

# DIEGO GARCIA:

## ANCHORING AMERICA'S FUTURE PRESENCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC



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### ABSTRACT

Systemic shifts are reorienting the world's economic center of gravity to the Indo-Pacific. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is emerging as a strategic zone of particular importance, one with tremendous economic potential but significant security challenges. Still the sole superpower, the US has a unique role to play in securing and maintaining the international system—including in the IOR—but requires a reliable network of overseas bases to do so, in a region that is not part of its traditional sphere of influence. The British island of Diego Garcia in the center of the Indian Ocean offers unique capabilities in this regard, and is therefore being further developed by the US military as a regional hub. Meanwhile, India and China are strengthening their presence in the IOR, without challenging US influence. India, which logically views the Indian Ocean as its geostrategic backyard, increasingly views American presence as a positive hedge against China. On the other hand, China's interests and presence in the IOR are increasing, but enduring challenges closer to home are likely to limit the rate and extent of its

transition to IOR power. While facing a changing world in which power diffusion increases the relative influence of such developing nations as China and India, the US is poised to retain a significant role as the foremost underwriter of security and systemic functions in the increasingly vital IOR. Central to such efforts is access to military facilities, with Diego Garcia set to play a disproportionately important role.

### INTRODUCTION

Significant geopolitical realignment, catalyzed in part by the rise of China and India, is shifting the global “center of gravity” from the Euro-Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific. In its latest prognostication of global trends, the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) projects that “by 2030 Asia will be well on its way to returning to being the world's powerhouse, just as it was before 1500.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, World

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, December 2012), 2, [http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends\\_2030.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends_2030.pdf).

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Bank modeling projects that “together China and India will serve as nearly twice the engine for growth as of the United States and the euro zone combined by 2025.”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, “as global economic power has shifted to Asia, the Indo-Pacific is emerging as the dominant international waterway of the 21st century....”<sup>3</sup>

To maintain its preponderant position in what might thus be termed the “Indo-Pacific Century,” the United States is shifting its geostrategic focus to two critical water spaces: the Pacific and Indian oceans. These oceans are prioritized in both the 2007 US Maritime Strategy<sup>4</sup> and the Obama Administration’s ongoing Asia-Pacific Rebalance.<sup>5</sup> After more than a decade of war, therefore, the US military is returning to an expeditionary force posture in the Middle East and South Asia, land areas intimately connected with the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean is rich in promise and problems. Its promise stems from its vital role as the world’s foremost trade and energy conduit. Its problems include: volatile and fragile states, which are often beset by irregular threats, irredentist powers, sectarian divides, and religious tensions; rich flow of resources through constrained and vulnerable shipping lanes; restive and newly hopeful populations seeking more responsive governance, as well as improved economic and social conditions; and newly capable actors possibly seeking to undermine others’ influence by the sustained projection of power.

The volatile strategic situation in the Indian Ocean littoral demands a flexible and enduring US military presence. Future US military force posture in the region depends on several factors, including political changes stemming from the Arab Spring; Iran’s increasingly malign influence; progress in Afghanistan; the transition in Iraq; efforts to disrupt violent

extremist organizations and counter piracy; and progress toward comprehensive Middle East peace, among others. But arguably the most important factor affecting future US force posture is the growing influence of ascendant powers such as China and India.

During the March 2011 Congressional posture hearings for US Central Command (CENTCOM) – the combatant command overseeing US military operations throughout the greater Middle East, South Central Asia, and the Northern Indian Ocean – Representative Allen West (R, FL) asked CENTCOM Commander General Jim Mattis to envision US force posture in his area of responsibility post-Iraq and post-Afghanistan:

*Representative West: As I look across ... the world right now: Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Lebanon, Somalia, Gaza Strip, Yemen, Oman, Pakistan, Syria, Iran, there [is] one geographical thing that each one of those share, and that’s the littorals. So as we begin to move away from this occupation, nation-building style of warfare, my concern really is ... Do we really have the maritime forces to be able to have the power projection and potentially the forcible entry capability to contend with the rising threats that can come out of those nations?*

*General Mattis: ... I am right now commanding an increasingly maritime / naval theater, as these numbers of troops on the ground come down. We are going to have to maintain a very robust naval presence. It’s welcome, it’s reinforcing, it’s reassuring and it tempers any mischief by certain people who might want to get meddlesome in other people’s issues.<sup>6</sup>*

Unlike the large fixed military facilities the US built in Europe and East Asia during the Cold War, to maximize presence and influence in the IOR, amid instability and opposition to foreign military presence, US forces will need to operate from a network of forward operating bases and small military facilities across the littoral region. The foremost among these is the American base on the British island of Diego Garcia. This atoll has played an important role in helping the United States sustain a forward presence in the IOR for decades, yet questions remain about Diego Garcia’s

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>4</sup> Department of the Navy, US Marine Corps, US Coast Guard, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower* (October 2007), <http://www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Remarks by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Mark Lippert at CSIS-Georgetown-US Studies Center Conference, “The Rebalance: One Year Later,” February 27, 2013, <http://maxoki161.blogspot.com/2013/03/remarks-by-assistant-secretary-of.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “House Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing on the Proposed Fiscal 2012 Budget for the Defense Department’s US Central Command and US Special Operations Command,” *Congressional Quarterly Transcripts*, March 3, 2011.

