative or symbolic act, and sensitivity to the name of the Persian Gulf. All of these activities reflect a skillful, emphatic use of foreign policy for domestic purposes. And this is where the elements of a global policy begin.

Security and status also provide the impetus to Iran's global policies; although, they assume different nuances and perspectives. According to many Iranian scholars, Iran has no separate Indian Ocean

policy; rather, it is an extension of the vitally significant Persian Gulf policy. While Iranian security considerations emphasize relations with immediate neighbors, they also embrace certain global elements: protecting tanker routes, ensuring access to raw materials and markets, and acquiring technological assistance and arms supplies. All of these get wrapped up in Iran's goal of achieving enhanced international status by hopefully stepping into the ranks of industrialized nations. This adds a wider, economic dimension to security, reflects the Shah's view that the area over which he wants to exercise paramountcy is of global importance, and fuels the drive for increasing the size and capability of the armed forces. Widened defense horizons reflect growth in the nation's economy and in the self confidence of its ruler. The global policy, no less than the regional policy is, in a word, ambitious.

This very ambition cautions the student of Iranian foreign policy to question its realism regarding the congruence between goals and interests that even superpowers disregard at their peril. The trouble with excessive ambition, and the posturing that attends it, is that goals begin to exceed one's interests. Iran has acted unilaterally against neighbors in the past, and the noises emanating from Teheran occasionally threaten similar actions in the future. While these gestures are draped with the trappings of duty or necessity, others sometimes see them as the arrogance of power. The Shah frequently talks about responsibilities to the West, and to the East, and close to home in the Persian Gulf. Not everybody is firmly convinced that his capabilities can match his pretensions. This being the case, the Shah would be wise not to unduly or unnecessarily antagonize his regional neighbors. He needs to understand and apply the "Law of Conservation of Enemies," which states that you should not make any more enemies than you can realistically afford at any one time. Sometimes one gets the impression that the Shah fancies himself above this principle and that the more military hardware he acquires, the more threats he perceives.

## 2.2 THREATS AND PERCEPTIONS

There is a decided difference between actual threats and perceived threats. Basically, if they are close to being synonymous, better policies ought to emerge therefrom, and goals and interests should be properly balanced. But perceptions and reality can sometimes be quite far apart. Nations frequently pursue goals that exceed their interests because leaders put more stock in the perception than in the reality. For numerous and varied reasons, what people think is often more important than what is true, for it is on the basis of the former that they will act. Based on this psychological fact and the previous section's analysis of policy concerns, we can elaborate the real and perceived, present and future threats that influence the activities of the three countries most likely to trigger a regional naval conflict in the Indian Ocean.

### 2.2.1 Iran

One finds few sharp differences of opinion over potential threats to Iran's security; however, people do debate certain real or unreal aspects of Iran's national security needs. Most threat analysts usually focus on geography and oil as the primary sources of Iran's security concerns. The Shah argues in varied forms and numerous forums that he is threatened from all directions. Theoretically, that may be true. Conflicts continue in the Arab world to the West, subversive or "radical" movements permeate the Gulf and plot against conservative monarchies and sheikhdoms, Iraq and Russia cavort in ways that temporarily suit each other's purposes, and the long northern border with the Soviets is a security fact of life. Also, tensions continue unabated in the South Asian subcontinent, and nothing of a regional collective nature replaces the security system in the Gulf and Indian Ocean that disappeared with the British. These all create either minor or major security problems for Iran, but none actually constitutes a bonafide threat. For example, the Soviets potentially represent Iran's most serious, powerful threat, but in reality the U.S.S.R. creates more problems for Iran because of the support given to several of Iran's neighbors. Both of the above are more in the nature of perceived threats.

Other perceived threats derive from the Shah's view of the world and his conception of Iran's place in it. Based on past performances, he feels that neither the United Nations nor CENTO are reliable defenders of Iranian interests and territorial integrity, and since the Persian Gulf is so important to him economically and strategically, those who would upset its tranquility or covet its resources illegally must be summarily dealt with. Iran has expressed a willingness to do this in concert, or alone if necessary.

Approximately a year ago, the Mantel Report on U.S. Military Sales to Iran (for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) provided an excellent analysis of the legitimate threats confronting Iran. These were identified by five basic categories: oil, Soviet, Arab, East-Southeast, and internal. The authors of the report accorded first priority to the vulnerability of Iran's oil economy. It is apparent that the Shah views this threat as the most tangible, as his nation's primary concern, and believes strongly in acquiring the capability to protect the entire system -- fields, pumps, pipelines, refineries, storage and loading facilities, oil tankers, sea lanes. The Soviet threat is not ranked with the others. Being so ominous and overwhelming, it is considered in a class by itself. Second in importance comes the threat from the Arab West. Military rivalry with Iraq, perhaps a revolution in Saudi Arabia, possible overthrow of the present regimes in both states by more extremist elements -- each of these political developments might enhance the possibility of future conflict. In any case, the future likelihood of an Iranian clash with an Arab neighbor cannot be

dismissed. The third most serious threat confronting Iran is that to the East and Southeast. Listening to the noises emanating out of Teheran about developing a blue water navy and protecting tanker routes into the Indian Ocean, and comparing Delhi's reactions to these statements and to proposed activities at Chah Bahar and acquisitions of SPRUANCE-class destroyers, one begins to see the classic development of a perception into a threat. Exaggerated rhetoric and posturing by both sides could easily get blown out of proportion to the extent that Iran and India might talk themselves into becoming Indian Ocean antagonists. And Pakistan could be the trigger!

The Shah has made a fundamental security policy tenet of espousing the territorial integrity of Iran's Muslim, non-Arab neighbors, Turkey and Pakistan. Pakistan serves as a buffer against the extension of a hostile power to Iran's southeastern border. In this context, the Shah has repeatedly committed Iran to preserving Pakistan's territorial integrity, saying that he could not sit idly by and watch Pakistan dismembered further. How realistic is this latter eventuality?

#### 2.2.2 Pakistan

Pakistan provides an excellent example of the agonizing that accompanies national soul-searching in the policy tug between goals and interest, between perceptions and real threats. This country suffers from what probably is a permanent inferiority complex toward India, bred of the frustration and humiliation of defeats in all wars with India, and undoubtedly views India as its most serious threat. As with the Soviet threat to Iran, the Indian threat to Pakistan is as much perceived as real.

