SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE INDIAN OCEAN

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BACKGROUND

I have worked on South Asia and the Indian Ocean for much of my working life, either within government or as an academic.

I was the support academic for then Foreign Minister Gareth Evans' Indian Ocean initiative of 1995, known as the International Forum on the Indian Ocean Region (IFIOR). I subsequently wrote a book on the Indian Ocean based on this work [*Security and Security Building in the Indian Ocean Region*, The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1996 (243 pp)]. I have also written about the Indian Ocean in the context of my work on India's rise to power.

I am currently a visiting fellow at the Regulatory Institutions Network (RegNet), Australian National University.

This submission will deal mainly with terms of reference (c) and (d), namely the strategic developments in and around the Indian Ocean (IO) and the various attempts

at multilateral institution building. I note, however, that the elements of (c) which touch upon sea lanes of communication (SLOC) security are also highly relevant for terms of reference (a), which focuses on trade.

SUMMARY

The Indian Ocean is Australia's back yard. It also plays a major role in transporting energy from the oil and gas-rich Persian Gulf to Australia's principal trading partners, China and Japan. With each passing year, these and other East Asian powers become more dependent on the free passage of oil over the Indian Ocean.

This makes China nervous. India and China have an ambivalent relationship. On the one hand they have common interests based on growing trade and similar positions in the WTO and on climate change. But on the other, they have abiding suspicions over the longstanding border dispute and what India sees as Chinese meddling in its own back yard – South Asia and the Indian Ocean region (IOR).

New Delhi is above all concerned about China's friendship with India's principal competitor in South Asia, Pakistan, and with its growing economic and military relationships in the Indian Ocean region.

On its part, Beijing is deeply concerned about India's growing naval clout in the Indian Ocean. It fears that India, possibly in collusion with the US, could interdict its oil in times of rising tension or war. Even though India is far weaker than China, it has the advantage of occupying a strategic 'box seat' in the Indian Ocean. It also shares many commonalities with the US in terms of its longer-term strategic outlook and the two navies frequently exercise together.

All this gives rise to a classic 'security dilemma' in the IOR– one in which China fears India might cut off its oil and India fears China's counter-manoeuvres are intended to 'surround' it.

Furthermore, the Indian Ocean is surrounded by some of the poorest, most troubled countries in the world. It confronts enormous issues of poverty and food and water scarcity. It suffers serious non-conventional security threats – terrorism, people smuggling and trafficking, drug and gun smuggling, piracy and a host of environmental and natural disaster challenges.

Any actions that would have the effect of deepening this security dilemma, such as the proposals recently floated in Washington to base US reconnaissance aircraft on the Cocos Islands and nuclear powered submarines at HMAS Stirling, should be avoided, or at the very least reframed to present a greater focus on comprehensive security. China would definitely interpret any such moves as an attempt to threaten its 'soft underbelly' – its high dependency on Middle East oil – during times of rising tension.

What is needed instead is a strategy designed to provide for joint action in the 'commons' to alleviate the sense of insecurity on the part of the major powers that their legitimate interests in the Indian Ocean might be threatened.

Unfortunately, the security building mechanisms in the Indian Ocean are inadequate and show little prospects of improvement. Unlike the Asia Pacific, where four great powers (the US, China, Japan and Russia) to an extent balance each other, India is by far the dominant littoral power in the Indian Ocean. Australia has the next most powerful navy, and it can only aspire to be a middle power.

This means India is able to dominate the security building mechanisms in the Indian Ocean – no India, no viable mechanisms. As with any great power, India will use its influence to ensure its wishes are met. And those wishes have more to do with locking what it fears to be a China-Pakistan combination out than building a regime capable of solving some of the region's manifest problems so we can all 'rise on the same tide'.

So Canberra should be working quietly trying to convince New Delhi that the best way to ensure that China doesn't seek a permanent military presence in the Indian Ocean region would be to work with it to alleviate its concerns through collective action to address the non-conventional and other problems of the region.

This would be a long-term, difficult prospect, however. Australia's challenge would be to convince Washington of this need, as much as it would be to convince India and China. But we must make a beginning. The Indian Ocean must remain 'the great connector', which has been its principal role throughout its long history.

If indeed US forces require reinforcing in the Indian Ocean, then at the very least it will be important to ensure that they are perceived to be, and are in fact, designed to assist the region meet its multifarious non-conventional security challenges. This would in turn require that Washington take a stronger interest in comprehensive security building mechanisms in the region than it has hitherto.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN (TERMS OF REFERENCE C)

INTRODUCTION

Australia has major interests in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). We have the second most powerful littoral navy after India and we command the longest stretch of coast fronting the Indian Ocean of any country. We also have important Indian Ocean island possessions, including Christmas Island, the Cocos Islands and Heard Island. We have major energy provinces off-shore in the north west. Our Search and Rescue (SAR) responsibilities stretch west almost as far as Sri Lanka. As pointed out by Defence White Papers from Dibb onward, the 'sea-air gap' is crucial to the defence of Australia – and a significant stretch of it lies within in the Indian Ocean.

In terms of its institutional base, the IO is the least developed of the world's great oceans. There is no equivalent to NATO in the North Atlantic or APEC, ARF or EAS in the Asia-Pacific region. The major pan-Indian Ocean institution, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), is focused on trade and does not include Pakistan or key external users like China and Japan (although China is a dialogue partner). A more inclusive regime, which involved Pakistan and dealt with non-conventional security as well as trade, was suggested by Australia's then Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, in 1995. But due to India's influence, this was sidelined in favour of an initiative established by New Delhi, at the time known as the 'Mauritius Process'. In 1997 this initiative was folded into the IOR-ARC.

