It may seem strange, in this last third of the twentieth century, when Man is reaching out to the stars and is close to harnessing the might of thermo-nuclear energy for his own use, to be concerned with such an old-fashioned matter as whether a merchant in the interior of a continent may be given assurances that his goods enroute to or from a merchant in another state will not be interfered with or unduly taxed merely because they must cross a line which governments have drawn between their respective territories. It is not so strange, though, for even now the overwhelming majority of mankind is earthbound and have at their disposal for commercial purposes only mechanical energy; indeed, in some places only animal energy! Moreover, notions of "sovereignty" and "nationalism", while they may seem dated and even dangerous to some political scientists, die hard and are still very much dominant in the affairs of states. These conditions are likely to prevail for many, many years, and while we may sigh and long for the day when mighty ion engines will whisk all manner of goods around the world in a twinkling without regard to lines on a map, we must still bring our eyes and thoughts back down to earth and deal with the world as it is, not as it ought to be – or might be some day. And so it is necessary to examine in some detail the need for and the problems of "a free and secure access to the sea" in the space age.

Analyses of Case Studies

As was made clear in Chapter I, land-locked states have little in common other than that they have no sea coasts and are very much aware of that fact. Even among the developing land-locked states there is no such thing as a "typical" or "average" case. Nevertheless, some of them share many similarities while differing in other respects. Rather than size or age or standard of living as measures of similarities and differences on a
world-wide basis, it is more useful to compare the developing land-locked states on a continental basis. Broadly speaking, the land-locked states of each continent have more in common with one another, and with the littoral states of the continent, than with the land-locked states of other continents. The three cases studied may then be measured against the other land-locked states in their respective continents.

Afghanistan is one of four land-locked states in Asia. It is the largest by far in population, only that of Nepal even approaching it, and second largest in land area. Because of terrain and, in varying degrees because of historical ties, the natural routes to the sea for each country lie through coastal states which flank them on the south and east. Afghanistan has the largest volume of foreign trade, while that of Laos is minimal, consisting largely of opium, gold and aid goods. Laos, moreover, has overland access routes through both Saigon and Bangkok and a potential water route via the Mekong River. She is on reasonably good terms with these two neighbors and may be said to have the least pressing problem of access to the sea of the four. Mongolia has alternated between being a part of China, or at least a tributary state, and being a satellite of Russia or the U.S.S.R., and virtually all of her foreign trade has been, and still is, with these contiguous states. Only Nepal and Afghanistan make substantial use of their access to the sea at present. Nepali foreign trade, except for that with India and minor amounts with Tibet, passes almost exclusively through Calcutta. As we have seen, Afghanistan has a choice of access routes, but still relies mostly on Karachi for trade with all but her immediate neighbors.

No Asian country has yet suffered deliberate interference with its transit trade since becoming independent except Afghanistan, but none of the other three can be wholly confident that the record will remain so clean. Both Laos and Nepal have bilateral transit agreements with their transit states and it may be presumed that Mongolia has similar agreements with China and the Soviet Union. But the road to Calcutta can be cut at any time by fighting between the Indian government and East Pakistan or rebel tribesmen, the Vietnam War could spread to Cambodia and Thailand and to Laos itself, the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" could disrupt road and rail transport in North China, and the land-locked states would then become helpless victims of forces over which they have no control and for which they have no responsibility. Afghanistan has been unique among Asian land-locked states in this respect, but she may not remain so.

Bolivia is the only state in the Western Hemisphere which does not