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

Walter C. Ladwig III

Abstract: In recent years the Indian Ocean has received significant attention from the defence-intellectual community in the United States. However, the actual strategic importance of the region to US interests is less clear. In an environment of fiscal austerity, if commitments abroad are not firmly linked to interests, any significant involvement in a region of secondary concern could contribute to ‘imperial overstretch’. The ‘Neo-Nixon Doctrine’ outlined here calibrates American interests and regional commitments by devolving primary responsibility for regional security to the major democratic powers in the Indian Ocean, whom the US would bolster with aid and advice.

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

Although arguments about American decline in the popular press are frequently overstated, in an environment of geopolitical uncertainty and fiscal austerity, attempting to do more with less requires national security strategies that clearly distinguish the nation’s vital interests from issues of secondary concern. Even a country that continues to think of itself as being the indispensable nation must recognise that not

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every development abroad affects an important US security interest. Excessive activity in a region of marginal national interest can stimulate resentment, squander scarce resources and contribute to over-extension.

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

Indian Ocean: centre stage or regional sideshow?

Ever since Robert Kaplan declared the Indian Ocean to be the 'centre stage' of global politics in the 21st century, it has become the region *du jour* for US national security analysts.⁶ This has led to a proliferation of workshops and reports on Indian Ocean security from the think tanks and professional military education institutions that make up the American defence-intellectual establishment.⁷ As a tangible sign of the shift in American thinking, the current US maritime strategy has reoriented the navy and the marine corps' traditional two-ocean focus on the Atlantic and the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.⁸

The arguments in favour of the region's importance are well known. The 30 nations that constitute its littoral region contain one-third of the world's population, as well as 55 per cent of the world's proven oil reserves, 35 per cent of its gas, 40 per cent of its gold, 60 per cent of its uranium and 80 per cent of its diamonds.⁹ These littoral areas also abound in important industrial raw materials, such as iron, titanium, chromate, lithium, bauxite, cobalt, nickel manganese, rubber and tin.¹⁰ Moreover, the Indian Ocean is a key transit route for oil from the Persian Gulf to reach consumers in Europe and Asia. Seventeen million barrels of oil a day (90 per cent of the oil exported from the Gulf) transits by tanker through the Strait of Hormuz and into the western reaches of the Indian Ocean.¹¹ In terms of global trade, the Indian Ocean is a major conduit linking manufacturers in East Asia to markets in Europe, Africa and the Persian Gulf. In addition to carrying more than two-thirds of the world's oil shipments, half of the world's containerised cargo and one-third of its bulk cargo travels the ocean's busy sea lanes annually.¹²

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

of both India and China, it has been suggested that ‘the Indian Ocean is where global struggles will play out in the 21st century’.¹⁶

To what extent are US national security interests affected by developments in this potentially volatile region? The Indian Ocean has not traditionally held pride of place in US strategic thinking. Through the 1960s, American planners largely considered the Indian Ocean to be a backwater. Britain’s dominance at sea, combined with its imperial role in South Asia, led the US to regard the region as a British preserve.¹⁷ In the early years of the Cold War, American strategy concentrated on the Atlantic and the Pacific Basin, because Western Europe and Japan were viewed as essential territory in the struggle against global communism, whereas American involvement in the Indian Ocean littoral consisted primarily of economic and military aid, rather than the deployment of military forces.¹⁸ America’s direct involvement only increased in the wake of British withdrawal from ‘East of Suez’ in the late 1960s, which appeared to coincide with increased Soviet presence in East Africa and South Asia. The overthrow of the Shah—which eliminated a key security buffer between the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf—and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan justified the heightened American concerns about the security of the region in the 1980s.

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

With respect to the goods trade, the Indian Ocean is also a far more important conduit for the nations of East Asia and Europe than it is for the United States. The Asia–Europe shipping route, via the Indian Ocean, is the world’s largest containerised trading lane in the world. Moreover, security scholars have noted that Europe is ‘heavily reliant upon the timely unhindered movement of vessels in the waters between the

Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal'.²⁴ Nevertheless, as the world's largest economy, analysts have suggested that the United States has a strong economic interest in the security of Indian Ocean shipping since the globalised nature of commodity markets means that the American economy would feel the effects of any major tremors in the Indian Ocean.²⁵ Despite the purported effects of globalisation in linking economies around the world, the actual vulnerability of the United States to this kind of threat is frequently overstated, in large part because true threats to international trade are quite small. Even in the case of a major regional war, the economic impact on a non-participating, large open economy, such as the United States, is typically small in terms of capital flows, trade, and direct investment.²⁶ Thus, economic imperatives cannot justify a major American regional commitment.