In the past, the Indian Ocean was not really a single security system at all, but consisted of a number of sub-regions, some of which had very little strategic interaction. Although still true to an extent, today globalisation has done a great deal to bring the different sub-regions of the IOR together. For example, the Persian Gulf and Straits of Hormuz are today linked with that other 'choke point', the Straits of Malacca, because both carry vital energy supplies for Australia's major trading partners such as Japan and China. The SLOCs that run west-east across the Indian Ocean thus 'stitch together' the giant stretch of ocean in between. South/Southwest Asia nowadays provides an important source of ideology, indoctrination and training for South East Asian based terrorism groups such as Jamaah Islamiyah (JI). There is increasing evidence of developing criminal linkages between South and South East Asia. The former 'backwater' of the Horn of Africa is now a key location for piracy, which threatens the trade routes out of the Bab-el-Mandeb and to a lesser extent the Persian Gulf, thus affecting Australia and its major trading partners in East Asia. Somalia is a key location for the major terrorism group al-Shabaab, which has links into Australia. South Asia is progressively becoming more involved in the security considerations of South East and East Asia, not only as India 'looks east', but also as trade develops between the two sub-regions. Asian powers, and especially China and India, are now major investors in Africa. India is developing bases and infrastructure on its Andaman Island holdings in the Andaman Sea, where its territorial waters extend to within 80 nautical miles of Aceh, Indonesia.

Indian Ocean littoral countries also have a great deal in common to do with the Ocean itself: as an important 'breeding ground' for climatic events that deeply affect monsoonal Asia and Australia, for example through their effects on the El Niño and La Niña events; in terms of the *tsunami* warning system; in the form of SAR jurisdictions; because of the need to protect vital fish stocks and crucial Antarctic zones; and because of the need to manage mining of the rich seabed resources, such as manganese nodules, known to lie under the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean is all too little understood and Australia stands well placed to contribute to a better understanding of it.

Because of growing globalisation, it is now relatively commonplace to reference the 'Indo-Pacific' as a security concept, on the basis that the two oceans are strategically linked. Caplan argues that the Indian Ocean will be centre-stage in the 21st century, containing a significant proportion of the world's "tinderbox" countries and transnational problems (Caplan, 2009). For non-littoral, East Asian powers, the Indian Ocean has for many years fulfilled the role of an important transit point: whether in terms of the need of Russia for maritime transit between Europe and Eastern Siberia; transit of vital flows of oil and gas for the energy hungry East Asian powers, especially China and Japan; or as the major maritime trade route between East Asia and Europe. In this sense, the Indian Ocean might well be dubbed 'the great connector'.

Strategically, in terms of trade, and in perceived scientific importance, the Indian Ocean has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War in 1991. This means that this inquiry by the Senate is timely.

THE INDIAN OCEAN IN STRATEGY

Given the way globalisation and research are increasingly indicating strategic and scientific connectedness of the Indian Ocean and its surrounds, especially the West Pacific, and given the way the interests of the individual littoral powers and outside users interlock, it is difficult analytically to separate the various interests of the major protagonists of Indian Ocean security. But for ease of analysis, we will examine

separately the interests of the major outside powers and littoral countries, starting with those of Australia's ally, the United States and including India, China and Australia.

US Indian Ocean interests

The connecting role of the Indian Ocean is as true for US as for any other power. US strategic interests extend across the Pacific and on into the Gulf/South West Asia in terms of the 'west about' route into the Persian Gulf. For Washington, the two Gulf wars (1990-91 and 2003-11) and the Afghan war (2001-present) sheeted home the importance of an alternative route into the Gulf.

What was then called Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) – now US Pacific Command (USPACOM) – with its headquarters in Hawaii was responsible for the vast stretch of ocean taking in the Pacific and Indian Oceans as far as Pakistan to the west. This route, and associated bases and facilities in the Indian Ocean, were important to US Gulf strategy in a number of respects, which remain a constant today.

First, the route provided back-up should transit facilities or vital sea lanes such as the Suez Canal ever be denied through Europe or the Gulf and Middle East regions, as occurred in the Yom Kippur War (1973). Second, it provided the means by which US forces and equipment located in the west of continental US and in the Pacific itself could be deployed into the Gulf – the so-called 'west about' route. Third, dedicated bases such as Diego Garcia had been used as vital locations for pre-positioned, rapidly deployable forces, either ship-based or transportable by air. Fourth, Diego Garcia provided a base within B-52 bomber range of the Gulf-South West Asia region, from which aerial bombardment could be undertaken. Such bombardment was used to devastating effect in the two Gulf wars and the 2001 attack on Afghanistan. Fifth, the Indian Ocean – and particularly the Arabian Sea – was a vital launch point for ship-based ballistic missiles, also used to great effect in both Gulf wars. Sixth, Australia's 'suitable piece of real estate', to use Ball's term, provides vital listening, targeting and monitoring facilities for US forces (Ball, 1980). And lastly, as China develops into a regional and global power, the extended domain from the Pacific into the Indian Ocean becomes strategically important to the US in terms

of its assertion of its role as the major global maritime power – one capable of operating and predominating in all oceans. Beijing would argue this is part of a strategy to 'encircle' China, whereas Washington perhaps sees it more as an aspect of the fact that the US is a world maritime power with important interests to assert in the Middle East.

India-US interests in the IOR – from competition to collaboration

The abiding strategic interests of outside powers are, of course, viewed somewhat differently by the littoral powers, especially India. Prior to the First Gulf War and fall of the Soviet Union, India was generally seen in the West to have had a pro-Soviet 'tilt'. Although this 'tilt' was real enough, in terms of the Indian Ocean, India favoured the position of the majority of the Non-Aligned Movement, in support of a Zone of Peace (ZOP) in the Indian Ocean. The ZOP proposal suited India as the largest littoral power. The US and Australia opposed the ZOP in so far as it would have favoured the Soviet Union, which would have retained right of innocent passage, while US war ships would have been precluded from loitering and basing.

The First Gulf War and near simultaneous fall of the Soviet Union gave a sharp jolt to this *status quo*. Despite all the transit resources available to it, the US made a crucial request at the outset of the war. It asked India whether its territory could be used to stage into the Gulf. New Delhi initially gave the US permission to allow US *Starlifter* aircraft to refuel at Mumbai, a decision subsequently reversed by the minority Chandra Shekhar government. But Washington's request nonetheless represented an important 'straw in the wind'.

For the US, the end of the Cold War also meant that Pakistan was no longer a front-line state in relation to Afghanistan (although ironically it was to re-emerge in that role after the events of 9/11, thus further earning the title of 'most allied ally'). It also meant that India was no longer seen in Washington as a 'fellow traveller' of the Soviet Union.

