

MARITIME PERSPECTIVES 2017

Edited by

VICE ADMIRAL PRADEEP CHAUHAN
CAPTAIN (DR.) GURPREET S KHURANA



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2017

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First Published in 2018

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ISBN: 978-81-932998-5-2

Rs. 600.00

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Published by:
NATIONAL MARITIME FOUNDATION
Varuna Complex, Airport Road,
NH-8, New Delhi-110 010

Printed by:
Alpha Graphics
6A/1, Ganga Chambers, W.E.A.,
Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005
Mobile : 9312430311
Email : tarunberi2000@gmail.com

Foreword

The seas around us are gaining new-found importance as each day goes by, and I have no doubt that the current century is the 'Century of the Seas'.

As India once again turns to the seas in her quest to emerge as a resurgent maritime nation, the environment in the Indian Ocean Region, and the larger Indo-Pacific, is characterised by an unusual complexity. At the National Maritime Foundation (NMF), we seek to unravel and understand the multiple threads that run across our maritime neighbourhood, with a view to promoting the continued constructive and peaceful use of the maritime domain.

The NMF's ever-growing community of contributors, write on strategic maritime issues, and analyse the implications of larger geopolitical game plays in the Indo-Pacific Region, which has emerged as the world's centre of gravity in the maritime domain. This is manifested in numerous Commentaries, Issue Briefs and Policy Briefs, and Reports on the many dialogues and discussions that we participate in, throughout the year. 'Maritime Perspectives' collates the best of these contributions, aiming to review the challenges and opportunities, and fill as many spaces in the large maritime jigsaw puzzle in the region and beyond.

In consonance with India's sustained maritime reach, the NMF is also constantly seeking to expand its horizons, through collaborative efforts with partners all over the world, and in seeking academic contributions from varied sources. The 2017 edition of 'Maritime Perspectives', is an apt representation of this aspect, and I am confident that it will contribute immensely to our understanding of the many developments, the inferences therein, and their impact across the global commons.

Admiral RK Dhowan
PVSM, AVSM, YSM (Retd.)
Chairman
National Maritime Foundation

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*Blue Economy &
Marine Environment*

IMOs Views on Shipping and India's Sagarmala: Examining the Convergences

G. Padmaja

Introduction

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has selected - 'Connecting Ships, Ports and People' - as the World Maritime Day theme for 2017.¹ The theme for 2016 was - 'Shipping: indispensable to the world'.² The purpose of selecting these themes is to spell out the manner in which shipping impacts the everyday lives of ordinary people all over the world; highlight the contribution of all individuals involved in the shipping industry; and to enhance awareness of the role of IMO as the international regulatory body for international shipping.

The IMO is a United Nations specialized agency. Its primary role is to create a regulatory framework which will ensure a safe, secure and efficient international shipping industry. India has acceded to about 32 of the Conventions/Protocols adopted by IMO. It joined IMO as a member state in 1959, after

having ratified the convention which established IMO.³

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), around 80 per cent of global trade by volume and 70 per cent of global trade by value are carried by sea and handled by ports worldwide. This is because shipping is the most cost-effective method of transportation of most goods. There are more than 50,000 merchant ships trading internationally transporting every kind of cargo. These ships are registered in over 150 nations and over a million sea-farers from almost every country are employed. Thus, in this globalised world, shipping facilitates commerce and thereby contributes to socio-economic development of nations.⁴

In the above context, this issue brief spells out some of the regulatory frameworks formulated by IMO for the shipping industry; IMOs views

on shipping being indispensable to the world; and the relevance of IMO's views on the present Indian narrative regarding the critical role of shipping in a nation's development. This essay argues that given the growing interdependence between activities on sea and wealth created on land; and similarly, activities on land and safe shipping that takes place on sea - the sharp dividing line in policies for land-based and sea-based activities will soon be blurred. Secondly, there is a convergence in the IMOs and the Indian development narratives, for both opine that the maritime strength of a country is crucial for its socio-economic development.⁵

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

Since the mid-nineteenth century, notably after some major shipping accidents, many countries were of the view that a permanent international body to promote maritime safety should be formed. Thus, following the establishment of the United Nations Organization in 1945, an international conference was held in Geneva in 1948 to address this issue. The conference adopted a convention formally adopting IMO which was initially called that the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO). The name was changed to IMO in

1982. The IMO Convention entered into force in 1958.⁶

The purposes of the IMO, as summarized by Article 1(a) of the Convention, are "to provide machinery for cooperation among Governments in the field of governmental regulation and practices relating to technical matters of all kinds affecting shipping engaged in international trade; to encourage and facilitate the general adoption of the highest practicable standards in matters concerning maritime safety, efficiency of navigation and prevention and control of marine pollution from ships".⁷ The Organization is also empowered to deal with administrative and legal matters related to these purposes.

'Maritime safety' is an important mandate for IMO. The organizations first task was to adopt a new version of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), the most important of all treaties dealing with maritime safety. This was completed in 1960. IMO then focused on issues dealing with the facilitation of international maritime traffic, load lines and the carriage of dangerous goods, while the system of measuring the tonnage of ships was revised⁸. By adopting international standards which are adhered to by all member states, IMO ensures safety at sea.

IMO has also been the pioneer in recognising the potential for satellite communications to assist in distress situations at sea. In the 1970s, it initiated a study of the operational requirements for a satellite communications system devoted to maritime purposes. This led to the establishment of International Mobile Satellite Organization (IMSO). Its efforts have resulted in the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), which was adopted in 1988 and began to be phased in from 1992. GMDSS provides the technical, operational and administrative structure for maritime distress and safety communications worldwide. According to IMO, "In February 1999, the GMDSS became fully operational, so that now a ship that is in distress anywhere in the world can be virtually guaranteed assistance, even if the ship's crew do not have time to radio for help, as the message will be transmitted automatically".⁹

To make maritime navigation safe, other satellite-based measures adopted include Long-Range Identification and Tracking of Ships (LRIT)¹⁰ and the Automatic Identification System (AIS) which provide a means to track the location of vessels anywhere around the world; help in situational awareness; provide a means to assist in collision

avoidance; and are an aid to navigation, by providing location and additional information. The International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, is a mandatory instrument for all countries Party to the Convention. The aim of the ISPS Code is, "to ensure that the applicable ocean-going ships and port facilities of IMO Member States are implementing the highest possible standards of security."¹¹ Since the 1980s, IMO has also addressed the issue of 'sea borne Piracy'.

Though maritime safety is the most important responsibility of IMO, with the growth in the amount of oil being transported by sea by oil tankers and the accidents which took place at sea, 'maritime environment' and the issue of pollution emerged as an important issue. This led to the adoption of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto (MARPOL 73/78).¹²

According to IMO, "The safety and security of life at sea, protection of marine environment and over 90 per cent of the world's trade depends on the professionalism and competence of seafarers."¹³ In this context, the IMO's International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch-

keeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978 was the first internationally agreed Convention to address the issue of minimum standards of competence for seafarers. By focusing on the 'human element', the IMO sought to inculcate a 'safety culture' in the shipping industry. IMO has also developed an Integrated Technical Cooperation Programme (ITCP), "which is designed to assist Governments which lack the technical knowledge and resources that are needed to operate a shipping industry safely and efficiently."¹⁴

To overcome unnecessary paperwork, IMO's Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL Convention), was adopted in 1965. It seeks to achieve the most efficient maritime transport as possible, looking for smooth transit in ports of ships, cargo and passengers. These measures have a positive impact in the growth of trade and the economy.¹⁵

In 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the UN. As international shipping contributes to economic growth and sustainable development, it indirectly plays a role in achieving all of the SDGs.

IMO has developed a concept paper on Sustainable Maritime Transportation System, which includes a set of goals and actions, to highlight the importance of maritime transportation.

IMO's measures cover all aspects of international shipping. This includes, ship design, construction, equipment, manning, operation and disposal. IMO's universal regulatory framework ensures that all ship operators and member countries implement them so that the shipping industry remains safe, environmentally sound, energy efficient and secure.

Shipping – Indispensable to the world¹⁶

As the global population of 7 billion is set to double by 2050, social and economic development should be planned in a way that it satisfies the need of this rising population. Shipping is central to the world economic growth as it is through ships that commodities, fuel, foodstuffs, goods and products are transported. Thus, IMO considers maritime transport as the backbone of international trade.

With the development of technology, ships too have become safe, are carrying huge cargo and are environmentally sound. However, IMO strongly opines

that for the benefits of globalisation to reach all and be evenly spread, countries must play an active role in the shipping industry. It is of the view that that sustainable economic growth, employment opportunities, prosperity and stability can all be enhanced through developing maritime trade, improving port infrastructure and promoting sea fearing as a career.

The Shipping industry is also investing in green technologies which are not only beneficial for the environment but also result in cost savings in the long term. IMO argues that the availability of low cost and efficient maritime transport has helped make possible many dramatic improvements in global living standards especially in emerging economies that have seen many people being taken out of acute poverty in recent years. Also, the IMO and shipping industry have a major role to play in implementing two major multilateral agreements - that of Paris Climate Change and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development- by adopting the necessary measures.

The Indian Narrative – SAGARMALA¹⁷

India is strategically located on key international trade routes. It has a long coastline of 7,500km covering 13 states and union territories; has 14,500km

of navigable and potentially navigable waterways; 90 per cent of EXIM trade by volume and 72 per cent by value is through sea; and in the financial year 2015, more than 1 billion tonnes of cargo was handled across over 200 ports. However, this is only part of the picture. Container exports take 7 to 17 days from hinterland to vessel, compared to 6 days in China; EXIM containers in India travel 700 to 1000km between production centres and ports compared to 150 to 300kms in China; water transport accounts for only 6 per cent of total freight movement in India in tonne-km terms despite it being cost efficient and energy efficient; none of the Indian ports rank among the top 20; and industrial clusters and zones have not adequately taken into account proximity to ports and the port land has not been adequately utilised for setting up industries and manufacturing.

The Sagarmala initiative conceived by the Government of India seeks to address these challenges. It is a national programme aimed at accelerating economic development in the country by harnessing the potential of India's coastline and river network. The vision of Sagarmala is to reduce logistics cost for EXIM and domestic trade with minimal infrastructure investment. This is sought to be done among others by lowering

logistics cost of bulk commodities by locating future industrial capacities near coast; improving export competitiveness by developing port proximate manufacturing clusters; and reducing the cost of transporting domestic cargo through optimising modal mix.

It clearly comes from the above that the concept of 'port-led development' is central to the Sagarmala vision. This focuses on logistics-intensive industries, where transportation either represents a high proportion of costs or timely logistics is a critical success factor. These industries would thus be able to deliver only when ports function with modern infrastructure; and the ports have seamless multi-modal connectivity. The skilled manpower for these industries is sought to be provided by the population in adjoining areas leading to job creation for coastal communities. The Government has identified 150 projects in different coastal states of India to be implemented under Sagarmala. It is estimated that Sagarmala can reduce logistics costs for EXIM and domestic cargo leading to overall cost savings of 350-400 billion.

Thus, the four pillars of the Port-led development programme are – Port modernisation; Port connectivity; Port-led industrialisation; and Coastal community development. To invite

investments in these mega ventures from players all over the world, the Indian government held the 'Maritime India Summit' on 14 April 2016 in Mumbai.

The purpose of all these efforts is to have a holistic and sustainable development of coastal regions and communities. Approximately 18 per cent of India's population lives in 72 coastal districts accounting for 12 per cent of India's landmass. Sagarmala will provide employment to the youth and empower coastal communities. These coastal regions will become engine of growth for India. They will complement the ambitious infrastructure plan for the hinterland which is being planned in parallel.

Conclusion

As a member of IMO, India benefits from the various frameworks/ conventions of IMO. It shares the international agency's belief that shipping is indispensable to the world. India's Sagarmala reflects the country's commitment to tap its maritime assets for equitable economic growth. It is also a response to the IMOs call for governments all over the world to focus on shipping and ports development; develop maritime trade; improve port infrastructure and promote sea fearing as a career– so as to result in sustainable economic growth, increase employment

opportunities, prosperity and stability. Thus, there is a convergence in IMOs and India's development narrative.

In the coming years, the sea based and land based developmental narratives will be integrated, for both are interdependent and impact each other. Activities on sea, create wealth on land; and similarly, activities on land contribute to efficient ports and safe shipping on sea. Both - 'blue economy' and 'port-led development' – focus on sustainable development. The interdependence which will emerge will lead to more integrated policies with

focus on 'green growth', so as to achieve the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While IMO will continue to shape the international debates, bring new conventions and frameworks; India will have to amend its policies accordingly and be part of the global narrative. Most important, India should ensure that Sagarmala is implemented with all seriousness, political will and public support; and the fruits of globalisation trickle down to the common man and are evenly spread.

09 January 2017

ENDNOTES

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- 2 World Maritime University (WMU), World Maritime Day 2016, <http://www.wmu.se/events/world-maritime-day-2016#> (last accessed 27 December 2016). World Maritime Day was first held in 1978 to mark the 20th anniversary of the International Maritime Organizations (IMO) Convention's entry into force. World Maritime Day celebrations are usually held during the last week in September. This year it was held at IMO Headquarters in London on 29 September. A parallel event is also hosted by a member state. In 2016, it was hosted by Turkey. In 2017, it will be hosted by Panama.
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Ballast Water Management (BWM) Convention: Late Implementation, Huge Impact

Kapil Narula

Ballast water is used to stabilize the ships and is essential for the hydrodynamic safety of the ship. Ships fill in ballast water in their tanks after unloading the cargo at the destination port and then discharge it prior to reaching the source port. During this process, a large number of marine organisms such as bacteria, microbes, small invertebrates, eggs and larvae are transferred from their native location to a foreign environment. In the process, there is a persistent danger that these organisms may become invasive species and could wipe out local biodiversity, thereby permanently changing the native marine environment. The problem of invasive species has been observed across the world and is expected to grow further due to the expansion in seaborne trade and new routes taken by ships. It is estimated that upto 5 billion tonnes of ballast water is transferred annually throughout the world and approximately 10,000 unwanted species are carried in

ships ballast tanks daily. Ballast water is hence widely recognised as a major environmental threat as it endangers the sensitive marine ecosystems and may lead to irreversible damage to marine life.

In order to prevent the unhindered flow of marine organisms across the oceans, standards and procedures for management of ballast water have to be implemented so as to minimize the transfer of harmful aquatic organisms. Article 196 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 relates to 'use of technologies or introduction of alien or new species' and there is a provision for introducing a legally binding mechanism to coordinate a global response to this issue. Under this article, "States shall take all measures necessary to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment resulting from the use of technologies under their jurisdiction or control, or the intentional

or accidental introduction of species, alien or new, to a particular part of the marine environment, which may cause significant and harmful changes thereto.” In accordance with this clause, the IMO adopted the ‘International convention for the control and management of ships’ ballast water and sediments’, known as the BWM Convention by consensus in 2004. However, it took more than 11 years for countries to ratify this convention. Finland was the latest signatory to this convention in September 2016, bringing the overall country count to 52. With its accession, the combined tonnage of contracting parties crossed 35 percent threshold (tonnage of world merchant shipping) and the convention will enter into force from 08 September 2017.

Once the BWM convention is enforced, all ships of 400 GRT and above will be required to fit an approved ballast water treatment system onboard the ship. Ships would need to have a ship specific BWM plan approved by the maritime administration and this will be verified by issue of an international BWM certificate. The BWM plan includes a detailed description of the actions which need to be taken to implement the ballast water exchange standard and the ballast water performance standard for ships. Under the regulation for ballast

water exchange, all ships should conduct ballast water exchange at least 200 nm from the nearest land and in water at least 200 metres in depth. Further, all ships shall remove and dispose off sediments from spaces designated to carry ballast water in accordance with the provisions of the ships’ ballast water management plan. The ship will also have to maintain a ballast water record book which would record the time and location of taking or discharging the ballast water and the type of treatment which is undertaken on-board a ship.

According to the existing guidelines, BWM systems onboard ships shall discharge less than 10 viable organisms per cubic metre (greater than or equal to 50 micrometres in size) and less than 10 viable organisms per millilitre (less than 50 micrometres and greater than or equal to 10 micrometres in size). Further, to ensure that there is minimal health impact, standards have been adopted to ensure that the discharge of the indicator microbes shall not exceed the pre-defined concentrations. More than 50 BWM systems manufactured by various companies have received type final approval certification for installation on-board ships. There are three types of ballast water treatment systems: mechanical, physical and chemical. The mechanical treatment methods include

filtration and separation while physical treatment methods involve sterilisation of the ballast water by use of ozone, ultra-violet light, electric currents and heat treatment. Chemical treatment methods include addition of biocides to ballast water to kill organisms.

The IMO Secretary General has termed the BWM convention as a significant step towards preservation of the marine environment but complying with the convention would pose a huge challenge for the shipping industry. The convention will impact ship-owners as they will have to retrofit the ballast water treatment systems at an additional cost. It is estimated that around 60-70,000 ships would have to be fitted with approved ballast water treatment system. It will also lead to an increase in the sales of ballast water treatment systems and the time spent to retrofit the system on operational ships will lead to loss of productivity for shipping companies. Ship operators will have to train seafarers to take various measures to comply with the new regulations when the ship is underway. Ship designers and ship builders will have to modify the existing design for optimising the fitment and for system integration of the ballast water treatment equipment and systems onboard ships. Ports where cleaning and repair of ballast tanks are

undertaken will need additional facilities for reception of sediments from ballast water tanks. Maritime administrations of flag states will have to make extra arrangements for inspection of vessels including sampling of ballast water and for verification of documents. Port state control would have to train their staff for detecting the violation of regulations and for collecting evidence apart from having to issue additional documents in a routine manner.

The BWM convention does not apply to warships and hence there are no implications for the navies. India acceded to the BWM convention in 2015 and the Union Cabinet approved the introduction of the Merchant Shipping (Amendment) Bill, 2015 in May 2015. The bill provides for penalty on the violation/non-compliance to the regulations contained in the convention and there is a provision for the ports to charge the visiting ships for the use of additional facilities. Further, Indian ships below 400 GT plying within the territorial waters of India shall be issued an Indian Ballast Water Management Certificate instead of an international certificate and have to follow all regulations under the convention in Indian waters. The BWM convention is likely to significantly lower the negative environmental impact from shipping and

is an important step in environmentally safe shipping. It directly contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 on sustainably using the oceans. However, there are many implications for the shipping industry and maritime

actors will have to cooperate to overcome the challenges for implementing the convention seamlessly across the globe.

23 January 2017

Analysis of the Union Budget 2017: The Maritime Context

Vasudha Chawla

Lately, the apex political leadership in India has clearly enunciated the nation's vision to develop its comprehensive maritime power. The vision seeks to revive India erstwhile maritime heritage and make concerted maritime endeavours in tandem with its extended regional neighbourhood to satiate the overall national objective of economic development and prosperity for its citizens. During his 2015 visit to Mauritius, for instance, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi enunciated the mantra of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR, meaning 'Ocean'). This was followed by his reiteration of India's maritime vision during the International Fleet Review in Vishakhapatnam and at Maritime India Summit in Mumbai, both in 2016. He linked the deep-blue 'Chakra' (wheel) in India's national Flag to the oceans and the nation's past maritime glory, prodding his countrymen to see the 'chakra' as the vital node of maritime

energy to revitalize the nation's economy. Consequent to laying down this broad framework, the Indian government has worked hard towards developing all facets of the nation's maritime potential. A particular emphasis has been laid upon maritime infrastructure and connectivity, as exemplified by Project Sagarmala.

In this context, the various sectors of national activities linked to the maritime domain may have expected the Union Budget FY 2017-18 to reflect India's resurgent maritime vision. However, the text of the budget was disappointing, to say the least. Firstly, the budget did not indicate any emphasis on the maritime sector as a whole. The text was even devoid of the word 'maritime'. Secondly, while the allocation to few maritime sectors like shipping and inland waterways was mentioned, these were clubbed with other non-maritime sectors like rail and road. The text said,

1. "Railways, roads and rivers are the lifeline of our country. We are now in a position to synergise the investments in railways, roads, waterways and civil aviation. For 2017-18, the total capital and development expenditure of Railways has been pegged at ₹1,31,000 crores."
2. "In the road sector, I have stepped up the Budget allocation for highways from ₹57,976 crores in BE 2016-17 to ₹64,900 crores in 2017-18. 2,000 kms of coastal connectivity roads have been identified for construction and development. This will facilitate better connectivity with ports and remote villages."
3. "An effective multi modal logistics and transport sector will make our economy more competitive. A specific programme for development of multi-modal logistics parks, together with multi modal transport facilities, will be drawn up and implemented."
4. "For transportation sector, as a whole, including rail, roads, shipping, I have provided ₹2,41,387 crores in 2017-18. This magnitude of investment will spur a huge amount of economic activity across the country and create more job opportunities."

The allocation mentioned is a total of all the modes of transport, where maritime sectors are clubbed with non-maritime sectors. The mention of waterways and rivers is included in the railways budget (point 1), but would it help the development of waterways? The allocated amount of ₹1,31,000 crores is clearly stated for railways. The rivers and waterways are an independent sub-sector, which can be combined for a multi-modal transportation as mentioned in point 3. These maritime sub-sectors have been neglected over a long period of time, and thus, a separate budget would have helped it develop, to further complement the overall transportation sector. We can also see a slight mention of coastal connectivity in the roadways budget, which can be considered as one step forward towards the development of ports. It would, undoubtedly, help in better connectivity of the ports with the hinterland, and further enhancing our logistics network. The overall transportation budget is ₹2,41,387 crores as mentioned above (point 4). Out of this amount, ₹1,31,000 crores have been allocated for railways and ₹57,976 crores for roadways. Of the remaining amount of ₹73,024, how much is allocated to shipping and inland waterways remains to be seen.

A trivial mention about few maritime sectors was made in the Union

Budget FY 2014-15, covering port development, industrial corridors on the coastline, shipping, and development of inland waterways, especially River Ganga. In comparison to the current budget, this budget was incrementally a better budget. The current budget is certainly not in tandem with the vision of our Prime Minister.

As far as maritime security is concerned, Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard are responsible for the country's maritime security. The two forces are comparatively smaller, but are more technologically driven. The defence allocation saw a mere increase of six per cent, and government's 'Make in India' initiative seems to nose dive. This indicates that the Modi's government is not serious, as also mentioned in an article on defence budget allocation. There is a sure need for a comprehensive maritime budget for India to rise as a maritime nation.

The defence allocation for FY 2017-18 saw a meagre increase of six per cent.

A large part of it has been absorbed in the Revenue Budget, which includes salaries and pensions. The budget for modernization of Indian Navy and Coast Guard, the primary maritime security agencies, is likely to be insufficient. Thus, protection of India's maritime interests would be a challenging mandate for the two forces.

For an area where 90 per cent of the world trade goes through the sea, there is a negligible mention of maritime aspects in the budget. Our prime Minister surely has a vision, which is prominent in his Sagarmala initiatives mentioned during his international visits, but there doesn't seem to be any road map for the same. India needs a comprehensive road map for its maritime heritage, which includes various sub-sectors including security, shipping, inland waterways, ports, connectivity, coastal industrial clusters, etc., to develop as a maritime nation.

03 March 2017

Blue Economy: A Catalyst for India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'

Adarsh Vijay

There is an emerging narrative which pushes a green agenda for India's maritime outlook. Blue economy, an idea as conceived by Gunter Pauli, has already received recognition among the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral states. Blue Economy signifies a subset of Economy for marine activities by incorporating the principles of social inclusion, environment sustainability with innovative and dynamic business models. It relies on organic and renewable inputs as catalysts for the sea-based model of development. In short, it seeks to ensure a healthy ocean providing higher productivity.

Despite the awareness of the prospects it offers, India is yet to be enthusiastic to take the 'blue growth' forward. The Maritime Agenda 2010-2020 released by the Ministry of Shipping in 2011 was devoid of even a hint of blue economy. New Delhi's ocean economic activities have invariably been restricted to "port-

led development" model. Blue economy renders an unconventional outlook to explore and exploit the maritime domain in manifold ways. Therefore, three questions are worthy of attention. Why should India push for blue economy? What it offers for India to strengthen its strategic edge? How can it meet the needs of India's Neighbourhood First Policy?

Apart from the economic and environment-friendly postulations, blue economy bears serious foreign policy implications for India. New Delhi has been appearing to be in a quandary with the increasing presence of inimical extra-regional players in the IOR. Chinese policy of "string of pearls" continues to gear towards reducing India's influence in the region. Countries like China and Japan are also seeking a deeper engagement in the region, particularly through maritime diplomacy.

Despite India's sincere endeavours, its littoral counterparts are sometimes circumspect about New Delhi's intentions and policies. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is running out of options to regain its eroding amity that once it maintained among these maritime neighbours. Blue economy can help complement the other channels that brought contradictory results at the end.

The strategic connotation of blue economy is not restricted to the ocean economy and maritime trade. IOR is a rich source of polymetallic sulphides and nodules including iron, copper, zinc, gold, silver and platinum. Untapped oil and natural gas reserves also increase the strategic importance of the seabed in the region. New Delhi had received the exclusive right to explore the Central Indian Oceanic resources in 1987 by the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and two mining sites were consequently established. India had also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ISA in 2016 for exclusive mining rights for polymetallic sulphides in the IOR.

An Ocean Dialogue was initiated in 2015 between the US and India seeking the sustainable development of blue economy. The Maritime Security Dialogue as envisioned in the recent joint statement by Washington and New

Delhi in June 2016 can be considered as an add-on to it. The White House is also considering an Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor to bridge the South and South East Asia. It has serious implications when it is read in consonance with the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative by Beijing along with New Delhi's Act East Policy and the Washington's interests in the Asia-Pacific.

Considering the pessimistic behaviour from the maritime neighbours, the Indian foreign office will have to work on sharpening its "blue edge" as the next device. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) had organized its first Ministerial Blue Economy Conference in September 2015. Mauritius had come up with its policy on blue economy as early as 2013. It had decisively tabled its short and long terms goals dedicated to marine governance in various regional forums of IORA. Blue economy was insisted as an important component by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka and to the SAARC leaders. A joint statement was also signed with Mauritius which identified the critical areas requiring cooperation.

With a push for blue economy by keeping "Make in India" at the core, MEA can approach its counterparts for remoulding a sufficient market for its

commodities. New Delhi's technological edge in the region gives it an edge in facilitating a multilateral resource exploration in the IOR. Offshore infrastructure would be a respite for these geographically dwarfed-states. New Delhi had already pioneered in a similar venture by launching a sea-based transhipment apparatus in the Bay of Bengal. This mechanism at the Sandheads within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is meant to transport the imported coal to the thermal power plant at Farakka in West Bengal. Thus, the ties can also be rejuvenated by pursuing for receiving ocean infrastructure tenders from these Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Furthermore, blue economy as a unifying factor can help build a consensus among these states with India in a myriad of issues.

The future lies in "blue diplomacy." PM Narendra Modi called for Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) during his visit to the three Indian Ocean countries (Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka) in March 2015. Blue economy holds the key to a committed green agenda for the days ahead. India's ocean access and maritime know-how renders an opportunity to take a substantial lead in the seabed platform. Despite the flagship "Neighbourhood First" policy, India's position has not been much promising in keeping the neighbourhood intact. If India does

not keep the pace up, it may lose in this "blue race" and will have to witness the enhanced partnership of the neighbours with its strategic rivalries like China. The proposed Maritime Silk Route by China is posing a consistent challenge to India's interests in the IOR. "Blue pursuits" can subdue the role of external players in the IOR and considerably re-establish New Delhi's hitherto-enjoyed influence in the region.

In the wake of the International Fleet Review held in Vishakhapatnam in February 2016, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi acknowledged blue economy as a component for the country's transformation. It is also palpable that countries like Australia, Bangladesh and Germany are keen in actualising their "blue agenda" with India. However, the need of the hour is a pro-active engagement on a priority basis with the immediate neighbourhood. Blue economy, in this regard, is an economic and political strategy. Besides, it can take us closer to achieving the goals seven and fourteen of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which deal with the renewable energy mix and conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources respectively. It strives for the greening of the ocean economy. If fully exhausted, blue economy is a game changer in the due course.

18 April 2017

India-Bangladesh Maritime Trade: Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT)

Vasudha Chawla

Introduction

After the 1971 India-Pakistan War leading to the creation of Bangladesh, India and Bangladesh signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship, in 1972. Since then, more than 50 bilateral institutional mechanisms were forged between the two countries. Evidently, issues concerning the sharing of river waters, illegal migration, and border security are still outstanding.

At present, India is a part of two economic initiatives that create economic corridors for the landlocked countries of South Asia to the sea, viz. the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative, and the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT). The former is a quadrilateral initiative, focusing on issues such as water resources management, connectivity, power, transport, and infrastructure; the latter is a bilateral protocol connecting the inland waterways of India and

Bangladesh. These economic initiatives showcase India's interest to connect with northeast India, and further on with the South East Asian countries.

In the past five years, trade between India and Bangladesh has grown more than 17 per cent.¹ Bangladesh seeks to enhance bilateral trade further towards the northeastern states of India. As indicated by the officials of Bangladesh, 100 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are being planned in Bangladesh, of which, two SEZs in north-west Bangladesh are dedicated to Indian businesses.² Bangladesh has been welcoming the Indian private sector to help achieve the desired growth, benefitting both. Companies like Reliance, Adani, Tata, and Godrej are already present in Bangladesh. The northeastern states of India offer Bangladesh a desired market, particularly in the FMCG sector.

This issue brief examines the geostrategic dimensions of the India-

Bangladesh bilateral Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade, and its ramifications for the two countries.

Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT)

In 1972, India and Bangladesh signed the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT). It was initially renewable every two years; however, since October 2001, the renewal was done in a haphazard manner. In June 2015, Prime Minister Modi's visit to Bangladesh propelled the bilateral ties and the two governments renewed the protocol on 6 June 2015.³

The protocol is an agreement between the two governments for the transportation of goods and keeping their respective waterways navigable, while providing infrastructure facilities. The protocol further states that both countries will mutually decide the proposed expenses; voyage permissions shall be taken at least four days prior to the actual journey; and the vessels shall share equal tonnage.⁴ The cargo tonnage share between the two parties on paper seems highly attractive, questioning its viability, as the routes are dominated by Bangladeshi vessels.

In May 2017, the two governments also signed an MoU on river cruises on

the PIWTT routes, which will see the upcoming cruise vessel *Charaidew 2* begin its voyage from September 2018.⁵ The execution of plans on waterways between the two countries has been quite efficient, portraying their individual interests.

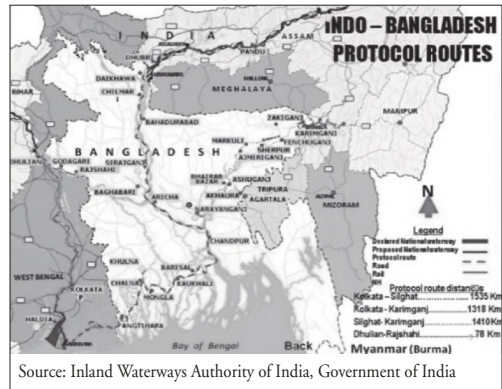


Fig.1. Official Map of PIWTT

The EXIM trade between India and Bangladesh is of great economic salience for the two countries. However, in terms of quantity, Indian exports to Bangladesh are higher than the imports from Bangladesh.⁶ This has led to a one-way traffic on the waterways, and increased costs for vessel operators. Other than this, the protocol has a five-year automatic renewal, until either government terminates the protocol. The termination is valid on the expiry of the protocol, and shall not affect the actions already taken.⁷ This clause shall prove to be beneficial for the two



Fig.2. Key routes of PIWTT (Source: IWAI, GoI)

countries, as the initial developments would not come to a standstill with the change in governments or the expiration of the protocol. The India-Bangladesh Protocol Routes include parts of rivers Ganga, Hooghly, Brahmaputra, and Barak, and the Sundarbans delta (Fig.1). The key routes are indicated in Fig.2.

Developments under this protocol have taken major strides. Initially, Bangladesh allowed a transshipment of food grains to Tripura on humanitarian grounds, and another transshipment of equipment for ONGC's power plant.⁸ In 2015, Prime Minister Modi's visit to Bangladesh further strengthened the ties. In May 2017, India and Bangladesh initiated the process to make River Brahmaputra (also known as Jamuna in Bangladesh) navigable through dredging. In this, India bears 80 per cent of the total cost.⁹ Though the primary aim of the PIWTT is economic, it will also help the two countries geostrategically.

The signed protocol between the two governments will primarily drive their respective economies towards growth. While Bangladesh aims to grow its economy through an increase in trade, India's interest is not only restricted to the economy but also includes geostrategic issues. If Bangladesh is enclosed by India on three sides, India is separated by Bangladesh, while being connected via a narrow corridor. Thus, India's primary interest is to efficiently connect the northeast with the main hinterland by using the waterways.

Strategic Interests of Bangladesh

Bangladesh's economy has grown by 0.6 per cent in the financial year 2016–17, pushing its GDP to 7.2 per cent. With an aim to increase its trade with India, Bangladesh would benefit from the services it would offer to Indian vessels during their voyage, which will further facilitate growth in their service industry

and enhance their logistics businesses. Since Bangladesh is looking forward to export to the northeastern states of India, the protocol opens various opportunities for Bangladesh to enhance their trade, which will in turn generate revenues.

Being a deltaic country, Bangladesh is home to 54 rivers that flow from India into the Bay of Bengal, of which the Ganga and the Brahmaputra are vital for both the countries. In Bangladesh, they are famously known as Padma and Jamuna, respectively.

Bangladesh's political leadership is often driven by either the Bangladesh Awami League, which has a pro-India tilt, or the Bangladesh National Party, which has an anti-India tilt. The most favourable bilateral ties with India have taken place under the leadership of the Awami League. But there have also been a few instances that have weakened the ties. Former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh lacked West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee's support during his visit to Bangladesh to sign the Teesta agreement. The agreement was not signed as Mamta Banerjee argued that water sharing would harm agriculture in northern West Bengal. Also, the water sharing agreement on the Ganges signed in 1996 created problems for Bangladesh. After the construction of the Farrakka Barrage, Bangladesh had

issues with the water flow, which had been diverted into the Hooghly River, causing water scarcity in Bangladesh for drinking and agriculture. The 30-year agreement is approaching its renewal, which might be difficult with problems persisting.

On the other hand, recent developments such as resolving the maritime boundary dispute under the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the signing of the Land Boundary Accord, have shown progress in the bilateral relationship. Bangladesh surely is looking forward to the settlement of Teesta water sharing. But, Mamta Banerjee's proposal (made during Sheikh Hasina's visit in 2017),¹⁰ for sharing the water of the river Torsa instead of the river Teesta, might further delay the signing of Teesta agreement.

A major part of the PIWTT routes inevitably passes through Bangladesh, which will give Bangladesh leverage to control the river routes. At present, Bangladeshi vessels enjoy cheaper diesel costs, cheaper labour costs, and lower capital costs vis-à-vis Indian vessels, due to lower safety standards adopted in Bangladesh.¹¹ The dominance of Bangladeshi vessels in the region will also give them an opportunity to put pressure on India for signing the Teesta agreement. Bangladesh has also

remained silent on Mamta Banerjee's proposal of water sharing of the Torsa river. In short, the strategic advantages of Bangladesh would create geopolitical ramifications for India.

Strategic Interests of India

India's primary interest to integrate with the northeast is quite evident with the recent developments on the protocol. Bangladesh provides India access to northeast India, both via land and by the waterways. The waterways are known for their cost-friendly and environment-friendly characteristics. Thus, transportation through waterways seems to be the best alternative to land routes. Also, the poor infrastructure of roads led to the signing of the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade.

In 2001, the Ministry of the North-East Region (NER) was founded to have complete commitment towards the development of the region, and to tap the potential of its people and natural resources.¹² The NER was vital for former Prime Minister Narsimha Rao's Look East policy, whereas it is crucial for the current government's Act East policy to connect to the South-East Asia.

The northeastern states do not have direct access to the sea, and are landlocked. Their situation is similar to

other landlocked countries of the world, as their economic prosperity is the lowest among the developing countries.¹³ They especially lack infrastructure development and the role of private players, which generate efficiency, higher productivity, and incomes. The northeastern states of India would benefit the most from the waterways. There would be sufficient availability of goods and services in the region. The vessel services and river fishing would generate employment; the maintenance of waterways would help prevent floods in the areas; and mainly, the seven sisters would be accessible for the transportation of goods, especially at the time of any calamity.

Being economically viable, waterways would benefit Indian traders because of reduced transport costs. The existing infrastructure development of river ports and multimodal transport networks under the Project Sagarmala will further enhance the overall logistics costs and bring economic prosperity.

The lack of accessibility to the northeast has been under discussion for decades, and even the few recently proposed developments by the Indian government have mainly centred around road and rail connectivity projects. But the Siliguri corridor, known for its vulnerability because of its narrow

width, is not sufficient to connect to the seven sister states. Famously known as the 'chicken's neck', the corridor is 100km long and the width comes down to as low as 17km at one point.¹⁴ Thus, to supplement the land routes through the corridor, strong bilateral ties with Bangladesh on waterways is the only viable option left for India. India looks forward to strengthening the ties and revive the lost water routes in the region.

Moreover, Bhutan's exit from the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement might turn out to be fruitful for the development of inland waterways between the two countries as an alternate route. The reason for its exit is environmental concerns.¹⁵ Thus, for India, it is the best opportunity to move forward with the development of waterways to transport goods in an environment-friendly manner. This might even solve the problem for Bhutan, as they would enjoy equal benefits by using waterways as a mode of transportation.

Possible Challenges

The execution of navigable waterways will no doubt face some serious challenges in its course to become efficient. The siltation of rivers is a common problem in the Sundarbans delta, being the largest delta in the world. This will require

regular dredging in the waterway routes. As mentioned above, India is bearing 80 per cent of the dredging costs initially; but the requirement of dredging is more frequent in deltaic regions. Thus, the cost incurred by both the countries, especially India, will increase. Also, an effective and efficient management is needed to perform regular dredging in the entire protocol route.

The Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers are seasonal in nature and thus, proper infrastructure is necessary. The construction of locks should be the primary concern after dredging. The locks help in maintaining efficient water levels for vessels to ply smoothly. As mentioned in a report, transportation in Assam becomes unpredictable during the monsoon. Operating small passenger ferry boats is risky. Similarly, between December and March, big vessels are unable to ply due to low water levels. This has led to the untapped potential of trade and transit through the waterways.¹⁶

Way Ahead for India

India has been endeavoring to keep good relations with its neighbour despite the conflicting interests within Bangladesh's political parties. India's efforts to connect its northeastern states might prove to be fruitful after the rivers

are made navigable. But, Bangladesh's leverage in the region will continue to hinder smooth navigation till the Teesta agreement is signed.

The protocol routes will open doors for India to trade with the South East Asian countries through Bangladesh. The development of waterways in this landlocked region will be a boon for their economy, simultaneously also satisfying the individual interests of each country. The effective development of

these routes might also benefit the BBIN agreement if Bhutan opts for waterways to supplement roadways.

The above developments in the region support the Indian Prime Minister's initiative: 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas'. The collaboration will further benefit every country in the region because of mutual interests.

16 June 2017

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Implementing SDG 14: Takeaways from the Ocean Conference

Kapil Narula

The high-level United Nations (UN) conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) was held at UN Headquarters, New York from 5 to 9 June 2017. The event was specially convened to build international momentum for the implementation of SDG 14 and coincided with the World Oceans Day, celebrated every year on 08 June.

In a landmark agreement in September 2015, all 193 member countries of the United Nations adopted the document titled ‘Transforming our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, with an aim to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030. As a part of the 2030 Agenda, 17 SDGs which were universal, inclusive and indivisible were adopted. SDG 14 was dedicated to oceans and aims to ‘Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for

sustainable development’. SDG 14 has 10 targets dealing with marine pollution; marine ecosystems; ocean acidification; overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; marine conservation and eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies, amongst others.

Although oceans are essential to support life on earth, SDG 14 is relatively lower on priority for many developing and under developed countries which face compelling challenges such as eliminating poverty and hunger, providing education, clean water and sanitation for their citizens. The Ocean Conference was organized in order to focus on the centrality of the oceans for life on earth and to highlight the importance of SDG 14 in sustainable development. The aim of the event was to identify ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14 amongst all member countries; to build on existing successful partnerships

as well as to stimulate innovative and concrete new partnerships; involve all relevant stakeholders; share experiences gained in the implementation of SDG 14; and to provide an input to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) which is scheduled to be held in July 2017.

The Oceans Conference attracted approximately 4,000 delegates including 16 heads of State and a large number of stakeholders. It also succeeded in building momentum towards action on SDG 14. Discussions were held on a wide variety of issues such as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), IUU fishing, Blue Economy, international legally binding agreement on marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), plastics and ocean pollution, climate change and its impact on oceans, small scale and artisanal fisheries etc. thereby effectively mainstreaming maritime issues at the UN in a coherent and single voice.

The Ocean Conference produced three key outcomes. The first was an intergovernmentally-agreed declaration in the form of a document titled 'Our Ocean, Our Future: Call for Action'. This declaration reconfirms the commitment of UN Member States for the implementation of SDG 14 and calls on all stakeholders to strengthen

cooperation and coordination among institutions at all levels. Participants also agreed to promote effective and transparent multi-stakeholder partnerships and to mobilize resources for collection and sharing of data and knowledge. While the document does not make any new commitments, it reinforces the support of various actors to cooperatively seek solutions for meeting the challenges in implementing SDG 14.

The second outcome was the large number of voluntary commitments by governments and other stakeholders for implementing SDG 14. These initiatives were pledged by various actors - individually or in partnership - and would contribute to the implementation of SDG 14. These actions include up scaling of existing successful efforts, introducing new initiatives as well as financing and capacity building efforts. Of a total of 1328 commitments, 615 were made by the national governments, 112 by UN entities, 58 by intergovernmental organizations, 277 by NGOs, 84 by civil society organizations, and remaining by scientific communities, private sector and academic institutions on various oceans related aspects.

India registered 17 commitments including mapping of potential fishing

zones for sustainable fisheries and supporting artisanal fishing; designating Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and reduction of plastic pollution. Laying emphasis on ocean observation systems it committed to developing the Indian Tsunami Early Warning System (ITEWS) and a Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (RIMES) apart from using technology for monitoring the health of coastal seas and deploying dedicated space technologies and assets for ocean applications and its continued support to research in the Arctic Ocean. It also registered its commitment towards developing 'green ports' and coastal community development as a part of Project Sagaramala.

The third outcome was the conduct of partnership dialogues which were successful in facilitating sharing of experiences and knowledge between the participants. Seven partnership dialogues were held viz. addressing marine pollution; managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems; minimizing and addressing ocean acidification; making fisheries sustainable; increasing economic benefits to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets;

increasing scientific knowledge and developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology; and enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). These issues were discussed in the background of the concept papers presented in the event on the subject.

While the Ocean Conference succeeded in its aim of bringing the oceans for discussions at the high table, it may however be argued that little was achieved in terms of concrete action. Apart from the formal issue of statement and expression of solidarity and support by all stakeholders, there was little progress in terms of verifiable actions. The commitments made by various actors are also voluntary in nature and are an expression of interest with no quantifiable aspect in terms of committing financial resources, time for completion of activity and have a minimal measurable aspect, if any. Without inbuilt aspects of monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) such voluntary commitments have been observed to disappear off the radar once the spotlight from the event fades away. To sum up, the event did bring a spotlight on the need for action on implementing

SDG 14 and suggested a way ahead, but various cooperative arrangements and commitments need to be implemented so that the call for action materializes into actual action.

With an EEZ of more than 2.3 million square km, India has vast interests in the maritime domain. As an emerging economy which is committed to sustainable development

for the well-being of its people, India needs to increase its presence and visibility at international events. Such an opportunity was effectively lost with no major interventions or proposed partnerships statements from the Indian contingent except a statement presented on the behalf of the Minister of State for External Affairs of India, M.J. Akbar.

10 July 2017

Domestic Cruise Tourism in India: An Assessment

Vasudha Chawla

Introduction

The advent of domestic cruise tourism in India is a relatively new phenomenon, although it is a well-known industry around the world. Many coastal countries, particularly island countries, are dependent on cruise tourism for their economic growth. With a 7,516-km long coastline, India has immense potential to develop a domestic cruise industry, which could significantly contribute to economic growth of the country. Cruise tourism is gaining popularity in India, for both social and leisure activities and hence there is an immense opportunity to develop the domestic cruise sector in the country.

Initially targeted at a high-end niche segment of society, cruise tourism has changed its stereotypical image and has opened its doors to a much larger consumer base. By observing this growing industry in India, this issue briefs aims to highlight the opportunities in the cruise sector that

can be utilized to complement other major development projects. It will also highlight the challenges that the cruise tourism sector has been facing, using as a case study, India's first domestic cruise vessel, the *AMET Majesty*.¹

India's Cruise Industry

As India sits astride the busy Sea Lines of Communication that crisscross the Indian Ocean, its nine coastal states, 7516km long coastline, and 14,500km of inland waterways, collectively impart to the country, a natural advantage in the development of cruise tourism. The Indian peninsula extends over a thousand miles into the Indian Ocean, and this provides an additional comparative advantage for the development of the cruise tourism sector in the country.

According to a 2015 report, India ranks ninth in a list of the world's most popular tourist destinations, and is a preferred cruise destination.² Indian ports are primary ports of call for foreign cruise lines. In 2015-16, cruise

vessels made 128 calls at five major ports — Mumbai, Cochin, Goa, New Mangalore and Chennai. Presently, while foreign cruise ships are allowed only in Mumbai, Chennai and Kochi, domestic operators offer river cruises on the Brahmaputra and Ganga, which are a part of the National Waterways 1 & 2, and sea cruises to the Lakshadweep Islands and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, from the ports of Mumbai, Kochi, Chennai and Kolkata.³

In India, there is a lack of awareness and several misconceptions about cruise tourism, and there is little or no realization of the opportunities it offers in the Indian market. India's culture and heritage have attracted tourists from various countries, and for that reason, India has a very large number of well-developed tourist locations. Knowing that India's major heritage sites happen to be located in the coastal areas, cruise tourism development will surely be beneficial.

Opportunities

The Indian government's commitment towards making India a cruise destination is quite clear from the measures taken by it to promote this sector.

Six of India's major ports are being developed as world-class cruise terminals. These ports, which are located in states

where tourism is a strongly supported sector, provide a ready platform for the development of cruise tourism. These ports are Mumbai, Goa, Kochi, New Mangalore, Tuticorin and Chennai. In four of them, terminals for cruise liners are ready, but they require additional infrastructure for passengers to have a smooth entry into the city.

The port of Kochi, for instance, has basic berthing facilities at the Samudrika Convention Centre. However, foreign ships that call at the port, are too large for the jetty to handle, forcing the ships to berth at the Ernakulam Wharf, where they jostle for space with a variety of cargo ships, at a wharf that does not have facilities for cruise liners. The Kochi Port Trust submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Tourism for the creation of a new terminal. Estimated to be completed by 2019, the terminal would have state-of-the-art facilities, making Kochi a preferred destination for cruise tourism. Kochi is also the first port in India to set up an online immigration clearance facility. The port attracted 39 cruise liners in 2016 and is expected to cater to 45 cruises in 2017.⁴ Encouraged by the success of operations by Mumbai's first cruise ship, the *'Costa neo Classica'*, the Ministry of Shipping has planned to develop cruise terminals in all the above-mentioned ports. Costa Cruises,

for instance, have extended their reach in India to Kochi and Mangalore Ports as well.⁵ Likewise, the Royal Caribbean Cruises plan to begin domestic voyages in India on the West Coast, starting in December 2017.⁶ With major cruise lines entering India, one can imagine the potential Indian market has, to develop a domestic cruise tourism industry. In 2016-17, India's passenger traffic for cruise tourism stood at 1.76 lakh, and this is estimated to grow to 1.5 million by 2031-32.⁷

The government of Kerala, too, has drawn up an ambitious, ₹300 crore 'Malabar Cruise Tourism Plan', to link the rivers and backwaters in North of Kerala.⁸ The plan is a part of the development of the National Waterway 3, which is a major tourist destination in the state.

Other than state governments, the central government, too, has launched several initiatives to boost India's cruise tourism industry. Amongst these are the following⁹:

- (i) The Ministry of Shipping has further requested the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council to continue to exempt Cruise Tourism from the ambit of GST.
- (ii) E-visa facilities have been extended to five major ports, following the model of Kochi port.

- (iii) A 30 per cent rebate is being offered on vessel related charges by all major ports to cruise ships.
- (iv) Cruise vessels are exempted from any priority, ousting, or shifting charges at all major ports, provided the vessel informs the port 30 days in advance.
- (v) Major ports provide 25 per cent rebate in vessel related charges for coastal cruise movements, in addition to the existing rebate of 40 per cent for coastal vessels.
- (vi) Walk-in or preferential berthing is given to cruise vessels at their home ports, without any extra charge.
- (vii) Foreign Flag passenger vessels are allowed to call at Indian ports without obtaining a license from DG Shipping. This was initially allowed for a maximum period of 10 years, but now (with effect from 06 February 2009) the period for which this relaxation is applicable has been extended to 15 years.
- (viii) A Task Force to promote cruise tourism has been constituted jointly by the Ministry of Shipping and the Ministry of Tourism. The Task Force is responsible for formulating suitable strategies and for facilitating their execution.

- (ix) The government has implemented Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the handling of cruise vessels.
- (x) A number of 'Port-Level Committees' have been constituted to address manpower, coordination, and logistics issues, for the optimal handling of cruise vessels. Each such committee comprises the chairman of the respective Major Port Trust as its Chairman, the Secretary Tourism of the concerned state as its Vice-Chairman, and the Regional Director of the respective region of the Ministry of Tourism as its Convener.
- (xi) The Ministry of Tourism also extends financial assistance to Ports for tourism infrastructure, under its Scheme for Assistance to Central Agencies.

These reforms have attracted various foreign-flag vessels to Indian ports, and has also opened up opportunities for domestic companies to venture into this sector. With other projects, such as 'Sagarmala' and its sub-projects such as port industrialisation, existing companies and entrepreneurs can set up cruise tourism-related businesses. They would be supported by the above-mentioned rebates, along by other

initiatives like 'Start-Up India', 'Skill India' and 'Make in India'. All these initiatives and projects complement one another and hence, it will not only promote domestic cruise tourism, but also help in the development of Coastal Economic Zones and the success of Project Sagarmala.

