

The Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific region stretches from the eastern shores of Africa and West Asia to the littoral countries of the western Pacific. The region constitutes the 'maritime underbelly' of Asia, and is the fastest growing region in the world; and in a few decades, is likely to witness what may be referred to as 'Renaissance 2.0'. The region is, therefore, ripe with enormous opportunities, not only for regional countries, but also for the rest of the global community. And yet, the region is beset with equally colossal security risks that emanate from inter alia the rise of China - that is not satisfied with 'status quo' in the global order including established international law and norms; strategic rivalries and the attendant security dilemma and arms race; issues of governance including maritime jurisdictions; the proliferation of malevolent non-state actors involved in maritime crimes and terrorism; and so on. The book is a collation of commentaries that analyse the trends with regard to the geopolitical and maritime security environment, along with the naval developments, in the Indo-Pacific in the past half-decade or so.

Gurpreet S. Khurana

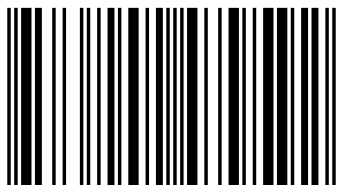
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Geopolitics & Security in Indo-Pacific



The Indo-Pacific Region

The Emerging Geopolitical and Security Environment



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Khurana

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SECTION I

Regional Architecture and Maritime Security

The ‘Indo-Pacific’ Concept: Retrospect and Prospect

02 February 2017

Since 2010, the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ has gained increasing prevalence in the geopolitical/strategic discourse, and is now being used increasingly by policy-makers, analysts and academics in Asia and beyond.¹ It is now precisely a decade since the concept was proposed by the author in 2007. Although the Australians were using this term earlier, it was the first time, at least in recent decades, that the concept was formally introduced and explained in an academic paper. The said paper titled ‘Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation’ was published in the January 2007 edition of *Strategic Analyses* journal of the *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses* (IDSA), New Delhi.²

The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific region (WP) – inclusive of the contiguous seas off East and Southeast Asia – into a singular regional construct. There are some variations based on specific preferences of countries. For instance, the United States (US) prefers to use the term ‘Indo-Asia-Pacific’, to encompass the entire swath of Indian and Pacific oceans, thereby enabling the US inclusiveness for it to maintain its relevance as a resident power in this important region. Nonetheless, the fundamental ‘idea’ of ‘Indo-Pacific’ is accepted nearly universally. It has been argued that the concept of the Indo-Pacific may lead to a change in popular “mental maps” of how the world is understood in strategic terms.³

It may be conceded that there are some fundamental and distinct differences between the IOR and the WP in terms of geopolitics - including the geo-economics that shape geopolitics – and even the security environment. If so, how did the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ take root? It is a conceptual ‘aberration’? What was the underlying rationale behind the use of the term? This essay seeks to examine these pertinent issues. Furthermore, based on current trends, the analysis presents a prognosis on the future relevance of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept.

¹ ‘Indo-Pacific: Strategic/ Geopolitical Context’, *Wikipedia*, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific>

² Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation’, *Strategic Analysis* (IDSA/ Routledge), Vol. 31 (1), January 2007, p.139 – 153

³ David Brewster, ‘Dividing Lines: Evolving Mental Maps of the Bay of Bengal’, *Asian Security*, Vol. 10(2), 24 Jun 14, p.151-167, at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14799855.2014.914499>

Indian Ocean-Western Pacific Divergences

Undeniably, the IOR and the WP differ substantially in nearly all aspects, ranging from the levels of economic development of countries and their social parameters, to the security environment. Unlike the IOR, the WP has been beset by major traditional (military) threats. Such insecurity is based on historical factors, mainly flowing from the adverse actions of dominant military powers, particularly since the advent of the 20th century – for instance, Japan; and now increasingly, China – resulting in heightened nationalism and an attempt to redraw sovereign boundaries, including ‘territorialisation’ of the seas. The military dominance of these powers was a consequence of their economic progress, beginning with Japan, which later helped the other East Asian economies to grow through outsourcing of lower-end manufacturing industries – the so-called ‘Flying Geese Paradigm’.⁴

In contrast, the recent history of the IOR is not chequered by onslaught of any dominant and assertive local power. Why so? Despite being rich in natural resources – particularly hydrocarbons – the IOR countries were severely constrained to develop their economies. Not only did the colonial rule of western powers last longer in the IOR, but also that these countries were too diverse in all aspects, and were never self-compelled to integrate themselves economically; and therefore, lagged behind East Asia substantially in terms of economic progress. As a result, many of these countries could not even acquire adequate capacity to govern and regulate human activity in their sovereign territories/ maritime zones, let alone developing capabilities for military assertion against their neighbours. Therefore, the numerous maritime disputes in the IOR remain dormant, and have not yet translated into military insecurities. (The India-Pakistan contestation is among the rare exceptions, and is based on a very different causative factor). The IOR is plagued more by non-traditional security issues, such as piracy, organised crime involving drugs and small-arms, illegal fishing, irregular migration, and human smuggling.

⁴ Shigehisa Kasahara, ‘The Asian Developmental State and the Flying Geese Paradigm’, *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Discussion Paper No. 213*, Nov 2013, at http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/osgdp20133_en.pdf

The Rationale

The broader rationale behind the prevalence of the 'Indo-Pacific' concept is the increasing developments in the area spanning the entire 'maritime underbelly' of Asia, ranging from the East African littoral to Northeast Asia. This is best exemplified by the launch of the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in 2004 to counter the sea-borne proliferation of WMDs and their delivery systems. The PSI focused on the maritime swath stretching from Iran and Syria to North Korea.⁵ These developments led strategic analysts to search for a suitable common regional nomenclature to be able to communicate more effectively. The term 'Asia' was too broad and heterogeneous; and 'continental' rather than 'maritime'. The term 'Asia-Pacific' – which traditionally stood for 'the Asian littoral of the Pacific Ocean' – was inadequate.⁶ The 'Indo-Pacific' – shortened from 'Indian Ocean–Pacific Ocean combine' – seemed more appropriate.

The coinage of 'Indo-Pacific' has much to do with the increased eminence of India with the turn of the 21st century; beginning in the 1990s with its impressive economic growth and later, its nuclear weaponisation. In 2006, Donald Berlin wrote that the 'rise of India' is itself a key factor in the increasing significance of the Indian Ocean.⁷ Also, India could no longer be excluded from any overarching reckoning in the Asia-Pacific; be it economic or security related. For example, India was an obvious choice for inclusion in the ASEAN Regional Forum (in 1996) and the East Asia Summit (in 2005). Even for the PSI (2004), President Bush sought to enrol India as a key participant through its PACOM. Though India was located in US PACOM's area of responsibility; 'technically', it did not belong to the Asia-Pacific. During the Shangri, La Dialogue 2009, India's former naval chief Admiral Arun Prakash highlighted this contradiction, saying,

⁵ 'Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)', *Arms Control Association*, 2 Jun 2007, at <https://www.armscontrol.org/taxonomy/term/21>

⁶ Japan and Australia promoted the term 'Asia Pacific' in the 1970s and 1980s to draw them closer to the United States and the economically burgeoning East Asia. India was far, geographically, from the region, and politically, economically and strategically remained uninvolved for inherent reasons. See D. Gnanagurunathan, 'India and the Idea of the 'Indo-Pacific'', *East Asia Forum*, 20 Oct 12, at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/20/india-and-the-idea-of-the-indo-pacific/>

⁷ Donald L Berlin, 'India in the Indian Ocean', *Naval War College Review*, Vol.59(2), Spring 2006

"I am not quite sure about the origin of the term Asia-Pacific, but I presume it was coined to include America in this part of the world, which is perfectly all right. As an Indian, every time I hear the term Asia-Pacific I feel a sense of exclusion, because it seems to include north east Asia, south east Asia and the Pacific islands, and it terminates at the Melaka Straits, but there is a whole world west of the Melaka Straits....so my question to the distinguished panel is ... do you see a contradiction between the terms Asia-Pacific, Asia and the Indian Ocean region?"

The 'Indo-Pacific' concept helped to overcome this complexity by incorporating 'India' in the affairs of 'maritime-Asia', even though the 'Indo-' in the compound word 'Indo-Pacific' stands for the 'Indian Ocean', and not 'India'.

Since long, the IOR had been a maritime-conduit of hydrocarbons to fuel the economic prosperity of the WP littoral countries, which was another significant linkage between the IOR and the WP, and provided much ballast to the rationale of 'Indo-Pacific'. In context of China's economic 'rise' leading to its enhanced military power and assertiveness, this linkage represented Beijing's strategic vulnerability, and thereby an opportunity for deterring Chinese aggressiveness. Ironically, China's strategic vulnerability was expressed by the Chinese President Hu Jintao himself in November 2003 through his coinage of "Malacca Dilemma", wherein "certain major powers" were bent on controlling the strait.⁸ The reference to India was implicit, yet undeniable. In his book '*Samudramanthan*' (2012), Raja Mohan says, "India-China maritime rivalry finds its sharpest expression in the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait...", which demonstrates the interconnectedness of "the two different realms (of) Pacific and Indian Ocean(s)".⁹

The Genesis

Against the backdrop of strengthening India-Japan political ties following the 2006 reciprocal visits of the two countries' apex leaders, Indian and Japanese think-tanks had intensified their discussions on strategic and maritime cooperation. At one of the brainstorming sessions held at the IDSA in October 2006, the participants took note of

⁸ Ian Storey, 'China's Malacca Dilemma', *China Brief* (The Jamestown Foundation), Vol. 6(8), 12 Apr 2006, at <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-malacca-dilemma/>

⁹ C Raja Mohan. *Samudramanthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: October 2012)

China's strategic vulnerability in terms of its 'Malacca Dilemma', and sought to stretch its sense of insecurity eastwards to the IOR with the objective of restraining China's politico-military assertiveness against its Asian neighbours.

Besides, Japan itself was vulnerable due to its rather heavy dependence on seaborne energy and food imports across the IOR, and thus sought an enhanced maritime security role in the area in cooperation with India. During the discussions at IDSA, a clear concord was reached that the IOR and the WP cannot possibly be treated separately, either for maritime security, or even in geopolitical terms. It was during that event that the 'Indo-Pacific' concept was casually discussed, which led to the publication of the January 2007 paper in *Strategic Analyses* (as mentioned above). Interestingly, a few months later in August 2007, the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed the Indian Parliament, speaking of the "Confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans" as "the dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity" in the "broader Asia".¹⁰

In 2010, the US officially recognized 'Indo-Pacific' for the first time. Speaking at Honolulu, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke about "expanding our work with the Indian Navy in the Pacific, because we understand how important the Indo-Pacific basin is to global trade and commerce".¹¹

In 2012, the Australian analyst Rory Medcalf wrote that he was convinced that the "Indo-Pacific (is) a term whose time has come". A year later in 2013, Australia released its Defence White Paper, which carried the first government articulation of the 'Indo-Pacific' concept.¹² Soon thereafter, Rory Medcalf endorsed India's centrality in the Indo-Pacific

¹⁰ Confluence of the Two Seas", Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmvo708/speech-2.html>

¹¹ Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton, US Secretary of State, 'America's Engagement in the Asia-Pacific', US Department of State, 28 Oct 10, at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/10/150141.htm>

¹² 'Defending Australia and its National Interests', Defence White Paper 2013, Department of Defence, Australian Government, May 13, at http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/wp_2013_web.pdf

construct stating that “Australia’s new defence policy recognises India’s eastward orientation.”¹³

China was initially circumspect of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ coinage. As the Australian writers, Nick Bisley and Andrew Phillips wrote in 2012,

*“...Viewed from Beijing, the idea of the Indo-Pacific...appears to be to keep the US in, lift India up, and keep China out of the Indian Ocean... (which is why), the Indo-Pacific concept has...received a frosty reception in China...”*¹⁴

In July 2013, a Chinese scholar Zhao Qinghai trashed the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept on the basis of his interpretation of it being an “India too” geopolitical construct.¹⁵ Notwithstanding, not all Chinese scholars have been dismissive of the concept. In June 2013, Minghao Zhao wrote,

*“...And it is true that a power game of great significance has unfolded in Indo-Pacific Asia. The US, India, Japan and other players are seeking to collaborate to build an “Indo-Pacific order” that is congenial to their long-term interests. China is not necessarily excluded from this project, and it should seek a seat at the table and help recast the strategic objectives and interaction norms (in China’s favour).”*¹⁶

Interestingly, in November 2014, the *Global Times*, an official Chinese English-language daily carried a commentary cautioning India on the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept. It said that the Indo-Pacific concept has not been endorsed by the “Indian government and scholars”, but scripted by the United States and its allies “to balance and even contain China’s increasing

¹³ Rory Medcalf, ‘*The Indo-Pacific Pivot*’, 10 May 13, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/the-indopacific-pivot/1113736/>

¹⁴ Nick Bisley (La Trobe University, Australia) and Andrew Phillips (University of Queensland, Australia), ‘*The Indo-Pacific: what does it actually mean?*’, *East Asia Forum*, 06 Oct 12, at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/06/the-indo-pacific-what-does-it-actually-mean/>

¹⁵ Zhao Qinghai, ‘The Concept of “India too” (“Yin Tai”) and its implications for China’ (translated from Mandarin “印太”概念及其对中国的含义), *Contemporary International Relations* (现代国际关系), No. 7, 2013, 31 July 2013, at http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2013-07/31/content_6170351.htm

¹⁶ Minghao Zhao, ‘*The Emerging Strategic Triangle in Indo-Pacific Asia*’, 4 Jun 13, at <http://thediplomat.com/china-power/the-emerging-strategic-triangle-in-indo-pacific-asia/>

influence in the Asia-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean”, and who have made India a “linchpin” in the geo-strategic system. Paradoxically, however, the commentary was titled “New Delhi-Beijing Cooperation Key to Building an Indo-Pacific Era”.¹⁷

Prognosis

It emerges from the foregoing that the current prevalence of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept is premised upon – and necessitated by – the growing inter-connectedness between the IOR and WP, rather than any similarities in their characteristics. This leads to another pertinent question: What would be the relevance of the concept in the coming years?

According to preliminary indicators, the relevance of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept may enhance in future due to the strengthening linkages between the IOR and the WP. Events and developments in one part of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ are likely to increasingly affect countries located in the other part. Furthermore, over the decades, the growing trade and people-to-people connectivity between the IOR and WP countries may benefit the IOR, and slowly iron out the dissimilarities in terms of economic and human development indices.

China’s ‘Maritime Silk Road’ (MSR) and India’s outreach to its extended eastern neighbourhood through its ‘Act East’ policy could contribute substantially towards the economic integration of the IOR and the WP. Indonesia’s putative role is also noteworthy. It is an archipelagic country that straddles the ‘Indo Pacific’ with sea coast facing both the IOR and the WP. Possessing substantial potential to become a major maritime power, Indonesia is likely to be a key player in the process of melting the IOR-WP divide, and thereby reinforcing the ‘Indo-Pacific’ construct.

Over the decades, the current dissimilarities between the IOR and the WP in terms of the security environment may also diminish, if not vanish altogether. Greater economic prosperity in the IOR is likely to be followed by increasing stakes in the maritime domain, besides the ability to develop naval capabilities. The hitherto ‘dormant’ maritime disputes in IOR could become ‘active’. Furthermore, the MSR could be accompanied by China’s invigorated efforts towards naval development to fructify its ‘Two-Ocean Strategy’.¹⁸ China’s

¹⁷ Liu Zongyi, ‘New Delhi-Beijing Key to Building an <Indo-Pacific Era>’, *Global Times*, 30 November 2014, at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/894334.shtml>

¹⁸ Robert D. Kaplan, ‘China’s Two Ocean Strategy’ in Abraham Denmark and Nirav Patel (eds.) *China’s Arrival: A Strategic Relationship for a Global Relationship* (Centre for New American Strategy: Sep

intensified naval presence in the IOR could lead to increased likelihood of acrimony due to its politico-military involvement in regional instabilities and maritime disputes. It may also cause the PLA Navy to increase its activities in the maritime zones of IOR countries, and have unintended encounters at sea with the naval forces of other established powers, leading to enhanced maritime-military insecurities. In such a scenario, the 'Indo-Pacific' concept would be essential to manage the regional developments and integrate China into the established norms of conduct in the IOR.

In the broader sense, as India's leading strategist Uday Bhaskar avers, "In the global context, the Pacific and the Indian oceans are poised to acquire greater strategic salience for the major powers of the 21st century, three among whom – the China, India and the US – are located in Asia".¹⁹ Indeed, a holistic treatment of the Indian-Pacific Ocean continuum would be required to assess the evolving balance of power in Asia, and to address the fault-lines therein, with the overarching aim of preserving regional and global stability.

2009), p.43-58, at https://lbj.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/file/news/CNAS%20China's%20Arrival_Final%20Report-3.pdf

¹⁹ C Uday Bhaskar. '*Pacific and Indian Oceans: Relevance for the evolving power structures in Asia*', *Queries*, Magazine by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), No. 3(6), Nov 11, p.123-128

‘Indo-Pacific’ was always about China? Yes, but let’s not cross the ‘Red Line’

15 Dec 17

Beginning 5 November 2017, the US President Donald Trump undertook his much-publicised 12-day tour of Asia, visiting five countries: Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines. During the tour, his ‘catch-phrase’ was the “Indo-Pacific”, reflecting his geopolitical worldview of Asia, and the latest in a long history of diplomatic slogans from American presidents. This was a notable departure from the traditional Western expression of ‘Asia-Pacific’, which led the media,²⁰ analysts²¹ and policy-makers worldwide scrambling, trying to delve deeper into the intent and ramifications of this new “alliance”²² articulated by the leader of the most powerful nation on Earth.

The ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept, which combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with the Western Pacific region into a single geopolitical construct, is known to have gathered widespread acceptance in wake of my January 2007 paper²³ on India-Japan maritime cooperation, and the ensuing address by Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, to the Indian Parliament, a few months later, in August 2007. In his address, the Japanese leader endorsed the idea of ‘Indo-Pacific’ through his articulation of the “Confluence of the Two Seas²⁴ (the Indian and Pacific oceans)”.

²⁰ “Why Trump keeps saying Indo-Pacific”, BBC News, 09 Nov 17, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-41912990/why-trump-keeps-saying-indo-pacific>

²¹ David Dodwell, “No one is commenting on this ‘big idea’ Trump put forward at Apec”, *South China Morning Post*, 12 Nov 17, at <http://www.scmp.com/business/companies/article/2119540/no-one-commenting-big-idea-trump-put-forward-apec>

²² Christian Shepherd, Sanjeev Miglani, “Indo-Pacific? Not from where China is sitting...”, *Reuters*, 10 Nov 17, at <https://in.reuters.com/article/usa-china-indo-pacific/indo-pacific-not-from-where-china-is-sitting-idINKBN1DA1Yo>

²³ Gurpreet Khurana, “Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India–Japan Cooperation”, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 31(1), 2007, pp. 139-153, at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700160701355485>

²⁴ Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, at the Parliament of the Republic of India “Confluence of the Two Seas”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 22 Aug 07, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmvo708/speech-2.html>

President Trump's repeated use of the term 'Indo-Pacific' during his Asia tour led the *Washington Post* to seek my view on the issue. My opinion piece²⁵ published in *The World Post* (*Washington Post*, 14 November) expressed my concern on the original 'Indo-Pacific' idea having drifted away from the original 'constructive' India-Japan proposition of a geopolitical amalgamation of the Indo-Pacific towards regional stability. The essay highlighted President Trump's implicit intent to seek India's partnership in containing China, thereby dividing the region into opposing camps.

As expected, the issue of 'Indo-Pacific' has lately generated widespread discussion, debate and a number of contrarian views. An Indian analyst, Abhijit Singh, expressed a view that the 'Indo-Pacific' construct was always about "containing the rise of China".²⁶ Writing for the *South China Morning Post*, he says that "Maritime Asia still struggles under the yoke of Chinese expansionism, with a permanent Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea"; and therefore, "the use of the term (Indo-Pacific) to describe an emerging India-Japan-US-Australia alliance as a balance against Beijing is not a distortion of the term's original meaning; it is the fulfilment of it".

While many such shades of views and counter-views exist to enrich the views of global strategic community, it is necessary to take stock of the original concept of 'Indo-Pacific' – as conceived in 2007 – in context of the prevailing geopolitical environment in Asia. It is true that the 'Indo-Pacific' concept has always been about China. However, there lies a nuanced – albeit important – difference between the original conceptualisation and the current vision of President Trump.

By the mid-2000s, both India and Japan were beginning to get overly worried of China's so-called "peaceful rise".²⁷ In the anxious environment of those days, for the Japanese, the 'Indo-Pacific' was largely a notion of assurance from India as an emerging power in the wider Asian region. For India too, it was an opportunity to join up with Japan, so as to share their respective assessments of the emerging environment and their respective visions for the region. This came about after several futile efforts by New Delhi at 'persuasion' of Beijing to adopt a conciliatory approach; following which, India

²⁵ Gurpreet S Khurana, "Trump's new Cold War alliance in Asia is dangerous", *The World Post* (*The Washington Post*), 14 Nov 17, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2017/11/14/trump-asia-trip/?utm_term=.03e8456d7c5f

²⁶ Abhijit Singh, "The 'Indo-Pacific' has always been about containing the rise of China", *South China Morning Post*, 28 Nov 17, at <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2121907/indo-pacific-has-always-been-about-containing-rise-china>

²⁷ Zeng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status", *Foreign Affairs*, September/ October 2005, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2005/84/5>

was compelled to scale up its outreach to Japan in order to moderate China's behaviour through 'dissuasion'.

In contrast, President Trump's re-interpretation of the 'Indo-Pacific' construct amounts to partnering with India to create a China-specific alliance of sorts. Its temporal coincidence with the revival of the Australia-India-Japan-US 'quadrilateral'²⁸ further enhances the risks of the proposition. This will severely constrict the strategic options of the regional countries – including those in the 'quadrilateral' – who would now need to make difficult choices. As Australia's former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd puts it, this will lead to "brittle, (and) binary strategic choices" being thrust upon these countries.²⁹ If this happens, the ensuing regional environment would be reminiscent of the fissures in Europe preceding the two World Wars that created a geopolitical environment ripe for conflict.

Notably, the 'Indo-Pacific' concept was first discussed in India (some time in 2006), and its coinage had much to do with the increased eminence of India with the turn of the 21st Century. However, in this conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific, the term 'Indo-' did not stand for 'India', but was a collective noun representing the countries littoral to the Indian Ocean. This proposition continues to be valid today.

The growing traction of the 'Indo-Pacific' idea holds much value for the countries of both, the IOR and the Western Pacific. The leaders of these countries would need to review and articulate their own visions for the region. Given that the 'Indo-Pacific' represents the 'maritime underbelly' of Asia as the fastest growing continent, the increasing currency of the concept is indicative of the growing imperative for regional countries to develop their sea power, and develop constructive and collaborative maritime interfaces amongst themselves, rather than focussing merely upon achieving a favourable balance of power with military-strategic connotations.

²⁸ Ankit Panda, "US, Japan, India, and Australia Hold Working-Level Quadrilateral Meeting on Regional Cooperation", *The Diplomat*, 13 Nov 2017, at <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/us-japan-india-and-australia-hold-working-level-quadrilateral-meeting-on-regional-cooperation/>

²⁹ Kevin Rudd, "Former Australian PM: Trump has ceded economic leadership to China", *The World Post (The Washington Post)*, 15 Nov 17, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2017/11/15/trump-asia/?utm_term=.1389b7d8c918

A New beginning for ‘Code of Conduct’ in South China Sea: Is one required for the Indian Ocean?

08 September 2017

On 06 August 2017, the foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China met in Manila, The Philippines, and adopted³⁰ the "Framework of the code of conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea (SCS)". The framework is meant to lead eventually to the CoC comprising a set of rules outlining certain norms, proper practices and responsibilities of all those involved in maritime activities in the SCS.

The SCS encloses some of the world's most important international shipping lanes (ISL), and is believed to be rich in mineral and marine resources. This has led to the area being the locus of politico-military jostling – including over competing maritime-territorial claims between China and many ASEAN countries – and varied interpretations on the provisions of international law on ‘freedom of navigation’.

While adopting the framework, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated China's intent³¹ “to begin consultations on the text of the CoC sometime within the year”. For long, the ASEAN countries have vied for the CoC as a ‘holy grail’ that could be fruitfully employed by the ASEAN solidarity to moderate China's assertion of its maritime-territorial claims in the SCS. It is important to note that the CoC framework has come 15 years after the ASEAN and China agreed upon the Declaration of Conduct³² (DoC) for SCS in 2002 amidst heightened tensions in the disputed waters.

Towards a win-win end-state of a benign environment in the SCS and the consequent stability of the broader Indo-Pacific region, it may be hoped that the CoC fructifies. However, imponderables and uncertainties abound. Notably, China has avoided releasing in the public domain even the details on the CoC framework's content, stating fears of possible attempts by external powers like the United States to ‘meddle’ in

³⁰ “ASEAN, China adopt framework for crafting code on South China Sea”, Reuters, 06 Aug 17, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-philippines-southchinasea/asean-china-adopt-framework-for-crafting-code-on-south-china-sea-idUSKBN1AMoAY>

³¹ “ASEAN, China adopt framework for South China Sea code of conduct”, CNN Philippines, 06 Aug 17, at <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/08/06/asean-china-framework-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct.html>

³² “Declaration on the conduct of parties in the south china sea”, asean, 17 Oct 12, at http://asean.org/?static_post=declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea-2

the process. China's intent remains unclear. Does the framework signify a policy change in Beijing, making it amenable to negotiate its maritime-territorial claims multilaterally? Or is it merely assuaging its maritime neighbourhood to wean away the influence of the United States and 'bide time'? Will the CoC interpret and extrapolate the legal order stipulated by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS³³)? If the CoC is not legally binding, it will lose all its 'teeth', barely serving as another meek instrument for confidence-building.

During the Indian Ocean Conference 2017 (IOC-17)³⁴ held at Colombo on 31 August – 01 September 2017, Sri Lanka proposed that the countries of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) emulate the 'success' (albeit partial) of the ASEAN, and develop a similar CoC for the Indian Ocean, which could address the key aspect of freedom of navigation.

It is true that since its first articulation in a 2007 academic paper³⁵, the 'Indo-Pacific'³⁶ concept has led to a mental map portraying Pacific-Asia (enclosing the western Pacific, including its contiguous seas) and the IOR as an integrated region. However, such interconnectivity between the two areas is premised on the broader geopolitical and strategic rationale, rather than in terms of maritime security. After all, the inherent security characteristics of the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean are vastly dissimilar. The environment in the former is characterised by traditional military threats, which differs substantively from that in the latter, wherein non-traditional issues are predominant.

In the best case scenario, the conception of a CoC for the Indian Ocean may be an 'overkill', or at least premature. In the worst case, it may even lead to a deleterious effect on regional stability. Owing to the divergent strategic alignments of the IOR, any multilateral deliberation on a CoC could germinate geopolitical polarisation, which may be accentuated through lobbying by the extra-regional stakeholders. This could stymie cooperation among the member countries of the recently revitalised Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) on all fronts. The proposed CoC could also adversely affect the IORA's nascent agenda of maritime safety and security, which needs to grapple with the exigent issues relating to non-traditional security. It may also impair the IORA's

³³ "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea", United Nations, at http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

³⁴ "Sri Lanka's PM addresses Indian Ocean Conference 2017", Lanka Business Online, 01 Sep 17, at <http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/sri-lankas-pm-addresses-indian-ocean-conference-2017/>

³⁵ Gurpreet S. Khurana, "Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation", 13 July 07, at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700160701355485?journalCode=rsan20&>

³⁶ Gurpreet S Khurana, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Retrospect and Prospect", National Maritime Foundation, 02 Feb 17, at <http://maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/636215922419657386.pdf>

‘inclusive’ approach to security that seeks a constructive contribution of the extra-regional powers, which are represented in the IORA as dialogue partners.

The current CoC suggestion of Colombo is reminiscent of Sri Lanka’s erstwhile initiative of declaring ‘Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace’ (IOZOP), which led to the adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution 2832³⁷ on 16 December 1971. The objective of IOZOP was well-conceived to mitigate the Cold War super-power rivalry in the Indian Ocean, and spirit of living in a benign environment unconstrained by the motives of external powers was endorsed by India’s National Security Advisor (NSA) as lately at in 2016. However, the IOZOP effort collapsed in 2005, when China stepped up its role in the deliberations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, established in 1972 to study practical measures to achieve the objectives of IOZOP. Ostensibly, the lack of a sustained endorsement and involvement of India as the key Indian Ocean power took its toll on the otherwise laudable initiative from Sri Lanka.

Hence, while the IOR countries would need to continue conceptualising innovative means to enhance regional security and stability, the proposed replication of the CoC for SCS in the Indian Ocean may not be a good idea, particularly without India being onboard. Rather than the CoC as a political agreement, a functional arrangement to de-conflict unintended encounters among warships of different nationalities may contribute more substantively to maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Such de-confliction is becoming exigent due to the increasing presence of China’s PLA Navy in the Indian Ocean, including through its submarine deployments in the area. In 2014, the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) developed such a mechanism called the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES³⁸). The Code provides for basic instructions for communicating and manoeuvring when warships and military aircraft of different nationalities meet at sea unexpectedly. In September 2016, China and the ASEAN jointly agreed³⁹ to abide by the CUES in the SCS. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is presently discussing the proposal to emulate the CUES, which needs to be taken forward.

³⁷ At <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/34/a34res80.pdf>

³⁸ At <http://www.cpf.navy.mil/leaders/harry-harris/speeches/2014/04/western-pacific-naval-symposium.pdf>

³⁹ “ASEAN, China agree on code for unplanned encounters in South China Sea”, Xinhuanet, 07 Sep 16, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-09/07/c_135669832.htm

Asymmetric Maritime Threats in the IOR

April 2012

“If he (the enemy) is superior in strength, evade him. If his forces are united, separate them. Attack him where he is unprepared; appear where you are not expected.”

- Sun Tzu (The Art of War)

Abstract

The non-state actors who were particularly known for their expertise in maritime terrorism in the Indian Ocean Region are on the ebb. This calls upon all stakeholders in the IOR to re-assess the security environment in terms of the asymmetric maritime threats. The paper avers that threat potential persists due to the lingering instabilities and terrorist/insurgent movements in the region, the inherent vulnerabilities of maritime choke points, and the easy access of prospective actors to nautical expertise. Besides, some defeated militant groups known for their maritime expertise may be dormant, and waiting for an opportunity to strike. To further their objectives, the actors may not only resort to maritime attacks, but may also use innovative means to transport instruments of terror via the sea. The Mumbai terror strike of November 2008 is among the grim reminders of the extant threat. What enhances the insecurity is the possibility of asymmetric attacks by militant groups being supported by states, or even resorted to by states themselves, if they perceive their critical interests to be threatened. The paper also aims to identify the cooperative responses involving the regional littorals and extra-regional stakeholders.

Introduction

If one could imagine the terrestrial and maritime realms of the earth reversed, the Indian Ocean would appear to be an ‘island continent’. Such ‘insular’ characteristic of the Indian Ocean emanates from its embayed nature, with the seven gateways (choke points) providing the only warm-water access to the oceans beyond.⁴⁰ This lends a distinct geo-political hue to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The criticality of the regional choke points for seaborne commerce and military communications increases the strategic salience of the IOR. The added factors of abundance of natural resources in the IOR and the wide power disparity among its littoral states make the region susceptible to contestation among major powers. Furthermore, any security-related event occurring in one part of the IOR often ‘resonates’ across the Indian Ocean affecting its other parts, with strong security ramifications for the entire IOR.

⁴⁰ Indian Maritime Doctrine (INBR-8), Integrated Headquarters, MoD (Navy), Aug 2009, p. 56-57

Over the past decade, the maritime security environment of IOR has undergone a substantial change. While maritime crimes like piracy have been ascendant, the non-state groups with known affinity for violence in the maritime realm have been on the decline. This makes it imperative for the regional stakeholders to reassess the prevailing and emerging threats, so that their maritime strategies could be appropriately realigned.

In any security assessment, accounting for asymmetric threats is particularly daunting. The challenge lies in not only extrapolating such amorphous threats, but also mobilizing consensus for strategy formulation. This facet of maritime security not only demands, but also deserves a greater intellectual investment. The paper is an attempt at 'stock-taking' of such maritime threats in the IOR. It also aims to identify the cooperative responses involving the regional littorals and extra-regional stakeholders.

The Concept of 'Asymmetry'

At the outset, it may be necessary to visit the concept of 'asymmetry' in the security lexicon. The word refers to the significant disparity in material power between opposing actors in a conflict involving the use of force.⁴¹ In this context, therefore, the term 'asymmetric means' may be defined as:

'an unconventional approach adopted by the weaker side to undermine a superior adversary's strengths through application of unorthodox tactics and novel use of existing technologies in an unexpected manner'.

Hence, the propensity to associate the term 'asymmetric threats' solely with non-state actors or terrorism is not a holistic representation of its underlying concept. Asymmetric means may also be employed by states during state-on-state armed conflicts.

Security Environs of IOR

The IOR is beset by multifarious insecurities, most of which are directly or indirectly related to the maritime realm. A broad overview of the security concerns is depicted in the table below.

⁴¹ The genesis of the term stems from an article written by Andrew Mack in 1975. Andrew Mack, 'Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict', *World Politics* (Cambridge University Press), Vol. 27 (2), Jan 75, pp. 175-200

	War/ Armed Conflict	Terrorism/ Insurgencies	Maritime Trafficking	Piracy/ Armed Robbery at Sea	Political Risk/ Internal Instability	Maritime Disputes
Australia						X
Bahrain						
Bangladesh			X	X	X	X
Comoros						X
Djibouti			X			
East Timor					X	X
Egypt		X	X			X
Eritrea			X			
India		X	X	X		X
Indonesia		X		X		X
Iran		X	X		X	X
Iraq	X	X			X	X
Israel	X	X			X	
Jordan						
Kenya			X	X		
Kuwait						X
Madagascar			X			X
Malaysia				X		X
Maldives					X	
Mauritius			X			X
Mozambique			X		X	
Myanmar			X		X	X
Oman			X	X		
Pakistan	X	X	X		X	X
Qatar						
Saudi Arabia	X	X	X			X
Seychelles				X		X
Singapore				X		X
Somalia	X	X	X	X	X	
South Africa						
Sri Lanka					X	
Sudan	X		X		X	
Tanzania			X	X		
Thailand			X	X	X	
UAE			X			X
Yemen	X	X	X	X	X	

Sources: AON Political Risk Services, CIA World Fact Book, IMB, SIPRI, Risk Intelligence

Table - Security Concern/ Issue Summary for IOR⁴²

Of the IOR countries, 39% exhibit political risks accompanied with governance deficit or socio-economic instabilities. The instability in Somalia and the seafaring skills among its fishing folk are among the key causes for the emergence of rampant piracy in the area. In all, 33% of the countries are affected by piracy (or armed robbery at sea) in their waters. Terrorism and insurgencies threaten 28% of IOR countries. The internal violence is nourished by maritime crimes - drug-trafficking, gunrunning and human smuggling - affecting 56%. While lingering maritime territorial disputes affect 53%, 19% are involved in armed conflicts in various forms.⁴³ In sum, the IOR's security environment provides fertile nestling grounds for asymmetric threats to take root, not the least in the maritime-littoral realm.

⁴² This table is an updated version of the one depicted in Amit Pandya, Rupert Herbert-Burns et al. 'Maritime Commerce and Security: The Indian Ocean', *The Henry L. Stimson Center*, Feb 2011, p.100

⁴³ -ibid-, p. 99

Potential Actors

Maritime Actors on the 'Ebb'?

LTTE Sea Tigers

The non-state actor best known so far for its expertise to conduct asymmetric attacks at sea has been LTTE⁴⁴ *Sea Tigers*. Although LTTE was disbanded in 2009, its informal networks and support groups are still known to be active worldwide. In June 2010, three LTTE arms smugglers with 5,000 bomb detonators were detained by Tamil Nadu police.⁴⁵ Although it is unlikely for *Sea Tigers* to be revived in the near future, their nautical expertise is likely to be extant and would need to be factored.

Al Qaeda

The Al Qaeda terror network is a potential actor. It undertook maritime attacks against USS *Cole* (2000) and *Limburg* (2002). Soon thereafter, the brain behind the attacks Al-Rahim al-Nashiri was arrested.⁴⁶ He revealed the existence of an Al Qaeda naval handbook - a compilation of tactical tips for conducting maritime attacks. It includes information on handling of weapons and boats; use of underwater scooters and limpet mines; the procedure for attaching them to ships; the vulnerable areas in different types of vessels; and the amount of explosive to be used. In 2005, another maritime terror expert, Hamid al-Utaibi replaced Al-Nashiri.⁴⁷

Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT)

The Pakistan-based *LeT* terror group is an emerging maritime actor. The November 2008 Mumbai terror attack was its first use of maritime means, but this was not unexpected. In 2006, the Indian Home Minister had issued a warning that "Some *LeT* operatives are being trained specifically for sabotage of oil installations".⁴⁸ So the asymmetry of the Mumbai attack was not so much about *LeT*'s maritime dimension, but in terms of stealth and innovative use of maritime transport. The terrorists used a larger mother ship for major part of the voyage; then shifted to a small 14-metre trawler

⁴⁴ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

⁴⁵ 'Three LTTE cadre Held', Indian Express, 21 Jun 2010 at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/3-ltte-cadres-held-in-tamil-nadu/636421/> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁴⁶ "Suspected Qaeda Chief Cooperating", CBS News, November 22, 2002 at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/11/17/attack/main529656.shtml> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁴⁷ "The Threat of Maritime Terrorism", Defence Update News Commentary, December 10, 2005 at <http://www.defense-update.com/2005/12/threat-of-maritime-terrorism.html> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁴⁸ Sudha Ramachandran, 'India moves to secure its shores', Asia Times online, December 22, 2006, at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HL22Df01.html (Accessed 04 Apr 07)

Kuber; and barely five nautical miles from coast, shifted into two smaller inflatable dinghies. The IMO stipulations such as the ISPS Code⁴⁹ and AIS/ LRIT⁵⁰ that are meant to detect such illegitimate activities apply only to larger vessels above 300 gross register tonnage (GRT), and not vessels like *Kuber* and the inflatables. In the coming years, the possibility of terrorists elsewhere imitating this modus operandi cannot be ruled out.

Free Aceh Movement (GAM)

The GAM has been a separatist group seeking independence of Aceh province (Sumatra) from Indonesia. In 2005, the organisation surrendered its separatist intentions following a peace agreement with the government. GAM is unlikely actor for undertaking maritime attacks. But even at present, the possibility of the maritime expertise of its cadres feeding into the human resource pool of the maritime terror groups cannot be discounted.

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)

As a terrorist organisation of Southeast Asia, JI has amply demonstrated its intent to conduct maritime terrorism.⁵¹ Beginning 2008, JI has been on the decline with many of its top leaders having been arrested or killed. However, some recent reports talk about its re-emergence.⁵² If so, given the strong maritime traditions in Southeast Asia and its environs being highly suited for maritime guerilla tactics, JI may be considered a potential actor. Although its center of gravity lies in Indonesia's Java Province, it could potentially undertake asymmetric attacks in the Malacca Strait.

State Actors

A state with sufficient *wherewithal* to challenge the military power of its adversary, and that perceives its critical interests to be in jeopardy, may be a potential actor for asymmetric warfare. In context of the IOR, Iran is one. In the medium-to-long term timeframe, if Pakistan's relations with the US and India deteriorate, it could resort to

⁴⁹ The International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code came into force on 01 Jul 04 as part of amendments to the 1974 SOLAS convention.

⁵⁰ While the Automatic Identification System (AIS) is V/UHF-based (line-of-sight), the satellite-based Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) provides a global coverage for inputs on own ships.

⁵¹ In 2002, JI cadres arrested in Singapore were found to possess charts of Changi naval base indicating plans to attack US warships. "U.S. Base in Singapore was Target", CBS News, June 11, 2003 at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/06/11/attack/main558055.shtml>. In 2004, senior JI members detained by Indonesia admitted to have considered attacks on Malacca shipping. See 'Indonesia Warns of Malacca Terror Plots, Hails Anti-Piracy Patrols', AFP News, 25 Aug 2004, at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1199785/posts> (Both accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁵² Zakir Hussain, 'Indonesia Terrorist Group Jemaah Islamiyah: Fractured But Still Fighting', Straits Times, 07 Jan 2012, at <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/indonesia-terrorist-group-jemaah-islamiyah-fractured-but-still-fighting/489697> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

asymmetric means of warfare. It may acquire asymmetric concepts/ technologies from China, which is a major potential actor in the Western Pacific.

The Latent Links

The Piracy Connection

As indicated in the table above, one-third of the IOR countries are affected by piracy in their waters. The nautical expertise of the pirates may be used by non-state militants to conduct asymmetric attacks at sea. These actors may employ pirates, or emulate their tactics. As a response to the Somali piracy, many flag-states have begun arming their merchantmen or providing them with armed escorts. While this may have been necessary, it is likely for the pirates to develop appropriate countermeasures, possibly the resort to stand-off and more lethal attacks to disable the victim vessel. Even at present, the Somali pirates are known to be using rocket propelled grenades. In the coming years, it is highly possible for the pirates to arm themselves with shoulder-launched missiles. If so, it is likely to have strong implications on the tone and tenor of asymmetric maritime attacks by non-state groups.

Complicity of State Actors

State actors constitute another possible source of maritime training and access to advanced nautical technology for the non-state actors. The 2008 Mumbai terror attack conducted by the LeT is case in point. A report indicates that the LeT operatives received maritime training in Mangla Dam area of central Pakistan, which including a practice sea-borne run into Mumbai in 2007. Further, the training includes techniques of boat handling, navigation, laying of mines in coastal areas, planting underwater charges on bridges, dams and ships, and attacking coastal targets and vessels.⁵³ The meticulous planning and execution of the attack, including the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) and the knowledge of the landing points in south Mumbai lends credence to the veracity of the report. This provides some indication that naval training may have been imparted to the LeT operatives. It is more likely to be the undertaking of some elements of the Pakistan Navy without the knowledge of the government. However, an implicit government support cannot be ruled out, in which case, it may be argued that Pakistan is already an asymmetric actor in the IOR that is resorting to terrorism as the asymmetric means.

The LTTE-Al Qaeda Link

Al Qaeda is known to have been copied LTTE tactics to undertake terror strikes. The *Al Qaeda* attacks on US World Trade Centre (9/11) and London public

⁵³ 'TDC Security Alert: Maritime Aspects of Mumbai Terror Attacks' The Maritime Executive, 11 Jan 2011 at <http://www.maritime-executive.com/article/tdc-security-alert-maritime-aspects-mumbai-terror-attacks> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

transportation are also known to have been inspired by similar attacks by LTTE.⁵⁴ The USS *Cole* bomb-laden boat attack in 2002 employed a similar tactic to the LTTE attacks on Sri Lanka warships. The discovery of a detailed *Al Qaeda* documentation on undertaking attacks at sea strengthens the case. Its contents were found similar to the provisions of LTTE's naval manual. Reports indicate that after the 'not-too-successful' USS *Cole* attack, *Al Qaeda* sent a team to LTTE to sharpen its skills.

It is important to remember that LTTE was highly vulnerable to being blockaded, which became the pivot of Sri Lanka Navy's plan since 2006. This not only severed LTTE's overseas supplies, but also deprived the *Sea Tigers* of its wherewithal.⁵⁵ If any other terror group like *Al Qaeda* without such strategic vulnerability could develop a similar nautical expertise, it would pose an overwhelming asymmetric challenge. It is notable in this context that up to a few years after Al Nashiri's arrest in 2002, *Al Qaeda* was ineffective at sea. In 2004, its suicide attack on Iraqi oil terminals also failed. But more recently in July 2010, a Japanese supertanker MV *Star* was successfully targeted by *Al Qaeda* using a water-borne IED. This indicates its growing maritime potential in the 'watch' of *Al Qaeda* new maritime terror expert Hamid al-Utaibi.

The JI-GAM Link?

In Feb 2010, some JI operatives were reported to be seeking “**safe haven**” and “**training base**” in Aceh, the stronghold of GAM.⁵⁶ A month later, security level in the Malacca Strait had to be heightened after Singapore Navy issued a warning of possible JI attacks on oil tankers.⁵⁷ The warning came on the heels of the arrests of 14 suspected terrorists in Aceh at an alleged JI training camp.⁵⁸ The 'Aceh connection' reinforces the JI's potential.

The LeT-LTTE Link?

⁵⁴ Glen Jenvev, 'Al Qaeda Follows LTTE Textbook on Terror Faithfully', Asian Tribune, 12 Feb 2007, at www.asiantribune.com/index.php?q=node/4518 (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁵⁵ Ravin Edirisinghe, 'Sri Lanka Navy's RABS/SBS Concept: An Operational and Tactical Edge over Sea Tigers', Sri Lanka Navy website, 14 Feb 2010, at www.navy.lk/index.php?id=1068 (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁵⁶ Heru Andriyanto & Nurdin Hasan, 'Aceh Seen as a 'Safe Haven' for Terror Group Jemaah Islamiyah', Jakarta Globe, 24 Feb 2010 at <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/aceh-seen-as-a-safe-haven-for-terror-group-jemaah-islamiyah/360644> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁵⁷ Singapore Raises Security Alert Levels After Malacca Strait Threat,” Reuters, 5 Mar 2010 at <http://in.mobile.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-46679120100305> and 'Terrorist threat in Straits of Malacca: High alert for possible JI attacks on oil tankers', Ordons News, 06 Mar 2010, at <http://www.ordons.com/asia/southeast-asia/3223-terrorist-threat-in-straits-of-malacca-high-alert-for-possible-ji-attacks-on-oil-tankers.html> (Both accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁵⁸ '14 Suspects Charged Under Indonesia's Anti-Terror Laws', Channel News Asia, 4 Mar 2010 at http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/1041575/1/.html (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

Recent reports indicate LeT's growing links with the LTTE. According to an Indian *Intelligence Bureau* (IB) alert sent to Maharashtra Police in November 2011, owing to the inability of *Indian Mujahidin* (IM) to make effective inroads into India, LeT may be activating LTTE sleeper cells located in and around Mumbai.⁵⁹

Nature of Threat and Vulnerabilities

Having established the defining contours of the concept of asymmetric means and the potential actors, the following paragraphs examine the nature of the expected maritime threats in the IOR and the vulnerabilities of the region that the actors could exploit. It may, however, be noted that the list of threats conceived therein are subject to limitless human imagination, and thus cannot possibly be exhaustive. Also, in the coming years, the emergence of new technologies may give birth to new asymmetric tactics.

