



MAKING WAVES

Inside this Brief

- **Maritime Security.....p.6**
- **Maritime Forces.....p.13**
- **Shipping, Ports and Ocean Economy.....p.21**
- **Marine Environment.....p.35**
- **Geopolitics.....p.46**

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

Acknowledgement: 'Making Waves' is a compilation of maritime news and news analyses drawn from national and international online sources. Drawn directly from original sources, minor editorial amendments are made by specialists on maritime affairs. It is intended for academic research, and not for commercial use. NMF expresses its gratitude to all sources of information, which are cited in this publication.



US-Philippines Maritime Security Cooperation in the Spotlight with expanded exercise

India, ASEAN focus on Maritime Security

‘China quietly resumes its activities in Doklam area’

Pakistan Navy ship SAIF reaches Oman for maritime patrolling

Houthi attack on oil tanker threatens Maritime Security



Malabar 2018: Why Is It Important?

Defence ministry clears decks for buying 111 choppers for navy at Rs 217 bn

Russia rapidly expanding Navy with 26 new ships by end of 2018, Putin says

Panel: China continues to coerce South China Sea neighbours with its Maritime Forces

A Leaked photo shows that China is building a supercarrier that could rival the US' Nimitz-Class Carriers

Indian shipping companies headed for troubled waters

China military develops robotic submarines to launch a new era of sea power

Iran extends insurance, ships to India for oil export

Chabahar Port ready to transit goods from India to Afghanistan – Iran official

India's economic growth remains intact; GDP to grow around 7.5%: FICCI



MARINE ENVIRONMENT



Industry players eye potential anti-microfiber legislation

Dead fish surfacing on a Vermilion beach may have been caused by lack of oxygen

Plastic straws play only minor role in global plastics pollution

Giant Pac-Man system could help eat up ocean plastic pollution

Ocean wilderness 'disappearing' globally

Calls for tighter rules after regulator approves foreign ships dumping palm oil in British waters for three years



GEOPOLITICS



China to boost military ties with Sri Lanka and gift frigate

India is the weakest link in the Quad?

The return of the Indo-Pacific Quad

Is time running out for the Gulf Cooperation Council?

India, Australia up defence cooperation, plan key talks

Indo-Pacific initiatives gain currency despite gaps over China



US-Philippines Maritime Security Cooperation in the Spotlight with Expanded Exercise

- Prashanth Parameswaran

Last week, the United States and the Philippines carried out the latest iteration of a new maritime training activity between the two sides that has taken place under Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. The interaction highlights the continuing cooperation between the two longtime treaty allies despite the challenges the relationship has faced thus far under Duterte.

As I have been noting in these pages, Duterte's emergence has seen a mix of continuity and change in U.S.-Philippine defense relations, including with respect to individual projects and exercises both countries hold. An example is the fact that while the Philippines was initially out of the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise series that the United States carries out with a number of Southeast Asian states, both sides had set up a new training activity codenamed Sama-Sama to focus on a similar list of common security concerns.

The first iteration of Sama-Sama occurred last June, and the focus was on the same sorts of engagements both sides had carried out previously, with a similar level of participation from U.S. assets as well. Following Sama-Sama, the two countries also conducted a coordinated patrol in the Sulu Sea, which has become an area of ongoing maritime security cooperation involving regional as well as extra regional states to varying degrees.

From July 9 to July 14, the U.S. and Philippine navies held another iteration of Sama-Sama. According to the U.S. Navy, the engagement focused on a full spectrum of naval capabilities, with engagements covering areas such as air defense, diving, and search and rescue at sea along with shore phase symposiums and seminars including capabilities such as explosive ordnance disposal and anti-submarine and surface operations.

Interestingly, while last year's focus was more on the Sulu Sea relatively speaking, this year saw a focus on the South China Sea. U.S. and Philippine vessels – on the U.S. side the USNS *Millinocket*, diving and salvage ship USNS *Salvor*, and a P-8 Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft, and on the Philippine side, Philippine navy frigate BRP *Ramon Alcaraz* and landing dock ship BRP *Tarlac* – conducted activities in the South China Sea. Notably, the timing of the engagement came during the commemoration of the second anniversary of the July 12 arbitral ruling on the Philippines' South China Sea case against China

Another notable development was the integration of Japan into the exercise, with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) joining the exercise as an observer. Beyond the development itself, this reinforces a broader trend where Japan has been included in several U.S.-Philippine bilateral engagements, including the annual Balikatan exercises, as Tokyo itself expands its security collaboration with Southeast Asian states. Apart from the engagement itself, both U.S. and Japanese officials also met with Philippine Navy officials during their visits there.

To be sure, the U.S.-Philippine alliance, and the defense cooperation therein, ought to be evaluated comprehensively rather than from the perspective of a single exercise. But as U.S.-Philippine interactions develop on through the rest of the year and into 2019, engagements like Sama-Sama will continue to be ones that will be worth keeping an eye on for how ongoing collaboration is evolving.

Source: thediplomat.com, 16 July 2018

India, ASEAN focus on maritime security

Ministers and experts from India and ASEAN countries have vowed to work together on maritime security. That pledge comes at a time when there is growing concern about China's maritime activity in the region. Officials just wrapped up a 2-day meeting in New Delhi. ASEAN members want India to take on a bigger role when it comes to maritime security in the Asia-Pacific region. Some of the association's members are at odds with China over its military expansion in the South China Sea. But India has been cautious about expanding patrols there. An Indian military official said China's attempt to increase its influence in the Strait of Malacca poses a regional threat. That Strait connects the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said, "The summit recognizes that India and ASEAN, as maritime partners and neighbors, must work together to

ensure the security and sustainability of oceans, seas and waterways." Experts are watching for any policy change from India after this meeting.

Source: www3.nhk.or.jp, 20 July 2018

‘China quietly resumes its activities in Doklam area’

A United States Congress woman has claimed that China has 'quietly resumed' its activities in the Doklam area and neither Bhutan nor India has sought to dissuade it, an assertion that was denied by New Delhi on Thursday.

Congresswoman Ann Wagner made the claim during a Congressional hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee for Asia and the Pacific. During the hearing, she posed a question to a State Department official, Alice G Wells, on Beijing's actions in the Himalayan region and compared them with its manoeuvres in the disputed South China Sea. Tensions between India and China reached their peak during a 73-day standoff in Doklam near Bhutan over Beijing's construction of a road in the area. The standoff ended after both sides agreed to disengage, and there have been no confirmed or official reports of China resuming any activities since then.

"Although both countries backed down, China has quietly resumed its activities in Doklam and neither Bhutan nor India has sought to dissuade it. China's activities in the Himalayas remind me of its south China Sea policies. How should our failure to respond to the militarization of the South China Sea inform the international response to these Himalayan border disputes?" Wagner asked. Wager did not elaborate on her claim of China resuming its activities.

In her response, Wells, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, did not directly refer to Doklam, but told Wagner and other lawmakers: "I would assess that India is vigorously defending its northern borders and this (the situation at the northern borders) is a subject of concern to India."

Wells said US looks to the Indo-Pacific strategy put forward by the Trump administration in light of the 'South China Sea's Strategy', a reference to China's aggressive claims of sovereignty over all of South China Sea. Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims. "How do we maintain the region to be open, to have maritime security, to not have militarisation that would imperil the 70 per cent of global trade?" Wells said. "We need to do that by giving authority

to sovereign nations to have choices in how they develop, to have choices in their partnerships," Wells said.

In New Delhi, Minister of State for External Affairs Ministry V K Singh told Rajya Sabha on Thursday that there have been no new developments at the site of the face-off with China in Doklam and its vicinity, and status quo prevails in the area. "Since the disengagement of Indian and Chinese border personnel in the Doklam area on August 28, 2017, there have been no new developments at the faceoff site and its vicinity. The status quo prevails in this area," Singh said in a written reply to a question on whether China has constructed new roads in the southern part of the Doklam Plateau.

In a statement later, Ministry of External Affairs spokesman Raveesh Kumar repeated Singh's comments. Although the Congressional hearing was to discuss the Trump administration's budget request for the financial year 2019 for South Asia, the sub-committee chairman, Congressman Ted Yoho, raised the issue of China's aggressive posture in South Asia. "What are your thoughts on what is the best way to counter China in that region?" Yoho asked. The US should not be seeking to compete with China dollar for dollar, Wells responded.

She added that instead of a state lending on terms that may not be to the benefit of countries or their citizens, the US and its companies are providing USD 850 billion in foreign direct investment in the region, which is far more than what has been injected by China. "We're trying to gather like-minded countries who can bring resources to the table, who can coordinate assistance and an effort so as to provide countries with meaningful alternatives," Wells said.

Source: www.rediff.com, 27 July 2018

Pakistan Navy ship SAIF reaches Oman for maritime patrolling

Pakistan Navy (PN) Ship *SAIF*, F22-P class destroyer of Pakistan Navy Fleet on Sunday visited Port Muscat at Oman during first Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP) deployment in Gulf of Aden & Southern Red Sea Region. The objective of RSMP is to maintain PN presence along critical choke points and sea areas in Indian Ocean Region to fulfill international obligations for maritime security and safeguarding both national international shipping by preserving freedom of navigation at high seas.

During the visit, Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) commanding officer SAIF called-on Royal Navy of Oman's head of fleet staff and other officials. He conveyed well wishes from Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Zafar Mahmood to the people of Oman in general and Royal Navy (RN) of Oman in particular. A reception was also hosted onboard PNS SAIF which was graced by Oman's Commodore Saif Bin Mohammad Al Habsi, Commanding Officer Said Bin Sultan Naval Base, while Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman H E Ali Javed was the Chief Host of the event. The reception was attended by large number of guests including Pakistani and Omani community members, diplomats, officials and other dignitaries. Ship remained open for local visitors, which provided unique opportunity to overseas Pakistanis to have a glimpse of life onboard ships of their homeland naval force. Pakistan and Oman enjoy close diplomatic ties and cordial relations. The visit of PNS SAIF is expected to provide new vistas to further strengthen these relations. Officers of PNS SAIF engaged in various interactions during the port visit to ensure continuity in bilateral collaboration.

