



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

REPORTS OF INDIAN NAVY PART OF IRAN- RUSSIA MARITIME DRILL FALSE

NEW DELHI: Indian Navy did not participate in the two-day maritime exercise of Iran and Russia in the Indian Ocean Region, said the Indian Navy on Thursday. The naval exercise of Iran and Russia known as Iran-Russia Maritime Security Belt 2021 started on February 16. "Reports that Indian Navy is participating in the drill are incorrect. We never joined the exercise," the Indian Navy said.

Two days ago in Tehran, Admiral Gholamreza Tahani, the spokesperson of the drill, had made an announcement that the Indian Navy had also requested and joined the exercise with a select group of vessels. Admiral Tahani had also stated that the exercise with Russia is so flexible that not only one other country, but several others could join in later if they wish to do so. The naval exercise took place in the northern part of the Indian Ocean. The drill covered an area of 17,000 sq km. It included the air targets, shooting at sea, liberating the hijacked ships, as well as the rescue and search and anti-piracy operations. In 2019, Iran, Russia and China held similar naval exercise. Two days ago in Tehran, Iran's Navy Chief Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi hailed India as one of the powerful naval forces in the region and stated that Indian Navy is joining the exercise. Khanzadi also said that China, which took part in a joint naval exercise with Iran and Russia in December 2019, will join the manoeuvres after Chinese New Year's celebrations.

The Iran Navy Chief made the statement even as India and China have been engaged in a 10-month-long standoff at borders. Further growing military cooperation between Iran and Russia comes at a sensitive time with Tehran and Washington locked in a stalemate. Tensions between the two countries continue to simmer with both sides beefing up military presence in the Persian Gulf.

Source: [The Economic Times](#); 18 February 2021

INDONESIA AND CHINA FACE OFF OVER INCREASING MARITIME INTRUSIONS

- Charity Wright

Indonesia is facing a flurry of naval challenges in its sprawling offshore territories as China and other countries move south and attempt to explore and exploit the waters and continental shelves of the South China Sea, the Java Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Several recent incidents point to an increasing trend of maritime challenges for

Indonesia's naval and coast guard forces, which have successfully intercepted foreign ships and unmanned underwater vehicles that appear to be illegally exploring Indonesian waters. Several nations' vessels have conducted illegal or secretive activity in Indonesian waters, with the majority being from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The South China Sea and surrounding waters hold rich oil and gas reserves. For the nations that have sovereignty over those waters, particularly Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, this area has potential to stabilize economies and provide natural resources for decades to come. Billions of gallons of oil sit beneath these oceans. Trillions of dollars of global trade flows through the region's straits. However, maritime shipping routes throughout the region are becoming congested, and the largest exporting country in the region — China — is exploring new routes to guarantee trade efficiency and redundancy as they build out their Belt and Road Initiative.

China's maritime missions have become increasingly aggressive and covert, lacking transparency and breaking international laws which require them to identify their vessels and their missions. The combination of territorial disputes and lack of transparency has led to geopolitical conflicts, regional disputes, and an increasing U.S. naval presence in the region in an effort to protect allied waters.

Indonesia's Maritime Defense Challenges

During the week of January 11, 2021, the Indonesian Coast Guard (ICG) intercepted the Xiang Yang Hong 03 (向阳红03) (Figure 2), a survey vessel operated by the Chinese Ministry of Natural Resources' Third Institute of Oceanology. The ICG discovered that the Xiang Yang Hong 03's Automated Information System (AIS) global positioning reporting system was inactive. According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), AIS is required to be active during international navigation, especially when entering another nation-state's waters. Xiang Yang Hong 03, whose home port is in Xiamen, departed for its current voyage from the city of Sanya on Hainan Island on the morning of January 6. The trip coincided with a diplomatic meeting involving Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on an official visit to Jakarta.

Indonesia requires all ships transiting its archipelagic sea lanes to have functioning AIS and prohibits them from carrying out oceanographic research. The Xiang Yang Hong 03 responded via radio that their AIS was damaged, which would not normally be concerning, except this is one of several similar recent incidents.

Chinese Underwater Drones

The Xiang Yang Hong 03 incident happened only a few weeks after a local fisherman accidentally discovered a Chinese unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV), likely a Sea Wing (Haiyi) glider, in Indonesian waters near Selayar Island in South Sulawesi — on the other side of Indonesia from where the Xiang Yang Hong 03 was transiting. The device was carrying a trailing antenna and had no identifying marks. The fisherman turned the device over to police and the Indonesian Navy, who claim that the device could have been used to explore underwater sea routes to enable covert submarine activity.

Deepfar Ocean Technology

Sea Wings were developed by Tianjin-based Deepfar Ocean Technology Company (深之蓝), a Tianjin-based Chinese military contractor heavily involved in military technology projects. Deepfar is led by Wei Jiancang, a former People's Liberation Army (PLA) officer and main shareholder, and has been supplying the PLA since its creation in 2013. Wei worked on missiles and lasers for underwater drones while attending the National University of Defense Technology (NUDT) for a master's program. In 2019, Deepfar partnered with the Artificial Intelligence Military-Civil Fusion Innovation Center to build an underwater drone technology laboratory. The center partners with the PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS), China's top military science research institution. Deepfar has received visits from Chinese officials such as Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Admiral Shen Jinlong, the commander of the PLA Navy (PLAN).

This was the third instance of a Chinese UUV discovered in Indonesian waters since March 2019, when a different variant of the Sea Wing UUV was discovered by Indonesian fishers in the Riau Islands nearer the South China Sea. Another UUV, reportedly with Chinese writing on it, was discovered in January 2020 in East Java. In all of these instances, the UUV's point or vessel of origin is unknown. Although it is unclear what vessel deployed the drone found near Sulawesi, trackers say the Xiang Yang Hong 06 (向阳红06) left its port of Qingdao (north of Shanghai) on December 11 and switched off its AIS on December 18, north of the Sulu Sea in the Philippines. On December 26, the Xiang Yang Hong 06 re-activated its transponder, passed through the Molucca Sea between Sulawesi and Halmahera and then back into international waters north of Papua New Guinea. Between December 2019 and January 2020, 12 Sea Wing UUVs were deployed and recovered by the survey vessel Xiang Yang Hong 06, which docked in Zhoushan, Zhejiang in March 2020. The latest discovery is the most significant for the Indonesian military, as it is reported that the drone was still active when the fisherman found it. The drone was reportedly still moving, the light was still blinking, and the forward sensors were still working. This is the first time the Indonesian military publicly announced that they secured the drone and are conducting a full investigation at the 2nd Fleet Command of the Indonesian navy in Surabaya. The investigation may lead to identifying its owner and the data that it had been collecting.

The correlation between the mission of Xiang Yang Hong 06 and its location in Indonesian waters during the time the Sea Wing was intercepted indicates a high likelihood that the UUV belongs to China. The two most recent instances of Chinese state-sponsored military technologies discovered in Indonesian waters are notable because neither were transmitting geopositioning data via AIS, which may indicate a covert operation intended to illegally survey sea channels in Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Other Illegal Activity in Indonesian Waters

Indonesia spans over 17,000 islands and over six million square kilometers of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The vast sea space is a tempting open area for both nation-state militaries and criminals to conduct various illegal activities. On January

24, 2021, the Indonesia Coast Guard discovered two oil tankers conducting illegal oil transfers with national flags hidden and AIS and radios switched off. The suspicious behavior first detected on January 23 around 2130 GMT tipped off authorities to possible illegal activity. Upon investigation, Indonesian authorities identified the ships as the MT Horse, owned by the National Iranian Tanker Company, and the MT Freya, a Panamanian-flagged ship managed by Shanghai Future Ship Management Company. Crew members were reportedly from Iran and China, respectively, and some were detained on coast guard ships for questioning. According to authorities, the Iranian tanker was carrying around 280,000 metric tonnes of crude, while the other was empty and at the time of discovery. The tankers were actively transferring oil from MT Horse to MT Freya and allegedly caused an oil spill around the area where the oil transfer was taking place. Iran has been accused of hiding its oil sales and trade by disabling tracking on its oil transport ships in an effort to obfuscate how much crude Tehran is exporting around the world. Some experts speculate that this is a direct result of U.S. sanctions, but Iran counters the accusation, claiming that the seizure of the MT Horse has “nothing to do with” U.S. sanctions.

Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea

The South China Sea is one of the most valuable and disputed areas of the world today. Several countries maintain overlapping historical claims to the East and South China Seas, areas that hold potentially trillions of dollars of natural resources such as hydrocarbons and natural gas. As China continues to aggressively expand its presence throughout the seas, building artificial islands for military outposts and conducting covert underwater surveillance, countries such as Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines have grown assertive in defending their territorial claims through both military buildup in the region and filing claims in international courts. The United States has also increased its naval presence in the region in an effort to deter Chinese aggression and defend allied waters which it also relies on for transport of over \$208 billion USD of goods every year. Under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), coastal states can claim an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of up to 200 nautical miles. Those states have the exclusive rights to natural resource extraction within their own EEZs, but they must also allow passage through these zones. Because of their close proximity, some states in maritime Asia claim EEZs that are overlapping.

