H-Diplo Article Review 1004

3 December 2020

Yogesh Joshi. "Whither Non-Alignment? Indian Ocean Zone of Peace and New Delhi's Selective Alignment with Great Powers during the Cold War, 1964–1979." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30:1 (2019): 26-49. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2019.1557414.

https://hdiplo.org/to/AR1004
Article Review Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

Review by Ryan A. Musto, Stanford University

In September 1964, at the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Cairo, Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike proposed that the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) be turned into a Zone of Peace (IOZP). Specifically, she called for the eradication of military bases from the area and the Ocean's denuclearization. India, a neighboring littoral state, immediately supported the initiative and became one of its greatest champions through the end of the 1970s. Scholars have claimed that India's enthusiasm stemmed from its non-aligned foreign policy and enduring commitment to Prime Minister's Jawaharlal Nehru's *moralpolitik* (27-28). But as Yogesh Joshi argues in his exemplary article, such interpretations miss the mark.

With fresh sources from the labyrinthine collections of the National Archives of India and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, Joshi reveals that India grounded its approach to an IOZP in "power politics." Behind non-aligned rhetoric, India used the IOZP initiative as cover for "selective alignment" with the "Great Powers" (namely Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States) in order to advance its national security interests (27). India did not use calls for an IOZP to eradicate the Cold War from the region, but rather to harness the competition to advance its regional ambitions and capabilities. Overall, Joshi demonstrates that India did as much to encourage the militarization of the region as to thwart it.

Joshi identifies three distinctive periods in India's calls for an IOZP between 1964 and 1979. The first occurred between 1964 and 1970, when India used the initiative to align itself with Great Britain and the United States against the People's Republic of China (PRC). The twin blows of the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the PRC's first successful nuclear test two years later led India to seek Anglo-American protection. A formal military alliance presented problems, though: it could be unreliable, undermine India's standing in the Afro-Asian world, and lead to Sino-Soviet rapprochement. As a result, India adopted what Joshi labels a "highly generalized" approach to the idea of an IOZP [31]. This tactic allowed India to cover for a western naval buildup in the IOR while New Delhi maintained the appearance of non-alignment. When Great Britain decided to withdraw its forces East of Suez after 1968, India welcomed "Soviet forays" into the IOR (32). By promoting Great Power balance and cooperation in the area, India hoped to thwart any thaw in Sino-Soviet relations.

From 1970 to 1976, India continued to use the IOZP proposal to counter the PRC, but New Delhi affixed itself to one Great Power partner over the other. U.S. actions in the early 1970s threatened India. Over the first half of the decade, the Nixon Administration opened relations with the PRC, backed Pakistan against India in the 1971 war over Bangladesh, employed the U.S Navy to influence the outcome of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and continued to expand the United States' naval presence on Diego Garcia, a British-owned IOR archipelago. India's call for an IOZP in the early 1970s belied acceptance of a Soviet naval buildup in the area, which India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) rationalized as "defensive in nature" and a guard against "US or western 'gun-boat' diplomacy and Chinese moves to extend her area of influence" (35). But as Joshi shows, India also used the IOZP initiative to consolidate regional hegemony after its resounding defeat of

Pakistani forces in the 1971 war and successful detonation of a 'peaceful nuclear explosion' in 1974. India pushed to apply the restrictions of an IOZP solely to the Great Powers, not the littoral states, as a way to leave its capabilities untouched. Overall, Joshi notes that a "combined feeling of regional supremacy and continued vulnerability against extra-regional interventions" drove India's IOZP policy in the first half of the 1970s (34).

By the end of the decade, India's IOZP pendulum swung back to the United States. From 1977 to 1979, with a changed domestic political environment under Prime Minister Morarji Desai, India sought to recapture "genuine nonalignment" (38). In the context of the IOZP initiative, this meant a rebalancing of Great Power affinity. Relations improved with the United States under President Jimmy Carter. In March 1977, Carter initiated negotiations with the Soviet Union on the demilitarization of the IOR. New Delhi welcomed Carter's push to confine the IOZP talks to the Great Powers, which allowed India to continue its naval expansion. A year later, Carter visited India to bolster ties between the two countries. The Indo-American thaw strained relations with the Soviet Union; Moscow resented India's equation of Soviet and U.S. forces in the IOR, while India chaffed at Soviet attempts to include littoral states in IOZP limitations and to expand the IOR's geographic scope. With an on-going crisis in the Horn of Africa, IOZP talks floundered and the two superpowers expanded their naval presence in the area.

