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Editorial Team

Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S Khurana

Ms. Richa Klair

Address

*National Maritime Foundation
Varuna Complex, NH- 8
Airport Road
New Delhi-110 010, India*

Email: maritimeindia@gmail.com

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Nigeria detains Security contractors during Anti-Piracy sweep

Nigerian authorities have arrested nine private maritime security contractors (PMSCs) during a multinational anti-piracy sweep in the Gulf of Guinea. The Nigerian Navy detained the civilian anti-piracy personnel on suspicion of illegal firearms possession. Four semiautomatic rifles were found on board, along with ammunition and assorted tactical equipment. In addition to five Nigerian citizens, the suspects include four foreign nationals. These individuals have been identified as Angelopolous Spyridon, 54, Kappis Christos, 57, and Petropoulos Stylianos, 34, all Greek nationals; and Zanski Michael-Anderson, 50, an American citizen. The arrests occurred during a joint U.S.-Nigerian maritime security operation, the annual Junction Rain exercise.

“There were nine suspects on the first boat arrested. The boat was looking like a naval boat and when we made initial contact, the captain made us believe that he was in our waters for routine patrol waiting for a merchant vessel,” said Nigerian Navy Commodore Dickson Olisemenogor, speaking to local media. “They did not tell us where they were coming from and that was why we arrested them. They earlier switched off some of the equipment to make it difficult for you to detect them, but unfortunately for them, we have the equipment on board to detect whoever is at sea. No criminal can hide again in our waters.” The detainees' employer, U.S.-based maritime security firm Trident Group, told media that the arrest occurred in international waters, outside of Nigerian jurisdiction. The weapons were properly licensed, according to the firm.

The Nigeria Immigration Service asserted that none of the detainees have passport stamps or visas indicating that they had entered Nigeria legally. The allegation may be accurate: if the *Sea Angel III* was in international waters, the detainees may have arrived at that location without ever entering Nigeria at all.

Nigeria forbids the use of embarked armed security contractors in its territorial seas, which are the most dangerous region in the world for maritime hijacking and kidnapping. Instead, shipping interests may hire privately-operated escort vessels carrying armed Nigerian Navy security personnel

Source: maritime-executive.com

India takes lesson from terror attacks on Sri Lanka: Maritime security heightened

After a series of explosions at churches and hotels in Sri Lanka that killed 290 people and injured more than 500 on Sunday, Indian Coast Guard are on high alert along the maritime boundary. According to sources, intelligence input suggested that those behind the deadly attack might attempt to escape from Sri Lanka and try to enter India via sea route. Preventing any attempts by terrorists to escape in India, ships and maritime surveillance aircraft Dornier have been deployed on the maritime border with Sri Lanka.

In the wake of the serial bomb blasts in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and police have stepped security along the coastal lines to prevent any possible infiltration from Sri Lanka via sea route. Frequency of sea patrol has been increased and a strict vigil is being kept to make sure no terrorists infiltrate in India along with the coastal areas. Security of churches has also been beefed up.

Indian Coast Guard on Monday apprehended four Indian fishermen from the 4th islet in Rama Setu near Dhanushkodi in Rameswaram Island. They were later released after being interrogated at the Mandapam Coast Guard station. Earlier, India has witnessed how terrorist took the sea route to carry out a serial attack in Mumbai in 2008 at the Taj hotel.

Last month, Indian Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba had warned that there are reports about terrorists being trained to carry out operations through the sea. “We also have reports of terrorists being trained to carry out attacks with varying modus operandi including through the medium of the sea. India has been facing the threat of terror through the seas,” he added.

Source: sguardian.com

Chinese Naval escort fleets ensure Maritime Security

At 1:45 p.m. on December 26, 2008, the first Chinese naval escort taskforce sailed to waters off Somalia, to help in the fight against pirates in the Gulf of Aden. Consisting of two guided missile destroyers, one replenishment ship and members of the special

task force, the operation was the first deployment of the Chinese navy beyond the Pacific Ocean, off on the high seas.

After 12 days of sailing, the naval fleet escorting four Chinese merchant vessels reached the Gulf of Aden. But soon, the escort fleet was surrounded and blocked by pirate ships. As the pirates attempted to board the commercial ships, stun grenades were fired to fend off the intruders. In the naval escort taskforce's 124 days of operation, the same scenery repeated itself numerous times.

Protecting Chinese shipping interest

Traditionally, the Chinese navy's primary responsibility is coastal defense. But with rampant pirate hijacking activities along the Gulf of Aden, which threatened the economic interests of Chinese merchant vessels, the navy was called upon to safeguard maritime security.

In 2008, 100 vessels were reportedly attacked in the Gulf of Aden, including seven Chinese commercial fleets, with 14 ships held for ransom before the first Chinese naval escort operation began. The United Nations in the same year passed a resolution calling on all countries to help patrol the waters off Somalia to protect the sea trade lanes.

The pirate-infested waters in the Gulf of Aden are a critical sea lane of communication for China. Crude oil imported from the Middle East and cargo ships from Africa go through the Gulf of Aden, critical for China's continued economic growth. It is also one of the world's busiest sea lanes, with 20 percent of the world's sea trade passing through it.

Initially, the escort taskforce focused their operation on Chinese-flagged vessels. But with time, foreign vessels were included in the escort operation. In the ten years since the first escort operation in 2008, China has escorted over 6,000 Chinese and foreign commercial vessels, half of which are foreign owned or carrying cargo of the United Nations World Food Program.

Leading charge in promoting navy diplomacy

While the first sailing into the high seas was dedicated to escort alone, the Chinese navy gradually expanded its activities, participating in cooperation exercises and engaging in naval diplomacy.

With pirates' activities dwindling since 2012, the scope of the operation expanded to other areas of international operations. In 2013, the 16th batch of escort fleets accompanied vessels in charge of carrying Syrian chemical weapons for destruction. In 2014, the 17th batch of fleets participated in the search of the missing MH370 aircraft. Later in the same year, they escorted potable water shipments to the Maldives during a water crisis. Bilateral exchanges between the Chinese navy and foreign naval forces regularly take place. In 2009, the Chinese and Russian navies held joint anti-piracy escort exercises for the first time. "Whereas it is hard for land force to cross the border, air force cannot stay long in other countries' territorial air space, the navy is thus in the best position to promote diplomacy," Yang Zhen, researcher at Fudan Institute of Belt and Road & Global Governance told CGTN Digital. Either in the form of joint military exercises, port calls, senior-level meetings and dialogues, navy diplomacy can enhance mutual trust and strengthen cooperation, Yang added. Increased interaction between navies is a sign of close bilateral relations.

Behind the biggest evacuation in Chinese history

Years of deployment in the high seas quickly enhanced Chinese navy's ability to conduct operations — how to use special forces in dealing with non-traditional security threats, how to provide logistics support, etc. Those lessons learnt were quickly put to use. In 2011, Libya descended into a state of lawlessness, as the country teetered on the brink of a civil war. Among the 75 Chinese companies with operations in Libya, many suffered from economic losses because of looting in office buildings, destroyed vehicles and stolen cash. The Xuzhou missile frigate, which was already deployed in the anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, was redirected to Libya to carry out the evacuation operation. It offered support and protection for ships evacuating Chinese nationals, and in the end successfully evacuated more than 35,000 Chinese nationals from Libya — the largest civilian evacuation operation in Chinese history. "These international cooperative operations debunked the myth of 'China Threat' and 'Chinese naval nationalism'," said Yang. Through escort operations, Chinese navy's ability to conduct long-range operations increased greatly. China has showcased its capacity and its will to act as a provider of maritime security.

Source: eng.mod.gov.cn

The Bahamas commissions new radar to improve Maritime Security

- Alejandro Sanchez

The Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF) commissioned a new radar on 17 April as part of its new maritime security strategy, which focuses on decentralising the RBDF and acquiring new technologies to improve monitoring and surveillance operations.

The newly commissioned long-range coastal radar was manufactured by Kelvin Hughes and donated by the US government to Nassau, RBDF said in a release. Valued at USD2.1 million, the radar operates in the RBDF base in Matthew Town, Inagua Island, located just north of Cuba and Haiti. The RBDF said another radar will be installed by the end of the year at an undisclosed location.

Source: [janes.com](https://www.janes.com)

India's ASAT test a response to growing space threats: France

-Dinakar Peri

'Outer space becoming an arena of rivalry between nations'

Stating that defence and offensive space technologies are being developed with various aims of spying, gaining control, deactivating service and destroying, French Envoy in India Alexandre Ziegler has supported India's Anti-Satellite (ASAT) missile test as a response to these growing threats. "India shared the same observation and desire to act, which is actually reflected in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of the ASAT missile test on March 27 this year. It is obvious that it was a clear response to an assessment of growing threats in the outer space. And that's an assessment that we share....," Mr. Ziegler said addressing the 5th Kalpana Chawla annual space policy dialogue organised by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) that began on Monday.

Debris concerns

He also observed that outer space has become an “arena of rivalry between major powers.” At the same time, he said there was common concern on space debris. Satellites today have to avoid almost 6,00,000 debris of over 1cm travelling at speed faster than a bullet, he stated. On March 27, India shot down a live satellite in the Low Earth Orbit (LEO) of 300 km using a modified interceptor of the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system. Officials had stated that the LEO was particularly chosen to minimise space debris.

India and France, which have been cooperating in the area of space for several decades, had announced the setting up of a constellation of satellites for maritime surveillance of the Indian Ocean. Mr. Ziegler said as part of this, the two countries are co-developing a constellation 10-15 satellites that could help “monitor the maritime traffic in the Indian Ocean.”