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military importance and how the island might be used by the US military in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Uniquely in the Indian Ocean, Diego Garcia supports long-range bomber operations, the replenishment of naval vessels, and the prepositioning of heavy equipment to expedite the rapid deployment Army and Marine Corps brigades. The island's geographic advantages are two-fold: (1) it is the sovereign territory of a close ally which does not present the uncertainty that periodically plagues other overseas bases and (2) from a military standpoint, Diego Garcia's isolated location mitigates vulnerability to terrorist or state-based attacks.

To explore the importance of Diego Garcia to US strategy in the IOR, this article proceeds in five parts. The first section explains the importance of basing and military access to US command of the global commons and maintenance of the international system. The second examines the IOR's emerging strategic importance. The third part surveys American interests in the region, the limitations inherent in many basing options, and the consequent American presence on Diego Garcia. A fourth portion examines India and China's interests and activities in the region, the latter as an emerging power there. The final section concludes.

#### BASING, POWER PROJECTION, AND AMERICAN PRIMACY

The salient characteristic of the post-Cold War era has been the dominant position of the United States in world politics. America's concentration of political, economic, and military power has evoked comparisons to France under Louis XIV, to Victorian Britain, and even – in the most pessimistic of assessments – to the Roman Empire. Scholars of international politics are divided as to the evolving configuration of the international system and the sustainability of America's paramount position in world affairs.<sup>8</sup> However, as Barry Posen argues cogently, this dominant position is likely to persist in the medium term due to America's command of the commons.<sup>9</sup> The ability of US military power to dominate and exploit the sea, space and air for military purposes provides “the foundation of US

political preeminence.”<sup>10</sup>

Sustaining this position depends in large part on America's ability to project power around the globe.<sup>11</sup> The issue of power projection plays a significant role in John Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism. Specifically, he argues that the “stopping power of water” will prevent any other great power from achieving global hegemony. While the oceanic boundaries surrounding the United States provided an important buffer between potentially rival great powers during its rise, these same oceans are also a barrier that must be surmounted for America to exercise its military might abroad. To command the commons, the US military employs an extensive network of overseas bases. In Posen's words, these military facilities abroad are “the crucial stepping stones for US power to transit the globe.”<sup>12</sup>

Gaining and maintaining access to the overseas bases necessary to project power globally is an increasing challenge in a dynamic international environment. While the traditional conventional and irregular military threats to overseas bases remain, political constraints on access have become a more serious challenge in the past decade.<sup>13</sup> Multipolar regional orders are emerging, particularly in Asia, where short-term national interests may drive alignment in a classic balance-of-power manner.<sup>14</sup> Multiple poles and shifting alliance patterns would threaten the reliability of America's global basing network. During the Cold War, a group of ideologically aligned allies and client states provided the US with a worldwide system of ports, airbases and other facilities in return for security guarantees against the Soviet Union or China. In the contemporary security environment, the threats and challenges are far more ambiguous than they were in previous decades. Individual states will perceive different levels of risk may play great powers off of each other. As a result,

<sup>7</sup> For detailed analysis of broader financial and strategic choices confronting Washington, as commissioned per the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance via the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, see Michael J. Lostumbo et al., *Overseas Basing of US Military Forces: An Assessment of Relative Costs and Strategic Benefits* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), RR-201, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR201.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR201.html).

<sup>8</sup> For differing views see Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993); William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999); and Samuel P. Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (March/April 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U. S. Hegemony,” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 40-42. For a contrary view that oceans actually facilitate a bid for hegemony by a maritime power, see Christopher Layne, “The Poster Child for Offensive Realism: America as a Global Hegemon,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter 2002/3), 126-32.

<sup>12</sup> Posen, “Command of the Commons,” 44. Similarly, in rebutting Mearsheimer's notion of the stopping power of water, Layne notes that the US overcame this challenge after World War II by “maintaining large numbers of forward deployed troops and propositioned material in Europe and northeast Asia, creating an elaborate network of bases in those regions, and creating a logistical infrastructure that can support the rapid projection of additional US power to these regions.” As a result, Layne argues, the United States would have a harder time projecting power into South America, where such infrastructure does not exist, than it would into two of the “most critical regions of the world.” Layne, “The Poster Child for Offensive Realism,” 131-32.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the range of threats to overseas facilities, see Christopher J. Bowie, *The Anti-Access Threat and Theater Air Bases* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002), <http://www.csbaonline.org/>.

<sup>14</sup> The potential impact of the emergence of India and China on regional and even global politics has been compared to the rise of Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the US in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Maritime Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific* (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, March 2005), 3.

if they lack a shared threat perception, even formal alliance partners could prove to be less reliable sources of access to the overseas facilities the US relies on to project power abroad.