Attributes of Asymmetry

Non-state Actors

To counter the force advantage of the state adversary, the asymmetric means employed by non-state actors would be premised on the following broader concepts: -

- Since the identity and location of non-state actors are unknown, the actors seek to exploit this information advantage ('information asymmetry').
- The concept of suicide missions, which was initiated by the LTTE.
- Non-adherence to law.

State Actors

In context of the IOR, the character of asymmetric means employed by state actors (as known in public domain) would be as follows: -

- The means are likely to be based on the concepts of Sea Denial/ Anti-Access and Special Operations. (It is pertinent to reiterate that possessing a capability itself is not asymmetry, but it is its innovative use in a manner unexpected by the superior adversary).
- State actions may be expected to be circumscribed by the *Law of Armed Conflict* (LOAC). But states may use unlawful means by disguising or concealing

⁵⁹ Nikhil Dixit, 'LeT sending LTTE and BKI militants to do its dirty work: Intelligence', Daily News and Analysis (DNA), 21 Nov 2011, at http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_le-t-sending-ltte-and-bki-militants-to-do-its-dirty-work-intelligence_1615235 (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

their actions, or exploiting the inherent ambiguities and voids in the prevailing international law. Such errant states may also use chemical or biological weapons.

- States may obtain access to extra-regional asymmetric concepts and technologies.

The Surface Threat

The most prevalent threat posed by non-state actors emanates from the surface-based asymmetric attacks. Among these, the bomb-laded high speed boat attack on targets of high symbolic value has been the most common. This *modus operandi* was first used by LTTE's *Sea Tigers*, and later emulated by *Al Qaeda*. Stationary assets being easier to target would be most vulnerable. These include offshore platforms, high-value coastal infrastructure and naval platforms alongside and at anchor. An attack on a moving vessel is also possible if it presents a lucrative target like a VLCC, and is cruising at slow speeds in restricted waters. The 2002 *Limburg* attack exemplifies this. As indicated earlier, the use of stand-off weapons is also within the realm of possibility.

In another conceivable scenario, terrorists may commandeer a ship laden with dangerous material such as ammonium nitrate to collide with a high-value vessel or into a major port. It may be recalled that in March 2003, ten armed men hijacked and steered the Indonesian tanker *Dewi Madrim* in the Malacca straits for an hour before fleeing with technical documents.⁶⁰ The incident caused widespread anxiety as a likely preparation for a 'maritime 9/11'.⁶¹

The LTTE *Sea Tigers* also specialized swarming/ cluster attacks by multiple fast-attack craft on major Sri Lankan warships. With the only *de facto* non-state navy in the region neutralized, such attacks can now be undertaken only by state actors. Notably, Iran is large numbers of Fast Attack Craft (FACs).

The Sub-Surface Threat

Another probable type of asymmetric threat is a sub-surface attack. With state support, the non-state actors could obtain access to older conventional mines, but they are more likely to resort to Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). It is pertinent to note that in June 2006, the Malaysian defence chief had issued a warning of the possibility of terrorists trying to disrupt trade by using sea-mines, which could be as crude as

⁶⁰ "Global ship piracy down, but Malacca Strait worsens", Reuters, London, February 07, 2005 at http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/181_1232169,00020008.htm (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁶¹ Simon Elegant and Kuala Sepetang, 'Dire Straits', *Time Magazine*, 29 Nov 2004, at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,832306-1,00.html> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

explosives packed in oil-drums, or advanced ones incorporating trigger-devices.⁶² Owing to the high density of mercantile traffic in the maritime choke points and confined approaches to major ports, these areas would be highly vulnerable to these waterborne IEDs.

Another sub-surface threat emanates from divers. The *LITTE Sea Tigers* were adept at it. They even used to strap their cadres onto explosive-laden underwater vehicles for conducting suicide attacks. While such 'human torpedoes' attacks are now unlikely, divers may still be used to plant limpet-type mines on ships' hulls.

A state actor could employ divers for clandestine saboteur operations, but the use of conventional mines of increasing sophistication constitutes a more likely option to undertake sub-surface attacks. Notably, Iran has a large inventory of sea-mines of various types. It is also possible for the mines to be planted in drifting mode. Though against LOAC, state actors could deny it and attribute it to non-state actors. The use of mines may be supplemented by alternate sea-denial options like midget submarines, and even extra-regional asymmetric technologies such as 'super-cavitating' torpedoes. The technology for developing these 'carrier killers' was developed by the Soviets during the Cold War, and is believed to be extant in some countries like China.

Can Choke Points be Choked?

The asymmetric threat to maritime choke points deserves due attention. An assessment was undertaken to examine the possibility of non-state actors capsizing a large vessel to choke one of the three waterways off the Arabian Peninsula. As per its findings, considering the width and depth of the navigational channels, and practical considerations, it would be difficult to 'physically' choke any of the waterways except the Suez Canal.⁶³ The same may apply to the other Indian Ocean choke points. However, the major international straits like Malacca and Hormuz are vulnerable to a 'virtual blockage'. An activation of a single waterborne IED in the waterway, for example, would be sufficient to disrupt energy flows through it for many days due to fear among the shipping companies.

Any state geographically contiguous to narrow waterway could effectively choke it. This is particularly true for Iran considering its focus on sea-denial/ anti-access concepts. The statement made by the US General Martin Dempsey (Chairman, Chief of Staff) in January 2012 bolsters this view. He said,

⁶² 'Malaysian Military Warns Underwater Mines Could be Terrorist Tool', *Agence France-Presse* (Kuala Lumpur), *Defence News*, July 6, 2006 at <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=1853798&C=navwar> (Accessed 20 Feb 2012)

⁶³ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'Maritime Terror off Arabian Peninsula: A Post-Limburg Security Assessment', in NS Sisodia and Ashok Behuria (eds.) *West Asia in Turmoil: Implications for Global Security* (2007: Academic Foundation, New Delhi), pp.95-112

“(The Iranians have) invested in capabilities that could, in fact, for a period of time block the Straits of Hormuz....And so the simple answer is, yes, they can block it.”⁶⁴

The WMD Threat

Though not restricted to the maritime domain, *Weapons of Mass Destruction* (WMD) such as CBRN weapons⁶⁵ constitute another asymmetric threat. While in case of state actors, such weapons are more likely to be used as threat-in-being and for brinkmanship, the possession of WMDs by non-state actors constitutes a major threat.

Closely related to the threat is the growing potential of the global shipping for transportation of WMDs and the means of their delivery. Considering the fact that the maritime domain continues to be the most unregulated realm on earth, maritime transportation has been inherently suited for transporting the various instruments of terror, which included the militants, weaponry and explosives and even narcotics required to finance militancy. Among these, the use of shipping containers for transporting WMDs constitutes a very serious threat.

The Response

While extrapolating asymmetric threats is difficult, identifying the appropriate responses is even more daunting since any such effort must necessarily reconcile divergent views on the most appropriate course of action. The following paragraphs depict one among many possible views.

The Geo-Political Response

The response to asymmetric threats would need to begin at the geo-political level. The policies of all regional stakeholders, not least the major powers, would need to emphasize more on ‘prevention’, rather than ‘cure’, both individually and multilaterally. This has two facets – the first pertains to prevention of state failures. The efforts would need to focus on addressing the root causes of their instability by assisting the affected states to improve their economy and governance. Measures in this direction would encompass the entire gamut ranging from monetary aid and loans for developmental to UN peace-support operations.

⁶⁴ ‘Iran’s Threat to the Strait of Hormuz’, CRS Report for (the US) Congress, 23 Jan 2012, p.4, at www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R42335.pdf (Accessed 01 Mar 2012)

⁶⁵ Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear weapons.

Secondly, states – particularly the major powers – must avoid driving non-state actors and smaller states to resort to asymmetric means, which is usually their ‘last resort’. Their policies would need to be based on a profound understanding of the perceptions and ‘pulse’ of the potential actors. For example, the *Proliferation Security Initiative* (PSI) launched by the US in 2004 was premised on a sound rationale to prevent the proliferation of WMDs, but its legal underpinnings were tenuous.⁶⁶ The high-sea interdiction of foreign-flagged vessels by the PSI states at will (at least, as the initiative was originally envisaged) was perceived by states like Iran and North Korea as ‘hostile act’. Such ad hoc initiatives by major powers could trigger asymmetric responses by states that consider themselves to be targeted.

Are Pre-emptive Strikes Feasible?

Among the options usually debated at the geo-political level is the conduct of pre-emptive strikes against the asymmetric actors. According to international law, such strikes may be conducted against both state and non-state actors, if these can be justified as a case of ‘anticipatory self-defence’ as extension of Article 51 of UN Charter (the right of individual or collective self-defence).⁶⁷ It must, however, be noted that there lies a probability of such operations being counter-productive in terms of adverse geo-political ramifications. Besides, conducting such strikes against non-state actors in the territory of another state would encounter some impediments. Among the foremost of these is the question of sovereignty of the host country. Even in the event of its cooperation, the military forces would be operating with severe constraints in foreign environs *inter alia* in terms of ‘information-asymmetry’. This may lead to unacceptable casualties or collateral damage.

Inter-State Cooperation

Multilateral cooperation is indispensable to respond to asymmetric threats, and particularly non-state threats that are acquiring an increasingly transnational character. The current security environment is likely to become more complex in the coming years as the different actors across the IOR exploit the information age to establish cross-linkages in search for convergences and symbiotic relations. Besides, the capacities and resources of all stakeholders in the IOR need to be pooled in to reduce the effect of asymmetry.

⁶⁶ For a detailed analysis of the legal aspects of PSI, see Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Proliferation Security Initiative: The Legal Underpinnings’, *Indian Defence Review*, Vol.19(4), (Oct-Dec 2004), p.58

⁶⁷ The phrase “inherent right” in the text of Article 51 can be interpreted to mean *Anticipatory Self-defence* that has a historical foundation, which predates the UN Charter and stems from customary international law.

Regional Organisations

Article 52 of the UN Charter mandates the role of “regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action”. Under this provision, the IOR needs a region-wide security organisation which it has never been able to institute. The IORARC⁶⁸ does not address security issues at all. This is in sharp contrast to the emerging security architecture in the Western Pacific region, which also includes some IOR countries.⁶⁹ Fortunately for the IOR, collective wisdom led to the institution of the *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium* (IONS). It was inspired by the successes of the *ASEAN Regional Forum* (ARF) and modeled on the lines of the *West Pacific Naval Symposium* (WPNS). The IONS is presently the only pan-IOR security forum. It is becoming increasingly essential to involve the extra-regional stakeholders to be involved in IONS, at least as observers.

Information Sharing

To address the non-state threats in the IOR, the foremost imperative lies in forging inter-state information-sharing agreements to enhance *Maritime Domain Awareness* (MDA), and thereby reduce the effect of 'information asymmetry'. The effort could be initiated as an anti-piracy measure. The SHADE⁷⁰ is a valuable forum in this direction. As a response to Southeast Asian piracy, the *Regional Cooperative Agreement against Piracy in Asia* (ReCAAP) has been highly effective. The model could be replicated in the western Indian Ocean. In due course, the agreement could become pan-IOR and expanded to encompass maritime terrorism and other crimes at sea. The regional organisation would need to be supplemented by bilateral agreements for exchange of LRIT data. However, sharing of data of own shipping has not been forthcoming due to the prevailing trust-deficit, which would need to be overcome.

Container Security

Another agreement worthy of emulation with some changes is the *Container Security Initiative* (CSI) launched by the US in 2002.⁷¹ Notably, the initiative has the sanction of

⁶⁸ Indian Ocean Region Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) is a 18-member grouping comprising Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE and Yemen.

⁶⁹ The East Asia Summit (EAS) instituted in 2005 also has not yet decided to address Maritime Security, but the void is being filled by the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus instituted in 2010.

⁷⁰ Shared Awareness and De-confliction (SHADE) meetings was instituted in December 2008 as a means of sharing 'best practices', conduct informal discussions and de-conflict the activities of nations/ organisations involved in counter-piracy operations off Somalia/ Gulf of Aden.

⁷¹ CSI involves a bilateral understanding of the US with other countries to station customs officials in each other's ports and use of advanced technology for “non-intrusive” detection of illegal cargo that may be concealed in shipping containers.

the *World Customs Organisation*, which passed a resolution on 28 June 2002 enabling countries to develop container security programmes in line with the initiative. It thus bears the potential to be expanded even beyond its present US orientation. Although it was envisaged to cater for the security of US as a 'hub-and-spoke' model, the major ports of IOR could form a 'web' to ensure the automated scanning of containers. In due course of time, the CSI may even become a 'global web', when it could also serve as a tool for WMD non-proliferation.

Review of International Instruments

While it is necessary for all regional stakeholders to accede to at the relevant international treaties/ conventions and regulations such as the Law of the Sea, SUA Convention⁷², ISPS Code, and those to terrorist financing, they would also need to mobilize regional consensus to fill the voids in the existing instruments. Among such voids, for example, is one relating to the legal provision for security zones around high-value assets in high seas. The radius of the zones should be appropriate given the nature of asymmetric threats. For example, if we consider a bomb-laden boat approaching an oil-rig even at 20 knots, the present provision of 500 metres 'safety zone' provided for in UNCLOS, 1982 would give a response time of only 48 seconds, which is grossly inadequate for any effective response. It is pertinent to recall that following the 2004 *Al Qaeda* attack on Iraqi oil terminals, the US-led coalition has stipulated a 2 km exclusion zone around the terminals.

Resolution of Maritime Disputes

The resolution of maritime boundary disputes among maritime neighbours of the IOR would be a significant response to non-state asymmetric threats. This would help establishing clear-cut and unambiguous national jurisdictions. Lingering disputes can be exploited, as was done during the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. The Indian trawler *Kuber* used by them is known to have been hijacked in the area disputed between India and Pakistan, where incursions by vessels on both sides are frequent.

Cooperation Among Maritime Forces

Due to the significant geo-political and operational impediments in undertaking pre-emptive strikes against asymmetric actors, such option would be exercised rarely, and only in extreme circumstances. In operational terms, therefore, the cooperative among maritime forces would be largely defensive in nature.

⁷² Convention for Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, 1992

Operational Coordination

The IOR and extra-regional maritime forces would need to coordinate their operations depending on the circumstances. The de-confliction of the anti-piracy operations among the naval forces of China, India and Japan in the Gulf of Aden (under the *SHADE* 'umbrella') achieved in January 2012 is an apt example of such operational coordination. It is, however, noteworthy that the agreement was reached more than three years later, which may be attributed to the geo-political trust-deficit. Another example of such coordination is the increasing agreements between maritime neighbours on conducting coordinated naval patrols along the common maritime boundaries to prevent maritime crimes. This will also foster mutual confidence at the political level, and among maritime forces. Operational coordination may also involve providing replenishment facilities in IOR ports to extra-regional naval forces deployed in the area. However, such coordination may also be impeded by geo-political factors. The apprehension among IOR countries with regard to China's quest for such a facility in Seychelles is case in point.

Capability Enhancement

Another aspect of cooperative endeavour pertains to capability enhancement. This would include the following: -

- Maritime Domain Awareness. Cooperation to enhance MDA among maritime forces, which would be fed into the national-level MDA.
- Combined Exercises. As a lesson learnt from anti-LTTE operations conducted by the Sri Lanka Navy, exercising *Force Protection Measures* (FPM) is most exigent. Such exercises would also foster operational compatibility for combined operations.
- Doctrine Development. Cooperation for formulating a doctrine specifically to address non-state asymmetric threats. The IN has recently published one. The maritime forces may also benefit through cooperating for framing *Rules of Engagement* (RoE). These would also enhance operational compatibility.

Capacity Building

Another aspect of cooperative endeavour pertains to capacity enhancement in the context of material wherewithal. To offset the threat posed by asymmetric maritime threats, the regional maritime forces need to share material resources. The *Mine Countermeasures* (MCM) and diving/ salvage capabilities of individual regional states are grossly inadequate, and will need to be pooled in to respond to underwater asymmetric threats. Besides, the conventional minesweeping capabilities may not be appropriate given the asymmetric challenge posed by improvised mines. The response would thus need to incorporate advanced mine identification and clearance technology including *Unmanned Underwater Vehicles* (UUV) and air-borne MCM. In addition to the above, the regional maritime forces need fast gun-boats for shallow-water

operations and high-rate of fire weapon systems. Also necessary is to have access to seaborne target boats and control systems that can simulate 'swarm' attacks on naval vessels, allowing its close-protection specialists to hone their gunnery skills. Eventually, such cooperation may lead to defence industry cooperation among regional countries through joint ventures.

Conclusion

If viewed in the light of the decline of non-state actors known for violence at sea, the security environment of the IOR seems to be on a positive trajectory. However, it may be too early for the regional stakeholders to be overly optimistic considering the lingering insecurities in the IOR; most of which percolate down to the maritime domain due to the inherent configuration of the region. The potential involvement of state actors, either in support of non-state threats, or on their own heightens the insecurity further. Some of the conceivable salient expected asymmetric threats are outlined in the paper.

While the response strategies would need to be as dynamic as the continuing emergence of new asymmetric threats, it is suggested that the regional littoral and extra-regional stakeholders initiate a collective response based on the threats currently expected. The IONS presents a valuable forum to enable this. It is recommended a holistic response must necessarily address the entire spectrum ranging from geopolitical issues and inter-state cooperation, to operational coordination and capacity-building among maritime forces.

Common Public Good at Sea: Evolving Architecture in the Indo-Pacific Region

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The concept of 'Common Public Good(s) at Sea' has lately gained much traction in the context of maritime safety and security in the Afro-Asian swath of the Indo-Pacific region.⁷³ As the centre-of-gravity of world's economic power shifts eastwards, the salience of this predominantly maritime-configured region is increasing, and the attendant emphasis on security and stability in its maritime domain.

One does not recall coming across a precise definition of the phrase 'Common Public Good(s) at Sea' (CPGS). The closest one gets is to define it is through exemplification of a navy's 'constabulary' and 'benign' tasks at sea, ranging from counter-piracy and counter-terrorism to search and rescue (SAR), and humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief (HADR). This essay attempts to understand CGPS as a concept, examine the regional trends, and extrapolate the emerging CGPS architecture in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Concept

Most of us are familiar to the term 'public good(s)' used in the economic context. It draws its genesis from the renowned economist Paul Samuelson, who defined it in his 1954 paper as:

“[goods] which all enjoy in common in the sense that each individual's consumption of such a good leads to no subtractions from any other individual's consumption of that good.”⁷⁴

A 'public good' is, therefore, something that is a collective good *sans* exclusions. Further, it is not amount to a 'zero-sum' reckoning; in a sense that its consumption by one entity does not reduce its availability to other entities. In the maritime domain, a public good are best represented by 'lighthouses' that beacon weather-beaten seafarers to the ports and safe waters.

⁷³ The term 'Indo-Pacific Region' was first used in 2007 by the author. See 'Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 31(1), January 2007, pp.139-153.

⁷⁴ Paul A. Samuelson, 'The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure', *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Nov., 1954), pp. 387-389

Much of the world's ocean realm wherein humans undertake multifarious maritime activities is 'international medium' not subject to the laws of any single country. The delivery of safety and security in such space of global commons thus becomes a logical extension of 'public good'. Further, such 'good' could be extrapolated to the littoral. The watery medium provides transnational access to maritime security forces to undertake humanitarian missions during adverse contingencies on and off foreign shores. It is pertinent to note that while undertaking such benign tasks – whether at high seas or in the foreign littoral – the maritime forces perform a valuable function for their respective governments as 'instruments of foreign policy'. Given the above, in the contemporary context, CPGS may be defined as:

'measures taken by the maritime security forces to meet their respective States' international commitments towards facilitating good and lawful order in the maritime global commons, while also meeting their respective foreign policy objectives'.

It is necessary to note, however, that the maritime domain – represented by the seas and oceans of the world – constitutes the most unregulated and treacherous realm on Earth. To develop situational awareness in this domain, deliver safety and regulate activities therein presents a formidable challenge for maritime forces, including those belonging to major naval powers.

The Regional Context

In geographical terms, the Indo-Pacific region has a predominant maritime configuration. While geography has been a 'constant' in history, the so-called 'rise of Asia' and the attendant maritime-economic activity in the region has made the CPGS concept highly relevant to the regional countries and the extra-regional stakeholders. Traditionally – or at least in more recent times since the beginning of the post Cold War era – CPGS across the globe, and particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, has been provided by the maritime forces of the United States (US); at times, assisted by the forces of what the US calls, its "allies and partners".

The regional countries, beset by the lack of adequate capacity – besides limited national objectives in terms of geographical scope – have been largely content with the arrangement, and have adopted a 'free-rider' approach to security. However, clearly, such a measure is not sustainable, neither for the regional countries, not for the global stakeholders. It is not easy – even for a superpower like the US – to deliver CPGS incessantly in the nearly 'endless' stretch of the world's maritime realm. The military/ naval resources of the US have been increasingly stretched since the end of Cold War

due to its increasing military-strategic commitments overseas. The geopolitical challenges added to the US resource ‘overstretch’, best exemplified by the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)⁷⁵ and the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI)⁷⁶. This led to the US Navy Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) propound the concept of “Thousand-Ship Navy” (TSN)⁷⁷ concept propounded by the in 2005.

Seeking support of the allies and partners to partake the responsibility of CPGS, the TSN concept continued well into the later years, even though ‘TSN’ concept was later rephrased as the ‘Global Maritime Partnership’ (GMP) initiative, and the same was highlighted in the US Maritime Strategy document of 2007.⁷⁸

In the long run, however, the reliance of the Indo-Pacific region on a single power (or even on a group of ‘monolithic’ western powers) for providing CPGS may not be in the interest of the regional countries and global stakeholders alike, including for the US itself. There are nascent indicators of a change, which augurs well for both categories of nations!

Emerging CPGAS Architecture

Tier One

For the US, since the beginning of the current decade, delivery of CPGS in the Indo-Pacific has assumed greater salience than ever before in consonance with its national-strategic concept of ‘Rebalance to Asia’. Strategy-2015 furthers the appeal for the partnership, with the ‘Global Maritime Partnership’ (GMP) – of the 2007 Maritime Strategy document – now rephrased as a “global network of navies” in the 2015 Maritime Strategy. The 2015 document effectively communicates to the potential partners the rationale for such “plug and play” cooperation with the US forces *sans* “commitment”.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ The Proliferation Security Initiative: Can Interdiction Stop Proliferation?’ *Arms Control Association*, June 2004, at https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_06/Joseph. Also see, Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Proliferation Security Initiative: An Assessment’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Apr-Jun 2004, p.237

⁷⁶ Joshua Ho, ‘Operationalising the Regional Maritime Security Initiative’, *IDSS Commentary* (18/2004), 27 May 2004 at <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/COO4018.pdf>

⁷⁷ Address by the US Navy CNO Admiral Mike Mullen to the students and Faculty of the Naval War College, 31 August 2005 at the Naval War College Newport, R.I. See US Navy website at <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/leadership/quotes.asp?q=11&c=2>

⁷⁸ ‘A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower’, October 2007, at https://www.isc.gov/sites/default/files/Maritime_Strategy.pdf

⁷⁹ ‘A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower’, US Maritime Strategy, 2015. Also see, Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Indo-Asia Pacific’ Explained: An Assessment of US Maritime Strategy 2015’, Web-publication of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, 21 August 2015, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635756366838030982.pdf>

While the US has been a ‘constant’ in terms of delivery of CPGS in the region, and it may continue to be the ‘lead actor’ for some time, it is unlikely to be the ‘only’ provider of ‘net security’⁸⁰ in the longer run. The Indo-Pacific is witness to the emergence of new major and middle powers with increasing geopolitical, economic and military stakes in the entire Indo-Pacific region. For geopolitical and military-strategic reasons, China is likely to contest the primacy of the US in delivery of CPGS. Notably, however, the Chinese refer to CPGS differently, as ‘Military Operations Other than War’ (MOOTW), as indicated in China’s Defence White Papers since the 2012 document titled ‘The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces’.⁸¹

Tier Two

While the US-China dialectic may soon emerge as the first tier of the regional CPGS arrangement, other medium powers are likely supplement it and form the second tier. These include Australia, India and Japan: middle powers, all of whom have gained considerably from their alliance/ partnership with the US, but would like to form a concert to hedge against being entangled in the US-China tussle. Towards this end, analysts are increasingly promoting the idea of “middle power coalitions” to offset big-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific.⁸²

Australia’s strategic focus has traditionally been on its eastern seaboard facing the Pacific. Lately, however, Canberra is increasingly looking westwards, akin to a “pivot to the Indian Ocean”,⁸³ and reminiscent of events of the 1970s leading to Australia’s ‘Two-Ocean Navy’ policy enunciated in 1986.⁸⁴ Sam Bateman writes, “Australia’s approach to

⁸⁰ The concept of ‘net security’ is defined as “...the state of actual security available in an area, upon balancing prevailing threats, inherent risks and rising challenges in the maritime environment, against the ability to monitor, contain and counter all of these”. ‘Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy’, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015, New Delhi.

⁸¹ ‘The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces’, Information Office of the State Council, The People’s Republic of China, April 2013, Beijing, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm

⁸² Rory Medcalf and C Raja Mohan, ‘Responding to Indo-Pacific rivalry: Australia, India and middle power coalitions’, *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, August 2014, at http://www.lowyinstitute.org/files/responding_to_indo-pacific_rivalry_o.pdf

⁸³ Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘AUSINDEX-2015: Australia ‘Pivots’ to the Indian Ocean’, Web-publication of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, 12 October 15, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635802023056774316.pdf>

⁸⁴ In the 1970s, Australia was wary of Soviet naval activity in the Indian Ocean, which led to the establishment of its lone naval base in west (HMAS Sterling) in 1978 and enunciation of ‘Two Ocean Policy’ in 1986, through which Canberra intended to relocate half of the Navy’s fleet to the Indian Ocean seaboard.

the Indian Ocean in recent decades might appear to have waxed and waned (but) it never withered away...I don't see any prospect of the current 'pivot' withering away!"⁸⁵

India's new maritime strategy released in October 2015 indicates its intention to be a provider of 'net security' in its areas of maritime interest, which have been significantly expanded within the Indo-Pacific region, and even beyond. Such enunciation is in consonance with the Indian Prime Minister's vision of "SAGAR" (hindi word for 'Ocean' and an acronym for 'Security and Growth for All in the Region').⁸⁶ Furthermore, the role emerges not only from India's normative responsibility as a regional power, but is also closely interwoven with its own economic growth and prosperity.⁸⁷

The Japanese maritime forces have played an active role in maintaining good maritime order in the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean despite the constraints imposed by their national Constitution, specifically relating to the concept of 'collective security'. Notably, in June 2011, Japan established a forward operating base at Djibouti to facilitate its counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden. As Japan's only military facility on foreign soil, new base is being reinforced with more resources and accorded added responsibilities.⁸⁸ The base would enable the Japanese Self Defence Forces (JSDF) to respond to any contingency involving humanitarian and good order missions in the area. With the constraints of domestic law eroding, Japan's CPGS role – in concert with other countries – is likely to increase in the coming years.

The tier two is likely to be reinforced by the European Union (EU). Through the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Operation *Atalanta*, the has already proved itself to be a reckonable actor in the Indian Ocean, and the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS)⁸⁹ promulgated in June 2014 is likely synergise the role of EU navies to provide CPGS – and least in the IOR, if not further eastwards – through its "integrated approach

⁸⁵ E-mail communication with Commodore Sam Bateman (Retd.), Royal Australian Navy (RAN), 24 October 2015.

⁸⁶ 'Mr. Modi's Ocean View', *The Hindu*, 17 March 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/mr-modis-ocean-view/article7000182.ece>

⁸⁷ 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy', Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015, New Delhi. For an analysis of the Strategy, see Gurpreet S Khurana, 'Net Security Provider' Defined: An Analysis of India's New Maritime Strategy-2015', Web-publication of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, 23 November, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635838396645834619.pdf>

⁸⁸ 'Japan to reinforce SDF anti-piracy base in Djibouti for broader Middle East responses', *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 January 2015, at http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201501190036

⁸⁹ 'European Union Maritime Security Strategy', Council of the European Union, Brussels, 24 June 2014, at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2011205%202014%20INIT>

to global maritime security”.⁹⁰ The Strategy would support the role of France – the only major power besides the US that has maintained a continuous naval presence in the Indian Ocean – and would draw support from the re-establishment of the Royal Navy’s permanent presence east of the Suez after a hiatus of nearly 45 years.⁹¹

Tier Three

In due course, some other medium powers and other relevant countries are likely to share the stage by taking on the gauntlet of CPGS in the Indo-Pacific, forming the third tier of the regional CPGS architecture. The potential medium powers include Indonesia and Iran. Indonesia has enunciated for itself the sobriquet of “*Porus Maritim Dunia*” (global maritime axis)⁹² that envisions developing of the maritime power of the archipelagic nation to its full potential. Further, in consonance with its geo-strategic centrality, it seeks to shape events in the maritime space of the Indo-Pacific region. Although Jakarta has accorded priority to internal consolidation, it is likely to play a significant CPGS role in the region.

Iran could be an effective counter to the global threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and bears a high potential of contributing to stability in West Asia and maritime security in the western Indian Ocean. The international community needs to realize the potential of ISIS to disrupt the West Asian international shipping lanes (ISL) by targeting oil and gas tankers, particularly in the maritime choke-points. The Iranian Navy may be a bulwark against the ISIS in securing the global energy trade sourced from the Persian/ Arabian Gulf. The positive trends in P+1 negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme represents an opportunity for the stakeholders to engage with Iran.

The other relevant powers that could potentially contribute to CPGS in the region are South Africa, Pakistan and a cohesive group of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Their highly capable and professional maritime forces could contribute significantly to regional CPGS effort. However, the political leaderships in Islamabad

⁹⁰ European Commission Press Release data base, Brussels, 6 March 2014, at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-224_en.htm

⁹¹ In December 2015, Britain began construction of its new military base at Bahrain. ‘Work starts on new UK military base in Bahrain’, The Gulf News, 18 December 2015, at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/work-starts-on-new-uk-military-base-in-bahrain-1.1610885>

⁹² ‘Jokowi’s Inaugural Speech as Nation’s Seventh President’, The Jakarta Globe, 20 October 2014, at <http://jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/jokowis-inaugural-speech-nations-seventh-president/> Also see, Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘The Maritime ‘Rise’ of Indonesia: Indicators, Intentions and Inferences’, Web-publication of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, 16 Jan 2015, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/CommentaryView.aspx?NMFID=5381>

and the GCC capitals need to realize the emerging imperative to look beyond their respective sub-regional rivalries.

Concluding Remarks

The postulated CPGS architecture for the Indo-Pacific region conforms to the so-called “inclusive approach to maritime security”, which has been the ‘mantra’ of all the multilateral security institutions of the region: the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting - Plus (ADMM+), the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). However, in the longer term, a formulation of regional security and stability architecture on a select group of regional countries and non-resident powers does not auger well for regional and global security.

The CPGS effort would need to be pan-Indo Pacific and collective, and enmesh the IOR and Western Pacific spheres of multilateralism. While it may be too ambitious and unrealistic to expect ‘all’ regional countries to acquire ‘surplus’ capacity for CPGS, even if the smaller countries develop adequate capacity to police their respective maritime zones and areas of SAR responsibility, they could contribute significantly to the collective regional CPGS effort. The efforts of multilateral institutions, and major and middle powers would need to be directed towards such ‘capacity-building’.

Prospects of PLA Navy's Presence in the Indian Ocean and Impact on Regional Dynamics

March 2014

"The Indian Ocean will be one of the major problems (challenges) of the future."

– KM Panikkar (1945)⁹³

"The Greater Indian Ocean region...will be the centre of global conflicts, because most international business supply will be conducted through this route... it is in this region the interests and influence of India, China and the United States are beginning to overlap.... two key players in this region are India and China – India moving east and west while China to the South"

– Robert Kaplan (2010)⁹⁴

This essay aims to discuss the prospects for PLA Navy's presence in Indian Ocean, say in the medium-term time-frame of about 2025-30, and its impact on regional dynamics. What lies ahead flows essentially from what is China's intent in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Although China has been characteristically opaque in issues of national policy, it is nonetheless essential to understand China's maritime strategy for the IOR.

China's 'Blue Book' on Indian Ocean

China's 'Blue Book' on Indian Ocean released in June 2013 says that China has no Indian Ocean strategy.⁹⁵ This appears odd since the following month (July 2013), the Chinese President advocated enhancement of Chinese maritime power⁹⁶; and in October 2013, while on a visit to Indonesia, he announced the 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR) initiative.⁹⁷ Does the 'Blue Book' then mean to merely say that China has no 'maritime-military' strategy for Indian Ocean? Possibly yes.

⁹³K. M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1945)

⁹⁴ Robert Kaplan. *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean & Future of American Power* (Random House: Oct 10)

⁹⁵ 'Development Report in the Indian Ocean', *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (CASS), June 6, 2013.

⁹⁶ 'Xi advocates efforts to boost China's maritime power', July 31, 2013,

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-07/31/c_132591246.htm, accessed January 21, 2014

⁹⁷ 'The Silk Road - From Past to the Future', Website of PRC's Permanent Mission to the UN, April 3, 2014, <http://www.china-un.org/eng/gdxw/t1134206.htm>, accessed Jul 8, 2014

Be that as it may, China's 'Blue Book' does provide some valuable pointers to identify its strategy for the Indian Ocean. The salient pointers have been paraphrased as follows: -

- China's intent in IOR is guided by commercial and economic (not military) interests and objectives.
- It has lagged behind India and US thus far in securing these interests, and would now be more proactive.
- If India and/or the US impede the attainment of its objectives, it would not desist from resorting to confrontation.
- It would not permit any single power to dominate the IOR. It is prepared for jostling with such powers to establish 'a fragile'⁹⁸ Balance of Power equilibrium.

China's Interests and Objectives in IOR (Ends)

China's strategy for Indian Ocean may be constructed through the 'ends-ways-means' format by examining its interests and objectives in Indian Ocean (Ends), and a SWOT analysis. The strategy so deduced (Means and Ways) could spell out the prospects of PLA Navy's presence in the Indian Ocean, wherefrom flow the likely implications on regional dynamics.

Areas of Maritime Interest

The Western Pacific is Undeniably, China's primary area of maritime interest. The IOR may be considered as its secondary area of interest. The division between China's primary and secondary areas of maritime interest may be denoted as the geographic median of the four Southeast Asian choke points (Malacca, Sunda, Lombok-Macassar and Ombai-Wetar straits), indicated in Figure 1 as a red line. It is interesting to note that this median nearly coincides with the line joining India's southern-most territorial extremity (Indira Point of Great Nicobar Island) and the new US Marines 'place' at Darwin (Australia).

⁹⁸The word 'fragile' possibly means that the Balance of Power equilibrium would be dynamic, and no power (or a combination of powers) would enjoy an overwhelming superiority.

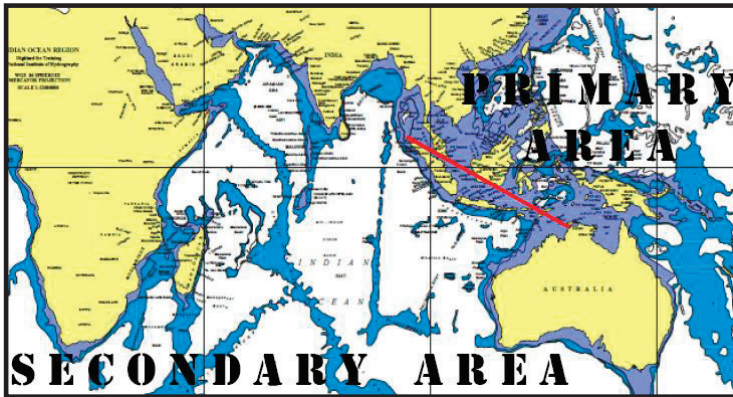


Figure 1 – China's Areas of Maritime Interest

Source: Author/ National Institute of Hydrography, Goa

The IOR may be considered to be of level-two importance for China, but as in the case of Western Pacific, events in the IOR bear strongly on China's national security interests. In other words, the entire Indo-Pacific region (encompassing the Western Pacific and IOR)⁹⁹ may be referred to as encompassing China's geo-strategic frontiers. Hence, China is rapidly building maritime-military capacity to be able to influence events in the IOR as well. Furthermore, China's strategy for the Western Pacific is closely linked to that in the Indian Ocean.

Specific Stakes/ Objectives

China's specific stakes in the Indian Ocean, and attendant objectives to secure these interests/ objectives are examined below.

⁹⁹The term 'Indo-Pacific' was first used by the author, at least within the Indian academic discourse. See Gurpreet Khurana (2007) 'Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation', *Strategic Analysis*, Volume 31, No. 1, p.139 – 153. Also see C Uday Bhaskar, 'India and the Indo-Pacific: Semantic and Strategic Import', NMF commentary, October 8, 2013, <http://www.maritimeindia.org/india-and-indo-pacific-semantic-and-strategic-import>, accessed April 17, 2014.

Geo-Political

- Regional Polarity - Beijing has no choice but to accept a 'bipolar' world order. However, it vies for a 'unipolar' Asia. China believes that it must be the predominant power in this region, which includes the IOR.
- Influence - China seeks symbolic influence in IOR as a major global power. Such influence is necessary for it to have a 'favourable voice' at global fora to further its quest for a redefined global order and altered global systems, and to press for its territorial sovereignty claims.

Economic

- Access to Natural Resources - China seeks an assured supply of natural resources and other raw materials to fuel its growing economy. It includes hydrocarbons and minerals¹⁰⁰, including seabed minerals.¹⁰¹
- Maritime Transportation -Unrestricted use of International Shipping Lanes (ISL) for China's seaborne trade, particularly for its energy supplies is considered to be vital. China's stakes also lie in the potential IOR feeder nodes to overland oil/ gas pipelines; both, under construction such as Kyaukpyu-Kunming pipeline (Myanmar),¹⁰² and those proposed, such as Gwadar-Kashi pipeline (Pakistan).¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Chinese companies are involved in mining operations in 13 African states and prospecting for more. Sarah Raine. *China's African Challenges*. (IISS/Routledge, London: 2009), p. 35

¹⁰¹In July 2011, China secured the permit of the *International Seabed Authority* (ISA) to undertake deep seabed mining in central Indian Ocean. Status of contracts for exploration for poly-metallic nodules, poly-metallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crust, *International Seabed Authority* (ISA) website, <http://www.isa.org.jm/en/scientific/exploration/contractors> (accessed 07 Jul 14)

¹⁰²The pipeline is likely to be operational by June 2014. Du Juan, 'Myanmar-China gas pipeline completed', China Daily, October 20, 2013, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-10/20/content_17046712.htm

¹⁰³Zafar Bhutta, 'Gwadar Port: Pakistan, China all set to develop master plan', The Express Tribune, Feb 15, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/671852/gwadar-port-pakistan-china-all-set-to-develop-master-plan/>, accessed February 22, 2014

- Maritime Outlet for Continental China -Commercial maritime outlet for the western and southern parts of China through IOR littorals like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- Other Commercial Interests - These include IOR markets for Chinese exports (mainly manufactured goods¹⁰⁴), IOR as a source of food (agricultural produce in Africa¹⁰⁵, fishing rights off Sri Lanka¹⁰⁶), Chinese citizens/workforce in IOR¹⁰⁷ and commercial port operations like at Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Chahbahar (Iran)¹⁰⁸ and Lamu (Kenya)¹⁰⁹.

Military-Strategic

China's military-strategic objectives flow from the aforesaid geo-political and economic interests/ objectives, with particular emphasis to catering for high-risk scenarios during war. China's key objective strategic objective in the IOR then is to possess the ability for unhindered maritime communications, military mobility and maritime power projection.

¹⁰⁴ The proportion of machinery and electronic products accounts for more than half of China's exports to Africa. 'China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation', *Information Office of the State Council of PRC*, December 23, 2010, www.waltainfo.com/resource/China%20Africa%20Economic%20and%20Trade%20Cooperation.pdf, accessed February 23, 2014

¹⁰⁵ China had at least 63 agricultural investment projects in southern Africa ranging from small-scale farms to large cattle-raising grounds. Loro Horta, 'Food Security in Africa: China's New Rice Bowl', *China Brief, The Jamestown Foundation*, Volume 9(11), May 27, 2009, p.10

¹⁰⁶ In mid 2013, Sri Lankan government accorded permission to a Chinese fishing company to use the Dikkowita harbour located north of Colombo to fish off Sri Lankan waters. See Ceylon Today, 'Indian fish workers concerned over Chinese fishing off SL', June 23, 2013, <http://www.ceylontoday.lk/16-35971-news-detail-indian-fishworkers-concerned-over-chinese-fishing-off-sl.html>

¹⁰⁷ Besides numerous Chinese entrepreneurs flocking to IOR states (particularly Africa), most projects taken up by Chinese companies employ Chinese labour. At present, there are over 1 million Chinese nationals living in Africa. Yun Sun and Jane Olin-Ammentorp, 'The US and China in Africa: Competition or Cooperation?', *Africa in Focus, Brookings*, April 28, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/africa-in-focus/posts/2014/04/28-us-china-africa-policy-sun>, accessed July 8, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Zachary Keck, 'China Makes Play for Iran's Chabahar Port', *The Diplomat*, July 1, 13, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/07/china-makes-play-for-irans-chabahar-port/>

¹⁰⁹ China offered to finance construction of Kenya's Lamu Port in Oct 11. 'Kenya says Chinese firm wins first tender for Lamu port project', *Reuters*, 11 Apr 2013, [athttp://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/11/kenya-port-lamu-idUSL5NoCX38D20130411](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/11/kenya-port-lamu-idUSL5NoCX38D20130411)

SWOT Analysis

After examining China's interests and objectives in the Indian Ocean, an analysis of China's 'Strengths', 'Weaknesses', 'Opportunities' and 'Threats' (SWOT analysis) is undertaken below to identify its likely strategy for the Indian Ocean.

Strengths

- China's rising economic power is increasing its global clout and enabling unprecedented double-digit increases in defence budget for its military modernisation.¹¹⁰
- The PLA Navy has been a major beneficiary of China's increasing defence budget. As per US Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), 85 percent of its fleet will be modern by 2020¹¹¹. China is also rapidly developing capabilities for distant maritime power projection.
- China's influence in IOR has increased substantially over the decades. This was enabled through its multi-pronged approach ranging from soft loans and investment in infrastructure projects to defence equipment sales at concessional prices. China's rising influence is facilitated by its membership of UNSC and other exclusive global institutions such as the G-8.
- China has demonstrated its ability to absorb advanced military technology, including space-based technology. It has thus developed a sound defence industrial base.

Weaknesses/Vulnerabilities

- China is a predominantly export-led economy. Foreign trade accounts for more than half of its GDP. This leads to its overwhelming reliance on sea-borne trade.

¹¹⁰On March 5, 14, China announced the biggest increase in defence budget (for 2014-15) in three years at 12.2% amounting to USD 130 billion. Saibal Dasgupta, 'China increases defence budget by 12% to \$130bn', *Times of India*, Mumbai, March 6, 2014, p.18.

¹¹¹ 'PLA has ambitious plans to upgrade naval fleet: US report', *Want China Times*, February 8, 2014, <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20140208000035&cid=1101>

- China is overly dependent on the IOR for natural resources. This leads to vulnerabilities, including those associated with the International Shipping Lanes (ISL) transiting the Indian Ocean.
- China is severely constrained geographically for naval access to sea areas beyond its immediate maritime periphery, and particularly so, for access to the Indian Ocean.
- The Chinese naval power is beset by capability voids in key facets of naval operations, at least vis-à-vis major potential adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region. This may be attributed to the lack of certain key technologies. The western arms embargo on China has also impeded PLA Navy's efforts to fill these voids. It is also pertinent to note that most of its capabilities are not battle-tested.

Opportunities

- The strategic focus of the US 'Rebalance to Asia' lies in the Western Pacific, not the Indian Ocean. Attendant to this are severe fiscal challenges for the US, for simultaneous naval focus on IOR.
- China's economic and other stakes in Indian Ocean are increasing rapidly. This justifies and legitimises PLA Navy's presence in the area.
- India's polity has long been beset by political and security contentions with its immediate neighbours within South Asia, which strategically boxes it within South Asia and prevents it from playing a role in the wider IOR.
- India's stance of 'Strategic Autonomy' would prevent it from forging a formal security alliance with any of China's potential adversaries.

Threats

- Notwithstanding the focus of US 'Rebalance' strategy being in the Western Pacific, there is a notable remnant US naval presence in the Indian Ocean, including military bases/ facilities, such as Diego Garcia and the US Marine base at Darwin.

- India's geo-strategic location astride key International Shipping Lanes (ISL) transiting the Indian Ocean and Indian Navy's increasing capabilities pose a reckonable potential threat to China's maritime 'lifelines'.¹¹²
- China also perceives a major threat of its containment by the US in conjunction with allies and partners. The increasing India-US strategic convergence in the Indian Ocean is being watched in Beijing with immense anxiety.¹¹³

China's Indian Ocean Strategy (Ways and Means)

The SWOT matrix could be used to outline China's likely maritime-military strategy in the IOR. Its salient elements are stated in the succeeding paragraphs. While China may have no articulated strategy for the IOR, and profess predominantly economic interests only in the region, it is necessary to reiterate Mahan's dictum: "*Naval power, economic development and international relations are inextricably linked ...*"¹¹⁴

Two-Ocean Navy

Adhering to Mahanian principles, China seeks to operate a two-Ocean Navy, which it considers necessary to buttress its claim to global power status. China's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean, its quest for membership of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)¹¹⁵ and its 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR) concept extending westwards from Southeast Asia to the Indian Ocean, are among the indicators of this strategy.

¹¹² Chen Angang, "Malacca: America's Coveted Strategic Outpost," [*Malike Haixia: Meiguo Jiyu de Zhanlue Qianshao*], *Modern Ships* [Xiandai Jianchuan], December 2004, p. 11-14, cited in Gabriel Collins, "An Oil Armada? The Commercial & Strategic Significance of China's Growing Tanker Fleet", in Toshi Yoshihara & James Holmes (eds.), *Asia Looks Seaward*, (Praeger Security International, Westport, Connecticut & London: 2008), p. 113.

¹¹³In June 2012, US Defense Secretary described India as lynchpin of its Indian Ocean strategy. Address by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, June 2, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/utility/printitem.aspx?print=http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1681>, accessed February 17, 2014

¹¹⁴Kamphausen, Roy D. and Liang, Justin, 'PLA Power Projection' in Swaine, Michael D., Yang, Andrew N.D. and Medeiros, Evan S (eds.) *Assessing the Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan's Security*. (2007: Carnegie Endowment, Washington DC), p. 116

¹¹⁵PK Ghosh, 'IONS and the Indian Ocean: Reviving a listless initiative – Analysis', *Eurasia Review*, May 9, 2014, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/09052014-ions-indian-ocean-reviving-listless-initiative-analysis/>

Diversion to Counter US 'Rebalance'

China may have adopted a diversionary strategy for the Indo-Pacific region, seeking to increase naval presence in IOR to relieve the pressure imposed upon it in Western Pacific by the US and its allies. Such a strategy may be becoming increasingly necessary for China following its growing military assertiveness in the China seas, which Beijing anticipates could lead to countermeasures from the US (and allied) military forces.