Maritime surveillance

“It is part of the joint vision that we signed. It is a civilian project,” he stated. In this regard, Rod Hilton, Deputy High Commissioner of Australia, said his country was keen to be part of the broader maritime security cooperation and was working with India and France. “We have signed technology cooperation agreements with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and space situational awareness is part of that,” he said. As space gets increasingly crowded, Mr. Ziegler also called for the need to regulate space traffic on the lines of air traffic or railways. He said France shares India’s view on the use of outer space for peaceful purposes and said, “We therefore refuse any destabilising arms race, which would be detrimental to all of us.”

Source: www.thehindu.com



China wants 'tranquillity', navy chief says ahead of new warships reveal

- Ben Blanchard

QINGDAO, China (Reuters) - China's navy wants maritime "tranquillity and good order", its chief said on Monday, ahead of a parade to mark its 70th anniversary at which the military is expected to display new warships including nuclear submarines and destroyers. President Xi Jinping is overseeing a sweeping plan to refurbish the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by developing everything from stealth jets to aircraft carriers as China ramps up its presence in the South China Sea and around self-ruled Taiwan, which has rattled nerves in the region.

The navy has been a key beneficiary of the modernisation plan, with China looking to project power far from its shores and protect its trading routes and citizens overseas. Last month, Beijing unveiled a target of 7.5 percent rise in defence spending for this year, a slower rate than last year but still outpacing its economic growth target. Tuesday's parade in the waters off the eastern city of Qingdao will feature 32 vessels and 39 aircraft, some of which will not have been unveiled before, as well as warships from 13 foreign countries including India, Australia and Vietnam. Speaking at a reception in Qingdao, navy chief Shen Jinlong said China was looking to promote trust and cooperation this week in its interactions with foreign navies and delegations. "China's navy is willing to, together with other navies, tackle maritime security challenges and maintain maritime peace, tranquillity and good order, stay committed to maritime security and development and actively provide more public goods for world maritime security," Shen, who is close to Xi, said. "The PLA navy is willing to be your close, friendly and equal partner for mutual support, development and win-win cooperation and remain united and act resolutely with all of you to safeguard world peace and stability," he added. "Let us contribute more to an ocean of lasting peace common security and prosperity, an ocean that is open and inclusive."

Military officers accompanying reporters in Qingdao have been at pains to point out China has no hostile intent with the naval parade and it is not a show of force but a sign of a genuine desire for global maritime cooperation. China has not said which new equipment it may reveal, but state media has run several glowing reports in recent days about a second and as-yet unnamed aircraft carrier, domestically built and

undergoing sea trials. The Liaoning, its first carrier, was bought second-hand from Ukraine in 1998 and refitted in China. While Chinese navy ships have participated in international anti-piracy patrols off Somalia's coast since late 2008, its ships' last naval battles were with the Vietnamese in the South China Sea, in 1974 and 1988, though these were relatively minor skirmishes.

Source: in.reuters.com

Head of US naval forces in Europe and US ambassador to Russia talk great power competition

- Matthew Bodner

ABOARD THE CARRIER ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA — Relations between the United States and Russia have seen a number of ups and downs since Russian President Vladimir Putin first came to power in 2000. Both sides have their lists of grievances, and at various points have contributed in some way to the sorry state of their relationship.

But Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea from neighboring Ukraine was the decisive moment, sparking five years of consistent tension between Moscow and the West. Since then, the Kremlin has gone all-in on projecting an image of new strength — and part of that has been a rebirth of Russian naval activity across the board.

On April 23, Defense News landed aboard the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln in the Mediterranean Sea for an exclusive interview with Adm. James Foggo, commander of U.S. naval forces in Europe, and U.S. Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman. The two shared their views on Russia's resurgent Navy, and how the two individuals coordinate military and diplomatic messaging. Huntsman's visit to the Lincoln did not go unnoticed by Moscow. In a U.S. Navy release, he was quoted as saying American aircraft carriers represent "100,000 tons of international diplomacy." This comment drew flak from the Russian Foreign Ministry and the state media apparatus.

The Russian Navy is modernizing, but we've seen a few setbacks in recent years — among them the cutting off of engine turbine deliveries from Ukraine, which has put a lot of Russian surface fleet projects on hold. In terms of great power competition with Russia, from your perspective on the water, what are you most concerned about?

Adm. James Foggo: The Russian Navy has definitely modernized. They have put some of their capital into faster, leaner, more agile and smaller warships — the Admiral Grigorovich- and Admiral Gorshkov-class frigates, as well as the Steregushchy-class corvettes. Gorshkov is out participating in China's fleet review this week. Russia is working on problems with their aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov, and they have never stopped putting money into the undersea domain, and their submarine force is very capable.

So to tell you the truth, I respect the Russian Navy for the capability that they have, but nothing comes close to this: a U.S. aircraft carrier strike group, two at the same time in the Med. We are not here to do anything but deter and defend, and while we are at it, we have seen an increased presence of Russian naval forces in the Med, particularly in the eastern Med, and the USS Abraham Lincoln will experience that while they are here. And I would expect nothing short of professional conduct from both navies.

About two years ago, the Kremlin sent the Admiral Kuznetsov with a battlegroup that included the battlecruiser Peter the Great through the English Channel, into the Med and onto Syria. It was, in a way, Putin's Great White Fleet moment. Russians were shown on television that Russia was again a great naval power, deploying an American-style carrier strike group. What did you see?

Foggo: The Russians want what we have right here on the deck of this ship, they want a powerful carrier strike group. What I saw with Kuznetsov: She was ordered in 1981 — the year I graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy — so we are talking 38 years ago. She's a [very short-takeoff-and-landing] carrier. She does not have the incredible capability of the steam catapult like the Lincoln, and nobody has anything like electromagnetic-assisted launch that is on the brand-new Ford-class carriers. So when you do an apples-to-apples comparison, there is no comparison.

The Russians wanted to prove with that deployment that they could get underway for a long period of time, and they did that. But as they came around [northern Europe and the English Channel] they were blowing some pretty nasty black smoke, so I think the engineering system on that ship is in dire need of upgrade. And today you saw

cycling air operations — launching and recovering aircraft. We do that 24/7, including at night. These guys in the Lincoln air wing are proficient, same with the [carrier John C.] Stennis.

The Russians didn't do that with Kuznetsov. They basically drove the air wing down to Syria and offloaded them, so it was more like a fly-on/fly-off type of ship. So there is no comparison, and I am very happy the U.S. Navy has got two of these fantastic carriers in the Med right now to send a very strong message to all of our adversaries, and also to our friends.

Last year you spoke at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, where you addressed the situation between Russia and Ukraine in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. You said it was not a situation in which the U.S. could perform a freedom of navigation operation in support of Ukraine. After those remarks, Russia seized three Ukrainian naval vessels attempting to transit the Kerch Strait into the Sea of Azov. Did that change your views? What can the U.S. do in the region to assist Ukraine in any future clash there?

Foggo: I was disappointed with the Russian reaction to the Ukrainian Navy's attempt to pass through the Kerch Strait into the Sea of Azov. Three ships have been impounded, 24 sailors are being treated inappropriately in Moscow's Lefortovo Prison. They're being treated like common criminals, but they are uniformed members of a military force, so they are guaranteed some proper respect and treatment under the Geneva Conventions. So that is point one.

Point two: The body of water that we are talking about, the Sea of Azov, if I am not mistaken, is governed by a memorandum of agreement between Ukraine and Russia from about 2003. Now, things changed when Russia illegally invaded Crimea in 2014, but that agreement still stands. And the two signatories of that agreement are supposed to control standards of behavior on the maritime domain, and in the air in and around the Sea of Azov. So this is not a place I would consider international waters where I would sail a NATO warship.

However, we have a big presence in the Black Sea and have always had one. Between NATO and the U.S. Navy, we are running about 260 days of presence in the Black Sea. The USS Ross is there right now, and she is conducting a port visit in Batumi, Georgia — I was just there myself and participated in the NATO-Georgia exercise. We do the Breeze and Sea Breeze exercises with the Romanians, the Bulgarians and the Ukrainians.

I think it is time to kind of pause and see what happens now as a result of the recent presidential elections in Ukraine. Since things like the memorandum of understanding from 2003 exist for the Sea of Azov, let's see how the new president forms a government and gets back to the negotiation table with Russia on matters of importance.

What knowledge and insights have you gained about Russia over your past two years as ambassador to Moscow that you can bring to Adm. Foggo and his staff that they might not have otherwise known?

Ambassador Jon Huntsman: Well, there's nothing quite like being on the ground and working across the negotiating table on a day-to-day basis, whether its things like North Korea, Afghanistan, Syria, the multitude of issues where we are trying to find collaboration with Russia — but also the issues where we have huge disagreements. In Moscow, we are able to pick up perceptions that are possible to get anywhere else: how the system works internally and what the trends are likely to be going forward, because they are obviously going to impact the strategic dynamic in a broader context.

So this [Huntsman's visit to the Lincoln and meetings with Foggo] is a pretty good example of the integration you seek between diplomats and our men and women in uniform. And it is good that we are doing it more and more, this is always something you aspire to. So we have been consulting with each other on a pretty regular basis — with [U.S. European Command] and now [U.S. Naval Forces Europe] — and it makes each side a little better and stronger.

How does working with the Navy help you in your diplomatic role in Moscow? What knowledge does the service bring that you do not have?

Huntsman: They can help us understand the strategic overlay, how all the component parts are moving, what you are able to identify, interpret and analyze from outside Russia. All of this allows us to get a better sense of where Russia chooses to deploy its resources, how it strategically sees the region, where they see their priorities versus areas that are less of a priority — and, quite frankly, it allows us to see how they respond to some of our deployments. So this is all very helpful for us, for me as chief of mission. This is why chiefs of mission come out here and do this kind of thing, particularly when you are from Russia because a lot of what we are doing here is being watched and analyzed. We are watching and analyzing, too, and it is best if we do it together with our colleagues in uniform.

How do you, as ambassador to Russia, ensure Moscow doesn't see the dual-carrier operation about to start here in the Med as nefarious?

