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Subcommittee on the Indo-Pacific

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Nilanthi Samaranyake

Director, Strategy and Policy Analysis Program, CNA

Adjunct Fellow, East-West Center in Washington¹

Good afternoon Chairwoman Kim and Ranking Member Bera, Members of the Subcommittee, Thank you for the invitation to testify today. I will examine the topic areas outlined in the objective of the hearing: “The Subcommittee on the Indo-Pacific aims to build emphasis and awareness about U.S. interests in the region surrounding the Indian Ocean and Beijing’s expanding footprint in the IO.”

Please note: The research and views I will share today are solely my own and not of any organization with which I am affiliated.

My testimony will address three issues. First, I’ll discuss what we see China doing in the Indian Ocean. Next, I’ll examine the constraints on greater presence and influence by China in the Indian Ocean, as well as regional enablers of stability. Third, I’ll examine US interests in the Indian Ocean. I’ll conclude by offering a few recommendations.

1. What is China doing in the Indian Ocean?

Naval and maritime presence

China has had diplomatic ties with Indian Ocean countries since the Cold War era. But its greater military and maritime presence in the Indian Ocean over the past 15 years has been a striking development. The clearest examples are counterpiracy and noncombatant evacuation operations and the establishment of a base in Djibouti. Counterpiracy continues to serve as a rationale for a recurring PLA Navy presence across the Indian Ocean, even as piracy incidents have dramatically declined. China’s hospital ship *Peace Ark* has conducted humanitarian assistance visits to build goodwill among local countries, while military and civilian platforms have conducted relief operations—for example, during the water crisis in Maldives in 2014 and the floods in Sri Lanka in 2017. China signed a contract in 2011 with the International Seabed Authority and has sent research vessels for the prospecting and exploration of polymetallic sulphides in the southwest Indian Ocean. Media reporting showed a handful of PLA Navy submarine port visits to Pakistan and Sri Lanka during 2014-16. More recently, the platform causing immediate concern is the Chinese surveillance and tracking ship *Yuan Wang 5*, which paid port visits to Sri Lanka last summer and South Africa this month.

Statements by chiefs of naval staff in India are useful for tracking trends on China’s Indian Ocean presence. In January 2019, India’s then-chief of naval staff, Admiral Sunil Lanba, estimated: “At any given time, there are six to eight Chinese Navy ships in the northern part of the Indian Ocean.”² Four years later in December 2022, Admiral Hari Kumar said, “There are a lot of Chinese ships which operate in the Indian Ocean Region. We have about 4-6 PLA Navy ships, then some research vessels which operate. A large number of Chinese fishing vessels

operate in the Indian Ocean Region.”³ The numbers from 2019 to 2022 are roughly stable. It is worth noting that attention to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing by Chinese vessels has generally increased, but we do not have robust data to measure the extent of the problem.

A disturbing demonstration of China’s potential to disrupt the regional order occurred in 2018, when US officials filed a diplomatic protest that China was responsible for directing lasers at US Air Force aircraft in Djibouti, threatening the crew’s safety. Such incidents suggest that China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea could carry over into the Indian Ocean—which is precisely the reason regional countries have historically called for an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace.

Economics

China’s commercial and financing activities have left a greater footprint in the Indian Ocean. This has occurred over the past 20 years, predating the Belt and Road Initiative, which was announced in 2013 as One Belt, One Road. Fifty years ago, most Indian Ocean states but Australia were considered underdeveloped. Today, most Indian Ocean countries are categorized by the World Bank as middle-income economies (see the table in the appendix). The majority of this group are lower middle-income countries that are trying to meet their national development goals, while facing challenges such as the loss of concessional assistance from multilateral development banks.

Before the disruption of Covid-19 and global inflation, many of these countries were eager to pursue infrastructure projects to improve internal and external connectivity for the movement of goods and people. Examples in the Indian Ocean are new or upgraded seaport and airport terminals, highways, roads, and railways. China responded to those countries’ development needs often when alternative financing from countries such as Japan, the US, and India was not available. China supported the financing and/or construction of many high-profile projects, including the Colombo and Hambantota port projects in Sri Lanka, a terminal at Chittagong port in Bangladesh, and a bridge connecting the airport to the capital in Maldives. In recent years, countries have become increasingly wary of pursuing development projects with China due to the potentially detrimental impacts on their economies and the environment.

