

History of Indian Ocean-A South Asian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Much of the literature available on history of the Indian Ocean offers an extraneous perspective. This paper is an attempt to see the past developments in this crucial body of water from a native lens. Indian Ocean has been central to the rise and fall of empires. The maritime highways here have introduced new merchandise products in Europe and elsewhere. It has also been pivotal in expanding the frontiers of Islam following its birth and later as a tolerant and acceptable religion in littorals and beyond. The narrative includes a leaf from Mughal history whose landward obsession and abandonment of the vast coast of South Asia set the stage for stranglehold of India by external powers. The machinations of British Raj, the shenanigans and debauchery of last Viceroy and his wife and above all, the denial of vitally important Islands of Andaman and Nicobar to Pakistan were instrumental in turning the tide of post-independence history in favour of India. In the famous episode of December 1971, the US Chief of Naval Operations had no clarity on what precisely the mission of his Carrier Task Force, USS Enterprise was. Yet Islamabad was kept in dark and an impression created that assistance was on way. In twenty first century this Ocean expanse is once again in global spotlight. The power politics and competition for resources will be played out here.

Keywords: **Indian Ocean, Commerce, Mughals, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, USS Enterprise, China, US Navy & British East India Company.**

Introduction

“Of all these countries, Pakistan will be the chief register of China’s ability to join its Silk Road across Eurasia with its maritime Silk Road across the Indian Ocean”. (Kaplan, R.D. 2018, p. 28)

What thoughts prevail in the mind of a thinking observer who looks at Arabian Sea from a cliff on Makran Coastal Highway? The spectacle is a deep blue sea stretching to the horizon. If the person turns, he looks at a brown scape, ridgelines and a vast empty zone behind. In this kaleidoscope of thoughts, the blues stretching in front of this observer have been providing for the dwellers of this brown, a moonscape for centuries. And in twenty first century, this blue stretch

holds enormous importance for the region and the world at large. It is ground-zero in great power competition.

The oldest sea

Indian Ocean was known variedly, ignored, dismissed and documented by several scholars. It was often seen as a passive region by European scholars. In their view, the Ocean was part of unchanging East. External forces like Roman, Islamic and Western European cultural traditions influenced it. These forces frequently brought Indian Ocean into history (Pearson, M. 2003, p.3). In terms of being traversed by humans, it is still the oldest of the seas. Human history records first sea passage over the waters of the Indian Ocean. Two earlier civilizations established regular connections some 5,000 years (Pearson, M. 2003, p.3). back. In contrast, the Atlantic is 1,000 years old. The long distance voyaging in the Pacific is recorded at around 2,000 years. But the density of voyages over Pacific is not anywhere close to what was or has been seen over the Indian Ocean pathways (Pearson, M. 2003, p.3).

Indian Ocean has a unique sea faring history. The Mediterranean and the North Atlantic are creation of people from littorals or one of their coasts. Conversely, Indian Ocean has a history of outside voyages done by people from its coast and beyond. The westerners briefly controlled the region for say 150 or so years. It is claimed that the Indian Ocean has been at the heart of global history up until the end of 18th century. It is further said that in twenty first century this Ocean is once again emerging as central to global power politics and competition (Frank, A.G. 1998).

Commerce through ages

Historically speaking, supremacy in the Indian Ocean has been a crucial factor in defining the power of empires. Trade and security have gone on side by side (Pearson, M. 2003, p.104). In twenty first century, this Ocean is once again projected to be the true convergence of global trade, power politics and contest for supremacy (Kaplan, R.D. 2010).

Trade amongst Arabs and South Asian coast once thrived in the Indian Ocean. This flourishing trade eventually lost to Persian rivals in the fifth and sixth centuries. In order to capture strategically important, Yemen¹ (Cordesman. A.H. 2015) the Persian King Shah Khusro-I send a naval expedition in 570. The expedition succeeded in its mission following which the Red Sea trade route too got imperiled. Red sea is a key Indian Ocean trade route Consequently, the Arabs merchants became uneasy as a result of clashes between Persians and Greeks and resultant fast variations in the control of Red Sea (Kearney, M. 2003. p.60).

Prophet Mohammed was born in Mecca into a Hashemite family of Quraysh clan in the same year that Yemen fell to Persians. The adherents of the new religion proclaimed by Mohammad grew significantly by 620. In 630, Persians

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were defeated by Byzantine emperor Heraklios I at Nineveh. This restored Greek control over Middle East. Mecca was seized by Muslims that same year. The Muslims then went onto grab Yemen from the Persians. (Kearney, M. 2003. p.60-61).

