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Pakistan, China to deepen maritime security ties

-Mateen Haider

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China have agreed to further deepen practical cooperation in maritime security, science and technology and their respective naval forces. The agreement emerged during the third round of Maritime Dialogue between Pakistan and China held in Beijing. The Pakistani delegation was represented by the Additional Secretary of the Foreign Office, Mr. Imtiaz Ahmad while the Director General of Asian Affairs and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Wu Jianghao led the Chinese side.

According to a communique issued by foreign office in Islamabad on Friday, both sides held comprehensive discussions on the entire gamut of maritime cooperation between Pakistan and China. The areas which were covered during the talks were existing maritime cooperation, bilateral cooperation and exchanges between the two navies, cooperation in the fishing sector. The communique says the two sides expressed satisfaction with the current level of cooperation and vowed to further strengthen and enhance bilateral cooperation in all mutually relevant areas.

Both countries expressed their commitment to further improve cooperation in matters of regional and international significance. Under the agreement China will extend further cooperation to Pakistani maritime security institutions along the Pakistani waters in Arabian Sea to deal with any possible threat.

Source: dailytimes.com.pk, 17 August 2018

Africa's chance to boost maritime security in the Indian Ocean

- Timothy Walker And Denys Reva

This year the Indian Ocean has seen a drop in piracy risks and an increase in maritime development and attention to the blue economy. This is largely thanks to improving maritime security.

Africa will benefit from efforts to further secure and develop the Indian Ocean. In its role as chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), South Africa is making the forum the most relevant and promising organisation on maritime security and the blue economy. The 18th meeting of the Council of Ministers – IORA’s top decision-making authority – takes place in November and will mark one year since South Africa assumed the chair. IORA was formed in 1997, but was inconspicuous for many years. It was revived under India’s lead from 2011-13, Australia from 2013-15 and Indonesia from 2015-17. These countries re-established it as a prominent regional organisation and identified its priorities. South Africa aims to consolidate the gains of the past chairs by strengthening IORA’s institutions. It is doing this by expanding ties between member states, other partners and important regional bodies like the African Union (AU).

With this in mind, South Africa hosted a series of IORA meetings in Durban from 30 July to 3 August. Member states in attendance worked to strengthen the Indian Ocean Dialogue initiative and Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group as platforms for better international planning and coordination. One of the next steps is to bolster IORA’s decision-making functions in regard to maritime security. Sri Lanka is holding an initial Maritime Safety and Security Working Group meeting on 4 and 5 September. The group’s terms of reference will be discussed and, once adopted, will significantly strengthen IORA as a maritime security forum.

It is expected that existing organisations covering maritime security will also benefit from closer affiliation with a stronger IORA. For instance, while the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium has a more inclusive membership and stronger working groups, IORA can bring additional perspectives outside of the naval purview. Other well-established maritime security platforms in the Indian Ocean, like the United Nations’ Contact Group for Piracy off the Coast of Somalia and the Djibouti Code of Conduct (with its 2017 Jeddah amendments), can also benefit from IORA alignment. The UN contact group’s mandate is limited to piracy, whereas IORA will be able to consider a broad range of maritime crimes and security threats. The Djibouti Code of Conduct focuses only on the Western Indian Ocean. While this covers African member state interests, it precludes the oceanic focus which blue economies and comprehensive maritime security need and which IORA can provide.

IORA could well become the Indian Ocean’s most relevant and promising maritime security forum. As the Council of Ministers milestone draws nearer, South Africa must

also consider what happens after it hands over as IORA chair in October 2019. Until then it needs to focus on three areas.

First, South Africa can encourage African member states to interact more with IORA, as recommended in a recent Institute for Security Studies (ISS) report. The ISS noted that African states struggle to implement their maritime strategies and participate in forums like IORA due to limited resources and capacity. Attention from African member states is also diffused as many belong to other international organisations besides IORA. South Africa intends to align its chairing of IORA to the implementation of the AU's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy. The AU can then encourage all states, not simply those on the Indian Ocean, to prioritise their maritime policies. This will also go a long way to help revive AU maritime initiatives.

Second, South Africa can explore ways of deepening the involvement of IORA Dialogue Partners (the United States, Japan, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Egypt). IORA member states generally are not as wealthy as the partners and can't contribute as much funding to the organisation. Partners therefore play a key role, and more active participation in implementing the IORA Action Plan 2017-2021 will prevent them from disengaging.

Finally, South Africa needs to ensure strong continuity when it hands over to the incoming IORA chair – the United Arab Emirates. It is apt that the recent IORA meetings in Durban began with a dedication to Nelson Mandela, as South Africa celebrates the centenary of his birth. In 1995 the former president played a crucial role in establishing the organisation. Mandela promoted the idea of an Indian Ocean platform for states to pursue peaceful socio-economic cooperation. Twenty-two years later, his words are still the benchmark for assessing South Africa's role as IORA chair, and emphasise the need for a strong maritime body.

Source: issafrica.org, 17 August 2018

India to focus to maritime security, energy as Sushma Swaraj visits Vietnam, Cambodia

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on Monday arrived at Hanoi, Vietnam on the first leg of her four-day tour to South East Asian countries. Swaraj will be visiting Cambodia, on August 29, after Vietnam aiming to deepen India's strategic cooperation with the key countries in the ASEAN region.

India has been scaling up its cooperation with Vietnam in areas of maritime security and energy. Swaraj will inaugurate the third edition of the Indian Ocean Conference. She will also co-chair the 16th meeting of the Joint Commission, along with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh. In her first official visit to Cambodia, Swaraj will hold extensive talks with her counterpart Prak Sokhonn, covering the entire expanse of bilateral and regional issues of mutual interests. Oil exploration in the South China Sea is a sensitive issue in the Vietnam-China relations. India has been asserting that India's ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) exploring areas claimed by Vietnam in the South China Sea is a commercial operation and not connected with the dispute.

Source: www.indiatoday.in, 27 August 2018

US-ASEAN Defense Ties in Focus With Maritime Security Exercise

- Prashanth Parameswaran

On August 27, the United States and South and Southeast Asian states kicked off this year's iteration of the Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) exercises. The drills put the spotlight on ongoing efforts by the United States and allies and partner countries in Southeast Asia to boost collaboration on maritime security in the wider Indo-Pacific.

As I have noted before in these pages, SEACAT is one of the main multilateral exercises that the United States carries out involving largely Southeast Asian states. The exercise began in 2002 under the name "Southeast Asia Cooperation Against Terrorism," but was then subsequently renamed in 2012 to expand the scope of training among regional navies and coast guards. It has since evolved as a means to promote multilateral cooperation and information-sharing among navies and coast guards in South and Southeast Asia, bringing together personnel to execute maritime responses to scenarios to better tackle maritime security challenges such as smuggling, piracy, human trafficking, and illegal fishing.

On August 27, the United States kicked off the 17th iteration of the SEACAT exercises. According to the U.S. Navy, this year's exercise features nine countries, with seven of them being from Southeast Asia – Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam will take part along with the United

States. This constitutes an effective decrease from the 11 countries that participated last year, when Myanmar and Sri Lanka were also included.

As is typical with such exercises, while there is largely continuity with respect to its main aspects such as seminars, workshops, and operations there are some notable, ongoing changes too. For instance, with respect to scenarios during the drills, the U.S. Navy noted that this year's exercise would incorporate increasingly complex maritime interdiction scenarios. The sea phase itself includes 15 boarding operations by multiple nations across three vessels, including in the Sulu Sea, a site of ongoing unilateral cooperation between Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand

Beyond the scenarios themselves, another feature is the growing integration of information sharing centers, a critical step within Washington's broader, longer-term objective to foster a common operating picture between like-minded states through a range of initiatives. This year, the centers include Singapore's Information Fusion Center (IFC); Maritime Operations Centers (MOCs) in Brunei, the Philippines, and Thailand; as well as the Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System (CENTRIXS), a global multinational information sharing initiative to communicate in real time during such exercises.

Source: thediplomat.com, 27 August 2018

Japan-Philippines Security Ties in Focus with Patrol Vessels

- Prashanth Parameswaran

Last week, the Philippines commissioned the last two of ten patrol vessels that it had been receiving from Japan. Though the development was part of an ongoing induction process that has been underway since 2016, it nonetheless once again highlighted the ongoing collaboration between the two countries in the maritime security domain. As I have noted before in these pages, Japan-Philippines defense ties have continued strengthening despite the uncertainties and subsequent refocusing that we have seen under President Rodrigo Duterte

The strategic rationale for both sides remains clear in terms of bilateral ties and their wider interests, with Japan looking to boost ties with Southeast Asian states, including in the defense realm, and the Philippines eyeing ways to strengthen its limited military capabilities to address a series of threats ranging from terrorism to the South China Sea.

Japan-Philippines defense cooperation has been growing over the years across various aspects, including not just defense equipment and transfer, but also critical capacity-building and broader regional cooperation in areas ranging from cybersecurity to maritime security. One of the manifestations of this was when, as part of the Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project, the Philippines was set to receive ten *Parola*-class Multi-Role Response Vessels (MRRVs), with the project awarded to the Japan Marine United Corporation (JMUC) in 2015 and implemented as an official development assistance (ODA) project worth 8.8 billion pesos.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) had indicated that the MRRVs, which are 44 meters in length, have a standard cruising speed of 15 knots, and a range of 300 nautical miles, would be used for the PCG for a variety of purposes once they were delivered, including search and rescue operations, assistance in marine environment protection, law enforcement, relief, and transport. It would also fill some longtime gaps for Manila which faces a wide range of maritime security challenges.

Since the deal was originally set up, the delivery of the vessels itself had proceeded as scheduled every quarter or so, and commissioning had begun in October 2016 and had taken place over time. The seventh and eighth vessels, named BRP *Cape San Agustin* and BRP *Cabra* and assigned pennants number 4408 and 4409, were commissioned in March at the PCG National Headquarters in South Harbor, Manila Bay.