Further, the Gulf victory had cost the United States an estimated US $60 billion. This enormous cost (in then prevailing prices) was fortunately for Washington eased by

contributions from the Gulf allies and Japan – known as 'burden sharing'. As a result, Saudi Arabia defrayed US $36 billion and Japan US $14 billion. But Washington, anxious to reap a 'peace dividend' from the end of the Cold War, was also keen to exercise burden sharing not just in financial terms but also in terms of contributions of countries like India to 'regional security' – in this case the security of the Indian Ocean. Therefore, far from being concerned about India's rise as an Indian Ocean power, the US switched tack and became an active supporter of that process. Significantly CINCPAC, with its two ocean responsibilities, was the main driver of the new relationship. According to a CINCPAC study:

> "India's foreign policy has been steadily converging with US interests as a result [of the advent of] the bipolar era. For example, [India is moving closer to the US position on] the spread of AIDS, religious fundamentalism, illegal drug trafficking, support for human rights, and *unrestricted navigation in the Indian Ocean, and the adjourning Persian Gulf region*. [Emphasis added]", (Harrison and Kemp, 1993).

On its part, India too was forced to reassess its perceptions of Indian Ocean security as a result of the Gulf War and end of the Cold War. India's military model of large land armies was derived from the Soviet Union and was shown to be anachronistic during the Gulf War. The 'air-land' war, the revolution in military affairs (RMA) and military modernisation were now the order of the day. Moreover, in the 'unipolar' world it now confronted, India would have to deal with the US in the Indian Ocean, whether it liked it or not.

The India-China-US 'triangle' as a factor in Indian Ocean security

As well as the traumas India suffered as a result of the Gulf War and end of the Cold War, which brought it closer to the US and made it more accepting of Washington's IO role, from the 1990s onward, New Delhi became increasingly concerned about the growing role of China in the IOR. Following the 1962 border war, China was increasingly perceived as India's competitor. It was, moreover, Pakistan's staunch friend. Without the counterpoise of the former Soviet Union at China's flank, the strategic game in South Asia was radically altered. What is today in India called 'China's string of pearls' of alleged bases in the Indian Ocean was actually under

development by the early 1990s, when China began garnering influence in Burma. This increasing concern about the growing IOR role of China also had the effect of refocusing New Delhi's strategy on the relationship with the US.

On its part, Beijing saw the Indian Ocean in terms of both threat and opportunity. In terms of an investment opportunity, Burma, South Asia, Africa and the Middle East offered enormous possibilities to a newly cashed-up China that was willing to do the 'hard yards' of development increasingly shunned by the West – building ports, roads, power stations and other elements of basic infrastructure. China spread its investment web far and wide throughout the IOR, and this perforce included countries India considered to be within its strategic sphere, such as Burma, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and some of the Indian Ocean island states. Worse, China also developed military-to-military relationships with these countries, possibly as a natural extension to the economic relationship and possibly also as a 'hedge' against what Beijing saw as the more troubling aspect of the IOR.

This 'threat' scenario in the IOR related to the security of the enormous quantities of energy and raw materials that were extracted around the Rim and that flowed across the SLOCs of the IO. Energy was especially sensitive, since although China was developing pipelines into Russia and the Central Asian Republics, these would never be sufficient in themselves to meet China's enormous need.

Moreover, although India is clearly strategically weaker than China, it has one considerable strategic advantage: it is located centrally athwart the main energy SLOCs across the Indian Ocean. Chinese military planners, while not necessarily expecting it to happen, felt the need to hedge against a possible Indian attempt, which could be conducted in collusion with the US, to threaten or interdict energy flows during times of increasing tension or even war. Although China is not yet in a position to commit a major strategic focus on the Indian Ocean, its garnering of influence, investment and knowledge across the so-called 'string of pearls' could be seen as a hedge against a future escalation of tension within the IOR. In other words, we have the making of a classic 'security dilemma' within the IOR, in which China is seeking to protect itself from a possible Indo-US combine and garnering influence to

do so; and in which this very process makes India less secure and more inclined to develop its own strategic options.

Initial thinking in Washington on the Indian Ocean may have been driven by the need to access the Gulf and South West Asia. But increasingly the US too was concerned about China's regional rise and growing influence. By the mid-1990s and gathering pace into the twenty-first century, it was the perceived need in Washington to set up India as a possible balance to China that was driving relations forward. According to then Secretary of State Rice's policy adviser, this important shift in US policy is motivated by the fact that the US "goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century". And he added, "We understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement" (*Times of India*, 2005). On the face of it, this is an extraordinary statement by any superpower about the rise of another power and we need to ask what lies behind it. The answer is China.

This desire on the part of the US for a *strategic* relationship is a major factor behind the Indo-US nuclear agreement – which is not to say that other motives are not present. The reason why the nuclear agreement is important is that it would have been difficult for the US to support and build Indian power in some key technologies – for example, ballistic missile technology, anti-ballistic missiles and space – without first bringing India in 'to the nuclear tent'. The recently agreed 'end user' agreements are but a logical outcome of this process.

But in developing its India strategy, it is not even clear that Washington necessarily anticipates that China will emerge as a classic strategic competitor. Thus US strategic interests in India should be taken for what they are: part of a 'hedging' strategy, just as, in pursuing the relationship from its point of view, India is also 'hedging' against the rise of an adversarial China.

None of this indicates that India will enter any US 'sphere' or abandon its important relationships with other powers, especially Russia. While there have been recent hiccups in the arms sale relationship between India and Russia to do with late delivery, escalating costs and poor supply of spare parts, the relationship is still of considerable importance to India and will not be easily discarded. Russian support

for India's *Arihant* SSBN project and delivery of the first of two nuclear powered hunter-killer submarines is especially important for India's ambition to be a major nuclear and Indian Ocean power. And it must also be said that relations between Washington and New Delhi have not always been smooth: witness the recent friction over India's continuing perceived need to purchase oil from Iran despite the US-imposed sanctions regime. So it is important not to conceive of the US-India relationship as an 'alliance'. But while it may never become an alliance, it is also replete with strategic possibility, driven essentially by a rising China.