The advent of Islam in Hijaz during the seventh century had an influence on Indian Ocean trade by way of cultural makeover. The well traversed commerce routes remained more or less unchanged. But over the course of next few centuries, bulk of population inhabiting the coasts of Indian Ocean converted to Islam. The community on the shores of the Ocean was linked by a common religion (Pearson, M. 2003. p.62). Consequently, it was the followers of the new religion who handled both, coastal as well as oceanic trade (Pearson, M. 2003. p.62).

As a religion, Islam was much more centralized than was either Hinduism or Buddhism. This manifested in one of the most basic tenets of the faith i.e., Muslim performance of Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca (Pearson, M. 2003. p.62). The obligatory pilgrimage opened new vistas of connectivity, travel and trade besides exchange of ideas in the region. The intra-regional trade through Indian Ocean highways spread the Muslim culture and traditions to the region's peripheries. Islam's Holy Scripture (the Quran) and other texts encouraged a free-market economy and trade. This positive and approving approach towards sea; sea trade, as well as other maritime matters (Pearson, M. 2003. p.63), encouraged Muslims to undertake extensive voyages for trade and financial benefits. Islam's success however was largely a result of its acceptance of local traditions. There was clear demarcation between prayers or other religious obligations and those performed outside this sphere. The divine and temporal matters were, in other words, segregated. It was accordingly an acceptance rather than conversion to Islam by the coastal populations (Pearson, M. 2003. p.62).

The people of the Indian Ocean saw a perpetual prosperity during the Arab Golden Age (7th -12 century). In the Bay of Bengal, the Arabs encountered some tough competition from Indians and Indonesians. This competition reached its pinnacle in the eleventh century. The previous diplomatic relations between Arab rulers and their Indian equals nonetheless stimulated trade in eastern quadrant of the Indian Ocean. The development was driven by improved technology i.e. navigation (using stars) and ship building with watertight bulkheads to provide safety against sinking. It is worth noting that Lateen Sail that revolutionized sea faring was an Arab invention.

“The construction of larger and more seaworthy compass-guided Arab dhows (a word which probably comes from the Persian word dawh) (Pearson, M. 2003. p.62), allowed increased transportation of bulk cargoes such as timber, wheat, barley, rice etc”. (Kearney, M. 2003. c). Found all over the western Indian Ocean, these dhows could ferry remarkably heavy cargo, like camels, horses; even elephants (Pearson, M. 2003. p.63-65).

Ingress

“Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world”, Napoleon Bonaparte is famed to have said (Fish. S.I. 2016). Between 1403 and 1433, the emperor of China’s Ming dynasty sent seven expeditions to Indian Oceanⁱⁱ. These voyages were commanded by Zheng He, a Muslim slaveⁱⁱⁱ who became the Ming Empire’s admiral (Economist, 2019). The vast fleets travelled all around the littoral of Indian Ocean going as far as Jeddah. Each expedition had between 100 and 200 ships. About forty to sixty of these were huge treasure ships. The fleet traded goods as it transported variety of materials from port to port (Pearson. M. 2003. p.104).

Vasco da Gama, (d. December 24, 1524, Cochin, India) was a Portuguese navigator. His voyages to India (1497–99, 1502–03, 1524) finally opened up the sea route from Western Europe to the East via Cape of Good Hope. This was a landmark moment in world history. It laid the foundation for European incursions in numbers in Indian Ocean (Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, 2018, p.27). It quickly became clear that Portuguese had other designs beyond simple expeditions. The intent was to achieve economic stranglehold and monopoly over the Asian trade chiefly, in pepper and spices. It led to their capture of strategic ports of Colombo, Socotra, Goa, Hormuz and Diu in the Indian Ocean between 1505 and 1535. Portuguese were followed by the Dutch who established Dutch East India Company in 1602 and ruled the waves in Indian Ocean. The English and French followed Dutch though a bit later.

Imperceptive to Sea-The Mughals, Khizri Darwaza, Lahore and the Navy

The most influential queen of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605), and mother of Emperor Jahangir, was the beautiful Empress Mariam-uz- Zamani, commonly known as Jodha Bai. She stands out as an adviser who maintained that without a strong navy, the Mughal Empire would be overtaken by foreign armies. As the Mughals had come from Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, both landlocked countries, the concept of a navy was just not in their DNA. But then Akbar allowed his favourite and most loved wife to build ships for trade and Haj pilgrims at the Khizri Darwaza on the River Ravi. This place was later renamed by Maharajah Ranjit Singh as Sheranwala Darwaza after he tied two lions there to celebrate his victory over Multan (Sheikh, M. 2021).