Permanent Naval Presence

China is likely to maintain a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean through counter-piracy and humanitarian missions. It is necessary to understand that PLA Navy's deployments in the Indian Ocean are likely to have been contemplated long before its Gulf of Aden counter-piracy mission began in December 2008. In his book authored in 2005, the eminent Indian strategist (late) Dr. K Subrahmanyam recalls that as far back as in 1994, "China had plans to deploy its navy in the Indian Ocean in the early years of the 21st Century".¹¹⁶

In the coming years, PLA Navy's deployed force levels and missions in the Indian Ocean may witness graduated increase with the aim of progressively attenuating US and Indian naval power in the region. Increasing numbers of China's destroyers and frigates, the new Type 056 corvettes and Coast Guard vessels may enable the PLA Navy to assign the other destroyers and frigates for Indian Ocean deployment. China's new Yalong Bay naval base at Hainan is likely to be the home base for such deployments.

Naval Diplomacy

Naval diplomacy/flag showing in IOR ports is a key element of China's aggressive soft power diplomacy aimed at shaping the strategic environment and displacing US influence in IOR. It is meant to supplement other forms of influence-building tools like financial assistance, infrastructure development, defence equipment sales, and space and nuclear cooperation. The emphasis of China's naval diplomacy is lately directed towards certain key countries, as follows: -

¹¹⁶K Subrahmanyam, *Shedding Shibboleths: India's Evolving Strategic Outlook* (Arthur Monterio, Wordsmiths, New Delhi, 2005), p.312

- Indonesia. Indonesia, with its maritime choke points, is critically important for China's cross-ocean naval deployments. Lately, the PLA Navy is increasingly transiting through Indonesian straits like Sunda and Lombok, as opposed to its traditional reliance on Malacca straits for its commercial shipping. This provides strategic rationale for Beijing to woo Jakarta. The Chinese President's October 2013 initiation of the 'Maritime Silk Route' initiative at Jakarta¹¹⁷ may be seen in this context.
- Pakistan. Maritime frontage of Pakistan overlooking the Hormuz outlet of Persian Gulf is geo-strategically valuable. A cooperative relation with Pakistan could enable China to obtain strategic and operational intelligence of this vital area. It is important to recall that the PLA Navy's first foray into the Indian Ocean in November 1985 began with a port call at Karachi. PLA Navy's interaction with Pak Navy has since intensified substantially at the *Aman* exercises off Pakistan, wherein both navies are increasingly operating common Chinese-made platforms/ equipment.
- IOR Island States. The IOR island states of Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka are all geo-strategically located astride China's 'maritime lifelines' transiting the Indian Ocean. The level of influence and presence that the PLA Navy can achieve in these states would directly affect China's ability to safeguard its strategic imports. Conversely, the influence and presence of an inimical naval power in these States would directly threaten China's 'maritime lifelines'.
- India. China's desire for naval engagements with India is driven by two factors. The first is its quest to undermine New Delhi's maritime-strategic partnership with China's potential adversaries like the US, Japan and Australia. The two Malabar multinational naval exercises conducted in 2007 had caused much anxiety in Beijing. China's February 2014 proposals for India to participate in its Maritime Silk Road concept,¹¹⁸ and an institutionalised navy-level dialogue with India¹¹⁹ may be seen in this

¹¹⁷Vibhanshu Shekhar, 'Maritime silk route: China's foothold in the Indian Ocean?' *The Jakarta Post*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/02/25/maritime-silk-route-china-s-foothold-indian-ocean.html>, accessed March 02, 2014

¹¹⁸Ankit Panda, 'China invites India to the Maritime Silk Road', *The Diplomat*, February 15, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/china-invites-india-to-the-maritime-silk-road/>, accessed March 02, 2014

¹¹⁹Sandeep Unnithan, 'China moots first-ever maritime dialogue with India', *India Today*, February 15, 2014, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-china-maritime-dialogue-panchsheel-diamond-jubilee-indian-navy-pla-navy-yang-jeichi/1/343577.html>, accessed March 2, 2014.

context. The second driver for naval engagement with India is to seek a greater role in the dynamics of IOR, including through membership of IONS.

Naval Sustenance

The PLA Navy warships may continue to obtain peacetime naval access to IOR ports as hitherto. However, the challenge of naval sustenance pertains more to wartime facilities. The so-called Chinese ‘String of Pearls’¹²⁰ may not be converted into naval bases, at least in medium term timeframe (2025-30). But this is unlikely to hinder PLA Navy’s operations in the Indian Ocean for the following reasons: -

- Fuel and Victuals. International law (Law of the Armed Conflict/ Law of Neutrality) permits a 24-hour latitude to warships before departing neutral ports – a sufficient duration for the PLA Navy units to embark fuel and victuals for the next few days. Thereafter, the PLA Navy units at sea may be replenished at sea by civilian tankers that have topped-up fuel and victuals at IOR ports.
- Machinery/ Equipment Stores and Ordnance. Increased naval hardware (including weapon) exports to IOR littorals would reduce the need for PLA Navy to source equipment/ machinery stores and even ammunition from home bases.

Naval Deployments/ Power Projection

- Surface Forces. Notwithstanding that sustenance of naval forces may not be a serious problem; the PLA Navy is unlikely to achieve ‘Sea Control’ capabilities in Indian Ocean in the medium-term. Its surface forces are likely to be used increasingly for peacetime missions like anti-piracy. Its aircraft carriers, major amphibious platforms and hospital ships are likely to be used not only for humanitarian missions like disaster relief and non-combatant evacuation, but also for low-opposition interventions.
- Land-based Aircraft. Conduct of maritime air operations by Chinese land-based aircraft would pose major challenges due to distance/ endurance factor, the need to use

¹²⁰The phrase ‘String of Pearls’ was first used in a 2005 report by Booz-Allen-Hamilton, “Energy Futures in Asia” prepared for US Defense Secretary. ‘String of Pearls’ Military Plan to protect China’s oil: US Report’, *Space War*, January 18, 2005, <http://www.spacewar.com/2005/050727.edxbxn8.html>, accessed February 22, 2014

airspace of IOR littorals, and the inability of PLA Navy's carrier-based aviation to establish air superiority in the Indian Ocean during war.

- Submarines. The PLA Navy is likely to deploy its new-generation nuclear attack submarines (SSN) armed with land-attack cruise missiles (LACM) in the Indian Ocean. Its conventional submarine construction programme is likely to plateau in favour of SSNs. Construction of SSNs is then likely to increase significantly, particularly for long-range missions to support strategic shipments plying the Indian Ocean.
- ASBM-based Area Denial. The possibility of re-orientation of Chinese ASBM-based area-denial capability southwards to target US and Indian aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean cannot be discounted.¹²¹

Impact on Regional Dynamics

That China's present emphasis in its Indian Ocean strategy is commercial may be a statement of fact. However, economic power is fungible with military power. According to the author's broad assessment, as China accumulates economic power, it is likely to: -

- Translate it into maritime-military power, which is the emphasis of its military modernisation program.
- Employ distant naval capabilities for missions in the Indian Ocean, where it needs increasingly greater security guarantees to cover its economic/commercial interests.

The key specific aspects defining regional dynamics are discussed below:

Regional Balance of Power

Notwithstanding the modern-day dynamics of Asia driven by geo-economics and economic interdependence, the 'Balance of Power' struggles of the erstwhile era are likely to remain relevant for this region. There seems to be a likelihood of the 'Balance of Power' in the Indian Ocean Region progressively shifting in favour of China.

¹²¹Kamlesh K. Agnihotri, China's 'Anti-ship Ballistic Missile' based Anti-access Concept : Implications of a Southward Re-orientation', Journal of Defence Studies (Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, 2013) Vol-7, Issue-1, pp- 9-30.

The foremost of the key factors contributing to this power shift is, ironically, the US 'Rebalance to Asia'. This is premised on the reality that the focus of such 'Rebalance' lies in the Western Pacific, not the IOR. In any case, for the US, the western extent of Asia extends at best, to India, not the entire IOR.¹²² The fiscal challenges for the US for its concurrent naval attention to IOR also need to be factored. It is pertinent to note that counter-terrorism has lately been the only major driver for the US strategic attention to the IOR.

The second factor is likely to be Russia's increasing assertiveness in Central Asia. Recent developments in this sub-region, deep in the hinterland of the Asian maritime periphery, are already demanding US strategic attention. The third contributing factor is the stagnant maritime/ defense cooperation among relevant naval powers in IOR. An apt example is the US-India Maritime Security Cooperation. The agreement has not progressed as envisaged since it was inked in 2006.

Regional Stability and Security

Given China's growing economic/ commercial stakes in IOR States, the PLA Navy could conceivably contribute positively to regional stability through 'stability operations', including those under the aegis of UN mandate. The PLA Navy – with its increasing force-levels of policing vessels, sealift platforms and hospital ships – could also complement the grossly feeble capacities of many IOR navies for undertaking constabulary and humanitarian missions. Noted US analysts James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara aver that "*China's 'soft-power' strategy seems to be based on the premise that a nation can store up international goodwill by supplying 'international public goods' like maritime security, which benefit all nations with a stake in the international order.*"¹²³

However, there lies a real possibility of China resorting to unilateralism dictated by self-interest to serve its geo-political, military or commercial interests. This may adversely affect regional stability and security, particularly since there is no overarching

¹²²It is pertinent to recall in this context that what Indians refer to as 'West Asia', is called 'Middle East' in the United States.

¹²³ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, 'Is China a "Soft" Naval Power?', *China Brief*, Vol. 9(17), August 20, 2009, p.5

security forum at present for IOR that could have addressed these issues in a more broad-based manner. Some conceivable actions by China in the IOR are indicated below.

- Politico-Military Interventions. China could undertake politico-military intervention in an IOR State at the slightest hint of an impending political or ethnic problem, leading to regional tensions.
- Military Coercion. China could resort to a show of naval force to coerce an IOR state.
- Chinese Military Activity close to IOR States. Naval exercises or intelligence-gathering in close proximity of IOR States (or in their maritime zones) leading to security concerns in the affected State, even though conducted in international waters. In February 2014, China carried out a naval exercise off Australia's Christmas Islands.¹²⁴ What was the intended message? Could it be an assertion against the stationing of US Marines at Darwin?
- Chinese Stakes in Disputed Waters. Chinese oil and gas companies acquiring offshore stakes in waters disputed between two IOR States, thereby aggravating tensions between them.
- Chinese Arms Exports causing Instability. Chinese defence equipment exports to IOR States may be undertaken at 'friendship prices' to facilitate PLA Navy's sustenance in IOR, thereby causing instability or an arms race. In the past, Chinese have rarely been mindful of ethical considerations while supplying arms. For example, during Iran-Iraq war in the mid-1980s, 92 percent of all Chinese defence exports bound for West Asia went to the two warring nations.¹²⁵ It later sold one billion US Dollar worth of weapons to both Ethiopia and Eritrea during their border conflict from 1998 to 2000.¹²⁶ In April 2008, China pushed for arms supplies to

¹²⁴ David Wroe, 'China's military might is Australia's new defence reality', *The Brisbane Times*, February 15, 2014, <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/chinas-military-might-is-australias-new-defence-reality-20140214-32rb1.html>, accessed March 2, 2014.

¹²⁵ Yitzhak Shichor, 'Middle Eastern Perceptions of China Threat', in Herbert Yee & Ian Storey(ed.), *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths & Reality*, (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.313-316

¹²⁶ 'China Steals the March over India in Arms Sales', *Defence Digest*, September-October 2006, p. 32.

Zimbabwe against the majority global opinion that these supplies would be used by Zimbabwe government to crush political opposition, and thereby aggravating the political crisis in the country.¹²⁷

- WMD/ Missile Proliferation. PLA Navy forces in the Indian Ocean may shield WMD/missile proliferation to/from errant States. Pakistan's ballistic missile technology is well known to have been sourced from North Korea, which was implicitly supported by China.¹²⁸ In June 1999, Indian authorities seized the North Korean ship Ku Wol San at the Kandla port carrying missile components and related blueprints to West Asia and Pakistan.¹²⁹ In August 2009, North Korean vessel MV *Musen* was intercepted by Indian Coast Guard off Little Andaman Island under suspicious circumstances. A probe revealed that *Musen* had made several voyages between North Korea and China without maintaining proper records.¹³⁰ In June 2009, the US Navy tracked a North Korean ship MV *Kang Nam* along the coast of China, The ship suspected of carrying illegal weapons to Myanmar suddenly reversed its course homewards.¹³¹ Although China's complicity in these cases is still a speculation, there are indicators in this direction.

Freedom of Navigation

PLA Navy's presence in IOR may be conducive for freedom of navigation, given its active participation in counter-piracy efforts. This may contribute to a sense of security in the region against low-intensity threats and maritime crime; thus spur commerce and economic integration of the regional countries. But a maritime conflict may severely impinge upon freedom of navigation, though its probability is presently low, at least relative to the Western Pacific. China has no maritime-territorial claims in Indian Ocean, but its propensity to disregard international norms with respect to freedom of

¹²⁷ Celia W. Dugger and David Barboza, 'China May Give Up Attempt to Send Arms to Zimbabwe', New York Times, April 23, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/23/world/africa/23zimbabwe.html>

¹²⁸ Sharon A. Squassoni, 'Weapons of Mass Destruction: Trade Between North Korea and Pakistan', CRS Report for Congress, Nov 28, 2006, <http://fas.org/srg/crs/nuke/RL31900.pdf>, accessed Jan 21, 2014

¹²⁹ 'Indian agencies to investigate North Korean ship's entry', *The Economic Times*, August 9, 2009, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2009-08-09/news/28434630_1_security-agencies-indian-waters-k-r-nautiyal, accessed January 21, 2014

¹³⁰ Rajaram Panda, 'Is China behind *Musen's* intrusion to Indian Waters?', Global Politician, August 2009, www.globalpolitician.com/print.asp?id=5825, accessed January 21, 2014

¹³¹ Pauline Jelinek, 'North Korean Ship Kang Nam Turns Around', *Pacific News Centre*, June 4, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/30/north-korean-ship-kang-na_n_223262.html, accessed March 3, 2014

navigation in the China Seas is well known. It is an indicator that China is unlikely to observe such norms with regard to the international shipping plying the Indian Ocean while planning naval operations during conflict.

Indian Context

From the Indian perspective, PLA Navy's permanent presence in Indian Ocean may lead to increased avenues of maritime security cooperation, but the possibility of grim scenarios cannot be discounted. The 'balance of power' shift in the IOR in favour of China may lead to major strategic adversity for India, particularly in the light of adversarial potential of India-China relations. PLA Navy units could undertake military surveys/intelligence collection in the Indian maritime zones, thereby directly undermining India's security and leading to the possibility of maritime skirmishes. Although China has traditionally resisted such foreign military activities off its own coast, recent instances indicate a reversal of its earlier stance. PLA Navy's conduct of such activities in the US EEZ off Guam¹³² may be seen in this context. In any case, strong Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean would not only hinder India's ability for maritime power-projection in the IOR, but also weaken its overall conventional deterrence against China.

In case of a war with China, India would need to defend against a seaward threat to its territory and maritime interests. There are also real possibilities of Pakistan using this as an opportunity to undertake an offensive in the western maritime theatre; and of PLA Navy's use of Gwadar in a two-front scenario. In sum, from the Indian perspective, betting on China to provide regional stability and freedom of navigation is accompanied with major risks. It may be safer if US maintains preponderance, with India 'onboard', for maintaining regional peace and stability.

The Way Ahead

Before suggesting the way ahead very broadly, a few key questions need to be posed: -

¹³²Kevin Kerrigan, 'FT: China begins patrolling U.S. EEZ, Possibly off Guam', *Pacific News Center*, June 4, 2013, http://www.pacificnewscenter.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34835:ft-china-patrols&catid=45:guam-news&Itemid=156, accessed July 7, 2014

- Is PLA Navy's emerging assertiveness in the IOR a Chinese reaction to the US 'Rebalance'? If so, could the US address such assertiveness by China?
- Can the putative 'balance of power' shift in IOR in favour of China be prevented, mitigated or delayed? Or at least, can the relevant naval powers act to mitigate its adverse effect on regional stability?

The common answer to these questions is probably '**yes**'. On the US 'rebalance to Asia' strategy, Ashley Tellis says,

*"The objective (of US 'rebalance' strategy) of managing China's rise is going to be an extremely challenging one...because it requires the US to **socialize** China, to **integrate** China, to **deter** China, and to **reassure** China...all simultaneously."*¹³³

Firstly, any strategy must be continually re-appraised. Whether the US wants to tone down, maintain or ratchet up its strategic posture of 'Rebalance', is for the US to decide. But it is necessary for it to consider all factors, including particularly the following: -

- Ability of the US (in conjunction with allies/ partners) to sustain military-strategic 'escalation'.
- Likely effect of such escalation on regional dynamics, including regional stability, security and economic integration.
- Regional perceptions.

Secondly, the US, India and other relevant naval powers need to put their act together. Their governments and foreign policy establishments would need to adopt a more comprehensive approach including politico-diplomatic engagement with China to prevent the worst case scenarios to manifest. On the other hand, their maritime forces would need to prepare for such scenarios, besides assisting their governments to shape the environment favourably.

¹³³Ashley Tellis, Public Lecture on 'Pivot or Pirouette: The US Rebalance to Asia', National Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS), IISc Campus, Bangalore, January 3, 2014.

SECTION II

China

China in the Indian Ocean: Foreign Policy and Maritime Power

08 Aug 15

"Where the enemy advances, we retreat. Where the enemy retreats, we pursue."

-Mao Zedong

Abstract

Over the past decade or so, China has been increasing its 'visibility' in the Indian Ocean. It is becoming increasingly conspicuous here through its politico-diplomatic and economic engagements with the regional countries, and naval activities in the region's waters. Beijing seems to be using all instruments of its national power that operate in the maritime domain, and synergizing them to meet its national objectives in the region.

The aim of this paper is to undertake a comprehensive assessment of China's diplomatic and maritime posture in the Indian Ocean, based on an inquiry into China's broader objectives and national strategy in the region. Ascertaining China's intent has always been a major challenge. Hence, for a more realistic assessment, the official documents and statements emanating from Beijing and the Chinese media may need to be 'read between the lines', and these examined in the context of the emerging developments and events.

The paper examines how China's diplomatic and maritime posture in the Indian Ocean is largely driven by economic, strategic and geopolitical objectives and imperatives, and how these are shaping China's national strategy – including its maritime-military strategy – in the region. The paper concludes with a implications for India.

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, China has been increasing its 'visibility' in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It ranges from China's politico-diplomatic and economic engagements with the regional countries to its naval operations in the Indian Ocean, including for diplomatic, constabulary and benign missions. These have drawn sombre attention of the countries worldwide – particularly the major powers – that have stakes in the region. Each one is assessing the emerging developments, and extrapolating into the future, the 'rising' China's unprecedented forays beyond its immediate maritime periphery. However, since the assessments are being made by the various stakeholders

under the lens of their respective national-strategic interests, these fall short of presenting the 'big-picture'. Besides, the developments relating to China's forays into the Indian Ocean are merely 'tail-end' manifestations of its foreign and economic policies, and its maritime-military strategy. A disparate examination of each one of these developments is thus unhelpful for a comprehensive assessment. The aim of this paper is to undertake a comprehensive assessment of China's diplomatic and maritime posturing in the region, beginning with an inquiry into China's broader objectives and imperatives, and its national strategy in the Indian Ocean; and deduce the salient implications for India

Ascertaining China's intent and national strategy in general, and for the IOR in particular, is a major challenge. China's policy articulations are not always helpful; and at times, these may even be misleading. The major reasons are China's well-known lack of transparency and its propensity to project a benign image. The latter flows from the current geopolitical imperatives of a 'rising global power'; besides, as a China analyst indicates, due to China's unique culture tempered by past geopolitical experiences, which have led to its palpable 'humanitarian activism' in recent times.¹³⁴ Hence, for a more realistic assessment, the official documents and statements emanating from Beijing and the Chinese media may need to be 'read between the lines', and these examined in the context of the emerging developments and events.

National Objectives/ Imperatives

Economics

China's 'Blue Book' on Indian Ocean published by an authoritative Chinese think tank in June 2013 is considered to be close to an official articulation.¹³⁵ It says that China's interests in the Indian Ocean are only economic and commercial. This articulation is well supported *inter alia* by the 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR) initiative of President Xi Jinping,¹³⁶ and other port-building initiatives preceding it, such as in Hambantota (Sri Lanka) and Gwadar (Pakistan). Hence, 'economics' is clearly China's primary objective in the IOR and thus the main 'driver' for its national strategy for the region.

¹³⁴ The Chinese school of humanitarianism is all-encompassing in nature, which includes any activity ranging from economic to military endeavours. See Antara Ghoshal, 'China's Humanitarian Activism', *NMF Issue Brief*, 22 May 2015, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/CommentaryView.aspx?NMFCID=8504>

¹³⁵ 'Development Report in the Indian Ocean', *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (CASS), 6 Jun 13

¹³⁶ 'Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament', *ASEAN-China Centre*, 3 October 2013, at http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm

The above stems from China's insatiable quest to enhance its Comprehensive National Power (CNP), which is necessary for it to challenge the United States, and regain the stature of the 'middle kingdom'. Economic power would play the key role in enhancing China's CNP. However, China's 'adverse geography' poses a major challenge. Most of China is continental, far away from the locus of economic activity – the sea. The case may be appreciated better by its 'coast versus land' ratio, which is amongst the least in the world. China is thus severely disadvantaged in this regard. A comparison of 'coast-land' ratios of select major/middle regional and global powers is tabulated in Fig. 1 below.

Country	Length of Coast (km)	Land Area (sq. km)	Coast-Land Ratio
Japan	29,751	364,485	81.60
U.K.	12,429	241, 930	51.40
Indonesia	54,716	1,811,569	30.02
South Korea	2,413	96,920	24.90
France	4,853	640,427	7.58
Germany	2,389	348,672	6.85
Australia	25,760	7,682,300	3.35
India	7,000	2,973,193	2.35
South Africa	2,798	1,214,470	2.30
Russia	37,653	16,377,742	2.30
United States	19,924	9,161,966	2.17
China	14,500	9,569,901	1.52
Brazil	7,491	8,459,417	0.89

Fig. 1 – Cost-land Ratios of Select Major/ Middle Global and Regional Powers/ Source: *The World Factbook*¹³⁷

From Kashghar, the capital of China's Xinjiang province, the distance to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar port in Pakistan is only 2,000 kilometres, but its distance to its nearest Chinese sea port Guangzhou is 4,000 kilometres. From southern part of

¹³⁷ *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), at

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2060.html> and

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2147.html> (Accessed 23 July 2015).

The data does not include disputed and overseas territories.¹

Tibet, the Bangladeshi ports overlooking the Bay of Bengal are only 600 kilometres away, whereas the Chinese Pacific coast is more than 2,000 kilometres away.

Also, while nature has bestowed China fairly long coastline, its maritime frontier lies far away from the major sources of hydrocarbons and other natural resources of West Asia and Africa. Furthermore, China's shipping routes to the source countries lie across maritime choke-points of the Indian Ocean, which are often insecure due to various reasons. For Chinese exports, the emerging markets of the IOR are also too distant. Notwithstanding, the dilation of China's economic dependence on Indian Ocean seems unavoidable. An analysis of the trends over the past decade indicates a steady increase of the proportion of China's trade flows via the Indian Ocean vis-à-vis its total foreign trade. (See Fig 2 below).

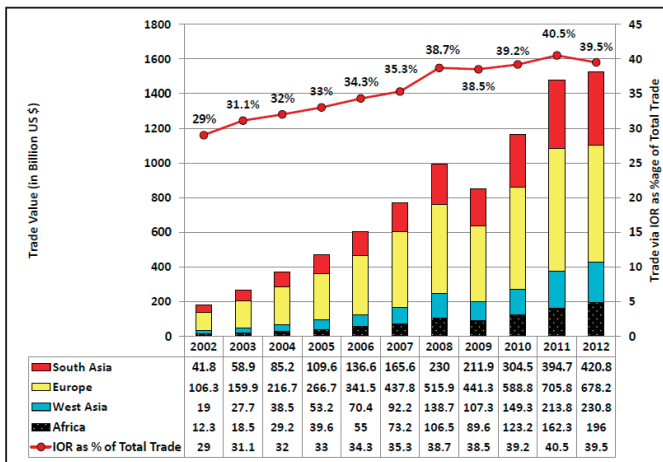


Fig 2: Trends - China's Trade Through I.O.R. (2002-12)/ Source: Author/ WTO ¹³⁸

China's phenomenal economic growth over the past three decades has led to widening of the development differential between its more prosperous east (that is closer to the coast) and its underdeveloped west, thereby making China's 'adverse geography' more palpable.

¹³⁸ Data sourced from International Trade Statistics 2013, World Trade Organisation (WTO), Table A-16, at http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2013_e/its13_appendix_e.htm China's trade with Australia/ Oceania also transits the Indian Ocean, but this data is not included. The dip in 2009 is attributed to the global economic crises, when China's foreign trade with all regions declined. The decline was significant with regard to China's energy imports from West Asia and Africa. The dip in 2012 was a result of the financial crisis in the European Union (EU).

In more recent years, China's geographical adversity is aggravated by the US rebalance strategy. In May 2014, Singapore's Foreign Minister K Shanmugam stated that "the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) must form the centrepiece of the US' economic rebalancing to the region."¹³⁹ The TPP is likely to be perceived by Beijing as its 'economic containment'.¹⁴⁰ To counter it, China must forge economic bonds beyond East and Southeast Asia in the IOR, where the U.S. is pivoting away from. This leads to China's policy of 'March West',¹⁴¹ which is probably the 'prime mover' of the MSR initiative.

Geopolitics

China's 'geopolitical' imperatives in the IOR are closely related to 'economics'. Money does bring along geopolitical influence and leverages. A non-*status quo* power like China earnestly seeks such influence to meet its core national objectives of territorial consolidation, and also to reorient the global geopolitical and economic order in its favour.

The US 'rebalance' strategy poses a strong geopolitical adversity for China. The 'rebalance' strengthens the US support for China's opponents in the maritime-territorial disputes in the western Pacific, and serves to 'displace' Beijing in the western Pacific. China must, therefore, enhance its engagement with the IOR to offset these 'losses'. The MSR is the latest instrument of such engagement.

Military-Strategic Considerations

Besides 'economics' and 'geopolitics', the aforesaid adversities also translate into China's strategic vulnerability, particularly in terms of access to hydrocarbon resources. In the past decade, China's total oil consumption has nearly doubled from 5.77 million barrels

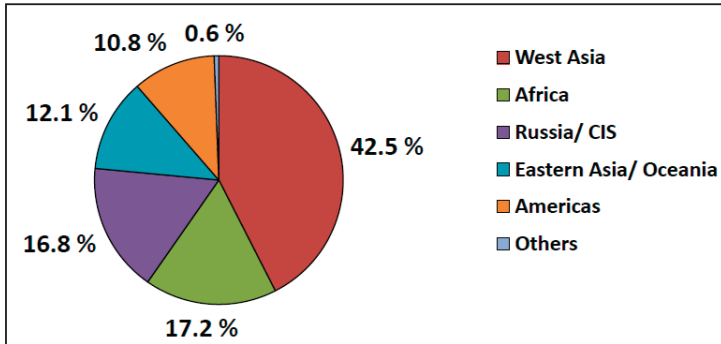
¹³⁹ "TPP must form centrepiece of US economic rebalancing: Shanmugam", *Channel News Asia*, 16 May 14, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/international/tpm-must-form-centrepiece/1109400.html>

¹⁴⁰ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'Economic Dimension of US 'Rebalance': A 'Back Door' to China's Containment?', Experts View, *National Maritime Foundation*, New Delhi, 29 May 14, at https://www.academia.edu/7756661/Economic_Dimension_of_US_Rebalance_A_Back_Door_to_China_s_Containment

¹⁴¹ Yun Sun, 'March West: China's Response to the U.S. Rebalancing', Brookings, January 31, 2013, at <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/01/31-china-us-sun>

per day (mbpd) in 2003 to 10.76 mbpd in 2013.¹⁴² Its total oil import in 2013 stood at 7.67 mbpd, which was 71.3 percent of its consumption.¹⁴³ An analysis of the region-wise proportion of its total oil imports is depicted in Fig. 3 below.

Fig. 3: Region-wise Proportion of China's Oil Imports (2013)



Source: Author/ BP¹⁴⁴

The analysis reveals that in 2013, nearly 60 percent of China's oil imports sourced from Africa and West Asia transited via the Indian Ocean. The African component of this oil (17.2 per cent) needs to transit one of the Southeast Asian straits, with some of it sourced from North Africa crosses through the Bab-el-Mandeb as well. The West Asian component (42.5 per cent) needs to transit the Hormuz Strait in addition to the Southeast Asian straits. Therefore, notwithstanding that Chinese official strategy articulations are mute on the IOR or a maritime military strategy for the region, it is inconceivable that a professional navy that Beijing professes to nurture has not planned for adverse 'security' contingencies that could potentially impinge upon its increasing economic and other vital stakes in the region.

¹⁴² BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2014, p.9, at <http://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/Energy-economics/statistical-review-2014/BP-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2014-full-report.pdf>

¹⁴³ China's 'net' total oil import, however, amounted to 6.2 mbpd (57.6 percent of its total consumption). BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2014, p. 18, at <http://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/Energy-economics/statistical-review-2014/BP-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2014-full-report.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ Data sourced from BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2014, p.9 and 18, at <http://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/Energy-economics/statistical-review-2014/BP-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2014-full-report.pdf>

Furthermore, China's increased naval activities in the IOR seem to have revealed another element of China's 'latent' maritime-military strategy in the region. These activities are likely to be a response to the US 'rebalance' strategy. From the Chinese perspective, the US 'rebalance' seeks to contain China's military power by limiting its strategic depth in the western Pacific. In response, China's 'March West' policy could effectively serve as a means of 'strategic distraction' for the US.

National Strategy

Altering Geography

To meet its national objectives, China seeks to alter geography in its favour. Among the measures are the overland oil and gas pipeline projects (in Myanmar and Pakistan) and the multi-modal Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor, which is meant to provide maritime access to China's western regions to the Indian Ocean.

Enhancing Regional Stakes

As mentioned earlier, China is a major stakeholder in the IOR, particularly in terms of its critical economic and energy interests, leading to its strategic vulnerability. Its efforts to 'change geography' can contribute only marginally to mitigate this vulnerability. In such scenario, China's enhancement of its stakes in IOR seems paradoxical, but is based on sound reasoning. It would not only assist China's economic growth, but also enhance its profile as a stakeholder in IOR, thereby increasing its role in regional multilateralism and legitimizing its military 'presence' in the Indian Ocean.

Since mid-1990s, China has increased its trade with IOR substantially, and encouraged Chinese business investments to Africa.¹⁴⁵ In 2011, China signed a 15-year contract with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) for seabed mineral exploration in the southwest Indian Ocean ridge.¹⁴⁶ Earlier in 2001, China had obtained similar exploration rights in the central Pacific Ocean. Notably, the area lies barely 500 nautical

¹⁴⁵ Howard W. French, 'High Stakes in Africa: Can the U.S. Catch China?', Bloomberg Business, July 31, 2014, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-07-31/how-the-u-dot-s-dot-can-rival-china-in-africa>

¹⁴⁶ Amitav Ranjan, 'China set to mine central Indian Ocean, Delhi worried', *Indian Express*, July 31, 2011, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/china-set-to-mine-central-indian-ocean-delhi-worried/824900/0>

miles south of Hawaii that houses the US Pearl Harbour military base. In April 2014, China signed another 15-year contract with ISA for seabed exploration in the western Pacific.¹⁴⁷ The area lies only 600 nautical miles east of the key US military hub of Guam. Similarly, China's increasing stakes in the IOR are likely to be driven by geopolitical and strategic factors.

Foreign Policy Posture

Over the years, China politico-diplomatic engagements with the IOR countries have been growing steadily, particularly since the launch of the MSR, with increased visits by the Chinese to the IOR countries at all levels, ranging from the apex leadership to government officials and scholars. Trends indicate that Beijing is likely to have developed a foreign policy approach that prioritizes its engagement with certain regional countries that are crucial to meet its national-strategic objectives in the IOR. India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran and Sri Lanka are among these countries, for various reasons as enumerated below.

- India is important to China, notwithstanding the rivalry. The latest empirical evidence is the MSR. It is necessary for Beijing to 'enrol' New Delhi into the MSR initiative,¹⁴⁸ not because its participation is critical for the success of MSR's 'economic' agenda, but to wean it from Washington's tightening embrace. For the same reason, in April 2015, China proposed to India a joint seabed mining venture in the Indian Ocean. The US does not subscribe to the prevailing global understanding on seabed mining. This presents an opportunity for China to build bridges.
- Indonesia is likely to play a pivotal role in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region. Besides, the archipelagic Indonesia and its choke-points are important for China for its naval access to the Indian Ocean.
- Iran's value to China lies in its geopolitical divergence with the West.
- Pakistan is crucial to China both for its endeavours to 'change geography' and to maintain leverage against its regional rival – India.

¹⁴⁷ 'China Ocean Mineral Resources Research And Development Association(COMRA) and ISA Sign Exploration Contract', *International Seabed Authority (ISA) website*, at <https://www.isa.org.jm/news/china-ocean-mineral-resources-research-and-development-associationcomra-and-isa-sign>

¹⁴⁸ In March 2014, the Chinese Ambassador to New Delhi proposed to merge MSR with the India's projects 'Mausam' and 'Spice Route'. "China seeks India's 'Spice Route' link with its 'Silk Road'", *Times of India* (New Delhi), March 6, 2015, p.13

- Sri Lanka is bestowed with a geo-strategic ‘centrality’ in the IOR vis-à-vis China’s maritime energy ‘lifelines’. Notably, the Chinese President Xi Jinping called Sri Lanka as the “hub” of MSR.¹⁴⁹

Defence Hardware Sales

China’s rationale for defence hardware exports to IOR goes beyond ‘economics’; it is meant to create security dependence and accrue military-strategic dividends. In May 2015, a Chinese Yuan-class submarine made a week-long port call at Karachi (Pakistan).¹⁵⁰ Pakistan is likely to purchase eight of these boats. Its week-long halt at Karachi – too long merely for replenishment – is likely to have been utilised to train Pakistani personnel to operate the submarine and its machinery and weapon systems, particularly its Sterling Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system. Beijing also plays on the advantage of its ability to ‘sweeten’ the terms of its bids. For example, the contract for selling three submarines to Thailand was sealed by China since it offered not only a relatively low price, but also a soft loan, and technology transfer and training as part of the package.¹⁵¹

Security Multilateralism

Lately, China is seeking increasing representation in IOR’s two nascent multilateral security forums – the *Indian Ocean Rim Association* (IORA) and the *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium* (IONS) – even if as a ‘tier-two’ participant. It has secured for itself the status of a ‘dialogue partner’ in IORA and an ‘observer’ in IONS. To be a part of these forums, Beijing has leveraged the ‘inclusive’ approach of the regional countries. Such approach welcomes the role of major extra-regional powers, not only to tide over

¹⁴⁹ “China hopeful of Colombo Project as Sri Lanka backs Silk Road”, *India Today*, March 26, 2015, at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/president-maithripala-sirisena-president-xi-jinping-maritime-silk-road-initiative/1/425874.html> (Accessed March 28, 2015)

¹⁵⁰ ‘Exclusive: Chinese submarine lurked past Indian waters, docked in Karachi?’, *India Today*, June 27, 2015, at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/chinese-submarine-indian-navy-karachi-indian-ocean-pm-modi/1/447505.html>

¹⁵¹ Prashanth Parameswaran, ‘How Did China Just Win Thailand’s New Submarine Bid?’, *The Diplomat*, June 26, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/how-did-china-just-win-thailands-new-submarine-bid/> Also see, ‘Beijing offers sweetener for Thailand to buy Chinese subs’, *Want China Times*, April 08, 2015, at <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20150408000108&cid=1101> The deal was later suspended, reportedly owing to its adverse effect on Thailand’s relations with the United States. Michelle FlorCruz, ‘Thailand-China Submarine Deal Suspended Following Concern Over Jeopardizing Ties With Washington’, *International Business Times*, July 19, 2015, at <http://www.ibtimes.com/thailand-china-submarine-deal-suspended-following-concern-over-jeopardizing-ties-2012291>

the region's capacity constraints to ensure maritime security, but is also necessary for maintaining a stable balance of power and geopolitical 'hedging'.

China's approach is driven by four imperatives: symbolism/ influence, policy shaping, access to information and seizing opportunities.¹⁵² Being a part of IOR multilateralism is critically necessary for Beijing to buttress its claim to global power status. As a 'tier-two' participant, China cannot 'make' policy, but it could 'shape' policy to make it more favourable for itself. It could do this by altering the behaviour of participants by putting forth its perceptions and views. It would also be aware of the multilateral transactions, including the official positions of the ('tier-one') members, and seize opportunities to further its interests in the region.

Security multilateralism in the IOR is a recent phenomenon, which China sees as an opportunity to be seized. It implies that no other major power – the US included, notwithstanding its major contribution – possesses the advantage of a 'head-start' or primacy in regional security affairs. On the other hand, if Beijing plays its cards deftly in terms of engaging the regional countries, it could attain a degree of eminence, if not primacy. Notably, the US has not yet been admitted as an observer in IONS due to the objections raised by Iran. Has China played its cards through Iran?

Maritime-Military Strategy

China's maritime-military strategy in the Indian Ocean presents a puzzle. China's 2013 'Blue Book' on Indian Ocean says the China has no maritime strategy for the region. Yet, it adds that "if India or the US impede the attainment of its objectives (in the Indian Ocean), it would not desist from resorting to confrontation."

The MSR initiative is much about sea-trade, but avoids any reference to maritime security or safety of shipping and seafarers. Notably, in 2015, China conducted a combined counter-terrorism exercise with the Sri Lankan Army called "Silk Road Cooperation-2015".¹⁵³

¹⁵² Based on the analytical framework propounded by Nick Bisley and Brendan Taylor, 'China's Engagement with Regional Security Multilateralism: The Case Study of the Shangri-La Dialogue', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (ISEAS), Vol.37(1), 2015, pp.29-48.

¹⁵³ 'China, Sri Lanka hold "Silk Road Cooperation-2015" joint drill, *PRC Ministry of National Defence*, March 31, 2015, at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2015-03/31/content_4577899.htm and 'Sri Lanka : China military exercise concluded', *LankaSri News*, July 14, 2015, at <http://www.lankasrinews.com/view.php?224OlX2acV5YKo4ecyMCdo2eAmB2dd2fBmA303ogAm2e4cY5L3ca4lO4b3>

On 26 May 2015, China released its Defence White Paper of 2014 titled ‘China’s Military Strategy’. The document contains no explicit mention of the Indian Ocean; neither in terms of its security interests nor its strategy.¹⁵⁴ Yet it refers to the need to protect “strategic Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)”. The emphasis on adjective “strategic” indicates that China’s considers itself vulnerable to the interdiction of its energy SLOCs in the Indian Ocean.

The inference is that the aforesaid ‘omissions’ are well-considered and deliberate. It is highly unlikely that the PLA Navy has not catered for adverse contingencies to secure its interests in IOR. The various facets of China’s maritime-military strategy for the Indian Ocean are examined below.

Fungible Missions and Capabilities

Since 2008, China has been actively articulating and demonstrating its emphasis on PLA Navy’s ‘Military Operations Other than War’ (MOOTW) missions such as counter-piracy search and rescue, and hospital ship deployments. Such missions are useful for presence and surveillance, familiarising the PLA Navy with these waters, and furthering diplomatic engagement with the regional countries.

China’s pitch for MOOTW missions is not unusual, since all navies do this. However, as China’s Defence White paper of 2014 indicates, PLA Navy’s “presence in relevant sea areas (and) capacity for MOOTW missions” is likely to be dovetailed with preparing for ‘wartime’ operations. This needs to be understood in context of China’s September 2014 Song-class submarine deployment in the Indian Ocean, which Beijing stated was on a counter-piracy mission. While its rationale was operationally unviable to naval analysts in India and elsewhere, this represents China’s doctrinal thought. It also implies that China intends to develop multi-mission capabilities optimised equally for peace and war.

It is pertinent to mention that China already possesses advanced civilian technologies and research vessels and for underwater mapping, which also have military applications. In December 2014, its deep-sea manned submersible ‘Jiaolong’ carried out its first dive in the seabed mining area allotted to China in southwest Indian Ocean.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ ‘China’s Military Strategy’, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, May 2015, Beijing, at <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/>

¹⁵⁵ ‘China deploys submersible in Indian Ocean to explore metals’, *Economic Times*, December 23, 2014, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-12-23/news/57350099_1_international-seabed-authority-polymetallic-indian-ocean

Such capabilities may be used by China to collate hydrographic data for submarine operations in the Indian Ocean.

Sea Control and Power Projection

As implicit reference to its naval strategy for the Indian Ocean, China's 2104 Defence White Paper indicates a shift in PLA Navy's focus from "offshore waters defence" to "open seas protection" of China's "overseas interests".¹⁵⁶ Along with China's ongoing aircraft carrier programme, this indicates an evolving strategy for 'sea control'. However, this indicates China's doctrinal intent. Given that the operationalisation of China's aircraft carrier task force is still at a relatively nascent stage, it is unlikely that the PLA Navy will be able to establish carrier-based sea control westwards of the Malacca Straits, until at least a decade from now.

Furthermore, "open seas protection", in conjunction with emphasis on protection of "strategic SLOCs and overseas interests" (as stated in the White Paper) implies that as part of naval operations in military role,¹⁵⁷ the PLA Navy seeks to undertake wartime maritime power-projection missions in the Indian Ocean. Until the PLA Navy develops the capability for establishing carrier-based sea-control in the IOR, it could project limited military power projection in the region through its nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) as part of its 'deterrence-by-punishment' strategy. Notably, Chinese media reports indicate that the PLA Navy is likely to commission upgraded versions of its six existing Type 093 SSNs.¹⁵⁸ Armed with land-attack-cruise missiles, these SSNs are optimised for distant power-projection.

Sustenance of Naval Forces

The 2014 Defence White Paper also hints at PLA Navy's strategy for the 'sustenance' of the forward-deployed naval platforms through "strategic prepositioning". Lately, China

¹⁵⁶ 'China's Military Strategy', The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, May 2015, Beijing, at <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/>. It is pertinent to note that on 01 July 2015, China passed a new domestic law that confers upon the PLA Navy the duty to defend these "overseas interests", through military action if necessary. Minnie Chan, 'PLA tasked with protecting 'overseas interests' under new China security law', *South China Morning Post*, July 02, 2015, at <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1831564/chinas-national-security-law-gives-pla-mission-protect>

¹⁵⁷ Naval operations in military role is referred to in China's 2014 Defence White Paper as "Preparation for Military Struggle" (PMS).

¹⁵⁸ Zhao Lee, 'Navy to get 3 new nuclear subs', *China Daily*, April 03, 2015, at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/03/content_19989106.htm

has been seeking hub-and-spoke Logistics Support Agreements with the IOR states.¹⁵⁹ Whether called 'String of Pearls', or fructified through 'MSR', China is thus obtaining overseas access facilities in the Indian Ocean, but these are for peace-time use, and not 'military bases'. India too, has such arrangements with many countries, including some in the western Pacific.

However, something that has not been noted is China's likely intent to sustain its naval forces in the Indian Ocean through the concept of 'sea-basing'. China has begun developing 'Mobile Landing Platforms' (MLP) used by the U.S. expeditionary forces, and Logistic Support Ships with roll-on, roll-off (ro-ro) design and bow and stern ramps.¹⁶⁰ The numbers of PLA Navy's Type 903A advanced underway replenishment ships are also increasing.¹⁶¹ With eight of these vessels added to the older fleet tankers, the PLA Navy is clearly being given the means to support distant missions in the IOR.

The PLA Navy's integral capability is being augmented by the state-owned commercial capacity. In June 2015, the Chinese government approved the new guidelines called "*Technical Standards for New Civilian Ships to Implement National Defense Requirements*", which lay down not only the provisions to requisition civilian ships for naval missions, but also *how* future construction of Chinese merchant vessels would need to adhere to naval specifications.¹⁶² These commercial vessels are quite numerous. About 2,600 ships are capable of ocean transport,¹⁶³ which represents a major element of asymmetry with any major navy operating in the Indian Ocean. The US Navy's 31 Maritime Prepositioning Ships (MPS) of its Military Sealift Command (MSC) pales in comparison.

In this context, it is pertinent to mention China's increasing defence exports to the IOR countries. Over the medium to long term time-frame, this may supplement China's

¹⁵⁹ 'Strengthening Exchange, Deepening Cooperation and Building the Safe and Harmonious Indian Ocean', Presentation by Rear Admiral Li Yunqing, Vice Chief of Logistic Department of PLA Navy, at 3rd IONS Conference at Cape Town, South Africa, April 2012, at

<http://ions.gov.in/sites/default/files/Presentation%20by%20China.pdf> (accessed 12 Jul 14)

¹⁶⁰ The first MLP was delivered to the PLA Navy in end-June 2015. Andrew Tate, 'China building mobile landing platform, new ro-ro PLA support ship', *Jane's Navy International*, June 3, 2015, at <http://www.janes.com/article/51984/china-building-mobile-landing-platform-new-ro-ro-pla-support-ship>

¹⁶¹ In June 2015, China launched its fifth Type 903A replenishment ship. 'PLA's 5th 'Super Nanny' Type 903A replenishment ship launched' *Want China Times*, June 10, 2015, at <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1101&MainCatID=11&id=20150610000066>

¹⁶² Zhao Lei, 'New rules mean ships can be used by military', *China Daily*, June 18, 2015, at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-06/18/content_21042373.htm

¹⁶³ According to 2014 statistics from China's Ministry of Transportation. Zhao Lei, 'New rules mean ships can be used by military', *China Daily*, June 18, 2015, at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-06/18/content_21042373.htm

military ‘sea-basing’. The Chinese-origin hardware being operated by IOR countries would accrue strong military-strategic dividends for China in terms of the sustenance of its naval forces in the Indian Ocean through overseas technical and ordnance support, virtually akin to overseas military bases.