In order to enhance interoperability with Royal Oman Navy, PNS SAIF will also conduct Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with RN Ship KHASSAB. Upon completion of PASSEX, PNS SAIF will resume Regional Maritime Security Patrols in the Gulf of Aden. PN has always contributed significantly in assuring a secure maritime environment for merchantmen by actively deploying ships in counter terrorism and anti-piracy operations. Continued active presence of PN depicts its resolve to curb menace of terrorism, drug and human trafficking and piracy on high seas.

Source: www.pakistantoday.com.pk, 29 July 2018

Houthi attack on oil tanker threatens maritime security

The Council of Ministers chaired by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman here Tuesday stressed that the botched terrorist attack on a Saudi oil tanker in the international waters west of the port of Hodeidah by Iranian-backed Houthi militias proves beyond doubt the danger posed by these militias and those behind them for regional and international security. The Cabinet said the threats to crude oil tankers affect the freedom of international trade and maritime navigation in the Strait of Bab Al-Mandeb and the Red Sea. It stressed the importance of handing over the province of Hodeidah to the Yemeni government to prevent it from being used as a launch pad for terror attacks against maritime shipping and international trade. The Cabinet condemned the suicide bombings that targeted a polling station in the Pakistani city of Quetta, an attack on a security convoy west of the Afghan capital

Kabul, and the shooting incident in Toronto. The Cabinet thanked the King for his order to host 1,500 pilgrims who are the relatives of martyred soldiers of the Yemeni National Army and the Sudanese forces participating in the Operation Decisive Storm and the Renewal of Hope. The Cabinet valued the appreciation of the Executive Council of the International Monetary Fund for the efforts of the Kingdom's government to implement its reform plans within the framework of Vision 2030. The IMF Executive Board announced this month that Saudi Arabia's real GDP growth is expected to increase to 1.9 percent in 2018.

The Council of Ministers decided to set up a supreme committee called the Supreme Committee for the Affairs of Hydrocarbons chaired by the Crown Prince. This committee will be a reference point for all matters related to hydrocarbons and related matters.

Source: saudigazette.com.sa, 31 July 2018



Malabar 2018: Why Is It Important?

- Dr. Rupakjyoti Borah

Recent years have seen an increasing cooperation between India, Japan, and the US, especially in the maritime realm. One such occasion was the 22nd edition of the Malabar naval exercises, which concluded off the coast of Guam in June this year. These exercises came against the backdrop of the shifting sands of geopolitics in the wider Indo-Pacific region. Even as US President Donald Trump met the North Korean strongman Kim Jong-un in Singapore on June 12, at the same time, the US and China (the world's two biggest economies) have been in an ongoing tariff-war.

This flux has also extended to the maritime domain. In a landmark move, the US Pacific Command has been renamed as the US Indo-Pacific Command. While India has been reaching out to Southeast Asia and East Asia through its "Act East Policy," its maritime focus has been consistently growing. At the same time, Japan, under PM Abe, has launched its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy. The three countries already have a trilateral strategic dialogue which has been taking place among them since December 2011.

India's Naval Doctrine of 2015 notes that the Indian Ocean accounts for "two-thirds of the world's oil shipments, one-third of bulk cargo traffic, and half the world's container shipments." Hence, the Indian Navy's role is crucial in this region. Besides, it is worth noting here that countries in the Indian Ocean region also face the danger of piracy and maritime terrorism. In the case of the horrendous Mumbai terrorist attacks of November 2008, the attackers came by the sea route.

Hence, it is no surprise that these three countries have come together in the Malabar naval exercises, which actually started out as bilateral exercises between India and the US back in 1992. Japan became a permanent member of these exercises only in 2015. In this year's edition of the Malabar exercises, the Indian Navy was represented by "two indigenously designed and built ships, the multi-purpose stealth frigate INS Sahyadri and Anti-Submarine Warfare corvette, INS Kamorta, Fleet Tanker INS Shakti and Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8I." However, this year, India's aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya was not a part of the exercises as it is undergoing a pre-scheduled refit.

The JMSDF sent a Hyuga-class helicopter carrier JS Ise with integral helicopters, the Takanami-class destroyer JS Suzunami, Akizuki class destroyer JS Fuyuzuki, two P1 Maritime Patrol Aircraft besides a submarine. The US Navy was represented by the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan with its air wing, two Ticonderoga class cruisers, two Arleigh Burke class destroyers, a Los Angeles-class attack submarine, and one Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8A. The exercises were conducted in two phases: the harbour phase from June 7-10, and the sea phase from June 11-16.

A US Navy Press Release about these exercises noted that “Indian, Japanese, and US maritime forces have a common understanding and knowledge of a shared working environment at sea. Each iteration of this exercise helps to advance the level of understanding between the nations’ sailors as members of Indo-Pacific nations, and the hope is to be able to continue this process over time to strengthen bonds and personal relationships.”

Why Malabar 2018 Matters

These exercises were important for a host of reasons.

For one, the Indo-Pacific has acquired an increasing relevance under the Trump Administration in the US, the Modi administration in India, and the Abe administration in Japan. Malabar 2018 was held against the backdrop of the Indian PM Narendra Modi’s visit to Wuhan in China for an informal summit with the Chinese president and his keynote speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, where he noted that “oceans had an important place in Indian thinking since pre-Vedic times. Thousands of years ago, the Indus Valley Civilisation as well as Indian peninsula had maritime trade.”

Very early on in his term (in March 2015), during a visit to Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka, PM Modi noted that “we seek a future for Indian Ocean that lives up to the name of SAGAR — Security and Growth for All in the Region.” New Delhi is also worried about China’s so-called “string of pearls” strategy which has seen Beijing helping build ports and port-related infrastructure in Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Kyaukpyu (Myanmar) and Chittagong (Bangladesh).

Second, the US has also advocated a stronger line on China during the recently-concluded Shangri-La Dialogue and had disinvited the Chinese Navy from the RIMPAC exercises. Secretary Mattis had noted at the Shangri-La Dialogue that “ as

initial response to China's continued militarization of the South China Sea, last week we disinvited the People's Liberation Army Navy from the 2018 Rim of the Pacific Exercise, as China's behavior is inconsistent with the principals and the purposes of the RIMPAC exercise, the world's largest naval exercise”

Third, Tokyo, as part of its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” would not want itself to be boxed in by China given that it depends on free and open sea-lanes of communication in the wider Indo-Pacific region for both its energy imports and also for its exports. In addition, Beijing claims the Japanese-controlled Senkaku islands (known as Diaoyu in China.)

Fourth, India's relations with both the US and Japan have been improving steadily. New Delhi has signed the LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement) with the US which allows the US and India to use designated bases in each others' countries for refueling and replenishment. In addition, Japan and India have been holding joint naval exercises known as the JIMEX since 2012, which is a far cry from the times when the two countries would conduct joint exercises only at the coast guard level. India is now buying a wide-range of weapons from the US as opposed to the earlier times when the former Soviet Union (and its successor state Russia) used to be almost the only supplier of weapons to India. It is noteworthy that arms imports by India from the US rose by a staggering 550% during 2013-2017 as opposed to the previous five years.

Fifth, the Malabar exercises build on the growing cooperation between these countries (and Australia) in the maritime arena, which first took effect after the disastrous Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004. In addition, India has also recently decided to base fighter jets in the strategically important Andaman and Nicobar Islands, giving it an even greater reach in the wider Indian Ocean region. New Delhi is also looking to develop the Sabang port in Indonesia, which lies very close to India's Andaman and Nicobar group of islands. New Delhi is also building its first home-grown aircraft carrier, which is expected to be ready by late 2020.

US-India-Japan Relations: Churning Ahead

While it is clear that India, Japan, and the US are testing the waters and looking to forge a closer maritime partnership, they have also been averse to taking on China head-on. This is reflected in the exclusion of Australia from the Malabar exercises, in spite of its stated position to join. At the same time, these three countries have

reasons to be worried about China's growing power projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean region. The scant respect Beijing has paid to international rules of conduct in its dealings with countries like the Philippines have also prompted other countries in the Indo-Pacific to reassess their capabilities vis-à-vis China.

The Malabar exercises will continue to rise in importance in the near future. These exercises afforded the three nations the opportunity to test the collaboration between their personnel and the interoperability of their military platforms. Japanese PM Shinzo Abe way back in August 2007 (during his earlier term in office) in his landmark speech before the Indian Parliament titled "Confluence of the Two Seas" had been very prescient in noting that "the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity." His words are now ringing true on the high seas of the Indo-Pacific region.

Source: www.geopoliticalmonitor.com, 31 July 2018

Defence ministry clears decks for buying 111 choppers for navy at Rs 217 bn

- Ajai Shukla

The defence ministry on Monday announced it had approved 'implementation guidelines for the strategic partnership model'. The 'strategic partner' (SP) model of defence procurement, which was promulgated in outline in May 2017, provides a policy framework for Indian firms to manufacture specified defence platforms in India based on technology transferred by a selected foreign vendor. The SP policy initially aims at building four categories of weaponry — fighters, helicopters, submarines, and armoured vehicles.

But while the policy framework had been drawn up, and retrospectively included as a chapter in the Defence Procurement Procedure of 2016 (DPP 2016), there was a need for separate selection criteria for each of the four equipment categories. "In an endeavour to convert policy into implementable directions and to kick-start the process, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) also approved platform-specific guidelines for procurement of naval utility helicopters," said a defence ministry release on Monday. That clears the decks for initiating the Rs 217.38 billion procurement of 111 helicopters for the navy.

“The amplifying guidelines lay emphasis on incentivisation of transfer of niche technology and higher indigenous content. Global majors who in collaboration with Indian partners are ready to make India a regional/global manufacturing hub for the platform will also be incentivised,” said the defence ministry release. “All procurements under the SP model would be executed by specially constituted empowered project committees to provide focused attention and ensure timely execution,” stated the ministry. In the SP pipeline are 110 medium fighters for the air force, 123 naval multi-role helicopters, 111 naval utility helicopters, and six conventional submarines under Project 75-I.