Mariam –uz-Zamani is believed to have been a very smart business woman. She ran a dynamic and vigorous international trade in silk and spices. As Mariam uz Zamani built her first ship, she named it ‘Rahimi’. The ship in its time was the largest ship in the world and carried, besides pilgrims, to Arabia indigo, cotton and other goods for onwards dispatch on camels to Egypt and Europe. On the way back it was laden with pilgrims returning to India, as well as gold and silver

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received for goods sold. On its return journey it carried what was considered the largest treasure to take to the seas.

The Mughals paid the British and the Portuguese a protection fee for these ships. Though on land the Mughals were very powerful, they had no answer to the naval power of the European trading nations. In the area where the British protected 'Rahimi' they allowed the ship to safely pass through. But even though the Portuguese were paid in full in advance, yet they did not allow the ship to reach the Indian coast. In the process they hijacked the ship, killed the men, raped the women and threw them overboard and removed all the gold and silver. They then burnt the ship (Sheikh, M. 2021).

The Empress was enraged and ordered her son Emperor Jahangir to close down all churches, ban all Jesuit priests, lock all Portuguese business persons in a fort and let them starve and ban all trade with Portugal. The Mughals then captured almost 100 smaller Portuguese trading ships berthed at Goa and set them alight. The king of Spain and Portugal offered ten times the loss of the 'Rahimi' to allow trade to continue, but it was just too late. The Empress was not for turning. In a way Portugal lost the chance to capture the entire Mughal Empire. It was a gap that saw the English slip in.

The Empress, Mariam Zamani then ordered the building of an even larger ship with 62 guns and placements for over 400 musket men. It was named 'Ganj-i-Sawai', and it was in its day the most fearsome ship on the seas, and its objective was to trade and take pilgrims to Mecca, and on the way back convert all the goods sold into gold and silver as well as bring the pilgrims back. But then the English, posing as pirates, attacked with a 25-ship armada of alleged pirates. At Mecca they claimed they were slave traders.

On the 7th of September 1695, the ship 'Fancy' attacked and captured Ganj-i-Sawai. The few male pilgrims aboard were all butchered and the 'pirates' raped every woman and threw them overboard. On board was a treasure of gold and silver, claimed as being the largest ever shipped. The attackers were commanded by a Capt. Henry Every, who the British claimed was a pirate, even though he had earlier commanded their navy ships. "The cost of gold, silver, and jewels in the heist of Ganj-i-Sawai attack was anywhere between 325,000 and 600,000 British pounds—the equivalent of tens of millions today" (Sheikh, M. 2021).

Emperor Aurangzeb threatened to end all East India Company trade and to attack its forces at different forts. In its day it was the greatest robbery ever committed. Soon the King of England, William the III, ordered that all the sailors be declared pirates, and be arrested and hanged. But the 'pirates' escaped to the Bahamas. A few returned quietly to Ireland, and all of them were arrested and hanged. No gold was ever recovered. The pirates decided that the safest place to go to was the new American colonies. The treasure of the 'Ganj-i-Sawai' soon became a legend and no trace has ever been found, that is till recently an American researcher zeroed in on a likely place where the treasure was hidden.

In 2014, the first traces emerged in a farm in Middletown, in the Massachusetts Bay area. Using metal detector researchers found gold and silver coins with Arabian texts; also in the treasure chest were musket balls and a shoe buckle. As the search widened they found another collection of silver coins again with Arabic text, all of which had darkened over age. The ship that brought the ‘pirates’ on shore at Rhodes Island saw its sailors settle in the American colonies. Soon three other samples of Arabian silver coins were found at the field that was owned by former pirates. Interestingly, just off the coast the wreck of one of the ships has been found.

So it was that the two great ships built at Khizri Darwaza or Sheranwala Darwaza, Lahore met a fate that also saw the entry of the colonial powers into our land. It seems that the advice by Empress Mariam Zamani was ignored for which the Mughals lost their empire. The mosque of the Empress Mariam Zamani is opposite Lahore Fort’s Akbari Gate. It displays an exquisite intricate work. She was after all the woman who built the first large sea-faring ships of the Mughals at Lahore. There was a ship-building facility at Surat, which built smaller trading ships. The role of the sea, in the ultimate analysis, was a major factor that brought the colonial powers to the sub-continent. For trade to grow military power plays a critical role. This to a great extent still true today (Andrews, E. 2018).

A ‘Beginning’ and an ‘End’

In 1615 British ambassador Thomas Roe presented his credentials to Mughal Emperor Jahangir. He was a humble supplicant before the world’s mightiest monarch. This was result of a three years effort by Roe to establish link between Mughals and East India Company. The association was one based on commerce and without any kind of coercion or domination. (Tharoor, S. 2019).

The British East India Company was earlier formally established in 1600 through a Royal Charter of Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth I. The stage was accordingly set for a long haul of British Raj in India. “The Charter sought to trade in silk, spices and other profitable Indian commodities. Within a century and a half, the Company had become a power in India” (Tharoor, S. 2016).