Huntsman: This is what countries do, they exercise. Russia does their exercises, too. It is better when countries are transparent about what they are doing. We are very proud of the 70-year history of NATO, probably the most important collective security organization that has ever existed. And in order to maintain it, to keep it fully lubricated and operational, you've got to get out and do this kind of thing.

As you see just right next to us, we have a Spanish ship, and others will participate along the way. This is to be expected, this kind of collaboration. It sends a very important message of deterrence, which is part of our overall strategy in the region, but it also reassures our NATO partners that we are all in this together, that we share common values and a common view of geography. And that can only be achieved when you are out here doing this kind of thing.

Source: www.defensenews.com

The US Navy is sending its most powerful assault ship to the Pacific

- Ryan Pickrell

The US Navy is bringing increased strike power to US forces in the region with a new deployment, the Navy said in a statement. The USS America - a new, more-capable amphibious assault ship able to deploy with a heavier configuration of F-35B Joint Strike Fighters than its predecessors and serve as a light aircraft carrier - is joining the US 7th Fleet's forward-deployed naval forces at Fleet Activities Yokosuka in Sasebo, Japan. Also headed to Japan is the USS New Orleans, a San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock. The USS Wasp, a predecessor to the America-class amphibious assault ships, will depart the region for scheduled maintenance in Norfolk. The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Stethem will head to San Diego for the ship's mid-life modernization.

"China, China, China"

On his first day as acting secretary of defense, Patrick Shanahan made his priorities clear, reportedly stressing that the focus is "China, China, China." The latest deployment is intended to increase US firepower in the Pacific at a time when China is

flexing its muscles in the region. "The security environment in the Indo-Pacific requires that the US Navy station the most capable ships forward," Naval Forces Japan said in a statement on the USS America's rotation into the 7th Fleet area of operations. "This posture allows the most rapid response times possible for maritime and joint forces," the service said, adding that the latest deployment "brings our most capable ships with the greatest amount of striking power and operational capability to bear in the timeliest manner."

The USS America is basically a light aircraft carrier

Unlike the the Wasp-class amphibis, the new America-class ships are more focused on aviation than amphibious assault. These flattop ships were designed with increased jet fuel and equipment storage, as well as more aircraft maintenance space. The USS America is capable of carrying around 20 short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) F-35Bs, a variant of the fifth-generation fighter built specifically for the Marine Corps. They can also deploy with fewer fighters and more tiltrotor aircraft and helicopters. The USS America was last in the Pacific from July 2017 to February 2018.

The departing USS Wasp has been experimenting with the "Lightning Carrier" concept in the South China Sea.

Turning amphibis into light carriers armed with F-35s is an experimental concept known as the "Lightning Carrier," a new take on the traditional "Harrier Carriers" (amphibis armed with AV-8 Harrier jump jets) rebranded with the name of the new stealth fighter jets.

Source: www.businessinsider.in

France, India begin 'Varuna' naval exercise off Goa coast

New Delhi-Navies of India and France Wednesday began the first phase of a mega naval exercise off the coast of Goa which is aimed at developing inter-operability between the the two forces in dealing with various security challenges. The first part of the joint naval exercise, 'Varuna', is being held from May 1-10 off the Goa coast, while the second phase is scheduled for later this month in strategically located Djibouti, Navy officials said. French Navy's aircraft carrier FNS Charles de Gaulle, two destroyers, FNS Forbin and FNS Provence, frigate FNS Latouche-Treville, tanker FNS Marne and a nuclear submarine will participate at the exercise, they said.

From the Indian side, aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya, destroyer INS Mumbai, Teg-class frigate INS Tarkash, Shishumar-class submarine INS Shankul, and Deepak-class fleet tanker INS Deepak, will participate in the drill, they said. The harbour phase at Goa would include professional interactions and discussions while the sea phase would comprise various drills across the spectrum of maritime operations, Indian Navy spokesperson Capt D K Sharma said. The bilateral naval exercise was initiated in 1983 and it was christened as 'Varuna' in 2001. "Having grown in scope and complexity over the years, this exercise exemplifies the strong relations between the two nations, in line with the Joint Strategic Vision of India-French Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region," the Navy said in a statement.

It said the exercise aims at developing interoperability between the two navies and fostering mutual cooperation by learning from each other's best practices to conduct joint operations. "The exercise underscores the shared interests and commitment of both nations in promoting maritime security," said the Navy.

Source: economictimes.indiatimes.com

The US Navy's Shifting View of China's Coast Guard and 'Maritime Militia'

- Ankit Panda

For years, U.S. planners have struggled to contend with China's use of non-military vessels in Asia's disputed waters. Specifically, maritime law enforcement vessels and even fishing vessels have been deployed to pursue Beijing's strategic ambitions in the East and South China Seas.

In its 2018 report on China's military power, the U.S. Department of Defense observed that combined, the People's Liberation Army Navy, the China Coast Guard, and China's maritime militia "form the largest maritime force in the Indo-Pacific." The report added that the three "sometimes conduct coordinated patrols."

Accordingly, U.S. officials have given more prominence to this issue, openly discussing the "maritime militia" as a matter of fact. Last November, for example, former U.S. Secretary of Defense acknowledged at a press conference following talks at the second U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue that the two sides "discussed the

importance for all military, law enforcement, and civilian vessels and aircraft, including those in the PLA Navy, the Chinese Coast Guard, and the PRC Maritime Militia, to operate in a safe and professional manner.”

A report published in the *Financial Times* over the weekend clarified that the issue of the China Coast Guard and maritime militia were also raised at the January 2019 meeting between Admiral John Richardson, the Chief of Naval Operations for the U.S. Navy, and his Chinese counterpart, People’s Liberation Army Navy chief Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong.

In public statements around the time of his talks with Shen, Richardson had underscored risk-reduction between the two sides. “The goal of the visit is to continue a results-oriented, risk-reduction focused dialogue... routine exchange of views is essential, especially in times of friction, in order to reduce risk and avoid miscalculation,” he had said in January.

His latest clarification suggests that there was greater messaging involved. “I made it very clear that the U.S. navy will not be coerced and will continue to conduct routine and lawful operations around the world, in order to protect the rights, freedoms and lawful uses of sea and airspace guaranteed to all,” Richardson was quoted as having told the *Financial Times*. The report noted that Richardson had conveyed to Shen that, for the United States, China’s maritime militia and coast guard would be treated equivalently to the PLAN.

That in itself is an important overt shift in the U.S. Navy’s approach toward China. Washington has to date not had a direct response to China’s use of non-gray-hull vessels to intimidate, coerce, and even ram third-country vessels in the South China Sea, for instance. Most recently, we’ve seen China’s maritime militia deployed to coerce the Philippines in the Spratly Islands.

While the change in policy is significant, it’s not clear that it will work in the way the United States intends. If the idea of clarifying that white-hull law enforcement vessels and the maritime militia would be seen in the exact same way as PLAN vessels was designed to deter China, it has apparently not worked given the recent tensions around Thitu Island with respect to the Philippines. One possible explanation for these tensions might now involve an attempt by China to see just how credible Washington’s policy is.

In the context of the recently clarified U.S. alliance commitment to the Philippines—specifically, that “any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels in the South China Sea will trigger mutual defense obligations” under the ambit of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the two countries—China may be further emboldened to test U.S. resolve.

Source: thediplomat.com

US Navy exercises option for two more Navajo-class ships under \$128M Contract

The US Naval Sea Systems Command has awarded Gulf Island Shipyards a \$128.5 million contract modification to exercise options for the construction of additional two towing, salvage and rescue ships. These will be the second and third ships in the class which will be known as Navajo-class, in honor of the major contributions the Navajo people have made to the armed forces. Designated T-ATS 6, the new class of vessels will be based on existing commercial towing offshore vessel designs and will replace the current T-ATF 166 and T-ARS 50 class ships. According to the contract modification, work under the contract is expected to be complete by November 2021.

The initial contract includes options for potentially seven additional vessels, and each additional ship will be named in honor of prominent Native Americans or Native American tribes.

Gulf Island Shipyards was awarded a \$63.5 million contract for the detail design and construction of the new towing, salvage and rescue ship which will be based on existing commercial towing offshore vessel designs and will replace the current T-ATF 166 and T-ARS 50 class ships in service with the US Military Sealift Command. The T-ATS will serve as open ocean towing vessels and will additionally support salvage operations and submarine rescue missions. The first ship in the class will be built at the company’s shipyard in Houma, Louisiana, and is expected to be completed in March 2021.

Source: navaltoday.com

We will not extend sanctions on Chabahar port project: US to India

- Subhayan Chakraborty

The US Department of State has informed India it will not be seeking to extend sanctions on the Chabahar port project, in which India has heavily invested — both financially and diplomatically.

Apart from increasing India's trade with nations in the Persian Gulf, the Chabahar port is also the starting point of the international north-south transport corridor (INSTC), and the US wants to see trade benefits reach Afghanistan and central Asia via the route, a senior foreign affairs ministry official said on Wednesday.

“Both sides had discussed the Chabahar issue comprehensively in September last year, when the 2+2 dialogues were held in the presence of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis. Now, Washington DC has reiterated its position of not putting investments made by India into the development of the Chabahar port into the sanctions list,” he added.

In December 2018, Iran had handed over a part of the operations at Shahid Beheshti port, Chabahar, to India. The port is the gateway to Afghanistan and central Asia.

Route to Russia

The INSTC has remained at the centre of India's plan for central Asia, crafted by geopolitical pundits at the external affairs ministry, hoping to reach into Afghanistan, and commerce ministry officials looking to boost exports to Russia, Iran, and other nations.

The plan incorporates thousands of kilometres of all-weather highways across central Asian deserts to transport goods to Azerbaijan. Here, logistics hubs have been set up for transporting goods to the Russian port of Astrakhan and onwards to Russia's European markets. Other nodes would transport shipments to Turkmenistan and its neighbouring countries.