China’s Trade Routes and Extraterritorial Exploration

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that approximately 80 percent of global trade (by volume) is transported by sea. Of that, 60 percent of maritime trade passes through Asia, with the South China Sea supporting nearly one-third of global shipping. With the second-largest economy in the world, China’s economic security is closely tied to the South China Sea and it is aggressively pursuing backup plans and alternative routes for shipping exports all over the world. There are currently several sea lines of communication (SLOC) in South Asia, including the Sunda Strait, Lombok Strait, and the Strait of Malacca, the latter of which is the busiest of the three. At its narrowest point, the Strait of Malacca is only 1.5 nautical miles wide, making it one of the world’s most notable strategic chokepoints. China’s reliance on the South China Sea, and shipping channels such as the Strait of Malacca, leave it vulnerable to maritime trade disruptions. To counter

these vulnerabilities, China has aggressively increased its projection of naval power in the Pacific region, including land reclamation across the South China Sea. China began dredging and building artificial islands on coral reefs to serve as military outposts, such as Panganiban Reef, or Meiji Reef (美濟礁) (Figure 10). China began land reclamation on the reef in 2014 and continued development despite losing jurisdiction under UNCLOS. In July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration issued its ruling on a claim brought against China by the Philippines under UNCLOS, ruling in favor of the Philippines, which designated Panganiban Reef as Filipino territory and declared all Chinese land reclamation and dredging projects in contested territory in the South China Sea illegal. While China is a signatory to the treaty, it refuses to accept the court's authority and continues to operate and claim ownership of the reef. The reef is now outfitted with anti-aircraft weapons and a CIWS missile-defense system. Chinese Expansion in the Indian Ocean

China expanded its maritime exploration to the Indian Ocean to support its overseas interests, which further aggravates conflicts with its neighbor India. As a major sea line of communication (SLOC) for Chinese trade, and the sphere of influence of China's greatest South Asian military competitor, the Indian Ocean is home to multiple Chinese strategic and economic priorities. In a 2019 defense white paper, China emphasized its maritime rights to protect overseas interests, which undoubtedly includes the movement of military equipment and construction materials to build military bases and commercial ports in this SLOC. China officially established a military base in the small African state of Djibouti in late 2017. Its strategic location at the west bank of the Gulf of Aden and the southern mouth of the Red Sea places it at the intersection of multiple trade routes connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. In December 2019, Indian warships encountered a Chinese research vessel, the Shiyan-1, operating in waters inside the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of India's Andaman Islands. The vessel retreated after receiving a warning from the Indian Navy. Chinese UUVs have also been dispatched in the Indian Ocean from research vessels operated by the Chinese Ministry of Natural Resources. In 2018, India signed a pact with Seychelles to build naval infrastructure on the Indian Ocean's small archipelago to counter Chinese naval influence in the region. Under the agreement, India will be able to extend its military reach into the oceans and rotate its ships and aircraft through the islands. While India has offered to help small, neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh develop infrastructure projects such as dams and roads, it is unable to match Chinese resources and efficiency in Belt and Road development projects. This predicament leaves China's smaller, weaker, and poorer neighbors in a vulnerable position, both economically and geographically.

Source: [recordedfuture.com](https://www.recordedfuture.com); 05 February 2021

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT ON OFFICIAL VISIT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER OF INDIA TO THE MALDIVES

1. At the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives Abdulla Shahid, the External Affairs Minister of India Dr. S. Jaishankar paid an official visit to the Maldives on 20-21 February 2021. He was accompanied by a delegation of senior officials from the Government of India.

2. During the visit, the External Affairs Minister called on the President of the Republic of Maldives Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. He also called on the Speaker of the Peoples Majlis, President Mohamed Nasheed. He also held meetings with Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Finance, Economic Development, Sports, and National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

3. Minister Shahid and Minister Jaishankar met on 20 February 2021 in a warm and friendly atmosphere, reflective of the renewed dynamism over the past two years in the traditionally close relationship. Given that both countries are celebrating the 55th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Maldives and India, the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to further deepening and strengthening the relationship, and exploring new areas of cooperation. The Ministers recalled a number of High-Level visits since November 2018, and noted the various interactions despite the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted with appreciation that in the last two years, the leadership of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has steered the Maldives-India partnership into a new era of high ambition and cooperative action for mutual benefit.

4. Foreign Minister Shahid reiterated the deepest appreciation to the Government and the people of India for gifting an additional 100,000 doses of COVISHIELD vaccine to the people of Maldives, in addition to the 100,000 doses gifted to the Maldives on 20 January 2021. Minister Shahid also thanked the Government of India for the various kinds of support extended to the people and Government of Maldives, during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially noting the financial assistance of \$250 million for budget support.

5. The Ministers agreed that people-to-people contact is the backbone of the bilateral relationship. The resuming of regular scheduled flights between the Maldives and India under the Air Travel Bubble established in August 2020, has enabled increased interaction for mutual benefit and enhanced the close relationship between the two countries despite this pandemic time. Minister Shahid appreciated the establishment of the Air Travel Bubble which enabled the travel of Maldivians to India for medical treatment, despite Indian borders being closed. The Air Travel Bubble has also enabled an increasing number of Indian tourists to visit the Maldives, making India the number one tourist-source market during 2020 and continuing to occupy the top spot in 2021 so far. Currently, over 45 flights per week are operating between the Maldives and seven destinations in India. Minister Shahid noted that the

increasing number of tourists from India has supported the recovery efforts from the pandemic. He also noted that the development of Hanimaadhoo Airport and Addu Gan Airport being financed under the \$800 million Line of Credit will contribute towards strengthening connectivity, and facilitate more visitors to the Maldives.

6. The Ministers discussed the status of implementation on the various infrastructure development projects financed through the Government of India Lines of Credit, which are of the highest priority to the Government of Maldives. The Contract for construction of roads and drainage systems in Addu City was awarded during the visit. This is the first of the eight major infrastructure projects being implemented jointly by the Maldives and India to be awarded. Within six months of the announcement of India's financial support to the Greater Malé Connectivity – Malé to Thilafushi Link Project (GMCP), the tender was also published this week by the Ministry of Finance. The Ministers also expressed satisfaction that the Construction of Water and Sanitation infrastructure on 34 islands will also be awarded this month, and that the Detailed Project Report for the Hanimaadhoo Airport expansion project has been finalised. Several of the major projects will soon be completing the tendering stage, and both Ministers agreed on the importance of close coordination for accelerating progress.

7. Foreign Minister Shahid noted the key role that India continues to play in the socio-economic development of the Maldives. He noted that the High Impact Community Development Projects and Small Grants Projects are very beneficial for the local communities. The Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of a Geydhoshu Mas Plant in Noonu Atoll Kendhikulhudhoo was signed during this visit. This is the twelfth project to be financed under the High Impact Community Development Projects scheme. Foreign Minister Shahid requested for a second tranche of financing under the scheme. During this visit, the two Ministers jointly inaugurated two projects financed with Indian grant assistance in Hulhumalé – the development of pathways, lighting and seating, as well as soft scaping of two sectors of the Hulhumalé Central Park, and the renovation of the Hulhumalé Westside Jetty.

8. The Ministers also discussed progress on the National College of Policing and Law Enforcement Studies being built in Addu City. Despite COVID-19, the project has made significant progress and is likely to be inaugurated in April 2021. Both Ministers also noted progress on institutionalising linkages between police organisations in the Maldives and India to support collaboration and cooperation in training management, and exchange of trainers and trainees between both countries.

9. The Ministers also discussed the importance of an effective multilateral system as a key factor in tackling global challenges and agreed on the need to pursue reform of the main UN bodies, including the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Maldives reiterated its support for India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded and reformed UN Security Council. India reiterated its support for the Maldives candidature for the Presidency of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly. Both Ministers agreed to cooperate and work together on addressing global challenges such as the threat of climate change, in the lead up to the 26th session of

the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC to be held in Glasgow, UK, in November 2021.

10. Underscoring the importance of defence and security cooperation, the Ministers agreed on the importance of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean Region. They further agreed to strengthen coordination in enhancing regional maritime security, including on combatting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross border terrorism and maintaining peace in the region to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean. The Ministers also agreed to work together to convene the first meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation at the earliest.

11. Minister Shahid welcomed the offer of a new line of credit of \$40 million for development of sports infrastructure and noted that it will contribute in creating new sports infrastructure. A special event was also held at Ekuveni track – newly renovated with financing through Indian grant – to celebrate the increasingly strengthening cooperation in the area of sports. Minister Jaishankar joined the Speaker of Majlis President Mohamed Nasheed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment Ahmed Mahloof, Members of Parliament, and Presidents of sports associations, at this event.

12. An amendatory agreement for the \$40 million Line of Credit signed in 2011, was signed during the visit. Under this amendatory agreement, the unutilized amount of \$25.64 million under this Line of Credit, will be directed towards roads development projects in the Maldives. And a \$50 million Dollar Credit Line Agreement between the Government of Maldives and EXIM Bank India was signed for defence projects. A Letter of Intent between Fahi Dhiriulhun Corporation and EXIM Bank was also signed during this visit towards extending a credit facility under EXIM Bank's Buyer's Credit scheme to support the design and construction of 2000 social housing units in Hulhumalé. And in this context, both Ministers noted with happiness, the increasing interest of Indian investors in the Maldives.

13. Other MoUs signed during the visit include cooperation between Public Service Media and Prasar Bharati, and between the Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Maldives, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, India on Sustainable Urban Development. Both Ministers agreed that these MoUs would serve to further strengthen the already strong bilateral cooperation, by expanding into new fields of cooperation.

14. The External Affairs Minister of India also reviewed the various facets of defence and security cooperation with the Minister of Defence Mariya Didi.

15. During this visit, an Agreement to develop, support and maintain a Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour at Sifvaru (Uthuru Thilafalhu) was also signed. This Agreement was signed pursuant to the request Government of Maldives made in April 2013 for support and cooperation of the Government of India to assist the Government of Maldives for enhancing the capability of the Defence Forces of the Maldives in exercising jurisdiction and undertaking maritime surveillance of its EEZ

and islands; and subsequent requests made in October 2015 and March 2016. Further, the Agreement is pursuant to the Action Plan for Defence Cooperation signed on 11 April 2016 signed between both countries, and subsequent discussions held during the Defence Cooperation Dialogues in July 2016 and January 2019, and in accordance with the Terms of Reference for the Project discussed during the Joint Staff Talks in June 2018, January 2019, and June 2019, and agreed in September 2019.

16. The External Affairs Minister of India held a joint meeting with the Minister of Finance Ibrahim Ameer, Minister of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure Mohamed Aslam and Minister of Economic Development Fayyaz Ismail, to discuss in detail, the various infrastructure projects and economic activities being undertaken in cooperation with India.

17. This is the second visit of External Affairs Minister Dr S.Jaishankar to the Maldives, in his capacity as the External Affairs Minister. He last visited the Maldives to take part in the Indian Ocean Conference, held in September 2019.

18. Guided by mutual respect and trust, the Maldives-India partnership has grown even stronger during the COVID-19 pandemic. The visit highlights the strong and shared commitment of both sides to strengthen the bilateral partnership that is anchored in common civilisational roots, cultural affinities, and the shared values of democracy and the rule of law.

