

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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### The Character of the Region

The Indian Ocean is the third largest of the world's oceans with a littoral of over 30 nations, with less developed, developing and developed economies. The economic diversity is carried through to diversities in race, religion, population growth, culture and politics. The Indian Ocean region is not a cohesive unit with a single voice in world affairs, in contrast its membership is characterised by regional differences and rivalries which influence events within and outside the region and in turn are influenced by events from without the region. The region contains the bulk of the world's newly founded nations and representatives of the Third World group.

### Economies of the Region

The economies of the littoral states have in most cases suffered from world inflation and yet the oil rich nations have increased their wealth and given impetus to a movement for a new international economic order which many of the resources rich nations are responding to while reassessing the importance of their natural resources and their significance in the future. The region is rich in oil and other natural resources and in so being its economic and political importance is apparent and vital to external nations.

## External Powers

The presence of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean captures the limelight but the region is of far greater significance to the economies of Western Europe, Japan and other nations as the source of oil and other natural resources, as demonstrated by the 1973 oil crisis and the impact it had around the world.

## Military Significance

Militarily the Indian Ocean and its region is of secondary importance to the superpowers and others as witnessed by the size of their respective fleets. In a conflict situation access to the Ocean can be made difficult by eliminating the narrow points of entry, which could be a more inhibiting factor to the U.S.S.R. than the U.S.A. The lack of supporting facilities for a protracted conflict is evident and the vulnerability of fleets in the Ocean would be high. Modern weaponry has reduced the importance of the Ocean in a conflict situation between the superpowers.

## Superpower Presence

The presence of the superpowers in the Ocean is to project their image and ideologies as global powers, oversight their political and economic interests and those of their allies. The existing and potential wealth of the region and the manifold ramifications this has for the extra-regional powers is what makes it a region of strategic importance to them.

While many littoral states object to the presence of the superpowers in the region and want to see it become a Zone of Peace free from superpower rivalries etc., there is no united practical plan between them which is persuasive enough to put into effect such a concept. Many do not want just one superpower to dominate the region and there are other states which fear that the withdrawal by both superpowers will create a void and start a competition between the strongest regional powers to dominate the region and threaten its security and stability.

#### Australia's Dependence on the Region

Australia is a member nation of the Indian Ocean littoral and as such is dependent on the viability of the Ocean and the region for sea and air communications links, trade, cultural and political relations, and regional progress to ensure our own development. Any disruptions to the security and development of the region will have repercussions in Australia.