As much as any other factor, internal problems in both Pakistan and India contain the seeds of potential trouble. Internal unrest could very easily provide the temptation to meddle in each other's affairs. For the moment, it appears that this problem is more acute as a threat to Pakistan's existence rather than that of India which seems to have weathered the recent political storm. And the threat stems primarily from the government of Pakistan's inability to get a grip on its internal elements of unrest, not because India is poised to capitalize via intervention. What would India stand to gain by pouncing on a Pakistan already militarily inferior and beset with serious political and economic divisions and problems? India has enough problems without feeling any compulsion to absorb Pakistan's as well. The latter's tensions and dilemmas probably ease India's security concerns from this direction and enable India to concentrate on other threat perceptions.

#### 2.2.3 India

Perceptions is probably the better, more realistic choice of word in this instance because most India "watchers" agree that currently

India is not seriously threatened by anyone. This does not deny or preclude the existence and interaction of tensions with neighbors or competition with other major powers. It simply suggests that India is not now seriously threatened with attack from any quarter, is strong enough to counter military threats from a regional neighbor, and is in an accomodation mood vis-a-vis its neighbors rather than poised to attack and conquer them.

Indian sources, of course, would neither admit to nor proclaim the absence of any serious threat, regardless of how sanguine they may be for the moment on India's security picture. Defense spokesmen generally perceive, identify, and discuss three threats to Indian security, the two principal ones being Pakistan and China. The third one getting increased attention is that related to superpower naval activity in the Indian Ocean.

As indicated previously, Pakistan is realistically more the spoiler than a threat. China may have once been viewed with ominous foreboding by Indian policy makers; however, over the past few years a substantive change has evolved in the manner and degree of threat each perceives in the other. The opening to China will probably develop gradually because there are certain restraints operable. India has to exercise caution, for its leaders are well aware that China remains the only power that directly and credibly can threaten India, although India has the capacity to deal with that threat. There are other restraints to any drastic, rapid reorientation of policy. China is still the primary supporter of Pakistan and a competitor for Asian and non-aligned leadership. India's previous quarrel with China and, more importantly, the U.S.-U.K. arms embargo of 1965 forced it into the arms of the U.S.S.R., an embrace that is not easily or desirably terminated. China's regional thrusts are primarily anti-Soviet, and this makes a complete reconciliation with India very difficult. Nevertheless, it has been obvious that both sides see mutual interests served in dampening the past polarization between them and within the region as a whole. Both sides have communicated modest gestures and signals of intent that an improvement in their relationship is in the offing, glacial though this movement may be. Such a shift will tend to project the Russian dimension of their policies along other lines less favorable to the Russians than those that presently obtain. Any reduction or easing of the threat from the north might provide India with just the degree of breathing room needed to devote more attention and efforts to Indian Ocean matters.

### 2.3 THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THREAT PERCEPTIONS

From the preceding analysis of policies and threats one can conclude that there are sufficient issues of an extra and intra-regional nature to fire the flames of tension, if not to cause outright conflict in the Indian Ocean. Tensions and power struggles within South Asia and amongst great powers are mutually interactive. Superpower competition

and naval activity get injected into the South Asia competitive equation and exacerbate the political tensions of the subcontinent by promoting polarization. A third India-Pakistan conflagration could conceivably involve three major powers, as well as several minor regional ones. But when all is said and done, India, Pakistan, and Iran contain within their own interactions the seeds of war or peace. Outside superpowers might influence the situation; they will not completely control or manipulate it for their own exclusive purposes. Regional dynamics should decide the future of South Asia. If Pakistan is not a sufficient source of friction or an ultimate cause of a regional naval conflict between India and Iran, then the Indian Ocean activities and visions of each could well provide the spark. Most probably, any conflict would likely be generated by the interaction of both possibilities. The Indian Ocean serves as an area where the security interests of India and Iran overlap and where each has expressed an urge to be powerful and even dominant.

Indian and Iranian interests in the Indian Ocean accelerated after 1970. In the last victorious war against Pakistan, India removed one danger to the northwest while getting introduced to a potential new one, the question of superpower naval presence. The presence of a U.S. carrier task force and the additional Russian shadow forces it attracted, in India's own maritime preserve, could hardly have been viewed dispassionately by a country such as India with global leadership aspirations -- much less from a security perspective. Thus, the introduction of superpower naval activity into India's immediate vicinity constituted a perceived threat to its defense planners. As circumstances and initiatives reduce dangers and threat perceptions to the north, and if domestic developments permit, India will certainly pay closer attention to such maritime matters. The Shah may provide an additional incentive in this regard.

Iranian interest in the Indian Ocean expanded dramatically with the increase in oil revenues over the past decade. Protection of the full panoply of oil-related activities, production and marketing, became a vital national interest. The buildup of Iran's navy relates essentially to the above concern; however, one must add to this the Shah's anxiety over certain centrifugal political tendencies and secessionist movements to the east that may influence the territorial integrity of Pakistan and thus complicate his relations with India. So, the possibility of conflict to the east, insurgency and terrorist problems in the Gulf, perceived threats to its oil economy, dependence on foreign trade and technological assistance, and the desire for a more active and prestigious regional role -- all operate to justify the Shah's substantial expenditures toward a naval building program designed for increased maritime activity in the Indian Ocean. The Indian government is more critical of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. naval presence than of the Shah's buildup, probably out of a sense of diplomatic tact and nicety, but also out of a realization that the Shah is a "paper shark" at the moment; his naval prowess is still but a thin veneer.



There are a significant number of additional developments and maneuverings that keep both nations' leaders casting wary eyes at one another. Both express concern about the naval presence of superpowers; yet, each depends on a different one for many or most of its major defense needs -- although India does have an indigenous shipbuilding capability. Financial resources and absence of an immediate sense of urgency both constrain India's naval expansion. Iran is more rambunctious; it seeks rapid solutions for more immediate problems by proposing some grandiose regional security schemes and by buying a navy. Thus, both countries seek expanded Indian Ocean roles in their own inimitable styles. Statements out of India reaffirm the possibility for conflict in the Indian Ocean, and its military leaders request higher naval appropriations as a hedge against the maritime threats of others, while Iran gestures and acts to expand its security perimeter. The key question is -- will they inevitably clash?