Source: [Ministry of External Affairs](#); 21 February 2021

INDIA, AUSTRALIA, JAPAN, US HOLD QUAD MEET, DISCUSS RULES-BASED ORDER, MYANMAR COUP

- Geeta Mohan

The third 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' meeting of the foreign ministers of India, Australia, Japan and the USA took place on Thursday. The meeting was attended by Minister of External Affairs of India S Jaishankar, Australia Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Japan minister Toshimitsu Motegi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The ministers broadly discussed cooperation in countering disinformation, counterterrorism, maritime security and the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Myanmar. "The ministers emphasized their commitment to upholding a rules-based international order, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes," a press release from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. The four nations also focused on the centrality of ASEAN nations in ensuring that their sovereignty is respected by all stakeholders in the region -- hinting at the growing Chinese aggression.

A statement issued by the Japanese foreign ministry said the four ministers confirmed the importance of a "free and open Indo-Pacific". "We agreed to deepen cooperation. In this regard, the four ministers reaffirmed ASEAN's proactive efforts, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and its strong support for ASEAN unity and centrality and an ASEAN-led regional framework," said the statement. Meanwhile, a statement by the US State Department said, "The ministers also discussed countering disinformation, counterterrorism, maritime security, the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma, and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region." The four leaders also discussed Quadrilateral ("Quad") cooperation on Covid-19 response and recovery and climate change and committed to working together to address these global challenges.

"The ministers discussed ongoing efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, including vaccination programmes. They expressed their commitment to cooperate in addressing this challenge, enhancing access to affordable vaccines, medicines and medical equipment. India's efforts at providing vaccines to 74 countries was recognized and appreciated," said the MEA statement. Regional security issues -- such as the situation in North Korea and cooperation on global issues like measures against new coronavirus infections and climate change -- were also part of the discussion. Noting the importance of this format of meeting, the four ministers agreed to hold annual Quad meetings at ministerial level and on a regular basis at senior and administrative levels to strengthen cooperation on advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region, including support for freedom of navigation and territorial integrity. The last meeting between the four countries -- India, US, Japan and Australia -- was held on October 6, 2020, in Tokyo.

Source: [India Today](#); 19 February 2021

THE POWER OF EXAMPLE: AMERICA'S PRESENCE IN DIEGO GARCIA

- Blake Herzinger

In remarks delivered at the US State Department in early February, President Joe Biden championed the rule of law as part of "America's abiding advantage" and spelled out his vision for a nation leading "not just by the example of our power but by the power of our example". In its swing toward competition with Beijing, the US has made every effort to draw attention to China's disregard for international law, while conveniently ignoring that law's application to the US military presence on Diego Garcia and the US presentation of itself as a champion of the rules-based order. Diego Garcia is the largest of 55 islands split off by the United Kingdom from its Seychelles and Mauritius colonies to create the British Indian Ocean Territory in 1965. Devised exclusively for military use, the BIOT has been the key US strategic outpost in the Indian Ocean since 1966. Shuttering civilian industry and removing Diego Garcia's original inhabitants paved the way for initial construction of British-US military facilities in 1967. These facilities were used to great effect in tracking the Soviet navy throughout the Cold War, although it was India's request for American support against

China in the 1962 Sino-Indian War that drove America's initial request for access to the archipelago. The Chagossian population was given the option to resettle in Mauritius or Seychelles. Some were able to relocate to the UK. This unceremonious exile went largely unremarked at the time – to most, it was a small subplot in the high drama of the Cold War. But not to Mauritius, nor to the Chagossians.

Diego Garcia became a critical node of American expeditionary warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq. It remains an invaluable operating location in a region with few permanent American bases. But rules and values are now at the centre of intensifying competition between Washington and Beijing. While the US claims the Chinese Communist Party is seeking to overturn the rules-based order, it has done so in the face of Mauritius' calls for restoration of its territory and near-universal rejection of British claims upon the archipelago. Mauritius has the law on its side. A prolonged campaign by Mauritius to confront the UK over the status of the Chagos Islands was finally addressed by the International Court of Justice in 2019. In a stunning rebuke, the court handed down an advisory opinion which stated that Britain's claim to the archipelago was illegitimate and that its retention of the archipelago constituted a failure to fully decolonise. A subsequent non-binding UN General Assembly resolution, passed by an overwhelming majority, demanded that the UK withdraw its "colonial administration" from the islands by the end of 2019. In 2021, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) added its own confirmation of Mauritius' sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, and criticised the UK's failure to comply with the 2019 UN resolution.

The US is not inclined to abandon its strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean, nor is the UK's Conservative government prepared to relinquish its claims to this colonial holdover. Both fear the potential consequences of ceding control, being subject to the whims of a state that might evict them from their unsinkable aircraft carrier. Admittedly, returning the islands creates risk – sovereignty trumps lease rights. A future Mauritian government might be less welcoming of the US and could revoke the lease. The US would also likely be forced to negotiate for benefits that it currently enjoys. But the Mauritian government has sought to assuage those fears by offering, twice, to lease the land to the US for up to 99 years, if it is returned to their control. Mauritius' UN ambassador made clear that it favoured a continued US presence at Diego Garcia, as well as its stabilising influence in the Indian Ocean region. Mauritius' prime minister offered his own assurances following the ITLOS judgement, stating that "The end of UK administration has no implications for the US military base at Diego Garcia, which Mauritius is committed to maintaining". Mauritius has offered both the US and UK a way to underline their commitment to the rules rather than flout them, while maintaining critical military access well into the next century. Thus, the Biden administration has an opportunity to remove tension between its hard strategic interests and its declared support for a rules-based order. In consultation with London, Washington should move quickly, announcing support for the transfer of the Chagos Archipelago to Port Louis' control, accept the offered 99-year lease and sign a defence agreement with a democratic partner as an equal under the law. The fact that the British political opposition has already telegraphed its intent to comply with the UN directive at the earliest opportunity is further reason for haste. With international opinion increasingly opposed to continued British control of the islands, the case for their return is not only ethically correct but strategically sound.

To continue in the current arrangement leaves the UK and UK open to criticism for hypocrisy in their approach to international law. London's refusal to comply with the ITLOS ruling can be likened to Beijing's rejection of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's 2016 award on the South China Sea, as both legal bodies are convened under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). It is only with a shocking lack of self-awareness that either country could accuse Beijing of undermining the rules-based order while defying the UN over Mauritian sovereignty. Better to seize this opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the rule of law than to remain defiant and isolated on a question of human rights. By demanding China conform to the rules-based order, the US and the UK have set a narrow rhetorical gate through which they themselves must walk. Attempts to justify a continuation of British control of the Chagos Islands look like destroying the rules-based order in order to save it, and reinforce China's vision of world in which the weak suffer what they must. Decisive action on behalf of the Biden administration to facilitate the return of Diego Garcia is not only ethically correct, but one that reinforces American commitment to international law and human rights. By committing itself to this course, Washington can avoid negative impact upon American strategic interests, while simultaneously bolstering the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Source: [lowyinstitute.org](https://www.lowyinstitute.org); 15 February 2021

MARITIME FORCES

EGYPT, SPAIN NAVIES CONDUCT JOINT DRILLS IN RED SEA

- Shaimaa Raafat

Egyptian and Spanish naval forces have carried out transient maritime training within the Southern Fleet in Egypt's Red Sea area, according to a statement from Egyptian Military Spokesperson Tamer El-Refae on Saturday. The Egyptian frigate "Sharm El-Sheikh" and the Spanish frigate "ESPS Reina Sofia" joined the drills, which included different training activities. It saw specialised training for imposing monitoring on suspected ships and maritime security procedures. It also saw various sailing formations that showed the ability of the joint maritime units to carry out their tasks accurately and proficiently.

Additionally, the participants implemented night transportation exercises, as well as moves for exchanging helicopter landings on the rooves of marine units. The most recent joint training between the two countries is the second of its kind in a short period, in which the Egyptian and Spanish navies have gathered as two forces have deep experiences. It reflects the importance of these joint exercises in consolidating bilateral relations between the two countries, which contributes effectively in maintaining security and maritime stability in the region, according to the statement.

Source: dailynewsegypt.com; 20 February 2021

IDEX 2021: SAUDI ARABIA TO INVEST MORE THAN \$20B IN ITS MILITARY INDUSTRY OVER NEXT DECADE

- Sana Jamal

Dubai: Saudi Arabia will invest more than \$20 billion in its domestic military industry over the next decade as part of aggressive plans to boost local military spending, the head of the kingdom's military industry regulator said on Saturday. The Gulf state wants to develop and manufacture more weapons and military systems domestically, aiming to spend 50 per cent of the military budget locally by 2030. "The government has put a plan that we will be investing in excess of \$10 billion in the military industry in Saudi Arabia over the next decade and equal amounts on research and development," Governor of the General Authority for Military Industries (GAMI) Ahmed bin Abdulaziz Al-Ohali told a defence conference in Abu Dhabi. He also said

the kingdom plans to increase military research and development (R&D) spending from 0.2% to around 4 per cent of armaments expenditure by 2030.

Saudi at IDEX

Saudi Arabian companies are participating in the International Defence Exhibition (IDEX 2021) in Abu Dhabi. The investment ministry, along with other Saudi bodies and firms will be taking part under the slogan "Invest in Saudi Arabia". The Kingdom will participate in the event, though the Saudi pavilion, led and organized by the General Authority for Military Industries (GAMI), Saudi Press Agency reported. The event will host international leaders and developers of the latest defense and security technologies across land, sea and air defense. Saudi Arabia's aims to localize 50 per cent of its military expenditure by 2030 in a move to grow the local defense industry and reduce reliance on imported weaponry. A major part of this shift will be securing investment in the Kingdom's growing defense industry including through events like IDEX. GAMI and 12 other major Saudi companies specializing in the military and security will introduce developments in Saudi military technology at the event.

Source: [Gulf News](#); 20 February 2021

FRANCE REJOINS JAPAN IN N. KOREA SURVEILLANCE IN E. CHINA SEA

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A French Navy vessel will conduct surveillance activities in the East China Sea until early March as part of international efforts to block North Korea from engaging in ship-to-ship transfers of goods at sea in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, according to the Japanese Defense Ministry. It will be the second time that France has carried out such activities in waters near Japan since 2019, the ministry said. Japan welcomed the dispatch of the frigate *Prairial*, with the ministry pledging to ensure "effective implementation" of relevant Security Council resolutions in partnership with France and other members of the international community.

