

## **Indian Ocean in the Globalizing World**

**V.S. Sheth\***

Being enclosed in the west, north and east by Eurasian, Indian and Australasian land mass and having been spread over tropics, warm waters of the Indian Ocean have given rise to uniform wind and precipitation patterns and navigable currents, influencing agriculture, trade and human habitat. Movement of trade and population have combined with geoclimatic and geoeconomics to create an idea of common geographical space encompassing enormous social, cultural, linguistic, religious and political diversity. Although smaller than Pacific and Atlantic, Indian Ocean has been traversed since times immemorial. People living on Asian-African littoral states traded with each other and also with the Romans and Greeks through the medium of Indian Ocean waters before and after the beginning of the Christian era. Given the technological capabilities of the communities living on the littorals then, Indian Ocean was a complete Universe for the people of the region.

Defined as intensity and extent of international interactions, globalization could be viewed as an age old phenomenon having changing pace and dynamics, though it has acquired variety of meanings and have different starting points for different people. The movement of trade and people between littorals was peaceful, without an aspect of domination. Indian Ocean waters provided a medium for cultural and human influences to spread across continents. All these ended with the onset of Age of discoveries. From 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards ocean waters

became maritime highway for European, trade going in all directions. The European quest for wealth and prosperity led to internationalization of their trade, migration of populations, setting up of new societies, creation of new linguistic and cultural patterns.

The Indian Ocean was converted into European lake with the discovery all sea route to the East. The trade route between the littorals was subsumed by the dominant European trading interests. Growth of Science and technology followed increase in material prosperity and this affected the political and economic set-up of European societies. The monarchical feudal order collapsed and political authority was relocated in democratic nation-states. The emerging trading and industrial classes became the basis of new European political structure. Strong overseas trading and commercial linkages were put in place through scientific and technological developments in transport, communication and medicine enabling human spirit to overcome geographical barriers and with stand health hazards.

Developments in Europe, affected relations between human beings and also between diverse far-flung societies. The pace and directions of international interaction during the second phase of Globalization which had begun in 1498, changed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Globalization moved with the help of imperialism and colonialism enhancing the need of cooperation between people residing in different Geographical segments. The European littoral societies came under European colonial and imperial control. The British for example, took possession of Cape Colony in 1843, took control of British East India Company in 1857, peacefully partitioned sub-Saharan African territories with other European powers at 1884-85 Berlin Congress, fought bitter wars with white Afrikaners for control of gold and diamond mines in South Africa.

During this period, Indian Ocean became main avenue for transporting European goods, men and material for the purpose of colonization of Indian Ocean rim territories and Far East. Indian ocean littoral societies during the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century gained in geo economic and geo strategic importance due to the discovery of minerals, oil, and natural gas and as a consequence control over warm waters of IO gained in importance for the uninterrupted flow of resources to the European continent. By their naval domination of high seas, gulfs and bays and the narrow entry and exist points, the British were able to mobilize vast colonial resources from IO hinterland during both the world wars.

### **Post war globalization and its impact on Indian Ocean:**

The dynamics of globalization in post war period were radically different than those of the earlier centuries. Use of military technology for civilian purposes reduced travel time from one part of the globe to the other and the capability and accuracy of military weapons to hit distant military targets increased. The invention of faster and efficient means of communications made it possible for the people to know about the developments in the different parts of the world. Developments in the fields of information, communication, transport and military in the initial two decades of post war period spatially compressed the world and thereby revolutionised global politics.

The interactions between nation-states during this period gathered momentum through inter and intra systematic consolidation. The cold war ideological competition between Super Powers had the consequence of the US providing Marshall Plan aid to Western European economies and the formation of alliance system for safeguarding territorial integrity of western democracies.

Globalization and fragmentation are the result of specific state policies. The setting up of United Nations Organization having global political, economic, military reach reaffirmed the 19<sup>th</sup> century process of economic globalization initiated under Imperial Powers. However, UN unlike the 19<sup>th</sup> century imperial states had to depend upon the member nation-states for its global activities. United Nations in the post war period recognized the right of colonial people to determine who and how they should be governed. All these developments in the global politics within a short span of one decade and the lack of primacy of former colonial and imperial powers in the international power configuration, cumulated in the accelerating dismantling of colonial empires.