The Federation of Freight Forwarders' Associations in India, which had conducted the first dry run through Azerbaijan in 2014, had initially pegged six months as the time required to popularise the new route after it opened. But difficulties over the lack of loan facilities from banks on this route, inadequate insurance coverage for bill of lading, non-vessel operating common carrier as well as irregular shipping services to Iran remain. Talks on the new route started in 2000 and the initial agreement was signed in 2003. A successful dry run was conducted through Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia in 2014.

Issues remain

"A lot of problems persist, with the banks negotiating the documents of transit goods passing through Bandar Abbas. Exporters are ready to provide a combined bill of lading showing the final destination to prove that goods are only in transit. But banks remain jittery, now that the US sanctions have again begun," Director-General of Federation of Indian Export Organisations, Ajay Sahai, said.

India's current trade with Iran takes place mostly through the choked Bandar Abbas port. It handles about 85 per cent of that country's seaborne traffic. Operations at the deep-sea port, having the capability of handling high-tonnage vessels, are behind schedule and drag down the INSTC. The corridor is also crucial for India's plan of securing a route to war-torn Afghanistan that does not have to cross neighbouring Pakistan. Back in February, India also acceded to the Ashgabat Agreement, allowing New Delhi to take advantage of rail connectivity in central Asia and utilise the Iran-Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan railway line.

Source: www.business-standard.com

India's Mumbai Port expects 150 international cruise vessels to call this year

MUMBAI, April 25 (Xinhua) -- India's Mumbai Port expects 150 international cruise vessels to call at its terminal this year and 300 cruise vessels are lined up next year, said its chairman Sanjay Bhatia on Thursday. Last year, 48 cruise vessels called at the port, he said while addressing an industry event organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry.

"The Mumbai port is shifting towards development of Sea tourism and Sea water transportation," Bhatia said, adding that domestic cruises have also started

operations. The port, based on India's west coast in the state of Maharashtra, has reduced the load capacity to 60 million tons of cargo per day and is promoting sea tourism by redeveloping its land around the port into world-class tourist hub. "7-8 hectares of land around the port will be open for real estate development with world class restaurants, ports and harbors. A 1-km Eastern waterfront is under development with all modern amenities to handle capacity of 300 yachts," he said.

Source: www.xinhuanet.com

Second Belt and Road forum: Fostering trade relationships

- Karen Kandie

With the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation being held this week in Beijing from 25 April 2019 to 27 April 2019, it is expected that the world's attention will be squarely on China, and her plans for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The BRI, launched by China's President Xi Jinping in 2013 and colloquially termed as the Silk Road Economic Belt, is hailed as one of the largest global initiatives of recent times. With land and maritime trade routes stretching across Europe, Asia and Africa, the BRI seeks to revolutionize global trade and infrastructure and ensure that China plays a more prominent role in global trade, particularly in the European, Asian and African markets. Specifically, through the BRI, China aims to establish infrastructure networks, including railways, roads, pipelines and utility grids that link China to the rest of the world. To achieve this, China has pledged USD 1 Trillion in funding toward infrastructure development.

Similarly, the BRI seeks to play a catalytic role in emerging economies across Europe, Asia and Africa by focusing on economic stimulants such as trade, finance and investment, agriculture and manufacturing, connectivity of infrastructure and facilities, ecological and environmental protection, tourism, cultural, social and educational exchanges. It is estimated that as many as 74 countries stand to directly benefit from the catalytic effect of the BRI, Kenya included.

Closer to home, it is clear that the Chinese push for infrastructure development is having an impact. On the back of Chinese loans, the Government of Kenya has embarked on ambitious infrastructure mega-projects that aim to modernize and revitalize Kenya's aging infrastructure networks. From the Standard Gauge Railway to LAPSET, and numerous roads, bridges and power plants in-between, it is clear that accelerated infrastructure development is hot on Kenya's agenda and within China's lending capacity.

The above notwithstanding, critics have continuously cautioned against over-reliance on Chinese lending to fulfil Kenya's ambitious growth strategy. Taking the fore, is the 'debt trap' concept that warns against China-skewed loan agreements. While the jury is still out on the validity of the 'debt trap' argument, it is yet imperative to ensure that our partnership with China, as with any other international trade partner, is mutually beneficial and inherently symbiotic. To ensure this, it is necessary to revisit the trade deficit between Kenya and China so as to ensure that Kenya maintains a mutually beneficial partnership with China in the long run.

This will involve securing market access for Kenya's products in China therefore bridging the gap between Kenya's imports from China and exports to the Chinese market. Similarly, maintaining information exchange programs will ensure that Kenya stands to learn from China's strengths and expertise.

Source: www.the-star.co.ke

First phase of mega Singapore port project on track for 2021 launch

SINGAPORE (April 23): Singapore on Tuesday said its plans to build the world's biggest container terminal in a single location were on track, as it held a ceremony to mark a milestone in the initial construction phase of the mega-project. Tuas Terminal is set to open progressively from 2021, six years after work began, and it is expected to be capable of handling 65 million twenty-foot long shipping containers per annum when fully completed in 2040. Once completed, the terminal is slated to become the world's largest container terminal in a single location, said Quah Ley Hoon, chief executive of the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore. "This will strengthen our Global Hub Port status, and more importantly, allow us to plug into the growing intra-Asia trade and global supply chain," Quah said. The ports authority said the first of

four construction phases — which alone covers an area equivalent to 383 football fields — is on schedule to be completed in 2021. Officials and media gathered at the site on the industrial west of the island on Tuesday to witness the installation of the final caisson, a retaining structure used to build the wharf in the first phase of the multi-billion dollar scheme. Shanghai is currently the world's busiest container port handling over 40 million shipping containers in 2018, according to industry data. Phase one of the Singapore project is being constructed by a joint venture of DIAP, a Singaporean subsidiary of Belgian dredging firm DEME, and South Korea's Daelim Industrial.

Source: www.theedgemarkets.com



Things you're doing to save the planet that are actually terrible

You know the saying “the road to hell is paved with good intentions?” It applies big-time to things we do to be greener. Many of those seemingly sustainable choices you're making may not be as eco-friendly as they seem. That's because there's a lot of money to be made by marketing items as environmentally-friendly, regardless of whether or not they actually are. Hans Hoogervost is the head of an international accounting standards organization that keeps track of how sustainably publicly-traded companies operate and he has warned that greenwashing is rampant and that corporations prioritize profit over the planet. With so much misinformation circulating though, it's hard to make sense of what products or services are truly good for the planet. To help you sort through this greenwashing mess, VICE spoke with experts across North America to find out what you need to stop doing or using for the sake of the environment:

Cotton shopping bags

There's a war on single-use plastic happening right now and single-use plastic is being painted as the devil. PEI was the first province in Canada to announce a ban on plastic shopping bags and Newfoundland and Labrador recently announced it will be following suit. But a rush to purchase cotton bags to replace those plastic retail bags might be a mistake. Reusable cotton bags seem like a fine substitution and they are—if you reuse them consistently for at least 11.5 years. According to a Danish study, anything less than that won't offset the fact that manufacturing these types of bags creates 606 times as much water pollution as making a plastic bag. Todd Myers, who is the environmental director of the Washington Policy Center, urges people not to “ignore the far more damaging, but less obvious impacts of cotton bags.” A UK government study echoes the fact that cotton and canvas tote bags have the biggest carbon footprint because they require more resources to produce and distribute.

Yes, we've all seen those images and videos of once-pristine beaches now overflowing with plastic garbage and marine life suffering the consequences of discarded plastic items—but in terms of air and water contamination, cotton bags are worse. Unless you keep re-using them for more than a decade, but what ends up happening too often is that many of those canvas totes are used for less than that and end up in landfills.

A better option is to use brown paper bags for lighter items (and re-use and recycle them afterward), or reuse those flimsy but remarkably-strong plastic bags and ditch this notion that they can only be used once, for a short period of time.

Biodegradable and flushable makeup and baby wipes

Choosing a product labeled “biodegradable” seems like a no-brainer for the planet but it turns out that wipes are among the worst offenders when it comes to masquerading as something they’re not. A team of researchers at Ryerson University released a damning report this month after testing 101 single-use products (23 of them were described as “flushable” by the manufacturer) and they found that none of the wipes were “able to fall apart or disperse safely through the sewer system test, which can negatively impact household plumbing, municipal sewage infrastructure, and consequently, the environment.” The Municipal Enforcement Sewer Use Group estimates that \$250 million is spent annually across Canada to remove blockages caused mostly by flushed wipes. It gets worse though. These greenwashed wipes contain synthetic fibers including plastics which then do terrible things to our waterways and wildlife. The alternative is messy and significantly less convenient though—replace them with a reusable cloth wipe, or your hands.

Crushing beer and pop cans

The vast majority of drink cans (a full 95 percent in the US) are made of aluminum. The good news is that they’re completely recyclable and can continue to be re-processed and re-used an infinite amount of times—unless they’re contaminated. For beverage cans, keeping them recyclable means resisting the urge to crush them. It’s counterintuitive because compressing them means they take up less room, so you can pack more into your recycling bin, which seems like a good thing. But most municipal sorting facilities use an automated process that categorize items by shape and size—which means a crushed can might get tossed into the wrong section because it’s wrongly identified as paper. It’s really important to keep repurposing aluminum cans because the longer they’re re-used the bigger the offset for their large carbon footprint. Mining the metal creates toxic byproducts that pollute the soil and water and the refining process to turn it into a can uses a lot of electricity, disrupts natural waterways and can wipe out forests.