Cruise tourism is gaining currency among Indians, albeit incrementally. This changing trend has seen people of all age and income groups preferring cruises as a mode of travel and relaxation; it is no longer considered to be an unaffordable luxury. With the concept of the Blue Economy very much part of the global discourse, cruise liner operators are looking for islands as their destinations, which makes India, which has more than 1300 islands and islets, a potential cruise hub.

Challenges

Despite growing interest of Indians in cruise tourism industry, India is yet to use its potential to the optimum usage. Except for South Asian cruises, where India's passenger share was six per cent in 2016¹⁰, Indians form a very small percentage on other cruise lines. Though India has the potential to develop its cruise tourism industry, certain challenges have hindered the growth of businesses in this industry.

Inadequate infrastructure and a lack of clear cruise policy are two of the more significant ones.

India's first cruise ship, *AMET Majesty*, offers a telling example of these challenges, whereby the AMET Group faced several hurdles in achieving their goal of making their cruise ship an economically viable venture that could be afforded by common people.

*Case Study: AMET Majesty Cruise Ship – 2011*¹¹

In 2011, the Chennai-based company, AMET Shipping Pvt Ltd, of the AMET Group, invested ₹100 crore in procuring a 35-year-old cruise vessel, the *Arberia* from its Greek owner. This training-cum-cruise vessel was renamed the *AMET Majesty*. The ship had a capacity of 700 passengers, who were served by a crew of 200.

The company tied up with the famous Thomas Cook Group for weekend tourist voyages, targeted at urban, middle-class Indians and foreign tourists. It offered affordable rates and also gave opportunities for the training of young cadets. The Directorate General of Shipping accorded approval for the ship to train 90 deck cadets and 120 engineering cadets for a period of six months, which was the period

stipulated before they could appear for the competency examination conducted by DG Shipping.¹² The routes on which the ship voyaged were Chennai-Andaman-Phuket-Chennai; Chennai-Vizag-Chennai; Chennai-Trincomalle-Karaikal-Chennai; Mumbai-Lakshadweep-Mumbai; Kochi-Lakshadweep-Kochi; and Kochi-Maldives-Colombo-Kochi.¹³

The AMET Majesty offered every service a cruise could have, but faced formidable challenges in terms of economic viability. Regulations such as harbour charges were incurred at every single entry and exit in same ports, making it difficult for the company to keep its rates pocket-friendly. Moreover, these charges are based on the Gross Registered Tonnage (GRT) of a vessel, which is a measure of volume and not mass. Consequently, a cruise vessel has comparatively higher GRT than a cargo ship. The security clearances to be taken by the ship were no different from those mandated for an international cruise liner. Thus, flying the Indian flag on the ship made it no easier or simpler to clear security than it would have been had the AMET Majesty been a foreign flag vessel. The high costs incurred in obtaining security clearances was a further constraint in the company's effort to make the cruise economically

viable for the public. Hence, in spite of good passenger traffic, the company discontinued their venture.

Based upon its unhappy experience, the AMET Group submitted a series of recommendations to the Ministry of Shipping, Government of India. This document is appreciated to have served as a catalyst for the present reforms.

The above case study brings out many facets of the challenges the company faced a couple of years ago. Though various projects and initiatives are now in place for the development of port infrastructure and to address major challenges faced by cruise liners, the time and costs inherent in the implementation of these initiatives are, in and of themselves, a matter of concern. Moreover, ensuring adequate awareness of these initiatives amongst the various components of the cruise industry, is another aspect needing focused attention directed at the travel fraternity as well as the passengers themselves.

In June 2017, the Minister of Shipping, Mr. Nitin Gadkari, announced the release of India's New Cruise Shipping Policy in July 2017¹⁴, but there have not been any further developments on the same till date. He has also written to the Home Ministry requesting the enhancement of human security at 12 major ports by deploying

the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), to promote cruise tourism.¹⁵ This would also mitigate any threats to India's coastal security that might be associated with the increased movement of cruise liners.

Recommendations

For India to develop its cruise industry, port infrastructure is of prime importance. Infrastructural developments need to pick up the pace at various ports, prioritising the existing major ports, which are already ports-of-call for foreign cruise vessels. Moreover, passenger facilities at all major ports are necessary for cruise ships to berth; this will also allow passengers to visit the port city, in turn increasing tourism for India. Hence, instead of developing the ports merely as cruise terminals, the government should consider developing these as 'port destinations'.

There is also a need to promote river cruises to complement coastal ones. River cruises plying on India's National Waterways will complement Coastal Cruise Tourism. Vessels can be reconfigured as 'River-Sea Vessels', suitable for both rivers and the sea, which can then help to integrate cruise tourism as a whole.

At present, the various projects and initiatives do complement one another's

development, but integrating them completely is what India needs. For instance, the 'Skill India' initiative can be incorporated to create awareness about the cruise tourism industry. Likewise, the "Digital India' campaign can be used to market the potential of the cruise industry in India, while organizing and conducting workshops for the various

other industries that constitute a part of the cruise industry.

A holistic approach needs to be adopted by India, to be able to fully tap the potential that the domestic cruise sector quite clearly possesses.

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One Trillion Tons: The Iceberg, Antarctica and Climate Change

Sanjay Misra

The second week of July 2017 saw an event that can only be described as a ‘mammoth moment’ taking place, as a trillion ton iceberg broke off from western Antarctica.¹ The size of the iceberg has been pegged at more than three times the size of the greater London area. Scientists who had been monitoring the progress of a crack nearly 100 miles long in an ice shelf in western Antarctica had been anticipating the break and the iceberg was finally reported to have broken off on July 12, 2017.

Dramatic as the event itself seems, it is important to assess the effects of the breaking off of such a large mass of ice on the seas surrounding this area and to also try and understand if climate change and the attendant global warming is responsible for this occurrence. The common perception is that if something so large, so dramatic has occurred, especially in the contemporary world where numbers- and big ones at that-

never fail to impress, then so must be its implications. To view this phenomenon holistically, it is important to understand what happened and how it happened.

Antarctica is the southernmost continent and is situated at the South Pole. The size of the continent is approximately 14 million square kilometres,² where temperatures dip to -90 degrees Celsius and wind speeds at times exceed 300 kmph. A less known fact is that it is the world’s highest continent with an average land height of 2.3 km. All these facts apart, what is more of interest and consequence is that Antarctica is almost completely covered with a sheet of ice. The trillion ton iceberg broke off from an ice shelf, known as the Larsen C ice shelf in western Antarctica. This ice shelf happens to be the northernmost major ice shelf of the continent and is situated at the edge of western Antarctica. The shelf is around 1100 feet thick. North

of the Larsen C are the Larsen B and Larsen A ice shelves. So is it odd that such a large iceberg has just broken off in the Antarctica? The Larsen A ice Shelf, which is furthest north, collapsed in 1995 while the Larsen B ice shelf disintegrated in 2002. The iceberg which has now broken off from the Larsen C ice shelf, was confirmed to have broken off between July 10 and July 12, 2017 by NASA's Aqua MODIS satellite³. While the break off is normal behaviour for ice shelves, what is of note is its size- approximately 5,800 sq km or over 2,200 sq miles. The iceberg named A68⁴, while said to weigh more than one trillion tons is not the largest iceberg or for that matter anywhere close to being the biggest. In fact, the largest iceberg recorded⁵, the B15, with an area of 11,007 square kilometres, about double the size of the Larsen C iceberg and as big as the island of Jamaica, calved off the Ross ice shelf in 2000.

So is climate change responsible for this trillion ton chunk of ice breaking off? The calving of bergs⁶ at the forward edge of the shelf is a very natural behaviour. The breaking away of icebergs is one of the means for the shelf to maintain equilibrium against the inflow of ice from feeding glaciers on land and from snowfall mass. Scientists from Project MIDAS⁷ who had been monitoring

the break in the Larsen C ice shelf believe that this is part of the normal behaviour of ice shelves though its size is what makes it unusual. The team of researchers also have not yet found 'any link to human-induced climate change.' However, there is no denying that climate change and global warming are affecting the environment and thus this event should not be seen in isolation.

Climate scientists are also looking into how the Earth's Albedo fluctuates over a period of time. White surfaces like snow on glaciers reflect the solar rays while darker ones like oceans are more absorbent. On the whole, about 30 per cent of the energy coming to earth is reflected back into space. Albedo⁸ is a ratio which describes how much of solar energy any given surface reflects. A warming climate would result in glaciers shrinking and sea ice melting, thus reducing the reflecting surface and increasing the absorbent surfaces, as darker and greater heat absorbing surfaces would now be exposed. A reduction in the albedo would disrupt the balance and cause an even faster heating up of the planet. Pollution also has a role to play as deposits on ice sheets would darken them allowing more absorption. However, it would be prudent to mention that as regards the Larsen A and B ice shelves that

disintegrated earlier, there is a view that warming climate very probably played a part- but also that the signs like thinning that were observed at Larsen A and B⁹ have not been seen in Larsen C, as yet. Glaciologists are largely of the view that while there is currently no cause for worry, monitoring will have to be done to keep a watch on the stability of the shelf and its calving rate.

As regards a rise in the sea levels, the common perception is that the creation of such an inordinately huge iceberg would result in an increase in sea levels. This is a misconceived notion. And this is why. Ice sheets become icebergs when they separate from the land mass and become free floating. However, ice shelves float on water and as the sheet of ice was floating before it became an iceberg- there would be no change in the sea levels. Thus, the iceberg is unlikely to immediately contribute to any rise in sea levels. However, on a cautious note, the rate of melt in the polar regions would need continuous monitoring to assess the impact of climate change in the years to come.

Finally, would the iceberg pose a threat to shipping? The 200-metre thick

iceberg is not expected to move very far in a short span of time. However, it could under the influence of currents and winds, move northwards perhaps even to the South Atlantic. Incidentally, many icebergs from this region have ended up around South Georgia, a British overseas territory in the South Atlantic. And unlike in the days gone by of the 'Titanic' and others, there is but a slim chance of the berg posing a threat at sea as the availability of satellite imagery and advanced navigation systems would by and large preclude iceberg collisions.

While climate change may not have been directly responsible for this event, it is a well-established fact that climate change and global warming are a reality- and the effects are already showing in the Arctic. The calving of the iceberg, while resulting largely in nought change in the immediacy of the event, brings attention once again to the environment that needs to be continuously monitored, especially of regions such as the Antarctic and the Arctic, to enable us to forecast changes that could affect the oceans and all that they entail.

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*China, US and
Developments in Pacific-Asia*

CPEC Drives China-Pakistan Naval Cooperation

Manpreet S Chawla

An International Maritime Conference on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port was held on 13-14 December 2016 at Gwadar. It was organised by the Pakistan Navy and the Pakistan-China Institute (PCI) on the theme – ‘CPEC and Gwadar Port as Harbinger of Regional Integration and Maritime Economic Development.’ Officials from China and Iran were in attendance.

Under the auspices of the Conference, the Pakistan Navy unveiled a special ‘Task Force (TF)-88’ commissioned for the protection of Gwadar deep-sea port. The TF-88 would comprise of warships, attack helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles and other surveillance assets. Pakistan has already established a ‘Special Security Division’ consisting of 20,000 personnel for security along the land route of the CPEC. The Pakistan Navy has also raised a Coastal Security and Harbour Defence Force for tackling threats along the coast and stationed a Force Protection Battalion

at Gwadar for protection of Chinese workers. The establishment of TF-88 and associated security apparatus as well as the conference mark the intensifying China-Pakistan maritime and naval cooperation during the calendar year 2016.

China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC), in October 2016, confirmed the sale of eight Type 041 Yuan-class diesel-electric submarines to Pakistan. These eight submarines will be commissioned during the next decade; four of these will be constructed in China and the rest would be assembled in Karachi. This deal is worth between US \$4 billion and \$5 billion and is the largest overseas arms deal for China. However, there are reports that Pakistan would have to repay cost of the submarines at a low-interest rate loan extended by China.

China and Pakistan have also conducted a series of combined naval exercises in 2016. Following the maiden

exercise in September 2014, the Pakistan Navy and the PLA Navy conducted the second bilateral naval exercises in the East China Sea from 28 December 2015 to 03 January 2016. The exercise coincided with the seven-day visit to Shanghai by a Pakistan naval taskforce, consisting of a frigate and a supply ship. The third edition of the combined naval exercises was held off Karachi, on 11 January 2016, and included the ships of the participation 21st Chinese naval escort taskforce.

The fourth bilateral naval exercise was conducted in mid-November 2016 in the Arabian Sea. The five-day exercise comprised of harbour and sea-phases. It covered a wide spectrum of maritime and naval operations involving ships, helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft, boarding operations by special forces, air defence exercises, communication drills and several manoeuvres by the ships of both navies. The November 2016 exercise was noteworthy and focused exclusively on providing maritime security to the CPEC and Gwadar deep-sea port. The exercises highlight the increasing complexity in terms of size, ships and equipment involved, duration as well as complexity of exercises. Further, the increasing cooperative engagements between China and Pakistan to address security challenges to the CPEC denotes the importance attached to it.

Pakistan and China share a long-standing 'all weather relationship'. Cooperation in nuclear technology, ballistic missiles and other strategic support notwithstanding, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become the linchpin of the relationship between the two countries. Under the CPEC initiative, China has promised to spend US \$46 billion to develop infrastructure projects like power plants, gas pipelines, expressways etc. from the

Karakoram highway in Gilgit-Baltistan to the port of Gwadar in Balochistan. The CPEC is also a part of China's strategy to overcome its 'Malacca Dilemma' by developing alternative land routes for its ever-increasing energy demand. The PLA Navy's increased engagement also augments Pakistan Navy's capabilities and is considered critical for enhancing maritime security in the region.

China's 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) initiative has geostrategic value and is slowly gaining acceptance in South Asia with CPEC as the 'flagship project.' It is also developing ports in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, which will be the CPEC. These ports consist of dual-use facilities and can be used for military purpose as and when required. Besides its 'logistics base' in Djibouti, reports emanating from the Conference point

towards China building a naval base at Gwadar to safeguard its economic and strategic interests. This grand strategic initiative with significant commitment provides China a perfect opportunity to advance its presence in the Indian Ocean.

On 22 December 2016, the PLA Navy celebrated the eighth anniversary of the launch of its anti-piracy escort missions in the Gulf of Aden, successfully completing its 1,000 escort tasks. The PLA Navy has gained considerable experience from the anti-piracy and escort missions far from its coast and

its submarines have docked more than once in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Along with its rapidly modernising fleet, the steady expansion of China's activities is intended to shift the current naval balance of power in the Indian Ocean region. The presence of an extra regional power in its backyard has serious security implications for India. With Iran and Russia announcing their desire to join the CPEC, India needs to respond to the changing maritime balance in South Asia.

03 January 2017

China - Sri Lanka Strategic Hambantota Port Deal

Anjelina Patrick

Introduction

Sri Lanka is conscious of its geostrategic position, and the advantage its ports hold in the Indian Ocean Region. One such port is the Hambantota Port, situated along one of the world's busiest east-west shipping routes, which passes 10 nautical miles from Hambantota. The island country holds the potential to become an advanced commercial hub so as to accelerate the country's economy and trade, with the help of infrastructural investment from foreign entities like China.

China has already invested USD 2 billion on the Hambantota Port Development Project. These investments were made without any feasible study or consideration of other repayment options. The port's existing economic non-viability, massive maintenance expenses, and huge interest payments have led to a serious 'debt trap' for the island country. In December 2006, the initial agreement between the two parties

was signed; wherein the Sri Lankan government was expected to sell 80 per cent stake in the Hambantota port for a 99-year lease, for USD1.12 billion.

This issue brief aims to trace the development of the Hambantota Port Development Project vis-a-vis the degrading economy of Sri Lanka. It further examines the implications of the proposed agreement on the security, politics, and society of Sri Lanka. It also attempts to analyze China's intentions behind the huge non-viable investment.

Background

The Hambantota port is an initiative of the Lankan government to further develop the strategic port and proposed industrial zone of 1,235 acres. The port project is financed and constructed by the China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited (CMPHCL), a fully Chinese government owned enterprise. The CMPHCL owns Colombo International Container Terminal Limited (CICT) which, apart from

Table 1. Phases of Hambantota Port Project

Phase	Construction Commenced	Work Completed	Estimated Cost (USD)	Status
Phase - I	January 2008	November 2010 ²	650 Million ³	Currently Operational
Phase - II	November 2012 ⁴	-	810 Million ⁵	In progress
Phase - III	-	2023	-	Future Development

developing the Hambantota Port, also operates the Colombo South Terminal through a 35-year Build-Operate-Transfer agreement.¹

In 2005, a Danish Consultancy organisation conducted a study of the construction of the Hambantota Port. The development project is divided into three phases. Phase – I of the development project have already been completed, and is now operational. The construction of the Phase – I was estimated to cost USD 360 million, with 85 per cent of funding from China Exim Bank and the balance 15 per cent by the Sri Lankan Port Authority (SLPA). In addition to the loan, the country had to incur additional expenses such as payment to the Danish consultancy, the cost of land attained for construction, payment of fluctuating equipment costs, etc.

The construction work of Phase - II of the project is substantially completed.⁶

Phase – II is estimated to cost around USD 750 million. The development project also includes an artificial island, built with the excavated material from Phase – II of Hambantota port. The island is located within the boundary of the port development area and has an approximate area of 43 Hectares.

Phase – III of the development project was expected to be completed by 2023, but future development appears to be on stalled.⁷ The phase-wise summary is tabulated below:

Chinese Debt Trap

Hambantota port has incurred heavy losses, with regard to its ongoing maintenance expenses, debt servicing installments, and interest payments. The total debt of Sri Lanka stands at USD 64.9 billion approximately, of which USD 8 billion is owed to China.⁸ For the Hambantota Port project alone, Sri Lanka had borrowed USD 301 million

from China, at an interest rate of 6.3 per cent.⁹ This huge debt resulted from the decisions of the erstwhile Rajapaksa government, which had obtained the loans for large-scale infrastructure development projects from China without adequate assessment of its implications. Later in 2015, the Siresena administration inherited this debt.

Unable to generate revenue from the failed project and with a huge loan to repay, the island country has fallen into a debt trap, leading Sirisena administration to enter into an agreement with CMPHCL. The Sirisena administration is of the view that the only feasible arrangement is to convert loans into equity to ease some debt it owes to China.

Proposed Way Ahead

On December 2016, the first agreement was signed between the two parties, i.e. the SLPA and CMPHCL signed their first agreement. The agreement laid down that the Sri Lankan government would sell 80 per cent shares of the Hambantota port (USD1.12bn) for a 99-year lease, to the Chinese company. The remaining 20 per cent of the shares were to be held by the SLPA. The total land leased includes the entire port infrastructure, industrial zone, an artificial island and naval area, which

were constructed on the port property. According to the Finance Minister of Sri Lanka, Ravi Karunanayake, the problem can only be solved by first settling high-interest loans, through the proceeds of the Hambantota sale.

On 21 March 2017, the agreement witnessed an unexpected change in its content due to extensive and violent protests and demonstration by the Sri Lankan citizens, with regard to the sale of 80 per cent of the port and the proposed industrial zone. The Sri Lankan Cabinet approved the renegotiated agreement, which aimed at reducing the current stake of China in the port project. The revised proposed agreement stated that the Chinese company shall agree to divest a maximum of 20 per cent from its initial shareholding of 80 per cent, within a decade to other Sri Lankan enterprises.

According to Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, the yet to be signed agreement, will create a fair balance between the two parties.

Although Hambantota is a 'free port', global shipping companies have refused to use it due to reasons of economic viability. The issue of economic viability is being addressed with the investment of USD 5 billion by the Chinese investors, in the proposed 15,000-acre industrial

zone for setting up of Chinese factories. These industries may later re-export goods to China through the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka is expected to visit Beijing in May this year to discuss the issue with China.

The sale of stakes in Hambantota will not only help Sri Lanka to pay its debt but will help manage its foreign currency reserves.

Implications of the Agreement

Conversion of the loan into equity by the Lankan government might help the country to overcome the economic debt trap; but at the same time, it could compromise national security and domestic stability of the country.

Security: The joint venture shall give various rights to the Chinese company, such as development and operating rights for port-related commercial activities, allowing direct control over the shipping movement, port security services, bunkering, inner anchorage service, ship repairing, etc.

As per the latest draft of the agreement revised on 25 March 2017, the overall security of Hambantota Port will be controlled by an Oversight Committee, comprising representatives of the Sri Lankan Navy, Sri Lankan Police, SLPA

and the Secretary to the Ministry of Strategic Development and International Trade. However, the internal security of the port will be controlled only by the Chinese company, thus providing a loophole to Chinese employ the military for the internal security role. Therefore, the Lankan government has indicated that such an arrangement will require substantive changes in the law with regard to the port and it would neither affect the sovereignty of the country nor lead to any inimical military presence.

Political: The island country has been facing continuous and frequent allegations of corruption, stemming from the unilateral Chinese investment in the country. Foremost, among those in permitting the Chinese company to secure the vast infrastructural projects without a bidding process.¹⁰ It also led to the widespread perception of the former Rajapaksa administration having a pro-China tilt. The Rajapaksa period saw the signing of numerous non-viable commercial infrastructural projects with the Chinese companies. These infrastructural projects not only share the former President's name but are also situated in his hometown of Hambantota district. The following table showcases the various infrastructural projects Chinese company invested during the Rajapaksa administration.

Table 2. Chinese Infrastructural Investments during Rajapaksa Period

Project	Investment
Mahinda Rajapaksa National Tele Cinema Park	2 Billion Sri Lankan Rupees
Mahinda Rajapaksa International Cricket Stadium	700 million Sri Lankan Rupees
Norochcholai Power Plant	USD 1.35 billion
Southern Expressway	776 Billion Sri Lankan Rupees
Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport	26 billion Sri Lankan Rupees

The current Sirisena administration has announced that the Chinese investment undertaken by the previous administration will be reassessed and canceled, if it lacked proper clearances. The abrupt suspension of the Colombo Port City Project in March 2015 is a case in point, even though it was revived again in March 2016. The Sirisena administration stands helpless, as the government can neither terminate the project midway nor are they able to pay compensation. The only practical option is to convert the loan into equity. However, the joint opposition led by Rajapaksa, has suggested that the country's strategic assets must remain in the hands of the government; and if needed, the country should acquire major stake rather than just 20 percent.

Social: Hambantota is considered to be located one of the poorest regions of Sri Lanka. The port development

project was conceived to be a catalyst for major social development, through employment generation. However, China is known to be sending its own casual labour, leading to a reduction in local employment opportunities.

In January 2016, a number of violent demonstrations, protests, and rallies surfaced against the port deal with China. On 6 December 2016, a satyagraha campaign was also launched by the Hambantota workers, who were at the risk of losing their livelihood. The protesters feared that the land provided by the government for the proposed zones will soon become a 'Chinese colony', leading to erosion of culture and demographic changes, apart from the prevailing resettlement issues.

China's Investment in Hambantota

China has been investing in economically non-viable projects of Sri Lanka, essentially to gain negotiating leverage.

This cheque book diplomacy has left the island country in an unenviable crisis situation. For now, China has already invested almost USD two billion on the port project. If the proposed agreement is inked, China will have to invest at least USD 700 million to operationalise the port completely.

China excels in the art of using financial assistance to advance its strategic interests, especially in developing countries. The Hambantota port is a classic example of Beijing's ambitious plans to create a lucrative outpost in the Indian Ocean Region, to secure its oil supplies and further its exports to South Asia, East Asia, Africa and Europe. It also supports its One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, designed to connect the Eurasian Landmass by land and sea. Chinese President Xi Jinping has called Sri Lanka 'vital' to the completion of the country's OBOR initiative.¹¹ Countries like Laos and Pakistan also complement the initiative and have already indulged in heavy Chinese funding. Beside the Hambantota port, China has been investing in other non-viable projects, such as the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, uncharitably famous as the 'world's emptiest international airport'.

Implications for India

The Sirisena administration will soon need to balance its approach vis-à-vis other regional countries. This is especially necessary to maintain peace and harmony in a region which is witnessing increasing geopolitical rivalry. The award of the port to China has not been viewed favorably by India, in the immediate neighbourhood. Sri Lanka cannot afford to alienate India any further. Colombo's proposal to India to develop the north-eastern port of Trincomalee is a case in point.

Conclusion

The yet-to-be-signed renewed agreement provides the Chinese company with unilateral powers, affecting both, the domestic and economic matters of the country. Therefore, the port being a strategic asset should remain in the hands of Sri Lanka, and the government should have a proprietary right over it, else it could legally be used as a staging base for Chinese naval ships and submarines operating in the IOR. The Chinese holding operational rights might also affect the business of the Colombo port economically.

13 April 2017

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China's 12th National People's Congress (NPC) 2017: Matters 'Maritime' and 'One Belt One Road'

Dolma Tsering

The fifth session of 12th NPC and China People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) was held from 3rd to 15th March in Beijing. It commenced with the opening session that saw Premier Li Keqiang place his Work Report. Popularly called the Liang Hui (Two Sessions), the biggest but rather 'rubber stamp' national legislative and advisory body NPC and the CPPCC of the government discussed various issues including maritime and One Belt and One Road initiative (OBOR). The Work Report consisting of 42 pages predominantly focused on economic development of China. The last three pages covered issues related to ethnic minority, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan as well and commented on promoting national defence capability. For China, maintaining a stable economic growth rate of 6.5 percent is a major concern, given its implications for both the domestic stability and international affairs.

Notably, this year's Work Report has been more articulate in discussing issues such as national sovereignty, territorial integrity, maritime interests and rights. While highlighting the achievements of 2016 and what is to be done in 2017, the Chinese Premier explicitly stated that: "We are resolute in upholding China's sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests". Although there is no mention of any particular issue of concern, much emphasis has been laid on "strengthening maritime and air defence, as well as border control and necessary operations related to international peacekeeping, stability, countering terrorism and providing escort in high seas."

The above two statements are highly relevant to the disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, and the entities involved in the disputes. It is well known that maritime interests constitute the focal point of China's current relations with the Asia Pacific

countries amidst the increasing tensions in the Western Pacific rim. Therefore, the Premier's statement on maritime and sovereignty issues implies that China's maritime interests are gaining prominence in its diplomacy and preservation of its national interests.

Recently, the Chinese government announced that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would be downsized to accommodate the increase in the strength of Marine Corps from 20, 000 to 1, 00,000. This indicates a tectonic shift in its focus from protecting China's periphery to maritime force protection. This development was driven by the growing Chinese interest overseas. Some of these corps would be stationed at facilities that China operates in Djibouti and Gwadar.

The last year's Work Report has failed to mention maritime issues. In comparison, this year's Work Report addressed China's maritime interest in same spirit as protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity. 'Sovereignty' and 'territorial integrity' is designated as China's 'core interest', where limited flexibility exists for peaceful resolution of disputes, and the use (or the threat of use) of force is a more preponderant theme.

One Belt and One Road (OBOR) was another widely debated issue at this

year's annual sessions. This initiative is considered necessary to further China's economic development and growth, as it would expand the country's economic footprint towards globalization. In comparison to the previous Work Report, the current edition is focused on specific programs. Besides strengthening the compatibility of customs clearance procedure, China aims to deepen the international industrial capacity, foster cooperation among OBOR countries and promote exports of Chinese equipment, technologies, standards and services.

Through international industrial capacity and cooperation, China is trying to bring in investment from its trading partner like Japan, which has been declining in the last few years. The Premier argues that such an approach is an initiative to rebalance the world economy, and promote inclusive globalization; which would help in curtailing growing protectionism in Europe and America market.

As a part of OBOR initiative, the government also aims to enhance the exchanges and cooperation in field of education, culture and tourism. After China's bid to expand Confucian studies in the universities across the globe, the Chinese government is likely to facilitate more studies or student exchange

programs through the OBOR. The City University of Hong Kong had already opened a research program on OBOR. The Chinese University of Hong Kong offers scholarships to the student from OBOR region to pursue a career with the University. Education is a novel element of the OBOR initiative.

As announced in the Work Report, China is holding OBOR International Forum in May 2017. This initiative is described as “opening the page on a great new chapter of mutually beneficial cooperation.” The Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi stated that the forum would have more than 20 Heads

of States and Government, over 50 leaders of international organizations, 100 ministerial-level officials as well as over 1,200 delegates from across the globe. The OBOR is pitched as part of China’s effort to challenge the prevailing protectionism and unilateralism. The Chinese government is expecting to finalise certain projects at this upcoming Forum. By May 2017, OBOR forum could give China a rough idea on international interest and participation in this initiative to enable Beijing to review its OBOR strategy.

28 April 2017

Djibouti: A Roadway to China's "Indian Ocean Dream"

Amrita Jash

Commemorating the 90th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army on 1st August 2017, China flagged its first overseas permanent naval military base in Djibouti. It dispatched troops to set up the base under the pretext that it is "conducive to China's performance of international obligations".

China first floated this overseas interest in November 2015, but it was put into operation in 2016 with infrastructure build up. China's strategic foot-forward in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) via the Horn of Africa has raised significant alarm over its military expansion in the region. However, dispelling concerns over a 'China threat', Beijing has downplayed the military-strategic significance of the base by claiming it to be a "support base meant for supply missions for implementing the China's escorting, peace-keeping, and humanitarian aid missions in Africa and West Asia". Justifying this objective, Chinese Foreign Ministry has stated

that, since 2008, China has deployed vessels to the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the Somalia coast on escort missions, and that Djibouti has acted as a logistical support for replenishing food and fuel. Owing to this rationale, Beijing has vehemently objected to calling Djibouti a military outpost that is built to serve as an entrepôt for its military presence, and has attempted to boost its deterrence role in the IOR.

This move by China reflects a shift in its foreign policy as it contradicts its own adherence to the 'non-intervention' principle. More specifically, it confirms Beijing's pragmatic drift from Deng Xiaoping's dictum of "keeping a low profile". Undoubtedly, this first-of-its-kind Chinese base of in Africa is a direct output of the maritime component of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), famously called the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" or "21 世纪海上丝绸之路" (MSR), which was put forward by Chinese President

Xi Jinping in 2013. To note, the 2015 Vision Statement says: “The Road is designed to go from China’s coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China’s coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other”. There remains no doubt that the Indian Ocean is very important to Beijing’s national interest, and falls in its strategic gambit of great power politics. This exemplifies a shift in China’s focus from a continental to that of a maritime strategy—moving away from a focus on a longstanding focus on the Atlantic-Pacific Oceans to the Indian Ocean which has evolved into the world’s largest and most strategically significant maritime corridor for global economy and security.

In view of the changing perceptions of the IOR and with an overseas military presence at Djibouti, China’s mercantile rationale of building economic activity along the international shipping lanes (ISL) seems to automatically get translated into expanding and strengthening its military presence in the strategic corridor of Indian Ocean along the MSR. This has aggravated speculation and concern over Beijing’s intentions. However, Beijing nullifies this by its logic of the “Three Nos” :non interference in the internal affairs of other nations; not to seek the so called

‘sphere of influence’; and not to strive for hegemony or dominance.

To note, China is entangled in territorial and maritime disputes in the South China and East China Seas. With its salami slicing tactic, it is constantly involved in military muscle flexing to safeguard its interests. Following suit in the Indian Ocean, China is slowly shedding the dormant mantle to become an active player. China’s push forward into the Indian Ocean is driven by a two-fold interest: first, its quest for energy security as 80 percent of China’s energy imports pass through the Indian Ocean into the Straits of Malacca. To note, the Indian Ocean is home to China’s important Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs), thus raising the stakes for China to maintain security and stability in the IOR to avoid any instances of being choked. Secondly, there is an ambition to attain the great power status, which can be achieved by bolstering a dominant role through power projection and gaining freedom of navigation in the crucial waters of the Indian Ocean. This is catalysed by the Chinese Dream of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”.

In this context, the quandary lies in assessing how long Beijing will maintain its benign posture in the Indian Ocean given the changing systemic and

security dynamics. The current political fallouts given the Doklam standoff with India at the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction, along with the pressing concerns of North Korea's rising nuclear belligerence has put Beijing into a fix. It remains certain that China's actions and presence in the Indian Ocean will only rise, and not fade away. With Djibouti,

China's ambitions in the Indian Ocean have become more pronounced. This is not merely rhetorical; it is rather a reality of great power politics that will undoubtedly be played out in the 21st century in which the centre of gravity has shifted to the Indian Ocean.

29 August 2017

China's "Blue Partnership" through the Maritime Silk Road

Amrita Jash

Introduction

On 20 June 2017, China for the first time put forward a blueprint of its grand "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (MSR) under the "*Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative*". The blueprint emphasised the establishment of a Blue Economy and sustainable development. China, through the MSR seeks to build a new form of maritime security regional cooperation. Here, the query lies in understanding China's 'blue partnership' under the MSR.

China's new Silk Road via the Waterway

In October 2013, during his visit to Indonesia, the Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the proposal of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" or "21世纪海上丝绸之路". This maritime plan came as an adjunct to Xi's "Silk Road Economic Belt". Following up

on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), on 28 March 2015, China's National Development and Reform Commission, in conjunction with China's Foreign Ministry and Commerce Ministry, issued an action plan for the BRI. The document titled "*Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*", stated:

"The Belt and Road run through the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asia economic circle at one end and developed European economic circle at the other, and encompassing countries with huge potential for economic development. The Silk Road Economic Belt focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic); linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia; and connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The 21st- Century Maritime



Figure 1: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Source: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/chinal/2015-04/14/content_20433306.htm

Silk Road is designed to go from China's coast to Europe through the South

China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other".¹

Given the above conception, from an International Relations framework, China's motivations behind OBOR can be broadly understood from two perspectives.² On the one hand, the realist perspective bases its evidence on China's national interest in securing natural resources, China's attempt to increase its military capabilities, and its desire to challenge the international

order. On the other hand, the liberal perspective chooses as its evidence China's significant growth with its neighbouring countries, China's engagement in regional multilateral frameworks, and China's responsible commitment to the international community.³ With specific regard to the MSR, the "Vision" document notes:

"The Road is designed to go from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other".⁴

That is, the "Road" is a maritime network of ports and other coastal infrastructure from South and Southeast

Asia to East Africa and the northern Mediterranean Sea.

To break connectivity bottlenecks, China's geostrategic objective underpinning the Maritime Silk Road project is to guarantee Beijing's control over the most important sea trade routes and uninterrupted import of raw material. Here, one of the key goals is to decrease China's dependence on the Malacca Strait, which carries almost 90 per cent of China's sea borne trade and energy supplies. Given this heavy dependence on one route, Beijing faces a "Malacca Dilemma".⁵ Therefore, to avert the risks inherent in this dilemma, Xi's MSR policy aims at building ports in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This is witnessed in China's port facilities in countries such as Myanmar (Sittwe), Pakistan (Gwadar), Sri Lanka (Hambantota) and Bangladesh (Chittagong).

China's Mapping of the MSR

On 20 June 2017, China's National Development and Reform Commission and the State Oceanic Administration released a document titled "*Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative*".⁶ As stated in this document, China under its 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, aims at:

“synchronising development plans and promoting joint actions

amongst countries along the Maritime Silk Road, setting up the all-dimensional, multi-tiered and broad-scoped Blue Partnership, jointly protecting and sustainably utilizing marine resources to achieve harmony between man and the ocean for common development and enhancement of maritime welfare.”⁷

It is noteworthy that this is the first time that the Chinese government has released a plan of action on 'maritime cooperation' ever since the first flagging of the MSR project in 2013. In this context, Wang Hong, the head of the State Oceanic Administration (SOA), remarked that this is the first time that the Chinese government has systematically proposed a "blueprint" for advancing maritime cooperation among Belt and Road countries.⁸

The priorities of China's MSR "Vision" feature green development, ocean-based prosperity, maritime security, innovative growth, and collaborative governance. Most importantly, in forging closer ties, the "Vision" document puts forward the Chinese plan of building three ocean-based "Blue Economic Passages" along the Maritime Road that will connect Asia with Africa, Oceania, Europe and beyond. The three such passages are: the China-Indian Ocean-Africa-Mediterranean Sea Blue Economic

Passage; the China-Oceania-South Pacific Blue Economic Passage; and one that will lead to Europe via the Arctic Ocean.

Given this proposed three-way network, the trajectory entails the following pathway: First, the China-Indian Ocean-Africa-Mediterranean Sea Blue Economic Passage- this will be based on coastal economic belts in China. It will link the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor and run westward from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, connecting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, according to the document. Second, the China-Oceania-South Pacific Blue Economic Passage- this is set to head south from the South China Sea into the Pacific Ocean. The third is the passage to Europe – this will run through the Arctic Ocean. It can thus be stated that China's Maritime Silk Road is not a one-way pass but a broad network of multiple passes.

In addition, the "Vision" document called on countries along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to focus on "sharing blue space and developing the blue economy," which will target issues such as marine environment protection, marine interconnectivity, maritime security and common oceanic

governance. Here, one of the key interests for China is to secure and strengthen its port facilities. In this regard, Zhuang Guotu argues that port logistics is an important aspect for deepening maritime cooperation between China and other countries along the MSR.⁹ He explains that:

"As exchanges and cooperation in trade, investment and tourism increase between China and other countries along the Road, it has been an irresistible trend to expand cooperation in port industry, ocean shipping, logistics, informatization, and human resources."¹⁰

It may, therefore, be argued that the outlook towards building the Maritime Silk Road is strongly driven by China's quest for maritime supremacy and an aspiration for maritime expeditionary capabilities to operate in the deep waters of open oceans- a "Blue-Water Navy". To explain, as China's comprehensive national power has significantly strengthened and its interests are geographically expanding, it becomes imperative for China to drive for a blue-water navy. This is well-noted in China's growing naval activities in the Indian Ocean, including the presence of its submarines, conduct of live fire drills, and the docking of Chinese warships in ports, such as in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

China's Dream of Haiyang Qiangguo (A Strong Maritime Power)

In advocating the efficacy of sea power, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan famously stated: "Control of the sea by maritime commerce and naval supremacy means predominant influence in the world ... (and) is chief among the merely material elements in the power and prosperity of nations."¹¹ This suggests that becoming a sea power is essential to a nation's prosperity and if ignored can put a nation at risk. This perspective explains the motivation underpinning China's maritime quest.

China's ambition is to become a maritime power, possibly reflecting the shift from from being merely a continental power. This is well-noted in the 2015 Defence *White Paper* on "China's Military Strategy" suggests:

"The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests."¹²

These interests are driven by China's economic rise, as also Beijing's security interests concerning long-standing unresolved sovereignty issues, such as unification with Taiwan and gaining

complete control of land features in the East and South China Seas held by other countries, all of which demands a focus on the maritime domain.

It needs to be noted that this Chinese maritime adventurism is an output of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CCP) in November 2012, wherein President Hu Jintao declared that China's objective is to be a *Haiyang quango*—that is, a strong or great maritime power. This marked an important defining moment in China's maritime strategy, as Hu posited:

*China should "enhance [the] capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, and build China into a strong maritime power (emphasis added)."*¹³

This objective was reiterated in the 2012 defence White Paper on "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces" that was released on April 16, 2013. The White Paper stated:

"China is a major maritime as well as land country. The seas and oceans provide immense space and abundant resources for China's sustainable development, and thus are of vital importance to the people's wellbeing and China's future. It is an essential national development strategy

to exploit, utilize and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into a maritime power.”¹⁴

Here, it is important to note that in the Chinese context, maritime power encompasses more than naval power but appreciates the importance of having a world-class navy.¹⁵ The maritime power equation includes a large and effective coast guard; a world-class merchant marine and fishing fleet; a globally recognized shipbuilding capacity; and an ability to harvest or extract economically important maritime resources, especially fish.¹⁶

The scope of China’s military strategy is also centered upon the maritime domain, that is to win “informationized local wars” by “maritime preparation for military struggle” – striving for achieving a ‘blue-water navy’.¹⁷ In view of this, the 2015 White Paper suggests a “long-standing task for China to safeguard its maritime rights and interests” and, the process to become a “strong maritime power”. The PLA Navy (PLAN) will play a greater role shifting its focus from “offshore water defense” to “open seas

protection”- thus, making a shift from defence to offence.¹⁸

Conclusion

Given these objectives, China’s Dream of building a ‘blue partnership’ via the ‘Maritime Silk Road’ is a means to achieve its larger goal of securing China’s foothold in the maritime domain. In this light, the construction of ports and related facilities aim to extend China’s maritime reach across the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal, into the Mediterranean basin. Here, the objective is to secure its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), which carry 90 per cent of China’s trade and energy supplies. More importantly, a secured maritime posture would also strengthen China’s naval military ambitions. In addition, attaining these goals will significantly result in a strong government, a prosperous economy, a harmonious society, and a strong military- the key elements needed in order to realise Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream.

22 September 2017

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Melaka Gateway Port: An Analysis

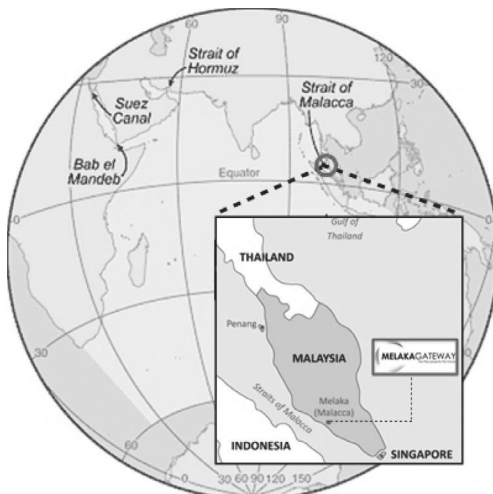
Anjelina Patrick

Introduction

This issue brief aims at analysing China's geo-economics and geostrategic intentions as manifested in its generous assistance to Malaysia for development of the Melaka port project. The issue brief also intends to study the impact of this project upon another key player within the area, namely, Singapore, especially since the Melaka port project will, by

design impact Singapore's established position as the pre-eminent maritime hub in the Southeast Asia in general and the Malacca Strait in particular.

The Melaka port project is a subset of the Melaka Gateway Project. It is a mixed development project set in Malaysia, within the strategically important Strait of Malacca. The project seeks to develop a consolidated port covering 1,366 acres of land, by linking three artificial islands and one natural island. Once complete, it will include a deep seaport as well as commercial and residential property expansions. While the entire project is targeted for completion by 2025, the port per se is due to be operational by 2019, and is expected to overtake Singapore as Southeast Asia's main shipping hub.



Map.1: Geographical location of Melaka Gateway Project/Source: Author

The Project

The Melaka Gateway Project was officially launched by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak, on 7 February 2014, as a national venture that was a part of the larger Economic Transformation



*Map.2: Major Ports of Malaysia
(Source: Website of Kuantan Port, MMC Corporation Berhad, UOB-Kay Hian Research/ Anjelina Patrick)*

Programme (ETP) by the Government of Malaysia. This strategically important project will be anchored upon the natural island of Pulau Panjang, which has a deep sea port facility with a depth of 25–30 meters. The project envisages the development of Pulau Panjang along with the creation, by reclamation, of three additional, artificial islands off Malacca’s coast, at a cost of RM 30 billion.¹ These three are needed to set the port suitably into the Strait of Malacca. The project commenced in 2015, and is intended to be completed by 2025.

Table.1: The Melaka Gateway Project

Nature of the Island	Description
Artificial	Tourism, Entertainment, Commercial and Property development
Artificial	Free Trade Economic Zone
Natural	Melaka Gateway Port
Artificial	Maritime Industrial Park

Table.1 shows the intended utilisation of all four islands. Singapore’s *Strait Times* claims that these artificial islands will enjoy freehold status.²

The development of Melaka port is a subset of this project and is appreciated to involve a 99-year concession, at a cost of RM 8 billion. It is a joint venture between the Malacca State Government’s KAJ Development Sdn Bhd, and the Chinese energy company, Power China International.

Economic Objectives

Malaysia, which has received more than US\$ 200 billion worth of Chinese infrastructure and real estate investment, is a principal partner in China’s “Belt and Road” initiative (BRI).³ The BRI (earlier known as the ‘One Belt One Road’ [OBOR] project) had been launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013 and focuses

upon 65 countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa, with a combined population of 4.4 billion, and a combined GDP value of US\$ 21 trillion. Evidently, the Melaka Port project aligns perfectly with the BRI; therefore, it is natural for China to invest in it on such a large scale.

It is clear that the competition offered to Malaysia by Singapore is so substantive that Malaysia needs to develop and significantly upgrade its infrastructure so as to boost its own economy. China's low-interest funded project (sometimes known as 'debt-trap diplomacy', especially after the experience of Sri Lanka vis-à-vis the port of Hambantota) and China's infusion of technology are perceived by Kuala Lumpur to be necessary to revitalise Malaysia's slowing economy.⁴

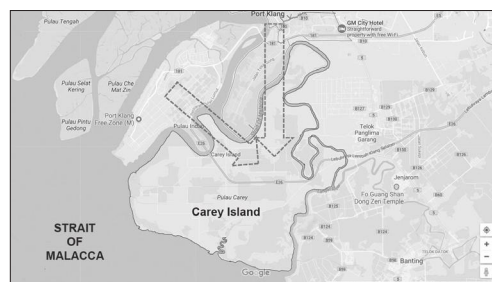
Oddly, however, there is simultaneously an ongoing capacity expansion underway at Malaysia's two main international ports, namely, the Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) and Port Klang, which, as may be seen in Map 3, bracket Port Melaka, lying to its north and south, respectively.

Moreover, Port Klang, the largest port in Malaysia, is set to expand towards Carey Island, as depicted in Map 4. The proposed expansion is worth RM 200 million, which the Malaysian

authorities justify by averring that Port Klang has reached its full capacity and is in desperate need of expansion. However, this is refuted by the World Bank which, in 2015, stated that "a new port on the west coast of Malaysia is not necessary, as the existing facilities are not reached its full capacity". Further, Port Klang's multi-cargo terminal, Westports (Port Klang is subdivided into three terminals, viz., Northport, Southpoint and Westports) will raise its capacity to 16 million TEU over the next decade, while Northport will invest in new equipment to increase its own capacity to 5 million TEU by 2018.⁵



Map 3: Malaysia: Port Klang, Melaka Port, and, PTP Port



Map 4: Planned Expansion of Malaysia's Port Klang towards Carey Island

Similarly, Malaysia's Port Tanjung elepas (PTP), which is located just 100 nm south of Melaka, is expected to receive an investment of more than RM 8.6 billion to enable it to double its capacity to 22 million TEU by 2030.⁶ Currently, this port serves as many as 26 shipping lines and has already made investments that would permit it to serve Maersk's Triple-E mega vessels.⁷ The expansion is taking place not by building new berths, but by acquiring new equipment such as bigger quay cranes, rubber-tyred gantries (RTGs), and the replacement of PTP's existing equipment.⁸

Apart from these port developments on the west coast of the Malaysian peninsula, numerous ports on the east coast are also being expanded. One such expansion is that of the Kuantan Port which, along with Port Klang, complements the RM55 billion Chinese-funded East Coast Rail Line (ECRL) project. The ECRL project aims to reduce the time taken to travel from Shenzhen to Port Klang, from 165 hours (via Singapore and Strait of Malacca) to 135 hours (via Kuantan Port and ECRL). The ERCL will to alter the existing regional trade route, which runs between the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, and the disputed South China Sea, through Singapore.



*Map 5: Shenzhen Port to Port Klang
(Source: Malaysian Logistic Executives/
Government Officials - Straits Time Graphics)*

At present, millions of tonnes of sand are being dredged from the disputed South China Sea in order to expand the Kuantan Port. Further evidence of China's deepening footprint in Malaysia may be seen in the fact that the Chinese firm Guangxi Beibu International Port Group already owns 40 per cent of the port.

In economic terms, it is important to note that China is entering Malaysia as both an investor as well as a contractor. The massive presence of Chinese workers, both skilled and unskilled, showcases China's dominance over Malaysia's infrastructure-related supply chain. In 2014, a large number of Chinese construction companies in Malaysia imported equipment and other supplies (such as steel) from China, valued at almost RM 883 million.⁹ This will have significant domestic implications, as this trend, which is continuing unabated, will lead to an imbalance in the Malaysian business and labour markets.

Geopolitical/Strategic Objectives

China's interest in the Malacca Strait is not merely to restore its historical legacy (one that can be traced back to Admiral Zheng He's voyages in the early 1400s) but also to provide China with a favourable geopolitical position in the Strait, as well as being a measure to safeguard its single-point commodity-vulnerability (oil) amidst the growing tensions in the region. Thus, even while the economic viability of these projects is highly questionable, they nevertheless demonstrate Beijing's desperate need to secure the Straits of Malacca and Singapore.

Due to these high-security stakes, the question that arises is: which of the three Malacca Strait littorals will end up with the most control over the Straits and the enormous volume of cargo that flows through them? The three littoral countries—Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore—have jointly affirmed their sole right to maintain security in the Strait of Malacca, prompting the formation of the Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP). Indeed, the rationale for keeping the right to security confined to the littoral states was to keep the Strait of Malacca from becoming a big-power flashpoint.¹⁰ However, the ability of these countries to actually do so has been questioned now and then, due to their own competing territorial claims.

In the past, China has deployed its marines to protect its maritime interests overseas. Gwadar port in Pakistan is an example of this, wherein China rapidly increased the number of its marines from 20,000 to one lakh.¹¹ The Gwadar and Melaka are both deep-sea ports, one next to the Strait of Hormuz, and the other in the Malacca Strait, and sit astride vital oil routes. Thus, the Melaka Gateway Project seems to principally be a means for China to acquire and sustain military-strategic influence in the Strait of Malacca.

Beijing is also involved in a "port alliance" with Malaysia, which will

fast-track trade by reducing customs bottlenecks at both ends. This port alliance was shaped in November 2015, during Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's official visit to Malaysia. According to the Chinese envoy to Malaysia, Huang Huikang, "The port alliance will serve not only as a maritime network between the two countries, but also the bond of trade, business, and tourism".¹² Under this port alliance, fifteen Chinese ports — Dalian, Shanghai, Ningbo, Qinzhou, Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Shenzhen, Hainan, Taicang, Kemaman, Sabah, Kuching, Tianjin and Qingdao — will collaborate with six Malaysian ports — Port Klang, Malacca, Penang, Johor, Kuantan, and Bintulu.

The Singapore Factor

Massive investments by China in Malaysia have caught regional attention, especially in Singapore. At present, the Melaka Port Project and the ECRL Project aim to replace Singapore as the main trading port in South East Asia, by diverting billions of dollars-worth of trade from Singapore. It is, therefore, important to incorporate Singapore in the existing equation along, with Malaysia and China.

