



MAKING WAVES

A maritime news brief covering:

- **MARITIME SECURITY**
- **MARITIME FORCES**
- **SHIPPING, PORTS AND OCEAN ECONOMY**
- **MARINE ENVIRONMENT**
- **GEOPOLITICS**

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MARITIME SECURITY

US NAVY: MOVING FORWARD BY GOING BACK TO BUCCANEERING?

- Atul Bhardwaj and Inderjeet Parmar

The Trump administration's Cold War-style "whole-of-society" approach to a constructed "China threat" appears to know no bounds. Having weaponised trade through tariffs, defunded and withdrawn from the "China-centred" World Health Organization, and threatened China with sanctions over its new national security law in Hong Kong, some leading naval analysts are mulling a return to old-fashioned piracy on the high seas to restore order. That is, to put China in its place, by licensing privateers to plunder China's massive merchant marine.

China, it seems, is the only question in US and world politics today so far as the Trump administration and its most vocal cheerleaders are concerned. While the 'rise of China' has concerned previous administrations of both parties, the Trump administration's obsession with the matter is palpable, especially in an election year in which over 100,000 Americans have died because of the coronavirus, over 40 million rendered unemployed and nationwide protests against police violence are taking place.

Trump is presiding over what increasingly appears to be an illegitimate, failing state, whose moral authority is sinking and whose leadership and institutions have been deconstructed by design over decades.

A Cold War type existential external threat is being conjured up by the Trump administration and its hawkish allies such as Frank Gaffney and Stephen Bannon's recently-resurrected "Committee on the Present Danger: China". This is to distract attention from glaring problems and crises that are homegrown and rooted in a failing political-economic model that places corporate interests and profit-making front and centre. In administration policy briefs and documents, this is frequently referred to as "protecting a free and open rules-based international order" against China's malign influence.

There is no hint of irony in this oft-repeated mantra, even as the Trump administration itself systematically undermines international institutions and international law.

America's naval-gazing paranoia

The US Navy has ruled the waves, and waived the rules, since the Second World War. No other power came anywhere close to challenging it. But the Chinese miracle has catapulted its naval forces, by some, albeit crude, measures, to international status.

Paradoxically, continental China is now a significant maritime power, with more than 300 warships and a merchant fleet of over 4,000 vessels. In sharp contrast, the US Navy force levels are stuck at 295 warships, while only 246 merchant ships fly the US flag. The Chinese Navy has more ships, or hulls, than the navies of the UK, India, Germany and Spain, combined.

Yet, mere hulls do not tell the whole story. The US navy retains fundamental advantages over China's. In sheer tonnage, the US force is three times greater. The US has 11 nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, China's carrier strength is two, both conventionally powered. The US's are globally deployed, while China's is largely for coastal defence operations. It is decades away from coming close to challenging the US on the high seas.

Threat inflation justifies action

America, the sole sea-faring world superpower, appears to be indulging in one of its regular bouts of hand-wringing, even paranoia, over its relative decline and what to do about it. The stress is apparent in ongoing debates in US elite naval circles, where some strategists suggest that the best way to negate China's maritime strength is to attack its merchant ships at sea using non-state actors. Yes, you read that correctly. This is a call for open piracy, a legally-tenuous solution to face a purportedly enormous threat which should "limit the salience of law". Decoded, it means international law may be set aside when the US says so.

The very viability of the century-old US naval strategy of maintaining order at sea, the "freedom of the seas", protecting the sea lanes of communication for trade to flourish, is being questioned. Commerce-raiding on the high seas – a strategy dismissed by top US naval strategists like Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian Corbett – is being reintroduced into the naval lexicon. The naval agenda would appear to be shifting in line with the US's totalised approach to rolling back and subordinating China's great power status.

Guerrilla warfare on the high seas

This revisionism in naval thought rests on the 'strategy of the weak', starkly expressed in two articles published in the April issue of *Proceedings*, the US Naval Institute's monthly magazine, whose "Vision" is to give a "voice to those who seek the finest [US] Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard". It is the publication of record of the naval-military establishment, having served its active duty and retired readers since 1874. The magazine articles conclude that the US Navy should be directly involved in the trade war with China by employing 'licensed pirates' to target and plunder Chinese merchant ships and their cargoes at sea.

In "Unleash the Privateers!", Brandon Schwartz, a former media relations manager of the influential Washington, DC, think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and retired Marine Corps Colonel Mark Cancian (senior adviser at CSIS), make a radical recommendation. Rather than using the more time-consuming but legal option of confronting Chinese defences using state-owned naval forces, Congress, which is constitutionally-mandated (by Article 1, section 8, clause 11) to issue 'letters of marque' to civilian ship-owners, should provide legal cover to capture,

destroy, or loot, Chinese merchant ships and bring the booty home for sharing with the government.

A “letter of marque” is effectively permission to any so authorised private ship to arm itself and to commit piracy. Irregular warfare, the weapon of the weak, is now being promoted as an increasingly attractive strategy of the world’s most powerful navy.

The second article’s title is so unconsciously Orwellian it may as well have been “Crime is Legal”. In fact, in “US Privateering Is Legal,” Schwartz adds that according to the 1977 Additional Protocol I (AP I) of the Geneva Conventions, privateers cannot be labelled “mercenaries” so long as they are a national of a party to a conflict or a resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict.

Yet, The International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries 2001, as ratified by 35 countries (except the UK, US, Russia, and China), shows that there is hardly any distinction between a privateer and a mercenary. Both are motivated to indulge in hostilities by the desire for private gain. In addition, a ‘Letter of Marque’ is a gross violation of the principles of natural justice under customary international law, besides being a violation of the international law on the use of force.

Privateering, however, is not limited to war-time, because it becomes applicable in situations when a particular part of an ocean is declared a hostile zone. For example, when sanctions are imposed on another state, such as Iran or North Korea, the surrounding waters become a war-zone where privateers can attack trade.

Recruiting privateers to overthrow governments is against international law under a 1977 UN Security Council resolution that rejects the recruitment of mercenaries with the objective of overthrowing governments of the member states of the United Nations.

Sailing boldly back into the past: The return of East India Company

The state-licensed raiding of commercial vessels was a popular business from 1689 to 1815. However, as international maritime trade picked up momentum, increased costs dissuaded merchants from arming their ships. But as “trade followed the flag”, and vice versa, privateering declined with the rise of the naval power of the British state. This was also the time when India witnessed a violent transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown.

Privatised combat at sea and re-introducing guerrilla warfare on the high seas is a recipe for anarchy. However, despite past experience and legal constraints, private navies may gain legitimacy because the Anglo-American world appears set on their re-introduction. The ‘War on Terror’ – especially the Afghan and Iraq Wars – re-energised private military companies (PMCs) into the battlespace to provide logistical support and repair services for weapons. The elevation of PMCs to combat roles would complete the process of “mecenarisation” of the profession of arms.

America is not alone in privatising war. The Russians actively use the Wagner Private Military Company in Syria, a formally private entity with very close links with the state. But it provides sufficient distance to permit “plausible deniability” to President Putin.

Erik Prince, the founder of one the most notorious PMCs, Blackwater (rebranded as Academi) has openly proposed that the US government restructure the war in Afghanistan by withdrawing the US national military completely and handing over operations to his company. In an interview, Prince pointed to the East India Company during British colonisation as a source of emulation for US policy in Afghanistan. In an op-ed in USA Today, Prince wrote, “This approach would cost less than 20% of the \$48 billion being spent in Afghanistan this year.”

Prince is the brother of the secretary of education, Betsy DeVos. Betsy is married to former Amway CEO Dick DeVos. The DeVos clan is one of the biggest sponsors of conservative think-tanks, which includes the American Enterprise Institute.

Prince’s pronouncements are to be taken seriously and one needs to look at the long-term consequences of such a move on world order. How the East India Company, a corporate entity acting under the guise of ‘delegated sovereignty’, metamorphosed into a colonising power forms an important part of India’s historical experience. And the explosion of violence that caused the Company’s demise should also be remembered.

American conservatives cherish a minimal state, promoting privatisation as and when required. The corporatisation of combat is the next big step towards handing over one of the key functions entrusted to the nation-state. The paleo-conservatives currently dominating the political-intellectual space in America seek to redeem such backward-looking ideas. J. Michael Waller, at the Center for Security Policy (CSP), for example, has proposed that Congress issue letters of marque and reprisal to private American entities to make the CCP (Communist Party of China) “pay” for the global pandemic, and share the (ensuing) wealth with the American taxpayer.

The CSP is an influential conservative think-tank led by Frank Gaffney. Gaffney along with Steve Bannon, former Trump 2016 election campaign CEO, and White House chief strategist, is leading the diplomatic onslaught against China through the Committee on the Present Danger – China (CPD-C) an ultra-hawkish advocacy group.

The 21st century Trump political agenda, obsessed with China’s apparently overwhelming threat, is attempting to reinstate pre-modern practices to subordinate its rivals. It is driven as much by elections, as by ideology and nostalgia for a bygone age when China knew its place. It is rhetorically justified by claims to defend the rule of law and international order while its plans and actions challenge the order’s very essence.

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Source: [thewire.in](https://www.thewire.in); 12 June 2020

US NAVAL BUILDUP IN INDO-PACIFIC SEEN AS WARNING TO CHINA

- Lolita C Baldor, The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — For the first time in nearly three years, three American aircraft carriers are patrolling the Indo-Pacific waters, a massive show of naval force in a region roiled by spiking tensions between the U.S. and China and a sign that the Navy has bounced back from the worst days of the coronavirus outbreak.

The unusual simultaneous appearance of the three warships, accompanied by Navy cruisers, destroyers, fighter jets and other aircraft, comes as the U.S. escalates criticism of Beijing's response to the coronavirus outbreak, its moves to impose greater control over Hong Kong and its campaign to militarize human-made islands in the South China Sea.

"There have been some indications in Chinese writings that the United States was hit hard by COVID-19, that military preparedness was low, so perhaps there is an effort by the United States to signal China that it should not miscalculate," said Bonnie Glaser, director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "The Chinese will definitely portray this as an example of U.S. provocations, and as evidence that the U.S. is a source of instability in the region."

President Donald Trump, criticized for his own handling of the coronavirus outbreak, has condemned China for what he sees as a failure to adequately warn the world about the COVID-19 threat. The administration has also moved to ban Chinese graduate students and researchers with links to the People's Liberation Army or other security services from the United States.

The convergence of three carrier strike groups in the region is unusual because of the limited number of carriers and the fact that they are often cycling through repair schedules, port visits, training or deployments to other parts of the world. This week, however, Navy commanders said they were able to take advantage of the timing, particularly during this period of great power competition with China.

The U.S. national defense strategy cites China as a top security concern, and Pentagon leaders have been working to shift more resources and military assets to the region to battle what they see is Beijing's growing economic influence and military might.

"The ability to be present in a strong way is part of the competition. And as I always tell my guys here, you've got to be present to win when you're competing," said Rear Adm. Stephen Koehler, director of operations at Indo-Pacific Command. "Carriers and carrier strike groups writ large are phenomenal symbols of American naval power. I really am pretty fired up that we've got three of them at the moment."

Speaking to The Associated Press from his office in Hawaii, Koehler said China is slowly and methodically building up military outposts in the South China Sea, putting

missile and electronic warfare systems on them. The U.S. and other allies and partners in the region have beefed up operations near the human-made islands to try to blunt China's development, but none of that has appeared to work.

Koehler said that most recently China deployed aircraft to Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands and is now operating them out of there.

On Thursday, the strike group warships were spread out across the Indo-Pacific. The USS Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group are operating in the Philippine Sea near Guam. The USS Nimitz strike group is in the Pacific off the U.S. West Coast. The USS Ronald Reagan has left port in Japan and is operating in the Philippine Sea south of there. Navy commanders were quick to point out that dozens of other Navy ships had been operating around the Pacific, but the three strike groups put a bit of an exclamation point on America's commitment to the region and its allies.

The Roosevelt has just returned to duty after spending more than two months sidelined in Guam with a massive COVID-19 outbreak among its crew. And small numbers of sailors on the Nimitz and the Reagan tested positive for the virus, triggering quarantines and extensive new health and safety procedures that had to be instituted before the ships could deploy.

As they deploy, sailors' daily lives on the ships and to some degree their operations at sea have been altered by the virus and the new precautions they must take to ensure the ships remain clear of infection and able to continue operations.

Onboard the Nimitz, Rear Adm. Jim Kirk said there have been no positive cases of the virus on the ship since it set out, and he is confident of all the changes put in place to keep it that way. On the Nimitz and the other Pacific ships, crew members are screened daily, they wear masks where needed, meal hours have been extended to allow for more social distancing, and specific routes are designated on the ship to prevent sailors from bumping into one another in the narrow passageways and stairs.

"As we head out to stand the watch, the message that I have is that this is the end of the beginning" for the crew, said Kirk, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11. "Now it's time to go about doing our job to the best of our abilities."

Koehler said the ships will continue to work with allies and partners in the region, conducting exercises at sea and patrolling contested regions. One key change, however, will be their ability to stop in foreign ports.

The port visits have been largely curtailed, except to carefully pick up supplies when necessary. Guam has been designated the only safe harbor for port stops in the Pacific so far, and sailors have only limited freedom to go to the pier and cannot travel freely in the city. Navy leaders are looking into establishing other safe havens but haven't approved them yet.

This is, said Koehler, "the new normal." And he said that while it's not likely there will be three carrier strike groups consistently in the Pacific over the long term, "it's something we can do when we want to."