There is an increasing risk that in a crisis a host nation government may constrain or reject the use of facilities in its sovereign territory. Turkey provided a tangible example of this phenomenon in 2003 when it denied permission for the US 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to invade Iraq from its territory with tangible consequences for the immediate post-war aftermath. When differing threat perceptions amongst allies are compounded by a dynamic international system and pervasive anti-American sentiments world-wide, it suggests that securing reliable access to overseas bases may be a more significant challenge than it was in the past.<sup>15</sup> As a result, America could find it substantially more difficult to command the commons, which provides a foundation for its worldwide political primacy. In the contemporary security environment, therefore, strategically located facilities in politically reliable locations will be at a premium for the United States.

## KEY RESOURCE AND TRADE CONDUIT

Stretching from the Persian Gulf and the coast of East Africa on one side to the Malay Archipelago and the shores of Australia on the other, the Indian Ocean covers over twenty-eight million square miles. The thirty nations that constitute the ocean's littoral region contain one-third of the world's population. Rich in natural resources, this geographical space contains 62 percent of the world's proven oil reserves, 35 percent of its gas, 40 percent of its gold, 60 percent of its uranium, and 80 percent of its diamonds.<sup>16</sup>

The Indian Ocean is not just a source of raw materials; it is also a vital conduit for bringing those materials to market. Most notably, it is a key transit route for oil making its way from the Persian Gulf to consumers in Europe and Asia. Seventeen million barrels of oil a day (20 percent of the world's oil supply and 93 percent of oil exported from the Gulf) transits by tanker through the Strait of Hormuz and into the western reaches of the Indian Ocean.<sup>17</sup> While some Gulf oil makes its way to Europe and the Americas via the Suez Canal and the Cape of Good Hope, the more important route is eastward: the economies of Japan, China, and India are almost totally dependent on Gulf oil, which provides nearly 75 percent of Asia's import needs.<sup>18</sup> Such is

the importance of this route that some commentators have termed it the "new Silk Road."<sup>19</sup> In terms of global trade, the Indian Ocean is a major waterway linking manufacturers in East Asia with markets in Europe, Africa, and the Persian Gulf.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the Asia-Europe shipping route, via the Indian Ocean, has recently displaced the transpacific route as the world's largest containerized trading lane.<sup>21</sup>

Continued economic growth in both the developed and developing world depends in part on uninterrupted access to the IOR's oil and mineral resources and the goods that transit it—particularly because 80 percent of the trade conducted across the Indian Ocean is extraregional.<sup>22</sup> This causes the region and its sea-lanes to assume a strategic significance for many nations, as political and military developments that adversely affect the flow of oil, raw materials, or trade goods could impact global economies.

The potential for interstate conflict in the IOR remains high, as many states have unresolved maritime or territorial disputes in a region that lacks substantial collective security arrangements. Moreover, the littoral is plagued by a host of irregular security threats ranging from piracy to violent extremist networks – including al-Qa'ida and associated movements – which operate from the region's many poorly governed spaces. While maritime trade routes are at risk from piracy on the high seas, the very same waterways that transport goods are also used for human smuggling, drug trafficking, and gunrunning. Finally, pundits have predicted that the region has the potential to be the scene of great-power conflict.<sup>23</sup> It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the IOR could be pivotal geopolitically for decades. Any country that exercised a dominant role in the northern Indian Ocean would have the ability to affect the oil and trade routes from the Middle East to Europe and Asia – and thereby exercise negative influence over the industrialized world.

## AMERICAN INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND DIEGO GARCIA

American interests in the IOR are driven by a mixture of economics and security. Among the most significant concerns are the need to secure sea lines of communication (SLOCs), the desire to prevent a hostile power from dominating the littoral, and the challenge to existing governments in the region posed by the spread of militant extremist groups.

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istration, November 21, 2011, [www.eia.gov/countries](http://www.eia.gov/countries).

<sup>15</sup> For a survey of global attitudes towards the United States, see Tom Baldwin, "World Crisis of Confidence in Bush," *The Times*, June 28, 2007, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/americas/article1996348.ece>.

<sup>16</sup> "BP Statistical Review of World Energy," BP Global, June 2009, 6, [www.bp.com/](http://www.bp.com/).

<sup>17</sup> "The Strait of Hormuz: Key Oil Shipping Route," Reuters, January 7, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21st Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2009): 20, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64832/robert-d-kaplan/center-stage-for-the-21st-century>; "China's Crude Oil Import Data," March 2010, <http://data.chinaoilweb.com/crude-oil-import-data/latest.htm>; "India," U.S. Energy Information Admin-

<sup>19</sup> C. Uday Bhaskar, "Regional Naval Cooperation," *Strategic Analysis* 15.8 (November 1992): 736.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Defense, *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters [Navy], 2009), 57.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations, *Review of Maritime Transport 2008* (New York: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2008), 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (2009), 58.

<sup>23</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2009): 23, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64832/robert-d-kaplan/center-stage-for-the-21st-century>.

