Soviet Policies in the Indian Ocean Area
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The first publicised incursion of the Soviet Navy into the Indian Ocean was as recent as March-April 1968, though this was not the first time Soviet ships had entered the Ocean.

The strength of the fleet is difficult to determine with any accuracy, but it is not such as to 'add up to a vast Soviet fleet cruising hungrily round the ocean.' Nonetheless, it does represent a new factor in the strategic situation in the region.

In this study Dr Millar argues that for the indefinite future the Ocean will be the main maritime thoroughfare between the eastern and western parts of the Soviet state, in part for geographical reasons, in part because the Soviet Union's policies in the Indian Ocean cannot be separated from its policies and strategies throughout the world.

As he says, 'The Soviet ships are not in the Indian Ocean out of concern for the national interests of any state except the Soviet Union'. It is in the light of those interests that he examines the implications of the Soviet actions.
From information that came to notice after this pamphlet was printed it is clear that although there is considerable naval and mercantile marine traffic between European Russia and the eastern seaboard provinces the greater part of the trade is in fact by rail.

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Soviet Policies in the Indian Ocean Area

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SOVIET POLICIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA*

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS and the events of Britain's military withdrawal from the area 'east of Suez' except Hong Kong, and especially from the Indian Ocean where British power was dominant for so long, have coincided with an increasing Soviet interest and involvement in the same area, and indeed an increased Soviet capacity to intervene there.

The first dramatic incursion came as recently as March–April 1968, when a small squadron of the Soviet navy left Vladivostok for a visit to the Indian Ocean. It apparently included a Sverdlov-class cruiser, two guided-missile destroyers, and a submarine. This obviously was not the first time that Soviet naval vessels had entered the Indian Ocean, but it was the first publicised tour by a group of Russian naval ships in recent years. The drama of their visit lay less in what they did and where they went than in what they appeared to presage. Some apprehensive observers saw the visit as inaugurating a Soviet takeover bid for the Indian Ocean—the routes across it, the key points on the periphery, even for the water itself. Others, more sympathetic, have seen it as a normal activity by a great navy, which could yield direct or indirect benefits to the countries of the region. Irrespective of one's emotional reactions, it is surely less surprising that the visit happened than that it did not happen years before.

Since that visit in 1968, the strength of Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean area has fluctuated, although a layman cannot easily write with confidence on the subject. To judge from press reports, it includes, on a continuing basis, several surface combat ships, a number of submarines, fleet maintenance vessels, intelligence ships, space

* Earlier versions of this paper were read to the Institute for Strategic Studies, London, and the Australian Institute of Political Science, Sydney.

1 Variously reported. See Times of India, 4 April 1968.
support ships, hydrographic and oceanographic ships, and tankers. As well there are fishing trawlers, whalers, and merchant ships. These do not add up to a vast Soviet fleet cruising hungrily around the ocean, but they do represent a new factor in the strategic situation in the region, which must be seen in the context of other Soviet activities of a military, political, or commercial nature. From Australia’s point of view, as its Minister for External Affairs has said, there is no need for panic; but there is cause to examine the disadvantages which the Soviet actions may entail, no less than other implications. The Soviet ships are not in the Indian Ocean out of concern for the national interests of any state except the Soviet Union.

One ‘innocent’ Soviet activity which may well increase is the use of the ocean for the recovery of space vehicles. This has already occurred once, with Zond-5 (in September 1968), and may help to explain Soviet interest in Indian port facilities. An ocean provides easier and safer recovery than does the land, and there are advantages in having the water warm. Space support vessels are usually deployed, especially in the western and south-western Indian Ocean, during major Soviet space activities, presumably because orbits which provide maximum overflight of the U.S.S.R. traverse the south-western reaches of the Indian Ocean.

Yet the size and nature of Soviet naval and political activities suggest much more than preparations for an occasional pick up of a space vehicle. Soviet policies in the Indian Ocean area cannot be separated from Soviet policies elsewhere. The Soviet Union is a world power—a ‘super power’—and by far the largest in the world geographically, stretching through 170° of longitude from the Baltic to the Pacific. Whether or not there is a grand design in Soviet strategy, we must assume a degree of common purpose in the various activities. Soviet policies at the north end of the Suez Canal cannot be separated from policies at the south end and in the Persian Gulf; dealings with India and Pakistan react upon each other. Except for a few brief weeks of the year when a northern route is possible, the western Soviet Union

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2 The then Australian Minister for External Affairs, Mr Freeth, was more confident when he said on 12 August 1969 that the Soviet flotilla in the Indian Ocean at no time consisted of more than twelve ships in all, including seven fighting vessels. Compare this with a report by the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies that in December 1969 there were twenty-five to thirty Soviet vessels in the area. *Soviet Seapower* (Washington, 1969), p. 63.

3 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (House of Representatives), 14 August 1969, p. 312.
with the seat of government—the political centre of gravity—and with large centres of population and industry, is in maritime terms half a world away, through alien seas, from its eastern provinces. The importance in this context of the Suez Canal and the Strait of Malacca is obvious, and particularly at a time when the eastern Soviet Union is considered to be under threat from the Chinese People’s Republic. A glance at a map shows how strategically precarious is the naval base at Vladivostok, and the railway supplying it. The greater part of the trade between European Russia and the eastern seaboard provinces is by ship. Unlike Panama, neither Suez nor the Malacca Strait is under American control.