In making this point, we need to note that the Indo-US strategic relationship is already more developed than *any other* such Indian relationship. It consists of a comprehensive framework for military exercising – particularly navy-to-navy but not confined to that – and a growing arms and technology transfer relationship. Although India didn't choose the now outdated F-16 and FA-18 technologies on offer from the US for its latest multi-role fighter, that shouldn't overshadow the fact that substantial purchases have already been made or are in train, such as the LPI *USS Trenton*, C-130 and C-17 transport aircraft, artillery tracking radars and the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft – totalling $6 billion already spent since 2000 (Raja Mohan, 2012, 7). India has also acquired valuable technologies from Israel, such as the *Phalcon* AWAC and *Arrow* anti-ballistic missile systems. These were made available with US permission (denied China in the case of the *Phalcon*). India has in return launched Israel's TecSAR satellite, capable of spying into Iran in all weathers.

The deepening military-to-military relationship is just as important as the transfer of technology in terms of exchange of military doctrine, inter-operability and intelligence. This is very much an evolving, multi-faceted relationship, albeit one focusing on maritime warfare. At its heart is a ten-year defence agreement signed in 2005 and a program of ever more sophisticated exercising, especially in the maritime sphere.

While it is currently true that the predominant thinking in New Delhi is that India should continue to assert its 'strategic independence' in relation to the US, it is by no means clear that this will always remain so. One significant variable in the equation is how power parities might develop between India and China, and the way Beijing

chooses to behave in terms of its competition with New Delhi should China become significantly more powerful than at present *vis à vis* India.

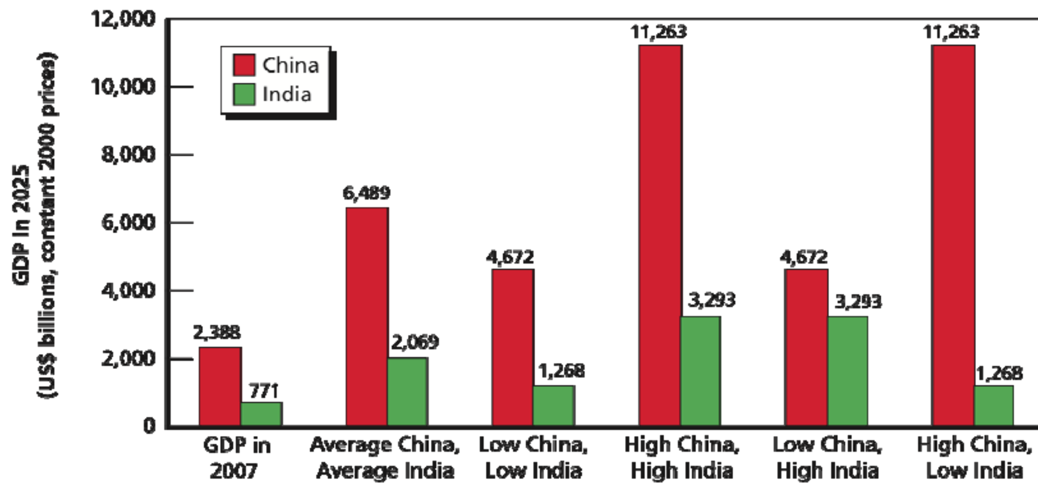
Sino-Indian relations might presently be characterized as ‘ambivalent’. On the one hand there are abiding tensions between the two on issues such as the border and China’s growing range of activities in South Asia and the IOR – regions that New Delhi considers as India’s ‘back yard’.

On the other, however, India and China have a rapidly escalating trading relationship now worth some US $62 billion, but weighted heavily in China’s favour. India and China, as mega-population powers with large numbers of poor people, share similar positions in global trade and climate change.

But given any ‘straight line’ trajectory for the growth of India and China, and given current force structures and dispositions, over the longer-term India is vulnerable to a rising China, especially should that rise cause Beijing to become more assertive towards perceived competitors like India.

In terms of straight-line trajectories, it can be seen that China, with an economy nearly thrice that of India at market rates, is growing faster and will therefore continue to widen the gap. This disparity has persisted over the last two global economic downturns. A recent Rand study (Rand, 2011) seeks to quantify the respective GDPs at market rates according to various growth scenarios, as follows:

Figure 1: Five scenarios: GDPs of China and India in 2025, market exchange rates



NOTE: Conversion to market exchange rates based on the World Bank's World Development Indicators (World Bank, no date).

RAND MG1009-3.5

Source: Rand, *China and India, 2025: A Comparative Assessment* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2011) as at RAND_MG1009.pdf, accessed 20 February 2011, Figure 5.3, p. 53.

What is remarkable about this projection is that even given a low growth scenario for China and a high one for India, China would still have a substantially bigger economy in 2025.

Of course, there are many variables and unknowns associated with such assessments, not least the supposed demographic advantage for India, which apparently favours it in terms of working age population. But according to Rand, India's dependency ratio will not fall below that of China till 2027 – well down the track in strategic terms. The key here is the term dependency. One must also ask whether India's legions of undernourished, undereducated poor actually constitute a 'demographic advantage'. Added to this, China will undoubtedly be able to use its enormous capital reserves to substitute for labour, just as Japan, Korea and Taiwan have done successfully as their economies graduated.

Rand is also of the view that China's economic advantage, in combination with a range of other factors, will by 2025 translate into a defence expenditure of between four to seven time that of India – a very significant advantage (Rand, 2011, p XVII).

While such projections are only ever that, they do provide a salutary warning on two fronts. First, those who assume India is *necessarily* in a process of catch-up with

China need to explain why risk in India is inherently less than it is in China. Indeed, at least some of the risks that India will confront as its economy develops, such as the environmental ones and the urgent need to develop infrastructure to seize the advantage of labour-intensive manufacturing afforded by its demography, are now well known. While the same environmental problems certainly confront China, there is no evidence to suggest they would be worse there than India. And even though China still has to 'cross the Rubicon' of some kind of democratization process, that is a difficult unknown to factor in. (Indeed, some are now even touting China's high percentage of state owned enterprises as somewhat of an advantage – *The Economist*, 2012). Meanwhile, we should remain conscious of all the impediments associated with India's particular brand of democracy, as detailed by Guha et al in a recent study from the London School of Economics. (Kitchen et al, 2012). The Rand paper cited above is a coherent attempt at an analysis of the comparative strengths of India and China by 2025. Significantly, it was commissioned by the US Department of Defense.