The IOR has not traditionally assumed pride of place in US strategic thinking. Indeed, 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, nor does the energy security of the United States turn on developments in the IOR.<sup>24</sup> However, as noted previously, many of America's allies and key trading partners in Europe and East Asia are highly dependent on the Indian Ocean for energy. Similarly, 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.<sup>25</sup> Thus the strategic importance of the IOR to the US is not based on its direct impact on America, but on its importance for key US allies and partners. In so far as developments in the IOR affect key allies and partners in Europe and East Asia, who depend on the region energy and trade flows, they are of importance to the United States.

Unfortunately, many of the basing options to address these considerable American interests come with significant problems – even when policy recommendations from some of the very best studies to date are considered. The US might account for political risks, for instance, “by basing in small, politically stable nations at the periphery of troubled areas that have strong geopolitical reasons to ally with America, and under any circumstances away from major cities.”<sup>26</sup> In this context, Qatar, with its rich gas reserves abutting those of Iran, its majority population of non-Qatari citizens, and its ongoing border dispute with Saudi Arabia, is a preferred location to host CENTCOM's Forward Headquarters. Yet some of the same factors that make Qatar a favorable location today might make it a high-risk location in the future.

Larger bases should be supplemented with multiple, redundant, forward-operating locations, as the US enjoys in Bahrain and in Singapore. The latter offers a compelling model: access based on a special agreement, with a skeletal deployment of permanent personnel and visits by aircraft and naval task forces rather than a large permanent deployment of forces. To maximize its chances of maintaining favorable access in host nations, the US should prepare for all political contingencies by maintaining close relations with a wide variety of current and potential political actors; seek the

formal ratification of agreements in host nation legislatures where possible; and pay for access transparently if reasonable terms can be arranged.<sup>27</sup>

To overcome host-nation political concerns, the US must help partners develop capacity while at the same time reducing their dependence on Washington. Additionally, the US must also limit force structure costs while working to improve long-term stability. To resolve these tensions, the US enables local partners to take the lead in various security tasks, and yet retain specific “linchpin” capacities to influence regional security. Where possible, it makes sense to use host nation capabilities instead of an extended and expansive US presence that might alarm regional actors.

The US must also strengthen and expand a regional network of major and minor support locations. Establishing such a network involves pinning together a number of cooperative security locations and smaller forward operating sites. The US has consolidated assets and capabilities across the region – and especially the Gulf States – while at the same time building operational capacity together with partners in the region. In contrast to the large US installations in Europe and the Western Pacific, smaller bases that are spread among a number of partners assume a flexible character. Key nodes are then placed in central, reliable locations, and have additional capabilities that are deemed unnecessary elsewhere.

Political considerations assume additional prominence in light of the uncertainty created by the Arab Spring. It is too soon to know how the populist unrest will settle. However, gradual democratization within the region – a central goal of US military presence – may paradoxically force the departure of US forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, and other nations undergoing political transition, even before these areas have stabilized.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, although the US has succeeded in establishing a presence on the eastern and western edges of the Indian Ocean Region, there are no US bases along the littoral between the Persian Gulf and Singapore, nor are there any US bases in Eastern Africa south of Djibouti.

Fortunately, there is at least a partial solution to the abovementioned problems. Located in the center of the Indian Ocean, Diego Garcia is approximately 970 nautical miles south of India, 925 nautical miles southwest of Sri Lanka, and 2,200 nautical miles southeast of the Strait of Hormuz and roughly 1,600 nautical miles from the mouth of the Strait of Malacca. More significantly, the atoll abuts all major shipping lanes that reticulate the Indian Ocean. As Admiral John McCain once noted, “as Malta is to the Mediterranean, Diego Garcia is to the Indian Ocean – equidistant from all points.”<sup>29</sup> The island itself consists of a wishbone-shaped coral atoll, fourteen miles long and four miles wide, that surrounds “one of the finest natural harbors in the world.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Changes and the US Military Overseas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 273.

<sup>28</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Rasul Rais, *The Indian Ocean and the Superpowers* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1987), 76.

<sup>30</sup> K.S. Jawatkar, *Diego Garcia in International Diplomacy* (London: Sangam Books, 1983), 3.

<sup>24</sup> “US Imports by Country of Origin,” US Energy Information Administration, [www.eia.gov/petroleum/data.cfm](http://www.eia.gov/petroleum/data.cfm). On America's relative energy independence, see Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “Protecting ‘The Prize’: Oil and the National Interest,” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, March 17, 2004; Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “Energy Alarmism: The Myths that Make Americans Worry about Oil,” *Cato Institute Policy Analysis* 589, April 5, 2007, <http://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/energy-alarmism-myths-make-americans-worry-about-oil>.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Review of Maritime Transport 2008* (New York: United Nations, 2008), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 231.