Last week, this aspect of Japan-Philippine ties was in the spotlight again as the Philippine Coast Guard commissioned the two final *Parola*-class patrol vessels. The two ships, which have been named BRP *Bagacay* and BRP *Cape Engaño* and assigned pennant numbers 4410 and 4411 respectively, were officially commissioned on August 23. The commissioning of the final two vessels effectively represents the end of a two-year commissioning process for the whole class of new vessels. It is also yet another step forward for the PCG in this regard, which had indicated that it had wanted to be able to fully operate all of the vessels by the end of 2018 or early 2019 to full current maritime gaps and address some of the challenges that the Philippines faces in that domain.

Source: thediplomat.com, 28 August 2018



U.S. Navy Moves Ships Out of Pearl Harbor to avoid Hurricane Lane

- Mahita Gajanan

The U.S. Navy is moving most of its fleet out of Pearl Harbor as Hurricane Lane continues its approach to Hawaii. The ships will be in position to provide assistance after the storm if needed, the Honolulu *Star Advertiser* reports.

“Based on the current track of the storm, we made the decision to sortie the Pearl Harbor-based ships,” Rear Admiral Brian Fort, who commands the Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, said in a statement. “This allows the ships enough time to transit safely out of the path of the storm.” Rain has started to fall in Hawaii as Hurricane Lane bears down on the state. It’s the first powerful storm to hit Hawaii since Hurricane Iniki in 1992.

According to the Navy, ships are sometimes moved out of the harbor in some extreme weather conditions to reduce the risk of damage. The ships will remain at sea until the storm threat passes. Some ships currently undergoing repairs will not be sent away from Pearl Harbor. Crews working on those ships have taken extra precautions ahead of the storm.

Source: time.com, 23 August 2018

Russia to offer the Ka 226 to Indian Navy for naval utility helicopter

-Manu Pubby

MOSCOW: Russia will offer the Kamov Ka 226T chopper that it will produce in partnership with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for an upcoming Rs 12000 crore ‘Make in India’ deal for a naval utility helicopter. The helicopter, which will be produced for the army and air force as part of a government to government between Russia and India but it does not have a naval version yet. If it participates, the Russian chopper will compete against competitors from Airbus and Sikorsky. “A naval version is currently under development by Russia.” “We believe that the joint venture with HAL for the KA 226T can be offered for the Indian Navy requirement. It will not be an import but will be a made in India

system. We are ready to negotiate on this with our Indian partners,” Alexander Mikheev, DG of Rosoboronexport said in response to a question by ET. The development is interesting as HAL has already put its hat in the ring for the naval requirement by asking the defence ministry to consider its indigenous chopper as well, against just looking at international companies for replacements.

The state owned company has informed the defence ministry about the progress in its light utility helicopter (LUH) program – different from the KA 226 - that undertook its first flight in September 2016 and is planned for production starting this year.

Making a pitch for considering a naval variant of this helicopter for the requirement of 111 Naval Utility Helicopters (NUH), the company has written that Rs 400 crore has already been invested into the program and it can be used by the navy instead of relying on imports. The NUH program is a key priority for the Navy that wants to retire its ageing Chetak fleet and is short of rotary wing aircraft for warships at sea. In July, the government has cleared guidelines to select private sector companies for major defence manufacturing projects under the strategic partnerships (SP) mode. The first project that will take off under the initiative is the Rs 12000 crore requirement for naval utility helicopters, tenders for which can now be issued in the coming months. The next steps will include issuing a global request for proposals to international manufacturers that can include Airbus, Bell, Sikorsky and Kamov. At the same time, the process to down select Indian companies that can partner and set up manufacturing facilities will start with contenders including Tata, Mahindra and the Kalyani Group. It is still not clear if state run Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) will be allowed to take part as well.

Source: economictimes.indiatimes.com, 23 August 2018

China’s new type 055 guided missile destroyer begins Sea trials

- Franz-Stefan Gady

The lead ship of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA Navy) new class of Type 055 guided-missile destroyers (NATO designation: Renhai-class), Nanchang (with hull number 101), has left the Jiangnan shipyard in Shanghai for the first time on August 24 to commence its initial set of sea trials, according to images published on a Chinese microblogging site. The sea trials come after a 14-month outfitting period following

the launch of the warship in June 2017 in Shanghai. The Chinese Ministry of National Defense called the launch of the first-of-class Nanchang “a milestone in the PLA Navy’s strategic transformation and development,” at the time. The ship is expected to be transferred to the PLA Navy in 2019.

The PLA Navy intends to procure at least eight Type 055 destroyers — the largest surface combatants to be built for the PLA Navy to date — within the next five years. In the longer term, the service could field up to 24 guided missile destroyers of the class. The Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Company (DSIC) launched two Type 055 warships at a shipyard in Dalian in China’s Liaoning province in July.

Another Type 055 destroyer was launched in May 2018. “In March, China reportedly begun construction of the sixth vessel of the class,” I explained elsewhere. “A total of six Type 055 guided-missile destroyers are currently in various stages of construction with work on the latest ship of the class kicking off in March of this year.”

I previously summarized:

The 180-meter long, 20-meter wide Type 055 class is a development of the Type 052D Luyang III-class guided-missile destroyer, but is about a third bigger than the latter. Given its size, the U.S. Department of Defense has classified the Type 055 as cruiser [CG] rather than a destroyer. According to some estimates, the displacement of a Type 055 destroyer appears to be almost a third greater than that of a Flight IIA Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer.

The full-load displacement of the warship is estimated between 10,000 to 13,000 tons. Furthermore, I explained: The Type 055’s main armament consists of two cell blocks consisting of a total of 112 vertical launch systems (VLS) capable of firing medium- to long-range surface-to-air [SAM], anti-ship, and land-attack cruise missiles including HHQ-9 surface-to-air missiles, YJ-18 long-range, anti-ship cruise missiles, CJ-10 land-attack cruise missiles [LACS], next to others. The ship is also armed with a H/PJ-38 130mm main gun. Later upgraded variants of the Type 055 destroyer could also be armed with a railgun. According to the U.S. Department of Defense’s recently released annual report to Congress on Chinese military power, the Type 055 destroyer will also be capable of firing anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs). “The RENHAICG is a 10,000-ton design that can carry an array of long-range ASCMs and long-range SAMs, and will likely be able to launch ASBMs and LACMs once these weapons are available,” the

report reads. The ship can also carry up to two Z-18 anti-submarine warfare helicopters.

Source: thediplomat.com, 28 August 2018

With Ships and Missiles, China is ready to Challenge U.S. Navy in Pacific

- Steven Lee Myers

DALIAN, China — In April, on the 69th anniversary of the founding of China’s Navy, the country’s first domestically built aircraft carrier stirred from its berth in the port city of Dalian on the Bohai Sea, tethered to tugboats for a test of its seaworthiness. “China’s first homegrown aircraft carrier just moved a bit, and the United States, Japan and India squirmed,” a military news website crowed, referring to the three nations China views as its main rivals. Not long ago, such boasts would have been dismissed as the bravado of a second-string military. No longer. A modernization program focused on naval and missile forces has shifted the balance of power in the Pacific in ways the United States and its allies are only beginning to digest.

While China lags in projecting firepower on a global scale, it can now challenge American military supremacy in the places that matter most to it: the waters around Taiwan and in the disputed South China Sea. That means a growing section of the Pacific Ocean — where the United States has operated unchallenged since the naval battles of World War II — is once again contested territory, with Chinese warships and aircraft regularly bumping up against those of the United States and its allies.

To prevail in these waters, according to officials and analysts who scrutinize Chinese military developments, China does not need a military that can defeat the United States outright but merely one that can make intervention in the region too costly for Washington to contemplate. Many analysts say Beijing has already achieved that goal. To do so, it has developed “anti-access” capabilities that use radar, satellites and missiles to neutralize the decisive edge that America’s powerful aircraft carrier strike groups have enjoyed. It is also rapidly expanding its naval forces with the goal of deploying a “blue water” navy that would allow it to defend its growing interests beyond its coastal waters. “China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States,” the new commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Philip S. Davidson, acknowledged in written remarks submitted during his Senate confirmation process in March.

He described China as a “peer competitor” gaining on the United States not by matching its forces weapon by weapon but by building critical “asymmetrical capabilities,” including with anti-ship missiles and in submarine warfare. “There is no guarantee that the United States would win a future conflict with China,” he concluded. Last year, the Chinese Navy became the world’s largest, with more warships and submarines than the United States, and it continues to build new ships at a stunning rate. Though the American fleet remains superior qualitatively, it is spread much thinner. “The task of building a powerful navy has never been as urgent as it is today,” President Xi Jinping declared in April as he presided over a naval procession off the southern Chinese island of Hainan that opened exercises involving 48 ships and submarines. The Ministry of National Defense said they were the largest since the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949.

Even as the United States wages a trade war against China, Chinese warships and aircraft have picked up the pace of operations in the waters off Japan, Taiwan, and the islands, shoals and reefs it has claimed in the South China Sea over the objections of Vietnam and the Philippines. When two American warships — the Higgins, a destroyer, and the Antietam, a cruiser — sailed within a few miles of disputed islands in the Paracels in May, Chinese vessels rushed to challenge what Beijing later denounced as “a provocative act.” China did the same to three Australian ships passing through the South China Sea in April. Only three years ago, Mr. Xi stood beside President Barack Obama in the Rose Garden and promised not to militarize artificial islands it has built farther south in the Spratlys archipelago. Chinese officials have since acknowledged deploying missiles there, but argue that they are necessary because of American “incursions” in Chinese waters. When Defense Secretary Jim Mattis visited Beijing in June, Mr. Xi bluntly warned him that China would not yield “even one inch” of territory it claims as its own.

‘Anti-Access/Area Denial’

China’s naval expansion began in 2000 but accelerated sharply after Mr. Xi took command in 2013. He has drastically shifted the military’s focus to naval as well as air and strategic rocket forces, while purging commanders accused of corruption and cutting the traditional land forces.