The process of decolonization in the fifties and sixties around Indian Ocean Rim had two consequences. First, independence was given in rapid succession to collectivities of people possessing differing territorial size, political, economic, military, social viability. The consequences of resultant power vacuum and political instability in the littoral and hinterland was sought to be negated by the spread of super power politics and growth of neo colonial influences. The political instability in the Indian Ocean gave anxious moments to the western elites, because of their dependence on import of 50 different strategic materials such as manganese, cobalt, titanium, chromium, platinum, tin, nickel, iron, lead, copper from IOR. European, Japanese and US economies, import 70%, 76%, 25% of their crude oil requirements respectively from the IOR. Besides crude oil, the IOR exports agricultural produce such as tea, coffee, rubber, sesame in large quantities to the west. The creation of dependant economies in the Indian Ocean Region was a second consequence rapid decolonization. The dependence between asymmetrical economic forces resulted in the further impoverishment of third world economies in general and those of IOR in particular.

The emergence of quasi states and dependent economies in the post war period was accompanied by the spread of neo-colonial influence in the form of military bases and the supply of economic and military aid to IOR region states from countries belonging to rival ideological camps. The space provided by Indian Ocean waters and its uninhabited islands was used for stationing of nuclear weapons, military aircrafts, naval ships and military personnel of US.

### **Indian Ocean Rim Association Of Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC):**

The intra and inter systemic consolidation in post war period reinforced 19<sup>th</sup> century trend towards establishing global organizations for securing economic and physical security of the people. The idea of economic association was first initiated by the western European nation states and the concept caught imagination of third world elites in post independence period. In the nineties the pace and dynamics of globalization changed due to information and communication revolutions. These when combined with biotechnological revolution in agriculture- which opened new vistas of development and economic growth- affected international relations. The overhauling of rigid, centralized economic and political systems through introduction of popular participation and liberalization of economies on the part of socialist economies became imperative for achieving comparable speed of economic development to that of the West. This resulted in the end of the Cold War as communist command economies and supportive political structures collapsed under the impact of information, communication and technological revolutions. While international system became unipolar, the international capital became mobile. The digital space has emerged not simply as a means of communicating, but as a major area for capital accumulation and the operation of global capital in the post cold war period.

In this unfolding process of globalization the patterns of cooperation and conflict have been redefined. The increased flow of information, capital, technology and labour-factor flows- is taking place across the territories on global and not national terms. This has created new space of exchange and interaction, setting a process of dissolution of national economies and this new spatial dimension has been articulated as the rise of 'Region State'.

The Indian Ocean region interfaces three politically, economically, socially, culturally diverse continents and the rationale for cooperation in such a large region does not emanate as much from territorial contiguity as from the contours of 'new geography'. As the globalization involves restructuring of organizational patterns beyond national states into new models, it generates new synergy and creates the possibilities of new conflicts. Some old conflicts have been resolved only to be replaced by new ones in the post cold war globalization. While conflicts generated by terrorism, drug trafficking pose threat to global society, the ethnic and genocidal conflicts, wars of secession, the illicit supply of arms endanger security of individual nation states and regional environs.

Challenges emanating from changes in Post Cold War period have forced IO region countries to overlook regional diversity and cooperate in establishing Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). End of the Cold War and end of South Africa's international isolation, global trend towards establishment of World Trade Organization, adoption of processes of economic liberalization by India and other countries, the emergence of environmental, terrorists and criminal concerns and fear of further marginalization of IOR economies within the global economy, provided impetus for the setting up of the IOR-ARC. As President Nelson Mandela aptly put it, the natural urge of facts of historical and geographical

complementarity should broaden for including conceptual exploration of Indian Ocean rim and socio economic cooperation and other peaceful endeavours.

The IOR-ARC charter signed in 1997 operates on the principle of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non interference in the internal affairs of member states, peaceful coexistence, respect for the bilateral, multilateral cooperation, exclusion of divisive issues from IOR ARC deliberations and adoption of method consensus in decision making process. In order to overcome economic backwardness of IO Rim countries, IOR-ARC has been designed to set directions for the economic and trade policy in IOR and reaffirm policy of “open regionalism” and inclusion of membership, due to proliferation of regional economic, political groupings. The charter aims to promote trade liberalization and flow of goods, services, human resource and infrastructural development. It further aims at facilitating trade diversification and foreign direct investment, tourism and scientific and technological exchange in the region. Regional cooperation in IOR aims at developing common positions and strategies on issues of mutual interest in international forums and forge close links between member states in human resource and training.

IOR-ARC faces conceptual problems of both local and global level. The size and diversity of IO region has burdened the Association with the problems of definition and membership. The total membership of IOR-ARC could vary from 24 to 38 countries depending on the definition used to indicate who will qualify to join in the cooperative venture. For example, out of the 15 landlocked countries situated in Africa, nearly 12 could stake a claim to be members of IOR-ARC by virtue of their dependence on IO trade. Three regional powers namely India, South Africa and Australia have differing views on the expansion of IOR-ARC membership. India’s stand on gradual expansion of Association has been opposed by Australia,

Singapore, Indonesia, South Africa. While Australia feels that major economies such as Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan must be included if IOR-ARC has to proceed apace, India views Pakistan and France's inclusion problematic due to her strained relationship with the former and non sovereign status of the later in IOR. South Africa will like to have quick addition of new members as it will enable all the countries of the Southern Africa Development Council (SADC) to become the members of IOR-ARC. This will help South Africa to link up her IO policy with that towards SADC for playing effective performance in both the areas.