Implications and Concluding Remarks

China seems to be synergising all its instruments of national power effectively to meet its national-strategic objectives in the IOR. China and India being two major powers in Asia, the interplay between the former’s emerging strategy of ‘March West’ and the latter’s reinvigorated policy of ‘Act East’ bears significant ramifications for the two countries, and also at the regional and global levels. New Delhi would continually assess the manifestation of China’s strategy in the Indian Ocean since the related developments have immense policy relevance for India on many fronts ranging from foreign policy and national security strategy.

Since the 1962 China-India armed conflict, the nature of their bilateral relations is characterised by an adversarial potential. Assuming that the current ‘trajectory’ of the relationship does not deviate substantially in the foreseeable future, China’s increased politico-military presence in the Indian Ocean is likely to enhance bilateral geopolitical and strategic discord further, mainly on three counts.

Geopolitical Adversity

First, the reinforcement of China’s sphere of influence within India’s geo-strategic frontiers could potentially induce the countries therein – particularly those in its immediate neighbourhood – to pit New Delhi against Beijing. This would severely constrain India’s foreign policy options and impinges of its relations with these neighbours. The ramifications would be particularly severe for Indo-Pak relations. Pakistan is likely to become more intransigent, particularly in context of its proxy-war strategy against India. Pakistan’s hardened stance would hem India within the subcontinent, thereby encouraging China to further increase its politico-military assertiveness against India, at international forums and across the land border.

National Security

Second, given the persisting China-India territorial dispute and the lack of Beijing’s demonstrated will to resolve it, the China’s established military presence in the IOR directly impinges on India’s national security. It adds a maritime element to India’s military strategy vis-a-vis China, and an additional seaward flank to defend. Even if the

PLA Navy is unable to establish carrier-based sea-control in the Indian Ocean in the next few decades, the strategic assets and infrastructure in India's littoral would be vulnerable to its SSN-based (albeit limited) power-projection capability. India would need to cater for the worse-case two-front (China-Pakistan) conflict scenario.

Even in peace-time, Indian naval forces are likely to face unintentional encounters at sea with the PLA Navy units, which is a complex proposition considering that the IOR security architecture has not yet evolved to establish a code of conduct to regulate such encounters. Also, India would need to contend with the Chinese merchant ships and marine research vessels deployed in the Indian Ocean – particularly in the maritime zones of India – to collate strategic and operational intelligence. Furthermore, while Chinese ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) may not be deployed in the Indian Ocean, its non-strategic naval platforms are likely to encounter (and may even trail) India's SSBNs in its sea-based nuclear bastion in the Bay of Bengal.¹⁶⁴ In India's western operational theatre, China's technological assistance to Pakistan to base its tactical nuclear weapons at sea could also lead to further insecurities.¹⁶⁵

Regional Stability

Third, the IOR is known to be an inherently volatile one on account of political instabilities and socio-economic disparities in many 'fragile states'. Until recently, the strategic interests of all major Indian Ocean powers were broadly congruent, which ensured regional stability (albeit with some temporary aberrations). Although China has lately demonstrated its will and capability to contribute to regional security and stability, it is a non-*status quo* and revisionist power, whose overarching national-strategic objectives are divergent with the 'mainstream'. As and when China becomes an Indian Ocean power, any contingency involving instability in a regional country may lead to China and the established western powers to undertake a hasty politico-military intervention to pre-empt the rival. This would make IOR more unstable, thereby impinging on India's interests that are closely enmeshed with the IOR.

Given the above, it may be necessary to bear a broader view in mind. Despite the rather serious irritants in India's relations with China, the latter's primary geopolitical and strategic contention is against the United States, and by extrapolation, against the US allies in Asia, not India. Hence, in terms of its larger national objectives, while the

¹⁶⁴ Iskander Rehman. *Murky Waters: Naval Nuclear Dynamics in the Indian Ocean* (2015: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C.), pp.42-47.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Indian armed forces may need to 'keep the powder dry', India need not embroil itself in the intensifying geopolitical tussle between China and the United States, which could well potentially spill over from the Western Pacific into the Indian Ocean. This would need to be factored in India's policymaking vis-a-vis China, by both its foreign policy and security establishments.

‘Maritime Silk Road’: China’s ‘Master-Stroke’ of Economic Diplomacy?

28 August 2014

The concept of ‘Maritime Silk Road’ (MSR) was proposed by China’s President Xi Jinping during his Indonesia visit in October 2013. The concept may be traced back to the Han Dynasty when key land and sea trading routes carried Chinese silk to Europe. Since the MSR idea was first announced, China has approached all countries strategically located along the key shipping lane from Southeast Asia to Europe across the northern Indian Ocean to seek their partnership to further the aims of MSR concept.

The map and details of the MSR were first brought out in April 2013. It essentially involves China helping its MSR partners to develop their port infrastructure, establish production zones and free-trade areas, and enhance coordination to facilitate trade. A major portion of the MSR transits through the Indian Ocean and its strategic chokepoints. The map also depicts a continental route linking China to Italy through Central Asia and West Asia.

For seeking their support, China has offered the prospective MSR partners several economic incentives beyond trade benefits. This led to these countries – like those in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa and the Gulf to extend their whole-hearted support. However, the proposal received a guarded response from India. While New Delhi backed the BCIM corridor, it sought more details and greater “transparency” from Beijing.

China’s rationale for proposing the MSR concept may have been driven by its economic imperatives with regard to maritime trade connectivity. In 2013, China surpassed the United States to become the world’s largest trading nation. At present, 40 percent of its total foreign trade crosses the Indian Ocean, and this proportion is increasing. The MSR concept may have been envisaged to reinforce this trend, besides catering for security and safety of its shipping. China’s overseas crude-oil supply constitutes another related driver. In 2013, nearly 60 percent of its oil imports (sourced from Africa and West Asia) transited through the choke points of Western Indian Ocean. This constitutes a major strategic vulnerability for China.

The MSR may also be an element of Beijing’s grand-strategy to propagate influence, to ‘soften’ its maritime ‘rise’, and negate the ‘String of Pearls’ theory. Concurrently, the MSR concept would enable China’s maritime-military power to break free from the geographical constraints of the island chains in the Western Pacific, along with the military pressures mounted on China by the US ‘rebalance’ strategy.

India has its own imperatives with regard to economic connectivity. Its ‘Look East’ policy is severely impeded by constraints of land connectivity. Its endorsement of the BCIM corridor may be seen in this context. Hence, nearly all of India’s merchandise

trade with these countries transits via the sea. In 2013, 30 percent of India's total foreign trade transited east across Southeast Asia's maritime choke-points. This proportion is likely to increase in the coming years, which would necessitate security and safety of shipping and seafarers. Will the MSR contribute to it?

Like China, India is as vulnerable in terms of access to energy resources. In 2013, nearly all of its oil imports transited through the western choke-points, with only three percent coming from East Asia, Southeast Asia and Australia. Being boxed within two sets of maritime choke-points on both extremities of the Indian Ocean, source-diversification is not easy for India. Besides, it may not be prudent for India to diversify to Eastern Asia, due to the prevailing inter-state maritime disputes in the China Seas. However, if the MSR concept could contribute to enhanced security assurances with regard to freedom of navigation in this region, India could benefit from it.

An additional aim of MSR is to encourage Chinese companies to shift their manufacturing hubs to the partner countries due to rising labour costs in China. While this would make Chinese exports more competitive, the MSR countries would gain through infrastructure development and increased employment opportunities. For India, this bears promise, only theoretically. India's policy thus far has not permitted Chinese investments in such 'strategic' sectors due to the imperatives of 'national security'.

Would the management of MSR be based on a 'web' of partnerships or a 'hub-and-spoke' model? Considering that MSR is being financed by China's 'deep pockets', its management is likely to be in China's firm grip. Secondly, Maritime economics cannot possibly be disaggregated from maritime security. The China Seas has lately become a highly insecure maritime space with contesting maritime claims. Would the MSR concept contribute to maritime security in the China Seas? This is a moot point, which needs to be addressed.

China's 'Maritime Silk Road': Beyond 'Economics'

16 April 2015

On the eve of his visit to China in end-March 2015, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo indicated a desire to seek more details of 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR) initiative so that he could endorse it. It may be recalled that the Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the MSR initiative during his visit to Indonesia in October 2013. For Beijing, Jakarta's support for the MSR is crucial since in the coming years, Indonesia is likely to play a pivotal role in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region.

Drawn from the erstwhile 'Silk Road' of the Han Dynasty era, the MSR concept represents a master-stroke of Beijing's diplomatic manoeuvre. It aims not only to meet China's economic objectives, but also uses 'economics' as an effective 'camouflage' to achieve its national objectives in the Indo-Pacific region. This essay examines MSR in the context of China's likely grand-strategic objectives in the region, to assess how the concept transcends the domain of (pure) 'economics' into the ('economics plus') realm of broader geo-politics.

MSR helps China to propagate influence in its 'periphery' (the Indo-Pacific region), and possibly even beyond. For Beijing, such influence is an overarching strategic objective for various reasons ranging from the civilizational genesis of the 'Middle Kingdom', to the contemporary imperatives of Chinese statecraft.

For a 'non-*status quo*' power like China, among the foremost imperatives is the support ('voice') from its MSR partners at international and regional fora. Such support is necessary for China to shape the global order in its favour, and fructify its maritime and territorial claims. A concurrent need is to 'displace' the regional influence of the West, particularly that of the United States.

China's regional influence is necessary for assured access to natural resources and raw materials to feed its manufacturing industries. It is pertinent to note that Beijing strongly believes in the dictum of 'flag follows trade', and is well known for its 'mercantilist' approach to sustain its economic growth. Towards this end, China began engaging the African countries a decade before the MSR was conceived. For Africa, therefore, MSR is merely a platform to reinforce China's larger geopolitical ends, rather than a medium to forge mutually-beneficial economic partnerships with the African

countries, such as through outsourcing Chinese manufacturing and investments to develop their trade infrastructure.

China is also seeking to increase its defence exports to the regional countries. Between 2010 and 2014, China overtook Germany, France and the UK to become the world's third largest arms exporter (exporting five per cent of global defence sales). But it lags far behind Russia (in the second place, exporting 27 per cent). The MSR could be useful to shift low-end Chinese defence manufacturing to the potentially large arms markets in the region. This driver transcends 'economics', and goes into the domain of Beijing's 'national-strategic' objective to create security dependence of regional countries on China. Furthermore, Chinese-origin hardware being operated by countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) would accrue strong military-strategic dividends for China in terms of sustenance of its naval forces in the Indian Ocean through overseas technical and ordnance support, virtually akin to 'overseas bases'.

Lately, China has been increasingly assertive against its immediate and extended neighbours in Asia, including through the use of military force. MSR may offset the adverse effects of such politico-military assertiveness. Furthermore, leveraging the MSR and high economic stakes of Asian countries, China could control escalation of conflict in such scenarios, and compel these countries to acquiesce to Beijing's will.

MSR may also be useful to counter the western theory of 'String of Pearls'. Before MSR was launched, the Chinese laboured hard to convince the world that their port projects in the Indo-Pacific region were commercial, not strategic ventures, but few believed them. The MSR was the best way to make them realize the 'truth' in what the Chinese were 'always saying'. Concurrently, it would enhance China's options for using the maritime facilities in IOR for replenishment of its naval forces engaged in peace-time missions (like counter-piracy) and also short-of-war contingencies (akin to the US concept of 'places', not 'bases').

The MSR may be seen as a response to the US 'rebalance' strategy that seeks to 'contain' China within East Asia. At the geopolitical level, the US containment involves economic and diplomatic elements. The former seeks to isolate China through creation of US-led blocks such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The latter seeks to isolate China through politico-diplomatic engagements with regional allies like Japan, 'partners' like India and other littoral countries.

The US 'rebalance' strategy has a substantial military-strategic element as well. The US strategy seeks a military-strategic containment of China through increasing military presence in the Western Pacific, and its 'Joint (operational) Concept for Access

and Maneuver in the Global Commons' (JAM-GC). The MSR may be seen as a 'strategic distraction' to the US 'rebalance'. Through MSR, China could seek to project its naval power into the IOR, which could release the US military strategic 'pressure' in China's backyard. Towards this end, although the current enunciation of the MSR concept is devoid of a 'maritime security' element, 'security' could become a credible alibi for China to increase its naval presence in the IOR. Notably, however, for its naval access to the IOR, Beijing would need the support from Indonesia that sits astride most of Southeast Asia's maritime choke-points. It may be recalled that in February 2014, a PLA Navy task force crossed the Indonesian straits of Sunda and Lombok to conduct unprecedented and unannounced exercises off Australia. For MSR, therefore, the significance of Jakarta's support cannot be overemphasized.

India's Approach to China's Maritime Silk Road: An Alternative View

17 Feb 15

In his December 2014 pre-election manifesto, Sri Lanka's President Sirisena had expressed his intent to reconsider the US\$1.4 billion Chinese-funded project to develop Colombo port. However, the visit of Chinese 'special envoy' (Liu Jianchao) to Sri Lanka in early-February 2015 led to a "careful assessment" of the issue, following which, the Sri Lankan government has indicated that it is likely to go ahead with the project.

The Colombo port project has been essential for the 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR) initiative of the Chinese President Xi Jinping. But this success for China may be only the first step in the implementation of MSR, with more to follow. Many other countries in India's maritime neighbourhood – Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Maldives, Pakistan, Thailand *et al* – are on the MSR bandwagon. In the context of this trend, this essay examines India's approach to the MSR concept, and presents an alternative to the prevailing mainstream view in New Delhi.

Invoking the 'ancient' Chinese contribution to Asian seaborne trade and cultural linkages, the MSR concept essentially involves China helping its partner countries to develop their port infrastructure to enhance trade connectivity, and to establish manufacturing and free-trade zones in the hinterland, with attendant economic incentives. The MSR initiative is thus proposed as an economic concept. However, even as its specific details are yet unclear, its multi-dimensional strategic intent and wide-ranging ramifications cannot be ignored. India's response to MSR has been guarded; and understandably so, owing to the adversarial potential of its relations with China.

While India has not yet rejected China's MSR proposal, a preliminary assessment – outlined in the succeeding text – indicates that there may be a case for New Delhi to consider the MSR more objectively. The assessment needs to factor both economic and security considerations.

Economics

As the largest manufacturing economy in the world, China's impressive economic growth in the past few decades has led to rising incomes and better lifestyles, but also slowing down of its exports due to rising production costs. China seeks to address this conundrum by outsourcing manufacturing to its MSR partners. For India – given its advantages in terms of the relatively low cost of labour and raw-material – this presents

an opportunity to strengthen its manufacturing base, propagate its 'Make in India' campaign, and generate employment opportunities. The prevailing cynicism against shifting China's 'sunset industries' to India purely on environmental considerations may be akin to 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'. Considering that China's industrial capacity is at least two decades ahead, Indian industries could leapfrog in the same way that the Southeast Asian economies did in the 1980s on the back of 'outsourcing' by Japanese multinational companies. Commonly referred to as the 'Flying Geese Paradigm', the sound logic for such 'outsourcing' was based on comparative advantage and market rationalism.

On the other hand, if New Delhi opts to stay out of the MSR, India's industrial growth will lag behind its Asian neighbours – most of which are China's avowed MSR partners – thereby adversely affecting India's economic growth and developmental plans.

India also needs to overcome infrastructure-related constraints to enhance connectivity for its overseas trade, which contributes substantially to the national economy. Notably, in 1990–91, India's external trade accounted for a mere six per cent of the GDP, which rose to 52 per cent by 2010–11. The MSR could be an effective maritime supplement to the land-based Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor under active consideration by New Delhi. It could be dovetailed with India's own 'Sagarmala' project, and thereby contribute to the nation's efforts to enhance sea-trade connectivity, while also progressively leading to 'port-led development' of the hinterland, and the SEZs. The MSR may also help India to develop its 'blue economy' through bolstering its marine industries and ship-building capacity.

Security

China's military-strategic intent behind the MSR cannot be discounted. The unprecedented docking of a PLA Navy submarine at Colombo port in September 2014 is a bellwether for future developments in the Indian Ocean. China is likely to seek naval access to the maritime infrastructure that it is helping to create, thereby increasing its strategic presence in India's primary areas of maritime interest. The PLA Navy could seek replenishment facilities in Chittagong, Colombo, Gwadar, Hambantota, and so on. The question arises: what can India do to prevent this? India could possibly try to use its leverages with the IOR countries; but these are hardly adequate vis-à-vis the economic attractiveness of China's MSR. Notably, even Bangladesh and Maldives have opted to support the MSR, and with Pakistan, India has no leverage at all. Hence, the progress of the ongoing developments seems inevitable, over which, New Delhi seems to have little control.

On the other hand, permitting a Chinese company to develop an economic zone – comprising a port-hinterland complex with manufacturing hubs – in an appropriate location in India would entail considerable Chinese investment in terms of finances, technology and possibly, skilled human resource. This would lead to China developing major stakes in India, which would contribute to the latter's national security through 'dissuasion'.

It is important to note that in the present times of national technical means and stand-off non-kinetic offensive weapons, national security cannot be achieved through physical barriers, including denying Chinese companies / entrepreneurs' access to Indian production and distribution hubs.

Understandably, India has been cautious with regard to its critical logistic infrastructure including ports and port-connectors, which it calls 'strategic sectors'. However, the strategic value of a facility depends upon the context. A 'generic' designation of sea-ports as 'strategic' may not be appropriate. Hence, a selected site on Indian coast allocated to a Chinese company for port construction need not be designated as strategic. An apt parallel is New Delhi's 'active consideration' to connect the (otherwise 'strategic') road infrastructure in India's north-eastern states to the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC).

Though the MSR is Beijing's initiative, its historic roots are not exclusively Chinese. MSR represents the ancient maritime inter-linkages within Asia, which closely followed the regularly-reversing Monsoon winds, thereby enabling sea-borne commercial and cultural exchanges across Asia. India's support to the MSR concept would, therefore, serve to propagate Asia's 'rise' and integrate Asia economically. In the process, it would create mutual dependence, and thereby contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

On the contrary, with the regional countries supporting MSR on the back of growing regional economic integration, India's exclusivist approach would lead to its marginalisation, thereby helping China to 'displace' India's influence in its own backyard.

China Challenges the Unipolar World Order: An Assessment of China's Defence White Paper 2014

03 Jun 2015

China has been issuing Defence White Papers biennially since 1998. The ninth White Paper of 2014 titled 'China's Military Strategy' was released recently in May 2015. This essay seeks to analyse the salient aspects of the document, particularly in context of the preceding document of 2012 released in April 2013.

In comparison to the Defence White Papers published by China in the preceding years, the 2014 document is very concise. Nonetheless, it reveals substantial content and context, disproportionate to the size of its text. While much of the revelation is likely to be Beijing's 'strategic communications', the document is nonetheless insightful.

Title of White Paper

The present White Paper has continued the trend of using a thematic title – a trend that was initiated with the 2012 document titled 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces'. The trend and the specific title spelling out "China's Military Strategy" signify the increased self-confidence of an emerging global military power, which until a few years ago, preferred to be opaque to the world on 'matters military'. The document also reflects an increased self-assurance as a nation, stating that "China's comprehensive national strength, core competitiveness and risk-resistance capacity are notably increasing, and China enjoys growing international standing and influence".

Core National Objectives

In the document, China has maintained its earlier stance of avoiding war through its military strategy of "active defence" (that envisages an 'offensive' only at the operational and tactical levels). However, the document mentions "preparation for military struggle (PMS)", which indicates its strong desire to retain the option of first use of military force, if it cannot achieve its core objectives otherwise. Furthermore, the emphasis on

“maritime PMS” indicates that these objectives pertain to Taiwan’s “reunification”, and fructification of its maritime-territorial claims in the Western Pacific. Furthermore, the inclusion of the phrase “You fight your way and I fight my way” indicates that China’s war-fighting concept to meet its core objectives is likely to be based on use of asymmetric capabilities.

Maritime Interests

The previous 2012 document stated the PLA Navy’s mandate to preserve China’s sovereignty over its territorial seas and its maritime rights and interests in ‘offshore areas’ against complex security threats, thereby portraying China as a victim or an underdog reacting to the actions of Japan, and implicitly, of the U.S. The new document, however, emphasis on a more proactive protection of its interests in ‘open waters’, thereby enlarging its strategic depth. Notably, the document also calls upon the need to shed the mindset that peace, stability and development of China is linked to affairs on land rather than the sea. This indicates a maritime emphasis of China’s military strategy.

With regard to the security of sea-lanes, it uses the term “strategic Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)”. Although the term ‘SLOC’ itself bears a ‘strategic’ connotation, the addition of the adjective indicates that China’s considers itself vulnerable to commodity denial during war, thereby severely limiting its option of use of military force. Although the document does not specifically mention the ‘Indian Ocean’, the reference to Indian Ocean SLOCs may be inferred

Naval Presence in Indian Ocean

Alike the previous 2012 document, the 2014 White Paper states that the PLA Navy would maintain “regular combat readiness patrols...(and maintain)...military presence in relevant sea areas.” While the former may refer to the Western Pacific, the latter is a likely reference to the Indian Ocean. This is buttressed by the statement that the PLA Navy would “continue to carry out escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and other sea

areas as required, enhance exchanges and cooperation with naval task forces of other countries, and jointly secure international SLOCs.” This implies that China’s naval presence in the Indian Ocean would continue, and may even increase. While such presence may be primarily for undertaking ‘Military Operations Other than War’ (MOOTW), it is likely to be dovetailed with preparing for ‘wartime’ operations. This assertion is borne out by Beijing’s assertion in September 2014 that its Song-class submarine deployed in the Indian Ocean was meant for counter-piracy.(The credibility of this rationale was dismissed by naval analysts on operational grounds).The document adds that the “PLA Navy will work to incorporate MOOTW capacity building into...PMS” thereby implying the China would also seek to develop fungible capabilities.

Furthermore, the White Paper lays emphasis on ‘sustenance’ of the forward-deployed naval platforms through “strategic prepositioning”. This indicates that China is likely to seek overseas access facilities (if not military bases) in the Indian Ocean, or even resort to the U.S. concept of ‘sea-basing’. The latter possibility is supported by recent news-reports about China developing large ‘Mobile Landing Platforms’ (MLP) similar to those used by U.S. expeditionary forces.

Military Interface with Major Powers

The mention of Russia in the White Paper precedes all other countries. The “exchanges and cooperation with the Russian military within the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership...to promote military relations in more fields and at more levels” indicates the imminence of a China-Russia quasi-alliance.

The 2012 White Paper, without naming the U.S., had expressed a concern for its “pivot” to Asia strategy and “strengthening of its military alliances with the regional countries, leading to tensions.” In contrast, the 2014 document mentions the U.S. explicitly. While it does state the need for “cooperative mechanisms with the US Navy, including exchange of information in the maritime domain”, its tone and tenor indicates a precursor to a ‘Cold War-style’ military interface between the two major powers. It talks about a “new model of military relationship” with the US based on “major-country

relations”, with “strengthening of defence dialogue (and)...CBMs to include notification of major military activities (and) rules of behaviour” to prevent “air and maritime encounters...strengthen mutual trust, prevent risks and manage crises.” However, it is yet unclear what kind of bipolar interface will eventually emerge since the current global environment marked by close China-U.S. economic ties is vastly dissimilar to the erstwhile Cold War era.

The 2012 White Paper had mentioned India’s combined Army exercises with PLA and increased anti-piracy coordination with India. Since the 2014 document is more succinct, the lack of details is understandable. However, the lack of even a mention of defence exchanges with India, or any other Asian country is remarkable.

Also ‘conspicuous by absence’ are the various facets of ‘transparency’ that the preceding Defence White Papers had addressed, ranging from China’s defence budget to its nuclear weapons policy of no-first use (NFU). Evidently, China has ‘arrived’ on the world stage with a single-minded preoccupation of how it could challenge the unipolar world order dominated by the U.S.

China and Freedom of Navigation in South China Sea: The Context of International Tribunal's Verdict

Date: 19 July 2016

On 12 July 2016, the Tribunal constituted at the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS) issued its decision in the arbitration instituted by the Philippines against China. It relates to the various legal issues in the South China Sea (SCS) *inter alia* pertaining to China's historic rights and 'nine-dash line', the status of features and lawfulness of Chinese actions.¹⁶⁶

Within hours of the release of PCA Tribunal's decision, India released a government press release, stating that

“India supports freedom of navigation and over-flight, and unimpeded commerce, based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the UNCLOS. India believes that States should resolve disputes through peaceful means without threat or use of force and exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes affecting peace and stability...”¹⁶⁷

However, Beijing has stated that China would not accept the Tribunal's verdict.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, tensions have rekindled in the SCS with reports indicating that China intends “closing off a part of SCS for military exercises.”¹⁶⁹ The issue of Freedom of

¹⁶⁶ ‘The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines V. The People's Republic of China)’, Permanent Court of Arbitration, The Hague, Press Release, 12 July 2016, at <https://pca-cpa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/175/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Award.pdf>

¹⁶⁷ ‘Statement on Award of Arbitral Tribunal on South China Sea Under Annexure VII of UNCLOS’, Ministry of External Affairs (Govt of India) Press release, 12 July 2016, at http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27019/Statement_on_Award_of_Arbitral_Tribunal_on_South_China_Sea_Under_Annexure_VII_of_UNCLOS

¹⁶⁸ ‘Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on the Award of 12 July 2016 of the Arbitral Tribunal in the South China Sea Arbitration Established at the Request of the Republic of the Philippines’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 12 July 2016, at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1379492.shtml

¹⁶⁹ ‘China ups the ante, to close part of South China Sea for military exercise’, *Times of India*, 18 July 2016, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/China-ups-the-ante-to-close-part-of-South-China-Sea-for-military-exercise/articleshow/53263905.cms>

Navigation (FON) is of immense relevance not merely for the SCS littorals, but for all countries that have stakes in peace and tranquillity in the SCS; and yet bears a significant potential to flare-up into a maritime conflict.

This issue brief aims to examine China's approach to FON in context of international law, including the verdict of the PCA Tribunal. In this writing, the term 'FON' refers to the broader concept of 'navigational freedoms', including the freedom of over-flight. Furthermore, this brief attempts to identify the *de jure* ramifications – even if not *de facto*, considering China's rejection of the verdict – of the PCA Tribunal's decision on China with regard to FON in the area.

FON is a fundamental tenet of customary international law that was propounded in 1609 by the Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius, who called it *Mare Liberum* (Freedom of the Seas). The legal tenet is codified in the UNCLOS, a process that involved over two decades of intense labour of the international maritime lawmakers at three brainstorming Conferences. The Third Conference itself (UNCLOS III) spanned nine years, which led to the signing of Convention in 1982, and its subsequent entry into force in 1994. The Peoples' Republic of China was among the first signatories to the Convention on 10 December 1982 (along with India), and ratified it on 07 June 1996. The key question is whether China – despite the foregoing – is impeding freedom of navigation in the SCS? For a comprehensive answer, the issue would need to be examined separately for the three legal regimes/ areas wherein international law applies differently: China's Territorial Sea, its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the other areas within the 'nine-dash line'.

Territorial Seas

In a State's 12-nautical mile (NM) Territorial Sea, the right of 'Innocent Passage' provided for in UNCLOS Article 17 applies to both commercial and military vessels. As regards commercial shipping, there is no evidence whatsoever of China denying this right to such ships flying the flag of any nationality. Notably, China is a manufacturing-based and export-led economy, which imports nearly 80 per cent of its oil and natural gas via the sea. Therefore, China has tremendous stakes in unimpeded maritime

commerce, and does not stand to gain by deliberately impeding the FON of merchant ships.

For foreign warships, however, the ‘yardstick’ of ‘Innocent Passage’ differs. During the UNCLOS negotiations, most developing countries wanted restrictions on of foreign warships crossing their Territorial Seas. Many of these States proposed that foreign warships must obtain ‘authorization’ for this from the coastal State. Eventually, however, the proposed amendment was not incorporated in UNCLOS; nonetheless, the States were permitted to take measures to safeguard their security interests. Consequently, and in accordance with UNCLOS Article 310¹⁷⁰, like many other States, China made a declaration in June 1996 while ratifying UNCLOS, seeking ‘prior permission’ for all foreign warships intending to exercise the right of Innocent Passage across its Territorial Seas.¹⁷¹ (The declaration was based upon Article 6 of China’s national law of 1992.¹⁷²) It is pertinent to state that about 40 other States – including many developed countries in Europe – made similar declarations seeking ‘prior permission’ for Innocent Passage. (Notably, India seeks only ‘prior notification’. However, the United States does not recognise the right of either ‘prior permission’ or ‘prior notification’).¹⁷³

It may be recalled that during the Cold War, in 1983, the Soviet Union promulgated rules for warship navigation in its Territorial Seas, which permitted Innocent Passage only in limited areas of Soviet Territorial Seas in the Baltic Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk and Sea of Japan. This led to a vigorous protest from the United States. Later in 1986 and 1988, the United States Navy conducted Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) in the Soviet Territorial Sea in the Black Sea.¹⁷⁴ In contrast, therefore, China’s stand on navigation of foreign warships through Territorial Seas of ‘undisputed’ Chinese territory is clearly legitimate.

¹⁷⁰ Article 310 of UNCLOS allows States to make declarations or statements regarding its application at the time of signing, ratifying or acceding to the Convention.

¹⁷¹ Office of the Legal Affairs of the United Nations, Treaty Section website (Date of most recent addition: 29 October 2013), at

http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm

¹⁷² Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, No.55, 25 February 1992, at <http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/lotprocottsatz739/>

¹⁷³ *Limits in the Seas*, US Responses to Excessive Maritime Claims, US Department of State (Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs), No 112, 09 March 1992, p.52

¹⁷⁴ Rules for Navigation and Sojourn of Foreign Warships in the Territorial and Internal Waters and Ports of the USSR; ratified by the Council of Ministers Decree No. 384 of 25 Apr 1983, cited in *Limits in the Seas*, US Responses to Excessive Maritime Claims, US Department of State (Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs), No 112, 09 March 1992, pp.56-57

However, the passage of foreign warships within 12-NM of the disputed SCS islands/features – which are occupied and claimed by China – has been highly contentious. Since the United States seeks to prevent any norm-building in favour of China’s territorial claims, it has been undertaking FON operations (FONOPS) in the 12-NM zone of these islands. Notably, since the launch of the US “Freedom of Navigation Programme” in 1979, the United States has conducted such operations at numerous occasions all around the globe; sometimes even against its closest allies.

From the perspective of China – that is in *de facto* control of the islands/features – its objection to the US warships cruising within 12-NM of these islands/ features without ‘prior permission’ is as much valid as the US FONOPS to uphold its right of military mobility across the global commons. Hence, until such time that the issue of sovereignty over these islands is settled, the legitimacy of China’s stand on FON in these waters cannot be questioned.

Exclusive Economic Zone

Alike in its Territorial Sea, China has never impeded FON of commercial vessels in its EEZ. However, like many other States, China has been objecting to foreign military activities in its EEZ. It may be recalled that in April 2001, China scrambled its J-8 fighters against the US EP-3 surveillance aircraft operating about 60 NM off China’s Hainan Island, leading to a mid-air collision.¹⁷⁵

Unfortunately, the UNCLOS does not contain any specific provision, either permitting or prohibiting such activities. According to Articles 58(1) and 87 of UNCLOS, the EEZ is part of ‘International Waters’ wherein all foreign warships may exercise High Seas FON, with certain exceptions that relate to economic/ resource-related uses of the EEZ, such as Marine Scientific Research, which may be conducted only if permitted by the coastal State. Therefore, if a foreign military conducts hydrographic surveys in China’s EEZ, it may be justified as being among the High Seas Freedoms since it may be necessary, for example, for safe navigation of warships. However, if a foreign military

¹⁷⁵ Patrick Martin , ‘Spy plane standoff heightens US-China tensions’, *World Socialist Web Site*, 3 April 2001, at <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/04/spy-a03.html>

conducts intelligence collection in the EEZ – as China interprets the objective of US military activities in its EEZ – it may be objectionable, at least in terms of the spirit of UNCLOS, whose Article 88 says that “The high seas shall be reserved for peaceful purposes.” Of course, some may consider ‘intelligence collection’ as a normal peacetime activity of a State to bolster its military preparedness to maintain peace. But this only serves to reinforce the prevailing void in UNCLOS, rather than legally deny China the right of ensuring its own security.

Other Areas within ‘Nine-Dash Line’

China has never explicitly articulated its stand on the legal status of the sea areas within the ‘nine-dash line’, which lie beyond its 12-NM Territorial Sea and the 200-NM EEZ. However, by laying ‘historic’ claim to all SCS features (islands, rocks or reefs), and referring to all these as islands entitled to EEZ and Legal Continental Shelf (LCS), it has implicitly claimed sovereign jurisdiction over the entire sea area enclosed within the nine-dash line. Based on such assumed sovereign rights – though disputed by other claimant States – China has been curtailing FON in these areas, particularly for warships. For example, in the days leading to the International Tribunal’s verdict on the China-Philippines Arbitration, Beijing declared a ‘no sail zone’ in the SCS during a major naval exercise in the area from 4 to 11 July 2016 (see Fig. 1 below).

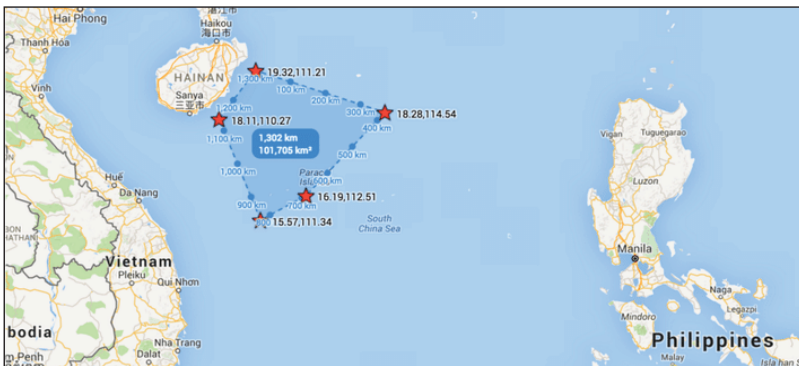


Figure 2 - China's 'No Sail Zone' in South China Sea (Promulgated: 04 July 2016)

(Source: defenseone.com)

As the map indicates, the ‘prohibited zone’ was a sizable 38,000 sq mile area lying between Vietnam and the Philippines. It encompasses the Paracel Islands, but not the arterial International Shipping Lane (ISL) of the SCS.¹⁷⁶ During such exercises in the past too, China has been imposing such restrictions on navigation in the SCS. While some analysts have referred to such restrictions on FON as violation of maritime law,¹⁷⁷ given the susceptibility of prevailing international law to divergent interpretations, China cannot be denied the right to interpret law in a manner that best suits its security interests.

However, the above scenario prevailed prior to 12 July 2016. The verdict of the PCA Tribunal has changed all that. The Tribunal has dismissed China’s claim to ‘historic rights’ within the ‘nine-dash line’, indicating that such claim was incompatible with UNCLOS, and has asserted that no feature claimed by it in the SCS is capable of generating an EEZ. At least from the standpoint of international law, therefore, Beijing’s claim to sovereign jurisdiction over these areas is decisively annulled. Henceforth, China will need to concede to unimpeded FON in the SCS, both for commercial shipping and warships. For example, if it needs to conduct a naval exercise in the area, declaring a ‘no sail/ prohibited zone’ would no longer be legally tenable. Instead, China could, at best, merely promulgate a mere ‘advisory’ for the safety of ships and civil aircraft intending to transit through the exercise area.

China could possibly react to the adverse verdict of the International Tribunal by declaring an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the SCS. A resort to this would not be constructive since it would further heighten anxieties in the area. Nonetheless, China’s declaration of ADIZ would be tenable from the legal standpoint. The promulgation of such Security zones is not prohibited by international law. However, for interpreting it as ‘not prohibited, and hence permitted’, promulgating such a zone must adhere to the spirit of law, essentially in terms of its need for maintain peace or for self-defence, and that it is not obverse to the overarching principle of freedom of navigation and over-flight.

¹⁷⁶ Echo Huang Yinyin, ‘China Declares a No-Sail-Zone in Disputed Waters During Wargame’, *Defence One*, 5 July 2016, at <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2016/07/china-declares-no-sail-zone-disputed-waters-during-wargame/129607/?oref=d-river>

¹⁷⁷ Sam LaGrone, ‘Chinese Military South China Sea ‘No Sail’ Zone Not a New Move’, *USNI News*, 7 July 2016, at <https://news.usni.org/2016/07/07/chinese-military-south-china-sea-no-sail-zone-nothing-new>

Concluding Remarks

It is amply clear from the foregoing that the contentions over freedom of navigation and over-flight in the SCS are more of result of the geopolitical ‘mistrust’ between China and the other States, aggravated by the voids and ambiguities of international law, rather than any objective failing on part of China and the other States involved to observe the prevailing tenets of international law.

The geopolitical relationships constitute an aspect that China and the other countries involved need to resolve amongst themselves, and the rest of the international community can do little about it. Further, there is hardly a case for convening the fourth UN Conference on the Law of the Sea to renegotiate the UNCLOS, which is a result of painstaking efforts of the international community during a period that was geopolitically less complex than it is today.

Nonetheless, it is encouraging that the lingering maritime-disputes in the Asia-Pacific are being arbitrated upon by international tribunals. Over the years, the decisions of international tribunals on cases such as the India-Bangladesh (July 2014)¹⁷⁸ and the more recent one between China and Philippines on the SCS would be valuable to fill the legal voids, and would firm up over time to add to the prevailing tenets of international law.

China’s adherence to PCA Tribunal’s decision would not only contribute to peace and prosperity in the region, but would also best serve its own national interest, at least in the longer term. However, it remains to be seen how long Beijing will take to assimilate the ‘new normal’ into its policymaking.

¹⁷⁸ Bay of Bengal Maritime Boundary Arbitration (Bangladesh V. India) Award, Permanent Court of Arbitration, The Hague, 07 July 7, 2014, at http://www.pca-cpa.org/showpage.asp?pag_id=1376

China in the Arctic: Awaiting the ‘Rising Tide’?

“The Arctic belongs to all the people around the world as no nation has sovereignty over it.”

-Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo (PLA Navy)

While the legal validity of the Admiral’s statement may be a moot issue, it underscores China’s thoughts on the Arctic barely a few years ago. However, Beijing has been extremely cautious on such overt articulations indicating its Arctic ambitions. It has instead couched its stakes in terms of polar scientific research, besides Arctic environment monitoring and protection. Towards these stated aims, in 2012, China’s Ukraine-built Icebreaker Xuelong undertook its first high-latitude voyage across the Arctic Ocean. Without such caution, it may not have been feasible for China to gain ‘permanent observer’ status in the Arctic Council in May 2013. In the coming years, as greater opportunities emerge, Beijing may conceivably become more assertive in satiating its interests in the Arctic, even to the extent of seeking a major role the management of the polar region, which it considers as ‘global commons’.

The climate-change induced trends in the Arctic are evolutionary and incremental, and thus, it may be early days yet for Beijing even to articulate an Arctic policy, much less to adopt a proactive policy stance. Nonetheless, the trends need to be noted. This essay aims to guess-estimate the opportunities for China in the Arctic and the possible contours of its approach to the region.

Natural Resources

China’s rapidly-growing industrialized economy is likely to demand an increasing share of the world’s natural resources, particularly hydrocarbons for energy generation. In 2008, the U.S. Geological Survey assessed that the Arctic holds as much as 13 per cent of the world’s undiscovered oil and 30 per cent of its undiscovered natural gas. The abundant resource reserves of the Arctic enhance China’s policy-making options to

diversify the sources away from the unstable areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, since the provisions of 1982 UN Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) do not permit China to claim any sovereign right in the Arctic, Beijing is likely to bid for joint ventures with the Arctic countries.



Map - China's Alternative Option: The North Sea Route (NSR)
(Source: Author)

Sea Trade

Analysts predict that by 2030, the Arctic could be ice-free in summers. The jury is still out on the timeline for around-the-year ice-free navigation across the region, but trends indicate that this could eventually happen. At present, 40 per cent of China's trade moves westwards across the Indian Ocean. While piracy in the Indian Ocean waxes and wanes periodically, the insecurity for shipping and seafarers in the area is likely to prevail, if not aggravate further, consequent to the threats of 'maritime jihad' from the

Al Qaeda and its affiliate, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This is likely to be a major source of anxiety for all maritime powers, including China. Some decades from now, a substantial amount of China's economic ventures may continue to involve the Indian Ocean and its littoral countries, including through its new concept of 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR). However, a significant proportion of this trade – particularly with Russia, North-western Europe and North America – may use the North Sea Route (NSR). Its recently initiated collaboration with Arctic nations to build its own ice-breakers is a nascent indicator. Given China's penchant for innovative ideas, one may even conceive an Arctic version of China's MSR concept.

Symbolism

Beijing's interest in the Arctic is driven by symbolism to a large extent. At an emerging global power, and the only one that can challenge global preponderance of the United States, China seeks a role in any development that could shape the global order. It realizes that its status in the Arctic Council (permanent observer) is hardly substantive for decision-making on Arctic affairs, but it nonetheless symbolic. It may be noted that while the U.S. is a full member of the Council, its decision-making role is also limited since it is not a party to the 1982 UNCLOS.

Strategic Imperatives

At present, about 60 per cent of China's seaborne oil imports transit through the embayed Indian Ocean, and the two sets of maritime choke-points on its either end. This represents a major strategic adversity for China. In case Beijing opts to use military force to meet its 'core' territorial objectives in the western Pacific, the US and its allies/partners have several options to interdict China's strategic energy imports in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, the Arctic North Sea Route (NSR) would be relatively secure, particularly in conjunction with China's oil source-diversification to the Arctic region (as noted earlier). The only insecure stretch would be the Bearing Strait, where the US and Japan could interdict China's oil shipments (See map). However, it would be

easier for the Chinese Navy to provide protection to its strategic imports in this area, rather than in the Indian Ocean. If the predicted circa 2030 timeline of Arctic becoming ice-free in summers is true, it is likely to be confirmed within the next decade. If so, would it encourage the Chinese to become more militarily assertive in the beginning of summer months?

It is pertinent to note that the climate-induced trends in the Arctic, besides taking shape in the longer-term timeframe, are also accompanied by many imponderables in terms of *inter alia* the pace of ice-melt, cost-effectiveness of Arctic resources and the viability of the polar sea-route in terms of the risks involved. Hence, it is not easy at this stage to extrapolate precisely the opportunities afforded by the changing Arctic that China may be able to exploit. It is, nonetheless, certain that the Chinese would be looking out to all these developments with an eagle's eye. Would the Arctic Ocean assume precedence over the Indian Ocean as China's area of maritime interest? This question may not take too long to be answered.

Section III

India

India and China: Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region

November 2015

Lately, both India and China have enhanced their respective maritime power in tandem with the geographic dilation of their vital interests. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) now holds major economic and geopolitical stakes for China, leading to its intensified Chinese maritime activities in the Indian Ocean and vigorous engagements with the IOR countries. The same could be said about India's enhanced stakes in the Western Pacific, and its littoral countries, that has led to New Delhi scaling up its 'Look East' policy to 'Act East' policy. This has led to an interesting and seminal occurrence of historical salience. The two major civilizational powers that have interacted over centuries with each other across the land frontier, have now developed a maritime interface. This leads to immense opportunities for India and China to cooperate at sea for mutual gains.

As two major powers in Asia, India and China need to play a leading role towards regional security and stability. This is not only their normative responsibility as major regional powers, but also an imperative to further their respective national objectives in terms of economic development and prosperity of their peoples. With the Indo-Pacific being a predominantly maritime configured region, a greater emphasis may need to be placed on security and good order in the region's maritime realm.

However, it is necessary to realise that India-China maritime cooperation cannot possibly materialize unless the overriding impediments are removed, which hinder trust-building, and therefore, any 'meaningful' cooperation. The 'India-China Maritime Dialogue' represents an empirical evidence for this. The Dialogue was finally held in February 2016, nearly four years after it was first agreed upon by the foreign ministers of two sides¹⁷⁹; and even so, the inaugural event turned out to be largely symbolic, with little discussion on substantive cooperation.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Subhajit Roy, 'India, China to start <Maritime Dialogue>', *The Indian Express*, 02 March 2012, at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/india-china-to-start-maritime-dialogue-/918922/>

¹⁸⁰ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'First China-India Maritime Dialogue: Beyond Icebreaking', *National Maritime Foundation (NMF) View Point*, New Delhi, 23 February 2016, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635917882555223208.pdf>

This chapter attempts to identify specific convergences and complementarities between India and China in the broad domains of maritime economics, maritime security and geopolitics, which may lead to potential bilateral maritime cooperation, ensuring security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. In the process, it also identifies the essential prerequisites for India and China to cooperate at sea.

Maritime Economics

Land Access for Sea Trade

For China, in comparison to its land area, the length of its coastline is small. As the table below (Fig. 1) indicates, among a select group of major and medium powers in the world, China's coast-to-land ratio is among the least. Hence most of China – particularly western and central China – is continental, far away from the locus of economic activity – the sea.

Country	Length of Coast (km)	Land Area (sq. km)	Coast-Land Ratio
Japan	29,751	364,485	81.60
U.K.	12,429	241,930	51.40
Indonesia	54,716	1,811,569	30.02
South Korea	2,413	96,920	24.90
France	4,853	640,427	7.58
Germany	2,389	348,672	6.85
Australia	25,760	7,682,300	3.35
India	7,000	2,973,193	2.35
South Africa	2,798	1,214,470	2.30
Russia	37,653	16,377,742	2.30
United States	19,924	9,161,966	2.17
China	14,500	9,569,901	1.52
Brazil	7,491	8,459,417	0.89

Fig. 1 – Cost-land Ratios of Select Major/ Middle Powers¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2060.html> and <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2147.html> (Accessed 23 July 2015). The data does not include disputed and overseas territories.

Besides, China's maritime frontier is located far away from the sources of raw-material and markets in the rest of Asia and Africa. China seeks to offset these geographical disadvantages through its 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) initiative. The land component of the OBOR in Southern Asia seeks maritime-economic access for its land-locked provinces in Western and Central China to the Indian Ocean.

China may be able to implement its OBOR initiative without India, but that way, it is unlikely for China to realise the full potential of the opportunity that India offers. The potential lies in the geographical distances to the Indian Ocean. Kashghar (in China's Xinjian Province) is located 2,000 km away from Pakistan's Gwadar port in the Indian Ocean and 4,000 km from Guangzhou port in South China Sea. However, Tibet is only 1,200 km from India's Kandla port and only 600 km from Kolkata port, both in the Indian Ocean. Hence, China could attain nearly 'direct' access to the Indian Ocean across India.

