



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

175 COUNTRIES MOVE TO END ILLICIT ACTIVITIES IN GULF OF GUINEA

- Adaku Onyenucheya

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Assembly has charged the Governments of its 175 member states to assist in the prevention of piracy and armed robbery against ships as well as other illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea. The charge was made as part of the series of resolutions adopted by the IMO Assembly at the concluded 32nd session held in London following concerns on the incessant attacks and illicit activities in the GoG. Part of the resolution includes a comprehensive action to address seafarers' challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, consolidating issues related to crew change, access to medical care, key worker designation and seafarers' prioritisation for COVID-19 vaccination.

According to the IMO Assembly, there are serious concerns on the safety and security of the maritime industry and the seafaring community as a result of the attacks against ships sailing in the Gulf of Guinea and the grave danger to life. The IMO Assembly also stated that it is also concerned about the serious risks to navigational safety and the environment that attacks by pirates, armed robbers and other criminals may cause. The assembly urged governments that have not yet become parties to the 2012 Cape Town Agreement on fishing vessel safety to consider doing so by October 11, 2022, the tenth anniversary of the Agreement's adoption. While acknowledging the efforts made by countries in the region as well as other entities, the assembly urged governments to cooperate with and assist States in the Gulf of Guinea to develop their national and regional capabilities to improve maritime governance in waters under their jurisdiction. The assembly also urged governments to prevent piracy, armed robbery against ships and other illicit maritime activities following international law, in particular, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The assembly further urged governments to assist States to build capacity to interdict and bring to justice those who commit crimes.

Such assistance, the assembly stated, include strengthening of the legal frameworks, including anti-piracy laws and enforcement regulations, training of national maritime law enforcement agencies, promoting anti-piracy and law enforcement coordination and cooperation procedures between and among States, regions, organisations and industry; and the sharing of information. On capacity-building, the IMO Assembly adopted a strategy to address the needs of member states including issues identified through the IMO Member State Audit Scheme (IMSAS); and achieve the maritime aspects of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through a focus on supporting the development and implementation of robust national maritime

policies and strategies predicated on harnessing the full potential of the maritime economies.

Source: [The Guardian](#); 29 December 2021

VIETNAM, INDONESIA INTENSIFY COLLABORATION IN MARITIME SECURITY, SAFETY

- VNA

The Vietnam Coast Guard and the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency on December 28 signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in strengthening maritime security and safety between the two forces. The signing ceremony was held online. The MoU marks the official beginning of the close and comprehensive cooperation between the two agencies since they signed a Letter of Intent on enhancing bilateral cooperation on August 23, 2017. The MoU sets forth specific contents and clearly defines the responsibilities and authority of each party in the process of implementing the document's contents.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Commander of the Vietnam Coast Guard Major General Le Quang Dao affirmed the importance of collaboration between the two forces. Vice Admiral Aan Kunia, chief of the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency said that the Vietnam Coast Guard is an important partner in Southeast Asia in ensuring maritime security and safety in the region. He expressed his belief that, on the basis of the MoU, the two parties will deepen and expand the bilateral friendship and cooperation. The newly-inked document is expected to serve as a tool, corridor and mechanism for the two sides to enhance mutual understanding, and practical and effective cooperation to settle cases arising at sea. The signing is an important milestone that opens a page of deeper and more comprehensive cooperation in the bilateral relationship between the two sides. The MoU is one of the temporary measures in delimiting the exclusive economic zone between the two countries, contributing to preserving peace, stability, cooperation and development on the region's waters.

Source: [Vietnam Plus](#); 28 December 2021

US NAVY SEIZES CACHE OF AK-47 ASSAULT RIFLES

US 5th Fleet ships have seized approximately 1400 AK-47 assault rifles from a stateless fishing vessel during a flag verification inspection in the North Arabian Sea, according to the United States Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT). US Navy patrol coastal ships USS Tempest (PC 2) and USS Typhoon (PC 5) recovered the weapons and over 226,000 rounds of ammunition during a search conducted by embarked US Coast Guard personnel, on 20 December. The weapons and ammunition have since been transported to guided-missile destroyer USS O’Kane (DDG 77) and await 'final disposition,' according to NAVCENT. 'The stateless vessel was assessed to have originated in Iran and transited international waters along a route historically used to traffic weapons unlawfully to the Houthis in Yemen,' NAVCENT added. 'The direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of weapons to the Houthis violates U.N. Security Council Resolutions and U.S. sanctions.'