Outposts (also called factories) were set up by the Company along two seaboard of the Indian Coast. These gradually grew into mega port cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay (Tharoor, S. 2019). It was a case of classic and effective application of sea power which enabled British to progressively built up their land power, through Madras in 1749 and Bengal in 1756.

No one could have imagined the scale of Empire carved out by the East India Company when it moved into South Asia. At the time, Mughal Empire was vast. It extended west to east between Afghanistan and Bangladesh to Kashmir in the north and present day Karnataka in the south. The internecine conflict however weakened the Empire before it crumbled (Tharoor, S. 2019).

The collapse of horsemen

As stated in the preceding, since Mughals horsemen had marched into India from the west (Central Asia, Afghanistan), Mughal empire was focused on the land and its domination in South Asia. They built large armies and an effective land management, administrative and revenue collection system. They never left the land frontiers to intrude into distant shores (Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, 2018, p.29.). The vast Indian coastline which provided ideal strategic position in relation to major maritime trade routes was ignored throughout the Mughal era. One possible reason could be that the present day Tamil Nadu, Kerala etc. were not part of this empire. Mughals influenced events in Southern India by using their proxies. Now in hindsight we may think it was a fatal oversight. But for some good reasons, Mughals suffered from perennial maritime blindness (Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, 2018. p.29)

The collapse of Mughal authority was hastened by any event; ransack of Delhi by Persian invader Nadir Shah in 1739. (Tharoor, S. 2019). Under Robert Clive, the forces of East India Company defeated the ruling Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula of Bengal at Plassey in 1757. But this defeat was result of a combination of superior artillery and striking web of deceit and deception (Tharoor, S. 2016). Consequently, in the coming decades, the British backed East India Company extended its hegemony over most of India. The Company ruled through a mix of extortion, double-dealing, and outright corruption backed by violence and superior force (Tharoor, S. 2016).

To the good fortune of Britain, by 1800 one more lucrative commodity had entered the market in a big way. This was tea. The tea then was in great demand in Europe. Accordingly, by 1900 India's tea exports to Britain had reached a staggering Pound 137 million (Tharoor, S. 2016, p.xv). The British, who set foot on Indian soil ostensibly for trade, had an agenda to entrench themselves. It was to divide society into communal lines, and steal local commodities, treasure and resources, to enrich the British Crown. Ironically, at the onset of Britain's control over India, the country's share of world GDP was around 23 percent. By the time Colonial masters left, India's share had fallen to just above 3 percent. (Tharoor, S. 2016, p.85).

Shenanigans of a Royal couple

“During the Second World War, he managed to lose two destroyers, the Kelly and the Javelin, under him in circumstances that were professionally questionable. Yet, he was portrayed as a hero to the public.--- Britain was in difficult situation and needed heroes to raise public morale. Churchill decided to make one out of Mountbatten. He was promoted to the rank of acting Vice Admiral and, against better advice appointed Director, Combined Operations. This is when he mis-planned and directed the famous Dieppe raid. It was an unmitigated disaster. The Canadian Second Division that took part in ‘Operation Jubilee’ had 3369 of its

4963 men killed on the beaches of Dieppe. –Mountbatten was merely living upto his reputation” (Zia, K.H. 1995. p.39-40)

History is by no means an unflawed science. ‘History is a lie that historians agree on’ Voltaire is reputed to have said. Truth nonetheless has a bizarre way of surfacing. The principal player in the closing days of British Raj in India was none other than the last viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, a former naval officer who entered the Royal Navy in 1913. He held various naval assignments before becoming aide-de-camp to the Prince of Wales in 1921. Mountbatten’s quick rise in rank owes in large part to connections with Royal Family.

Mountbatten married Edwina Ashley in 1922. Edwina was one of the most sought after girl in London. She had inherited a fortune of two million Pounds (equivalent to Pound 53 million today) from her grandfather, Sir Ernest Cassel. Understandably, Edwina was quite spoilt and had a notorious reputation¹. Stunningly attractive and outgoing, Edwina was named the sixth best dressed woman in the world of her times (Maloney, A. 2019). The stories of her bizarre romance with Nehru who was 58, ten years her senior when both first met, are too well known. In one of the diary entries and letters written to Nehru, Edwina says, “nothing we did or felt would ever be allowed to come between you and your work and me and mine” (Zia, K.H, 1995, p.41) But if history is harsh and cruel on Edwina’s infidelity, it is no less telling in exposing Mountbatten’s infirmities and debauchery (Maloney, A. 2019). These too are well documented and now out in open as a result of FBI’s declassified documents (Maloney, A. 2019).