This will also help India in terms of interconnectivity with China, and the development of economic corridors within the country. Owing to the geophysical barriers in the North and geopolitical contentions with Pakistan, the access to China and the Central Asian Republics has always posed major challenges for India, making it virtually an 'island-state'. China's land access to the Indian Ocean could also help India substantially to develop its sea-port infrastructure. It would bolster the latter's 'Sagar Mala'¹⁸² sea-port project and lead to an enhanced demand for ships, thereby providing a fillip to local shipbuilding and petroleum-based industries. However, the full potential of geography can be leveraged by China and India only after the resolution of outstanding border dispute.

The need to develop trade connectivity between India & China will increase in the coming years with the fructification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The two countries are not part of TPP agreement signed among the U.S. and 11 other countries of the Pacific Rim in early October 2015.¹⁸³ Although it may be too early for economists to figure out its implications for China and India, it is likely to adversely affect their GDPs to some extent, besides potentially leading to job losses.

¹⁸² Gurpreet S Khurana. *Porthole: Geopolitical, Strategic and Maritime Terms and Concepts* (2016: Pentagon Press, New Delhi), p.172

¹⁸³ TNC Rajagopalan, 'How the Trans-Pacific Partnership will affect India's foreign trade', *The Business Standard*, 11 October 2015, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/how-the-trans-pacific-partnership-will-affect-india-s-foreign-trade-115101200053_1.html

Ocean Economy

There lies immense potential for India and China to cooperate in the development of ‘ocean economy’. In China, ‘ocean economy’ contributes to four per cent of the national GDP – among the highest proportion in the world – which is creditable given China’s geographical adversity in terms of its coastline-to-area ratio. On the other hand, India has tremendous potential to develop ‘ocean economy’, and much emphasis is being laid lately to realise this potential.

The Chinese fishing nets in Kochi in Kerala province of South India are apt reminders of the historic engagement between the two countries in this domain. These are a series of 20-30 nets on the shores of Kochi employing a rather unique method of fishing, which has become a tourist attraction. It is unclear whether the Portuguese brought these nets from Macau, or these were carried by Admiral Zheng He’s ships during their voyages across the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, the Chinese link is undisputable, and could become a symbol of future India-China cooperation in ‘ocean economy’. While India and China could share their experiences and best practices on various facets ranging from fishing to sea trade and marine tourism, the two countries can actually work together in unison on seabed exploration and mining in the Indian Ocean where both have been awarded exploration rights by the International seabed Authority (ISA). In this field, the concerned agencies belonging to the two countries could undertake joint development of seabed mineral exploration and extraction technologies.

The two countries could also share expertise on the ‘greening’ of the Ocean Economy, which is becoming increasingly necessary and is being called “Blue Economy”¹⁸⁴. Furthermore, there are immense possibilities of cooperation in development of renewable energy, specifically in the fields of harnessing maritime wind, wave and tidal power.

Sea trade is an important component of ‘ocean economy’. The maritime component of China’s OBOR initiative – the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) – proposes cooperation to enhance sea trade connectivity through development of ports and other infrastructure. Ostensibly, this looks to be a win-win proposition. However, India has not shown much enthusiasm towards it since the intent behind MSR is not transparent. Some analysts, for example, have suggested a military-strategic motive behind the MSR, which appears

¹⁸⁴ Defined as the ‘efficiency enhancement and optimisation of natural marine resources within ecological limits’. Prospects of Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), 2015, p.5

to be coming true with recent reports of the PLA Navy acquiring its first military access facility in Djibouti.¹⁸⁵

Maritime Safety and Security

Common Public Good at Sea

There lies immense scope for China and India to cooperate towards providing Common Public Good at Sea (CPGAS). The perils at sea are numerous from weather to maritime criminals, which do not distinguish nationalities. Similarly, a warship's response to such perils to human activity and disorder at sea is unrelated to its nationality. For any merchant vessel cruising in the high seas, the mere presence of a naval ship in the vicinity is a source of immense security. In May 2011, an Indian warship undertook an operation to rescue a Chinese cargo ship from Somali pirates.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, for an Indian mariner sailing in the Gulf of Aden, for example, sighting a Chinese warship would be a source of comfort nearly as much comfort as an Indian warship.

CPGAS needs to be seen in context of maritime commerce, and thus the MSR. Although it is surprising that the MSR concept does not mention 'maritime security and safety' at all, cooperation between the navies of India and China would be essential for security and safety of sea trade along the MSR. However, until a degree of mutual trust is developed, the Indian and Chinese naval units operating in the same area are likely to engage in snooping on each other. Such activity is pregnant with immense risks, given the absence of an established code of conduct during unplanned naval encounters.

Reciprocal Arrangement

While China has vital economic stakes in the Indian Ocean, the same is true for Indian interests in the Western Pacific. The maritime forces of China and India could institute a reciprocal arrangement to provide for maritime safety and security of each other's nationals and assets in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean respectively.

¹⁸⁵ Jane Parlez and Chris Buckley, 'China Retools Its Military With a First Overseas Outpost in Djibouti', *The New York Times*, 26 November 2015, at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/asia/china-military-presence-djibouti-africa.html?_r=0

¹⁸⁶ 'Indian Navy thwarts pirate attack; rescues Chinese vessel, crew', NDTV, 06 May 2011, at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indian-navy-thwarts-pirate-attack-rescues-chinese-vessel-crew-455057>

This does not imply that the PLA Navy need not operate in the Indian Ocean and vice versa. However, since most maritime-security missions would need low-end policing and constabulary forces, rather than sophisticated warships, these tasks could be performed by coast-guards, rather than the PLA Navy and the Indian Navy. For example, China's vital interests lie in the Bay of Bengal in terms of the Kyakphu oil and gas terminal. In this case, the Indian Coast Guard (and the policing assets of the Indian Navy) could easily provide security to these assets in conjunction with Myanmar Navy. Another example is the safety and security of Chinese nationals and assets engaged in seabed exploration and mining in the Indian Ocean.

Naval Cooperation with Third Country

Although the potential areas for maritime security cooperation are plenty, China's military-strategic interface with Pakistan is a major factor that breeds mistrust, and impedes India-China cooperation. Possibly, Beijing harbours similar apprehensions on New Delhi's relations with the countries in the Western Pacific. While sovereign states are free to choose their friends, China and India would need to factor the implications of naval and defence interactions with any third country. For example, China's assistance to Pakistan to develop and deploy sea-based tactical nuclear weapons not only complicates India's security calculus, but is also inherently destabilising for the region.

It seems that through Pakistan, China seeks to keep India strategically focussed in its west, and dilute its increasing maritime-military capabilities in its east. Even if such a perception is baseless, it is strong enough to impede maritime security cooperation with China. Notwithstanding, it is pertinent to note that Beijing has imposed a major restraint upon Islamabad on some occasions when Pakistan has tried to create trouble for India through proxy war – such as during the Kargil Conflict of 1999 – a fact that has been widely noted and appreciated in India.

Naval Access Facilities

Some reports indicate the likelihood that alike Djibouti, the Pakistani port of Gwadar being developed by China would also be used by the PLA Navy. China's acquisition of overseas military access facilities in the IOR may be justified as necessary for 'maritime security and safety' which is inextricably linked to maritime economics, and thus, to the MSR. However, the lack of transparency again becomes an issue of concern. If only China could share with India its plans to develop access facilities in the IOR, it is likely to be welcomed in New Delhi. On its part, India could reciprocate by sharing with China information and plans on its access facilities in the Western Pacific.

The visits of China's Song and Yuan-class submarines to Colombo (September-October 2014) and Karachi (March-May 2015) represent specific cases in this context. The visits caused much tension in New Delhi, primarily caused by the media hype. Only if Beijing could have intimated New Delhi in advance about the submarine visits, the media could have been silenced and mutual trust between the two countries maintained.

The 'Geopolitical' Dimension

It is necessary for us to realize that China's MSR concept and the Indian concepts of Mausam, Spice Route and Cotton Route not only serve to reinforce economic connectivity and/ or strengthen cultural ties across the oceans, but also collectively represent the reincarnation (re-birth) of Asia's erstwhile rich maritime heritage, and thus bear strong geopolitical ramifications.

China and India would need to develop these concepts together to attain their rightful place in the global order. It may be recalled that half a millennium ago, the two countries led the world in nearly every domain of human endeavour and together contributed to one-fourth of the world's combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

It is also necessary for us to recognize the fact that a navy plays a major role for their country as an instrument of foreign policy. The humanitarian missions and stability operations undertaken by navies also enable the countries to fulfil their international commitments. One may call it by any name – either 'Common Public Good at Sea' (CPGAS) or 'Military Ops other than War' (MOOTW). China and India would need to facilitate this role of each-others' navies in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean respectively. In this context, it may be recalled that during the Annual Defence Dialogue (ADD) held in Beijing in April 2015, the representatives of the two had discussed a reciprocal arrangement of providing rest and recuperation facilities.¹⁸⁷

In the Indo-Pacific region, the responsibility of providing CPGAS has traditionally been shouldered by the naval forces of the United States (US), whereas the regional countries – beset by capacity constraints of their maritime forces – have adopted a 'free-rider' approach. This reality has compelled the regional multilateral organisations to accept the so-called 'inclusive approach' to security, wherein 'inclusion' refers primarily to U.S. and the U.S.-led 'coalition of the willing'. This has led to a skewed geopolitical

¹⁸⁷ 'Indian Media: Chinese Navy's port call at Mumbai a Positive Footnote', China Military Online, 24 July 2015, at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/pla-daily-commentary/2015-07/24/content_6599658.htm

environment in the region. In such a scenario, the involvement of India and China as resident naval powers will serve better, including to prevent dominance of a monolithic group of extra-regional western powers. China and India could even facilitate the involvement of Russia under the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-China-South Africa) banner.

However, if China and India were to be able to act in consort to achieve these common objectives, the resolution of outstanding border dispute would be essential for China to attain access to the Indian Ocean to support its naval forces in the IOR that are engaged in furthering China's foreign policy in the IOR. This would be in the broader interest of India and the IOR countries in general, since China would be able to play a greater role in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), temper the dominance of monolithic extra-regional powers (the US and its allies) and even shape policy in IOR's multilateral institutions.

Conclusion

The resolution of outstanding border dispute between China and India, and tempering of the former's strategic and defence ties with Pakistan are not merely essential for building trust, but to realize the full potential of China's plans to attain direct access to the Indian Ocean and to cooperate with India at sea. At least a demonstrated will on part of China to address these Indian concerns and symbolic gestures such as enhanced diplomatic communications and India's membership of global institutions like the UN Security Council and the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) would contribute significantly to build mutual confidence.

¹⁸⁸It is possible that even without addressing these two key areas of concern to India, given the imperatives of good neighbourly relations, the Indian leadership may be able to forge cooperative maritime ties with China. After all, the Indian Navy and the PLA Navy have been coordinating their counter-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden since 2008. However, unless these two essential prerequisites are fulfilled, the leadership will tend to perceive their interface at sea through the 'zero-sum' rather than a 'positive-sum' lens, and any cooperation would not be substantive and meaningful, only a superficial measure, which could, at best, lead to improving 'atmospherics', and possibly an incremental confidence building.

First China-India Maritime Dialogue: Beyond ‘Icebreaking’

23 February 2016

On 4th February 2016, India and China held their first-ever ‘Maritime Affairs Dialogue’ at New Delhi. While the Indian side was led by the Joint Secretary (Disarmament and International Security Affairs) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Chinese delegation was led by the Assistant Minister of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Given that the two sides agreed to institutionalize a dialogue, the inaugural event was indeed a ‘seminal’. Although the details of the discussions are not yet available in the public domain, this essay attempts to extrapolate the open-source reports, and ‘look beyond’ it in context of emerging imperatives.

Since the turn of the new millennium, or even earlier, it began to be realized and acknowledged world-wide that the texture of future security and geopolitical environment in the ‘resurgent’ Asia will depend much upon how the two resident regional powers – India and China – will shape their relations at the bilateral level. The two countries have traditionally been continental neighbours. However, since at least a decade ago, the waters of the Indo-Pacific have become an arena for a maritime interface between the two in diverse arenas encompassing geopolitics, economics and security issues. The need, therefore, for the two countries to institutionalize a maritime dialogue has been long overdue. It may be recalled that the foreign ministers of two sides had first decided to initiate the maritime dialogue nearly four years ago in March 2012¹⁸⁹. Such an arrangement is essential to foster cooperation, while also preventing unproductive competition and confrontation.

Soon after the first Dialogue, the Indian MEA issued a press-release¹⁹⁰ indicating its essentials. It states,

¹⁸⁹ Shubhajit Roy, “India, China to start ‘maritime dialogue’”, Archive, 02 Mar 12, at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/india-china-to-start--maritime-dialogue-/918922/>

¹⁹⁰ “Inaugural India-China Maritime Affairs Dialogue”, Ministry of external Affairs, 04 Feb 16, at <http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26317/Inaugural+IndiaChina+Maritime+Affairs+Dialogue>

“The dialogue covered issues of mutual interest, including exchange of perspectives on maritime security, developments in international regimes such as UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982) and (the other) IMO (-related treaties) and prospects for maritime cooperation”.

The Chinese MFA press-release¹⁹¹ on the Dialogue states,

“Both sides introduced their respective maritime development strategies and their respective stance and views on current maritime security situation, and agreed to enhance policy dialogue and expand practical cooperation in such areas as marine scientific research, navy exchanges, fishery and navigation in a joint effort to ensure maritime security and harmony.”

The ‘exchange of views and perspectives on maritime security’ may have begun with the two sides drawing satisfaction from the successful multinational anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, wherein India and China have been coordinating their policies and naval operations since 2008, including at the ‘Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia’ (CGPCS). The discussions may have also included other issues relating to good order at sea in the Indo-Pacific region.

The “international regimes” are likely to have been discussed in the context of the developments in the South China Sea (SCS) relating to the maritime-territorial disputes, freedom of navigation and resource exploration. These discussions would have been valuable for both sides. For India, it is necessary to tell China its position on its hydrocarbon exploration in the SCS and its growing naval engagements with the other SCS littoral countries. To China, it was an opportunity to present its perspectives, achieve transparency of policies and allay concerns of the regional countries over its increased politico-military assertiveness in the region.

It seems, however, that the first India-China Maritime Dialogue was essentially an ‘ice-breaker’; and in their own ways, both sides had envisaged their objectives to be rather limited, and rather symbolic. Since the Indian side was led by a Joint Secretary, the representation from the ‘functional’ agencies/ navy would have been pitched at the

¹⁹¹ “China and India Hold First Round of Dialogue on Maritime Cooperation”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 06 Feb 16, at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1339176.shtml

‘Director/ one-star’ level or even below. From China’s perspective, the dialogue seems to have been accorded even lesser significance. The photograph released by the Chinese MFA indicates that the Chinese side did not have any naval representation at all, at least not in uniform.

Notably, two days earlier, a Chinese delegation under the same leadership was in Islamabad for the second China-Pakistan Maritime Dialogue¹⁹²; the first dialogue having been held in Beijing in July 2014. Since Pakistan’s delegation was headed by an Additional Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, functionaries much above the ‘Director/ one-star’ level would have been represented. The Islamabad event itself, the higher level of representation and the indicative scope of the discussions encompassing ‘maritime connectivity’, ‘security of international shipping lanes’ (ISL), ‘marine scientific research’, ‘search and rescue’ and ‘naval and coast-guard cooperation’ reveal the difference.

On the Dialogue in New Delhi, neither the Indian nor the Chinese official report mentions any discussion on China’s ‘Maritime Silk Road’ (MSR) initiative, which is surprising. Further, the discussions on ‘practical cooperation’ on each of the issues mentioned in the Chinese MFA report is unlikely to have gone beyond China gauging whether and to what extent India is amenable to the prospect of cooperation on a particular issue. The mention of ‘marine scientific research’ is particularly instructive. It is a pointer to China’s emergence as a major maritime power and its intent to undertake such research in the Indian Ocean, with major strategic implications for India.

The next round of the India-China Maritime Dialogue is planned to “be held in Beijing on a mutually convenient date”. The agenda for this – and the ensuing dialogues – may need to be more ‘encompassing’, and include key issues that hold the key to a ‘harmonious’ maritime interface between the two countries. Most of these substantive issues broadly relate to China’s strategic intent in the Indian Ocean. These include ironing out the prevailing ambiguities on China’s MSR initiative; the rationale behind its emphasis on cooperating for ‘marine scientific research’; and an agreement on a naval

¹⁹² “China and Pakistan Hold Second Round of Dialogue on Maritime Cooperation”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, 03 Feb 16, at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1338748.shtml

code of conduct; both for force deployments and unintended tactical encounters, which could be reciprocated by India with regard to its own naval units in the western Pacific.

To address these issues, Dr Ouyang Gouxing of China's Hainan Academy for World Watch (HNIWW) aptly recommends a 2+2 Dialogue, wherein both sides are represented at the apex level by their respective foreign and defence ministries. He adds that the Chinese delegation would need to include a PLA Navy contingent from its South Sea Fleet (SSF), which is being integrated to the South War Zone responsible for China's Indian Ocean strategy. India may also need to upgrade its naval participation accordingly. Hopefully, in due course, the two sides would be able to transcend bilateral issues and develop sufficient mutual trust to contribute to maritime security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

‘Net Security Provider’ Defined: An Analysis of India’s New Maritime Strategy-2015

23 November 2015

During the Naval Commanders Conference held in New Delhi on 26 October 2015, the Indian Defence Minister Shri Manohar Parrikar released India’s revised maritime-military strategy titled, ‘Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy’ (IMSS-2015). It supersedes the 2007 strategy document titled, ‘Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime-Military Strategy (IMMS-2007)’. This essay seeks to examine the salient features of the new strategy, including in comparison to IMMS-2007.

IMSS-2015 is the first strategy document released by the Indian Navy since the 26 November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai (26/11), when *jihadi* operatives well-versed in nautical skills used the sea route from Karachi to Mumbai, and carried out dastardly cold-blooded killings in India’s ‘financial capital’. In wake of 26/11, the Indian government designated the Indian Navy as the nodal authority responsible for overall maritime security, including coastal and offshore security. The new strategy reflects the overwhelming imperative for the Navy to counter state-sponsored terrorism that may manifest in the maritime domain, and prevent a repeat of 26/11. It also addresses India’s response to other forms of non-traditional threats emanating ‘at’ and ‘from’ the sea that pose security challenges to ‘territorial’ India and its vital interests.

While 26/11 may have been among the major ‘triggers’ for India to review its maritime-military strategy, IMSS-2015 clearly indicates that proxy war through terrorism has not prevented India to adopt an outward-looking approach to maritime security. The new strategy dilates the geographical scope of India’s maritime focus. Ever since the Navy first doctrinal articulation in 2004—the Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2004, which was revised in 2009—India’s areas of maritime interest have been contained within the Indo-Pacific region, with the ‘primary area’ broadly encompassing the northern Indian Ocean Region (IOR). IMSS-2015 expands the areas of interest southwards and westwards by bringing in the South-West Indian Ocean and Red Sea within its ‘primary area’; and the western Coast of Africa, the Mediterranean Sea and “other areas of national interest based on considerations of Indian diaspora, overseas investments and political reasons” within its ‘secondary area’ of interest.

IMSS-2015 is merely an expression of intent of the Indian Navy to engage with the countries and shape the maritime environment in these areas. Nonetheless, the Navy's multi-vectored and expanding footprint in recent years through the overseas deployments clearly indicates that the maritime force is developing the capabilities to implement the intent.

India has always maintained that the International Shipping Lanes (ISL) and the maritime choke-points of the IOR constitute the primary area of its interest. However, the new strategy goes beyond IMMS-2007 to include two additional choke-points: the Mozambique Channel and Ombai-Wetar Straits, which are strategically located at the far end of the south-western and south-eastern Indian Ocean (respectively). Through a formal 'recognition' of these choke-points, IMSS-2015 not only reiterates the embayed nature of the Indian Ocean, but also highlights—albeit implicitly—the Ocean's geo-strategic 'exclusivity' for India.

IMSS-2015 also clarifies India's intent to be a 'net security provider' in its areas of interest. The concept of 'net security' has hitherto been ambiguous and subject to varied interpretations. It is, therefore, refreshing to note that the document defines the concept, as "...the state of actual security available in an area, upon balancing prevailing threats, inherent risks and rising challenges in the maritime environment, against the ability to monitor, contain and counter all of these". In the process, India's role in this context also stands clarified. India seeks a role as a 'net security provider' in the region, rather than being a 'net provider of security' as a regional 'policeman'.

IMSS-2015 also expounds on India's strategy for deterrence and response against conventional military threats and the attendant capability development, sufficiently enough for an unclassified document. In doing so, it may be inferred that the concept of 'maritime security'—at least in the Indian context—operates across the entire spectrum of conflict. The new strategy attributes this to the "blurring of traditional and non-traditional threats...(in terms of their) sources, types and intensity...(necessitating) a seamless and holistic approach towards maritime security." Notably, in contrast, for the established naval powers of the 'western hemisphere', the usage of the concept of 'maritime security' is limited to ensuring security at sea against non-traditional threats, including those posed by non-State actors.

Although the epithet of India's maritime-military strategy has changed from "Freedom to Use the Seas" (IMMS-2007) to "Ensuring Secure Seas" (IMSS-2015), 'freedom of seas' for national purposes remains *inter alia* a key objective of the current strategy, which is sought to be achieved through the attainment of a more 'encompassing' end-state of 'secure seas'.

India's role as a 'net maritime security provider' in the region is not only its normative responsibility as a regional power, but is also closely interwoven with the nation's own economic growth and prosperity. The 'roadmap' in IMSS-2015 provides a direction to the Navy to play this role as an effective instrument of the nation's proactive foreign policy, in consonance with the ongoing endeavour of its apex political leadership, and echoes the enunciation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "SAGAR"¹⁹³ (Security and Growth for All in the Region). However, it remains to be seen how India's navy would effectively balance the rather conflicting national security priorities of ensuring territorial defence across its oceanic frontiers versus providing 'net maritime security' in its regional neighbourhood.

¹⁹³ "Mr. Modi's ocean view", The Hindu, 17 Mar 15, at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/mr-modis-ocean-view/article7000182.ece>

India Needs Sea-based ‘Active’ Deterrence against State-Sponsored Terrorism

25 Mar 15

In early-March 2015, the Indian government created a new post of Additional Director General (ADG), Indian Coast Guard (ICG). The ADG has been assigned the responsibility for coastal security off India’s western seaboard, comprising the coastal provincial States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Lakshadweep and Minicoy Islands and the Union Territory of Daman and Diu. Coming in the wake of the reported interception of the Pakistan-based suspect terrorist boat off Gujarat coast on the New Years day and the ensuing developments, it indicates that the Indian security establishment is thinking hard how to secure its western frontiers against state-sponsored terrorism.

Ever since Pakistan opted for proxy war strategy – leading to the Kargil Conflict (1999) and Mumbai terror strikes (2008) – the asymmetric threats to India have increased manifold. The rise of religious fundamentalism in West Asia coupled with *Al Qaeda*’s intent to shift their operations to the Indian sub-continent could encourage the Pakistan-supported terrorist groups to target India across its land or maritime frontiers. Following the September 2014 incident involving the unsuccessful bid by *Al Qaeda* operatives to hijack PNS *Zulfiqar*, the Indian Navy placed its warships on high alert. The alert was prudent since a maritime-terror strike may have been planned against India concurrently.

Besides the organisational revamp (as indicated by creating a new designation of ADG, ICG), a comprehensive response to the emerging threat may involve a re-appraisal of ‘concepts’ and the attendant ‘capabilities’. This essay aims to propose a reorientation in this direction.

Concept of ‘Deterrence’

Conventional deterrence is meant to prevent military aggression against own country by convincing a potential aggressor that resorting to force is not cost-effective, and thus not an option. Traditionally, India has resorted to a ‘passive’ form of deterrence. It seeks to deny the gains to the potential adversary, regardless of the cost (deterrence by ‘denial’). It involves maintaining an implicit, though credible military

capability, strategy and readiness. Since the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, a full-scale armed conflict has not been thrust upon India. This indicates that India's 'passive' deterrence has been effective to prevent a conventional war.

However, such deterrence has been ineffective against Pakistan's proxy war strategy involving the use of terrorism "to bleed India through a thousand cuts", which led to the Kargil Conflict in 1999, and the subsequent intrusions by Pakistan-based terrorist groups into India via the land and sea routes. Conceptually, therefore, India may need to shift from 'passive' to 'active' deterrence. 'Active' deterrence requires the possession of a robust military capability for retaliation, and a commensurate overt politico-military posture that assures the potential aggressor of unacceptably high costs. If a mere 'possession' of retaliatory capability is insufficient, India could even resort to 'deterrence by punishment'. Also known as the concept of 'compellance', it entails infliction of escalatory punishment upon the opponent by effecting damage and destruction, with the threat of continued use of force until the opponent acquiesces to the demands. It is however, important to note that in the concept of 'compellance', the application of punitive military force needs to be carefully calibrated to prevent the outbreak of an armed conflict. This is particularly essential in case of Pakistan that brandishes its nuclear weapons capability – including tactical nukes – on every opportune moment.

The Question of 'Capability'

Over the years, India has been severely affected by Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Assuming that New Delhi does mobilize the political will to opt for 'active deterrence', it would need to address the question of 'capability'. Since the Mumbai terror strikes of 2008, the capabilities of the Indian maritime forces are being augmented progressively. These range from additions of new surface and air platforms for policing and surveillance, to incorporation of technological 'force-multipliers' like coastal radar and Automatic Identification System (AIS) stations and the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) for enhanced Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the coastal zones. However, all these are defensive capabilities optimised for coastal security; and at best, cater for limited 'passive' deterrence. For 'active' deterrence, India may need to augment its retaliatory capability in a manner that it can also effectively control escalation. Naval forces can deliver a retaliatory strike from anywhere in the international waters and from all dimensions of that space (surface, sub-surface and air). Furthermore, by virtue of its inherent attributes of flexibility and poise, naval power can be applied in a restrained or covert manner – through surgical or precision strikes – to effectively limit its escalation to within the threshold of armed conflict.

Hence, the Indian Navy offers a viable option to the political leadership shift from 'deterrence by denial' against Pakistan to 'deterrence by punishment'.

India's Yemen Evacuation: An Evolving Doctrine

21 May 2015

On 10 April 2015, India concluded Operation *Rahat*, its major civilian evacuation mission in Yemen, amidst a tense security situation. The mission involved the sealift and airlift of 4,640 Indians, besides 960 foreign nationals.¹⁹⁴ While the sealift was undertaken by Indian warships and transport ships, the C-17 aircraft of the Indian Air Force and Air India flights undertook the airlift.

Operation *Rahat* falls within the doctrinal rubric of 'Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations' (NEO), which refers to the evacuation of non-combatant (civilian) citizens from foreign countries affected by war, civil unrest or a natural disaster, to safe havens when their lives are endangered. The concept of NEO is articulated in the Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2009.¹⁹⁵ This essay seeks to analyse trends with regard to the major NEO missions conducted by India so far.

The protection of its citizens abroad constitutes the responsibility of the Indian government. As an element of its foreign policy, it can be traced back to the address made by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, to the Constituent Assembly as early as in December 1947. He said,

The history of Indian emigration abroad...reads almost like a romance...India is a country which, in spite of everything, has abounding vitality and spreads abroad...[something] that naturally frightens others who may not have the vitality in them, and they want to protect themselves against it...Questions then arise of vested interests that India has developed or Indians have developed there...While we cannot protect any vested interests, which injure the cause of the country they are in...undoubtedly we shall try to do our best to protect all legitimate interests.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ 'India concludes Yemen evacuation, 5,600 pulled out', The Hindu, 10 April 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-announces-end-of-yemen-evacuation-effort/article7088279.ece>

¹⁹⁵ Indian Maritime Doctrine, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), New Delhi/ Maritime Doctrine and Concept Centre (MDCC), Mumbai, August 2009, p.115.

¹⁹⁶ 'India's Emergence in World Affairs', Speech by Jawaharlal Nehru, cited in Sanjaya Baru, *Strategic Consequences of India's Economic Performance*, Routledge, 2013, p.462.

The Trend

For many decades since Independence, India did not demonstrate its policy with regard to the protection of its citizens overseas. It was only during the Persian Gulf War in 1990—when Saddam Hussain's Iraq invaded Kuwait—that India airlifted more than one lakh Indians from Kuwait and Iraq using civil airlines.¹⁹⁷ Notably, the evacuation is said to have been 'mobilized' by 'public pressure' in India, including the protest by the Members of Parliament (MPs) from the provincial state of Kerala outside the Parliament House.¹⁹⁸ Notwithstanding, the operation is considered as 'record-breaking' in terms of the scale of the evacuation.¹⁹⁹ During the second Gulf War in 2003, the Indian government, possibly anticipating a similar public sentiment, made an elaborate plan to airlift Indians from Kuwait using civil airlines; however, the ensuing scenario did not mandate its implementation.

In July 2006, the Israeli military offensive against Palestinian guerrillas in Lebanon placed as many as 12,000 Indians working there at immense risk. Fortunately, an Indian naval task force comprising four warships was in the Mediterranean Sea at that time. The warships evacuated 2,280 Indian and foreign nationals from Beirut to Larnaca (Cyprus), from where the people were flown to India aboard civil airlines.²⁰⁰ Operation *Sukoon* was pregnant with lessons at the operational level, such as in terms of

¹⁹⁷ When Iraq invaded Kuwait, there were 172,000 Indian nationals in Kuwait, and another 9,000 in Iraq. The MEA Report states that more than 150,000 Indians were evacuated, through most other reports state the precise number was 111,711 Indians. Ministry of External Affairs (Government of India) Annual Report 1990–91, p.32.

¹⁹⁸ A.K. Pasha, 'India's Foreign Policy Towards the Arab World in the 21st Century', in V.D. Chopra (ed.) *India's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi: 2006, p.222.

¹⁹⁹ The Indian government called it 'one of the most successful operations of organised evacuation ever undertaken in recent history'. Ministry of External Affairs (Government of India) Annual Report 1990–91, p.32. See also, K.P. Fabian's (Head of the Gulf Division of the MEA during this period), 'Biggest Ever Air Evacuation in History', *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* Vol. 7(1), January–March 2011, p.93–107. According to Wikipedia's 'List of Mass Evacuations', through this evacuation, 'Air India entered the Guinness Book of World Records for the most people evacuated by a civil airliner'. *Wikipedia*, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mass_evacuations

²⁰⁰ 'Operation *Sukoon* for the evacuation of Indian nationals from Lebanon', *Ministry of Defence* (Government of India) press release, 24 August 2006, available at <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=20224>

sealift capacity and a rapid repose capability.²⁰¹ For this, the Indian Navy's NEO mission received global appreciation.²⁰²

During the 2011 Libya crisis, about 18,000 Indian citizens were trapped in the 'crossfire' of the Libyan Civil War involving the forces of President Muammar Gaddafi and the anti-government forces. At that time, the option of airborne evacuation did not seem feasible due to insecurity at the key Libyan airports. Although the seaports were also temporarily closed, three naval ships (including INS Jalashwa, the only large sealift platform with the Indian Navy till date)—based on the navy's inherent characteristic of poise (sustenance and flexibility)²⁰³—were sailed off for the NEO mission (Operation Safe Homecoming). Concurrently, merchant ships berthed in the Mediterranean ports were chartered for the evacuation. Eventually, before the Indian warships could reach Libyan ports, more than 15,000 Indian nationals in Libya were evacuated by commercial ships to Egypt, from where they were flown to India by civil airlines.²⁰⁴

Trend Analyses

An analysis of such rescue missions reveals interesting trends, which cumulate to indicate India's increasing policy emphasis on NEO missions. The **first** trend is the increasing frequency of such missions. Assuming that there has been no major change in the global security environment in terms of the occurrence of wars, civil unrest, or natural disasters, this is the clearest indicator of India's policy 'reorientation' to protect its citizens abroad.

The second trend is the increasing numbers of Indians evacuated vis-à-vis the total numbers present in the affected country. While the 2006 Lebanon NEO successfully rescued more than 2,000 people, after the mission was terminated, about 10,000 Indians were still in Lebanon, and many of them approached Indian embassy in Beirut for their return to India. However, during the 2011 Libya NEO, 15,000 of the 18,000

²⁰¹ Gurpreet S. Khurana, *Maritime Forces in Pursuit of National Security: Policy Imperatives for India*, IDSA, Shipra Publications, New Delhi: 2008, p.73.

²⁰² 'International media appreciates Operation Sukoon', *One India*, 11 August 2006, available at <http://www.oneindia.com/2006/08/11/international-media-appreciates-operation-sukoon-1155299940.html>

²⁰³ Indian Maritime Doctrine, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), New Delhi/ Maritime Doctrine and Concept Centre (MDCC), Mumbai, August 2009, p.71.

²⁰⁴ Suhasini Haidar, 'Over 15,000 Indians safely evacuated from Libya', CNN-IBN, 12 March 2011, available at <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/over-15000-indians-safely-evacuated-from-libya/145637-3.html>

Indians present in Libya were evacuated. Most of the remaining 3,000 opted to stay back in Libya. In the case of the 2015 Yemen NEO, nearly all of the 4,500-plus Indians present in the war-torn country were evacuated.

The **third** trend is the increasing number of foreign evacuees. The 1990 Iraq and Kuwait evacuation involved only Indians, with probably the only exception being a US citizen of Indian origin, who was given a temporary Indian passport to fly to Delhi.²⁰⁵ However, during the 2006 Lebanon NEO, India evacuated 516 nationals of three countries: Sri Lanka, Nepal and Lebanon. In the recent Yemen NEO, India evacuated 960 foreign nationals of 41 countries.

The **fourth** trend is India's demonstrated willingness to undertake NEO missions in insecure environments with all attendant risks involved. During the 1990 Persian Gulf mission, the adversity for Indians in Kuwait and Iraq was more due to deprivation (such as the shortage of drinking water) and the impending risks, rather than a severely hostile environment that existed in the case of later NEO missions. This was particularly true in the case of the Yemen NEO.

The fifth trend is the employment of a larger mix of NEO 'vectors': civil airlines, military transport aircraft, passenger ships and warships. Such an approach facilitates the quickest form of evacuation; but more importantly, it also caters for diverse unforeseen contingencies. For example, while airlift provides the quickest response, if local airports are not available or if the airspace is hostile, sealift would need to be resorted to. In such cases, chartered passenger ships sailing from close geographical proximity to the affected area could be used, as was done during the Libya NEO mission. Further, naval ships are inherently self-contained and are versatile platforms to use defensive military force, if required.

Assessment

The above trends may be attributable to many factors that are closely inter-linked. At the national-strategic level, it may be the increasing self-confidence of an emerging power that seeks to play a more proactive role not only to meet its sovereign obligation and secure its direct vital interests, but also to contribute to regional security and stability. The NEO missions undertaken by India in recent years have showcased the benign form of its 'hard' (military) power, and its willingness to 'expose' its armed forces to risk while evacuating foreign nationals of numerous countries. Notably, the USA did

²⁰⁵ K.P. Fabian (Head of the Gulf Division of the MEA during the period), 'Biggest Ever Air Evacuation in History', *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* Vol. 7(1), January–March 2011, p.103.

not undertake any NEO mission in Yemen, and simply issued a travel advisory for its citizens to seek help from the Indian Embassy in Aden. Another key factor may be the increasing realisation of the importance of India's overseas Diaspora. This could be mainly because of the inflow of remittances that have nourished the national economy. For some years now, India has been topping the global remittance chart. In 2014, it drew a remittance of US\$ 70.38 billion, which constituted 3.7 per cent of its US\$ 2 trillion GDP.²⁰⁶ Notably, such remittances from the large pool of India's migratory workforce are considered more stable than other capital inflows. This makes it a reliable financial resource to tide over financial crises and economic downturns, and even enhance the recipient country's sovereign credit rating.

At the military-strategic level, India's growing strategic airlift and sealift capacity is among the key factors that have shaped the positive trends with regard to India's NEO missions. This is not withstanding some critical voids which still persist, such as a quick-response expeditionary capability, with marines integral to the naval sealift platforms. Another crucial enabler has been India's maritime doctrine that places much emphasis on the navy's overseas presence and surveillance missions. It is noteworthy that, on two of the three latest crisis contingencies necessitating NEO, Indian warships were cruising in the vicinity of the affected countries.

Conclusion

While the underlying factors behind India's successful endeavours in the NEO domain would need to be recognised and propagated, the lessons learnt from these missions would also need to be assimilated at all levels, ranging from national-strategic to tactical. One of these at the higher (national) level could be to establish a permanent organisational structure in the central government—possibly under the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) and in consort with the Ministry of Defence (MoD)—to continually monitor the safety and security of Indian Diaspora abroad. At the operational level, India may need to streamline its Standard Operating Procedures (SoP), and even its Rules of Engagement (RoE), for undertaking overseas NEO missions. The imperative to do so lies in India's interest in continuing to pursue the course it has charted for itself, based on the normative responsibility of an emerging major power, and the need to play a role that the Indian Prime Minister described in 2013 as a 'a net provider of security in our immediate region and beyond'.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Chidanand Rajghatta, 'India looks after its own remittance-rich diaspora', 13 April 2015, *Times of India*, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-looks-after-its-own-remittance-rich-diaspora/articleshow/46910153.cms>

²⁰⁷ Prime Minister's speech at the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony for the Indian National Defence University at Gurgaon, *Prime Minister's Office*, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 23 May 2013, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=96146>

Indo-US Logistics Agreement LEMOA: An Assessment

08 September 2016

On 29 August 2016, during the visit of the Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar to Washington DC, India and the United States (US) signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA). Essentially, LEMOA is only a ‘functional’ agreement ‘to account for’ the essential supplies and services that one country would provide (at its port or airport facility) to the visiting military force of the other – an arrangement that the US has made with over a hundred countries worldwide. Nonetheless, the significant symbolic and strategic import of the agreement cannot be ignored. Also, while the proposal was initiated in 2002, it has fructified at a crucial time. Never before in recent history has Asia’s geopolitical and security environment been so tenuous; or the strategic interests of India and the US so convergent. Understandably, therefore, the signing of LEMOA has grabbed much attention, and raised the multitude of questions and speculations. This essay attempts to clarify a few key issues, and appraise LEMOA in terms of its strategic implications.

In the past, India and the US have transacted military logistics, but on an *ad hoc* basis and largely during combined exercises. LEMOA would change the nature of transactions. Hitherto, each transaction was considered as a separate case and on every occasion, paid for in cash by the side using the supplies or services. LEMOA would entail both sides maintaining a ledger for the transactions, such that much of the debit would be defrayed against the credit, and only the residual balance owing to whichever side would be paid for at the end of the fiscal year. Notably, as a standing agreement, LEMOA is indicative of the expectation on both sides that logistic transactions would increase in the coming years, and expand from combined exercises to coordinated operations.

However, the signing of LEMOA has led to a perception that India has side-stepped “its policy of not entering into a military agreement with any major”²⁰⁸. Owing

²⁰⁸ Sushant Singh, “India, US sign key defence pact to use each other’s bases for repair, supplies”, The Indian Express, 31 Aug 16, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/manohar-parrikar-signs-key-logistics-defence-pact-with-us-3004581/>

to its civilizational ethos, India's foreign policy proscribes a 'military alliance', but not a 'military agreement'. In the past, India has entered into a plethora of military agreements with major powers on various functional aspects, such as development of defence hardware, combined exercises, and sharing of operational information. Specifically with the US, in 2002, India entered into an agreement with the US to provide naval escort to the US high-value ships transiting the Malacca Straits²⁰⁹. As another functional agreement, LEMOA represents no departure from India's enduring policy.

Even under LEMOA, India would be able to exercise its strategic autonomy. The agreement would not restrict India's strategic options since it is 'tier-two' agreement. This implies that only if and when the Indian government agrees to a US proposal to conduct a combined military exercise or operation (entailing a logistics exchange), will LEMOA come into play. For instance, since the India-US Malabar naval exercise is a standing arrangement approved by the Indian government, LEMOA will apply on all occasions that such exercises are conducted. As another instance, if hypothetically, the US seeks to undertake a coordinated military operation with India to flush out a terrorist group in a neighbouring country, based on many factors, India may decide to turn down the US proposal, with no obligation to offer the US forces access to Indian logistic facilities. Furthermore, as the Indian Ministry of Defence (MoD) Press Release specifically states, the agreement does not provide for setting up of a US military base on Indian soil.

The above leads to a pertinent question: Does LEMOA give the right to the US and Indian armed forces to use each others' military bases? According to the Indian MoD Press Release LEMOA pertains to reciprocal 'access' rights to military forces for logistic supplies and services comprising "food, water, billeting, transportation, petroleum, oils, lubricants, clothing, communication services, medical services, storage services, training services, spare-parts and components, repair and maintenance services, calibration services and port services". Even at present, some of these supplies and services would be available only in the military base of the host country. In the coming years – given the existing trends – when a substantial proportion of Indian military hardware is of US origin, the visiting military force may seek to replenish even ammunition, missiles and

²⁰⁹ Josey Joseph, "Navy Replaces Vessels on patrols in Malacca Straits", *rediff.com*, 17 Jul 02, at <http://in.rediff.com/news/2002/jul/16josey2.htm>

torpedoes from the host country. LEMOA may then become analogous to the reciprocal use of military bases.

The signing of LEMOA has led to apprehensions amongst a few analysts in India that the benefits of the agreement weigh heavily in favour of the US. Such perception may not be true. The US possesses numerous globally-dispersed overseas military bases and access facilities. In an operational contingency, therefore, the US would expect India to provide essential supplies and services to its military forces only if the contingency occurs in geographic proximity of the Indian sub-continent. Such logistics may also be required for an inter-theatre shift of US forces in an emergency – such as the Persian Gulf crises of 1990, when C-141 transport planes transiting from the Philippines to the Gulf were refueled in Indian airfields – but such occasions would be rare. In contrast, India has no overseas military base, and yet its areas of interest are fast expanding much beyond its immediate neighbourhood – notably, the Persian Gulf, southern Indian Ocean and the western Pacific – where its ability to influence events is severely constrained by stretched logistic lines. Access to the US military bases in these areas, facilitated by LEMOA, would provide useful strategic alternatives to India.

In sum, therefore, while LEMOA may be functional agreement meant to facilitate military operations and exercises, it would enhance the strategic options of the involved parties; and thus pose a credible strategic deterrence to actors – both state and non-state – that seek to undermine regional security and stability. However, to address the possibility of its negative perception in terms of India's 'policy polarization', New Delhi may consider entering into similar agreements with other major powers with whom its strategic interests converge.

Section IV

United States

Economic Dimension of US ‘Rebalance’: A ‘Back Door’ to China’s Containment?

29 May 14

On 15 May 2014, at a closed-door dialogue in Washington DC, Singapore’s Foreign Minister K Shanmugam stated that “the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) must form the centrepiece of the US’ economic rebalancing to the region”, and strongly urged all sides to work towards an early conclusion of the agreement.²¹⁰ The economic dimension of the U.S. rebalance is increasingly gaining traction, and our new policymakers in New Delhi may need to keep an ‘eagle eye’ on the related developments.

While announcing the ‘rebalance to Asia’ policy at the APEC Summit in November 2011, the U.S. President Barak Obama initiated his talk with ‘economics’; about how “the Asia Pacific region is absolutely critical to America’s economic growth”.²¹¹ Since then, whenever American policymakers and strategic analysts attempt to justify the rationale and imperative of the U.S. rebalance, a statement on the ‘economics’ is usually the ‘pretext’ of their articulations.

The pretext may be considered necessary for the U.S. to water down any apprehensions that the Asian countries may harbour on the potential risks of a balance of power struggle in their region. Besides, understanding the economic dimension of rebalance is particularly necessary for the regional countries, including the U.S. allies and partners. Over the years, these countries have developed close economic ties with China, and are thus concerned about the potentially adverse ramifications of the new U.S. strategy on their own economic well-being. The U.S. can hold no grudge against them; as someone said, “It’s all about money, honey!”

In terms of the ‘economic’ pretext of explaining the American rationale for the rebalance, the public lecture by Prof. Ashley Tellis a few months ago was no different.²¹²

²¹⁰ ‘TPP must form centrepiece of US economic rebalancing: Shanmugam’, Channel News Asia, 16 May 14, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/international/tpm-must-form-centrepiece/1109400.html>

²¹¹ Opening Remarks by President Obama at APEC, Session One, *The White House*, Office of the Press Secretary, 13 Nov 11, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/13/opening-remarks-president-obama-apec-session-one>

²¹² ‘Pivot or Pirouette: The U.S. Rebalance to Asia’, Public lecture delivered by Prof. Ashley J. Tellis, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C. at the *National Institute of Advanced Studies* (NIAS), IISc Campus, Bangalore, 03 Jan 14.

The comprehensive talk, which also covered the other two dimensions of the rebalance strategy – military-strategic and diplomatic – was well articulated, and revealing. The succeeding paragraphs are based on an analysis of his talk. He explained how the military-strategic dimension includes augmenting the capabilities of the U.S. allies and partners – besides enhancing its own expeditionary presence in the region – with the larger objective of augmenting strategic deterrence²¹³ against China. When viewed under the *realpolitik* ‘lens’, any realist – including in India, notwithstanding the Indian stance of ‘strategic autonomy’ – would have no quarrels with it.

Among the key ‘diplomatic’ measures is one that dwells pressure upon China to preserve the established international norms with regard to “the conduct of inter-state behaviour devoid of the use of force”, and the preservation of freedom of navigation in international waters. This is also something that the regional countries – India emphatically included – would welcome.

But the ‘digestive enzymes’ dry up when the ‘subtext’ of the justification for ‘rebalance’ says that the U.S. does not seek “containment of China”, as it did against the erstwhile Soviet Union during the Cold War. The difference is well brought out by Ashley Tellis. He aptly points out that during the Cold War era, the U.S. and Soviet Union shared no economic connectivity at all. In contrast, the U.S. and China today share a very high degree of economic interdependence. Given this reality, the US approach may be different this time. It’s not ‘Cold War-style containment’ alright, but is it ‘containment’ nonetheless in another form?

Possibly yes. It seems that Washington has adopted a hedging strategy. Even as it engages with Beijing economically – which it cannot possibly avoid – it intends to rely increasingly on three regional preferential free trade agreements, namely the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP), the US-EU *Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP), and the *North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA). The TPP presently envisages a membership of fourteen countries (the U.S., Brunei, Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam and Japan), and is more relevant in context of the ‘rebalance’. Ashley Tellis calls these US-centric economic blocs as “supplements, and not substitutes” of the WTO-based multilateral economic system. By terming these as “an extension of the global multilateralism represented by the WTO”, he not only tries to portray the U.S. effort in a ‘benign’ light, but also implicitly beckons praise from the international community. One cannot be too sure on this. While many other countries of the Indo-

²¹³ ‘Strategic deterrence’ must not be confused with ‘nuclear deterrence’. It subsumes all facets of deterrence, including conventional and nuclear deterrence.

