

**THE INDIAN NAVY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL MARITIME  
FOUNDATION**

**THE INDO-PACIFIC REGIONAL DIALOGUE: 2018 EDITION**

**AN ANNUAL REVIEW OF INDIA'S OPPORTUNITIES AND  
CHALLENGES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION**

**CONCEPT NOTE**

The term 'Indo-Pacific' has, in recent years, moved quite decisively from its origins within the discipline of 'biogeography' into 'geopolitics', where it has acquired very considerable traction. In spatial terms, this refers to a predominantly maritime space that incorporates all littoral states of West Asia and Africa; it goes right across the Indian Ocean in its entirety, envelops SE Asia (ASEAN), and stretches into the western Pacific to include the littorals of East and Northeast Asia (including North and South Korea, Japan and China) and even reaches across Australia and New Zealand into the sprawl of southern Pacific Island-nations.

Within the Indo-Pacific, one encounters a heady mix of maritime connectivity, collaboration, cooperation and competition — all of which is increasingly being recognised as being of the most immediate importance to the world, to Asia, and, most especially, to India. Many of these processes — whether collaborative, cooperative or competitive — are occurring simultaneously on both, the tangible and the intangible plane. Thus, in the high drama that is unfolding before us, the main protagonists and supporting-actors alike, all jockey for influence, projecting the attractiveness or otherwise of a way-of-life that they either espouse or reject, both individually and collectively.

Even as individual nation-states that are the inheritors of great and wondrous civilisations manoeuvre to once again occupy what they perceive to be their rightful place in the sun, we are indeed witnessing a historic restoration of the balance of global power. This is most certainly being signalled by the rapid rise of a number of Asian nation-states — India, China, Iran, Japan, South Korea, and the ten constituent nations of ASEAN — to name only a few. The Indo-Pacific is in the throes of maritime change and this change is of an order of magnitude and complexity that was unimaginable only a few short decades ago. The multinational, rules-based order — exemplified by the consensual entry into force of the 1982 UN Law of the Sea, which has thus far sustained maritime intercourse between nations — is under great strain as contemporary China offers an alternative interpretation of a new regional order with the promise of inclusive economic growth through the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI). India, a resurgent maritime nation, on the other hand, seeks to emphasise its equally great civilizational and cultural heritage and offers its

own leadership-models. Other great civilisations, too, such as those of Iran, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and South Korea, are all striving to break free from the shackles of relatively modern history — whether colonial or not — and re-establish prominence if not predominance.

All nation-states of the Indo-Pacific are wrestling with the multi-faceted challenges of the globalised world in which they find themselves. Indeed, the defining characteristics of globalisation remain economic interdependence and the centrality that this economic interdependence has afforded to international trade. Since the bulk of all international trade is carried over the seas, this also serves to underscore the criticality of the International Shipping Lanes (ISLs) that transit across the Indo-Pacific, as also the ports to and from which this trade flows.

What are the central nodes that might define the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific from India's perspective? What are the more significant of maritime challenges in this region and what ought to be India's strategies for risk-mitigation? Perhaps even more importantly, since every challenge is simultaneously an opportunity, what are the opportunities that present themselves before India's maritime policy-shapers, policy-makers, and, the practitioners of these policies? How should other regional players react to the geopolitical game-moves by India and other major players within the Indo-Pacific? The current (2018) edition of the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue will seek to address these and allied issues.

The 'Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue', which is an annual review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, is the Indian Navy's apex-level seminar, conducted jointly by the Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence (Navy) and the National Maritime Foundation, both of which are located in New Delhi. Last year's review concentrated extensively upon the emerging contours of the Blue Economy, which is shaping the regional maritime discourse in its entirety. It is appropriate that in this year's seminar, stock be taken of the progress that has been made in furthering the recommendations that emerged from last year's intensive discussions, so as to allow participants and policy-makers alike to get a sense of where we stand a year down the line, with regard to harnessing the Blue Economy.

In this year's review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue intends to focus upon four basic themes of great relevance to regional geopolitics:

- The first is maritime merchandise trade, whose environmentally-sensitive development is an important constituent of the Blue Economy but whose centrality to maritime geopolitics precedes this economic conception by several centuries, if not several millennia. Obviously, deliberations centred upon the growth and vulnerabilities of maritime merchandise trade must necessarily include associated infrastructure such as ports and multi-modal connectivities. These have strong geopolitical connotations and the current

year's edition of the Dialogue seeks to reference the discourse on maritime merchandise trade and its allied industry to these very geopolitical considerations, with which established and emerging powers of the Indo-Pacific region must wrestle, both individually and collectively. The deliberations are so designed as to not limit themselves to trade growth, vulnerabilities, opportunities and mitigation-options only in respect of the major regional maritime players such as China, Japan, India, etc. Instead, a far more inclusive approach is intended to be adopted and the impact of trade growth, vulnerabilities, opportunities and mitigation-options upon the geopolitical game-plays of several other important and dynamic regional players of North and East Africa, West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia will be explored with equal intensity.

- The second theme will focus upon regional connectivity-models such as the BRI, the International North South Transit Corridor (NSTC), the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), Project MAUSAM, the SAGAR concept, etc. This theme also encompasses an examination of collective regional structures within the IOR, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), as also corresponding structures within the Pacific segment of the Indo-Pacific, such as ASEAN and the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS).
- The third theme will delve into pan-regional changes and challenges to the overall maritime environment of the Indo-Pacific. These include the trials and tribulations of sustaining persistent surveillance at sea, the challenges posed by the increasing digitisation of the maritime space, and the dangers of cyber-malevolence that are already afflicting the maritime domain.
- The fourth and final theme will highlight the role of Indian industry within both, the private and the public sectors, in enhancing holistic maritime-security. While bilateral, trilateral and multinational industrial-partnerships are relatively virgin areas that merit exploration, special attention is sought to be paid to 'Make-in-India' options in the maritime domain and the optimal manner in which the enormous potential of India's shipyards and the effervescence of the MSME sector can best be realised and leveraged.

The Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue recognises that the contemporary maritime-security dynamic of this vast oceanic expanse is dominated by the strategic moves and counter-moves of three ascending major powers, viz., China, India and Iran; two status-quo powers, each with a sharply declining population, namely Japan and Russia; at least four facilitating powers, namely, Indonesia, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam; one revisionist power (North Korea), and one superpower, viz., the USA. This year's seminar seeks to direct intensive and extensive scholarship to the trade vulnerabilities and geopolitical game moves of each of these.