The People’s Liberation Army — the bedrock of Communist power since the revolution — has actually shrunk in order to free up resources for a more modern fighting force. Since 2015, the army has cut 300,000 enlisted soldiers and officers, paring the military

to two million personnel over all, compared with 1.4 million in the United States. While every branch of China's armed forces lags behind the United States' in firepower and experience, China has made significant gains in asymmetrical weaponry to blunt America's advantages. One focus has been in what American military planners call A2/AD, for "anti-access/area denial," or what the Chinese call "counter-intervention."

A centerpiece of this strategy is an arsenal of high-speed ballistic missiles designed to strike moving ships. The latest versions, the DF-21D and, since 2016, the DF-26, are popularly known as "carrier killers," since they can threaten the most powerful vessels in the American fleet long before they get close to China. The DF-26, which made its debut in a military parade in Beijing in 2015 and was tested in the Bohai Sea last year, has a range that would allow it to menace ships and bases as far away as Guam, according to the latest Pentagon report on the Chinese military, released this month. These missiles are almost impossible to detect and intercept, and are directed at moving targets by an increasingly sophisticated Chinese network of radar and satellites. China announced in April that the DF-26 had entered service. State television showed rocket launchers carrying 22 of them, though the number deployed now is unknown. A brigade equipped with them is reported to be based in Henan Province, in central China.

Such missiles pose a particular challenge to American commanders because neutralizing them might require an attack deep inside Chinese territory, which would be a major escalation. The American Navy has never faced such a threat before, the Congressional Research Office warned in a report in May, adding that some analysts consider the missiles "game changing." The "carrier killers" have been supplemented by the deployment this year of missiles in the South China Sea. The weaponry includes the new YJ-12B anti-ship cruise missile, which puts most of the waters between the Philippines and Vietnam in range. While all-out war between China and the United States seems unthinkable, the Chinese military is preparing for "a limited military conflict from the sea," according to a 2013 paper in a journal called *The Science of Military Strategy*.

Lyle Morris, an analyst with the RAND Corporation, said that China's deployment of missiles in the disputed Paracel and Spratly Islands "will dramatically change how the U.S. military operates" across Asia and the Pacific.

The best American response, he added, would be "to find new and innovative methods" of deploying ships outside their range. Given the longer range of the ballistic missiles,

however, that is not possible “in most contingencies” the American Navy would be likely to face in Asia.

Blue-Water Ambitions

The aircraft carrier that put to sea in April for its first trials is China’s second, but the first built domestically. It is the most prominent manifestation of a modernization project meant to propel the country into the upper tier of military powers. Only the United States, with 11 nuclear-powered carriers, operates more than one. A third Chinese carrier is under construction in a port near Shanghai. Analysts believe China will eventually build five or six. The Chinese military, traditionally focused on repelling a land invasion, increasingly aims to project power into the “blue waters” of the world to protect China’s expanding economic and diplomatic interests, from the Pacific to the Atlantic. The carriers attract the most attention but China’s naval expansion has been far broader. The Chinese Navy — officially the People’s Liberation Army Navy — has built more than 100 warships and submarines in the last decade alone, more than the entire naval fleets of all but a handful of nations. Last year, China also introduced the first of a new class of heavy cruisers — or “super destroyers” — that, according to the American Office of Naval Intelligence, “are comparable in many respects to most modern Western warships.” Two more were launched from dry dock in Dalian in July, the state media reported.

Last year, China counted 317 warships and submarines in active service, compared with 283 in the United States Navy, which has been essentially unrivaled in the open seas since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Unlike the Soviet Union, which drained its coffers during the Cold War arms race, military spending in China is a manageable percentage of a growing economy. Beijing’s defense budget now ranks second only to the United States: \$228 billion to \$610 billion, according to estimates by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The roots of China’s focus on sea power and “area denial” can be traced to what many Chinese viewed as humiliation in 1995 and 1996. When Taiwan moved to hold its first democratic elections, China fired missiles near the island, prompting President Bill Clinton to dispatch two aircraft carriers to the region. “We avoided the sea, took it as a moat and a joyful little pond to the Middle Kingdom,” a naval analyst, Chen Guoqiang, wrote recently in the official Navy newspaper. “So not only did we lose all the advantages of the sea but also our territories became the prey of the imperialist powers.” China’s naval buildup since then has been remarkable. In 1995, China built only three new submarines to begin replacing an older fleet that totaled 83. It now has

nearly 60 new submarines and plans to expand to nearly 80, according to a report by the United States Congressional Research Service. As it has in its civilian economy, China has bought or absorbed technologies from the rest of the world, in some cases illicitly. Much of its military hardware is of Soviet origin or modeled on antiquated Soviet designs, but with each new wave of production, analysts say, China is deploying more advanced capabilities. China's first aircraft carrier was originally launched by the Soviet Union in 1988 and left to rust when the nation collapsed three years later. Newly independent Ukraine sold it for \$20 million to a Chinese investor who claimed it would become a floating casino, though he was really acting on behalf of Beijing, which refurbished the vessel and named it the Liaoning.

The second aircraft carrier — as yet unnamed — is largely based on the Liaoning's designs, but is reported to have enhanced technology. In February, the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation disclosed that it has plans to build nuclear-powered carriers, which have far greater endurance than ones that require refueling stops. China's military has encountered some growing pains. It is hampered by corruption, which Mr. Xi has vowed to wipe out, and a lack of combat experience. As a fighting force, it remains untested by combat.

In January, it was embarrassed when one of its most advanced submarines was detected as it neared disputed islands known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China. The attack submarine should never have been spotted.

The second aircraft carrier also appears to have experienced hiccups. Its first sea trials were announced in April and then inexplicably delayed. Not long after the trials went ahead in May, the general manager of China Shipbuilding was placed under investigation for "serious violation of laws and discipline," the official Xinhua news agency reported, without elaborating.

Defending Its Claims

China's military advances have nonetheless emboldened the country's leadership. The state media declared the carrier Liaoning "combat ready" in the summer after it moved with six other warships through the Miyako Strait that splits Japan's Ryukyu Islands and conducted its first flight operations in the Pacific. The Liaoning's battle group now routinely circles Taiwan. So do Chinese fighter jets and bombers.

China's new J-20 stealth fighter conducted its first training mission at sea in May, while its strategic bomber, the H-6, landed for the first time on Woody Island in the Paracels. From the airfield there or from those in the Spratly Islands, the bombers could strike all of Southeast Asia. The recent Pentagon report noted that H-6 flights in the Pacific were intended to demonstrate the ability to strike American bases in Japan and South Korea, and as far away as Guam. "Competition is the American way of seeing it," said Li Jie, an analyst with the Chinese Naval Research Institute in Beijing. "China is simply protecting its rights and its interests in the Pacific." And China's interests are expanding. In 2017, it opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, saying that it will be used to support its participation in multinational antipiracy patrols off Somalia. It now appears to be planning to acquire access to a network of ports and bases throughout the Indian Ocean. Though ostensibly commercial, these projects have laid the groundwork for a necklace of refueling and resupply arrangements that will "facilitate Beijing's long-range naval operations," according to a new report by C4ADS, a research organization in Washington. "They soon will be able, for example, to send a squadron of ships to somewhere, say in Africa, and have all the capabilities to make a landing in force to protect Chinese assets," said Vassily Kashin, an expert with the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow.

The need was driven home in 2015 when Chinese warships evacuated 629 Chinese and 279 foreigners from Yemen when the country's civil war raged in Aden, a southern port city. One of the frigates involved in the rescue, the Linyi, was featured in a patriotic blockbuster film, "Operation Red Sea." "The Chinese are going to be more present," Mr. Kashin added, "and everyone has to get used to it."

Source: www.nytimes.com, 29 August 2018

Indian Navy to soon get Indigenous 8.5 km-range Anti-Submarine Rockets

Indian Navy will soon have a new weapon to target enemy submarines. An anti-submarine rocket which can hit targets 8.5 kilometres away has been developed by the Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE) along with High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL). According to The Times of India, ARDE director KM Rajan said on Sunday that the new rocket to target enemy submarines has been demonstrated to the Navy. "We have recently demonstrated a new rocket technology to the Navy, who have issued a set of qualitative requirements

to be achieved during our internal trials. We will be handing over the rocket to the Navy for their user trials after achieving the target of their qualitative requirements," Rajan told The Times of India.

Faced with an ever-increasing presence of Chinese Navy warships and submarines and a rapidly modernising Pakistani Navy, the Indian Navy has been trying to get better and modern offensive capabilities. The Times of India also quoted a senior Defence Research and Development Organisation, under which the ARDE and HEMRL come, that the Indian Navy requires a rocket which can target an enemy's submarine from a distance of 8 km. At present, the Navy has 110 kg Russian Rocket Guided Bomb (RGB)-60 which can engage an enemy submarine at a maximum range of 5.3 km. The RGB-60 has a warhead of 25 kilogrammes and is fired from the Rocketnaya Bombometnaya Ustanovka (RBU) 6000 launcher mounted on warships of the Rajput Class, Delhi Class and Talwar Class.

The Defence Ministry had on August 25, 2018, approved procurement of 111 utility helicopters for the Navy at a cost of over Rs 21,000 crore. Defence Ministry officials said the ministry cleared procurement proposals worth nearly Rs 46,000 crore which included the acquisition of the helicopters. The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), the ministry's highest decision-making body on procurement.

Source: zeenews.india.com, 27 August 2018

Govt mulls duty-free import of capital goods to skirt WTO

-Amiti Sen

The government is working on a scheme to allow duty-free import of capital goods by the domestic industry, a measure that may be linked to employment generation. The initiative could be an alternative to some of the export incentive schemes that will now have to be phased out or withdrawn because of their incompatibility with global trade rules, a government official told *BusinessLine*. “At present, exporters can import capital goods duty free under the Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme and also under initiatives for EOUs (export oriented units) and SEZ (Special Economic Zone) units. However, these schemes are no longer compatible with World Trade Organisation (WTO) norms and have to be phased out or withdrawn. The new scheme is being designed to offer similar benefits to manufacturers within the boundaries of WTO norms,” the official said. A team led by the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) and including trade experts and industry representatives is fine-tuning the scheme, which will finally be included in a Cabinet note on alternative incentive schemes for the domestic industry and exporters.