China's irritation towards Singapore has grown after its Prime Minister expressed support for the ruling against

China's claims in the South China Sea by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. China has rejected the ruling outright¹³ and this has polarised the region. Singapore also has military ties with self-governing Taiwan, in the form of exercises, due to geographical space constraints in Singapore itself. Apart from these, Singapore's growing closeness with the USA on the matters of defence also contributes to China's growing irritation.

Singapore's outlook towards both the South China Sea and Taiwan has led it to face some punitive economic aggression from China. Singapore, however, is already taking steps to face up to the future Chinese-funded competition of Malaysia's Melaka Port. Towards this end, Singapore has decided to fast-track the concentration of all its container handling activities at Tuas. (The idea of a Tuas-Mega Port had been proposed by Singapore's Economic Strategies Committee as far back as 2010.) According to the Transport Minister of Singapore, Lui Tuck Yew, Tuas Port is appropriate as it "shelters deep waters and is in close proximity to the country's major industrial areas and international shipping routes".¹⁴ Upon its completion, the port will be able to handle up to 65 million TEU

of containerised cargo per year, and will nearly double the current capacity of 35 million TEU.¹⁵

Conclusion

Melaka Port and the port alliance between Malaysia and China marks a significant upgrade in the bilateral relations between Malaysia and China. Operationalisation of the Melaka Gateway Project in general and that of Melaka Port in particular, could lead to significant flows of Chinese trade and energy through Malaysia. Apart from providing Beijing with a favourable geopolitical position, operationalisation of the Melaka Port would be an economic tool with which China can dissuade or even punish Singapore for its closeness with US and Taiwan. Moreover, the enhanced trade flows resulting from the operationalisation of the Melaka Port and the ECRL projects will inevitably drive Beijing to take measures to ensure the safe passage of its trade-flows in the region, and this will probably lead to the

establishment of Chinese naval presence in the territorial waters of Malaysia.

Malaysia's over-dependence on China may lead to serious repercussions on its existing economy. If China withdraws or stops its current investment in the Melaka port, it will immediately turn into an unaffordable white elephant. This is because, unlike other Malaysian ports, the hinterland markets are insufficiently developed and will probably be unable to sustain the port.

Apart from ports, China's investment in other sectors in Malaysia demonstrates that Melaka will primarily be used as an insurance for China's energy requirements and to facilitate its Maritime Silk Route as part of Beijing's BRI. Finally, these huge investments of China in Malaysia offer telling examples of how geopolitical interests can override economic factors as drivers of port-development.

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Revival of Quadrilateral: A shift in India's Policy towards China?

Dinesh Yadav

The prospect of a revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue¹ (QSD), involving the US, India, Japan and Australia, has recently set the international media abuzz. The first meeting of the Dialogue² was held in Manila on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit on 13-14 November.

Beijing, on expected lines, has reacted sharply³ stating that “relationships between countries in the Asia-Pacific region should not be a zero-sum game and that good relations between US and India or Japan and India should not be at someone else's expense”.

The QSD, an informal strategic dialogue between the US, India, Japan and Australia, had initially been established in 2007. The Dialogue was paralleled by combined military exercises of an unprecedented scale, as witness MALABAR⁴ 2007, which saw participation by all four countries,

and Singapore too. This diplomatic and military arrangement was widely perceived as ‘signaling’ to an assertive China. Beijing responded by issuing a *démarche* to the participating countries.

Subsequently, in 2008, with the withdrawal of Australia during Kevin Rudd's tenure as the Prime Minister, owing to concerns about Beijing's reactions, the QSD ceased.

Since then, Australia has not participated in MALABAR, whereas Japan participated in 2009 and 2014 and became a permanent partner in the exercise with effect from 2015. The last edition of the exercise was held in the Bay of Bengal in July 2017, with a total of 16 warships (including one aircraft carrier each from the participant countries, namely USS Nimitz, INS Vikramaditya and JS Izumo), two submarines and 95 aircraft participating in the exercise.

Ever since Prime Minister Kevin Rudd demitted office, and especially since 2015, Australia has regularly been bidding for restoration as a participant in MALABAR series. In the run up to MALABAR 2017, Australia renewed its request⁵, but, although its request was endorsed by the US and Japan, India, acting partly out of concern for Chinese sensitivities, and partly owing to its own reservations against multilateral military groupings/ alliances, declined to accommodate the Australian request.⁶

Of the three countries envisioned to be involved with the US in the QSD and the expanded MALABAR exercises, only India has had reservations as it has traditionally guarded its ability to forge an independent foreign policy, staying equidistant from the multilateral security arrangements. Also, risks and benefits involved in such multilateral security dialogues and exercises, which Beijing might consider as inimical to its interest, would be totally different for India and Japan, being China's next door neighbours, than for the US and Australia.

The Quadrilateral was dormant for almost a decade since withdrawal of Australia in 2008. The expansion of MALABAR was also put on hold, despite consistent nudge by all other stakeholders, owing to India's

discomfiture with multilateral groupings and exercises and also India's attempts at maintaining cordial relations with China. What has changed then between May this year, when India declined the Australian request for participation in the MALABAR exercise and now, in November, when India appears to have shed its inhibitions and the QSD now appears to be taking a formal shape?

There have been two major developments of particular significance recently that explains the possible reasons for the change in India's approach. In past one year, China has witnessed an unprecedented consolidation of power by its President, Xi Jinping, who today, is unarguably, the most powerful Chinese President of all time. And the history of modern China amply indicates that each time China has used military as its foreign policy tool, this has been preceded by consolidation of power by the Chinese President.

With most power concentrated in Xi's hands, it is almost certain that China would get even more aggressive in the coming times. An all-powerful leader in a totalitarian powerful state is not a good news for its neighbors, especially those with which it has unresolved territorial disputes. India would surely be aware of the consequences of these changes in China and consequently, is bound to

explore various possibilities to offset the resultant developments.

Also, Xi's consolidation of power was simultaneously followed by Beijing's intransigence and bellicose posture over the Doklam crisis, thereby exacerbating India's concerns. PLA's belligerent stand at Doklam, duly supported through regular acerbic and provocative Chinese media observations on the issue, would have probably pushed New Delhi towards exploring various possible avenues to counter an increasingly aggressive China. The US, Japan and Australia easily qualify to be the like-minded partners with converging interests in the region. The formalization of the QSD and expansion of MALABAR exercises, in partnership with these nations, appear to be the foremost of the available options.

The recent developments, therefore, appear to be a move towards the return of the Quadrilateral arrangement to supplement the regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region. The enhanced trilateral engagements existing between the four nations (US – India – Japan, US - Japan - Australia)

would provide a sound groundwork for a seamless return to the QSD. Formalisation of the QSD could lead to expansion of MALABAR, and it might be possible that 2018 edition of MALABAR features Australia too.

India has long followed the policy of hedging against China, carefully carrying out the policies of engagement and balancing simultaneously. With Beijing getting increasingly more assertive and aggressive in articulating and furthering its core interests, some of these unfavorable to India's interest, New Delhi would look to explore potent and credible avenues to balance Beijing's moves in the region. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and expanded MALABAR exercises are palpably two of those possible avenues. Also, if Beijing continues to push its aggressive agenda with obstinacy, even other nations of the region that are uncomfortable with the Chinese assertiveness, such as Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia etc, might also join in either of QSD/MALABAR in coming years.

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

Gurpreet S Khurana

Beginning 5 November 2017, the US President Donald Trump undertook his much-publicised 12-day tour of Asia, visiting five countries: Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines. During the tour, his ‘catch-phrase’ was the “Indo-Pacific”, reflecting his geopolitical worldview of Asia, and the latest in a long history of diplomatic slogans from American presidents. This was a notable departure from the traditional Western expression of ‘Asia-Pacific’, which led the media¹, analysts² and policy-makers worldwide scrambling, trying to delve deeper into the intent and ramifications of this new “alliance³” articulated by the leader of the most powerful nation on Earth.

The ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept, which combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with the Western Pacific region into a single geopolitical construct, is known to have gathered widespread acceptance in wake of my January

2007 paper⁴ on India-Japan maritime cooperation, and the ensuing address by Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, to the Indian Parliament, a few months later, in August 2007. In his address, the Japanese leader endorsed the idea of ‘Indo-Pacific’ through his articulation of the “Confluence of the Two Seas⁵ (the Indian and Pacific oceans)”.

President Trump’s repeated use of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ during his Asia tour led the *Washington Post* to seek my view on the issue. My opinion piece⁶ published in *The World Post* (*Washington Post*, 14 November) expressed my concern on the original ‘Indo-Pacific’ idea having drifted away from the original ‘constructive’ India-Japan proposition of a geopolitical amalgamation of the Indo-Pacific towards regional stability. The essay highlighted President Trump’s implicit intent to seek India’s partnership in containing China, thereby dividing the region into opposing camps.

As expected, the issue of ‘Indo-Pacific’ has lately generated widespread discussion, debate and a number of contrarian views. An Indian analyst, Abhijit Singh, expressed a view that the ‘Indo-Pacific’ construct was always about “containing the rise of China⁷”. Writing for the *South China Morning Post*, he says that “Maritime Asia still struggles under the yoke of Chinese expansionism, with a permanent Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea”; and therefore, “the use of the term (Indo-Pacific) to describe an emerging India-Japan-US-Australia alliance as a balance against Beijing is not a distortion of the term’s original meaning; it is the fulfilment of it”.

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

By the mid-2000s, both India and Japan were beginning to get overly worried of China’s so-called “peaceful

rise⁸”. In the anxious environment of those days, for the Japanese, the ‘Indo-Pacific’ was largely a notion of assurance from India as an emerging power in the wider Asian region. For India too, it was an opportunity to join up with Japan, so as to share their respective assessments of the emerging environment and their respective visions for the region. This came about after several futile efforts by New Delhi at ‘persuasion’ of Beijing to adopt a conciliatory approach; following which, India was compelled to scale up its outreach in order to Japan to moderate China’s behaviour through ‘dissuasion’.

In contrast, President Trump’s re-interpretation of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ construct amounts to partnering with India to create a China-specific alliance of sorts. Its temporal coincidence with the revival of the Australia-India-Japan-US ‘quadrilateral’ further enhances the risks of the proposition. This will severely constrict the strategic options of the regional countries — including those in the ‘quadrilateral’ — who would now need to make difficult choices. As Australia’s former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd puts it, this will lead to “brittle, (and) binary strategic choices¹⁰” being thrust upon these countries. If this happens, the ensuing regional environment would be reminiscent of

the fissures in Europe preceding the two World Wars that created a geopolitical environment ripe for conflict.

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

The growing traction of the 'Indo-Pacific' idea holds much value for the

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

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Will Donald Trump Rebalance The ‘Rebalance’?

Gurpreet S Khurana

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

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

implications for the Asia-Pacific, and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

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

Economics

Undeniably, Donald Trump understands economics. Besides having being a successful businessman, his book ‘*The America We Deserve*’ published in the year 2000 is a rather compelling read. It emerges from the book that Trump believes that sound economics and economic strategy will lead to, not only

effective governance, but also successful international relations. In the book, he lays a vision for the U.S. grounded in economics, and the need for America to have a 'dealmaker' President. It was perhaps with this strong conviction that he trashed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) without a second thought. Of course, this does not imply that the U.S. would hold back its economic engagement with the Asia-Pacific countries, only that he may seek more favourable arrangements, with a focus on bilateral ones.

Diplomacy

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

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

Military-Strategy

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

Hence, the indicators are that Trump may be more inclined to be conservative on military assertion in the Asia-Pacific. Of course, this may change

based on the developments, particularly the behaviour of China and North Korea. But in the overall sense, the U.S. assertiveness in the Western Pacific using its 'hard power' is likely to reduce.

Implications for the Region

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

cornered, and behave quite like a cat that is cornered – aggressively.

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

18 January 2017

The South China Sea Dispute: moving towards a Military Showdown?

Prakash Gopal

On 16 December 2016, the USNS Bowditch was conducting oceanic survey, 50 nautical miles (NM) northwest of Subic Bay, Philippines. As part of these operations, the vessel had deployed two Underwater Unmanned Vehicles (UUV), which as per the Pentagon, were being used in an unclassified program to collect oceanographic data. While the Bowditch was preparing to recover these underwater drones, a Chinese naval ship, which had been shadowing the US ship, deployed a boat with sailors and picked up one of the drones, even as the US crew looked on. The Pentagon issued a strong statement and demanded the immediate return of the UUV, even as China claimed that it had seized it *‘in order to prevent the device from causing harm to the safety of navigation and personnel of passing vessels’*. Four days later, on 20 December 2016, China handed over the drone to the crew of USS Mustin, bringing the episode to a mutually acceptable conclusion. It has,

however, raised a number of issues, both from legal and security perspectives, especially in the context of other developments that point to increasing militarization of the South China Sea (SCS) dispute. From a legal viewpoint, this incident underscores the absence of a uniform interpretation of the Law of the Sea (LoS). The Bowditch was operating in the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) but outside of its territorial seas. This location was also within 200nm of the disputed Scarborough Shoals, which may lead China to contend that the US ship was within Chinese EEZ. While the US believes it is free to conduct naval activities, including military surveys in the EEZ of other coastal states, China contests that such an exercise can only be conducted with its express consent. However, the recent ruling by the UNCLOS arbitral tribunal has explicitly stated that none of the features in the Scarborough Shoals generates an EEZ. While China may

have chosen to reject this award, it raises serious questions on the legitimacy and intent of Chinese actions in seizing the underwater drone. This is particularly relevant, as in this instance, the Chinese naval vessel failed to issue any warning or notice to the Bowditch, indicating a tacit recognition that the act of seizure lay even beyond the line drawn by the Chinese interpretation of the LoS, and in particular, its claims in the SCS.

What would be of greater concern to other littorals in the region, is the progressive militarization of the disputed commons, which may have the potential to escalate future incidents into military skirmishes. When President Xi Jinping visited the US in September 2015, he stated that “China does not intend to pursue militarization” of its outposts in the Spratly islands. It was a surprisingly welcome declaration – but one that the region realizes, may not necessarily be true. While no significant reclamation activities have been reported since the award by the arbitration tribunal in July 2016, a recent report by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) shows the placement of anti-aircraft guns and Close in Weapon Systems (CIWS) at all of China’s outposts in the Spratly Islands. This is in blatant violation of the

public commitment made by the highest political office-bearer of the People’s Republic of China. The installation of weapons on these outposts have been supplemented by Chinese military drills in the SCS, East China Sea and the Taiwan Straits.

It is however not only China which is contributing to the militarization of the SCS. Earlier in the year, in August 2016, Vietnam reportedly moved rocket launchers to its outposts in the SCS, with the ability to target Chinese installations in vicinity. More recently, in November, reports emerged of Hanoi’s construction activities in the Spratly Island, including the extension of runway to accommodate military aircraft. Whilst on a much lower scale than Chinese activities on the disputed features, Vietnam’s efforts to counter them would only lead to an escalatory sequence of events that would cause notable damage to the marine environment, besides raising the ante for an increasingly assertive China.

An aspect that will play a significant part in shaping the immediate future of the SCS dispute, will be the outlook of the new US administration under President-Elect Donald Trump. In fact, one argument attributes recent Chinese belligerence in the region, to the President-Elect’s engagement with

the Taiwanese President, and his recent anti-China statements encompassing economic policies and the SCS dispute. For China, both Taiwan and the SCS (the former more than the latter), are among its 'core interests', a classification that underpins its rigid and uncompromising stand on these issues, even when it goes against the tenets of international law, both customary and codified. If the increasingly aggressive political posturing on both sides translates into heightened military deployment, it could significantly escalate the situation in the region, much to the detriment of the regional order.

While the seizure and subsequent return of the Bowditch's underwater

drone is the latest in a series of military developments in the SCS, there is solace in the fact that the Chinese naval ship chose not to threaten the Bowditch and its crew directly. This could be indicative of the action being an operational and tactical outcome, as opposed to a strategic political or military directive. For the US and other regional countries however, it may serve as a warning to reinvigorate diplomatic and political efforts, in order to better manage the regional security situation that promises to turn increasingly fragile.

11 Jan 2017

Pivot, Rebalance, Et Cetera: What Next? The Future of US Engagement in Asia

Sanjay Misra

Apropos the US 'Pivot to Asia', "The future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the center of the action," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had announced in February 2011, when she had presented the Barack Obama administration's strategy towards the Asia Pacific.¹ However, come 2017 and mid-March saw the US 'Pivot to Asia,' or 'Rebalance'² or 'Pivot to the Pacific'³ being declared dead. The US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Susan Thornton, discussing US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's inaugural trip to Asia in a press conference, said on March 13, 2017, "On the issue of pivot, rebalance, et cetera, that was a word that was used to describe the Asia policy in the last administration. I think you can probably expect that this administration will have its own formulation and it hasn't actually, we haven't seen in detail what the formulation will be or if there even will be a formulation."⁴

The Pivot and the Trans-Pacific Partnership

The US Pivot to Asia was a major policy initiative of former US President Obama which was a strategic rebalance effort by shifting US diplomatic and military resources towards Asia. The economic undertone to this was the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which would link 12 Pacific Rim nations that accounted for 40% of world trade.⁵ The 'rebalance' had been spoken of as the most effective counterbalance to Beijing's growing influence and assertiveness. While reassuring its allies and partners, the rebalance, while keeping China in check, also imposed a 'strategic cost' on it.⁶

China's view was that the rebalance was a means to contain it and simultaneously maintain US pre-eminence in the region; a strategic tool one could say to hold back China's rise. Washington on the other hand had maintained that the rebalance increased

regional security and economic prosperity for all.⁷

The East China Sea and the South China Sea have been of late witnessing regular ‘happenings,’ whether on water or within the shorelines of the countries involved i.e. China, Japan, North Korea, the Philippines, etc. So, what next then? The United States despite quitting the ‘Pivot to Asia’ have definitely not quit the area – neither in terms of the projection of hard power or of soft power. While one of the first acts of the Trump administration was to withdraw the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade pact that incidentally the previous US administration believed would strengthen US leadership in Asia,⁸ the US is obviously not letting its commitment to Asia take a backseat.

However, mere declaration of intent is not enough to have the same effect as actions. For the United States to show resolve in maintaining its preeminence in Asia it has to have the ability to back its policies with not just power projection-but power projection that is sustainable. For any fleeting show of arms - and speaking of arms i.e. in tandem with the use of economic and diplomatic power - will not demonstrate the same resolve as one with the capability of long term commitment. With or without the ‘Pivot to Asia’ having been abandoned,

the US will still need to have a sufficient number of seafaring vessels in place to build the kind of confidence that it wants Asia to look towards the US for. So, while abandoning the ‘pivot,’ is the US 2018 defense budget any indicator of things to come?

A Bigger Fleet?

In September 2016, the then US Defense Secretary Ash Carter spoke of launching a new phase of the ‘rebalance’- that of increasing funding for the US Coast Guard and increasing Foreign Military Financing for the ten countries that form the ASEAN security collective. However, with the change in administration and of its priorities, the US Coast Guard and the Foreign Military Funding appear to be heading for cuts.⁹

On March 16, 2017, US President Donald Trump unveiled the Pentagon’s fiscal 2018 (FY2018) budget proposal. The President’s fiscal budget requested for USD 639 bn in funding for the Pentagon, an increase of USD 52 bn from the 2017 level of USD 587 bn. The proposal included USD 574 bn for the base budget and USD 65 bn for Overseas Contingency Operations.¹⁰ This is the largest increase since President Ronald Reagan’s military build-up of the 1980’s.¹¹ The US budget intends to facilitate funding for a stepped up fight

against ISIS, enhance troop readiness and build new ships and planes.¹² The United States Navy has 274 ships.¹³ Analysts in general agree that there is an urgent need for the US Navy to increase its fleet size and reduce the pressure on the Navy given that they appear to be stretched. However, it is not clear yet what this figure will be. The figure put forth by the US Navy is 355 ships, the latest as per the new Force Structure Assessment completed in December 2016.¹⁴ The Trump administration on the other hand has often stated 350 as the number including two new aircraft carriers.¹⁵ America incidentally accounts for more than half of the world's 18 active aircraft carriers and while no specifics have been given for the requirement for new carriers, they would take years to build.¹⁶ Senator John McCain, the Chairman of the US Armed Services Committee has said that the plans to increase the fleet to 355 ships by 2022 was "unrealistic" but that the Navy could have an increase of 59 ships in that timeframe, including five fast attack submarines, five fleet oilers, two amphibious ships, two undersea surveillance ships, and one aircraft carrier. He also said that the marines could add 3000 troops a year to reach 200,000 by 2022 with a further scope for increase.¹⁷ However, apart from the funding issues it appears that the US

shipbuilding industrial base will not be able to meet the projections.¹⁸

The Asian Conundrum

With tensions ratcheting up in the East and South China Seas, along with the new Trump administration determined to show its resolve, the United States will have to make the best use of diplomacy along with flexing its economic might if it wants to sustain and develop its interests in the Western Pacific – Indian Ocean region. As far as diplomacy goes, the job of the America's top diplomat, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, is an unenviable one. While Beijing has cheered the March 2017 visit of the US Secretary as a diplomatic win,¹⁹ and with the Trump-Xi visit going better than could be expected in the present global scenario, it hasn't made the diplomat's job easier as the preponderance of North Korea remains the numero uno challenge for the United States. Despite the recent 'diversion' of Syria, North Korea continues to be in US crosshairs. And this is where the importance of the US Navy comes to the fore. Because diplomacy apart this is the most efficacious means that the US have, to back up their Asia policies. Following North Korea's test firing of a medium range ballistic missile from its eastern port of Sinpo into the Sea of Japan on April 05, the US declared on April 09, 2017, that a US Navy Strike

Group would be moving to the Korean Peninsula. The strike group comprises the USS Carl Vinson – a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, two guided missile destroyers and a guided missile cruiser. The strike group also has the capability to intercept ballistic missiles. Experts opine that North Korea might conduct more tests and that it may even test an intercontinental ballistic missile.²⁰

While North Korea has hit out at the US Navy Strike Group move²¹ and upped the ante in an already tense situation, the move by the US is an evidentiary show of US commitment to the region and an indication of sorts of US President Trump's recent statement "If China is not going to solve North Korea, we will."²² President Trump's ordering of a missile strike on Syria late on April 06 – during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to the US²³ was a clear indication of US resolve under the Trump administration to both China and North Korea. It also was a signal to allies Japan and South Korea that US involvement in the region was likely to gather steam rather than a lessening post 'pivot'.

What Next?

While the US Navy Strike Group sails on to the Korean peninsula it would be pertinent to note that US Naval

presence in Asia is still a force to reckon with, notwithstanding how US plans for their naval forces with respect to Asia pan out. The end of the pivot does not mean that US Naval presence will reduce or wane in importance. On this note it would do well to remember the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training or 'CARAT' series of exercises that the US Navy conducts in Asian waters.²⁴ CARAT is a bilateral exercise series between the US Navy, US Marine Corps and the armed forces of nine partner nations in South and Southeast Asia, including Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines Singapore, Thailand and Timor-Leste. CARAT Brunei 2016 was held in November 2016.²⁵ Pivot or not, with US defense cuts being removed and a United States Navy build up on the cards, one could take guidance on likely US policy in Asia from what the US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs had to say last month when she spoke on 'pivot, rebalance et cetera': "We're going to remain active and engaged in Asia. The Asian economy is very important for US prosperity and growth so we'll be there working on fair and free trade issues; working on regional security challenges, such as North Korea, and continue to press for a rules-based, constructive, peaceful, stable order in Asia."²⁶

The ‘Pivot to Asia’ was the keystone of the Obama administration eight years ago, with the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement at the heart of it and ‘underpinning a mesh of American security alliances.’²⁷ Notwithstanding Assistant Secretary Susan Thornton’s remarks last month, the US needs to now declare a policy and clearly signal its intent to its Asian allies. With China’s slogan of the ‘new model of great power relations’ by which China signals its hopes for an Asian sphere of influence,²⁸ a new US policy, while being reassuring to its allies would also have to maintain a balance with China. There is a view, that the abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership could lead to a leadership and security vacuum in the region.²⁹

With the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean regions becoming increasingly joint with common and overlapping economic and security concerns, the US

needs to incorporate what one could call ‘affordable actions,’ which would in essence address all the stakeholders on the economic, diplomatic and security fronts; without putting itself in an invidious position. While US interests in the region are likely to remain largely much the same it is the architecture that is likely to change. The resources that it would require to balance its interests in today’s geopolitical environment are definitely going to see an increase and that is where the expansion of the US Naval fleet will come in. What is going to be of essence is how the new administration decides to go about it. But with the Trump administration it’s still early days, and going by the first 100 days it wouldn’t be too much out of place if US policy makers to Asia spring a surprise; and that too probably sooner than later.

19 April 2017

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The North Korean Crisis: A Geopolitical Analysis

Shabana Thankachan

Introduction

North Korea has been under the dictatorial regime of the Kim dynasty since the end of the Second World War. Currently under Kim Jong-un, it is considered a pariah state which pays no heed to democratic values, prioritises military build-up at the cost of starving its citizens, has a closed Stalinist economy, and has the dubious distinction of being the only country to perform nuclear tests in the twenty-first century. North Korea has conducted more than a hundred missile tests from the 1980s until the time of writing¹. This includes two Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) tests. North Korea has also conducted six nuclear tests. The situation has intensified with the ICBM tests in July 2017 and the nuclear test on 3 September 2017². North Korea's relations with the United States have had a very rocky history. Every successive US president has tried to reign in North Korea without much success.

North Korea has been testing missiles since the late eighties. Hence, Kim Jong-un is not doing anything new every time he tests a missile. He uses it as a leverage mechanism to extract concessions from the international community. North Korea's weapons capability provides it with effective deterrence and ensures the stability of the regime. The change has also happened in terms of the improved range and capability of the missiles, but this was expected. It was widely believed that if it goes unchecked, North Korea would soon test an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile and may soon arm one with a nuclear warhead³. However, the international community is a lot more concerned this time about the likelihood of a conflict breaking out in the region. This concern arises from the fact that North Korea has been confronted by another unconventional and unpredictable leader — US President, Donald J. Trump.

This paper examines whether there has been any change in the American policy towards North Korea under the Trump administration. The paper first analyses the American policy towards North Korea under successive US presidencies. Thereafter, it briefly looks at the role of other stakeholders in the region— China, Japan and North Korea. Finally, the paper examines the implications of the North Korean missile crisis for India.

American Policy towards North Korea

Upon a cursory glance, Trump's approach towards North Korea would seem naive and bereft of any understanding of the situation. It merely looks like the unnecessary chest thumping of a populist leader. He has not been consistent with the chest thumping either. One can see a lot of contradictions in the American policy towards North Korea with President Trump saying one thing and the Secretary of State and the Defence Secretary saying quite another, and President Trump contradicting himself at other times. On closer examination, however, a clear pattern emerges in the US approach towards North Korea. But, before looking at Trump administration's policy, there is a need to briefly examine the history of the US policy towards North Korea.

Bill Clinton (1993-2001)

Bill Clinton's Presidency is a good starting point. This is because North Korea successfully tested a missile in 1993⁴. Bill Clinton wanted to rein in a North Korea that felt increasingly threatened after the dissolution of the Soviet umbrella. Clinton got North Korea to sign the Agreed Framework in 1994. As part of the Agreed Framework, North Korea was to shut down the Yongbyon nuclear reactor in exchange for the US providing oil deliveries, cutting down on sanctions and providing proliferation resistant light water reactors to meet its energy needs⁵. This was successful until 1998 when America failed to follow up on its commitment towards the Framework, and began dilly dallying on the oil shipments and the light water reactors⁶. This caused the regime to restart the reactor leading up to the breakdown of the Framework. While failure of the Agreed Framework is often cited to point out the flaw in appeasement as an approach towards North Korea⁷, it was American hesitation to honour the terms of the Agreement that led to the failure of the Agreement⁸. It must however be conceded that North Korean demands are not always reasonable. But this is a concern that must be addressed before committing to them.

George W. Bush (2001-2009)

George Bush, who took over from Clinton in 2001, followed a diametrically opposite policy compared to his predecessor which was called “Anything But Clinton Approach (ABC)”⁹. He designated North Korea as part of what he called “The Axis of Evil”¹⁰. He squeezed North Korea the tightest in terms of sanctions and coercive diplomacy. He made not just denuclearization, but the reduction of even conventional weapons as a precondition for negotiations¹¹. The strategy did not work very well as North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006 and proliferated nuclear technology and material to Iran, Syria and Pakistan¹².

Barack Obama (2009-2017)

Obama’s leadership was one of experimentation with both the Bush strategy and that of Clinton’s i.e. both carrots and sticks. While it has been described as “Strategic Patience” by the administration, it can be argued that the phrase is a misnomer. This is because Obama’s policy became very harsh towards North Korea after the nuclear test in January 2016. He imposed unilateral sanctions on North Korea, and he got the United Nations Security Council to issue tough sanctions against North Korea¹³. During Obama’s tenure

North Korea conducted three nuclear tests and a lot more missile tests than during the predecessors. However, this statement must be appended with an important consideration. The North Korean leadership changed during Obama’s tenure¹⁴.

Donald J. Trump (2017-)

Donald J. Trump took over as the President of the United States in January 2017. Up till the period of writing, there has not been any clearly laid out strategy towards North Korea. In order to understand the US foreign policy, therefore, this paper has tried to analyse each tweet and statement made by the current US administrators on North Korea in the past eight months. Based on this, the paper tries to look for patterns or the lack of it.

The Trump administration began with very hawkish views by the President towards North Korea. It must be noted that Trump had a favourable view of Kim Jong-un during his Presidential Campaign. However, immediately after he assumed leadership, the US Secretary of State declared the “End of Strategic Patience” towards North Korea, indicating a shift away from Obama’s approach¹⁵. This has been followed by a series of seemingly confusing and contradictory statements by President

Trump and other American office bearers. But, on closer examination, one could find a clear pattern in the administration's approach towards North Korea.

There are small cycles of aggression and abatement visible in the US administration's views towards North Korea. Based on this analysis one could argue that Trump's policy towards North Korea is not very different from Obama's "Strategic Patience". However, it is also not the same. Trump's policy can be called "Strategic Impatience". This policy can be described as one that makes overt displays of "impatience", but this is part of the strategy, and hence the term "strategic". The businessman in Trump comes to play here. He passes aggressive statements towards North Korea on the one hand, but after a period of time passes conciliatory remarks. His hawkish statements are also abated by the dovish statements made by the other office bearers.

This pattern of aggression and abatement is also visible in Trump's approach towards China with respect to North Korea. A very tough stance towards China is visible in the first few weeks of April 2017. This view changes a few days after the Mar a Lago meeting with Xi Jinping¹⁶. One could argue that this is simply a reflection of Trump's ignorance of the larger geopolitics of

the region. But, this argument would not explain why Trump resorts to an aggressive stance towards China once again¹⁷.

The Council of Foreign Relations' Task Force Report argues that North Korea follows a predictable pattern of behavior towards the United States too. The report talks about this pattern as having three stages — Provocation, Intensification and Abatement¹⁸. One could argue that the 2017 cycle is also a reiteration of the pattern which has repeated itself for decades. This cycle started with the period of provocation from February to July 2017 with the very frequent missile tests. This cycle witnessed its peak with the July ICBM tests and climaxed with the sixth nuclear test on 3 September 2017. The strategic community believes that the second ICBM tested in July has the ability to reach the US mainland¹⁹. If the pattern is to be believed North Korea will show abatement behavior after this as the peak of the cycle has been reached. North Koreans have mastered the understanding of this cycle based on which they seek concessions from the United States.

Other Actors in the Region

There cannot be a discussion of North Korea without factoring in China. It

has been dominantly argued that China has heavy interests in maintaining the North Korean regime's survival to ensure a strategic buffer between the United States and itself²⁰. China also does not want the regime to collapse as this would mean heavy immigration into China and instability in the region²¹. China is blamed for the failure of sanctions against North Korea as 85 per cent of North Korean trade is with China. Sanctions by no other country against North Korea would be effective. However, it is also important to point out that China has increasingly been keen to curb North Korea in the recent past, and there are several examples to prove this. China has been voting in favour of most UNSC resolutions against North Korea²². The first nuclear test by North Korea in 2006 went against the Chinese wishes. The Chinese state media has been increasingly critical of the North Korean regime, there have also been reports of China's PLA having deployed Light Armoured Formations in its border with North Korea²³. This Chinese dilemma must be suitably exploited by the international community.

An escalation in the Korean peninsula will quite obviously have a direct effect on Japan and South Korea. The direct effect involves attack by North Korea on Japan and South Korea, primarily due

to the US bases in both these countries. But, the indirect consequences are also plenty. A conflict in the peninsula would finally expedite the increasing "normalisation" of Japan's security policy. It would provide the Japanese government a valid reason to convince the pacifist opposition to amend the constitution. This would also have larger consequences on India's defence and security cooperation with Japan. South Korea is the prime reason for the US restraint in acting towards North Korea. South Korea will be the biggest casualty of a conflict in the region²⁴.

Implications for India

Most countries have been condemning the North Korean missile mania but India's silence on the issue until recently has been very loud. India's Ministry of External Affairs released a statement in July 2017 after the ICBM test asking North Korea to refrain from such activity. After the North Korean nuclear test India issued a more strongly worded statement. Although on the right track, India's response is still reactive and not proactive, and is too little too late. While the stakes for India might not be so direct in the region, but instability in the region will have immense geo-economic repercussions for India. Another reason for India's silence could be the need to stay out of the mess of a country outside

the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime. But this should hardly be a concern for India. The track record of India and North Korea with respect to nuclear and weapons proliferation cannot be compared²⁵. India should condemn North Korea proactively and use this as a strategic communication to the international community on India's clear stand on the issue. The Pakistan-North Korea nuclear nexus is another reason India should be more enthusiastic in its condemnation. Pakistan's relationship with North Korea is also a powerful indicator of its loyalty towards China. China has always defended Pakistan's nuclear and non-proliferation record. In exchange China uses Pakistan as the intermediary funnel for supplying North Korea with nuclear materials²⁶.

Conclusion

Going back to the American policy towards North Korea, one can clearly see that Donald Trump is quite intentionally cultivating a culture of

his seeming unpredictability. On paper, however, American policy towards North Korea remains the same. In America's relations with North Korea the cycle of provocation, intensification, and abatement from North Korea is nothing out of the ordinary, and this cycle would live itself out irrespective of Trump's approach. It is not that there is no peaceful solution to the North Korean problem. The Agreed Framework as mentioned earlier is a good example of the success of engagement. However, the approach has to be a mixture of engagement and containment. And the trick to containment is not more and more rigid sanctions, but the successful implementation of these sanctions. In this regard China's gradual change in stance towards North Korea must be used favourably. India should see this situation as an opportunity to come across as a responsible nuclear power which is not insecure of its position in the international community.

12 September 2017

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Duterte's Foreign Policy Shift: Bandwagoning with China?

Jyotishman Bhagawati

The election of Rodrigo Duterte as the President of the Philippines in June 2016 led to a remarkable shift in the foreign policy of the archipelagic state. Unlike the previous administration of Benigno Aquino III, which was somewhat confrontational with China on several fronts, including dragging Beijing to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) over the maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), Duterte downplayed the friction and adopted a more conciliatory stance towards China. Shortly after his election victory, Duterte announced that his foreign policy “will not be dependent on the United States”.¹ He also embarked on a state visit to China in October 2016 (his first outside the Association of South East Asian Nations countries) where he announced his “separation” from the U.S. in favour of a new association with China and Russia.² Incidentally, this policy pivot also comes a year after the arbitral tribunal invalidated China's claims in the South China Sea and censured it for violating

the Philippines' sovereign rights in the region. This reflects the unpredictable nature of geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific, which has recently witnessed traditional U.S. allies like Thailand and the Philippines moving into closer relationship with China.

In view of the increasing geopolitical competition at play between China and the U.S. over dominance in the Indo-Pacific region especially over the South China Sea, this paper attempts to evaluate how Beijing has been successful in bringing the Philippines to its fold and whether the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte is ‘bandwagoning’ with China.³ It also analyses the declining U.S. influence in the Philippines and attempts to examine the implication of Duterte's strategy for India and the wider Indo-Pacific region.

Conceptual Framework

Several scholars like Amitav Acharya and Peter Katzenstein are inclined to believe

that Western theoretical frameworks do not adequately explain the full range of ideas, norms and attributes associated with intra-Asian relationships.⁴ A prominent voice among this group is of David Kang, who points out that Eurocentric ideas, concepts and theories have created wrong predictions and conclusions about Asia. He, therefore, highlights the need for new analytical frameworks to study Asia. According to him, Asian states behave differently than the West because of their different historical and cultural traditions and dissimilar geographical and political realities. Kang argues that containment of China does not have a strong appeal in the region as most Asian states generally have a penchant for ‘hierarchy’ as opposed to ‘equality’. He criticizes not just Realism but Western International Relations theory in general for “getting Asia wrong” and argues that instead of balancing against China, they are bandwagoning with it.⁵

Duterte’s Approach to China

Whether Kang’s conceptual framework can fit into Manila’s recent bonhomie towards Beijing can only be gauged from an understanding of Duterte’s broader policy priorities since coming to power. It is noteworthy that even though Duterte assumed office just before the PCA verdict in July 2016, he

continued to downplay the disputes in the South China Sea and moved towards rapprochement with Beijing. During his first visit to China, Duterte declared his intention to have an “independent” foreign policy, to reduce U.S. influence over the Philippines. As part of his poll promise, he is also seeking foreign aid and investments in order to drive growth and create more employment opportunities. Furthermore, Duterte is facing pressing domestic challenges including a violent campaign against illicit drug trade, which has already claimed around 3,000-7,000 lives and the ongoing conflict in Marawi City, where the government is currently battling a homegrown pro-Islamic State, Maute group. The ensuing violence has also led to the killing of over 300 people, besides displacing tens of thousands of Marawi residents.⁶ Duterte has also been unsuccessful so far in negotiating a peace treaty with another significant armed group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Simultaneously, his administration is also negotiating for peace with the National Democratic Front-Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army (NDF-CPP-NPA); although, even after repeated setbacks, prospect of a final settlement of the five decade old conflict still looks dim.⁷ He has attached more importance to confronting illegal drug trade and militancy in Marawi City on the island

of Mindanao, his home island. Duterte has further promised to the progression of infrastructure projects held up under the previous administration, and is also planning to build a large infrastructure system in Mindanao.

Towards these domestic policy priorities, Duterte has been able to receive substantial financial, military and diplomatic support from China. Beijing has consistently supported Duterte's campaign against drugs and his confrontation against the Islamist militants in the south; for which, it has been willing to provide large-scale assistance in counter terror and domestic security operations.⁸ Besides offering the Philippines about US\$ 12 million in weapons and ammunitions for counter-terror operations, Beijing has also made available a loan of US\$ 500 million for its military to counter its historically close ties with Washington, D.C., and increase China's own ability to shape the Philippines' defence and foreign policies.⁹ Duterte has also been able to garner investments and financing agreements worth US\$ 24 billion (of which US\$15 billion comprised investment projects and US\$ 9 billion credit facilities) during his first three day visit to China.¹⁰ Moreover, recently, China has also began allowing Filipino fishermen to

resume fishing activities around the Scarborough Shoal under a tentative fishing agreement which is now being hailed by Duterte's administration as "fruits" of his "strategy".¹¹ However, the Scarborough Shoal is still under the administrative control of the Chinese Coast Guard, and the Filipino fishermen have only been allowed to operate in the immediate vicinity of the Shoal. They have not been allowed to enter the lagoon within the shoal, which is not only rich in fisheries but also serves as a crucial rest, repair and recuperation spot for fishermen, especially during inclement weather.¹²

Another positive development in the region has been China's agreement to sign a "Code of Conduct for the South China Sea" with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although not a legally binding agreement, it is still taken as a "positive momentum" for a "steady progress toward a substantive Code of Conduct".¹³ Also, in contrast to its past attempts to diplomatically isolate the Philippines, China is now wooing the Philippines to partner in its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the "Belt and Road" initiative. Hostilities between the two states have also reduced considerably despite China's unabated island construction activities in the region.¹⁴

Analyzing Duterte's Anti-U.S. Stance

In contrast to China's strong backing of Duterte's policies, the U.S. has not been able to offer similar support and assistance to the Philippines. On the contrary, the Obama administration was harshly critical of Duterte's anti-drug campaign over concerns regarding gross human rights violations and extra judicial killings allegedly committed by the Duterte administration. In light of these concerns, the U.S. State Department halted a planned sale of 26,000 assault rifles to the Philippines national police.¹⁵ Washington had also deferred an aid package to Manila worth up to US\$ 434 million in December 2015.¹⁶

The U.S. was very supportive when the Philippines approached the PCA on the SCS issue against China. Surprisingly, however, it took a comparatively subdued position on the PCA verdict by calling for calm and patience in the region rather than declaring its resolute support to the Philippines, with which it has a "Mutual Defence Treaty" since 1951.¹⁷ This was in contrast to states like Japan and Australia, which despite having no defence obligations to the Philippines, categorically called for compliance by all parties to the dispute over the ruling.¹⁸

Thus, the repeated Western criticism over human rights in the Philippines, the U.S.' restrained stance with regard to the arbitration verdict, the increasing need for aid and investments to sustain higher growth and investor confidence in the Philippines as well as Duterte's own predicament to pursue an independent foreign policy steered him to maintain distance from the U.S., and opt for rapprochement with China. As part of this policy shift, Duterte also reversed from the Filipino leaders' diplomatic tradition of undertaking their first major foreign trip to Washington. Much to the chagrin of the U.S., he has not only visited China twice in his capacity as the Filipino President but has also become the first President to undertake a state visit to Russia, while deliberately snubbing major Western capitals including Washington, D.C.¹⁹ Even when President Donald Trump invited him to the White House in April 2017, Duterte refused to give any positive response, saying he "cannot make any definite promise".²⁰

Philippines-U.S.: Continued Engagement

Of late, relations between the U.S. and the Philippines have shown signs of improvement. Both of them have been conducting joint patrols, more recently

in the Sulu Sea amid rising concerns about Islamist militancy and piracy in the region. The high profile exercise involved the American Littoral Combat Ship *USS Coronado* and the flagship warship of the Philippines Navy, the *Del Pilar* Class Frigate *BRP Ramon Alcaraz*.²¹ The U.S. have also been providing technical assistance to the Philippines military in the battle against the pro-Islamic militants. However, when asked about the U.S. support to the Philippines, Duterte said he had “never approached America” for assistance and was “not aware of that until they arrived”.²²

Nevertheless, despite all the rhetoric about “separation” of ties with the U.S., security relations between the U.S. and the Philippines is likely to remain strong since territorial and maritime disputes with China continue to persist especially over growing assertiveness by the Chinese Navy. Duterte is also facing heavy criticisms from several quarters at home. Apart from the military which has been historically close to Washington, D.C. and deeply suspicious of Chinese activities in the region, Duterte’s approach to China has also been criticised as lacking “discernible direction, coherence or vision” by Antonio Carpio, the Philippine Supreme Court Justice who played an advisory role in the arbitration award.²³ Nevertheless,

Duterte has shown proclivity to his domestic concerns while downplaying the disputes with China.

Deduction

Although known for his temperamental attitude and use of unparliamentary language, Duterte has been successful in receiving defence assistance from both the U.S. and China. Similarly, through pragmatic diplomatic flexibility, Duterte is also enhancing diplomatic ties with Japan and Russia.²⁴ Besides, military-to-military contact and coast guard talks with China have also resumed in order to enhance confidence-building and reduce risk of miscalculation.²⁵ This clearly indicates that rather than bandwagoning with China, Duterte has adopted a multi-vectored approach in dealing with both the U.S. and China in the region. This is also reflected in the fact that Duterte has improved relations with not only China and Russia but also U.S. allies in the region like Japan, which shows his emphasis to have balanced relations with the major powers of the region.

Conclusion

To conclude, Duterte’s policy change towards China can best be described as a tactical maneuver rather than a strategic realignment of foreign and

security policies. Therefore, this may not affect India's immediate interests in the region. However, Delhi should have a long-term perspective on the region taking into account the changing facts on the ground marked by the growing presence of the Chinese Navy and the implications that it can have over India's external relations and trade in the region.

India must also remain actively engaged with like-minded regional states like Japan, Vietnam and Australia especially in view of the prevailing uncertainties in the region, particularly after the election of Donald Trump as the U.S. President.

23 October 2017

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Maritime Security and Law

Piracy in the Gulf of Aden: Isn't it time already for the Warships to head home?

Dinesh Yadav

On 13 March pirates hijacked an oil tanker¹, named Aris 13, off the Somali coast, when the tanker was carrying fuel from Djibouti to Mogadishu. It is interesting, however, to note that this was the first successful hijacking of a commercial ship by Somali pirates since 2012. Even more interesting is the fact that, in less than three days, the pirates released the 08 men Sri Lankan crew and the ship without ransom².

The last decade was witness to an unprecedented surge in piracy emanating from Somalia, which became the most serious threat to global shipping passing through the area. The Somali coasts sits astride two of the most significant maritime trade routes; one that connects Asia and the Persian Gulf with Europe, through the Gulf of Aden, and the other, the North–South trade route running along the East African coast. Severe lack of economic opportunities and an absence of government in Somalia

allowed some of these Somali rebels to hijack some hapless merchant ships plying on these two busy sea routes, and trade them off for handsome ransoms.

Heightened piracy activities along one of the busiest maritime routes inflicted overwhelming financial losses for the shipping community. These costs were in the form of lost cargo, ransom money, higher insurance costs, added shipping times, extra compensation to crews, litigation and legal fees, etc. Even cruising faster through the area, in an effort to discourage pirates, added to fuel costs. A study has indicated that for a supertanker, cruising at 17.9 knots versus the typical 12.8 knots speed, adds an extra \$88,000 in fuel expense per ship per day. Some ships even started avoiding the area altogether by taking a much longer alternative route, adding to huge fuel, time and opportunity costs.

As the piracy incidents off the Horn of Africa crossed the threshold,

the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), in 2008, issued its first resolution³ that empowered foreign navies to act against piracy in the waters around Somalia. Despite that, the acts of piracy continued unabated off the Somali coast and even expanded beyond its coastal waters into the high seas. These resulted in a series of other UN resolutions on piracy in general and Somali piracy in particular.

One immediate fallout of Somali piracy and subsequent UNSC sanctions was the assemblage of warships in the region from almost all major powers. There are a number of international naval alliances active in the region, these include the Combined Task Force (CTF) 151 under the 30-nations Combined Maritime Forces partnership; NATO's Operation Ocean Shield; and EU Naval Force Op ATALANTA. In addition, there are a number of navies operating in the region individually which include China, Iran, India, Japan, Korea, Russia and Malaysia, etc. Such is the congregation of these warships in the region that it would rival the largest maritime firepower that would have come together anywhere during the World War II.

The piracy risk off Gulf of Aden is much suppressed today, and this has been possible due to deployment of a

large number of warships in the region. However, the larger issue consequential to Somali piracy is the permanent presence of extra regional navies in the region. Deployment of warships for anti-piracy operations is a gross overkill. Deployment of a destroyer/frigate sized warship with an array of advanced weaponry against a handful of pirates armed with basic personal weapons defeats all logic. Accordingly, the contention that warships are present in the region purely for anti-piracy operations appears to be implausible. China demonstrated this blatantly when it deployed one of its submarines for the operations. The huge assemblage of warships for anti-piracy operations is so much out of proportion that presently, there are more number of warships in the region than the total estimated number of pirates.

It is also true that the ground situation in Somalia has not improved and the pirate networks remain. It is, therefore, essential that credible foreign-led counter-piracy efforts remain in place. However, if the intent is transparent, stakeholders could handle the piracy issue by simply deploying helicopter carrying merchant ships, with Special Forces contingent embarked. Deployment of container vessels as Naval Auxiliary vessels by the Royal Malaysian

Navy, for instance, Bunga Mas Lim, is a copybook example showcasing economy of effort and transparent intent in the case.

Such a large congregation of warships in its primary area of interest doesn't auger well for India. Accordingly, India should advocate progressive de-militarization of the region, with only appropriate number of warships

deployed in the region, based on the nature and the scale of threat. On its part, India could deploy a modified ship from the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) for anti-piracy operations, on similar lines as Malaysia's auxiliary vessels, and thereafter recommend the same for other stakeholders as well.

05 June 2017

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Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in Palk Bay: Issues and Challenges

R. S. Vasan

The Context

Palk Bay is the South-western portion of the strait which is a small stretch of ocean in the Bay of Bengal located between Northern Sri Lanka and south eastern India. The strait is bounded on the south by Pamban Island, Adam's bridge (also known as Rama Setu), the Gulf of Mannar. The strait is 40 to 85 miles (64 to 137 km) wide, 85 miles long. The average depth is less than 100 meters. Many rivers including Vaigai (India) drain in to the Palk Bay., The Sri Lankan side has many Islets including Katchateevu which has been the bone of contention between Indian fishers and Sri Lankan fishers since 1974.

The occurrences of Tamil fishermen crossing the International Maritime Boundary Limit (IMBL) in large numbers—quoting the traditional rights to fish in the Palk Bay and despite the fear of being arrested—has not abated. The mostly intentional crossing of the

officially demarcated (IMBL) by quoting historical rights has not helped matters. The agreement of 1974 for demarking the IMBL, and the subsequent clarifications by the Indian Government, do not allow Indian fishers to cross the IMBL. The fishers continue to fish not only around the Katchatheevu Island (where the drying of nets was allowed in the 1974 agreement) but also in areas well in Sri Lankan waters. With the clarifications of 1976 on the floor of the Indian Parliament by the then External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh, the fishermen were specifically directed not to cross the IMBL to fish in Sri Lankan waters. The vows of Tamil fishermen have only accentuated with each passing year due to the complexities involved in resolving the vexed issue of fishing in the Palk Bay. Both Sri Lanka and India are engaged in tackling the issue in an amicable manner; however, a permanent solution seems to be elusive given the ground realities between the fishermen

on both sides who insist on juxtaposing historical rights. This issue brief makes an attempt to understand the present status, and provide some options for finding lasting solutions.

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing

Fishermen the world over are involved in poaching wherever surveillance and anti-poaching measures are weak. Fishers from neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and others from South East Asian countries are also regular poachers in unmonitored fishing areas, irrespective of who owns that Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The overlapping claims of the EEZ in the South China Sea between China and its maritime neighbours (Taiwan, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam) has resulted in aggressive fishing by Chinese fishers who are even escorted by the Chinese Coast Guard. With dwindling stocks and increasing demand, the resulting conflicts have become a regular occurrence. The situation in Europe and west appears to be better managed, with clear demarcations and the monitoring of activities in the fishing zones. However, what needs to be noted is that, irrespective of which country's EEZ is violated, the activities such as the ones witnessed in the Palk

Bay would come under the category of IUU,¹ and needs to be dealt with as such by the concerned Governments. From this point of view, the navies and the coast guards of the countries charged with the protection of the EEZ and the prevention of poaching by foreign vessels are well within their rights to apprehend the offenders, and try them according to the law of the land.