#### 2.4 INDIA AND IRAN: COMPETITION OR CONVERGENCE

Placing one's faith in functional cooperation leading to a peaceful and stable security picture, in a vast heterogeneous region such as South Asia is certainly not predictable from the historical record. No indestructible friendships exist; each is subject to the vicissitudes accompanying regional rivalries and turmoil. Indian-Iranian relations reflect the normal tensions expected of near-neighbors with significantly divergent interests and noticeably different styles and approaches to regional and global problems. There are bound to be potential problems, but these need not necessarily erupt into armed conflict. Perhaps the best evidence for this argument can be mustered following a comparison and analysis of the extent to which their interests converge or compete.

It is true that India and Iran have frequently suspected each other's intentions. However, serious mutual efforts and initiatives over the past several years have improved relations even though they have not necessarily produced genuine warmth. Political and trade relations have improved even though they have not eliminated mutual suspicion of each other's long-range strategic ambitions and near term naval intentions in the Indian Ocean. Perhaps the most hopeful signal of improved political relations stems from calmer attitudes and expressions regarding Pakistan, Iran's ally and India's arch enemy. While the following lists do not presume to be exhaustive, significant elements of competition and convergence in Indian-Iranian affairs are arranged below for comparative and analytical convenience:

### Elements of Competition

- |                                                |                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| - Pakistan                                     | - Relationship to the U.S.S.R.                      |
| - Iranian sophisticated arms purchases         | - Naval competition; appropriate Indian Ocean roles |
| - Nuclear questions and weapons policy         | - Law of the Sea issues                             |
| - Iranian drive for global power and influence | - Maneuvering to shape regional policies            |

### Elements of Convergence

- |                                                                                    |                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| - Shared stake in Pakistan's territorial integrity                                 | - Economic and trade links; may be complimentary                 |
| - Mutual acceptance of Teheran's Gulf views                                        | - Varying dependence on imports                                  |
| - Interest in stability; neither covets territory                                  | - Joint call for better deal for third world commodity producers |
| - Declarations of harmony on various regional issues; Indian Ocean a zone of peace | - Qualified opposition to superpower naval presence              |

Even the briefest glance at the above balance sheet conveys the complexity of the relationship. The competitive column certainly contains sufficiently serious sources of friction, and one should not minimize their potential to spark a resort to arms. However, one must also be influenced by the combined impact of the convergence elements. They at least caution against accepting an Indian-Iranian clash as predestined or that both countries are pursuing policies and defining interests and goals in a way that will inexorably lead to war. There is a potentially strong convergence of economic interests; Iran could supply oil and investment capital, while India could reciprocate with raw materials, industrial equipment, and technicians. Neither a legacy of conflict nor direct bilateral differences automatically preclude a cooperative future relationship. Mutual suspicion of military and naval intentions could naturally upset the influence of convergent elements. Iran mistrusts the Indian-Soviet connection and the massive scale of India's armed forces. India mistrusts the Iranian-CENTO connection and Teheran's large purchases of sophisticated arms. Nevertheless, the above balance sheets suggest logically that India and Iran could avoid war in the Indian Ocean. There are ample reasons for them to eschew armed confrontation and live in relative harmony, a harmony devoid of

the sorts of strategic concerns bred of irrational competition that can generate hostilities. But logic is not always the driving ingredient of national policy.

## SECTION 3

### NAVAL POSTURES AND CONFLICT POTENTIAL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

#### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

Thus far politics and threat perception have been emphasized as two key elements affecting any potential naval conflict in the Indian Ocean between India and Iran. The previous chapter analyzed their major policy considerations, reviewed these in the context of a tug between goals and interests, and suggested that the two nations were not inexorably headed toward a confrontation. Elements of competition and convergence did exist to complicate the relationship and preclude any such simplistic or foregone conclusions. It is the trends that are significant, for in the interaction of trends we often have the seeds of armed conflict.

This chapter will focus on another of these trends, the naval modernization programs of India and Iran. Both countries are seeking to broaden naval missions and improve their navy's capabilities for augmented roles; so, both of their navies are in a transition stage in terms of equipment, support, training, and personnel. We will not concern ourselves here with providing a detailed naval order of battle or a description of equipment upgrades and delivery timetables. There are several very fine compendia and studies produced by DIA, CIA, and Navy Intelligence which already provide excellent detailed information and analysis on what systems each country has or is acquiring and on individual Navy force structures and programs. This study desires to analyze the trends in the naval modernization programs and what these trends portend for the future of Indian-Iranian relations. Relying on the excellent data provided by the several intelligence agencies on ships and programs, we wish to focus attention here on a comparative analysis of naval postures and potential. We are interested in how modernization trends interact with threat perceptions and national policy considerations and whether there is any potential for naval conflict in the interactions.

#### 3.0.1 Naval Support of National Interests

Obviously, a naval modernization program designed for local hegemony is consistent with the accepted conception of a legitimate national interest and elicits little suspicion or negative reaction. It is a different question when such programs get associated with more grandiose visions of that interest, such as establishing a presence for promoting political influence. In the cases of India and Iran, the modernization trends unmistakably and clearly transcend the goal of purely local hegemony. On the basis of their own particular threat perceptions, and pursuant to policies reflecting augmented definitions of the national interest, both countries envision expanded roles for their navies in the decades ahead. Current modernization programs reflect their desire to provide these hitherto neglected services with the requisite capabilities to meet these larger responsibilities. As will be apparent in the discussion ahead, this does not mean that they are

spoiling and preparing for an inevitable fight. They seek differing degrees of modernization and must overcome some different problems. In addition, numerous other factors exist to check or influence the likelihood of aggressive action at sea well beyond their coastal waters. These include: domestic restraints, degree of incentive or sense of urgency, weak offensive posture, relative strength of neighbors or other rivals, and international pressures. To the degree that there is a meaningful relationship and balance between their naval goals and national policies, we will have one good measure of intentions. Another good measure is to carefully scrutinize self-proclaimed mission statements.