Since India’s per capita Gross National Income (GNI) exceeded the threshold of \$1,000 for three years in a row in 2015, it can no longer extend export subsidies, under WTO rules. With India still continuing with many of its export sops, the US dragged the country to WTO’s dispute settlement body earlier this year, complaining that its export subsidies were harming American companies. It identified five popular export promotion schemes, including the merchandise export from India scheme (MEIS), the EPCG scheme, and some incentives available to EOUs and SEZ units, as being in violation of the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures. “The idea now is to replace these schemes with ones that are not directly linked to exports. The duty-free import of capital goods scheme being designed will be available to all domestic producers and would be linked to criteria other than exports — such as employment. This will ensure that exporters will continue to get duty-free benefits along with other domestic producers,” the official said. The average level of import duty on capital goods is around 7.5 per cent. Bringing it down to zero for the domestic industry that meets certain criteria like employment generation will provide relief for manufacturers, especially those who have newly set up their plants.

The catch

There are, however, a couple of glitches in the execution of the scheme. A scheme to incentivise capital goods import could go against the interests of the domestic capital goods industry. "The government is clear that the ultimate objective is to give a fillip to 'Make in India'. This can be done by giving the industry more benefits if they procure domestically," the official said. The Finance Ministry would also suffer a revenue loss if a duty-free import scheme is implemented as capital goods are a source of generation of income from Customs duty, the official added. "All these factors have to be taken into account before finalising the scheme. Hopefully the scheme will be given a final shape soon," the official said.

Source: www.thehindubusinessline.com, 20 August 2018

India natural partner in Belt and Road: China

India is a natural partner in China's Belt and Road project and should not be paranoid about its key artery in the disputed Kashmir as it won't affect Beijing's neutral stance, a top Chinese government official said on Monday. "Historically, India was an important country on the ancient Silk Road and it is fair to say that India was a natural partner in the ancient (Silk Road) and (is one) in the Belt and Road initiative," China's Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Jun said here. India has opposed Belt and Road's flagship project China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as it cuts through the disputed Kashmir. "China has repeatedly stressed that CPEC is an economic initiative. Implementing CPEC does not change China's position on Kashmir," Zhang said. China is building a huge network of roads, highways, ports and sea lanes to connect Asia with Europe. Many countries including India suspect the project is a China's geostrategic ploy. "Let me say a few points. First, India is an important neighbour of China. Both China and India are emerging economies and developing countries. Under the leadership of our leaders, China and India relations have exhibited a very good momentum of growth and entered a phase of development. "I think we can all recall that since April, it has been only three months, President Xi and Prime Minister Modi met in Wuhan, in Qingdao, and in Johannesburg in South Africa. "Three important meetings between of the two leaders and they have reached important understandings which added fresh and strong impetus to our bilateral ties," Zhang added.

Source: economictimes.indiatimes.com, 27 August 2018

India's 12 major port aims to improve the efficiency

The Major Port Authorities Bill, 2016 aims to improve the efficiency of India's 12 major ports by enabling decision-making autonomy, but India's lower house of parliament did not pass it during its recently concluded monsoon session, reported The Diplomat. This is despite the fact the draft bill was approved in July. Major ports are currently governed by the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963, which involves central-government appointed trustees subject to orders from the Ministry of Shipping, plus tariff regulations.

However, over 200 private minor and intermediate ports are administrated by state governments, meaning they do not follow the same tariff regulations and so can better benefit from any business they do and see more growth than bigger ports.

According to data from the World Bank that indexes the performance of ports in South Asia, India's Mundra and Pipavav ports are among the highest performers, ranked at 4th and 3rd respectively, while the bigger ports of Chennai, New Mangalore, and Kolkata lag far behind, stated The Diplomat. Reforms in the 2016 bill include replacing the old Board of Trustees with a Board of Port Authority with greater autonomy; opening membership in the board to independent and port employee representatives, to allow for faster and more transparent decision-making. The bill would also allow the Board, and any committees it appoints, to determine tariff rates. Powers would extend to tariff rates for port services, access and use of port assets, and determining rates for different types of goods and vessels at the port.

Source: steelguru.com, 27 August 2018

Vizag port gets electronic tool to track cargo bound for Nepal

- CH RS Sarma

The Customs authorities on Tuesday launched an electronic cargo tracking system (ECTS) for goods exported to Nepal from the Visakhapatnam port. The GPS-based tracking tool will cut down on the transshipment time to two weeks from 2-3 months now, and result in savings to the Nepalese trade. Cargo pilferage by tampering can also be prevented, as the containers are electronically sealed. "It is a a great development for movement of goods transshipped from Visakhapatnam to Birgunj rail route," Commissioner of Customs DK Srinivas said. Depending on the success of the pilot, it will be replicated at other places. The first rail movement to the Birgunj Inland

Container Depot was flagged off from the Visakha Container Terminal a BOT operator of Visakhapatnam Port Trust by Srinivas, in the presence of VPT Deputy Chairman PL Haranadh, Divisional Railway Manager MS Mathur, CONCOR General Manager Yelvender Yadav, representatives of Maersk Line India and VCTPL Additional CEO Anil Narayanan. The Centre had declared Visakhapatnam as the second gateway port for Nepal-bound cargo after Kolkata-Haldia a few years ago. The introduction of the pilot project at Visakhapatnam Customs House would drastically reduce the cost incurred by Nepalese importers and the time for transshipment from Visakhapatnam to Birgunj would be reduced to two weeks from the present two to three months.

Srinivas said Visakhapatnam Port had so far handled 10,355 containers for the land-locked country. Unlike the present practice of obtaining eight documents by Nepal-based importers, the new procedure, again a first in the country, allows filing of single transshipment declaration by the shipper/carrier.

Source: www.thehindubusinessline.com, 28 August 2018



MARINE ENVIRONMENT



Decades of chemical pollution suspected in Maine’s seal die-off

- PETER MCGUIRE

As the number of dead and stranded seals washing up on southern Maine beaches rises by the day, researchers are linking the sudden die-off to decades of chemical pollution that made the seal population vulnerable to toxins and disease. “We don’t think there is any possibility that these animals are biologically healthy,” said Susan Shaw, a marine biologist based in Blue Hill. Shaw has studied the effect of man-made toxins such as polychlorinated biphenyl – PCB – on the long-term health of harbor seals for almost two decades. Her findings, based on flesh samples, show that the population of harbor seals in the Gulf of Maine is loaded down with toxic, immune-suppressing chemicals, conclusions that are in line with a thick body of scientific evidence from studies of whales, dolphins, porpoises and other marine animals in the U.S., Canada and Europe. “They have body burdens that are just staggering,” Shaw said. “We find this in young animals. They are immune-suppressed from birth,” she added. “When some pathogen comes along like this, they are very susceptible to becoming very sick and dying very quickly.”

The ongoing seal die-off has nearly overwhelmed Marine Mammals of Maine, the Harpswell-based nonprofit that manages a network of volunteers who respond to reports of stranded animals on the southern Maine coast. The volunteers assess which seals are so sick or weak they have to be taken to the group’s rehab facility in Harpswell or to an alternative clinic outside the state. In the past week, volunteers responded to 100 dead seals on Maine beaches south of Portland and in Casco Bay, said Lynda Doughty, the group’s executive director. The phone has been ringing off the hook, and on Friday afternoon volunteers were clearing a backlog of animal reports. “We are still kind of playing catch-up with people reporting in animals, trying to confirm and document cases as much as possible so we are not double-counting.”

‘Numbers Kept Rising, Rising, Rising’

Marine animal rehabilitation clinics across the Northeast stopped taking stranded live seals last week, concerned that healthy animals in recovery could be exposed to whatever is causing the die-off. Volunteers had to euthanize at least three suffering seals in the last few days, Doughty said. There is no obvious reason for so many animals

suddenly dying or becoming ill. Dead seals have been found in various stages of decomposition and across all age groups. The state reports clear water quality readings and the dead animals don't seem malnourished, Doughty said. On Saturday afternoon, Marine Mammals interns Katie Gilbert, Kat King and Laura Cassetty strained as they dragged a dead 5-foot harbor seal in a plastic sled less than 100 yards across the beach at Scarborough Beach State Park. The animal was destined for the group's Harpswell base for testing. The team was assigned to Scarborough to collect the big seal, but while there, they also investigated a newly reported smaller seal washed up in seaweed clumps on the northern edge of the beach.

Interns measured the little seal's fins and checked its mouth and body for signs of trauma. Both carcasses were mostly intact, but vacant eye sockets showed signs of predation by opportunistic scavengers. The smaller seal was left for park staff to dispose of. "Right now, everything is a case-by-case basis," Cassetty said. "We are so busy right now it varies." Greg Wilfret, the state park manager, stood by to transport the dead animal with a tractor. In his 46 years working on the beach, Wilfret has gotten used to getting reports of dead or stranded seal pups, but this year is different. "We usually get one, two, three a season," he said. "Most of the ones we used to see were shot, or injured, had their heads missing, but these are whole seals." And some are big adults, at least 300 pounds in one case, he said. Spring and summer are typically high times for seal mortality because it is when young pups are trying to survive on their own, adults are molting and seals are more likely to get hit by boats. But the volume of dead and stranded seals this summer is unsettling, Doughty said. "Having a hundred since Sunday is not normal," Doughty added. "For us, July seemed to be pretty steady. Once August hit our numbers kept rising, rising, rising." "We don't know what each day brings right now."

An 'Unusual Mortality Event'?

Excluding Saturday's toll, since the beginning of the year, 414 dead and stranded seals, the vast majority harbor seals, have been reported in Maine, more than twice the annual average in the last seven years, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Rescuers reported 179 dead seals in Maine since the beginning of July and another 51 dead in New Hampshire, according to the agency. So far in August, 114 dead seals have been reported just in Maine, according to NOAA's data. The 10-year average for the entire month of August in Maine is 38 dead or stranded seals.