After removal of five crew members who identified themselves as Yemen nationals and the illegal weapons, the US Navy determined the stateless vessel to be a hazard to commercial shipping and subsequently sank it. 'U.S. naval forces regularly perform maritime security operations in the Middle East to ensure the free flow of legitimate trade and to disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and other unlawful activity,' NAVCENT reported. 'U.S. Navy warships operating in the U.S. 5th Fleet region have seized approximately 8,700 illicit weapons in 2021.'

Source: [Shepherd News](#); 24 December 2021

UK UNCLOS INQUIRY: IS UNCLOS FIT FOR PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA? A COMMENT

- Elizabeth Mavropoulou

One of the most contemporary challenges international law is facing today is protecting, monitoring, and enforcing human rights at sea. A recently launched House of Lords Inquiry in the United Kingdom examining the UNCLOS applicability in the 21st century is asking amongst other questions, how to address the contemporary challenge of monitoring and enforcing human rights law at sea.

It can be said that human rights at sea are a relatively recent narrative in the long history of UNCLOS. Academics only started writing explicitly on the topic ten years ago (indicative scholarship includes that of Treves 2010, Petrig & Geiss 2014, Evans & Galani 2014, and Papanicolopulu 2018) and there is only one civil society organisation explicitly mandated to raise awareness of human rights abuses at sea. Recently, human rights at sea have made it as a distinct topic of maritime and human rights related policy agendas at UN, regional and national levels. The UK House of Lords Inquiry

into the future of UNCLOS and its applicability in the 21st century launched by the Lords Select Committee on International Relations and Defence is one such example.

A human rights at sea gap

During the oral evidence stage, it was well acknowledged by the majority of the expert witnesses invited by the Lords that UNCLOS does not explicitly and comprehensively deal with human rights protections at sea (Oral evidence of Haines, Klein, Petrig, Evans and Galani). A dissenting opinion was that of the UK government which remains of the view that UNCLOS does ‘address human rights issues in some discreet areas’, that have also have been further supplemented by instruments such as the 2006 Maritime Labour Convention and the 2007 ILO Work in Fishing Convention as well as IMO Guidelines.

As it has been argued on the blog before, the UK’s position reflects a narrow and somewhat flawed understanding of human rights obligations at sea that still incorrectly equates human rights with minimum labour and welfare standards on board UK-flagged commercial shipping and fishing vessels. This flawed perception has severe consequences for the human rights of people who found themselves at sea around the world and in the UK’s territorial waters and who are not always at sea for employment purposes, (if they have an employment contract in the first place), but also for purposes of recreation, military, or in search of asylum. Throughout the oral evidence stage, experts have sought to explain to the Committee that the protection of human rights at sea cannot rest on the limited maritime jurisdictional competencies established under UNCLOS. In other words, despite its detailed regulation on maritime delimitation and states’ jurisdictional competencies within the various maritime zones (UNCLOS Part I -VII), as well as general guidance on how to use the oceans’ natural resources in accordance with the principle of the common heritage of mankind (Part XI, Article 136) UNCLOS says little, if anything, on the application of and compliance with human rights at sea.

In fact, one could argue that UNCLOS alone can hinder the monitoring and enforcement of human rights because of the principle of the exclusive jurisdiction of the flag state (Article 92 (1)), a fortiori in cases where the flag state is an open registry or flag of convenience. Essentially, under UNCLOS, flag states – namely administration entities licencing the flag of the coastal state-, are legally responsible to ensure the effective application and compliance with human rights on board their registered vessels, wherever they might be. In the case of flags of convenience, these are often protected by the corporate veil from commercial accountability, as an effective licensee of the coastal state. The challenge of effective monitoring and enforcement of human rights at sea is further compounded by conflicting legal obligations between the commercial flag administration and the shipowner, ship manager, insurer and legal contractual requirements for strict confidentiality. This system is one of the single most significant barriers to transparency as to the scale of human, labour and social rights abuses at sea occurring on the high seas. This is not to say that UNCLOS has failed the world, or that it has become irrelevant for the 21st century. On the contrary, UNCLOS should be better understood as a ‘framework convention’, one of many in international law, setting the general rules and principles surrounding the use of the seas and the oceans. It must also be seen as a product of its time, an instrument that could not have foreseen most of the contemporary human

rights challenges that arise in today's maritime environment, and which require careful attention. One of the challenges that require the attention of international lawyers as aptly summarised by Prof. Petrig in her oral evidence is the serious 'sea-blindness' of international human rights law'.