### 3.1 COMPARATIVE MISSIONS

Geography and policy determine naval missions, and this should be reflected in mission statements, as should the implications of any naval modernization program. While a country can do nothing about its geography, policies do change and naval missions with them. Within reason -- within the limits of reality and fiscal constraints -- mission statements should be taken seriously. They are straws in the wind, the manifestation of national hopes married to commitments of national toil and treasure.

#### 3.1.1 India

Several years ago pundits stated that India's resources were too limited and its defense posture too land oriented to support and sanction a naval program designed to establish a significant presence and project power into the Indian Ocean. They argued that it was implausible to expect the Indian government to allocate funds for an enhanced navy role well beyond the coast when the main threats were to the north. But several factors combined after 1971 to reduce India's sense of insecurity in the latter direction: weakness of Pakistan, confidence that neither Russia nor China would likely threaten its territorial integrity, and an improved defense posture to the north. After 1971, Indian naval policy proved the pundits wrong.

Prior to that time the mission of the Indian navy generally encompassed the traditional roles: defense of coasts, guarding territorial waters and islands, protection of shipping and sea LOC's -- and especially defense against Pakistan's navy. This being the case, the bulk of its striking power was concentrated in the western littoral because the chief mission was to counter any Pakistani naval attack. The swift demise of Pakistan in the 1971 war, altered perceptions of the Chinese threat, internal pleas and arguments in behalf of an expanded role for the Indian navy, all combined to influence a change.

A major 1972 defense review prompted the government to increase funds for the navy in order to continue the pre-1971 expansion program. The implication of this development then became apparent in a public

announcement by the Chief of Naval Staff in which he proclaimed a "new role" for the Indian navy. Two additional roles were added to the traditional ones: (1) an offer of protection to other small developing countries, upon request and (2) a self-appointed role to monitor major power navies "prowling" in adjacent high seas. Thus, we see a nation not historically sea-oriented make a decided shift to bring the Indian Ocean more emphatically within its political universe. The revised mission statement reflects an India no longer basing Indian Ocean policy entirely on the limitations of her naval power, an India not satisfied to limit her naval policy to defense of a 12-mile territorial sea. Philosophically, the shift was consistent with India's mood and vision regarding her regional position of leadership. Her style has generally been to work within her own resources and view of the world rather than to work toward assembling an Indian Ocean community or a defense in league with other littoral powers. For the first time in decades, the time was probably ripe for devoting additional attention to the navy: a relaxed land threat, the opportunity for substantial Russian assistance under terms favorable to India, and an internal and external political situation conducive to developing a naval posture and policy more befitting her own self-image.

The overall significance of the "new-role" has not been lost to India "watchers" at the DIA Intelligence Research Center. In an excellent, recent analysis of India's naval strategy, CDR. R. L. Seger indicated that through the revised mission statement the Indian navy was directed to develop a power projection capability and an effective naval presence -- both with important, self-imposed limitations that: (1) recognized the presence of major power navies in the area and (2) predicated assistance to small powers on a request-only basis. More importantly, CDR Seger pointed out that the naval policy and mission pronouncements have since been backed up with fiscal commitments, thus emphasizing the importance of believing the associated rhetoric. The message seems quite clear -- India will allocate scarce funds toward a naval modernization and expansion program that will enable her navy to perform naval presence and power projection missions.

The obvious question in many minds is why? One wonders to what extent the answer lies in a formula compounded of varying measures of threat, adventurism, cunning, paranoia, and bluster. One temptation is to ascribe the motive to great power aspirations, somewhat akin to reasons for the nuclear explosion, a status symbol. There may be some element of truth to this, but India, like other powers, probably appreciates the limited payoff of status symbols. No nation establishes a certain military posture based entirely on the premise that its position in the world requires a certain concomitant military establishment. First, Indian rhetoric continually recognizes certain threats, even though outside observers might categorize these realistically as only calculated perceptions. Naval policies that emerge therefrom enhance India's posture whether the threat is real or imagined. Second, India

chafes somewhat at the presence of outside naval powers; she objects to superpower navies more or less dominating Indian Ocean naval activity. Third, and related to the first two, the Indian navy is undoubtedly destined to be utilized for political purposes to: (1) dispel notions of an Indian Ocean power vacuum as a residue of the British withdrawal, (2) perhaps reduce any future superpower temptation to increase naval presence, (3) increase India's voice in regional matters, and (4) communicate a capability to the Chinese in case they cast strategic eyes west of the Malaccan Strait toward the Bay of Bengal. All four of the above would promote a degree of dominance commensurate with India's size and regional and global aspirations.

The entire question of naval presence affecting political outcomes is tricky and complex, and it is vital for India that the Indian Ocean not be dominated by any other single power or combination of powers. India's defense planners feel that the best guarantee against this latter eventuality is for India to project a modicum of power, while, hopefully, no other country manages to achieve a near monopoly of presence. Currently each of the two superpowers maintains a relatively low-key presence, thus precluding any monopoly or ill-considered political action on the part of the other. India is beginning to add its presence to the equation. Delhi feels this permits the Indian navy to play an effective deterrent role with a presence that need not match the superpowers ship for ship. India has done this very effectively, showing the flag around the region, unobtrusively making its presence felt with cruises and port visits. Perhaps more importantly in this advanced technological era, India does not need all that many ships, but those it does deploy can make their presence felt most effectively if they are current models, capably operated, and suitably armed. The manner in which the Indian navy's modernization program is progressing, largely with Soviet assistance, suggests that the country will be able to watch Pakistan, guard its coasts and ports, patrol selected portions of the littoral, and project power to a limited degree. So, if our fabled Portugese captain rounded the Cape a decade from now, he would probably run into a different situation than did his 16th century cousin -- a regional entity capable of projecting seapower to a limited degree because it is embarked on a course designed to establish a maritime dimension to its overall strategy. He could even be confronted by a second entity.