The DAC also accorded approval on Monday for buying eight fast patrol vessels for the Coast Guard under the ‘Buy Indian – Indian Designed Developed and Manufactured’ category for approximately Rs 8 billion. “These vessels will be indigenously designed and manufactured and would strengthen maritime security by undertaking day/night patrolling and policing of (India’s maritime zones),” said the defence ministry.

Source: www.business-standard.com, 31 July 2018

Russia Rapidly Expanding Navy With 26 New Ships By End Of 2018, Putin Says

-Jason Lemon

Russia is rapidly expanding its navy and plans to add 26 new ships by the end of the year, President Vladimir Putin announced on Sunday. The Russian leader highlighted the speed with which the new vessels are being constructed during a Russian Navy Day reception. "A good pace of re-equipment and upgrading is a great merit of the people working in our shipbuilding sector, the result of their professionalism and responsibility," Putin said, Russian news agency Tass reported. "The Russian Navy will get 26 new warships, boats and vessels, four of them equipped with Kalibr missiles," he explained.

Putin said that expanding the naval fleet would ensure “high combat readiness” and increase Russia’s “fighting capacity.” He added that the country “will continue taking measures aimed at strengthening and developing the fleet, making it better

equipped.” Last month, Admiral James Foggo, who commands the U.S. Navy in Europe and Africa, warned in an interview with *Stars and Stripes* that Moscow is expanding its submarine force around Europe to challenge American naval dominance more aggressively than at any time since the Cold War. Some of Moscow’s submarines possess missiles that can hit any European capital, the admiral explained, making it “important for us to have the situational awareness of where those platforms are operating at all times.” Foggo’s concerned comments followed shortly after Russian state media reported that Moscow would add a class of large amphibious assault ship, known as the *Ivan Gren*, to its naval fleet. The warship can carry 13 main battle tanks, or 36 armored personnel carriers, and up to 300 marines. It also has two Kamov Ka-29 attack helicopters. Russia has also recently tested “invincible” hypersonic missiles, and announced plans to test “fine-tuned” and “unlimited-range” nuclear-powered cruise missiles. In March, Putin revealed the development of a range of new weapons that would be capable of “circumventing” those of the U.S.

Moscow’s military developments come at a time of heightened tensions with Europe, NATO and the U.S. The world has eyed Moscow’s apparent ambitions to expand warily, especially since a 2014 decision to support separatist rebels in Ukraine and annex the Crimean Peninsula. Many European nations have expressed concern at a newly expansionist Russia. As European countries have moved to enhance military cooperation with Washington and NATO, Russia has repeatedly responded with threats of retaliation. Just last week, Russia’s defense minister said his country would “take response measures” to NATO’s increasing ties with Sweden and Finland. Moscow threatened “consequences” after Norway announced in June that it would more than double the presence of U.S. troops within its borders starting next year. In May, reports suggested that Poland had offered the U.S. \$2 billion to place troops permanently on its territory. Russia warned that such a move could “lead to counteraction” from its side. Russia has a long history, however, of carefully projecting might, and attempting to destabilize its perceived enemies with stories of military capacity that far outstrip the reality.

Source: www.newsweek.com, 29 July 2018

Panel: China Continues to Coerce South China Sea Neighbors with its Maritime Forces

- John Grady

China persists in employing a variety of tactics to coerce Taiwan, its maritime neighbors and put more pressure on Japan, a panel of experts agreed last week. Nowhere is that more visible than Beijing's "persistent and flexible presence" from its maritime militia, Coast Guard and People's Liberation Army Navy. It is a maritime force that also keeps open the Malacca Straits, a vital passageway for its energy imports, as well as backing up its territorial claims far from its shores and extending its reach into the Indian Ocean and Africa, Bonnie Glaser, director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies China Power Project, said on Thursday.

In addition to its maritime forces, China has expanded the capability of its artificial island network in the South China Sea. The installations are now capable of handling patrol aircraft, fighters and strategic bombers as well as anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles. The expansion allows the PLA "to develop operating concepts... they could use further north" to intimidate Tokyo and raise new threats to U.S. bases on Guam, she said. Collin Koh Swee Lean, a research fellow at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, said some South East Asian nations, already operating at a quality and numbers disadvantage with China on law enforcement and naval vessels. They "could not match what China has" when Beijing was only employing its coast guard or maritime militia in these disputes. In a confrontation with the Chinese under those conditions, a South East Asian navy and coast guard would likely "turn tail and run." "Modernization is moving at a snail's pace" in these nations' coast guards and navies, he said. Because the security needs vary widely, there is little or no coordination among neighbors on buying together, setting common needs, developing interoperable capability and a general reluctance to spend money in this area. They also don't want to risk provoking China — militarily or economically.

Maritime domain awareness must be the building block in responding to China's assertiveness, Hideshi Tokuchi, of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, said. Tokyo does not distinguish between Beijing's behavior in the South China Sea or what it is doing in North Asia — from intimidation of civilian fishermen to insisting on specious claims to islands in the East China Sea. From that point of view and geography, "Taiwan is more important than before" because it is in the connecting position between the two bodies of water. Its security concerns "should not be ignored" with strike aircraft from the mainland constantly circling the island and causing scrambles of fighters and periodic threats of invasion.

Glaser said despite its military moves and sometimes heated rhetoric China was not looking for a war with anyone in the Indo-Pacific. “There has been some pushback” against China, surprisingly enough it came from Europe, Richard Heydarian, a fellow at ADR-Stratbase Institute, said Acknowledging France and Great Britain joining the United States in freedom of navigation operations around the artificial islands was new, he warned that those missions “alone could be counterproductive.” In Beijing, they could be dismissed as “empty tactics” because they “are not robust enough to deter” the Chinese from beefing up their military presence on the reclaimed lands or extending their reach to reefs and rocks further out or to the north. Complicating matters is the behavior of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s “meek” and “humble” approach to China in its territorial dispute, despite an international arbitration panel’s supporting Manila’s claims, he said.

This has caused a split between the country’s military, “with its constitutional responsibility to protect Philippine sovereignty” and the president’s “leaning to China.” Signs of this include his allowing PLAN naval vessels to make port calls and military aircraft to fly into bases without treaty or much formal notice. Further complicating matters in the Philippines is Duterte’s periodic bashing of the United States, that throws into question American use of naval and air bases. At the same time, the Philippine military has more closely embraced Washington to counter China and is seeking to expand exercises and training assistance. While a way ahead would include a “negotiated Code of Conduct” for the South China Sea, Heydarian said for the countries in the region to accept such a deal it would have to include a freeze on militarization, reclamation and naval exercises. “Otherwise, what’s the point,” he said.

Source: news.usni.org, 30 July 2018

A Leaked Photo Shows That China Is Building A Supercarrier That Could Rival The US' Nimitz-Class Carriers

- Daniel Brown

The Chinese shipbuilder that's constructing Beijing's third aircraft carrier, Type 002, leaked an artist's impression of that carrier on social media in late June that heightened intrigue about China's naval ambitions before quickly taking it down. The China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation photo showed the future Type 002 with a large flight deck that featured an angled landing strip and three electro-magnetic catapult launching systems - all of which represent a technologic leap to the kind of

supercarriers fielded by the US Navy. It's expected to be a 70,000-ton ship that's finished by 2021, if all goes according to plan. Compare that to China's second carrier, Type 001A - it has a built-in ski jump on the flight deck and uses an old-fashioned short take-off but arrested recovery launching system that limits the speed of launches and the size of the armaments fighters carry.

Type 002's features will be much more advanced than Type 001A, allowing the People's Liberation Army-Navy to deploy a greater number and variety of aircraft - and to deploy the aircraft more quickly. If the supercarrier works as planned - and that's a big, if - it would make the Chinese navy one of the most powerful in the world. And this appears to be just the beginning. China has grand ambitions for a world-class navy, and is even building a fourth carrier, which will reportedly be nuclear-powered and possibly match the specifications of the US' Nimitz-class carriers the US Navy has operated for half a century. A modern supercarrier would leap China ahead of Russia, which has only one carrier that's breakdown-prone, to rival only France and the United States, the only navies that boast nuclear-powered supercarriers that launch planes with catapults. The "interesting question is what do they intend these carriers to do," Daniel Kliman, a senior fellow in the Asia-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security, told Business Insider. "What would it enable China to achieve?"

"A lot of it's prestige," Kliman said. And prestige is also about domestic politics. "There's a lot of popular attention in China to its carrier program," said Kliman, who added that a supercarrier is also an effective means to project power in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, much as the US has used them for decades. "Beyond that, China does see a real need to protect its far-flung investments and protect market access overseas," Kliman said. "Carriers are certainly useful in that role." Whatever the intentions, these supercarriers would vastly expand China's ability to project power into contested areas at sea and to fly missions overland. "Either they're going to try to take the fight to the enemy or it's about prestige," Eric Wertheim, a naval expert with the US Naval Institute, told Business Insider, adding that it's probably "a little bit of both." Wertheim said that people were seen crying when China's first carrier, the Liaoning, was commissioned because "there was such pride." Wertheim and Kliman also agreed that China would initially use their current and future carriers to project power in the East and South China Seas, especially the latter. Ultimately though, China really doesn't need carriers to achieve its territorial objectives in the East and South China Seas. "Everything's within land-based aircraft," Kliman said. So "is their goal to just dominate Asia" or to project power in other waters? Wertheim asked. Last year, China opened an overseas military base (its

first ever overseas base) in Africa, where it continues to invest and compete for interest. "We really don't know what [China's] intention [are]," Wertheim said.

Source: www.businessinsider.in, 28 July 2018

Indian shipping companies headed for troubled waters

- Lalatendu Mishra

A proposed move by the Centre to abolish the Right of First Refusal (ROFR) clause for transportation of Indian cargo by Indian-flagged vessels — the only benefit available to Indian shipping companies — is threatening the existence of the domestic shipping industry.

Anticipating a bleak future, Indian shipping companies — which have a combined fleet of 1,372 ships with a total capacity of 12.35 million Gross Tonnage (GT) — are mulling over de-registering their vessels from India and flag them in tax havens of Panama and Bahama to survive and compete with foreign lines.