The Japan Coast Guard and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force are collecting information on the activities of "vessels suspected to be in violation" of the resolutions, and Tokyo will "work closely with related countries," the ministry said in a statement issued Thursday. Japan also vowed to maintain solidarity with allies and partners "for the realization of North Korea's dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner," it said. Japan has reported to the United Nations multiple cases of suspected ship-to-ship goods transfers between North Korean and foreign-registered vessels in the East China Sea since 2018.

The *Prairial*'s mission to monitor Pyongyang's illicit maritime activities comes as European powers have stepped up engagement in the Indo-Pacific, partly due to rising concern about China's assertiveness and military buildup. France's recent activities in the region include a patrol in the South China Sea by the nuclear-powered submarine

Emeraude earlier this month, in a veiled counter to Beijing's militarization of disputed areas of the strategic waterway. The submarine also took part in a joint drill last December with the MSDF and the U.S. Navy off Japan's southernmost island of Okinotorishima. The French Navy also plans to deploy its amphibious assault ship Tonnerre to Japan later this year. Paris has strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific where it has territories, including the French island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean and French Polynesia in the South Pacific. Similarly this year, Britain will send the aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth and its strike group to East Asia, while Germany will dispatch a naval vessel to the Indo-Pacific.

Source: [The Mainichi](#); 20 February 2021

SHIPPING, PORTS AND OCEAN ECONOMY

INDIA SIGNS FREE TRADE PACT WITH MAURITIUS, THE FIRST OF ITS KIND WITH AFRICAN NATION

- Aanchal Nigam

In one of the significant outcomes of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Mauritius, India on Monday signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Mauritius. It is the first such arrangement that India struck with any African country. Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth hailed the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation & Partnership Agreement (CECPA) as “far-reaching” and said that it would unleash new as well as expanded opportunities in trade, goods & services, investment, economic cooperation & technical assistance. In a joint statement on February 22, Mauritius PM said that the nation aspires to play a greater role in India’s engagement in Africa. Jugnauth said that CECPA will further encourage Indian entrepreneurs to invest not only in Mauritius but also in the entire region consolidating the joint ambition to make the African nation the “centre of excellence”. Mauritius PM said at India-Mauritius joint statement, “As India seeks to step her vast & multilayered cooperation with the African continent, for next edition of India-Africa forum Mauritius aspires to play a greater role in these engagements as a gateway b/w India & Africa. Comprehensive Economic Cooperation & Partnership Agreement is 1st of its kind, signed by India with an African country. It's far-reaching & should unleash new & expanded opportunities in trade, goods & services, investment, economic cooperation & technical assistance.”

Jaishankar on two-day visit to Mauritius

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar is presently visiting Mauritius from February 22-23 after last arriving in the nation in August 2018. Jaishankar last arrived in the East African nation when former EAM late Sushma Swaraj visited Mauritius for the 11th World Hindi Conference. While India is the largest development cooperation partner of Mauritius with a focus on people-oriented projects, Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jagnauth had also visited India in an unofficial visit with his spouse in December 2019. Elevating the bilateral relations between both the nations, in July 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Jugnauth jointly e-inaugurated the new Supreme Court building in Mauritius built with India grant assistance. Both leaders had previously also inaugurated Phase 1 of the landmark Metro Express project and a new ENT hospital in Mauritius. The Metro

Express Project is also the largest infrastructure projected which is being executed by India in Mauritius.

Source: republicworld.com; 22 February 2021

UNCERTAINTY DOGS INDIA-JAPAN AFRICA INITIATIVE

- Ranjana Narayan

NEW DELHI: Three years after it was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor is yet to get off the ground. The corridor was touted as the rival to China's mega trans-continental Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), so the lack of movement is disappointing. "There has been some stalemate in the process... but it has certainly not stopped. Work is still on," a source told StratNews Global, acknowledging that "it appears to have lost some priority in the governments (India and Japan)." The corridor was outlined as Modi's and then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's vision of collaboration in Africa, during their annual bilateral summit in Tokyo in November 2016. In May the following year, Modi made a pitch for developing the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor at the annual meeting of the African Development Bank in Gandhinagar. The Indian and Japanese governments presented the vision document of the corridor project at that event. This was days after China had hosted a Belt and Road Summit meeting in Beijing with nearly 30 countries participating. India has declined to join the BRI, despite Beijing's constant exhortations, saying the Chinese initiative does not respect India's concerns of sovereignty and territorial integrity, while Japan has toyed with the idea of BRI but not joined it so far. The corridor was projected to focus on development and cooperation projects, building quality infrastructure and connectivity, skill enhancement and building people-to-people links. This was also intended to bring Asia and Africa closer but while the Track-I process (between the governments) appears not to have moved forward after the Gandhinagar announcement, the Track-II process (between the think tanks) has been going on. From India, the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) participated while the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and the Institute of Developing Economies–Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO) are the other think-tanks involved.

Officials of the two countries involved in the corridor project met once in 2018 but after that there was no further conversation. Possibly Japan's change in leadership—Abe stepping down due to ill health last year and the mantle passing on to Yoshihide Suga— was a reason, the source suggested. Add to that the Covid-19 pandemic. The corridor did not come up during the India-Japan bilateral in 2017 nor during the "summit telephone talk" in September last year. In fact, the two sides have taken forward the India-Japan Act East Forum, launched in 2017, with the fifth meeting held in January this year. The Act East Forum is a platform for India-Japan collaboration in the North Eastern Region under India's 'Act East Policy' and Japan's vision for a

‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’. The corridor is seen as a perfect blending of Japan’s ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ vision outlined by Abe and India’s SAGAR doctrine outlined by Prime Minister Modi in a speech in Singapore in 2018. “With the Indo-Pacific strategy gaining currency in recent times, the corridor could help realise the economic agenda of the region. The corridor can be leveraged to achieve the goals of an open, free and inclusive Indo-Pacific,” the source said.

For India, development partnership has been the cornerstone of its involvement in projects in Africa, ranging from infrastructure building to capacity building and training under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, providing concessional credit, among others, which is “demand driven and free of conditionalities”. So how would the corridor be different from the work India has been doing for decades in Africa under its Development Partnership initiative? “While under the development partnership initiative, the projects are handled in silos (individually), under the corridor it would be integrated. From building a port, to a road from it leading to the nearest SEZ, employing locals and enhancing their capacity building and training—all would come under one umbrella,” the source pointed out. The collaboration in Africa is not limited to Japan, other Asian countries could also join in, said the source. Indonesia had evinced interest in joining the corridor and “is still looking forward” to becoming part of it, the source added. Asia and Africa together represent 70 per cent of the global population and 37 per cent of global GDP. China has reportedly invested in 52 out of the 54 African countries under the BRI while the African Union has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on BRI cooperation. But given reports that BRI projects have been hit by the Covid economic slowdown, the time may have come for India and Japan to seize the initiative and push forward with the corridor project.

(The author is a senior journalist on the foreign policy beat. Views expressed in this article are personal.)

Source: stratnewsglobal.com; 13 February 2021

WHAT HAPPENS TO CONTAINERS LOST OVERBOARD? HOW LONG DO THEY FLOAT?

We reviewed the typical causes and legal aspects of container collapse cases in June. In this article we address what happens to the containers once they enter the sea. How long do containers stay afloat? Is there any basis in fact for the myth that they “hover” below the surface? The World Shipping Council’s 2020 report estimates that an average of 1,382 containers are lost at sea each year. The figure is based on a survey of the WSC members that represent 80% of the global vessel container capacity. The WSC assumed for the purpose of the analysis that the container losses for the 20% of the industry’s capacity that is operated by carriers that did not participate in the survey would be roughly equivalent to the losses reported by the responding carriers representing 80% of the industry’s capacity. The report, however, was issued before

the One Apus stack collapse in December 2020 that resulted in the loss of more than 1,800 containers in the Pacific Ocean.

For how long will a container float?

-Well, how long is a piece of rope?

Empty containers will eventually sink as they are not truly watertight. The question of how much time a container needs to sink is, of course, impossible to answer in a simple way – there are too many variables. The timespan depends on the type of cargo, the type of container and its permeability and resilience. However, the most determining factor is the extent of structural damage to the container after hitting the sea surface.

Some containers sink immediately, while there are stories of containers floating across the Atlantic – in one case, taking 15 months to cross the Atlantic from the Caribbean to Spain.

Once in the sea, water will enter through vents and seals. However, containers laden with lightweight, low density and buoyant cargoes can float for years even when holed and waterlogged. The cargo itself may have enough uplift to keep the container unit afloat. Reefer containers are naturally tighter by nature for securing the correct airflow and atmosphere when carrying temperature sensitive cargoes. A reefer box may float until it is broken up, so damage during the incident, sea conditions and wave action will decide how much time before the reefer sinks. Experience suggests that containers falling onto the sea from lower heights tend to float longer than containers falling from heights. The explanation is, of course, that the chance of containers falling from heights suffering structural damage is far greater compared with containers falling from lower heights. In practice, this means that containers falling from small coaster vessels and barges can often be recovered prior to sinking. Containers falling from mega oceangoing boxships will often sink almost immediately after touching the sea surface.

The myth of the “sub-floater”

Some have claimed that containers may lurk wholly below the sea surface. This is not possible. It is not physically possible for a container to be totally immersed and freely floating some distance below the surface. The reason is in line with Archimedes’ fundamental principles of mass and displacement: The container can only be at surface level partly immersed, or at the bottom (or in the process of sinking – which is normally a quick event anyway).

The upward thrust or force on any free-floating object is equal to the weight of the liquid it displaces. If the weight of the container and its contents is less than the amount of water displaced it will therefore float. If the weight of the container and its contents (which includes water in the inside space) is greater than the weight of the fluid displaced, the container will sink. Sinking will normally gain momentum quickly as the increasing pressure compresses the container and the contents. This will affect the mass displacement ratio further and reduce the buoyancy.

The physics

In other words: like a ship, a container will sink to the point where the weight of water displaced by the container is equal to the weight of the container. Hence, a fully laden (MGW 30 tonne) 20ft or 40ft dry container will float. This is because the volume of a 20ft container is approximately 1300 cu ft. If it were to be fully immersed, it would displace about 83,000 lb of water – which is more than 30 tonnes (approx. 66,000 lb). A fully loaded 20ft x 8ft 6in high container would therefore float with about 1ft 6in showing above the water.