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

A Neo-Nixon Doctrine for the Indian Ocean

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

The four principal states on which to anchor the strategy are Australia, Indonesia, India and South Africa. These countries increasingly possess the economic means and military capabilities to provide for regional security, and each of these nations is also a

presumptive hegemon in its respective sub-region of the Indian Ocean littoral (Oceania, South East Asia, South Asia and Southern Africa), which makes it natural for them to assume a leading role in regional security. In explicitly seeking to foster the emergence of a robust multi-polar security structure that can contain most security threats without direct US involvement, this strategy of self-interested altruism leverages the primary geopolitical trend in the region—namely the emergence of second-tier powers. By putting liberal democracies—who have a shared interest in maintaining an open economic order and minimising great power conflict—at the centre of this arrangement, US regional goals can be advanced by encouraging local powers to pursue their own national interests. This core of major littoral powers can also provide a foundation for multilateral efforts that bring both regional and extra-regional actors together to address issues of collective concern, such as energy security and the free transit of goods.

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

It is significantly easier to convince a foreign partner to acquire a system or technology that America feels is most appropriate to its needs if such items are given as grants, rather than attempting to persuade the partner to purchase the particular item through arms sales. The reality of a strategy designed to facilitate regional security by local powers is that they know it is in the US interest to help build their capacity. As a result, they may be less likely to purchase the types of systems the US advises them to have with their own funds if they believe that the US will gift these to them anyway. This kind of free riding is less than desirable; however, subsidising the military capacity of local partners can be more cost effective than taking the lead in providing regional security, particularly since the manpower, operations and maintenance costs of the additional military capability would be borne by the local country.

A key advantage of this strategy is that it furthers the interests of local powers while also securing American aims. US aid would enhance their power and facilitate their order-producing role in their respective sub-region, both of which would boost their claim to major power status. In many respects, the US would simply be encouraging an extension of existing behaviour. For example, of its own initiative, the South African navy has undertaken anti-piracy patrols in the Mozambique gap, while the Indian navy has patrolled off the coast of Madagascar and Mozambique as well as in the Gulf of Oman, and worked to enhance the coast guard capacity of several small island nations in the Indian Ocean, such as the Maldives and the Seychelles.

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

With respect to irregular security challenges in the region, American nuclear non-proliferation efforts would continue unabated. Ideally, regional security cooperation would extend to nuclear matters in a manner that addresses the concerns of countries such as South Africa, India and Indonesia, who have previously resisted joining such efforts as the Proliferation Security Initiative. In so far as nuclear proliferation by states in the Indian Ocean region is driven by security concerns vis-à-vis the United States, a restrained US posture could reduce some of that anxiety. With respect to terrorism, the capacity-building focus of this strategic approach could extend to the counter-terrorism realm, and to states beyond the democratic major powers, wherever the contacts, local



Figure 1. In this handout photograph provided by the Indian navy, Indian and US naval ships are seen during a joint India-US naval exercise, Malabar 07-1, off the coast of Okinawa, Japan, Wednesday, 11 April 2007. The Indian navy has embarked on a series of exercises with navies from the US, Japan, Russia, China, the Philippines, Vietnam and New Zealand, according to news reports. (AP Photo/Indian Navy HO).

knowledge and language skills of foreign police and intelligence services are best positioned and willing to uncover and disrupt terrorist groups. The US can bolster such agencies through training, equipment and technical support, the latter of which is America's comparative advantage and can act as a key force multiplier without an overtly visible presence. Ideally, counter-terrorism efforts would be handled by local governments, but should they prove unable to act, the US would be prepared to assist with air strikes or small-scale raids carried out by special operations forces stationed at low-profile remote bases in the region. To the extent that anti-American terrorism is fostered by the visible presence of US forces in key countries in the region, an Indian Ocean strategy that minimises the 'footprint' of US forces would reduce that source of antagonism.³²

Diplomatic measures

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

Although the United States can leverage its own bilateral relationships with these states to promote regional cooperation, the goal is not to recreate the East Asian hub-and-spoke alliance system. Instead, the objective is to foster regional linkages that can enhance political coordination and contingency planning to the point where joint or multilateral operations could be readily undertaken in the absence of direct US leadership. This process should begin with bilateral and multilateral discussions with Canberra, Delhi, Jakarta and Pretoria. Regular multilateral exercises should be held as frequently as possible to promote interoperability, intelligence cooperation and shared threat perception. Modelled on the Milan series of naval exercises, these should include other littoral nations (Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore) and like-minded extra-regional actors (Japan and South Korea). Furthermore, military-to-military exchanges of officers from these target countries should be significantly increased, with specific attention given to developing bilateral ties not only between the US and the next generation of military leaders in the target country, but also among the future military leaders of the major regional democracies.