This then was the Royal couple appointed by the throne in London to preside over the fate of undivided India and also oversee the partition of their colony in 1947. Little wonder, the legacy of moral and political bankruptcy of the Raj in expanding frontiers of communal schism, duplicity, corruption and double-dealing continues to plague the region 73 years later.

Case of andaman and nicobar islands

On July 5, 1947, New Delhi’s newspapers carried the text of the draft Indian Independence Bill which British Prime Minister Clement Attlee’s Government was to hurry through the House of Commons for mandating establishment of the new dominions of India and Pakistan in mid-August. Jinnah was irritated that no change had been made in the text of the Bill apropos of his earlier advice that the Andaman and Nicobar group of Islands must be excluded from its scope and should not be allotted to India. He sought an immediate meeting with the Viceroy. In the meeting, Jinnah handed over a telegram marked, “Immediate and Most Urgent” (British Government. 1947, p.937-39). It demanded exclusion of the two groups of Islands from the Bill.

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In this monumental act of Britain's final yet hasty retreat from India, the Attlee government did not accept Jinnah's contention nor his claim for Pakistan to have the Andaman and Nicobar. Jinnah had earlier made a strong case for the two chains of Islands to be given to Pakistan. He had demanded a land corridor for Pakistan through India to link East and West but both, Congress and British rejected it. There was no objection raised by Jinnah insofar Muslim majority Laccadive Islands off the Western coast of India near Bombay was concerned. It was so since these were administratively part of British India. The case of Andaman and Nicobar was however different.

Jinnah was of the view that Andaman and Nicobar have never formed subject of discussion or agreement between parties at any time. "Their sudden inclusion in India raises very grave issue", he stated in the telegram. "Majority of population consists of tribes who are not connected with peoples of India by ethical, religious or cultural ties. Pakistan's claim to these Islands is very strong since only channel of communication between Eastern and Western Pakistan is by sea and these Islands occupy important strategic position on sea route and provide refueling bases" (Aziz, Q. 1997, p.113), it added. The contents show the vision of Mr. Jinnah as a statesman. It also illustrates the perfidy of Mountbatten as Viceroy of Britain in the last days of empire.

In hindsight

"The collapse of the Soviet Union originated in American sea power and also opened the door for US naval power to dominate the world.—Mahan was correct-- It is always cheaper to ship goods by sea than by any other means. As far back as fifth century BC, the Athenians were wealthier than Spartans because Athens had a port, a maritime fleet, and a navy to protect it. Maritime powers are always wealthier than non-maritime neighbours, all other things being equal. With the advent of globalization, this truth became as near to absolute as one can get in geopolitics" (Friedman, G. 2010, p.25).

One wonders if the fate of the 1971 war at sea would have been any different had the islands of Andaman and Nicobar been in possession of Pakistan with a strong naval presence thereon. PN submarine Ghazi's dispatch to Bay of Bengal, most certainly under controversial circumstances and despite opposition by the then Commander Submarines (later Chief of the Naval Staff, Pakistan Navy), came as a consequence of pressure from Pakistan army's Eastern Command^{iv}. Though audacious and heroic, it was last minute 'measure to rectify a strategic posture that was getting increasingly out of step with military realities' (PN History. 1991, p.36). The tragic sinking of Ghazi provided long awaited operational flexibility to Indian navy which thereafter moved in its aircraft carrier lying low until then to operate and display belated prowess in Bay of Bengal.

The shadows of a great game?

Some interesting facts emerge from the declassified papers of British government including Mountbatten papers. Those documents show Britain had a hidden agenda behind partition. According to accounts, by early 1947, the British chiefs of staff had become fervent promoters of Pakistan. They thought the new country would cooperate with Britain in military matters. On 12 May 1947, while articulating consensus views of chiefs of staff, General Leslie Hollis put forward several suggestions to British Prime Minister Clement Attlee. One of these read: “We should obtain important strategic facilities (such as) the port of Karachi and air bases-in North West India and the support of Muslim manpower” (Sarila, N.S. 2006, p.26).

Another, unsigned Memorandum of Mountbatten dated 19 May 1948 notes, “Only through the open ocean port of Karachi could the opponents of the Soviet Union take immediate effective countermeasures. The sea approaches to all other countries will entail navigation in enclosed waters directly menaced by Russian air fleets---If the British Commonwealth and the United States of America are to be in a position to defend their vital interests in the Middle East, then the best and most stable area from which to conduct this defence is from Pakistan territory. Pakistan (is) the key stone of strategic arch of the wide and vulnerable waters of the Indian Ocean” (Mountbatten Papers. n.d, p.39)^v.