The key question is: what are the implications of any rapid gain in power by China in relation to India?

Given current difficulties in the relationship, it would not be surprising if China's comparative rise were to make India edgy and inclined to 'call in' its hedge in terms of relations with the US. Its alternative might be eventually to cede position to China on what it considers its core interests, such as the border, South Asia and the IOR. Moreover, comparative accrual of power by China would further affect India's regional relationships, making it less likely the small powers of the IOR and South/South East Asia would seek to use India to balance a rising China. Vietnam's position as China's neighbour would be especially tenuous. Such powers would tend to look either to the US or accept China as the regional hegemon.

India too may well draw closer to the United States in such circumstances, seeking to leverage the latter's technological base through its own relatively cheap productive capability. Coincidentally, such a strategy would harmonise with the current desires of Washington, since one of the great problems the US faces is China's growing comparative advantage as a source of cheap weapons, technology and research. An example of Washington's desire to leverage its relationship with India was the offer to

provide joint production of the fifth generation Joint Strike Fighter – an offer India knocked back on this occasion in favour of the French *Rafale*.

If this analysis proves correct, it will likely have implications not just for Sino-Indian and Sino-US relations, but also for the nature of the security regime in the IOR, especially given China's growing concerns about security of energy supplies passing through the Indian Ocean.

Moreover, even were the US not part of the equation between China and India in the IOR, India's inherent strategic advantage and especially its attitude to the IOR would suggest continuing competition between Beijing and New Delhi. India's strategies in respect of the IOR are explored below.

The Indian Ocean as a factor in Indian security

India inherited much of the intellectual and strategic baggage of its independence years from the British. Whitehall saw control of the Indian Ocean as an essential part of the 'ring fence' Britain erected to protect its Indian possessions – the other main element being a system of buffer states around British India. To this has been added in recent years the perceived imperative to protect India's vital energy SLOCS, extensive territorial waters and trade routes that cross the Indian Ocean.

Together these add up to a perceived imperative to exercise sea denial, control and influence over considerable portions of the IOR. Of course, this has not been possible during the independence period and remains a distant prospect given the naval predominance of the US in the Indian Ocean and the 'continental' imperative still impacting on Indian security. Nevertheless it is a goal to which Indian naval strategists aspire.

When it comes to the acquisition of naval assets, India's ambition has tended to outflank its capacity. This tendency was evident in the 1980s, when India planned for a 200-ship navy, which led to a Senate inquiry in Canberra. Similarly, India's naval ambitions as expressed in its contemporary documents have been ambitious and have also had the effect of 'spooking' some of the neighbours. India's long-term security

strategy is increasingly focused on acquiring the capability to exercise sea control in surrounding waters and denial more broadly in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. To this end India has embarked on two courses of action: the accumulation of bases, resources and potential areas of influence on the one hand and the acquisition of substantial naval assets on the other.

The Indian Navy first wrote a naval 'doctrine' document in 2004, with a public version in 2005. This ambitious document identifies the Navy – always the poor cousin of Indian strategy – as the torchbearer of India's global strategic ambitions. It views the Indian Ocean as India's "back yard", calling for a blue water capability and "sea control" in designated areas of the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. It cites India's "policing" role in the Indian Ocean and the need to protect far-flung populations of Indian origin. It posits a fully-fledged SLBM capability as the main plank of India's strategic nuclear capability and suggests India should have at least a two-carrier battle group capacity. Significantly, the document states: "India stands out alone as being devoid of a credible nuclear triad, specially when a *powerful adversary* [emphasis added] like China has massive capability in 14 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) [sic]" (Ministry of Defence (Navy), ND). Although it is more diplomatic in not specifically mentioning China in these terms, the 2007 version says essentially the same thing (Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2007). This document places considerable emphasis on the development of maritime surveillance and knowledge of the "maritime domain". India's space program is cited as an important element in this ambition. The strategy emphasises the development of India's sealift and amphibious assault capabilities so it can exercise power on a territorial basis if need be. It also claims "there is a critical need to wean the littoral states away from increasingly pervasive influence of states hostile to India's interests [which can only mean China]" and to "shape" probable battle spaces, being the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal (MoD, 2007, 81-87). According to a Deloitte's study, by 2022 the navy will have more than 160 ships, including three aircraft carriers, 60 major combatants (including submarines) and 400 aircraft. (Deloitte, 2010, 8).

In pursuit of this program, the first of two nuclear hunter-killers has just been delivered from Russia on a leased basis. Meanwhile, India is busy developing its indigenous SLBM program and has already launched the shell of its first vessel, the

Arihant, intended to carry a short-range (and eventually medium range), vertically launched nuclear capable missile. It intends eventually to have five such ships.

But it can be seen from the table below that this otherwise handsome navy would still be somewhat week in conventional submarines by the 2020s. We should also note the slow pace and low investment in capacity building and bottleneck removal of the indigenous program (Aviotech 2011, 7).

TABLE 1: PRESENT AND EXPECTED FORCE DEVELOPMENT: INDIAN NAVY

Type	**Actual**	**Planned, comment**	**Number by 2022**
Surface			
Aircraft carriers	1 (*INS Viraat* – was scheduled for retirement in 2009): **Total: 1**	1 ex-Russian, *Admiral Gorshkov*, delivered 2013, not complete till 2017; 2 indigenously built, first scheduled 2015 but slipping	Possibly 3
Destroyers	3 Delhi Class; 5 Rajput Class : **Total: 8**	3 'stealth' destroyers, contract issued, to be built indigenously, with option for a further 4	11
Frigates	2 Shivalik Cl (stealth); 3 Talwar Cl; 3 Brahmaputra Cl; 3 Godaveri Cl; 2 Giri Cl: **Total: 13**	1 under construction; some say a total of 8 to be built. The Godaveri and Giri frigates are old and will likely be phased out by 2022	Possibly 20, likely about 14
		3 from Russia (Krivak III guided missile with Brahmos) 2 for delivery 2012; 1 delivery 2013	
Corvettes	4 Kukri Cl; 4 Kore Cl: **Total 8**		8
Offshore Patrol	X6		?
Ant-Submarine Patrol	4	4 ASW corvettes under domestic construction	4