Having recently relaxed norms benefiting foreign shipping lines, the government is now preparing ground to do away with the ROFR clause which ensures Indian-registered ships carry Indian bulk dry/liquid cargo of Indian public and private sector companies at the lowest rate quoted by a foreign shipping line by matching the price. Thus, while it does not add any extra cost to the importer or exporter, it provides assured business to the national fleet at a rate quoted by a foreign line.

Multiple taxes

Currently, 92% of India's export import trade is carried by foreign flag ships. And the 8% that is assured to Indian ships is likely to go if the ROFR is scrapped. This benefit is provided since foreign flag vessels do not pay any tax in India while Indian companies are costlier since they have to pay multiple taxes.

In 2017 alone, Indian shipping companies have made investments of around ₹4,700 crore in assets in anticipation of business. All this investment is at stake, said ship owners.

Recently, the Union Shipping Ministry issued orders that permitted foreign flag vessels to transport export import-laden containers, agri products, horticulture, fisheries, animal husbandry commodities and fertilizers between two or more Indian ports without obtaining a licence from the Directorate General of Shipping. All this

means is that an Indian flag vessel, if available, has lost the opportunity of doing this business. Indian shipping companies said this move is being contemplated without any consultative process. Also, the integrity and security of transportation of critical cargo in times of war or economic sanctions seem to have been completely ignored, they said. “The proposal to remove ROFR is not only retrograde but also flies in the face of data which shows that such a policy has aided growth of Indian flag tonnage with beneficial freight rates to consumers – after all, Indian vessels only match the lowest rate of the foreign flag,” Anil Devli, director-general, Indian National Shipowners’ Association, said. “It is sad that an industry which employs close to 30,000 persons with assets of approximately ₹68,000 crore and whose contribution to the exchequer is in excess of ₹8,000 crore in a year is being forced to shut down needlessly,” he added. “The right of first refusal is the only incentive to the Indian flag, which suffers from many disadvantages versus foreign flags. It is also an incentive that comes at no cost to anyone. Removal of ROFR will strike at the very foundations of Indian shipping,” said G. Shivakumar, executive director, The Great Eastern Shipping Company Ltd.

The government’s move to deny Indian shipping companies the ROFR will put the already-battered firms at a disadvantageous position against foreign liners, said Ranjit Singh, executive director & CEO, Essar Shipping. Mr. Singh added: “This untoward move will push Indian ship owners to immediately plan for de-register their ships from Indian Register and flag them out of India as it would reduce their cost of operations.”

‘Strategic blow’

Analysts said de-registering of vessels from the Indian flag will be a strategic blow to Indian security as merchant naval fleet always acts as a second line of defence for coastal security. However, some experts feel the objective of the government is to shift cargo movement from railways and roadways to the waterways to reduce logistics costs and ensure faster movement of cargo, which the domestic lines have failed to deliver. “This move should not be looked at in isolation. The government wants to build volumes and see a large-scale shift of cargo movement to waterways which foreign lines can provide as we do not have a strong domestic shipping industry,” said Jagannarayan Padmanabhan, director, CRISIL Infrastructure Advisory.

Source: www.thehindu.com, 14 July 2018

China military develops robotic submarines to launch a new era of sea power

-Stephen Chen

China is developing large, smart and relatively low-cost unmanned submarines that can roam the world's oceans to perform a wide range of missions, from reconnaissance to mine placement to even suicide attacks against enemy vessels, according to scientists involved in these artificial intelligence (AI) projects. The autonomous robotic submarines are expected to be deployed in the early 2020s. While not intended to entirely replace human-operated submarines, they will challenge the advantageous position established by Western naval powers after the second world war. The robotic subs are aimed particularly at the United States forces in strategic waters like the South China Sea and western Pacific Ocean, the researchers said. The project is part of the government's ambitious plan to boost the country's naval power with AI technology. China has built the world's largest testing facility for surface drone boats in Zhuhai, Guangdong province. Military researchers are also developing an AI-assisted support system for submarine commanders. As the *South China Morning Post* reported earlier this year, that system will help captains make faster, more accurate judgments in the heat of combat situations.

The new class of unmanned submarines will join the other autonomous or manned military systems on water, land and orbit to carry out missions in coordinated efforts, according to the researchers. The submarines will have no human operators on board. They will go out, handle their assignments and return to base on their own. They may establish contact with the ground command periodically for updates, but are by design capable of completing missions without human intervention. But the researchers also noted that AI subs had limits, especially at the early stages of deployment. They will start with relatively simple tasks. The purpose of these projects is not to replace human crews entirely. To attack or not to attack, the final decision will still be in the hands of commanders, the researchers said. Current models of unmanned underwater vehicles, or UUVs, are mostly small. Their deployment and recovery require another ship or submarine. They are limited in operational range and payload capacity. Now under development, the AI-powered subs are "giants" compared to the normal UUVs, according to the researchers. They station in dock as conventional submarines. Their cargo bay is reconfigurable and large enough to accommodate a wide range of freight, from powerful surveillance equipment to missiles or torpedoes. Their energy supply comes from diesel-electric engines or other power sources that ensure continuous operation for months. The robotic submarines rely heavily on artificial intelligence to deal with the sea's

complex environment. They must make decisions constantly on their own: changing course and depth to avoid detection; distinguishing civilian from military vessels; choosing the best approach to reach a designated position. They can gather intelligence, deploy mines or station themselves at geographical “chockpoints” where armed forces are bound to pass to ambush enemy targets. They can work with manned submarines as a scout or decoy to draw fire and expose the position of the adversary. If necessary, they can ram into a high-value target. Lin Yang, marine technology equipment director at the Shenyang Institute of Automation, Chinese Academy of Sciences, confirmed to the *South China Morning Post* this month that China is developing a series of extra-large unmanned underwater vehicles, or XLUUVs. “Yes, we are doing it,” he said.

The institute, in China’s northeast Liaoning province, is a major producer of underwater robots to the Chinese military. Lin developed China’s first autonomous underwater vehicle with operational depth beyond 6km. He is now chief scientist of the 912 Project, a classified programme to develop new-generation military underwater robots in time for the 100-year anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2021. Lin called China’s unmanned submarine programme a countermeasure against similar weapons now under intensive development in the United States. He declined to elaborate on technical specifications because the information was “sensitive”. “It will be announced sooner or later, but not now,” he added. The US military last year made a deal with major defence contractors for two prototype XLUUVs by 2020. The US Navy would choose one prototype for the production of nine vehicles. Lockheed Martin’s Orca system would station in an area of operation with the ability to establish communication to base from time to time. It would return home after deploying payloads, according to the company’s website. “A critical benefit of Orca is that Navy personnel launch, recover, operate, and communicate with the vehicle from a home base and are never placed in harm’s way,” the company said in a statement announcing the system. Technical details on Orca, like its size or operational endurance, are not available. The company did not respond to the *Post*’s queries. Boeing is developing the other prototype, basing it on its Echo Voyager, a 50-ton autonomous submarine first developed for commercial uses like the mapping of the sea floor. The Echo Voyager is more than 15 metres long and 2.6 metres in diameter, according to Boeing. It can operate for months over a range of 12,000km, more than enough to sail from San Francisco to Shanghai. Its maximum speed reaches 15km an hour. The vessel needs to surface periodically as its batteries need to be recharged by air-breathing diesel engines. It can dive to 3km while carrying up to eight tons of cargo, Boeing said. Russia has reportedly built a large underwater drone capable to carry a nuclear weapon. The Status-6 autonomous

torpedo could cruise across large distances between continents at high speed and deliver a 100-megaton warhead, according to news accounts. The Chinese unmanned submarine would not be nuclear-armed, according to a researcher involved in a separate programme in China. The main advantage of the AI subs is that they can be produced and operated on a large scale at a relatively low cost, said the researcher, who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. Traditional submarines must attain a high level of stealth to increase the chance of survival. The design has to consider other things including safety, comfort and the mental health of the crew to ensure human safety. All these elements add costs.

In the 1990s, an Ohio-class submarine for the US Navy cost US\$2 billion. The research, development and purchase of the first 12 of its new Columbia-class submarines, scheduled for delivery in the early 2020s, is more than US\$120 billion. In contrast, the budget of the entire Orca programme is about US\$40 million, according to Lockheed Martin. An AI sub “can be instructed to take down a nuclear-powered submarine or other high-value targets. It can even perform a kamikaze strike,” said the researcher, referring to the suicide attacks some Japanese fighter pilots made in the second world war. “The AI has no soul. It is perfect for this kind of job,” the researcher added. Luo Yuesheng, professor at the College of Automation in Harbin Engineering University, a major development centre for China’s new submarines, contended that AI subs would put the human captains of other vessels under enormous pressure in battle. It is not just that the AI subs are fearless, Luo said, but that they could learn from the sinking of other AI vessels and adjust their strategy continuously. An unmanned submarine trained to be familiar to a specific water “will be a formidable opponent”, he said. AI submarines are still at an early stage, Luo noted, and many technical and engineering hurdles remain before they can be deployed in open water.

Hardware on board, for instance, must meet high standards of quality and reliability, since no mechanics will be on board to fix a broken engine, repair leaking pipes or tighten a screw, he said. The missions of unmanned submarines will also likely be limited to specific, relatively simple tasks, Luo said. “AI will not replace humans. The situation under water can get quite sophisticated. I don’t think a robot can understand or handle all the challenges,” he added.

Source: www.scmp.com, 23 July 2018

Iran Extends Insurance, Ships To India For Oil Export

With the US sanctions threatening to block its oil trade, Iran has started providing ships as well as insurance cover to continue exporting crude oil to India, its second-biggest buyer after China, people familiar with the development said.

The US, which in May pulled out of a landmark nuclear deal and said sanctions will be re-imposed on Iran within 180 days, has threatened to cut off access to the American banking system for foreign financial institutions that trade with Iran. This has led to European re-insurers refusing to give insurance cover to firms importing Iranian oil. To overcome this, Iran has started providing shipping insurance. Also, Iran is using its own ships to transport oil to India as not many shipping lines participated in recent tenders for transportation of Iranian oil.