In the Indian context, due to the seriousness of the problem between Gujarati fishers and Pakistan fishers, a hot line was set up between the MSA and the Indian Coast Guard. This has certainly helped in resolving such issues as crossing into each other's territory and consequent apprehension. Signed in 2005, this MOU has been extended for another five years—from March 2016² onwards. This CBM has, to a large extent, addressed the issue of the unwarranted detention and harassment of fishermen who are pursuing their livelihood. However, the problems are most acute in the respect of TN fishers who have a Hobson's choice in Palk Bay. It has also been reported that a similar MOU on the lines of the existing one with MSA of Pakistan is being considered for implementation with the Coast Guards of India and Sri Lanka.³

Tackling the Problem in Palk Bay: Alternatives

It was decided by both the Governments last year (2016) that the Joint Working Group formed would meet every three months,⁴ and the ministerial meeting would be conducted every six months. The JWG met in New Delhi in November 2016, and the first ministerial meeting was conducted in Colombo on 02 January 2017. The main issue for the Indian side was the return of the fishing vessels apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy/Coast Guard. By and large, the release of the fishermen has not posed major hurdles on both sides, despite some occasional delays. However, it is the release of the mechanized vessels that has strained the relations between the fishers of both countries.

As far as the Sri Lankan fishers are concerned, they object to the use of mechanized trawlers, which has created havoc on the Indian side of the IMBL. The insistence of the Indian Tamil fishers that they need to be given some more time (three to five years)—has not been received well by their counterparts who fear that the fishing grounds on the Sri Lankan side will also meet similar fate as on the Indian side. It is noteworthy that Sri Lankan fishers whom are also Tamils from the Island—have not objected to traditional modes of fishing which is least disruptive to the fishing grounds.

The Sri Lankan Navy or the Coast Guard cannot be blamed for arresting the fishermen who are violating the IMBL on a regular basis. It may be noted that many fishermen are also wage earners, and the fear of loss of livelihood compels them to fish in Sri Lankan waters as there is hardly any fish left on the Indian side due to over fishing using mechanized means. Arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy or the Sri Lankan Coast Guard, and the follow up action by the State Government to exert pressure on the centre to secure the release of fishermen is a regular occurrence, and both sides eventually release them. Sri Lanka has serious reservations about releasing the boats which they know will return to Sri Lankan waters to indulge in illegal fishing again. Successive governments in Tamil Nadu have used the fishers as vote banks and support them even when their actions are not in accordance with the agreements. This is also partially due to the political affiliation of some of the boat owners who have invested in trawlers, and have employed fishers to poach in the neighbouring country's waters. The fishers who man these trawlers are wage earners under threat, and hence do not mind taking the risk of venturing deep in to Sri Lankan waters.

Joint Patrolling

Presently, the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and the Sri Lankan Coast Guard have quarterly meeting near the IMBL where issues of security, fisheries, and other related issues are discussed. The maritime security agencies on both sides have good working relations, and exchange all information during such meetings in a spirit of cooperation.

The proposal for Joint Patrol by the two sides in Palk Bay is not new. It has been proposed on many occasions by the Sri Lankan Government at regular intervals. It may be noted that this was rejected outright by the TN Government when the DMK⁵ was in power in 2007. However, it appears that India is now looking at this option⁶ seriously, as agreed during a meeting in November 2016 between the External Affairs Ministers of both the countries. However, there are serious challenges associated with enforcing a strict code of conduct for politically supported fishers. Since the number of offenders from the Indian side is huge, it would become the primary task of the Indian Navy/Coast Guard to prevent Tamil fishers from crossing the IMBL.

Going by past precedents, the regional party in power would accuse the centre of interfering with the pursuit

of livelihood of fisher's by deploying the Indian Coast Guard alongside its counterparts from Sri Lanka. The possibility of fishers taking to the streets, and precipitating a crisis for the party in power in Tamil Nadu, is immense. This has the potential for creating a law and order problem, and could spiral out of control due to strong emotions that unite the fishers and the politicians in Tamil Nadu.

Impasse

Even in the recently concluded ministerial meeting, the insistence on obtaining more time for stopping Indian trawlers for fishing has not been received favourably by the Sri Lankan side as there are genuine fears about the wanton destruction to the fishing fields on the Sri Lankan side. It is on record that, during the meeting between the fishermen's association on both sides facilitated by the Centre, Tamil fishers wanted a period of five years. Thereafter, it was brought down to three years—and even that is not acceptable to the Sri Lankan fishers considering the delicate nature of the fishing grounds on the Sri Lankan side.

The problem is the making of the State that has a responsibility for providing alternate means of livelihood to the fishermen. Various suggested

options for alleviating the sufferings of the fishers have not been acted up on. Despite the strong advice for moving away from trawlers to deep sea water fishing, not much has been done in that direction for decades. The Tamil Nadu vision document of 2023 which was brought out in 2013, does make a mention about the concept of deep sea fishing, but it is moving at a snail's speed. The procurement of the mother vessels⁷ and other related activities remains as work in progress. The wherewithal for deep sea fishing is just not in place. For deep sea fishing to be effective, it needs an adequate number of suitably equipped vessels, trained man power, hinterland connectivity, cold storage, on board canning facilities, etc.,

Many nations indulge in deep sea fishing on a routine basis, and it is indeed surprising that, despite the advantages of two million plus square kilometres of EEZ, India has not invested in this initiative. The fact that the livelihood options of Tamil fishermen cannot be at the mercy of a small neighbouring nation needs to be borne in mind, and all actions required—including skill development and infrastructure—need to be initiated without any time delay by committing funds and working to a time bound plan to wean the fishermen away from trawlers, and eventually from Palk Bay.

Conclusion

It is evident that any solution to the problems of fishers in the Palk Bay has remained elusive mostly due to the insistence of the TN fishers (who are supported by political parties) to violate the IMBL on a regular basis. As a big neighbour, India has a responsibility to ensure that it abides by the provisions of FAO guidelines on preventing IUU.

Knowing that the fishers affected on their side are also Tamils, Sri Lanka has been sympathetic, and is willing to allow traditional modes of fishing for some more time. The insistence by the TN fishers that they should be allowed to continue with mechanized trawlers defies all logic and reasoning. Unfortunately, they are also supported by political parties with an eye on the vote bank. This does not augur well for bilateral relations. That the Joint Working Groups are meeting every quarter, and the Ministerial meeting is now a six-monthly occurrence, should pave the way for keeping up the dialogue to work on the way ahead.

Both the Centre and the State should fast track the processes for acquiring deep sea fishing capability with the associated augmentation of infrastructure, maintenance facility, hinterland

connectivity, skills development, and other such components to make DSF a success which is like the many East Asian

and South East Asian countries who have invested in this mode of fishing.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing IUU around the world has assumed serious dimensions due to dwindling stock and poaching in the EEZ. The responsibility of preventing the IUU has been entrusted to the Flag States. FAO has many initiatives and documents which discuss the plan of action for International Plan of Action to deal with IUU. Many documents available on the home page of FAO vide <http://www.fao.org/fishery/iuu-fishing/en>, accessed on 10 January 2017
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- 7 http://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/documents/fisheries_e_pn_2015_16.pdf The detailed paper put out as a policy note by the Fisheries Department of the TN Government covers all issues, including deep sea fishing. However, despite the announcements, nothing much has progressed on the ground. The PDF quoted was accessed on 9 January 2017.

Rohingya Crisis: A Potential Maritime Quagmire for India

Dinesh Yadav

Continued ethnic strife and the State's overtly discriminatory policies in the Rakhine province of Myanmar have resulted in hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fleeing their homes. As the exodus began in earnest in the late 1970s, the majority of the Rohingyas, escaping prosecution, crossed into Bangladesh through the land route, although a significant number also took the sea route, and fetched up in far off countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and even Australia. Whilst the issue of Rohingya refugees/ illegal immigrants in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia have been widely covered by the international media, there has been no mention, even in the Indian media, about the presence of nearly 40,000 of Rohingyas in India¹, of whom 16,500 have been formally recognised and registered by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Most of these are believed to have crossed into India through Bangladesh and have now settled even in far off places like Jammu.

The illegal ingress of Rohingyas poses a serious security threat to India, especially in insurgency affected areas. The proximity of Bangladesh, from where these people are channeling into India, with the insurgency-ridden northeastern states and the Red Corridor, further exacerbates India's security challenges.

According to some estimates, more than 10,000 illegal Rohingya immigrants are settled in Jammu, of which around 7,000 are registered with ²the UNHCR. The settlement of these illegal immigrants, in large numbers in Jammu, is singularly intriguing as it defies the usual immigration norms. The usual determinants of terrain, climate, culture, food, etc., of Jammu should not have matched with the settlement preference for Rohingyas, nor does Jammu provide any preferential economic opportunities. Proximity to the troubled region of Kashmir and the volatile India-Pakistan Line of Control should have, in fact, de-incentivized the

Jammu option for these settlers. Also, the far off location chosen is a pointer towards the conclusion that these people might not have any intentions of ever going back, not even as and when the situation improves in Myanmar.

To compound the situation further, there always exists a high potential of displaced and aggrieved youth becoming cannon fodder for extremist and terrorists groups. The most relevant example in this regard would that be of the Taliban, which was born in the seminaries set up in the refugee camps of Pakistan, as they poured out of Afghanistan in the early eighties, after the Soviet invasion. Pakistan, a proven exporter of terror to India, would not hesitate in fishing in troubled waters and use misguided youth from the Rohingya community in furtherance of its intention to inflict a “thousand cuts” on India. The presence of these potential recruits in Jammu, close to the India-Pakistan Line of Control, therefore, further complicates the security conundrum for India.

According to an assessment made by Indian intelligence agencies, some of the top Rohingya leaders are suspected to have links with a number of Pakistan-based extremist groups including Hafiz Saeed’s Jamaat-ud-Dawah (JuD) and Masood Azhar’s Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). In fact, the Myanmar-based

extremist Rohingya group, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), is even believed to have a Pakistani chapter. As per the International Crisis Group (ICG), the extremist group ARSA is led by Ata Ullah, a Karachi born Rohingya and Rohingya fighters are being secretly trained by Afghan and Pakistani extremist groups.

Renewed violence, since 2016, has worsened the conditions in the Rakhine province, resulting in an accentuated exodus of refugees. Bangladesh alone has received more than 300,000 Rohingyas since August 2017, when violence erupted afresh, thus taking the estimated population of displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh to 600,000 – 800,000. These large numbers of refugees impose huge economic, humanitarian and security strains and Bangladesh might have already reached the limit of its resilience. It will, therefore, become increasingly difficult for Bangladesh to hold such large numbers in its territory, let alone accepting fresh exodus. The consequent probability of some of these Rohingyas crossing over to India through Bangladesh and also directly from Myanmar through the sea route increases manifold.

With a large numbers of Rohingyas already in India and a near certain arrival of many more in the near future,

as the situation deteriorates further in Myanmar, India faces a serious security challenge. The potential of their misuse for nefarious activities, including terrorism, also remains high. Amidst the backdrop of these revelations, the Indian government has expressed its intention to identify and deport Rohingyas who have illegally entered India.

It is germane that India is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, which spells out the rights of refugees and the responsibilities of countries. Neither does India have a domestic refugee law. As per the existing rules of the land, the illegal immigrants in India could, therefore, well be deported. However, India has a long history of providing refuge to groups fleeing persecution, although on an ad hoc basis, including Tibetans, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankan Tamils and Afghans in recent history. However, national security implications weigh heavily as the Indian Government takes a stand to deport Rohingyas.

Meanwhile, Naypyidaw, for the first time, has offered to take back Rohingyas who have fled to other countries. Aung San Suu Kyi, in her state address on September 19, 2017 has said that *“Myanmar is prepared to start a refugee verification process for those who wish to return.”* This welcome change in Naypyidaw’s policy on Rohingyas

has come about soon after the visit by Prime Minister Modi to Myanmar. During his visit to Myanmar, whilst the criticism of Myanmar was growing, the Indian Prime Minister expressed India’s solidarity with Myanmar and had also shared India’s concerns over the violence in its Rakhine state.

New Delhi must, therefore, continue to work with Naypyidaw and Dhaka to help stabilize the situation such that the exodus stops and conditions become conducive for the return of these migrants to their home country. Although the statement from Aung San Suu Kyi is a welcome change, the identification and deportation of Rohingyas back to Myanmar would still remain a challenging task for the concerned Indian agencies.

Also, with increased chances of India emerging as one of the preferred location for displaced Rohingyas, it is quite likely that these people might take the sea route for transit from Myanmar/Bangladesh to India. With Bangladesh and Myanmar hardening their stance on not allowing the influx through the land borders, the ingress through land would become increasingly difficult and consequently, the sea route becomes the obvious alternative. Rohingyas are no strangers to the seas, and have travelled by boats to distant places such

as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia. The east coast of India is hardly a long distance from Myanmar/Bangladesh for these intrepid seafarers!

Such a development would pose a severe challenge to the maritime security organisation of India off the East Coast. While the maritime security apparatus on the country's western seaboard has been regularly tested, largely due to

regular misadventures by our western neighbor, the eastern seaboard remains relatively uninitiated to this kind of security threat. All maritime security agencies on the East Coast of India must, therefore, gear up for this challenge, lest we should be taken by surprise by 'Boat People' landing up on our eastern shores.

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ENDNOTES

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Maritime Dimension of Hybrid Warfare – The Indian Context

Gurpreet S Khurana

(This is a revised extract of chapter titled “India’s Strategic Landscape, Hybrid Threats and Likely Operational Scenarios” jointly authored by Gurmeet Kanwal, Syed Ata Hasnain, Gurpreet S Khurana and Manmohan Bahadur, in Satish Kumar (ed.) India’s National Security: Annual Review 2016-17 (Routledge India: December 2017)

Introduction

To address its maritime dimension, it is essential to comprehend the generic concept of ‘hybrid war’ and its nature, applied in the Indian context. First; it represents the innovative use of unconventional (non-military) means by the adversary to hurt India’s national interests in a manner to be able to achieve its ‘desired end-state’. It could also be used in conjunction with conventional means of war fighting, with the aim of disrupting India’s war fighting processes at the national-

strategic and military-strategic levels. At the higher level, it could target India’s apex political decision-making or its national war-effort. At the latter level, it could seek to disrupt its military-operational planning; more specifically – in terms of ‘Operational Art’ – the ‘lines of operation’.

Second; while the term ‘hybrid war’ has come into vogue in recent times, the concept is not new. Nonetheless, the increased employment of non-state groups by India’s adversaries and the advent of new technologies – including the easy availability of Commercial Off-The-Shelf (COTS) equipment – over the past decades have enabled to enhance the potential of disruptive effects against India. In this context, it may be recalled how in November 2008, Pakistan-based terrorists specifically trained for sea-borne clandestine infiltration used advanced satellite-based navigational and communication gadgets and

sophisticated weapons to wreak havoc in Mumbai.¹ When used in conjunction with conventional war fighting, such ‘hybrid’ means could lead to palpable ‘asymmetry’ against the Indian military forces.

Third; traditionally, the various security agencies constituting India’s national security apparatus have preferred to operate in their respective ‘compartmentalized’ domains – land, sea or air. However, in the contemporary context, the nature of relevant unconventional means and of the associated technologies enables hybrid threats to transcend all domains. Whatever hybrid means are brought and bear in the terrestrial domain, can also be employed in the maritime realm. Of course, the application of such means would differ, and would be based on the inherent nature of the ocean realm, and the role the seas play in meeting national interests.

Furthermore, the seamless nature of the maritime domain enables ready flow of threats and challenges from one area to another. For instance, maritime terrorism has grown and expanded over the years, operating from the sea and at sea, in both direct and indirect forms, necessitating increased focus on coastal and offshore security. It has also started

taking an increasingly hybrid character, with possible blurring of lines between conventional and sub-conventional levels of conflict.²

Threat Scenarios

The maritime domain bears vital economic interests of a country. However, a predominant part of the oceans is not subject to national sovereignty, which makes it much easier for a hybrid threat to manifest. For instance, during an armed conflict, an adversary would usually attempt to disrupt India’s strategic crude oil imports. The conventional practice is to achieve this through a naval blockade of Indian ports or distant interdiction of India-bound oil tankers. However, this would necessitate establishment of Sea Control. The adversary could avoid all this simply by employing a terrorist group to lay crude mines – even explosive-laden drums – in maritime choke-points like the Strait of Hormuz or Bab-el-Mandeb, where from much of India’s oil imports transit. The explosion of a single mine would be sufficient to disrupt shipping through the choke-point due to fear among shippers. The insecurity to shipping could be aggravated using information operations, including through social websites. Although this action would also impinge upon the interests of many

other countries, the adversary could deny any linkage with the terrorists.

Another possible scenario could be the paralysis of India's sea trade through cyber-attacks. The increasing digitization of the shipping industry has made it highly vulnerable to such unconventional threats.³ A determined adversary could hack into its port management information systems or even into the navigation, automation or external communication systems of Indian-flagged ships, leading to disruption of commercial transactions, eventually causing serious outcomes for the Indian economy.

The adversary could also employ terrorists to target India's offshore oil-platforms using bomb-laden fast boats. Identifying the threat in the open seas amidst rather dense shipping and fishing environment has always been a major challenge. After the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India has taken major strides towards enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through coastal surveillance measures and the establishment of the National Command Control Communications and Intelligence Network (NC3IN). However, the NC3IN could be disrupted by the sponsoring state through cyber attacks preceding the terrorist action. Such disruption could also precede a

terrorist strike from seawards against India's critical littoral infrastructure like nuclear installations.

The adversary may also use unconventional means to disrupt India's satellite-based maritime communications and imagery services. This is more likely to be undertaken at crucial moments during or preceding an armed conflict; and using non-kinetic means, which encompasses an element of deniability. The satellites could be 'blinded' through cyber-attacks against the control stations, or even directly through Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP) weapons.

India's coastal infrastructure and assets are also susceptible to hybrid threats in the form of clandestine underwater attacks by terrorists trained in diving operations. It is well known that achieving even limited sub-surface MDA is extremely challenging. The recent advances in underwater technology – including robotics – achieved by India's adversaries, compounds the threat. India's major ports are more at risk since these are hubs of the nation's maritime-economic activity and represent soft targets. The impending growth of passenger and cruise shipping industry would only enhance the vulnerability of Indian ports, including that of cruise

terminals and passenger vessels plying in India's island territories.

Another hybrid scenario could be the disruption of the Global Undersea Communication Cable Infrastructure (GUCCI), which runs across the Indian Ocean. Nearly all of India's major internet and telecommunications service providers use GUCCI, whose disruption could isolate India's cyberlink communication with the rest of the world. In December 2008, multiple accidental cable cuts in the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf resulted in a widespread loss of internet connectivity throughout the Middle East and South Asia. India lost 50 to 60 per cent of online connectivity while Egypt lost 70 per cent. Many feel that communication satellites can serve as redundancy in the event of a disruption of GUCCI, but this is not true since these satellites offer a limited bandwidth.⁴

Conclusion

Responding to 'hybrid' threats at sea is not an easy proposition, considering that the maritime domain is a predominantly international medium. The presence of a large number of neutrals in the vast and largely unregulated expanse of the oceans brings about two major challenges, viz. achieving MDA and formulation of effective Rules of Engagement (RoE).

Nonetheless, since 'hybrid' threats transcend land, sea and air domains, and even the capabilities of Indian military forces, the response to these threats necessitates a more holistic and synergistic national approach, with the defence forces firmly within the loop, even though not spearheading the response.

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ENDNOTES

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Retrieving Kachchatheevu for India: A Non-Starter?

Alyona Seth

Introduction

The encroachment by Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan waters in search of profitable catch and their detention by the Sri Lankan Navy have often caused friction in Indo-Sri Lankan ties. In order to maintain amiable bilateral relations, concurrent with India's "Neighbourhood First" policy, resolving this fishing dispute has assumed greater significance. During his March 2016 visit to Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Modi labeled the dispute a "livelihood and humanitarian concern" requiring a long-term solution.¹

The government of Tamil Nadu alleges that the Indo-Sri Lankan fishing dispute is a direct consequence of the "unlawful" ceding of Kachchatheevu to Sri

Lanka. Kachchatheevu is a small barren island in the Palk bay contested by Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen from the northern provinces.

The rich fisheries, now depleted on the Indian side, have been the traditional fishing grounds for fishermen from both countries. The island lies in Sri Lankan waters under the terms of a bilateral treaty signed in 1974.

This issue brief analyses the contentious issue of Kachchatheevu by examining the delineation of the maritime boundary with Sri Lanka and the contrasting claims of the Tamil Nadu and central government with regards to Kachchatheevu. It aims to examine to what extent the issue of Kachchatheevu plays a role in the fishery contention between the two countries.

Background

The negotiations between Sri Lanka and India on the settlement of their maritime boundaries, specifically in the Palk Bay, were propelled by the camaraderie enjoyed by then Indian PM Indira Gandhi and her Sri Lankan counterpart Mrs. Srimavo Bandaranaike.

In the 1970s, Mrs. Bandaranaike was at the receiving end of harsh criticism on the Tamil ethnic issue, higher cost of living and labour unrest. Seeking diplomatic means to silence her critics, she approached Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the matter pertaining to the delineation of historic waters and Kachchatheevu was settled between the two countries.² In Palk Bay, adjustments were made to the equidistant line, because of which, Kachchatheevu fell on the Sri Lankan side.³

Equidistant lines are often corrected for equitability. In establishing maritime boundaries, international norm governs that “delimitation is to be effected by the application of equitable criteria” in a manner “capable of ensuring an equitable result.”⁴ In the 1974 Indo-Sri Lanka agreement, India recognized Sri Lanka’s sovereignty over Kachchatheevu whilst gaining sovereignty over Wadge Bank in return.⁵ This decision was undertaken in order to cement friendly relations between the two countries and prevent ties from souring in the future over the relatively minor matter of the small uninhabited island. Furthermore, India was averse to approaching the International Court of Justice or involving a third party to settle the issue.⁶

Between India and Sri Lanka, three agreements were signed on the maritime boundary but only the 1974 and 1976 agreements are relevant to the fishing dispute. The 1974 treaty safeguarded the traditional rights of Indian Tamil pilgrims and fishermen to visit the island without travel documentation. Do visiting rights without travel documentation (Article 5) and traditional rights (Article 6) allow fishing in waters around Kachchatheevu which falls under Sri Lanka’s jurisdiction? The treaty fails to elaborate upon “such rights as they have traditionally enjoyed” leaving it open to often contrary interpretation.⁷ The subsequent agreement signed in 1976, on the other hand, restricted fishermen’s rights to fishing to only their home country’s waters.⁸ Does the 1976 agreement, on the settlement of maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mannar and Bay of Bengal, supersede the 1974 agreement? The ambiguity pertaining to the two treaties lies at the heart of the current dispute between India and Sri Lanka, and the Tamil Nadu and central governments.

Each year, a large number of Indian fishermen are apprehended by the Sri Lankan authorities. From 1983 to 2009, about 250 fishermen were killed by the Sri Lankan Navy and several hundreds injured, their equipment damaged and their catch pillaged.⁹ According to the

Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in 2012, the Sri Lankan Navy nabbed 197 Indian fishermen, followed by 676 in 2013, 787 in 2015 and 235 in the first half of 2016. In recent years, the Sri Lankan authorities have taken to retaining trawlers, even after the release of the imprisoned fishermen has been secured by the Indian government. However, as is evident by the increasing number of arrests, the steps taken by Sri Lanka have done little to deter Indian fishermen from crossing the IMBL.

Tamil Nadu versus Central Government

Tamil Nadu's Claims

Tamil Nadu asserts that Kachchatheevu is an integral part of India on historical, geographical and cultural grounds. Kachchatheevu fell under the Ramanthapuram Zamindari, ruled by the Sethupathis, as documented by the Ramanathapuram Registrar's Office. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu contends that in 1845, the Governor of Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was formerly known) had acknowledged Sethupathi Dynasty's territorial right over the islet in certain documents.¹⁰ On this basis, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, the Late Ms. Jayalalitha had filed a petition in 2008 in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutional legitimacy of the

International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).¹¹ In 2013, a unanimous resolution seeking the retrieval of Kachchatheevu was passed in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. The petition is sub-judice in the Supreme Court.

Central Government's Stance

Described by Indira Gandhi as a "sheer rock with no strategic significance", she could not have foreseen the animosity this uninhabited island would generate amongst Tamils from both sides of the border which continues to haunt India-Sri Lanka relations today.¹² Subsequent governments have held a similar view with regards to Kachchatheevu.

The central government perceives Kachchatheevu to be a settled issue. In response to a RTI application filed, the Ministry of External Affairs responded by stating that the two agreements (1974 and 1976) "did not involve either acquiring or ceding of territory belonging to India since the area in question had never been demarcated."¹³ In another instance the Centre had reiterated its stance by filing an affidavit in the Supreme Court stating "no territory belonging to India was ceded nor sovereignty relinquished since the area in question was in dispute and had never been demarcated."¹⁴ In the same affidavit, the Centre also dismissed Tamil

Nadu's claim that the 1974 Agreement safeguarded the fishing rights of Indian Tamils, as outlined in Article 5 and 6 of the bilateral treaty. The Indian Coast Guard, in an affidavit to the Madras High Court in 2015, stated that Indian fishermen crossing into Sri Lankan waters partook in illegal activities, namely peddling of contraband and banned trawling methods causing damage to Sri Lankan fishing equipment.¹⁵

Kachchatheevu as a 'Band-Aid'

The Question of Livelihood

Fishermen from Tamil Nadu are predominantly employed as daily wage labourers on trawlers owned by big businessmen.¹⁶ These fishermen are compelled into fishing in waters with more profitable catch. According to one report, an estimated 40 percent of the total recorded catch in Tamil Nadu is poached from Sri Lankan waters.¹⁷ They risk arrest and alleged mistreatment by the Sri Lankan Navy so as to meet the demands of their employers. The alternative is to lose their jobs. The trawlers used by Indian Tamil fishermen generate employment for at least 25 people, which makes it highly unlikely that they will revert to traditional fishing.

An estimated 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamils from the northern provinces are

dependent on the waters in Palk Bay to make ends meet.¹⁸ Following the end of the civil war in 2009, in an effort to resume their occupation, the fishermen set out to sea but were met with mechanized bottom trawlers operated by Indian Tamils who were encroaching in Sri Lankan waters. These bottom trawlers not only destroy the seabed and marine ecosystem but tear the fishing nets and destroy the traditional boats of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Bottom-trawling by Indian fishermen has contributed to the destruction of their primary source of livelihood by depleting the fisheries in Indian waters. They wish to replicate the same in Sri Lankan waters but under the protection of legal and historic rights. This is unlikely to secure the long-term future of these fishermen.

Bilateral Ties

It is important for India and Sri Lanka to maintain good relations for various reasons including for the sake of their citizens' livelihood.

In February 2015, the European Union (EU) imposed a ban on fish imports from Sri Lanka, for failing to sufficiently address illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In April 2016, 15 months after the ban was imposed, the EU delisted Sri Lanka

in light of the satisfactory reforms undertaken by the government to combat IUU.¹⁹ Sri Lanka's revenue against fish export from the EU was an estimated \$108 million prior to the ban.²⁰ India, viewed as a "friendly neighbour" was not at the receiving end of a similar ban as Sri Lanka did not lodge a complaint to the EU against Indian fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters.²¹

Sri Lanka's attempts to maintain good relations has also meant that Indian fishermen have been remanded under the less stringent Immigrants and Emigrants Act, 1948 for crossing the maritime boundary rather than the more pertinent Fisheries Act, 1979 for poaching. In response to unrelenting domestic criticism for failing to curb illegal poaching, the Sri Lankan government has decided to amend the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act, 1979. The amendment will lead to intensified patrol and surveillance by the Sri Lankan Navy and Coast Guard, imposition of higher penalties on foreign vessels found poaching in Lankan waters and the permanent seizure of captured trawlers. The government has restated its intent to continue releasing Indian fishermen on humanitarian grounds.²² But a restive northern province with a mainly impoverished population is unlikely to maintain its patience for long.

The island nation continues to rebuild after the conclusion of its decades long civil war. If the livelihood of its Tamil population is not secured and their fears continue to be neglected, instability may resume in the province—a risk Sri Lanka cannot afford to take.

International Obligations

The 1974 Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement is binding under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969 (VCLT).

The bilateral treaty with Sri Lanka does not have provisions for either withdrawal or termination. Under Article 56 of the VCLT, it stands then that India cannot unilaterally rescind the treaty. In order to withdraw from the treaty, India is required to notify Sri Lanka and acquire the latter's consent to the same under Article 65 (1). If Sri Lanka's consent is not forthcoming, the two countries will have to seek recourse under Article 33 of the UN Charter.²³ In such a situation a peaceful settlement may be sought through resorting to arbitration or involving a third party.²⁴ However, Sri Lanka has opposed any disruption to the status quo with regards to the maritime boundary with India. Therefore, third-party intervention may threaten Indo-Sri Lankan relations and runs contrary to India's current "Neighbourhood First" policy. The

abrogation of the bilateral treaty by India, as Tamil Nadu demands, will ensure the country loses face in the realm of international politics at a time when it is staking its claim as a rising power.

Conclusion

The reinstatement of the “traditional rights” of Tamil fishermen which Tamil Nadu continues to call for is short-sighted. It only serves as political rhetoric helping political parties curry favour amongst a one million strong vote base. As a responsible power, India has an obligation to abide by international law. The bilateral relation with Sri Lanka should take precedence over the small matter of an uninhabited island which fails to provide a feasible solution to the

fishing dispute. Over the years, relations with Sri Lanka have been amicable at best. Colombo’s growing closeness to China means New Delhi has to tread with caution. The need of the hour is to incentivize fishermen towards a sustainable alternative to bottom-trawling which will safeguard the future of both the Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen without compromising Indo-Sri Lankan ties. The willful and inadvertent transgressions into Sri Lankan waters by Indian fishermen need to be curtailed, but this will only be feasible when the livelihoods of these fishermen are secured—the duty and obligation of which rests with the Tamil Nadu and Central governments.

07 February 2017

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Right of Innocent Passage for Fishing Vessels: Issues and Challenge

RS Vasan

There have been a few recent arrests of Sri Lankan vessels by the Indian Coast Guard while returning after fishing in international waters. Twenty nine fishermen with the vessels were also arrested on 27 April 2017 by Pakistan Maritime Security Agency on charges of trespassing sea. Such arrests of fishers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India by the respective maritime security agencies is a regular feature as fishers continue to seek fishing grounds irrespective of the maritime boundaries.

On 04 April, Kaveesha Putha a 48-foot multi-day fishing vessel with seven fishermen was returning after a month at sea and was arrested by the Indian Coast Guard. The Coast Guard escorted the vessel and the crew to Thootukodi. The vessel and crew were released by the Magistrate after due process of trial. However, the Sri Lankan fishermen claimed that their catch of some 2.2 metric tonnes worth 4.4 million rupees

was auctioned off in Tamil Nadu at a much lower price of Rs. 2,00,000 as reported by the Sunday Guardian on 23 Apr 2017 here. As per this report, some 141 Indian mechanised trawlers are in the custody of Sri Lanka and 18 multi-day vessels of Sri Lanka are in the custody of India.

This and other acts of arrest by the Indian Coast Guard has been contested by Sri Lanka, which has brought the attention of India to the provisions of UNCLOS which allow for such passage through the waters of another country. The right to innocent passage is enshrined in article 17 of UNCLOS 1982. Both India and Sri Lanka are signatories to the UNCLOS. The article quoted explicitly allows fishing vessels of both coastal states and even land locked countries to transit through the territorial waters of another country to reach international waters (High Seas) for fishing as long as the act is not prejudicial to good order, peace or security of the coastal state.

Article 27 of UNCLOS is explicit that “The criminal jurisdiction of the coastal state should not be exercised on board a foreign ship passing through the territorial sea to arrest any person or to conduct any investigation in connection with any crime committed on board the ship during its passage, save only if the consequences of the crime extend to the coastal state,”

From the Indian point of view, regulating the fishing by foreign vessels has been covered by the MZI Act of 1981 and amplifying orders for foreign fishing vessels with specific reference to licensed foreign vessels was issued in 1982 based on the powers conferred in Section 25 of the MZI Act of 1981.

Section 7 of the MZI Act of 1981 is quite clear about the code of conduct for vessels which are not permitted to fish in the Indian EEZ. According to section 7, the fishing gear of such vessels which are transiting the Indian waters should always be stowed in the prescribed manner. There are exceptions for fishing for scientific purposes by foreign vessels as per clause 8 wherein, such vessel could be permitted in writing by the Government of India.

It appears that the clauses applicable in section 9 of the said act may have been used by the Coast Guard in the instances

quoted above. This clause specifically allows for inspection by a Coast Guard Officer or another authorized officer of the vessel, the catch the fishing gear and the documents to determine if there have been violations in the maritime zones of India. If it is proved that an offence has been committed, the master of the vessel and the crew could be charged and produced in front of a magistrate. The penalties could be up to ten lakhs under section 10 of the said clause. This is in addition to the cost that could be recovered by auctioning the fish catch and deposited in the Government treasury.

From the analysis of the relevant provisions of the UNCLOS and also the Maritime Zones of India Act (1981) it is clear that Sri Lankan vessels or for that matter any fishing vessel of a coastal or a land locked state is authorized to transit through the territorial waters as far as it is clear that the passage is for reaching the fishing grounds in international waters and returning to the port of origin. The Indian Coast Guard is authorized to ensure that the provisions of the UNCLOS are not being violated and this can be done by physical inspection. In the reported incident, since the Sri Lankan vessels were released by the court, it is inferred that they were using the territorial waters of India only for transit

and were not fishing in the Indian. The Sri Lankan official has averred that this has been the practice for many years and expressed surprise that the Indian Coast Guard has apprehended the vessel.

While the fishing issues in the Palk Bay have different dimensions, the issue of multi day fishing vessels which use the territorial waters for accessing the global commons needs to be managed in a more efficient manner by all the nations in India's neighbourhood. A list of all the multi-day fishing vessels need be exchanged and their schedules shared with the Coast Guards. Continuous tracking of such vessels till they leave the maritime zones of India both to and from the fishing grounds by the

MDA architecture will ensure that these deviations are spotted. Also, since the orders are very specific as to the processes by which, the Coast Guard as an inspecting agency can determine whether or not a vessel transiting the Indian waters has violated the provisions of the MZI Act 1981, the occasions on which legitimate multi-day fishing vessels are apprehended should be more an exception than a rule. It appears that this case reported was an exception and the incident should allow the coast guards and the government agencies on both sides to hold further discussions to ensure that such incidents are managed better.

05 May 2017

Proposed Chinese Law on Maritime Traffic Safety: Interpretations and Implications

Prakash Gopal

On February 14, 2017, the Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council of China sought public comments on a new draft legislation, proposed to replace the existing Maritime Safety Law of 1983. Coming in the backdrop of the rather uneasy peace in the South China Sea, certain provisions of the draft legislation garnered significant media attention. A closer examination reveals that most suggested provisions are a reiteration of either existing international laws on the subject (as codified in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea [UNCLOS], 1982), or of existing domestic laws of China. There are also however, provisions that are problematic and not compatible with customary or codified international legal tenets and practices. Such provisions, when implemented are likely to lead to contested interpretations, and serious implications for the larger maritime region, and therefore merit greater analysis. A caveat worth highlighting

is that this study was undertaken on an unofficial English translation of the draft legislation, which may have inherent semantic inaccuracies.

Whereas the existing Maritime Safety Law has 53 Articles, the new proposed law has 134. Much of this increase in the volume of text can be attributed to new provisions on registration, and certification of vessels and crew members. There is also a relatively elaborate article (Article 21) on delineation of various zones, for management of maritime traffic, which includes 'forbidden zones', and areas that may be separately demarcated for military purposes.

The most striking issue with the proposed legislation, is the concurrent usage of terms which have a legal basis in the UNCLOS, together with those that do not have a standardized and internationally accepted definition. Article 2 for instance, talks about

the geographical scope of application for this law. Standard terms such as Territorial Waters, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Continental Shelf, are used, together with terms such as ‘other sea areas under the jurisdiction of the People’s Republic of China’. This term is open to interpretation in the absence of an internationally recognized and delimited span of maritime space that may be additionally under Chinese ‘jurisdiction’. So when Article 21 talks about the maritime administrative authority retaining the right to promulgate ‘forbidden zones’, Article 2 would allow the promulgation of such areas even outside of the maritime zones to which China is entitled under the provisions of UNCLOS. This could pose a significant threat to freedom of navigation in the region, especially in the ambiguity that is associated with Chinese claims within the ‘nine-dash line’, as well as the large area of sea that is enclosed by it.

Another misuse of the ‘jurisdictional’ seas clause could also be made in the case of a ‘hot pursuit’. While UNCLOS permits ‘hot pursuit’ to commence within different maritime zones depending on the nature of violation committed, the draft Chinese law permits its commencement even within the undefined ‘jurisdictional’ waters. The

unfettered extension of jurisdiction over waters that may otherwise constitute part of The Area is a point of significant potential contest and conflict.

Yet another provision that has garnered notable media attention, is one that mandates foreign ‘submersibles’ to transit on surface, with its flag displayed, within Chinese Territorial Waters. This however is in consonance with the stipulations concerning ‘Innocent Passage’ in the UNCLOS (Article 20), which states that all ‘submarines and other underwater vehicles’ are required to traverse through the Territorial Waters of a Coastal State, on surface and showing their flag. With the increasing use of Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs) in the South China Sea, especially by the US, and the large span of disputed waters within China’s ‘nine-dash line’, it is likely that this provision would be extensively applied to curtail underwater activity in the region. This is also evident in the Chinese seizure and subsequent return of the US’ UUV in December 2016, being operated off the coast of Philippines by USNS Bowditch.

The new draft law also reiterates China’s position on foreign military vessels requiring permission to enter Chinese Territorial Waters. This is a tenet that has been contested by the

US, through diplomatic demarches and the US Navy's Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS). In this instance the Indian position is also somewhat similar, with the Maritime Zones of India (MZI) Act of 1976 requiring foreign military vessels and submarines to give prior notification to Indian authorities before entering Indian Territorial Waters. Additionally, while ratifying the UNCLOS on June 29, 1995, India made a declaration in accordance with Article 310 of the UNCLOS, to state that foreign military vessels are required to obtain prior consent before conducting military exercises within the Indian EEZ. India's position on the rights of foreign military vessels within its Territorial Waters and EEZ, is also in conflict with that of many other countries, and has also been subject to US diplomatic and military opposition.

While in its entirety, the new draft legislation appears to be an attempt to merely revise China's existing 1984-vintage legislation, there are some contentious provisions that do not conform to international maritime law. Once implemented, these have the potential to create conflicts at sea, which may assume greater military and diplomatic proportions, especially in the prevailing environment in the South China Sea. The introduction of this draft legislation also serves as a reminder for India to revisit its existing legal structures, and revise them as necessary. This may be an opportune time to evolve a comprehensive domestic legal framework that supports the pursuit of India's maritime interests and the fulfillment of its international obligations.

01 June 2017

Lessons from Recent Spate of Collisions at Sea: Back to Basics?

RS Vasan

A lot has been said and written about the series of collisions at sea particularly concerning the USN ships. According to one writer, there were four major incidents in as many years demanding serious introspection and more importantly, an audit of the procedures and policies adopted at sea for training and watch keeping. The most recent one, which raised many questions was in the Malacca Straits where USS John McCain collided with a merchant vessel the Arnica MC resulting in extensive damage to the warship and the loss of ten sailors. The US Navy was compelled to order an operational pause for carrying out a review on all the ships of the Seventh Fleet. The top leadership in Washington believed that there were some serious issues with the Seventh Fleet which resulted in the sacking of the Seventh Fleet Commander.

Navies around the world in pursuit of national objectives and international

obligations, are charged with posturing, forward presence and flag showing in different parts of the world. This charter is the basis for the existence of the navies, which are created as military maritime instruments of national policy. The challenges of spending many days at sea in unfamiliar waters with hostile weather and visibility conditions, while engaged in out of area operations, are unique to naval forces. It may be worthwhile to list out the challenges that exist today in the maritime domain.

Maritime Environment

The shipping density out there is only increasing by the day. While collisions involving warships and big ships are devastating, collisions with smaller fishing craft are no less distressing as it is invariably the smaller craft that suffer, often with loss of life and property. In busy straits like the Straits of Malacca and Singapore there are Traffic Separation Schemes (TSS) in place and one would

have expected that strict compliance with such schemes would avoid accidents. However, the recent accident in the Malacca Strait clearly illustrates that accidents continue to be caused by human errors and noncompliance with Standard Operating Procedures.

Coming to the specific issue of accidents in the Pacific, whether the recent operational pressure on ships carrying out Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea, the heightened tension due to the aggressive stance of North Korea, and changed areas of operation of the Seventh Fleet are causing undue stress on the crew of ships is being debated.

Weather and Visibility

Weather and visibility have always played an important role in accidents and incidents, particularly when due caution is not exercised while navigating through such conditions. Despite the presence of modern tools and aids to navigation, both over reliance and lack of situational awareness have led to close quarter situations that have the potential to result in major collisions. In the case of the collision of the US Navy destroyer, it happened at 5:24 AM, well before day break. According to researchers, the period of darkness, particularly before sunrise, appears to have been a

contributing factor for lower levels of alertness by the crew. Even in the case of USS Fitzgerald the accident took place at 02:30 hours when most of the crew excepting the watchkeepers were asleep.

Likewise, the collision off Ennore, between the BW Maple and MT Dawn Kancheepuram which resulted in a major oil spill, occurred at 04:00 am on 28th January 2017. The time of occurrence of several major accidents clearly illustrates the critical importance of keeping additional vigil during dawn, dusk and hours of darkness.

Bridge Resource Management (BRM)

A lot of importance is being given to BRM which is akin to Crew Resource Management in the aviation world. However unlike merchantmen, whose primary purpose is the safe and expeditious navigation from point A to point B, warships have the additional responsibility of accomplishing many other missions during any given passage. One of these is to keep the ship's crew trained and prepared at all times for hostile conditions. A common reason given in several collisions is the late response of the Officer of the watch along with the bridge team and a delayed call to the captain of the ship while at a close quarter situation at sea is still developing.

Another common refrain is the multiple demanding tasks undertaken by the crew onboard warships, which drain them both physically and mentally thus leading to lower span of attention on the bridge which in turn leads to incidents and accidents.

Technology and Training

The navies of the world, the merchant fleet and even the fishing fleet are increasingly adopting front end-technology for managing activities in the maritime spectrum. The use of radars, satellites, digital meters, laser range finders, Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) cannot be substitute for Safe navigation practices or for sound seamanship. Unfortunately, there is a tendency towards over dependence on technology as generally there is a high degree of reliability of technical aids and minimal failures. The fact that the number of accidents have come down since 2007, which year, witnessed 17 incidents as compared to just one in 2016 may have brought about a certain degree of complacency. Technology, however is a double-edged weapon which helps, but also distracts from, the primary purpose of safety. The Oversight by the bridge team is of vital importance in order to ensure that the famous 'Eye Ball Mk 2' is constantly in the loop to assess the situation and to take effective

control of the situation. This is where there has to be greater stress on training the bridge team of the OOW, lookouts, radar operators and the Machinery Control Room team, together to be able to respond to developing situations. The merchant navy has laid a lot of emphasis on STCW and as a result, the percentage of accidents and incidents in the merchant fleet are fairly under control.

Rules of the Road (ROR)

Finally, it bears repeating that the most important instrument is the International regulations for prevention of collision at sea (COLREGS), promulgated way back in 1972 by the IMO. International Conventions and the Rules of the Road (ROR) or the COLREGS - as popularly called - have stood the test of time. Though ROR is applicable in the medium of the seas, strangely the reference to 'Roads' in this nomenclature has remained unchanged. No trainee whether on a warship or on a merchant ship, can escape the rigours of learning the ROR. Aids to learning the ROR have gone from visual models with lights and symbols to digital training and have been also included in the ship handling simulators.

In conclusion, it is obvious that navies which could be deployed any-

where in the world, need to prepare for their area specific assignments based inter-alia on based on the expected or prevailing traffic patterns, weather and visibility factors. A multibillion dollar ship that is capable of deploying a wide

spectrum of weaponry and capable of defending itself, cannot under any circumstances be seen as compromising its own safety by neglect of essentials of safe passage.

20 September 2017

Naval Power

The Indian Navy and India's Overseas Citizens: Operations Sukoon and Rahat

Bhargav Acharya

The primary role of any government is to safeguard its people at home and abroad. India has a significant number of its citizens living in different parts of the world. The security of these overseas citizens is a moral obligation of India. But there are instances when this obligation to security has been inadequate. One such instance involved a dhow, the *MV Bhakti Sagar* with 21 Indians on board, which was hijacked by Somali pirates near the Gulf of Aden in February 2006.¹ The Indian Navy (IN) had the destroyer *INS Mumbai* in the vicinity. The government refused to act on the incident despite IN's willingness to perform a rescue operation. India was unsure of its legitimacy in the area, and feared the backlash of West Asian countries and North Africa.² The failure to honour its values drew criticism, and the incident proved to be a timely reminder to the government to contribute more to the cause of the safety of its citizens. The Non-combatant Evacuation Operations

(NEO) performed thereafter by the IN has been instrumental in trying to set the priorities straight.

This issue brief aims at providing a background to successful Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), namely Operation *Sukoon* and Operation *Rahat*, undertaken by the IN. The dynamics associated with such operations are explained, which include such issues as the Indian citizens in the region, a reactive-proactive approach, and India's soft power.

Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO)

The Indian Maritime Doctrine (2009) notes,

There are increasing numbers of Indian citizens who work and reside in various parts of the world. They are important contributors to the progress of their countries of residence as well as to India. In view

of insecurity and instability in some parts of the world, Indian citizens there may require to be evacuated under arrangements and control of the Government of India, which could be done by civil or military means, by land, air or sea. The IN may be tasked with undertaking such Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO).³

Operation *Sukoon* and Operation *Rahat* are two such operations that have been widely acclaimed the world over. It is imperative to have an overview of these two operations that highlight the versatile role the IN has played in securing India's overseas citizens.

Operation Sukoon

Operation *Sukoon* was orchestrated by the IN to evacuate Indian nationals, along with Sri Lankan, Nepalese and few Lebanese nationals, who were caught in the conflict in Lebanon during the 2006 Lebanon War. The conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah militants intensified, with Israel taking the route of a military offensive. Around 12,000 Indians and a few hundred foreign nationals were left stranded needing help, of which around 2000 were believed to be in the conflict zone.

At around the same time, four Indian warships were in the Mediterranean Sea returning from a 'goodwill' trip to

Greece. The naval task force consisting of the destroyer *INS Mumbai*, the frigates *INS Brahmaputra* and *INS Betwa*, and the fleet tanker *INS Shakti* were directed to help the distressed people. The task force was successful in evacuating 2,280 Indian citizens and personnel from friendly countries.⁴ Operation *Sukoon* of IN was recognised as a landmark achievement, and drew accolades from around the world for its ability to provide succour.⁵

Operation Rahat

In March 2015, the Yemeni crisis began to unravel after the military intervention by the Royal Saudi Air Force led a coalition of Arab states against the Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen. The ground situation in the region took a turn for the worse when the Houthi rebels toppled the government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Thousands of Indians found themselves in a precarious situation, having ignored the initial advisories given out by the India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to avoid travel, and to vacate Yemen.⁶ Upon directives by the government, the Indian Armed Forces carried out the civilian evacuation mission known as Operation *Rahat*.

The IN deployed the patrol vessel *INS Sumitra*, the destroyer *INS Mumbai*,

the frigate *INS Tarkash* and two ferries belonging to Lakshadweep—the *MV Kavaratti* and the *MV Coral*—to carry out the evacuation operation. The operation also involved the deployment of C-17 aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Air India flights to airlift people. The combined efforts led to the evacuation of 5,600 people, including 4,640 Indians and 960 foreign nationals from 41 countries.⁷ The readiness shown by the Indian forces at such a time of distress did not go unnoticed, and was applauded on the successful completion of the mission.

Dynamics of Naval Role in Securing Overseas Citizens

The success of Operations *Sukoon* and Operation *Rahathas* set the benchmark for the role that the IN could play in providing humanitarian assistance. Understanding what makes them stand out from one another essentially helps one understand the incorporation of the navy as a contributing factor to the overall security of overseas citizens. An analysis of the dynamic aspects of these missions reveals the cornerstones of India's commitment to overseas citizens.

The first aspect is the number of Indian citizens in the region. It is estimated that more than 6 million

Indians work in West Asian countries. They are the source of huge remittance flows into India which stood at around 30.8 per cent of the total US\$ 72 billion in 2015.⁸ India receives the largest share—around 12 per cent—of total world remittances, which amounts to nearly 4 per cent of the country's GDP.⁹ This is a reflection of the increased involvement of Indians overseas, contributing to the overall growth of the region as well as of their home country, considering the fact that the remittances grew from around US\$ 2.1 billion in 1991 to US\$ 24 billion in 2006.¹⁰

The successive governments at the centre did not fail to notice this upward shift in capital inflows—one that was relatively hassle free and steadier than the much hyped Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). These remittances also exceeded India's earnings from high technology exports.¹¹ Operation *Sukoon* and Operation *Rahat* carried out by the IN should be understood in the context of the government accepting these facts. For far too long, the safety of Indians in the region has seldom received the kind amount of attention it receives in other parts of the world. There was a growing realisation that India could not afford to ignore either its people or the region since it would prove to be detrimental to its economy in the long run.