		for delivery 2012-13	
Minesweeper	9		
LPD	Former *USS Trenton* acquired 2006: **Total 1**	Tenders issued internationally for 4	1-5
LST	5		?
LST(m)	4		?
LCU	39	8 under domestic contract (not yet commenced)	?
Missile Boats	12		?
Training	3		3
Survey/Research	9		?
Supply and replenishment	3		3
Submarines (conventional)	4 Type 209; 10 Kilo: **Total 14**	6 *Scorpène* under construction for 2015-20 phase in; 6 'stealth' conventional submarines to be acquired, no dates. Comment: the final 3 *Scorpènes* may not be built due to lack of yard space.	10 (but possibly only 7)
Submarines (nuclear)			
'Hunter-killer'	1 Akula II, (10 year lease with option to buy) **Total: 1**	1 Akula II, awaiting delivery	2
SLBM		1 launched, awaiting commission; 4 more planned, based on Russian Charlie III	2 or 3
Aircraft			
Carrier borne A/C	17 Sea Harrier	46 MiG-29K, purchased, delivery commences 2012	46
Maritime patrol	5 TU 142 (Bear), refurbished but not all operational; 15 Dornier 288-101; 12 UAV	12 P-8i (Neptune), ordered for delivery 2013 – possibly 24 to be acquired in total	24

Sources: various as compiled by Author and Aviotech, (2011) 'Indian Naval Acquisitions I: Defense Ship-building in India' as at www.aviotech.com/Aviotech_Thought_Leadership_Series_Naval_Shipbuilding_December_2011-2.pdf, *accessed 7 February 2012.*

India's growing basing capability and its developing influence in the IOR also signal its wide naval ambition in respect of the area. In terms of the location of its assets, a progressive move to the east seems to presage deepening concern about China's access points into the Ocean, especially through and around the Straits of Malacca. In 2007 the annual 'Malabar' exercise with the US Navy took place off the eastern seaboard and involved Australia, Singapore and Japan as well as India. This year's 'Milan 12' exercise off the Andaman and Nicobar Islands involves 14 Indian Ocean and South East Asian nations, including Australia, and has a focus on anti-piracy and non-conventional security. As well as developing its naval bases at Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Visakhapatnam on the east coast (where its nuclear submarine fleet will be located), India has opened the giant naval base on its west coast, *INS Kadamba*, at Karwar. Further afield, India has a listening post in northern Madagascar, berthing rights at Oman and conducts ship visits and training with Seychelles, Mauritius and a number of Gulf countries. It is active in anti-piracy operations on both sides of the Indian Ocean and has scored some notable successes.

Even though India is unlikely to meet its ambitions in relation to its navy and the IOR in the near term, in time it will emerge as a significant Indian Ocean power. As such, it is bound to affect the strategic environment more broadly, even though it won't be a major strategic factor in the Asia-Pacific in the direct sense.

Australia's interests as an IO power

Australia's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean are at one level very similar to India's: to ensure that this vital trading route is maintained as a free and peaceful venue for the enormous flows of energy and other traded goods that pass across it. But at another level Australia's concerns are quite different, since it does not seek to preserve its security by making itself the predominant power, but rather by the twofold strategy of its alliance with the US on the one hand and seeking to ensure that

a more congenial and less competitive regime evolves in the IOR on the other. But as we shall see, the problem is for Canberra that these two strategies at times pull in opposite directions.

Australia's interests in a benign trading regime are further focused by the fact that it is developing as an energy and resources 'superpower' with substantial exports of coal, liquefied natural gas (LNG), iron ore and other minerals. Australia's economy is intensively engaged in the international trading system and as an island continent almost all that trade is maritime.

Leaving differences over regionalism aside, with the gathering *rapprochement* in Indo-Us relations since 1991, perceptions of strategic differences between Australia and India are narrowing. And there are other important commonalities. India and Australia are the two leading scientific littoral nations and as such they must make most of the headway in understanding the Indian Ocean. In Australia, this is seen as increasingly important in terms of understanding the drivers of weather and climate change, just as it is vital to an understanding of the monsoons in India. There is considerable scope for joint oceanographic work and an enormous job of work ahead. Similar commonalities exist in understanding the behaviour of *tsunamis*, earthquakes and other natural disasters, in maritime safety, SAR and disaster relief. Australia's search and rescue zone responsibilities take in a vast swathe of the Indian Ocean, putting its range slightly to the west, and just south of Sri Lanka.

Understanding of weather patterns and climate change also depends on sound scientific work in Antarctica. Both Australia and India are involved in such work: but here there is a potential difference. India is intent on setting up a third base (or second operational one) in an area of Antarctica which Australia and a number of other Antarctic Treaty nations would like to preserve for ecological reasons. India cites the fact that the Indian Subcontinent originally detached from this area as an important driver of its scientific work. Some in India are also of the view that those who presently claim large tracts of Antarctica such as Australia are trying to keep others out so they can retain control over natural resources to themselves (Jayaraman, 2009).

Most of the range of human induced, non-conventional security problems are in evidence across the IOR and require concerted joint action. These include terrorism, drug smuggling, piracy, people smuggling and trafficking and arms trafficking. Both India and Australia have been in the forefront in addressing these problems, whether in terms of the widely recognised assistance in counter-terrorism provided by Australia to Indonesia or India's valued efforts to address piracy and more recently potential nuclear smuggling by North Korea to Burma.

These opportunities in the developing relationship with India are fully captured in the 2009 Australian *Defence White Paper*, which says, *inter alia*:

"Australia and India will have a strong mutual interest in enhancing maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean, where we both have key strategic interests to manage. Maritime trade through the eastern Indian Ocean is particularly important for both countries, and we will explore opportunities to work together with India to ensure that those waters are kept secure and open over the decades ahead. The Government has specifically directed Defence to examine opportunities for increased bilateral maritime cooperation." (Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2009, 96).