Source: [navytimes.com](https://www.navytimes.com); 12 June 2020

OPERATIONAL TEMPO OF WARSHIPS, SUBMARINES MAINTAINED DESPITE COVID- 19: NAVY CHIEF

- Shaurya Karanbir Gurung

NEW DELHI: Indian Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh has said that the operational tempo of the force's warships, submarines and aircraft squadrons has been maintained despite the COVID-19 pandemic and it is ready to face any situation. He said that this readiness is necessary due to the deteriorating security situation along India's borders with China and Pakistan.

Singh, in a video message to navy personnel on the future actions for COVID-19 earlier this week, said that the force's operational teams have been constantly working amid the pandemic. "Our operational tempo of ships, submarines and aircraft squadrons has been continuing. There is no let up and we are ready to deal with any challenge. We have to be ready and it is relevant, because our security situation along our western and northern borders is not good," he said.

Speaking about the navy's "float crew", the Navy Chief said that they have been deployed for a long time, been in quarantine and stayed away from their families. "Some ships have been sailing for 100 days at a stretch," he said.

While giving instructions on what needs to be done ahead amid the pandemic, he said that a different approach and mindset will have to be adopted under unlock 1.0, following the nation-wide lockdown. "We have to adopt good practises. That must become our priority," he said.

He gave an example of INS Vishwakarma, a naval shipwright school based in Visakhapatnam, which has divided its trainees and personnel into three groups. Members of one group don't interact with those of other groups. He said this has been done to avoid a contagion in the base, even if one person is infected. "This is a best practise that we can adopt in other bases," he said.

Singh also said that another measure being implemented is that any personnel above 50 years of age and having low morbidity will not be kept in risky tasks such as in sea-going units.

"Unlock doesn't mean that we face this challenge by being complacent. We can't do that. The collective efforts that we have taken at our units have to be supplemented with individual self-discipline by wearing masks, maintaining social distance and protecting our elders and children...It cannot be business as usual," he said.

Singh also told his personnel to be "flexible" to face any uncertainties. "During this time, there will be a lot of strain on our administrative support," he said.

The navy is focussed on securing its personnel at a time when it is operationally deployed across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Under its Operation Samudra Setu, as part of Mission Vande Bharat, to repatriate stranded Indians from abroad, the navy has brought back over 1,500 people from Maldives and 700 citizens from Sri Lanka.

Singh said the navy is ready for further repatriation with its Landing Ship, Tank (LST). “These evacuations are different from normal combatant operations. It is more dangerous, as a contagion on the ship could happen due to an infected person. To prevent this, a high degree of preparations and precautions had to be taken by the ship teams. They have done this safely,” he said.

INS Kesari has also been deployed to provide medical aid to Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles. The Navy Chief said that the force has helped the Philippines, whose ships were deployed in the IOR. “They had asked for help of repatriation of citizens from Indian ports, medical support to its troops and southern naval command had made essential repairs of their ships, which are on the way to the Philippines,” he said.

Deployments in the Gulf of Oman and anti-piracy duties in the Gulf of Aden to keep Indian merchant vessels safe are continuing as well.

Source: economictimes.com; 11 June 2020

CHINA’S TIGHTENING GRASP IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA: A FIRST-HAND LOOK

- Zachary Williams

China has taken advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been dominating headlines around the world, to reinforce its grasp on the South China Sea. While Western media is now preoccupied by the U.S. protests, Beijing will likely continue to take advantage of the fact that the eyes of the world remain focused elsewhere.

In the South China Sea, these past six months were marked by four distinct events. First, there was the Chinese Coast Guard’s aggression in sinking a Vietnamese fishing vessel. Second, the Chinese survey ship Haiyang Dizhi 8 went trolling for oil in the Malaysian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) north of Malaysia but within the nine-dash line that encompasses China’s claimed waters. Third, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) stretched its legs and conducted sea trials with the Liaoning aircraft carrier. Finally, Beijing announced the creation of two new administrative districts in the South China Sea, covering disputed maritime features.

Looking into the summer with major Chinese military drills on the horizon, it can be expected that Beijing will continue to make advances that tighten its grip within the first island chain.

While deployed in the South China Sea on the USS America this spring, I would make it a point to go to the weather deck every day and take in as much as I could observe. One early morning, while we were south of the Paracel Islands, the water was heavily congested by small, brightly covered ships all the way out to the horizon in every direction. Fortunately, I packed binoculars. While our large amphibious ship weaved meticulously through the traffic I was able to discern that each of these vessels was casting fishing equipment into the sea while proudly flying the Vietnamese flag. After conversing with the watch sailors I gathered that at this time of the year the South

China Sea, which the Vietnamese refer to as the East Sea, is always congested with Vietnamese fishing ships.

All of this occurred while our ship was shadowed by the PLAN, which is routinely done during freedom of navigation operations. But we did not see the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG), which would surely have chased away these fishermen. The key takeaway from the sheer number of vessels present during this time of the year is that the potential for a dispute is constant during the fishing season. However, we rarely see what happened in April with the sinking of one of these fishing ships that happened to come across the CCG. Beijing has apparently tasked its Coast Guard to patrol with a purpose this year.

Then, while COVID-19 spread aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier and it returned to Guam, the news hit that the Haiyang Dizhi 8 survey ship, accompanied by an armada of CCG and PLAN vessels, was heading towards the coast of Malaysia. The West Capella, a contracted oil drilling ship, was operating for a Malaysian oil firm in the Malaysian EEZ due south of the Spratly Islands. The U.S. Navy tasked the USS America to maintain a presence and ensure that operations by all parties were peaceful and in keeping with international law while the USS Theodore Roosevelt was sidelined. There were no clashes, but it was obvious that the Chinese presence was precipitated by the operation of the West Capella within the nine-dash line. Beijing had a message to send to all who want to scour their claimed waters. Why else would these ships need an escort from their PLAN partners? In the end, the West Capella was able to do its job while U.S. Navy ships and one Australian destroyer provided a protective blockade to forbid interlopers that loomed in the distance any chance at strong-arming the competition, all without much excitement.

While the Chinese Coast Guard was trying to flex its operating range by going to the southeastern-most corner of the nine-dash line, the Liaoning was conducting sea trials in the South China Sea as well as off of the east coast of Taiwan. The carrier was escorted by two guided missile destroyers and two guided missile frigates. The Liaoning participated in multiple military drills, although it seems to be in the infancy phase in comparison to the rest of their naval war-fighting force. Carrier operations are still a developing facet of Chinese naval war fighting capability. This did not stop them from getting into close proximity with multiple US naval vessels, all while conducting flight operations. Though nothing occurred that would have indicated directly hostile intent toward U.S. forces, they were making sure we knew they were there, and signalling that our presence would not mean they would halt their training in the area.

The timing — the PLAN deployed a “big deck” carrier to the South China Sea just when the news hit about the USS Theodore Roosevelt being sidelined in Guam to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak onboard — was no coincidence. The messaging was obvious. As of this week the USS Theodore Roosevelt is back out to sea to continue its deployment cycle and with this, a leveled Chinese naval response would be expected. With new Chinese carriers on the horizon to be commissioned in the next decade, robust Chinese carrier strike groups — as seen this spring — would not be an uncommon occurrence in the near future. Intercepts from Chinese J-15s, the naval variant of their knock-off Su-27 Russian fighter, will start to become routine. This capability extends their fighter ranges significantly farther than aircraft currently

conducting intercepts of Western aircraft, which predominantly come from Hainan Island and the Paracel Islands. Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) flights are likely to be intercepted in uncommon areas as the Chinese carrier deployments become the new normal.

Back in Beijing, the Chinese State Council announced the establishment of two districts within Sansha City under the purview of Hainan province — a bold geopolitical action. The jurisdiction of these two districts in the South China Sea has significant political implications with China's ability to consolidate its hold in this region this year. Most of the nine-dash line territories are included in this announcement, such as the Paracel and Spratly Islands as well as Scarborough Shoal and Macclesfield Bank. The two districts are broken down into the two main island groups: Xisha district, headquartered in the Paracel Islands and Nansha district headquartered to the south in the Spratly islands.

The announcement of these districts has been dismissed by some as a symbolic gesture with no real-world consequence. However, this is likely to mean continued infrastructure growth of civilian facilities such as resorts, schools, and housing. By making the Xisha and Nansha districts hot-spots for Chinese tourism, Beijing is likely to complicate the Western effort to enforcing freedom of navigation. It can also be assessed that strategic areas such as Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal could be developed in similar ways to the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the past decade.

The bar is set on expectations with Chinese aggression in the South China Sea for the rest of the year. While the world fixes its gaze elsewhere, Beijing will continue tightening its grasp. For the immediate outlook, it is likely that the late summer exercise Red Sword will involve aspects of carrier operations linked with the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF). This will directly correlate with aspects of maintaining sovereignty in the South China Sea. At the very least it will involve increased naval integration, fifth-generation fighters, and strategic bombers from mainland China. With the U.S. naval fleet getting back on its feet in the Pacific after COVID-19, this summer will prove to be an important season for U.S.-China relations.

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Source: thediplomat.com; 10 June 2020

CHINA PLOT: SATELLITE IMAGES CATCH BEIJING IN THE ACT CARRYING OUT WORRYING MILITARY MOVE

- Luke Hawker

Aerial footage from the South China Sea appears to show a Chinese ship laying underwater cables between outposts in the disputed Paracel Islands. China has already

established military outposts on the Paracel Islands and the Spratly islands – two disputed archipelagos in the region and experts fear the cables will strengthen Beijing’s ability to detect foreign ships.

Vessel-tracking software revealed the Chinese-flagged Tian Yi Hai Gong ship sailed to the Paracel Islands on May 28.

Detailed imagery appears to show the vessel laying cables between Tree Island, North Island and Woody Island – the largest of the Paracels.

Strategically, the ship continued to sail southwest on June 5 and visited three other key military outposts on Drummond Island, Yagong Island and Observation Bank.

James Kraska, a professor at the US Naval War College, claimed China may have been strengthening existing encrypted military communications between Chinese outposts.

Professor Kraska added China could also be plotting a Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS) to track submarines.

He said: “The other thing that they could be doing is that they’ve got a SOSUS-type of network, an underwater sound surveillance system, to listen for adversary submarines.

“So it could be passive listening for surface ships or submarines coming into the area.”

Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, a Washington-based think tank, said a tracking device between Woody Island and Hainan Island would be an ideal location as it is home to the submarine fleet of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

He said: “A sonar system would be important north of Woody Island because the PLAN’s South Sea Fleet submarine base is on Hainan Island at Yulin.”

According to Mr Clark, the military base in Yulin is already complete with underground tunnels and nuclear submarines.

He added: “A seabed sonar between Woody Island and Hainan Island would help find US submarines that might be coming to spy on the base or its submarines in peacetime, or that may attack PLAN submarines during wartime.”

Tensions between the China and the US continue to soar in the South China Sea.

Just last week, China accused Washington of violating international law during a routine freedom of navigation operation – something the US denies.

The US regularly conducts freedom of navigation operations in line with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

China’s sovereignty over the South China Sea is disputed by claims from neighbouring Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Under international law, a large part of the South China Sea comes under Vietnamese sovereignty.

However, Beijing disagrees and says that the entire waterway up to the coasts of the Philippines, Malaysia and Taiwan belongs to China - a claim rejected by an international court of arbitration in 2016.

The contested South China Sea is also one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world and is crucial to global trade.

A 2015 US Department of Defense report found an estimated \$5.3trillion (£4million) worth of goods are shuttled through the waterways every year.

Source: [express.co.uk](https://www.express.co.uk); 09 June 2020

INDIAN NAVY COMMENCES EVACUATION OF CITIZENS FROM ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN - “SAMUDRA SETU”

Indian Navy had launched Operation Samudra Setu to repatriate Indian citizens commencing 08 May 2020. Indian Naval ships Jalashwa and Magar have already evacuated 2874 personnel from Maldives and Sri Lanka to ports of Kochi and Tuticorin.

In the next phase of Samudra Setu, Indian Naval Ship Shardul will evacuate Indian citizens on 08 June 2020 from the port of Bandar Abbas, Islamic Republic of Iran, to Porbandar, Gujarat. The Indian Mission in Islamic Republic of Iran is preparing a list of Indian citizens to be evacuated and will facilitate their embarkation after requisite medical screening.

COVID-related social distancing norms have been catered onboard INS Shardul and the ship has been specially provisioned for the evacuation operation, including embarkation of additional medical staff, doctors, hygienists, nutritionists, medical stores, rations, personal protective equipment, face-masks, lifesaving gear etc. In addition to authorised medical outfit, medical equipment specific to dealing with COVID-19 including innovative products developed by the Indian Navy during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis is also being carried onboard.

The evacuated personnel would be provided the basic amenities and medical facilities whilst undertaking the sea-passage to Porbandar. Special isolation compartments have also been earmarked for any contingencies. In view of the unique challenges associated with COVID-19 including asymptomatic carriers, stringent protocols are being stipulated during the passage.

After disembarkation at Porbandar, the evacuated personnel will be entrusted to the care of State authorities.

Source: pib.gov.in; 08 June 2020

JAPAN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO MARITIME STABILITY IN THE BAY OF BENGAL

- Michael van Ginkel, Stable Seas

Japan has a vested interest in contributing to regional maritime stability in the Bay of Bengal. It holds important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) that open commercial opportunities by increasing connectivity with littoral countries. Japan has more actively contributed to the maritime stability and security efforts of countries like India, Myanmar and Bangladesh in its from isolationism to internationalism. While Japan's expanding role in the Indo-Pacific has , the potential for mutual economic gains has encouraged Japan to continue increasing its maritime presence in the Bay of Bengal.