Pacific are seeking such economic partnerships – both bilateral and multilateral – it is evident that Washington wants to make sure that Beijing is kept out of any economic bloc involving the United States.

Admiral Arun Prakash concurs with this assessment. He adds, "U.S.-China trade amounts to half a trillion dollars and China happens to be the largest foreign holder of U.S. public debt, and in 30-40 years, it may make sufficient economic and technological progress to pose a real challenge to the U.S....Given the prospect, in addition to robust deterrence, economic 'engagement' plus 'hedging' seem to be the optimal course of action for the US."²¹⁴

Ashley Tellis asserts that the emerging construct of the economic partnerships involving the United States "is to ensure that countries that are at a "very different" (low) level of (economic) development compared to the "mature and capital rich" powers are not included in Free Trade Agreements (FTA), otherwise it would be difficult to maintain a "uniform set of rules", thereby leading to meagre dividends for all. This really does not cut much ice. At a time when the roots of globalisation were sown soon after the end of World War Two, and newly independent nation-states emerged after centuries of subjugation by colonial powers, the disparity among countries in their levels of development was even more pronounced. Even so, the global institution of *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade* (GATT) did come into being in 1947, which was fathered by none other than the United States, and was later renamed as *World Trade Organisation* (WTO). Of course, in the process, the United States – unwittingly and ironically – also fathered the economic 'rise' of China. As Ashley Tellis himself admits, "aiding the rise of China through globalisation (WTO) was something the US may not have done...except in a state of absent-mindedness...if it had foreseen the results (China's 'rise')...".

So if the U.S. effort does amount to a sort of 'economic containment' against China, what may be its global ramifications? The U.S. is pursuing its economic strategy with much vigour, knowing fully well that it is accompanied with great risks with regard to the future of the existing WTO-based global trading system. But it seems this is a sacrifice that it must make to 'tame' the emerging "regional hegemon".

Another notable aspect of the economic dimension of the rebalance emerges when viewed in context of its 'military-strategic' and 'diplomatic' dimensions. The result is a contradiction. China's increasing forays into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) may be

²¹⁴ Based on e-mail communication with Admiral (Retd.) Arun Prakash (former Chief of Indian Navy), 24 May 14

the precursors of a shift in regional balance of power in its favour. Given so, very thoughtfully, the geo-strategic scope of the American rebalance stretches from the Western Pacific to the Indian Ocean (the Indo-Pacific region²¹⁵). This makes India *ipso facto* a “key state” of the U.S. rebalance. During his address to the *Shangri La Dialogue* in June 2012, the US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta also stated that the “rebalancing effort...places a premium on enhancing partnerships with (*inter alia*)... India”.²¹⁶

In contrast, in the proposed TPP, India is conspicuous by its absence. The U.S. administration’s rationale for keeping India out may not be too difficult to fathom. The United States cannot possibly include India without weakening its fundamental premise for excluding China – that the countries entering into trade agreements with the United States must necessarily be of similar standards of development. From New Delhi’s perspective, this does not bear too severely upon the economic interests of India, which is firmly in the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership* (RCEP) saddle.²¹⁷ But this does lead to important questions that the policy-makers in New Delhi’s North Block may need to grapple with. If the U.S. wishes to include India in TPP at a later date, should New Delhi be interested, considering that the premise of TPP is China’s ‘economic containment’? Would it serve India’s larger national interests?

²¹⁵ C Uday Bhaskar, ‘India and the Indo-Pacific: Semantic and Strategic Import’, *National Maritime Foundation* (NMF) website, 08 Oct 13, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/india%20and%20the%20indo-pacific.pdf>

²¹⁶ Leon Panetta, Secretary of Defense, United States. Remarks at the 11th IISS Asian Security Summit (*Shangri La Dialogue*), *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (IISS), First Plenary Session, 02 Jun 12.

²¹⁷ ‘RCEP important agreement for India: Commerce Secy’, *Zee News*, 04 Apr 14, at http://zeenews.india.com/business/news/companies/rcep-important-agreement-for-india-commerce-secy_97408.html

US-Japan Disaster Response Plans in Asia: A View from the Indian Ocean Region

The alliance relationship between the United States and Japan has been revitalized in the recent past. For the first time since 1997, the two countries are revising the “guidelines for bilateral defense cooperation”. While the review is underway, the US-Japan alliance is planning to institutionalize a disaster-management mechanism in the ‘Indo-Asia-Pacific’ region in consonance with the new draft guidelines which say:

“When either or both Governments conduct emergency relief operations in response to requests from governments concerned or international organizations in the wake of large-scale disasters, they will cooperate closely with each other as necessary”.²¹⁸

The U.S.-Japan alliance endeavour has got together American and Japanese think-tanks to conduct a series of workshops titled ‘(US-Japan) Strategic Assistance: Disaster Relief and Asia-Pacific Stability’ so as to understand the perceptions of the regional countries with regard to their acceptance for such humanitarian and capacity building assistance, and advise their respective governments accordingly.

The third workshop in the series was conducted at Tokyo in September 2014. The author was invited to the workshop to present the South Asian perceptive. The workshop addressed the entire spectrum of disaster management, viz the three R’s – Resilience, Response and Recovery. Hence, the perspectives of non-government organisations (NGO) and the private sector were also discussed. However, the focus of the workshop was clearly on disaster response, wherein the military forces usually play the primal role as ‘first responders’. Given the predominantly maritime configuration of the region, it translated into seeking answers on what and how the U.S. Navy/ U.S. Marines and the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) could do together in a joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) mission. For such a mission, the alliance is willing to partner with the key regional navies with adequate HA/DR capacity, such as those from Australia, India, Singapore and South Korea.

This issue-brief seeks to analyse this new development with regard to its drivers, the imperatives for the IOR, and the challenges for institutionalising the US-Japan disaster response mechanism in the IOR, including issues relating to India’s partnership. It also attempts to address the salient operational aspects of the US-Japan endeavour.

²¹⁸ ‘The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/guideline2.html> and ‘Japan, U.S. to compile interim report on defense guidelines in October’, *The Japan Times* (Kyodo), 13 September 2014, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/13/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-u-s-to-compile-interim-report-on-defense-guidelines-in-october/#.VBcWAPmSxQo>

The Rationale

The US-Japan endeavour is ostensibly a result of the spate of successive regional disasters over the past decade ranging from the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 to the March 2011 Tsunami off Japan's east coast leading to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. These also include the more recent Typhoon *Haiyan* of the Philippines in November 2013.

Besides human-security considerations, the geo-political imperative is likely to be a major driver of the prospective US-Japan disaster response endeavour. During the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, while the four navies (of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.) undertook the HA/DR mission, China was only a bystander. But since then, its capacity to respond to maritime disasters has grown significantly, particularly in terms of its naval platforms – notably large amphibious vessels and hospital ships – capable of undertaking HA/DR missions. The U.S. and Japan may have realised the emerging imperative of the 'Strategic Assistance' concept, not only to wield a favourable balance of influence in Asia, but also attempt to 'contain' Chinese influence, and thereby, its strategic options in the region.

Imperatives for IOR

The imperatives for disaster response in the IOR are too evident to be stated. The region – particularly the north-eastern IOR – is highly prone to natural disasters. The resilience of the regional countries to prevent such disasters is underdeveloped, and so is their capacity to respond to such contingencies. Besides, the increased use of the Indian Ocean as an international space for maritime and air routing has enhanced the likelihood of man-made disasters.

In the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the coordinated four-navy HA/DR mission turned out to be immensely effective. However, it was an *ad hoc* arrangement implemented *sans* Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) among the participating navies. While the success of the mission is reflective of a high level of 'operational compatibility' achieved among the participating navies over many years, military operations – even for low-end missions like HA/DR – cannot depend on 'good luck'.

The above needs to be seen in context of deliberations during the recent *Indian Ocean Dialogue* (IOD-2014) held in early-September 2014 at Kochi (India) under the auspices of the Indian Ocean Regional Association (IORA).²¹⁹ During IOD-2014, a consensus emerged that in the light of the uncertainties about the continued American

²¹⁹ Indian Ocean Dialogue, 05-07 September 2014, Kochi (Kerala state) India. Organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (India) and the ORF, New Delhi. The author was among the delegates.

commitment to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in the coming years, the regional countries may not be able to fend for themselves in terms of maritime security. The IOR countries would, therefore, need to adopt an inclusive approach, by welcoming the assistance of major stake-holders in the IOR like the U.S., China and Japan, including for disaster response and capacity-building.

Overcoming the Challenges

While the IOR countries may seek foreign assistance to tide over their adversities with regard to coping with major disasters, any such assistance would willy nilly involve foreign military forces, which is a sensitive issue for many regional countries. It is also important to note that for staging of relief supplies to an affected state, a foreign HA/DR mission may also need the cooperation of a neighbouring country. Some countries may view a western-led HA/DR mission through the prism of intervention. The 2008 case involving France invoking Responsibility to Protect (R2P) when Cyclone *Nargis* hit Myanmar²²⁰ has not contributed to reverse such perceptions. While the R2P as a concept may be legitimate, the IOR countries may perceive it as an instrument that possesses a high potential to be misused in the guise of HA/DR. The US-Japan endeavour would, therefore, need to be based on a 'narrative' that indicates the indispensability of foreign assistance for humanitarian considerations. It would need to build upon the U.S. and Japanese contribution to the Tsunami disaster relief effort the Indian Ocean (2004-05), which generated substantial goodwill for the two countries among the affected countries. The posture of US-Japan alliance would need to be seen as 'benign', and not motivated by geo-politics. An outreach to the IORA may also be helpful to overcome geo-political sensitivities. Humanitarian aid would be more welcome to IOR countries through direct bilateral dialogue, wherein there is no influence on its sovereignty, and it is treated as a 'partner' rather a 'subordinate'.

Some regional countries may not be amenable to any assistance under the aegis of a military alliance. This applies to the prospective U.S.-Japan endeavour, notwithstanding the scale of their efforts to project it as benign. Hence, a multilateral approach may be preferable, which involves the identified regional countries with adequate capacity to partner with the US and Japan. Furthermore, a trilateral US-Japan-India response may need to be avoided due to geo-political sensitivities of China. The HA/DR effort may, thus, also involve other key players like Australia, Singapore and South Korea.

The U.S.-Japan alliance may seek to forge standing agreements with individual countries. Track-2 channels would be valuable for the assisting nations to secure the willingness of the affected and other relevant countries. In the absence of a prior

²²⁰ Leigh Phillips, 'French call to force aid into Burma rejected', *EU Observer*, 09 May 2008, at <http://euobserver.com/foreign/26116>

agreement, the political-level acceptance of foreign assistance may be sought through diplomatic channels, before committing the HA/DR forces.

In the longer-term timeframe, the demonstrated willingness of the U.S.-Japan alliance to develop the resilience of regional countries to natural disasters and the capacity of their maritime forces would be crucial.

Operational Issues

The US-Japan endeavour may consider developing real-time Information and Communication Technology (ICT) links with IOR Disaster Response organizations for early-warning and response coordination. The initiative may need to enter into agreements with regional organizations and regional countries at the political-level for planning and coordination of disaster-response. Institutionalized exchanges with the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) involving coordinated planning and joint-exercises – possibly through the West Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) – may be helpful.

The geographical mandate of the US Pacific Command stretches from the International Date Line (in the far-east) to the longitude passing through the India-Pakistan land border (in the IOR), thereby placing the western IOR beyond its purview. This leads to a jurisdictional ambiguity. In the event of a disaster involving the western IOR/ East African countries, would the US-Japan alliance commit its disaster response efforts in the area? Even if it does, the challenge lies in establishing standing mechanisms/ SOPs and developing local resilience/ capacity before a disaster occurs. This would need to be addressed by the U.S.-Japan alliance.

The acceptance of Command-and-Control chain by the affected country may be an issue. Some regional countries may have reservations about a particular major power (the US, even an Asian power) being in command of the HA/DR operation. The ‘Malabar’ exercises have enabled the Indian Navy to achieve a high level of operational compatibility with the US Navy. However, the established SOPs for HA/DR missions would need to resolve the existing divergences on fundamental issues like the Chain-of-Command and Rules of Engagement (RoE) for Force Protection.

The resources of military forces are optimized for high-end conflicts. Hence, for lower-end contingencies like HA/DR, their capability needs to be suitably re-oriented. The key elements of HA/DR capability are the vectors, communications, medicine and sea-basing.

- Given fiscal challenges for dedicated capabilities, the key ‘HA/DR Vectors’ would need to be fungible with other high-end missions. Such ‘multi-functionality’ could be achieved through inducting large amphibious ships capable of operating heavy-lift helicopters and air-cushion craft.

- The second element is 'HA/DR communications'. The naval communications meant for high-end military used would need to be made compatible with those of government, NGOs and other civilian agencies involved in HA/DR.
- The third element is 'HA/DR medicine'. The capacity of medical teams and hospital ships would need to be reoriented from combat wound treatment of military personnel to a wide spectrum "at-risk" population (including infants and the elderly) and on preventing the outbreak of infectious diseases.
- The fourth element is 'sea-basing'. While tailoring HA/DR capabilities, 'quick reaction' is among the foremost of the imperatives since in disaster-response, 'time lost' is directly proportional to 'lives lost'. During natural disasters, land-based facilities may not be available. Hence, the concept of 'sea-basing' would need to be implemented more comprehensively than hitherto. This would need to include all its elements ranging from logistics to command-and-control, and communications. This would also reduce the concerns of the US-Japan alliance over force-protection issues, and to a large extent, the sensitivities of regional countries over sovereignty issues.

Lastly, while military forces may continue as the 'first responders', eventually, the overall direction of the HADR mission may be shifted to the political/ government level. This is the underlying philosophy of India's Disaster Management Policy of 2009,²²¹ that civilian authorities must direct national disaster management, even though the military forces remain a key component of its apex Disaster Management structure. Of course, the military forces would continue to play a major support role, such as for overseas & ship-to-shore logistics, sea-based communications, security and other specialized tasks. Coastguard vessels can play a valuable role in HA/DR – their employment would be more cost-effective, besides being less sensitive to the affected countries.

²²¹ National Policy on Disaster Management, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, Approved by the Union Cabinet on 22 October, 2009, at <http://www.ndma.gov.in/images/guidelines/national-dm-policy2009.pdf>

‘Indo-Asia Pacific’ Explained: An Assessment of US Maritime Strategy 2015

21 August 2015

In March 2015, the United States published a new maritime strategy document titled ‘A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower’ (Strategy-2015). It supersedes the one of the same title published eight years ago in October 2007 (Strategy-2007²²²). It is the first maritime strategy to be released after the US announced its ‘Rebalance to Asia’²²³ in 2011, and comes amidst seminal developments with far-reaching geopolitical and security ramifications. This view-point attempts to analyze Strategy-2015, including in comparison to Strategy-2007.

Jointness and Political Interface

Strategy-07 was the first-ever combined strategy of the three US Sea Services (Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard). Strategy-2015 maintains this feature, with is appropriate since the maritime environment is essentially ‘joint’, and therefore, any strategy relating to the maritime realm cannot be a single-service articulation. Besides, due to fiscal uncertainties the US is facing today, an inter-service synergy is necessary to avoid duplication of resources and optimise investments for capability development.

Notably, unlike the 2007 document, the new strategy contains a ‘Preface’ by the Secretary of the Navy, which indicates an enhanced political interface with the Sea Services, possibly in terms of both oversight and support of the higher national leadership.

²²³ “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s “Rebalancing” Toward Asia”, Congressional research service, 28 Mar 12, at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>

Indo-Asia-Pacific

The new strategy contains an explicit focus on the region that it calls the “Indo-Asia-Pacific”. While US officials have been increasingly using this phrase, the 2015 Strategy document is the first official articulation. The inference is two-fold:

- First, it denotes the realisation of the ‘inadequacy’ of ‘Asia-Pacific’ to address the emerging geopolitical, economic and security dynamics of the rising Asia.
- Second, while the phrase ‘Indo-Pacific’ has become more prevalent in Asia since 2007²²⁴, the US preference to use “Indo-Asia-Pacific” indicates that it wishes to be part of Asia’s ‘rise’ and derive the attendant gains.

Ends, Ways and Means

The term ‘strategy’ is defined as an articulation of ‘ways’ and ‘means’ to achieve the ‘ends’. In this context, Strategy-07 was merely a ‘primer’ to strategy. It referred to ‘ends’ in very broad terms, without going into specifics of security challenges. It avoided naming countries, either as adversaries, or allies and partners. While it mentioned maritime threats like piracy, it did not contextualize these with specific areas. It was also frugal in expounding on the ‘ways’ and ‘means’.

In comparison, Strategy-15 is a detailed articulation. It echoes the spirit of the US ‘Rebalance’ policy in terms of China’s naval ascendancy as both an opportunity and a challenge. It seeks to temper Beijing’s revisionist stance and dissuade its politico-military assertiveness through multifaceted engagement. It is also more forthright in defining the “military challenges”, such as the “Russian military modernization (and) aggression” and the (Chinese) “anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities that

²²⁴ Gurpreet S Khurana, “Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation”, academia, 01 Jan 07, at https://www.academia.edu/7710744/Security_of_Sea_Lines_Prospects_for_India-Japan_Cooperation

challenge our global maritime access....” Furthermore, it is more explicit on the ‘geography’ of piracy, the effects of religious radicalism and the fundamentalist groups. In terms of the ‘ways’ and ‘means’ too, Strategy-2015 reveals as much as a document in the public domain possibly can. It provides much detail on the US plans to allocate forces for the ‘Rebalance’.

Strategic and Operational Access

Since the middle of 20th century when the US rose to superpower status with the ability to influence events worldwide, unimpeded strategic access to the global commons and freedom of operational manoeuvre have been the cornerstones of its military strategy.

While Strategy-2007 did acknowledge the operational salience of dominating the realms of space, cyber and the electromagnetic (EM) spectrum – as integral to sea control, for instance – it conceived strategic access largely in the geospatial context: sea, land and air. Strategy-2015 goes beyond this to seek access and freedom of action in any domain—the sea, air, land, space, and cyberspace, as well as in the EM spectrum. In all likelihood, this is a declaration meant to counter China’s declaratory policy of A2/AD in the western Pacific, including the asymmetric challenges in the space, cyber and EM domains that Chinese military forces may impose upon their US counterparts.

Forward Presence and Partnership

Strategy-2007 had laid much emphasis on forward presence of the US Sea Services as essential for a major power like the US that seeks *inter alia* to shape developments in its areas of interest, be better prepared to respond to adverse contingencies, deter and dissuade potential adversaries, reassure allies and friends.

While maintaining the emphasis on forward presence, Strategy-2015 also explains how the US intends to achieve this more effectively, both operationally and

fiscally. It adds that the forward naval presence would enable a quick and seamless access to the US joint military forces, if and when the occasion demands.

Given that resource limitations envisaged by the US Sea Services, ‘forward naval presence’ is closely enmeshed with the need to develop partnerships with local maritime forces. The Thousand Ship Navy²²⁵ (TSN) concept propounded by the US Navy’s Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Mike Mullen in 2005 was rephrased as the ‘Global Maritime Partnership’ (GMP) initiative in Strategy-2007. As a set of informal arrangements, the GMP was also intended to “send powerful messages to would-be aggressors that we will act with others to ensure collective security....”

Strategy-2015 furthers the appeal for the partnership, now rephrased as a “global network of navies”. The document effectively communicates to the potential partners the rationale for such “plug and play” cooperation with the US forces *sans* “commitment”.

Force Design and Employment

Strategy-2015 describes “a force that balances warfighting readiness with our Nation’s current and future fiscal challenges”. This statement seems to be the mainstay of the force design and employment strategy of US Sea Services.

Strategy-2007 had laid down the intent to “tailor” maritime forces “to meet the unique and evolving requirements particular to each geographic region”. Strategy-2015, possibly driven by fiscal prudence, seems to have adopted a less ‘ambitious’ approach. It aims only to “align (existing) capability, capacity, and platforms to regional mission demands...by ensuring that our most modern and technologically advanced forces are located where their combat power is needed most”. It also seeks to enhance the

²²⁵ Gurpreet s Khurana, ““Thousand-Ship Navy”: A Reincarnation of the Controversial P.S.I.?” , IDSA, 28 Dec 06, at https://idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/AREincarnationoftheControversialPSI_GSKhurana_281206

effectiveness of naval forces by employing “new warfighting concepts... and.... innovation.” The innovations stipulated by the document include increasing forward-basing of forces “to reduce costly rotations...” and developing modular platforms like Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) to enable swapping mission modules in lieu of costly ship rotations.

In sum, Strategy-2015 is not only a quantum improvement over the preceding strategy document of 2007, but also sets a model for the other existing and emerging major powers to emulate in the interest of transparency in military concepts and capability development. Such transparency is essential among maritime-military forces that operate in the international medium, and particularly those belonging to the “Indo-Asia-Pacific” region that is becoming increasingly volatile, as recent developments indicate.

America's Expectation versus India's Expediency: India as a Regional 'Net Security Provider'

04 April 2016

During the 'Raisina Dialogue' held in March 2016 at New Delhi, Admiral Harry Harris, the Commander of United States (US) Pacific Command (CINCPAC) referred to the first ever tri-lateral (Australia, Japan and India) ²²⁶ ministerial discussions held in September 2015, which had addressed "maritime security – including freedom of navigation patrols", and proposed "expanding this tri-lateral to a quadrilateral venue", also involving the US.²²⁷ Later, while addressing questions, the crux of his message was that the high level of 'inter-operability' achieved during complex India-US *Malabar* exercises should not be an end into itself, but translated into "coordinated operations".²²⁸ The US Admiral thus prodded India – albeit implicitly – to undertake 'coordinated freedom of navigation patrols' in the South China Sea (SCS). Evidently, such patrols could be used to restrain China's growing military assertiveness in the SCS, and the process of legal norm-building in its favour in the maritime-territorial disputes with the other littoral countries of the SCS.

India has consistently upheld the US position in terms of being non-party to the SCS disputes, dispute-resolution through the well-established norms of international law, and freedom of navigation in international waters, including in the SCS. Nonetheless, the Indian Defence Minister Mr Manohar Parrikar lost little time to clarify India's

²²⁶ 'US, India, Japan Hold First Trilateral Ministerial Dialogue, Call for Freedom of Navigation', *NDTV*, 30 September 2015, at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/us-india-japan-hold-first-trilateral-ministerial-dialogue-call-for-freedom-of-navigation-1224830>

²²⁷ "Let's Be Ambitious Together", Remarks by Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, *The Raisina Dialogue*, New Delhi, India, 2 March 2016, at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/Speeches/Testimony/tabid/6706/Article/683842/raisina-dialogue-remarks-lets-be-ambitious-together.aspx>

²²⁸ Dinkar Pheri, 'U.S. push for joint patrols in Indo-Pacific region', *The Hindu*, 3 March 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/us-push-for-joint-patrols-in-indopacific-region/article8306481.ece>

position, saying that “As of now, India has never taken part in any joint patrol; we only do joint exercises. The question of joint patrol does not arise.”²²⁹

The case indicates an ‘apparent’ mismatch between the US expectation from India, and what New Delhi is willing to deliver to its ‘strategic partner’. This could be contextualized and explained through analytical insight into the salient policy pronouncements from either side. The most instructive among these are those articulating India’s role as a ‘net security provider’ in Asia. This essay aims to analyse such role to understand the ‘aberration’ in the otherwise healthy trajectory of India-US strategic relationship contemporary times, thereby enabling a better comprehension of the Indian perspective, and its compelling strategic and foreign policy considerations.

America’s Articulation

The ‘net security provider’ concept emerged during the 2009 ‘Shangri La Dialogue’, when the then US Secretary of Defence Mr Robert Gates stated,

*“When it comes to India, we have seen a watershed in our relations – cooperation that would have been unthinkable in the recent past... In coming years, we look to India to be a partner and net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond.”*²³⁰

This sentiment of the USA was thereafter reiterated on various occasions – both formally and otherwise – including in the 2010 US ‘Quadrennial Defense Review’ (QDR). The statement in QDR-10 predicted,

²²⁹ Sushant Singh and Pranav Kulkarni, ‘Question of joint patrolling with the US does not arise: Parrikar’, *The Indian Express*, 5 March 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/question-of-joint-patrolling-with-the-us-does-not-arise-need-to-cut-the-flab-from-the-military-parrikar/>

²³⁰ ‘America’s security role in the Asia-Pacific’, Address by Dr Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defence, Shangri-La Dialogue, 30 May 2009, at <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2009-99ea/first-plenary-session-5080/dr-robert-gates-6609>

*“India’s military capabilities are rapidly improving through increased defense acquisitions, and they now include long-range maritime surveillance, maritime interdiction and patrolling, air interdiction, and strategic airlift. India has already established its worldwide military influence through counterpiracy, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief efforts. As its military capabilities grow, India will contribute to Asia as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond.”*²³¹

India’s Articulation

The Indian political leadership and policymakers clearly supported the proposed role for India in principle. Addressing the top brass of the Indian Navy and the Defence Ministry in 2011, the then Indian Defence Minister Mr AK Antony emphatically assured India’s maritime neighbours of an “unstinted support for their security and economic prosperity”, and stated the Indian Navy has been:

*“mandated to be a net security provider to island nations in the Indian Ocean Region... most of the major international shipping lanes are located along our island territories. This bestows on us the ability to be a potent and stabilising force in the region”.*²³²

More recently, in 2013, the then Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh said,

*“We have...sought to assume our responsibility for stability in the Indian Ocean Region. We are well positioned... to become a net provider of security in our immediate region and beyond.”*²³³

²³¹ Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) Report, US Department of Defense, February 2010, p. 60 at http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/QDR_as_of_29JAN10_1600.pdf

²³² ‘Indian Navy-Net Security Provider to Island Nations in IOR: Antony’, Press Information Bureau, Government of India (Ministry of Defence), 12 October 2011, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=76590>

²³³ PM’s speech at the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony for the Indian National Defence University at Gurgaon, Press Information Bureau, Government of India (Prime Minister’s Office), 23 May 2013, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/mbErel.aspx?relid=96146>

These seminal articulations represent a valuable take-off point for the analysis on India's projected role as a 'Net Security Provider', which – for the sake of objectivity – is divided into three parts, with each one analysing a specific facet of India's broader national-strategic imperative for it to fulfil such role. These aspects are Geographical Area; Capacity and Capability; and Cultural Ethos.

Geographical Area

Primary Area of Interest

Notably, by virtue of its geographic location and peninsular disposition, India's most critical national interests are closely connected with events in the Indian Ocean, broadly in its northern part; and more specifically in the areas categorized in the Indian Maritime-Security Strategy, 2015 (IMSS-15) as the 'primary areas of maritime interest'.

²³⁴

In nearly all articulations on India's role as a 'net security provider' – both Indian and American – whereas the 'Indian Ocean' is the 'common thread', the phrase "...and beyond" has never been specifically defined. Arguably, the phrase would refer more accurately to the Persian Gulf or Red Sea that are India's 'primary areas of maritime interest', rather than the SCS that – notwithstanding India's increasing economic and strategic stakes here – is the 'secondary area of maritime interest'. (Such classification does not, however, undermine the criticality of the SCS for India's vital interests). In this context, India's Professor Mahapatra aptly enquires:

*"If India and the U.S. have not contemplated similar kind of patrol in Indian Ocean, what could justify India and U.S. patrolling waters of South China Sea?"*²³⁵

²³⁴ 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy', *Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy)*, 2015, p.31-32, at

http://indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf

²³⁵ Professor Chintamani Mahapatra, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, cited in Anjana Pasricha, 'India Rejects Joint Naval Patrols with US in South China Sea', *Voice of America* (VOA), 11 March 2016, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/india-rejects-joint-naval-patrols-with-us-in-south-china-sea/3231567.html>

Geo-Strategic Frontiers

As a related though distinct concept of ‘Geo-Strategic Frontiers’ is also relevant here. As part of a country’s military-strategic calculus, it refers to the geographical boundaries necessary for it to achieve ‘strategic depth’ against a potential State adversary. The recent analyses by American analysts such as the one by Professor James Holmes on ‘Get Ready, India: China’s Navy is Pushing West’²³⁶ (towards the Indian Ocean) is indeed instructive for India, and adds to the trends that were noted and analysed in India beginning nearly a decade ago.²³⁷ However, it is unlikely that India would need to extend its strategic depth vis-à-vis China eastwards beyond the Southeast Asian straits. Notably, these maritime choke-points constitute a major strategic challenge for the PLA Navy itself.

The ‘Geo-Strategic Frontiers’ of a country are also contingent upon the ‘capacity’ and ‘capability’ its own and friendly military forces to be able to influence events in the area within the said frontiers. This aspect is addressed below.

Capacity and Capability²³⁸

In 2012, the IDSA undertook a study on Out of Area Contingency (OOAC) missions by Indian armed forces. The study deduced that:

²³⁶ James Holmes, ‘Get Ready, India: China’s Navy is Pushing West’, *The National Interest*, 8 March 2016, at <http://www.nationalinterest.org/feature/look-out-india-chinas-navy-pushing-west-15426>

²³⁷ See for instance, Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘China’s ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications’, *Strategic Analysis* (IDSA), 32:1, p.1-39, at https://www.academia.edu/7727023/Chinas_String_of_Pearls_in_the_Indian_Ocean_and_Its_Security_Implications

²³⁸ The ‘capacity’ of a military force refers to its wherewithal in the limited context of its hardware. ‘Capability’ refers to the ability of the force in a more comprehensive sense encompassing not only its physical capacity, but also the conceptual and human components. For details, see Gurpreet S Khurana, *Porthole: Geopolitical, Strategic and Maritime Terms and Concepts* (Pentagon, New Delhi: 2016), pp.30-31

*“the reach of current air and sealift capabilities means that, realistically speaking, India can conduct OOAC operations only within the Indian Ocean region (IOR).”*²³⁹

Even while India’s strategic sealift and airlift capacities are being augmented, the aforesaid finding of the study is likely to remain valid in the foreseeable future. The same is true for India’s ability for other forms of maritime power projection.

The new Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS-15) aptly emphasises on the term ‘net security’, rather than ‘net provider (of security)’. Further, it pegs India’s role as a ‘net security provider’ to the question of ‘capability’. Accordingly, it defines the term ‘net security’ as:

*“a state of actual security available in an area, upon balancing prevailing threats, inherent risks and rising challenges in a maritime environment, against the ability to monitor, contain and counter all of these.”*²⁴⁰

The analysis of IMSS-15 clearly indicates that the Indian Navy seeks to contribute to maritime security and stability in its primary and secondary areas of interest, broadly constituting the entire swath of the Indo-Pacific region. For doing so, it is not only developing its own capabilities for distant operations, but is also providing ‘capacity building’ and ‘capability enhancement’ assistance to friendly countries of the region. However, since the November 2008 seaborne terrorist attacks against Mumbai, the sub-conventional threats to India’s coastal and offshore security will continue to pose major challenges for the Navy to deftly balance its force accretion and modernisation between the two competing imperatives of ‘blue water’ and ‘brown water’ operations.²⁴¹

²³⁹ *Net Security Provider: India’s Out-of-Area Contingency Operations* (IDSA/ Magnum Books, October 2012), p.53

²⁴⁰ ‘Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy’, *Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy)*, 2015, p.80, at

http://indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf

²⁴¹ Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Net Security Provider’ Defined: An Analysis of India’s New Maritime Strategy-2015’, *National Maritime Foundation* (NMF) View Point, 23 November 2015, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635838396645834619.pdf>

Cultural Ethos

As stated above, IMSS-15 dwells upon India's regional role as a "provider of net security" rather than a 'net provider of security'. Ostensibly, an additional aim is to dispel any notion that India seeks to act as a hegemonic power or a 'policeman' in the region. Such intent flows from India's cultural ethos and is closely linked to its evolution as a modern nation-State.

Another facet of cultural ethos is the pride that Indians identify themselves with based on their civilizational genesis, something more profound and deep-seated than the concept of 'nationalism'. Together with the afore-mentioned non-hegemonic stance, this facet manifests in India's long-standing policy of not involving itself in coalition military operations, except those mandated by the United Nations. This policy also manifests in the operational domain. Unless operating under the UN flag, Indian military forces are averse to undertaking 'joint' operations (like joint patrols), since such operations would involve placing Indian forces under foreign Command and Control (C²). The Indian Defence Minister's negation of the possibility of 'joint (naval) patrols' may be seen in this context.

Notwithstanding, the statement by the US CINCPAC at the Raisina Dialogue deserves more attention than it has received. He proposed turning India-US "joint (naval) exercises" into "coordinated (naval) operations". His preference for the term 'coordinated' rather than 'joint' is noteworthy. While in common English parlance, the two terms may be considered synonymous, the difference is significant in 'operational' terms. Whereas a 'joint' operation involves a unified C² of military forces, in a 'coordinated' operation, the forces maintain their respective national C² structures. In the past, the Indian Navy has indeed undertaken 'coordinated' operations with the US Navy on various occasions. The examples are the 2002 Escort Mission of US High-Value ships in the Malacca Straits and the 2004-05 Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) mission in the aftermath the Indian Ocean Tsunami. Even during the more recent anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden involving escort of merchant vessels, the Indian Navy coordinated its operations with the US-led coalition naval forces, as well as with the other navies deployed for the mission. The notable commonality among these operations, however, was that these were all conducted in the Indian Ocean (or its contiguous straits).

Concluding Remarks

The subtext of the US-India Joint Statement of January 2015 on “our diversified bilateral strategic partnership”²⁴² clearly indicates the broader strategic convergence and the fact that India needs the strategic partnership of America as much as the other way around. However, occasional dissonance in the bilateral relationship cannot be ignored. Notwithstanding the diplomatic ‘refrain’ as a natural occurrence between two major democracies, the dissonance cannot be slighted, particularly in the light of the emerging regional security environment. Also, the discord may does not lie in Indian’s longstanding foreign policy tenet of ‘Strategic Autonomy’ (or ‘Non-Alignment 2.0’), as it is usually touted to be. As in case of a few other facets of the bilateral relationship, the occasional discord mostly manifests at the functional level. In context of India-US military strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, the aberrations at this level could be addressed by bridging national policymaking with strategy formulation of the military forces.

Given the ‘overstretch’ of America’s maritime-military resources, and its increasing contribution to the Indian Navy’s ‘capacity building’ and ‘capability enhancement’ over the years, its expectation for India to provide for regional security and stability in the maritime-configured Indo-Pacific region is not misplaced. At the operational level too, the US expectation for India to convert ‘joint’ naval exercises into ‘coordinated’ operations may be justifiable. However, it seems that India’s broader strategic imperatives in terms of the three key facets of Geographical Area, Capacity and Capability, and Cultural Ethos are not in consonance with such expectations, at least not yet.

²⁴² ‘U.S.-India Joint Statement’, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 25 January 2015, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-statement-shared-effort-progress-all>

Will Donald Trump Rebalance the ‘Rebalance to Asia’?

18 January 2017

On 20 January 2017, Mr Donald Trump assumes office as the 45th President of the United States (U.S.). Six years ago in 2011, his predecessor, President Barak Obama launched the ‘Rebalance to Asia’. Among the key objectives of the policy were to engage with the economically rising Asia-Pacific, maintain U.S. supremacy in this region, and manage the rise of China. So far, clearly, the ‘Rebalance’ has not been effective for the U.S., *inter alia* in terms of bringing about an enhanced economic integration, reassurance of allies, or even managing military escalation.

There is much speculation on what the new incumbent to the White House Donald Trump would do. A few believe that Trump will unravel ‘Rebalance’. The mainstream view is that the Asia-Pacific is too important an area for the U.S. to disengage with. Nonetheless, the texture of ‘Rebalance’ may change. This essay attempts to lift the fog on this issue to extent possible, and examine its strategic implications for the Asia-Pacific, and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Those who have followed the U.S. election campaign are well aware that America’s electorate voted for a change. Trump, therefore, notwithstanding all his odd ways, did win. This will embolden him to continue to do things differently. However, he can do things differently only with regard to the functions that he understands well. This calls for an analysis of Trump’s disposition towards the three key dimensions of the U.S. ‘Rebalance’: economics, diplomacy and military-strategy.

Economics

Undeniably, Donald Trump understands economics. Besides having being a successful businessman, his book *The America We Deserve* published in the year 2000 is a rather compelling read. It emerges from the book that Trump believes that sound economics and economic strategy will lead to, not only effective governance, but also successful international relations. In the book, he lays a vision for the U.S. grounded in economics, and the need for America to have a ‘dealmaker’ President. It was perhaps with this strong conviction that he trashed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) without a second thought. Of course, this does not imply that the U.S. would hold back its economic engagement with the Asia-Pacific countries, only that he may seek more favourable arrangements, with a focus on bilateral ones.

Diplomacy

Does Donald Trump understand diplomacy? One cannot be very certain, but then Donald Trump thinks that he does. The reasons are evident. He began appointing key envoys – such as to the United Nations and China – without even naming his Secretary of State, whose advice he could have benefited from for making these key envoy appointments. He then picked Rex Tillerson as the Secretary of State. Tillerson is a former Exxon Mobil CEO, who has never served in the U.S. government, but is close to the Russian President Vladimir Putin. All these indicate the likelihood that Trump will adopt a self-willed foreign policy; but one that premised on rationale, which to him is ‘sound economics’.

Trump has irked China by ‘cosying up’ to Taiwan, but it also fits well into ‘the picture’. Trump may continue making noises against Beijing suggesting a review of ‘One-China’ policy and so on, but all this commotion is likely to be meant as leverage against China to concede to the critical U.S. interests, such as in terms of Beijing’s trade practices, about which, lately, Washington is not too happy about.

Military-Strategy

Does Donald Trump understand military-strategy? Here, Trump may find himself on a ‘sticky wicket’. Undeterred, he had wisely appointed the retired Marine Gen Mattis as his Defence Secretary, who has served in Iraq; notwithstanding the special waiver he would need from U.S. Congress for the post. Although Trump has declared that he would avoid repeating the “mistakes” of his predecessors in getting the U.S. embroiled in “costly wars”, he is likely to focus on the Islamic State (IS) and other forms of religious terrorism, which may hold his attention on developments in the Middle East/ West Asia, and its periphery.

Hence, the indicators are that Trump may be more inclined to be conservative on military assertion in the Asia-Pacific. Of course, this may change based on the developments, particularly the behaviour of China and North Korea. But in the overall sense, the U.S. assertiveness in the Western Pacific using its ‘hard power’ is likely to reduce.

Implications for the Region

The aforesaid ‘informed’ speculation on the likely U.S. strategic disposition under Donald Trump leads to two broad conclusions. First, China may assert itself more strongly, not only in Asia-Pacific, but also in the broader Indo-Pacific region. Such assertion could be centered on the ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR), and also involve a maritime-military assertion in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Furthermore, if the U.S. manages to rob

China of its emerging strategic ally Russia, Beijing may be cornered, and behave quite like a cat that is cornered – aggressively.

Second, notwithstanding the U.S. stakes in the IOR, America's security role in the IOR may be scaled down somewhat, carefully calibrated to prevent a 'vacuum' being filled by China; and possibly, coordinated with the European powers. This will ensure that the stakeholders in the IOR do not enjoy 'free-riding' financed by American citizens. In this scenario, India would need to play a more proactive role as a regional 'net security provider'. Though New Delhi has always been willing to do so, its challenge would be to balance the regional security role with the more pressing commitments of homeland (internal, coastal and offshore) security.

Section V

Other Countries

AUSINDEX-2015: Australia ‘Pivots’ to the Indian Ocean

October 2015

In mid-September 2015, Australia and India held their first-ever bilateral naval exercise, AUSINDEX-2015. The week-long exercise was held in the Bay of Bengal, and involved five warships, an Australian submarine and two long-range anti-submarine aircraft (Australian P3C and Indian P8I). A “pronounced emphasis²⁴³” of the exercise was on anti-submarine warfare (ASW). Beyond merely being ‘just another combined exercise’, it bears a far-reaching import, and highlights Australia’s national-strategic reorientation in recent years.

Traditional Approach

Until a few years ago, it was commonly said that ‘Australia and India are divided by the Indian Ocean’, which had an element of truth. Traditionally, Australia’s national security strategy has been characterised by a combination of a ‘maritime citadel’ and ‘Pacific-oriented’ approach. The former is best exemplified by Australia’s promulgation of a 1,000 nautical-mile ‘Maritime Identification Zone’ (MIZ) in 2004. While such an approach was considered necessary for Canberra to counter the seaward incursions by foreigners, it led to a perception of Australia’s ‘exclusivity’.

The Pacific-oriented prong of Australia’s approach entailed its strategic focus towards the southwest Pacific, where the island countries have been prone to political instability. Such instability could spill-over into Australia in various forms, thereby impinging on its national security. Notably, most of Australia’s developed cities lie on the eastern side facing the southwest Pacific, making it highly vulnerable to destabilising events in its eastern maritime neighbourhood.

Australian defence forces have often contributed to coalition operations in the western end of the Indian Ocean, such as in Afghanistan and the Gulf of Aden (counter-

²⁴³ Amitava Mukherjee, “New Strategic balances to emerge in Indian ocean, Asia-Pacific”, Gulf News, 05 Sep 15, at <http://m.gulfnews.com/opinion/thinkers/new-strategic-balances-to-emerge-in-indian-ocean-asia-pacific-1.1578841>

piracy). However, these were driven by Australia's need to fulfil its alliance and international commitments, rather than being 'directly' linked to its security interests.

Outwards and Eastwards

In the past, Australia's traditional approach may have been adequate to secure its national security interests. However, Canberra seems to have realised that the emerging regional environment has made it unviable in present times. An inward-looking strategic orientation has also been unhelpful for Australia to develop multifaceted engagements with the Asian countries, including in terms of responding to the vulnerabilities of the maritime realm and strengthening trade ties. In particular, Australia needs to expand its maritime security perimeter to be able to achieve situational awareness in distant waters, besides 'influencing' and 'managing' developments therein.

For Australia, whose strategic orientation has traditionally been encapsulated in the concept of Asia-Pacific, its re-orientation towards the Indian Ocean is relatively recent, and is evidenced in the conceptualisation of the "Indo-Pacific" region in its National Security Strategy (January 2013) and Defence White Paper ²⁴⁴(May 2013). Although the term 'Indo-Pacific' as often appeared as a geographic entity in the lexicon of Australian policymakers and analysts in the past, its formal articulation as a "new strategic construct" appears for the first time in these documents of 2013.

Where India Fits In?

Notwithstanding its sensitivities stroked by the Indian nuclear tests of 1998, Australia could not keep itself estranged from India for long. Naval cooperation was a natural choice to begin the engagement; in 2003, Australia began its participation in the Indian Navy's biennial Milan (congregation) of regional navies at Port Blair. It also participated in the five-nation Malabar-2007 exercise in the Bay of Bengal, which caused worries in China. In the following years, India sent observers to the Australia-hosted Dugong (2009) and Kakadu (2010) naval exercises.

Australia's quest to involve India in its growing maritime engagement with the Indian Ocean countries is clearly discernible. These include Australia's increasing

²⁴⁴ Defense White Paper 2013 at

http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf

involvement in the emerging discourse on maritime security under the aegis of the 'Indian Ocean Rim Association' (IORA) and the 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS), and the Track 1.5 Australia-India-Indonesia trilateral dialogue on the Indian Ocean (TDIO).

Australia and India have already established an information-sharing mechanism on 'white shipping'. By contributing to Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and Search and Rescue (SAR), India could mitigate Australia's primary concern of illegal immigration across the Indian Ocean. Although Canberra has been troubled since long by migrants from Southeast Asia, in more recent times, Sri Lankan Tamils and Rohingyas have also been trying to migrate to Australia in large numbers.

The China Factor

Undeniably, Australia is seeking partners in the Indo-Pacific region to ride the crest of 'rising Asia'. The salience of China is an economic powerhouse of the world is not lost to Australia. Hence, notwithstanding its alliance with the United States and its wariness about the rapid growth and disposition of China's military power, relations with Beijing will be important to Australia.

Nevertheless, it is instructive to note that Australia's 2013 National Security Strategy calls China "our key economic partner", whereas it calls India "our Strategic Partner". The essence is that as Australia develops its economic ties with China, it needs India and other regional powers and as a hedge against possible scenarios involving China that could be inimical to its national security interests. Ostensibly, the need to build strategic deterrence against China is a major driver for Australia's keenness to join the Malabar-2015²⁴⁵ naval exercise involving India, Japan and the US.

Indian Perspective

The PLA Navy's submarine visits to Colombo (September-October 2014) and Karachi (March-May 2015) are likely to increase in future, and involve nuclear submarines. Neither Canberra nor New Delhi draws comfort from unannounced forays of such stealth

²⁴⁵ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Australia Wants to Join India, US and Japan in Naval Exercises: Defense Minister", *The Diplomat*, 05 Sep 15, at <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/australia-wants-to-join-india-us-and-japan-in-naval-exercises-defense-minister/>

platforms in their maritime zones. For India, a partnership with Australia could check China's possible politico-military assertiveness in the Indian Ocean.

Notwithstanding, New Delhi will need to be cautious in any partnership with Canberra involving other major powers, so as not to send misleading signals to Beijing, for instance, on the prospects of 'Asian-NATO²⁴⁶' that emerged during Malabar 2007. For Delhi, therefore, the biennial AUSINDEX was a deft move to engage with Australia bilaterally, rather than under the multi-nation format of Malabar.

While AUSINDEX-2015 as a seminal event does not by itself herald the evolution of Australia's strategic reorientation, it does portend to be a bellwether for its enhanced maritime security cooperation with India. Possibly, in the coming years, the Indian Ocean will be more of a 'bridge' rather than a 'barrier' between Australia and India.

²⁴⁶ Gurpreet S Khurana, "India-US MALABAR Naval Exercises: Trends and Tribulations", academia, 05 Aug 14, at [https://www.academia.edu/7879273/India-](https://www.academia.edu/7879273/India-US_MALABAR_Naval_Exercises_Trends_and_Tribulations)

US_MALABAR_Naval_Exercises_Trends_and_Tribulations

The Maritime ‘Rise’ of Indonesia: Indicators, Intentions and Inferences

16 January 2015

In October 2014, while taking oath as Indonesia’s seventh President, Joko Widodo (popularly referred to as “Jokowi”) called upon his nation “to work as hard as possible to turn Indonesia into a maritime nation...”.²⁴⁷ A month later, during the East Asia summit, he recalled his vision of Indonesia being a “global maritime axis” (*poros maritim dunia*), postulating that concurrent to the ‘rise’ of Asia, the sea would assume immense salience for his country. He envisioned Jakarta’s pivotal role in shaping security in “the Pacific and Indian Ocean (maritime) region (PACINDO)”, popularly known as the ‘Indo-Pacific’ region. He said, “We want the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean to remain peaceful and safe for world trade, not used as a platform for the seizure of natural resources, territorial disputes or maritime supremacy”.²⁴⁸

The President also announced a roadmap for Indonesia through its new Maritime Doctrine. The national-strategic level Doctrine encompassed five key components: rebuilding Indonesia’s maritime culture, harnessing marine resources, enhancement of economic connectivity through development of maritime infrastructure, cooperation through maritime diplomacy, and capacity building of maritime security forces.²⁴⁹

Amidst the global focus on China’s ‘maritime rise’ and Beijing’s recent maritime initiatives, the recent political articulations by Indonesia and consequent developments have not yet attracted the attention these deserve. Assuming that Indonesia’s current trajectory on ‘matters maritime’ is maintained, it would not take too long for the country to become a major maritime power in the Indo-Pacific region.