Fighting the law's sea blindness

The way to fight the sea-blindness of international human rights law is not necessarily by creating new law, but rather to take a holistic approach when conceptualising and dealing within the context of human rights at sea. This holistic approach could start by broadening the understanding of human rights at sea to go beyond seafarers, and fishers' rights to include indigenous fishers, children at sea, refugees and migrants at sea, victims of trafficking or forced labour at sea, to the victims of sexual assault on board cruise ships. A second step is to refine the application of human rights law at sea by clarifying the scope of human rights obligations at sea, the duty bearers (flag state, port state, coastal state), often acting through private actors, and when interpreting the law to take into account the spatial dimension of the seas and the oceans. Lastly, and as Papanicolopulu proposes the protection of human rights at sea can be enhanced by unifying the existing various self-contained regimes concerning the protection of people at sea, which spread across UNCLOS, human rights law, refugee law and labour law standards into one single legal regime.

The Inquiry on UNCLOS has now closed and a Report will be published by the Lords some time in 2022 answering these timely and pressing questions in light of the oral and written evidence received. Meanwhile, the UK is soon to pass legislation that goes squarely against the concept of respecting human rights at sea. The proposed Nationality and Borders Bill will seek to endanger life at sea by allowing the Border Force to intercept and push backs migrant boats violating the UK's human rights obligations, it will criminalise civil society search and rescue organisations performing the duty to rescue people in distress at sea (analysed here) and penalise those few who will survive the Channel crossing. Human rights at sea are to become more and more a compelling subject of academic and policy research and hopefully judicial scrutiny. There are still questions to be posed and answered.

Source: ejiltalk.org; 27 December 2021

HOW PALK BAY LURES DELTA FISHERS INTO SRI LANKAN NAVY'S NET

- Antony Fernando

MAYILADUTHURAI: Seven fishermen from Mayiladuthurai district figured among the 13 who on Monday set out to sea from Pudukkottai district and were arrested late that night by the Sri Lankan navy for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). This, coastal delta native fishermen say, is not an isolated incident, pointing to conflicts and the lure of tranquil sea at Palk Strait as making them to risk it all and migrate to fish. P Selladurai, a boat-owning fisherman from Vanagiri in Mayiladuthurai district said, "I have been fishing from Palk Bay for years. I brought

my vessel here to Jegathampattinam (in Pudukkottai) because I do not have a harbour at my village. I do not wish to berth at Poompohar harbour because of differences we have with them like their use of purse seine nets. So I migrated to Jegathampattinam where we can fish in unison with the Palk Bay villagers.” With the Palk Bay bordering five coastal districts between Nagapattinam and Ramanathapuram, fishers in the region carry out fishing in Palk Strait on alternate days of the week, in a rotational policy between mechanised boats and motorised boats. The lone conflict they have is reportedly with Sri Lanka which arrests them for allegedly crossing the IMBL, with delta native fishers among them. It may be noted that one of the two boats that were seized by the Sri Lankan navy during Monday’s arrest of 13 fishermen was a trawler from Sembanarkoil block in Mayiladuthurai district. It was, however, operating from Jegathampattinam harbour.

Sources said nearly 150 such boats from Mayiladuthurai district are operating from the Jegathampattinam harbour and the fish landing centre at Kottaipattinam in Pudukkottai district. Some of the fishers from Nagapattinam district also operate from Mallipattinam in Thanjavur district. P Balamurugan, a fisher representative from Jegathampattinam said, “Fishers from other districts migrate to Palk Bay because the waters in Palk Strait are tranquil, especially during monsoon, as compared to the Coromandel waters. They respect the law of the land. But they are also facing the same conflict with the Sri Lankan Navy as us when it comes to fishing.”

Source: [The New Indian Express](#); 23 December 2021

MARITIME FORCES

INDONESIAN MARITIME AGENCY HAILS SUCCESS OVER NATUNA DRILLING

The Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) has hailed last month's completion of a six-month drilling project on Indonesia's continental shelf in the North Natuna Sea as a "victory" over China's constant objections. In the past two years, interventions from China through a "grey hull" naval approach and diplomatic threats became increasingly common around the Natuna Islands.

The archipelagic regency and the surrounding waters are located between the Malay Peninsula and the island of Borneo to the south of the South China Sea, one of the most disputed bodies of water in the world. China has unlawfully claimed ownership of the sea as well as part of Indonesia's territorial waters and seabed, over which the country has the right to conduct economic activities like oil and gas exploration and fishing. This included contractual activities with foreign companies, such as the United Kingdom's independent Harbour Energy and Russia's state-owned Zarubezhneft, which operated offshore drills in the Indonesian regency. The island chain was constantly under guard by the Indonesian Navy and Bakamla, which essentially functions as the national coast guard. The drilling activity at two natural gas appraisal wells in the Tuna Block began in June and was completed in late November. Bakamla chief Vice Adm Aan Kurnia said Indonesian patrol vessels were occasionally found shadowed by Chinese Coast Guard vessels 4-5 nautical miles from the drilling site. But on the completion of drilling last month, he said Indonesia had "scored a point". Aan added that the agency would continue to enforce the nation's territorial rights and report any disagreements to the Office of the Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister as well as the Foreign Ministry.