Increasing regional stability in the Bay of Bengal has significant economic benefits for Japan as it imports almost of its foreign oil from Middle Eastern countries. Protecting its energy shipments through the SLOC in the Bay of Bengal remains imperative for Japan as it attempts to . Non-traditional threats of piracy, armed robbery and maritime terrorism threaten the security of these commercial shipping lanes.

Increasing connectivity with the rapidly developing economies of littoral countries provides Japan with many commercial opportunities. Myanmar experienced an average annual GDP growth of from 2012 to 2016, over twice the of 2.7 per cent. Highlighted in the maritime security report, low coastal welfare, poor rule of law and under-developed blue economies in littoral countries diminishes the region's economic potential and also acts as a catalyst for illicit activity, which further detracts from economic output. By contributing to coastal infrastructure and maritime law enforcement efforts, Japan has a positive impact on the region's maritime stability and economic resilience.

Japan's support of coastal infrastructure projects around the Bay of Bengal improves maritime security. Japan relies heavily on the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the country's overseas aid agency, to fund local maritime infrastructure projects. On South Andaman Island, JICA is working with India to create a 15 megawatt and has expressed interest in follow-up projects. The power plant and associated infrastructure create a functioning forward base from which India can project its maritime surveillance around the Strait of Malacca.

Complemented by assets like India's Boeing P-8s, the patrols launched from the islands will enhance India's awareness in the maritime domain and non-traditional maritime threats like smuggling, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU), mixed migration and trafficking.

JICA also provided funding for Bangladesh's and to Myanmar's . These ports contribute to coastal stability by increasing national revenue and providing local economic opportunities, reducing incentives for coastal communities to engage in illicit activities to sustain themselves. In playing a supporting role in ongoing coastal infrastructure projects and security initiatives, Japan is building strong relationships with local stakeholders while contributing to regional maritime stability.

Japan helps build up the maritime capacity of littoral countries in the Bay of Bengal by enhancing maritime law enforcement training and donating law enforcement vessels. In January 2020, the Japanese and Indian coast guards worked together in the , the 18th installation of the Japan–India joint exercise. The exercises allow Japan to share skillsets and law enforcement protocols while increasing interoperability in coordinating operations between Japan and India.

In the case of Bangladesh, Japan the country's ability to contend with non-traditional threats by providing a JICA grant to obtain 20 rescue boats. Both the skillsets and assets Japan has provided for littoral countries build capacity to counter maritime security threats in the region.

Although Japan's primary form of contribution to Bay of Bengal stability takes the form of capacity building and infrastructure projects, the country also uses Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) vessels to bolster maritime security and signal its regional commitment. MSDF to the Indian Ocean between 2001 and 2008 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In 2017 and 2018, Japan continued to show its commitment to protecting the vital SLOC running through the Bay of Bengal by deploying its largest warship — the JS Kaga helicopter carrier — to the region where it also conducted port visits in India and Sri Lanka.

The maritime security report identifies several areas of focus in the Bay of Bengal that require attention in order to improve underlying drivers of regional maritime insecurity, including IUU fishing, piracy and armed robbery, and coastal welfare. Capacity-building support and resource contributions from extra-regional states like Japan enhance existing maritime stability initiatives.

The positive reception to Japan in the Bay of Bengal has even led to between Japan and India, the region's most powerful littoral country, on an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement which would allow Japan to access Indian naval facilities in the Andaman and and India to use the Japanese naval facilities in Djibouti and in Japanese territory. Such a cooperative measure has the potential to build further trust between the two nations, increase interoperability during joint operations and allow for a more sustained overseas Japanese presence.

By working with nations to not only monitor and patrol against non-traditional security threats but also cooperatively address drivers of illicit maritime activity, Japan is actively contributing to the region's security and prosperity.

Michael van Ginkel is a research assistant at Stable Seas, a program of the One Earth Future foundation, based in Colorado. This article is drawn from a longer paper published on Stable Seas.

Source: pinevillevoice.com; 13 June 2020

MARITIME FORCES

CHINA'S GLOBAL NAVY EYEING SEA CONTROL BY 2030, SUPERIORITY BY 2049

- Captain James E. Fanell (Retd)

In June 2018, I stood aboard the fantail of the PLA Navy guided missile frigate Binzhou in port Kiel, Germany—it was never clearer to me than at that moment that Beijing has the national will to dominate the seas.

Binzhou had been at sea for two and a half months, patrolling the waters of the Gulf of Aden, as part of China's anti-piracy naval task force. Moored among German, British and United States warships, Binzhou stood out with its immaculate appearance. Staff, ship's officers and crew exuded confidence and preparedness to get underway...to sea where they looked like they belonged. This contrasted sharply with my recollections from a 2004 visit aboard the destroyer Luhu in Qingdao, as well as many subsequent visits aboard Chinese warships over the course of the next 15 years.

The visit to the Binzhou, in that port halfway around the world from China, crystallized for me that in the short space of a decade and a half I had witnessed the transformation of the PLA Navy from a timid near-seas assembly of ships into a global naval force where their ships and crews were as comfortable, confident and capable mariners as were their German, British, American and Indian counterparts.

A half decade ago the conventional wisdom held that the PRC's leaders were only focused on "domestic concerns" of regime survival. We were wrong. In hindsight it's now clear the PRC was building a naval force intended to sail and eventually dominate the seven seas.

After 20 years of transformation, the PLA Navy operates around the world from the Baltic to the South Pacific and from the Arctic to the Antarctic. China's naval shipbuilding continues unabated in order to support the PLA Navy's expanding set of missions to fulfill the "China Dream" of national rejuvenation and restoration.

In 2015, I assessed there would be "a massive expansion in the size of the PLA Navy" for the period of 2015 to 2030. While that assessment essentially remains on track, there is one impediment in the strategic environment that could stymie the PRC's maritime strategy—the Donald Trump administration. The current administration has challenged 40 years' worth of assumptions about how to deal with the PRC. It's definitive decision to treat the PRC as a strategic competitor, especially if combined with the deepening partnerships with our allies, may be the only chance to stop the PRC from becoming the dominant global military and naval power over the course of the next three decades.

The PRC's naval expansion is already well advanced. Since 2008, the PLA Navy has dispatched 35 naval escort task forces through the Indian Ocean and into the Gulf of Aden, and PLA Navy ships have visited over 60 nations. According to the US Navy War College China Maritime Studies Institute, these naval escort task force deployments have provided the PLA Navy with “irreplaceable naval training” and catalyzed “the development of naval skill sets often taken for granted but absolutely critical for long-distance operations”.

In the summer of 2018, the PLA Daily announced the Chinese Navy is no longer worried about warship shortages. Not only were more warships built, but the qualities have also been improved, transforming the Chinese Navy from a green-water navy into a robust blue-water navy. They aren't building those ships to stay in port, or even to stay in East Asia. They have been in India's backyard for over a decade.

Perhaps no platform has received more attention than the PLA Navy's aircraft carrier program. A decade ago, Chinese naval planners were aware of “the problem of a relatively small aggregate tonnage of naval vessels must be resolved, in order to increase the navy's capability to confront naval hegemonies in the world”.

As of today, the PLA Navy has two operational aircraft carriers and a third under construction. Just how many aircraft carriers the PRC will build is a topic of great discussion in the PRC press. Given the PRC's penchant for being the “biggest” or “number one”, I believe the PRC is determined to build more carriers than the US, despite their assertions of needing just six. I expect at least ten by 2049. And with this number, the people of India should expect to see PLA Navy aircraft carrier strike groups operating in the Indian Ocean in the next 1-3 years.

Another facet is the dramatic expansion of the PLA Marine Corps to 100,000 strong personnel—a tenfold increase of its Marine Corps of just a few years ago. Reporting indicates some of these new PLA Marine Corps forces will be dispatched to Gwadar, Pakistan or its new PLA Navy base in Djibouti. The growth of PLA Marine Corps personnel is necessary to keep up with the increasing number of high-end, large amphibious warships that China has acquired and is intent on building over the near term. For instance, the PLA Navy has 59 amphibious warships, including the large, modern Yuzhao-class Type 071 amphibious transport docks (LPD), that are perfectly fitted for an amphibious island campaign as they “can carry up to four of the new air cushion landing craft”, as well as “four or more helicopters, armored vehicles, and troops”.

Not content with the Yuzhao, China started building a new generation of Yushen-class Type 075 landing helicopter (LHA) amphibious assault vessels that will strengthen the Navy as it plays a more dominant role in projecting the PRC's power overseas. Indian Naval officers can expect to see PLA Navy and Marine Corp expeditionary strike groups patrolling in the Indian Ocean within this decade.

Regarding PLA Navy submarines, between 2006 and 2013, PLA Navy submarine operations expanded into the South China and Philippine Seas and became a normalized pattern of activity. Since 2013, PLA Navy submarines have conducted regular deployments into the Indian Ocean and can be expected to be the eyes and ears for future PLA Navy aircraft carrier and expeditionary strike group operations into the Indian Ocean.

As for the number of PLA Navy submarines that can be expected in the future, given the expected increased production from a new production facility in Huludao, the PRC may be able to launch up to two SSNs and one SSBN annually, meaning the PLA Navy could have as many as 24 SSNs and 14 SSBNs by 2030. These are SSBNs that most assuredly will have missiles pointed at the United States, but also India. And while some may scoff at this estimate, recall as late as a decade ago similar doubts existed for Chinese destroyer production.

As a result of the past 20-year trajectory in PRC naval construction, the PRC's expressed desire and ability to continue to increase its spending on naval shipbuilding, the cost advantages its shipbuilding industry enjoys compared to foreign naval shipyards, and Chinese shipbuilders continued trend of indigenous technical mastery of complex designs and systems integration, I assess the PLA Navy will surpass the combined number of US Navy and Indian Navy warships as early as 2030.

Specifically, I assess that the PLA Navy by 2030 will consist of a surface force of over 450 ships and a submarine force approaching 110 submarines, an almost 10% increase from my 2015 estimate. It may still be a low estimate. The most notable feature of our China assessments is that all of our misjudgements have been in the same direction—underestimating China's rise in military aggressiveness and capabilities—perfectly fitting the definition of systematic error. The most accurate predictions of the PLA Navy are derived from an in-depth and consistent observation of what the PLA Navy is actually building and where their ships and submarines are actually operating.

So then, what does the future hold for the PLA Navy in the far seas? All indicators point to a global naval presence, first to the Indian Ocean, and then beyond. A future similar to what the world witnessed in the South and East China Seas over the past decade as PLA Navy forces bullied and intimidated weaker nations to comply with Beijing's dictates.

Given the PLA Navy's operational and naval construction trajectory, the PRC's overall economic strength, the PLA Navy's decade long experience operating in the far seas, and its established track record of intimidating neighbours to forfeit their coastal state rights to China, we can also assess the PRC is on track to be able to achieve sea control in the global maritime commons as early as 2030, and potentially even sea superiority by 2049, and it will use its power for the expansion of China's interests at the expense of others. A global PLA Navy will increasingly threaten US, India and allied interests abroad, increasing, not decreasing the risk of major power war.

It is popular to say that conflict with China is not inevitable. Of course, it's not. However, the likelihood of conflict will not be wished away by platitudes and more unconstrained engagement. The best option to avert future conflict is for the US and India to adopt a combined effort to significantly enhance our whole of government approach to strengthen and integrate our military capabilities to confront the PRC's bad behaviour, especially at sea.

Source: [sundayguardianlive.com](https://www.sundayguardianlive.com); 13 June 2020

PAROCHIALISM, SEABLINDNESS IN COVID BUDGET CUTS' ERA: LONG TERM IMPACT FOR COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL POWER

- Capt D K Sharma

Acquiring a third aircraft carrier is a major decision. It is no surprise then that it will be taken after a much-needed deliberation of the Services as well as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

A strong Army well supported by an equally dynamic Air Force, hence are a must. The important questions that two questions that, however, need to be asked are:

- Is the Naval warfare being undertaken only for the sake of naval warfare?
- For a country like India which is dependent on the sea for over 97% of its trade including fuel and critical war-fighting supplies, without the Navy being strong, can the Army and Air Force every be strong?

Let us not forget, the Indian Navy “has seen action only twice, 1965 and 1971, on the sidelines of the land operations and the aircraft carrier had a minimum role”. If fact, let us face it, the Navy has seen classic naval action only in 1971. This one was a sure shot victory which also surprised its planners. The Navy, and especially INS Vikrant, played an extremely important role in this victory. Let us not forget that in 1965, thanks to political directions, the involvement of the Navy was kept to the minimum. In fact, the Indian Navy was not allowed to operate beyond the North of Okha.

Maritime domain is crucial, a fact that planners knew rather well in 1971. Lt Gen Jacob, in his memoirs of the 1971 war, talks about his briefing – at Fort William – on the draft Operation Instruction by Gen Manekshaw and the then Director of Military Operations (DMO), Maj Gen KK Singh, identified the ports of Khulna and Chittagong as “prime objective”. He writes, “At the meeting, held in the operations room, Manekshaw, KK Singh, Arora, and I were present. Sam Manekshaw let his DMO do all the talking. KK Singh spelt out the objectives, maintaining that if we captured Khulna and Chittagong, what he termed the entry ports, the war would come to an end”. Admittedly, the taking of the ports was initially planned to be an army operation and Gen Jacob was “flabbergasted”. He recommended that “we should utilise our naval superiority and have an effective naval blockade in place.”