This issue brief seeks to examine the key developments indicating Indonesia’s increased emphasis on bolstering its maritime-power. It also undertakes an assessment

²⁴⁷ “Jokowi’s Inaugural Speech as Nation’s Seventh President,” *The Jakarta Globe*, 20 Oct 2014, at <http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/jokowis-inaugural-speech-nations-seventh-president/>

²⁴⁸ Rendi A. Witular, ‘Jokowi launches maritime doctrine to the world’, *The Jakarta Post*, Nay Phi Taw, Myanmar, 13 November 2014, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/13/jokowi-launches-maritime-doctrine-world.html>

²⁴⁹ -ibid-

of Jakarta's rationale and intent behind such emphasis, and deduces the salient takeaways for India.

Economic Connectivity

Indonesia is the largest archipelagic state comprising 17,508 islands. It is geo-strategically located at the cross-roads of maritime commerce in 'rising' Asia. However, many of the widely dispersed islands of the archipelago lie isolated due to lack of economic linkages and travel connectivity. These insular areas cannot contribute to national production and distribution chain, and thereby to overall national output. Hence, Indonesia's geographic location and geo-strategic configuration has not yet been optimally harnessed.

This realization in Jakarta has led to recent measures to enhance inter-island connectivity and upgrade port infrastructure across the archipelago. Indonesia plans to build 24 seaports and import up to 2,500 boats as part of the plan to bolster inter-island trade and travel connectivity, which could lead to development of Indonesia's far-flung island provinces. To generate the necessary finances for developing maritime infrastructure, Indonesia has begun encouraging foreign investments. For instance, in December 2014, Singapore's PSA International and Japanese companies decided to partner with an Indonesia port operator to build and operate a container terminal in Jakarta.²⁵⁰

Jakarta has strongly backed China's new 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR) as a concept that would complement Indonesia's vision of being a "global maritime axis".²⁵¹ The fact that the Chinese President first announced the MSR at Jakarta (in September 2014) indicates Beijing's confidence in securing Indonesia's support.

Marine Resources

Until recently, Indonesia's national development program was largely inward-looking and continental in nature, leading to significant depletion of land-based natural resources. Lately, however, Jakarta is beginning to realize the enormous resource potential of its maritime zones that constitutes 70 per cent of its sovereign territory. The marine resources are critical to materialize Jakarta's development plans. The significant economic strides taken lately by Indonesia - Southeast Asia's biggest economy - has acted both an enabler and imperative for Jakarta to turn its gaze towards the seas.

²⁵⁰ 'Singapore's PSA to jointly build Jakarta terminal', Reuters, 20 December 2014, at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/12/20/indonesia-ports-investment-idINL3NoU402120141220>

²⁵¹ Shannon Tiezzi, 'China Woos Indonesia's New President', The Diplomat, 05 November 2014, at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/china-woos-indonesias-new-president/>

The need to harness its immense maritime resource wealth led Indonesia to assert sovereign rights over the maritime zones. Its demonstrated political will to settle its maritime boundary dispute with the Philippines and its increased assertion on its maritime claims in the Natuna Sea disputed with China may be seen in this context.

In October 2013, Indonesia launched its 'Blue Economy' concept to bolster the marine productivity in a sustainable manner and create new employment opportunities. New incentives are being provided to Indonesian fishermen including in terms of easy availability of fuel for their boats, and even fuel subsidies. With the economic growth rate of Indonesia's marine and fisheries sectors being already higher than the national growth rate of 5.81 per cent, the 'Blue Economy' concept is likely to become a major contributor to Indonesia's GDP.²⁵² The port development plan also feeds into the concept. Indonesia also seeks to cut down on the existing bureaucratic hurdle, which has been a major disincentive for its marine tourism and cruise shipping industries to flourish.²⁵³ However, Indonesia has a long way to go before it catches up with two of its immediate neighbours, Malaysia and Singapore.

Maritime Security

Given the geographical spread and scatter of the archipelagic state, territorial integrity has always been paramount security imperative for Indonesia, taking precedence over dealing with low-level maritime crimes such as rampant piracy in its waters. Particularly since the secession of East Timor (1999), Jakarta has been extremely insecure. However, due to financial constraints and the 'overwhelming' internal security distractions, Indonesia could not develop a credible maritime-military deterrent to secure this 'critical' national security interest. Its Cold War-era over-aged naval platforms were 'numerous' but 'numb'. As averred by the author earlier in 2005, "the relative numerical superiority of Indonesia's naval assets is misleading. Serious budgetary constraints have led to block obsolescence of platforms and shortage of spares....only 30 of its 117 warships are operational,²⁵⁴ while more than 300 vessels are required for patrolling vast maritime areas around its 17,000 islands...Indonesia's concerns of being unable to hold on to some of its far-flung islands are therefore not unfounded."²⁵⁵ Indonesia's 2005 "Green-Water

²⁵² 'Marine and Fisheries Sectors Initiate Blue Economy', *Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries* (MMAF) website, 07 October 2013, at http://www.kkp.go.id/en/index.php/archives/c/2671/Marine-and-Fisheries-Sectors-Initiate-Blue-Economy/?category_id=2

²⁵³ 'Indonesia Shows Maritime Ambition with \$6 billion Port Plan', *The Bangkok Post*, 07 November 2-14, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/business/news/441976/indonesia-widodo-sets-maritime-ambition-with-6-billion-port-plan>

²⁵⁴ Loannis Gatsiounis, 'Malacca Strait: Target for Terror', *Asia Times* online, August 11, 2004 at http://atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/FH11Ae02.html, cited in Gurpreet S Khurana, 'Cooperation among Maritime Security Forces: Imperatives for India and Southeast Asia', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 29, Issue 2 (April 2005), p. 295

²⁵⁵ Abdul Khalik, 'Navy warns of imminent disputes over 12 remote islands', *The Jakarta Post*,

Navy” blueprint for a 274-ship force by 2024, and its 2008 Presidential MEF (Minimum Essential Force) directive could not gather much headway.

While Indonesia’s economic and internal security challenges continue to prevail, Jakarta’s national policymaking seems to be striking a balance by providing adequate focus to its external environment. The Indonesian leadership has lately adopted a two-fold approach: First, it plans to increase the defence budget from the current 0.9 per cent of GDP to 1.5 per cent over the next five years, with the proportionate increase of monetary outlay for the maritime forces expected to be the highest. Second, it plans to encourage foreign investment to develop indigenous defence industry. The major sources envisaged include the US, Russia, China and South Korea.

Besides piracy, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in Indonesian waters has always been a major security concern for Jakarta. It is claimed the 30 per cent of the IUU fishing in the world occurs in Indonesia alone. The illegal activity mostly involves fishermen from Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, who are much better equipped as compared to the Indonesian fishermen. This deprives the locals the opportunity to ameliorate their livelihood, and leads to a major loss of revenue to the State.²⁵⁶ Indonesia has lately stepped up its tirade against IUU fishing in its waters through various *inter alia* diplomatic overtures with the concerned states, and a direct Presidential directive that stated, “There is no need to arrest them (the foreign boats involved in IU fishing); just sink them”.²⁵⁷ While the latter is a contentious issue in terms of international law, such measures are illustrative of Jakarta’s proactive approach to prevent such maritime crimes through deterrence.

The Indonesian leadership are also involved in serious deliberations to designate its East-West Archipelagic Sea Lanes (ASLs) – in addition to the already promulgated North-South ASLs – to avoid ambiguities and maritime incursions into Indonesian waters.²⁵⁸ The promulgation of East-West ASLs would also serve to optimise the utilisation of the new ports being developed across the Indonesian archipelago.

September 09, 2004 at http://www.westpapuanews.com/articles/publish/article_1209.shtml cited in Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Cooperation among Maritime Security Forces: Imperatives for India and Southeast Asia’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 29, Issue 2 (April 2005), p. 295

²⁵⁶ ‘New Indonesian Maritime Affairs Minister declares war against illegal fishing’, Antara News, 31 October 2014, at <http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/96351/new-indonesian-maritime-affairs-minister-declares-war-against-illegal-fishing>

²⁵⁷ Hasyim Widiarto, ‘Jokowi declares war on illegal fishing’, The Jakarta Post, 19 November 2014, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/19/jokowi-declares-war-illegal-fishing.html>

²⁵⁸ Dylan Amirio, ‘RI ‘must designate sea lanes’ to assert maritime sovereignty’, The Jakarta Post, November 18, 2014, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/18/ri-must-designate-sea-lanes-assert-maritime-sovereignty.html> According to Article 53 in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, archipelagic states that have not properly designated their sea lanes may see their waters become international passageways.

There are no less than 12 national agencies in Indonesia involved in maritime security affairs, five of which commit seagoing assets. The Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL), besides its military role, is responsible for law enforcement in the Indonesia's maritime zones, except the territorial waters, which is the responsibility of the Marine Division of National Police. In 2008, Indonesia's National Law No. 17 tasked the new Indonesian Sea and Coast Guard (ISCG) Directorate (under the Ministry of Transportation) with issues of shipping and maritime safety. The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fishing (MMAF) is mandated for marine environment protection and fisheries. The Finance Ministry's Customs and Exercise Directorate is meant for tax revenue. Coordination among all these agencies has been a major issue troubling Jakarta.²⁵⁹ The coordinating body Maritime Security Coordinating Board (*Badan Koordinasi Keananan Laut, Bakorkamla*) was revamped in 2007, but has still not been effective. Although effective coordination remains elusive due to the parochial interests of the concerned agencies, the emphasis of the current apex leadership is likely to lead to suitable domestic legislation to bring coherence of diverse interests towards national purpose. The indicators are already visible. Until now, the ISCG has only functioned as a Directorate under the Ministry of Transportation for shipping and maritime safety. News-reports indicate that the ISCG is likely to be designated as a full-fledged service responsible for maritime law enforcement.²⁶⁰ This also indicates Jakarta's intent to employ the Indonesian Navy for distant missions, which is in line with its 2005 "Green-Water Navy" blueprint.

Inferences

The commonalities between Indonesia and India are striking. These include the long-prevailing economic, developmental and security imperatives of the two countries, the geographical contiguity and similarities in terms of far-flung and scattered island territories, the post-Cold War multi-vectored foreign policy approaches, and the problems of multi-agency coordination. Another notable commonality that has developed lately is the top-down approach to policy-making, enabled by the far-sighted dynamism of their apex leaderships.

Nations refuse to learn from each other at their own peril. While Indonesia may have many reasons to lean from India's experiences and approach, the latter needs to emulate the positives of the former. The preceding paragraphs of this essay provide ample lessons for India based on the readers' own experiences and expertise, the

²⁵⁹ Ristian A Supriyanto and Siswanto Rusdi (RSIS), 'Maritime Security Agencies in Indonesia: More Not Merrier – Analysis', 07 January 2013, *Eurasia Review*, at <http://www.eurasiareview.com/07012013-maritime-security-agencies-in-indonesia-more-not-merrier-analysis/>

²⁶⁰ Kanupriya Kapoor and Randy Fabi, 'Indonesia to Create New Coastguard, Boost Defense Spending', Reuters, Jakarta, 13 November 2014, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/13/us-indonesia-security-idUSKCN0IX10220141113>

following text provides an overview of the salient inferences for India, as deduced by the author.

The most prominent takeaway is in conceptual terms – the need for India to articulate a Maritime Doctrine at the national-strategic level. This would lay down the ‘roadmap’ for the various organisations dealing with ‘matters-maritime’. As important is the organisational re-orientation in terms of inter-agency coordination. A cohesive approach under the oversight of a nodal authority in the central government would lead to enhanced coordination among the multifarious organisations dealing with maritime issues.

While India’s participation in China’s MSR concept would need to factor in the details of the concept and overriding national security considerations, New Delhi would need to materialize its plans for enhancing maritime-economic connectivity within the country and overseas through development of maritime infrastructure. The long-awaited ‘Sagarmala’ project for development of ports needs to be fast-tracked.

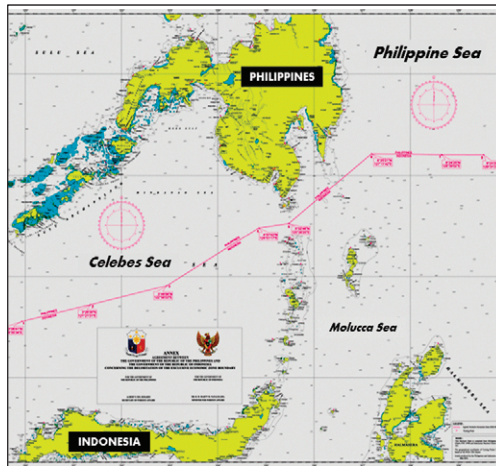
While far-flung and scattered island territories may be perceived as a liability, Indonesia has planned to turn its geographic challenge into an opportunity. It has been aptly realized by Jakarta that developing such connectivity will lead to the total output of these insular areas being more than merely the sum of their individual outputs. Good economic and travel connectivity among Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Islands/Lakshadweep and the mainland would lead to optimal contribution of these to national output, besides mitigating security concerns.

Despite its natural endowments, India has demonstrated a benign neglect of the emerging concept of ‘Blue Economy’. Its immense potential for marine tourism and cruise shipping needs to be tapped. It is instructive that IUU fishing troubling Indonesia involves nationals of all its neighbours – and even distant countries like China and Vietnam – but not India that is an immediate neighbour. In fact, it is the waters off Andaman and Nicobar Islands that are plagued by IUU fishing by nationals of Indonesia. The import of this reality is clear – Indian fishermen may be among the most poorly equipped in Asia. India’s fishing industry needs to be developed, including through assistance to small-scale fishermen.

Philippines-Indonesia Maritime Boundary Agreement: An Analysis

Date: 30 May 14

On 23 May 2014, during the Indonesian President's state visit to the Philippines, the two countries signed a 'milestone' agreement to resolve their unsettled maritime boundary. An Indonesian official gazette declared the agreement, and also carried its text and a chart indicating the coordinates of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) stretching from Celebes Sea to the Philippine Sea (Map 1).²⁶¹



Map 3 – Philippines-Indonesia IMBL

Interestingly, the IMBL settlement fructified after bilateral negotiations *sans* any external arbitration. It may be pertinent to mention that India's maritime dispute with Bangladesh is being arbitrated upon by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, with the verdict expected to be delivered in June 2014.

The intervening maritime area addressed by the Philippines-Indonesia IMBL agreement is not only rich in fish and hydrocarbon resources, but also encompasses key international shipping lanes (ISL). Official sources have not released the techno-legal details of the settlement. Nonetheless, a comparison of the geographical coordinates

²⁶¹ 'Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia Concerning the Delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone', Official Gazette of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia, 23 May 14, at <http://www.gov.ph/2014/05/23/agreement-between-the-government-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines-and-the-government-of-the-republic-indonesia-concerning-the-delimitation-of-the-exclusive-economic-zone-boundary/> (Accessed 23 May 14)

agreed upon (Map 1) with the equidistant coordinates of 2010 (Map 2) indicates that an 'equitable' settlement was based on the 'equidistance' principle.



Map 2 – Prospective Philippines-Indonesia Maritime Boundary
based on Equidistant Coordinates (2010)

The IMBL agreement needs to be assessed not only in terms of local maritime security, law enforcement and economic/ resource issues, but also its broader geopolitical import in the context of the lingering maritime disputes between China and the Southeast Asian countries. It may also be worthwhile to draw its implications for India, if any.

Maritime Security

Before the IMBL settlement, fishermen of one country were often arrested by the maritime law enforcement agency of the other country, for what the latter perceived as illegal fishing in its maritime zone. With a clearly demarcated IMBL, the fishermen would be able to operate in their own waters without fear of such arrests.

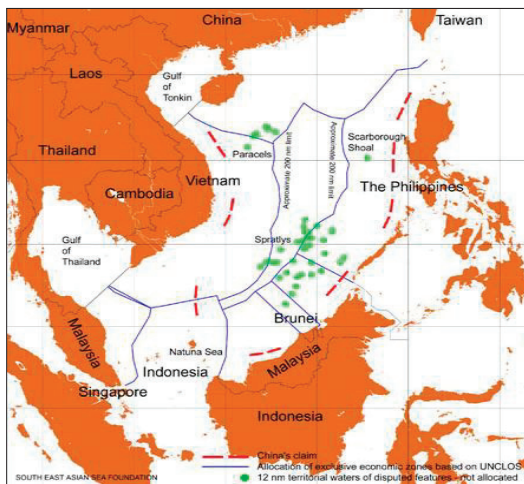
Another key bilateral contention was the issue of Filipino fishing vessels transiting the Indonesian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to reach their fishing areas in the Pacific Ocean. This is likely to be resolved now with Indonesia being able to formulate domestic maritime legislation catering for the rights of Filipino fishing vessels to exercise freedom of navigation through its EEZ, as bestowed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS).

The agreement would also help the two countries to check trans-national maritime crimes like piracy, drug trafficking and gunrunning. A mechanism for coordinated naval/coast-guard patrols along the common boundary is now conceivable, which could effectively deter such crimes. The pact would also enable protection of the maritime environment, including in terms of sustainable exploitation of living resources, as stipulated by UNCLOS.

Import for Security Forces

Attendant to the above, the agreement could be of immense help to the maritime security forces of both countries. Their navies and coast guards will no longer need to deal with the issue of illegal fishing across the established IBML, and would now be able to focus on the more exigent imperatives concerning their respective maritime disputes with China, based on the ‘nine-dash line’ promulgated by Beijing.

For the Philippines, the dispute encompasses the entire western swath of its maritime frontier facing the South China Sea (that Manila calls the West Philippine Sea) – from Spratly Islands to Scarborough Shoal. For Indonesia, the ‘nine-dash line’ overlaps with its maritime zone off Natuna Islands (Map 3).



Map 3 – Maritime Disputes in South China Sea

The IMBL settlement would also help assuage Jakarta’s broader anxieties with regard to the security of its 17,000 plus island territories. Considering the extensive geographical spread of the archipelagic country, Indonesia’s maritime surveillance and law enforcement capacity is severely constrained. The agreement with the Philippines would serve to contribute – albeit to a limited extent – to address the current ‘overreach’ of Indonesia’s navy and coast guard.

Resource Imperatives

Although both the Philippines and Indonesia are archipelagos with extensive maritime zones, their access to offshore resources – particularly hydrocarbons – may have been a

significant driver for the two countries to settle the IMBL. With the dispute with Indonesia (on its southern frontier) added to the one with China (along its western maritime frontier), the Philippines was constrained in prospecting for offshore oil and gas, or to make such offers to foreign companies.

Indonesia encountered a similar predicament. It has not yet demarcated its maritime boundaries with Malaysia, Palau and *Timor L'este* (besides the Philippines thus far). It had settled its IMBLs only with India (1977), Australia (1997) and Singapore (2009), which constitute a relatively small portion of its extensive maritime frontiers that bear enormous resource potential.

Geo-political Imperatives

It is well known that China has been asserting its maritime claims against the Philippines (and Vietnam) with increasing bellicosity. In April 2012 for instance, Chinese Maritime Surveillance (CMS) vessels clashed with the Philippines Navy while preventing the arrest of Chinese fishermen who were fishing illegally off the Scarborough shoal. In January 2013, the Philippines filed an arbitration case against China in accordance with UNCLOS Article 287 and Annex VII.²⁶²

Although Indonesia's maritime contention with China off Natuna Islands was dormant for long, Jakarta has lately been more vocal on the existence of the dispute. Chinese fishing activity in the area has also increased more recently, leading to Indonesia augmenting its naval deployment.²⁶³ In March 2013, for instance, an Indonesian government vessel *Hiu Macan 001* seized a Chinese fishing boat operating Indonesian EEZ about 200 km northeast of Natuna Island. Despite higher directives to *Hiu Macan 001* to transfer the Chinese fishermen ashore for legal proceedings, its Captain was compelled to release the men following threats and harassment by a Chinese patrol ship.²⁶⁴

The most pressing imperative for the IMBL agreement, therefore, is likely to be the geo-political dimension. Although bilateral meetings on Philippines-Indonesia IMBL delimitation began 20 years ago in June 1994, the process gained momentum after March 2011, when the two countries formally agreed to accelerate the negotiated settlement. The fact that the agreement was signed in the wake of China's growing

²⁶² Notification and Statement of Claims, Republic of Philippines, Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila Note Verbale (No. 13-0211 dated 22 Jan 13) to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Manila, at https://www.dfa.gov.ph/index.php/component/docman/doc_download/56-notification-and-statement-of-claim-on-west-philippine-sea?Itemid=546

²⁶³ Zachary Keck, 'China's Newest Maritime Dispute', *The Diplomat*, 20 Mar 14, at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/chinas-newest-maritime-dispute/>

²⁶⁴ 'Acts of Attrition in Natuna Sea', *Garuda Military* (Indonesian Military Documentation), 25 Sep 13, at <http://garudamilitary.blogspot.com.au/2013/09/kisah-gesekan-di-laut-natuna.html>

politico-military assertiveness to further its maritime claims and its hesitation to sign a legally-binding Code of Conduct (CoC) indicate that the settlement was driven by geo-political imperatives (and possibly, also the economic/ resource incentives), rather than being a consequence of technical (hydrographic) breakthrough in arriving at an equitable settlement. The agreement may be among the measures to pose a united ASEAN front against China.

As for the Philippines, the recent Chinese muscle-flexing was building tremendous pressure on Manila to deter China. The 'Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement' (EDCA) it signed with the United States in April 2014 may also be seen in this context.²⁶⁵ In such circumstances, Jakarta's cooperative stance is likely to have been driven by inter alia its emerging leadership role in ASEAN and its increasingly vocal endorsement of the use of politico-diplomatic tools to resolve bilateral disputes. While signing the agreement, the Indonesian President emphatically stated that "...any of the tension (sic) must be resolved peacefully without the use of military force."²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ 'Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of the United States of America on enhanced defence cooperation', Official Gazette of the Government of the Philippines, 29 Apr 14, at <http://www.gov.ph/downloads/2014/04apr/20140428-EDCA.pdf>

²⁶⁶ Kimberly Jane Tan, 'PHL, Indonesia ink agreement setting maritime boundaries', GMA News, 23 May 14, at <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/362317/news/nation/phl-indonesia-ink-agreement-setting-maritime-boundaries>

Implications for India

In the broader geo-political terms, any development that reinforces Southeast Asian solidarity – not necessarily against China – may be seen positively in India, particularly in terms of furthering its ‘Look East’ policy.

More specifically, any development – albeit incremental – that serves to resolve disputes and buttress established international norms – is also good news for New Delhi. Among the key norms is freedom of navigation. Such assurance is particularly essential in the South China Sea, which is among India’s stated areas of maritime interest.²⁶⁷

In legal-technical terms, the ‘equidistant’ principle of the Philippines-Indonesia IMBL agreement (though adjusted for equitability) strengthens the international norm as a basis of maritime boundary delineation. It may be recalled that India has always insisted on this principle as the basis of IMBL agreements with its neighbours, including the pending issue with Bangladesh.

It is pertinent to add that any dispute resolution process – even if based on equidistant coordinates – cannot possibly be completely objective. Even while technical aspects are examined threadbare, political ‘give and take’ based on realpolitik is a crucial determinant of any outcome. In this context, the Indonesia-Philippines case is instructive for India. A bilateral negotiation has the distinct advantage of greater control over the desired outcomes. On the other hand, an external arbitration leads to uncertain outcomes that may be sub-optimal for both parties. While the arbitration over the dispute with Bangladesh is fait accompli, it may be prudent for India to resolve the Sir Creek/maritime dispute with Pakistan through bilateral negotiations.

²⁶⁷ Indian Maritime Doctrine (Aug 09). *Maritime Doctrine and Concept Centre* (MDCC), Mumbai, published under aegis of Integrated Headquarters, MoD (Navy), New Delhi.

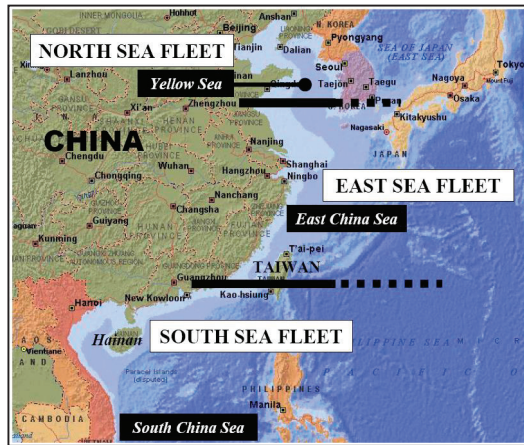
Section VI

Naval Developments

South Sea Fleet: The Emerging ‘Lynchpin’ of China’s Naval Power Projection in the Indo-Pacific

10 February 2016

In December 2015, China commissioned *Hefei* (174) – the third Type 052D guided-missile destroyer into its navy.²⁶⁸ The warship represents the most advanced surface combatant ever operated by the PLA Navy, and comparable to the best in the world. It is armed with potent long-range missiles like the HHQ-9 (anti-air), the YJ-18 (anti-ship), and the CJ-10 (land-attack).²⁶⁹ This seems incredible considering that until barely a decade ago, China’s navy did not even possess a credible fleet air defence missile system, let alone a land-attack capability.



Map – PLA Navy Fleets: Areas of Responsibility

Notably, all three Type 052D destroyers are based in PLA Navy’s South Sea Fleet (SSF).²⁷⁰ This is among the latest indicators of the growing salience and strength of this fleet. The SSF is fast becoming the ‘sword arm’ of the PLA Navy that is rapidly amassing

²⁶⁸ ‘New missile destroyer joins South China Sea Fleet’, at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2015-12/14/content_4632673.htm

²⁶⁹ The CJ-10 (also called DH-10 or HN-2) is known to feature terrain contour matching (TERCOM) and data from the Chinese Beidou Navigation Satellite System for its guidance.

²⁷⁰ PLA Navy is divided into 3 fleets (equivalent of naval commands in India). The North Sea Fleet (NSF) adjoins the Yellow Sea/ Korean Peninsula, the East Sea Fleet (ESF) faces the East China Sea/ Taiwan, and the South Sea Fleet (SSF) overlooks the South China Sea.

distant power-projection capabilities, with major geopolitical and security ramifications, not only for the China's immediate maritime neighbours in the South China Sea (SCS), but also for the littorals of the Indian Ocean region (IOR). This essay attempts to discern the trends since the rise of China's naval power in recent decades, and the implications for the Indo-Pacific²⁷¹ region.

Circa 1995-2005: Focus on ESF

Until the 1980s, the PLA Navy was merely a 'brown-water' coastal force. Beginning in the mid-1990s, China's naval power witnessed a quantum jump with the acquisition of the Russian *Kilo*-class submarines and the *Sovremenny*-class destroyers. The *Kilos* were considered to be the quietest submarines in the world, whereas the *Sovremennys* were armed with the lethal S-22 *Moskit* anti-ship missile – dubbed 'aircraft-carrier killer' – whose supersonic speed gives little reaction time to the victim warship to defend itself.

All four *Sovremennys*²⁷² and eight *Kilos*²⁷³ were added to the East Sea Fleet (ESF). At this time, China's strategic focus was directed towards its eastern seaboard, primarily to prepare for any adverse contingency involving Taiwan, soon after the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. In 1999, China began the indigenous development of its *Song*-class conventional submarines. The first of these new-generation boats commissioned between 2001 and 2004 were also inducted into the ESF²⁷⁴.

Circa 2005-2010: Focus on SSF

About a decade after the Taiwan Strait crisis, however, China's strategic focus began to shift from Taiwan to its maritime-territorial claims in the South China Sea (SCS). The reason for the shift is unclear; it could be attributed to Beijing's successful 'Taiwan policy' that led to a reduced probability of a military conflict across the Taiwan Strait. It is also possible that Beijing had always considered the SCS as its priority, but was 'biding its time' due to various geopolitical and capability constraints. All the same, China's intent

²⁷¹ The term refers to the region stretching from East Africa and West Asia to Northeast Asia, across the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. Gurpreet S Khurana, 'Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 31(1), January 2007, p139-153.

²⁷² All four *Sovremenny*-class destroyers were acquired between 1999 and 2006.

²⁷³ These refer to the eight *Kilo*-class submarines acquired between 1995 and 2005.

²⁷⁴ It refers to pennant numbers 321, 322, 323, 324, 325 and 314. The sole exception was the first Song (320) commissioned in 1999, which was inducted into the SSF, possibly since the waters off Hainan were deep enough for its dived test.

began to unravel through the increasing ‘capabilities’ being allocated to the SSF, such as those enumerated below.

- 2004-05: SSF inducts two each of Type 052B and 052C destroyers, the first-ever world-class indigenous warship designs.²⁷⁵
- 2005: China begins refurbishing the erstwhile Soviet aircraft carrier *Varyag* for power-projection in the SCS (that later joined SSF as *Liaoning*).
- 2006-07: SSF inducts four additional *Kilo*-class submarines procured from Russia.
- End-2007: SSF inducts the first Type 071 *Yuzhao*-class Landing Platform Dock (LPD), which provided China a distant sealift capability.²⁷⁶
- Mid-2008: Satellite-based reports carried pictures of China’s new Yalong Bay base in southern Hainan, indicating entrances to the underground submarine pens and a *Jin*-class (Type 094) new-generation nuclear ballistic missile submarine (SSBN).²⁷⁷
- 2007-08: Extension of Woody Island airstrip (Paracels) to 8,100 feet. The airstrip was now capable of operating heavier aircraft like bombers, transports and aerial-refuellers.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ While more warships of the Type 052 not built, the Type 052C (dubbed ‘Chinese Aegis’) provided the PLA Navy for the first time, a long-range fleet air-defence capability. It is equipped with vertical-launch 90 km range HHQ-9 surface to air missiles (SAM) cued by the AESA phased-array radar with all-round coverage. The Type 052C warships commissioned later were based at the ESF.

²⁷⁶ Since long, the SSF has been home to a significant proportion of amphibious vessels and two Marine brigades, but the PLA Navy never possessed distant sealift capability. It may be recalled that China could not even contribute to the multi-nation humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) mission following the Indian Ocean *Tsunami* of December 2004. Ostensibly, this provided the trigger for China to build the Type 071 LPD for the SSF.

²⁷⁷ Although China’s plans to build Yalong bay base was known for some years, the report was the first to provide its details. Richard D Fisher Jr, “Secret Sanya - China’s new nuclear naval base revealed”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 15 April 2008, at http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/jir/doc_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2008/jir10375.htm@current&Prod_Name=JIR&QueryText=

²⁷⁸ Called *Yongxing Dao* by the Chinese, Woody Island is located 150 nautical miles south-east of Hainan, and is the largest island of the Paracel group. In the 1980s, it accommodated a mere helicopter pad. In 1990, China undertook land reclamation to construct a 1,200-foot airstrip to operate jet fighters.

Most of these developments were analysed in 2008-09 by the author²⁷⁹ and a few other analysts like James Bussert.²⁸⁰ However, these writings received little attention. Interestingly, China's 'intentions' became clearer within a couple of years when Beijing declared in 2010 that the SCS was its "core interest" of sovereignty.²⁸¹ Two years later, in 2012, China upgraded Sansha City on Woody Island from county-level to a prefecture-city level²⁸² to facilitate the administration of all the island groups in SCS claimed by China.²⁸³ It also established a military command in Sansha City, under Hainan provincial sub-command within the Guangzhou Military Command. While these were largely 'administrative' and 'defensive' policy measures, these reinforced China intent's with regard to its "core interest" of sovereignty.

Recent Developments: Reinforced Focus on SSF

Recent developments clearly indicate that China has persevered with its southward-oriented military-strategic intent. The latest of these is China's January 2016 redeployment of its *Haiyang Shiyou* 981 (HD-981) oil rig in disputed waters with Vietnam, which created a major diplomatic rift between the two countries in mid-2014.²⁸⁴ A CSIS report of January 2016 notes an "accelerated...frequency of its (China's) coercive activities and pace of its island-building in the... South China Sea..."²⁸⁵ The report adds that "the PLA in the near future will be operating well beyond the First Island Chain and into the Indian Ocean ...". If such predictions are substantive, what precisely may be among the enabling capabilities?

Aircraft Carrier Task Force

²⁷⁹ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'China's South Sea Fleet Gains Strength: Indicators, Intentions & Implications', *India Strategic*, Vol. 3(10), October 2008, p.48, at <http://www.indiastrategic.in/topstories183.htm>

²⁸⁰ James C Bussert, 'Hainan is the Tip of the Chinese Spear', *Signal*, June 2009, at <http://www.afcea.org/content/?q=hainan-tip-chinese-navy-spear>

²⁸¹ Edward Wong, 'Chinese Military Seeks to Extend Its Naval Power', *The New York Times*, 23 April 2010, at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/world/asia/24navy.html?_r=0

²⁸² These refer to the hierarchal levels of China's administrative divisions: Province (first level), Prefecture City (second level) and County (third level).

²⁸³ 'Sansha new step in managing S. China Sea', *Global times*, 25 June 2012, at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/716822.shtml>

²⁸⁴ Mike Ives, 'Vietnam Objects to Chinese Oil Rig in Disputed Waters', *The New York Times*, 20 Jan 2016, at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/21/world/asia/south-china-sea-vietnam-china.html?_r=0

²⁸⁵ 'Asia-Pacific rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships', *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS) Report, 20 January 2016, p.VI, at http://csis.org/files/publication/160119_Green_AsiaPacificRebalance2025_Web_0.pdf

In 2012, *Varyag* was commissioned as *Liaoning*; and soon after sea-trials, it was based in the SSF. China is building an indigenous carrier,²⁸⁶ which is also likely to be based in the SSF for patrols in the disputed South China Sea.²⁸⁷ These carriers will have potent escort combatants. In addition to the Type 052D destroyers, most of PLA Navy latest *Jiangkai II* class frigates are also based in the SSF. The carrier(s) – along with these escorts – would provide versatility to the SSF to conduct missions in the IOR and SCS across the spectrum of conflict, ranging from humanitarian missions and counter-piracy to flag-showing, and from supporting maritime expeditionary operations to military coercion.

Notably, both *Jiangkai II* frigates – *Liuzhou* (573) and *Sanya* (574) – that participated in India's *International Fleet Review-2016* (IFR-16) at Visakhapatnam in early-February 2016 were based at SSF. The two ships – part of PLA Navy's 21st anti-piracy task force – made a 'goodwill' port call at Chittagong and conducted combined naval exercises with the Bangladesh Navy, before participating in IFR-16.²⁸⁸ In the coming years, the availability of the carrier in its task force will provide the PLA Navy more operational options, enabling it to undertake other types of missions in the IOR as well.

'Unsinkable' Aircraft Carriers in the SCS

China is likely to continue upgrading its airfields in the Paracels and Spratlys. In Woody Island, satellite imagery reveals that since 2007-08, China has added a wide array of aviation infrastructure to the main airstrip, which includes aircraft hangers, air traffic control buildings and radars, fuel depots, crew accommodation and berthing facilities for larger warships.²⁸⁹ This would provide a force-multiplier effect to the PLA Navy's carrier operations, enabling China to effectively exercise sea control and power-projection in the

²⁸⁶ 'China defence: Work starts on second aircraft carrier', *BBC News*, 31 December 2015, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-35207369>

²⁸⁷ 'Beijing Plans Aircraft Carrier Patrols in Disputed South China Sea', *Sputnik International News*, 29 January 2016, at <http://sputniknews.com/asia/20160129/1033950259/aircraft-carrier-south-china-sea.html>

²⁸⁸ '21st Chinese naval escort taskforce wraps up visit to Bangladesh', *China Military Online*, 2 February 2016, at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2016-02/02/content_6885175.htm

²⁸⁹ Carlyle A. Thayer, 'Background Briefing: China's Air Strip on Woody Island', *C3S Paper* No.2055, 20 October 2014, at <http://www.c3sindia.org/uncategorized/4568>

SCS. It would also enable China to enforce an ADIZ over the SCS, if its Beijing were to promulgate it.

New-Generation Submarines

In mid-2015, the PLA Navy commissioned three modified *Shang*-class SSNs (Type 093A/093G). Like Type 052D destroyers, these are likely to be armed with the vertical-launch YJ-18 anti-ship and CJ-10 land-attack missiles.²⁹⁰ In a few years, China is likely to develop the advanced *Jin*-class (Type 096) SSBN, which could provide China a more credible nuclear deterrence and first strike capability. Although Yalong Bay (Hainan) may be home base for these nuclear-propelled platforms, their virtually unlimited endurance will enable the PLA Navy to project submarine-based maritime power eastwards far beyond the second island chain, and westwards into the IOR.

China's latest conventional submarines the *Song*-class and the *Yuan*-class with Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) – are also based at Yalong Bay.²⁹¹ Notably, all submarines that the PLA Navy has deployed so far in the IOR are based in the SSF. These include the *Song*-329 that docked in Colombo in September-October 2014²⁹² and the *Yuan* 335 that spent a week in Karachi harbour in May 2015.²⁹³

Expeditionary Forces

In 2011-12, two more Type 071 LPDs (*Jinggang Shan* and *Changbai Shan*) joined the first LPD (*Kunlun Shan*) in the SSF.²⁹⁴ In mid-2015, the SSF inducted PLA Navy's first Landing Platform (MLP). Based on the novel submersible roll-on/ roll-off (RO-RO)

²⁹⁰ Jeremy Bender, 'China's New Submarines Could Create Problems for the US Navy', *Business Insider*, 7 April 2015, at <http://www.businessinsider.in/Chinas-new-submarines-could-create-problems-for-the-US-Navy/articleshow/46844459.cms>

²⁹¹ AIP enhances the operational effectiveness of a conventional submarine substantially by enabling it to remain submerged up to as long as three weeks.

²⁹² Gurpreet S Khurana, 'PLA Navy's Submarine Arm 'Stretches its Sea-legs' to the Indian Ocean', National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, 21 November 2014, at <https://independent.academia.edu/khurana>

²⁹³ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'China's Yuan-class Submarine Visits Karachi: An Assessment', National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, 24 July 2014, at <https://independent.academia.edu/khurana>

²⁹⁴ The fourth Type 071 LPD *Yimengshan* (988) commissioned in February 2016 was inducted in the East Sea Fleet. Andrew Tate, 'The PLAN commissions fourth Type 071 LPD', *IHS Jane's Navy International*, 3 February 2016, at <http://www.janes.com/article/57683/the-plan-commissions-fourth-type-071-lpd>

design developed by the United States, MLPs would be able to transport PLA Navy's heavy *Zubr*-class air-cushion landing craft to distant littorals.²⁹⁵

This enhanced distant sealift capacity would not only enable the SSF to undertake humanitarian missions in the SCS and the IOR, but also provide the fleet a nascent expeditionary capability. Interestingly, the 15000-men Chinese Marines – who have traditionally trained for amphibious assaults – have lately begun to exercise in continental locales of Mongolia and Xinjiang, which is a pointer to China's intention to be involved in out-of-area expeditionary missions.²⁹⁶

Logistic Ships

The PLA Navy is also developing 'longer legs' through induction of high-endurance logistic vessels meant to provide underway replenishment (UNREP) to its principal warships far away from Chinese home bases. Since 2005, it has commissioned six advanced Type 903A (*Fuchi*-class) UNREP vessel with a full-load displacement of 23,000 tons. Although these are equally divided among the three PLA Navy fleets, the sequence of allocation and other developments indicate a focus on the SSF. In 2015, China launched a new rather massive 45,000 tons logistic vessel of the *Qinghaihu*-class, which is likely to be allocated to the SSF.

Conclusion

In tandem with China's overall power, the capabilities of the PLA Navy's SSF is expected to continue to grow in the coming decades, notwithstanding transient 'hiccups' in its economic growth. However, China's geographically expanding economic interests into the IOR and beyond will soon overstretch its resources. Ostensibly, Beijing is well aware

²⁹⁵ Mike Yeo, 'China Commissions First MLP-Like Logistics Ship, Headed For South Sea Fleet', *USNI News*, 14 July 2015, at <http://news.usni.org/2015/07/14/chinas-commissions-first-mlp-like-logistics-ship-headed-for-south-sea-fleet> Also see, Gurpreet S Khurana, 'Sea-based' PLA Navy may not need 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean', *Centre of International Maritime Security (CIMSEC)*, 12 August 2015, at <http://cimsec.org/sea-based-pla-navy-may-not-need-string-pearls/18053>

²⁹⁶ In 2014, the Marines conducted the first such training in the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, followed by the second one in December 2015 in the deserts of Xinjiang. The latter came in wake of Beijing passing a new unprecedented legislation that permits the PLA to undertake counter-terrorism missions overseas. Michael Martina and Greg Torode, 'Chinese marines' desert operations point to long-range ambitions', *Reuters*, 14 January 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-military-marines-idUSKCN0US2QM20160114>

of this prognosis, and adopting necessary measures as part of a comprehensive long-term strategy.

Among the two overwhelming imperatives for China is to shape a benign environment in its north-eastern maritime periphery. Towards this end, in March 2013, Beijing amalgamated its various maritime agencies to form the unified Coast Guard under the State Oceanic Administration.²⁹⁷ Reportedly, China has also been trying hard to resolve its maritime boundary dispute with South Korea.²⁹⁸

The second imperative is to sustain its naval forces in distant waters of the IOR. Towards this end, China is developing military facilities in the IOR, and dovetailed with its increasing hardware sales to the regional countries. Through its 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR) initiative (2013), China seems to have effectively blunted the theory of 'String of Pearls' (2005). Djibouti may be only the beginning. Similar facilities – supplemented by PLA Navy's long-legged and 'sea-based' assets based in the SSF – would enhance China's military-strategic and operational options manifold. Such emerging developments – and their extrapolations – need to be factored by the national security establishments of the Indo-Pacific countries.

²⁹⁷ Wu Jiao and Pu Zhendong, 'Nation merging maritime patrol forces', *China Daily*, 11 March 2013, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013npc/2013-03/11/content_16296448.htm

²⁹⁸ In 2014, China and South Korea agreed to initiate a dialogue to delineate their maritime boundary outstanding for two decades. The preliminary talks were held in December 2015. 'South Korea, China Discuss Fisheries and Boundary Conflict', *Maritime Executive*, 22 December 2015, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-12/14/c_134916062.htm

PLA Navy's Submarine Arm 'Stretches its Sea-legs' to the Indian Ocean

In naval parlance, acquiring 'sea-legs' refers to a person who is usually more comfortable on *terra firma*, but has adapted to living and working on an unstable sea-going platform. The unprecedented distant deployment of China's submarines in the Indian Ocean is a seminal development with far-reaching consequences, which may be expressed metaphorically as a traditionally 'continental' power stretching its 'sea-legs'. In an unprecedented development, in end-September 2014, a submarine of the PLA Navy docked in Colombo port along with a submarine-support vessel. More recently in early-November 2014, another Chinese submarine docked in the same port with a similar support vessel. The identity of the submarines and the mission remains unknown, at least in the public domain.

Most media reports indicated that these two submarines were nuclear-propelled (SSN). Their names were stated as 'Changzheng 2'. 'Changzheng' is specific classification for a Han-class SSN, five of which were commissioned between 1974 and 1991. However, Changzheng 2 (the second of the Han-class) was decommissioned in 2005. This ambiguity is possibly caused because the Chinese also refer to their submarines *generically* as 'Changzheng' (Great Wall). Eventually, analysts identified the first submarine at Colombo port through its pennant number as a Song-class diesel boat. While the second boat remains unidentified, it is likely to be the same diesel submarine, and certainly not a nuclear submarine.

As the Indian media reports indicated, the unprecedented development raised a storm in India. The docking of the Chinese submarines off its southern (maritime) frontier was perceived in New Delhi as being 'unmindful to India's security concerns'. New Delhi strongly objected to Colombo's acquiescence via high-level political exchanges and diplomatic channels. The development raises three key questions:

- Was the Chinese submarine foray into the Indian Ocean unexpected?
- Was it appropriate for Colombo to permit a Chinese submarine to dock in its port?
- How should India respond?

Ever since its birth as a sovereign state, sub-surface warfare has been central to China's naval strategy. In initial years, when threatened by big neighbours, submarines provided the PLA Navy the necessary asymmetric edge. Today, China's security environment is vastly different, but its stakes and vulnerabilities have expanded much beyond its maritime periphery. For the next couple of decades at least, the PLA Navy would not be able achieve 'sea-control' to preserve these far-flung interests against

military opposition. Under such circumstances, PLA Navy's only option is to employ its submarine arm for 'punishment' and 'limited power-projection'.

'Peace-time' submarine deployment in the Indian Ocean is, therefore, a necessity for the PLA Navy to familiarize itself with the new operational environment. (Although China claims that its submarines were deployed for counter-piracy mission, such claim is tenuous, since it would be a grossly sub-optimal employment of a potent warfighting platform).

Over the past decade, many news-reports and academic writings – both Indian and foreign – have covered China's naval strategy and modernisation. When pieced together, a number these writings clearly indicate the likelihood of PLA Navy's submarine deployment in the Indian Ocean up to the medium term timeframe. The salient indicators *inter alia* are the following: -

- Augmentation of PLA Navy's South Sea Fleet since early-2000s including completion of the new submarine base in Hainan. (This Fleet is likely to be responsible for Indian Ocean).
- Induction of new-generation Shang-class (and follow-on) SSNs for distant missions since 2006.
- Expression of concern by Indian naval chiefs on various occasions about the growing numbers of Chinese nuclear submarines.
- IDSA analyses (2008) on the military potential of China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean.
- US report (2012) on Indian Ocean deployment of China's maritime intelligence ships capable of collecting oceanographic and bathymetric data.

Considering this backdrop, the foray of PLA Navy's submarine arm into the Indian Ocean was not unexpected, except that one would have expected the PLA Navy to deploy its long-endurance SSNs, rather than the conventional submarines. A possible explanation (and deduction) could be that its new-generation Type 093 and 095 SSNs – armed with land-attack cruise missiles (LACM) – are not successful, or at least, are still not deployable. (The reports of March 2014 on the Chinese SSNs undertaking operational patrols in the Indian Ocean have not been confirmed).