The second aspect is the reactive-proactive approach followed by India. India has always been criticised for its lack of initiative in maintaining the security of its overseas citizens caught in conflicts. This was evident in the execution of Operation *Sukoon* in July 2006. Although the operation has been termed a success, there was ample scope for the better execution of the operation. Undoubtedly, the IN played a crucial role in the success of the mission. But it happened only as a reactive measure—that is, after the conflict had reached an alarming level at Lebanon. The government responded to the situation after receiving significant pressure from the state governments to rescue their people. India was fortunate to have Indian navy warships returning from Greece in the vicinity. However, the reaction time was questionable since the warships had ended their goodwill trip to Greece on 13th July and had left Mediterranean Sea when the government directive to the IN came four days later—that is, on 17th July.¹²

However, there has been a gradual transition from age old reactive methods to a more proactive approach. Operation *Rahat* carried out in April 2015 is a testament to such a shift. It redefined the Indian approach to complex situations. The crisis that broke out in Yemen in

late March 2015 did not come as a surprise to India as it anticipated the changing circumstances and factors in the region. Even before deploying the IN to rescue its people, the government warned Indians living in the region of the possible repercussions of the conflict. The number of evacuated people in Operation *Rahat* was in stark contrast to those in Operation *Sukoon*. While Operation *Rahat* saw a total of 4,640 Indians being evacuated—barring the few who chose to stay back in Yemen—Operation *Sukoon* saw only 2,280 people of the total 12000 Indians in the region being rescued. The remaining 10,000 were left stranded, looking for help.¹³ The execution of Operation *Rahat* was efficient as the IN was able to complete its part of the mission before the conflict turned into a full-fledged war. This proactive approach acted as a reassurance mechanism which was aimed not only at providing humanitarian assistance but also at maintaining regional security and stability when faced with such dire situations.

The third aspect—and perhaps the most vital—is India's soft power which has emerged as the very crux of India's global strategy in the 21st century. Soft power is aimed at influencing another nation's behaviour by attraction, agenda-setting, and legitimacy.¹⁴ This soft power

could be observed in India's approach during the execution of Operation *Rahat*. The government used the services of the IN and war veterans as soft power tools to resolve standoffs in the region through dialogue for the safe evacuation of Indians.

India has always tried to avoid conflicts and, at times, even seemed reluctant to assume leadership roles while trying to solve them. The priorities of the government were hardly at par with those of the IN. In matters of the security of overseas citizens, the IN had a very limited role to play. But since the onset of the new millennium, the signs of symmetry among the two have started to show promise. The government seems to believe that the IN could indeed be used as an instrument of soft power in securing its citizens as well as in pursuit of India's regional and global interests.¹⁵

It is often said that during the exercise of naval power in conflicts, the main problem is the lack of political skill on land rather than the lack of professional quality at sea.¹⁶ Operation *Rahat* executed in April 2015 reflects a changed strategy on India's part. It concentrated on assuming a central position while negotiating the safe evacuation of Indians. Also, considering the fact that requests to rescue several hundred foreign nationals were made

by their respective home governments, the onus was on India to make use of the opportunity to project itself as a capable, efficient, and disciplined power in the global world. The government's decision to send the Minister of State for Overseas Indian Affairs General V. K. Singh as a soft power mascot to negotiate with local forces and oversee the operations¹⁷ worked wonders in realising the success of the mission.

Conclusion

In the wake of the growing security threats to overseas citizens, India has a moral responsibility to ensure their safety. What one can observe from the success of the above NEO is that there is now a better correlation among various stakeholders in the Indian government. Operation *Rahat* was a monumental success because the MEA, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and the IN worked in absolute synchronisation, and with real-time information.¹⁸

India's willingness to confront global challenges has contributed to a positive image even among those countries that have, traditionally, been giving it the cold shoulder in the past. The IN has been an influential factor in changing perceptions. In the recent past, the IN has played a significant role in maintaining interests that are

of economic, political, and military importance to the government. Given the multiple role that the IN could play, it is important to make full use of its

potential to ensure better environment for the safety of Indians living overseas.

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China's Aircraft Carrier: 'Dreadnought' or 'Doctrinal Dilemma'?

Gurpreet S Khurana

Within five years after the China commissioned its first Soviet-origin aircraft carrier *Liaoning* in September 2012, it launched its first-ever domestic carrier¹ – the Type 001A – on 26 April 2017. The new carrier is likely to be commissioned in 2020 as *Shandong*. Even though the *Liaoning* and the Type 001A are medium-sized conventionally powered (non-nuclear) vessels equipped with aircraft ski-jumps (not catapults), and thus far less capable than the super-carriers operated by the United States, the occasion was celebrated in China as a major achievement symbolic of China's 'great power' status. A report² indicates that China's larger next generation Type 002 carrier equipped with a steam catapult is already under construction since March 2015, and its follow-on carriers may be nuclear powered.

The launch of the Type 001A is indeed a milestone in the development of China as a major naval power. It

reminds us of the famous battleship HMS *Dreadnought* commissioned into the Royal Navy in 1906. The *Dreadnought* was a highly successful warship induction marking the dawn of the 20th century warfare at sea. It became iconic of a transformative naval capability in a manner that the older existing warships of the world began to fade into obsolescence as pre-*Dreadnoughts*. The celebration in Beijing similarly justified, given the achievement of China's defence-technological endeavour within a relatively short period of time. It stands out rather conspicuously in comparison to India, which has been operating aircraft carriers since 1961, but is yet to commission its first indigenous carrier³ named *Vikrant*.

Moving from 'symbolism' to 'substance', such 'flat-tops' are indeed valuable platforms for maritime force-projection, which, for centuries, has been an important naval mission of all

major power navies. However, given China's maritime geography and the kind of insecurities it encounters today from vastly superior adversarial navies of the United States and Japan operating in the western Pacific rim, the PLA Navy's growing doctrinal reliance on carriers seems to be an aberration. It may have been more prudent for China to focus on bolstering its existing Anti-Access/ Area-Denial (A2AD) ⁴operational doctrine with the naval doctrine of 'sea-denial' – particularly given the PLA Navy's traditional strengths in submarine, sea-mine and missile warfare – rather than diluting its naval doctrine by adding the carrier-based 'sea-control' doctrine.

Chinese carriers will also be highly vulnerable in the western Pacific rim, not only to the advanced navies, but also to the many unfriendly airbases and submarine bases of the littoral countries dotting the periphery of the East and South China Seas. It is well known that even the smaller countries in the region are building potent sea-denial capabilities against China. The recent induction ⁵of the six advanced Russian *Kilo*-class submarines into the Vietnamese Navy is case in point. If a maritime conflict breaks out in the area, the PLA Navy carrier would surely be a primal target, and any such successful targeting would be a major symbolic

blow to China's morale, and thus its war effort.

The Chinese believe that 'sea-control' is necessary to assert its maritime-territorial claims in the China Seas. This could have been achieved effectively – and at reduced risk – by optimally using the air-bases in the Chinese mainland and the occupied islands, which China is expanding through reclamation. Ironically, China's island-building activity⁶ in the South China Sea has caused a major 'damage' to China's claim to its 'peaceful rise' theory, which is now being aggravated by its own carrier-building programme. Furthermore, the programme lacks operational credibility, much into the foreseeable future. It would take the PLA Navy many years to operationalise a full-fledged Carrier Task Force, and possibly decades to make it effective enough to achieve sea-control against advanced navies. Meanwhile, the process could cause an indelible dent on China's objective to propagate a 'benign' and 'constructive' image in the Indo-Pacific region, including through its 'One-Belt-One-Road' (OBOR) initiative.

Chinese strategists also believe that carrier-based sea-control is necessary to protect their Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean, as indicated by China's

recently articulated strategy of “open-seas protection” in its 2014 Defence White Paper. However, this could have been achieved – again effectively, and at reduced risk – by deploying its warships in its naval bases at strategic locations such as Djibouti and Gwadar.

China is likely to have at least three aircraft carriers in commission at any given time in the future. The Chinese have clearly gone too far ahead for

any reappraisal of its aircraft-carrier programme, possibly lured into the ‘command of the seas’ gambit of the major western naval powers, without factoring their own geo-strategic conditions and circumstances. One may, therefore, expect that the PLA Navy’s ‘doctrinal duality’⁷ in terms of primacy to both ‘sea control’ and ‘sea denial’ may become its dilemma in the coming years.

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Coral Sea to the China Seas: The Carrier as a Constant

Sanjay Misra

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first aircraft carrier battle ever fought, comprising a series of naval engagements off the Australian coast during the Second World War.¹ It was fought between May 04 and May 08, 1942, 75 years to date. The start of May 2017 befittingly saw the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea being commemorated in Australia with a dawn service in Townsville, Queensland, by the Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.² On May 04, 2017, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, met with the Australian PM aboard the USS *Intrepid*, a WW2-era aircraft carrier from the war in the Pacific, to commemorate the 75th anniversary.³

Remarking on the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Prime Minister of Australia said that this was the “first time a naval battle was fought entirely from the air.”⁴ And therein lay its uniqueness. With tensions ratcheting up in the China Seas and the ‘attention’ being given to aircraft carriers per se, a look at the Battle of the Coral

Sea which just saw its 75th anniversary being celebrated, would not if anything but be apt.

The Battle of the Coral Sea

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the largest naval battle ever fought so close to Australian shores and was significant for two reasons; firstly, the battle was fought solely by aircraft attacking ships, and secondly, at no time did the opposing fleets sight each other, let alone fire at each other. Additionally, and most importantly, it was the first time that the Japanese southward advance in the Pacific had been stopped.⁵

The situation was precarious for the Allies in the early months of 1942. The Japanese seemed unstoppable post Pearl Harbour and the fall of Singapore. The Australian Navy had lost eight ships. The Dutch East Indies, the north coast of New Guinea and the naval base of Rabaul were taken. Darwin had been bombed.⁶ It was also a time when the Japanese were

not quite sated with their progress thus far, and also understood the importance of the aircraft carrier. The Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto was concerned that the Japanese had missed the aircraft carriers of the US battle fleet at Pearl Harbour. With the US carriers carrying out raids on Japanese bases in the central and south Pacific and the Doolittle raid on Tokyo by bombers from the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* exacerbating their concerns, the Japanese looked forward to the destruction of the US Pacific Fleet before it could rebuild itself. And so, Yamamoto began planning for a move against the island of Midway.⁷

The Japanese had no plans to invade Australia during the Second World War.⁸ They, however, had plans to extend their Pacific control by setting up a base at Tulagi in the southern Solomons and also to capture Port Moresby in New Guinea. This would in effect cut off Australia thus taking them out of the war and leaving them prone to invasion by the Japanese at their convenience, as it were. Control of Port Moresby would safeguard islands held by the Japanese from land based air attacks while enabling the Japanese Air Force to attack Queensland ports and airfields at Horn Island, Cooktown, Coen and Townsville. This would effectively

halt the flow of men and materiel by cutting off sea links between Australia and America thus leaving the Japanese unchallengeable in the Pacific area. A subsequent destructive attack on the main US Fleet at Midway would then force the US out of the Pacific war.⁹

The Japanese modus operandi was to first seize Tulagi in the Solomons. Troop carrying transports escorted by the aircraft carrier *Shoho* and other ships would then head for Port Moresby from Rabaul. The invasion force would have additional protection from the aircraft carriers *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku* along with cruisers and destroyers. The plan was for these carriers to intercept the US naval force from two sides as it entered the Coral Sea in response to the invasion.¹⁰

The Allies had however cracked the main Japanese codes and discovered the Japanese plans.¹¹ Admiral Nimitz sent two carrier task forces led by the USS *Lexington* and the USS *Yorktown* under command of Rear Admiral Fletcher of the US Navy. A third task force commanded by Rear Admiral Crace and led by the cruisers HMAS *Australia*, HMAS *Hobart* and the USS *Chicago*, joined them.¹² On May 07, 1942, US aircraft sank the Japanese auxiliary carrier *Shoho*. However, the next day, Japanese action led to the sinking of the American aircraft carrier USS *Lexington*.

Both, the US carrier USS *Yorktown* and the Japanese carrier *Shokaku* were damaged on the eighth of May 1942 and the Japanese withdrew.¹³ Both sides to the battle had a heavy price to pay. The US fleet's losses included one carrier destroyed, one damaged, one oiler and one destroyer each sunk plus a loss of 66 aircraft along with 543 men killed or wounded. The Japanese losses on the other hand had one small carrier destroyed, one destroyer and three small ships sunk along with 77 carrier aircraft lost, and 1074 men killed or wounded.¹⁴

A Turning Point

The Battle of the Coral Sea will be remembered for not only being the first ever aircraft carrier battle but also as a turning point in the Second World War. It was the first major operational failure for the Japanese in the war and stopped the southward advance of the Japanese Pacific expansion. A month later, the Japanese Navy suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Midway, which saw four Japanese aircraft carriers being sunk within a few hours by the US forces.¹⁵ While the Battle of the Coral Sea saw an end to the Japanese invasion plans for Port Moresby, it also contributed to a weakened Japanese force which met the Allied fleet at Midway. This ended

Japanese plans to capture Fiji, Samoa and the New Hebrides.¹⁶

Carriers and the like notwithstanding, it was also an example of America and Australia coming together against a common enemy. The Battle of the Coral Sea is considered to be a key moment in the alliance between America and Australia. The Australian Prime Minister while commemorating the 75th anniversary of the battle said that "The US Navy's commitment of two of its precious carriers into this battle, showed a total commitment to the defence of Australia." He further went on to say that "Today, Australia and the United States continue to work with our allies to address new security threats around the world."¹⁷ This is all the more significant in view of the threat of North Korea and the turmoil in the China Seas.

The Carrier as a Constant

Fast forward from the Coral Sea to the China Seas, and the one strategic constant that springs to the fore is the use of the aircraft carrier as a tool for power projection.¹⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan, American naval officer, and an influential exponent of sea power, published 'The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783,' in 1890, a period which saw tremendous technological advances in warships.¹⁹ While there were no

aircraft carriers then, if one were to now interpolate them into that period, then the importance of sea power which he so espoused, would have been even more pronounced.

The China Seas in particular and the Indo-Pacific at large are today, 75 years down the line from the Battle of the Coral Sea, making headlines once again for that same instrument of sea power, the ubiquitous aircraft carrier. April 2017 saw China's first domestically built aircraft carrier taking to the waters. It is China's second aircraft carrier after the *Liaoning*. While the Type 001A carrier which is yet to be named would become operational only by 2020, it is fair to say that there are more carriers to come.²⁰ China has reasoned the need for aircraft carriers to 'effectively protect its fair rights that are increasingly extending overseas.'²¹ However, what is equally as important as the number of carriers is the experience of operating them, and that takes time. The US today being the *numero uno* operator of aircraft carriers with ten carriers,²² is also the prima donna in the ongoing China Seas - Korean peninsula 'opera' that is currently being played out. The USS *Carl Vinson* is another aircraft carrier that has been in the limelight. The USS *Carl Vinson* Strike Group was ordered to the Korean peninsula in April 2017, by the

Trump administration to deter North Korea from carrying out further nuclear tests. The move of the aircraft carrier led to threats from Pyongyang to sink the US aircraft carrier,²³ indicating the seriousness that the DPRK attaches to the presence of such concentrated force, as that which a carrier group brings, into its neighbourhood.

Recent events thus bear testimony to the importance that nations – and especially littoral nations – attach to the aircraft carrier and all that it conveys. The aircraft carrier then remains the most effective tool available to exercise military muscle and so also diplomatic might today. The most potent tool of modern 'gunboat diplomacy' one might say. Aircraft carriers and by extension aircraft carrier groups thus possess the means to be an effective means of deterrence – as seen with the US sending the USS *Carl Vinson* Group to the Korean peninsula to deter North Korea. The aircraft carrier with its reach and firepower also provides reassurance to allies, as indicated in the China Seas with the US Carrier Group carrying out joint naval exercises with its ally, South Korea.²⁴ Unlike in the Battle of the Coral Sea, today's ship borne aerial elements provide far superior maritime domain awareness. In addition to this, the advent of superior technology and

weaponry has increased the potency of aircraft carriers, thus resulting in an increased capacity to affect the outcome of not only maritime engagements but also of those on land too. Further, the nearly unlimited reach of today's nuclear powered aircraft carriers makes it possible for a nation to protect its interests – uninhibited by constraints of distance. Finally it is indeed ironical that while the navies of the United States and Japan faced each other off in the first ever aircraft carrier battle in

May 1942, 75 years to date, the month of May 2017 saw erstwhile US enemy Japan dispatching the helicopter carrier *Izumo* – its biggest warship and a 'carrier' nonetheless - to protect a US supply vessel within Japanese waters.²⁵ Having remained a strategic constant - from the Coral Sea to the China Seas - the aircraft carrier today acts as an extension of national resolve, perhaps more so than ever in the past and is going to continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

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The Changing Contours of Underwater Maritime Warfare in the South China Sea

R.S. Vasan

The recent developments in the South China Sea (SCS) have unnerved the neighbours that surround it, and stake holders around the world are concerned about the happenings. Whether it was the half-hearted effort to get a code of conduct in place some fifteen years ago; or the sustained efforts by China through cartographic aggression to claim all the areas within the so called nine dash line; or the subsequent militarization of the artificial Islands created by dredging the corals with utter disregard to environmental damage; or the helplessness of the ASEAN to even rebuke China due to the strong economic dependence on China for their own growth; and the inability of the USA under Obama to stem the tide—all these hardly deterred China from pursuing its objective of total maritime dominance in the South China Sea. Notwithstanding the US Policy of *slew to the Pacific* which appears to be faltering under the Trump Administration, China

today has consolidated its position in the maritime domain. While observers are sceptic, after a recently concluded ASEAN meeting, the members are optimistic that the frame work for an effective Code of Conduct (CoC)¹ would be adopted by August this year.

Even the most important verdict of the decade by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) that indicted China on and supported the case of Philippines was rejected even before it was awarded. The maritime military capability and capacity of the PLA Navy was not built overnight. This has been a carefully crafted strategy by China which worked assiduously to consolidate its position as a major challenger to the USA which was floundering in its policies in the western Pacific. Except for harping on the Freedom of Navigation and overflight, and sending some of its combatants close to the islands in the SCS, the USA was in no mood

to precipitate its actions. The recent statements by the US Defence Secretary, James Mattis, stressing that, “We oppose countries militarising artificial islands and enforcing excessive maritime claims unsupported by international law. We cannot and will not accept unilateral, coercive changes to the status quo,” has not been received well by China which slammed him for the comments made at the Shangri-La Dialogue.²

China’s multifaceted strategy is transforming the regional balance totally in its favour. First and foremost, it is bringing the smaller economies in the region under its economic clout by their dependence on heavy Foreign Direct Investments and soft loans for various projects—which, in any case, have also helped the Chinese economy to grow. The second and most important dimension of this strategy was to consolidate its military gains in the region by shoring up its response mechanisms. The artificial Islands in the SCS have extended the range of operations as they have built of runways on unsinkable carriers.

ASEAN members having disputes with China over territorial claims, are also adding to their own submarine fleets and ASW capability³. The presence of both surface and sub surface units of the USA, Japan and Australia also operate

in the areas of interest. There are official reports that China is contemplating revisions of its Maritime Traffic Safety Laws MTSL 1984 which will make it difficult for certain foreign vessels and submersibles to enter its claimed (disputed) territory. This is being given final legal shape, and is expected to be in place by 2020. Once that law is in place, China will have the wherewithal to enforce the MTSL 2020. A credible Command, Control Communications, Computer Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance(C4ISR) structure to detect, deter, and defend its core interests in the South China Sea area must if the PLA Navy has to counter underwater surveillance/offensive missions by submarines/UUVs of adversaries in its claimed territory.

The recent announcement about creating a scientific underwater monitoring facility is to be analysed in the above context. The entire process of building a credible structure in the South and East China Sea is well planned. On completion, this will ensure that China achieves maritime supremacy in all the four dimensions (including cyber), and will aid its efforts to take a lead in the informatization warfare. According to the stated purpose, the underwater scientific station will enable a better understanding of the oceanic

environment and its wealth. However, it is clear that the facility will be equipped to monitor the movements of both surface and subsurface vessels. This new facility, along with inputs from other sensors and platforms, will provide the PLA-Navy with a real-time capability to monitor all activity around its newly created assets in the SCS.

There is nothing new as far as such underwater monitoring facilities are concerned. During the Cold War, the USA and the USSR depended on the SOSUS to keep track of SSBNs and other submarines which were proceeding to and from the patrol areas around the world. So, China is investing in a similar system, albeit after some five decades of a similar exercise by the super powers. However, the current level of technology, micro miniaturization and digitization offers more credible and

cost-effective options for keeping the areas under continuous surveillance. It is important to note that there are reports about a similar Indian initiative in the Bay of Bengal along with Japan to detect the movement of PLA-N submarines by having a great underwater wall from Sumatra to Indira point.

It is clear from all the developments in the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal that both China and India are gearing up to revamp their underwater detection, tracking, and prosecuting abilities by investing in updated current SOSUS technology in their respective areas of interest. This is a watershed moment in the history of both the Asian powers, and portends an impending Cold War in the Indo-Pacific region.

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Strategic Salience of Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Economic and Military Dimensions

Pranay VK

Introduction

Accounting for 30 per cent of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) in the Bay of Bengal have been acknowledged as a distinctive strategic asset only in the 21st century.¹ Now labelled the 'unsinkable aircraft carrier', the islands provide India with a springboard to expand its strategic frontiers to its maritime east. By virtue of this change in outlook, the islands have figured more vividly in geopolitical discourse than ever before.² Prior to this shift in thought, the islands were considered to be more of a liability in India's security apparatus than an integral component of its larger national strategy. Post 1950 and prior to the turn of the new millennium, the ANI was governed by a policy characterised by 'benign neglect' and 'masterly inactivity'³, owing to its distance from the mainland, for the most part.

The eastern 'frontier'—as has been the recurring terminology used in the past—consists primarily of India's eastern extremities—the ANI included. The very notion that India's eastern-most reaches are mere territorial frontiers is a problematic one. It indicates a gross underestimation of the strategic value of these regions and the misplaced notion that India's territorial and strategic frontiers are one and the same. Consequently, the islands of Andaman and Nicobar, along with the eight north-eastern states, being part of this classification, have lagged behind their counterparts on the mainland in many respects. Thus, it is essential to distinguish between the two to gauge the extent to which the ANI allows India to expand its strategic frontiers well beyond the confines of its geographical territory.

For a long time, the national effort to capitalise on the islands seemed

optimistic, at best. Despite its proximity to the Strait of Malacca, the world's busiest shipping lane and possibly its most integral chokepoint, and playing host to the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), India's first and only integrated command, the islands were scarcely referred to as a viable strategic asset.

Ever since the establishment of the ANC at Port Blair in 2001, however, India's approach on the utilisation and role of the ANI in its national strategy has been steadily shifting. The islands have witnessed a greater degree of governmental focus and rate of development, both, in the military domain as well as the commercial, in the last couple of years. This shift in approach is essential for India to better secure its sea trade passing through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) near the Strait of Malacca and to maintain its maritime pre-eminence in its vicinity. Additionally, the ANI has been identified as a vital military asset in light of China's recent forays into the IOR. China's supposed activity on Coco Islands, a set of islands not far from the ANI, in particular, have been subject to much debate and discussion.

The Andaman and Nicobar islands have received additions and upgradations to its air-based and naval capabilities

in the last decade or so. While such developments are sure to help, the ANI possesses great potential, much of which is yet to be incorporated into India's overarching strategic calculus. This paper aims to analyse possible security and economic dividends of developing the ANI as an asset of great national strategic importance, keeping in mind the prevailing geopolitical, socio-economic and cultural realities.

Geographical Salience: Linking Security and Economics

The ANI's geographical orientation is perhaps its most standout characteristic. Located in close proximity to the busiest maritime chokepoint in the world and possessing a vast North-South spread spanning about 800 kilometres⁴, it provides India with a range of security-related and economic options. Traffic passing in and out of the Strait of Malacca routinely circumvent Great Nicobar and enter the 200-kilometre-wide Six Degree Channel⁵, while a smaller portion uses the Ten Degree Channel that separates the Andaman Islands from those of Nicobar. Such geographical traits and their subsequent economic pay-offs provide India with a platform and the impetus to maintain a certain degree of oversight and domain awareness in order to better secure its interests in the region.

Island territories provide nations with a variety of possibilities. From a military standpoint, they often serve as natural fortification against approaching hostile maritime assets while also doubling up as warning and surveillance posts.⁶ This, coupled with the presence of the integrated command in the case of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, should provide for a legitimate defensive counter against most traditional and non-traditional confrontational actions in the region, leading to the notion of the islands being India's very own 'island chain'. Such a theorisation would imply that the ANI stands to play an integral role in India's power projection and forward posturing to its east, owing to its far-flung geographical location and thus, the logistical convenience it would provide. Although an island chain theorisation in this context might seem far-fetched at this point, China's aggressive progression in the maritime realm might make it inevitable.

The geographical contiguity of the islands to countries such as Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand further cement its strategic versatility. Landfall Island, the northern-most island in the chain is a mere 40 kilometres from the Coco Islands of Myanmar, while Indira Point, near Campbell Bay, is about 165 kilometres from Aceh in Indonesia.⁷

Such statistics are especially important in the context of the Act East Policy adopted by India in 2014. For instance, Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum has given it the impetus to intensify its synergy with India in matters maritime, with the ANI being projected as a region with an integral role to play in the same. Better connectivity between the islands and the littorals of the Andaman Sea would in turn improve trade and thus, economic relations—a key aim of the AEP. Likewise, the ANI presents India with a vast canvas for convergence of interests between India and South East Asian nations.

Historically, India's threat perception has forced it to remain pre-occupied with its continental north. This has resulted in it prioritising its land-based interests over maritime opportunity—a view that is possibly apparent in the lack of a more concrete maritime dimension to the AEP. Should there be a standard operating procedure while acting east using the seas, the Andaman and Nicobar must play a central role. That being said, the Indian Navy, in particular, has played a key role in maritime diplomacy and strengthening ties between navies of the South East Asian littoral, with the ANI playing the role of host on multiple occasions. India continues to participate in bilateral and multilateral exercises

to improve inter-operability while also promoting the diplomatic dimension of India's regional maritime interests through frequent port visits, operational training and capacity-building, among other things.⁸

Developing strong maritime ties with the South East Asian littorals is key to India playing the role of a net-security provider in the IOR, as envisioned by its most recent naval strategy document titled, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*.⁹ This status is perhaps intrinsic in the fact that India enjoys a central position in the IOR and possesses a unique asset such as the ANI so close to the Strait of Malacca that sees over 75,000 container vessels¹⁰—carrying essential global resources—passing through each year. In line with such a designation, India has been open to improving cooperation with nations involved in the Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP) in order to ensure security of passage between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean¹¹.

In addition to tackling non-traditional threats such as maritime terrorism, piracy, drug smuggling, gun running and illegal migration, navies of the countries in the vicinity of the Strait of Malacca are well aware of Chinese forays into the Indian Ocean Region. Furthermore, much has been

written about China's presumed hostile activities on Myanmar's Coco Islands and the threats they pose for India and its maritime pre-dominance in the region. Irrespective of the validity of such allegations, India must remain cognizant of all its options. One such option that has been discussed in some detail is that of using the ANI to enforce a naval blockade upon China at the north-western mouth of the Strait of Malacca if and when required.

Thus, the Andaman and Nicobar islands are an apt representation of the convergence between geography, economics and security. Being inextricably linked variables, it is impossible to talk of either of them in complete isolation. With geography favouring India to such a large extent in relation to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, it is up to the political leadership to work with the armed forces to capitalise on this good fortune and add further impetus to India's maritime aspirations in and around India's maritime east.

The ANI in Transition

A lot can be learnt about the Andaman and Nicobar islands from its history. Vivid pictures of the complex ethno-cultural and socio-military background of the islands have been drawn up in the past. The islands have come a long way since the Japanese and British

occupation during and prior to the 1900s. There was a time during the independence struggle when the ANI was considered to be merely a penal colony for British-deemed outcasts sent in from the mainland. Post 1950, when the islands came under the jurisdiction of the Indian government, they were governed by a policy characterised by 'benign neglect' and 'masterly inactivity'. This, perhaps, formed the basis of the lack of inclusion of the ANI in India's military and economic strategy in the latter half of the 20th century.

The turn of the millennium brought about a shift in strategic thought with regard to the Andaman and Nicobarislands. In 2001, for example, the India set up the Andaman and Nicobar Command at Port Blair, a move that was deemed to be of great strategic value especially in the context of the islands' geographical location. New Delhi seemed taken with the idea of a joint command comprising all three wings of the Indian armed forces, despite opposition from each service.¹² However, the theoretical value of such a move notwithstanding, the ANC was and possibly has continued to remain caught up in matters financial and administrative.¹³

In relative terms, the Andaman and Nicobar islands are currently a much

more integral part of India's strategic calculus. It is nearly impossible to talk about India's maritime security architecture in exclusion of the ANI. The islands have gone from being a territory that required assistance to secure itself, to a land of many possibilities that is now a key component of the security apparatus in the region. India has steadily gone about increasing and improving its military assets on the islands in the recent past, in light of traditional as well as non-traditional threats emanating from the sea. China, as discussed, continues to aggressively wade into the maritime realm and the IOR in particular, while non-traditional threats emanating from piracy, maritime terrorism, drug smuggling, gun and running are a constant menace.

Of the total land area of the islands, only about 6 per cent is open to human habitation and development, while only 38 of the 572 islands and islets in the chain are inhabited. Such numbers stand in stark contrast to the fact that the islands comprise 30 percent of India's total EEZ. Such figures not only signify a considerable loss in revenue but also present a security dilemma. It is a known fact that the uninhabited islands, islets and rocks of the ANI pose as safe havens for pirates and illegal migrants from countries such as Bangladesh and

Myanmar. However, the non-use of such a large percentage of the land is justified. The Andaman and Nicobar islands boast of vast forest cover and are home to a number of indigenous tribes such as the Jarawas and the Sentinelese that are in dire need of state protection. Governmental measures have, thus, been taken to ensure the autonomy of these tribes and the protection of the forest cover through restricted public access and developmental activities by the government on the islands.

Despite such restraints, the ANI is steadily developing into a seat for economic growth and tourism. There has been talk of transforming the islands into a trans-shipment hub, much like Singapore, to attract greater sea-based container traffic.¹⁴ With greater traffic comes a bigger need for security. The onus would fall upon the ANC and its various assets for constant patrols and security provisions along the Six Degree Channel, the Ten Degree Channel as well as the Preparis Channel, north of the Andaman's. India has taken steps in the right direction with upgradations to its airstrips and ports, deployment of key naval and air assets, and the launch of its very own floating dock for ship-building and repairs, among other things.

However, for the ANI to truly become a global hub for trade and

trans-shipment, India must focus on issues such as inter-island connectivity and civilian infrastructure. Such moves would further generate jobs and promote tourism and, thus, bring about a rise in revenue. With India accepting Japanese investment on the islands, the economic stakes have only risen. For a comprehensive understanding of the logistics and planning that go into improving inter-island connectivity, it would do India good to initiate conversations with island states such as Indonesia and Fiji, for instance. Indonesia's model for inter-island connectivity, in particular, although not directly applicable, should provide a

sound base for development. An improvement in this respect would enable the ANI to establish itself as a prime tourist destination. This would only further concretise the security imperative of the ANC.

Conclusion

The 21st century has witnessed the resurgence of India's maritime legacy, with the ANI having played and continuing to play an integral role in the larger scheme of things. The islands are no longer limited to playing the role of an outpost on India's eastern territorial frontier. Today, they represent a platform for the nation to extend its strategic frontiers

and achieve its aspirations of becoming a blue economy. They offer the nation a wide range of military strategic options by virtue of its geographical location and traits, so as to secure its trade and EEZs, and maintain its pre-eminence in the IOR. However, there is much left to do in terms of fulfilling its potential as an economic and military asset. There is a growing need for improved inter-island connectivity, civilian infrastructure and further military assets on the islands, amongst pre-requisites to protect and preserve the environment and its indigenous inhabitants. While this is

certainly a dilemma no state would like to face, it is not that development and environment protection need to be mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, India seems to be gradually heading in the right direction in terms of utilising the islands for its strategic gain while attempting to remain cognizant of any environmental ramifications. The ANI is truly a unique point of convergence between geography, security and economics that India must strive to further develop and capitalise upon.

03 August 2017

ENDNOTES

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‘Beyond Hardware and Technology’: The Intangibles of China’s Naval Power (Part 1)

Gurpreet S Khurana

This is part one of a three-part series on China’s naval power

(PART 1: MILITARY-STRATEGIC LEVEL)

The past two decades have witnessed a phenomenal growth in China’s naval capabilities. The ‘rise’ of China as a global power has led to its increased politico-military assertiveness far from Chinese shores. In turn, this is leading to shifting regional military balances and attendant insecurities, beginning with the Pacific Asia, and spilling over into the broader Indo-Pacific region. Attendant upon this is the enhanced attention of strategists, academicians and policymakers around the globe to China’s growing potential for maritime force projection in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

In this regard, much analysis thus far has focused on examining the military balance based on the PLA Navy’s existing and projected force-levels, and

associated hardware inductions and technological progression; either in general, or specifically in the context of a conflict in the Western Pacific rim. Undeniably, examining these tangible elements could provide valuable indicators of the potency of China’s naval power. However, military capability is a function of more than merely hardware and technology.

The intent, objectives and strategy; tradition, operational experience and joint-service synergy; and the trends with regard to training and exercises, maintenance philosophy, and so on; all constitute rather intangible elements of the PLA Navy, which would play a major role in determining the effectiveness of China’s naval power in combat. The most fundamental intangible character is ‘Doctrine’: a set of beliefs and principles that spans all three levels – military-strategic, operational (theatre/campaign-level) and tactical – and

governs all other intangible elements of maritime-military power. This part of the paper intends to examine the intangibles of Chinese naval power at the 'military-strategic' level. The 'operational' and 'tactical' levels would be assessed later as parts 2 and 3 respectively as sequels to this part of the paper.

Transformation of Naval Doctrine

Naval Doctrine is the set of beliefs and thoughts of a country's naval forces, on how the forces would preserve national interests and objectives relating to the maritime domain; those including - but not exclusive to - safeguarding national-security military and non-military threats. Usually such a doctrine evolves over a relatively long period of time through iterations based on maturing of national-strategic doctrine. But in case of China, which has traditionally been a continental power, the change of its naval doctrine has been transformative. It has occurred in such a short time duration so as to be unprecedented in modern history.

China has not been transparent in this process, making it difficult to develop a more profound understanding of its military doctrines. Nonetheless, if one tracks the trajectory of the doctrinal developments and its major facets, two characteristics emerge clearly. First, the

perception of severe threat against its sovereignty by potential adversaries has pushed China to 'fast-track' its military doctrine development, particularly its naval doctrine. Second, it is clear that Chinese naval doctrine has been shaped by the symbolism of acquiring the G-2 'Great Power' status aside the United States, and hence driven by a sense of competition with the Western maritime powers, against the backdrop of China's sense of inferiority, and even an emotion of vengeance. Due to the rapid nature of its evolution, at the strategic level, China's naval doctrine cannot be considered as 'mature' in the traditional sense, due simply to the sheer speed of its development.. This emerges clearly from an analysis of the trajectory of the PLA Navy's doctrine development since the 1980s.

The 1980s

Until the mid-1980s both the United States and the Soviet Union were very real potential adversaries. At that time, the "People's War" doctrine sought 'strategic depth' by capitalizing upon China's advantages in terms of vast territory and population. By mid-1980s, owing to the Cold War nuclear stalemate and conflicts like the 1982 Falklands War, China realized that large-scale wars were unlikely; and therefore, reconfigured its military doctrine from "People's War"

to fighting a conventional “Local and Limited War¹”. This led to the shift in naval doctrine from static “coastal defense” to “active offshore defense²”. The term ‘active defense’ draws from China’s updated military doctrine of offensive action at operational and tactical levels, while retaining a defensive posture at the strategic level. In more functional terms, it necessitates the neutralisation of a threat well outside China’s periphery; and thereby translates into the need for ‘strategic depth’ beyond – rather than within – Chinese sovereign territory. The measure of such ‘depth’ was deliberately not defined deliberately, since China wanted to enhance it progressively in tandem with the increasing distance to which the China’s military would be capable of influencing events. Likewise, in naval terms, the quantification of ‘offshore’ was dynamic.

The 1990s

In the early-1990s, the fall of Soviet Union reduced the likelihood of a major war further, and validated China’s military doctrine tailored for limited wars. However, the first Gulf War highlighted China’s vulnerability in terms of its warfighting technology differential vis-à-vis the United States. Accordingly, in 1993, Beijing promulgated its national military

strategy titled “The Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period,” wherein it stressed on military modernisation encompassing equipment development and procurement, and institutional and organizational reforms; and introduced the concept of “local wars under high-technology conditions”. (Later in 2004, this concept was modified to “local wars under informationalized conditions”.)

As a result of China’s increased emphasis on technology, by the first half of 1990s, the PLA Navy began inducting domestically-designed second-generation platforms, which represented a quantum leap over its Soviet-design platforms (built before 1980s), which were equipped with obsolete weapon systems and were prone to machinery breakdowns. A notable induction was the new-generation *Shang*-class nuclear attack submarines (SSN).

Nonetheless, China’s military doctrine remained antiquated in all its dimensions – land, sea and air. This realization dawned upon China soon after the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1996, which made it critical for China to upgrade its doctrine, particularly to secure its vulnerable maritime frontier. In 1999, China issued new classified campaign guidance documents called Campaign Gangyao³ (纲要), fleshing

out the warfighting concept for each service through service-specific combat-doctrine manuals (战斗条令).

Meanwhile, China accelerated the technological upgradation of its naval platforms. By late-1990s, China began to build modular design third-generation naval platforms *Luhai*-class destroyers and *Jiangwei*-class frigate to improve upon its second-generation ones of the early-1990s, which has been beset by many constructional flaws and design deficiencies. Notably, in 1999, the PLA Navy also began inducting the Russian *Sovremenny* destroyers and also the *Song*-class indigenous attack submarine (SSG) capable of submerged missile launch.

The 2000s

By early 2000s, China has accumulated much self-confidence as a major power, with the attendant realisation of the importance of the sea for retaining and perpetuating such status. A Chinese writing says,

“Until the 17th century, the global economy was dominated by continental powers. Later, with sea trade gradually replacing land-based economy, and locus of world economy gradually shifted westward, leading to prosperity in Europe, and then the Americas. Countries like Spain, the Netherlands, the United

Kingdom, and later the United States who mastered sea power, prospered and took turns in exercising hegemony across the globe. Despite China’s inherent economic strengths, its weakness to influence events at sea is a major adversity which China has not overcome over the ages. But now, with the rise of China having led to global focus on Asia, China will need to realize the continued relevance of sea-power for economic interactions (paraphrased extract translated from Mandarin)...”

Soon, China’s political leadership began a campaign for psychological mobilization of Chinese youth to build Chinese “sea power” by recalling the country’s long-forgotten 15th century seafaring tradition of Zeng He. This led to a major transformation in China’s naval doctrine. In 2004, China’s Central Military Commission issued a revised set of “military strategic guidelines”. While the emphasis of China’s strategy was still on traditional military security in the Western Pacific (and this has continued so), and began developing blue-water naval power to preserve its expanding economic interests. As the same Chinese writings says,⁴

“...Of course, as compared to exercising influence over events on land, developing effective sea power is easier said than done. It needs to be achieved progressively outwards from the first island chain – even

if it implies in military opposition to the United States and other inimical littoral countries – so as to create strategic depth for China (paraphrased extract translated from Mandarin)”.

Possessing an effective blue-water navy was not an easy task for a traditionally continental power like China, but it was essential for two reasons:

- First, for distant power-projection, including projection of ‘soft’ power to propagate national influence; and later, for (hard) ‘force-projection’, as and when required to preserve its vital interest overseas.
- Second, for enhancement of ‘strategic depth’. While this was the most immediate compelling need for the nation’s territorial security, in the longer term, it was also essential for securing China’s vital maritime and overseas interests.

China thus began to take concerted measures to bolster its naval power, and even named the PLA Navy as a “strategic service”. In 2003-04, the PLA Navy began to assume a role in higher policy-making when Admiral Zhang Dingfa, the PLA Navy Commander (along with his counterparts of PLA Air Force and

Second Artillery) became members of the Central Military Commission (CMC) for the first time. Around the same time, China began to reorganise its Coast Guard for better management of its extensive maritime-territorial claims, which freeing the naval forces for distant blue-water missions (yuanhai, 远海). Around mid-2000s, the PLA Navy began inducting blue-water assets such as the Type 052 B/C destroyers and the Type 054 frigates, besides the *Yuan*-class submarines. It was also the time when China’s geo-strategic intent in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) appeared, expressed as “String of Pearls”. However, it was not amply clear at that time if China’s intent was to develop overseas military bases in the IOR. In December 2008, the PLA Navy began the anti-piracy mission in Gulf of Aden, which was its first foray into the Indian Ocean and began to be predicted as a precursor to China’s permanent naval presence in the IOR.

The 2010s

In the beginning of the current decade, China blue-water endeavours became more conspicuous, including for securing its overseas interests beyond the Western Pacific. For instance, in 2010, PLA Navy began conducting annual humanitarian assistance missions with *Anwei*-class (Type 920) hospital

ship *Peace Ark* deployed to South Asia (2010), Latin America (2011) and Africa (2013). In 2011, China evacuated approximately 36,000 Chinese nationals from Libya predominantly via the sea (also employing its warships). In February 2014, China undertook an unprecedented show of naval might when its warships sailed through the Sunda Strait, conducted a naval exercise off Australia's Christmas islands, and returned to the South China Sea via the Lombok strait. Similar exercises in the same area were conducted on two occasions in the later years.

President Xi Jinping's 'Maritime Silk Road' (21世纪海上丝绸之路) vision launched in 2013 reinforced the imperative for the PLA Navy to adhere to the dictum 'flag follows trade'. Accordingly, China's 2014 Defence White Paper published in May 2015 – which was first official articulation of China's military strategy – was the first to explicitly state the PLA Navy's task of "open seas protection". This indicated a shift from the PLA Navy's doctrine of 'offshore defence' to that of 'offshore defence-cum-open seas protection' for securing China's distant interests. Undeniably, the most critical of these interests is China's energy 'lifelines' transiting the IOR that make up much of its 'strategic vulnerability' to

a interdiction by the US or India. This makes the protection of its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) among the most important functions of PLA Navy missions in the IOR, and reinforces the prognosis of China's permanent naval presence in the IOR.

Doctrine Duality: Sea Denial & Sea Control

China's prevailing military-strategic doctrine of "active offshore defense – cum – open sea protection" has compelled the PLA Navy to tailor itself for both 'Sea Denial' and 'Sea Control', thereby diluting its naval doctrine. China's primary strategic imperative is to build strategic depth in the Western Pacific against its potential adversaries, who continue to be vastly superior in technological terms, a reality that is not lost upon Beijing ever since the demonstration of US military-technological prowess in the 1990s. In maritime-military terms, this translates into the suitability of 'sea-denial' concept (as part of the overall strategy of asymmetric warfare), which continues to be PLA Navy's primary doctrinal approach. As China's 9th Defence White Paper of 2014, published in 2015 stated, "You fight your way and I fight my way."

However, since early-1980s, the PLA Navy has been making endeavours

to develop the ‘sea-control’ concept concurrently, aspiring to operate an aircraft carrier. As is evident from the numerous Chinese writings on the subject, this approach flows from the overbearing influence upon Chinese thought of Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan and his concept of ‘Command of the Seas’. In 1985, the *Melborne* was purchased from Australia as scrap to examine its design. At that time, this decision was driven by the PLA Navy, without much support of the political leadership. Amid much internal debate, over the following two decades, political leadership support for a carrier navy arrived in mid-2000s, paralleling along with China’s rise to true “great power” status. It eventually progressed to the present state wherein the *Liaoning* is operationalized, a domestic carrier is about to be launched, and more ‘flat-tops’ are likely to follow.

However, given China’s geo-strategic setting, a carrier-based sea-control doctrine is unsuitable in strategic and operational terms. An aircraft carrier would be highly vulnerable in China’s maritime periphery that is ‘dotted’ by the numerous ‘unfriendly’ air bases. The Chinese carrier would also need to be protected against the rapidly increasing threat of advanced submarines of the US, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam;

and possibly, of Australia and India. A carrier would be extremely vulnerable to the sub-surface threats, considering that the waters off the Western Pacific rim favour submarine operations due to their relatively lesser depths and mixed gradients of temperature and salinity. The growing submarine threat becomes a very serious issue for Chinese carriers considering that Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) has not been among the strengths of the PLA Navy (examined in detail in Part 3 of this paper). Operating a carrier would also stretch the available resources of the PLA Navy for its protection and logistics, without commensurate operational advantages. Furthermore, this symbolic leap in China’s military capabilities is adding to the alarm among China’s neighbours, which is counterproductive for China to propagate its regional influence meet its broader national-strategic objectives.

Nonetheless, China has sustained its commitment to doctrinal duality – Sea Denial and carrier-based Sea Control – at a rather high cost to its core national interests in its maritime periphery. Even if the Chinese were to opt for sea-control to meet its objectives in the Western Pacific, it would have been more prudent to hinge the sea-control doctrine on land-based fighters while augmenting air-basing on its occupied islands. The

currently ongoing land reclamation of South China Sea islands⁵ would have been invaluable to give effect to such doctrine.

Operationalisation of a carrier task-force to be able to establish sea-control requires a fairly long gestation time (decades), and the Chinese are well-known to think far ahead in time. Also, developing aircraft carriers would be essential for China to project power in the Indian Ocean and beyond as it continues to build on the Mahan doctrine. However, investing in carrier-based sea control doctrine is pre-mature for China, and a contradiction in strategic terms. Beijing cannot deny that its immediate challenges in the Western Pacific against the US and its allies are rather serious. Therefore, unless China's investments are prioritised, it may never be able to reach the latter envisaged stage of global power-projection. The key driver for opting for carrier-based sea control is driven by symbolism and competition – even a sense of vengeance. When symbolism outweighs substance and leads to compromise of rational thought, the result creates a paradox for Chinese strategic planning, including in terms of naval force development.

In turn, imitating the US makes China vulnerable and susceptible to

to US strategic communications. In January 2017, for instance the US Navy published its Surface Force Strategy titled, “Return to Sea Control.”⁶ Ostensibly, this title effectively misled the Chinese into believing that the US doctrine has been reviewed in response to the Chinese naval doctrine. Upon closer review, however, the US Navy never really deviated from its sea control doctrine. To any naval professional, the indispensability of sea-control for performing any surface mission against military opposition has never been in doubt. Post Cold War, even as the focus of US naval strategy shifted to the littoral, the doctrinal imperative remained ‘sea control, which merely shifted from ‘mid-ocean sea control’ to ‘littoral sea control’. However, beset by nationalistic sentiments, the Chinese media picked up the news of the US Navy’s doctrinal ‘review’, and reported comparisons with operationalisation of China’s own carrier *Liaoning*. Such tendency is likely to strengthen China’s misperceived resolve to pursue a sea control doctrine, which may result in an unfulfilled vision of its naval doctrine.

18 August 2017

(This article was first published in ‘*The Navalist*’ on 13 Apr 19)

ENDNOTES

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‘Beyond Hardware and Technology’: The Intangibles of China’s Naval Power (Part 2)

Gurpreet S Khurana

This is part two of a three-part series on China’s naval power

(PART 2: OPERATIONAL LEVEL)

As introduced in Part 1, so far, most analyses of China’s naval power worldwide have examined the PLA Navy’s existing and projected force-levels, and its associated hardware inductions and technological progression, with little emphasis on the ‘intangibles’ of China’s naval power, such as the strategic intent, objectives and strategy; tradition, operational experience and joint-service synergy, and the trends with regard to training and exercises, maintenance philosophy, and so on.

While Part 1 assessed China’s naval doctrine at the ‘military-strategic’ level, Part 2 undertakes an assessment of the intangible elements of China’s naval power at the ‘operational’ (campaign) level. Part 3 will address the ‘tactical’ level.

Operational Planning & Operational Art

Since Sun Tzu’s Art of War – the oldest treatise on operational art – Chinese military operational theory has developed in insular environs. This has led to a substantial difference between the Chinese and other militaries in fundamental doctrinal nomenclature and concepts. The Chinese express operational art in a very different manner, which is difficult for a non-Chinese analyst to understand. For instance, there is no single word in Chinese that directly corresponds to ‘doctrine’, but many documents talk about ‘operational theory,’ which is linked to ‘operational practice’ through ‘military science.’

The doctrinal variance is best exemplified by the differences in the two strategy board games – the Chinese ‘Weichi’ and the Western ‘Chess’, which explains how the Chinese think vis-à-vis their counterparts in the West. In

'Chess', the player aims to checkmate the opponent's king (operational 'centre of gravity') through a single decisive encounter. On the contrary, 'Weichi'¹ is essentially an 'encirclement game' involving multiple battles over a wide front, whose objective is to fully surround a larger total area of the board than the opponent. Clearly, therefore, the Chinese 'Weichi' is oriented to fighting a land campaign, and thereby – unlike the western 'chess' – entails capture of territory. On the other hand, 'chess' is more akin to a naval campaign, which does not entail holding of territory, unless during an amphibious campaign; in which case too, the military objective lies inland.

Another difference between Chinese and Western operational thought lies in the subtle nuances of 'operational manoeuvre.' Although 'manoeuvre' is the cornerstone of Sun Tsu's treatise, and also essential in the Chinese game of 'Weichi,' its relevance is confined only to the initial part of the campaign to avoid the strength of the adversary. In the Chinese operational thought, decisive victory is achieved at a later stage only through 'attrition'. In contrast, in Western doctrine, as exemplified by the 'Chess' game, 'manoeuvre' is critical for the entire length of the campaign, particularly since the operational

objective would not usually involve capture of territory. This variance possibly emanates from the historical-cultural divergence between China and West. Whereas the western militaries having learnt lessons from its 'bloody' history, seek to avoid 'attrition' of own forces at all costs, China's perceives its strength to lie in numbers – in terms of both platforms and human resource – and thus its ability to absorb 'attrition' of own forces.

Chinese operational theory, therefore, evolved largely for land campaigns, capitalizing upon the numerical advantage of forces. Later, China adapted to the operational design of naval warfare by imitating the practices of the major naval powers. Fundamentally, therefore, the PLA Navy's operational tenets of warfighting are not different from those of the western navies. To a casual observer, nevertheless, the difference may seem conspicuous due to two reasons.

First, conceptual and linguistic differences have been a major challenge for the PLA Navy to adapt to the western operational doctrine. This has led to Chinese naval operational art being 'underdeveloped' vis-à-vis the other major navies.

Second, while China and the non-Chinese navies alike follow the practice

of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, the deductions for China usually differ substantially from those of the western powers, necessitating a vastly different approach by the PLA Navy. For instance, China's substantial technological inferiority vis-à-vis its potential adversaries in the Western Pacific rim leads to the deduction that it must employ its numerical strength and asymmetric capabilities like anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM), submarines and missile boats.