The analysis of the war in the official history (“The Story of the Pakistan Navy”) of the Pakistan Navy acknowledges that “The success of Pakistan’s counter-plans hinged largely on reinforcements and resupply of the eastern theatre of war by the sea which could only be accomplished by a strong Navy capable of breaking India’s naval blockade”. If the Indian Navy had not effectively stymied this plan, Pakistan was quite hopeful of a ‘stalemate’ (which they could have claimed as a victory for the domestic audience, much like had been done just a few years earlier in 1965).

An argument is being made, today, that an aircraft carrier may not be useful in “future war scenarios (which) will be short and swift”. Interestingly, Pakistan Navy history

laments that it was this very argument of the (ir) relevance of a navy in a ‘sharp short war’ that led to their downfall in 1971! Plans for a two-flotilla Navy (one each based in the two wings) in had been put up to the Pakistan Government as early as 1949. The plans “unfortunately had become the victim of seemingly endless bureaucratic indifference and of vague concepts such as “the defence of East Pakistan lies in the West” and “a short, sharp war” which stood in the way of the Pakistan Navy’s expansion and re-organisation from the early fifties. The Navy continued to be accorded a lower priority, and the fleet was allowed to degenerate into a shrinking force quite incapable of taking on the task of providing protection to the sea lines of communication between the two wings”.

As far as the Indian Naval viewpoint is concerned, its history (‘Transition to Triumph’) records that “It was correctly foreseen that by themselves the ships of the Eastern Fleet were too few and too slow to enforce contraband control and that help would be needed from Vikrant’s aircraft. But the extraordinary extent to which Vikrant’s aircraft actually succeeded in assisting ships in contraband control and apprehending merchant ships, over and above their airstrikes against East Pakistan, came to be fully realised only after the war. A new role had crystallised for an aircraft carrier in limited war”.

Terming the naval, and specifically the Aircraft Carrier, involvement in the 1971 war as ‘peripheral’ is therefore not only against all known facts of but also displays an incorrect understanding of our military history and strategy. Close to a lakh Pakistani soldiers would possibly not have surrendered unless they had lost their ‘will to fight’. The Indian Navy – the silent service – ensured this by enforcing a blockade where no reinforcements were forthcoming, no supplies could be provided and no escape route was possible. Without the Carrier, the proponents of ‘alternate scenario’ of history can possibly at best come up with a stalemate followed by international intervention.

Another dangerous shibboleth that needs to be discarded is regarding the ability of the Air Force – any Air Force, not just the Indian – being able to provide effective air cover at sea. It is all very well to state that this would be undertaken to score inter-service brownie points in peacetime debates. Once again, military history shows otherwise. In 1971 war itself, the carrier-borne aircraft of INS Vikrant repeatedly attacked the Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar airfields on request of AOC-in-C Eastern Command (the Indian Air Force Commander in the East).

Before concluding – and moving away from military history – a few quick counterpoints to a recent article in the media which talked about a third aircraft carrier may be in order.

Firstly, it is a very narrow interpretation to state that China went in for an aircraft carrier only after building its army. This may have been Hobson’s choice for China. Was the option of a carrier ever really available to them? They had to go for a second-hand Russian carrier to learn the nuances before they could think of embarking on an ambitious carrier building program. Aircraft carrier operations take years to master even if a ship is available or can be built. Further, China’s 2015 defence white paper, ‘China’s Military Strategy’, explicitly states that “The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned”. Even as China is reducing its land forces and focusing on the sea, it is being propounded that India does the exact opposite.

Secondly, forgoing an aircraft carrier due to budgetary constraints is counterproductive. Aircraft carriers are certainly expensive, but even if we ignore the military power it bestows, purely from an economic viewpoint an indigenously constructed carrier can effectively galvanise the economy given a large number of industries and MSMEs involved in the supply chain. The money whilst going out of the defence kitty – goes back into reviving the national economy. Numerous examples can be cited of countries GDP being impacted solely by the shipbuilding industry – which is considered a strategic ‘mother industry’.

Thirdly, saying that aircraft carriers are required only for global powers is debatable. India had initiated procurement of INS Vikrant within a few years of Independence. The ‘Plans Paper’ giving the blueprint for the Indian Navy written in 1948 itself saw the need for three aircraft carriers. However, even if we admit that it is, indeed, true that India would require a carrier only when it becomes a major power; it must be pointed out that ships – especially carriers – cannot be built overnight. India had announced the plan to replace its ageing British-built carriers in 1989, work on the indigenous design began in 1999, and the keel of the first indigenous aircraft carrier was laid only in February 2009. Planning for the future requires foresight. Can we today say what our global posture or military requirements would be in 2035? Would just stopping cross border infiltrations continue to be our “priority”? If not, then we need to think big and think strategically while formulating our current plans.

Parochialism and Sea Blindness in an era of COVID budget cuts can have a long term impact on the Comprehensive National Power.

(The author is Indian Navy Veteran. He was the Spokesperson of Indian Navy at Ministry of Defence. Views expressed are personal.)

Source: financialexpress.com; 13 June 2020

FRENCH NAVY LHD ‘TONNERRE’ HEADS FOR THE GULF OF GUINEA

- Martin

In addition to a reinforced medical team, three detachments (amphibious detachment, naval infantry and air detachment) reinforce the Tonnerre’s capabilities for this operation in the Gulf of Guinea.

With nearly 270 sailors on board, the LHD will ensure the regular presence of a French vessel in the Gulf of Guinea, an area marked by numerous maritime security issues and where nearly 80,000 French nationals live ashore.

In addition, the Tonnerre will continue its cooperation with the navies of the region in support of the Yaoundé process by participating in joint patrols. Its presence will also provide an opportunity to conduct training with the French forces stationed in the area.

Finally, the 152nd mandate of Operation Corymbe comes in the particular context of the Covid-19 health crisis, which requires the utmost vigilance. Strict prevention and organisation measures have been taken on board in order to contain any risk of contamination on land, protect the health of the crew and guarantee the availability of the vessel. Stopovers will be limited to what is strictly necessary (refuelling) and will be carried out avoiding any contact. Reinforcements from the Armed Forces Health Service (SSA) have been taken on board to strengthen the capacity to detect, treat and even evacuate any seamen presenting suspicious symptoms.

About operation Corymbe

Since 1990, France has been deploying one or two vessels on an almost permanent basis on the Corymbe mission in the Gulf of Guinea. The mission has two major objectives: to be in a position to provide possible protection for French nationals in the area in the event of a crisis and to contribute to the reduction of maritime insecurity, in particular by helping to strengthen the capacities of the navies bordering the Gulf and the centres of the structure resulting from the Yaoundé process. The deployment of French vessels on the Corymbe mission completes the French presence in West Africa (Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal) and participates in the maritime component of the operational cooperation implemented regionally by these forces.

Source: navalnews.com; 12 June 2020

MISSION SAGAR: INS KESARI RETURNS TO PORT LOUIS, MAURITIUS

- Justin Katz

As part of Mission Sagar, Indian Naval Ship Kesari returned to Port Louis, Mauritius, on 14 June 2020, to embark the Indian Navy Medical Team, which was disembarked during her last visit to Port Louis on 23 May 2020. The 14-member medical team comprising specialist doctors and paramedics was disembarked at Port Louis with an aim to assist in management of COVID-19 pandemic, share expertise to help contain the spread of the disease and minimize risk to life.

During their deployment at Port Louis, the team visited various healthcare facilities including Regional Hospitals, Flu Clinics, ENT Hospital (the designated COVID Hospital in Mauritius), Quarantine Centre, Central Health Laboratory (the COVID testing facility in Mauritius) and the SAMU (Emergency Medical Services) Headquarters cum Control Centre located at Victoria Hospital. The team interacted with healthcare warriors at all levels and held meaningful discussions towards sharing best practices on COVID-19 management. Demonstrations and workshops on important topics such as Hand Hygiene, Screening and Triage, Disinfection and PPE were conducted, and audience response during these sessions was highly encouraging. The team also shared PDF versions of two documents 'Guide to Contain and Combat COVID-19' and 'Manual on Training of Health Care Workers' for future reference by

the healthcare workers. Mr. Janesh Kain, Deputy High Commissioner also interacted with the Indian Navy Medical Team prior to their embarkation onboard INS Kesari.

‘Mission Sagar’, is in line with India’s role as the first responder in the region and builds on the excellent relations existing between the two countries to battle the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant difficulties. The deployment is in consonance with the Prime Minister’s vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region ‘SAGAR’ and highlights the importance accorded by India to relations with the countries of the IOR. The operation is being progressed in close coordination with the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs, and other agencies of the Government of India.

Source: pib.gov.in; 14 June 2020

IF THE US NAVY ISN’T CAREFUL, ITS NEW UNMANNED TANKER DRONE COULD FACE A 3- YEAR DELAY

- David B Larter

WASHINGTON — The US Navy could face a three-year delay in testing of the MQ-25 Stingray carrier-based tanking drone if it doesn’t get its designated test ships through the required modernizations on time, a possibility the Navy said was remote.

Two carriers — Carl Vinson and George H.W. Bush — have limited windows to complete the installation of unmanned aircraft control stations, and if operational commitments intervene it could create significant issues for the program, according to Navy officials and a government watchdog report.

“Program officials stated that, among other things, the Navy’s potential inability to maintain its schedule commitments could require modifications to the contract that would impact the fixed-price terms,” the Government Accountability Office reported. “Specifically, the Navy faces limited flexibility to install MQ-25 control centers on aircraft carriers.

“If the Navy misses any of its planned installation windows, the program would have to extend MQ-25 development testing by up to 3 years. According to officials, such a delay could necessitate a delay to initial capability and result in a cost increase.”

Navy officials say a three-year delay is “extremely unlikely,” however the Navy has struggled in recent years to balance its modernization schedules with operational commitments, a problem that its “Optimized Fleet Response Plan” deployment rotation scheme was supposed to address. Ultimately, a delay would further push back the Navy’s ability to extend its carrier air wing’s range through unmanned tanking, critical to keeping the service’s powerful strike arm relevant against long-range guided munitions.

The Navy believes it can avoid a schedule delay and is working toward keeping the program on track, said Jamie Cosgrove, a spokesperson for Naval Air Systems Command.

“The Navy is still planning to achieve [initial operating capability] in 2024,” Cosgrove said. “A three-year extension of development testing and a delay to IOC is extremely unlikely and represents improbable scenarios where both aircraft carriers currently designated to support MQ-25 testing are unavailable due to operational requirements, or the program misses the planned periods to install the MQ-25 test equipment on those two carriers.

“Should either of these unlikely scenarios occur, the program will reevaluate the schedule and determine how to best mitigate schedule impacts to deliver the mission-critical MQ-25 to the Fleet ASAP.”

Unmanned control

The specific alternations needed to operate the MQ-25 Stingray include special control and network equipment, Cosgrove said.

The program of record is the Unmanned Carrier Aviation Mission Control System and installing it will include setting up a control room known as the Unmanned Aviation Warfare Center on the ship. The equipment in the UAWC will include control stations, network interfaces and routing equipment, commanding and control equipment and network infrastructure, Consgrove said.

The Navy awarded Boeing an \$805 million contract to build the first four MQ-25 aircraft, with options for three additional aircraft. In April, the Navy announced it had exercised the option to the tune of \$84.7 million, bringing the total number of Stingrays under contract to 7.

Ultimately the Navy plans to buy 69 additional aircraft as part of the its full production run, according to the GAO report.

The Navy’s former air boss Vice Adm. Mike Shoemaker told USNI Proceedings in a 2017 interview that the MQ-25 would extend the carrier air wing’s range by up to 400 miles.

Juggling maintenance

The Navy has struggled to maintain its carrier schedules in recent years as the problems have arisen with carriers during their availabilities. For example, last year, the carrier Abraham Lincoln was extended on its deployment because its relief, the carrier Harry S Truman, was stuck in maintenance to repair unforeseen issues.

That can throw a monkey wrench into the Navy’s overstretched deployment rotation scheme, meaning that other carriers have their deployments extended while still others have their maintenance availabilities truncated to play catch up. But that can lead to even more problems down the road with differed maintenance and worn-out equipment that ultimately adds up to a significant readiness hole that is tough to dig out from.

All of this is exacerbated by crushing demands from Combatant Commanders for Navy forces overseas, which ultimately is driving the vicious cycle.

That means the Navy will have to manage the risk of impacting the Vinson and Bush’s upcoming maintenance availabilities to not set back the MQ-25 development cycle.

Source: defensenews.com; 11 June 2020

RUSSIA'S ADMIRAL GORSHKOV FRIGATE SET FOR ELECTRONIC WARFARE SYSTEMS UPGRADE

- Martin Manaranche

The electronics will be updated for Tsirkon missile. Two warships of the project will test the equipment, the Izvestia daily writes.

Defense Ministry sources said all project 22350 frigates would be upgraded if test operation is successful. New warships will be built according to the operational experience of the weapons, life support and controls.

The first warships of major series usually differ from subsequent ones. The practice existed yet in Soviet times, former Navy Chief-of-Staff Admiral Valentin Selivanov said.