Once enough water has entered through the floor, the door seals, and the ventilators (to increase the total weight to more than 83,000 lb) the 20ft container will sink. If the floor is solid and well-sealed, and if the door seals are in good condition and there are no ventilators fitted, the container may float for many hours, days and even months. Indeed, if the cargo is watertight and it fills the majority of the space inside the container, the container may float indefinitely. In time, however, it will get damaged by waves, from hitting land, or due to the increased pressure of water. A conservative estimate would be that containers lost in the sea float for three months on average.

Retrieval of containers is supported

Shipping containers in the sea pose a risk to navigation for smaller vessels and can contain dangerous cargo, Certain cargo that is not designated as dangerous under the IMDG code may nonetheless be polluting, for example, plastic pellets. Most parties involved in the shipping industry will support removal of containers and cargo when feasible. Gard is committed to handle claims in a sustainable manner. This means that we are willing to incur reasonable costs to search for and retrieve containers that pose a threat to safety of navigation and/or the marine environment when there is a feasible chance finding and retrieving them. A modicum of common sense must be applied and we engage with authorities to find the best practical approach in each separate case. At great water depths it may be practically impossible to recover a container. This underscores the maxim that prevention is always better than cure so it remains critical to identify the root causes of stack collapse and other events leading to the loss of containers. Gard stands ready to work with our Members and industry stakeholders to address container loss and retrieval.

Source: [Gard](#); 15 February 2021

PROJECT FOCUSES ON CREATING SHIP CAPABLE OF BEING FUELLED BY EITHER AMMONIA OR METHANOL

- Sam Chambers

Dual fuel ships are set to get a whole new meaning. Italian class society RINA is partnering with the Shanghai Merchant Ship Design & Research Institute (SDARI) to develop a ground-breaking ship design capable of being fuelled by either ammonia or methanol. SDARI will focus on the ship concept development and design while RINA will verify the compliance with the applicable rules, including those for the use of

alternative fuels. The selected ship type is a tanker but the project, which is the first to investigate using both methanol and ammonia in this type of vessel, will increase understanding of the application of both fuels within the shipping industry with opportunities to apply designs to different types of ships. External support to the project will be provided by engine manufacturer MAN Energy Solutions.

Giosuè Vezzuto, executive vice president Marine at RINA, said: “Ship designs have come a long way in their efficiency, but to meet targets for reduced emissions we need to look to alternative fuels. A ship specifically designed and optimised for using ammonia and methanol as fuels offers a future proof, environmentally sustainable solution.” Brian Østergaard Sørensen, vice president and head of R&D, two-stroke business at MAN Energy Solutions, said: “We encourage industry-wide partnerships for decarbonising the marine market and are very happy to collaborate with such respected institutions as RINA and SDARI. While two-stroke engine technology will likely retain its influence within deepsea shipping for the foreseeable future, ammonia and methanol are fuels with a lot of potential as clean, zero-carbon fuels and with whom we have a lot of experience.”

Source: [splash247.com](https://www.splash247.com); 15 February 2021

MARINE ENVIRONMENT

INDIA'S PROSPERITY MUST NOT BECOME HOSTAGE TO EUROPEAN CLIMATE AGENDA

- Nick Butler

As part of its agenda for reducing the risks of climate change, the European Union is developing plans for what are euphemistically called border tax adjustments, but which are really just a new generation of tariffs. The plan is that the tariffs would be applied, perhaps as soon as 2023, to specific products from countries that do not match the EU's own environmental standards. The stated aim of the policy is to achieve a common global approach on climate change. The unstated objective is to defend European industries threatened by global competition.

Asian economies would be the victims of such protectionism and India, because of its growing emissions of greenhouse gases, would be the primary target. The most likely outcome is not a common approach to global warming but rather retaliation and a trade conflict that would do nothing to help the environment or to prevent global warming. India must be at the heart of any discussion of climate change. Per capita emissions are still low. The energy used by an Indian citizen generates less than 40% emissions than the global average and the country has made great strides in developing renewables as a source of electricity. The development of the world's largest floating solar power facility at Omkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh is just the latest example of the growth of a renewables sector that barely existed five years ago. But the combination of a growing population and rising living standards mean that Indian emissions have risen by over 400% since 1990 and, on the authoritative projections of the International Energy Agency, will rise by another 50% over the next 20 years on the basis of current policies. Solar, wind, hydro and nuclear power have all grown but remain a tiny proportion -- less than 10% in 2019 -- of India's overall energy mix.

Coal remains dominant -- providing 44% of total energy demand -- and oil continues to grow as more and more Indians become car owners. By 2030 India is projected to be using a third more energy than was the case in 2019, with hydrocarbons accounting for over 70% of the total. As a result, the growth in Indian emissions is likely to more than offset any gains made in Europe as a result of the Green Deal policies adopted last year by the European Commission. The issue is serious and European concerns are understandable. The large-scale investments being planned to support the Green Deal will be hard to explain to European voters if any positive impact on climate is being overwhelmed by growth elsewhere. The answer, however, is not to penalize countries such as India at a crucial stage of development that is bringing hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. If trade is restricted, economic modernization will move more slowly and the country will continue to rely on the existing industrial base,

powered overwhelmingly by carbon-intensive coal. Indian citizens and businesses will be poorer and there will be less money available to make environmentally beneficial choices. India has succeeded in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty over the last decade, but many families still have only very limited disposable incomes.

The key lies in encouraging the kind of growth that enables India to escape from its current dependence on coal, and offers some alternatives to the current highly likely prospect that India will become -- within the next twenty years -- the world's most substantial importer of crude oil. If the EU is serious about reducing global emissions, it should be promoting economic growth in India not least by encouraging, rather than limiting, trade. Giving Indian companies access to the opportunities which the Green Deal will generate would assist the deployment of those same technologies in India itself.

At the same time, European companies should be encouraged to invest in India as one of the great growth markets of the 21st century. That should include investment in the infrastructure, products and new energy supplies necessary for India to deliver the energy transition. Decarbonization will need new grids for power and natural gas -- the cleanest of hydrocarbons -- and the electrification of the transport sector including the railways. It will also require the development of energy-efficient consumer goods from off-grid refrigeration for India's villages to low-cost electric vehicles, including cars and cycles that can help reduce India's frightening levels of urban air pollution. The case for engagement on environmental grounds is powerful. But climate policy cannot be seen in isolation and, in hard times, defensive protectionist policies often attract support from people nervous about job security. Globalization has never been popular in Europe. With unemployment now at around 8% across the EU, and after the departure of the U.K. -- in the past the strongest advocate of open trade -- there is a real risk that climate policies will be used as an excuse for limiting imports. Some in Europe argue for developing countries to be exempt from any tariffs, but the prevailing view stated clearly by Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice President of the European Commission, is that border taxes are essential for the survival of European industry. India beware.

Source: [Nikkei Asia](#); 19 February 2021

FISH FARMING MARKET SIZE IS PROJECTED TO REACH \$378,005.5 MILLION BY 2027, REGISTERING A CAGR OF 5.8%

- Report Ocean

According to a new report published by Report Ocean, titled, "Fish farming Market by Environment, and Fish Type: Opportunity Analysis and Industry Forecast, 2021–2027," The global fish farming market size was valued at \$285,359.7 million in 2019, and is projected to reach \$378,005.5 million by 2027, registering a CAGR of 5.8%. The

others segment is expected to retain its dominant position, in terms of revenue generation, throughout the forecast period. Asia-Pacific held a leading position in the global market in 2019, and is expected to maintain its dominance in the future.

The growth of the fish farming market can be attributed to growing need for food security. Currently, fish farming is an absolute necessity to meet food demand and supply. This industry provides high-quality and disease-free fish by rearing fish in an environment that meets hygiene standards. Fish farming activity is also utilized by industries to conserve species that are on the verge of extinction. Moreover, advanced technology enhances yield of fish farming. The global fish farming market is projected to witness significant growth during the forecast period, owing to increase in health awareness among consumers about intake of balanced nutrient quantities. Moreover, rise in government rules and regulations in different countries that promote fish farming to meet growth in demand to cope with food insecurities is expected to further boost the market growth. However, increase in water pollution and changes in climatic conditions hamper the market growth. Furthermore, rise in the adoption of veganism and implementation of stringent regulations toward animal cruelty act as the major restraints of the global market. On the contrary, rise in popularity protein rich diet is expect to open avenue for the global fish farming market growth. The global fish farming market is segmented into environment, fish type, and region. The environment segment includes marine water, fresh water, and brackish water. On the basis of fish type, the market is divided into pompano, snappers, groupers, salmon, milkfish, tuna, tilapia, catfish, sea bass, and others. Region wise, it is analyzed across North America (the U.S., Mexico, and Canada), Europe (Russia, Norway, Iceland, and rest of Europe), Asia-Pacific (China, the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Australia, and rest of Asia-Pacific), and LAMEA (Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa). Based on fish farming market forecast by environment, the fresh water was the highest revenue-generating segment, accounting for a major share in 2019. The fresh water segment is expected to witness highest growth of 5.9% during the forecast period, followed by the marine water segment at 5.8%. The growth can be attributed to rapid expansion of fish farming as a viable alternative to wild fishing.

Based on the fish farming market analysis by fish type, the others segment generated maximum revenue in 2019. The dominance of this segment can be attributed to hardiness and adaptability of these fish encouraging widespread domestication globally. Moreover, rise in demand for fish in the dietary nutrition sector to produce omega-3 supplements further propels the market growth.

Region wise, LAMEA was the second largest market, in terms of revenue generation, with almost one-fourth share in 2019. This region is further expected to expand at a CAGR of 5.6% during the forecast period. In North America, fish farming has ceased expanding in recent years, however, in South America it has shown strong and continuous growth, particularly in Brazil and Peru. Technological developments in South America and some countries in South Africa are expected to increase growth of the fish farming market in LAMEA. Moreover, rapid development in the Middle East, in terms of infrastructure and technology result in growth in the LAMEA market. However, weak economies in Africa hamper growth of the fish farming market in this region.