The Indian Ocean has traditionally been of less interest to the Russians than has the Atlantic, the Pacific, or the Mediterranean, but access to it has had a place in Russian thinking at different times. A good proportion of British defence and diplomatic effort in India during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was devoted to containing Russian pressures southwards. In a secret protocol to the 1940 four-power pact arranged but never signed between the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, and Japan, the Soviet government stated that ‘its territorial aspirations center south of the national territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean’. And a memorandum from Schulemburg, German Ambassador in Moscow, to his Foreign Office on 26 November 1940, reported that the Soviet government accepted the treaty draft ‘provided that the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf is recognized as the center of the aspirations of the Soviet Union’. Iran (Persia) has been periodically subjected to Russian intervention and occupation, and after World War II Soviet forces were evacuated only after pressure was brought to bear in the United Nations Security Council.

It cannot be said that Imperial Russia or the Soviet Union has made a major effort to obtain a direct outlet into the Indian Ocean; but for the indefinite future that Ocean will remain the major maritime thoroughfare between the eastern and western parts of the Soviet state. Traditionally it is an alien sea, dominated by often unfriendly powers; can we be surprised that the Russians now seek to make it less alien, more friendly? The Soviet Union is now patently attempting, with some success, to gain positions of economic, political, and military strength in the region. These activities are not necessarily improper, but they do show

a pattern of interest and endeavour of which other nations must take account.

THE DETAIL of these activities is more easily recorded than the policies they represent. There have been recent expressions of policy, both towards the region and towards the use of naval power; there have also been changes in capacity to deploy power far away from the Soviet homeland, which we must try to interpret.

In a speech to the Supreme Soviet on 27 June 1968, the Foreign Minister (Mr Gromyko) said inter alia:

... the military might of imperialism is ... successfully contained, by the might created by the Soviet people. ... The example of the United States shows that the policy based on 'positions of strength,' which has been a sort of gospel for the forces of aggression since the days of Dulles, is incapable of solving the problems confronting imperialism and only multiplies and aggravates them. ...

The Soviet Union has frequently confronted the major western powers for the sake of defending the cause of national liberation and independence ... every liberation action of the peoples ... always find support in Soviet foreign policy. ... Equal rights at all sectors and in all spheres of activity in the international arena, including the adoption of measures to protect the vital interests of the Soviet Union, its allies and friends; no discrimination in world trade; extensive exchange of the scientific technological and cultural values; freedom of navigation for our ships and fleets, and no less than for the ships and fleets of any other power—all this determines our possibility and responsibilities in world affairs.5

While this may all sound reasonable enough, it leaves the Russians to decide what constitutes the 'cause of national liberation and independence' in any instance, and the post-war history of Eastern Europe offers no reassurance on the point; it leaves unstated the 'vital interests' of the Soviet Union or of the Soviet Union's allies and friends; it does not say in which additional areas the Russian ships and fleets would like freedom of navigation. The main lesson the Soviet Union appears to have learned from the 'failure' of American 'positions of strength' policy (not to mention the failure of its own in Indonesia) has been the value of establishing or seeking Soviet positions of strength in a range of hospitable places from the Mediterranean to the Pacific.

At the world conference of communist parties in Moscow on 7 June 1969, Mr Brezhnev made his reverberating reference to the need for a

collective security system in Asia. What did he have in mind? All we can say with the hindsight of eight months is that he was floating a rather nebulous idea in order to get a response and so give the idea shape and substance. Speaking at the United Nations on 19 September, Mr Gromyko said that his country, being not only a European but also an Asian state, is

ready to take part in consultations and exchanges of views on all questions concerning the proposal for a collective security system in Asia so that an atmosphere of enduring peace and good-neighbourliness can prevail in that region.

The reactions of the countries in the area were initially most restrained but have since become more sympathetic in some cases. In India, the Prime Minister reacted warily, rejecting any military alliances for the region, but the Foreign Minister on a subsequent visit to Moscow was reported to have said that the proposal was in line with Indian policies. Pakistan saw the anti-Chinese implications of the proposal, which thus pointed up a dilemma in her own foreign policy. The Indonesian newspaper *Nusantara* said on 17 June that the major aim of the Soviet leaders was 'the expansion of Soviet influence in this part of the world', but Indonesian officials—perhaps mindful of the huge financial debt to the Soviet Union—subsequently indicated a cautious interest, without apparently being clear what the proposition entailed. The Australian attitude was similar. Most reactions have implied uncertainty as to whose interest—indeed, whose 'enduring peace'—the Soviet Union is trying to promote. The Chinese People's Republic has viewed the proposal with demonstrable and continuing hostility, seeing it as something 'picked up from the garbage heap of John Foster Dulles', a 'sinister plot', a 'tool for pushing further the [Soviet] social-imperialist policy of aggression and expansion in Asia'. The Chinese government saw the scheme as being directed against itself, and this is the most reasonable interpretation. The Soviet Union is aware of the strong

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*We are of the opinion that the course of events is also putting on the agenda the task of creating a system of collective security in Asia.* L. Brezhnev, *For Greater Unity of Communists, For a Fresh Upsurge of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle* (Moscow, Novosti, 1969), p. 53.