“There is the same situation in other countries with big shipbuilding programs. The construction of a series takes many years. The operational experience accumulates during the time, new materials, communications and arms appear. The Admiral Gorshkov first frigate of the project was built for a long time. It was laid in 2006. Russian shipbuilders have made a big step forward since then. Warships operate for 30-40 years and adjustments are necessary,”

The upgrade does not call to remake the whole project, as design bureaus envisage a reserve for large-scale work, Selivanov said. The Admiral Gorshkov is actively operating and drawbacks were exposed, expert Dmitry Boltenev said. “They checked the running qualities, arms and life support and exposed weak places. Conclusions will be made,” he said.

A lot of material has accumulated for analysis. The frigate made a round-the-world voyage in 2019. It lasted 175 days and the warship sailed over 40 thousand nautical miles (close to 74 thousand km). It called at ports of Sri Lanka, China, Ecuador, Cuba and other countries. It sailed the Suez and Panama Canals and crossed the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The navigation tested equipment and arms in various climates.

In February 2020, the Admiral Gorshkov was the first surface warship to fire Tsirkon latest hypersonic missile from the Barents Sea. It flew over 500 km and precisely hit the ground target at a range in Northern Urals.

The upgrade by modern requirements of big antisubmarine ships of project 1155 offers an example. They were built to fight submarines, but could not strike at sea and ground targets. The drawback is rectified. The Marshal Shaposhnikov is the first warship to get universal vertical launchers for Kalibr cruise missiles.

The Navy currently operates one frigate of project 22350. The Admiral Kasatonov second one is undergoing acceptance trials. It is likely to join the Navy by the end of the year.

The third and fourth frigates — the Admiral Golovko and the Admiral Isakov have to become operation in two years. Two more warships of the project have been laid.

Besides Kalibr missiles, the frigates are armed with Poliment-Redut air defense which can simultaneously attack 16 targets. It intercepts airplanes, helicopters, and cruise missiles. There are also two Palash anti-aircraft artillery guns. A-192M 130mm artillery gun can destroy sea and ground targets, the Izvestia said.

Source: navalnews.com; 08 June 2020

WHAT CHINA'S 'D-DAY' INVASION OF TAIWAN WOULD LOOK LIKE

- Keoni Everington

TAIPEI (Taiwan News) — A day after the 76th anniversary of the Normandy landings of WWII, Forbes published an article outlining the armada that China has already amassed for a potential future invasion of Taiwan.

In the article, titled "If China Invades Taiwan, This Is What The Fleet Could Look Like," H.I. Sutton, a defense analyst and expert on underwater warfare and submarine technology, breaks down the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) flotilla that has been assembled over the years for a future invasion of Taiwan. In the analysis, Sutton itemizes the major weapons in China's war chest that would be employed during an amphibious assault on Taiwan's shores.

Sutton starts off by pointing out that unlike a quarter-century ago during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, China now has two aircraft carriers, the Liaoning and Shandong, both of which are reportedly going to be deployed in waters near Taiwan as part of its war games in August. The carriers, which are based on the same Soviet template, are escorted by China's Type 052C destroyers fitted with Aegis-type radars and technology.

The analyst asserted that China's modern destroyers and frigates are now "well-defended enough" to be able to circle to Taiwan's Pacific side. He claimed that China's submarines, the most numerous in the world, can also now circle to waters off Taiwan's east coast, making it more difficult for the Taiwan Navy to outflank a would-be invasion task force.

He wrote that the two carriers would likely sit far out of harm's way, but unlike previous wars that involved flattops, their locations would likely be known at all times due to Open-source Intelligence (OSINT) via commercially available satellites. Even before such an invasion fleet left port, preparations on land via OSINT would be easily observable, with Taiwan being able to see indications 90 days, minimum, in advance of the invasion, according to Ian Easton, a research fellow at the Project 2049 Institute.

Sutton stated that the workhorse of an invasion would be Type 071 Yuzhao class Landing Platform Docks (LPDs), which can launch hovercraft and helicopters to ferry troops to the shore from a much greater distance than landing craft seen in previous wars, such as WWII. These LPDS would be supported by Type-075 assault carriers, which are similar in design and size to U.S. Navy Wasp-class and America-class amphibious assault ships.

The assault carriers will mainly house helicopters, but could potentially carry hovercraft as well. Sutton suggests that the assault carriers could feature Harbin Z-20 helicopters, which some Western observers have dubbed the "Copyhawk" due to its suspiciously similar appearance to the Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk.

Rather than marines, Sutton asserts that the main contingent of shock troops hitting the beaches would be soldiers from the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) amphibious assault brigades. He said they would most likely be favored because of their stock of amphibious tanks and troop carriers.

He said that even main battle tanks would likely be a part of the first wave. Subsequent waves could continuously be ferried to the beachhead by the Soviet-designed Zubr-class of air-cushioned landing craft (LCAC).

However, Sutton cites military analyst B.A. Friedman as saying that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would be far more difficult than the D-Day invasion: "Taking Taiwan would be one of the most difficult amphibious operations in history, if not the most difficult. Taiwan has had decades to prepare. Every landing spot is planned and the defensive plans are dialed in." Friedman believes that in theory, China has the inventory in place to launch an invasion, but he questions whether the PLA has the knowledge and willpower to pull off such a high-risk operation.

Unlike the D-Day invasion, given modern satellite technology and social media, China would not have the element of surprise, giving Taiwan plenty of time to prepare its defenses. In addition, current information technology would result in an attack that was essentially broadcast live to the world.

This could have propaganda advantages if the battle goes in China's favor. Any stiff resistance by Taiwanese forces, however, could cause a major loss of face for the CCP regime.

As Sutton points out, the longer Taiwan is able to fend off invading communist troops, the more likely it is that major powers such as the U.S. and Japan would come to Taiwan's aid, possibly turning the tide of the war. Sutton closes by warning that although the U.S. fleet of submarines could threaten China's carriers, the PLAN has already amassed an armada that is "already overtaking many more established navies."

What Sutton left out was Taiwan's growing arsenal of anti-ship missiles such as the Hsiung Feng II, Hsiung Feng III, and Block II AGM-84L Harpoons. It also has a burgeoning arsenal of Sky Bow, Sky Sword, Patriot, and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.

Source: taiwannews.com; 08 June 2020

SHIPPING, PORTS AND OCEAN ECONOMY

DAEWOO TO BUILD TWO LNG TANKERS FOR RUSSIAN ENERGY GIANT NOVATEK

South Korea's shipyard Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (DSME) has received an order from Russian gas producer Novatek for the construction of two LNG tankers to operate in Kamchatka and Murmansk.

According to DSME, the two carriers with a capacity of 380,000 cubic meters of LNG (liquefied natural gas) each are expected to be built before the end of 2022. The value of the order is 901.3 billion won (\$748 million), the shipbuilder said, adding that an option for two more vessels is included in the contract.

The vessels, which will be deployed in Russia's Murmansk and Kamchatka, will play the role of intermediate stations. Their installation will allow for LNG to be transported much faster to Europe and Asia, and will significantly reduce the cost of cargo servicing.

"With the conclusion of this contract, our company was able to once again prove to the market our advanced technologies in the field of LNG. Due to the consequences of the coronavirus, some major projects were postponed, so this order will help the company gain stability," DSME said.

Novatek plans to build a 20 million ton LNG transshipment and storage complex in Murmansk Region in order to optimize logistics and transportation costs. It is also aiming to organize a LNG transshipment point in Kamchatka with a volume of 20 million tons per year. Both terminals are scheduled to be launched around 2022.

Source: [rt.com](https://www.rt.com); 12 June 2020

CHINESE FIRMS MAY HALT USE OF TANKERS THAT HAVE TRANSPORTED VENEZUELAN OIL: SOURCES

- Jonathan Saul and Devika Krishna Kumar

LONDON/NEW YORK (Reuters) - Chinese oil companies may soon decline to charter any tanker that has visited Venezuela in the past year to avoid disruption to operations if the United States blacklists more ships for trading with Caracas, four shipping sources told Reuters on Tuesday.

The U.S. government is seeking to choke Venezuelan oil exports to starve the government of socialist President Nicolas Maduro of its main source of revenue. Existing sanctions have cut Venezuelan exports sharply, but Maduro has held on.

Washington may tighten sanctions by adding dozens more tankers to an existing blacklist, U.S. sources told Reuters on Friday.

That has prompted Chinese oil firms to consider dropping the use of tankers that have called at Venezuelan ports at any time during the last 12 months, said the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue.

“There is a sense of growing risk now with such tankers,” one of the sources said.

Leading Chinese oil companies Unipet, PetroChina and CNPC could not immediately be reached for comment.

Unipet last year banned the use of vessels linked to Venezuelan oil exports, although it is unclear how strictly that was enforced. U.S. major Exxon Mobil Corp imposed a similar ban.

Oil companies and merchants worldwide - not just in China - are becoming more wary of vessels that have recently transported Venezuelan oil, sources said.

“Anything on the potential sanctions list will just become toxic,” a source at a top oil trading company said. “No one will touch it until it’s clear what the rules will be.”

Broker Clarksons Platou Securities estimated that 77 tankers had called at Venezuela’s main oil ports since December alone, more than 2% of the global fleet, and so were potentially at risk of sanctions.

Increased sanctions would have a knock-on effect on the rest of the oil tanker market as oil companies and merchants scramble to swap out sanctioned vessels for others. A decision late last year by the U.S. government to sanction two units of the Chinese tanker company COSCO caused freight rates to hit record highs and roiled global oil trade.

Source: [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com); 10 June 2020

TANKER DEMAND LOOKING TO RETURN TO NORMALCY SOON

- Nikos Roussanoglou

The tanker market has gone through some major shifts in demand and fundamentals in the past few months, as a result of the pandemic and its effect on crude oil demand.

However, as the contango plays which emanated from this, start to fade, a return to the market's fundamentals is bound to shift tanker demand to more normal plays.

In its latest weekly report, shipbroker Gibson said that “anyone who has worked in the tanker market for the last decade will be familiar with the story about the demise of old refineries in Europe in the face of stiff competition from newer, more efficient facilities in the East and the United States. Yet, in the last oil price crash (2014-2016), refineries in Europe had somewhat of a renaissance as lower prices boosted margins, and the story, which many product tanker owners used to beat the drum with investors, never fully materialised. Now, during the current price crash, the same old story has once again re-emerged – refinery rationalisation in Europe. But why, during this price crash, are analysts talking about the opposite outcome? Should this time really be any different?”

“Well, yes. The last oil price crash (2014-2016) was supply driven when OPEC and the United States engaged in a supply war. This price collapse has been demand driven. Looking ahead, it will be the evolution of demand, coupled with rising utilisation rates that will dictate global refining margins. In ordinary times, weaker margins might prompt renewed investment in plant upgrades, but given the scale of the financial shock across the energy space, the weakest refineries could finally throw in the towel. Many of these are in Europe (although not exclusively)”, said Gibson.

According to the shipbroker, “in the short term, there will be a delicate balance between regional refiners increasing runs in response to a rapidly evolving demand picture whilst also seeking to protect margins. To what level of utilisation refineries can sustain remains uncertain. Any increase in product prices in Europe will draw distillate cargoes from Middle East and United States, where stocks are at 10-year highs, keeping margins and utilisation under pressure”.

The shipbroker added that “looking forward, over the next 5 years planned refinery capacity additions exceed demand growth. East of Suez, refinery capacity is expected to increase by 4.6mbd, whereas in the West, it is expected to increase by just 1.7mbd, with additions in Africa and the US accounting for most of the new capacity. However, despite rising capacity in the West, utilisation is expected to grow just 700kbd by 2025 (from 2019 levels), versus growth of 4.1mbd in the East. Quite simply, even with pre-Covid-19 demand projections, there is not enough room for everyone. Indeed, a recent forecast by consultancy IHSMarkit suggests that European plants could lose 2mbd of capacity over the next 5 years. This may seem aggressive, but with the competitive pressure increasing, at least some capacity will have to close or be repurposed. Less sophisticated refineries on the US East Coast may also be at risk”.

Gibson concluded that “regardless of any potential rationalisation, Europe will remain a significant refining centre, with a large baseload of capacity to service local and export demand. Increasingly, however, it will find stronger competition both in domestic and overseas markets. Increased volumes of products from the East will support the tonne mile story, but this is likely to continue as an evolution, not a revolution”.

Source: hellenicshippingnews.com; 08 June 2020

SSAB RAAHE'S STEEL PLANT IS TESTING BIOGAS FROM GASUM AS A MARITIME TRANSPORT FUEL

SSAB, ESL Shipping and Gasum are working together to reduce the emissions arising in shipping SSAB's raw materials. Last year, SSAB and ESL Shipping introduced a new transport chain that, in comparison with its predecessor, nearly halved the carbon dioxide emissions originating in shipping SSAB's raw materials between Luleå, Oxelösund and Raahe. The improved transport chain brought into use ESL Shipping's new ships Viikki and Haaga which are fueled by liquefied natural gas (LNG) rather than conventional fuels. Now these companies are piloting the use of liquefied biogas (LBG) as a supplementary fuel to further replace fossil fuels.

In the test that kicked off today, M/S Viikki was fueled with LNG and one tanker load of liquefied biogas which was brought to SSAB Raahe from the Gasum Terminal in Pori.

"With this test, we aim to find out whether biogas could be used in small amounts for maritime transport to reduce emissions. The methane in biogas originates from biogenic material and so does not contain any fossil coal. This means the amount of biogas used in the test could further reduce the fossil carbon dioxide emissions originating in this transport chain by between 25% and 28%," says Harri Leppänen, Head of Environment, Health & Safety at SSAB.