2. What are the enablers of stability in the Indian Ocean and constraints to China expanding its presence and influence?

The above is what we are seeing in terms of China’s military presence and economic activities in the Indian Ocean. Yet, while we should closely examine the threat posed by China, we should also consider existing enablers of stability in the Indian Ocean as well as constraints on the threat.

Enablers of stability

One enabler of stability to consider is that the Indian Ocean is not characterized by rampant territorial disputes and Chinese assertiveness, as is the Pacific. These destabilizing factors have helped intensify US strategic focus in recent years on the Pacific segment of the Indo-Pacific as a potential warfighting theater, but less so in the Indian Ocean.

Second, the Indian Ocean derives its importance from its economics, which creates converging goals. The region effectively serves as a highway, connecting the bustling waters of the Pacific through the Malacca Strait and across to the Middle East and African Straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb and Mozambique Channel. The Indian Ocean sees significant traffic of hydrocarbons, containers, and bulk cargo. Due to the economic significance of this region, countries share a common interest in keeping the sea lanes open and safe. When piracy in the western Indian Ocean threatened to disrupt the stability of these waterways more than a decade ago, we witnessed a multinational response to secure them. Counterpiracy operations emerged, including from the US-led coalition Combined Maritime Forces' Task Force 151 and the NATO alliance's Operation Ocean Shield. Meanwhile, China began its own counterpiracy operations as an independent deployer, as did India and Japan.

A third enabler of stability in the Indian Ocean over the past decade is greater engagement with international legal institutions. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and a Permanent Court of Arbitration tribunal have been used to peacefully resolve bilateral maritime delimitation disputes in the Bay of Bengal between Myanmar and Bangladesh in 2012⁴ and Bangladesh and India in 2014,⁵ respectively. The respect for international law and willingness by parties in this theater to abide by legal decisions stands in sharp contrast to China's disregard for the arbitration process in the Philippines-China dispute in 2016. Even in Mauritius's dispute with the United Kingdom over the Chagos Islands,⁶ while the UK has refused to cede control of its British Indian Ocean Territory—including Diego Garcia, where US military forces are based—Mauritius has relied on various international institutions such as the International Court of Justice, a UN Convention on the Law of the Sea Annex VII tribunal, and UN General Assembly to seek a resolution to the dispute. Mauritius also used the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea to manage its dispute with Maldives, which concluded in 2021 and strengthened its stance in the dispute with the UK. For its part, the UK appears to have seen the tide turning on the Chagos issue in international law and diplomacy and announced in November 2022 that it would enter into discussions with Mauritius to resolve the dispute. The outcome will have a direct impact on what is arguably the US's most important location for basing forces—Diego Garcia—for operations both westward to the Middle East and eastward to the Pacific.

Constraints on greater presence and influence by China

Turning to constraints on the threat posed by China, one should first of all consider US, partner, and allied presence and capabilities. Although the US is a non-resident power in the Indian Ocean, it can rely on allies for their territory, military basing, and presence. This includes European allies⁷ such as France and the UK (i.e., Diego Garcia), as well as Australia. Such allied access in the Indian Ocean augments the US's own access to partner facilities, including in Bahrain, Djibouti, and Singapore. The AUKUS partnership with Australia and the UK will also offer US naval forces the opportunity to benefit from Australia's Indian Ocean basing.

Situated in the center of the Indian Ocean, India is a major defense partner to the US and is a Quad partner. India has made significant progress in demonstrating leadership and presence across the entire region. In particular, it has strengthened its maritime domain awareness over the past 15 years, starting with an effort to augment coastal security after the Mumbai attacks in 2008. This investment in non-traditional security, which focused on preventing another terrorist

attack, has paid dividends in the traditional security context as it expanded to partnerships in the wider Indian Ocean region.