"The point is, they [Chinese vessels] did not disturb us physically and the drilling was completed," Aan told reporters on Wednesday (Dec 22) during a year-end review of the agency's work. Following the successful completion of the appraisal drilling, Harbour Energy is seeking to finalise its investment to develop the Tuna Block in 2023 with initial production planned for 2026, according to industry publication Energy Voice. Drilling continued despite the movement of Chinese research ship Haiyang Dizhi-10 in the area between August and October, which caught the attention of NGOs like the Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative (IOJI). Jakarta and Beijing have reciprocally summoned their envoys over the past two years, mostly discreetly, to lodge protests over the activities in Natuna waters.

In some instances, bilateral tensions have flared from hostile engagements at sea, underscoring Asean's insistence on the need for a code of conduct in the South China Sea. The North Natuna Sea is located along the southern edge of the hotly contested body of water, over which a handful of South-East Asian nations have overlapping

claims with China, including Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Beijing made sweeping claims over the South China Sea, which an international tribunal invalidated in 2016. Indonesia is not a claimant in the dispute, but China has insisted it has a claim in “relevant waters”, a term that has been rejected for its incompatibility with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos). Eddy Pratomo, an international law professor at Diponegoro University, said Indonesia was coming from a much stronger legal standpoint that allowed it to ignore China’s repeated protests that the drilling site encroached the nine-dash line underpinning its claims.

“With the completion of drilling, China’s protests are now completely irrelevant, because the objective has been achieved,” Eddy told The Jakarta Post. Bakamla chief Aan said he had invited his counterparts from five Asean nations to a meeting in February 2022 in Batam, Riau Islands province, to “share experiences and foster brotherhood” among the countries facing similar challenges in the context of China’s claims. He said it was important to present a coordinated approach to such incidents, especially following reports on the presence of China’s maritime militia in the waters of the South China Sea claimants. China reportedly disrupted similar drilling projects in Malaysian and Vietnamese waters this year. Indonesia has invited Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam to convene next year as part of the Asean Coast Guard Forum, which met virtually in October. “We will share experiences on how to respond in the field when we face the same ‘disturbance,’” he said, without mentioning China by name. The Chinese Embassy in Jakarta was not immediately available for comment.

Source: [The Star](#); 24 December 2021

FORCES HOLD SYNERGISTIC EXERCISE TO PREPARE FOR CHINA CHALLENGE

- PNS

Honing their operational readiness to meet any challenge from China, the three forces and more than 3,000 elite para commandos and Special Forces are carrying out a combined exercise in the strategically-important Andaman and Nicobar islands. This multi-domain exercise is taking place weeks after the three services carried out similar drills along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh and the Line of Control (LoC) facing Pakistan in Jammu & Kashmir.

This multi-domain exercise is taking place weeks after the three services carried out similar drills along the LAC in Ladakh and the LOC facing Pakistan in Jammu & Kashmir. Giving details of the current exercise, sources said here on Wednesday the exercise is currently in progress at the Nicobar group of islands of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. As part of the exercise, troops of the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force

were mobilised for amphibious landing, in close coordination with the para drop of airborne troops.

Amphibious landing involves the ground troops landing at the seashore from the ships under covering fire from the warships and aircraft. The rapid response capability of Shatrueet Brigade has validated wherein the paratroopers who had moved from mainland executed airborne drop in an island territory of Andamans in a realistic tactical setting under the overall command and control of Andaman and Nicobar Command, the only joint services operational command of the defence forces of India. Lt General Ajai Singh, Commander-in-Chief Andaman Nicobar Command, witnessed the Airborne Exercise and complimented the paratroopers for their battle readiness. The exercise saw the transport planes para dropping light tanks and assault vehicles along with the troops. The Shatrueet Brigade had earlier participated in the same exercise at the LAC and LOC. The Andamans is very important for Indian interests as most of the sea lanes ferrying Indian imports and exports pass through them close to the Islands. India has to ensure that trade takes place unhindered.

Moreover, China is increasingly flexing its maritime muscle in the region and the Indian security establishment is keen to test all its equipment and troops to meet any threat, they said. Over the years India has developed vast infrastructure there including airbases with the capability of launching front-line fighter jets including SU-30s, Mirage, and Jaguars. These bases have manifold increased the strategic reach of the Indian forces to meet any challenge in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. This series of exercises is also an effort to validate the doctrine of fighting the war jointly in perfect coordination and achieve the military objective in the shortest possible time. Similar exercise at some other strategically important places may take place in the coming weeks, sources added.