Diego Garcia's role as a regional hub for the US military materialized gradually over the last thirty years. Growing out of its value as an in-transit re-supply station and the dependability of access to the territory – which make it useful for both routine operations and crisis response – the island has become a prepositioning point for logistical equipment for contingency operations. Diego Garcia acts as a fixed warehouse from which the US Navy and Air Force support operational units throughout the region with fuel, food, routine supplies, spare parts, munitions, aircraft shelters, maintenance services, and communications. The atoll serves four primary functions for American commanders: a full one-third of the entire US Afloat Prepositioning Force occupies the lagoon;<sup>31</sup> fast-attack submarines and surface ships use the deep-draft wharf; an Air Expeditionary Wing supports tactical and long-range aircraft; and a telecommunications station tracks satellites and relays fleet broadcasts to units in the area.<sup>32</sup>

Despite its many strengths, the island's location and size impose important limits. Although Diego Garcia is centrally located, is relatively far removed from likely contingency locations in the Northern Indian Ocean. Consequently, Air Force fighters cannot traverse the Indian Ocean to Diego Garcia without help from tankers. Moreover, Diego Garcia contains only one runway and one quay wall (to which ships can moor). The long runway on the island accommodates any aircraft in the inventory – which is particularly relevant for B-1 and B-2 pilots on missions (often longer than forty hours) that originate from theaters other than CENTCOM – however, the island cannot accommodate large Navy platforms at its small pier. Finally, the island's small footprint is far less than required for a buildup of material to support a major military engagement. Nonetheless, should the need arise to surge units and equipment to the area, planners could expect to use Diego Garcia immediately.

American planners understandably place a high priority on *assured access* to regional bases. If the atoll is thousands of miles from any given area of interest, it is central to many. Absent advance notice of the next hot spot, it is sensible to concentrate on the center of the overall operating area. Accordingly, ally-sovereign access to the island remains critical to continued operations in the theater.

Like its Pacific counterpart Guam, Diego Garcia is a preferred launching point for prepositioned stock and munitions to surrounding hot spots. Unlike with Guam,

<sup>31</sup> This includes: (1) the US Navy Seventh Fleet's Maritime Prepositioned Stock Squadron-2, with sufficient supplies to support a Maritime Expeditionary Brigade's 16,000-18,000 personnel for thirty days; (2) support for one Infantry Brigade Combat Team via Army Prepositioning Afloat-3; and (3) Air Force War Reserve Materials, i.e., via two container ships rotating from Guam. David J. Berteau et al., *US Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2012), 60-62, [http://csis.org/files/publication/120814\\_FINAL\\_PACOM\\_optimized.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120814_FINAL_PACOM_optimized.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

however, defense planners long hesitated to modernize the island's aging infrastructure. This is no longer the case. After a ten-year hiatus in structural improvements to the pier, a refit and facilities upgrade has returned to the budget priority list. This is no coincidence. The US military will continue to confront violent extremism, Iran's nuclear ambitions, and other regional threats over the long term. In this context, Diego Garcia offers a stable platform from which to protect the promise and opportunity of the Indian Ocean, which links the Middle East and Africa to the trade routes of the western Pacific.

As operational tempo increases throughout the region, to the need to improve basic services on the island has grown. The atoll's military practicality, then, is catalyzing further American investment to allow this narrow strip of land to meet new requirements, including increased payloads for vertical strike (often quantified in terms of the number of serviceable Tomahawk missiles in-theater at a given time), increased surveillance capabilities, and increased operational flexibility for short- and long-range aircraft. The coming years will bring additional construction to Diego Garcia, substantively upgrading the existing forward operating base.

## A CONTESTED SPACE

The United States is not operating alone in the Indian Ocean, where it increasingly encounters Indian and Chinese military influence. The next two sections address, respectively, Indian and Chinese efforts to establish influence in the region. While Indian presence has been significant over time, China is emerging as a regional actor as well.

### *India and the Indian Ocean*

India's strategic orientation toward the Indian Ocean has increased markedly in the past decade. When India achieved independence in the wake of the Second World War, senior British officials assumed that the Raj's dominance in the region would pass to the Republic of India. Early Indian strategic thinkers argued, accordingly, that India required a navy that could pick up where the Royal Navy had left off. Moreover, they noted that India lost its independence when it lost control of the sea in the first decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>33</sup> As a result, it was necessary that India exercise control over the Indian Ocean.

Despite these expectations, the country took a different route following independence. India's political leaders turned their strategic attention westward and northward, to Pakistan and China. In an environment where a focus on economic growth constrained the size of the defense budget, the Indian army and air force received shares of military expenditures

<sup>33</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), p. 7; See also, Indira Gandhi, Opening Address, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Asia-Pacific Region, New Delhi, September 4, 1980.

double that of the navy. The idea of controlling, let alone dominating, the Indian Ocean was ignored for decades.

The current round of naval expansion began in the late 1990s, when the right-of-center BJP government launched an ambitious program of naval acquisition paired with a “forward-leaning” foreign policy that sought to bolster India’s influence across the littoral region from East Africa to the Asia-Pacific. Indian naval strategists are staking an explicit claim to the legacy of the British Empire as identifying the natural boundaries of India’s sphere of influence.<sup>34</sup>

India’s focus on the Indian Ocean is driven by three interrelated factors: geography, economics, and concern about extraregional actors. India’s landmass protrudes into the ocean at its midpoint, adjacent to the primary maritime trade routes that link the Strait of Hormuz, the Arabian Sea, and the Horn of Africa, on one hand, with the Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca on the other. With a host of island chains and atolls in both the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, India has a massive exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 2.54 million square miles – nearly ten percent of the Indian Ocean’s total area.