Let us now turn to the specific development in terms of the submarine docking in Colombo port. From the Sri Lankan view-point, permitting entry to the submarine into its port was legitimate in terms of norms of international conduct for 'goodwill' visits of 'men-of-war' to foreign ports. What about the legal status of the Sri Lankan action? Since

China and India are not at war, Colombo cannot be accused of violating the Law of Neutrality under the laid down Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC). India has cited the July 1987 India-Sri Lanka agreement that obligates the latter against making available any of its ports “for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India’s interests”. However, the provisions of the agreement are not objective, and subject to interpretation. For example, there are no objective criteria to determine what is “prejudicial to India’s interests”. In any case, the 1987 agreement is superfluous to the central issue. Today, we are talking about Chinese submarines in Colombo; tomorrow, these submarines may enter Karachi or Gwadar ports. Which agreement will India then assert?

Notwithstanding the above, India would need to formulate a suitable response, before its strategic options narrow down further. The diplomatic manoeuvres of South Block would need to be subsidiary arm of the overall approach, at best. The central arm would need to be deterrence and preparedness for the worst-case scenarios. India’s recent decision to scale-up its naval engagement with the United States, including in terms of conducting multi-nation Malabar exercises, indicates that its policymakers are ‘steering the right course’.

China's Yuan-class Submarine Visits Karachi: An Assessment

24 July 2015

In May 2015, a Chinese Type 041 Yuan-class submarine (pennant number 335) entered the Indian Ocean and made a week-long port call at Karachi, Pakistan. This development²⁹⁹ caused alarm in India, at least in the media circles, particularly since it comes barely six months after the first-ever Indian Ocean deployment of China's Song-class submarine between September and November 2014, and its docking in Sri Lanka's Colombo port. Notably, following the Colombo docking, NMF view-point titled "PLA Navy's Submarine Arm 'Stretches its Sea Legs to the Indian Ocean'³⁰⁰" of 21 November 2014 had predicted future Chinese submarine dockings in Pakistan's ports. These seminal developments call for an objective assessment in terms of China's intent underlying its submarine deployments in the Indian Ocean and its implications for India.

Alike the port call in Sri Lanka, China is likely to justify the submarine visit to Pakistan as a replenishment halt enroute to PLA Navy's ongoing counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden. However, these deployments may be seen in context of the growing volatility of the security environment in the South China Sea, including the increasing brinkmanship between China and the United States. In case of a maritime conflict in the area, China's energy shipments transiting the Indian Ocean are strategically vulnerable. Through its submarine deployments, China may be seeking to deter its potential adversaries against interdicting its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean.

By virtue of its opaque operating medium, a submarine has always been a potent platform of war. The technological advances in satellite and air surveillance have not been able to offset the submarine's inherent advantage of stealth. On the other hand, the advances in underwater weaponry – particularly submarine-launched anti-ship and land-attack missiles – have further enhanced the submarine's lethality. The only constraint of a conventional (diesel-driven) submarine – like the Song-class – is to re-charge its batteries, for which its need to come up to the sea surface (for access to atmospheric oxygen) every two or three days, depending upon the usage of the batteries. This limits the submarine's operational role and makes it highly vulnerable. However, Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology – such as on the Yuan class – has eased this

²⁹⁹ "Exclusive: Chinese submarine lurked past Indian waters, docked in Karachi?", India today, 27 Jun 15, at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/chinese-submarine-indian-navy-karachi-indian-ocean-pm-modi/1/447505.html>

³⁰⁰ Gurpreet S Khurana, "PLA Navy's Submarine Arm 'Stretches its Sea Legs to the Indian Ocean", National Maritime foundation, 21 Nov 14 at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/CommentaryView.aspx?NMFCID=2347>

constraint substantially, since its stored liquid oxygen enables the submarine to operate underwater for an extended durations of as much as two to three weeks.

Among the aims specific to the Yuan 335 call at Karachi, the foremost may be to showcase the Yuan to the Pakistan Navy. Notably, news-reports³⁰¹ indicate that Pakistan Navy (PN) is likely to acquire up to eight Chinese Type 41 Yuan-class submarines. The contract between Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works Limited (KSEW) and China Shipbuilding and Offshore International Co. Ltd. (CSOC) includes building some of these at KSEW. These submarines are equipped with Sterling AIP system, which the Chinese claim is more efficient than the AIP systems currently available in the world. The week-long docking of the Yuan at Karachi – too long merely for replenishment – may also have been utilised for training of the KSEW and PN personnel on the submarine, and its machinery and weapon systems, particularly the AIP system.

In broader terms, the two sets of Chinese submarine forays into the Indian Ocean (Colombo and Karachi) are likely to be ‘trial balloons’ for regular operational deployments of Chinese submarines in the region. The current deployments are also likely to be meant to familiarise the PLA Navy with the new operational environment in the Indian Ocean, train them for distant missions, collect intelligence, and collate hydrographic data specific to the Indian Ocean, which is essential for future submarine operations in the region. At present, the Chinese submarines need to replenish only fuel, food and fresh water. In the longer term, with the PN (and some other regional navies such as the Thai Navy³⁰²) operating the same submarines, the PLA Navy is likely to benefit from a more comprehensive logistics support – technical services, machinery and equipment spare-parts and even ammunition. This will enable the Chinese submarines to remain deployed in the Indian Ocean for extended periods.

While China may continue to deploy its conventional submarines in the Indian Ocean, these are likely to be supplemented with the upgraded version³⁰³ of its new-generation Type 093 nuclear attack submarines (SSNs), whenever these are operationally deployable. These SSNs are likely to be armed with anti-ship and land-attack missiles, and capable of launching Special Operations Forces (SOF) via Swimmer Delivery Vehicles (SDV). Since SSNs do not need replenished, these submarines would not need to enter any regional port, unless China wants to demonstrate a deterrent posture.

³⁰¹ “Exclusive: Chinese submarine lurked past Indian waters, docked in Karachi?”, India Today, 27 Jun 15, at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/chinese-submarine-indian-navy-karachi-indian-ocean-pm-modi/1/447505.html>

China and India share a complex relationship, competitive, and even potentially adversarial. Hence, even if increasing Chinese submarine deployments in the Indian Ocean is not directly targeted at India, the development has severe national security implications for New Delhi. The response to increasing Chinese submarine forays in the Indian Ocean lies in developing effective air, ship and submarine based Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities, including sub-surface Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

‘Sea-based’ PLA Navy may not need ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean

03 August 2015

In May 2015, China released its biennial 2014 Defence White Paper titled ‘China's Military Strategy’. It indicates that the PLA Navy would undertake a more proactive protection of its interests in ‘open waters’, which implies – albeit implicitly – the waters of the Indian Ocean. The White Paper also brings to the fore PLA Navy's strategy for the ‘sustenance’ of the forward-deployed naval platforms in these waters through “strategic prepositioning”. What precisely does this mean?

Until lately, strategic analysts worldwide were smitten by the concept of ‘String of Pearls³⁰⁴’ propounded in 2005 by Booz Allen Hamilton - a US based think-tank. The scholarly extrapolation of China's increasing geopolitical and strategic presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) led to the prognosis that its port and maritime infrastructure projects in the IOR were precursors to China eventually establishing military bases in the region. In case of an armed conflict, such overseas military bases would be valuable for China to protect its strategic interests in the interests, particularly its crude-oil imports. These bases could provide logistics support the Chinese maritime-military forces in the region *inter alia* in terms of machinery and equipment spare-parts, technical services and ammunition depots, besides general replenishment of fuel, food and water. Analysts in India generally took the lead in the academic inquiry³⁰⁵ into the potential of the Chinese military bases in the IOR.

Rattled by the String of Pearls ‘theory’, Beijing decried the military-strategic connotation of its financial and technical assistance to the IOR countries; and devoted much intellectual capital to prove that its intent was only economic and commercial. Among its efforts in this direction, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) published the June 2013 Blue Book called ‘Development Report in the Indian Ocean’. The Blue Book said that China has no maritime (-military) strategy for the Indian Ocean. The

³⁰⁴ “China builds up strategic sea lanes”, The Washington Times, 17 Jan 05, at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/jan/17/20050117-115550-1929r/>

³⁰⁵ Gurpreet s khurana, “China's ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications”, Strategic Analysis, 27 Feb 08, at https://www.academia.edu/7727023/Chinas_String_of_Pearls_in_the_Indian_Ocean_and_its_Security_Implications

Maritime Silk Road³⁰⁶ (MSR) concept initiated by President Xi Jinping later that year in October 2013 was used to reinforce the message that China sought only economic objectives in the IOR.

However, analysts and the media – particularly in India – persisted upon China's doctrinal intent to develop military bases in the IOR, averring that the MSR was only a 'reincarnation' of the 'String of Pearls' concept. Notably, the Indians are not the only ones wary of the potential of PLA Navy's use of the maritime facilities in the IOR. Notwithstanding the strategic convergence between Indonesia's 'global maritime axis' and China's MSR concepts, eminent Indonesian statesmen have advised Jakarta to be cautious since the maritime infrastructure being constructed through MSR could be used by China for 'military penetration'³⁰⁷.

In July 2015, news-reports³⁰⁸ indicated that Maldives was encouraging foreign entities to own its island territories to undertake land reclamation. Coming amidst the growing anxieties caused by China's controversial "island-building"³⁰⁹ activities in the South China Sea, this reinforced the theory of 'Chinese military bases' in the Indian Ocean. Even while Maldives is under severe strain of the long-term effects of sea-level rise caused by climate change, its government is unlikely to be ignorant of the near-term adverse geopolitical and security consequences of permitting Chinese military bases on its territory. Besides, it is most unlikely that the Chinese would need such bases anyway.

Since 2011, China has been seeking a hub-and-spoke logistics support agreements with the IOR countries like Seychelles³¹⁰ and Djibouti³¹¹. Undeniably, therefore, China is

³⁰⁶ Wu Jiao, "Xi in call for building of new 'maritime silk road'", CHINADAILY, 04 Oct 13, at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-10/04/content_17008940.htm
³⁰⁷ "In Indonesia, caution urged with China's new 'Silk Road' plans" JakartaGlobe, 31 May 15, at <http://jakartaglobe.id/news/indonesia-caution-urged-chinas-new-silk-road-plans/>

³⁰⁸ Zachary Keck, "Get Ready: China Could Build New Artificial Islands Near India", The National Interest, 29 Jul 15, at <http://www.nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/get-ready-china-could-build-new-artificial-islands-near-13446>

³⁰⁹ "Philippine Official: China Island-building in full swing", CBS News, 21 May 15, at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/philippines-official-china-constructing-islands-reclamation-south-china-sea/>

³¹⁰ Li Xiaokun and Li Lianxing, "Navy looks at offer from Seychelles", CHINADAILY, 13 Dec 11, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-12/13/content_14254395.htm

³¹¹ "Djibouti President: China Negotiating Horn of Africa Military Base", DefenseNews, 10 May 15, at <https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2015/05/10/djibouti-president-china-negotiating-horn-of-africa-military-base/>

seeking access facilities³¹² in the Indian Ocean, whether known by the ‘String of Pearls’ nomenclature, or fructified through the ‘MSR Concept’. Some more bilateral pacts may be added over time. However, these are not potential Chinese ‘military bases’, but agreements for peace-time replenishment of fuel, food and water for Chinese naval units, something that even India has forged with many countries, including those in the western Pacific littoral.

China’s intent to sustain its naval forces in the Indian Ocean through the concept of ‘sea-basing’ has not been widely noted. The concept refers to a naval capability to undertake overseas military missions of expeditionary nature without reliance on land-based operational logistics and command and control infrastructure, either of home bases or the overseas bases. The concept was developed by the US expeditionary forces, largely due to the increasing constraints to maintain overseas military bases, besides for catering to the emerging concepts of amphibious warfare.

This high probability of the PLA Navy’s resort to ‘sea-basing’ concept is supported by its July 2015 induction of the first ‘Mobile Landing Platform³¹³’ (MLP) similar to the US design. The U.S. expeditionary forces are themselves new to the MLP concept. China is also known to be building naval Logistic Support Ships with roll-on, roll-off (ro-ro) design and bow and stern ramps optimised for amphibious operations.

The numbers of PLA Navy’s advanced underway replenishment ships are also increasing. Notably, media reports indicate that in June 2015, China launched its fifth Type 903A replenishment ship, and more are under construction. With these six new replenishment vessels added to the older fleet tankers, the PLA Navy is clearly being given the means to support distant missions in the IOR.

PLA Navy’s own increasing sea-based logistics capability could be supplemented by the capacity of state-owned commercial ships, following the implementation of the new guidelines³¹⁴ for building merchant ships to conform to naval standards. These guidelines called “*Technical Standards for New Civilian Ships to Implement National Defense Requirements*” were approved by the Chinese government in June 2015. The guidelines *lay down not only the provisions* to requisition civilian ships for naval missions, but also

³¹² Gurpreet S Khurana, “China’s ‘Maritime Silk Road’: Beyond ‘Economics’”, National Maritime Foundation, 16 Apr 15, at https://www.academia.edu/11968181/China_s_Maritime_Silk_Road_Beyond_Economics_

³¹³ Alvin Ybanez, “PLA Navy Receives Its First Mobile Landing Platform”, YIBADA, 01 Jul 15, at <http://en.yibada.com/articles/42062/20150701/pla-navy-receives-first-mobile-landing-platform.htm>

³¹⁴ Zhao Lei, “New rules mean ships can be used by military”, CHINADAILY, 18 Jun 15, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-06/18/content_21036944.htm

how future construction of Chinese merchant vessels would need to adhere to naval specifications.

China is also formulating a 'National Defense Transport Law³⁴⁵' to cover the additional financial costs of shipbuilding and insurance for employment for military missions. These commercial vessels are quite numerous. According to statistics from China's Ministry of Transportation, in 2014, about 2,600 ships are capable of ocean transport, which represents a major element of asymmetry with any major navy operating in the Indian Ocean. The US Navy's 31 Maritime Prepositioning Ships (MPS) of its Military Sealift Command (MSC) pales in comparison.

The concept of 'military base' necessary for executing a full-fledged armed conflict may be a thing of the past. Politico-military manoeuvres in short-of-war situations are more contemporary. Therefore, in the foreseeable future, a maritime-military strategy that combines 'peacetime replenishment' with 'sea-basing' may be more than adequate for Beijing to meet its national-strategic objectives in the IOR.

³⁴⁵ "New rules mean ships can be used by military", China Military Online, 18 Jun 15, at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2015-06/18/content_6546905.htm

China delivers Submarines to Bangladesh: Imperatives, Intentions and Implications

28 Nov 2016

On 14 November 2016, Bangladesh Navy (BN) took delivery of two old refurbished Chinese Type 035G *Ming*-class diesel-electric submarines. As part of the US\$ 203 million contract signed in 2013, the submarines were handed over to the BN crew during a ceremony at the Liao Nan Shipyard in China's Dalian city. The submarines are slated to be commissioned as Bangladesh Naval Ships (BNS) *Nabajatra* and *Joyjatra* and expected to arrive in early 2017 at the new Bangladeshi submarine base being constructed near Kutubdia Island.

This may be a rather seminal development with strong ramifications not only for the littoral countries of the Bay of Bengal, but also for the wider Indo-Pacific³¹⁶ region. This essay seeks to undertake an assessment of the development in the context of the likely imperatives of Bangladesh, the intentions of China and its implications, with specific reference to the Indian context.

Imperatives for Bangladesh

For any navy, the surface warships and their integral aircraft a capable of being used across the entire spectrum of conflict including for 'constabulary' and 'benign' missions ranging from counter-piracy to maritime search and rescue (M-SAR). In contrast, submarine forces – due to their inherent stealth characteristics – are optimised for sea-denial during war. Even in peace-time, these underwater platforms are used to undertake highly specialized missions against a military adversary like clandestine surveillance, intelligence-gathering and Special Forces operations. Hence, it is difficult to fathom why Bangladesh – which does not encounter any conventional maritime-military threat – has inducted submarines in its navy. The maritime disputes between Bangladesh and two of its only maritime neighbours – Myanmar and India – were resolved through international arbitration in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Neither Naypyidaw nor New Delhi has indicated any reservations to the verdict of the international tribunals, or have either any other major outstanding contention with Dhaka.

It is nonetheless well known that the BN has since long aspired for a three-dimensional navy through inclusion of underwater warfare platforms. After Dhaka succeeded in settling its maritime boundary through the highly favourable decisions of

³¹⁶ At <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific>

the international tribunals, the apex political leadership showered much attention upon the BN as the guardian of the country's new-found maritime interests. Notably, Bangladesh is seeking an increasing dependence upon sea-based resources for economic prosperity of its rather high density of population. The political nod to acquire submarines may therefore be seen as an incentive for the BN. Besides, it is a low-cost deal to reinforce strategic ties with China, including by taking forward Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's support to President Xi Jinping for its 'One Belt One Road'³¹⁷(OBOR) initiative. Hence, the development seems to have been driven by symbolism for Bangladesh, rather than being a result of the navy's appreciation-based force-planning based on an objective assessment of the projected security environment.

China's Intentions

As in case of other defence hardware exports, Beijing's overarching intent behind the sale of submarines would be to go beyond strengthening political ties with Dhaka, to bring about its 'strategic dependence' upon China. The long-term submarine training and maintenance needs of the BN would also enable China's military presence in the Bay of Bengal, and enable it to collate sensitive data for PLA Navy's submarine operations in the future. This area is becoming increasingly important as the transit route for China's strategic crude-oil and gas imports, and bears the origin of China's oil pipeline across Myanmar. Strategic presence in the area is also critically necessary for Beijing to supplement the strategic and geopolitical dimension of its Maritime Silk Road (MSR)³¹⁸ plans.

Further, by selling the two old (though upgraded) *Ming*-class submarines – which were commissioned in early 1990s and presently at the end of their service life with the PLA Navy – Beijing has assiduously generated useful revenue out of hardware, which would have only 'scrap value' in a few years. As per an established practice in China³¹⁹, a significant proportion of the revenue would go to PLA Navy since the submarines were sourced from its inventory.

³¹⁷ "Bangladesh formally joins China's flagship 'One Belt One Road' initiative", bdnews24.com, 15 oct 16, at <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2016/10/15/bangladesh-formally-joins-chinas-flagship-one-belt-one-road-initiative>

³¹⁸ Gurpreet S Khurana, "Geopolitics of China's 'Maritime Silk Road' Concept: An Indian Perspective", academia, at https://www.academia.edu/27093584/Geopolitics_of_China_s_Maritime_Silk_Road_Concept_An_Indian_Perspective

³¹⁹ Gurpreet S Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and its Security Implications", academia, at https://www.academia.edu/7727023/Chinas_String_of_Pearls_in_the_Indian_Ocean_and_its_Security_Implications

Implications

The sale of Chinese submarines to Bangladesh bears significant ramifications for the Indo-Pacific region. Lately, apprehensions are being increasingly expressed over the rapidly increasing number of submarines being operated by the regional countries. An addition of a submarine-operating country would not only multiply the complexity of water-space management – particularly due to the confidentiality associated with the deployments of such stealth platforms – but could also lead other countries to follow suit. The development also strengthens the imperative for the Indian Ocean navies to institute a mechanism for de-conflicting unintended naval encounters at sea through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which ironically, is presently being chaired by Bangladesh.³²⁰

The submarine sale to Bangladesh has come at a rather inopportune time for the countries of the Bay of Bengal. With the two major maritime disputes having been resolved, the sub-region was looking forward to enhanced maritime cooperation in various sectors like trade connectivity, blue economy and maritime safety and security, including through the revitalisation of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The BN's acquisition of submarines could lead to the littoral countries to reassess their maritime security strategies and adopt a cautious approach to maritime cooperation.

In the Indian context, New Delhi has little reason to be threatened by Dhaka's newly-acquired sea-denial capability. Nonetheless, Beijing's likely intent needs to be factored in its national security calculus, particularly considering the imminence of China's military-strategic presence in close proximity to India's naval bases, including its nuclear submarine bastion. Evidently, India's foreign policy vis-à-vis Bangladesh needs to be recalibrated. At the national-strategic level, India possesses insufficient financial and defence-industrial wherewithal to offset China's overwhelming influence upon Bangladesh, but there is no dearth of other leverages. In such circumstances, New Delhi may need to graduate from its long-standing policy of 'appeasing' Dhaka to a 'carrot and stick' policy.

³²⁰ Capt M A R Khan, "Capacity Building amongst IOR Navies towards Coordinated Disaster Relief Operations", IONS, at <http://ions.gov.in/content/bangladesh-navy>

China's Aircraft Carrier: 'Dreadnought' or 'Doctrinal Dilemma'?

23 May 2017

Within five years after the China commissioned its first Soviet-origin aircraft carrier *Liaoning* in September 2012, it launched its first-ever domestic carrier³²¹ – the Type 001A – on 26 April 2017. The new carrier is likely to be commissioned in 2020 as *Shandong*. Even though the *Liaoning* and the Type 001A are medium-sized conventionally powered (non-nuclear) vessels equipped with aircraft ski-jumps (not catapults), and thus far less capable than the super-carriers operated by the United States, the occasion was celebrated in China as a major achievement symbolic of China's 'great power' status. A report³²² indicates that China's larger next generation Type 002 carrier equipped with a steam catapult is already under construction since March 2015, and its follow-on carriers may be nuclear powered.

The launch of the Type 001A is indeed a milestone in the development of China as a major naval power. It reminds us of the famous battleship HMS *Dreadnought* commissioned into the Royal Navy in 1906. The *Dreadnought* was a highly successful warship induction marking the dawn of the 20th century warfare at sea. It became iconic of a transformative naval capability in a manner that the older existing warships of the world began to fade into obsolescence as pre-*Dreadnoughts*. The celebration in Beijing similarly justified, given the achievement of China's defence-technological endeavour within a relatively short period of time. It stands out rather conspicuously in comparison to India, which has been operating aircraft carriers since 1961, but is yet to commission its first indigenous carrier³²³ named *Vikrant*.

Moving from 'symbolism' to 'substance', such 'flat-tops' are indeed valuable platforms for maritime force-projection, which, for centuries, has been an important naval mission of all major power navies. However, given China's maritime geography and the kind of insecurities it encounters today from vastly superior adversarial navies of the United States and Japan operating in the western Pacific rim, the PLA Navy's growing doctrinal reliance on carriers seems to be an aberration. It may have been more prudent for China to focus on bolstering its existing Anti-Access/ Area-Denial (A2AD)

³²¹ "China launches first domestically-built aircraft carrier Type 001A", Global Times, 26 Apr 17, at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1044189.shtml>

³²² Huang Jingjing, "Experts weigh in on what to expect from China's next two aircraft carriers", Global Times, 09 May 17, at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1046052.shtml>

³²³ "Vikrant'- Navy's First Indigenous Aircraft Carrier Launched", at <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/vikrant-navys-first-indigenous-aircraft-carrier-launched>

³²⁴operational doctrine with the naval doctrine of ‘sea-denial’ – particularly given the PLA Navy’s traditional strengths in submarine, sea-mine and missile warfare – rather than diluting its naval doctrine by adding the carrier-based ‘sea-control’ doctrine.

Chinese carriers will also be highly vulnerable in the western Pacific rim, not only to the advanced navies, but also to the many unfriendly airbases and submarine bases of the littoral countries dotting the periphery of the East and South China Seas. It is well known that even the smaller countries in the region are building potent sea-denial capabilities against China. The recent induction ³²⁵of the six advanced Russian *Kilo*-class submarines into the Vietnamese Navy is case in point. If a maritime conflict breaks out in the area, the PLA Navy carrier would surely be a primal target, and any such successful targeting would be a major symbolic blow to China’s morale, and thus its war effort.

The Chinese believe that ‘sea-control’ is necessary to assert its maritime-territorial claims in the China Seas. This could have been achieved effectively – and at reduced risk – by optimally using the air-bases in the Chinese mainland and the occupied islands, which China is expanding through reclamation. Ironically, China’s island-building activity³²⁶ in the South China Sea has caused a major ‘damage’ to China’s claim to its ‘peaceful rise’ theory, which is now being aggravated by its own carrier-building programme. Furthermore, the programme lacks operational credibility, much into the foreseeable future. It would take the PLA Navy many years to operationalise a full-fledged Carrier Task Force, and possibly decades to make it effective enough to achieve sea-control against advanced navies. Meanwhile, the process could cause an indelible dent on China’s objective to propagate a ‘benign’ and ‘constructive’ image in the Indo-Pacific region, including through its ‘One-Belt-One-Road’ (OBOR) initiative.

Chinese strategists also believe that carrier-based sea-control is necessary to protect their Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean, as indicated by China’s recently articulated strategy of “open-seas protection” in its 2014 Defence White Paper. However, this could have been achieved – again effectively, and at reduced risk – by deploying its warships in its naval bases at strategic locations such as Djibouti and Gwadar.

³²⁴ “China’s A2AD and Its Geographic Perspective”, at http://www.rchss.sinica.edu.tw/files/publish/1239_4394902e.pdf

³²⁵ “Vietnam receives sixth and final submarine from Russia”, at <https://navaltoday.com/2017/01/20/vietnam-receives-sixth-and-final-submarine-from-russia/>

³²⁶ Bai Tiantian, “China to continue island development”, Global Times, 20 Jul 17, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/995351.shtml>

China is likely to have at least three aircraft carriers in commission at any given time in the future. The Chinese have clearly gone too far ahead for any reappraisal of its aircraft-carrier programme, possibly lured into the 'command of the seas' gambit of the major western naval powers, without factoring their own geo-strategic conditions and circumstances. One may, therefore, expect that the PLA Navy's 'doctrinal duality'³²⁷ in terms of primacy to both 'sea control' and 'sea denial' may become its dilemma in the coming years.

³²⁷ Gurpreet S Khurana, "Beyond Hardware And Technology: The Intangibles Of China's Naval Power (Part I)", *The Navalist*, 13 Apr 17, at <https://thenavalist.com/home/2017/4/12/beyond-hardware-and-technology-the-intangibles-of-chinas-naval-power>

‘Malabar’ Naval Exercises: Trends and Tribulations

05 August 2014

The 2014 edition of ‘Malabar’ trilateral exercise among the navies of India, Japan and the US in the western Pacific Ocean concluded on 30 July 2014. Given the trends, this event indicates the increasing will and self-confidence among the participants to impart greater momentum to their strategic interface at sea, notwithstanding the past tribulations. This essay seeks to take stock of the ‘Malabar’ series of exercises since the first nascent India-US event conducted more than two decades ago, and examine the factors that have shaped the trends and tribulations, including those relating to China’s perceptions of ‘Malabar’. It also aims to suggest the approach for a positive-sum outcome for all involved actors in the complex geo-political relationships spun around ‘Malabar’.

The Upward Trajectory

Following a post-Cold War initiative from the US side, ‘Malabar’ began in 1992 as a token passage exercise (PASSEX) between the Indian Navy (IN) and the US Navy (USN), off India’s southwestern Malabar coast.³²⁸ After a brief hiatus (1998-2001) due to India’s Pokhran-II nuclear tests, ‘Malabar’ recommenced in 2002. From 1992 to 2007, the scope of the exercises progressively increased, in terms of the participating navies, the exercise area, and the complexity of naval missions.

³²⁸ For the genesis of India-US Defence Exercises, see Khurana, Gurpreet S. (2008) ‘India-US Combined Defence Exercises: An Appraisal’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 32(6), p. 1047-1065

Table 1 – Malabar Exercises 1992-2007

Year	Country	Exercise Area	Level and Missions³²⁹	Platforms³³⁰	Sea Days
1992	India-US	Off India's west coast	Elementary. PASSEX ³³¹ . Basic manoeuvres.	Destroyers/ frigates	1 day
1995	India-US	Persian Gulf	2-dimensional, PASSEX, Anti-submarine warfare (ASW)	Indian warship and US SSN ³³² on passage (UAE to Kuwait)	1 day
1996	India-US	Off Kochi	Unidimensional	7 ships (3 from each side and a US logistics ship)	2 days
2002	India-US	-do-	Basic. Manoeuvres, Underway replenishment (UNREP)	2 destroyers/ frigates from each side	4 days
2003	India-US	Off Kochi	Medium level. 3-dimensional. Cross-deck helicopter landings, ASW, VBSS ³³³	6 ships, including US SSN & Indian diesel submarine, US P3C Orion aircraft	3 days
2004	India-US	Off Goa	Medium level. Tactical encounter at sea, Night UNREP, VBSS	7 ships, including US SSN & Indian diesel submarine	8 days
2005	India-US	Off Kochi	Advanced. SSN ops, Carrier ops, Diving salvage ops	7 ships, including 2 carriers (Nimitz, Viraat), US SSN & Indian diesel submarine	8 days
2006	India-US	Off Goa	Advanced. Diversified. SSN & Expeditionary ops	US SSN, Amphibious ships, US Marines, Indian Army Landing Forces	11 days
Apr 2007	India-US	Philippine Sea	Highly advanced. Multi-carrier ops, Amphibious ops, SSN ops.	12 ships, including 3 carriers (Nimitz, Kitty Hawk, Viraat), Amphibious ships, US SSN & P3C Orion aircraft	4 days
Sep 2007	India-US-Japan-S'pore-Australia	Bay of Bengal	Highly advanced. Carrier ops, SSN ops, counter-terror/ counter-piracy.	26 ships. US: 13, including 2 carriers & SSN. India: 8, including carrier. Australia: 2. Japan: 2. Singapore: 1	6 days

³²⁹ Refers to the most salient missions. In nearly all exercises after 2003, communication drills, surface warfare missions, manoeuvres and UNREP (underway replenishment) have been exercised in addition.

³³⁰ Refers only to the most salient naval platforms. In addition, destroyers/ frigates and tankers also participated.

³³¹ Passage exercise.

³³² Nuclear-powered attack submarine

³³³ Visit Board Search and Seizure (maritime interdiction) operations

The 2003 Malabar was seminal, since it not only graduated from the uni/two-dimensional level to a three-dimensional exercise (involving surface, sub-surface and air platforms), but also included *Visit Board Search and Seizure* (VBSS) missions against suspect vessels. Such operations may be necessary to curb terrorist use of sea transportation, including for trafficking of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

The Malabar conducted in November 2006, for the first time, included Expeditionary operations, which have immense applicability for India given its increasing normative responsibility to ensure regional stability in the IOR. The mission necessitated the involvement of the US Landing Helicopter Dock (LDH) USS Boxer and the US Marines forces, operating in conjunction with Indian Army troops and Indian marine commandos (MARCOS). This was a valuable lesson for the IN to emulate the concepts of operating expeditionary platforms and stand-off amphibious operations. Three months later, the IN inducted the USS Trenton, and rechristened it as INS Jalashwa.³³⁴

Malabar-07-1 (April 2007) was the first exercise to have been conducted outside the Indian Ocean. Although an India-US bilateral event, it was nearly enmeshed with TRILATEX-07 (mid-April 2007) involving Japan as well. China's reaction to these two exercises was guarded. Malabar-07-2 (September 2007) involved the navies of Australia, Japan and Singapore. As in the case of Malabar 07-1, maritime strike missions, dissimilar air-combat and 'buddy-refueling' between the Indian Air Force (IAF) Jaguars and the US F-18 Super Hornet aircraft were the highlights.³³⁵ The exercise raised a storm in Beijing, which projected the imminence of "an Asian NATO."³³⁶ The Chinese government activated diplomatic channels to seek explanations from all participating nations. The Chinese media upped the ante further. A vernacular press-report read, "*India reminds the Chinese Navy: If you want to enter Indian Ocean, first seek India's permission!*"

³³⁴ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'The Indian Navy's Amphibious Leap: 'With a little help from America'', IDSA Comment, 3 April 2006, at http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/TheIndianNavysAmphibiousLeap_GSKhurana_030406 (accessed 30 Jul 14).

³³⁵ Manu Pubby, 'IAF Jaguars 'sink' USS Nimitz, F-18s return the favour to INS Viraat', Indian Express, 8 September 2007, at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/iaf-jaguars--sink--uss-nimitz-f18s-return-the-favour-to-ins-viraat/215163/> (accessed 30 Jul 14).

³³⁶ Indrani Bagchi, 'As big powers play in Asia, where does India stand?', Times of India, 7 September 2007, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/As-big-powers-play-in-Asia-where-does-India-stand/articleshow/2345454.cms> (accessed 30 Jul 14). NATO refers to 'North Atlantic Treaty Organization'.

(translated from Mandarin).³³⁷ An analyst in Pakistan averred that exercise may be the makings of the erstwhile “SEATO in (a) new format”.³³⁸

The Tribulations

The tribulations began with Malabar-08, which was scaled back to the bilateral level (India-US). Although Malabar-09 (April-May 2009) was trilateral (involving Japan), India pulled out from the IN-US Marines amphibious assault exercise scheduled at Okinawa in September 2009. In 2012, the Indian government turned down IAF’s request to include Jaguar aircraft in Malabar-12.³³⁹ These aircraft are optimized for undertaking maritime strikes in support of naval missions. It may be recalled that five years earlier, the IAF Jaguars had participated in Malabar 07-2 conducted in the same area. From 2010 to 2013, the Malabar exercises were scaled back to bilateral level, with no further increase in their complexity.

³³⁷ Michelle, ‘India reminds the Chinese navy: Wants to enter Indian Ocean first to ask India’ (sic) (Translated from Mandarin), 23 August 2007, at <http://9link.116.com.cn/node/33841> (accessed 2 Oct 07).

³³⁸ Shafaat Ahmad, Brig. Gen. (Retd.), Pak Army, ‘Joint naval exercise: SEATO in new format?’, *The Daily Star*, September 2007, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=6809> (accessed 10 Nov 07). SEATO refers to the erstwhile *Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation*.

³³⁹ Sujaan Dutta, ‘Delhi scales down US war games - Air force request to join exercise with American navy turned down’, *The Telegraph*, 29 Apr 12, at http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120429/jsp/frontpage/story_15432138.jsp#.U9jFH-OSxqU (accessed 30 Jul 14).

Table 2 – Malabar Exercises 2008-2014

<u>Year</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Exercise Area</u>	<u>Missions</u>	<u>Platforms</u>	<u>Sea Days</u>
2008	India-US	Arabian Sea	Carrier ops, SSN ops, P-3C Orion-based ASW, VBSS, counter-terrorism.	15 ships, including US Carrier & SSN, & Indian diesel submarine	10 days
2009	India-US-Japan	Off Okinawa	Surface Warfare, ASW, Air Defence, VBSS.	6 ships including US SSN	6 days
2010	India-US	Off Goa	ASW, VBSS, Cross-deck helicopter landings	10 ships, including US SSN & Indian diesel sub. US P3C Orion	7 days
2011	India-US	Off Okinawa	Missions same as above. Also, Air Defence and screen exercise	8 ships, including US SSN	5 days
2012	India-US	Bay of Bengal	Surface warfare, helicopter landings	9 ships including US Carrier Battle Group	7 days
2013	India-US	Off Visakhapatnam	Surface warfare, gun-firing, helicopter landings, ASW, VBSS	No Carriers. 4 ships, including US P3C Orion & IN TU-142 aircraft	6 days
2014	India-US-Japan	Off Nagasaki	Carrier ops, Maritime-air operations, cross-deck helicopter landings, UNREP, Gunnery, ASW, Counter-piracy, VBSS, Search and Rescue	8 ships including US Carrier, SSN & P3C Orion. Japan's P3C Orion & US-2 aircraft	6 days

In sum, the quantum and scope of Malabar exercises has steadily increased till it peaked in 2007. Since then, the level of the exercises has languished. The essentials of the trends (1992-2014) in terms of the countries participated and the exercise area are depicted in the map below.

Map – Malabar Exercises 1992-2014: Participants and Exercise Areas

Source: Author



Pertinent Questions

The incremental progression in the complexity of Malabar exercises (till 2007) may be explained as a function of time and the growing operational compatibility (inter-operability) between the US Navy and the IN. However, an examination of the broader trends raises some interesting questions: -

(a) What was the motivation to change the nature of ‘Malabar’ from ‘bilateral’ to ‘multilateral’?

- The rationale to have Malabar at the multilateral level flows from the imperatives of ‘cost-effectiveness’ and ‘resource optimisation’, and cannot be attributed to China. After the end of the Cold War, India began conducting naval exercises with all major navies, in consonance with its multi-vector foreign policy. Besides the India-US Malabar, these include ‘Indra’ (with Russia), ‘Konkan’ (with the UK), ‘Varuna’ (with France) and SIMBEX (with Singapore). Also notable is the biennial naval exercise with China since 2003. All these bilateral naval exercises are conducted regularly, and have led to IN’s resources being severely stretched. Besides, it was realised that, over the years, the dividends from these

exercises seemed to have ‘plateaued’. The logical approach, therefore, was to schedule exercises with a group of navies, rather than bilateral exercises.

(b) What was the basis of the choice to include Australia, Japan and Singapore in Malabar (among other options)?

- India’s decision to include Australia, Japan and Singapore in ‘Malabar’ may have been largely driven by the commonality of operational philosophy between the navies. English is a common language, and a major facilitator for maritime communications, which itself, is an essential prerequisite for joint naval operations. Besides, familiarity with ‘Allied’ publications leads to commonality of tactical doctrines. Notably, Japan’s military alliance with the US since the end of Second World War has made the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) proficient in NATO doctrines and procedures. In contrast, the navies of India and China are vastly different in terms of evolutionary development, operational philosophies and battle indoctrination. Hence, the occasional exercises that the IN has undertaken with the PLA Navy has largely meant to foster mutual trust, and thus involved very basic facets such as communication drills and formation steaming.

(c) Why was the ‘Malabar’ exercise area diversified to beyond the Indian Ocean?

- The occasional shift of the ‘Malabar’ exercise from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific may be justified by the geographical dilation of India’s maritime and overseas interests beyond the IOR, and hence the imperative for the IN to familiarise itself to operate in these distant waters. Notably, the Indian Maritime Doctrine (2009) classifies the Western Pacific as India’s secondary area of maritime interest.³⁴⁰ Since 2009, the IN has conducted joint exercises with the navies of France and the UK in the Atlantic as well.³⁴¹

(d) Why has the quantum and scope of ‘Malabar’ been steadily declining since 2007?

- India’s reluctance to enhance the scope of Malabar – or at least its cautious approach to avoid breaching its established frontiers – is more likely to have been

³⁴⁰ Indian Maritime Doctrine (INBR-8), *Maritime Doctrine and Concept Centre* (MDCC), Mumbai/Integrated Headquarters MoD (Navy), August 2009, p.66

³⁴¹ ‘Navy war games with French, British in Atlantic next month’, *The Hindu*, 29 May 2009, at <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/001200905291971.htm> (accessed 30 Jul 14).

influenced by the China factor. This is best exemplified by its pulling out from the IN-US Marines Amphibious Assault exercise at Okinawa (September 2009) and its unwillingness to field the IAF Jaguars during Malabar 2012.

The objectives of 'Malabar' are well established³⁴², and so are the compelling reasons for India and the US to enhance the quantum and scope of these exercises. However, these have steadily declined since 2007 due to New Delhi's overriding compulsions to balance its relations with the US and China. It appears that the US has understood India's concerns, and has been reciprocating by toning down its own participation.

However, the 2014 edition of 'Malabar' indicates the realization of the potential and imperative to develop these exercises further. To achieve this, the perceptual challenge with regard to China would need to be addressed.

The Way Forward

The anxieties raised by 'Malabar' in Beijing are understandable. The answer does not lie in hedging the issue by scaling down Malabar, as was done by India following Malabar-07. As in case of the recent RIMPAC exercise (2014), India and the US could invite China to be an observer in the next trilateral Malabar. In the next few years, the Chinese Navy could be invited to participate in a multi-nation Malabar. This may serve the larger interests of both the US and India.

During the 2009 visit of the US Admiral Keating – CINCPAC (C-in-C Pacific Command) – to India, he noted that the US had invited China to take part in the joint exercises involving its military forces in the region (including RIMPAC). He added that "China had agreed to send observers to these exercises, and hence, he would have no objection to the Chinese observing the Indo-US exercise."³⁴³ It is also notable that among the important elements of the US 'rebalance to Asia' strategy is the endeavor to 'socialize' China.³⁴⁴ The US invitation to China to participate in RIMPAC-14 may be seen as a step towards that end.

On the other hand, in all past endeavours of India to engage with the US – particularly with regard to naval exercises – it has been necessary for New Delhi to look

³⁴² For objectives of India-US Defence Exercises, see Khurana, Gurpreet S. (2008) 'India-US Combined Defence Exercises: An Appraisal', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 32(6), p. 1047-1065

³⁴³ 'US invites China to join naval exercises', *Brahmand Defence and Aerospace News*, 15 May 2009, at <http://124.124.231.87/news/US-invites-China-to-join-naval-exercises/1588/1/10.html>

³⁴⁴ Ashley Tellis, Public Lecture on 'Pivot or Pirouette: The US Rebalance to Asia', *National Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS)*, IISc Campus, Bangalore, 03 Jan 2014

back over its shoulder for reassurance that such engagement would not yield negative consequences vis-à-vis its relations with China. Ostensibly, India's decision to accept the US offer to participate in RIMPAC-14 was based on the fact that China itself was sending its warships for the exercise.³⁴⁵

China could be occasionally included in India-US Malabar exercises, which may yield positive-sum outcomes for all parties. Even if symbolic and *sans* tangible operational benefits, it would be valuable joint India-US endeavor to 'socialize' China. At the same time, it would enable India, the US and their maritime partners in the Indo-Pacific region to break through the 'glass-ceiling' to further their cooperative endeavour towards regional security, while also preserving the established global norms with regard to the global maritime commons.

³⁴⁵ India to play Sea War Games with 22 Nations, *Hindustan Times*, 9 September 2013, New Delhi, at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/newdelhi/india-to-play-sea-war-games-with-22-nations/article1-1119373.aspx> (accessed 28 Jul 14)

Indian Navy Updates Indian Maritime Doctrine 2009

22 March 2016

On 12th February 2016, the Indian Navy released the Indian Maritime Doctrine 2015³⁴⁶. It is an online version of the Indian Maritime Doctrine 2009, updated as on 2015. It may be recalled that the first ever edition of Indian Maritime Doctrine was published in April 2004, and the same was revised in August 2009.

The Indian Maritime Doctrine 2009 was updated to conform to the new maritime strategy document³⁴⁷ titled 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy' promulgated in October 2015. The new strategy supersedes the 'Freedom of use the Seas - Indian Maritime Military Strategy' (2007), which was the first-ever Indian maritime strategy document in the public domain.

This write-up aims to disseminate to the strategic and academic communities in India and abroad the specific need for updating the Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2009 and the salient amendments.

At the outset, it is necessary to comprehend the distinction between 'doctrine' and 'strategy'. A 'Military Doctrine' flows from concepts, and shapes the development and employment of military power. It is a collation of principles that guide the actions of a force in the way it organises, trains, fights and sustains itself in pursuit of national objectives; and places all its members and stakeholders on a common conceptual platform. On the other hand, a 'Military Strategy' is an overarching plan that articulates the 'ways' and 'means' of how a military force will be employed to meet the desired 'ends'. The doctrine, therefore, provides the conceptual framework to devise the strategy. Hence, the Indian Maritime Doctrine and Strategy documents together provide a holistic perspective of the Indian Navy towards development of maritime-military power and its employment to meet the national objectives.

It is clear from the above that the Doctrine is a 'superior' document, and the Strategy must necessarily draw from it. The 'shelf life' of a doctrine is relatively long. In the interim, however, a fundamental change may occur in a national stake, concept or objective. Such a change involves a doctrinal shift, and must be addressed at the first

³⁴⁶ "INDIAN MARITIME DOCTRINE Indian Navy Naval Strategic Publication 1.1", at <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian-Maritime-Doctrine-2009-Updated-12Feb16.pdf>

³⁴⁷ "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy", 25 Jan 16, at https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf

available opportunity. Such a need and opportunity arose during the compilation of the new strategy 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy' (2015), when it became necessary to update the base-document, viz. Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2009.

The 2009 document is thus updated at various places for new developments relevant to India. The new document also bears some changes with regard to nomenclature, and naval missions and tasks. However, three salient amendments to Indian Maritime Doctrine 2009 may be considered as the most pronounced reflections of the doctrinal changes in India's maritime-military thinking.

The foremost of these is the enlargement of India's areas of maritime interest south-eastwards and westwards. The South-East Indian Ocean, including sea routes to the Pacific Ocean and littoral regions; the Mediterranean Sea and its littoral region; and the West Coast of Africa and its littoral region are added as new 'secondary' areas of interest. (The original 2009 document had referred only to the littoral regions of Australia and Africa as 'secondary' areas).

The second amendment pertains to the reconfiguration of 'primary' and 'secondary' areas of interest and *inter-se* prioritization between the two. The South-West Indian Ocean and Red Sea, which was earlier considered as 'secondary' areas, are now encompassed within the 'primary area'. Also, in the sequence of various 'primary' areas, the 'Persian Gulf and its littoral' now precedes the 'choke-points of the Indian Ocean', indicating that it is considered more crucial for India's interests. The rationale is clear – the Gulf is a major source of India's hydrocarbon imports and home to about seven million expatriate Indians. Additionally, while the Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden and the Andaman Sea are contiguous to the seas (Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal) that have continued to be 'primary' areas of interest, these water bodies have been specifically named as 'primary' areas. Further, the original document had stated that other areas of national interest may be classified as 'secondary' areas based on considerations of 'Indian diaspora' and 'overseas investments'. The updated version adds "political relations" as another consideration.

The third major amendment relates to altered emphasis on maritime choke-points of the Indian Ocean. In lieu of the two mid-ocean choke-points – the Six-degree Channel and the Eight/ Nine-degree Channel – the updated document attaches greater salience to the international straits that circumscribe the Indian Ocean at its extremities, such as Hormuz Strait, Bab-el-Mandeb, Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait. This serves to highlight the Ocean's geo-strategic 'exclusivity' for India. Significantly, Ombai-Wetar Straits located in the far south-eastern Indian Ocean is a new addition to the choke-points constituting India's 'primary' area of interest.

It is also notable that the Doctrine's updated online version 2015 conforms to the Indian Navy's new doctrinal hierarchy. The designation of Indian Maritime Doctrine

2009 was 'Indian Navy Book of Reference' (INBR)-8, which has been now been amended to 'Naval Strategic Publication (NSP) 1.1'. The word "strategic" indicates that the document refers to the 'military-strategic' level (other levels are 'operational' and 'tactical'). Its first numeral indicates that it pertains to the function of 'naval operations' (other functions are 'technical', 'personnel', logistics', etc.). Its second numeral denotes the hierarchy within the function. Hence, NSP 1.1 refers to the apex document of naval operations at the military-strategic level. In a similar manner, 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy' has been designated INSP 1.2, which refers to the second-highest document of naval operations the military-strategic level

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