Key Findings of the Study

- On the basis of environment, the fresh water segment is projected to witness the highest CAGR of 5.9%, in revenue terms, during the forecast period.
- On the basis of fish type, the others segment is expected to dominate the market from 2021 to 2027.
- The salmon segment is expected to grow at a significant CAGR during the forecast period.
- China was the largest country, in terms of revenue generation for fish farming in 2019.
- Asia-Pacific is anticipated to witness highest growth rate, registering a CAGR of 6.0% from 2021 to 2027.
- Key players in the fish farming market have relied on strategies such as acquisition, partnership & agreement, merger, and geographical expansion, to expand their market share and to stay relevant in the global fish farming market share. The key players in the fish farming industry profiled in the report are Cermaq Group AS (Mitsubishi Corporation), Cooke Fish farming Inc., Grupo Farallon Fish farming, Leroy Sea Food Group, Marine Harvest ASA, P/F Bakkafrost, Selonda Fish farming S.A., Stolt Sea Farm, Tassal Group Limited, and Thai Union Group Public Company Limited.

Source: openpr.com; 15 February 2021

THE FISH WE EAT ARE EATING PLASTIC

- Alexandra McInturf and Matthew Savoca

Trillions of barely visible pieces of plastic are floating in the world's oceans, from surface waters to the deep seas. These particles, known as microplastics, typically form when larger plastic objects such as shopping bags and food containers break down. Researchers are concerned about microplastics because they are minuscule, widely distributed and easy for wildlife to consume, accidentally or intentionally. We study marine science and animal behavior, and wanted to understand the scale of this problem. In a newly published study that we conducted with ecologist Elliott Hazen, we examined how marine fish – including species consumed by humans – are ingesting synthetic particles of all sizes. In the broadest review on this topic that has been carried out to date, we found that, so far, 386 marine fish species are known to have ingested plastic debris, including 210 species that are commercially important. But findings of fish consuming plastic are on the rise. We speculate that this could be happening both because detection methods for microplastics are improving and because ocean plastic pollution continues to increase.

Solving the plastics puzzle

It's not news that wild creatures ingest plastic. The first scientific observation of this problem came from the stomach of a seabird in 1969. Three years later, scientists reported that fish off the coast of southern New England were consuming tiny plastic particles. Since then, well over 100 scientific papers have described plastic ingestion in numerous species of fish. But each study has only contributed a small piece of a very important puzzle. To see the problem more clearly, we had to put those pieces together.

We did this by creating the largest existing database on plastic ingestion by marine fish, drawing on every scientific study of the problem published from 1972 to 2019. We collected a range of information from each study, including what fish species it examined, the number of fish that had eaten plastic and when those fish were caught. Because some regions of the ocean have more plastic pollution than others, we also examined where the fish were found. For each species in our database, we identified its diet, habitat and feeding behaviors – for example, whether it preyed on other fish or grazed on algae. By analyzing this data as a whole, we wanted to understand not only how many fish were eating plastic, but also what factors might cause them to do so. The trends that we found were surprising and concerning.

A global problem

Our research revealed that marine fish are ingesting plastic around the globe. According to the 129 scientific papers in our database, researchers have studied this problem in 555 fish species worldwide. We were alarmed to find that more than two-thirds of those species had ingested plastic. One important caveat is that not all of these studies looked for microplastics. This is likely because finding microplastics requires specialized equipment, like microscopes, or use of more complex techniques. But when researchers did look for microplastics, they found five times more plastic per individual fish than when they only looked for larger pieces. Studies that were able to detect this previously invisible threat revealed that plastic ingestion was higher than we had originally anticipated. Our review of four decades of research indicates that fish consumption of plastic is increasing. Just since an international assessment conducted for the United Nations in 2016, the number of marine fish species found with plastic has quadrupled.

Similarly, in the last decade alone, the proportion of fish consuming plastic has doubled across all species. Studies published from 2010-2013 found that an average of 15 percent of the fish sampled contained plastic; in studies published from 2017-2019, that share rose to 33 percent. We think there are two reasons for this trend. First, scientific techniques for detecting microplastics have improved substantially in the past five years. Many of the earlier studies we examined may not have found microplastics because researchers couldn't see them. Second, it is also likely that fish are actually consuming more plastic over time as ocean plastic pollution increases globally. If this is true, we expect the situation to worsen. Multiple studies that have sought to quantify plastic waste project that the amount of plastic pollution in the ocean will continue to increase over the next several decades.

Risk factors

While our findings may make it seem as though fish in the ocean are stuffed to the gills with plastic, the situation is more complex. In our review, almost one-third of the species studied were not found to have consumed plastic. And even in studies that did report plastic ingestion, researchers did not find plastic in every individual fish. Across studies and species, about one in four fish contained plastics – a fraction that seems to be growing with time. Fish that did consume plastic typically had only one or two pieces in their stomachs. In our view, this indicates that plastic ingestion by fish may be widespread, but it does not seem to be universal. Nor does it appear random. On the contrary, we were able to predict which species were more likely to eat plastic based

on their environment, habitat and feeding behavior. For example, fishes such as sharks, grouper and tuna that hunt other fishes or marine organisms as food were more likely to ingest plastic. Consequently, species higher on the food chain were at greater risk.

We were not surprised that the amount of plastic that fish consumed also seemed to depend on how much plastic was in their environment. Species that live in ocean regions known to have a lot of plastic pollution, such as the Mediterranean Sea and the coasts of East Asia, were found with more plastic in their stomachs.

Effects of a plastic diet

This is not just a wildlife conservation issue. Researchers don't know very much about the effects of ingesting plastic on fish or humans. However, there is evidence that that microplastics and even smaller particles called nanoplastics can move from a fish's stomach to its muscle tissue, which is the part that humans typically eat. Our findings highlight the need for studies analyzing how frequently plastics transfer from fish to humans, and their potential effects on the human body. Our review is a step toward understanding the global problem of ocean plastic pollution. Of more than 20,000 marine fish species, only roughly two percent have been tested for plastic consumption. And many reaches of the ocean remain to be examined. Nonetheless, what's now clear to us is that "out of sight, out of mind" is not an effective response to ocean pollution – especially when it may end up on our plates.

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Source: [maritime-executive.com](https://www.maritime-executive.com); 15 February 2021

SAVING SMALL ISLANDS FROM PLASTIC POLLUTION

- Caroline Kibii

Lamu archipelago, with its beautiful white sandy beaches, sand dunes, mangrove forest, and tranquility, is being threatened by poor waste management, and especially plastic pollution. Lamu county has more than 60 islands, most of which are small in size; hence slight environmental degradation results in adverse effects on its social, economic, and ecological wellbeing.

Therefore, poor disposal of solid waste endangers the lives of people, animals, and aquatic life. During an exploratory visit to Lamu and neighbouring islands in late January, we encountered several instances of poorly disposed waste, most of which

were plastic wrappings and water and soda bottles. Lamu is hot; hence water and other cold drinks are in high demand. The majority of these products are packaged in plastic containers. Similarly, we recorded massive amounts of plastic waste along the beaches and shores, particularly the stretch from Old Town Lamu to Shela Beach. The plastics are conspicuous during high tides as they float and when deposited ashore during low tides.

In most cases, we encountered donkeys, a significant identity, and a transport mode in Lamu, feeding on the poorly disposed of solid waste on land. While it is an environmental problem, it threatens the people's socioeconomic livelihood sources as well. Previous studies and documentaries have demonstrated that plastics impede the reproduction and existence of marine life. A United Nations Environment Programme article highlights plastic packaging, discarded anchor lines, and fishing nets among the many plastic items entangling turtles in the sea. The sight of floating plastics alone was a nuisance. It then begs the questions, what should be done? What is being done to save such islands from losing their richness of biodiversity and identity? How can plastic pollution in oceans be addressed?

Notably, some youth groups and social enterprises in Lamu have ventured into regular beach cleanups, reusing and recycling single-use items and plastics. For instance, we came across a long stretch of a wall made of wine/whiskey bottles and concrete and handmade arts made of plastic waste sold locally and internationally. Besides, we encountered tourists during different times and in separate locations collecting plastics during their walks. Despite these actions, it seems there is an underlying factor behind the plastic pollution menace. One assumption would be a lack of awareness and commitment to proper waste disposal among Lamu Island residents. This means the county government of Lamu should establish and promote capacity building initiatives that empower the community to reduce, reuse, recycle, and upcycle their wastes. It is also fitting to help the locals realise that the ocean is one of their primary livelihood sources, meaning that ill actions on the land will impact marine ecology. If plastics find their way into the ocean, it jeopardises the community's wellbeing.

Tourism, which is a strong pillar of Lamu's economy, will no longer thrive. The promotion of a circular economy in waste management should be a primary aspect of addressing plastic pollution throughout the country. Responsible manufacture, reusing, and recycling of items need to be emphasised. The ban on the use of single-use plastics in protected areas, which include beaches, seems inoperative yet. From our exploration, it is clear that there is no restriction and that everyone is free to carry their drinks in single-use bottles to the beach. What is not clear is whether the empty containers are taken to the designated disposal areas or are left floating away in the ocean. Ultimately, the proper implementation of stipulated policies and regulations will streamline operations towards a circular economy. Working policies and regulations will oblige manufacturers to ensure any product being released into the market is within the legal and environmental standards of a given county or the country. Operationalising and strengthening the polluter pays principle will significantly force polluters – individuals and manufacturers – to be extra cautious. Thus, safeguarding small islands from plastic pollution should be an urgent priority. Installing workable waste management mechanisms, including viable policies, is indispensable.

Source: [The Star \(Kenya\)](#); 15 February 2021

US APPROVES OF EXPANSION OF FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY IN GULF OF MEXICO

- Ashley Curtin

The United States government approved the expansion of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary making the Gulf of Mexico's coral sanctuary 200 percent larger.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the expansion of the boundaries will protect "important habitat for vulnerable species such as mobula rays, sea turtles, and whale sharks, while serving as nurseries for numerous fish species of commercial and recreational importance." The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) will now include portions of 14 additional reefs and banks in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, representing approximately a 104 square mile increase in area. "The more we found out about these areas, the more we realized that they are as diverse and as productive as any marine communities in the world," said G.P. Schmahl, Superintendent of the sanctuary. The FGBNMS, which is located 70 to 115 nautical miles off the coasts of Louisiana and Texas, was first designated as a National marine Sanctuary on December 5, 1991. The concentration of the expansion of the sanctuary emerged as a top priority after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion, which was the largest offshore marine oil spill in U.S. history, Good News Network reported. The new rule, which will go into effect in the spring, will "ultimately, expanding FGBNMS will help ensure that valuable marine resources remain available for the use and enjoyment of future generations of Americans," according to NOAA. "Adding these ecologically significant reefs and banks will protect habitats that contribute to America's blue economy and drive ecological resilience for much of the Gulf of Mexico region's thriving recreation, tourism, and commercial fishing," Tim Gallaudet, Ph.D., deputy NOAA administrator and retired Navy rear admiral, said.