The speech by the Australian Minister for External Affairs on 14 August 1969 set the Brezhnev proposal, and Australia's relations with the Soviet Union, in the context that Communist China provided the 'most likely' threat to the security of the area. A commentary on *Radio Moscow* on 10 June said that the Brezhnev proposal was a preferable alternative to the CENTO and SEATO alliances.
fears of China held in South and South-East Asia, and it is entirely logical that she should seek to exploit these in order to limit Chinese influence in the area, increase her own influence, and with a minimum outlay strengthen the military capacity of the states on China's southern boundary at a time when the Sino-Soviet border (7,395 kilometres long) is under dangerous tension.

It would also be reasonable to assume that the Soviet Union seeks to replace American and British influence whenever this can be done at reasonable cost and with expectation of profit, or at least to take advantage of the almost total British withdrawal and the substantial American disengagement now in progress. On the whole, the reactions to Soviet diplomatic and economic initiatives, as distinct from the naval presence and the proposals for a security system, have been favourable (see below). And the Soviet Union must have been heartened by its successful intervention at Tashkent in the affairs of the Indian sub-continent, leading to the situation where it is the principal supplier of arms to India and an important supplier to Pakistan, with corresponding—if not necessarily proportional—influence on the foreign policies of the two states. The Soviet government could be forgiven for believing that successful initiatives of this kind might be possible elsewhere in the region, might act as a force for stability, and substitute Soviet friendship, influence, or power for that of Britain, China, or the United States.

Increased Soviet military capacity and diplomatic interest in the whole area east of Suez has followed the unsuccessful attempt to install nuclear missiles on Cuba. Probably there is a causal relationship. The humiliation of October 1962 demonstrated the weakness of inferior power deployed at a distance. The Russians may have drawn the inference not to deploy power at a distance in confrontation with the United States, but they certainly have increased their capacity to operate at a distance and thus to reduce the risks of humiliation should they decide to intervene. As the Soviet Foreign Minister said on 10 July 1969:

... as a major world power with extensively developed international contacts the Soviet Union cannot regard passively events which though territorially remote, nevertheless have a bearing on our security and the security of our friends.\textsuperscript{11}

The Soviet Union has come rather tardily to realise the world-wide opportunities provided by its power, but it has come.

\textsuperscript{11} A. A. Gromyko, \textit{International Situation and Soviet Foreign Policy} (Moscow, Novosti, 1969), pp. 4–5.
Although the Soviet activities in the Indian Ocean area in recent times have comprised much more than the maritime presence, that presence has lent point and thrust to the political and economic ventures. The days of 'gunboat diplomacy', using the term in its widest sense of employing naval power to reinforce diplomatic effort, are not over and are never likely to be; some fairly crude versions were employed in the sixties.

Navies are potential or actual instruments of foreign policy; they do not customarily have foreign policies of their own different from those of their governments, but they do customarily have policies—about their own nature and role—which may differ in some respects from government thinking, have implications for foreign policy and, in particular instances or with particular officers, come to constitute foreign policy. The Soviet navy is no exception to these generalisations, but the outsider cannot distinguish the nuances of naval policy as easily as with the navy of a Western power.

A world-wide role for the Soviet navy has developed only very recently. What the Soviet Naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Gorshkov, called 'the ingrained habit of thinking about defensive categories in the strategic plan, and the coastal scales of operations' dominated Soviet government thinking about the nature of the navy and its area of operations until well after World War II. Preoccupied with a cataclysmic land struggle, the Russian leaders believed that 'co-operation with the ground forces on defence and offence was the primary mission' of the fleet; they virtually ignored the problem of defending sea communications beyond the range of land-based aircraft, and assumed that any enemy capital ships would come of their own accord or be lured into combat near the Soviet coastline and bases. After the war, Stalin set in motion a large naval construction program, including heavy surface vessels (Sverdlov cruisers, etc.) and submarines, but—astonishingly enough—no aircraft carriers, and thus no air cover to his 'fleet for the open ocean'. Amphibious forces whose value had been demonstrated conclusively during the war, were also ignored.


13 Erickson states that four carriers were in the 1947 program, but construction
Only after the death of Stalin was big ship construction abandoned and a sophisticated naval strategy developed. As in the United States, the hidden flexibility of the missile-firing submarine made it (potentially at first) the main strategic deterrent and this upgraded the navy in the defence system. A large submarine fleet was built, including nuclear-propelled vessels and ones firing missiles with nuclear warheads, capable of attacking an enemy homeland, his lines of communication, and his surface ships and submarines. Surface-to-surface missiles were installed in a range of ships, including large motor boats.

The missile was to be the alternative to and the destroyer of the aircraft carrier, and surface-to-air missiles were developed for anti-aircraft purposes. Stalin's surface fleet was not scrapped, but retained both to provide 'comprehensive combat support' and to contribute to flottenpolitik. Anti-submarine warfare became the left arm of the submarine deterrent, and prompted the building during the 1960s of the first concession to naval-air requirements: two combination helicopter carriers and guided missile cruisers, Moskva and Leningrad. The Naval Infantry (Marine corps) was re-established in 1964, and presumably could be deployed from a ship like the Moskva. 'Float support'—with ships carrying supplies or with workshop repair facilities—has been developed rapidly.