The sustained economic growth that India has experienced over the past fifteen years has given it sufficient wealth and power to start considering its security interests beyond its immediate region, while the need to sustain economic growth require that India focuses increasingly on the Indian Ocean littoral. India imports more than half of its natural gas and 70 percent of its oil, while roughly 90 percent of its external trade by volume and 77 percent by value travel by sea. Consequently, it is not surprising that the security of shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean is a major concern for India. Indeed, the Indian navy’s Maritime Strategy explicitly argues that “being the major maritime power in the [Indian Ocean region], a large part of the responsibility for ensuring the safety of international shipping lanes devolves upon the Indian Navy.”<sup>35</sup>

The need for India to secure its own interests in the IOR points to the third and final factor driving India’s attention to the region – concern about extra-regional actors. India has long sought to preclude other powers from gaining a lasting presence in the Indian Ocean; however, since the Cold War’s end, China has replaced the United States as the extraregional actor of primary concern. There is long-standing friction in the relationship between New Delhi and Beijing. The 1962 war between the two countries inflicted a humiliating defeat on India and created a yet-unresolved border dispute; furthermore, China has been a principal supplier of weapons technology, both conventional and nuclear, to Pakistan, India’s South Asian *bête noire*. Moreover, China’s perceived

efforts to establish a network of ports and partnerships with countries in the littoral region – including in several nations that have traditionally been hostile to India – are viewed by some as part of a coherent strategy to encircle India and confine its influence to South Asia.

India’s attitude toward the US presence in the IOR in general, and the base at Diego Garcia in particular, has evolved significantly in the post-Cold War era. In keeping with the pro-Soviet orientation of the “nonalignment” policy pursued by successive Congress Party-led governments, the joint British/US facility at Diego Garcia was a particular target of left-leaning politicians who characterized American naval presence in the IOR as a significant threat to regional peace, while largely ignoring the Soviet navy’s deployment to the Indian Ocean.

With the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991 and the subsequent reorientation of India’s economic and foreign policies, Indian attitudes toward American naval power in the Indian Ocean have adjusted accordingly. Indian strategists recognize that the United States will remain the world’s preeminent economic and military power for at least the next several decades. As such, American power will likely be committed to defending the status quo in the international system – and thereby the stability India requires to sustain its own economic development. Moreover, with common interests and concerns in areas ranging from securing the free flow of commerce to halting the spread of radical extremism, US military presence is now seen a stabilizing factor in a fragile region.<sup>36</sup>

The absence of criticism of Diego Garcia and US military presence in the region has been particularly notable at a time when military operations against violent extremism have brought a significant increase in US forces in Central Asia and the Horn of Africa region, as well as a significant use of the air and naval facilities at Diego Garcia. Although India ultimately seeks strategic autonomy in its foreign affairs, New Delhi has looked favorably on its strategic ties with Washington as a means to reinforce its position in the IOR. Given the US ability to base substantial air assets at Diego Garcia and to deploy naval forces from the Gulf and the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, there is recognition that American presence in the littoral can complement India’s quest for a peaceful and stable regional order.<sup>37</sup>

### *China and the Indian Ocean*

Where Indian observers increasingly see a Chinese “string of pearls” encircling India,<sup>38</sup> Chinese observers see a

<sup>34</sup> The definitive articulation of this view is C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> *Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime Military Strategy* (New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence [Navy], 2007), 54, 96. See also, Integrated Headquarters (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defense, 2004), 63–64.

<sup>36</sup> David Scott, “India’s Aspirations and Strategy for the Indian Ocean—Securing the Waves?” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36.4 (2013): 484–511.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Prakash Panneerselvam, “India-Japan Maritime Security Cooperation (1999–2006): A Report,” *Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Staff College Review* 2 (May 2013): 98–102.

<sup>38</sup> “String of Pearls” is not a Chinese term, but rather was introduced in Juli A. MacDonald, Amy Donahue, Bethany Danyluk, *Energy Futures in Asia: Final Report* (Washington, DC: Booz

rapidly developing Indian navy gradually complementing the overwhelming US naval power in the Indian Ocean to challenge the security of China's seaborne trade there. Since the Cold War's end, US forces in Diego Garcia have been viewed by Chinese analysts as part of a larger strategy of maintaining American control of East Asia at China's expense.<sup>39</sup> Despite strong concerns about America's global military posture, however, current Chinese analyses of Diego Garcia's significance are not nearly as alarmist as assessments of American bases in Guam, Japan, or even South Korea, which are perceived as more directly applicable to military scenarios directed against China and its core interests.

This relative prioritization of Chinese concerns should not be surprising – China's current naval platforms and weaponry still suggest an "access denial" strategy focused on deterring Taiwan from declaring independence and on consolidating contested maritime claims in the Yellow, East China, and South China seas. Beyond these areas, the Chinese navy may not seek to project influence into the western Pacific. Instead, persistent fears of oil-supply interdiction, together with China's growing interests in maritime resource and commerce, may gradually drive more long-ranging naval development south and west along the strategic sea-lanes through Southeast Asia and past the subcontinent.