A working group is determining if the die-off is an “unusual mortality event,” said agency spokeswoman Jennifer Goebel. The designation would authorize a federal investigation into the causes of the event and may help repay animal rescue groups for their costs via a donor-supported contingency fund. Tissue samples from seal carcasses and oral swabs from live seals are being tested at state, federal and private laboratories for pathology, infectious diseases and harmful algae blooms, Goebel said. “For this case we are initially focusing testing on a few suspected pathogens, based upon the symptoms of the seals and past events,” she said. “Should these tests not confirm the presence of those pathogens, we would broaden the screening.” Doughty, from Marine Mammals of Maine, said NOAA is testing for influenza and distemper, two maladies known to affect the population. Results are not expected until at least this week at the earliest. While the sudden die-off has shocked volunteers and the public, the effect on the overall harbor seal population is unclear. Harbor seals are some of the most common marine mammals in the U.S., and while legally protected from hunting, they are not endangered or threatened.

The harbor seals commonly seen in Maine are part of a population that lives in coastal waters from the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia to New York and New Jersey. There are approximately 76,000 harbor seals in the western North Atlantic and the population had not significantly changed since the last survey in 2012, NOAA reported in its 2017 stock assessment. The number of gray seals believed to be in U.S. waters is much lower, around 23,160, according to NOAA’s most recent stock assessment, but scientists believe the population is growing.

‘Astronomical Levels Of PCBs’

While the seal population seems robust, Shaw’s research indicates an underlying vulnerability from generations of man-made toxins. Shaw, the founder of the Shaw Institute – formally the Marine and Environmental Research Institute – has been studying toxins in seals and other marine animals since 2000. A high level of exposure to PCBs among harbor seal pups was one of her first findings. Years of research have aligned with Shaw’s findings, said Milton Levin, a professor at the University of Connecticut who studies the effect of pollutants and toxins on marine animals. “The weight of evidence suggests that animals that are exposed to different environmental contaminants, somehow that modulates their immune system, (and) that may make them more susceptible to viral or bacterial diseases,” Levin said. “It is always hard to prove definitively, but I think there is overwhelming evidence, (and) nothing to suggest otherwise.”

Before production was banned in the U.S. in 1979, PCBs were widely used in insulation, adhesive, paint, plastics and electrical equipment. The compounds cause serious health effects in animals, including on the immune, reproductive, nervous and endocrine systems and are a probable carcinogen in humans. Despite the ban, widespread PCB contamination is present in marine food chains because the durable chemical takes so long to break down in a natural environment and work its way up the food chain into large predators like whales and seals, Shaw said. “Even though they were banned 40 years ago, they are still a major contaminant in all marine mammal tissues.” Her most recent work showed that adult, juvenile and young harbor seals along the Northeast coast had an average PCB contamination of 76 parts per million – almost six times the level at which the chemical suppresses an adult animal’s immune system.

Since PCBs are hard to metabolize, the contamination passes down through generations of seals, Shaw added. That’s why adult females often have lower levels of contamination than adult males or pups – because mothers have offloaded some of the chemicals onto their offspring. “These are astronomical levels of PCBs in liver and blubber in these animals – they are born polluted,” Shaw said. “These animals could not possibly have a normal immune response with these levels.” Other toxic, long-lasting chemicals such as polybrominated diphenyl ethers – PBDEs, a commonly used flame retardant in household furniture and electronics – are also found in marine animals and have similar effects to PCBs, but have not been found in anywhere near the same concentrations, Shaw said. “We are talking about food web toxicity – are the oceans sustaining these top predators?” Shaw said. “You have to look at the whole picture when you talk about a large die-off like this.”

Source: www.pressherald.com, 19 August 2018

Wastewater treatment plants – a surprising source of microplastic pollution

A lot of attention has been drawn recently to microplastics in freshwater and marine environments, and the threat they pose to ecosystems and people’s health. The source of microplastics is generally thought to be well known: most plastic items are not recycled or incinerated when they are discarded. Plastic waste therefore ends up in landfill or in our rivers and oceans where it gradually breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces and particles. Microplastics are defined as pieces of plastic 5mm in diameter or less. A new study, however, concludes that treated sewage effluents are

also key sources of microplastics – the implication being that wastewater treatment plants are not effective at filtering them out. Published in July 2018, a study in the United Kingdom titled *Wastewater treatment plants as a source of microplastics in river catchments* looked at six river catchments in the north of England. “The fact that the quantity of microplastics present in receiving waters was greater downstream of each of the six wastewater treatment plants studied confirms that treated sewage effluent is a key source of microplastics,” concluded the authors. The study also found microplastics upstream of water treatment plants. These, in turn, come from sewage sludge applied to agricultural land as fertilizer, the diffuse release of secondary microplastics, and aerial deposition. One surprising finding was that while the composition of microplastics varied spatially and temporally, it was dominated by fibres, fragments, and flakes, as opposed to beads and pellets. “Management efforts to reduce microplastic concentrations in rivers and oceans must focus on a diverse range of microplastic sources,” according to the study, in addition to addressing the treatment facilities’ failure to filter out the micropollutants. An additional reason for concern is that microplastics can also trap, or act as a vehicle for the dispersal of, harmful chemicals. These chemical-laced particles can be ingested by small organisms, which are eaten by bigger animals and so on up the food chain and onto our plates.

Studies have linked the additives that leach out of certain microplastics to endocrine disruption in fish, affecting their reproductive ability and the hormone system of vertebrates and invertebrates alike. UN Environment is focusing the topics of this year’s World Water Day, World Water Development Report and Stockholm World Water Week on “nature-based solutions” for water. World Water Week, in Stockholm from 26-31 August, is an opportunity to raise awareness about the interplay between microplastics and chemical pollution in our freshwater and marine environments.

Source: www.unenvironment.org, 22 August 2018

Eco-friendly plastics cutting ocean pollution, reducing CO₂

Tokyo-based car accessory maker Mirareed started a project in 2014 to develop eco-friendly bioplastics, using plants and other biological resources. In the project, thinned Japanese cypress wood from Owase, Mie Prefecture, tea leaves from Kakegawa, Shizuoka Prefecture, and lotus root from Tsushima, Aichi Prefecture, as well as rice hulls and bark, are used to make plastic. Those ingredients are crushed at Mirareed’s

plant in Ichinomiya, Aichi Prefecture, and then mixed with petroleum-derived plastic resin to create plastic pellets. The pellets are provided to molding firms, so they can be turned into and marketed as construction materials to produce gardening goods and wood-like decks. Mirareed makes 2.4 tons of plastic pellets a day. “There is only a limited amount of oil resources,” said Katsumoto Higashiyama, president of Mirareed. “Use of bioplastics will also lead to reduced carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.” Mirareed is on the cutting edge as production of new, eco-friendly plastics is increasing amid rising global sentiment against the environment-damaging materials.

Aggressive efforts are being made to develop plant-based bioplastic and plastic that can be dissolved with the help of microorganisms, as pelagic microplastics, which are generated when plastic waste is degraded and broken down into tiny pieces measuring 5 millimeters or smaller, are drawing increasing attention as a cause of marine pollution. The European Commission has proposed a plan to ban the distribution of straws and other goods made of plastic, accelerating the worldwide trend toward a plastic-free society. Under such circumstances, Japanese companies are developing eco-friendly plastic materials to prevent oceanic pollution and slash CO₂ emissions. Mirareed's bioplastic, released in December 2017, has received many inquiries with the rising interest in environmental preservation. It is planning to expand its production facility. While Mirareed is looking to raise its annual bioplastic sales to 1 billion yen (\$9.04 million) by 2020, the Environment Ministry intends to increase domestic bioplastic shipping from 80,000 tons in fiscal 2014 to 1.97 million tons by fiscal 2030, giving the company a burst of momentum, according to Mirareed officials.

Local wood producers who provide ingredients for bioplastic also welcome the company's effort. Mirareed will adopt the Mosochiku bamboo produced in Kuwana, Mie Prefecture, as an ingredient for bioplastic on a full-scale basis. Under the plan, it will purchase powdered bamboo from a nonprofit group there called Sochikukai, which manages long-unattended bamboo thickets. Sochikukai, which fell 6,000 bamboos annually, has been creating bamboo charcoal to sell for use to improve the soil. Shigenobu Sakai, 68, vice chairman of Sochikukai, said Mirareed's adoption of bamboo as an ingredient for bioplastic will offer a new option for the group. “Many people are troubled by the issue of how to deal with felled bamboo,” he said. “I am happy if the bamboos are effectively used.”

Dissolvable Plastic

Leading chemical maker Kaneka Corp. said on Aug. 7 that it will raise its production capacity fivefold of plant-derived plastic that can be dissolved with the help of microorganisms. Kaneka expects demand for eco-friendly plastics will grow rapidly because the plastic waste-relating problem attracts increasing attention, such as the U.S.-based Starbucks coffee shop chain's decision to stop using plastic straws at its outlets. Made from plant oil and fat as well as other ingredients, the company's PHBH plastic is a kind of biodegradable plastic, which can be broken down by microorganisms in seawater or soil. More than 90 percent of PHBH is converted into water and CO₂ within six months in seawater at 30 degrees. Kaneka exports PHBH mainly to Europe so it will be used to make bags used when manure is generated from food scraps. With demand growing, Kaneka decided to increase its PHBH production.

At a cost of 2.5 billion yen, Kaneka's plant in Takasago, Hyogo Prefecture, will be improved so its annual production capacity will be raised to 5,000 tons in December next year. Anticipating that PHBH will be used for straws and tableware, Kaneka is looking to increase its annual output to 20,000 tons in the future.