Ride-sharing

As its name suggests, ride-sharing is carpooling and that seems like a better alternative to a single passenger in a taxi or their own vehicle. But research suggests that what ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft are doing isn't necessarily better for the planet. It's a topic of great debate though, because both companies are protective of their data so it's been difficult to get an accurate read of what's happening, but there is a case to be made against Uber and Lyft because their rapid growth has seen them increasingly used as an alternative to public transit, rather than as an alternative to cabs, car rentals, and vehicle ownership. With that in mind, the culprit behind increased emissions are so-called deadhead kilometers, which are created when an Uber or Lyft driver is roaming without passengers. In New York City, that "deadhead" travel makes up half of the distance covered by on-demand mobility services like Uber and Lyft since 2013. That equals more emissions from more distance traveled, and more traffic jams which in turn also result in more emissions.

Both companies have become publicly-listed in the last month, which will likely force them to be more transparent. However, several well-known investors have stated that they're not buying into these companies for environmental reasons.

The companies themselves acknowledge they could be incorporating more sustainable practices. Lyft has said it spent millions on carbon offsets last year, and has become the largest bike-sharing entity in the US after buying up its biggest rival. Meanwhile Uber's CEO pledged \$10 million USD to study the company's impact on congestion and traffic. Although Uber isn't going the carbon offset route, it is offering incentives to drivers to switch to hybrid or electric vehicles, which the company says would go a long way to improving its environmental impact.

That impact is the focus of a lot of debate. The most comprehensive study of its kind looked at 22 US markets and although it can't say that ride-hailing services are the *only* reason for this, the data shows that the arrival of these types of companies resulted in a decrease in bus ridership of about 12.7 percent after the first eight years.

A recent University of Toronto study points out that the Uber effect depends on where you live—specifically that the ride-hailing app reduces transit ridership in smaller cities while increasing ridership in large cities (it can boost it by about 5 percent over two years). The study also suggests that Uber bumps up bus ridership but decreases train use.

A responsible approach to ride-sharing services is probably a sensible way to handle this. Whenever possible, choose the carpooling option (if it's available where you are) to try to get as many other passengers in the vehicle. And don't make the driver wait around, creating more emissions and wasting everyone's time (that's a general rule for life too). Finally, make Uber and Lyft a last choice if transit is available rather than your convenient go-to.

Source: www.vice.com

The amount of plastic in the ocean is a lot worse than we thought, study says

- Jen Christensen

If you're sad when you see stories about dead whales washing ashore with dozens of pounds of plastic in their bellies or feel guilty when you forget to bring your reusable bags to the grocery store, there's a good reason. The amount of plastic that's been dumped into the ocean has been increasing, according to a new study, and the problem will probably get worse. Scientists call plastic litter "one of this generation's key environmental challenges" because it is a persistent pollution that hurts wildlife, the ocean itself and might hurt humans. Many stories and studies have focused on microplastic, the smaller stuff that plastic items like bottles, toothbrushes and shopping bags get broken into by ocean currents and exposure to ultraviolet light. The new study, published Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications, finds that there's been a significant increase in macroplastic pollution, too: entire plastic bags, plastic fishing gear and other items.

The increase in large plastic pollution has been happening since 1957, with a significant increase since the 1990s, according to this study. The researchers didn't set out to do a study about plastic pollution. They were initially studying plankton. "This happened through chatting with the guys that do the metal work to fix the equipment and the volunteers working to tow the recorders," said study co-author Clare Ostle, a research scientist at the Marine Biological Association in the UK. "They were talking about how this plastic kept getting tangled up in the equipment."

There are very few historical records of ocean plastic pollution, she said, so the researchers used the incidents to investigate exactly how much plastic pollution there was and how often these entanglements happened. Ostle and her team looked at 60 years worth of ocean data covering over 6.5 million nautical miles in the North Atlantic and adjacent seas. They found that plastic entanglement on the equipment used to measure plankton increased by about 10 times from 2000 on. "We have known that plastic production has increased, and although there are a number of studies that have shown increased concentrations of plastic up to the 1990s, these studies have not been able to demonstrate the expected increase in plastics in open ocean surface waters," Ostle said. The first plastic bag was found entangled with their equipment off the coast of Northwest Ireland, and the first trawl twine was on their equipment off the east coast of Iceland. The findings are in line with what is known about the amount of plastic produced in the world.

A previous study found that between 4.8 million and 12.7 million metric tons of plastic entered the ocean in 2010 from people living within 50 kilometers (31 miles) of the coastline. Global plastic production has quadrupled over the past four decades, a separate new study found. That study, published Monday in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, found that if the trend continues, the making of plastics will comprise 15% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050; by comparison, all of the world's forms of transportation now account for 15% of emissions. "This is long-lasting damage. It is such an important problem to solve, but the only way to do that is to stop putting it in the ocean," said Jacqueline Savitz, who did not work on the new studies but serves as chief policy officer for North America for Oceana, a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to protecting and restoring the oceans.

Savitz said she's been encouraged to see people try to reduce their carbon footprint by turning to alternatives like electric cars, but that also means petroleum companies are looking for alternative markets for their products. She's watched the growth of plastic manufacturing plants in Pennsylvania and Texas with increasing concern. "Plastic is a cheap product to make, but it comes at a high price to our environment," Savitz said. "I can't even stand the thought of it, when I go to the beach and see all the plastic on the waves and in the sand. It's found in most every bird stomach and in sea turtles and whales that starve to death, and the problem is getting much worse." Ostle said she has been encouraged by the increase in public awareness about plastic pollution. "Many people now use reusable bags, recycle where possible and shop consciously by choosing to take food or drink items with less plastic," she said. "I very much hope that this awareness surrounding plastics will continue and spill over into other

environmental issues such as our emissions." Savitz agreed that "individual action can help, but we don't want the individual to feel like they are the problem. What we really want is for companies to give us choices of more plastic-free products or products that can be reused or refillable. We need to change the structure of our commerce to protect our marine health and our own."

Source: edition.cnn.com

The Smurfs join the EU's fight against ocean waste

- Celeste Williams

The Smurfs are partnering with the European Union to reduce ocean litter by taking part in the Global Beach Cleanup campaign. Véronique Culliford, daughter of the Smurfs creator Peyo and the CEO of the cartoon's parent company IMPS, joined Joao Aguiar Machado, director-general for fisheries and maritime affairs for the European Commission, on Wednesday to sign the agreement. "Marine pollution is one of the most pressing environmental problems, in Europe but certainly also in the rest of the world. With the Smurfs, we have found a partner that can help us reach out globally while sharing our values and priorities," Machado said at the signing. By teaming up with the iconic little blue cartoon characters, the EU hopes to educate children and engage them early in global efforts to reduce ocean waste. "I think that the Smurfs are the only characters that can use their body, colour and everything to send a message to the world — a message to the children — to say to people 'pay attention to your planet'," Culliford told Euronews.

Since 2018, the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have been combatting the plastic waste that is increasingly filling our oceans through the cleanup campaign. To incite action, the campaign organises volunteers throughout the EU to get involved through community events and cleanups. In March, Belgian volunteers cleared 11.5 tonnes of waste from the coastline. The Smurf-EU matchup is the next step in spreading awareness about ocean waste and moving towards a more sustainable Europe. Culliford told Euronews that she hopes the Smurfs' passion for cleaner oceans can inspire others, especially for one particular reason: "Everybody can identify themselves in a Smurf."

Source: www.euronews.com

Blue Tech: Joshua Berger of Washington's Maritime Blue Initiative

- David Hume

In early 2019, Washington State Governor (and presidential candidate) Jay Inslee launched the Maritime Blue 2050 initiative, the first program of its kind in the U.S. to bolster innovations in the maritime sector that create living-wage jobs, protect the environment and ensure long-term sustainability for the industry. The initiative is meant to build on Washington's strengths as a global leader in maritime technology innovation and best practices.

Joshua Berger, the governor's Maritime Sector Lead, laid much of the groundwork leading up the launch of this initiative. Read his answers to my questions about Maritime Blue below.

What is unique about the Pacific Northwest that led to the creation of Maritime Blue?

Washington State is unique. We are in the Pacific Northwest which sometimes feels removed from other maritime regions. Therefore, the state's maritime industry is incredibly diverse and interdependent. Washington's maritime industry contributes over \$37 billion to our state's economy, employing nearly 100,000 direct jobs and impacting over 200,000 more, making it the most trade dependent state in the US. We design and build world class vessels, operate the largest ferry system in the US, are home to the fastest growing cruise industry, and serve as a world class boating destination. We have a \$10 billion fishing industry, a robust supply chain, service industry, and world class research institutions working on everything from underwater robotics to novel energy storage technologies. Combine this work with a rapidly growing tech industry driven by groups like Microsoft and Amazon, high amounts of capital looking for investments, a strong environmental conservation ethic, and a culture of collaboration. Washington is primed to become a leader in maritime innovation.

What are the essential elements that brought Maritime Blue to fruition?

This has truly been a public and private partnership from the beginning. Having previously worked to stand up a statewide trade association for the breadth of the industry, one of the key goals was to better tell their story of environmental leadership.

In my current role, my job is to be the liaison between industry interests and state government. It's a unique role: I serve as a policy advisor specific to my sector as well as lead strategic economic development goals. When we began the process to develop a plan to accelerate the Blue Economy here in Washington, the governor called together a Maritime Innovation Advisory Council made up of state and local government leaders, industry executives, leaders from research institutions, organized labor, tribes, workforce development, and community groups. We built consensus on the goals and recommendations outlined in the strategy and we maintain that diverse leadership as we now shift towards implementation.

How did you build trust with industry or other key stakeholders?

To be honest, it took years. When my role was first established by Governor Inslee in 2013 a former Port of Seattle Executive, Steve Sewell, was appointed as the first Maritime Sector Lead. Steve began the process of bringing together diverse industry interests. We worked together to found the Washington Maritime Federation. That Association of Associations (as we called it) took the first steps to find more productive communication channels with industry. When I came into this role in 2015, we started with finding a common vision for the industry and shared values with the broader community. We all agreed that we wanted a “world-class, thriving and sustainable maritime industry built on the values of the Blue Economy” – a growing maritime economy, healthy ecosystems, and resilient communities. Once that agreement was in place we began setting goals, finding models and examples, and committing our plans to action.