Efforts toward removing fossil CO₂ emissions from the transport chain would require replacing all LNG with LBG and replacing the diesel fuel used to power the ship's engine with fossil-free biodiesel.

"Our company's key environmental goal for 2020 is testing biogas in our ships. We have been engaged in long-term environmental work together with SSAB for years, and now we are taking a new significant step towards fossil-free sea transport," says Mikki Koskinen, ESL Shipping's Managing Director.

"The test with ESL and SSAB is in line with our strategy to bring cleaner fuels to our customers. We are all the time increasing our biogas production and sourcing to meet growing demand of our customers. We are already in discussions with ESL about running vessels Viikki and Haaga on 100% LBG," says Jacob Granqvist, Sales Director maritime, Gasum.

SSAB wants to launch fossil-free steel on the market as the world's first steel company as early as 2026. The entire company is aiming to be fossil free by 2045. To achieve these targets, SSAB together with LKAB and Vattenfall has launched the HYBRIT initiative to eliminate fossil carbon dioxide emissions across the entire steel manufacturing value chain from mines to finished steel products. "However, for operations to be entirely fossil free, it is also necessary to strive to eliminate fossil fuels from shipping," Harri Leppänen continues.

More than 90% of carbon dioxide emissions at SSAB Raahe originate in ironmaking, where coal is used as a raw material in the reduction process. The HYBRIT initiative

aims to replace coal with hydrogen, which means emissions will be water vapor instead of carbon dioxide. Iron is made at SSAB Raahe using two blast furnaces, one of which will be decommissioned in about 2029, when half of the production will switch to electric arc furnace technology where hydrogen-reduced iron and recycled steel will be used as raw materials. This transition will cut the plant's emissions by about 40%. The other blast furnace will also be replaced by an electric arc furnace by 2040, which will reduce the plant's fossil carbon dioxide emissions to zero if shipping can be operated without fossil fuels.

The energy company Gasum is a Nordic gas sector and energy market expert. Gasum offers cleaner energy and energy market expert services for industry and for combined heat and power production as well as cleaner fuel solutions for road and maritime transport. The company helps its customers to reduce their own carbon footprint as well as that of their customers. Together with its partners, Gasum promotes development towards a carbon-neutral future on land and at sea. The Gasum Group has around 350 employees in Finland, Norway and Sweden. The company's revenue totaled €1,128 million in 2019. Gasum is owned by the State of Finland.

Source: portnews.ru; 13 June 2020

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IS ADVANCING OCEAN EXPLORATION

- Mary B. Neumayr and Kelvin K. Droegemeier

America's oceans, coastal waters, and Great Lakes are national treasures, providing beauty and recreation, along with valuable resources that enhance our health, security, and economic prosperity. America's oceans and coastlines contribute greatly to America's economy, supporting 154,000 ocean-dependent businesses, \$373 billion of economic activity annually, 2.3 million jobs, and \$162 billion in wages.

Advancing understanding of our oceans and coastlines has been a top priority for President Trump, particularly as it relates to further mapping the United States Exclusive Economic Zone (U.S. EEZ) –an area surrounding the United States that is larger than the areas of all fifty states combined. The U.S. EEZ contains a vast amount of natural resources, such as critical minerals, energy, and marine-derived pharmaceutical compounds, and is home to countless ecosystems on which the health and productivity of the oceans depend.

Only 40 percent of the EEZ has been mapped, and considerably less has been fully explored and studied to identify the natural resources that could benefit our Nation. The undiscovered potential is priceless. Knowledge of our oceans will support advancements in tourism and recreation, maritime commerce, healthy and sustainable fisheries, improved understanding of ocean characteristics and marine life, resilient coastal communities, and other national interests. Recognizing the importance of this critical resource, President Trump has taken bold action to dramatically increase our understanding of the marine environment to support the conservation, management, and balanced use of our extraordinary ocean resources.

In November of last year, President Trump signed a Presidential Memorandum directing the Federal government to develop a national strategy to map and explore the U.S. EEZ, a strategy to map the coast of Alaska, and recommendations to facilitate permitting for ocean exploration and research. Today, as Co-Chairs of the Ocean Policy Committee, we are proud to release strategies and recommendations requested by the President that will guide the national ocean mapping and exploration enterprise, unleashing a new era of knowledge and innovation and ensuring continued U.S. global leadership in ocean research.

The National Strategy for Ocean Mapping, Exploration, and Characterization provides a roadmap to coordinate Federal action and further our understanding of the U.S. EEZ. This roadmap will advance key goals, including completing mapping the deep water by 2030 and the nearshore waters by 2040 and exploring and characterizing priority areas of the U.S. EEZ. It also will aid in developing and maturing new and emerging science and technologies, and building public and private partnerships to support these activities.

The Alaska Coastal Mapping Strategy, developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Alaska Mapping Executive Committee, and the State of Alaska, advances the modernization of ocean and coastal maps. Because Alaska lacks current mapping data, this work is critical to a state that has a coastline longer than all other states' coastlines combined. With an economy closely linked to coastal and ocean waters, accurate, up-to-date mapping will support economic growth, resource management, and the safety and security of Alaska's coastal residents.

Ocean and coastal exploration, mapping, and research activities frequently require multiple environmental reviews, consultations, permits, and other authorizations under Federal laws and regulations. In order to reduce duplication, increase coordination across Federal agencies, save taxpayer dollars, eliminate waste, and protect marine resources, President Trump directed the Ocean Policy Committee to recommend actions that increase the efficiency of the permitting process for ocean exploration activities. The Recommendations for Increasing the Efficiency of Permitting for Ocean Exploration, Mapping, and Research Activities identify opportunities to promote clarity and consistency in the Federal permitting processes, examine approaches to increase efficiency, and evaluate ways in which new and emerging science and technology can streamline the permitting process.

June is National Ocean Month, and under President Trump's leadership, high priority is placed on advancing our knowledge of America's unexplored oceans and coastlines. Through increased mapping, exploration, and efficient permitting, the United States is poised to harness cutting-edge science, new technologies, and partnerships that will benefit our economy, enhance national security, and promote conservation and stewardship of our oceans.

Source: [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov); 12 June 2020

MARINE ENVIRONMENT

WORLD OCEANS DAY: A VOYAGE ACROSS THE ‘ROARING FORTIES’

- Priyadershini S

Just before the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a lockdown in various parts of the world, a group of Indian scientists, research scholars and academicians had been in a different kind of lockdown. From January 6 to March 8, this group of 39 — 32 men and seven women — sailed around the Southern Ocean (SO), the roughest in the world, conducting experiments and studies of coastal Antarctica from the MV SA Aghulas. The participants had been selected by the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research under the Ministry of Earth Sciences. All members of the group agree that, though the main objective was scientific research and data collection, the voyage was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The group set sail from Mauritius on January 6, crossing the notorious southern hemisphere geographical coordinates — the Roaring Forties, Furious Fifties and the Screaming Sixties — cutting through ice fields and negotiating repeated storms. As the region (68 degree South and 57 degree East) experiences daylight for much of the day, many experienced a disorientation. Conducting experiments in temperatures below minus five degrees and at times working on a tilted deck and moving with the roll and pitch of the waves was both challenging and thrilling.

Maiden experience

For most participants, it was their maiden experience and one that redefined what the ocean had hitherto meant to them. “Due to extreme rolling and pitching, the SO is a challenge for every oceanographer,” says Sumit Mandal, Assistant Professor of Zoology at Presidency College, Kolkata, who was on his maiden SO trip. “As a marine biologist, I don’t fall sea sick. But some other members had a terrible time.” He added that the constant daylight “disrupted our biological clock. We also saw the midnight sun at Antarctica.” They saw albatross, petrel-like sea birds, penguins, geese, water fowl, south polar skua, seals and whales. Sumit’s project was to collect sediment samples to study life organisms in them. He collected samples from nearly 10 stations of approximately 2,000 metres depth and was amazed to see the variety of life.

“There are polychaete worms, crabs, starfish, beetle, sponges and soft corals. This is the first time that Southern Ocean’s benthic diversity is being studied by India,” he says. He recalls the biting cold at Prydz Bay that penetrated through his clothes, getting frostbitten through washing the sediments with his bare hands.

Princy M John, a research scholar from Kochi, conducted studies on marine life like the krill and the salp. She collected water samples from as deep as 2.5 kilometres below the icy surface and recalls waves that were as much as eight metres high. “The scenery

was stark and heavy. We covered nearly 40 stations to conduct our research,” says Princy.

Team leader Anoop Mahajan, an Earth Scientist at IITM, explains the importance of the SO. “All the oceans of the world are connected through the SO. What happens there is conveyed to all other oceans. We need to understand the SO to understand the climate system of the world. From the Indian perspective, the South Indian Ocean is part of it and the monsoon is developed around these.”

Tough environment

He adds that the region needs to be studied through the year but SO is out of bounds in winter. But plans are afoot to study the region then. India has two bases: Bharati at 69 degrees S and Maitri, which is inland. “As of now we conduct winter studies using automated instruments like Argo floats,” says Anoop for whom this was the third trip. “It is not an easy environment. On some days, there is sunshine and the perfect glassy sea is serene.”

Anoop says that often they had to work for up to 18 hours a day on station days. “On non-station days, we analysed the samples and did related work.” The big success, says Anoop, was the collection of a large number of sediment cores, but above all “we saw the power of unity and also the diversity of our country. The crew was South African and we all worked well together.”

When they reached India in early March, it felt like they were out from, as one of them put it, “the Big Boss house”.

Source: thehindu.com; 08 June 2020

EXPLAINED: WHAT IS CHALLENGER DEEP, THE DEEPEST SPOT IN THE OCEAN?

On June 7, astronaut and oceanographer Kathy Sullivan, who was the first American woman to walk in space in 1984, became the first woman and the fifth person in history to descend to the deepest known spot in the world’s oceans, called the Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench, which is seven miles below the surface of the Pacific Ocean.

Sullivan is now the only human who has walked in space and reached the deepest point in the ocean. She made her descent in the two-person submersible (vehicles that can be operated underwater) ‘Limiting Factor’ as part of Caladan Oceanic’s Ring of Fire Expedition.

Through the expedition, the team hopes to observe volcanic vents, identify new species and conduct the extensive mapping of the US Exclusive Economic Zone at the request of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

What is Challenger Deep?

According to NOAA, the average depth of the ocean is about 12,100 feet and the deepest part is called the Challenger Deep, which is located below the surface of the western Pacific Ocean. It is approximately 36,200 feet deep.

The first dive at Challenger Deep was made in 1960 by Lieutenant Don Walsh and Swiss scientist Jacques Piccard on a submersible called 'Trieste'. The British Ship HMS Challenger discovered Challenger Deep between 1872-1876.

In 2012, film director James Cameron reached the bottom of the Mariana trench after a descent that lasted 2 hours and 36 minutes. Cameron reached a depth of about 10,908 metres on a dive in his submersible called the 'Deepsea Challenger' and became the first to complete a solo submarine dive to this spot.

Why are scientists interested in deep ocean areas?

As per NOAA, most of the existing knowledge of the oceans comes from shallower waters, while deeper waters remain relatively unexplored, even as humans are relying more on these areas for food, energy and other resources. "Ocean exploration, however, is not randomly wandering in hopes of finding something new. It is disciplined and organized and includes rigorous observations and documentation of biological, chemical, physical, geological, and archaeological aspects of the ocean," the NOAA website says.

Further, finding out more about the deep ocean areas can potentially reveal new sources for medical drugs, food, energy resources and other products. Significantly, information from the deep oceans can also help to predict earthquakes and tsunamis, and help us understand how we are affecting and getting affected by the Earth's environment.

What does it take to reach the deep ocean?

Vehicles called Human Occupied Vehicles (HOVs) may be used that carry scientists to the deep sea. Alternatively, there are unmanned Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) that are linked to ships using cables and can be steered by scientists remotely, according to an article on Smithsonian.

Even so, it is difficult for most private citizens to travel more than 100 feet below the surface of the ocean. According to a blog published by the Scientific American, "most recreational divers can't explore more than about 120 feet down due to the amount of air you need to keep your lungs pressurized at depth and to nitrogen narcosis, an intoxication by nitrogen that starts to set in around that depth (most of our atmosphere is nitrogen, not oxygen)."

Further, technical divers can go as deep as 500 feet or more, but with an array of tanks filled with different gas blends, as per the blog.

Source: [indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com); 11 June 2020

EXPLORING THE INDIAN OCEAN AS A RICH ARCHIVE OF HISTORY – ABOVE AND BELOW THE WATER LINE

- Gerald Singh

This article is part of a series on oceans being co-ordinated across all The Conversation sites. This is an introductory article on the Indian Ocean. Similar essays will be featured on the other oceans of the world. These essays are longer than usual.

On many beaches around the Indian Ocean, keen observers may spot bits of broken pottery. Washed smooth by the ocean, these shards are in all likelihood hundreds of years old, from centres of ceramic production like the Middle Eastern Abbasid caliphate and the Chinese Ming dynasty.

Originally destined for Indian Ocean port cities, this pottery would have been purchased by merchant elites accustomed to eating off fine plates. These traders formed part of vast commercial networks that crisscrossed the Indian Ocean arena and beyond, from East Africa to Indonesia, the Middle East and China.

These trade networks stretched back thousands of years, powered by the monsoon winds. Reversing direction in different seasons, these winds have long shaped the rhythm of life around the ocean, bringing rain to farmers, filling the sails of dhows and enabling trade between different ecological zones.