### 3.1.2 Iran

As might be expected, Iran went through an evolution in its overall naval strategy development similar to that of India, from a focus on coast defense to emergence as a regional force to development of open ocean visions. Here, once again, geography and policy determine naval missions. Iranian naval expansion and modernization dates back to approximately 1968, even prior to Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, and really accelerated when oil revenues zoomed after 1971. Oil

provides the compelling common denominator in any geopolitical equation of Iranian interests which a navy must support. These interests center on the total panoply of oil-related activities, running the complete production - distribution spectrum, wherein lies Iran's wealth. While this wealth cannot guarantee security, it pays for enhanced industrial development and military power that can insure the measures of national security Iran seeks.

The scope of missions assigned to or envisioned for the Imperial Iranian Navy (IIN) expanded almost in direct proportion to the rate and degree to which Iran gained complete ownership and control over production and marketing of its oil resources. These missions were generally couched rather modestly; initially, the primary mission of the IIN was defending the Iranian coast and offshore islands and providing forces to CENTO. Between 1965 and 1975 the navy was expanded, and its mission began to encompass activities throughout the entire Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. This, essentially, added up to a regional policing program, one designed to limit or eradicate any threats to the all-important oil interests and related traffic. The Shah was very vocal about the strongest regional actors assuming responsibility for the region's defense. So the IIN took on not only the responsibility for protecting Iran's sea communications through the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, but also for maintaining the freedom of Gulf waters for international trade. Either individually or in concert with others, Iran sought to assure free movement of ships in the Gulf and unhindered passage through the Strait and adjoining seas.

From 1972 onward another chorus was added to the tune emanating from Teheran, for the Shah began including the Indian ocean within Iran's security horizons. By 1974 his Imperial Majesty initiated a bevy of orders for some of the systems required for a "blue-water" navy: destroyers, submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, logistical support ships, etc. This Iranian activity signaled that its definition of "regional" would now transcend the confines of the Persian Gulf. Currently, when the Shah talks about Iranian leadership having regional dimensions, he means South Asia; the Persian Gulf is viewed as local domain. Thus, he has committed the IIN to a greatly expanded and much more difficult, challenging mission. Iran's interests in the Indian Ocean are now explained as natural and inevitable, and based on its increased wealth, power, responsibilities, and world position. Therefore, acquiring the navy to match is also viewed as inevitable, and it is justified on the basis of the need to protect strategic interests in a highly volatile area plagued with numerous uncertainties.

It appears that the decision to establish a maritime policy beyond the Persian Gulf ties Iranian urges for regional hegemony to naval expansion into the Indian Ocean. This creates additional pressures on a naval force still experiencing excruciating growing pains. It calls for a force designed to play a political role, as is the case with



India; it envisions a navy that can not only continue to function in its present anti-terrorist, trade protector, deterrent role, but one that should also be able to fight a conventional war at sea. This is a tall order!

In comparing the motives and missions of the navies of India and Iran, we see both beginning with rather modest missions which expanded as their nation's leaders envisioned enhanced security and political roles for services previously accustomed to lesser stature in their respective defense establishments. Their related naval expansion and modernization programs reflect an increased determination to defend expanded interests. When these security interests overlap in an area where two nations feel a desire or compulsion to dominate, the seeds of potential contention are sometimes sown.

### 3.1.3 Sources of Naval Conflict

Looking at the full spectrum of mutual Indian-Iranian security interests and political concerns, there appear to be three potential sources for a naval conflict developing. The emphasis must be on potential because most observers agree that perhaps for the next decade there seems little likelihood of a naval war occurring between them. Even should hostilities commence in the next five years, the avoidance of a naval showdown could be predicated simply on India's present superiority. (The consensus throughout the intelligence community is that India would win, hands down.) We are interested in speculating about the post-1985 time frame. The three seeds of potential conflict are: (1) Pakistan, (2) Indian Ocean naval presence, and (3) Law of the Sea disputes.

Two points need to be made about them at the outset. First, they may either individually, or through their interactions, prove to be sources of trouble and competition. Most important will be to watch the interaction of trends. Second, the three seeds above contain overlapping categories of strategic consideration. In any competitive trends stemming from the first two, the Indian Ocean would likely become the stage of a conflict that actually started elsewhere or came about as a result of other issues not in or of the ocean itself. In any similar trends stemming from the third, we see the Indian Ocean as a cause/occasion for conflict, as well as the stage. Here also the interactions are significant.

Pakistan was identified early in this study as India's arch enemy, Iran's ally. Current weakness ought to restrain Pakistan from militarily engaging India again. However, the temptation will always be there to meddle, to take advantage of the other's problems, to settle old scores or recoup old losses. Should Pakistan ignore reality, adopt excessive goals, and attack India in the next decade, chances are that

it could be overwhelmed, even before the Shah could decide what to do. (The degree of his commitment to Pakistani territorial integrity has always been questioned in some circles.)

If Pakistan does not materialize as a source of friction and no full scale Indo-Pakistan war develops in the next decade, the next bone of contention could be the symbolic posturing in and "jawboning" about the Indian Ocean. By defining security interests in this area so that they overlap, India's and Iran's urges to dominate could run head on into each other. Some definition of security perimeters could avoid this. Iran can moderate how far it envisions its presence will extend. It can coordinate and explain its actions in such a way that Indian Ocean ambitions are realistically aligned with its security interests. These need not run afoul of India's interests.

The last seed of conflict might evolve out of the unsettled matters associated with Law of the Sea questions. Offshore oil resources, overlapping claims, the status of international law governing the seas and seabeds -- all increase the possibility of naval clashes. Some observers see more likelihood of these kinds of questions causing naval competition and conflict in the Indian Ocean than in the Persian Gulf. India and Pakistan's continental shelf, for example, has not yet been divided. The state of their relations should affect whether the old land rivalry gets extended into the ocean.

What is needed to avoid conflict is some clarification of goals and priorities. Both nations need to talk over the question of naval patrols in the Arabian Sea and to understand what roles are acceptable for each other's navies. By realistically gauging legitimate security concerns, the two could adopt a degree of self-denial regarding certain issues that sometimes get blown out of proportion as symbols of national resolve. Attention to national sensibilities, not viewing the other as a competitor, avoiding the manipulation of external events and threats, all these could help tilt the scale toward convergence of interests and stable relations. In addition, while naval conflict between India and Iran will hinge primarily on the degree to which interests are perceived to be threatened, how far they carry this depends on the capabilities of their respective navies.