Inter-Service (Functional) Integration/ Jointness

For a long time since China's emergence as a nation-state, joint-service planning/ operations has been virtually non-existent in the Chinese armed forces. The primary reason for this has been the continental disposition of the Chinese and the primacy of land-based operations in China's military-operational doctrine, resulting in the dominance of the PLA Army. This led to the PLA Navy and PLA Air Force being merely branches of the Army-dominated PLA, not only in nomenclature, but also in functional terms. The PLA Army's functional integration/ jointness with the PLA Air-Force was somewhat justifiable, but its synergy with the PLA Navy was considered unnecessary, since the

latter operated in a completely different (maritime) realm, and was thus required to deal with its maritime security functions on its own. In order to ward off the enemy's amphibious assaults across its seaward frontiers, China developed the Marine Corps in the 1950s for the PLA Navy. This diminished further the need for PLA Navy's functional integration with the PLA Army.

In the mid-1990s, as a strategic guideline for fighting a 'Local War Under High Technological Conditions', China implemented the 'War Zone Concept' (WZC). As per the WZC, during war, all army, navy and air forces from more than one Military Region were to be brought directly under the command and control of the HQ of one Military Region, which was then reconstituted as a "war zone" (theatre) [战区], with the operational command exercised by a single unified commander. However, the WZC had two serious voids.

First, the WZC was not a permanent organisation. In peacetime, the Chinese military continued to operate with the erstwhile Command and Control organisation of seven military region (MR) commands representing China's seven geographic regions.

Second, although the WZC did cater to a maritime conflict – such as in a Taiwan scenario – it was based on the

seven Military Regions, and was thus largely optimised to fight a land-based war.

In 1999, emulating the western defence structures, China promulgated its first-ever Joint Campaign Guidance (*Gangyao*) – along with Joint Logistics Campaign Guidance (*Gangyao*). However, this endeavour was also flawed. The Chinese term “Gangyao” (联合) literally means ‘united’ (rather than ‘joint’ or ‘integrated’), merely indicating that the units of two or more services are operating together at the tactical level, and are not joint (or integrated) at the operational level. This realisation dawned upon the Chinese military in 2004, when it coined a new term, “Integrated Joint Operations” (体化联合作战), to describe what the western defence forces refer to as theatre-level ‘joint planning and operations’. The concept was formally incorporated in China’s Outline of Military Training and Evaluation (OMTE) ³only in 2009. Since then, China began emphasizing upon this ‘integrated’ concept in its Defense White Papers. However, even thereafter, inter-service integration has been more of rhetoric and symbolic than substantive, as also indicated by the kind of tactical exercises undertaken by the PLA even today (examined in detail later in part 3 of this paper).

In December 2015, China replaced the WZC with a permanent ‘Theatre Command Concept’, when the former seven MR Commands were replaced by five Theatre Commands. The reorganisation emerged from Beijing’s realization that inter-service operational integration needs to cater effectively to fight a maritime war. Accordingly, the PLA Navy’s East Sea Fleet (ESF) and the South Sea Fleet (SSF) now form part of the Eastern and Southern Theatre Commands respectively. Notably, with this reorganisation, a PLA Navy Vice Admiral (Commander of the Southern Theatre Command) became the first non-PLA Army officer ever to command a Military Region (MR) or a Theatre Command (TC).

Soon thereafter, in 2016, to achieve a genuine jointness in defence planning, China undertook a major reorganisation⁴ of the PLA Headquarters’ (PLA HQ) under the Central Military Commission (CMC). The PLA HQ and its four “general departments” (Staff, Political, Logistics, and Armaments) were hitherto performing two concurrent functions, as follows:

HQ of the PLA Army, similar to to the HQs of the PLA Navy, the PLA Air Force, and the PLA Rocket Force (formerly known as the Second Artillery Force).

HQ of joint staff responsible for overall policy and strategy formulation for the Chinese military.

The four “general departments” were dismantled; all joint staff-type functions were assigned directly to the CMC, and a separate PLA Army HQs was created.

The two latest measures of 2015-16 are indeed notable, which could potentially transform China’s joint war fighting effectiveness in the Western Pacific rim. However, these would need some years to ‘settle down’ to contribute effectively to its envisaged purpose. Besides, these are not devoid of significant challenges, particularly in terms of the operational effectiveness of the PLA Navy in a maritime conflict:

First, although the PLA appears committed to integration, the Army’s historic dominance over other services may complicate these efforts. Some officers have complained that the ongoing dominance of the “great infantry” concept across the military has affected the development of joint operations and training.

In March 2017, China announced its plans to expand the size of its Marine Corps from the existing 20,000 troops to about 100,000 troops. Beijing,

considers this upgrade essential for China to provide the PLA Navy an integral forward-deployed quick-reaction capability overseas, beginning with Djibouti and Gwadar. Notably, this is indicative of China’s quest to emulate the force planning of the major western powers. However, this would dilute the motivation and efforts to integrate the PLA Navy with the other armed forces of China, for enhanced inter-service synergy for a campaign in the Western Pacific.

Naval Operational Logistics

Over the years, the lack of inter-service functional integration has also adversely affected naval logistics for joint operations in the Western Pacific rim. Until recently, maritime logistics has also been a notable void for PLA Navy’s independent missions. The three key causes are the following:

The PLA Navy has been compelled to maintain a high teeth-to-tail ratio to counter the militarily superior adversaries in the Western Pacific rim through an ‘anti-intervention strategy. This has led to an emphasis on combat platforms at the expense of their supportive logistic elements.

The PLA Navy’s ship-borne logistics concept has traditionally been based

upon provision of fuel, food and water. This is inadequate for comprehensive sustenance of naval forces overseas over extended periods, and also necessitates the provision of technical and other services, the associated spare-parts and ordnance/ ammunition.

Traditionally, the PLA Navy's warship crews have lacked experience of extended sea deployments, which also bears upon the expertise for routine maintenance of machinery and equipment during such deployments (examined later in Part 3 of this paper).

The voids in PLA Navy's maritime logistics became conspicuous during its counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden beginning December 2008. Among the most salient problems was the low operational availability of logistics ships. Until mid-2011, due to the poor material state of its older logistic ships, the PLA Navy was compelled to deploy its two latest logistic ships *Weishanhu* and *Qiandaohu* for consecutive missions, and alternate between these, leading to considerable strain on their material and crew.

However, over a very short period, the PLA Navy transformed its operational logistics in the Gulf of Aden⁵. From mid-2011, the strain encountered by *Weishanhu* and *Qiandaohu* was shared

by the new logistic ships – beginning with *Qinghaihu*, and later by *Taihu* and *Chaohu*. By end-2014, the PLA Navy had achieved the comfort level to deploy its seven new logistic ships in succession.

Traditionally, China was conceptually reliant on the ships of State-Owned Enterprises (SoE) like the *China Ocean Shipping Company* (COSCO) for providing support to the PLA Navy during a crisis necessitating distant operations like logistic support and strategic sealift. In 2015, Beijing issued a set of new guidelines to build all Chinese commercial ships to warship standards. The option to employ these ships for logistic support in the Gulf of Aden mission was considered. However, it is likely that Beijing realized the highly specialized nature and demands of maritime operational logistics, and thus discarded the option. Besides, tasking these vessels would be detrimental to their primary commercial function, thereby adversely affecting Chinese economy, at a time when the PLA Navy's *raison d'être* is to support 'economics', and not the other way around.

Notably, for the first time, China's 2014 Defense White Paper lays emphasis on 'sustenance' of the forward-deployed naval platforms through "strategic prepositioning". This indicates that

China is likely to seek overseas access facilities – possibly, even full-fledged military bases – in the Indian Ocean, or even resort to the U.S. concept of ‘sea-basing’. The latter possibility is supported by recent news-reports about China developing large ‘Mobile Landing Platforms’ (MLP) similar to those used by the U.S. expeditionary forces. This

trend constitutes the key indicator⁶ for China’s intent for distant force-projection in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and beyond.

06 September 2017

(This article was first published in ‘*The Navalist*’ on 07 Jun 17)

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'Beyond Hardware and Technology': The Intangibles of China's Naval Power (Part 3)

Gurpreet S Khurana

This is part three of a three-part series on China's naval power

(PART 3: TACTICAL LEVEL)

As introduced in the Part 1, so far, most analysis of China's naval power worldwide has focused on the PLA Navy's existing and projected force-levels, and their associated hardware inductions and technological progression, with little emphasis on the 'intangibles' of China's naval power. These intangibles include strategic intent, objectives and strategy; tradition, operational experience and joint-service synergy; and the trends with regard to training and exercises, maintenance philosophy, and so on.

Parts 1 and 2 assessed China's naval doctrine at the 'military-strategic' and 'operational' levels; Part 3 undertakes an assessment of the intangible elements of China's naval power at the 'tactical' level, including the quality, disposition and employment of the 'man behind the machine.

Human Resource

Shortage of Educated Personnel

Authoritative literature indicates that the PLA Navy has been beset by a major shortage of educated personnel. Alike the rest of PLA, a major proportion of the PLA Navy's enlisted ranks constitutes rural intake requiring lower educational standard (middle school). Cognisant of better employment opportunities in cities, the proportion of urban intake has remained low (urban candidates tend to have higher academic standards). Although the officers usually come from urban areas, they also do not hold a very high educational standard since they were either graduates of PLA military academies or have been directly promoted from the ranks without receiving a higher education. The urban-rural divide can lead to officer-enlisted tension in the PLA Navy.

A personal interaction between the author and Chinese think-tanks

indicates that the challenge of recruiting educated youth is more acute in case of the PLA Navy's submarine arm. Although China has traditionally emphasised on its submarine capability, its tough demands on personnel without adequate commensurate dividends for them has led to the progressively weaning volunteering for the submarine cadre. At least until a few years ago, many *Romeo*-class submarines were placed in reserve due to non-availability of trained crews.

Sub-Optimal Employment of Officers

The same RAND report also indicates that until a decade ago that the PLA Navy officers were sub-optimally employed in operational billets. The officers were tasked to undertake many duties on board warships that are usually performed by non-commissioned officers (NCO) in other navies. The PLA created the NCO cadre only in 1999. Even at present, PLA Navy's officer cadre constitutes about one-third of its total personnel strength, whereas the average ratio worldwide is about 15 per cent. This means that the officers are not groomed for their primary role relating to command and control functions of a warship. This is among the key reasons why the internal command structure on Chinese warships depends excessively on the Captain and the heads of departments (HOD). There is little if any delegation of authority

and responsibility to the other officers, which leads to the degradation of the ships effectiveness as these 'command nodes' become weary with time. This becomes a particularly serious issue during extended warship deployments.

The PLA is continuing to increase the NCO cadre. NCOs presently constitute about half of the PLA's enlisted force, but 95 per cent of them are from the enlisted ranks, and thus not graduates of universities or three-year technical colleges. They are being given the required education progressively whilst being in service.

Training and Exercises

Reports indicate that historically, training and exercises have been a weak area for the PLA Navy, due to both a shortage of trained manpower and 'shallow' level of proficiency attained. Until 1996, China's military training was considered very poor. Exercises were largely 'scripted', with predetermined outcomes, and very limited hitherto due to limited operational availability of assets. In 2002, the PLA Navy issued an *Outline of Military Training and Evaluation* (OMTE), which articulated the need for more realism in training and exercises. In China's 2004 Defense White Paper,¹ this aspect was reiterated, indicating a realisation of this 'weak

link' and the need to address it. These instructions, however, have not always had the desired effect. For instance, in accordance with the OMTE, the PLA Navy Air Force upgraded its pilot training regime adding more rigour to the training under hostile conditions. However, while increasing the sortie-duration, it was compelled to reduce the number of training sorties so as not to increase the total number of flying hours. This was perhaps necessary to ease the load on aircraft engines to avoid their frequent overhaul/ replacement, but it amounts to a major compromise between achieving proficiency in handling a tactical opposition and the more critical take-off and landing procedures and the accompanying readiness-checks, which feed into not only flight safety, but also combat preparedness.

Since a decade ago, doctrinal emphasis has begun to focus more on the PLA Navy's training and exercises with the other PLA services. In June 2006, the PLA released new guidance² to increase realism in training and exercises, including through joint-service evolutions. However, at that time, the term "joint" simply referred to forces from more than one service operating in the same area at the same time. In more recent years, the PLA Navy has been observed to be operating more frequently

in coordination with the other services, and increasingly further from China's shores. The Chinese media has also been increasingly reporting³ these exercises/ operations, such as the following:

- PLA Air Force aircraft simulating attacks on PLA Navy warships.
- PLA Army attack helicopters providing air cover to PLA Navy ships engaged in amphibious exercises.
- The April 2014 PLA Navy and PLA Air Force joint search for Malaysia Airlines MH370 in the southern Indian Ocean.

Rather than true joint operations, however, these may be better framed as 'opposing-force training' or merely 'joint-service coordination'⁴ at the tactical level. The PLA still lacks true 'integration/ jointness', which should emanate from joint-planning at the operational level, leading inter alia to a joint command and control at the tactical level. The operational-level integration in PLA has begun only recently in December 2015 with the permanent 'Theatre Command Concept' (as examined in Part 2 of this paper). Notably, until lately, the PLA has not even conducted any joint theatre-level exercise involving all PLA defence services. Therefore, it could be assumed

that the 'Theatre Command Concept' would take considerable time to translate into 'joint-ness' at the tactical level.

Tactical Doctrines

The PLA Navy succeeded in instituting an organisation for development of naval concepts and doctrines well over three decades ago. The Navy Military Studies Research Institute—commonly referred to as the Navy Research Institute (NRI) has been the cornerstone of the organisation since 1985. The 'Tactics Department' of the NRI is tasked for development of doctrines at the tactical level. A US intelligence report of 2007 indicates that the doctrine-development process in the PLA Navy is fairly well developed, and very similar to that of most advanced navies. However, a realistic assessment of tactical practices indicates that the PLA Navy's tactical doctrines remain underdeveloped and archaic. This is largely attributable to the fact that the PLA remains a conservative organisation with inherent internal resistance to implement transformational doctrinal reforms. This has led to a mismatch between the ostensible sophistication of the PLA Navy's hardware and its tactical utilisation. The following text provides an illustrative (rather than an exhaustive) account of the PLA Navy's doctrinal voids at the tactical level.

Anti-Shipping Task

The 'anti-shipping' task constitutes one of the key enablers of the sea-denial doctrine. Ever since China followed the strategic-level naval doctrine of 'static coastal defense' (until the 1980s, as mentioned in Part 1 of this paper), the PLA Navy has been proficient in operating anti-ship missiles and torpedoes from their numerous low-cost combatants. The doctrinal emphasis on anti-shipping has continued to this day. China's technological 'head-start' in anti-shipping capability has ensured that the PLA Navy's meets the stringent demands of the contemporary maritime battlefield, such as in terms of the sophistication of the weapon system, the survivability of the weapon *per se*, and its ability to be launched from a variety of platforms. The imperative for maintaining a 'top-notch' anti-shipping capability – in terms of land, ship, aircraft and submarine launched missile systems - is reinforced further by China's current operational doctrine of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD).

Another imperative applicable to contemporary surface missile warfare is the need for coordination among dispersed forces for greater strike effectiveness. The PLA Navy has not yet demonstrated the ability to coordinate

missile strikes among dispersed units, which is a tactical imperative to extend sensor ranges (for optimum utilization of the high weapon ranges), maintaining the launch platform's radar silence and saturating the adversary's missile defenses. This inadequacy is linked to China's C⁴ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) capabilities. Although the PLA Navy has been able to develop the C⁴ systems to contemporary standards, the 'SIR' component has traditionally lagged behind the C⁴ component. It should be noted, however, that this is more of a technological void, rather than a doctrinal one.

Anti-Air Task

Since 'sea-denial' has traditionally been the mainstay of China's naval doctrine at the military-strategic level, China accorded a preferential treatment to developing anti-shipping tactics. Since China did not encounter any significant maritime-air threats, the PLA Navy's emphasis of 'anti-shipping' was at the cost of its doctrinal attention to the 'anti-air' dimension. In the 1960s and 1970s, as part of China's coastal defence doctrine, the PLA Navy warships began to be provided air cover by its own land-based fighters (PLA Navy Air Force). Such land-based fighter air-defence was

considered adequate. Since the PLA Navy units have rarely been deployed as a composite task force (examined later), fleet air-defence has been a major doctrinal deficiency, and thus a capability void. This translates into PLA Navy's key vulnerability today, particularly considering the increased tonnage and value of its major warships, including large amphibious ships and the aircraft carrier.

Over the past decade, the PLA Navy has re-oriented its doctrinal orientation with increased emphasis to fleet air-defence. It has translated into all new-construction warships being equipped with advanced gun and short-range missile systems for 'terminal (point) air-defence' of individual platforms. However, the most crucial component of the fleet layered Anti-Missile Defence (AMD) to forestall the adversary saturating own missile defences is 'area air-defence', which remain relatively weak. Only a few of the PLA Navy's latest Type 052 destroyers are armed with medium and long-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems with engagement ranges of more than 25 km; and most of these are either imported or reverse-engineered. Furthermore, their effectiveness against modern sea-skimmers with advanced CECUM (Electronic Counter Counter Measure) features is not yet proven.

Ostensibly, China's realization of its gaping doctrinal void in fleet air-defence is among the key drivers for its decision to opt for the aircraft carrier. Theoretically, a carrier-based organic aviation could contribute significantly to interdict the adversary's missile platforms before the missile launch is achieved from stand-off ranges. However, as noted in Part 1 of this paper, this would lead to a carrier-based sea-control doctrine, which is unsuited for China's maritime geography. China could have better augmented its fleet air defence by employing land-based fighters, and extending their operating ranges through mid-air refuellers, if required.

Anti-Submarine Task

Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) has always been the Achilles' Heel of the PLA Navy. The lack of doctrinal emphasis is similar to the anti-air doctrine, viz. China's near-perennial focus on anti-shipping task and the absence of submarine threats during the formative years of its navy. For the PLA Navy, the operational need for sanitizing the sub-surface domain never arose.

This translated into lack of the PLA Navy's ASW capacity in terms of technology, largely in terms of sonar technology, anti-submarine weapons and anti-submarine helicopters. While

China's focus was directed at developing naval capabilities like submarines, strike aircraft, anti-ship missiles, torpedoes and sea-mines, it came at a cost of investing in SONAR (Sound Navigation and Ranging) technology. China has never been able to develop the technological capacity to build advanced sonars like towed arrays indigenously and has always resorted to foreign acquisitions. Even when towed-arrays were inducted in the PLA Navy, these were fitted on submarines rather than surface combatants, due to the predominance of the former in the naval doctrine. China's defence industry did develop a formidable array of torpedoes, but these were essentially for anti-shipping role. The void of ASW aircraft relate to both integral and shore-based aircraft, and to lack of air-sub (aircraft-submarine) cooperation, which is an important requisite for effective ASW. The PLA Navy's first-generation ships had no integral helicopters, whose dipping sonars could have been valuable for ASW. Although the later ships do have integral aviation in the form of domestically developed helicopters, these have restrictions of all-up-weight, leading to constraints in deploying dipping sonars.

It is also important to consider that the discipline of underwater warfare,

known to be as much an ‘art’ as it is a ‘science’, depends much on training and experience of operators, which heretofore has been a constraint in for the PLA Navy.

Submarine Operations

The PLA Navy has taken its traditional doctrinal emphasis and strength in operating submarines further to conform to the strategic and operational-level doctrines (of ‘strategic depth’ and A2/AD respectively, This has translated into current level of force-levels of various submarine types and their relative sophistication. Based on the OMTE issued in 2002, the PLA Navy is developing and implementing new and more realistic tactics and combat methods to enable its submarines to be able to attack, survive after an attack, and maintain the capability to attack again at a later time. This is a change from the tactics followed by the PLA Navy in yesteryears, which focused primarily on attacking and less on defence before and after an attack, thereby reflecting a ‘people’s war’ characteristic. The incorporation of towed arrays on PLA Navy submarines indicates the intent to operate the submarines in deeper waters. (A towed array would be unsuitable for shallow waters since it would drag along the sea-bottom). In the coming years, therefore, the PLA Navy may

increasingly deploy its conventional submarines in the waters of the Western Pacific beyond the China seas, and its nuclear attack submarines (SSN) in the Indian Ocean.

However, some prevailing practices of the Chinese submarine operations indicate very outdated tactical concepts. For instance, the PLA Navy has been exercising multiple submarines attacking an adversary’s surface task force. This indicates a very outdated tactical concept of a time when surface forces were devoid of air-ASW. Today, a collective formation of PLA Navy submarines would be highly vulnerable to the ASW helicopters integral to an adversary’s surface task force, and may not be able to cause any harm to the task force.

It may, however, be noted that the latest Chinese submarines today are armed with underwater launched anti-ship missiles. For targeting, the group of Chinese submarines would need data on the surface target’s motion parameters. To maintain their stealth, these submarines cannot employ their integral sensors to obtain the data, and would thus need ‘external’ inputs through its trailing wire antenna (TWA) closer to the sea surface. This would pose a major risk in vicinity of the adversary’s surface task force. However, theoretically, the inputs

on the task force could be achieved as far as the maximum effective missile range of 100 km plus. If so, a combined (even if not coordinated) missile attack on the surface task force could saturate its defences and lead to much harm.

Composite Task Force Operations

Based on the new OMTE of 2002, the PLA Navy's surface forces are moving away from task forces composed of a single class of vessel to employing 'composite task forces', alike the other major navies. Meeting and synergising the diverse functional demands and operating parameters of the forces comprising the 'composite' presents a major challenge for the PLA Navy. Among the challenges is Underway Replenishment (UNREP), an ability that the PLA Navy has acquired only recently since its 2008 anti-piracy deployment in the Gulf of Aden. Notably, in the first few missions, the replenishment was observed to be done in the most rudimentary manner, in a stopped condition, with the receiving warship tied to the logistic ship.

This indicates that the PLA Navy is at the nascent phase of evolution with regard to the high level of tactical coordination necessary for operating composite task forces. The PLA Navy may, therefore, take substantial time

before it can field an effective Carrier Task Force (CTF) with integral aviation and SSN escorts.

Overall Deduction

In the light of the above, one could observe a divide between the sophistication of PLAN's hardware and its tactical utilisation. This reason of this doctrine 'lag' may be attributable to three factors:

- **'Static Inertia' of Party Functioning.** The conservative nature of the PLA to adapt to new institutional, systemic or operational changes, possibly aggravated by the need for political assent to any doctrinal change, even at the tactical level.

- **Lack of 'Exposure' to Doctrines of Major Naval Powers.** China's traditional national policy of opaqueness in defence matters has restricted the PLA Navy's interactions with foreign navies, and thus stunted its doctrine-development through learning best-practices of major naval powers. Though the PLA Navy has lately conducted combined exercises with navies of France, Britain, Australia, Pakistan and India, as well as being part of the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC), these exercises have been pitched at very basic level. The exercises with the Russian Navy since 2005 have been fairly advanced, but this can

provide limited doctrinal value. Notably, the PLA Navy has never conducted submarine and ASW exercises with foreign navies, the former to maintain secrecy and stealth of its submarines, and the latter to hide its 'weakness' in ASW.

- **Lack of Battle Indoctrination.**

Although the PLA Navy is increasingly incorporating realism in its training and exercises, these efforts may not be able to completely offset its lack of battle indoctrination. Chinese naval forces have never been engaged in a conventional war, only localised maritime skirmishes such as with Vietnam⁵ and the Philippines. Even in its land wars – for instance, against Vietnam in 1979 – China did not achieve any notable edge – either technologically, or in doctrinal terms – to build upon.

Hardware Maintenance

A navy's hardware maintenance and upkeep philosophy represents the 'life-blood' of its hardware capabilities. There are several indicators that at least until the early-2000s, the PLA Navy encountered major problems with regard to the exploitation of its onboard equipment, machinery and weapon systems. Notably, even though the PLA Navy has been operating submarines since 1957, this void has been most

conspicuous in its submarine forces. It is well known that the underwater domain is the most unforgiving to errors made by the submarine crew, but lapses are known to have occurred by the higher naval hierarchy as well. When, for instance, the PLA Navy inducted the Russian Kilo-class submarines in the late-1990s, it 'cut corners' to save money for training of the commissioning crew in Russia. This was reported as among the key reasons why the first two boats were not operational for two years after the induction. Later, in 2003, the loss of Ming 361 submarine was a reflection on the unsatisfactory maintenance, and the technical training organization itself. It led to indictment of the entire chain of command ranging from the PLA Navy Commander (Admiral Shi Yunsheng) to the Senior Captain closely associated with the maintenance.

Another problem for the PLA Navy has been maintaining the imported hardware integrated with locally manufactured hardware. Of course, this challenge is not unique to the PLA Navy, and is an issue common to all navies of developing countries like India that are dependent on foreign systems, and concurrently endeavour to become self-reliant. However, China's adversity has been compounded due to its emphasis on 'reverse engineering'

the imported hardware to build these systems domestically. Much of such 'copied' hardware was known to have no authentic documentation like 'technical description' and 'operating instructions', which has been posing major problems for both maintainers and operators in the PLA Navy.

The problems of maintenance in the PLA Navy become more complex during extended stand-alone deployments of its platforms, especially in distant areas, which – as mentioned in Part 2 of this paper - was not conceived until the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy mission beginning December 2008. Until 2002 (and possibly, even later), the warships deployed for extended missions were assigned additional spare-parts packages and specially trained technicians for routine maintenance. Interestingly, two Senior Captains of the PLA Navy embarked onboard US warships during the 1998 RIMPAC exercises in Hawaiian waters emphasized how impressed they were by the fact that the American sailors continued performing equipment maintenance while the ship was underway, which indicates that this was not the practice in the PLA Navy.

It is not clear whether today - after more than a decade - the PLA Navy has ironed out its hardware maintenance issues. Likely, some of the deficiencies

have been overcome. However, the underlying reasons for these seem to have been more doctrinal - skewed maintenance philosophies – rather than the lack of adequate means. Given the PLA Navy's constraints to induct quality human resource (as mentioned earlier), any significant upgradation of hardware maintenance standards is likely to pose challenges.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, the PLA Navy's strategic imperatives have been pushing not only the development of its 'means' ('tangible' hardware capabilities), but also the 'ways' component ('intangibles', primarily doctrines) in its strategy formulation. This flows from the PLA Navy's compulsion to 'adapt' to the emerging security environment, besides furthering the national objective of attaining 'big power' status in global geopolitics. While such a 'transformative' doctrinal reorientation may be valid and justifiable, the key question is whether the PLA Navy will be able to cope with the oxymoron of 'doctrinal transformation'. At present, it is evident that China's naval doctrine at the strategic level is not self-evolved, and thus cannot be considered as 'mature'. Under these circumstances, despite the PLA Navy's overbearing commitments in the Western Pacific rim and the major

doctrinal deficiencies to counter military threats therein, the force is gearing itself for distant maritime power-projection. This represents a paradox, since it does not conform to a conventional maritime strategy, at least in the thinking of the other major naval powers of the world. Perhaps, the Chinese are thinking differently.

The PLA's operational art is adapting well from its traditional land-based focus to a fighting a maritime war. However, its reorientation is still at a nascent stage. Additionally, the functional integration among the PLA services continues to develop. Hence, one may expect that it would take a few decades before the PLA Navy would be able to effectively contribute to a maritime war in any theatre of the Western Pacific rim. The PLA Navy's increasing emphasis on stand-alone distant operations, and the attendant imperatives of maritime

logistics may further dilute its attention to integrated operations in China's maritime periphery.

At the tactical level, the PLA Navy could employ asymmetric means in its concept of sea-denial. The continued prevalence of its erstwhile doctrine of employing packs of submarines could be useful in this regard. However, its continued doctrinal voids at the tactical level clearly indicates that the force has not been able to effectively translate the strategic-level doctrine of 'strategic depth' articulated by China long ago in the 1980s (as noted in Part 1 of this paper) into tactical doctrines, particularly with regard to the PLA Navy's surface-based operations. At least not yet.

16 October 2017

(This article was first published in '*The Navalist*' on 22 Sep 17)

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Missing Argentine Submarine ‘San Juan’: Issues and Inferences

RS Vasan

While the President of Argentina has assured his people that the search for the missing Argentine submarine San Juan (S 42) will continue, there is not much good news for the families of the crew of the submarine and for Argentine Navy. There is evidence that the submarine has perhaps met its watery grave following a non-nuclear explosion on 15th November 2017, which was monitored near the last known position of the submarine. The sequence of events with no record of any evidence clearly indicates that something went amiss on the submarine that was commissioned in 1985, and also was given a mid-life upgrade between 2008 and 2013.

The question always has been about the efficacy and effectiveness of the Search, Rescue and Recovery systems that need to be deployed without any delay. Submarines, by nature, are complex entities operating in demanding environment that requires high levels

of training, skill and maintenance. The Indian Navy (IN) – having been operating submarines since 1969 – has decades of experience in operating and maintaining conventional submarines. From the Soviet/ Russian *Foxtrot* and *Kilo* class, to the German Type 209 and the leased Russian nuclear attack submarines (SSN), India has moved on to its own ballistic-missile nuclear submarine (SSBN) INS *Arihant*, which – along with the follow-ons – will ably serve to strengthen India’s nuclear deterrence. Along with the submarines inducted from the former Soviet Union, the IN operated the submarine support ship INS *Nistar*, which provided facilities for extracting a stricken crew from a distressed submarine. This vessel was also used¹ to locate Ghazi - the Pakistani submarine that sank off Visakhapatnam. However, there was a substantial gap after the decommissioning of *Nistar*, which was sought to be bridged through an arrangement with the US Navy,

and the contract came into force in 1997.²This provided for the US Navy to fly out the necessary rescue equipment along with the Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel (DSRV) within 72 hours. However, the 'time-late' on datum is a crucial factor that would determine the success of a rescue mission. A crippled submarine is constrained by its ability to maintain the required levels of oxygen. The inability to surface – either due to battle damage or malfunction in peacetime - would be a nightmare for the crew of the submarine. It is under these circumstances that there is a need to cut down all the time delays to rescue the crew.

In the case of the Argentinian submarine, it was indicated that the crew would have about seven days of oxygen supply and the day a signal was reported to have originated (later proved to be false) was the last day of the oxygen supply. The rescue forces also had to contend with high winds and twenty-metre high waves, which precluded any meaningful rescue mission to be undertaken. The weather will continue to play a dominant role in the mission's success or failure. The depth of the seas in the area of operations will continue to be major constraint in even reaching the submarine. Some accidents may take the submarine to well beyond the operating depths and the success of

timely rescue is a factor of how soon the rescue platforms pinpoint the location and initiate rescue /recovery missions. There were two recent cases of service aircraft which fell in to the Bay of Bengal off Chennai; and in both the cases, even locating the aircraft position was a major challenge. In the first case of a Coast Guard Dornier aircraft in June 2015, submarines, ocean research vessels and commercial remotely operated (underwater) vehicle (RoV) combed the oceans for both signal and location. The sustained effort paid dividends after 33 days of intense search using all available means.³ Even after location, it was the ability of a RoV to use sophisticated gadgetry that enabled the recovery of the remains of the crew and also vital black box of the Dornier at a depth of nearly 1000 meters. In the case of the Indian Air Force AN-32 aircraft that went down in June 2016, unfortunately, there is no trace even today of the missing aircraft. The case of the service aircraft has been discussed to indicate the complexities of location and follow up action in deep waters to initiate rescue and recovery missions when time is running out.

Following the accident of IN submarine Sindhurakshak which sank alongside⁴ in harbour after explosions and another accident on the Kilo class in February 2014⁵ resulting in the death of two officers, the Indian Navy had to

accelerate the process of having its own rescue system. Accordingly, a contract was drawn up with James Fisher Defence⁶ in 2016 for a sum of 1900 crore for procuring two systems for use by the two fleets of the Navy. According to the reports of the Indian Navy and the company, the crew for the rescue systems are training in Scotland and the entire system would be available in 2018 for use by the Indian Navy. Since the Indian Navy is now operating nuclear submarines, the related issue of how to integrate the to-be inducted equipment to deal with emergencies on nuclear powered submarines would be separate subject of study.

The Submarine Operating Authorities (SoA) around the world would be constantly working through

their navies and the governments to ensure that they have the requisite equipment and well trained personnel under a proven structure to be able to support submarine missions both during peace and during times of hostility.

In conclusion, the recent accident has demonstrated that the navies which operate submarine fleet have to create credible Search, Rescue and Recovery architecture and have them exercised regularly to build up confidence amongst both the submarine crew and also those who are operating the modern rescue systems. There is also a need to workup teams together in rescue missions during bilateral and multilateral exercises such as the Malabar.

29 November 17

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*India: Comprehensive
Maritime Engagement*

The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Retrospect and Prospect

Gurpreet S Khurana

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

The term 'Indo-Pacific' combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific region (WP) – inclusive of the contiguous seas off East and Southeast Asia – into a singular regional construct. There are some variations based on specific preferences of countries. For instance, the United States (US) prefers

to use the term 'Indo-Asia-Pacific', to encompass the entire swath of Indian and Pacific oceans, thereby enabling the US inclusiveness for it to maintain its relevance as a resident power in this important region. Nonetheless, the fundamental 'idea' of 'Indo-Pacific' is accepted nearly universally. It has been argued that the concept of the Indo-Pacific may lead to a change in popular "mental maps" of how the world is understood in strategic

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

Indian Ocean-Western Pacific Divergences

Undeniably, the IOR and the WP differ substantially in nearly all aspects, ranging from the levels of economic development of countries and their social parameters, to the security environment. Unlike the IOR, the WP has been beset by major traditional (military) threats. Such insecurity is based on historical factors, mainly flowing from the adverse actions of dominant military powers, particularly since the advent of the 20th century – for instance, Japan; and now increasingly, China – resulting in heightened nationalism and an attempt to redraw sovereign boundaries, including ‘territorialisation’ of the seas. The military dominance of these powers was a consequence of their economic progress, beginning with Japan, which later helped the other East Asian economies to grow through outsourcing of lower-end manufacturing industries – the so-called ‘Flying Geese Paradigm’.³

In contrast, the recent history of the IOR is not chequered by onslaught of any dominant and assertive local power. Why so? Despite being rich in natural resources – particularly hydrocarbons – the IOR countries were severely constrained to develop their economies. Not only did the colonial rule of western powers last longer in

the IOR, but also that these countries were too diverse in all aspects, and were never self-compelled to integrate themselves economically; and therefore, lagged behind East Asia substantially in terms of economic progress. As a result, many of these countries could not even acquire adequate capacity to govern and regulate human activity in their sovereign territories/ maritime zones, let alone developing capabilities for military assertion against their neighbours. Therefore, the numerous maritime disputes in the IOR remain dormant, and have not yet translated into military insecurities. (The India-Pakistan contestation is among the rare exceptions, and is based on a very different causative factor). The IOR is plagued more by non-traditional security issues, such as piracy, organised crime involving drugs and small-arms, illegal fishing, irregular migration, and human smuggling.

The Rationale

The broader rationale behind the prevalence of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept is the increasing developments in the area spanning the entire ‘maritime underbelly’ of Asia, ranging from the East African littoral to Northeast Asia. This is best exemplified by the launch of the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in 2004 to counter the

sea-borne proliferation of WMDs and their delivery systems. The PSI focused on the maritime swath stretching from Iran and Syria to North Korea.⁴ These developments led strategic analysts to search for a suitable common regional nomenclature to be able to communicate more effectively. The term 'Asia' was too broad and heterogeneous; and 'continental' rather than 'maritime'. The term 'Asia-Pacific' – which traditionally stood for 'the Asian littoral of the Pacific Ocean' – was inadequate.⁵ The 'Indo-Pacific' – shortened from 'Indian Ocean–Pacific Ocean combine' – seemed more appropriate.

The coinage of 'Indo-Pacific' has much to do with the increased eminence of India with the turn of the 21st century; beginning in the 1990s with its impressive economic growth and later, its nuclear weaponisation. In 2006, Donald Berlin wrote that the 'rise of India' is itself a key factor in the increasing significance of the Indian Ocean.⁶ Also, India could no longer be excluded from any overarching reckoning in the Asia-Pacific; be it economic or security related. For example, India was an obvious choice for inclusion in the ASEAN Regional Forum (in 1996) and the East Asia Summit (in 2005). Even for the PSI (2004), President Bush sought to enroll India as a key participant through

its PACOM. Though India was located in US PACOM's area of responsibility; 'technically', it did not belong to the Asia-Pacific. During the Shangri, La Dialogue 2009, India's former naval chief Admiral Arun Prakash highlighted this contradiction, saying, "I am not quite sure about the origin of the term Asia-Pacific, but I presume it was coined to include America in this part of the world, which is perfectly all right. As an Indian, every time I hear the term Asia-Pacific I feel a sense of exclusion, because it seems to include north east Asia, south east Asia and the Pacific islands, and it terminates at the Melaka Straits, but there is a whole world west of the Melaka Straits....so my question to the distinguished panel is ... do you see a contradiction between the terms Asia-Pacific, Asia and the Indian Ocean region?"

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

Since long, the IOR had been a maritime-conduit of hydrocarbons to fuel the economic prosperity of the WP littoral countries, which was another significant linkage between the IOR and

the WP, and provided much ballast to the rationale of 'Indo-Pacific'. In context of China's economic 'rise' leading to its enhanced military power and assertiveness, this linkage represented Beijing's strategic vulnerability, and thereby an opportunity for deterring Chinese aggressiveness. Ironically, China's strategic vulnerability was expressed by the Chinese President Hu Jintao himself in November 2003 through his coinage of "Malacca Dilemma", wherein "certain major powers" were bent on controlling the strait.⁷ The reference to India was implicit, yet undeniable. In his book 'Samudramanthan' (2012), Raja Mohan says, "India-China maritime rivalry finds its sharpest expression in the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait...", which demonstrates the interconnectedness of "the two different realms (of) Pacific and Indian Ocean(s)".⁸

The Genesis

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

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

Besides, Japan itself was vulnerable due to its rather heavy dependence on seaborne energy and food imports across the IOR, and thus sought an enhanced maritime security role in the area in cooperation with India. During the discussions at IDSA, a clear concord was reached that the IOR and the WP cannot possibly be treated separately, either for maritime security, or even in geopolitical terms. It was during that event that the 'Indo-Pacific' concept was casually discussed, which led to the publication of the January 2007 paper in Strategic Analyses (as mentioned above). Interestingly, a few months later in August 2007, the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed the Indian Parliament, speaking of the "Confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans" as "the dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity" in the "broader Asia".⁹

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

important the Indo-Pacific basin is to global trade and commerce”.¹⁰

In 2012, the Australian analyst Rory Medcalf wrote that he was convinced that the “Indo-Pacific (is) a term whose time has come”. A year later in 2013, Australia released its Defence White Paper, which carried the first government articulation of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept.¹¹ Soon thereafter, Rory Medcalf endorsed India’s centrality in the Indo-Pacific construct stating that “Australia’s new defence policy recognises India’s eastward orientation.”¹²

China was initially circumspect of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ coinage. As the Australian writers, Nick Bisley and Andrew Phillips wrote in 2012, “... Viewed from Beijing, the idea of the Indo-Pacific...appears to be to keep the US in, lift India up, and keep China out of the Indian Ocean... (which is why), the Indo-Pacific concept has...received a frosty reception in China...”¹³

In July 2013, a Chinese scholar Zhao Qinghai trashed the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept on the basis of his interpretation of it being an “India too” geopolitical construct.¹⁴ Notwithstanding, not all Chinese scholars have been dismissive of the concept. In June 2013, Minghao Zhao wrote, “...And it is true that a power game of great significance has unfolded in Indo-Pacific Asia. The US,

India, Japan and other players are seeking to collaborate to build an “Indo-Pacific order” that is congenial to their long-term interests. China is not necessarily excluded from this project, and it should seek a seat at the table and help recast the strategic objectives and interaction norms (in China’s favour).”¹⁵

Interestingly, in November 2014, the Global Times, an official Chinese English-language daily carried a commentary cautioning India on the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept. It said that the Indo-Pacific concept has not been endorsed by the “Indian government and scholars”, but scripted by the United States and its allies “to balance and even contain China’s increasing influence in the Asia-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean”, and who have made India a “linchpin” in the geo-strategic system. Paradoxically, however, the commentary was titled “New Delhi-Beijing Cooperation Key to Building an Indo-Pacific Era”.¹⁶

Prognosis

It emerges from the foregoing that the current prevalence of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept is premised upon – and necessitated by – the growing interconnectedness between the IOR and WP, rather than any similarities in their characteristics. This leads to another

pertinent question: What would be the relevance of the concept in the coming years?

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

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

Over the decades, the current dissimilarities between the IOR and the

WP in terms of the security environment may also diminish, if not vanish altogether. Greater economic prosperity in the IOR is likely to be followed by increasing stakes in the maritime domain, besides the ability to develop naval capabilities. The hitherto 'dormant' maritime disputes in IOR could become 'active'. Furthermore, the MSR could be accompanied by China's invigorated efforts towards naval development to fructify its 'Two-Ocean Strategy'.¹⁷ China's intensified naval presence in the IOR could lead to increased likelihood of acrimony due to its politico-military involvement in regional instabilities and maritime disputes. It may also cause the PLA Navy to increase its activities in the maritime zones of IOR countries, and have unintended encounters at sea with the naval forces of other established powers, leading to enhanced maritime-military insecurities. In such a scenario, the 'Indo-Pacific' concept would be essential to manage the regional developments and integrate China into the established norms of conduct in the IOR.

In the broader sense, as India's leading strategist Uday Bhaskar avers, "In the global context, the Pacific and the Indian oceans are poised to acquire greater strategic salience for the major powers of the 21st century, three among

whom – the China, India and the US – are located in Asia”.¹⁸ Indeed, a holistic treatment of the Indian-Pacific Ocean continuum would be required to assess the involving balance of power in Asia,

and to address the fault-lines therein, with the overarching aim of preserving regional and global stability.

02 February 2017

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Significance of Civilizational Nautical Narratives in India's Maritime Diplomacy

G. Padmaja

Examples of India's cultural and civilizational nautical linkages with the rest of the world built over centuries, have presently come to occupy a prominent place in India's maritime diplomacy. This issue brief tries to understand the reasons for this development. It spells out some of the civilizational and cultural narratives discussed by India's political leadership; and analyses the nature of 'continuum' between these cultural narratives and India's maritime strategy as it is spelt out presently.

The essay argues that most of these civilizational narratives have existed since long; however, it is only now that they are playing a strategic role for India in building relations with its maritime neighbours. This is because of two significant factors. First, they are now operating in the context of a well defined maritime strategy spelt out by a political leadership which has prioritised 'matters maritime'.

Policies like SAGAR, SAGARMALA, Project Mausam, Act East and India as 'net security provider' - bring out the centrality of the oceans in a globalised world for India's economic and social development. Their underlying theme is cooperation, collaboration, freedom of navigation and respect for international law among maritime nations to build a 'favourable environment' to address the security challenges and tap economic opportunities related to the maritime domain.

Second, this maritime strategy has to be implemented in a world of uncertainty; and absence of well defined security architecture in the Indo-Pacific.¹ In such a scenario, India's maritime strategy is being emphatically articulated by its political leadership by weaving in the civilizational and cultural narratives which bring out that India as a maritime nation has always had a pervading global maritime influence

through centuries. The idea conveyed is that India seeks to continue to influence the maritime debates in the present times too; and this will be done like in the past centuries without any domination or force. The aim is to stress on this historic 'continuum' in the Indian maritime narrative which has through centuries been characterised by 'absence of coercion', 'celebrating diversity', 'respect for others cultural narratives'; and that India's influence has always enriched the local people and society through centuries. This is especially significant at a time when competing maritime strategies are presented to maritime nations by countries vying for global leadership and influence. India wants to convey that whatever choices other countries may make, its actions will always be anchored on the values embedded in these civilizational and cultural narratives.

The Narratives

Delivering the keynote address in January 2017 at the 2nd International Conference on ASEAN-India Cultural and Civilizational Links, India's Minister of State for External Affairs Gen (Dr) V K Singh (Retd.) said that India's Act East Policy lay significant focus on the third pillar of the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership which was 'socio-cultural'; the other two pillars of cooperation

being 'political' and 'economic'. The conference was being held in Indonesia and the Indian Minister said that Indonesia had for long been the maritime bridge to South East Asia. He said that 2017 marks twenty-five years of Dialogue Partnership between India and ASEAN and the theme of the commemorative celebrations was 'Shared Values, Common Destiny'. The theme aptly reflected the close cultural and civilizational links India and the countries of South East Asia enjoyed over the millennia. The Minister spelt out with examples, the civilizational linkages spanning art, architecture, language, religion, music, culture etc., dating back to two millennia primarily spread through the seas. This, significantly, was not through conquest but essentially through non-political agents such as merchants and religious men.² Similar thoughts were echoed at the first International Conference on 'ASEAN-India Cultural Links: Historical and Contemporary Dimensions' held in New Delhi in July 2015, where India spelt out that it sought to not only strengthen the socio-cultural pillar but also wished to bring it to the forefront of their relationship.³

Earlier in February 2016, at the International Fleet Review in Visakhapatnam, the Indian Prime Minister delivered his speech overlooking

the nearly 100 ships from 50 countries anchored off the Visakhapatnam coast. He emphasised that India had always been a maritime nation with a rich maritime heritage. Lothal in Gujarat was one of the earliest sea ports of the world; and India's ancient Sanskrit texts refer to the oceans as the storehouse of 14 gems. He said that India's central location in the Indian Ocean had connected the country with other cultures, and shaped not only its maritime trade routes with Africa; Western Asia; the Mediterranean region; the West, South East Asia and the Far East but also influenced India's strategic thought and defined its maritime character. In the same address, the Prime Minister also spelt out the economic and strategic importance of the oceans; the traditional and non-traditional security threats connected with the maritime domain; and his governments vision for the Indian Ocean, which he termed as SAGAR ie. Security and Growth for All in the Region and which he had first articulated in Mauritius in March 2015.⁴

Much before SAGAR was articulated by India in March 2015, there was an important international conference held in Mauritius in November 2014. This was the International Conference on Indentured Labour Route Project. The indentured labour system had resulted

in one of the largest mass movement of the Indian diaspora. Over 2.2 million indentured labourers, mostly from India moved through the seas to more than two dozen countries which included Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Jamaica, Reunion Islands, Fiji, East Africa, Seychelles. Their descendants continue to make significant contributions in the countries their ancestors settled. In this context, the Indentured Labour Route Project would research and document the hitherto unknown experiences of the indentured labour; preserve and promote important sites; and also, disseminate information about the role played by indentured labour in shaping modern societies around the world. This strong Indian Diaspora spread across Oceans shows that India's cultural footprints stretch across Asia and Africa.⁵

Mauritius was the first and largest recipient of indentured labour from India which landed over 180 years back. India's relation with Mauritius becomes that much more unique and extraordinary because of this shared historical and cultural heritage. No wonder then that, Modi first enunciated India's Indian Ocean strategy - SAGAR in Mauritius in March 2015. According to this, India with a coastline of 7,500 kms would safeguard its mainland;

1,200 islands; and the 2.4 million sq km Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation, especially with its maritime neighbours. For this, India would cooperate on exchange of information and coastal surveillance, building of infrastructure and strengthening their capabilities. India believes that it's through collective action and cooperation that peace can be advanced in the region and thus associations like IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) are important. Bringing out the importance and centrality of Blue Economy to India, the Indian Prime Minister said that the blue chakra or wheel in India's national flag represents the potential of Blue Revolution or the Ocean Economy. Lastly, he opined that those who are resident in the region ie the littoral countries have the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean.⁶

India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in her address at an international conference on 'India and Indian Ocean: Renewing the Maritime Trade and Civilizational Linkages' in Bhubaneswar in March 2015, gave many examples of the civilizational linkages in the Indian Ocean region. She referred to the festival of 'Boitha Bandana' in Odisha where ships are worshipped. The practice

began centuries earlier for the safe passage of ships, which would embark on long voyages to Sri Lanka, Bali, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Malaya, Vietnam and also to China. She said that small 'krathongs' or boats on several streets of Bangkok sometime in November, remind one of the Boitha festival; and that similar cultural practises are evident in Indonesia when Mesakapan Ke Tukad is celebrated all across the different islands. The minister referred to many civilisational linkages, one of which was the image of the boat containing a giraffe in the Sun Temple in Konarak which shows India's civilizational linkages with Africa. The Minister then spelt out the importance of the Indian Ocean region for maritime trade and energy security; traditional and non-traditional maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean region; India's role in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS); the multilateral naval congregation MILAN; the Contact Group on Piracy; the importance of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the six priority areas it has identified for cooperation. She also referred to SAGAR.⁷

The Government of India's Ministry of Culture launched Project Mausam in June 2014. This was just after Prime Minister Modi assumed office but much before he articulated

his maritime vision. Project Mausam aims to understand the manner in which the knowledge of the monsoon winds shaped interactions across the Indian Ocean which led to the spread of shared knowledge systems, traditions, technologies and ideas along maritime routes. Thus, its research will extend from East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian Subcontinent and Sri Lanka to the Southeast Asian archipelago. Not only will maritime routes be researched upon and be documented but also the cultural landscapes which arose in the coastal areas and their hinterlands.⁸

Strategic Continuum in the Cultural Narratives

These narratives should be seen in the larger context of the conduct of foreign policy by the present government which as it says is based on the '3 C mantra' ie. Commerce, Culture and Connectivity. Elaborating it, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj says, "Broadly speaking, sustained dialogue, promoting economic prosperity, enhancing India's prestige and national honour, bolstering security and promoting India's cultural and civilizational values are the five core principles that animate the foreign policy of our government".⁹ Therefore, it is observed that even in conducting maritime diplomacy, which is but part

of the larger conduct of diplomacy there is a deliberate and conscious effort to emphasise the maritime cultural and civilizational linkages.

However, the reference to India's rich maritime tradition and civilizational linkages is not done in a vacuum but in the context of a well defined maritime vision ie. Act East Policy; SAGAR; India 'as a net security provider'; SAGARMALA; and Project Mausam. This is to subtly communicate that just like India had been at the centre of maritime activity in the ancient period, presently too it seeks a larger and deeper footprint in the maritime domain. Further, that India aspires to be a leading maritime power and is ready to shoulder greater global responsibilities with commitment to 'cooperation', 'collaboration', 'connectivity', 'respect for International Laws' and 'a shared security architecture'.