Joshi focuses on India's relationship with the Great Powers, but his discussion of other regional states is also noteworthy. India's push in the 1970s to confine the IOZP initiative to the Great Powers contrasted with the desire of South Asian states like Sri Lanka and Pakistan to use the IOZP to check India's mounting capabilities (37-8). This observation raises interesting questions about regional south-south ties that lay beyond the scope of the article. For example, did Sri Lanka resent India's commandeering of the IOZP initiative? To what extent did Sri Lanka work with Pakistan to corner India on the issue? And did other littoral states beyond South Asia look to contain India with the proposal?[1]

Joshi makes the important distinction between the push for an IOZP and a stand-alone nuclear weapon free zone (NWFZ). At times these concepts bled into one another, but they also evolved as separate endeavors. Despite early nominal support for Sri Lanka's call to denuclearize the IOR, India opposed any regional ban on nuclear weapons and instead sought to regulate Great Power conventional forces. Joshi reveals that in 1965 India's Foreign Secretary dismissed the idea of a NWFZ for the IOR as a mere "platitude" in the face of the PRC's nuclear capability (31). Other factors likely played a role in the decision to eschew calls for an IOR NWFZ in the 1960s as well, namely India's desire for a Great Power military presence in the area and concern over the efficacy of NWFZs as an arms control strategy.[2] Joshi paints a more nuanced picture in his coverage of the issue for the 1970s, when India faced a concerted push by Pakistan to establish a NWFZ for South Asia.[3] India once more called for inclusion of the PRC in any NWFZ, but it also viewed the idea as Pakistani propaganda that

[1] For example, India's representative to the UN Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean in the early 1980s notes that after 1979, "India and Australia had become antagonistic to one another" over the IOZP proposal. See, T.P. Sreenivasan, "New wars on the Cold War relic," *The Hindu*, 16 December 2014, https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/lead-article-new-wars-on-the-cold-war-relic/article6694860.ece.

[2] India professed general support for NWFZs as an arms control strategy, but it also remained wary that such an approach might leave certain regions exposed to the dangers of the nuclear arms race. See, "Final Verbatim Record of the Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament [Meeting 005]," 20 March 1962, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2005), 36; It is unlikely that nuclear ambitions played a role in India's decision to reject a NWFZ in the 1960s. While he does not mention it in this piece, Joshi finds elsewhere that the MEA rejected Indian nuclear weapons development during the decade. See, Yogesh Joshi, "Waiting for the Bomb: P.N. Haksar and India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s," Working Paper #11, Nuclear Proliferation International History Project, the Wilson Center (September 2017), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/wp11-joshi-rc4.pdf.

[3] For more information on this initiative, see, Savita Pande, "Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone in South Asia," *Strategic Analysis* 22:11 (1999): 1681-1693.

could imperil an IOZP and India's newfound nuclear capability. Joshi finds that India "did not see the two superpowers as nuclear threats," an outlook that reinforced its opposition to a NWFZ (37).

Joshi's article redefines our understanding of India's approach to the IOZP issue and "busts the myth" that India's foreign policy consisted exclusively of an "idealist streak" (43). It also makes broader historiographical contributions to the study of South Asia and the Cold War. Joshi encourages scholars to further incorporate the IOR, an area of great strategic significance to New Delhi, into their studies of India's foreign policy and Cold War dynamics in South Asia. Moreover, he calls for scholars to move beyond a Cold War binary for the region. In doing so, Joshi reinforces an important trend, seen most recently in Lorenz Lüthi's landmark work, to de-center the Cold War narrative by integrating regional dynamics into our understanding of the East-West competition.[4] As Joshi notes, India's approach to an IOZP reminds us that "regional powers often used the Cold War to their advantage" (28).

Finally, Joshi's work illustrates that the study of failed initiatives can be just as important as that of those that succeed.[5] It reinforces Vince Houghton's observation, made in his book on whacky aborted U.S. intelligence and military schemes, that "the evaluation of historical *events* is not enough…The *intent* of historical actors can be (and I argue *is*) far more instructive and illuminating…"[6] As Joshi demonstrates, India's approach to the IOZP both reflected its regional interests and strengthened its ability to pursue them. Overall, Joshi's article should be of great interest and value to scholars of South Asia, arms control, and the Cold War.

Ryan A. Musto is a MacArthur Nuclear Security Fellow with the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University. He holds a Ph.D. in history from The George Washington University, and served as a Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow with the Security Studies Program (SSP) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Ryan is currently writing a book on the international history of NWFZs.

[4] Lorenz M. Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[5] The United Nations did pass a non-binding General Assembly resolution in 1971 that designated the IOR as a zone of peace, but with fifty-five abstentions, including those of the superpowers, it had little teeth. Joshi mentions part of the failure of the UN process on page 34.

[6] Vince Houghton, *Nuking the Moon and other Intelligence Schemes and Military Plots Left on the Drawing Board* (New York: Penguin, 2019), xiii.