Earlier this month, Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd (HPCL) had to cancel the purchase of an Iranian oil cargo after it faced insurance issues. When HPCL at the beginning of the month got its insurance for all its installations - from refineries to pipelines and storages, renewed to protect against any accident, the re-insurer refused to cover any incidents involving Iranian oil processed or stored. Sources said this seems to be a temporary problem and a similar situation had arisen when first round of sanctions against Iran were imposed in 2012. At that time, the insurance cover was extended to all installations minus the proportion of Iranian oil the company processed. So if Iranian oil in a company's portfolio comprised of 10 per cent, the insurance cover would be to the extent of 90 per cent of the processing. Sources said HPCL problem should be sorted out soon and the cancellation of one cargo happened because of new insurance company coming in on the renewal of the cover.

Other firms like Indian Oil Corp (IOC) would renew their insurance cover in 2-3 months, by when a clear situation on Iran would emerge, they said. Iran was India's second biggest supplier of crude oil after Saudi Arabia till 2010-11 but western sanctions over its suspected nuclear programme relegated it to the seventh spot in the subsequent years. In 2013-14 and 2014-15, India bought 11 million tonnes and 10.95 million tonnes respectively from the country. Sourcing from Iran increased to 12.7 million tonnes in 2015-16, giving it the sixth spot. In the following year, the Iranian supplies jumped to 27.2 million tonnes to catapult it to the third spot. In 2017-18, India bought 22.6 million tonnes of crude oil from Iran.

Iran became India's second-biggest supplier behind Iraq in the first three months of current fiscal, supplying 8.93 million tonnes of oil. The Trump administration is piling pressure on India, China, and other buyers to end all imports of Iranian oil by a November 4 deadline as it looks to choke the Persian Gulf state's economic lifeline with sanctions over its nuclear programme. New Delhi has so far not taken a stand on the sanctions. But beginning November the payment channels would get blocked and it will have to look at alternate means to pay Iran for the oil it buys. India currently pays Iran in euros using European banking channels.

During the first round of sanctions in 2012 when European Union joined the US in imposing financial restrictions, India initially used a Turkish bank to pay Iran for the oil it bought but beginning February 2013 paid nearly half of the oil import bill in rupees while keeping the remainder pending till the opening of payment routes. It began clearing the dues in 2015 when the restrictions were eased.

Source: www.ndtv.com, 26 July 2018

Chabahar Port ready to transit goods from India to Afghanistan – Iran official

Hadi Haghshenas, the deputy at the Ports and Maritime Organization, said the strategic port of Chabahar in southeastern Iran is ready to transit goods from India to Afghanistan. With the implementation of the first phase of Chabahar port, six million tons of goods will be transhipped from India port to Chabahar and then transited to Afghanistan, Haghshenas said, IRIB news agency reported.

Chabahar provides India with an easier land-sea route to Afghanistan. In November, India sent its first cargo of wheat to Afghanistan through Chabahar in what appeared to be a run dry of a multi-modal connectivity route. The cargo was shipped from India's western port of Kandla, unloaded at Chabahar and eventually taken to Afghanistan's Nimroz province by trucks. The port's transport capacity has reached from 2.5 million tons to 8.5 million tons and the major portion of the goods will go to India and Afghanistan, he said. A rail link between Chabahar and Zahedan and thereon to Afghanistan is a crucial part of India's extra-regional connectivity ambitions over which Tehran, New Delhi and Kabul have signed a basic agreement.

Source: www.azernews.az, 23 July 2018

India's economic growth remains intact; GDP to grow around 7.5%: FICCI

Despite short-term challenges, India's economic growth story remains intact and the country's GDP is expected to grow around 7.5 per cent in the current financial year, industry body Ficci said on Thursday. According to the body, the slowing down of industrial output growth in May and higher retail inflation in June are "short-term challenges which are being pro-actively acted on by the government and the RBI, and these should not be seen in any way as hurting the signs of revival in the economy significantly". "While the industrial output growth is expected to rebound in the next few months, the rise in inflation is being watched by the RBI closely, and the apex bank and the government will certainly take necessary measures to keep it at the manageable levels," Ficci President Rashesh Shah was quoted as saying in a statement. "The Goods and Services Tax (GST) will play the role of a catalyst in this. While the GST collection trends clearly indicate towards a positive sentiment in the economy, the national integrated indirect tax structure will also bring down inflation, going ahead."

government have shown willingness to rationalise the GST rate structure, bringing in the excluded items and simplifying the tax administration. "Equally important is the fact that GST has shown that industry, and the country, on the whole, is ready for adopting big-bang reforms," he said, adding: "there is no doubt now that larger economic reforms involving both the centre and the states are here to stay." He added that along with GST, reform measures like IBC (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code) and RERA (Real Estate Regulatory Authority) have already started yielding results and will help in taking the GDP growth beyond 8 per cent.

Source: www.business-standard.com, 19 July 2018



MARINE ENVIRONMENT



Industry players eye potential anti-microfiber legislation

- Jennifer Marks

New York – Microplastic pollution in the water supply might not be on retailers’ radar yet, but some state legislators are already moving on it. And several stakeholders in the textiles industry are working toward a solution of their own. The shedding of microfibers from synthetic textiles during routine washing is turning up in oceans around the world. A study by the Marine Pollution Bulletin last year found that New York’s Hudson River alone dumps 300 million clothing fibers into the Atlantic Ocean each day. This year, three U.S. states have introduced legislation targeting the problem, although none have been enacted. The action is part of a larger global trend, according to Kristen Kern, government relations representative for the American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA). “The [textiles] industry is already an active party and engaged on sustainability at large, and microfibers are the newest area we have to address,” she said during a July 10 webinar, “Microplastic Pollution: The Hidden Problem with Microfibers.”

The first challenge: accurately measuring the problem. The Hohenstein Institute is already investigating the impact of industrial laundering on the types of microplastic fibers appearing in waste streams and the environment. Synthetic fibers accounted for 62% of global fiber consumption last year, and textiles producers are concerned about actions like the U.S. government’s ban on microbeads. “That sets an interesting precedent on what could happen in the future,” said Kern, who noted that fibers are just a portion of the larger microplastics conversation. Tricia Carey, Lenzing’s director of global business development, said most textiles purveyors remain unaware of the gathering momentum concerning marine pollution. “I speak with many retailers and brands around the U.S. and many suppliers around the world, and it’s not really a topic,” she said. At the same time, she said, consumers are seeing social media about impacts on the water supply – such as the story last month about the dead whale that was found with 17 pounds of plastic in its stomach. “What I really see is an education and learning process that’s happening, and the industry has to figure out where to begin to solve some of the problems around marine pollution,” she added. Kern and Carey will take part in a deeper discussion

about the microfibers situation and industry efforts to mitigate during a session at Texworld USA on July 24 at 3:00 p.m. at the Javits Center in New York.

Source: www.hometextilestoday.com, 20 July 2018

Dead fish surfacing on a Vermilion beach may have been caused by lack of oxygen

- Jonathan Jankowski

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources is now investigating a situation at a Vermilion beach. Neighbors noticed dead fish surfacing and washing ashore on Saturday. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources will take water and dead fish samples, at this time it is believe the fish died due to lack of oxygen. The findings of the samples will be released sometime this week. Crews with Marine Pollution Investigation took a look at the situation on Saturday, according to the Coast Guard. Residents in Vermilion told Cleveland 19 that the fish started washing up on the shore around 10 a.m. on Saturday. This is a developing story, we will update this story as more information becomes available.

Source: www.cleveland19.com, 23 July 2018

Plastic straws play only minor role in global plastics pollution

- Henrietta Reily

Major retailers and municipalities are disavowing plastic straws, but they play a relatively minor role in plastics pollution. Why it matters: If all plastic straws ended up in the ocean in a given year, they would account for 0.03% of the plastics that enter the ocean annually. Many were moved in 2015 when they saw an image of an ill sea turtle with a straw stuck in its nostril, which prompted some of the bans in existence today. But there are far bigger culprits that harm marine life and ocean health, which some worry a straw ban allows people to ignore.

The big picture: More voices are sounding the alarm on waste finding its way into our oceans. There are now major garbage patches in each of the world's biggest oceans, with the most substantial in the Pacific — called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP) — and clocking it at twice the size of Texas.

- Large, semi-permanent currents in the ocean create massive swirling gyres. There are five major ones, and each has a substantial patch of micro and macro-plastics.

Ocean plastic pollution, by the numbers

- More plastic was produced in the last decade than ever before on earth.
- The majority of all plastic produced is discarded or disposed of in natural environments. Only a small fraction is recycled or burned.
- A study published this March in *Nature* estimated that the GPGP alone holds about 42,000 metric tons of megaplastics (like fishing nets), 20,000 metric tons of macroplastics (like crates), 10,000 metric tons of mesoplastics (like bottle caps) and 6,4000 metric tons of microplastics.
- Microplastics account for just 8% of the total mass in the GPGP but 94% of the pieces.
 - Being extremely numerous and extremely small, these types of plastics are almost impossible to remove and endanger all marine life that comes into contact with or consumes them.
- Fishing nets make up the lion's share of waste in the Pacific patch by weight, accounting for 46% of the patch's plastics mass. Lost or abandoned fishing nets, called ghostnets, negatively impact marine habitats and the economy. This number was previously believed to be only about 20%.
- Approximately 60% of the global plastic demand is for buoyant plastic (think styrofoam). That means about 40% will automatically sink, while the rest can be stranded on the coast or ingested by marine life.

What's next: Understanding the relatively meager role of plastics like straws in the massive problem of ocean pollution may be disheartening to consumers. However, advocates hope that a straw ban will make customers more conscientious overall, leading to further advocacy against ocean pollution, longer term effects that remain to be seen.