### 3.2 COMPARATIVE CAPABILITIES

Analyzing the issue of capability should always raise a few critical questions since it is a relative term: (1) compared to what or whom? (2) in what time frame? (3) in what context? To a considerable degree, mission requirements dictate capability development. India and Iran have very similar mission requirements and ambitions; however, they have quite disparate capabilities at the moment. Nevertheless, they are both engaged in somewhat similar expansion and modernization programs that might close that gap in a decade. Opinions differ on this score.

Some see India presently a quantum jump ahead, with the gap increasing; others agree with the first observation but see the gap narrowing. In either case, there is little evidence to suggest that they are engaged in a naval arms race in any classic sense. Modernization is the guiding principle.

Capability is also a many-faceted mosaic, a complex compound of ingredients: equipment, people, training, facilities, support, doctrine, tradition, experience, etc. Several sources exist that cover many of these facets in great detail. This study does not wish to duplicate the splendid work they do at regular intervals in the Naval Force Intelligence Study and elsewhere. Instead we hope to selectively analyze those capability factors and developments that seem most relevant to a potential Indian Ocean clash.

### 3.2.1 India's Program

Right now, the Indian navy constitutes the largest, most capable fleet on the Indian Ocean littoral. By regional standards, it is the dominant force. The ship inventory may be somewhat unbalanced because the seagoing, power projection force is obsolete; however, even a major navy would think twice about the attendant risk of going against India's coast defense force of missile boats, submarines, and frigates. In Indian territorial waters the force gets high marks on its capability to defend against most naval threats. This is a different situation from 1971.\* Having achieved this level of competence helps explain why India's leaders approved a new phase in its naval modernization program.

This next phase centers on developing a fleet befitting the region's dominant power, one that can extend India's influence well beyond contiguous waters and project a degree of force anywhere in the Indian Ocean. The key is not necessarily in numbers of ships, but rather in types, in what kind of weapons they employ, and in how well both can be maintained and operated. In 1976 the Indian Navy had approximately 43 significant combatants. Its comparatively modern and capable ship complement included 8 Foxtrot-Class submarines, 12 Osa-Class guided missile patrol boats and a frigate fleet numbering in the neighborhood of 20 ships. Consistent with the trend in most non-superpower navies, India will eschew large capital ships, with no plans to replace the single light carrier. Also, India has been rumored to have buttressed the above complement with another major arms agreement with the Soviets in 1975. Rumors suggest that negotiations continue for the purchase of a number of Nanuchka-class patrol guided missile combatants and several

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\*When the U.S.S. Enterprise Task Force sailed into the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, there is a story (perhaps apocryphal) that Indian Naval Headquarters asked Delhi for instructions as to what it should do. Supposedly the response was, "Invite the Americans over for tea; what else can you do?"

of the latest Soviet destroyers, the former carrying first rate cruise missiles, the latter carrying the latest in Soviet ASW capability, and both containing modern AAW systems. In conjunction with these attempts to upgrade equipment, India struggles along also to improve the shore establishment (logistics and support) and the quality of personnel and training.

The next decade will be critical to the overall program, and there will undoubtedly be some prices to pay. Much like the defense debates going on in the United States, India has its own sets of goals and interests to weigh. Whichever way the debate goes in India, it ought to remain the dominant naval power on the Indian Ocean littoral. It will likely maintain a formidable, though not unchallengable, presence. The Indian Navy appears as though it will acquire some of the newer anti-ship platforms, but it will probably not achieve the sea-control capability needed to deny the ocean to U.S. or Soviet naval contingents. It should certainly be able to cope with Iranian units operating beyond the Persian Gulf.

### 3.2.2 Iran's Program

When discussing Iran's naval modernization program, with both professional and lay people, two reactions frequently emerge. One is a tendency to look at the equipment Iran is buying, check this against date of delivery, and chalk the system up as a capability at that point. Compile a total list of such purchases, weigh these against the Shah's security policy pronouncements -- all based on a worst case analysis of potential threats -- and a potentially explosive international relations problem emerges. The second reaction is a tendency to scoff at Iran's absorptive capacity, underrate its ability to maintain (even when it can operate) the systems purchased, and relegate them eventually to the scrapheap of overzealous ambition. Somewhere between these two tendencies, Iranian reality exists.

As of this writing, the Imperial Iranian Navy (IIN) is the largest, most powerful navy in the Persian Gulf. It consists of 3 guided missile destroyers, 4 guided missile frigates, 5 minesweepers, 12 hovercraft, 4 patrol escorts, and several landing craft -- approximately 30 ships in all. Add to this squadrons of F-4's and F-5's, several fast reaction units with anti-terrorist missions (such as the Kharg special naval strike force) and numerous helicopters and auxiliaries. The capability represented in the above array enables the IIN to perform the missions assigned to it in the Persian Gulf.

The same cannot be said about the present capability to fulfill the requirement of sea control and power projection that the Shah envisions. However, important steps have been taken to rectify that. With the purchase of a U.K. BATTLE Class destroyer in 1967, the IIN began acquiring vessels with a potential open ocean capability. For the near-term it

appears that these open ocean forces will be used, in concert with the Imperial Iranian Air Force (IIAF) to patrol and defend the seaward approaches to the Gulf of Oman. The build-up of potential open ocean forces looks as follows:

- 1970 - One U.K. destroyer (2324 tons): ARTEMIZ (fitted with surface-to-surface Standard missiles in 1975).
- 1972 - Two ex-U.S. FRAM II destroyers (2200 tons): BARR, PALANG (Modernized with surface-to-surface Standard missiles).
- 1980-? - Three ex-U.S. TANG Class diesel attack submarines.
- 1980-82 - Four modified U.S. SPRUANCE Class destroyers (7800 tons): DD 993, 994, 995, 996 (SPRUANCE hulls with VIRGINIA class (CGN-38) weapons suits, making them cruisers for all intents and purposes.
- 1982 - One U.K. designed INVINCIBLE Class ASW cruiser with SAMs and VSTOL/Helicopters (Procurement is uncertain at this time).