Since then, India has steadily increased its capacity-building activities, information-sharing partnerships, and operational relationships with Indian Ocean countries. For example, it has developed a network of coastal radar stations in the island states of Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius. The Indian Navy also performs training and education, conducts exercises and operations, and transfers platforms to smaller Indian Ocean neighbors. India's Information Fusion Center–Indian Ocean Region has hosted liaison officers from roughly 10 regional countries and non-resident partners, such as Japan and the US. It has also enlarged its regional presence through the Indian Navy's Mission-Based Deployments, which span the entire Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, the Indian Navy continues to build its fleet, most recently with the commissioning of a new aircraft carrier and the fifth Scorpene-class submarine. A recent estimate indicates that the Indian Navy has 131 ships, 143 aircraft, and 130 helicopters.⁸

The US has strong relationships with smaller countries in the region as well. In terms of economics, it is the top export partner for Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and second for Nepal. Exports are critical for lower middle-income countries to generate revenue. This is especially critical when considering that all three countries named above have turned to the International Monetary Fund in the past year due to varying levels of economic distress. The US's position as a top export destination is an advantage that does not often attract headlines.

In terms of security cooperation, the US serves as a robust partner to South Asian maritime forces. For example, it has transferred two retired US Coast Guard cutters to Bangladesh (BNS *Somudra Joy* and BNS *Somudra Avijan*) and three to Sri Lanka (SLNS *Vijayabahu*, SLNS *Gajabahu*, and SLNS *Samudura*). They are the largest ships in these countries' navies. The US Navy has also conducted the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise with Bangladesh for more than a decade, and US sailors and marines exercised in January with Sri Lanka. In Maldives, the US conducts training with the Maldives National Defense Force. Of note, the USCGC *Midgett* visited Maldives in September—the US Coast Guard's first ship visit there since 2009. This is significant given the budgetary constraints of this US sea service. These maritime forces benefit from receiving US capacity-building assistance as they are charged with monitoring their home waters.

A second underexamined constraint on China's growth in the Indian Ocean is the role played by India's smaller neighbors. South Asia is a particular focus for the US in the Indian Ocean. It is part of the area of responsibility of Indo-Pacific Command, the command that must conduct warfighting planning for the China threat. As the dominant country in South Asia, India has emerged as a strong partner to the US after two decades of US government policies that developed this relationship along multiple lines of effort. In contrast, the overall US relationship with Pakistan has deteriorated during this period, with some exceptions in the maritime domain. Meanwhile, Pakistan's security relationship with China continues to expand.⁹

In the context of these great-power and regional-level concerns, it is important to consider Smaller South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. Despite concerns about these countries moving closer to China, their historical and contemporary relationships

with India limit the potential for the expansion of China's military interests in South Asia. This is not well understood, but leaders from the Smaller South Asian countries actively reject the option for China to establish bases in their territory, given the negative repercussions from India. The Smaller South Asian countries have experienced India's economic, military, and intelligence reach—sometimes unwelcome—during the Cold War years and in the contemporary era, so this possibility is never far from their leaders' minds. As a result of fundamentally asymmetric power relationships with India, Smaller South Asian countries do not have the will or capability to meaningfully cross this dominant power in South Asia and rising power on the world stage.¹⁰

Two types of military cooperation are worth examining in connection with this point: bilateral naval exercises and military basing. Pakistan is the only country in South Asia that conducts regular bilateral naval exercises with China. The Smaller South Asian countries are certainly willing to accept military education opportunities when offered by China and are eager to accept or purchase platforms from China due to their availability and affordability. Examples include the August 2019 transfer of the offshore patrol vessel SLNS *Parakramabahu* from China to Sri Lanka; Maldives Coast Guard's acceptance in July 2018 of a sea ambulance for transporting patients across atolls; and Bangladesh's purchase of two Ming-class submarines—BNS *Nabajatra* and BNS *Joyjatra*—which were commissioned in March 2017. However, the Smaller South Asian countries have not been willing to conduct bilateral naval and maritime exercises with China, whereas they do conduct such exercises with India and the US. In other words, China is not attaining the same operational-level interactions.¹¹ This is a key indicator to monitor going forward when evaluating Indian Ocean security.