The monsoon wind pattern makes the Indian Ocean relatively easy to cross both ways. In the Atlantic, by contrast, winds blow in one direction all year round. That's why the Indian Ocean is the world's oldest long-distance trans-oceanic trading arena, and is sometimes known as the cradle of globalisation.

This cosmopolitan world has long fascinated scholars and has become a vibrant domain of research. Yet this work has had little to say about the sea itself. Its focus is on human movement with the ocean as a passive backdrop. In the age of rising sea levels and climate change, it's important to learn more about the sea from a material and ecological point of view.

Over the past few years, this situation has started to shift. In this article we survey both the older and the newer forms of Indian Ocean studies, of surface and depth.

Surface histories of the Indian Ocean

Given the long millennia of trade and exchange, one key concern of Indian Ocean studies has been a focus on cultural interaction. Cities on the shores have sustained deep forms of material, intellectual and cultural exchange, so that the denizens of these ports had more in common with each other than with their fellows inland.

This early cosmopolitan world has famously been explored in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, which traces the travels of Abram bin Yiju, a 12th century Jewish Tunisian merchant based in Cairo and later in Mangalore, India. The book contrasts

the rigidity of borders in the 1980s with the relative ease of movement in the late medieval Indian Ocean.

The Swahili coast provides another famed example of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism. Stretching a thousand miles from Somalia to Mozambique, Swahili society arose from centuries of interaction between Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Centred on coastal city states like Kilwa, Zanzibar and Lamu, Swahili trade networks reached far inland to present day Zimbabwe and outward to Persia, India and China. After reaching their height from the 12th to the 15th centuries, these city states were eventually undone by the Portuguese, who arrived from the early 16th century, seeking to establish a monopoly of the spice trade.

Central to these histories of mobility and exchange in the Indian Ocean has been the spread of Islam across land and sea from the 7th century CE. By the 14th century, mercantile networks around the Indian Ocean were almost entirely in the hands of Muslim traders.

In their wake came scholars, theologians, pilgrims, clerks, legal pundits and Sufi divines. Together, these groups created a shared economic, spiritual and legal frameworks. Sufism, a mystical form of Islam is an important strand in the Indian Ocean histories, as is the centrifugal power of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

European Colonisation along the Indian Ocean

When the Portuguese rounded the Cape in the late 15th century, they entered what many have termed a Muslim Lake, dominated in the north by the Turkish Ottoman, Persian Safavid and Indian Mughal empires. When the Dutch arrived in the Indian Ocean in the 17th century, “they were able to go from one end of it to another by carrying letters of introduction from Muslim sultans on various shores”.

As Engseng Ho has indicated, these sprawling networks of Muslim commerce operated without the backing of an army or a state.

The Portuguese, Dutch and English in the Indian Ocean were strange new traders who brought their states with them. They created militarised trading-post empires in the Indian Ocean, following Venetian and Genoese precedents in the Mediterranean, and were wont to do business at the point of a gun.

Early European entrants to the Indian Ocean world initially had to adapt to the trading orders that they encountered. But by the 19th century, European empires dominated. Their military, transport and communication infrastructure intensified the movement of people across the Indian Ocean world.

As Clare Anderson has demonstrated, much of this mobility was forced and conscripted. It involved slaves, indentured labourers, political exiles and prisoners who were transported between regions. At times, these systems built on existing foundations of labour exploitation. As recent research indicates, South Asian indentured labour was often taken from regions in India where slavery existed. Old and new systems of unfree labour produced an archipelago of prisons, plantations and penal colonies.

As an archive, the Indian Ocean provides a new way of looking at world history, that has previously been dominated by European accounts. The age of European empires is only one tiny sliver of time in a much longer arc. A view from the Indian Ocean unsettles ideas of the relationship between European colonisers and colonised groups.

As historians like Engseng Ho and Sugata Bose have argued, the Indian Ocean world was an arena of competing claims.

The ambitions of British imperialism, for example, were countered by the equally grand visions of Islam. Indeed, the Indian Ocean arena produced a rich repertoire of transoceanic ideologies, including Hindu reformism and pan-Buddhism.

Such ideologies eventually acquired an anti-imperial character which also fed into ideas of Afro-Asian solidarity and non-alignment. These arose from the Bandung Conference in 1955 at which 29 newly independent nations gathered to forge a new path rather than falling in line with either of the rival camps in the emerging Cold War.

In the 21st century, these older alliances have come under pressure as China and India elbow each other for dominance in the Indian Ocean. China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative involves massive transport and port infrastructure and aims to extend China's footprint across much of the Indian Ocean arena. In response, New Delhi has bolstered its economic and military activity in this domain.

Deep histories of the Indian Ocean

While the uniquely well-travelled surface of the Indian Ocean has received much attention, its depths barely register in the cultural or historical imagination. Its waters constitute nearly 20% of the ocean's total volume, and its deepest point, the Sunda Deep of the Java Trench, lies nearly 8km below the surface. Yet its seafloor, like much of the world's oceans, is largely unmapped.

Seafloor features determine weather patterns, fish concentrations and tsunami dynamics. Initial explorations by mining companies revealed mineral-rich deposits on submarine volcanic vents, while new species are continually being discovered.

The deep Indian Ocean is far less studied than the depths of the other oceans, for economic reasons: it is ringed by underdeveloped countries. The second International Indian Ocean Expedition was launched only in 2015, fifty years after the first. It aims to increase understanding about the oceanographic and biological characteristics of this undersampled ocean, as well as the ways in which it is changing.

Paying attention to the submarine world is becoming increasingly important in a time of climate change prompted by human activities. The Indian Ocean is warming faster than any of the other oceans, holding more than 70% of all the heat absorbed by the upper ocean since 2003. Indian Ocean islands – the Maldives being a well-known example – are already being submerged by rising global sea levels.

Cyclone patterns are shifting further south and happening more often as a result of the ocean's rising temperature. The monsoon, which underpinned the Indian Ocean's

shipping networks and the rainfall patterns on its coastlines, is losing its power and predictability.

Deities, spirits and ancestors

While the Indian Ocean's depths are in many ways opaque, they are not unpopulated in people's imaginations. The ocean bustles with water deities, djinns, mermaids and ancestral spirits – a mythical submarine world that reflects the cosmopolitanism of its land populations.

In southern Africa this mix is especially rich: Khoisan/ First Nation water sprites, Muslim djinns introduced by South East Asian slaves, African ancestors, one of whose domains is the ocean, and British imperial ideas about the romance of the sea.

These ideas encounter each other and turn bodies of water into rich sites of memory and history. They have been explored by the Oceanic Humanities for the Global South project. Work by Confidence Joseph, Oupa Sibeko, Mapule Mohulatsi and Ryan Poinasamy explores the literary and artistic imaginations of southern Africa's creolised waters.

Afrofuturist science fiction is also turning to the deep Indian Ocean. Mohale Mashigo's *Floating Rugs* is situated in a submarine community on South Africa's east coast. Mia Couto's stories from the Mozambican coastline have long paired myths of mermaids with marine biology. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel *The Dragonfly Sea* links contemporary Afro-Asian networks to the undersea.

Deep sea mining

Some exploration of the deep ocean can seem science-fictional, but isn't.

The International Seabed Authority, a branch of the United Nations in operation since 2001 and responsible for parcelling out potential marine mining areas, has granted contracts for mining exploration in the Indian Ocean. At the same time, researchers are discovering an astonishing number of new deep ocean species on the same sites.

The submarine world has long been plundered for riches. Histories of pearl diving in the Indian Ocean – as in a central scene of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* – are continued in today's illegal abalone trade. Poachers on the coast of South Africa don scuba gear to harvest abalone to trade with Asian markets, linking the undersea to Indian Ocean criminal underworlds, along the same lines as the ancient trade networks.

At times these networks are the source of treasure. On the Island of Mozambique, for instance, the shards of blue pottery that were traded around the Indian Ocean are one of the objects of the active treasure hunting trade today. While some of the treasures are sold by dealers in antiquities, others provide crucial evidence for maritime archaeological research. Recently, the Slave Wrecks Project has discovered slave shipwrecks that provide concrete symbols of the transatlantic slave trade and link it to histories of Indian Ocean slavery and indenture.

The old waterfronts of East African port cities like Mombasa, Zanzibar and Lamu are dominated by buildings with a pure white finish. This present-day architecture echoes

a centuries-old tradition of building houses, mosques and tombs from white coral stone and dressed with lime plaster. Made from shells and corals that began their life under the sea, this luminous plaster made port cities visible from afar to incoming vessels.

The ocean's submarine life and its human histories are always entangled. And now writers, artists and scholars are increasingly drawing attention to their connectedness.

Source: theconversation.com; 07 June 2020

OCEANS ARE CENTRAL TO THE FUTURE. MANAGE THEM WISELY | OPINION

- Hans Jacob Frydenlund and Ratan P Watal

The ongoing pandemic has cruelly reminded us of the need for partnerships that transcend boundaries in order to solve global challenges. This is more than ever true for the challenges facing our oceans. India and Norway recognise this today in our celebration of World Oceans Day. Only by respecting (samman in Hindi) our ocean spaces together (sammen in Norwegian) can we benefit from its full potential today and in the future.

Our oceans hold the world's longest mountain ranges and deepest canyons. They give us oxygen and regulate the climate. Almost half of the world's inhabitants depend on the oceans for food and employment, and the figures are increasing. In only 30 years, the global population may be close to 10 billion people. The world will look to the oceans for food, jobs, energy, transport, raw materials, medicines and economic growth to be able to sustain a population of this magnitude.

Our oceans are already under tremendous pressure. There is an urgent need for concerted action to ensure a more sustainable and integrated approach in years to come. India and Norway have joined forces to tackle some of the most pertinent questions related to this balance between exploitation and preservation.

The ocean industries — offshore energy, maritime transportation, seafood and newer industries — constitute the backbone of the Norwegian economy. They provide significant opportunities for prosperity and employment for both our countries on the path to recovery after the pandemic. Norwegian businesses recognise the vast potential of the Indian blue economy industries, and can offer important competence. India and Norway are ready to pursue new commercial partnerships in a range of sectors, such as sustainable shipping, aquaculture and renewable energy.

India has launched an ambitious Deep Ocean Mission last year which over a five-year span will explore the deepest recesses of the Central Indian Ocean Basin, look at harnessing tidal energy and study the oceans' biodiversity, metals and minerals.

In order to fulfil the potential of the blue economy also for future generations, we must ensure that our oceans are safe, clean and healthy. Neither of our countries has always got the balance right between exploitation and protection. In the long run, it is, however, clear that what is good for the ocean environment is also good for ocean business.

A recent “blue paper” commissioned by the high-level panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy makes the case for integrated ocean management for achieving a sustainable ocean economy. The longstanding scientific partnership between India and Norway regarding ocean research has been strengthened with the launch of a Joint Initiative on Integrated Ocean Management between our two countries in February. We are currently exploring how we can share experiences, research and technology in this field.

Marine litter is an environmental issue that represents a significant risk for the blue economy as well as for marine life itself. We are concerned by reports that there could be more plastic than fish in our oceans by 2050. Fortunately, we have the knowledge and technology to solve this problem. Both India and Norway are taking great strides in the right direction. India, for example, has ambitions to phase out single-use plastic by 2022. We have established a Joint Marine Pollution Initiative, which is taking advantage of our respective strengths in waste management, marine research, business and technology in order to learn from one another and implement best practices.

Litter does not respect national boundaries; so this is another challenge that demands global solutions. Our two ministers of environment have, therefore, jointly committed to supporting global action on plastic pollution. We are exploring the feasibility of establishing a new global agreement in order to manage the responsibility of the world, for the common challenges on marine litter.

India and Norway are both strongly committed to achieving ambitions set in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is our common global framework. Much work remains to be done in order for us to reach SDG 14 — Life Below Water. Success related to this goal will, however, facilitate progress in other SDGs such as ending poverty and hunger and ensuring good health. Cooperation between a variety of stakeholders is key to achieving all the SDGs — at the national, bilateral and multilateral levels — on land and at sea.

On this World Oceans Day, we are proud to affirm a solid partnership between India and Norway on our journey towards oceans that are both wealthy and healthy. We learn from each other about the oceans themselves, the technologies to master its resources, and the action needed to increase sustainability. An added value is an increased understanding of each other's countries and our culture, heritage and language. These are important cornerstones in any good relationship. The Indo-Norwegian ocean partnership aims to deliver *siger* (victory) for our *sagar* (oceans) through respect (*samman*) together (*sammen*).

Hans Jacob Frydenlund is the ambassador of Norway to India and Ratan P Watal is member secretary, Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister, Government of India. The views expressed are personal

Source: hindustantimes.com; 07 June 2020

BURU ISLAND FISHERMEN GIVEN PRESTIGIOUS CERTIFICATE FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING

- Made Anthony Iswara

Nine fishermen's associations made up of 123 fishers at a fishery on Buru Island, Maluku, have been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) with the ecolabel, which indicates that the associations' catch meet the international best practices for sustainable fishing.

With the award, they become the first handline yellowfin tuna fishery in the world, and the second recipient in Indonesia, to be certified with the MSC standard.

"We're extremely proud seeing the first Indonesian handline yellowfin tuna fishery meet the highest standard for sustainability. Indonesia is committed to supporting its small-scale fishers and sustainable tuna fisheries, and this MSC certification sets an example for other small-scale fisheries in Indonesia and around the world," Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister Edhy Prabowo said as quoted by an MSC press release.

The recognition also marks another step toward sustainable fishing ahead of World Oceans Day on June 8, with small-scale fishermen as the backbone of such efforts.