All above surface ships will carry long-range air search radar and air control facilities which enable them to act as Positive Identification Radar Air-Defense Zone (PIRAZ) ships for the forward control of IIAF tactical aircraft. The four DD 993 Class destroyers, with their powerful SAM batteries and NTDS, could provide the necessary C<sup>3</sup> and search and rescue functions required to extend IIAF air power out to sea by approximately 1000-1500 miles. One could envision a form of seaward defense-in-depth: an outer barrier provided by the submarines (perhaps 1500 miles from the proposed Arabian Sea naval base at Chah Bahar), a middle barrier (1000 miles out) formed by the DD 993s with their strong AAW capabilities and HARPOONS, and an inner barrier (500 miles out) provided by the older destroyers with their surface-to-surface Standard missiles. Fighters and fighter bombers from land bases, with aerial refueling, would provide air cover and strike out to perhaps 1000 miles under control of the destroyers. Iran's six P-3F maritime patrol aircraft would support all of the ships and submarines with a wider-ranging ASW capability and HARPOON coverage.

The INVINCIBLE Class ASW cruiser, whose receipt is uncertain at this time, could easily provide A/S helicopter support and augment the P-3s in "prosecuting" contacts obtained by the submarines, by the DD 993s towed arrays, and by air-delivered sonobuoys. Also, other missions are easily envisioned. It might operate along the outermost surface barrier with the DD 993s. Being a powerful AAW ship, it could carry

VSTOL fighters (although no Iranian procurements along this line have been announced). Alternatively, it might provide a modest degree of seapower projection, especially when one considers the possibilities for operating in conjunction with the IIAF.

It is unrealistic to discuss sea control in the Persian Gulf or its approaches without a word about the supporting role of the IIAF. Present and projected force levels over the next five years will provide the IIAF with a formidable array of tactical fighters and fighter bombers, with the present complement of F4's and F5's probably due to be replaced by later model fighters. Supported by an increasingly more effective aerial refueling capability, and with the prospect of being controlled by AWACS, this potent collection of airpower assets could provide substantial air cover for the IIN west to the Gulf of Aden and as far south as the Maldives in the eastern reaches of the Arabian Sea.

Overall, the combined current capability of the IIN and IIAF provides a formidable defense against any threats that might be mounted against Iranian interests in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman by any Arab state or non-superpower. And, if the projected force structure materializes, it can provide a significant sea-air projection capability over most of the Arabian Sea. Program development suggests that ultimately this will definitely become one of the primary missions of the IIN. Within that context the Iranian ship procurement program is well conceived in scope and timing.

Having spent the last several paragraphs speculating about what could happen, it is time to put that speculation in proper perspective, for no amount of Iranian luck or skill is going to make it happen completely. The degree to which Iran or India realizes the full naval ambitions each envisions will largely be in direct proportion to the number and extent of their problems and weaknesses and how well or poorly they cope with them. Iran's potential employment options were explored more fully above, because there is a tendency to overrate Iran's shortcomings and underrate India's. Iran's problems are truly gargantuan in the short term, but some might just be more solvable in the long term than some things India has to cope with. This is only meant as a caution not to dismiss Iran too lightly.

### 3.3. COMPARATIVE SHORTCOMINGS

In assessing overall weaknesses, some are obviously shared by both nations while others are unique. It is also important to remember that a significant number of the ships that each nation covets as part of its modernization program will not be available until some future date. Acquiring them is no foregone conclusion. Any number of conditions or developments could intervene to preclude plans from becoming reality. Short-range problems have a way of undermining long-range plans; so, programs started several years ago face an uncertain future.

Both nations wrestle with many vagaries. Fiscal constraint could easily dictate reduction in the scope of naval modernization and development, and related political prices may also be too high to pay.

Perhaps the most important shared weakness is the degree of their dependence on outside sources for equipment and logistical support. Each is, in a way, bound to a superpower. India depends on foreign military assistance from the Soviets, heretofore on favorable terms, while Iran pays top dollar through foreign military sales, primarily to the U.S. but to other sources as well. India is much better off in this regard, with an indigenous arms production capability far exceeding Iran's. Given the missions each navy was initially groomed for, observers record reasonably good coast defense capabilities for them, with India definitely the stronger of the two. Neither has a formidable open ocean strike capability; thus, sea control and power projection are still dreams. At the moment each is improving operational weaknesses in air defense, minesweeping, and maritime patrol aircraft. In the latter case they are weak for different reasons. India lacks modern equipment but anticipates receiving IL-38s; Iran has modern P-3Fs but has trouble keeping them airborne primarily due to lack of trained pilots and maintenance problems. Both shore establishments and fleet support systems need drastic improvement although India has a much better infrastructure. It also has more, and better, trained manpower, with greater battle experience at sea. Neither India nor Iran could hold its own against a significant effort mounted by another major navy; however, India could make such an effort more costly and risk-laden than could Iran.

In addition to these shared weaknesses, India has two that are unique. Its capital ships of World War II vintage are obsolete and deteriorating. They supposedly contribute prestige; however, this is getting to be a costly proposition in terms of men and money. Their days are undoubtedly numbered because they would be difficult to protect against modern naval weapons and aircraft, and because the cost of maintaining them in a state of operational readiness is getting difficult to justify. This is because resources constitute another weakness and a critical constraint on India's naval program and modernization plans.

Iran's weaknesses seem more extensive by comparison. However, before embarking on a litaney of Iranian woes, it must be said that Iran has made enormous strides in the last decade. Observers have returned from Iran recently with as much admiration as ridicule of Iran's absorptive capacity, though this will remain a severe problem. Having said that, we need only emphasize that these same observers seriously question how much military hardware the Shah really needs and wonder how much his country can absorb in such a short time. Nobody denies him the right rationally to build up Iran's military posture; they do wish the programs had been stretched out over a longer period which would allow time to overcome assimilation and absorption problems. By piling system on top of system, one complex model on top of another, the Shah has probably made absorptive capacity the nation's number one problem.