Source: www.axios.com, 23 July 2018

Giant Pac-Man system could help eat up ocean plastic pollution

- Kay Vandette

It was recently reported that the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a huge swath of plastic debris floating in the ocean, now measures almost one full square mile in area. An organization called The Ocean Cleanup calculated the most recent garbage patch size thanks to a mega aerial expedition surveying the extent of the plastic in the area. Now, Ocean Cleanup is working on deploying a huge Pacman-like sweeper designed to collect floating plastic in the Garbage Patch which can then be removed from the ocean and recycled on land. The Ocean Cleanup system is a 600-meter plastic floating tube that forms a natural U-shape and sits above the water attached to a tapered three-meter deep skirt. Its design is meant to ensure that plastic can't slip underneath the tube but also makes sure sealife can pass under unharmed.

The system will use wind, waves, and currents to maneuver through the Great Garbage Patch and every few months the collected garbage will be hauled away to land. "After completing the redesign last summer and passing third-party reviews, this is the design that is currently being constructed and is set to head into the Great Pacific Garbage Patch two months from now," Ocean Cleanup CEO Boyan Slat told the Daily Mail. Ocean Cleanup claims that the new system could clean up fifty percent of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch every five years and a fleet of the systems could remove 90 percent of all of the ocean plastic by 2040. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch contains 1.8 million pieces of plastic and that number is only projected to increase. If all goes according to the plan, the Ocean Cleanup technology could effectively solve one of the world's biggest environmental hazards and make the seas safer for marine wildlife and seabirds. The system still has to undergo some more testing, trials, and assembly before the cleanup technology will be towed 1,200 nautical miles offshore to start cleanup.

Source: www.earth.com, 24 July 2018

Ocean wilderness 'disappearing' globally

- Mary Halton

Scientists have mapped marine "wilderness" areas around the world for the first time. These are regions minimally impacted by human activities such as fishing, pollution and shipping. The team, led by researchers in Australia, found that just

13.2% of the world's oceans could be classed as wilderness - most in international waters, away from human populations. Very few coastal areas met the criteria, including coral reefs. Reefs are some of the most biodiverse habitats in the ocean, as they are home to a great number of different plant and animal species. They are thought to be vital areas for marine life.

What makes a wilderness?

"It's a place where the environment and ecosystem is acting in basically an undisturbed way that's free from human activity," explained lead author Kendall Jones. "Studies have shown that places free from intense levels of human activity have really high levels of biodiversity and high genetic diversity [but] we didn't have an idea of where across the globe these intact places could still be found," the Wildlife Conservation Society researcher told BBC News. Jones and other scientists set out to analyse the impact of 15 different human activities or "stressors" on global ocean environments, in order to map these regions. Areas that experienced the least impact - the bottom 10% - were classed as wilderness. Data from satellites, ship tracking and pollution reports from individual countries were analysed. Dr Rachel Hale from the University of Southampton, observed that "marine wildernesses are largely overlooked in terms of conservation priorities when compared to terrestrial ones, and it is extremely interesting to see where in the world these lie and what habitats they cover. "They could be important corridors connecting habitats and species populations," added Dr Hale, who was not involved in the study.

How much is left?

The team found that most of the areas they defined as wilderness fell within the Arctic, Antarctic and around Pacific Island nations, or in the open ocean, where human activity is more limited. Despite their conservation status, marine protected areas (MPAs) appear to host just 4.9% of global marine wilderness. Mr Jones also noted that wilderness areas exposed by the decline of sea ice in the Arctic are now potentially vulnerable to anthropogenic impacts.

What can be done?

Although Mr Jones points out that fishing is one of the most significant direct impacts that humans can have on ocean ecosystems, many of the problems being caused originate on land. Runoff of nutrients from farming fertilisers, chemicals from poorly controlled industrial production, and the influx of plastic pollution from

rivers are all disrupting ocean life. "Plastic pollution is one of the big things that we want to work out a way to get data on," he told the BBC. "It's so widespread and so hard to manage that we really want to get a good idea of where it is and where is most affected." The UN are currently considering a legally binding addition to the Convention on the Law of the Sea, which would mandate conservation and sustainable use of international waters - currently not protected. The first of four conferences to determine the details will take place in September 2018. Mr Jones welcomes this: "It's good that the international community is starting to recognise the need for improved management of international waters."

- Heatwaves 'cook' Barrier Reef corals
- Ocean plastic could triple in decade
- 'Medical test led me to ocean plastic patch'

However Dr Hale points out that the issues could prove more complex, with many problems traversing legal and international boundaries. "Formal protection of these wilderness areas would not be able to protect them from some stressors such as climate change and invasive species," she told the BBC. "We should prioritise conservation actions in at-risk and/or biologically important areas, and identifying these areas within the identified marine wilderness areas would be a positive next step."

Source: www.bbc.com, 26 July 2018

Calls for tighter rules after regulator approves foreign ships dumping palm oil in British waters for three years

- Wil Crisp

In February, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) approved regulation that will require tankers carrying palm oil and other food oils to pump the tank residue into purpose-built disposal facilities, instead of washing it out in open water. But the new rules will not come into force until July 1, 2021, a timeframe the IMO says will give states and industry time to increase capacity at shore-based oil disposal facilities. Britain already has the infrastructure required to deal with oil residue and experts say it should ban the dumping of food oils in British waters ahead of the 2021 deadline. "UK ports have oily water reception facilities that were put in place to

process crude oil waste,” said Paul Johnston, an honorary research fellow at the University of Exeter and principal scientist at Greenpeace’s research laboratories. “This legislation is already long overdue. Elsewhere there might be a need for specific ports to have a bit of time to catch up and install these reception facilities – but the UK, and Europe more generally, is in a position where it could implement this legislation immediately.” Gillian Glegg, the associate head of marine science at Plymouth University, believes the UK is in a position to lead the way globally, by taking action ahead of the 2021 deadline. “Once a regulator has decided that something like this is causing harm and there is good reason to ban it you obviously want to implement changes as soon as possible,” she said. “There are technical issues for some organisations and countries that don’t have the infrastructure to deal with that material – but I don’t see why the UK cannot bring this in ahead of the 2021 deadline.” In February, The Telegraph revealed that ships are regularly dumping large quantities of noxious palm oil off the coast of Britain without legal consequences.

During 2016 and 2017 seven instances of palm oil contaminating British waters were documented by satellites operated by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). Two spills in the southern part of the North Sea left oil slicks stretching for more than 44 miles, according to EMSA records. Palm oil spills have a similar impact on the marine environment as fossil fuel oils by depleting water of oxygen, killing fish, coating the wings of birds, and washing up on beaches. All seven of the pollution incidents identified by the EMSA satellites were labelled as permitted discharges by the MCA and no action was taken against the shipping companies. Under existing international law vessels are permitted to discharge up to 100 litres of water that is contaminated by palm oil for each chemical tank on board, and larger discharges can be permitted in extenuating circumstances, such as if abandoning a polluting cargo is essential to securing the safety of a ship. Prior to the IMO decision in February the UK had pushed for the legislation to be implemented earlier, according to the British regulator, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

In a statement, the MCA said it is currently looking into the possibility of negotiating a regional deal to crack down on the dumping of food oils in British waters. “The UK had sought an earlier date and is now engaged in discussions with other North Sea States on the practicality, and legality, of implementing these restrictions earlier on a regional basis,” it said.



China to boost military ties with Sri Lanka and gift frigate

China is to boost the military ties with Sri Lanka and gift a frigate to the Sri Lankan Navy, a Chinese official said today. Senior Colonel Xu Jianwei of the Chinese Embassy in Colombo said that this year China will continue to provide various training courses for the Sri Lankan tri-forces, to complete building a Chinese-funded auditorium complex at the Sri Lanka Military Academy, and make preparations to hand over a gift frigate to the Sri Lanka Navy.

He said that China is willing to enhance mutual strategic trust and is keen to see both countries continue supporting each other on issues for core interest. “China wishes to boost the development of Belt and Road initiative to strengthen the pragmatic cooperation between two countries and two militaries,” he added. Senior Colonel Xu Jianwei was speaking at a reception held at the Shangri-La hotel in Colombo today to mark the 91st Anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. “As a good and true friend, over the past decades, China has provided powerful support to the social-economic development and military and defense construction of Sri Lanka. The friendship between China has withstood the test of time and grew even stronger. Chinese military attaches great importance to improving relations with Sri Lanka military.

In the past few years, two militaries have witnessed the deepening communication and cooperation in the areas of personnel training, joint training, maritime security etc,” he said. Secretary to the Ministry of Defense Kapila Waidyaratne, who was the chief guest at the event, said that China’s military assistance to Sri Lanka indicates the success of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. However he noted that Sri Lanka is yet to reap the full benefits of China’s concurrences in Sri Lanka. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, former Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, opposition leader R. Sampanthan and other Ministers, the Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Cheng Xueyuan and other officials were also present at the event.

Source: eng.chinamil.com.cn, 24 July 2018

India Is the Weakest Link in the Quad?

- Derek Grossman

Since the Trump administration's announcement that it seeks a "free and open" Indo-Pacific, observers have spilled much ink on the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, to achieve this objective. The Quad—an informal consultative mechanism comprising the United States, Australia, Japan, and India—is quietly opposed to China's continued militarization of and attempts to control strategic waterways throughout the region, namely the South China Sea. The group met most recently last November, and again in June, after 10 years of inactivity.

But the fate of the Quad is still fragile. Indeed, the first attempt at the Quad died on the vine because then-Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd withdrew over concerns that the Quad needlessly antagonized China. Today, however, following a burst of concern about Chinese influence, Australia is all in. So are the United States and Japan. That leaves India, where New Delhi may be getting cold feet.

For starters, India seemed less enthusiastic about the Quad following the Wuhan summit. In April, Chinese President Xi Jinping invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Wuhan, China, for an informal summit. Xi's decision proved to be exceptionally deft diplomacy. Bilateral relations had reached a nadir in 2017 primarily stemming from the monthslong military standoff at Doklam, which probably hastened India's decision to re-engage the Quad in the first place. Although the two leaders did not issue a joint statement—underscoring their deep differences—they also agreed to find ways of working together.