Source: [Daily Pioneer](#); 23 December 2021

INDIA SUCCESSFULLY TESTS SHORT-RANGE BALLISTIC MISSILE 'PRALAY' OFF ODISHA COAST: DRDO

- Gloria Methri

India successfully test-fired short-range surface to surface-guided ballistic missile 'Pralay' off the Odisha coast, in an added boost to the country's Defence prowess. The solid-fuel, battlefield missile developed by Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) is based on Prithvi Defence Vehicle from the Indian ballistic missile programme. The Pralay missile, launched from the APJ Abdul Kalam Island around 10.30 am, met all the mission objectives, officials said. A battery of tracking instruments monitored its trajectory along the coastline, they said. Pralay is a 350-500 km short-range, surface-to-surface missile with a payload capacity of 500-1,000 kg.

The project to develop Pralay was sanctioned in March 2015 with a budget of ₹332.88 crores.

India successfully test-fires Agni Prime Missile

The development comes just days after India successfully test-fired its new generation Agni Prime Missile. The Agni-P is a new advanced variant of the Agni class of missiles. The surface ballistic missile with a range of 1000 to 2000 km, was tested in Balasore, Odisha. The new Prime variant of the nuclear-capable strategic missile met all its mission objectives with a high level of accuracy, the DRRDO said. Notably, the nuclear-capable missile was earlier test-fired for the first time by the DRDO on June 28, 2021, at the Odisha coast and it was also successful. The successful test becomes yet another leap towards the government's 'Make in India' initiative.

India bolstering its defence

Earlier this month, India had successfully tested the air version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. According to the R&D organisation, the missile was successfully test-fired from supersonic fighter aircraft Sukhoi 30 MK-I. The test-firing was carried out from Integrated Test Range in Chandipur off the Odisha coast on Wednesday morning.

Prior to that on December 7, the Indian Navy's indigenously designed and developed Vertical Launched Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM) was successfully test-fired from a static vertical launcher in the Integrated Test Range (ITR). The VL-SRSAM, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for the Indian Navy, has an operational range of 50 to km distance and features mid-course inertial guidance through fibre optic gyroscope and active radar homing in the terminal phase.

Source: republicworld.com; 22 December 2021

THE PHILIPPINES' DEEPENING TIES WITH INDIA

- Akash Sahu

INDIA's Act East policy seems to be taking strides in matching the rhetoric its foreign policy establishment has put out for so long. More particularly, India has engaged with partners in the Pacific where potential for strategic cooperation was, for many reasons, unexploited. The Philippines is one such Asean country with which India's recent engagements have seen considerable improvement. India and the Philippines are both vibrant democracies with large demographic capacities. The strategic calculations in Manila seem to have found New Delhi willing in maintaining the regional Indo-Pacific balance of power and deepening bilateral relations for mutual growth.

Recent developments

The Philippines has decided to buy at least seven Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) and eight Dornier 228 aircraft from India. Both countries also signed the

"Implementing Agreement" in March, 2021 which will facilitate arms purchases between them. Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana had conveyed that his country was interested in buying the BrahMos missiles from India. In 2020, the Philippines' Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin Jr. and Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar chaired a joint commission on bilateral cooperation and decided to strengthen defense engagements, maritime cooperation and defense training. They also agreed to cooperate on counter-terrorism and information sharing, among other different areas such as tourism. India's INS Ranvijay and INS Kora were deployed in the Pacific in August 2021 for a maritime partnership exercise with the Philippines' BRP Antonio Luna in the West Philippine Sea. Many operational maneuvers in the exercise allowed for greater interoperability between the two navies.

The Philippines Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has been coordinating with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) to promote bilateral trade and business ties. A preferential trade agreement (PTA) between the two countries, which will boost the value and volume of bilateral trade, may soon see the light of the day. Last year, the Philippines' imports from India stood at \$1.51 billion and exports to India amounted to \$547.98 million. Philippine Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez said that there was huge potential for greater economic exchange between the two countries.

Strategic convergence

The ups and downs in the Philippines' relationship with Beijing has been commented upon by analysts worldwide. But the conflict over territorial claims in their adjoining maritime region is still a bone of contention. The increasingly assertive position that China has taken in the South China Sea since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has worried Southeast Asian countries, and naturally also shot up concerns in Manila. The Duterte administration, which was set on improving ties with China and could even have been perceived as anti-US many times, began to mend relations with Washington last year. The Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) between the US and the Philippines is a foundational security arrangement which allows presence of US troops on Philippine soil. President Duterte has suspended the termination of the VFA in the interest of Philippine security, citing "great power competition" in the region.