This document points to the fact that most obvious area of joint activity and interest between Australia and India in the Indian Ocean is the north-east quadrant. India's maritime territory in this area takes it to within 80 nautical miles of Aceh in Indonesia – a giant swath of a vitally important segment of the Ocean that controls the entrance to the vital Straits of Malacca.

Australia's own interests in this quadrant are less well-recognised in New Delhi, but are strong. Australia's nearest large neighbour is Indonesia, the largest Muslim nation in the world, with a population of 240 million. Indonesia is struggling to establish a stable democracy after the long interregnum of the Soharto years. Indonesia, and South East Asia generally, are regarded in Australian strategic circles as vital stepping-stones that could potentially be used by would be invaders – a recognition that derives from the way the Pacific War against Japan unfolded. Ever since the influential Dibb Report of 1985, which influenced subsequent Defence White Papers in the so-called 'defence of Australia strategy', Australia has identified both the land bridge and so-called 'sea-air gap' separating Australia and South East Asia as vital to

Australia's defensive posture. The area of the Indian Ocean to the south and northwest of Indonesia forms an important component of this 'sea-air gap' and is a basic operational area for Australia's submarine-based and land-based fighter defensive posture.

This security posture takes in not only broad security concerns such as those mentioned above, but also a range of transnational issues. Australia's Ashmore Reef, for example, is only 11 hours sailing time from Indonesia and is an important location for placing illegal migrants and refugees seeking entrance to Australia. While further away from Indonesia, Christmas Island has a similar role. These waters are also heavily contested by illegal fishers, some of whom have enjoyed traditional fishing rights in the region for centuries. Australia's Indian Ocean security concerns in relation to transnational issues also take in its extensive off-shore oil and gas interests. Eighty-five per cent of Australia's substantial natural gas reserves (including some now contracted to be exported to India) lie within the Indian Ocean off the north-western Australian coast line. Australia has for some years been concerned that these resources could be targeted by terrorists and in 2004 decided to enhance protection around the interests.

Many of the above-mentioned interests of Australia would seem to provide an excellent common platform of interests for the two Indian Ocean powers to work more closely together as the major littoral naval powers.

In terms of Australia's broader Indian Ocean concerns, for example in the north-western quadrant, Canberra's position is somewhat different to that of India, however. As a larger and more proximate power, and one with a substantial strategic interest in Pakistan and China and the relationship between the two, India's interests in this quadrant are far more direct. Australia would see this quadrant as being within its scope of international interest, but less directly relevant to its security than the north east of the IO. Rather than direct, bilateral engagement in this quadrant, Canberra has a strong interest in working with larger powers, particularly the US, to ensure stability.

Under this strategy of cooperative international engagement, Australia has provided assistance to a number of international coalitions and task forces – in the First Gulf War, the Second Gulf War, Afghanistan and Task Force 150 (of which TF 151 focuses on anti-piracy operations). In the case of the Gulf wars, this support was somewhat tokenistic. But in Afghanistan, although Australia has only 1500 troops, they are 'punching above their weight', with relatively large numbers of Australia's highly regarded special forces (the Special Air Service) being involved on the ground.

As evidenced by its leading role in the 1990s in attempting to establish an Indian Ocean cooperative framework, Australia does see itself as having a role and say in broader Indian Ocean security concerns and cooperative architecture. In this regard, Canberra would see the triangular relationship between China, India and the US as vital. Canberra's objective should be to try to minimise the emerging security dilemma in the Indian Ocean. But as we note below, it has limited means of doing so. Moreover, its alliance goals with the US could present it with a dilemma in relation to comprehensive security building in the IOR, since Washington's IO aims may not be consonant with Canberra's.

Australian strategies

Although there is little Australia can do to affect outcomes in terms of the Sino-Indian border dispute, that dispute is itself conducted in the wider context of competition in and around South Asia and the IOR – a framework of competition in its own way as important in setting the Sino-Indian relationship agenda as the border dispute itself. This competition exists in Burma, South Asia, Central Asia, Africa and the IOR. Increasingly, and disturbingly, it is likely to be manifest in South East Asia, an area of fundamental importance to Australia and its security. Indeed, as described above, India already has important security interests and assets in the north-east quadrant of the Indian Ocean that take it right up to the strategic frontiers of South East Asia.

To date, security building efforts have been largely focused on the Asia-Pacific, considered the premier locus of Sino-US competition and the major venue for China's rise. An argument can be made, however, that the security dilemma as it is developing in the IOR is every bit as potentially damaging as is the strategic

competition in the Asia-Pacific. The reason is not hard to find: as China rises to power, the area in which it is likely to remain most vulnerable is in terms of access to vital energy resources through an IOR. And as Beijing presumably sees it, the IOR is increasingly dominated by a US-India combine and by India's strategic advantage.

It would seemingly make considerable sense, therefore, for Australia to use what influence it has in the IOR and with Washington to work assiduously to create a better comprehensive security regime in the IOR, so all users of the ocean can 'rise on the same tide'.

As illustrated when Australia took the lead in 1995, however, this may prove difficult. To achieve such an outcome today, when India is even more confident of its leadership role in the IOR, would involve different strategies than those adopted in 1995, which involved Australia taking the lead. This strategy comprehensively failed in the face of India's desire to dominate the strategic architecture of the region – which leads us to the issue of security building in the IOR, as set out in terms of reference d.