Shortly after Wuhan, New Delhi decided to reject fellow Quad member Australia's request to participate in Malabar military exercises along with the United States and Japan. To be sure, this was the fourth year in a row India had rejected Australia's participation, but the timing—the day following Wuhan—has widely been interpreted as a concession to Beijing. While there are reasonable Indian explanations for the decision, the timing seems unfortunate. Bringing Australia into Malabar for the first time would have sent a clear message that the naval component was active and that the Quad was unified, and rejecting Canberra sent the exact opposite message.

The second indication of trouble for India's participation in the Quad arrived in June at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. Modi gave the keynote address, and while he spoke of the need to ensure a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region,

matching Quad objectives, he nevertheless declined the opportunity to invoke the Quad and instead noted that “India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members.” He further avoided criticizing or even mentioning China’s military expansion and growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. Modi’s comments stood in marked contrast with U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis’s speech, which heavily criticized Chinese actions.

Instead, Modi offered: “In April, a two-day informal summit with President Xi helped us cement our understanding that strong and stable relations between our two nations are an important factor for global peace and progress. I firmly believe that Asia and the world will have a better future when India and China work together in trust and confidence, sensitive to each other’s interests.” These words effectively crystallized the connection between Wuhan and an apparent softening of India’s position on the Quad.

The following weekend, Modi attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Qingdao, China, for the first time as an official member of the group and met with Xi again on the sidelines. Modi and Xi agreed to find a project that they could work on collaboratively in Afghanistan and to engage Pakistan to reduce regional tensions.

But perhaps the most important development at the SCO summit was New Delhi signing onto the Qingdao Declaration, which noted that “economic globalisation is confronted with the expansion of unilateral protectionist policies.” This line has particular salience given the Trump administration’s ongoing trade frictions with multiple countries, including both China and India. Recent reports have since speculated that New Delhi may find it convenient to use bilateral trade as a crutch and “insurance policy” against Washington, should it need to do so. If true, Beijing would probably insist on India first leaving the Quad to fully benefit from this arrangement.

Most recently, in early July, reports surfaced that New Delhi planned to brief China and Russia on its Indo-Pacific policy. India used the opportunity of the second maritime dialogue with Beijing to elaborate on its vision of the region, first laid out at the Shangri-La Dialogue by Modi. A key theme is that the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) should be central to the Indo-Pacific, implicitly meaning not the Quad or any single country.

Taken together, these developments are no doubt troubling for the future sustainability of Indian participation in the Quad. But New Delhi has equally—if not more persuasive—arguments to remain a member and an active one. Regardless of any agreements reached at Wuhan, the reality is that India and China still have serious misgivings about each other. New Delhi reaffirmed its rejection of Xi’s signature Belt and Road Initiative and awkwardly broke annual consensus at the annual SCO summit over the issue. India believes that the initiative is targeting investment, trade, and infrastructure cooperation with small South Asian countries traditionally within India’s geostrategic orbit—such as Nepal, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka—and New Delhi has vigorously pushed back by shoring up ties with these nations.

India is aggressively seeking port access and joint development agreements with maritime states throughout the Indo-Pacific to deal with China’s growing influence. The strategy envisions countering Beijing’s establishment of a naval base at Djibouti and preventing additional access to new facilities. In the last year alone, New Delhi has been racing to forge agreements in diverse places including Duqm (Oman), Assumption Island (Seychelles), Chabahar (Iran), and Sabang (Indonesia). But eventual Indian Navy operations alone within this network will probably not be enough to ensure the entire Indo-Pacific remains stable and peaceful. Having the Quad members available to supplement and reinforce Indian operations at and via these ports could increase deterrence.

Source: foreignpolicy.com/, 23 July 2018

The Return of the Indo-Pacific Quad

- Jeff Smith

In March 2018, The Heritage Foundation, in partnership with three leading think tanks from Australia, India and Japan, held the fifth iteration of its “Quad-Plus Dialogue” in Tokyo, Japan. Inaugurated in 2013, this unique Track 1.5 dialogue was designed as a forum for think tank and government representatives from the four democracies to discuss common geopolitical challenges and promote greater strategic collaboration. Equally important, it was intended to encourage the four governments to revive the formal Track 1 Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (QSD) which first met in May 2007 but was disbanded the following year.

Participants in this year's Quad-Plus Dialogue included analysts from India's Vivekenanda International Foundation (VIF); the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI); and this year's host, the Japanese Institute for International Affairs (JIJA). The "Plus" portion of the Dialogue invites participation from a fifth country with interest and stakes in the strategic matters being covered at the dialogue. In 2018, representatives from Taiwan's Institute for National Policy Research (INPR) joined the discussion the Dialogue's Plus-partner. Previous years featured experts and officials from Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Singapore.

This year, analysts from the four think tanks have issued a joint vision statement, signaling their commitment to enhancing quadrilateral cooperation among the four parties and providing recommendations for taking the initiative forward.

The Birth and Fall of the Quad

The impetus to create the Quad-Plus Dialogue arose out of collapse of the first official Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (QSD). In May 2007, government representatives from the four democracies gathered for the first times on the sidelines of an ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Manila. It was a leap of faith for the four countries, particularly India, which was still wary of perceived "alignment" with the U.S. and its security partners. Some interest groups worried China would view the Quad as evidence of a budding containment strategy and their protests grew louder after the four countries, joined by Singapore, held an unprecedented multilateral naval exercise later that year.

Domestic politics forced the resignation of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, one of the Quad's intellectual godfathers, nine days after the Malabar naval exercises of September 2007. Three months later, a Labor government assumed power in Australia determined to strengthen engagement with Beijing. In early 2008 it very publicly signaled its disinterest in continuing the Quad, under the watchful eye of China's foreign minister. As I wrote in *The Diplomat* magazine this April: "A great deal of ink has been spilled dissecting the failure of the first QSD but its great flaw wasn't its underlying purpose, agenda, or membership; it was its timing. In 2007 Beijing was still effectively marketing a soft power offensive while the four democracies struggled to reach internal and external consensus on the nature of the challenge China was posing and the appropriate response." Much has changed since then. The case for the Quad is arguably more compelling now than it was a decade ago. The great irony of the first iteration of the QSD was that

it dissolved precisely at the dawn of China's new, more aggressive approach to regional affairs. Beijing has adopted a progressively more nationalist foreign policy since the global financial crisis of 2008, a trend further accelerated by Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012. Each member of the Quad's relationship with China has deteriorated in key arenas, even as each has tried to maintain robust economic and diplomatic ties with Beijing. Yet even those bonds are beginning to show signs of wear.

China-U.S. economic ties have arguably reached a political nadir, with Beijing and Washington on the cusp of a real trade war. With India, China has consistently proven unwilling or unable to address a key Indian political sensitivity—its ballooning trade surplus, which grew an additional 23 percent this year even as total trade has flatlined. China's economic and political influence in Australia has come under tremendous public scrutiny over the past year.

On the geopolitical front the picture is bleaker. The Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy painted China in more starkly competitive terms than any of its recent predecessors. Tensions over China's growing footprint in the Indian Ocean and among India's subcontinental neighbors has added another layer of friction to an already prickly rivalry. And China's dispute with Japan over the Senkaku Islands shows no signs of subsiding.

Meanwhile, each member of the Quad has expressed concerns about—and refused to endorse—China's pre-eminent Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with India taking the early, lonely lead. The Quad has also found common ground on the importance of the rules-based order and the underlying tenets of the U.S. and Japanese visions for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

The Return of the QSD

Against this backdrop, in November 2017 the four countries reconstituted their Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which met again for a second time in April 2018. Not only is the Quad's logic more compelling now, but its foundations are stronger.

In the decade since the last QSD the democracies have been strengthening trust and functional cooperation at a bilateral level and across a trio of complementary, overlapping trilateral strategic dialogues. In 2007 India had virtually no U.S. military hardware to speak of; it now hosts advanced U.S. surveillance and

transport aircraft, artillery, attack helicopters and missiles. Soon it may induct U.S. armed drones and potentially even fighter jets.

Japan has reinterpreted its constitution to allow for greater defense cooperation with America and other security partners. Australia and India recently began their first bilateral military exercises. A long list of new joint exercises, arms sales, military interoperability agreements, shared vision statements and intelligence sharing arrangements have strengthened the foundations of one of the world's most robust informal security networks.

To be sure, the Quad is not without its challenges. India remains perhaps the most circumspect member, still embittered by Australia's withdrawal from original QSD and concerned another Labor government in Canberra could prompt another readjustment of its China policy. In some cases, the trilateral forums remain the preferred venue for substantive achievements. All four countries, particularly Japan and Australia, are struggling to walk a tightrope between robust security balancing while maximizing opportunities for economic engagement.

It's also important to acknowledge what the Quad is not. For example, it is decidedly not an alternative to China's BRI, though the four democracies are strengthening collaboration on regional connectivity initiatives that promote good governance, transparency, accountability and sustainable debt financing. Nor does the Quad represent a containment strategy targeted at China, a futile proposition so long as China remains a top trading partner for each member of the Quad.

The Quad is a symbolically and substantively important addition to an existing network of strategic and defense cooperation among four particularly capable democracies of the Indo-Pacific. What makes the Quad unique is that its members are powerful enough militarily and economically to resist various forms of Chinese coercion while offering the "muscle" necessary to defend the foundations of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific from potential challengers.

Source: [nationalinterest.org](https://www.nationalinterest.org), 26 July 2018

Is Time Running Out For The Gulf Cooperation Council?

- Dominic Dudley

Over the past 37 years, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has proved to be a convenient arena for regional leaders to discuss political and economic issues and occasionally launch joint initiatives (some of which have even succeeded). But recent developments mean there are good reasons to doubt whether the body will make it into its fourth decade. The organization was set up in 1981 by six countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – with grand ambitions to create a regional economic and political bloc. The hope was it would strengthen the members, who had been unnerved by the 1979 revolution in Iran and the start of the Iran-Iraq war the following year. There have been some achievements over the intervening years, including the creation of a customs union which came into effect in January 2015 and a common electricity grid which was developed in two phases in 2009 and 2011. Such achievements are not negligible, but the GCC has still clearly failed to live up to its potential and the way diplomacy is being conducted in the region these days is placing the future of the organization under a dark cloud.