The Philippines' curve back to the US is a strategic development for Indo-Pacific countries like India. Manila has shown that in matters of security it is still conjoined with traditional allies. It has also expressed interest in buying BrahMos missiles from India, which will be its first deterrent capability against China. It may be speculated that given the common anxieties regarding China's conduct in its neighboring areas, the Philippines could find more alignment with the Quad countries.

Multi-alignment

What brings the Philippines and India together?

Friendship among nations is based on shared history and culture, or a common threat. India and the Philippines may be concerned about the threat to freedom of maritime space in the Indo-Pacific region and a rules-based international order. Hence, a growing bonhomie between New Delhi and Manila may not be very surprising. From the viewpoint of their foreign relations, however, there is an interesting observation.

India has shifted from its policy of non-alignment during the Cold War to a more pragmatic policy of multi-alignment today, suited to a globalized world. Meanwhile, the Philippines, in the past couple of years, has hinted that it may not be pressed to choose one camp against the other. This stance of not becoming overly dependent on one country, and exercising autonomy to engage with multiple powers based on national and security interests, probably explains the increasing pull Manila has created for New Delhi.

Although bilateral involvement is robust for now, the security environment in Asia is volatile to say the least. It may be essential to create formal channels of dialogue between important political and bureaucratic officials of the Philippines and India in order to sustain this engagement, and translate it into deeper strategic agreement. A more transparent conversation about China and the evolving security situation in the South China Sea may be aptly suited to the bilateral agenda. For both India and the Philippines, engaging with China is more or less obvious if not explicitly desirable. But they may work together to express to Beijing that their territorial sovereignty must be respected, and disputes resolved amicably

Source: [The Manila Times](#); 23 December 2021

CHINESE AIRCRAFT CARRIER SHOWS OFF 'COMBAT CAPABILITY' DURING MILITARY DRILL IN PACIFIC OCEAN

- Meera Suresh

China has conducted a military drill involving its first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, east of Okinawa, in the Pacific Ocean. Analysts said the exercises, which had fighter jets and helicopter operations indicated the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) increased combat capability. According to the Japanese Defense Ministry, besides the Liaoning, a Type 055 destroyer, a Type 052D destroyer, two Type 054A frigates, and a Type 901 supply ship took part in the drill. The ships sailed in waters about 300km (186 miles) east of Kitadaitojima in Okinawa Sunday, reported South China Morning Post.

Not just the Liaoning, China's second aircraft carrier Shandong too is conducting a drill in the disputed waters of the South China Sea. Shandong has left its homeport in Sanya for "combat-oriented exercises," according to the Chinese military mouthpiece. The Liaoning set out for a high seas training exercise on the Pacific Ocean last week. The carrier group was spotted about 350km west of the Danjo islands last Wednesday, then crossed the Miyako Strait to enter the Pacific the following day. On the same day, Japan's navy spotted the Type 052D guided-missile destroyer Xiamen passing through the Miyako Strait.

The pictures by the Japanese Defense Ministry show J-15 fighter jets and Z-9 and Z-18 helicopters on board the Liaoning. In response, Japan sent its Izumo destroyer and fighter jets to monitor the Chinese fleet. According to military observers, China is

trying to get the two strike groups to work together so as to "improve the Chinese navy's ability to strike inland targets and would make multi-platform coordinated attacks possible." Commentator and former Chinese military instructor Song Zhongping told South China Morning Post that the latest drill showed the Liaoning had acquired combat effectiveness with more types of aircraft on board.

"There is also a different range of aircraft, including fighter jets and early-warning aircraft such as the Z-18, which means that a complete formation combat system has been formed," he said. "It has relatively strong defensive capabilities for autonomous operations in far seas and air," he added. Collin Koh, a research fellow with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, too think the drill was "setting the foundation for future. "The Liaoning could carry up to 24 J-15 fighter jets and an assortment of helicopters. It's after all mainly for training and to set the foundation for future designs," he told The South China Morning Post.

Source: [International Business Times](#); 23 December 2021

SHIPPING, PORTS AND OCEAN ECONOMY

REPAIR OF FAULTY UNDERSEA CABLE TO BEGIN IN FEBRUARY

- Luu Quy

Vietnamese internet users will continue to experience slow speeds for over a month, with repairs to the disruption-prone APG undersea cable scheduled to start early February. The Asia Pacific Gateway (APG), which links Vietnam with Hong Kong and Japan, has encountered technical problems since December 13 due to a ‘cable fault’ about 125 km from the Hong Kong landing station. The representative of an Internet service provider in Vietnam said the traffic loss due to the impact of this disruption was estimated at 1 Terabyte (TB). The operator of the APG cable has informed local internet service providers that repair work on the undersea cable will start February 2 and is expected to be completed on February 6.