Source: www.asahi.com, 23 August 2018

Maersk launches first container ship through Arctic route in alarming sign of global warming

- Harry Cockburn

Maersk Line, the world's largest container shipping company, is about to launch the first ever container ship on an Arctic route along Russia's north coast, as melting sea ice promises to offer a possible future alternative to the Suez Canal. The Venta Maersk, a new ice-class 42,000 ton vessel which can carry 3,600 containers, will leave Vladivostok on Russia's east coast later this week. The ship, carrying a cargo of frozen fish, will then follow the Northern Sea Route up through the Bering Strait between Russia and Alaska, before travelling along Russia's north coast and eventually to St Petersburg by the end of September. The route has seen growing traffic during summer months already, with cargos of oil and gas regularly making the journey. Arctic sea ice hit a record low for January this year, and an "extreme event" was declared in March as the Bering Sea's ice levels reached the lowest level in recorded history as temperatures soared 30 degrees above average.

Data released by the National Snow and Ice Data Centre in Colorado showed this winter's sea ice cover was less than a third of what it was just five years ago. Though the Northern Sea Route can cut journey times between Asia and Europe by up to two weeks depending on destination, it remains more costly as nuclear icebreakers are still required to accompany ships. In an email to *The Independent*, Maersk confirmed the undertaking as first reported by Norwegian newspaper *High North News*. A spokesperson said the company wanted to “underline that this is a one-off trial designed to explore an unknown route for container shipping and to collect scientific data”.

Speaking about the viability of the route, they added: “We of course also want to have a product which is cost efficient enough to generate a reasonable return. Currently, we do not see the Northern Sea Route as an alternative to our usual routes.” With a reduction in sea ice, that may change however. The spokesperson said: “We do follow the development of the Northern Sea Route. Today, the passage is only feasible for around three months a year which may change with time.” Sune Scheller, of Greenpeace Nordic, told *The Independent* the organisation was aware several shipping companies were looking at the possibility of opening Arctic shipping lanes – a move he said was “environmentally damaging in a number of ways”. Chief among environmental concerns is the use of the heavy fuel oil large container ships use. According to *The Economist*, “just 15 of the biggest ships emit more of the noxious oxides of nitrogen and sulphur than all the world's cars put together”.

Mr Scheller said: “It's cheap, but it's damaging. It's more polluting, air quality-wise. It adds to particulate matter – black carbon, as it's known – which rests on white surfaces like ice and snow and absorbs heat instead of reflecting it, which contributes to climate change. “If these ships were to have an accident then heavy fuel oil in the marine environment is bad. It's even worse in an Arctic environment. The cold water temperatures slow or halt the natural breakdown of the oil. So it remains in marine environments for a much longer period of time. “In the Antarctic there is a ban on heavy fuel oil. You are not allowed to use it within the wider Antarctic. But a similar ban in the Arctic is not in place. This is a reminder for the IMO (International Maritime Organisation) that the shipping industry is looking at this [route] in increasing detail, and they need to get a ban in place now.”

Source: www.independent.co.uk, 21 August 2018

Canso spaceport chemical spill could be 'disastrous,' warn experts

Federal and provincial government staff are raising concerns about the potential impact on health and the environment of a proposed spaceport on the eastern tip of mainland Nova Scotia, with one staffer warning the project could result in ecological harm that would take centuries to repair. Government staff made submissions to Nova Scotia's Environment Department in response to an environmental assessment of the Maritime Launch Services project. The assessment, prepared for the company by Strum Consulting, was described by a number of reviewers as lacking analysis, information and evidence.

In one of the 25 letters received, an Environment Department staffer wrote any spill of hazardous material from the site "would destroy the impacted ecosystems with no chance of recovery for the next several hundred years." The project would see Maritime Launch Services build a commercial launch site in Canso — a fishing community with fewer than 1,000 residents — and send satellites into orbit. The project has already received support from the municipality. Nova Scotia Environment Minister Margaret Miller said last week the environmental assessment, submitted in July, didn't contain sufficient information for her to make a decision on whether to approve the project. Miller has given the company one year to provide additional information and studies. Stephen Matier, president and CEO of Maritime Launch Services, said the company was waiting to hear from the minister and would not comment beforehand.

'Disastrous' possibilities

Neil Morehouse, a manager in the Environment Department's protected areas and ecosystems branch, said in a submission the environmental assessment contained little to no mention of how an explosion, crash or major fuel leak would affect the nearby Canso Coastal Barrens Wilderness Area (CCBWA). "Soils here are very thin and because of cold wet climate, have taken centuries to form," he said. "Any liquid spill cleanup would end up removing all soil to bedrock. The proposal suggests that a launch failure is very unlikely, but if it did occur in CCBWA, it would be disastrous." The rockets would use kerosene and liquid oxygen for the first stage of the launch and nitrogen tetroxide along with unsymmetrical dimethylhydrazine, or UDMH, for the second stage.

The province's senior hydrogeologist raised concerns over the use of UDMH, citing studies that describe the chemical compound as a possible carcinogen that's toxic to humans, fish and aquatic organisms. The submission noted UDMH is

being phased out in the U.S. as well as most launch centres in Europe and Russia. The letter also underscored concerns about the impact of normal operations, spills and launch failures on the municipal drinking supply "given the nature of the proposed propellants." The Defence Department, in its submission, suggested an assessment be completed on the impact of a UDMH spill.

Company offers assurances

The environmental assessment acknowledges propellant spills could happen during transfer to or from the processing facility or during launch failure. The company said if a spill happened at the processing facility, it would be controlled through catchment systems and holding tanks and "would not impact surrounding soils." In a spill caused by a spacecraft crash or launch failure, the propellant would be collected and disposed of, with contaminated soil "removed and treated as hazardous waste." Chuck McKenna, manager of the Environment Department's resource management unit, noted there's nothing in the assessment to indicate how the company would handle contaminants in fractured bedrock, surface or groundwater.

Even if successfully removed, disposing of dangerous goods or contaminated water could be difficult because there's nowhere in Atlantic Canada to effectively treat some of the proposed substances, including hydrazine, said Brent Baxter of the Environment Department's sustainability and applied science division.

Air quality concerns

Submissions to the Environment Department also raised potential air quality issues. Johnny McPherson, who works in the department's air quality unit, noted the combustion of kerosene and liquid oxygen emits black carbon, which is "harmful if inhaled," and other expected emissions increase ground-level ozone, "a pollutant that directly affects human health." Health Canada said in its letter that it would be useful to see an example of how rocket launches could change air quality. "This would be particularly relevant in the event of an accident/malfunction where fuel may be dispersed over a larger area, and given the potential toxicity of several of these compounds, may impact the local area," said the department's letter. The department noted that based on information in the report, noise levels won't be high enough to result in hearing loss in the general public.

Missing information

While the environmental assessment was expected to outline solutions to potential problems, Heather Cameron of the provincial Department of Lands and Forestry wrote that "in many instances, options for mitigation are completely missing in the document, or are only alluded to." She added the assessment repeatedly defers its description of mitigation efforts to its environmental protection plan, which would only be developed after the environmental assessment is approved. "Please note that it is stated that [the] proponent 'should' undertake actions, but it is unclear whether the proponent 'will' undertake required actions," wrote Cameron.

Support from municipality

Not every submission raised red flags about the project. The warden of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough wrote a letter voicing his support for the spaceport. "This project has the potential to provide significant benefits to a region that has been greatly impacted by the collapse of the cod fishery in the 1990s," wrote Vernon Pitts. "We place our trust in the Nova Scotia regulatory system to complete its work in a timely fashion. We look forward to the development of this project and encourage its expeditious review and approval." Global Affairs Canada questioned in its submission whether Maritime Launch Services' liability insurance would include the Crown as a beneficiary in the event that a foreign country makes a claim of damage from a space object. The Canadian Space Agency declined to weigh in on the project.

Source: www.cbc.ca, 29 August 2018



Trump's China hawks prepare to swoop as trade talks go nowhere

-Shawn Donnan

The U.S.'s trade war with China is about to get uglier. After a long, hot summer spent weighing risks and firing warning shots, the hawks in President Donald Trump's administration have gained the upper hand -- and they're set to unleash a fall offensive. Talks in Washington between the world's two largest economies yielded little visible progress last week toward a cease-fire. Looming instead are new tariffs that Trump has threatened to impose on some \$200 billion in annual imports from China, and Beijing's already-promised retaliation. "We're facing an escalating trade war over the next few months," says David Dollar of the Brookings Institution, who served as the U.S. Treasury's top man in China under the Obama administration. Even before the latest talks broke up, the signals weren't hard to read. Earlier this year, the president publicly overruled Steven Mnuchin and ripped up a deal the Treasury secretary had struck with Liu He, his Chinese counterpart.

Hawks Won

In the past week, while the two sides were talking, the U.S. slapped tariffs on a further \$16 billion in Chinese imports. Retaliation by Beijing will bring the amount of trade affected by the dispute to \$100 billion, with more to come. While Trump's trade-policy comments in recent days have been focused on securing a Nafta deal with Mexico, the president also celebrated new restrictions on investment from China. "Not enough focus has been put on China. And that's been for a long time," the president told legislators gathered at the White House on Thursday to mark the passage of a law giving yet more powers to the already powerful Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., which can block acquisitions on national security grounds. And on Friday, Trump's officials were huddled in Washington with counterparts from Europe and Japan, discussing how to push China into changing course.

It all adds up to what many analysts see as a win for the president's China hawks, in the debate over how to tackle the first major strategic rival the U.S. has faced since the end of the Cold War.

'Spectrum Shift'

Scott Kennedy, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, says the hawks' victory is reflected in the way U.S. demands have evolved in recent weeks. When Mnuchin and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross led missions to Beijing earlier this year, one key priority was securing increased purchases of American soybeans, LNG and other commodities, to reduce a bilateral trade deficit that's been a persistent obsession for Trump. A few months on, the administration's goals are more maximal. It's demanding the kind of long-term structural changes to Chinese policy -- such as ending industrial subsidies and intellectual-property theft -- that hawks including Robert Lighthizer, the U.S. trade representative, and White House trade adviser Peter Navarro have been pushing for. "A spectrum shift," Kennedy calls it.