Source: [nationofchange.org](#); 20 February 2021

GEOPOLITICS

INDIA PITCHES FOR WIDENING RUSSIA TIES IN THREE GEO-POLITICAL THEATRES

- Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

NEW DELHI: India on Wednesday pitched for widening cooperation with old strategic ally Russia across various geographical regions - Eurasia, Indo-Pacific and the Russian Far East, and the Arctic and sought Moscow's support towards a free and open Indo-Pacific region. This message, delivered by foreign secretary Harsh V Shringla during his high-level meetings in Moscow on Wednesday, can be viewed as an attempt to address Russia's misgivings over various groupings in the Indo-Pacific. "An Indo-Pacific guided by norms and governed by rules, with freedom of navigation, open connectivity, and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states is an article of faith for India," Shringla said in his address at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, in a subtle message to Chinese territorial ambitions in the region. He also added: "As major powers and stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region, it is the responsibility of all stakeholders including us to ensure that the region remains peaceful and open, taking into account needs and concerns of all its inhabitants." Russia is crucial to all three regions (Eurasia, Indo-Pacific and the Russian Far East, and the Arctic), and India and Russia will agree much more than they will disagree on the strategic direction, the inherent and necessary multi-polarity, and the security and prosperity of these regions, the foreign secretary said, underscoring the nature of India's geopolitical partnership with Russia.

Moscow had expressed reservations over the US Indo-Pacific vision and its discomfort with the formation of Quad (among the US, Japan, Australia and India) was not a secret. However, keeping Indian sensitivities in mind, Russia did not target India. India-Russia-Japan are also putting in place a trilateral mechanism for the Indo-Pacific region including the Russian Far-East. Safeguarding mutual sensitivities was reflected in Shringla's address even as he refrained from any reference to China. "The long-term convergence of interests, sensitivity to each other's core concerns, mutual respect and trust shared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin and growing people-to-people contacts are key drivers of our bilateral partnership," he said. Shringla put forward suggestions for expanding counter-terror partnership and cooperation in the Afghan theatre. The foreign secretary, who is on his maiden visit abroad in 2021 to shape this year's annual summit, also referred to growing cooperation in traditional areas of defence, fossil fuel, nuclear energy and space sectors besides calling for stepping up a partnership in infrastructure, connectivity initiatives, and the health sector. "Phase-III trials of (Russian Covid-19 vaccine) Sputnik-V in India have commenced and I understand that significant production of Sputnik-V will be undertaken in India. We are hopeful that our joint attempts at bolstering global vaccine supplies will showcase our partnership for the

benefit of the world,” he said. There is interest in taking forward cooperation in railways, transport and logistics, civilian shipbuilding and repair, inland waterways, pharmaceuticals and medical devices, minerals, steel, chemicals, including petrochemicals, ceramics, agro-industry, timber, high technology and scientific research, according to Shringla. “Our companies are actively exploring investments in Russia in energy, minerals, infrastructure and healthcare.” An India Energy Centre will be opened in Moscow next month to further bolster energy partnership, he said.

Source: [The Economic Times](#); 18 February 2021

3RD INDIA-AUSTRALIA-JAPAN-USA QUAD MINISTERIAL MEETING

Dr. S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs participated in the 3rd India-Australia-Japan-USA Quad Ministerial Meeting held on 18 February 2021 with his counterparts Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The Ministers highlighted their shared attributes as political democracies, market economies and pluralistic societies. They recognized that the changes underway in the world makes a strong case for their countries working closely together. It was important for the international community that the direction of changes remains positive and beneficial to all. The Ministers emphasized their commitment to upholding a rules-based international order, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes. Their productive exchange of views on regional issues included a reiteration of their common vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, with clear support for ASEAN cohesion and centrality. It was noted that the Indo-Pacific concept had gathered growing international support, including in Europe. The Ministers discussed ongoing efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, including vaccination programmes. They expressed their commitment to cooperate in addressing this challenge, enhancing access to affordable vaccines, medicines and medical equipment. India’s efforts at providing vaccines to 74 countries was recognized and appreciated. The Ministers exchanged views on responding to climate change and furthering cooperation in areas such as maritime security, HADR, supply chain resilience and counter-terrorism. In the discussion pertaining to recent developments in Myanmar, the upholding of rule of law and the democratic transition was reiterated by India. Noting that regular Quad consultations hold value, the Ministers agreed to continue these useful discussions.

Source: [Ministry of External Affairs](#); 18 February 2021

CHINA FACES FATEFUL CHOICES, ESPECIALLY INVOLVING TAIWAN

- Chaguan

CHINA'S RISE involves some fateful decisions for President Xi Jinping, the country's leader. None matters more than whether to attack Taiwan, to bring that democratic, pro-Western island of 24m people under Communist Party control. If, one day, an armoured Red Flag limousine carries Mr Xi as a conqueror through the streets of the island's capital, Taipei, he will become a Communist immortal. He will join Mao Zedong as co-victor of a Chinese civil war that was left unfinished in 1949 when the defeated Nationalist regime fled to exile in Taiwan. Perhaps Mr Xi will ride through Taipei streets still scorched by fire, stained with blood and emptied of ordinary Taiwanese by the diktats of martial law. But Taiwan's conquest would still mark China's elevation to the ranks of powers so mighty that no single country dares to defy their wishes. To the hard men who rule China, history is not written by the squeamish. Should Mr Xi order the People's Liberation Army to take Taiwan, his decision will be shaped by one judgment above all: whether America can stop him. For 71 years Taiwan's existence as a self-ruled island has relied on deterrence of Chinese aggression by America. True, Taiwan also benefited from a degree of Chinese patience, as China tried other gambits that might avoid war. Since the days of Deng Xiaoping, Chinese leaders have been binding Taiwan to the mainland economically. They have also tried to woo the Taiwanese public with promises of autonomy should they accept rule from Beijing, under the rubric of "one country, two systems". That concept was transformed last year from dubious to empty by the crushing of civic freedoms in Hong Kong, a territory that was offered similar promises. But China is losing patience with "peaceful reunification", and colder calculations have always mattered more. At root, China stayed its hand for fear that Taiwanese troops would hold it off until American rescuers arrived.

America's centrality to this stand-off is well-known to President Joe Biden and his foreign-policy aides, who are an experienced bunch. That is why, on the Biden administration's fourth day in office, the State Department rebuked China for military, economic and diplomatic attempts to intimidate Taiwan, and declared America's commitment to the island to be "rock solid". In reality America's ability to deter an invasion over Taiwan is crumbling. The main reason is China's single-minded pursuit, over 20 years, of the advanced weapons and skills needed to keep American forces at bay. Another is Mr Xi's sense of historical destiny, and his use of populist nationalism to bolster his authority—though nationalism also raises the costs of a botched attack. In some forums, American scholars and retired high officials have praised the Trump administration for approving more than \$17bn in arms sales to Taiwan. They have also scolded Trump aides who used showy support for Taiwan as a way to provoke China, without thinking through risks to the island. Some scholar-diplomats, such as Richard Haass of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), have urged America to end its policy of "strategic ambiguity", which avoids making explicit pledges to respond to aggression against Taiwan. This vagueness is meant to discourage rash moves by Taiwanese politicians and avoid enraging China. Bonnie Glaser, an expert on Chinese and Taiwanese security at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a think-

tank in Washington, says that the Biden administration is showing resolve when talking about China and Taiwan, because it is “very worried about the potential for accidents and miscalculation”. It is sobering to hear Ms Glaser, a well-connected scholar, express concerns about accidental clashes today, for instance between Chinese and Taiwanese aeroplanes or boats, and about the possibility of a deliberate military conflict five or ten years from now. Robert Blackwill, a former national-security aide to George W. Bush and co-author of a new paper by the CFR, “The United States, China and Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War”, wants America to create credible “goeconomic deterrence”, as well as to shore up the military kind. He says America, and allies such as Japan, should make clear that China will be expelled from dollar-based financial and trading systems if it attacks Taiwan. Should Chinese commanders urge war, “we want the economic principals in the room” to spell out the costs, says Mr Blackwill.

Asians will miss America if it leaves Alas, the hardest part of deterring China involves building robust coalitions that are ready to challenge Chinese aggression. Comparisons with the cold war do not capture the problem. West Berlin’s survival was seen as a vital national interest by America and its NATO allies, who planned for war to stop the Soviets cutting access to the city. But it matters that the Soviet Union was an economic pygmy. Today, there is no consensus among America’s regional allies that Taiwan’s survival is a vital interest over which it is worth angering China, often their largest trade partner.

Meanwhile Chinese leaders are trying to reduce their country’s vulnerability to external economic pressure. In an article last May, Qiao Liang, a retired air force major-general, predicted that in a war over Taiwan, America and its allies would block sea-lanes to Chinese exports and imports, and cut China’s access to capital markets. General Qiao duly endorsed Mr Xi’s moves to reduce China’s dependence on economic demand from the rest of the world. He added that the key to the Taiwan question would be the outcome of China’s contest of strength with America. The general is a nationalist provocateur, but his comments reflect the views of many in Mr Xi’s China. That should give American allies pause for thought. To many Chinese, Taiwan’s recovery is not just a sacred national mission. Its fulfilment would also signal that American global leadership is coming to an end. If China ever believes it can complete the task at a bearable cost, it will act.

Source: [The Economist](#); 20 February 2021

HOW INDIA’S HUNGER FOR OIL COULD TRANSFORM THE MIDDLE EAST

- Simon Watkins

The release of a major report last week by the International Energy Agency (IEA) highlighting that India will make up the biggest share of energy demand growth from now until 2040 - ahead of China – comes at just the right time for the U.S.’s new strategy to counter China’s rapidly increasing influence in the Middle East. The details

of the IEA's 'India Energy Outlook 2021' only add further weight to the credibility of the U.S.'s attempt to portray India as a viable economic and energy-consuming alternative end user to China for Middle East oil and gas producers that side with the new U.S.-Israel-Arab state alliances. Specifically, according to the IEA report, India's energy consumption is expected to nearly double as its gross domestic product expands to an estimated US\$8.6 trillion by 2040 under its current national policy scenario (the equivalent of adding another economy the size of Japan to the world economy in less than 20 years). Particularly of note to Middle Eastern hydrocarbons producers will be the projection that India's oil demand is expected to rise to at least 8.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2040 from about 5 million bpd in 2019, while its natural gas needs are projected to more than triple to 201 billion cubic metres. In explicit potential export dollars terms for Middle East oil and gas producers, India is set to see its net dependence on oil imports increase to more than 90 per cent by 2040 from the current 75 per cent, according to the IEA, and its net gas import dependency increase to around 61 per cent by 2025 from just 20 per cent only 10 years ago.