Thus, the civilizational narratives are woven into the contemporary maritime vision to emphasize the natural continuum of a rich maritime tradition the country has inherited. Also, there is an effort to institutionalise the cultural linkages to make it relevant to the present time so that they can contribute to building and strengthening modern partnerships. For example:

- India's Act East Policy is contextualised with its civilizational Linkages with South East Asia. Further, the Mekong Ganga Cooperation aims at reviving cooperation between the peoples of the Mekong and Ganga River basins in the field of tourism, education, culture and people to people contacts. The MGC Museum of Asian Textiles was inaugurated to showcase affinities in weaving and textiles in the two regions. Another project is the re-establishment of the Nalanda University where centuries earlier scholars from around the world including South East Asia and India had exchanged knowledge and ideas.
- India relations with Mauritius become extremely special because of the experiences and contribution of indentured labour from India. Thus, India's Indian Ocean vision -SAGAR is first articulated in Mauritius. Also, India wholeheartedly supports the Indentured Labour Route Project.
- The blue colour in Ashoka Chakra in the Indian Flag, India's commitment to Blue Economy and the skill development program for the youth of coastal communities are thus knit together.
- Lothal in India as one of the earliest seaports in the world and India's SAGARMALA programme of port led development¹⁰ are seen as a natural continuum.
- Project Mausam aims to re-trace the ancient maritime routes and re-connect and re-establish communication between countries of the Indian Ocean. However, an important question arises as to - Why should these routes be re-traced? Doing so will help in building modern partnerships as it will emerge that India's maritime civilizational linkages with Africa, Asia and Europe were developed not through military conquest but primarily through traders both Hindus and Muslims; and religious men including Buddhist monks. In this context, India's contemporary maritime strategies will have greater credibility, acceptability and that it is non-hegemon. Most important Project Mausam will celebrate 'connectivity', 'interdependence' and 'diversity' at a time many countries in the West want to retreat from 'globalisation' and are becoming 'inward-looking'.
- Most of the world's shipping transits through the Indian Ocean and ensuring security of ISLs has become important for all countries including India. Thus, when security is

available, a favourable and positive maritime environment will emerge where threats are low; and even if they arise they can be prevented and contained. By helping shape a favourable and positive maritime environment, India becomes a 'net security provider'¹¹. The findings of Project Mausam will contribute to India's role as an effective 'net security provider'; for Project Mausam seeks to re-connect and re-establish communication between countries of the Indian Ocean which will then contribute to building positive partnerships and consequently a favourable environment.

Conclusion

The essay brings out the manner in which civilizational linkages and cultural narratives have been strategically woven

into contemporary maritime strategy by India to build beneficial global partnerships and claim leadership role in the maritime domain. In its present form, this strategy is heavily dependent on its effective articulation by the political leadership. To overcome this limitation, the academia and stakeholders from the maritime domain should now focus on the strategic continuum between civilizational linkages and maritime strategy. For this, the reports of Project Mausam; Indentured Labour Route Project; Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and many more should be discussed and disseminated. These then will be incorporated into the already present cultural narratives and contribute to the goals of India's maritime strategy.

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Australian Prime Minister's visit to India: An Assessment in the Maritime Context

Eshita Rudra

India is trying to bolster its partnerships throughout the vast swathes of the maritime Indo-Pacific region. Owing to the recent emphasis on the maritime domain, India is reinvigorating existing partnerships, while forging new ones. India warming up ties with Australia is an example.

The Joint Statement released during Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's visit to New Delhi April 9-12, 2017 reflects the expansion of India's maritime interests. The Joint Statement also reiterates the shared interests of India and Australia in "enhancing the regional cooperation in maintaining maritime safety and security" in the Indo-Pacific region. This article analyzes the Australian Prime Minister's visit to India and its outcomes relating to the maritime domain. The article argues that the uncertainties about China's perception of a maritime order is bringing India and Australia closer

to strengthen the existing maritime security architecture that in a mutually favourable manner.

It is pertinent to mention that India's foreign policy engagement has become proactive under Prime Minister Modi, and India's effort to strengthen relations with Australia is an example to substantiate that. In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Modi visited Australia. It was the first visit to Australia by an Indian PM in twenty eight years. Realizing the need to integrate Australia within India's growth story, PM Modi clearly conveyed that Canberra "will not be at the periphery" anymore. The new PM of Australia Malcolm Turnbull, within a year and a half of his assuming office, visited New Delhi to mark the newfound continuity in bilateral relations.

The Joint Statement released this year delineates a framework of cooperation for India and Australia in the context of Indo-Pacific for the coming years. There

is a marked difference in this Joint Statement, compared to the preceding Joint Statements released in the years 2009 and 2014. In 2009, during Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's visit, the Joint Statement focussed on issues like education, culture and sports along with cooperation on energy, water security and climate change. In 2014, during Modi's visit, a framework for security cooperation was introduced, but the Joint Statement did not mention any specific area. Nevertheless, it indicated a stronger collaboration between India and Australia was forthcoming. In this year's Joint Statement, a strong component of maritime security cooperation is distinct and conspicuous.

Australia and India in recent years have cooperated in various aspects like cooperation at the regional multilateral institutions such as East Asia Summit (EAS), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as well as bilateral exercises between the two navies. The first bilateral maritime exercise AUSINDEX was held in the Bay of Bengal in 2015, and both sides agreed to conduct it again in the first half of 2018 near Western Australia. Also, for the first time, the two sides agreed to conduct a combined army exercise in 2018. Although the visit failed to reach a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement

(CECA), the growing maritime security cooperation is evident. It underscores the growing trust between the two countries. This may eventually lead to an economic cooperation as well.

A few major developments have act as a catalyst to India-Australia bonhomie. The Joint Statement laid a greater emphasis on a rule based maritime security regime. It was agreed that maintaining stability and security in the Indo-Pacific is fundamental to growth and prosperity of both the countries and region. The Joint Statement mentions the need to maintain a maritime legal order based on the 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) stressing on "freedom of navigation, unimpeded lawful commerce, as well as resolving maritime disputes by peaceful means in accordance with international law including UNCLOS".

Although there was no explicit mention of South China Sea, it is not difficult to comprehend that the Joint Statement was propelled by the uncertainty about China's intentions in the semi-enclosed sea. In July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration announced its ruling on the Philippines' case vs China relating to latter's territorial claims in the South China Sea. China however, dismissed the tribunal's verdict. China's land reclamation and military

activities in South China Sea islands can be a challenge for sea-borne commerce. Over 55 percent of India's trade ¹passes through the South China Sea. Experts² in Australia fear a US\$5 trillion meltdown, if global trade flows are disrupted due to the disputes. Therefore, maintaining an unimpeded sea-borne trade flow is crucial for both Canberra and New Delhi.

The growing regional tensions due to the unresolved maritime territorial disputes between China and its maritime neighbours in the South China Sea can have serious implications towards the security of the international shipping lanes (ISL). Australia is an island nation and exclusively dependent on a stable maritime order in the region. Therefore, despite Canberra's conscious effort to limit the differences with its largest trading partner, South China Sea issue will shape the future foreign policy choices of Australia.

Lately, India-China bilateral relations have remained tenuous over various issues. Beijing issued a series of warnings to New Delhi with regard to Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh. Xi Jinping's announcement of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and construction of projects through POK is another major irritant. The disregard for India's sovereignty and attempts to

isolate India in its neighbourhood has compelled New Delhi to further its outreach off the eastern sea board by forging new partnerships such as the one with Australia.

China is one major factor but non-traditional security concerns are equally relevant to the national interests of both the countries. For Australia, the asylum seekers or the 'boat people' is major security issue. Piracy at sea can become an acute challenge for India and Australia. East Asia Summit Maritime Security Conferences have been conducted in 2015 at Goa and 2016 in Sydney by India and Australia respectively to raise maritime domain awareness. Given the significance of marine resources for economic growth and social development in the coming decades, the Joint Statement had acknowledged the need for a sustainable development of marine resources and cooperation in development of blue economy.

The scope of India-Australia partnership has significant potential, provided the words of the Joint Statement are corroborated with fruitful actions. The two might enhance maritime security cooperation with Southeast Asian nations. For example, capacity building of the maritime forces of Vietnam and Philippines could effectively correct the existing

military imbalances. India and Australia can initiate a trilateral dialogue with Indonesia. It is also necessary for India to balance its increasing maritime security cooperation along with equally strong economic cooperation with Australia. The political leaderships of both sides are coming out of past inhibitions that had prevented cooperation between two major maritime powers of Indian Ocean.

Australia and India might have different strategies to cope up with their

challenges, but a perceived challenge from China in the South China Sea has been a major push factor to consolidate their converging interests. Maintaining an uninterrupted sea-borne trade flow will require India and Australia to synergize their actions in the region. 'Indo-Pacific' as a geopolitical terminology has gained momentum among strategic circles in Australia and India, the apex political leadership of both the countries, and has begun reinvigorating the concept.

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Sheikh Hasina's Visit to India: Consolidating Maritime Cooperation

G. Padmaja

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina was on a State visit to India from 7-10 April 2017. India and Bangladesh not only share a land border, but also a common maritime boundary with both being littoral countries of Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Sheikh Hasina's visit enabled both countries to consolidate cooperation on maritime issues, which was identified during the June 2015 visit of Prime Minister Modi to Bangladesh. Interestingly, this was Sheikh Hasina's first visit to India after the Modi Government came to power in May 2014. Her last State visit to India took place seven years ago in January 2010. A very significant development during Sheikh Hasina's visit has been the conclusion of memoranda of understanding on Defence Cooperation, Defence Line of Credit, as well as cooperation between various defence training institutes of India and Bangladesh. Its significance emerges when seen in the context that

the dominant discourse in Bangladesh has perceived India as the threat against which security has to be built.¹ The conclusion of the above MoUs indicates that there is a shift in this narrative, being replaced instead by an environment of trust, goodwill and constructive cooperation. India and Bangladesh have already resolved their maritime boundary dispute; and the leaderships at the highest level in both countries are committed to broaden and deepen maritime cooperation. India's relations with Bangladesh is in-fact looked upon as the successful implementation of the Modi government's 'Neighbourhood First' policy.

In the above context, this issue brief spells out the maritime issues discussed by the two governments during Sheikh Hasina's visit to India. However, to put issues in perspective, the essay begins by first briefly discussing the maritime agenda identified during Modi's June

2015 visit to Bangladesh. The essay concludes by identifying the challenges which need to be addressed so that the progress in the bilateral relations is not derailed.

Modi's June 2015 Visit: Laying the Foundation of Trust

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Bangladesh in June 2015 was preceded by the historic unanimous passage of the 100th Constitution Amendment Bill in the Indian Parliament to give effect to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011 Protocol. The instruments of ratification were exchanged between the two governments during the visit. Its significance was brought out by India's Foreign Secretary Jaishankar who said in June 2015, '.....what it has done is, it has really created a climate of confidence, of goodwill, of trust where a lot other initiatives which could have happened, should have happened, can now happen.... there is an enormous sense today of optimism and confidence about the entire relationship'.² Earlier, in July 2014, the dispute over the maritime boundary was also resolved.

Modi's visit reflected this positive atmosphere in the 65-point Joint Declaration titled, 'Notun Projonma-Nayi Disha, New Generation-New Direction'. Further, 22 Agreements/MoUs were also concluded. Of these, six

agreements/MoUs were related to the maritime sphere. These dealt with blue economy and maritime cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean; coastal shipping; inland waterways trade and transit; use of Chittagong and Mongla Ports for movement of goods to and from India; cooperation between the coast guards of the two countries to ensure maritime security and safety, and prevent crimes at sea; and facilitate joint study, project research and cooperation for training and capacity building in oceanography between identified institutions in the two countries.

The coastal shipping service between Bangladesh and India was launched in March 2016 as a follow up of these agreements. On 16 March 2016, the container vessel MV *Harbour 1* left Chittagong Port in Bangladesh and reached Krishnapatnam Port on India's east coast on 28 March 2016.³ This historic journey inaugurated a new chapter of economic cooperation. Earlier, sea connectivity meant that goods had to be first sent to Singapore and Colombo ports and from there it would be sent in smaller vessels to India and Bangladesh ports. This used to take 30-40 days adding to both time and costs of EXIM trade.⁴

Another important development took place in June 2016 in connection

with inland waterways. A Bangladeshi ship from Kolkata carrying 1005 tonnes of steel rods meant for Tripura Governments Rural Development projects reached Ashuganj river port in Bangladesh on 15 June 2016. Bangladeshi trucks then carried the goods from Ashuganj river port to Tripura's Akhura check post. Follow up arrangements were made by the state government of Tripura to deliver the goods from the Akhura check post to different places in the state. This route cut the Kolkata-Agartala distance from 1600 km to 500 km.

In December 2016, senior coast guard officials of India and Bangladesh met in Kolkata and discussed matters regarding maritime safety and security in the Bay of Bengal. It is important to note that as part of capacity building, Indian Coast Guard has been imparting specialist training for Bangladesh Coast Guard personnel on maritime subjects like maritime law, search and rescue, pollution response, boarding operation, helicopter operations and anti-piracy, at their training centre in Kochi since February 2014.

It is observed that Modi's visit laid the foundation for an integrated and holistic maritime agenda. It incorporated cooperation among the coast guards of both the countries to ensure maritime

security which is necessary for carrying out coastal shipping and to tap potential of Blue Economy. Most important, as seen in the above section, follow up actions were taken to implement the decisions arrived at. It has specifically helped India access its north-east states, saving time to almost more than half.

Sheikh Hasina's April 2017 Visit: Consolidating the Gains

The India-Bangladesh Joint Statement of 8 April 2017; and the List of Agreements exchanged during Sheikh Hasina's visit, spells out the broad range of issues discussed. Accordingly, some of the observations made on issues which come under the maritime agenda are as follows: ⁵

The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the robust bilateral security cooperation that exists between the two countries. In this context, they were appreciative of the signing of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for operationalisation of the MoU on Cooperation between the Coast Guards.

The projects to be implemented in Bangladesh under the 3rd Line of Credit of US \$ 4.5 billion being given by the Government of India would include port construction and shipping also.

The leaders emphasised the advantages of sub-regional cooperation in the areas of power, water resources, trade, transit and connectivity for mutual benefit. It was noted that a Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding between Bangladesh, Bhutan and India for Cooperation in the field of hydroelectric power had been worked out and would be signed when the leaders of all the three countries would be present.

It was noted that the operationalisation of the Coastal Shipping Agreement signed in June 2015 had resulted in the desired objective of improving connectivity and enhancing bilateral trade. As a step further, the Bangladesh Prime Ministers visit resulted in the signing of an MoU and SOPs between the two countries on Passenger and Cruise services on Coastal and Protocol routes.

The commencement of transshipment of goods through the Ashuganj River Port under the Protocol on Inland Water and Transit and Trade (PIWTT) was appreciated. Both India and Bangladesh called for the speedy construction of the Ashuganj Inland Container Port (ICP) and the inclusion of more ports of call under the PIWTT framework.

Bangladesh proposed that the Ganges Barrage on the river Padma in

Bangladesh should be jointly developed. In this context, a 'Joint Technical Sub Group on Ganges Barrage Project' was established which would look into this issue and suggest the course of action.

Both the leaders complimented Armed forces of both the countries who had rescued a large number of fishermen from both sides by conducting Joint Search and Rescue Operations in the Bay of Bengal.

A MoU was also concluded between the Ministry of Shipping of both the countries with regard to cooperation on Aids of Navigation.

The Ministry of Shipping of both the countries also concluded a MoU on Development of Fairway from Sirajganj to Daikhowa and Ashuganj to Zakiganj on Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route.

The above details clearly bring out that cooperation on maritime issues which began with the Modi visit to Bangladesh was now being consolidated with Sheikh Hasina's visit to India. The institutionalisation of cooperation among the coast guards of the two countries; development of infrastructure connected with making inland waterways effective; commencing movement of passengers on cruise vessels on coastal and protocol routes and many other measures reflect the trust that has deepened since Modi's visit.

It is also observed that the bilateral relations are however being approached with a sense of realism and difficult issues are not being shunned. Modi reiterated his commitment to find a solution to the lingering issue of sharing of waters of Teesta River. Discussions are also being held on sharing of waters of other rivers too and it can be anticipated that both countries would have to approach the issue with trust. Also, both the countries would be looking forward for the findings of the report of the Joint Technical Sub Group on the Ganges Barrage Project to be built in Bangladesh. It can be safely said that while both the countries have built a relation of trust, the sharing of waters of the common rivers give rise to challenges that they will encounter in future. These issues have the potential to strain the relations unless they are honestly addressed and outcomes are both visible and measurable.

The Challenges

India-Bangladesh relations are being consolidated with a rare vision and trust shown by both Sheikh Hasina and Modi. However, one needs to note that Bangladesh has cordial and constructive relations with China too. There is thus a situation wherein Bangladesh's relations with China are not necessarily directed against India but has its own logic and purpose.

In October 2016, the Chinese President visited Bangladesh, the first by a Chinese head of state in 30 years. The two countries upgraded their relationship from a Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation to a Strategic Partnership of Cooperation. Both sides also committed to the projects under OBOR (One Belt One Road) Initiative to boost connectivity. 28 development projects with US 21.5 billion in foreign aid were agreed to⁶. Interestingly, on 14 November 2016, Bangladesh navy took delivery of two old refurbished Chinese Type 035G Ming-class diesel electric submarines.⁷ Bangladesh is also likely to participate in the 14-15 May 2017 Belt and Road Summit being held in Beijing. The OBOR initiative was first put forward by China in 2013. According to China, the May 2017 Summit will explore ways to address regional and global economic problems, generate fresh energy for interconnected development, and ensure that the Belt and Road Initiative delivers greater benefits to people of the countries involved.⁸ India has not endorsed the OBOR initiative.

How will India respond to such developments? India has to increase its cooperative space with Bangladesh on maritime issues of common interest. India and Bangladesh are both littorals of the

Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. There is a global consensus that the centre of economic and political power is shifting to Asia and in this context the Indian Ocean will assume great significance. Half of the world's container ships, one third of the bulk cargo traffic and two thirds of its oil shipments pass through the Indian Ocean. India will need to work closely with like-minded countries like Bangladesh to ensure that maritime security, freedom of navigation; and that adherence to international laws takes place. Thus, the bilateral trust will have to translate to collaborative actions at the regional and international forum on issues maritime. Outcomes play an important role in sustaining the trust in the relations.

One area which needs to be given added focus in India-Bangladesh maritime agenda is cooperation in 'Blue Economy'. This was not given much importance during the April visit of Sheikh Hasina to India. This paper argues that specific projects need to be identified and a road map outlined with regard to implementing Blue Economy so that there will be win-win outcomes. This suggestion is based on the manner in which Bangladesh is prioritising Blue Economy, brought out very eloquently during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's

address at the first Leaders' Summit of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) held in Jakarta, Indonesia to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the grouping comprising 21 member states and 7 dialogue partners.⁹ The IORA Summit had adopted the Jakarta Concord on 7 March 2017¹⁰. India is also a member of IORA and was represented at the summit by Vice President Hamid Ansari.¹¹.

Conclusion

Clearly, India-Bangladesh maritime cooperation has consolidated since the June 2015 visit of Indian Prime Minister Modi to Bangladesh. While Modi's visit to Bangladesh took place in the context of the resolution of land and maritime boundaries; Sheikh Hasina's visit has institutionalized defence cooperation. Both the visits have deepened maritime cooperation with regard inland waterways; coastal shipping; port construction; and cooperation among the coast guards of the two countries. However, in the context of the emphasis Bangladesh is according to Blue Economy in its development agenda, India should focus on cooperation in this area too, with specific time-bound outcomes and concrete deliverables.

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The Rohingya ‘Refugees’ : Regional Responses and Ramifications

Anjelina Patrick

Introduction

Rohingyas constitute an ethnic Muslim minority in Myanmar, and are considered ‘illegal immigrants’ from Bangladesh. They are deprived of citizenship rights, face religious persecution, and are economically and socially segregated in the Buddhist-dominated country. Since the 1970s, thousands of Rohingyas have fled Myanmar. Many cross the land border into Bangladesh while a significant number of others take to the sea to reach Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Australia.

In October 2016, nearly 74,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh after a violent military crackdown in the northern Rakhine state of Myanmar. Overcrowded refugee camps and the lack of livelihood opportunity in Bangladesh drive Rohingyas to relatively prosperous Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, the Rohingyas tend to consider Bangladesh as a transit point. In addition to the

existing crisis, Bangladeshi economic migrants are also taking advantage of the situation to escape poverty.

The present approach of regional navies such as those of Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, and Thailand is to tow these vessels back to sea as they enter into their territorial waters. This is often described as ‘maritime ping-pong’—which risks the lives of refugees who are already starving and ill.

This issue brief attempts to analyse trends in the response of regional countries to the issue of the Rohingyas. It also analyses the security implications posed by Rohingya refugees on regional countries, and the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with regard to them.

Current Situation of Rohingyas

Since independence in 1948, the government of Myanmar has refuted the Rohingyas’ historical claim of citizen-

ship, and denied the group recognition as one of the country's 135 ethnic groups. They are identified as illegal Bengali immigrants despite residing in Myanmar for centuries. 'Systematic discrimination' has been practised by the government of Myanmar on the basis of ethnicity, including restriction on marriages, family planning, employment, education, religious orientation, and freedom of movement. Rohingyas have faced more than a decade of persecution and violence in Myanmar, leading to frequently occurring conflicts between the Rohingyas and the dominant Buddhist groups.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Rohingya crackdown in October 2016 led to the killing of a dozen Rohingyas, and internally displaced thousands. The Rohingyas encountered the deadliest spate of ethnic violence when the military forces of Myanmar began a crackdown after the murder of nine border security guards allegedly by Rohingya militants. This crackdown led to an increase of Rohingya refugee movement. According to the UNHCR Report of May 2017, the total number of Rohingya refugees and internally displaced Rohingyas in the region was estimated at 420,000 and 120,000 respectively.¹ These refugees include both direct victims of the

violence as well as Rohingyas who fled Myanmar as a precautionary measure.

These Rohingyas and Bangladeshi migrants are risking their lives on boats to seek safety and stability in regional Southeast Asian countries. The Rohingyas usually reach the destination countries via the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. They are often dubbed Asia's 'New Boat People'. Due to stricter vigilance along the land routes by the Thai and Malaysian security forces, these abandoned Rohingyas are in a dire situation, often living in cramped spaces with limited food and water.

Regional Responses

Bangladesh

Thousands of desperate Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants are abandoned at sea. Those who are caught or towed to the shore by authorities continue to face the threat of detention and restricted access to basic human rights. Bangladesh, the immediate neighbour of Myanmar, is facing tremendous pressure due to heavy inflow of Rohingyas.

Approximately, 75,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh after the military crackdown in October 2016. They reach Bangladesh from the northern Rakhine state of Myanmar into the Cox's Bazar

district of Bangladesh, either on foot or by boat, across the Naf River. With its limited resources and overcrowded refugee camps, the country is facing tremendous challenges to accommodate such a huge exodus. Currently, Bangladesh is heading towards its highly controversial plan to relocate the Rohingyas to a remote 6,000-acre island, near the Hatiya Island in Noakhali district.² The Bangladeshi government is planning to implement the proposed plan despite acknowledging that the island is uninhabitable and prone to floods. At present, the Bangladeshi government has set up a committee to identify and relocate both registered and unregistered Rohingya refugees. This relocation plan might prompt the flow of Rohingyas to other regional countries via the sea.

Indonesia

In the recent past, Indonesia attracted a number of Rohingya refugees as it is a Muslim majority country. On 21 May 2017, Indonesian authorities rescued 600 stranded Rohingyas off the coast of Aceh.³ Occasionally, the Indonesian government has been stating that they have 'given more than it should' to help hundreds of Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants stranded in boats by human traffickers. Indonesia's military chief has also expressed concerns about

easing immigration restrictions which would ignite an influx of refugees, which might lead to serious implications.⁴

Malaysia

Malaysia was regarded as the primary destination for the Rohingya refugees prior to the crackdown, due to being able to provide potential employment in the informal sector. According to the UN, as of June 2016, more than 90 per cent of Malaysia's 150,700 registered refugees are from Myanmar.⁵ Even after reaching Malaysia safely, they have no legal status or permits to work. However, after October 2016, the Malaysian Navy has been pushing Rohingya boat people back into the sea towards Thailand. The situation has turned into 'maritime ping pong of human life'. An estimated 25,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi boarded people smugglers' boats in the first three months of 2017, to reach Malaysia.⁶

Thailand

Thailand is a hub for regional human smuggling and trafficking activities, and serves as a common transit point for the Rohingyas to reach destination countries like Malaysia or Indonesia. Most of the Rohingyas travel to Thailand from Myanmar or Bangladesh by boat with the assistance of human traffickers. These traffickers or smugglers are assisted by Thai officials, and the refugees are held

in squalid jungle camps before a ransom is paid by their relatives or known people. The Thai government views Rohingyas problem that came from elsewhere and on its way to elsewhere, explaining the 'push back policy'.⁷ According to this policy, Thai authorities intercept boats arriving on Thailand shores and push them towards Malaysia. Like Bangladesh and Malaysia, Thailand too has not signed the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, and its 1967 protocol making Rohingyas 'illegal' migrants and hence they are taken into detention.

Australia

Australia is one of the most desired destinations of the Rohingyas, and the country hosts approximately 1,661 Rohingyas. The primary refugee transit route to Australia passes through Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, with passenger ships, fishing boats, or cargo vessels being the means of transport. According to the UNHCR Report on Mixed Migration to South-East Asia, at least seven vessels carrying a total of at least 89 asylum-seekers and migrants sailed through South-East Asia in an attempt to reach Australia in 2016.⁸

Reasons for Denial

Except for Australia, these regional countries are not signatories to the 1952

Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Thus, they are not accountable for denying of immigrants. Yet, these countries do have a number of Rohingyas. South East Asian countries are reluctant to offer asylum to Rohingyas due to two main reasons. First, these Southeast Asian countries are members of the ASEAN. According to its cornerstone principle, giving asylum is an act of interference in the internal matters of Myanmar. Second, providing temporary shelter to the Rohingyas, especially to those stranded at sea, will create a pull factor, exacerbating the existing crisis and encouraging such departure. A similar situation occurred while offering resettlement to Vietnamese boat people reaching Southeast Asian shores; this acted as a 'pull factor', leading to an exodus of Vietnamese people leaving their homes more due to social and economic reasons rather than the fear of persecution.

Security Implications

The Rohingyas have shown a tendency to ignite conflicts, and jeopardize both social and national security of both the transit and destination countries. One of the major issues these countries fear is illegal infiltration which has the tendency to exacerbate as the Rohingyas tend to mix with the locals, and can

move beyond the camp boundaries. To prevent the increase in illegal infiltration, countries like Australia and Malaysia have adopted a screening process. However, these are relatively weak. For example, asylum seekers reaching Australia by boat are sent to an offshore processing centre to identify refugees separately from economic migrants. If found to be refugees, they are allowed to remain in Papua New Guinea and Nauru for resettlement; all others sent to detention centres in Australia. It is important to understand that such illegal migrants have the potential to threaten the internal security of transit and destination countries.

There are also fears that being an ethnic Muslim minority, the Rohingyas could contribute to Islamic radicalisation. Such fears are aggravated by the fact that they are already deprived of basic human rights and livelihood opportunities in both their home and destination countries, and because of their status of 'statelessness'. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), the group of Rohingya Muslims that attacked Myanmar border guards in October 2016 (as already mentioned) was headed by people with links to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. This incident sparked a crackdown by the security forces of Myanmar.⁹ There are confirmations about terrorist groups are

recruiting members from among the Rohingyas who are unregistered and living outside the refugee camps, such as in Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar, and Bandarban.¹⁰ The Rohingyas are being exploited by many extremist Islamic outfits, including the Jamat-E-Islam, by providing arms training and by involving them in armed Jihad. Pro-Rohingya sentiments could also enflame extremist tendencies in Indonesia and Malaysia; and now, when religious tensions and the threat of terrorism loom large in both countries, this may lead to the intrusion of terrorist elements.¹¹

Human trafficking and smuggling are highly prevalent in the Southeast Asian region, and the Rohingya refugee crisis is aggravating the already existing issues. In a number of cases, the Rohingyas are being smuggled and sold to Thai fishing vessels as slaves to produce seafood sold across the world.¹² Due to the profitability involved, some local fishermen in Thailand have now converted their boats to carry Rohingya migrants instead of fish. These activities are often rendered with the help of corrupt Thai officials. In some cases, Rohingya migrants held in immigration detention centers in Thailand were taken by staff to brokers, and then sold to Thai fishing boats.¹³ The dense forests of southern Thailand and northern Malaysia are major stop-off points for

human smugglers and traffickers where they abandon thousands of migrants from overloaded boats that have crossed the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea from Myanmar. Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants are ferried by traffickers through southern Thailand, and are held in remote camps along the border with Malaysia until a ransom is paid for their freedom. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the largest camp supposedly had a capacity of up to 1,000 people.¹⁴ If the Rohingyas are unable to process the fees to the traffickers, they are often tortured, beaten, and starved.

ASEAN

The current refugee crisis in Southeast Asia has led to several regional meetings, with outcomes such as prioritizing the saving of lives at sea, combatting human smuggling and human trafficking, and the safety of asylum seekers. The persisting fear of ASEAN countries is that providing assistance can be misunderstood as interference in the internal matters of Myanmar. For a long time, ASEAN's response to the Rohingya crisis has been quiet and passive, due to its belief in non-interference. ASEAN needs to find a middle way between the concept of non-interference and collective responsibility to address the crisis. ASEAN can use a

safe way by engaging with Myanmar through preventive diplomacy on issues like trafficking, counter-terrorism, and safety, to promote peace and safety in the region. And regional countries will have to understand that Rohingya crisis is not merely a national security threat, but a regional issue.

Conclusion

Regional countries are more focused on the symptoms of the crisis rather than solving the root cause—that is, providing the Rohingyas their identity. Thus, it is to be understood that the only way to reduce the loss of life at sea is by working together with the home country of the refugees, transit countries as well as destination countries, to create a mutual aid mechanism. However, in the case of Rohingyas refugees, the home country Myanmar refuses them citizenship identity. This gap can be filled by a regional organization such as the ASEAN as the refugee crisis is the major problem in the region.

Unless and until the situation in Myanmar improves, many Rohingyas are expected to cross the sea to seek stability in other Southeast Asian countries. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the root cause of the crisis is the lack of identity of Rohingyas in Myanmar.

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India-Japan Asia Africa Growth Corridor: An Assessment

Shabana Thankachan

The Asia Africa Growth Corridor is an initiative of India and Japan, the stated objective of which is improving economic connectivity between Asia and Africa through industrial networks and capacity building measures. The origin of the idea can be traced back to the November 2016 Joint Statement issued by India and Japan during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Japan. The statement referred to "improving connectivity between Asia and Africa through realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific as vital to the entire region." This idea acquired a more concrete form in the Annual meeting of the African Development Bank in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in May 2017. A vision Document titled "Asia Africa Growth Corridor: Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development" was released. This document outlined the broad contours and objectives of the project. According to the document, the four pillars of the AAGC are Enhancing Capacity and Skills, Quality Infrastructure and Institutional

Connectivity, Development and Cooperation Projects, and People to People Partnership. The vision document was jointly developed by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi; the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Jakarta; and the Institute of Developing Economies-Japan External Trade Organization (IDE- JETRO), Tokyo, in consultation with think tanks in Africa. India and Japan are the key overseers of this project, but the role of other players is unclear yet.

The vision document describes the AAGC as an attempt to connect the opportunities and aspirations of the two regions. From the vision document, the initiative appears to be primarily a sea corridor which intends to integrate Africa with South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania. The vision document stresses on providing quality infrastructure with a focus on people as the key to the project. It also places

importance on being responsive to the Sustainable Development Goals.¹ The project will use the Geographical Simulation Model developed by IDE/ERIA. This model will help in drawing out the economic gains for the region from the project through estimating the impact of the various trade and transport facilitation measures.

The first component of the AAGC, which is Development and Cooperation Projects, focusses on sectors such as Agriculture and Agro Processing, Health and Pharmaceuticals, and Disaster Management. The second component, mentioned above, lays emphasis on building robust institutional, industrial and transport infrastructure in growth poles among countries/regions through quality infrastructure. Through expanding the manufacturing base and infrastructure as well as investing in human resource development, it seeks to address the challenge of unemployment and skill. The final component, called People to People Partnership, intends to use tourism and education as the core tools for achieving the goal of connecting people.

Economic Relevance

The project lays maximum emphasis on the African continent. India has enjoyed very warm relations with Africa. India

and Africa are strongly connected by the common struggles of anti-apartheid and anti-colonial movements. The present Africa is no more the land of misery and deficits but the land of opportunities. There is increasing urbanization, there is a fast-growing young population, and the economy is slowly formalizing. Africa is also keen on diversifying its trade from focusing on the West and China to more Asian countries.² Inter-country barriers amongst African countries are fast dissolving, with the negotiations to create a Continental Free Trade Area, having begun. India's developmental work in Africa is based on a model of consultation with the stakeholders and which takes into account Africa's own aspirations for pan-African institutions and development programmes.³ This is achieved to a large extent by the platform of the India-Africa Forum Summit which started in 2008. Indian companies also have a very sustainable and large presence in Africa.⁴

Moreover, India has a lot to offer in terms of technological competence, human resource development, and institutional capacity building. In addition to this, India being a developing country is quite capable of understanding the unique developmental demands of Africa. This understanding of Africa's unique needs is reflected in some of the sectors where the AAGC intends to

focus its development and cooperation projects: agriculture and agro-processing, health and pharmaceuticals, and disaster management. India also has a lot to gain in terms of its increasing demand for raw materials as Africa possesses abundant natural resources.

Japan has also been quite closely associated with the African continent through platforms such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). TICAD provides a global platform for African and other international stakeholders to collaborate in promoting Africa's unique development needs. For a resource poor country like Japan, the African continent becomes an important destination of trade and investment. Japan has immense experience and expertise in providing developmental assistance to Asia and Africa. Along with this, Japan also has technological expertise and a penchant for innovation which could be utilized in Africa abundantly. The financial constraints India faces when it comes to investment in Africa can be fulfilled by Japan. Thus, one can see a smooth convergence of India and Japan in Africa.

Geopolitical Relevance

However, the question to ask is whether there is a reason beyond the narrative

of shared values and economic interests for Japan and India to come together for this project. To answer this question well, one must briefly look at the India-Japan relationship in the past two decades. India and Japan have been increasingly coming closer in strategic terms since 2000. The relationship has been especially closer since the beginning of the Abe administration in 2012. In 2014, India-Japan upgraded their bilateral partnership to a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership". Japan and India set a clear course for the future by releasing a joint statement in December 2015 called the "Japan and India Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of Indo-Pacific Region and the World." Japan is the only country that has been allowed by India to invest in strategically sensitive areas like India's North Eastern Region and the Andaman and Nicobar islands. In 2015, Japan became a permanent member of the annual Malabar exercises. Prior to this, this was a naval drill, only between the United States and India.

Through the AAGC, one can see this bonhomie between India and Japan translating also into an attempt to counter China's OBOR that goes beyond the mutual economic benefits accruing from it. The first indicator of this is the

timing of the project. The Asia Africa Growth Corridor Vision Document was released on 25 May 2017. This was just a few days after the OBOR Summit in Beijing. Events of such magnitude cannot merely be coincidental in international relations. It has been argued—and quite rightly so—that the core reason for India to emerge as the logical option for Japan is due to increased US interest in India as a stabilizing factor in Asia.⁵ But this is not to say that Japan does not have its own interests in stabilizing the regional order. Japan has a very heavy stake in the Indo-Pacific. It depends on maritime transportation for 99.6 percent of its trade volume. A large proportion of this trade passes through the Gulf of Aden region. The AAGC, which is primarily a sea corridor, will provide the much-needed maritime presence to Japan in the region. This should also reassure Japan in the face of increasing Chinese presence in the region. For India too, the reasons revolve along the same lines. India has every need to maintain its maritime supremacy in the region it traditionally dominated, especially in the face of fears of Chinese encirclement with the OBOR/Maritime Silk Road which has been construed by many as the reincarnation of the String of Pearls.

The AAGC also comes across as a counter to China's OBOR when

one looks at the language used in the vision document, as well as at the key components of this initiative. It is not easy to counter China in terms of the scale of the financial investment. Thus, India and Japan are trying to sell their project using a language that seems to present it as an alternative to the Chinese way of doing things. India and Japan have capitalized on the oft repeated criticism of China. The common brickbats that Chinese projects face are along the lines of transparency, destruction of local industry, causing labour unrest, environmental concerns, and poor quality. The Vision Document of AAGC comes across as specifically targeting these perceived shortcomings of China.

China has been criticized internationally for its constant violation of Intellectual Property Rights, and for its less than perfect record on the quality of products.⁶ Botswana has been struggling to sell a China constructed power plant after consistent technical problems in its operation since it was commissioned in 2012. Similarly, there have been ample media reports on the cracks appearing in a Chinese built hospital in Angola. Although the reality of the quality of Chinese infrastructure may be far from such media reports—with most Chinese infrastructure across the world

having maintained a good standard of quality—but there is definitely in existence a poor perception of the quality of Chinese goods. This oft-repeated criticism of China finds a clear counter in the Asia Africa Growth Corridor Vision Document. India and Japan have definitely capitalized on this. One of the four prime components of the AAGC is providing Quality Infrastructure. There is repeated emphasis in the document on the importance this project places on delivering high quality. This must also be seen in tandem with Japan's reputation of being a torch bearer of quality and innovation. Japan's launch of the Partnership for Quality Innovation must be seen in this regard. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made his challenge to China quite clear when, on the occasion of the 21st International Conference on the Future of Asia, he said, "we no longer want a cheap but shoddy approach".⁷

Transparency has been a prominent area of concern when it comes to Chinese investments abroad. There is need for more clarity on AIIB as a source of funding for OBOR. China is also not known for publishing detailed statistics and information about its investments and projects abroad. On the other hand, Japan is known for providing and publishing precise details of its

Official Development Assistance Loans and grants to other countries.⁸ Another component of the Asia Africa Growth Corridor which challenges concerns of transparency in the case of China is the use of the Geographical Simulation Model. The GSM Model will be used to measure the economic gains accruing from the project. This would help identify the socio-economic impact of the project on the region and the people in a more clear-cut manner.⁹

China also faces criticism for labour issues and the social impact of its investments. A study has pointed out that China has tended to use Chinese labour rather than local labour in its projects in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Namibia. This model has led to unemployment and labour unrest.¹⁰ The same study also states how the inability to compete with Chinese products has led to the closure of local factories—a good example is the textile industry in Namibia. In Zambia, protesting employees were shot down by Chinese supervisors. According to D. Zweig and B. Jianhai, "Beijing's resource-based diplomacy has no room for morality".¹¹ Beijing is also criticized for its "close shop" approach in which there is no transfer of skills and technology to the locals.¹² It is in this context that the Asia Africa Growth Corridor emphasizes on

people centric development and people to people partnership. According to the vision document, this would contribute to the local society, and would remain in harmony with the local community and the livelihood of the people. Another core component of the AAGC is what it calls “Enhancing Capacities and Skills”. Under this, the initiative aims to encourage and enhance human resource development, education, and skills development.

With respect to environmental pollution, China has begun to introduce environment protection legislation domestically; but this has not translated to Chinese investments in other countries. In its 2015 report, the China-ASEAN Environment Cooperation Centre states that China lacks clear environmental guidelines and rules for its overseas firms. Heavy environment pollution is the price of expedited development that poor countries have to pay for Chinese investment. Once again, the focus of the AAGC on environment is noteworthy, and can be seen in this context. The AAGC is described in the vision document as “a Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development”. It also emphasizes on using high standards of quality control for infrastructure development so as to mitigate any adverse environmental

impact. The mention of exploring a partnership with the International Solar Alliance can also be seen in this light.

Conclusion

The Asia Africa Growth Corridor is definitely a project that will go a long way in integrating Africa with Asia better. This initiative also picks up on the shortcomings of the China-led connectivity project, and tries to provide a better alternative for it. Moreover, in doing so, it also tries to counter China in a very subtle manner. China has tried to resolve a lot of the criticism levelled against it through several initiatives. However, “second round” players like India and Japan have the benefit of hindsight—the benefit of learning from China’s mistakes. It is also important to briefly introspect whether India and Japan have the experience of taking something like this to its logical conclusion. Unlike China, both India and Japan have very little experience in actually building infrastructure in other countries. Japan’s experience is mostly limited to Official Development Assistance. But for now, it is definitely an initiative in the right direction that gives the region an alternative that appears more benign.

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ENDNOTES

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Re-converging India-Indonesia ‘Strategic Tridents’: Economics, Security and Geopolitics

Surbhi Moudgil

*“In a dim, distant, unrecorded age
We had met, thou and I, –
When my speech became
entangled in thine
And my life in thy life”*

This prose by Rabindranath Tagore in his celebrated poem ‘To Java’ written in Bengali captures the essence of forgotten relations between India and Indonesia, subtly referring to the drift caused by colonisation of the two countries by the western colonial powers, viz. the British and the Dutch respectively.

India and Indonesia share a history of bilateral cooperation induced by similitude in their ethnicity and culture. The two countries led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President Sukarno supported each other during their independence movements, leading to the creation of Afro-Asian and Non-Aligned movements in 1955 at the Bandung Conference.

However, during the decade of the 1960s, relations between India and Indonesia drifted apart, arguably due to changing strategic dynamics in Southeast Asia. The divide widened further due to the combined effect of the signing of Sino-Indonesia Friendship Treaty in 1961 and the Sino-India war of 1962. The decline in relations continued throughout the 1980s due to Jakarta’s apprehensions over the substantive enhancement of Indian Navy’s capabilities, particularly in India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&N). For Indonesia, this was perceived as a looming threat to its Sumatra Islands situated only 80 nautical miles away.¹

With the initiation of India’s Look East Policy (LEP) in 1991, India announced a major strategic reorientation of foreign policy towards Southeast Asia. However, despite Indonesia being India’s immediate maritime neighbor, the LEP could not bridge the gap in

bilateral relations. During the visit of the Indonesian President Dr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to India in November 2005, the two countries initiated economic engagement in a major way. It led to signing of a Joint Declaration on Establishing a Strategic Partnership towards achieving that goal.² Notably, however, India took eight years to reciprocate to the Indonesian President's visit, with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visiting Indonesia only in 2013.³

Nonetheless, introduction of Act East Policy (AEP) in 2014 by Prime Minister Modi gave thrust to India's geopolitical approach towards Southeast Asia. AEP has envisioned and enhanced focus on India's extended eastern neighborhood by pronounced and proactive Indian role in the affairs of Pacific-Asia. Coincidentally, the introduction of Indonesia's Maritime-Axis vision was enunciated in 2014 converging with the motives and objectives of Indian AEP, which was also announced in 2014.⁴ Strategic developments in policy orientation of both countries made it important for them to allocate focus on different contours of collaboration in order to optimise their capabilities in the region.

Economic Dimensions

In the 21st century, the world's economic centre of gravity has shifted

to the Indo-Pacific, with the region presenting dynamic opportunities in economic, political, and security realm. The preceding few years have witnessed sustained economic growth in the region, with India and Indonesia being among the top performers. The two countries have high prospects in future to achieve higher growth rates, as their potential market base is locally driven contrary to countries like Taiwan, Korea and Singapore which are export driven.⁵ In their attempt to boost economic capabilities, India and Indonesia are collaborating in public-private investments and forging new partnerships. The two countries have also aided enterprises to achieve economic growth aimed at generating additional trade opportunities.

In December 2016, President Joko Widodo visited India and briefed Prime Minister Modi on Indonesia's ongoing reforms and how the country is on the path of become an investment-friendly destination. He also spoke about the opportunities available for Indian companies to invest in pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, information technology, energy and manufacturing industries in Indonesia.⁶ Subsequently, PM Modi also invited Indonesian businesses to invest in India's flagship projects such as Make in India, Digital India, Skill India, Smart City, and *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*.

Additionally, the two countries have also identified the importance of affordable energy for economic growth, based on which, the first 'India Indonesia Energy Forum' was held in Jakarta on 20 April 2017. India being the third largest importer of coal from Indonesia amounting to approximately US\$ 3.5 billion in 2016, proceedings of energy forum plays an important role in exploring areas of cooperation between India and Indonesia in energy sector. In this context, it is also important to note that Indian companies have made substantial investment in coal mines of Indonesia. Overall, bilateral trade between the two countries in the year 2015-16 stood at US\$ 15.90 billion, wherein Indonesia's export to India amounted to US\$ 13.06 billion and India's exports to Indonesia stood at US\$ 2.84 billion in 2015-16.⁷ However, it has been argued that India needs to increase its exports to Indonesia in order to reduce its trade deficit.

India and Indonesia currently stand as two vibrant and youthful democracies expedited with their emerging economy making it the best time for the two countries to recover their maritime heritage. Given the growing maritime trade in the region and the geographical continuity of the two countries along Indian A&N, both the countries need to synergise their efforts in expanding

maritime connectivity in the region to further expedite their economic opportunities in the region.

Geopolitical Convergence

The two large countries straddle the Indo-Pacific region, which makes them well-positioned to ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the maritime configured region. Both the countries demonstrate concerns over rising power of China in the region. China forms a complex relationship with each of the two countries as they engage economically with China, and concurrently harbor latent security concerns. India and Indonesia are committed towards freedom of navigation and overflight based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which promotes India's and Indonesia's peaceful discourse in South China Sea (SCS). This was iterated clearly in the December 2016 joint statement issued by India and Indonesia during President Jokowi visit to India. India and Indonesia have thus made amply clear their joint stand on resolving disputes in SCS by peaceful means in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law.⁸ Furthermore, both countries strive for development of a multipolar Asia, thereby striving to enhance their own influence and stature in the region.

India and Indonesia now look at each other for achieving complementary regional support, and can envisage their future as collaborating regional powers, reinforcing their strategic convergences to ensure a favourable regional balance. While both the countries aim to maintain peace, progress and prosperity in the region, they also seek to strengthen their relations with regional countries. India is prepared to provide viable alternatives to the Chinese Maritime Silk Route (MSR) initiative in the region. India's Project Mausam aims at re-establishing communication amongst the regional countries, and a better understanding of cultural bonds driven by regional maritime milieu.⁹ Whereas India's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) aims at bringing benefit to all in the region – as the very name suggests – its combination with Project Mausam could potentially provide Indonesia the other countries in the neighbourhood a preferred alternative to China's MSR.

On the other hand, Indonesia has the capability of extending India's strategic reach in the Indo-Pacific, by acting as a springboard connecting the Indian Ocean region to Pacific-Asia. Furthermore, the two countries could not only share a strong bilateral relationship, but also partner in multilateral forums. India and Indonesia are members of

multilateral organisations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to name a few, which largely aim to promote regional cooperation. Indonesia as the biggest democracy and largest country in ASEAN, thus, holds strategic value in the overall geopolitics of Southeast Asia. Accordingly, India and Indonesia geopolitical convergence has multiple advantages, which enhance the capability to formulate a meaningful collaboration for positively influencing the regional security environment through partnerships with countries and regional organisations.

Defence and Security Cooperation

The converging security concerns shared by the two countries are identified in their commitment to strengthen the architecture of their defence ties through holding regular defence dialogues. Following Indonesian President Jokowi's trip to India in December 2016, the two countries pledged to deepen maritime cooperation through the "Statement on Maritime Cooperation". The two countries also value the success and recognize the potential of "Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 2016", which took place in New Delhi. Subsequently, the two leaders directed their focus on maritime

industry and security, maritime safety and navigation, and other avenues of bilateral cooperation. In future, bilateral strategic and defence cooperation can be extended to a joint hydrographic surveys, joint production of defence equipment, formation of Joint Task Force for crises management, Search and Rescue (SAR) and most importantly, joint shipbuilding programs. A MoU is already in place for the same.

India and Indonesia offer unique opportunities to the strategic partnership shared by them as they are immediate maritime neighbors. Indonesia could contribute to the security of international sea lanes (ISL) due to its central location linking the Indian and Pacific oceans. At the same time, India, as a regional ‘net security provider’, could supplement Indonesia’s interest in protecting the regional ISLs – particularly in the western approaches to the Indonesian international straits – from multifarious security threats, thereby maintaining a benign maritime environment conducive to unimpeded seaborne trade.

The two countries face similar concerns about illegal fishing in their maritime zones. The two countries have thus considered signing a Joint Communiqué to eliminate illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing and to further promote

sustainable fisheries. Both countries have enhanced their defence cooperation by implementing initiatives like the India and Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT). The 29th Co-ordinated Patrol was conducted in May 2017.¹⁰ India and Indonesia are also participants in the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM-Plus), which aims at addressing shared security challenges.¹¹

Divergence and Impediments

Even as bilateral relations are pivoting towards development, some impediments do loom large over their efforts. Interestingly, China announced its Maritime Silk Route initiative and its aspirations to develop the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in Indonesia.¹² Both the projects propel China’s larger objective of Belt and Road initiative, to which India has showed no signs of being a part. China’s strengthening grip over Indonesian market creates serious apprehension upon India’s efforts to invigorate its historical ties with the country. Reassuring India’s concerns over China’s investment in Indonesia are President Jokowi’s five meetings in two years with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Adding to the Indian apprehensions is the investment of China Development Bank (CDB) in Indonesia, which is an estimated \$14.4 billion for 57 projects,

invested since the two countries entered into a commitment in 2006.¹³

The two largest democracies of Asia are re-converging under the guidance of their respective leaders Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joko Widodo, both elected in 2014. Notably, both the leaders are outward looking, thus bringing changes in respective policy orientations of the two countries. The newly initiated policies aim at improving infrastructure, combating corruption, overcoming red-tapism and establishing good governance in their respective countries. This similarity in thoughts can be a driver for the two leaders to converge their abilities to achieve geopolitical goals. However, politically, both the countries have elections due in 2019 and there is always a possibility that the two countries could fall back upon their 'default mode in terms of the two countries' erstwhile inward looking policy orientations. This would place a severe stress on their burgeoning maritime ties.

Conclusion

India and Indonesia are naturally situated in an advantageous geostrategic position, enabling them to play an important role in the region. Emanating from their regional development policies

and their shared strategic vulnerabilities in the region, India and Indonesia are imparting momentum to their maritime convergence. The emerging new power configuration in Asia is resulting in favourable regional geopolitics, impelling the two countries to contribute to regional stability. India and Indonesia have the potential to increase their strategic footprint in the region aimed at upholding their respective spheres of influence and their shared vision of developing maritime power.