The greatest issue is the breakdown of relations between Qatar on the one hand and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other. The latter trio – which, together with Egypt, like to refer to themselves as the ‘anti-terror quartet’ – have embarked on an effort to isolate Qatar diplomatically and economically, claiming it provides support to terrorist groups around the region. More than a year on since they launched their economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar, it is difficult to point to any advances made by the Saudi and UAE-led group. The US and others have called on both sides to negotiate and find a new *modus vivendi*, but at the moment there appears little appetite for compromise on either side.

The schism means the six countries of the GCC now form three distinct groups. There is Qatar on its own; the trio of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE; and the remaining two countries, Kuwait and Oman, which have been trying to fashion a middle way between their feuding neighbors. While that has been going on, a series of new bilateral initiatives have been launched which threaten to further undermine the point of the GCC.

The rise of bilateralism

The most significant is the Saudi-UAE Joint Co-operation Committee (JCC), announced in December last year on the even of the GCC Summit in Kuwait

(which broke up early amid rancor between the member states). It would, said the two governments, cover “all military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields, as well as others, in the interest of the two countries”. The Saudi and Emirati governments had previously run a number of joint retreats of their officials and their forces are also both fighting on the same side in the Yemen war – although their proxies have also been fighting each other on occasion. The first session of the JCC was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on June 6 this year, jointly chaired by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and his Abu Dhabi counterpart Mohammed Bin Zayed. The two sides said they had identified 60 projects they want to tackle together over the coming five years.

More recently, Saudi Arabia also set up a bilateral co-ordination council with Kuwait, with the agreement signed on July 18 by Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah and Adel Al-Jubeir, the foreign ministers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia respectively. The plans for this council are more vague than for the Saudi-UAE one and it may prove to be little more than a name under which to hold the sort of bilateral talks the two countries already have. The governments already coordinate oil production activities in their shared Neutral Zone – production was suspended in 2014 but may resume next year according to recent media reports. Taken together, the creation of these two forums suggests Riyadh is more interested in regional bilateralism these days than the multilateralism of the GCC. That marks a significant departure from past policy. Plans for an even more ambitious GCC Union, based on something akin to the EU, were proposed by the then Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdelaziz in 2011 which would have encompassed cooperation around foreign defense as well as economic policy. The new Saudi position also marks an intriguing change from the sort of problems which have halted previous efforts at GCC integration. In the past, it was a fear of Saudi dominance which led the smaller countries in the bloc to either drag their feet on joint initiatives or simply pull out of them. Now it appears that Saudi disillusion with the GCC is driving events.

Past failures

For example, the idea of a common currency disappeared in 2006 when Oman said it would not take part. Three years later the UAE also pulled out of that project, after plans were announced to establish a Gulf central bank (that would look after the currency) in the Saudi capital Riyadh. It is not the only reason for the failure of GCC projects to get off the ground though, with economic self-interest and a desire to maintain independence in a more general way also important factors.

That was seen when an agreement to introduce value-added tax (VAT) across the bloc in January was ignored by most countries. The UAE and Saudi Arabia were the only ones to stick to the deadline. For others, the risk of boosting inflation at a time when their economies were already under pressure may have been one motivation to delay introducing the tax; a desire to explore the potential for tax arbitrage may have been another. A GCC rail project is another grand scheme which has gone nowhere. The aim was to build a high-speed passenger and freight line from Kuwait City in the north of the Gulf all the way to Oman's Arabian Sea coast. However, it has been a victim of governments' unwillingness to fund such an expensive infrastructure project given the uncertain benefits it would bring – trade between the Gulf countries has risen substantially over the past few decades but at \$115bn in 2015 it still amounted to just 8% of the region's \$1.4 trillion GDP that year.

International encouragement

The GCC's allies have tried to encourage greater regional cooperation over the years, with few obvious signs of success. The European Union has tried to negotiate a free trade agreement (FTA) with the GCC for years, but it has foundered on Gulf resistance to the idea of including provisions around human rights. Most talks with other partners over the past decade or more, including Australia, Japan and China, have also failed to reach a conclusion, although negotiations with Beijing have shown some momentum since resuming in 2016, after a seven-year hiatus.

Overall, the fruits of GCC trade negotiations remain rather slim. An FTA with Singapore came into force in September 2013 and another with the members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) – Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland – followed in July 2014. Military cooperation has also been found wanting. A military wing of the GCC, called the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF), was set up in 1984. However, it was not sufficiently developed to take part in the campaign to push Iraq out of Kuwait following the 1990 invasion. A contingent of PSF troops was sent into Bahrain in 2011 to quash pro-democracy demonstrations though.

Under President Barack Obama, the US said it wanted to encourage the GCC to act as a single unit when it came to defense, particularly in areas such as maritime security and missile defense. Washington made clear its preference for a multilateral Gulf security architecture during the US-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum in Riyadh in 2012, but ultimately there has been little to show from such discussions. Subsequent talk of a unified military command has yet to be translated into action.

During his time in office, Donald Trump has contributed to the splits in the GCC, initially backing Saudi Arabia and the others in their dispute with Qatar, before eventually calling on all sides to resolve their differences. The GCC as an organization could still survive the current period of regional upheaval, but even if it does it might well simply become an irrelevance. If that is the case, it will be that much more complex for the US and others to engage with the region in the future.

Source: www.forbes.com, 25 July 2018

India, Australia up defence cooperation, plan key talks

- Smita Sharma

India and Australia are for the first time engaged in midair refuelling exercise even as the two countries are upping defence and security co-operation in Indo-Pacific. Nearly 160 security personnel are participating in the exercise 'Pitchblack' in Darwin in the Northern Territory with four SU-301, one C-17 and one C-130 involved. The Australian refuelling platform KC-30A Multi Role Tanker Transport is a heavily modified Airbus A330 airliner with advanced communications and navigation systems that allow air-to-air refuelling and strategic air lift. "India has earlier participated as only an observer in 'Pitchblack'. There have been a number of subject matter expert exchanges on air traffic control and flight safety," a source said. Sources indicate that bilateral defence relationship is on an upward trajectory regardless of Australia not getting a green signal to join the Malabar exercise despite demonstrated keenness. The ties have expanded since the framework for security cooperation was signed by PM Narendra Modi and then Australian PM Tony Abbott in 2014. A host of high-level meetings lined up later in 2018 include defence ministers' talks, annual defence policy talks between all three service chiefs on both sides.

The second round of 2+2 dialogue at level of defence and foreign secretaries inaugurated last year is expected in October. In August, the Indian Navy will for the first time participate in Australian multilateral exercise 'Kakadu' in Darwin. In November, the Indian Navy will participate as observers in submarine rescue exercise 'Black Carillion' in Western Australia. "There will be more opportunities of close co-operation, given the number of common platforms the two countries share like C-17, C-130 and P8 (Navy)," said an official.

The bilateral maritime exercise 'Ausindex' last held in August 2017 off Western Australia is expected early next year in the Bay of Bengal. The Indian Army will also host third round of Australian Special Forces exercise 'AustraHind' in August. Later this year, a counter improvised explosive device activity involving the two armies will be held in India. The Inaugural Joint Working Group on Mutual cooperation between Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) is also expected in 2018. Delhi and Oz are cooperating more closely even as US-Japan and Australia have announced a new trilateral investment partnership in the Indo-Pacific, seen as countering China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative.

The line-up

- In August, the Indian Navy will for the first time participate in Australian multilateral exercise "Kakadu" in Darwin
- The second round of 2+2 dialogue at level of defence and foreign secretaries inaugurated last year is expected in October
- In November, the Indian Navy will participate as observers in submarine rescue exercise "Black Carillion" in Western Australia

Source: www.tribuneindia.com, 01 August 2018

Indo-Pacific initiatives gain currency despite gaps over China

TOKYO -- Fostering economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region is gaining traction as a diplomatic strategy among major countries, with the U.S. proposing an infrastructure fund and Australia announcing a separate three-way initiative.

Yet not all countries view the policy as a counterweight to China's Belt and Road initiative. Even Japan, whose prime minister first proposed the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" plan in 2016 as a response to China's regional advances, is taking a more nuanced approach.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a Monday speech that Washington will commit \$113 million to help develop the digital economy, infrastructure and energy in the Indo-Pacific. "These funds represent just a down payment on a new era in U.S. economic commitment" there, he said.

The U.S. has yet to announce whether ad hoc investment frameworks will be created for each project or a permanent institution like the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank will be set up.

Japan sees the U.S. initiative as a sign that Abe's strategy is gaining traction and plans to cooperate. One option is a joint investment with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

Separately, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop announced on Tuesday a framework with Japan and the U.S. on infrastructure development. The countries will mobilize "investment in projects that drive economic growth, create opportunities, and foster a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific," according to a joint statement by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corp., and JBIC.

"Strengthening our cooperation in response to the region's significant demand for infrastructure is a plus for regional stability and prosperity," Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Tuesday.

In proposing the strategy, Abe initially envisioned working with countries like the U.S., Australia and India to promote shared values, such as the rule of law and market economies, and cooperate on maritime security.

Abe this June pledged about \$50 billion in infrastructure aid to the Indo-Pacific region over three years. But with Tokyo's ties with Beijing warming, the Japanese leader has tamped down his rhetoric on ideas like the rule of law -- a dig at Chinese maritime disputes in the East and South China seas. He is even considering collaborating with Belt and Road.

The U.S. has implicitly positioned its initiative as a way to rein in China. It continues to oppose China's maritime ambitions and renamed its Pacific Command the Indo-Pacific Command. Americans "have never and will never seek domination in the Indo-Pacific, and we will oppose any country that does," Pompeo said Monday.

Australia has seen a rise in anti-China sentiment at home, but is also facing pressure from the business community to mend ties with the country's largest trading partner. India has avoided taking sides, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi stressing that it does not see the Indo-Pacific as a strategy or a "club of limited members."

Developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region will require \$26 trillion in infrastructure investment between 2016 and 2030 to maintain its growth momentum, according to the Asian Development Bank. The Indo-Pacific framework also covers eastern African countries as well.

Source: asia.nikkei.com, 31 July 2018