Maritime Blue is just getting started, but can you comment on the long-term vision?

I'm proud of the work we did to ensure that the strategy we developed with all of these diverse stakeholders is more than a plan on a shelf. We were very intentional to put in place accountability to the plan. The most effective tool we've seen is the cluster organization. Following the model of public-private partnership, the cluster model supports and requires these key elements to work together to accelerate innovation and support entrepreneurship.

We launched an independent cluster organization whose mission is to implement Washington State's Strategy for the Blue Economy. Over the long term, we expect the cluster will gain further traction and momentum by attracting investment, creating

jobs, supporting a culture of entrepreneurship and competitive cooperation, and building bridges to communities that are otherwise affected or underrepresented.

How do you see it impacting the maritime community in the region?

This cluster model, or technology based economic development, is a new concept for many in the US and most certainly in our maritime sector. It is different than a trade association in that the focus is really on projects versus policy. It forces us to look outside of our sector for new ideas and take some risks.

The world of innovation and entrepreneurship love to use the word “disrupt,” but as a sailor that is about the worst thing one could say or intend. In maritime, it’s about stabilizing chaos, not encouraging it. There is a balance that we’re trying to tap into; innovation comes from doing things in new ways and “failing fast,” but not upending the industry. Investors are betting on technologies, but when margins are thin and the capital investments are huge, there is much smaller risk appetite.

That’s the beauty of the Cluster Organization: it manages the risk. It seeks opportunity, builds bridges, facilitates knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and commercialization of technologies. If the (little c) cluster of members are collaborative and sharing risk, analysis, and investments, then we are quite literally “raising the hulls of all ships.”

What sorts of services, infrastructure, grants, or other types of support will WA Maritime Blue be rolling out to support startups?

The scope of work of WA Maritime Blue is six fold.... We call them the 6 F’s: Focus, Forums, Forward, Force, Finance, and Facility.

- Blue Focus is a communications and marketing campaign. We need to do a much better job telling the story of our sector and our members. We need to reach the tech sector and those in control of risk capital. We need to reach underrepresented communities and learn to communicate with diverse groups.
- Blue Forums are open, public knowledge sharing events. This is where we discuss the latest in technological developments, address community issues, or invite new audiences to the working waterfront to learn about the maritime industry.

- Blue Forward is where much of the work takes place. This is where we are facilitating Joint Industry Projects, connecting members and research institutions, providing training and business services to include trade missions and cluster-to-cluster connections.
- Blue Force creates industry driven workforce development programs. We are starting with the coordination of the Youth Maritime Collaborative – a group of youth-serving organizations that provide on the water experiences for disadvantaged youths or underrepresented minorities that otherwise do not have access or awareness of the opportunities in the maritime industry.
- Blue Finance is supporting creation of a Blue Innovation Fund to drive investments in the Pacific Northwest’s maritime industry. We don’t intend to manage a privately capitalized fund but we do intend to encourage it and then offer our network of entrepreneurs and businesses as a investment opportunities, and our members and stakeholders as market experts.
- Blue Facility is the development of a Maritime Innovation Center and related programming which will be a focal point for all of the work mentioned above. With a hub and spoke model out to our more rural maritime communities, this Center will both house accelerator and/or incubator activities, public-facing events, and provide co-working space benefitting all types of our members, from large global firms to local startups. Although the physical building may be a few years out, we are currently working on recruiting a first round of entrepreneurs for a pilot accelerator program utilizing the existing network of accelerator programs in the area.
- Source: www.maritime-executive.com

Maritime chiefs call for ship speed limits to cut emissions

- Josh Spero and Anjali Raval

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The world's shipping watchdog should impose a speed limit on commercial vessels to cut emissions and protect the environment, more than 100 maritime industry chief executives have said. In a letter to the International Maritime Organisation, a UN agency, the executives said shipping had an "urgent need" to address global temperature rises and that limiting vessels' speeds could help. In the wake of the global financial crisis, ships reduced their speed because of decreased trade — known as "slow steaming" — which had the side effect of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as ships burnt less fuel. However, the letter, which came ahead of IMO negotiations on environmental regulation in London next week, warned "recent studies also suggest that ships are speeding up again as global demand recovers". "Should this trend continue, any GHG gains from slow steaming over recent years will disappear," it added. In April 2018, the IMO set a target for GHG emissions from international shipping to peak as soon as possible and then to be reduced by at least 50 per cent by 2050 compared with 2008. It has also adopted a limit on the level of sulphur in ships' fuel oil from 3.5 to 0.5 per cent from January 1 2020.

Source: www.ft.com



India as a challenge to China's BRI

- Captain (Dr) Gurpreet S Khurana

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, comprising both the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (launched in August 2013) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (introduced in September 2013). The initiative was showcased in a manner that was too appealing to be ignored by the countries of the Indian Ocean region. Many Indians also viewed BRI as highly promising for their country.

As a virtual “island state” constrained by landward geophysical barriers in the north, India is in dire need of developing its economic corridors and maritime transportation infrastructure. Projections indicate that by 2050, India will be the second-largest economy (in purchasing power parity terms), premised inter alia on the growth trends of merchandise trade.¹ However, leading Indian economists point out that a large part of the country's export potential remains unrealized, mostly in its own neighborhood. The key reason for this loss of competitiveness is rising “trade costs,” mainly for maritime transportation, which are heightened by the lack of connectivity and port infrastructure.² Therefore, even though the Indian government never endorsed BRI, a few Indian analysts (including this author) were of the view that the Chinese initiative was pregnant with geoeconomic opportunities for India, and, premised on the ongoing India-China rivalry, it may not be prudent for New Delhi to throw the baby out with the bathwater.³ Eventually, however, the official Indian position against BRI hardened to the extent that India was the only key country in the IOR and among the major powers not represented at the major international Belt and Road Forum organized in Beijing in May 2017

This essay aims to examine some mainstream Indian perspectives on BRI and analyze the likely adverse ramifications of BRI on India. Based on these findings, the essay considers how India should (and is likely to) tailor its foreign policy and national security responses to this Chinese initiative.

Mainstream Indian Perspectives on BRI

Owing largely to its geographic location and disposition, India's national interests are closely intertwined with developments in the Indian Ocean region. In the regional context, BRI is seen in New Delhi as China's endeavor to capitalize on the desires, vulnerabilities, and insecurities of regional countries.

Sri Lanka, for instance, sought BRI to bolster investment in its port-led economic development after the 2009 end to decades of internal conflict, but later became beset by debt. In December 2017, Sri Lanka was compelled to grant China a 99-year lease and 70% stake in the deep-water port at Hambantota.⁵ In Maldives, China played on the political fissures and local fears of sea-level rise to involve Chinese companies in reclamation projects. Today, the country owes China \$1.5 billion—about 30% of its GDP—in construction costs.⁶ In Malaysia, China's exorbitantly expensive Melaka Gateway port project was premised on Kuala Lumpur's geo-economic rivalry with Singapore to host a major hub port in the Asia-Pacific.⁷ Pakistan, for its part, was much too willing to cede to China the transit corridor from Kashi to Gwadar in order to reduce its own strategic vulnerability vis-à-vis militarily superior India and develop the Baluchistan Province. Pakistan owes China at least \$10 billion in debt for the construction of Gwadar port and other projects.⁸ Viewed in New Delhi, China's approach runs counter to India's vision for collective and inclusive economic development of the Indian Ocean region. India believes that cannot attain prosperity for its citizens in isolation of its regional neighbourhood.

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development of the Indian Ocean region. India believes that cannot attain prosperity for its citizens in isolation of its regional neighbourhood.

Rationale for India's Rejection of BRI

The objections to BRI that India has formally articulated include the fact that the proposed CPEC involves joint projects in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (which is claimed by India), the lack of details regarding BRI projects, and the initiative's unilateral character that is devoid of a consultative process. This lack of transparency bears the potential for smaller countries to be sucked into a crushing debt cycle, in addition to the potential for ecological destruction and the disruption of local communities. ¹¹ That BRI overlooks India's "core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity" is often stated as the key reason for India's rejection of BRI.¹² However, none of these articulations—individually or collectively—fully account for India's wariness of BRI.

The most critical factor is China's "Middle Kingdom" approach that is premised on its ancient notion of cultural superiority and seeks to subject the transactions among nationstates to a geopolitical hierarchy. Through such an approach, China seeks to dominate its periphery through a tributary system, thereby potentially challenging India's traditional influence in the Indian Ocean region. As Yin Gang stated, "In China's view, India must be reminded that areas around Gwadar, Chittagong, Hambantota, and Sittwe are not within India's traditional sphere of influence."¹³ India views the Chinese approach as undermining the regional balance of power and therefore challenging its geopolitical and national security interests. India does not want to become marginalized by a rival power in its own neighborhood.

It is thus important to understand the adverse security implications of BRI for India. For instance, the China-Pakistan strategic partnership already limits India's strategic options to respond to Pakistan's prevailing strategy of supporting cross-border terrorism against India.¹⁴ China's technological assistance to Pakistan to help it develop sea-based tactical nuclear weapons to offset India's conventional military superiority against Pakistan exemplifies this.