In this backdrop, it constitutes nothing short of a tragedy, perhaps, of epic proportions that a post partition Pakistan could accrue neither true geopolitical nor economic advantage of its geographic placement in the Indian Ocean. This has been so despite the fact that history was never kind to Pakistan. But if there was one defining moment in country’s existence to take stock, profoundly overhaul the strategic thinking within its military’s ranks besides giving a hard look to the country’s eternal embrace of Washington, it was in the aftermath of 1971 war (Kux, D. 2001, p.201)^{vi}.

“To be an enemy of America can be dangerous, but to be a friend is fatal”, former US diplomat and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger is known to have said. Only one event from 1971 war in the Indian Ocean would suffice to reflect on the soundness of Pakistan’s policy towards the United States. On December 10, 1971, President Nixon ordered the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Enterprise to proceed towards Bay of Bengal (Nixon, R. 1978, p.526-28). The then Chief of Naval Operations, United States Navy, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt recalls in his memoirs that the evacuation of US personnel (from former East Pakistan) was completed two days before the US naval task force entered Indian Ocean. Alternately, if the “aircraft carrier task force” was meant to deter India or the Soviets from conducting military operations against West Pakistan”, the argument too seems implausible in the backdrop of Indo-Soviet friendship treaty signed earlier. In both theatres, war between India and Pakistan was already raging. What exactly was then the mission of USS Enterprise? Zumwalt provides an answer- “he

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never knew the true mission of the task force group”, says the Chief of Naval Operations (Zumwalt, A.E. 1976, p.367-69) (Kux, D. 2001, p.403).

If the US Chief of Naval Operations had no clarity on the mission of his carrier task force that was ordered to sail into Bay of Bengal, it is fair to assume that White House had succumbed to internal Indian lobbying and external pressure of the Soviets. What prompted Nixon-Kissinger to keep Islamabad in dark and put up a sham display in Bay of Bengal, the history is silent. But facilitating Kissinger’s clandestine trip to Beijing for equally secretive talks with Zhou Enlai (Kux, D. 2001, p.191-92) did not earn Pakistan any dividends at the end of the day.

The makran coast and nomenclature

Pakistan’s 1001 Km (540.4 nm) long coast stretches South East and Westward. It covers the coast of Sindh, 266.5 Km and Balochistan (or Makran), 734.5 Km. The primary area of maritime interest to Pakistan is the North Arabian Sea. The extended area of interest covers the broader Western Indian Ocean (Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, 2018, p.57). The part of Indian Ocean currently known as Western Indian Ocean was called “Mare Erythraeum (in English Erythrean Sea)”. The most authentic account in this context is of Johannes Janssonius, a sixteenth century Dutch cartographer (Anwer, M.S. 2019).

The name, “Indian Ocean” has been in dispute since the times K.M. Pannikar, the Indian diplomat cum scholar published his magnum Opus, “India and the Indian Ocean” in 1945 (Panikkar, K.M. 1945). His narrative was a major attempt to justify why, “the Indian Ocean must remain truly Indian” (Panikkar, K.M. 1945, p.84). The cold war dynamics aside, a rapid globalization, rise of Asia Pacific economies over the past three decades and resultant shift in Atlantic centric trade to Pacific and Indian Ocean has provided fresh impetus to this debate. A scholar suggests that the term “Indian Ocean” is inappropriate (Pearson, M. 2003, p.13). He instead, proposes a more generic name, “the Asian Seas” (Broeze, F. 1989, p.3,21). Another scholar maintains that the term (Indian Ocean) implies that “India is the centre, the fulcrum, but this needs to be demonstrated not just assumed” (Pearson, M. 2003, p.13). He goes on to argue that, “a better name for the part of Indian Ocean known as the Arabian Sea is the Afrasian Sea” (Pearson, M. 2003, p.13). As if to lend further credence to this historically significant body of water in the Indian Ocean, Pannikar too upholds that the Arabian Sea is one of the “vital seas of the world”(Panikkar, K.M.1945, p.21). He then adds, ---“it (Arabian Sea) has been for at least 3,000 years a great highway of commerce and communication between people”(Panikkar, K.M.1945, p.21).

Strategic scan

When Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Bhutto flew to United States in September 1973 on a state visit, he sought Washington’s help to construct a new port at

Gwadar, located on the Arabian Sea coast of thinly populated Balochistan (Kux, D. 2001, p.191-92). The Prime Minister also added that the US navy could use the facility at Gwadar. Although President Nixon responded that he would have the proposal examined carefully, his National Security Council briefing paper indicated “no great interest in having a naval facility in Balochistan”. It was thought that such an which would stir up the Soviets, the Indians and the Afghans “without greatly contributing to US interests” (Kux, D. 2001, p.191-92). The Nixon administration took no action on the proposal, which Premier Zhou Enlai seconded when Kissinger visited China in November 1973 (Kux, D. 2001, p.191-92). That was then.