Vietnamese internet users, therefore, would have to suffer sluggish access to international websites for over a month. The APG cable has suffered technical problems four times so far this year, with the previous disruption happening in October. The cable resumed full service on November 27 after over a month of repair.

Vietnam, where more than 64 percent of the population is online, has six submarine cable systems, plus a 120 gigabit channel that runs overland through China. The APG cable, officially launched in December 2016, is capable of providing bandwidths of up to 54 Tbps (Terabit per second). It runs for around 10,400 km, with connection points in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. As of January 2021, out of its population of over 96 million people, the number of internet users reached approximately 69 million, according to a global consumer survey by German data portal Statista.

Source: e.vnexpress.net; 25 December 2021

QATAR LOOKS TO INFUSE \$10BN IN US PORTS

Qatar is reportedly seeking the support of international banks, with the aim to make an investment of around \$10bn in US ports. US-based adviser Michael Frodl, familiar with the plan, was quoted by Reuters as saying: “The Qataris have been preparing for almost a year to test the waters with US port investments. “We think that a shrewd investor with the \$10bn the Qataris desire to put into American port infrastructure would likely look at the underserved East Coast first and foremost. The West Coast is getting all the US government and private investment attention, while the East Coast is long overdue for improvements.” East Coast is projected to be developed in stages as per preliminary plans.

While investing, Qatar will focus on ports with easy access to roads and railway, along with aging medium-sized ports south of Boston and north of Jacksonville. These investments are expected to be supported by debt, which would be linked to the port assets. At present, Qatar is said to be engaging in early talks with banks for selecting a structuring adviser. These banks include Morgan Stanley, HSBC and Credit Suisse. Last month, US sanctioned an infrastructure package of \$1.2tn, which encompassed nearly \$5.22bn of federal funding for the implementation of port specific programmes. As per the US Coast Guard, the country has nearly 360 ports. At present, Qatar has minimal ownership in overseas ports. Last year, Global Ports Holding (GPH) agreed to divest Turkish company Ortadogu Antalya Liman Isletmeleri (Port Akdeniz), which runs the Akdeniz-Antalya port, for \$140m to Qatar-based QTerminals.

Source: ship-technology.com; 22 December 2021

ASIA LOSES LNG FLOWS TO EUROPE AS JKM-NWE SPREAD NEARS \$15/MMBTU

- Eric Yep and Shermaine Ang

An increasing number of US LNG cargoes are being sent to Europe and the Atlantic basin rather than destinations in Asia as the price spread between Asian and European spot prices has risen to a record \$14.5/MMBtu, according to traders and market sources. This week alone, at least five LNG cargoes headed to Asia were diverted to European ports, including cargoes loaded from Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria's Bonny LNG terminal, and US LNG terminals, shipbrokers said.

The diversions mean Asia could see fewer LNG inflows in coming weeks while spot prices remain significantly below Europe, possibly until a sharp drop in temperature forces importers like Japan and South Korea to compete for spot cargoes. The spread between JKM in Asia and the Dutch TTF gas hub widened to \$10/MMBtu on Dec 21, with one major Chinese end-user saying it was wide enough to incentivize loadings from Southeast Asia and Australia to the Atlantic on paper, although the reversal in shipping flows has not reached such extreme levels. "The economics support reverse

flows now, but there is a pecking order," a Pacific basin producer said. "The whole world is sending volume to Europe now. US and Middle East volumes will be more competitive. But things can change suddenly, if a cold front hits Asia and cargoes are already flowing to Europe." A Singapore-based trader said market participants were pulling cargoes to Europe, and there was no buying in Asia, including the absence of any short-covering, despite the onset of winter in China and Japan. China-based importers and national oil companies said they were well-supplied for an acute winter after the market volatility and bottlenecks of last winter, leaving them with healthy inventories even up to February. However, even with a wide arbitrage, many Asian importers are unlikely to divert their surplus LNG shipments to Europe readily, given that winter conditions can change quickly and most utilities do not wish to be caught on the back foot.

Gas storage constraints in Asia continue to be a problem, leaving importers with a very narrow buffer to optimize deliveries. Utilities in Beijing said they have LNG storage buffer of less than a week, while Japanese terminals can sustain supply for at least two weeks if downstream demand were to spike sharply. "I wonder how sustainable these diversions to Atlantic will be though. We have diverted one back to Europe as well," a Singapore-based trader said. A shipbroker said the volume of LNG on the water had dropped significantly from October-November levels, indicating that the bulk of LNG cargoes in transit had largely been delivered. Hence, Asian utilities were right to hold on to surplus volumes instead of rushing to resell, as the market's ability to respond to sharp changes in temperatures remains limited. Meanwhile, a drop in LNG spot shipping rates is helping arbitrage into Europe from the Atlantic basin and Middle East suppliers. Day rates fell to \$115,000/day in the Pacific basin on Dec. 21, from as much as \$320,000/day at the end of November, S&P Global Platts data showed.