For Iran to become a naval power to be reckoned with in the Indian Ocean by 1985-1990, will take some doing. What follows are in the nature of current weaknesses; they represent a few of the conditions that must be met if Iran is to be that open ocean naval power: (1) completing bases and a logistics/support infrastructure, (2) training an adequate supply of officers and enlisted men, (3) creating a reservoir of skilled technicians, (4) formulating a naval doctrine, (5) assimilating and absorbing modern weapons, (6) developing operational proficiency and experience, and (7) expanding the industrial base. Can the Navy and the Air Force cooperate? Can Iran solve its enormous command and control problems? It gets the best money can buy but lacks adequate storage facilities, and the Iranian navy was recently hit with numerous scandals. Many top officers were imprisoned or cashiered. Overcoming all of the above will certainly take time, and a recognition of the time that it will take to build a capable open ocean navy must influence Iran's Indian Ocean diplomacy.

The task perhaps seems insurmountable to some. However, the Shah can exercise some influence on events in the Indian Ocean even if he establishes a partial capability. If the IIN can develop some ability to match weapon performance and operational performance, the situation might be somewhat analogous to that between Britain and Germany between 1900 and 1914, in which the former was the recognized seapower and the latter was the upstart. The implications of Iran's naval program are thus both strategic and political. As long as Iran develops a force even partially capable of sustained operations in the Indian Ocean, India will ponder hard the relative merits of promoting convergence or conflict of interests.

In sum, the potential for naval conflict in the Indian Ocean resides where it should, in the interactions between policy and posture. Both are variables. The only constant, in a sense, is the assurity of the overall interactive process continuing -- and dictating events. No developments portend an automatic clash from either India's or Iran's perspective. The prospects for peace or war will rise or fall in direct proportion to the interaction of trends associated with foreign policies, threat perceptions, and naval postures -- and in the extent to which these trends establish whether elements of convergence or elements of competition prevail.



## SECTION 4

### EPILOGUE: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERESTS

U.S. interests in the South Asia-Indian Ocean area are frequently categorized as limited though significant, and derivative rather than direct. "Limited" suggests a lesser magnitude of importance when compared to interests such as NATO or Japan. "Derivative" suggests that direct U.S. interests are less involved than those deriving from the concerns of friends and allies. Policies acquire significance when they permit the U.S. to maintain some leverage or influence over events in that area and foster the adoption of indigenous, local policies that are perhaps compatible with, even when not directly supportive of, U.S. foreign policy. Derivative interests specifically call to mind a U.S. responsibility to understand and appreciate the dependence of friends and allies on the Indian Ocean for their own security and as a conduit for oil and other raw materials. These derivative interests are satisfied when oil tankers proceed freely east and west after exiting the Persian Gulf and when littoral nations remain independent and free to develop internally with a minimum of outside interference. Long-range U.S. interests are affected by Indian Ocean events to the extent that what happens there alters major power assessments of the world balance of forces. For the United States to adopt unilateral self-denial policies in the area and ignore derivative interests would be to fail several allies and associates, and to jeopardize its own limited, but significant, interests.

In a related context, the United States has nothing to gain from a naval war between India and Iran. Of the three things India needs most -- technology, money, military equipment -- the U.S.S.R. supplies the last and some of the first; the Soviets also provide a valuable, reliable counter to China. Support of Iranian Persian Gulf policy and bureaucratic investments in Iran, according to some observers, combine to constitute a form of surrogate U.S. defense commitment; many U.S. personnel also argue that Iran could not conduct major, sophisticated combat operations in the next 5 to 10 years without sustained U.S. support. It is clear from the above that any threat to India and Iran raises the danger of escalating to a confrontation between the superpower "patrons." Any prospect that enhances that danger, such as a "client" naval war, cannot serve U.S. interests. Confrontation in the Indian Ocean area over such a cause would distract attention from the main avenues of their respective security interests. Both superpowers need to exercise whatever moderating influence is possible on each regional "client." Any totally "hands off" policy could just as easily remove any constraints operating to hold armed clashes among littoral nations to a minimum.

All things considered, there are several policy initiatives or courses the U.S. Government might adopt and follow in order to reduce the danger of a regional naval conflict and thereby serve both its own as well as the regional interests of friends and allies. How the U.S.

conducts itself in this regard has never been self-evident; its conduct needs to be based on a careful assessment of the political barometers -- the costs and benefits of varying types and degrees of involvement.

As Iran develops into a regional force to be reckoned with, the U.S. must be continually alert to the reverse leverage Iran exercises on bilateral issues as well as wider-ranging U.S. interests. Iran's naval modernization program, for example, involves a close connection with the U.S. Navy and could be a potential source of friction if the program falters seriously in any way. Use of U.S. equipment that embroils U.S. personnel in a conflict situation obviously constitutes a danger to U.S. interests. Thus, U.S. policies should reflect skepticism of the belief that there is an automatic convergence or identity of all U.S.-Iranian interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. They should also divert the Shah from goals that are inimical to his own best interests. Dealing with the Iranian situation, in which so much rides on the whims of one man, will require of U.S. leaders the epitome of tact and mental toughness.

On balance, the prospects seem good for favorable U.S. relationships with India and Iran over the next decade, potential problems to the contrary notwithstanding. This bodes well for any policy initiatives. Numerous opportunities exist for influencing attitudes in India and Iran in appropriate ways that would divert or prevent trends toward a potential naval conflict. First, U.S. policies should be designed to promote and encourage the elements of convergence while also actively seeking to reduce the number and intensity of the elements of competition. Second, both India and Iran should be encouraged to define clearly their security perimeters to demonstrate that the Indian Ocean interests of each need not threaten the other -- to include continental shelf boundaries and sea bed questions. (The U.S. might serve as intermediary.) Third, it is possible that India and Iran might, through careful prior consultation, accept a meaningful role in any future naval arms limitation talks and agreements. If the superpowers can agree to eschew naval rivalry, littoral states might agree to restrict the scope of naval programs to that of providing capable coast defense and little more. The challenge here is to determine the circumstances under which India and Iran would agree to naval arms limitations and then to relate these circumstances to superpower naval limitation talks -- all in a manner that tactfully caters to the legitimate, productive aspects of the national egos involved.

It is important in this context to recognize and influence the convergence trends. Reasonable and effective policy initiatives can be the visible expression of a U.S. intent to prevent the Indian Ocean from becoming an arena for armed naval conflict.