Disentangling Economies

That doesn't mean that internal trade battles at the White House are over. The hawks are eyeing an even more ambitious agenda, says Kennedy: A long-term disentanglement of the two economies, with the goal of bringing supply chains back from Asia to the U.S. "After a few rounds of shooting, the two sides still don't understand each other well," according to Zhou Xiaoming, a former commerce ministry official and diplomat who's now a senior fellow at the Center For China & Globalization in Beijing. "The US wants to crush China by escalating the trade war, but it won't work."

'Like My Mom'

Chad Bown, a trade expert at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, says the administration's end-game remains unclear. At home, there's growing unrest in the business community and among consumers. In hearings last week, a procession of small and medium-sized companies complained about the forthcoming tranche of tariffs, which will hit some 6,000 products ranging from seafood to bicycles. Bown has seen firsthand how the trade war is arriving in American homes. Tariffs are about to make his mother's quilting supplies more expensive -- and "there's a big community of quilters out there like my mom." "More and more Americans are going to feel this," he says. "We haven't gone through a moment like this before. Politically, I'm not sure how it ends." The rude health of the U.S. economy is probably giving Trump room to escalate. Businesses may complain about tariffs, but they're also reaping the benefits

of the president's tax cuts. Dollar, the Brookings analyst, says the real economic effect of Trump's trade moves may not be felt until well into 2019.

'So Far'

Federal Reserve policy makers have flagged a trade war as a major risk to the economy -- but one that's still over the horizon. On Friday, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell predicted more "strong growth" accompanied by gradual interest-rate increases. He didn't mention trade at all. Loretta Mester, president of the Cleveland Fed, told Bloomberg TV in an interview that policy makers need to keep a close eye on how U.S. business responds to the tariffs. In her own district, said Mester, companies are studying their impact. "But so far they haven't reacted strongly," she said. "They haven't taken off investment that they had planned."

Source: www.bloomberg.com, 25 August 2018

Naval experts concerned over china's increasing presence in Mediterranean

- Anna Ahronheim

The increasing presence of China in the Mediterranean region as part of the Asian giant's Belt and Road Initiative should be a cause of concern, experts told *The Jerusalem Post* this week. "What concerns us is China's Belt and Road Initiative and its growing role in Israel's maritime domain, especially the operating of Haifa port," Rear Admiral (Ret.) Prof. Shaul Chorev told the Post during a two-day workshop held by the University of Haifa-Hudson Institute Consortium on the Eastern Mediterranean (Hudson Institute and the Haifa Research Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy). Under President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Action Plan released in 2015, China's "new Silk Road" will connect Beijing with 68 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe via land routes (the "Belt") and maritime routes (the "Road") with the goal of improving trade relationships primarily through infrastructure investments.

According to a report by the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), a leading German think tank, the Chinese workers building the network of infrastructure developments as part of the multi-billion dollar initiative are secured by 3,200 Chinese – many of them veterans of China's People's Liberation Army – employed by 20

registered private security companies. These security companies operate in places like Sudan, Pakistan and Iraq, where the risk of kidnapping or attacks against Chinese workers is high due to political unrest.

In Israel, China has invested in major infrastructure projects including the expansion of Haifa and Ashdod ports, the construction of the Mount Carmel tunnels in Haifa, and the building of the Tel Aviv light rail. Elsewhere in the Middle East, including Turkey, various Gulf emirates and Iran – which is China’s top trading partner – Beijing has similarly been active in building infrastructure projects.

According to Admiral (res.) Gary Roughead, who served as the 29th Chief of Naval Operations and Commander of the United States Fleet Forces Command, the ability to collect information by civilian systems from military systems should be of concern to both Israel and the United States. “In a world in which so much depends on how information moves, the types of systems we are using and the ability to collect information and intelligence from those systems is of significant concern,” warned Roughhead, who today teaches at the University of Haifa-Hudson Institute Consortium on the Eastern Mediterranean, and is the Robert and Marion Oster Distinguished Military Fellow at the Hoover Institute, an American public policy think tank and research institution located at Stanford University in California. “It’s not just someone listening in, but what is the technology being used in commercial systems which can bleed into military systems. How vulnerable are they to interference? It’s not something that just Israel and the Port of Haifa should be concerned about. What is being tested on an Israeli warship and how easily can those signals be picked up? What are the mechanisms in place to prevent that?”

The workshop, held at the University of Haifa, assessed the future of maritime warfare in the region as well as various strategic developments. The workshop also examined ways in which Israel and the United States can cooperate in the maritime domain. According to Douglas Feith, director at the Center for National Security Strategies at the Hudson Institute, some civilian cyber-defense technology used for commercial purposes “are the top of the line that militaries should adapt and use for their own purposes.” Ties and trade between Israel and China have increased dramatically in the past few years. According to data from Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics, exports to China reached \$2.8 billion in the first half of 2018, a 73% increase compared to the previous year. While visiting Beijing in 2017, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said China accounts for one-third of the investment in Israel’s high-tech sector.

The Belt and Road initiative, Feith added, must be looked at from various perspectives. “If you are going to look at phenomena like this initiative, you should look at it from all points of view,” he said. “Most militaries use civilian technology, and that’s one reason why the Chinese favor economic activities like expanding ports. These are not only commercial, but commercial with military implications.”

Source: www.jpost.com, 23 August 2018

Can India help the United States against China?

- Oriana Skylar Mastro

In his November 2017 APEC Summit speech in Vietnam, President Trump outlined his administration’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, elevating the importance of the “single strategic arena” of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as part of the geopolitical competition between China and the United States. The shift is a policy response to broad U.S. government concerns regarding China’s continued expansion into the Indian Ocean through initiatives such as “One Belt, One Road,” an infrastructure investment project intended to integrate Asian markets and expand Chinese influence, and the creation of a Chinese military base in Djibouti.

One of the drivers of the strategy is to bring together like-minded democracies to defend against Chinese attempts to disrupt the international rules-based order, universal liberal values, and free access to the maritime global commons. Notably, previous U.S. presidents have also attempted to convince New Delhi to take on a more proactive role in balancing against China. The Indo-Pacific strategy elevates India’s importance to the United States as a key partner in the region and calls on New Delhi to play a larger role as “a nation that can bookend and anchor the free and open order in the Indo-Pacific region.” The hope is that India’s active involvement will force China to divert and spread more thinly its resources, efforts, and capabilities from its eastern borders to its western borders.

But whether this U.S. strategy of strengthening its relationship with India in order to impose caution on Chinese aggression works primarily depends on how China perceives this move. In a recently published article in the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, I demonstrate that China is not responding proportionately or enough to India’s military build-up, even along the disputed border. For example, India

has increased the number of mountain troops in its order of battle since 1996, adding two additional mountain infantry divisions to the Eastern Command responsible for defense of the Sino-Indian border in 2009 and announcing the formation of a 90,000-strong mountain strike corps in 2013. In 2015, nine of the Indian army's 36 divisions were oriented toward the borders with China, Bangladesh, and Burma, compared with 18 divisions stationed in the states bordering Pakistan.

In contrast, according to PLA expert Dennis Blasko, the PLA, the largest ground force in the world, dedicates about six border defense regiments and five battalions in Tibet and a few less in southern Xinjiang for an estimated 40,000 border personnel. But PLA troops are widely dispersed along the 2,520 miles Sino-Indian border, manning static positions near the border and usually patrolling between guard points on foot, on horseback, or in vehicles in groups of ten men or fewer. Farther from the border are the "mobile operational units," but those are still relatively few in number for such a large area, especially compared to the Indian border forces. Even Chinese commentators note that India has many more troops along the border than China does; India also has the world's largest mountain forces, which are particularly useful along such a mountainous disputed border. Moreover, even though the Western Theater Command covers almost half of China's total land area, contains some of the most difficult terrain, and has the important mission of protecting the disputed Sino-Indian border, China dedicates less than 25 percent of the PLA to that region.

I argue that concerns about regime legitimacy are the primary reason for China's lack of balancing: The Chinese Communist Party needs to interpret China's external environment in a way that supports its right to power at home. As economic growth slows down, the CCP is pushing the narrative that only with the Party in charge can China achieve its "national rejuvenation," in the words of current leader Xi Jinping. This narrative of return to a rightful place of regional preeminence contributes to Party legitimacy by appealing to the public's sense of Chinese exceptionalism and civilizational pride.

If the Indian military can present a challenge to the Chinese military, then the Chinese government must tacitly acknowledge the possibility that another country, and a democratic one at that, can rise successfully without the CCP at the helm. The Party fears that such an admission, even if not explicit, would undermine the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the people. In short, internal stability depends on the Chinese people's continued belief in the often-heard argument that "there is no developing

country in the world that achieves prosperity and stability under Western-style democracy.”

China’s unique response to India’s military modernization has important implications for U.S. policy. The good news is that, because of Beijing’s concern over regime legitimacy, the threshold that the Indian threat must reach to spark a strong Chinese response is higher than that of other regional actors. This means that U.S. attempts to contribute to Indian military modernization are less risky than originally thought; they are unlikely to strongly provoke Beijing or lead to an arms race. But the United States must work with India discreetly, because the more Indian efforts are tied to the United States, the more likely China is to react strongly and negatively. An overt U.S. role could contribute to the CCP’s argument that strength cannot be built from within without the Party’s strong hand. It would allow China to recognize the military threat without implying that India is successfully undergoing military modernization. Therefore, to minimize a destabilizing Chinese reaction, the United States should think of ways to help improve Indian capabilities without being involved directly in operations with India in the region. For example, instead of pushing for joint exercises, the United States could pursue more low-key efforts, such as joint-training programs at the unit level. Additionally, the United States could support India indirectly by encouraging its partners and allies to support India’s military modernization, to include selling New Delhi critical technologies, platforms, and systems. In some ways, “the Quad,” an informal consultative mechanism between India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, is a step in the right direction. The bottom line is that the United States should prioritize programs that actually improve Indian capabilities discreetly instead of those that primarily focus on messaging and signaling to China their enhanced willingness to collaborate.