This outlook is perfect for the U.S.'s new counter-China strategy that politically began most obviously with the signing in August 2020 of the U.S.-brokered Israel-UAE 'normalisation deal'. This deal announcement heralded that a new corridor of co-operation was being developed from the U.S. (and Israel), through the UAE (and Kuwait, Bahrain, and in part Saudi Arabia) as a regional counterbalance to China's growing sphere of influence. With Bahrain later following the UAE in making a similar normalisation deal with Israel, Washington has considerable room for optimism that further such deals can be made with the other GCC states, comprising Kuwait (already firmly in the U.S. sphere of influence), Saudi Arabia (Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is believed to be broadly in favour of the UAE-Israel accord), Oman (toying with moving into the China fold), and Qatar (quietly co-operating with Iran over the South Pars/North Dome gas field). The remaining GCC states – Jordan and Egypt – already have similar pacts with Israel. The release of a major report last week by the International Energy Agency (IEA) highlighting that India will make up the biggest share of energy demand growth from now until 2040 - ahead of China – comes at just the right time for the U.S.'s new strategy to counter China's rapidly increasing influence in the Middle East. The details of the IEA's 'India Energy Outlook 2021' only add further weight to the credibility of the U.S.'s attempt to portray India as a viable economic and energy-consuming alternative end user to China for Middle East oil and gas producers that side with the new U.S.-Israel-Arab state alliances.

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ADNOC has already been granted the unique status of currently being the only overseas company so far allowed to hold and store India's vitally-important strategic petroleum reserves (SPR). In keeping with the developing scope of this relationship, India's government recently approved a proposal that will allow ADNOC to export oil from the SPR if there is no domestic demand for it, in the first instance from the Mangalore strategic storage facility (the other major SPR pool being at Padur). This decision marked a major shift in the policy of India in the handling of these vital energy reserves, with the country having previously completely banned all oil exports from the SPR storage facilities. A further sign of this relationship between the U.S.-sponsored UAE and India moving up a gear is the likelihood of ADNOC being 'top of the list' of foreign companies that would be considered to buy a substantial stake in the high-profile privatisation of major Indian refiner, Bharat Petroleum. Russian state corporate proxy, Rosneft, had expressed an interest in buying the Indian government's 53.29 per cent in the company as recently as the middle of 2020 – following a visit to New Delhi in February by Rosneft's chief executive officer, Igor Sechin – but these overtures have now been sidelined by India.

As far as the UAE is concerned, it would fit well not just into the broader geopolitical manoeuvring that is going on but also – commercially – into the swathe of deals being planned with Indian companies in the UAE. This was underlined by al-Jaber at the end of 2020 when he said: "Today, Indian companies represent some of Abu Dhabi's

key concession and exploration partners...[and] As we continue to work together, I see significant new opportunities for enhanced partnerships, particularly across our downstream portfolio.” He added: “We have launched an ambitious plan to expand our chemicals, petrochemicals, derivatives and industrial base in Abu Dhabi and I look forward to exploring partnerships with even more Indian companies across our hydrocarbon value chain.” This longer-term view accords with the outlook given at around the same time by India’s minister of petroleum and natural gas, Dharmendra Pradhan, as he stated that India’s demand for refined products is expected to rise dramatically, requiring a 40 per cent increase in the its refining capacity to 350 million tonnes a year or 7 million bpd by 2030.

Source: oilprice.com; 15 February 2021

WHY THE INDIAN FOREIGN SECRETARY WILL SEEK TO BRING RUSSIA INTO THE INDO- PACIFIC

- Andrew Korybko

Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla will travel to Russia next week on a multi-day visit aimed at discussing multiple topics of shared interest. The most important is to prepare for President Putin’s planned trip to India later this year after both sides claimed that last year’s annual summit was postponed because of Covid-19. The Indian diplomat’s visit will take place against the recent backdrop of Russia and India opening up an air travel bubble between their countries, New Delhi reaching an agreement with Beijing for the “synchronised disengagement” of their forces all along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and America threatening to sanction India for its decision to go through with its purchase of Russia’s S-400 air defense systems. The Tribune India also reported that Mr. Shringla “will seek to put the India-Japan-Russia trilateral on a firmer footing with the unstated purpose of reducing the need for Moscow to seek China’s participation in the development of the vast Russian Far East rich in minerals and hydrocarbons.” They also wrote that “A trial run of the Vladivostok-Chennai sea corridor will be followed up by more substantial programs. India will also be looking to activate its \$1 billion line-of-credit for the development of the Russian Far East.” In other words, his visit will seek to bring Russia into the Indo-Pacific, something that Moscow has wanted to do for a while already but has been hesitant about due to concerns that it might be negatively interpreted by China.

The recently changed international context might alleviate some of those concerns, however. The latest Sino-Indo deal along the LAC will reduce tension between Russia’s BRICS and SCO partners. In parallel with this, the US’ likely sanctioning of India will worsen relations between those two. These dynamics combine to create the opportunity for Russian-Indian ties to strengthen in the Indo-Pacific direction without drawing China’s suspicions as much as they might have done had they occurred earlier. The Japanese dimension of Mr. Shrinla’s visit shouldn’t be surprising for astute

observers who may have taken notice of Track II trilateral talks between the island nation, the Eurasian one, and their South Asian partner late last month. India's Mint reported at the time that "The first round of the India-Japan-Russia was hosted by the Indian government backed Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) think tank with Japan's Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA) and Russia's Far East Investment and Export Agency (FEIEA) attending as co-partners." According to the outlet, their joint statement announced that "India, Japan and Russia have identified energy, coal mining, transport and logistics, maritime connectivity, diamond processing, pharmaceuticals and healthcare among areas of potential cooperation in the Russian Far East." This adds credibility to The Tribune India's report about Mr. Shringla's Indo-Pacific agenda in Moscow.

The Indian Ministry of Defense-funded Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA) think tank released a detailed reportedly shortly thereafter earlier this month about "India, Russia and the Indo-Pacific: A Search for Congruence" where it was proposed that both sides focus on trilateral cooperation with Japan in the Russian Far East. Although IDSA's disclaimer reads that "Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manohar Parrikar IDSA or of the Government of India", the think tank's prestige and professional affiliation with the Indian government strongly suggest that this proposal will be taken seriously by decision makers, as it should because it's sensible from the perspective of all three nations' interests. This is far from an original vision and was one that I've also written about in the past too. I presented a short speech about this in September 2018 at a Russian Duma roundtable event on the country's "Turn to Asia" (as its post-2014 foreign policy reprioritisation is called by many in Moscow) that was republished at the time by one of my partner sites under the title "Russia Must Bring The 'Asia-Africa Growth Corridor' To The Far East". I incorporated some of my insight into a jointly authored academic article that I released at the official journal of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO, which is run by the Russian Foreign Ministry) last year about "The Prospects Of Russia And India Leading A New Non-Aligned Movement".

The idea is that trilateral Russian-Indian-Japanese cooperation can prevent Moscow's potential overdependence on Beijing, though this framework should focus solely on friendly forms of cooperation such as trade, energy, and infrastructure and not military ones in order to not be seen suspiciously by China. Last year's drastic worsening of relations between China and India along the LAC made it politically impossible for Russia to make progress on this policy, hence the importance of those two Asian Great Powers' recent "synchronised disengagement" agreement and Washington's S-400 sanctions threats against New Delhi. Those two developments are likely interpreted real positively by Moscow as signs of New Delhi's goodwill towards it. Although Russian-Indian relations became more complicated over the past few months after many in New Delhi overreacted to Foreign Minister Lavrov's criticisms last December about the US' rising influence over the South Asian state, there's powerful political will on both sides not to let that "misunderstanding" jeopardise the promising future of their strategic partnership. Mr. Shringla's visit is therefore expected to rectify their recent problems and get everything back on track, exactly as Russia wanted before last summer's Sino-Indo clashes along the LAC threw a wrench in its plans. India's close ties with Japan could even be put to positive use in helping

Tokyo and Moscow make progress on resolving their disagreement over the Kuril Islands. Slowly but surely, Russia is becoming a relevant Indo-Pacific power contrary to the US' expectations expressed in its recently declassified 2017 "Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific" which described Moscow only as a "marginal player". India is its primary anchor in this trans-oceanic space, but New Delhi hopes to create the conditions whereby Tokyo could play a supportive role alongside Moscow's traditional partners in Hanoi. The grand strategic vision that's starting to take shape is that Russia's mainland influence in Asia is concentrated in China while its maritime counterpart is spread between India, Japan, and Vietnam. Mr. Shringla's upcoming trip will thus reveal how fast Russia feels comfortable moving along that second-mentioned geostrategic track.

Source: [The Tribune \(Pakistan\)](#); 15 February 2021

CHINA OVERTAKES THE US AS LARGEST TRADING PARTNER OF EUROPEAN UNION

- Sumit Arora

The People's Republic of China has overtaken the United States (US) as the biggest trading partner of the European Union (EU) in 2020, according to the data by the European Union statistics agency, Eurostat. Britain, which left the European Union in 2020, was the third-largest trading partner for the bloc, behind China and the United States. The trade volume of the EU with China reached 586 billion euros (\$711 billion) in 2020, compared to 555 billion euros (\$673 billion) for the US. Bilateral trade with the UK reached 444.7 billion euros.

- The EU exports to China rose by 2.2 per cent to 202.5 billion euros while imports from China increased by 5.6 per cent to 383.5 billion euros.
- Similarly, EU exports to the United States fell by 13.2 per cent in the same period and imports by 8.2 per cent.
- Exports to the UK fell by 13.2 per cent, while imports dropped by 13.9 per cent.

Source: [curretaffairs.adda247.com](#); 17 February 2021

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