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

welcome to contribute to these efforts provided they embrace these established norms for managing the sea lanes and airspace of the littoral region.

Multilateral security initiatives

Although pan-Indian Ocean multilateral forums have not generally developed into strong institutions, both India and Australia have historically been enthusiastic proponents of regional organisations.³³ The US should attempt to channel both countries' efforts into the leadership of a regional collective security effort, by working through an existing organisation which has the legitimacy of indigenous origins that a more blatantly American-fostered effort would lack.

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

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

Engaging major regional powers

Implementing the Neo-Nixon Doctrine in the Indian Ocean would require American policy-makers to make a mindset shift since, unlike in East Asia, the majority of the proposed partner states are not treaty allies of the United States. Washington would have to become comfortable with the notion that these countries will follow foreign policies based on their own self-interest, which will converge with the US in some areas and possibly diverge in others. Moreover, it should be recognised ahead of time that as the US succeeds in strengthening these states militarily, their foreign policy autonomy may grow. However, on balance, strong democratic states in the Indian Ocean with the military means to defend themselves and provide for regional security will foster an environment that is in keeping with US regional goals.

India

Within the Indian Ocean, India emerges as the fulcrum of the Neo-Nixon Doctrine because it can play a role in key sub-regions such as South Asia, South East Asia,

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

Indonesia

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

Australia

Australia is a treaty ally of the United States and possesses the region's third largest navy. It has strengthened its security ties with Indonesia and India is its second most important bilateral link in the entire littoral region. Canberra also has a significant ability to forge partnerships with many key Indian Ocean littoral nations since it is not viewed as a threat in the region.³⁵ This puts Australia in a key position to expand the breadth and scope of its maritime surveillance and patrolling into the eastern Indian Ocean. However, inducing Australia to assume a more robust role in the Indian Ocean may pose some diplomatic challenges. Although Australia possesses one of the largest exclusive economic zones in the Indian Ocean, it has traditionally neglected this region in favour of the Asia-Pacific as the focus of its foreign policy. Moreover,

while Australia has a strong interest in not seeing the Indian Ocean become an arena of great power competition, the country's dependence on China as a market for its raw materials has made some of its leadership wary of actions that could be construed as contributing to the containment of China. Nevertheless, the present government has supported US plans to increase its military presence in Australia and in the broader Asia-Pacific region.³⁶

South Africa

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

Regional considerations

Eastern Indian Ocean

Coordination and cooperation among the respective navies of Australia, India and Indonesia will help ensure the free transit of shipping through the vital choke points of the Malacca and Lombok Straits. The United States can encourage and support these efforts by working with the three countries and sharing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) data to create a full-spectrum maritime domain awareness in the eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean. India has already undertaken coordinated patrolling of the northern approaches of the Strait of Malacca with Indonesia. Expanding that effort to include more regular Indian–Indonesian combined patrols, Indonesian–Australian patrolling in the vicinity of Lombok, as well as intelligence sharing and combined exercises, can help ensure that the sea lanes in the eastern stretches of the Indian Ocean are secure.

Western Indian Ocean

Although the India–Indonesia–Australia triad brings together the most capable nations in the region to focus on the eastern Indian Ocean, there is no similar configuration of leading states to the west of the ocean. Since Europe directly benefits from oil transiting the Cape, the EU or individual member states might become a source of financial support for the South African navy. France in particular could emerge as a security partner for South Africa. France maintains a permanent military presence in

the region—including more than a dozen naval vessels—through its overseas territories in the southern Indian Ocean and bases in Djibouti and Abu Dhabi and has been conducting anti-piracy operations off the coast of East Africa since 2005. Paris and Pretoria already undertake joint military exercises, including anti-piracy training, and are looking to deepen bilateral cooperation in the southern Indian Ocean. Moreover, France has good relations with India—to whom it has supplied advanced conventional submarines—and has bilateral agreements with Australia which facilitate surveillance and law enforcement operations in their adjoining territorial waters in the southern Indian Ocean.³⁷

Between India and South Africa, there is a notable gap in the Persian Gulf region. In the short term the US must still play an active role in providing security in this zone. Achieving American security goals in the Persian Gulf, which centre on preventing major hydrocarbon reserves coming under the control of a hostile power, does not require the maintenance of forward ground forces. With the three contenders for regional leadership—Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq—all strong enough to defend themselves but too weak to mount a bid for regional hegemony, the status quo is relatively safe. If necessary, the US can provide security assistance to enable local states to balance each other and to block the rise of a single region-dominating power. However, the primary security function carried out by the US in the region should be to oppose any violation of the territorial integrity of any major oil-producing state, which can be accomplished with a naval presence and intervention forces that are not stationed in theatre.