But there is also bad news. First, China’s need to downplay India’s military modernization also suggests that a competitive U.S. strategy of building Indian partner capacity is unlikely to have the desired effects. A strategy that relies on increased Indian military presence along the Sino-Indian border to goad China to invest more in ground capabilities at the expense of maritime ones is unlikely to succeed because China will not respond in a traditional balancing fashion to progress in Indian ground capabilities. This is a critical point given the new U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy and its emphasis on encouraging a greater Indian role in countering Chinese assertiveness in East Asia.

Second, the need to show military superiority to domestic audiences likely extends to any encounters with Indian forces. This could create some dangerous incentives for China to escalate in a crisis in an attempt to convey its superior military might instead of attempting to defuse the issue and offer off ramps. These escalation pressures create a unique degree of crisis instability in which China may be tempted to resort to force instead of relying on diplomatic means to resolve the issue. Even if China does not want to fight a war with India, displays and maneuvering of military forces to convey a strong message to India to back down could have the opposite effect. The two-month military standoff at Doklam, sparked by the Chinese military's attempts to extend a road through territory disputed by China and Bhutan, demonstrate some of these problematic escalatory dynamics.

In sum, a stronger U.S. defense relationship with India is unlikely to distract China from its aggressive policies in the South and East China Sea. But the risks of such a strategy are relatively low, so it doesn't hurt to try.

Source: www.lawfareblog.com, 26 August 2018

Re-shaping India-US Defense Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

- Hemant Krishan Singh and Richard M. Rossow

It is time for the United States to recognize that the Indian Ocean is the next front line of world geopolitics and the emerging arena for a new “great game.” China's aggressive inroads into the Indian Ocean through military bases, port leasing, and predatory economics present an imminent strategic challenge, as these advances will result in an Indo-Pacific that is less free, less open, less secure, and less prosperous for the United States and India. In the midst of a global power flux, revival of strategic competition, rampant regional rivalries, and concerns about the future of a liberal order, India and the United States are well positioned to shape the future together in ways that sustain the interests of both countries.

The U.S. National Security Strategy describes India as central to U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy and an essential component of Indo-Pacific security architecture. This recognition also underscores the need to meet the core challenge of China's economic and military assertiveness and its manifest desire to create a Sino-centric Asian order. The collapse of ASEAN unity since 2012 has significantly eroded ASEAN

centrality in regional security architecture; China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of conflict.

U.S. efforts to deepen its engagement in the Indian Ocean Region must not merely be intended to draft India into the existing Asia-Pacific security architecture, but also to recognize the growing strategic salience of the Indian Ocean itself. To make an Indian Ocean Region that is as prosperous as East Asia, the United States needs to join hands with India and work more closely with countries in the region to develop a security architecture that underpins free and open trade, preserves sovereignty, and is designed for a century in which the Indian Ocean will remain a vital connector of the global economy.

As matters stand today, the United States does not have a robust, consistent footprint in the Indian Ocean. From India's security perspective, the United States has virtually opted itself out of Central Asia and has only marginal commitments in the Indian Ocean. From the U.S. perspective, India must also progress pending proposals to augment and deepen the defense partnership. Based on the foregoing, we offer the following recommendations for a revamped U.S. vision of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific."

Enlarge

The United States needs to understand that India's security interests lie both to its west and east. While the United States is still trying to turn the clock back to regain lost strategic space in East and Southeast Asia, China is already driving into the Indian Ocean where it aims to establish an overwhelming presence. There is need for a holistic look at challenges in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Engage

If India is indeed to be a central pillar of the U.S. vision for the Indo-Pacific, it must be more deeply consulted in the development of a U.S. strategy which reflects the interests of both strategic partners. This requires a nuanced broadening from a predominantly East Asia focus, driven primarily by U.S. alliances and historical legacies, to a "whole of the Indo-Pacific approach" which draws on shared interests to achieve shared objectives. The United States and India need to jointly evolve a common strategy that acknowledges the challenge China presents in the Indian Ocean

as well as the need to preserve the role of ASEAN in regional security. A possible three-tier security architecture can be considered:

- An East Asian tier centered around U.S. alliances;
- An ASEAN-centric central tier buttressed by a web of Trilaterals and the Quad; and
- An Indian Ocean-centric tier alongside India (and Australia), where the United States commits to a greater coordination of defense assets, including Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR), and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.

Expound

The inability to articulate a wide range of specific actions through a standalone policy proved to be a central weakness of the “pivot” or “rebalance” under the previous U.S. administration. Recent pronouncements of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo offer a good start, but the United States needs to be more specific on how the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategy will alter U.S. presence and partnerships throughout the region. The United States and India, along with other Quad partners, also need to elaborate a detailed architecture for regional economic engagement, connectivity initiatives, and multilayered regional security architecture. Any such framework of enhanced U.S.-Indian (and particularly Quad) cooperation will certainly evoke a strong response from China. Policymakers and strategic communities in Quad capitals must try and mitigate this coercive challenge if the reborn Quad is to enjoy continued traction.

Conclusions: The Defining Role of US-India Defense Ties

It is inevitable that despite broad convergences, U.S.-India relations will continue to face challenges in both the diplomatic and economic domains. It is thus important for both strategic partners to recognize that intensifying discussions on defense cooperation have already led to a much deeper appreciation in Washington of India’s concerns and interests both to its east and its west. The United States must now put forward a clear vision on how the three commands covering the Indian definition of the Indo-Pacific (INDO-PACOM, CENTCOM, and AFRICOM) can work together on issues of defense cooperation with India.

The 10-year framework agreement on bilateral defense cooperation renewed in 2015 already provides the platform for strengthening defense ties from a strategic perspective, while preserving each country's strategic independence. Recent steps taken by the U.S. administration and Congress to bolster India's Major Defense Partner status have further incentivized efforts by both sides to keep pace with the evolving security scenario across the Indo-Pacific, especially in the Indian Ocean.

Strengthening maritime domain awareness mechanisms, synergizing ISR assets, enhancing anti-submarine warfare capability, improving the efficacy of our novel cooperative mechanism (the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative), and concluding interoperability agreements (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and Bilateral Exchange and Cooperative Agreement (BECA)) need to be vigorously pursued.

Finally, if there is one big idea that merits consideration as a symbol of U.S.-Indian defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, it is the enlargement of Malabar into a two-phase exercise next year: the first involving INDO-PACOM in the eastern Indian Ocean, and the second engaging CENTCOM in the western Indian Ocean. This will provide a qualitative boost to mutual confidence in the defense partnership and show Indian policymakers that the Indian Ocean is, indeed, part of Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy.

The forthcoming inaugural meeting of the United States-India Ministerial 2+2 Dialogue (scheduled for September 6) provides a historic opportunity to lay the foundations of balanced and upgraded bilateral defense and security relations that deliver mutual reinforcement and preserve a stable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Source: thediplomat.com, 24 August 2018

BIMSTEC eyes higher profile, visibility in Indo-Pacific region

- Elizabeth Roche

Ahead of the fourth summit of a regional economic grouping straddling South Asia and South-East Asia, member nations are seeking a higher profile for the body and its revitalization through concrete steps like a free trade pact and improved connectivity. The envoys of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand, speaking at a conference in New

Delhi last week called for increased “visibility” for the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, known by its acronym BIMSTEC, and seen as having the potential to emerge as a building bloc of the economically vibrant Indo-Pacific region. Nepal is to host the fourth summit of the group on 30-31 August, which is to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and others. BIMSTEC, formed in 1997, has seven member countries—Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka. It is home to 1.6 billion people, or nearly 22% of the world’s population, and has a combined gross domestic product of \$2.8 trillion.

Despite the impressive statistics, the grouping has little to show for its 21 years of existence. Leaders of the seven countries have met only thrice—in 2004, 2008 and 2014—at the summit level to push the regional forum forward. The bloc received an impetus when members were invited to a BRICS outreach forum in Goa in 2016. The invitation to the BRICS outreach meet was seen as a signal that India was prioritizing the grouping over the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, or Saarc, progress in which has been hobbled by tensions between India and Pakistan.

India called off attendance at the Saarc summit that was to have been hosted by Pakistan in 2016 after terrorist attacks on a string of military installations in that year. According to Syed Muazzem Ali, Bangladesh high commissioner to India, “progress in (BIMSTEC) in the past has been cautious and slow”. The challenge before the grouping at present was to hasten the “progress of interregional cooperation in this era of globalization”.

BIMSTEC established a secretariat in Dhaka in 2014 but “visibility of BIMSTEC needs to be enhanced in a region where a few other (groupings like) Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), SAARC” and others are operating, he said. This “is a prerequisite for an effective BIMSTEC,” he said. Ali also called for acceleration of trade and investment among the grouping. “India should invest more in its neighbourhood,” following the examples of the US and China “which have undertaken trade and investment projects in their own neighbourhood,” Ali said.

In her remarks, Chitranganee Wagiswara, Sri Lanka’s high commissioner to India, noted that BIMSTEC had the advantage of having a number of rising economies in the region but it was one of the least integrated parts of the world. Wagiswara echoed views expressed by Bangladesh high commissioner Ali who had termed it “disappointing” that BIMSTEC had not been able to conclude a free trade pact despite the idea being mooted in 2004. Wagiswara called for increased connectivity linkages in the region

describing it as a “the key that opens opportunities in other areas.” She also called for the necessity of increasing awareness of BIMSTEC as a grouping stating that “even within the BIMSTEC nations, the organisation is not very well known.”

In his remarks, Thailand’s ambassador to India Chutintorn Gongsakdi, welcomed the new lease of life that BIMSTEC had received with India’s renewed interest in the grouping. Urging the need to build a “competitive identity” for BIMSTEC, the Thai envoy also stressed that BIMSTEC members should reduce the number of areas of focus from 14 to five to ensure the success of the grouping.

Source: www.livemint.com, 26 August 2018