The traditional Chinese military threat to India's national security is another important consideration. The disputed land border in the Himalayas has often led to military confrontations, with the most recent occurring in June 2017 on the Doklam Plateau and lasting for 73 days.¹⁶ The People's Liberation Army Navy's established

presence in the Indian Ocean region could add a seaward dimension to the existential continental threat posed by China. India's naval power might no longer enjoy a favorable asymmetry in the region, and therefore India's conventional military deterrence against China to respond to a conflict across the disputed land border would be eroded substantially. For instance, given the naval superiority that India enjoys in the Indian Ocean today and thus its ability to interdict Chinese strategic shipments, China may think twice before resorting to a military escalation across the land border. However, for ensuring security of its BRI investments, as the PLA Navy acquires the ability for sea-control in the Indian Ocean against opposing naval forces, India will lose the military leverage in terms of its current option for horizontal escalation of an India-China armed conflict to the sea. Even worse, India might need to prepare for the possibility of a two-front war scenario involving China-Pakistan strategic collusion.

India's Response to BRI

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that India's response to BRI is likely to be premised on the assumption that BRI's comprehensive success, in terms of China meeting its envisaged objectives, is not in India's interest. India's approach will be to seek support of its strategic partners within and beyond the Indo-Pacific. However, even without any such support, New Delhi would likely need to do whatever may be required not to prevent India's influence in the Indian Ocean region from being displaced by China and to prohibit its prevailing maritime military edge over China in the region from being blunted by China's increasing naval footprint. It would likely adopt necessary geopolitical countermeasures across the entire spectrum ranging from geo-economics to military strategy.

At the foreign-policy level, India may seek to ramp up its relevance and influence in the Indian Ocean region, and even beyond into the eastern parts of the Indo-Pacific, as enunciated in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2015 vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) in 2015.¹⁸ The vision stands for the dictum that "all boats rise with the rising tide" and, therefore, provides an optimized approach to encourage regional solidarity and contrasts positively with the "extractive" model proposed by BRI. However, the dictum that holds for China also holds for India: the package is not the product. Policymakers in New Delhi will need to flesh out SAGAR in terms of its functional strategy – which has not yet been done – and pursue its implementation. For instance, India and its partners will need to offer the regional countries alternative models for enhancing economic connectivity in the Indo-Pacific that are more

attractive than BRI. The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor proposed by India and Japan was conceptualized with such an aim under the rubric of the contemporary Indo-Pacific concept, but it needs to be pursued more seriously by all potential partners.¹⁹ The AAGC is still at a nascent phase, though with enormous potential to challenge the BRI. The author's discussion with the officials – who prefer anonymity – indicates that the Japanese are disappointed with the slow pace of AAGC's implementation on part of the Indians. This is leading to Tokyo reconsidering India's partnership in the 5 AAGC. Such reappraisal contradicts the very rationale of the Indo-Pacific concept articulated by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in the Indian Parliament August 2007, which sought India's partnership for security of its maritime interests and Sea Lines of Communication in the Indian Ocean.²⁰ While India itself lacks infrastructure, and financial and technological capacities, and therefore, looks upon Japan for these to fructify the AAGC, the Indian government needs to do more to quell the perception that it is not serious about the AAGC.

As an instrument of the nation's foreign policy, the Indian Navy bears a major responsibility to shape a geopolitical environment in the Indian Ocean region that is favorable to India. The recent reorientation of its operational philosophy to mission-based (forward) deployments is meant, inter alia, to address the changing operational environment brought about by BRI. This includes the need to keep watch on the maritime chokepoints that all vessels—commercial, warships, and submarines—must traverse for entry into the Indian Ocean. The intelligence collected by the naval deployments is fed into the Indian Maritime Operations Centre and shared with friendly countries through the Information Management and Analysis Centre.²¹

While India has been making concerted efforts to enhance the sustained reach of its naval forces through basing arrangements with regional countries such as Mauritius and Seychelles, the prevailing geopolitical environment and local sensitivities will continue to be major impediments. The sustenance of forward-deployed naval units will, therefore, need to be enhanced through alternative measures that combine sea-based logistics with the existing logistics exchange agreements with major resident powers including the United States and France.

The Indian Navy will also need to be well-prepared to discharge its role as a mechanism for insurance in a possible conflict scenario involving China. The navy will need to be capable of this both independently and in conjunction with India's major partners, such as members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and from Europe, but without necessarily according undue visibility to the process. Such plans already

exist—both for the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific—and capacity accretions are adding more options to the latter operational area. Indian government approval in 2015 to build six indigenous nuclear attack submarines capable of distant power projection is notable in this regard.²² It is also high time for the Indian Navy to revisit its rules of engagement in its maritime zones.²³ Its current rules, for instance, do not cater for the contingencies involving intelligence-gathering by Chinese warships – particularly submarines – in the maritime 6 zones of India. Notwithstanding these new developments, the navy needs to shape the environment so as to avoid a conflict scenario.

Source: www.maritimeindia.org

India seeks right balance of ties with US, Iran

- Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

New Delhi: India is looking to balance its ties between the US and Iran even as New Delhi plans to source oil from alternate sources following expiry of waiver for Iranian oil imports from early May. New Delhi plans to assert its strategic autonomy by continuing to pursue its partnership with Tehran in long-term strategic interests, according sources.

India's sole gateway to Iran is through Afghanistan and provides a shorter route to Central Asia and Eastern Russia via the Chabahar Port. Central Asian majors Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan want to connect with India to push their respective economic partnerships with Delhi and connections tivity via Iran remains the most viable option, said a source.

Iran is also a key element in India's Indo-Pacific construct to connect Eurasia with Indian Ocean and Pacific as Delhi hopes to provide an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, another source said. International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), currently under negotiations, will connect Mumbai with St Petersburg in a shorter time period via Iran as India seeks to broadbase its economic ties with Russia. Iran is also critical to counter-balance Pakistan and securing Afghan interests in the long term, another source pointed out. Indo-Iran ties could be an irritant for Indo-US relationship, reckon experts. "Iran and Venezuela sanctions have come at a time when

other irritants in the US-India relationship have come to the fore. There are trade frictions, with the administration's announcement that it intends to withdraw India's benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences because of continuing concerns about Indian trade and investment policies. The 60-day deadline for a final decision on this step falls in early May," wrote Tanvi Madan of Brookings Institute in her latest paper. "Washington is unhappy with India's defence deals with Russia, despite US sanctions. Defence deals with the US, meanwhile, are still being negotiated or have stalled. India, in turn, is concerned about the Afghan peace talks and what Washington might cede to the Taliban — and to Pakistan for bringing them to the table."

Source: economictimes.indiatimes.com

State Department preparing for clash of civilizations with China

- Joel Gehrke

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's team is developing a strategy for China based on the idea of "a fight with a really different civilization" for the first time in American history. "This is a fight with a really different civilization and a different ideology and the United States hasn't had that before," Kiron Skinner, the director of policy planning at the State Department, said Monday evening at a security forum in Washington, D.C. Skinner is leading an effort to develop a concept of U.S.-China relations on the scale of what she called "Letter X" — the unsigned essay by George Kennan, who assessed "the sources of Soviet conduct" in 1947 and outlined the containment strategy that guided American strategists for the rest of the Cold War. China poses a unique challenge, she said, because the regime in Beijing isn't a child of Western philosophy and history. "The Soviet Union and that competition, in a way it was a fight within the Western family," Skinner said, noting Karl Marx's indebtedness to Western political ideas. "It's the first time that we will have a great power competitor that is not Caucasian." Skinner credited retired Army Gen. H.R. McMaster, who served as White House national security adviser from March 2017 to March 2018, with recognizing the need for a National Security Strategy organized around the return of great power competition with Russia and China. But those two rivals are not equivalent, she said, identifying Russia as a mere "global survivor" that pales in comparison to China.

“We see it as a more fundamental long-term threat,” Skinner told New America CEO Anne Marie Slaughter. “In China, we have an economic competitor, we have an ideological competitor, one that really does seek a global reach that many of us didn't expect a couple of decades ago.” Slaughter, who served as the head of policy planning for the State Department from 2009 to 2011, suggested that Skinner was offering the U.S.-China relationship as the “clash of civilizations” outlined in another landmark essay that discussed how geopolitics would change after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Skinner concurred. “Some of those tenets, but a little bit different,” she answered. “I think we have to take the rose-colored glasses off and get real about the nature of the threat. And, I think we also have to give a kind of respect for, I think, what the Chinese seek to accomplish.” Trump has made a trade war with China one of the major undertakings of his administration, in pursuit of a trade deal to rebalance the relationship between the world’s two largest economies. U.S. officials have also rebranded the Asia Pacific region as the Indo-Pacific, partly as a nod to China’s surge in Africa and the potential for India to function as a counter-weight to the Communist power.

But Pompeo has sounded the alarm about China’s influence around the world, warning of security threats in Europe and the Arctic, as well as predatory lending in the Western Hemisphere. “Trade is not the only problem and maybe not the biggest in the long run with China,” Skinner said. “But we're now looking more deeply and broadly at China. And, I think State is in the lead in that broader attempt to get something like a Letter X for China, what Kennan wrote. You can't have a policy without an argument underneath it.” Pompeo’s team has rebuked China repeatedly for human rights abuses, especially the hostility to religious beliefs displayed by the regime’s mass detention of Uighur Muslims and the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities. But Skinner suggested that human rights arguments might not be as useful against China as they were against the Soviet Union, which was weakened by a 1975 agreement that allowed Soviet dissidents to cooperate indirectly with Western powers to advocate for “the rights of emigration and religious freedom,” according to the State Department. “It was a really important Western concept that opened the door really to undermine the Soviet Union, a totalitarian state, on human rights principles,” she said. “That's not really possible with China.”

Source: www.washingtonexaminer.com

America's Iran Policy is Helping China Advance Its Vision of a Multipolar World

- John S. Van Oudenaren

The U.S. withdrawal from the Iran deal, and subsequent escalation of tensions between Washington and Tehran presents immediate challenges for China: higher prices for the world's largest oil importer, a potential conflict along a key juncture in the Belt and Road Initiative, and heightened risk of nuclear proliferation. Chinese Middle East experts have also raised concerns that overly constrictive U.S. pressure could sideline moderate elements in Tehran, and drive Iran to “adopt a more radical foreign policy” (采取更激进的外交政策), which would further intensify sectarianism and extremism across an already volatile region.