Already, China has achieved a modest presence in the IOR, including the deployment of a frigate and military transport aircraft to safeguard the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Libya in February 2011; participation in fourteen (and counting) antipiracy task forces to deter pirates in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008; and dispatching a hospital ship to treat patients throughout the Indian Ocean in 2010 and 2013.<sup>40</sup> However, it should be noted that China will not possess substantial warfighting capabilities in the region any time soon. Not only will Chinese naval ambitions in the IOR will run afoul of those of India,<sup>41</sup> Beijing must

tend to matters in East Asia before it can apply its energies to the Indian Ocean. Finally, China's growth trajectory vis-à-vis India is far from certain. In the NIC's analysis,

*As the world's largest economic power, China is expected to remain ahead of India, but the gap could begin to close by 2030. India's rate of economic growth is likely to rise while China's slows. In 2030 India could be the rising economic powerhouse that China is seen to be today. China's current economic growth rate – 8 to 10 percent – will probably be a distant memory by 2030. The total size of the Chinese working-age population will peak in 2016 and decline from 994 million to about 961 million in 2030. In contrast, India's working-age population is unlikely to peak until about 2050.*<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, some of the more thoughtful Chinese experts share Indian counterparts' assessment that, for all its present challenges, the US is likely to enjoy significant staying power as a superpower. For instance, noted Peking University professor and former advisor to President Hu Jintao, Wang Jisi, contends that legal traditions, social values, technological-institutional innovations, and civil society give the United States a competitive edge that will allow it to remain the world's sole superpower for at least the next two to three decades.<sup>43</sup> These dynamics, and China's unrealized regional ambitions, suggest that Beijing and Washington, at a minimum, can achieve "competitive coexistence" in the IOR.<sup>44</sup> In sum, while India will continue to build on its home court advantage in the Indian Ocean, and China's regional presence and influence will continue to increase there, for the foreseeable future the US is poised to continue its preeminent role in regional security provision and system maintenance.

## CONCLUSION: DIEGO GARCIA'S STRATEGIC FUTURE

The security situation in the IOR, long characterized by uncertain relations between its major power brokers, is prone to strategic miscalculation. More than ever before, the interests of the United States, India, and China coincide and collide in the IOR. These key states, one predominant and the others ascendant, may find themselves at odds as they protect

Allen Hamilton, 2004), [http://books.google.com/books/about/Energy\\_Futures\\_in\\_Asia.html?id=5En2PgAACAAJ](http://books.google.com/books/about/Energy_Futures_in_Asia.html?id=5En2PgAACAAJ). Other representatives from Booz Allen Hamilton subsequently confirmed to one of the authors that the term was introduced by two Indian participants in one of the workshops associated with the report's development. Nevertheless, this term is widely used by Indian analysts to express their widespread concern of growing Chinese strategic encirclement in the Indian Ocean region. See Alex Vines, "Mesmerised by Chinese String of Pearls Theory," *The World Today* (February/March 2012), 33-34, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/The%20World%20Today/2012/february/0212vines.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> 静海 [Jing Hai], "美国海军太平洋舰队五大海军基地和多少 [The US Navy Pacific Fleet's Five Great Naval Bases and Their Relevant Statistics], 人民海军 [People's Navy], March 4, 2006, 4.

<sup>40</sup> "Special: Hospital Ship Peace Ark," *China Daily*, July 23, 2013, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-07/03/content\\_16712682.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-07/03/content_16712682.htm).

<sup>41</sup> One of the most extensive studies to date of China's future in the Indian Ocean devotes considerable attention to India's interests and presence in the Indian Ocean. Published by a press affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the report includes chapters written by scholars across China. 汪戎, 万广华 [Wang Rong and Wan Guanghua, chief editors], 印度洋地

区蓝皮书 [Blue Book of the Indian Ocean Region], 印度洋地区发展报告 (2013)--印度洋形势与战略 [Annual Report on the Development of the Indian Ocean Region (2013)—Indian Ocean Situation and Strategy] (Beijing: 社会科学文献出版社 [Social Sciences Academic Press], 2013).

<sup>42</sup> *Global Trends 2030*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> 王缉思 [Wang Jisi], "20年内美国仍是唯一超级大国" [America Will Still Be the Only Superpower for the Next 20 Years], 环球时报 [Global Times], 2 August 2011, <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-08/1870188.html>; [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2011-08/02/c\\_121759583.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2011-08/02/c_121759583.htm).

<sup>44</sup> For two of the earliest known uses of this phrase to describe Sino-American relations and their likely character, see Andrew S. Erickson, "Assessing the New US Maritime Strategy: A Window into Chinese Thinking," *Naval War College Review* 61.4 (Fall 2008): 35-71, <http://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/21380430-28cf-4a54-afbb-cb1f64761b27/Assessing-the-New-U-S--Maritime-Strategy--A-Window.aspx>; Erickson and Gabriel Collins, "Beijing's Energy Security Strategy: The Significance of a Chinese State-Owned Tanker Fleet," *Orbis* 51.4 (Fall 2007): 665-84.



national interests in a region with great economic potential and numerous security challenges; they will increasingly compete for power, influence, and presence throughout the Indian Ocean littoral. The future stability of the IOR security environment thus depends in part on the extent to which the interests of the region's major stakeholders can coexist.