According to Erickson, 'all Soviet statements impute to Soviet “seapower” the capacity to deny absolute control of the seas but not to implement “command of the seas”'. Yet the idea of a 'naval presence' has also become prominent, supplementing the strategic defensive and offensive roles. The fleet, Gorshkov said, 'is also able to support state interests at sea in peacetime'. Further:

With the growth in the economic might of the Soviet Union have come ever expanding interests in the seas and oceans, so new requirements never began on them. Gorshkov has justified this decision, post hoc, by pointing out that submarine-launched missiles are superior strategic weapons to those of carrier-borne aircraft.

The fact that the U.S. Polaris fleet first began to pose a serious threat to the nuclear balance with the U.S.S.R. in the early 1960s no doubt helped change the Soviet leadership's philosophy about the kind of navy needed and the role it should have.

14 Jane's Fighting Ships 1969–70 (London, Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1969), p. 78, states that 'it would not be very surprising, after the experience gained with the building of this ship and her sister, if the Soviet Navy came up with a medium sized vehicle for VTOL aircraft which would vie in utility with some of the bigger fixed-wing carriers possessed by other powers'.

15 'The Evolution of Soviet Naval Thinking . . .', p. 88.
have been imposed on the Navy to protect those interests against the encroachments of the imperialists.\textsuperscript{16}

Where and what are those expanding interests? The current edition of \textit{Jane's Fighting Ships},\textsuperscript{17} the most authoritative unofficial publication about the world's navies, has reported editorially:

The latest and most formidable Soviet warships have in fact been seen all along, and off, the long sea routes from the Baltic round the Cape to Vladivostok. . . . Britain in her heyday had a similar chain of warships all the way from the English Channel . . . across the Indian Ocean, through the Straits of Malacca and along the coasts of South East Asia and China to, and up, the Yangtse River, and on to Dairen, to secure her physical and intangible interests. Britain has unshackled the chain and the Soviet Union has picked up the links.\textsuperscript{18}

Some additional 'links', of Soviet construction, appear to have been inserted recently. The London \textit{Times} naval correspondent reported last December that the Soviet navy has been laying mooring buoys over a wide area of the Indian Ocean—180 miles off the Seychelles, off Mauritius, 120 miles south-west of Malagasy (Madagascar), and in the Arabian Sea. The correspondent suggested that these could provide 'semi-permanent bases', with supply and repair facilities for Soviet submarines operating in the area, in somewhat the same way that the United States navy uses its anchorage at Holy Loch, Scotland.\textsuperscript{19} While there is a big difference between a buoy and a base, presumably the buoys are not there just as navigational aids.

The Soviet merchant navy, \textit{Morflot}, is one of the largest in the world—it will be the largest before long—and is certainly the most modern. It is as much an arm of Soviet defence and foreign policy as is the Soviet navy. There is also a considerable fishing fleet, some of whose components are used for other purposes. \textit{Jane's} lists nineteen intelligence or observation trawlers, and many of these have been sighted by British and American warships during international combined sea and air exercises. The Soviet oceanographic and hydrographic fleet is reputedly larger than that of all other countries added together; there have been

\textsuperscript{16} 'The Development of Soviet Naval Science', p. 42.

\textsuperscript{17} P. 78. According to \textit{Jane's}, the Soviet Navy includes 65 nuclear-powered submarines, 320 diesel-driven submarines, 2 helicopter cruisers, 25 cruisers, 100 destroyers, 100 escorts, 275 patrol vessels, 350 minesweepers, 125 missile boats, 350 torpedo boats, 230 landing ships, and several thousand support ships, auxiliaries, and service craft.

\textsuperscript{18} An English professor told me that a Soviet official had said to him: 'Where you move out, we move in.'

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{The Times}, 18 December 1969.
numerous reports of sightings of these vessels in the Indian Ocean, including near the Australian coast.

The Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean is virtually without competition. A conservative British government, if one is returned at the next election, might maintain a limited naval and even military presence in the area, but it would still be slight. The United States has a small surface squadron based on the Persian Gulf, and some Polaris submarines based on Guam and in communication with the radio station at North West Cape, Western Australia. The American government appears to have rejected the advice of its admirals and decided not to engage in naval competition with the Russians west of Singapore. The Australian navy is rarely seen in the Indian Ocean, and the government has moved with tortoise-like deliberation to have naval facilities on the west coast. The combat portion of South Africa's navy comprises two destroyers and six frigates, although three submarines are under construction. The largest regional navy is that of India, but it is only slightly bigger than Australia's and in no sense competes with the Soviet navy.

Thus, even now, the Soviet Union probably has the most effective conventional naval strength in the whole Indian Ocean area, relatively modest though that strength may be. At present, crews can be exchanged only at sea, at Aden, or at Mauritius (see below). Only about half of the Soviet submarine fleet has long-range capabilities, and geographic and climatic factors limit Soviet access to the open oceans and prevent rapid reinforcement and resupply. What it particularly lacks in the Indian Ocean is air strike capacity, but for flottenpolitik such capacity is probably unnecessary, and no other country is operating aircraft carriers in the Ocean. Long-range air transports have been developed, capable of bringing quick ground reinforcements from the Soviet Union. In the Mediterranean, the Russians have negotiated the use of local airfields in friendly countries. May they not do (or have done) the same in the Indian Ocean? If or when the Suez Canal is open, the Soviet Union will be the nearest great power to the Indian Ocean. It has a strong interest in the reopening of the Canal: from the Black Sea to Bombay is seven thousand miles longer by the Cape than through the Canal.