SECURITY BUILDING IN THE IOR (TERMS OF REFERENCE D)

For all its concrete activities in support of non-conventional security objectives in the IOR, India has generally not chosen to join international attempts to build security and confidence in the region, except those it founded and can dominate. Although active in combating non-conventional security threats on its own behalf, it has declined to join the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) or the international anti-piracy initiative known as Combined Task Force 151. (Ironically, CT-151 is currently under the command of a Pakistani). It has on occasion blocked the emergence of a viable IOR regional association because of its desire to keep Pakistan and China out of such forums. As already mentioned, it effectively scuttled the attempt by Australia's foreign Minister Evans in 1995 to set up a comprehensive security mechanism in the IOR. It did this largely because it saw the 1995 Perth initiative by Evans as cutting across the so-called Mauritius Process, initiated by New Delhi a few months earlier. The Mauritius Process was a narrowly based, trade-focused mechanism designed to keep Pakistan and like-minded countries out, along

with major users of the Indian Ocean such as China and the US. At the time the Perth process (known as the International Forum on the Indian Ocean Region – IFIOR) was criticised by India because it dealt with security issues – albeit non-conventional ones (Gordon, 1996, 202-3). The successor organisation of the Mauritius Process, IOR-ARC, has effectively been kept on a drip feed. Although China and some other outside users are dialogue partners, it is designed to keep out external users, Pakistan and like-minded states.[1] India has also been instrumental in establishing the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). This is a biannual meeting of Indian Ocean naval chiefs. It does include Pakistan but not outside users like China. It focuses on transnational issues rather than conventional security. India has also established the 'Milan' process, which consists of biannual exercising by India and South East Asian nations, usually in the North East Indian Ocean region. BIMSTEC (standing for Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) was also founded by India and consists of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. Again, the focus is economic. Indonesia is a notable omission given its key location in athwart the Straits of Malacca.

The nature of India's response to the need of confidence building measures and multilateral institutions in the IOR leads us to conclude, along with Raja Mohan, that "Delhi seems far more comfortable in multilateral military institutions set up under its leadership rather than those where the agenda and direction are set by the others" (Raja Mohan, 2012, 11).

The reasons for New Delhi's reluctance to support security-focused institution building initiatives in the IOR that it cannot control are not hard to understand. The strategic architecture in the IOR is very different from the Asia-Pacific. In the IOR, India is the dominant littoral power and also the power of the future. The next largest navy is that of Australia, and Australia is only ever going to be a middle power. In the Asia-Pacific, however, four great powers – the US, China, Japan and Russia – vie for regional position. As the big littoral power, India does not wish to institute any regime that might result in the weakening of its bilateral options at some point in the

[1] The charter of IOR-ARC states that all littoral states who accept the charter are eligible to be members. However, in the past, India has lobbied rigorously to keep Pakistan out. This may change now Pakistan has accorded India MFN status.

future or undermine its perceived strategic interests, such as containing the China-Pakistan relationship. At the same time, it wishes to do enough to be seen as a team player so it does not alienate the other IOR powers, especially the small island states. This approach to multilateral organisations is similar to the one followed by the other great powers such as the US and China.

What this means is that any effort by Canberra to focus on improving the security regime in the IOR will need to take a long-term approach which is sensitive to India's concerns: to its perceived need to be the leading Indian Ocean littoral power; to its deep-seated strategic anxiety about the Pakistan-China combination as it might shape the future of the IOR; and to New Delhi's desire to be in the driving seat of any emerging cooperative security and trading systems. This in turn implies working within India's current arrangements such as IOR-ARC, BIMSTEC, 'Milan' and especially the IONS. There is no reason, for example, why Australia as a north-east Indian Ocean power should not be more actively involved in the Milan process, so that it might eventually grow into a more effective and less periodic arrangement for maintaining non-conventional security in the north-east Indian Ocean.

The other area of major thrust where Australia can be actively involved with India is in the scientific and oceanographic activities that are necessary to improve the overall understanding and management of the IOR, whether in terms of maritime security, environmentally sustainable resources extraction, achieving a better understanding of weather patterns or management of Antarctica.

None of this, of course, solves the problem of the need for an inclusive regime in the IOR capable of instilling confidence in outside powers like China that their vital trade and energy flows will not be subject to pressure at some future time. Basically, such an outcome can be quietly pressed on India, but implementation will probably have to wait the time when India-Pakistan and India-China relations become less fraught with mutual suspicion. Also, to the extent security is the subject of such forums, they should focus on the more non-threatening, non-conventional elements of security.

In seeking quietly to convince India, Canberra might also consider involving Washington in an effort to persuade New Delhi of the need of a more inclusive

regime. But again, Washington would need to become involved in a way that respects India's very real and also its perceived strategic difficulties with more inclusive regional forums.

Concurrently with its efforts to build a more inclusive comprehensive security regime in the IOR Australia also confronts its own set of issues to do with its US alliance needs and obligations. Unfortunately these demands do not always accord with those of Indian Ocean security building.

The problem arises from the fact that the IOR and Asia-Pacific regions have become so closely entwined in terms of strategy, largely because of the role of the IO as 'the great connector'. Currently, in the Asia-Pacific context the US is involved in a complex process of off-shore balancing. This is designed both to check China's rise over the longer term should it become evident that Beijing is not conducting a 'peaceful rise' of China, but at the same time not unnecessarily alienating China to the extent if might feel 'contained' and threatened, thus reducing the likelihood of a peaceful rise.

As part of this process, Washington is strengthening all its key bilateral relationships in the Asia-Pacific while avoiding for the time being the appearance of developing a multilateral balance against China, which could smack of containment. Australia plays an important role in this process as a fulcrum to extend US bilateral off-shore balancing into the IOR. Hence the possibility of renewing visits of SSNs to HMAS Stirling and developing aerial surveillance facilities on the Cocos Islands.

Unfortunately any such moves to strengthen the Alliance are also likely to have an impact on the future of the security regime in the IOR. They could well be perceived by China as part of a strategy to check its rise to power by posing a strategic threat to its vital SLOCs across the IO. Moreover, Australia's potential role as a broker of a more inclusive regime is likely to be put at risk, especially since both New Delhi and Beijing would be far less likely to regard Australia as an honest broker in such circumstances.

The question therefore arises: is it possible to find a way to harmonise the two goals – that of building a more inclusive comprehensive security regime in the IOR and of supporting Australia's alliance needs in relation to the US?

One possibility might be to try to convince Washington to bring the two goals together both for presentational purposes and also in terms of reinforcing the comprehensive security regime in the IOR. This could be done by presenting the enhanced American presence as being more concerned with supporting comprehensive security (counter terrorism, anti-piracy, anti smuggling, disaster relief, SAR and general SLOC maintenance) than with off-shore balancing against China or supporting the 'west about' route into the Gulf. This would, however, require a somewhat different US presence than the one currently being canvassed, at least in the Australian press. In particular, it is difficult to see any role for SSNs in these activities. But enhanced surveillance could definitely have a role and could be presented as fitting well with the comprehensive security needs of the IOR.

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