One day after President Donald Trump announced the Iran Deal withdrawal, an editorial in the Communist Party's largest official newspaper, the People's Daily, highlighted a more general Chinese concern that the move heralds a United States shift away from multilateralism towards a more unilateral foreign policy. The editorial appeared under a recurring pen-name “Zhong Sheng” (“voice of China” 钟声) that is used to put forth “quasi-authoritative” positions on key policy issues. The piece castigates the United States for its “Reckless Disregard of International Responsibilities” (无视国际责任的轻率之举). The essay observes that by pulling out of the deal, “the US government ignored widespread opposition from the international community” (美国政府无视国际社会的普遍反对) and intensive lobbying from traditional allies. According to “Zhong Sheng,” this willingness to go it alone indicates that U.S. foreign policy is moving “further and further away from multilateralism” (多边主义越来越远).

Chinese foreign policy has long sought to facilitate the emergence of a multipolar world. In his 2017 address to the 19th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping observed that the international system has become more favorable to China as “trends of global multipolarity” are “surging forward.”

Beijing's push for multipolarity is part of a broader effort to erode U.S. primacy. As Robert Blackwill noted, Beijing's pursuit of “power in all dimensions” is “driven by the conviction that China, a great civilization undone by the hostility of others, could never attain its destiny unless it amassed the power necessary to ward off the hostility of those opposed to this quest.” In order to achieve this goal, China works

to build up its own national power, but also seeks to promote the emergence of other poles to counterbalance the United States (Russia, India and Europe). Contrary to some assertions, this not because Beijing seeks to “rule the world,” by supplanting the United States’ top spot in the international order (on the contrary, Beijing has demonstrated minimal interest in shouldering the burdens of global leadership). Rather, it is because China sees the United States as the main obstacle to its primary foreign-policy goal, which is to return to its historical position as the dominant power in Asia. Xi made this clear in his speech when he proclaimed that “the Chinese nation now stands tall and firm in the east.”

The emergence of a truly multipolar world order, divided into spheres of influence, would allow China to dominate its East Asian regional environment, and restore what it views as its civilizational birthright as the central country in Asia. Although the world is increasingly multipolar, much of the hardwiring of international system remains under U.S. preponderance (consider the dollar’s continued dominance of international finance; more on this later). One impediment to the emergence of a multipolar world order, is the stubborn persistence of Transatlantic unity, which has prevented the emergence of the European Union (EU) as an alternate, independent pole to U.S. power. As Robert Ross, et al, observe, a more independent European foreign policy would “allow China to capitalize on the emergence of an additional pole in the international system and attempt to play the US and Europe off against each other”.

Even U.S. multilateralism is something of a Catch-22 for China. On the one hand the United States’ global network of alliances and partnerships prevent the emergence of a truly multipolar system. However, on the other hand, these very alliances constrain the United States from acting unilaterally, and condition Washington to adopt a more multilateral foreign-policy approach. Put another way: Beijing wants to facilitate the emergence of a multipolar world, and in the long term, reducing the ability of the United States to act multilaterally with allies would help achieve that goal. But in the short term, the United States turning away from multilateralism and towards unilateralism is deeply threatening to China.

In contrast to Western elites’ alarm over the perceived erosion of global governance systems and the liberal international order in the Trump era, China’s anxiety about a United States that is more nationalistic and prepared to act unilaterally is not primarily normative, but self-interested. Although it would likely become increasingly isolated over time, an America unbound from the constraints of

multilateral organizations, pursuing a unilateral foreign policy based on a narrow, transactional conception of its national interests will be a profound challenge to China in the short to medium term. For example, China is already feeling the pinch of U.S. tariffs (Section 301) that the Trump administration has unilaterally imposed outside the framework of the World Trade Organization. Another concern for Beijing is the United States' ability to inflict economic pain on its adversaries through unilateral sanctions. As Andrew Small of the German Marshall Fund observes, "Beijing has long been keen to see an erosion of U.S. capacity to impose sanctions unilaterally, particularly the sophisticated toolkit that the U.S. Treasury has developed over the last decade." The recent sanctions that the U.S. Treasury has placed on Chinese enterprises that do business with North Korea and Russia, demonstrate that China is not immune from being a target of U.S. sanctions.

Iran is a Transatlantic Wedge

Some have suggested that U.S.-Europe trade disputes would become a potential Transatlantic wedge that Beijing could exploit. However, shared U.S. and European grievances towards China's trade and industrial policies clearly outweigh U.S.-EU differences on trade. This was evidenced this summer, when the United States doubled down on its trade conflict with China by imposing billions of dollars in new tariffs, while at the same time Trump and European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker achieved a modus vivendi to "work together toward zero tariffs, zero non-tariff barriers, and zero subsidies on non-auto industrial goods."

Iran is another matter entirely. Ultimately, the Europeans blame the Trump administration for taking a maximalist approach that sidelines diplomacy in favor of confrontation, a sentiment on full display at this year's UN General Assembly. French president Emmanuel Macron repudiated Trump's bellicose speech saying that sanctions and containment are insufficient, "we need to have the space for new negotiations," and declaiming that "the serious crisis of confidence was opened by the imposition of extraterritorial sanctions by the United States, but Tehran keeps abiding by its nuclear obligation." At the UN Security Council meeting on nonproliferation, UK Prime Minister Theresa May directly contradicted the Trump administration's position on Iran, arguing that the JCPOA is the best chance to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

China (and Russia) stand to accrue a more immediate practical benefit from the U.S.-Europe Iran rift: the weakening of the United States' ability to unilaterally impose sanctions. China and the other Iran Deal signatories, the UK, Germany, France and Russia, recently set up a special payments system, which would provide an alternate channel to SWIFT, the primary network for international payments. Although SWIFT is based in Europe, it is beholden to U.S. regulations because of the large number of dollar-denominated transactions it processes. This alternate special-purpose vehicle, which would not involve commercial banks exposed to the U.S. dollar and hence be shielded from potential U.S. retribution, would function as something of a "clearing house" that connected the "Europeans and Iranians as they try to do business." This demonstrates that the United States' Iran policy has created an opportunity for China to work with the European powers to begin to slowly chip away at a key lever of U.S. power—the dollar's dominant position in the international financial system. Cooperating with Europe enhances China's efforts to accelerate "de-dollarization" because the Euro is the only currency that is anywhere remotely as internationalized as the dollar. Per SWIFT, as of December 2017, the dollar was used in around 41 percent of international payments, the Euro in 39.45 percent and the RMB in merely 1 percent of transactions.

Of course Iran hawks will respond by decrying that the world does not adequately grasp the dangers posed by Iran. But they cannot deny the reality that most of the United States' longstanding allies (the UK, France, and Germany) and partners (India) are deeply uncomfortable with the U.S. pressure campaign on Iran. In fact, these allies are so frustrated that they are willing to work with U.S. competitors to blunt Washington's ability to levy sanctions on its adversaries. With this in mind, the Trump administration needs to undertake a cost benefit analysis on its Iran policy that addresses the following questions. Is it really worth making Iran, a middle power by all accounts, the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy, especially when this administration has sought to reorient U.S. foreign policy around major power competition? Is it worth alienating longtime allies to take a maximalist approach to Iran? Is it worth imperiling the dollar's dominance of the international financial system, which hitherto has been a key source of U.S. foreign-policy leverage? If the United States does find itself in a more serious major-power confrontation with China (for example over Taiwan), or Russia (over Ukraine), then Washington may come to regret that its unilateral approach to Iran alienated allies and eroded a key economic instrument of U.S. power.

Source: [nationalinterest](#)

China navy chief takes dig at U.S. freedom of navigation patrols

- Ben Blanchard

QINGDAO, China (Reuters) - Freedom of navigation should not be used to infringe upon the rights of other countries, China's navy chief Shen Jinlong said on Wednesday, taking a dig at the United States and its allies who have sailed close to disputed South China Sea islets. The United States has frequently sent warships near to Chinese-occupied features in the South China Sea, where China has been reclaiming land for runways and ports. Some U.S. allies, including Britain, have followed suit. China regards the patrols by the United States and its allies as a provocation, as it views almost all of the South China Sea as its territory, although Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei and the Philippines all have competing claims. Speaking at a forum in the eastern city of Qingdao, following a major naval parade marking 70 years since the founding of the Chinese navy, Shen said everyone needed to follow the rules and "safeguard good order". "Respect for the rules is the cornerstone of maritime good order," said Shen, who is close to President Xi Jinping. "Freedom of navigation is a concept widely recognized by the international community. However it should not be used as an excuse to infringe upon the legitimate rights and interests of littoral states," he added, without naming the United States directly.

The United States has sent only a low level delegation to the Chinese navy anniversary events. And unlike its close allies Australia, Japan and South Korea, the United States did not send a ship to take part in Tuesday's naval parade reviewed by Xi himself. "The U.S. government seeks a bilateral relationship that is results-oriented and focused on risk reduction," Lt. Col. Dave Eastburn, a Pentagon spokesman, said in comments sent to Reuters, responding to a question on U.S. participation at the event. "The U.S. Navy will continue to pursue its primary goal of constructive, risk-reduction focused discourse with the PLAN," he said, referring to the People's Liberation Army Navy. Shen said that China was continuing to advance talks on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, which Beijing has been having with Southeast Asian states for the past few years. "We are committed to making the South China Sea a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation," he added, speaking to an audience of both senior Chinese and foreign navy officers, but without giving details. The navy has been a key beneficiary of Xi's ambitious military modernization plan, which has seen China develop aircraft carriers, advanced new warships and nuclear submarines, and stealth

jets for the air force. “We adhere to non-conflict and non-confrontation and strive to be a stabilizer for maritime peace,” Shen said.

Source: www.reuters.com