On October 7, 2001, the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom from North Arabian Sea. Its intended objective-to rid Afghanistan of al-Qaeda. The opening salvos included relentless aerial bombing campaign, and Land attack cruise missile fired from warships on targets over 450 miles well inside Afghanistan. The US naval operations at Pasni, off the Makran coast, were described as “the largest amphibious operations in size, duration and depth that the US Marine Corps has conducted since the Korean War” (Rashid, A. 2008, p.89). Later, the US and allied warships set up an interception zone in the North Arabian Sea for netting the fleeing terrorists. A maritime component of the operation was too established under UNSC Resolution 1373 adopted in September 2001. It aimed at marshaling efforts to combat terrorism, narcotics and human trafficking at sea (Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan, 2018, p.34.).

The western part of the Indian Ocean is essentially an Afro-Arabian world. Pakistan is one of the two countries which form a direct link between the Eurasian heartland and the Indian Ocean. This has resulted in the region being a hotbed of rivalry between great powers both, during colonial period and subsequently during the Cold War (Nasir, F.M. 2018, p.8). Pakistan, although being closer to the western sphere, is essentially in a very central position along the rim of the Indian Ocean.

China steps in

“In Russia we see the influence of the Arctic, and how it limits Russia’s ability to be truly global power. In China we see the limitations of power without a global navy and how in 2016 it became obvious the speed at which China is seeking to change this” (Marshall, T. 2015, p.6).

In a 2016 article, “Indian Ocean Region-Strategic Net Assessment” (Cordesman, A.H. 2016), Anthony Cordesman who holds Arleigh Burke Chair in Strategy at CSIS, a US think tank opines, “An ongoing sea-air arms race between India and Pakistan could ultimately have the greatest impact on the Indian Ocean region. In a potential future conflict, naval warfare between the two could severely disrupt commercial maritime traffic. While India and Pakistan are more evenly matched on land, India’s navy and air forces currently outnumber Pakistan’s by a significant margin. To narrow this gap, Pakistan has turned to its ally, China, for

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assistance with shipbuilding and financing. In the event of conflict, the Pakistan navy would likely rely heavily on asymmetric naval warfare tactics to diminish Indian's relative strength" (Cordesman, A.H. 2016), it adds.

China has lately understood that naval forces alone cannot ensure the rise of a nation to great power status. The sea needs to be comprehensively understood, and then explored. The sea domain requires an all-embracing utilization, as a medium of immense economic, scientific, political, social and military potential so as to contribute in the building of a Comprehensive National Power (CNP) (Agnihotri, K.K & Khurana, G.S. 2015, p.xi). Consequently, China made huge strides in maritime infrastructure and naval developments over the past two decades. In 2009, the total output value of China's marine-based industries was 3.2 trillion Yuan (\$508 billion) (Agnihotri, K.K & Khurana, G.S. 2015, p.xi). Beijing inducted 17 indigenously built warships comprising of new stealth destroyers, first line ASW corvettes, replenishment ships, and minesweepers in PLA navy during 2013 alone (Agnihotri, K.K & Khurana, G.S. 2015, p.vii).

"It is necessary for China to develop a modern maritime military force structure commensurate with its national security and development interests, safeguard its national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, protect the security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests, and participate in international maritime cooperation, so as to provide strategic support for building itself into a maritime power", (Beijing, SCI. 2015, p.15) says China's Defence White Paper.

Pakistan is a central part of China's transition from a regional power to a global one. The country lies at the heart of Beijing's plans for a network of ports, pipelines, roads and railways connecting the oil and gas fields of the Middle East to mega cities of East Asia (Small, A. 2015). China's strategic expansion into the Indian Ocean region aims at integrating with other regions. Concurrently, it requires a navy that can engage in long-distance or "far seas" (blue waters) operations to safeguard Beijing's increasing overseas political and economic interests (Agnihotri, K.K & Khurana, G.S. 2015, p.11).

China is rapidly redoing its traditional passive posture in the Western Indian Ocean. Its forceful economic and infrastructural initiatives in littorals and presence in Islands is changing geopolitical landscape in the Indian Ocean. It may not be long before PLAN becomes a "two ocean" navy with a formidable "near seas" and "far seas" potential.