There are four areas of great international strategic importance in the Indian Ocean: the Suez Canal and Red Sea passage, the Persian Gulf and the general region of oil-producing states, the sub-continent after which the ocean is named and which dominates the northern half of
The ocean, and the Malay archipelago with its narrow straits leading into the western Pacific.\footnote{Two other points of entry—via the Cape of Good Hope and south of Western Australia—are much more open and can be bypassed.}

The Soviet Union has unquestionably become the dominant external power in the Suez-Red Sea area. The United Arab Republic (Egypt), while having little ideological sympathy with Soviet communism, depends wholly on Soviet military aid if it is to fulfil by force the national objectives for which it sees force as the only means—the defeat of Israel. According to reports,\footnote{Widely reported, and acknowledged by official Egyptian sources. Note especially Robert E. Hunter, \textit{The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East. Part I: Problems of Commitment} (London, Institute for Strategic Studies Adelphi Papers No. 59, 1969). See also Alvin J. Cottrell, 'Soviet-Egyptian Relations', in the U.S. \textit{Military Review}, December 1969. General Dayan, the Israeli Minister for Defence, has claimed that Soviet advisers are now taking 'an active part' in Egyptian military operations against Israel, even as much as directing Egyptian aircraft (\textit{International Herald Tribune}, 13 October 1969).} Soviet military advisers pervade the Egyptian armed forces, down to battalion level in the army and to smaller units in the navy and air force. The Soviet navy has reportedly been given access to facilities at Alexandria, Port Said, and Suez.\footnote{See \textit{New York Times}, 15 January 1968.} Soviet military aircraft make use of Egyptian airfields from time to time.

In view of the interesting additional roles given to some Soviet fishing vessels (if for no other reason), the Russian construction of a new fishing port in the Gulf of Suez must be viewed with some suspicion. In Jordan, the Soviet Union had no success with its offers of aid until 1968, when Amman agreed to accept economic assistance for a number of 'maritime' projects, thereby presumably providing a rationale for some form of Soviet access to the Gulf of Aqaba. In the Yemen, the Russians built a new port at Hodeida, have access to those facilities, and have been the main supplier of arms—directly or by Egyptian proxy—to the Republican forces.\footnote{See \textit{East African Reporter}, 8 March 1968.} Soviet aircraft, manned by Russians, even made a brief intervention in the Yemeni civil war. The Soviet government recently signed an agreement to improve the harbour and docks at Aden. It has become the main supplier of arms to the Sudan, whose revolutionary government includes prominent communists. Russians have rebuilt the port at Berbera, on the Somali coast of the Gulf of Aden.

We do not know the reason—if there is a single reason—for these activities, but Soviet interest in the Indian Ocean for purposes already
suggested is sufficient cause for seeking to reopen the Canal and to dominate it when it is open. The Soviet Union may not wish to see a renewal of the Arab-Israel conflict on the scale of earlier conflicts: Israel just might once again achieve a massive pre-emptive destruction of Soviet equipment, might force the overthrow of the Nasser government, and the war could lead to a Soviet/American confrontation. The Soviet government would probably prefer attrition and negotiation to effect change, yet it has made it possible for the Arab states to contemplate renewing the war, perhaps if only to reopen the Canal. By its physical presence in Egypt, the eastern Mediterranean, and elsewhere, the Soviet Union has complicated for Israel and for other interested governments the responses they may wish to make to any new Arab initiatives. It would seem that the Russians will be able to maintain their position in Egypt only so long as the Egyptians need them. Just how much the Soviet Union can influence Egyptian policy in any particular circumstances will always be open to doubt. Oil constitutes a further reason for Soviet interest in this region, and even more in the Persian Gulf (although the two cannot be separated). The Soviet Union is itself the world's second largest oil producer, with extensive published proved reserves, and is even an oil exporter. However, responsible observers consider that by 1980 Soviet domestic demand may well exceed production by about a hundred million tons a year. Further, there is economic and political advantage in exporting oil to Eastern and Western Europe (as it now does) while importing it from the Middle East.

Although this area provides more than half the oil imports of Western Europe, 90 percent of Japan's, and nearly two-thirds of Australia's, a majority of Western commentators appear to consider that the Soviet Union is unlikely to use force or political pressure to interrupt the flow

If the Canal were reopened, Egypt would in due course regain her revenues from it, and thus not need the subsidies currently given by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Libya. These subsidies have probably been a factor in the greatly reduced Egyptian aid to revolutionary movements in a number of Arab countries including the small states of the Persian Gulf.

This has been the case also in the Lebanon. Note the different American responses during the crisis of October 1969 (almost nil) and that of 1958 (physical intervention).


Hunter, Oil and the Persian Gulf, p. 3.
of Arabian and Iranian oil to the West. To do so would risk a confrontation with the United States, would antagonise the oil states, whose incomes depend on these sales, and would send the West to alternative sources. The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe could not take more than a fraction of the Middle East oil production, and the Western marketing organisations would render impossible Western import of Soviet-sponsored Middle East oil. To embark on crude Soviet imperialism in the area would subject the Russians to all the problems encountered by the British, for only limited strategic advantage.