The position of local economy as a bottom in conventional spatial hierarchies i.e. local national, international have changed under the impact of globalization. Establishment of WTO and its efforts to reduce tariff regimes across the world by 2005, the cross border activities of transnational corporations and global finance markets, the spread of globalizing network of production sites and emergence of denationalized Internet as a space for civil society and semi-private transnational legal regimes which escape conventional jurisdiction have impacted repositioning of local economy/regions into new global space .IOR-ARC therefore cannot revive classical South-South cooperation at a time when concept of time and space and principles of organization of production and market norms are undergoing change following new technological revolution . As Gamani Corea, former Secretary General of UNCTAD says, South-South cooperation as the type envisaged under IOR-ARC needs to be seen as strategic option for more effective participation in the new global order.

Besides enabling IO countries to more effectively participate in the Global economy, the regional cooperation will help in meeting new security threat in the form of low intensity conflict (LIC). Threat of LIC against sovereign states by non-state and state supported/sponsored actors

could be met by joint mobilization and operation of naval and coast-guard facilities on part of mini island states for effective control of coasts and vast maritime zones.

Indian Ocean provides in abundance, living and non-living resources and renewable and non-polluting sources of energy. Tropical climate favors growth of marine animal life in form of fish, plants and other marine animals useful for human consumption and making drugs and pharmaceutical products. Exclusive economic zones of various coastal countries have oil-natural gas and minerals in form of polymetallic nodules and hydrothermal vents.

Availability of important marine life and minerals and enormous trade passing through Indian Ocean, makes regional cooperation among member states an imperative for ship-building/repair, preventing ocean water polluting through ship wreckage and oil leakages, exploitation and protection of fisheries, marine life, minerals, oil and natural gas.

Poverty, rising population, unfulfilled popular aspirations religious divides, boundary disputes in the Indian Ocean hinterland could destabilize the Indian region through conventional and nuclear arms race and provide considerable needling by the external powers in the Indian Ocean region. The possibility of conversion of IOR into nuclear dumping zone is real, as India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons, and several Indian Ocean Rim states such as Iran, Israel, South Africa have harbored intention to develop them. Besides U.S and Western European Countries, Russia and China also have intention to make their presence felt in Indian Ocean.

Geography of Indian Ocean makes it possible to militarily pressurize northern rim states through land power and also use narrow Indian Ocean entry points of Suez, Gulf of Aden and Straits of Malacca for spincer movements. Moscow in post cold war period maintains diplomatic relations with all Indian Ocean Rim littoral and island states. Moscow rejects the tendency of world domination by one power or group of powers and therefore recognizes the assumption that

in view of increasing importance of cooperation through regional arrangements these would become a significant factor of regional and sub-regional security and peace-making. Moscow supports formation of IOR-ARC framework of regional cooperation which could strengthen a trend towards multipolarity and facilitate fruitful interaction in world economic and political processes.

China has vital trading interests in IOR. She imports from IO countries 36.2 billion US \$ worth of goods while exports goods worth 28.2 billion. Several IO rim countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel, South Africa, Australia, are important trade partners of China. In view of interdependent and beneficial relationship China has with IOR, emergence of dominant or hegemonic naval and military power may adversely affect China's IO trade. The proliferation of nuclear weapons and expansion of coastal states' naval strength especially that of South Asian states has worried the Chinese and Beijing therefore has set about installing naval and military communication base in Bay of Bengal.

The sinews of cooperation among IO littoral and island states will arrest further marginalization of IOR in global economy, strengthen their capacity to ward off or prevent environmental, terrorist and criminal dangers and face intrusion of external powers in IO waters with confidence.

## **Conclusion**

Bretherton in "Global Politics" published in 1996 has identified four pillars of post cold war globalization namely technology change, creation of global economy, increasing commonality of political institutions, values and ideas. Each one of these seriously affect IO landmass, island states, and surrounding warm waters. Institutional mechanism of IOR ARC is a

response of IO states to changing dynamics and pace of globalization in post cold war period. IOR has been in the vortex of international developments since 15<sup>th</sup> century and will continue to remain that way in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The success of IOR ARC will determine whether states of IOR will remain as subordinate, marginalized units of international state system or could shake off the bondage of states of Western Europe, North America, Japan, and prevent Russia and China from intruding into IOR.

\* Center for African Studies, University of Mumbai, Mumbai, India.