Simmering cauldron

Something unusual happened in Eastern half of the Indian Ocean on April 7 this year (2021). A US navy Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS John Paul Jones sailed past India's Lakshadweep Island. It would have been a routine affair but for two reasons: one, the US destroyer sailed well inside India's exclusive economic zone and two, it did so without New Delhi's permission. India reacted sharply and expressed its concerns over the move. But a brief statement issued by the Commander of the US Navy 7th Fleet said, "on April 7, USS John

Paul Jones asserted navigational rights and freedoms approximately 130 nautical miles west of the Lakshadweep Islands, inside India's exclusive economic zone without requesting India's prior consent". The statement added that the ship entered Indian waters to uphold "rights and freedoms recognised in international law by "challenging India's excessive maritime claims". This was an insult which India, despite being a principal ally and strategic partner of the US, had to swallow anyways. The two sides are also main partners in QUAD. So here is the message being sent out: The United States demonstrated will fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows it to do so, strategic partner or otherwise (Rej, A. 2021).

The ocean bed of Indian Ocean like the South China Sea is sitting on what is called "unimaginable wealth of mineral resources-potentially the last frontier" in human hunt for resources. The spectre of big power scramble is on the horizon for obvious reasons. It will involve not only US, China and Russia but European rivals as well. Accordingly, after nearly 65 years, Britain is returning to "east of Suez". The 65000-tonne HMS Queen Elizabeth, Britain's newest aircraft carrier is sailing to the Indian Ocean in its inaugural deployment (Chuter, A. 2021) (Bhadrakumar, M.K. 2021). All in all, Indian Ocean is set to see great power rivalry picking momentum alongwith a fierce contest for resources in this century of oceans.

To embark upon contemporary actions, it is always useful to look at historical perspective. Yet too much emphasis on history occasionally makes a society prisoner of the past. This saps away at the innovation and is certainly not conducive to development. To grow, we must learn from the past; unlearn and relearn. Pakistan of today is a melting pot of ideas, doctrines, dogmas and value systems of the past. This demands an urgent change to meet the complex challenges of future both, man-made and natural.

جہان تازہ کی افکار تازہ سے بے نمود
کہ سنگ و خشت سے ہوتے نہیں جہاں پیدا

(اقبال - ضربِ کلیم)

**Only great new ideas open new worlds;
Sand mud and clay do not make new worlds.**

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ⁱ Yemen is a strategic node in Indian Ocean. Yemen's territory and islands play a critical role in the security of a global chokepoint at the southeastern end of the Red Sea called the Bab el Mandab or "gate of tears."

ⁱⁱ The Ming court had sought to display its naval power to bring the maritime states of South and Southeast Asia in line. For some 300 years the Chinese had been extending their power out to sea. An extensive seaborne commerce had developed to meet the taste of the Chinese for spices and aromatics and the need for raw industrial materials. Chinese travelers abroad, as well as Indian and Muslim visitors, widened the geographic horizon of the Chinese. Technological developments in shipbuilding and in the art of seafaring reached new heights by the beginning of the Ming Empire. See, Encyclopedia Britannica. www.britannica.com/biography/Zheng-He.

ⁱⁱⁱ Zheng He's father was a *hajji*, a Muslim who had performed *hajji* (pilgrimage) to Mecca. The family claimed descent from an early Mongol governor of Yunnan province in southwestern China. See, Encyclopedia Britannica. www.britannica.com/biography/Zheng-He.

^{iv} Author's personal interview with Admiral Karamat Rehman Niazi while attending War Course at National Defence College (now NDU) Islamabad, August 1997. The former Commander of Submarines and later Chief of the Naval Staff Pakistan navy maintained that he bitterly opposed the deployment of Ghazi for good reasons. The ill-fated submarine was due for major refit; its batteries had outlived their useful life and most importantly, the crew of Ghazi had no experience in mine laying. The mines had been hurriedly imported from China and crew barely conducted any practice. The Commanding officer was too relatively new onboard and had assumed command of Ghazi when war clouds were already on the horizon. These facts are substantiated in the since "declassified" Inquiry Report of PN related to 1971 war.

^v Unsigned memorandum dated 19 May 1948, entitled, "*The Strategic and Political Importance of Pakistan in the Event of War with the USSR*". Mountbatten Papers, Hartley

Library, Southampton. Also, Narendra Singh Sarila, “The Shadow of the Great Game, The Untold Story of Partition”, Harper Collins, New Delhi India, pp29.

^{vi} The general impression drawn in West Pakistan at politico-strategic level was that the US military intervention will prevent any major conflict and even the dismemberment of the country. The dispatch of aircraft carrier, USS *Enterprise* to Bay of Bengal by Nixon administration was misconstrued as an upcoming US military intervention on behalf of Pakistan. While ostensibly the mission of USS *Enterprise* was to evacuate US personnel from East Pakistan, Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State declared that it was intended to give emphasis to United States warnings against an attack on West Pakistan or capture of entire Azad Kashmir. See, Dennis Kux, “*The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000 Disenchanted Allies*”, Oxford University Press 2001, pp 201.