Since the US remains the one state willing to provide public security throughout the region, however, the region's future security also hinges on whether Washington can maintain the access necessary to continue to play this role. The challenge of securing the transit of major trade and energy supplies through areas threatened by an irredentist state sponsor of terrorism seeking to develop nuclear weapons, weak and failing states, extreme poverty, religious extremism, and transnational terrorism requires reliable, rapid operational access to strategic sea-lanes and selected land-based threats without inflaming anti-Americanism.

America's forward bases facilitate the projection of US power around the globe, and in the post-Cold War strategic environment, access to such facilities has become more tenuous. Yet, maintaining the security of the sea-lanes and the free flow of goods transiting the Indian Ocean requires a sustained US maritime presence. This presence depends on access, which is particularly constrained by domestic politics across the IOR. In such an environment, American interests are best served by the cultivation of a regional presence that does not depend on the acquiescence of local governments responding to sometimes-volatile public sentiment, especially in light of the ongoing Arab Spring.

Consequently, there is simply no substitute for the vital role played by Diego Garcia. The island provides guaranteed access to American air and naval assets at the heart of a dynamic geopolitical region. As a key enabler of persistent American military presence, yet sufficiently far from the mainland to reduce the threat of state or non-state actors, it is the lynchpin of America's IOR strategy. As part of a larger American Indo-Pacific strategy, it must be utilized in conjunction with other key basing locations such as Guam, Australia, and Singapore to facilitate the rotational presence of forces. Only by doing so can Washington succeed in its Asia-Pacific Rebalance, which hinges on sustaining capabilities and presence sufficient to reassure friends and allies and deter negative actions by potential adversaries, and therefore continue to provide public security and safeguard the existing international system in an age of austerity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For instance, a major study commissioned by the US Department of Defense found that Australian officials and citizens alike pay significant attention to US force posture discussions with respect to Diego Garcia. Berteau et al., *US Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region*, 31.

# Harvard Asia Quarterly

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

We welcome you to a new issue of the Harvard Asia Quarterly under a new team. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our outgoing Editor-in-Chief, Allan Hsiao for his invaluable guidance and for helping us during our summer transition.

Let me start by sharing our themes for the year with you. In this issue we begin the year with a focus on 'Asia's Security Future – National Strategies and Regional Institutions'. We will then shift our focus to 'Asia – Regional Economic Institutions for Cooperation, Integration and Growth', followed by 'A New Politics in Asia? Responding to Inequality'. We will end the year with, 'Asia – The Arts, Humanities and the Role of the Media'. We hope you will be with us in this journey as we explore the complexity of modern Asia across a range of dimensions. We especially hope that by sharing our vision for the year with you at the start, you and your colleagues will be forthcoming with valuable contributions to our on-going discussions on Asia.

We begin by focusing on Asia's international relations. Professors Alex Littlefield (Feng Chia University) and Tsai Tung-Chieh (National Chung-hsing University) argue that despite the Obama administration's recent efforts at rebalancing in Asia, China will continue its rise to become the primary player in the region. Taylor Washburn, a student fellow with the US-Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, explores Russia's recent efforts to regain its historical influence in the Korean Peninsula – and how it is unlikely that the 'shrinking bear' will be able to decisively shape Korean events in the foreseeable future.

Our next section features two articles on issues of territory and sea. Andrew Erickson (US Naval War College), Walter Ladwig (University of Oxford), and Justin Mikolay look at the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean Region and the development of an enhanced US military hub on the little-known British island of Diego Garcia in the center of the Indian Ocean as the US feels the need to enhance its military footprint in the region. Professors William Lay and Chunjuan Nancy Wei of the University of Bridgeport look at the prospects for resolving territorial disputes and the competition for island ownership in the South China Sea by means of international legal processes including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea – they find that given contradictory interpretations of the Treaty, countries will continue to play out their contradictory claims militarily and politically.

Our final section focuses on regional institutions. Professor Arndt Michael of the University of Freiburg argues that while South Asia's problems cross borders and require regional solutions, the region's institutions, in particular the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are hampered in their visions by India's and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's foundational objection in its foreign policy formulation to collective security mechanisms. In our final article, Professor Sven Horak (St. John's University) compares the different approaches and relative successes of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) to create common regional identities. He finds ASEAN's efforts to be more successful in engendering a common Asian identity and speculates whether its approach may inspire the EU.

We hope that the range of issues covered and the viewpoints represented in these academic discussions showcase the complexity of the region – and spur further research and discussions on these themes. With the maturation of regional studies in American academia, we hope the Harvard Asia Quarterly continues to provide a strong platform for ongoing conversations on the region, in the US, in Asia, and around the world.

We look forward to hearing from you,



Erum Sattar  
Editor-in-Chief

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