Second, with regard to military basing, it is notable that despite the dominance of South Asia in the narrative of a Chinese “string of pearls” for nearly 20 years, the first Chinese overseas base was not in South Asia but in Africa. The base is located in the far fringes of the Indian Ocean in Djibouti at the Bab el-Mandeb chokepoint, where the Gulf of Aden meets the Red Sea, which connects to the Mediterranean. It is also worth noting that China established this base after another Northeast Asian power—Japan—established its own base in Djibouti, where France and the United States also have long operated bases.

Beyond their reluctance to engage with China militarily because of India's influence, Smaller South Asian countries are also increasingly wary of accepting loans from China. These countries have learned from each other's experiences. Despite the particular circumstances of Sri Lanka's economic mismanagement, its cumulative experience with China has warned other nations about potential consequences of China's infrastructure projects to the recipient countries as well as the implications for their overall debt profiles. Bangladesh has already shown a willingness to pull back from work with China, whether because of dissatisfaction with the terms of a deal, pressure from India, or distaste for corrupt Chinese business practices. Nepal also appears to have learned from Sri Lanka's experience and has been deterred from pursuing loans in favor of grants. In Seychelles and Sri Lanka, public protests have taken place against Chinese projects.

3. What are US interests in the Indian Ocean?

This subcommittee's specific focus on the Indian Ocean is important. While there has been more streamlined focus on the “Indo-Pacific” region in the past 5 years, this broader focus has not always translated into heightened attention on the Indian Ocean. Even as the Indian Ocean has

assumed greater importance in US strategic planning through the *Indo-Pacific* concept, the United States continues to understand the region through a Pacific lens. This is understandable, given China's assertiveness in the South and East China Seas, for example. But in terms of US strategy documents, this focus overlooks the unique features of the Indian Ocean.¹²

A review of major US strategy documents underscores the focus on the Pacific in the US conception of the Indo-Pacific. The White House's October National Security Strategy features 32 mentions of the "Indo-Pacific," while the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy also released in October has 18 mentions of the region. Even the White House's February 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy document, which includes 72 mentions of the region, only references the Indian Ocean specifically twice in the entire document, and the first is a geographic reference about the boundaries of the region. Thus, there is only one meaningful mention of the Indian Ocean in the entire Indo-Pacific Strategy. Notably, this reference connects the Indian Ocean to the US objective to "support India's continued rise and regional leadership":

"We recognize that India is a like-minded partner and leader in South Asia and the *Indian Ocean*, active in and connected to Southeast Asia, a driving force of the Quad and other regional fora, and an engine for regional growth and development."¹³ [emphasis added]

South Asia is also referenced here in connection to the Indian Ocean, rather than the other subregions.

Similarly, in the October National Security Strategy, there is only one mention of the Indian Ocean. In this instance, the region is connected to US partners in South Asia:

"As we work with South Asian regional partners to address climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the PRC's coercive behavior, we will promote prosperity and economic connectivity across the *Indian Ocean region*."¹⁴ [emphasis added]

Moreover, Southeast Asian nations that are Indian Ocean littoral nations are not referenced in this section.

Finally, the National Defense Strategy that was released in October also has only one mention of the Indian Ocean:

"The Department will advance our Major Defense Partnership with India to enhance its ability to deter PRC aggression and ensure free and open access to the *Indian Ocean region*."¹⁵ [emphasis added]

The connection to threats posed by China and US intent to support India for a deterrence objective is clear.

Overall, US security strategy in the Indian Ocean reflects a combination of long-standing requirements and evolving priorities for US national strategy in an era of great power, strategic competition. Three objectives can be discerned.¹⁶ The first is protecting the free flow of commerce. The Indian Ocean is strategically important for the flow of containers, bulk cargo, and hydrocarbon traffic that is critical for the global economy. The commanders of US Naval Forces Central Command in Bahrain often speak about securing the free flow of commerce as a clear goal.¹⁷ Moreover, the National Defense Strategy emphasizes the importance of maintaining open sea lanes in the region. In addition to the "Free and Open" language often invoked about the Indo-Pacific, this approach to keeping global commons open is consistent with longstanding US policy. When the government executes the Freedom of Navigation Program and military

conducts operations in support, US press statements reinforce this approach: “The United States will fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows.”¹⁸

The second US objective in the region is maintaining military access in the Indian Ocean. The US is an extraregional power with no resident territories. It needs continued basing and access relationships not only to support combat operations, as seen in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also to enable non-traditional security missions such as providing relief after natural disasters, which confront the Indian Ocean from the eastern African littoral to the Bay of Bengal. In addition, US policy seeks the expansion of defense relationships with partners. Bangladesh is a current example in the Indian Ocean, where the US Ambassador has discussed the pursuit of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements (ACSA) for logistics cooperation.