India and Indonesia are now more conscious about their united concerns and capabilities over economic, security and geopolitical issues. The two countries aim at maintaining peace and prosperity in the region. The leaders of the two countries have also begun to explore various contours of India and Indonesia relations, not only bilaterally but also multilaterally. The simultaneous change in strategic approach of both the countries is a fortunate coincidence. From which they need to maximize the benefits of the available opportunities. Thus, the re-convergence of India and Indonesia partnership is necessary for peace and prosperity in the region, but it may neither be irreversible, nor inevitable.

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ENDNOTES

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India and Mauritius: Cooperating to Ensure Collective Maritime Security

G. Padmaja

On 16 August 2017, the Indian built Water Jet Fast Patrol Vessel 'CGS Valiant' was commissioned by the Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth at Port Louis Mauritius. This was the third ship supplied by an Indian Defence shipyard to be commissioned in the National Coast Guard (NCG) of Mauritius.¹ Speaking on this occasion, the Mauritius Prime Minister said that CGS Valiant would upgrade the operational capability of the Mauritius NCG. It would help in Mauritius long journey towards enhancing maritime safety and security, especially in combating against poaching of its marine and fish resources, illicit activities in its seas, including drug trafficking and other types of transnational crimes.²

Earlier, in May 2017, the Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth had paid a state visit to India. This was his first overseas visit after becoming Prime Minister of Mauritius in January 2017.

In the press statement made on the occasion of Jugnauth's May 2017 visit, the Indian Prime Minister Modi said, "As frontline states of the Indian Ocean, Prime Minister Jugnauth and I agree that it is our responsibility to ensure collective maritime security around our coasts and in our EEZs."³ Both leaders agreed that India-Mauritius cooperation is very important for the effective management of conventional and non-conventional security threats in the Indian Ocean. Modi also recalled his March 2015 visit to Mauritius. It was during this visit to the island country that Modi had spelt out India's vision for the Indian Ocean which is 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' also known by its acronym-SAGAR. That Mauritius was chosen to enunciate such an important policy brings out the geostrategic importance the island nation holds for India.

The special relation that exists between the two countries was given

emphatic expression in May 2014, when Mauritius was the only non-SAARC country invited for the swearing-in ceremony of Modi as Prime Minister. Further, in April 2005, the very first official bilateral visit of the then Indian Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh upon his assuming office, was to Mauritius.⁴ Also, in March 2013, the President of India, H.E. Pranab Mukherjee, made a state visit to Mauritius as the Chief Guest at the 45th anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius.⁵

The strong India-Mauritius relations may be traced to the historical and cultural links the two countries share. It was in the year 1834 that the first batch of Indian indentured labourers travelled through the waters of the Indian Ocean in the ship 'Atlas' and arrived in Mauritius, in the month of November. With them, they also brought the plural cultural heritage of India to Mauritius; and their descendants continue to make valuable contributions to the development of the island country.⁶ Over sixty per cent of the population in Mauritius is Indo-Mauritian, consisting of immigrants from India and their descendants.

In the above context, this issue brief examines the close maritime cooperation between the two countries. It re-visits Modi's March 2015 visit to Mauritius;

and examines the significance of Prime Minister Jugnauth's May 2017 visit to India. The essay argues that engagement at the highest level has always been an important feature of India-Mauritius relations. Both countries have cooperated on a wide range of issues and India has contributed in many infrastructure and capacity building projects in Mauritius. However, Modi's bilateral visit to Mauritius in March 2015 marks a watershed for taking a holistic approach to maritime cooperation in both, its economic and security dimensions. Modi referred to this holistic approach by the acronym SAGAR.

Re-visiting Modi's March 2015 Visit to Mauritius

Prime Minister Modi visited Mauritius on 11-12 March 2015. He was the Chief Guest for the National Day of Mauritius and addressed a special session of its National Assembly. Modi, jointly commissioned along with Mauritius Prime Minister, the offshore patrol vessel (OPV) Barracuda, which is the first custom-built vessel exported by India. Bilateral agreements concerning maritime security, maritime infrastructure, and maritime economy, were concluded. These included the development of sea and air transportation facilities at Agalega Island and cooperation in the development of an ocean economy.

During this visit, Modi stressed the geo-strategic importance of the Indian Ocean which he described as 'our common maritime home'. He said that two-thirds of the world's oil shipments; one-third of its bulk cargo; and half of its container traffic, transit through the Indian Ocean. Further, it has over forty littoral states and over forty per cent of the world's population. Also, ninety per cent of India's trade by volume and ninety per cent of its oil imports take place through the seas. The seas are thus critical for both the economic prosperity and social stability of most nations in the world. It is in this context that Modi called for cooperation between Mauritius and India and the need to take collective responsibility to ensure that the Indian Ocean is safe, secure and free from both conventional and non-conventional threats.

The highlight of the visit, however, was his vision for the Indian Ocean Region which he articulated while commissioning the OPV Barracuda. Modi called this policy 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'-and articulated its acronym 'SAGAR'. According to this vision, India would do everything to safeguard its sovereignty and interests which include its 7,500 km long coastline; its 1,200 islands; and, the 2.02 million sq km of its

Exclusive Economic Zone. Second, India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbours and assist in building their maritime security capabilities. For this, India would cooperate on the exchange of information, coastal surveillance, building of infrastructure and strengthening their capabilities. Third, India believes that it is only through collective action and cooperation that peace can be advanced in the region and thus associations like the IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) are important. These mechanisms also strengthen efforts to counter non-State actors engaged in piracy, terrorism and other crimes. Fourth, India seeks an integrated approach and cooperative future, which will result in sustainable development for all in the region. Bringing out the importance and centrality of the 'Blue Economy' to India, the Indian Prime Minister said that the blue chakra or wheel in India's national flag represents the potential of the Blue Revolution or Ocean Economy. Lastly, he opined that those who are resident in the region, i.e., the littoral countries have the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean. With other nations who have strong stakes in the region, India progresses her engagement through dialogue, visits, naval exercises, capacity building,

capability enhancement, and economic partnerships.⁷

The dominant narrative among analysts has been that SAGAR was a response to the increasing China's engagement in the Indian Ocean region. However, a close examination does not show this view to be well-founded. SAGAR marks not a new beginning but continuity in the nature of the regional and bilateral maritime engagement that India has had with its maritime neighbours. For example, it is important to note that since 1991, the Indian Coast Guard and the MNDF (Maldives National Defence Forces) have been conducting a combined exercise series called DOSTI⁸. With regard to Mauritius, the joint statement issued at the conclusion of the state visit of the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Navinchandra Ramgoolam, in October 2005, clearly spells out the direction that the bilateral relations were taking on issues of defence and security. According to it, Mauritius expressed interest in the purchase of an Advanced Light Helicopter, an Offshore Patrol Vessel, and a Coastal Surveillance Radar System, in order to strengthen the naval and air surveillance capabilities of Mauritian security forces.⁹

Since 2009, the Indian Navy has been deploying ships to Mauritius bi-annually

to assist in patrolling the vast EEZ of the island country. The joint patrolling focuses on preventing piracy and illegal fishing and help reinforce maritime security in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Mauritius. These deployments have added to the special bonding that exists between India and Mauritius and contribute to maritime security in the Indian Ocean region.¹⁰ India has also been actively involved with the regional organisation IORA. The Secretariat of IORA is situated in Mauritius, which is also one of the founder members of IORA. It was in 2011 that IORA, in its Council of Ministers meeting under the chairmanship of India, identified six priority areas of cooperation. These are maritime safety and security; trade and investment facilitation; fisheries management; disaster risk reduction; academic and S&T cooperation; and tourism promotion and cultural exchanges.¹¹ The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), an Indian initiative, was founded in 2008. It seeks to increase maritime cooperation among navies of the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean Region. SAGAR was also important for India to be an effective 'a net maritime security provider'.¹²

Modi's visit was a watershed in the manner in which a holistic approach was articulated regarding maritime cooperation in the Indian

Ocean. SAGAR stressed the economic, security, and technological aspects; the bilateral and regional mechanisms of cooperation; and civilian and uniformed naval personnel interaction. It sought to convey that every Indian Ocean littoral country had an important role to play in ensuring safety and security of the waters of the Indian Ocean. Most important was the message that India seeks to ensure safety and security in the Indian Ocean Region through a shared security architecture. At the same time, SAGAR prioritised 'maritime security' in India's bilateral relations with Mauritius.

Regarding Mauritius relations with China, it is seen that diplomatic relations between them were established in 1972. Mauritius itself had achieved independence in March 1968. The two countries cooperate in the field of trade, economic and technological cooperation. China has helped Mauritius to build infrastructure such as a stadium, bridges, an airport terminal, amongst other projects. The two countries also have a vibrant cultural cooperation and Chinese tourists travel to Mauritius in substantial numbers. High level bilateral visits take place between the two countries and China looks upon Mauritius as a bridge to route its investment into Africa. Mauritius supports Beijing's 'One China Policy', while China supports

Mauritius's sovereignty claims over the Chagos islands.¹³

Mauritius Prime Ministers Visit to India in May 2017

India-Mauritius relations further deepened with Mauritius Prime Minister's visit to India in May 2017. Four agreements were concluded. These included cooperation among specific research institutions in both the countries in the fields of oceanography, marine resources etc; an MoU to set up a Civil Services College in Mauritius; an agreement on maritime security; the submission by Mauritius of the instrument of ratification of the International Solar Alliance; and an agreement on a US\$500 million Line of Credit from India to Mauritius to help in implementing priority projects of Mauritius.

The Agreement on Maritime Security will ensure that close cooperation between the two countries would be further strengthened. This would help in responding to not only the conventional threats but also the non-conventional challenges like the trafficking of drugs and humans; illegal fishing; piracy that impacts trade and tourism; and other forms of illegal exploitation of marine resources. During this visit, Pravind Jugnauth said, "The acquisition of

offshore patrol vessels and fast interceptor boats have enhanced the capacity of our police and national coast guards to patrol and protect our maritime zones. We also appreciate the training dispensed to our police personnel which have enhanced their skills”.¹⁴ India and Mauritius also agreed to further strengthen their wide-ranging cooperation in hydrography for a secure and peaceful maritime domain. A decision to renew the life of the Coast Guard Ship Guardian, through a grant assistance program to Mauritius was also taken.

In less than three months of the Mauritius Prime Ministers visit to India, the Indian built Water Jet Fast Patrol Vessel CGS Valiant was commissioned, on 16 August 2017. Speaking on this occasion, the Mauritius Prime Minister recalled the commissioning of Coast Guard ship Barracuda in March 2015; the induction, in March 2016, of ten fast interceptor boats; the commissioning of a new Dornier aircraft; and the commissioning in December 2016 of CGS Victory and two Chetak helicopters. He further added that the commissioning of CGS Valiant was part of a strategy to build the capability of the Mauritius National Coast Guard on a three-pronged approach of detection, deterrence and interception; and that at the same time, the NCG must be able to

protect people at sea with state-of-the-art capabilities in search and rescue.

In the above context, it is significant to note that on 10 December 2016, the commissioning ceremony of the state-of-the-art ship, CGS Victory, and two Chetak helicopters acquired by the Mauritius Police Force/National Coast Guard took place in Mauritius in the presence of Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth, and the Defence Minister of India, Manohar Parrikar. On this occasion, Anerood Jugnauth said, “Our Exclusive Economic Zone and territorial waters, our surrounding islands, national interests and security imperatives, regional commitments, and an extremely dynamic geostrategic environment are giving rise to many challenges.” He said that the new acquisitions would better equip the Mauritius Police Force and the National Coast Guard (NCG) to meet the emerging challenges in the maritime security environment, especially taking into account the vast expanse of ocean that surrounds Mauritius. He further added that India would assist Mauritius in an integrated development project known as the ‘Trident Project’, which would cater for appropriate infrastructure and facilities and would involve the construction of a new NCG headquarters at Fort William, upgrading of repair facilities for the NCG vessels,

and the construction of a dry dock facility with flotilla-support services.¹⁵

Manohar Parrikar reiterated India's commitment to augmenting the capability of the Mauritius Police Force, including in the critical area of search and rescue. He also underscored the need to work together to harness the untapped potential of the Ocean Economy sector in fisheries, aquaculture, renewable energy, seabed exploration, and marine biotechnology.

India's engagement with Mauritius is spread over many areas. India has extended assistance to Mauritius in the field of human resource development, capacity building and capability enhancement. Development projects that India is associated-with include the Metro Express Project; a new Supreme Court building; the construction of some 1000 social housing units; and a

state-of-the-art ENT hospital. India has also provided assistance in the IT sector of Mauritius, especially in the construction of the Cyber Tower. India has expressed its solidarity with Mauritius on all issues of importance, including on Chagos, at the UN and other multilateral fora.¹⁶

Conclusion

India-Mauritius engagement on maritime security has intensified in the last two years. This is a reflection of the realisation that unless maritime security is ensured, the economic opportunities that oceans offer cannot be tapped. However, SAGAR is all about a holistic approach to maritime cooperation and engagement. The two countries now need to focus on specific projects relating to Blue Economy which will directly benefit the socio-economic development of people.

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India's Plan for Tsunami Warning System in South China Sea: An Analysis

Yudhajeet Sinha

When India first announced its plans of setting up a Tsunami Warning System (TWS) in South China Sea (SCS) region, these evoked a negative reaction from China. However, China later rescinded its initial inhibitions, with the Chinese Foreign Ministry declaring that improving the efficiency of the TWS in the region would serve the interests of all parties involved.¹

India, which was one of the countries that was extremely adversely affected by the 2004 tsunami, had set up the Indian Tsunami Early Warning System (ITEWS) at the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad, operating under the Earth System Sciences Organization (ESSO), Government of India. Having achieved considerable success in running the ITEWS, India now wishes to venture into the SCS. According to M Rajeevan, Secretary of Ministry of Earth and Sciences, the plan is still at a nascent

stage and is yet to be officially sanctioned. Despite expressing the expected initial scepticism, Beijing eventually approved any prospective construction of TWS in the South China Sea.²

After the tsunamis of 2004, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) set up the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (PTWS), through its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), for immediate detection of tsunamis and to promote the exchange of data. The PTWS issued warnings to the SCS region as well. Around the year 2013, Chinese media widely reported that a Chinese proposal to build a TWS in SCS had been approved by the IOC and the responsibility for construction of the centre had been delegated to China's National Marine Environmental Forecasting Center.³

This issue brief attempts to explain why the SCS region may require a TWS,

assesses India's potential to build one, tries to identify appropriate nations with whom India can cooperate, and lastly, tries to analyse the implications that any construction of this sort might have on the broader Sino-Indian relationship.

The Imperative

Contrary to the popular belief that the SCS littoral states are not prone to tsunamis owing to the semi-enclosed geography of the SCS, it has been recently discovered by scientists from the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS) that all the coastal states in the aforementioned region in general, and the South China Coast, Hainan Island, and Vietnam, in particular, fall in the high tsunami hazard zone.⁴

The risk of a devastating tsunami that looms in this region owes its origin to the Manila Trench lying to the west of Luzon (in the Phillipines), which has striking resemblance to that of the source areas that caused the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, and also to the Japan trench from where the Tohoku-Oki earthquake took place in 2011.

The underestimation of tsunami hazards in SCS region can be attributed to the normally and widely used approach that is based on a uniform slip model.⁵ It fails to fully comprehend the gravity of the situation because SCS is

a narrowly confined and smaller area in comparison with the Pacific Ocean or the Indian Ocean region.

Since earthquakes rupture heterogeneously, on application of the heterogeneous slip approach,⁶ it was discovered that the threat to Taiwan, Luzon, southern China and Vietnam specifically, had been underestimated gravely.

Therefore, setting up of a TWS in SCS will be a useful addition to the existing tsunami warning centres such as the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center situated in Hawaii and the Japan Meteorological Agency based in Tokyo, since these confine their area of focus to tsunamis generated by Pacific-rim earthquakes.

The announcement of India's plans to set up a TWS in the SCS region and the subsequent approval of India's plans by China leads to the question of whether India is capable enough to translate its plan into reality and actually set up a TWS that can serve the interests of regions that will be critically hit if a tsunami takes place.

India's Potential Role

The Indian Tsunami Early Warning Center (ITEWC), which was established at INCOIS, Hyderabad, is

an independent body operating directly under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, and is subjected to continuous improvement in order to render it capable of issuing tsunami advisories for any tsunamigenic event taking place in any of the Earth's oceans.

The organisation consists of a real-time seismic monitoring network of 17 broadband seismic stations to detect earthquakes that can cause tsunamis, a network of real time sea level sensors with four Bottom Pressure Recorders (BPR) in the open ocean and 25 tide gauge stations situated at various coastal locations that monitor tsunamis, and a 24x7 active tsunami warning centre that is capable of providing necessary timely advisories to communities that can be detrimentally affected by a tsunami. The existing mechanism can also receive information about any earthquake with a magnitude of over 6.5 M from global networks all over the world. It is a state of the art early warning centre that has the required infrastructure for receiving real-time data from seismic and sea-level sensors, data analysis, modelling of tsunami, and information dissemination, guided by a comprehensive set of Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).⁷

The center can also use email, fax, SMS, and GTS, in order to forward advisories to the relevant authorities

within a span of ten minutes after detection of tsunamigenic earthquake in the IOR and oceanic regions as well. It is also one of the Regional Tsunami Advisory Service Provider (RTSP) in the IOR, along with Australia and Indonesia.⁸

The TWS in the IOR has been in place and functioning well for a long period of time. In contrast, the TWS in the SCS lag far behind the IOR system in application of the impact of hazards towards averting the risk of tsunami and land planning, because of the reasons discussed.⁹ Therefore, India can be a significant provider of tsunami warning products and information to the existing TWS in SCS and can contribute considerably to its improvement.

Also, according to the Ministry of Earth Sciences, since all the oceans on Earth are interconnected, any tsunami caused by a massive earthquake can have detrimental effects on Indian coasts. Therefore, India will be able to serve not only the interests of the littoral states in the SCS region, but also own as well.¹⁰

The Technique

There are limitations in restricting oneself to earthquake and sea level data for making correct predictions and issuing relevant advisories. While the former can provide data with regard

to magnitude, epicentre, etc., it fails to detect the exact energy of a tsunami caused by an earthquake. A relevant example of this issue would be the tsunami warning that was issued in 1986 for Hawaii, which led to the evacuation of Waikiki. Although the tsunami arrived as predicted, it was in the form of non-flooding waves. The false alarm led to a loss of \$41 million dollars.¹¹ The latter can provide immaculate tsunami wave amplitude but it has proved to be useless for early warning systems. Therefore, it becomes an imperative to ensure that sea level data, measured at the surface of deep ocean areas, is utilised in the making of forecasts.

The most important feature of a tsunami detection buoy is that a real time tsunami wave can be detected by it within 30 minutes of the tsunami being generated by an earthquake. These buoys are usually situated near subduction zones or borders between tectonic plates. The two main functions that a tsunami detection buoy can serve are, firstly, helps in detecting if a tsunami has been generated by an earthquake or not in a span of 15-30 minutes and can also detect the wave that has been generated. Secondly, it improves the accuracy of tsunami detection by using real time wave data.¹²

Since a tsunami occurs with minimal warning and is devastating in nature,

the deployment of numerous buoys in tsunami-prone regions enhances the efficacy of the TWS mechanism. There are already a multitude of these buoys in the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Their establishment in the SCS will definitely mitigate the risk of tsunamis in these high-risk areas. India can play a leading role in this direction, owing to its experience in advancing the existing alert system in SCS.

Potential Collaborators

According to MS Rajeevan, since India is head of the Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning System for Asia and Africa (RIMES), if the TWS is established as a part of RIMES, nations like Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand, which are also its co-members and are vulnerable to tsunamis in the SCS, will definitely stand to benefit.

Implications

According to Jay Batongbacal, Director of the Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea at the University of the Philippines, the incentive for China to positively react to India's plans may have been an attempt to display a reduction in its usual aggressive display of territorial claims and maritime policy in relation to the SCS, before the scheduled meeting of the Chinese Communist

Party Congress later in 2017, when President Xi Jinping is expected to seek another term as Chairman.¹³ They have been trying to polish up their image the past year because the coming Congress is important for Xi Jinping's attempt at the consolidation of his power, so it may therefore be an attempt by them to show that their foreign policy has been working. There is a possibility that Beijing may react more harshly once India moves to actually set up the warning system.

The South China Sea States may well have discussed the tsunami warning system with New Delhi before the plan was made public. The Chinese president's reputation at home, and international pressure on Beijing, may also have prompted the consent from China to India. It could be just a temporary reaction to the current problem at hand, with China responding to pressure to work with other countries that claim rights to a vast disputed sea, by voicing support for India's proposed tsunami alert system.

India is not a claimant in the South China Sea, which is prized for its fisheries, fossil fuel reserves and international shipping lanes. But when Vietnam and India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation agreed to explore off the Vietnamese coast more than a

decade ago, China "strongly objected," said Richard Cronin, a Southeast Asia Program Fellow with The Stimson Center, a think tank in Washington. India's Ministry of Earth Sciences' plans to transfer data to Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia through the setting up of a TWS in the SCS, to enable the issue of advisories to these nations about any earthquake that might result in devastating tsunamis, which can wipe out entire population in the coastal regions of those states.

China and India have quite a complex relationship. China has always had an opposition to foreign interference in its domestic affairs and also in regional affairs. They have their own territorial disputes along their land borders, and this has been the case for a long time. India and China dispute two border areas. China also frets over India because India has the world's second largest population and is backed by Western powers. The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, wants a stronger role for his country internationally, particularly in economic matters around Asia. In the 'Look East Policy', he has emphasized the improvement of relations with countries from Southeast Asia.¹⁴ "China's nod to the Indian warning system will likely be a one off", said Jay Batongbacal, hinting that China's behaviour in this instance

has been an exception. However, there are other experts who have taken a more positive view of the situation. “It’s not an India-specific initiative from what I remember, so given that background we may not be surprised that the Chinese have not reacted adversely,” says Brahma Chellany, professor of strategic studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research.¹⁵

Data from one Russian and three US DART buoys provided an accurate

forecast of the 2011 Japanese tsunami for US coastlines. This example of sharing of vital data between Russia and the USA is a model for international cooperation. India and China may cordially cooperate with each other in the SCS region by exchanging technological expertise and information and, consequently create a highly efficient TWS that will successfully avert any disaster from affecting threatened regions.

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

Gurpreet S Khurana

On 06 August 2017, the foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China met in Manila, The Philippines, and adopted¹ the “Framework of the code of conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea (SCS)”. The framework is meant to lead eventually to the CoC comprising a set of rules outlining certain norms, proper practices and responsibilities of all those involved in maritime activities in the SCS.

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

Minister Wang Yi stated China’s intent² “to begin consultations on the text of the COC sometime within the year”. For long, the ASEAN countries have vied for the CoC as a ‘holy grail’ that could be fruitfully employed by the ASEAN solidarity to moderate China’s assertion of its maritime-territorial claims in the SCS. It is important to note that the CoC framework has come 15 years after the ASEAN and China agreed upon the Declaration of Conduct³ (DoC) for SCS in 2002 amidst heightened tensions in the disputed waters.

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

like the United States to ‘meddle’ in the process. China’s intent remains unclear. Does the framework signify a policy change in Beijing, making it amenable to negotiate its maritime-territorial claims multilaterally? Or is it merely assuaging its maritime neighbourhood to wean away the influence of the United States and ‘bide time’. Will the CoC interpret and extrapolate the legal order stipulated by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS⁴)? If the CoC is not legally binding, it will lose all its ‘teeth’, barely serving as another meek instrument for confidence-building.

During the Indian Ocean Conference 2017 (IOC-17)⁵ held at Colombo on 31 August – 01 September 2017, Sri Lanka proposed that the countries of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) emulate the ‘success’ (albeit partial) of the ASEAN, and develop a similar CoC for the Indian Ocean, which could address the key aspect of freedom of navigation.

It is true that since its first articulation in a 2007 academic paper⁶, the ‘Indo-Pacific’⁷ concept has led to a mental map portraying Pacific-Asia (enclosing the western Pacific, including its contiguous seas) and the IOR as an integrated region. However, such interconnectivity between the two areas is premised on the broader geopolitical and strategic rationale, rather than in

terms of maritime security. After all, the inherent security characteristics of the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean are vastly dissimilar. The environment in the former is characterised by traditional military threats, which differs substantively from that in the latter, wherein non-traditional issues are predominant.

In the best case scenario, the conception of a CoC for the Indian Ocean may be an ‘overkill’, or at least premature. In the worst case, it may even lead to a deleterious effect on regional stability. Owing to the divergent strategic alignments of the IOR, any multilateral deliberation on a CoC could germinate geopolitical polarisation, which may be accentuated through lobbying by the extra-regional stakeholders. This could stymie cooperation among the member countries of the recently revitalised Indian Ocean Rim Association⁸ (IORA) on all fronts. The proposed CoC could also adversely affect the IORA’s nascent agenda of maritime safety and security, which needs to grapple with the exigent issues relating to non-traditional security. It may also impair the IORA’s ‘inclusive’ approach to security that seeks a constructive contribution of the extra-regional powers, which are represented in the IORA as dialogue partners.

The current CoC suggestion of Colombo is reminiscent of Sri Lanka’s

erstwhile initiative of declaring 'Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace' (IOZOP), which led to the adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution 2832⁹ on 16 December 1971. The objective of IOZOP was well-conceived to mitigate the Cold War super-power rivalry in the Indian Ocean, and spirit of living in a benign environment unconstrained by the motives of external powers was endorsed¹⁰ by India's National Security Advisor (NSA) as lately at in 2016. However, the IOZOP effort collapsed in 2005,¹¹ when China stepped up its role in the deliberations of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Indian Ocean, established in 1972 to study practical measures to achieve the objectives of IOZOP. Ostensibly, the lack of a sustained endorsement and involvement of India as the key Indian Ocean power took its toll on the otherwise laudable initiative from Sri Lanka.

Hence, while the IOR countries would need to continue conceptualising innovative means to enhance regional security and stability, the proposed replication of the CoC for SCS in the

Indian Ocean may not be a good idea, particularly without India being on board. Rather than the CoC as a political agreement, a functional arrangement to de-conflict unintended encounters among warships of different nationalities may contribute more substantively to maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Such de-confliction is becoming exigent due to the increasing presence of China's PLANavy in the Indian Ocean, including through its submarine deployments in the area. In 2014, the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) developed such a mechanism called the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES¹²). The Code provides for basic instructions for communicating and manoeuvring when warships and military aircraft of different nationalities meet at sea unexpectedly. In September 2016, China and the ASEAN jointly agreed¹³ to abide by the CUES in the SCS. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is presently discussing the proposal to emulate the CUES, which needs to be taken forward.

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BIMSTEC: Where India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' meet

G. Padmaja

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was established in 1997. Its members are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. On 11 August 2017, the 15th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting was held in Kathmandu. Addressing the meeting, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said, "For India, BIMSTEC is a natural choice to fulfil our key foreign policy priorities of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East'...."¹ These policies were enunciated by the Modi led Government which assumed office in May 2014. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are part of India's immediate neighbourhood wherein the 'Neighbourhood First' policy is implemented. Thailand and Myanmar are members of ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) which is central to India's Act East policy. BIMSTEC connects South Asia to Southeast Asia

and most of the member countries are littorals of the Bay of Bengal. Given their importance, a BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit was organised at the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Summit in India in October 2016. A BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat was also held on this occasion wherein the member countries pledged to make BIMSTEC stronger, more effective and result oriented.

In the above context, this issue brief looks at the origin of BIMSTEC; the discussions held at the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat in October 2016; and the significance of the Joint statement of the 15th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting. The paper argues that BIMSTEC, in its twentieth year, will play a decisive role in transforming the Bay of Bengal as a hub of constructive maritime activity. The BIMSTEC leadership is keen to implement maritime cooperation wherein issues of multi-

modal connectivity, ensuring maritime security, combating challenges of climate change, and tapping opportunities of Blue Economy have been prioritised. For India, BIMSTEC has an important role to play in its larger maritime vision. Also, the Bay of Bengal is part of India's primary area of maritime interest in the northern Indian Ocean Region.²

Origin of BIMSTEC

India's interest in establishing BIMSTEC needs to be seen in the context of India's Look East Policy (LEP). The cold war geopolitics had limited India's interactions with Southeast Asia. After the end of cold war, India engaged with Southeast Asia bilaterally and multilaterally through the LEP enunciated in 1992 under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. In 1992, India became a Sectoral Partner with ASEAN and in 1996 a full Dialogue Partner.³

With the success of LEP, it was opined that these interactions could be utilised for the economic development of India's landlocked Northeast States which share land boundaries with Bangladesh and Myanmar. According to Ambassador Ranjit Gupta, who had been India's ambassador to Thailand in the nineties - "The most important point in favour of BIMSTEC was that it was meant to focus on the economic development and stability of the Northeast by

doing away with its isolation and lack of connectivity with its geographical neighbours and even mainland India; remedying this remoteness and this lack of connectivity lay at the heart of the idea of BIMSTEC".⁴ Thus, the primary reason motivating India to join BIMSTEC was that it will directly connect South Asia to Southeast Asia and would provide economic opportunities to India's Northeast states.

On 6 June 1997, the officials of the countries of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand established BIST-EC ie Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation through the Bangkok Declaration. On 22 December 1997, Myanmar joined the grouping and BIST-EC was amended to BIMST-EC ie Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation. In February 2004 Nepal and Bhutan joined the grouping and since then the acronym BIMSTEC stands for Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. BIMSTEC collectively comprises twenty two per cent of global population and has a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of US\$2.85 trillion.⁵

BIMSTEC is a sector driven co-operative organisation which seeks to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development through projects

that can be dealt with most productively on a sub-regional basis making best use of available synergies among member countries. The sectors for cooperation include transport and communication, tourism, environment, disaster management, counter-terrorism, transnational crimes, trade and investment, climate change, cultural cooperation, energy, agriculture, poverty alleviation, fisheries, public-health, people-to-people contacts, and technology.⁶

However, the grouping failed to take off due to disinterest among the leadership and difficult bilateral relations among the member countries. A permanent Secretariat was established in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2004 and only three summit meetings have been held so far. The first in Thailand in 2004; the second in New Delhi in 2008; and the third in Nay Pyi Taw in Myanmar in 2014. The fourth is slated to be held in Nepal in 2017.

In its twentieth year however the situation in BIMSTEC is promising. Bilateral relations have improved and the political leadership, including that from India, is showing renewed interest in BIMSTEC. The maritime agenda of cooperation has also assumed primacy. All this has to be seen in the context of global power shifting from Europe to Asia with the economic rise of China and

India; ninety per cent of international trade including trade in critical energy resources being conducted through the seas; the BIMSTEC littoral countries of Bay of Bengal being geo-strategically located along important international shipping lanes; and the need to tap the opportunities being offered by Blue Economy.

For India, the Bay of Bengal is part of the Indian Ocean Region which India considers as its primary areas of maritime interest. Its engagement in BIMSTEC is part of India's larger maritime vision wherein SAGAR⁷, SAGARMALA⁸, Project Mausam⁹, Act East¹⁰ and India as a 'net security provider'¹¹ are being implemented. They propose a shared security architecture in the maritime domain and thus emphasise cooperation. Significantly, except Bhutan and India, the rest of BIMSTEC countries are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is in India's interest that BIMSTEC's maritime agenda be a success for then the members will be sensitive to India's security concerns while they maintain relations with China.

The re-orientation of BIMSTEC is closely linked to India's Act East Policy. It was at the India-ASEAN Summit in Myanmar in November 2014, that India stated that its 'Look East Policy' has become 'Act East Policy'. ASEAN

is at the heart of India's Act East policy wherein focus is not only on economic but strategic and security interactions too. India-ASEAN summit level partnership was established in 2002; strategic partnership in 2012; and presently there are thirty annual institutional mechanisms between them. While earlier India's north-eastern states were looked upon as a land bridge connecting India to ASEAN, presently its inland waterways along with the ports of Bangladesh are being looked upon as a critical connecting link to ASEAN. In fact, the Indian President inaugurating the Brahmaputra River festival in April 2017 said, "The development of this national waterway can give Assam access to international ports like Chittagong in Bangladesh. This will give Assam an exposure to international trade and commerce. With the Act East Policy taking forefront, Assam is perfectly positioned to become the corridor of the country to the ASEAN nations".¹² When connectivity with ASEAN improves, BIMSTEC too benefits.

India is taking steps to augment infrastructure and capacity at all major ports on the eastern sea board which overlook the Bay of Bengal and the BIMSTEC region to augment trade with ASEAN. This will have a direct bearing on BIMSTEC as Myanmar and

Thailand are part of both ASEAN and BIMSTEC. The Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project is important in this connectivity plans¹³. It aims to connect Kolkata Port with Sittwe seaport in Myanmar by sea; it will then link Sittwe seaport to Lashio in Myanmar via Kaladan river boat route and then from Lashio on to Mizoram in India by road transport.¹⁴ Another connectivity project is India Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway project. It seeks to provide seamless connectivity from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar. Discussions are taking place to extend this Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.¹⁵

India's diplomacy with the immediate neighbourhood is based on India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy' with focus on connectivity, contact and cooperation. Connectivity projects and strong bilateral diplomacy at the highest level form the bedrock of this policy.¹⁶ This policy, has specific relevance to India's immediate neighbours in the east i.e. Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh which along with India's Northeast states form the sub-region BBIN i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Growth Quadrangle. This entire region, which is part of BIMSTEC too, looks to the ports of Bangladesh and India to access the Bay of Bengal. On the other

hand, Sri Lanka, another BIMSTEC member has opined that it looks to strengthen economic cooperation in the Bay of Bengal.

These countries are focusing on 'connectivity' in the maritime domain. This refers to enabling coastal shipping between countries; connecting inland waterways to ports; connecting landlocked regions through roadways and waterways to ports; facilitating a seamless movement of people and goods through the waterways and ports of the South Asian region; and connecting the coast guards of the concerned countries so that maritime security is ensured. This will result in a secure and safe maritime space from traditional and non traditional threats so that economic activities are not hindered and movement of people and goods is possible.

The BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat, Goa, India 2016

On 16 October 2016, the leaders of the BIMSTEC member countries met in Goa, India for the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit and released an Outcome Document too. This meeting was held in the background of the terror attack on 18 September 2016 on an army camp in Uri in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in India. Later the 19th SAARC Summit scheduled to

be held in Pakistan in November 2016 was postponed.¹⁷ India had opined that that the increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in the region and growing interference in the internal affairs of Member States by one country had created an environment that was not conducive to the successful holding of the 19th SAARC Summit in Islamabad in November 2016.¹⁸

It was in this context that the dominant narrative was that India was trying to focus on BIMSTEC as SAARC was embroiled in difficulties. However, this paper argues that BIMSTEC has a relevance and significance independent of SAARC. Infact, by holding the BIMSTEC meet while BRICS Summit was being held, India sought to convey to the BRICs countries especially China that the Bay of Bengal falls under its area of influence.

Some of the issues spelt out in the outcome document are that terrorism remains the single most significant threat to peace and stability in the region; the need for implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as it impacts livelihoods of the people in the Bay of Bengal; closer cooperation in Disaster Management through joint exercises; need to focus on multi-modal physical connectivity (air-rail-roads-waterways); look into possibility of a

BIMSTEC Motor vehicle agreement; deepen cooperation in agriculture sector to facilitate food security; need for sustainable development of fisheries as the Bay of Bengal region is home to over thirty per cent of world fisheries; tap into the enormous potential of Blue economy; explore ways to deepen cooperation in areas of aquaculture, hydrography, sea bed mineral exploration, coastal shipping, eco-tourism and renewable ocean energy to promote sustainable development of the region.¹⁹

As a follow up, the First Meeting of the National Security Chiefs of BIMSTEC member states was hosted in New Delhi on 21 March 2017. The member states emphasised the importance of recognising the Bay of Bengal as a common security space and developing a holistic approach towards maritime security cooperation which would include Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief too. The meeting decided to establish Track 1.5 BIMSTEC Security Dialogue Forum. The issue of terrorism was also discussed. It is important to note that India is the lead country in areas of Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime; Transport & Communication; Tourism; and Environment and Disaster Management.²⁰

Through BIMSTEC, India is focusing on issues of maritime

cooperation in a benign manner in the Bay of Bengal. However this should be seen in the context of power projection which takes place on a different platform. For example in July 2017, the USA-Japan-India trilateral Malabar exercises involving the navies of these three countries took place off the coast of Chennai in the eastern coast of India in the Bay of Bengal.²¹

15th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, Kathmandu, 11 August 2017

The momentum initiated in Goa 2016 continued to have a positive impact at the 15th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting. The joint statement issued at the conclusion of the meeting indicates to the constructive activities which will be held in the months to come. Bangladesh would hold a BIMSTEC Experts' Workshop on Climate Change; the third BIMSTEC Energy Ministers Meeting would be held in Nepal in 2018; India will organise the First Annual Disaster Management Exercise in October 2017; an International Conference on Blue Economy will be hosted by Bangladesh in October 2017; and the fourth BIMSTEC Summit would be held in Nepal.

The members also decided to conclude at the earliest the BIMSTEC

Free Trade Area; the Trade Facilitation Agreement; and Agreement on Mutual Assistance on Customs Matters. The MoU on Establishment of BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection was finalised; and discussions will be held on Framework Agreement on Transit, Transshipment and Movement of Vehicular Traffic (BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement); BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement; and Thailand's Draft Concept Paper on BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity. Discussions were also held on issues of counter-terrorism and Transnational Crime; the importance of sustainable development of fisheries for food security; mountain economy; and tourism.²²

The Bangladesh Foreign Minister rightly said, "Connectivity is the key to overall cooperation which is lagging behind among BIMSTEC countries. Transportation of people and business through air-rail-road and seas and connectivity of ideas, knowledge and skills are fundamental to boost mutual cooperation and partnership in all other areas among BIMSTEC countries."²³

Conclusion

For India, BIMSTEC was an outcome of its Look East Policy where focus was on geo-economics. Twenty years hence, BIMSTEC has an added strategic relevance and needs to be examined in the context of Act East Policy and Neighbourhood First. All BIMSTEC member countries are aware that they are geo-strategically located and recent BIMSTEC meetings have prioritised maritime issues. There is a realisation that maritime security is necessary to tap the economic opportunities offered by Blue Economy. Most important, BIMSTEC is not a substitute for SAARC and was never meant to be.

The Bay of Bengal is part of the Indian Ocean Region which India terms as its primary areas of maritime interest. India needs to sustain the cordial bilateral relations in BIMSTEC and ensure that the connectivity projects are implemented. The resultant maritime activity will not only benefit the people of the region but also ensure that India's influence in the region prevails.

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Indian President's visit to Djibouti: Fulfilling a Strategic Necessity

G. Padmaja

On the third and fourth of October 2017, the 14th President of India, H.E Ram Nath Kovind undertook his first official visit abroad. It was significant that this was to Djibouti, an Indian Ocean littoral country of immense geo-strategic importance.¹ Incidentally, President Kovind is the very first Indian President to officially visit Djibouti.

This issue brief examines the significance of the Indian President choosing Djibouti as the destination for his maiden outgoing State visit. It outlines the geo-strategic importance of Djibouti, and discusses the State visit, with particular focus upon policies that can be adopted to strengthen India-Djibouti relations.

Geo-Strategic Importance of Djibouti

Though a small country, with an area of around 23,200 sq. km, Djibouti's geographical location on the Horn

of Africa bordering a critical choke point of Bab-el-Mandeb makes it geo-strategically significant. It has a population of 957,271² with most people following a moderate form of Sunni Islam. The countries that constitute the Horn of Africa are Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Djibouti is located at the confluence of the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. It connects Africa, West Asia and the rest of Asia. The Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, a 17 nm wide stretch of water that connects the Gulf of Aden with Red Sea and thereby the Suez Canal, is located between Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula, and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa. It is through the Babel-Mandeb that Persian Gulf oil, natural gas and petroleum products are shipped to Europe and North America. The European Union's and North Africa's oil exports and merchandise trade with China, Japan, India and the rest of Asia, also pass through this strait. Likewise,

some 50 per cent of China's oil imports must also cross Bab-el-Mandeb. Thus, the closure of this strait, for any reason, would not only cut off the flow of oil and trade, but also impact the economic and political stability of a number of countries.³

Djibouti lies close to the restive areas of Africa and West Asia, wherein domestic, regional and global politics already threaten the stability in the region, and thereby, the conduct of safe and secure maritime trade. Major insecurities emanate from piracy and militancy off Somalia, while concerns arising from the deteriorating security situation in war-torn Yemen are rising steadily. Thus, given Djibouti's geo-strategic importance and its proximity to unstable geographical areas, several countries have established military bases in this small country. France, which ruled Djibouti during the colonial period, has a base here, and this base also hosts soldiers from other European countries. After the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, the USA established a military base in Djibouti as part of its war on terror. Named Camp Lemonnier, it is America's largest military base in Africa, with as many as 4,000 personnel stationed in it. Japan, too has acquired a facility since 2011 to enable it to support its anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of

Aden.⁴ Likewise, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are also reported to have bases.⁵

In July 2017, China set up its first foreign military base, once again in Djibouti.⁶ China has acquired land for its base on a ten-year lease till 2026. The reasons given by China for establishing the base are that it will facilitate rest and rehabilitation for Chinese troops involved in various activities such as its shipping-escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia; UN peacekeeping operations; and, humanitarian rescue missions, as was seen when China evacuated its citizens from Libya and Yemen. The military base, Beijing argues, will also help protect Chinese investments in Africa, and Chinese nationals working on infrastructure projects in the region.⁷ It is important to note that China has already invested in the infrastructure sector in Djibouti, including a port and a 750 km-long rail line, which links landlocked Ethiopia to Djibouti and facilitates economic activity between the two countries. Significantly, China and Djibouti also concluded a Defence and Security Agreement in 2014.

Djibouti is able to manoeuvre successfully among countries of diverse strategic interests and geopolitical leanings. The earnings that it receives from the bases set up on its land are

critical to its economy. Some of the countries that have established bases are also investing in other infrastructure projects within Djibouti⁸. There appears to be little concern within the Government of Djibouti about the geographical implications of offering extra-regional powers quite so firm a footing within the Indian Ocean.

The Visit

Though President Kovind's visit is the first high-level visit from India to Djibouti, it needs to be seen as part of the continuum of India's broader engagement with Africa. The Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS III), held in India between 26 and 29 October 2015, provided a decisive thrust to India-Africa relations. Representatives of all 54 African countries participated in the Summit; among whom were 41 Heads of State or Government. Later, India's apex leadership, including its Prime Minister, the then Vice-President, and, the then President, all paid official visits to various countries in Africa. Interestingly, most of these visits were to coastal States, whose shores are washed by the waters of the Indian Ocean, or the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea. Yet, Djibouti was not amongst these. However, President Guelleh of Djibouti did visit India in October 2015, to participate in IAFS III. On that occasion, he had a bilateral

meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Modi. In fact, the first major visit from Djibouti to India was undertaken by Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh in May 2003. President Kovind was reciprocating the gesture to highlight the importance to India of Djibouti and the Horn of Africa in particular; and Africa in general.

The visit also enabled the Indian President to express India's gratitude to Djibouti for its logistical support to the civilian evacuation from Yemen, in April 2015, undertaken by the Indian Navy (Operation *RAHAT*). The growing instability in Yemen and the military intervention by Saudi Arabia in that country had put the lives of nearly 5,000 Indian nationals in Yemen in danger. Indian warships evacuated not only these stranded Indians but also 2,000 nationals of over forty countries, and disembarked them in Djibouti from where they were transported to their respective countries.⁹ At present, Djibouti also hosts the Embassy of India to Yemen.

Obviously, India-Djibouti economic relations too were discussed during the Presidential visit. In 2016-17, India's bilateral trade with Djibouti was a mere US\$ 284 million.¹⁰ The visit sought to up this in significant fashion and spelt out the investment opportunities for Indian` companies in infrastructure

projects such as road construction, port development, power transmission and transport in Djibouti. This is because Djibouti is an important entry port and transshipment point for the region's landlocked countries. The visit also enabled to highlight the opportunities offered by the Blue Economy to build new partnerships.

Given the geo-strategic importance of Djibouti as an important Indian Ocean littoral, one would have expected that issues of maritime security would be given primacy in discussions held by the President. However, the India-Djibouti Joint Statement does not specifically refer to maritime issues. It, however, does mention that both the countries acknowledged India's role for the maintenance of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. It is important to note in this context that the Indian Navy warships have been making regular calls at Djibouti for Operational Turns Around while conducting anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden since November 2008; during combined exercises with the US and French navies; and, for overseas deployment. Following the Indian President's visit, the interaction between the navies of the two countries may be institutionalized.

During the visit, India and Djibouti held discussions on eradicating the

menace of terrorism; the reform of UN Security Council; the importance of the International Solar Alliance; and ways and means to deepen economic relations. An MoU was also signed on Foreign Office Consultations between the two countries.¹¹ The visit could also result in the up-gradation of bilateral diplomatic relations. Presently, the Honorary Consul of India has been functioning in Djibouti since 1969, while Djibouti opened its embassy in India in 2004.

The dominant narrative among many analysts was that the Chinese inroads in Djibouti including the establishment of its first foreign military base had influenced the choice of the Indian President's maiden visit to Horn of Africa. While this may be one of the influencing factors, the visit was indeed motivated by a larger purpose. It sought to establish political relations at the highest level so that they will help to safeguard India's interests in this region. These interests are vital to India's economic and social well-being, and are independent of the 'China factor'. These include, among others, the safety of the thousands of Indian nationals working in West Asia, and the safe shipping of critical energy imports sourced from this sub-region. While the two countries have cooperated at multilateral fora including the India-Africa Forum

Summits, effective bilateral cooperation has remained a relative void. The visit filled this strategic vacuum. One can expect that high level interactions would now continue and that subsequent visits would focus on specific agreements and issues related to maritime security, challenges and cooperation.

Symbolism has an important place in diplomacy. Although 'matters maritime' were not discussed specifically, the very fact that Djibouti was chosen for President Kovind's first outgoing visit conveys the growing centrality of maritime issues in India's foreign policy. Unlike extra-regional stakeholders such as the USA, China and Japan, India occupies a central position in the Indian Ocean Region astride the main International Shipping Lanes (ISLs). India does not seek a military base in Djibouti. However, President Kovind's visit spells out loud and clear, without saying so, that the Indian Ocean is India's 'primary area of maritime interest'¹², and that India intends to be a 'net security provider'¹³ in the Indian Ocean Region.

Looking ahead

Djibouti has shown that like in many other parts of the world, it too can manoeuvre adroitly with multiple powers – be they the USA, China, Japan, France or India. In such a scenario, India

needs to conduct its diplomacy in a very competitive atmosphere. India has been late in undertaking a high level bilateral visit to Djibouti. However, having made a beginning, it is important that a serious follow up is made and a vibrant, broad-based bilateral relation is established. Cooperation on maritime issues will have to be a by-product of this solid foundation.

The SAGAR¹⁴ template of focus on both bilateral and multilateral security and economic relations, capacity building and capability-enhancement of the Indian Ocean littorals, and, a regional response to maritime challenges through regional institutions, has to be implemented in Djibouti. Given Djibouti's geo-strategic importance and the nature of its relations with global powers, it has to be actively made part of discussions on the emerging security architecture in the Indian Ocean Region. Its inputs have to be incorporated to work out customised solutions to maritime challenges, especially as the Horn of Africa is a region beset with maritime insecurities.¹⁵

One of the more important issues highlighted during the IAFS III held in India in October 2015 was cooperation in the Blue Economy. The Framework for Strategic Cooperation spelt out that India and Africa would place

special emphasis on closer collaboration through training, capacity building and joint projects in developing sustainable fisheries, maritime connectivity, managing marine resources, promoting eco-tourism and developing renewable energy. It was also agreed that they would pursue cooperation in hydrography, port operations and marine transport; address illegal and unregulated fishing; develop infrastructure in coastal areas; develop eco-friendly marine industries and technologies; and, build new networks of activity in coastal areas and associated hinterlands.¹⁶ India needs to identify and implement specific projects in Djibouti in all these areas, as the latter is seeking investments to enable it to make big developmental strides.

India also needs to spell out, in much more detail, the cultural, civilizational and nautical linkages between India and Djibouti. This will help in deepening its maritime diplomacy with Djibouti. It will bring out that India, as a maritime nation, has always had a pervasive global maritime influence and this was achieved without any domination or force. India should convey that whatever policies other countries may make, its

actions will be anchored on this spirit of cooperation, co-existence, and an absence of coercion. It is here that the relevance of India's Project *Mausam*¹⁷ is most evident, and this needs to be implemented in Djibouti as well.

Conclusion

Djibouti is a country of great geo-strategic significance in the Horn of Africa, playing host to the military bases of several major countries of the world. Quite clearly, extra-regional stakeholders are strengthening their respective footholds in the Indian Ocean Region. While India does not need a military base in Djibouti, it needs to spell out that it is a major stakeholder in ensuring the stability and security of the region. The historic visit by H.E. President Ram Nath Kovind to Djibouti has sent this message loud and clear. It has laid the foundation for a vibrant, broad based bilateral relationship with an important Indian Ocean littoral. India needs to now sincerely build upon this foundation and implement specific projects in the economic, cultural, social and security areas.

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Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan, AVSM & Bar, VSM, Indian Navy (Retd.) took over as the Director of the National Maritime Foundation on 01 August 2017. The Admiral retired in December 2013 after a distinguished four-decade-long service career, wherein he commanded several of the Indian Navy's frontline surface combatants including the aircraft carrier INS Viraat. He has enjoyed untrammelled success as the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff for Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence, the Chief of the Staff of the Western Naval Command, and, the Commandant of the new state-of-the-art Indian Naval Academy at Ezhimala, Kerala.

Since retirement, he has had over 70 professional articles and papers published in a variety of Indian and foreign journals and magazines. He is on the visiting faculty of the higher-command establishments of all three defence services of India, as also tri-Service establishments such as the College of Defence Management, Hyderabad and the National Defence College, New Delhi. He is an Adviser and Fellow of several important think-tanks including the Ananta-Aspen Centre, the Forum for Strategic and Security Studies, and the Centre for Advanced Strategic and Security Studies.



Captain (Dr.) Gurpreet S Khurana, Indian Navy, is a PhD in Defence Studies and currently the Executive Director National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi. He has authored two books: 'Maritime Forces in Pursuit of National Security' (2008) and 'Porthole: Geopolitical, Strategic and Maritime Terms and Concepts' (2016). He has reviewed and edited the 'Indian Maritime Doctrine' 2009 (INBR 8), and compiled the Navy's 'Handbook on the Law of Maritime Operations' 2013 (INBR 1652).



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Rs. 600.00

ISBN 978-81-932998-5-2



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