On the other hand, a majority of western commentators also acknowledge that the Soviet government is taking an increasing commercial, political, and military interest in the region, and that it will undoubtedly be the dominant power there when the British forces withdraw. Although its relations with successive Iraqi governments seem to be subject to the same fluctuations as those governments have with their predecessors and with other states, the Soviet Union has supplied the greater part of Iraq's military equipment, and has apparently negotiated naval access to facilities at the port of Umm Qasr. In 1967, it agreed to supply Iran with arms to the value of $U.S.110 million. It has negotiated agreements with both Iran and Iraq for the acquisition of oil and natural gas, in return for Soviet investment in the necessary pipe lines, in heavy industry, and (in Irak) in oil exploration, extraction, and marketing. It opposed the British plan for a Union of Arab Emirates (among the small states under British protection until 1971), but has not yet actively sought to undermine this fragile structure.

None of this demonstrates cause for alarm, and yet the situation is patently changing to one in which the Soviet Union, if it so wished, could do considerable damage to Western interests by encouraging the nationalisation of Western oil companies, or at least by entering into competition with them. The encouragement of instability—the traditional Soviet policy—would lead to uncertainty in oil supplies, and could

28 Hunter, *Oil and the Persian Gulf*, p. 15.
29 According to the Georgetown study (*The Gulf*, p. 64), Britain earns approximately $U.S.500 million annually from its Gulf oil investments; the United States earnings are probably somewhat less. There are additional balance of payments advantages (such as the sale of oil for important hard currencies). Oil states hold sizeable sterling balances in Britain (about £500 million). In November 1969 the government of South Yemen (Aden) nationalised thirty-six foreign firms involved in banking, stevedoring, foreign trade, insurance, and the marketing of petroleum products. In October 1968 the government of Peru expropriated the assets of the American-owned International Petroleum Company, valued at $U.S.200 million.
provide the rationale for physical intervention by Soviet forces conveniently at hand. Opportunity is a great corrupter.

Among the many complications for any single external power operating in the area are the international claims and frictions: the Iran/Iraq dispute over access to the Shatt al 'Arab River, Iran's claim to Bahrain and its interest in Kuwait; Iraq's claim to Kuwait; Saudi Arabia's claim to the Buraimi Oasis (part in Abu Dhabi and part in Muscat and Oman). These have been held in check in good measure by the British military and political presence. As the British depart, the Russians may feel impelled (where they are not invited) to protect the weak states against the strong, perhaps to take the spirit and lessons and benefits of Tashkent into the Iraq/Iran dispute, or even to adopt the British role of a pervading, restraining military presence in order to maximise (its own) commercial activity.

Is the Gulf relevant for other Soviet activities to the south and east? Communications through Iran and Iraq are still too primitive for substantial commercial operations, yet their development, especially through Iran, must be considered possible. It is much more likely that the Soviet Union will seek to replace the British in some of the existing naval and perhaps military facilities, or by off-shore deployment, not so much to provide strategic links to the Far East as to provide strategic dominance of the Gulf itself.

**IF A SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE in the Gulf is at present more potential—even perhaps hypothetical—than actual, its presence in the Indian sub-continent is real enough. Soviet assistance has been promised to improve the port of Gwadar in West Pakistan, on the northern shore of the Gulf of Oman. Indian reports claim that this goes much further than a fishing port, and involves the creation of a naval base. Soviet**

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50 Most of the British forces will be out by 1971, although it is still intended to maintain a staying post at Masirah.

51 E.g. *The Statesman*, 29 June 1969. *The Asian Recorder* of 13–19 August 1969, pp. 9074–5, claims that it was stated in Rawalpindi on 29 June that President Yahya Khan's government had revived, with Soviet assistance, a 5-year old project to give Pakistan a second major port on the west coast for the use of its growing navy, in a position (Gwadar) strategically commanding the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Later reports (ibid., 17–23 September, p. 9133) said that India had challenged Russia to deny that Pakistan was to be supplied with Soviet submarines, and that Gwadar was to be developed as a base able to accommodate and service submarines of the Soviet fleet. The Soviet government denied any such intentions, but India recalled that the Soviet Union had also previously denied any plans to provide arms to Pakistan, and yet was now doing so.
arms have been provided to Pakistan, including replacements for Chinese arms of Soviet design, but full details have not been made public. It may or may not be significant that the head of the 1968 Pakistani mission negotiating the arms deal with Moscow has since become his country's President.

Soviet military aid to Pakistan was presumably designed primarily to improve the Soviet position in Pakistan and provide a counter-attraction to Communist China, as well as to keep the India-Pakistan balance under Soviet guidance. It was immensely irritating to India, yet the Indian government was publicly less angry than in the case of earlier western military aid to Pakistan.

Since the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, when the United States and Britain cut off arms supplies to both countries, the Soviet Union has become the principal supplier of arms generally to India, including aircraft and helicopters for use in the northern mountainous region. A factory producing MiG-21s has been built in India and is now operational. India has received at least two Soviet submarines, a number of escorts, torpedo boats, patrol boats, and landing craft. The Russians have been helping to adapt the east coast naval base of Vishakhapatnam to take Soviet-type submarines—and who will be able to tell whether they are ships of the Indian navy or the Soviet navy? More and more Indian officers (and, of necessity, crews) are undergoing training in the Soviet Union.