Small-scale fishers make up around 90 percent of fishermen in Indonesia, according to Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry data in 2015. There are 572,270 fishing boats in the country, 506,720 of which are boats smaller than 5 gross tons (GT), while 43,696 are between 5 and 10 GT, 17,121 between 10 and 30 GT and 4,734 are big boats over 30 GT.

The award was the result of ongoing efforts initiated in 2012 by North America's leading sushi-quality tuna company Anova, local processor Harta Samudra and the Indonesian Fisheries and Community Foundation (MDPI), which focuses on sustainable fisheries. They assisted Buru Island fishermen in getting Fair Trade certification in 2014 and forming Fair Trade Fishing associations, paving the way for the fishermen to attain the MSC certificate.

"This is a beautiful stop on the journey toward sustainable fisheries, one that we believe in deeply, and one for which there is still a lot of hard work ahead," MDPI executive director Yasmine Simbolon said in a statement on May 13.

MDPI fisheries policy advisor Saut Tampubolon said the MSC certificate would allow Buru Island fishers to expand to a broader international market, including all of Europe, the United States and Russia, among other countries.

In the past, Buru Island fishers said they would only sell their fish in their own village or neighboring villages for lower prices and struggled to search for markets that would buy their catch.

Fisher Yusran Tomia said the MSC represented a beacon of hope for his family. “The most important thing that my family felt from [receiving the MSC certificate] is that there’s a big hope now with the broader market access, so no longer will we doubt where our fish is sold,” he said.

Around 600 yellowfin tuna fishers under the MDPI’s guidance in six provinces, including Maluku, are currently practicing handline fishing, and fishermen in at least three of the provinces have managed to export their fish to the US under the MDPI’s Fair Trade USA partnership.

Fish processing firm PT Harta Samudra director Robert Tjoanda said the fish they received from fishers, including those of Buru Island, were sent to countries like the US, Vietnam, Australia and Japan. The firm partnered with the MDPI in 2013 to improve fisheries for small-scale handline fishers in eastern Indonesia.

Indonesia was not alone in celebrating the award. “We congratulate Indonesia Handline Yellowfin tuna fishery and their partners for becoming MSC certified. They are demonstrating true leadership in sustainable fishing,” MSC Asia-Pacific director Patrick Caleo said in a press release.

However, Patrick said that, in order to maintain the certification, the Buru Island fishery would need to work with other fishing organizations and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission on important management measures to safeguard yellowfin tuna stocks.

Source: thejakartapost.com; 07 June 2020

GEOPOLITICS

INDIA HAS A BIGGER WORRY THAN LAC. CHINA NOW EXPANDING MILITARY FOOTPRINT IN INDIAN OCEAN

- Abhijit Singh

China at the Line of Actual Control is not the only thing India needs to worry about. According to recent media reports, China is growing its military presence in the Indian Ocean too. Satellite pictures in May this year suggest China's military base at Djibouti is being modernised. The facility, set up in 2017 as a logistics support unit, is being upgraded into a full-fledged naval base with a 1,120-foot pier that can berth Chinese warships, including the Liaoning aircraft carrier. This follows China's expansion of an artificial island in the Maldives, a development with seeming strategic overtones, leading some to claim that China is encroaching on India's sphere of influence.

Meanwhile, the rumour mills are abuzz that China is on a drive to militarise Gwadar port in Pakistan. Recent satellite pictures show anti-vehicle berms, security fences, sentry posts and elevated guard towers inside the port, fuelling speculation of the construction of a military facility. There are also reports that China is helping Bangladesh build a naval base at Cox Bazaar, including wharfs, barracks, ammunition depots, and a naval ship repair yard.

It is the People's Liberation Army's Djibouti base that most vividly demonstrates China's Indian Ocean ambitions. With an estimated area of nearly 250,000 square feet, China's Djibouti compound is no ordinary military base. Replete with outer perimeter walls, watchtowers and underground quarters capable of hosting an estimated 10,000 troops, the facility is a veritable military garrison. China insists the project is a "support facility" meant mainly for anti-piracy missions in the Horn of Africa, but analysts claim the base is capable of supporting other key missions such as intelligence collection, non-combat evacuation operations, peacekeeping operations support and counter-terrorism.

Rising threat to India

When China first began deploying warships off the coast of Somalia for anti-piracy patrols a decade ago, Indian analysts believed China's maritime security interests were primarily commercial, and that the People's Liberation Army Navy or PLAN's forays were driven mainly by the need to protect Beijing's trade and energy interests. That view is fast changing. Many now see China's rapid regional expansion as part of a broader effort to embed Beijing into the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean.

China's growing maritime deployments – including submarines and intelligence ships – demonstrate Beijing's growing interest in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littorals.

Many say the presence of a Chinese research vessel in India's exclusive economic zone in September last year foreshadows greater Chinese projection of power into the Indian Ocean, feeding fears of a strategic encirclement.

Ruefully, despite recognising the pressing challenge China poses, India hasn't been able to respond forcefully. Even as it has sought to expand regional presence through mission-based naval patrols, the Indian Navy hasn't quite matched the PLAN's operational tempo in the Indian Ocean. Critical gaps in combat capability — in particular, conventional submarines, anti-submarine helicopters, and minesweepers — and constantly shrinking budgets have constrained the Navy's ability to push back the Chinese.

Sea-denial won't work

One way to deter China, some suggest, is through a sea-denial complex in the Andaman Islands. The Indian Navy has been developing the Andaman and Nicobar as a strategic outpost to monitor rival naval activity in the Eastern Indian Ocean, and also invested in the development of an integrated surveillance network. Strengthening anti-access capabilities in the Andamans, analysts say, could help protect India's tactical leverage in the regional seas.

Yet, sea-denial assets in India's strategic eastern islands would be of little value when most Chinese naval deployments are in areas outside Indian territorial waters. Modern-day trading nations regard the oceans as a shared global common, with equal opportunity rights for all user states. Consequently, unless a sea-space is a site of overlapping claims or a contested enclave in a geopolitically troubled spot, no coastal state ever actively denies another the use of the high seas.

The second reason a sea-denial strategy is unlikely to work is that India's most pressing maritime challenge — the Pakistan-China nexus — doesn't yet involve a physical threat to Indian assets. The Chinese navy has cleverly avoided any entanglement with Indian warships in the regional seas, while expanding its engagement with the Pakistan navy, participating in a number of bilateral and multilateral exercises off the Makran coast. Defensive measures in the Eastern Indian Ocean would not thwart Chinese plans for deployment at Karachi or Gwadar, or impede China-aided modernisation of the navies of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Thailand.

Pressure in the Pacific

What the Indian Navy instead needs is a strategy of distant power projection. By employing a plan for sustained presence in the Western Pacific — a space Beijing dominates and is highly sensitive about — the Navy could materially influence the maritime balance in Asia, forcing Beijing to scale down its military presence in the Indian Ocean.

To be sure, a counter-pressure strategy in the Pacific will be hard to implement. For one thing, India's official maritime strategy deems Southeast Asia a secondary theatre of interest. For another, New Delhi's neutral status vis-à-vis the South China Sea disputes and continuing deference for China's regional sensitivities encourages the Navy to limit its 'security provider' activism to the Indian Ocean. Yet, as Beijing applies

greater pressure on the LAC in the north, India might have little option but to respond in a space China considers a maritime backyard.

In attempting to shape security dynamics in the Pacific, the Indian Navy must then meaningfully leverage logistics support agreements (one was signed with Australia last week) and capitalise on close naval ties with the United States, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia.

In the long run, sustained naval presence in China's sphere of maritime influence may be the only effective means of conveying Indian resolve to Beijing.

The author is a Senior Fellow and Head of Maritime Policy Initiative at the Observer Research Foundation. Views are personal.

Source: theprint.in; 12 June 2020

SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES AGAIN PUTTING SPOTLIGHT ON BEIJING

- Associated Press

BEIJING — A look at recent developments in the South China Sea, where China is pitted against smaller neighbors in multiple territorial disputes over islands, coral reefs and lagoons. The waters are a major shipping route for global commerce and are rich in fish and possible oil and gas reserves.

US-PHILIPPINE PACT STANDS

The Philippines has decided not to suspend a defense pact with the U.S., avoiding a major blow to one of America's oldest alliances in Asia.

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said Tuesday that the Philippines is delaying its decision to abrogate the Visiting Forces Agreement by at least six months.

The alliance is seen as having deterred aggressive Chinese actions in the disputed South China Sea, including possible construction of structures in Scarborough Shoal, a disputed fishing area off the northwestern Philippines that China effectively seized after a tense standoff in 2012.

CAMBODIA SAYS BASE OPEN TO ALL

Cambodia's leader says China has not been given exclusive rights to use a naval base on the country's southern coast, and that warships from all nations, including the United States, are welcome to dock there.

Prime Minister Hun Sen last week repeated denials that the Ream naval base on the Gulf of Thailand had been handed over to close ally and financial benefactor China for 30 years. Such a move would allow the Chinese navy to post military personnel, store weapons and berth warships.

Many analysts believe basing rights in Cambodia would extend Beijing's strategic military profile considerably and tilt the regional balance of power in a manner that

would pressure adjacent countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations whose security concerns traditionally have been aligned more closely with the United States.

US REJECTS CHINA MARITIME CLAIMS

The U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations has fired back at Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Ambassador Kelly Craft's note weighs in on Malaysia's behalf in its bid to reject China-imposed limits on its continental shelf allowing it rights to resources.

"The United States rejects these maritime claims as inconsistent with international law as reflected in the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention," Craft's note said.

China in December issued a rejection of Malaysia's petition to extend its continental shelf. Beijing ignored a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague that invalidated most of China's claims to virtually the entire South China Sea.

The U.S. does not officially take a stand on sovereignty issues in the area, but maintains its military has the right to fly, sail and operate in all areas open to international navigation.

INDIA-AUSTRALIA TO STRENGTHEN TIES

India and Australia are strengthening defense ties and cooperation on Indo-Pacific maritime issues, at a time when both countries are facing increased tensions with China.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart, Scott Morrison, on Thursday agreed to give each other access to their military bases.

India accuses China of starting the latest standoff along their undefined border in the Himalayas.

China and Australia are at loggerheads over trade, China's territorial ambitions in the South China Sea, and most recently, Australia's push for an international investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic and China's response to it.

Source: [startribune.com](https://www.startribune.com); 09 June 2020

JAPANESE CONSERVATIVES DISRUPT RECOVERING CHINA-JAPAN TIES BY HYPING DIAOYU ISLANDS DISPUTE

- Yang Sheng and Xing Xiaojing

Japanese conservative forces attempt to use a dispute over sovereignty with China to interrupt fast-recovering bilateral relations, said Chinese diplomatic experts on

Tuesday, after a local government in Japan mulled to change the Diaoyu Islands' administrative designation.

The city government of Inshigaki, Okinawa Prefecture, is seeking to change the administrative designation of the area containing the so-called Senkaku Islands, China's Diaoyu Islands, from Tonoshiro to Tonoshiro Senkaku, Japan's Asahi Shimbun reported on Sunday

The city office confirmed with the Global Times that the proposal was submitted to the city council at a routine conference on Tuesday, and the council will vote for the proposal on June 22.

Li Haidong, a professor at the Institute of International Relations of the China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times that the Diaoyu Islands dispute between China and Japan is still unsolved and is not likely to be solved in the short term, so both sides should manage the dispute carefully to prevent an escalation.

"Changing the administrative designation at this time can only make the dispute more complicated and bring more risks of a crisis. This will cause more uncertainties to the recovering China-Japan ties," Li said.

This could be a move initiated by local conservatives in Okinawa, and they do not stand for the interests and policy of the Japanese central government in considering the impact on China-Japan ties in general, Li further noted.

Chinese analysts also noted that the US could be maneuvering behind Japanese local conservative groups, as the US has now identified China as its most important strategic rival, and the Trump administration doesn't want to see Japan repair its ties with China, but instead wants it to stand with Washington to challenge Beijing.

The US, which will chair the G7 summit this year, is now planning to form an international alliance based on the G7 to confront China, but such plan received lukewarm responses from other major Western powers, including Japan and Germany.

"If Japan decided to have an intensive confrontation with China on the Diaoyu Islands, the 'support' from the US will mostly be words rather than actions, and eventually Japan will pay the price," Li said. So it would be very unwise to restart a confrontation with China over a sovereignty dispute this time, especially when the two countries, as well as South Korea, are trying to work together to realize economic recovery in the region.

Zhao Lijian, a spokesperson of Chinese Foreign Ministry, said at a routine press conference on May 11 that, China Coast Guard discovered a Japanese fishing boat illegally operating in China's territorial sea while performing regular patrol in waters around Diaoyu Dao (Diaoyu Islands in Chinese).

"The Chinese Coast Guard vessels followed and monitored the boat in accordance with law, asking it to immediately halt its activities and leave the relevant waters, and responded to the illegal disruption by a Japan Coast Guard vessel that came to the spot. The Chinese side has lodged representations with the Japanese side through diplomatic channels, urging it to immediately stop its infringements," he noted.

"I want to stress that Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands are an inherent part of China's territory, and it is our inherent right to carry out patrols and law enforcement activities in these waters. We ask the Japanese side to honor its four-point principled agreement with China, avoid triggering more incidents relating to the Diaoyu Dao and make concrete efforts for stability in the East China Sea," Zhao further said.

Source: globaltimes.cn; 09 June 2020

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