There is a third objective that is more implicit than explicit. In a climate of strategic competition, the US must ensure that the Indian Ocean does not assume greater priority than the increasingly interconnected Pacific, Arctic, and Atlantic theaters. The US military continues to plan for the possibility of a future war in the western Pacific, based on China’s provocative actions. Meanwhile, even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the US had shifted greater attention to the defense of the Atlantic and Arctic. US Second Fleet, which seeks to “[d]efend maritime avenues of approach between North America and Europe,”¹⁹ was reestablished in 2018, and the Navy and Marine Corps, Air and Space Forces, Army, and Coast Guard all have issued strategies recognizing the Arctic region’s significance for national security.²⁰ The war in Ukraine has resulted in even greater attention to European waters such as the Black Sea and wider changes to US force posture in Spain, Poland, Romania, Baltic countries, the UK, Germany, and Slovakia.

While the US seeks to operate globally, this combined Pacific-Arctic-Atlantic theater registers greater priority than do the more distant waters of the Indian Ocean. Initiatives such as the Quad²¹ permit the US to engage in important strategic campaigning in the wider Indo-Pacific on issues such as maritime domain awareness and climate change, but the Indian Ocean segment remains a lesser priority. For example, no Indian Ocean Region command (IORCOM) or fleet has yet emerged to consolidate areas of responsibility that currently fall across three combatant commands. Even the 2018 name change²² from Pacific Command (PACOM) to Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) did not result in a change in area of responsibility.²³

In other words, the Indian Ocean needs to remain a lesser priority for the US as it allocates limited resources globally in a new era of strategic competition. While the US does not seek a reduction in its Indian Ocean presence and holds economic and strategic interests in preserving the free flow of commerce, it does have growing requirements in the combined Pacific-Arctic-Atlantic theater. Moving forward, US officials will need to preemptively manage potential wildcards in order to keep crises from erupting in the vast Indian Ocean that would divert US attention and resources away from other regions.

4. Recommendations to consider for preserving Indian Ocean stability:

➔ *Better understand the structural economic situation in which middle-income countries find themselves.* After the shocks of the pandemic and global inflation, smaller states in the Indian

Ocean face economic challenges. This includes balancing debt management objectives with national development priorities via multilateral development banks; bilateral lenders like China, Japan; and use of international sovereign bonds. Given the large number of middle-income countries in the Indian Ocean, this issue is worthy of greater US attention and influence in those outcomes.

➔ *Analyze non-traditional security trends in the Indian Ocean.* Climate change and natural disasters, unstable coastlines, human-made disasters such as shipping accidents, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing increasingly pose challenges to smaller countries in the Indian Ocean. The National Security Strategy's focus on some of the non-traditional security issues affecting South Asian partners is notable, as these countries often speak about being at the frontlines of battling climate change and Covid-19, as well as marine pollution and shipping disasters.²⁴ IUU fishing, in particular, should be studied more systematically for patterns in the western, central, and eastern Indian Ocean. This is especially important given the importance of fish stocks to regional food supplies.

➔ *Develop a set of indicators and warnings for the Indian Ocean and track them annually, especially compared with the Pacific theater.* It can be hard to separate the signal from the frequent noise in the Indian Ocean. What is the meaningful impact of competitor developments and how can we measure this? For example, what are the numbers, types, and capabilities of China's military and non-military platforms operating in the region? Is China engaging in unsafe military encounters in the Indian Ocean? Are smaller Indian Ocean countries beginning to conduct bilateral exercises with China? Are they having discussions about basing? Identifying clear metrics about competitor activities in the Indian Ocean and tracking their movement will help policymakers go beyond the headlines of the day and discern patterns of activity in the Indian Ocean vs. Pacific.