America's enabling capabilities

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

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

Sri Lanka, India's Andaman and Nicobar islands, Australia's Cocos (Keeling) Islands and the Seychelles.

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

Risks and uncertainties

There are several risks inherent in a regional strategy that empowers local actors to maintain regional security. However, upon close examination, none appears so serious as to render the proposed strategy unworkable.

Firstly, it might be the case that the leading countries of the region are uninterested in assuming a regional leadership role or providing regional public goods in the manner described. This issue is most salient with respect to India, where the government has historically resisted proposals for multilateral security dialogues that are not initiated by the UN or a broad based regional grouping. Yet, all four of the leading democratic states in the region have previously undertaken efforts to provide security in their respective sub-regions as well as to forge strategic ties with each other. The Neo-Nixon Doctrine simply requires more of the same. Moreover, for states concerned about preserving their strategic autonomy, this proposal does not necessarily require a formal multilateral structure. At a minimum, an expansion of existing cooperation so that a joint crisis response—such as the unprecedented cooperation between the Indian and Australian navies in the wake of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami—can be conducted efficiently would be sufficient.

A second related concern is that the state of bilateral relations between the major democratic powers in the region, or between those countries and the US, preclude the kind of cooperation required. Indonesian–Australian ties, for example, have peaked and troughed over the past decade. Yet that has not prevented the two governments from deepening their security ties in the interim. Indeed, the opportunity to cooperate on regional security matters provides a new forum for the pursuit of common interests, which may give an impetus to bilateral relationships, such as the one between Jakarta and Canberra.³⁸ Similarly, America's ability to cooperate with and assist India over the past decade has been constrained by Washington's dependence on Pakistan for logistical support of its operations in Afghanistan. However, as the US moves to draw down its role in Afghanistan, the divergence of strategic interests between Washington and Islamabad has become clear.³⁹ Although the US will continue to require cooperation from Pakistan, the lavish military aid and support of the past 10 years will not continue as Washington focuses on the convergence of its interests with India.

Thirdly, critics may argue that a restrained regional role could embolden a revisionist local state or an extra-regional power to challenge the status quo. Doubts about America's willingness to intervene in a major crisis could lead local powers to bandwagon with such challengers. These concerns are valid. However, since the Indian Ocean has never been a theatre of primary importance for the US, American restraint would not be considered as significant a sign of decline or disinterest as it would be in East Asia or Western Europe. Moreover, concerns that local powers might bandwagon

with challengers in the absence of a major US presence overlook these states' own interests and capabilities. Uncertainty about American intentions may actually provide an incentive for them to develop their own military capabilities, which would further US goals.

A fourth possible concern is that the 'self-reliance' expected of major regional powers may lead to the development of nuclear weapons, which runs contrary to US non-proliferation policy. This is indeed a possibility, but it must be recognised that a major US regional presence also has the potential to encourage other littoral countries to seek nuclear weapons. Moreover, as the US tacitly acknowledged in its nuclear deal with India, the development of nuclear weapons by a democratic state for self-defence is not the same as proliferation by a revisionist state.

Fifthly, it could be argued that the bolstering of the military capabilities of certain states in the region might alarm some of their smaller neighbours. It should be noted, however, that the majority of the weapons systems to be transferred to local partners are defensive in nature. Moreover, the countries being assisted are democratic states which have already demonstrated the ability to be responsible stakeholders through their own efforts to contribute to regional security. While enhancing the military capability of leading states may cause some anxiety, it is certainly balanced by the reduced tensions associated with a more subdued American presence.