So much is established, but there have been reports, in responsible journals, of much more. When Admiral Gorshkov visited India in February 1968, he was widely believed to be seeking to negotiate access to share repair and supply facilities in return for Soviet aid to the Indian Navy. Within the last three or four years, India has expanded the naval facilities at Port Blair, at the southern end of the Andaman Islands. There have been various reports that Gorshkov (or the Soviet government by a process of negotiation) sought and obtained access to Port Blair, and on the west coast of India to Mormugao, Bombay, and Cochin.32

The Indian government has strongly denied that the Soviet government has been offered or accorded 'bases' in India, but this is not

32 See Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 15 December 1968; Baltimore Sun, 2 April 1968; Yomiuri Shimbun, 30 September 1968; Christian Science Monitor, 22 May 1969. The last of these quotes the Minister for Defence, Mr Swaran Singh: 'We have only offered the Russians the port facilities that we have given the warships of Britain, the United States, and other countries.' In view of what Britain has enjoyed, this appears a major admission.
seriously questioned. Access to repair and other facilities, in other words access to someone else's base—which the Soviet Union apparently has in India—is in many ways preferable to having your own base in his territory. And one can hardly imagine an Indian base, handling Indian and Soviet ships of Soviet origin, which did not include for several years sizeable numbers of Soviet technicians and managerial staff. These are undoubtedly present now at Vishakhapatnam.

This is not to suggest that India has become in any way a 'satellite' of the Soviet Union. The Indian government clearly has no wish to be dependent on or be influenced by any outside power; it seeks no military alliances, and wants no foreign bases on its territory or in its neighbourhood. But in the light of British and American policies, India probably feels it has no alternative to seeking assistance from the Soviet Union against any major threat from Communist China, the only nuclear power in Asia, with which it shares a long, uncertain, and unhappy border.

Although Soviet arms have been supplied to Burma (as have arms from the United States and Japan), it is not being suggested that the Soviet Union has sought or obtained a special position there. And Soviet initiatives towards Ceylon would presumably depend for their success on a change of government in Colombo.

Since 1966, the Soviet Union has established diplomatic and trade relations with Malaysia and Singapore. It is the largest purchaser of Malaysian rubber—in 1968 it bought 240,000 tons, about 20 per cent of total production—and is reported to have offered a variety of Soviet arms on long-term credit. Yet for obvious reasons the Russians have been more interested in Singapore. A joint shipping agency has been established; a commercial air agreement has been negotiated. Singapore shipyards are now being used to repair Soviet trawlers. There have been reports that the Soviet government sought permission to develop an island near Singapore for bunkering and supplying Soviet vessels, but this was refused; again, that they seek to lease part of the naval base when the British have finally left. The Singapore government cannot want to see the Soviet Union as the principal power in its vicinity, but it has declared an interest in having both the Soviet Union and Japan (as well as the U.S.) make use of Singapore's facilities. Among the states of South-East Asia, Singapore probably expresses more fear of Communist China than any other, and perhaps the Soviet Union is

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"See speech by the Singapore Foreign Minister, Mr Rajaratnam, to United Nations correspondents in New York, 14 October 1969. Straits Times, 15 October 1969."
seen as a potential countervailing power. If, as is not inconceivable, the Russians become major arms suppliers to Malaysia, and if they obtain naval repair facilities at Singapore, the strategic balance in this most strategically-placed corner of Asia will have changed radically.

In Indonesia, the Soviet Union has not regained the position it held briefly in the early 1960s. The government of President Suharto, despite its massive inherited debts to Moscow and its dependence on Soviet spare parts for its military equipment, has taken a firm anti-communist line. It seeks no military alliances with a great power, and in so far as it is subject to influence by external aiding countries, has to take account of the policies of Japan, the United States, the Netherlands, or even Australia, as well as of the Soviet Union.

Soviet merchant shipping lines have invaded the Europe-Far East shipping routes, offering cut-price rates. By such tactics the Baltic Steamship Company forced its way into the Europe-Australia shipping conference. In this respect it has both captured a small corner of the trade and been captured (temporarily, perhaps) by the major operators. Australian foreign policy, despite some pre-election declamations by the government in late 1969, is moving into a slightly more flexible relationship with the Soviet Union. As Mr Gromyko said in his speech of 10 July 1969, 'Definite prerequisites and possibilities exist for improving our relations with Australia.'

Elsewhere on the Indian Ocean periphery, the Russians have not been inactive. They have probably been most irresponsible in the Somali Republic, providing the arms and stimulus to Somali irridentist operations against Ethiopia on the one side and Kenya on the other. We do not know the price obtained for helping expand port facilities in Mogadishu. Uganda has been given a number of MiG fighters, for which pilots have been trained in the U.S.S.R. In Tanzania, the Soviet Union competes with China, Israel, and several other states for political influence and access to the port at Zanzibar. There have been rather nebulous but persistent reports of Soviet interest in Mauritius, and some of its outer islands. The Indian national press agency, Press Trust of India, reported on 11 December 1969 that the Indian and Mauritian Foreign

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32 International Situation and Soviet Foreign Policy, p. 51.