➔ *Avoid the appearance of outsourcing US policy toward the Smaller South Asian countries to India.* Current US strategy supports India's regional leadership in the Indian Ocean and South Asia. Yet, it raises a question about how directly involved the US will be with India's smaller neighbors and to what extent it will defer to India's preferences. Smaller South Asian countries are already suspicious of the US-India relationship in the context of competition with China and in the backdrop of India's growth as the dominant country in the region. Yet, the US has clear advantages for, as well as interests in, Smaller South Asian countries. These include serving as an export destination that contributes to the growth of these economies, offering financing prospects through the Development Finance Corporation and Millennium Challenge Corporation, conducting capacity-building activities that bolster regional security and stability, and strengthening US defense relationships and access in this bulwark to China's expansion of military presence. Ties with the US offer Smaller South Asian countries the opportunity to strengthen their autonomy and capacity, especially as they navigate the challenges of great-power and major-power rivalries.

Appendix

Indian Ocean Rim Association countries by World Bank income categories				
IORA countries²⁵	Low income	Lower Middle Income	Upper Middle Income	High income
Australia				X
Bangladesh		X		
Comoros		X		
France				X
India		X		
Indonesia		X		
Iran		X		
Kenya		X		
Madagascar	X			
Malaysia			X	
Maldives			X	
Mauritius			X	
Mozambique	X			
Oman				X
Seychelles				X
Singapore				X
Somalia	X			
South Africa			X	
Sri Lanka		X		
Tanzania		X		
Thailand			X	
United Arab Emirates				X
Yemen	X			
TOTAL	4	8	5	6
Source: World Bank and IORA websites; date accessed: April 8, 2023. Note that two Indian Ocean littoral countries are not members of IORA: Pakistan and Myanmar (lower middle income).				

¹ Nilanthi Samaranayake, Director, Strategy and Policy Analysis Program, CNA; Adjunct Fellow, East-West Center in Washington. The views expressed are solely those of the witness and not of any organization with which she is affiliated.

² <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/with-80-news-ships-in-last-5-years-chinese-navy-is-here-to-stay-admiral-lanba/articleshow/67458929.cms>

³ <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/chinese-presence-in-india-ocean-region-is-under-close-watch-navy-chief/article66219192.ece>

⁴ https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/cpp-2013-u-004603-final.pdf

⁵ https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/dop-2017-u-016081-final.pdf

⁶ <https://www.lawfareblog.com/chagos-archipelago-dispute-law-diplomacy-and-military-basing>

⁷ <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/european-middle-powers-in-the-indo-pacific-amid-great-power-strategic-competition>

⁸ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/house-panel-apprised-of-collusive-threat-from-china-and-pakistan/article66710973.ece>

⁹ <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/threshold-alliance-china-pakistan-military-relationship>

¹⁰ https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/sr_446-chinas_engagement_with_smaller_south_asian_countries.pdf

¹¹ <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/136/article/724108/pdf>

¹² <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/JIPA/IndoPacificPerspectives/Samaranayake.html>

¹³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>

¹⁶ <https://www.lawfareblog.com/how-has-sri-lankas-crisis-impacted-indian-ocean-security>; full chapter in forthcoming edited volume: Nilanthi Samaranayake, “US Naval Strategy in the Indian Ocean,” in *The Indian Ocean's Strategic Future: Cooperation and Contest in a Multipolar Region*, edited by David Brewster, Oxford University Press, 2023.

¹⁷ <https://www.state.gov/special-briefing-via-telephone-with-vice-admiral-brad-cooper-commander-u-s-naval-forces-central-command-u-s-fifth-fleet-and-combined-maritime-forces/>

¹⁸ <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/434083/7th-fleet-cruiser-conducts-freedom-navigation-operation-south-china-sea>

¹⁹ <https://www.c2f.usff.navy.mil/About-Us/Mission/>

²⁰ <https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/focusing-the-military-services-arctic-strategies/>

²¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement>

²² <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1535808/pacific-command-change-highlights-growing-importance-of-indian-ocean-area/>

²³ <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/>

²⁴ <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/non-traditional-security-in-the-bay-of-bengal/>

²⁵ <https://www.iora.int/en/about/member-states>