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Notes

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2. For a discussion of the significance of this, see Samuel P. Huntington, 'Why International Primacy Matters', *International Security*, 17(4), 1993, pp. 68–83.
3. 'Mullen: Debt is Top National Security Threat', *CNN*, August 27, 2010, at http://articles.cnn.com/2010-08-27/us/debt.security.mullen_1_pentagon-budget-national-debt-michael-mullen?_s=PM:US. For the classic treatment of imperial overstretch, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, Vintage, New York, 1980, pp. 514–515.
4. Peter Baker, no. 1; Charley Keyes, 'Dire Warnings from Pentagon over Potential Defence Cuts', *CNN.com*, November 14, 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-11-14/us/_pentagon-congress-cuts_1_defense-secretary-leon-panetta-cuts-base-budgets?_s=PM:US.
5. Mike Mullen, Testimony before the Committee on Armed Services, US Senate, February 17, 2011, at <http://armed-services.senate.gov/Transcripts/2011/02%20February/11-04%20-%202011-17-11.pdf>; Elisabeth Bumiller, 'U Pivots Eastward to Address Uneasy Allies', *New York Times*, October 24, 2011.
6. Robert Kaplan, 'Center Stage for the 21st Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean', *Foreign Affairs*, 88(2), 2009, pp. 16–32.
7. In January 2009, the US Naval War College established an Indian Ocean Studies Group. For examples of other activity, see 'Proceedings from the Indian Ocean Workshop', The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Washington, DC, April 2008; 'Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region: A Workshop Report', Center for the National Interest, Washington, DC, February 2011; Amit Pandya, Rupert Herbert-Burns, and Junko Kobayashi, 'Maritime Commerce and Security: The Indian Ocean', The Stimson Center, Washington, DC, March 2011.
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9. *BP Statistical Review of World Energy*, June 2010, p. 6, at www.bp.com/statisticalreview/; Amardeep Athwal, *China-India Relations: Contemporary Dynamics*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007, p. 31.
10. 'Indian Ocean', in *CIA World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, DC, 2010, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xo.html>; Amardeep Athwal, no. 9, p. 31.
11. 'The Strait of Hormuz: Key Oil Shipping Route', *Reuters*, January 7, 2010.
12. Integrated Headquarters (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, Ministry of Defense, New Delhi, 2009, p. 57.

13. 'The Failed States Index 2011', *Foreign Policy*, at <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/failedstates>.
14. 'Disputes – International', in *CIA World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, DC, 2010, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2070.html>.
15. 'Indian Ocean', no. 10.
16. Robert Kaplan, no. 6, p. 23.
17. Gary Sick, 'The Evolution of US Strategy Towards the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf Regions', in Alvin Z. Rubinstein (ed.), *The Great Game: Rivalry in the Persian Gulf and South Asia*, Praeger, New York, 1983, pp. 49–50.
18. Rasul Rais, *The Indian Ocean and the Superpowers*, Barnes & Noble, Totowa, NJ, 1987, p. 37.
19. 'US Imports by Country of Origin', US Energy Information Administration, at www.eia.gov/petroleum/data.cfm.
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25. James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner, and Toshi Yoshihara, *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-first Century*, Routledge, London, 2009, p. 108.
26. Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, 'The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries: Why It Doesn't Pay to Preserve the Peace', *Security Studies*, 10(4), 2001, pp. 1–57.
27. Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2006, pp. 27, 45.
28. For a detailed examination of the Nixon Doctrine see Jeffrey Kimball, 'The Nixon Doctrine: A Saga of Misunderstanding', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36(1), 2006, pp. 59–74.
29. The failure of the Shah actually set the stage for increased US regional involvement in the Persian Gulf, which is precisely what the Nixon Doctrine was seeking to avoid.
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31. On the importance of this, see Barry R. Posen, 'Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony', *International Security*, 28(1), 2003, pp. 5–46.
32. For an argument to this effect, see Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2010.
33. Regarding multilateral institutions in the Indian Ocean region, one Australian think tank judges: 'There's nothing in the IOR even remotely comparable with forums such as APEC, the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, or the Pacific Islands Forum with its strong associated bodies, such as the Forum Fisheries Agency'. *Sam Bateman and Anthony Bergin, Our Western Front: Australia and the Indian Ocean*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, March 2010, p. 33.
34. Nirupama Rao, 'Future Directions in India–US Relations', Speech given at Yale University, October 2, 2011; *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy*, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), New Delhi, 2007, pp. 54, 96; Integrated Headquarters (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi, April 2004, pp. 63–64. For a discussion of Indian naval capabilities, see Walter C. Ladwig III, 'India and

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35. *Bateman and Bergin, Our Western Front*, no. 33, p. 47.
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 37. A cluster of archipelagos and volcanic islands located southeast and east of Africa, known collectively as the French Southern and Antarctic Lands, provides France with territorial claims in the southern Indian Ocean and Antarctica.
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