30 E.g. Sydney Morning Herald, 29 March and 20 October 1969.
Ministers had met and discussed *inter alia* the question of a Soviet naval base in the Indian Ocean.\(^37\)

**This is** by no means a complete account. Yet it cannot be assumed that Soviet interests are inevitably in conflict or incompatible with Western interests. Much of the economic aid going to developing countries, including those in the Indian Ocean area, is complementary to that from Western countries, not competitive with it. The Soviet initiative at Tashkent was a real contribution to the stability and security of the sub-continent, at least in the short term. Soviet military aid is invariably accompanied by or is an adjunct of economic and technical assistance, training places for students at Soviet institutions, cultural exchanges, etc. So, obviously, is American military aid, and that of smaller donors such as Britain, West Germany, or France. The Russians run into the same kinds of problems as other aid-giving states—incompatibility, lack of aid-receiving facilities, red tape, neighbourhood disputes. They do not always find the recipients particularly appreciative. They have no magic formula for translating aid into influence. Their diplomacy can be blundering, insensitive, even counter-productive. It can also be intelligent, sensitive, and productive; it can be blunt, crude and powerful. Here is a super-power feeling the extensiveness of its superiority.

We do not know with any certainty what Soviet objectives are in the Indian Ocean area, but it would be irresponsible for the governments concerned to base their policies on the best possible interpretation of Soviet actions. It is entirely reasonable and by no means the worst possible interpretation that the Russians seek:

1. to be in a position to exercise effective influence over both ends of the Suez-Red Sea passage: this must strengthen their strategic and diplomatic-negotiating position;

2. to replace the United Kingdom as the dominant external power in the Arabian peninsula and Persian Gulf area: the Western oil companies and half of the West’s oil supplies are then in a measure hostages to Soviet political and economic policies;

\(^37\) *Canberra Times*, 12 December 1969. Perhaps the most important aspect of Soviet-Mauritian relations will stem from the agreement on Soviet aid to set up a joint fishing industry in Mauritius. The protocol to the negotiations of 11–26 August 1969 reads in part: ‘The Mauritian delegation views with favour the desire of the Soviet Union for the provision of services to Soviet fishing vessels in the port of Port Louis, including loading and unloading facilities, current and emergency repair work, provision of fresh water, fuel and food supplies and for the replacement of crews of Soviet fishing vessels brought to Mauritius by Soviet airplanes of “Aeroflot”.’ (Official transcript.)
3. under Soviet ‘protection’, to foster self-defence and co-operative defence against China, in India, Pakistan, and South-East Asia;

4. to obtain positions of political and military strength throughout the whole region, in order to exercise control over sea routes between the Western and Eastern Soviet Union, and be able to influence the policies of local governments towards Soviet ends in a crisis or at other times of decision;

5. to provide arms to local governments to foster these ends, and to weaken or destroy the influence of competitive powers or ideologies;

6. to keep watch on American naval activities, especially Polaris submarines; and

7. to ensure increased access to certain raw materials, to trade extensively and profitably within the region, and to use trade for political ends if the occasion arises.

No one would wish to see a continuing, competitive escalation of Soviet and American naval forces in the Indian Ocean, with the possibility of confrontation. One could perhaps interpret American statements and actions, however, as implying an acknowledgment that they are prepared to concede in some parts of the area a superior Soviet interest or even sphere of influence; in other parts, they may seek to co-exist. Although in the eastern Mediterranean the United States and its NATO allies have greater strength, they do not extend that strength to the south and south-west. In the north-east of Africa, and in the Persian Gulf area, there is no indication that the United States will contest Soviet initiatives. In India and Pakistan, the United States is the most important supplier of non-military aid, the Soviet Union of military aid: it is hard to say which affords greater influence, although one can for a period fight a war without money whereas one cannot fight it without arms. The United States has interests in the Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia area, but will presumably not physically dispute gradually increased Soviet interest or influence there. The Soviet Union may well prefer to see the United States bearing much of the burden of ‘containing’ Communist China, but will have to consider the alternatives if American disengagement becomes more nearly total. The Soviet Union no doubt wants to establish a firm claim to be considered an Asian power, as a means of gaining access to Afro-Asian councils, and as well to convince the Asian countries that it can be a valuable ally in opening up new policy options for them.

Should the countries in the region be fearful of these developments? Should they accept any arrangements made, explicitly or implicitly by
the great powers? There may not be very much they can do about them. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 occasioned very little reaction in the United States, and a surprisingly delayed and muted reaction in Britain and France, largely because of an implicit acceptance of the division of Europe into an area of Soviet predominance in the East and an area of American predominance in the West. In some respects these alignments appear looser than ever, but Soviet policies—as epitomised by the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty for 'socialist' states—appear no more flexible in the final resort. Spheres of influence are highly convenient arrangements for the major powers concerned. They may contribute to overall stability. They can be less congenial, perhaps, to the small states so disposed of. When the Soviet troops march home from Eastern Europe, small states everywhere, including the Indian Ocean area, may feel able to view with less suspicion Soviet expressions of concern, offers of aid, and diplomacy against the silhouette of naval power.