Source: spglobal.com; 22 December 2021

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TRUCKERS BEAR BRUNT OF EMPTY CONTAINERS-FILLED PORTS

- Julia Pierrepont

Some Southern California truckers have said their livelihoods and even their national economy hinge on shipping containers, but these days those containers are filled with air instead of goods. While they acknowledge that issues from international trade conflicts, soaring consumer demand in Christmas season to COVID-19-induced labor shortages are straining the supply chain, the container plight tops them all.

"Our biggest problem by far is empty shipping containers," Matt Schrap, CEO of the Harbor Trucking Association, a coalition of intermodal carriers serving America's West Coast ports, told Xinhua. "They are the bottleneck that is sinking the global supply chain." There are now 71,000 empty containers on Los Angeles terminals or near-dock depots, up from 65,000 a month ago, reported the FreightWaves on Wednesday, which closely follows the global logistics industry, noting that the glut of empty containers is worsening. "It's a complicated mess," sighed Ian Weiland, vice

president of operations for JC Transports, a mid-sized trucking firm operating out of the twin ports of Los Angeles-Long Beach in Southern California. In a nutshell, the supply chain starts with consumers ordering goods from large retail giants like Amazon, who then place high volume orders for these goods from all over the world. Ocean shipping lines load these goods into fortified steel shipping containers, stack thousands of full containers onboard their ships, and sail them across the sea to ports like Southern California.

After the ships dock at a terminal, longshoremen crane the containers off the ships into the terminal's container yards. Then, a trucker, hired by the retail chain that owns the goods, arranges an appointment time with terminal operator to pick up the full container from the terminal yard. After being loaded onto the truck's chassis, the container can be delivered to the retail chain's warehouse for unpacking. "In an ideal world," Schrap said, "Our trucker then picks up the empty container and makes an appointment to return it to the terminal yard, where it would be loaded back onto the ship and returned to its port of origin to be refilled." "But this is not an ideal world," he noted. "The problem is, shipping liners and terminal owners are dragging their feet, not giving timely appointments for truckers to return the empty containers."

So empties are piling up everywhere, in warehouse parking lots, trucking company compounds, warehouses, and even dirt lots. The terminals and port yards themselves are already filled to capacity. This has created a brutal bottleneck that keeps goods from flowing smoothly and efficiently along the global supply chain, leaving Asian exporters clamoring for empty containers that are returned less and less frequently, and driving American truck drivers out of business. "Now you're stuck driving home with 10-ton steel container on the back of your truck that you can't get rid of. That means you can't go to work the next day," Schrap explained. "That's why so many small truckers like me, are going out of business, putting families at risk, even though the whole country is crying out for more truck drivers," independent trucker, Herb Pounder, explained to Xinhua. "It's tanking our industry and our country's economic recovery." "Asia needs those empty containers back so they can ship out more stuff, so this is hurting them too. But shipping lines can drive up the price they charge per container," Pounder said.

It's reportedly that containers, which used to cost about 1,500 U.S. dollars to be shipped from China and other Asian countries to California, now cost over 8,000 dollars, and there have been reports that some customers have been forced to pay up to 20,000 dollars per container for rush deliveries. Even the mid-sized trucking companies are feeling the pinch. "The problem of empties is eating up everyone's profits," Weiland said. "We are a mid-sized trucking company, but 50 percent to 70 percent of our yard is being wasted, filled with unreturnable empties." He added that hundreds of their truck trailers can also be out of circulation, trapped under empty containers, adding to the chassis shortage. "And there are many trucking companies in the same situation. There is no container storage left anywhere in Los Angeles." "This is a crisis. It's not just a West Coast problem, it's a national problem," Weiland continued. "We need a government agency that can set aside land near ports to store the empties and allow unrestricted drop-offs." Gene Seroka, the executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, was quoted as saying by the FreightWaves that "If necessary,

we will look at additional measures, including levying fees on liner companies for empty containers that dwell excessively at our marine terminals."

Source: [Xinhua](#); 22 December 2021

HYBRID ENERGY SYSTEM INTEGRATES SOLAR POWER AND BATTERIES ON BULKER

As shipowners continue to search for solutions to improve the energy efficiency of their vessels, the technology group at Wartsila has completed the installation and commissioning of a unique hybrid system that integrates solar panels to create a technologically advanced bulker. The system combines and integrates the power from multiple sources to optimize consumption and lower the vessel's emissions. The solar panel installation, which is believed to be the first aboard a bulker, was carried out on the Paolo Topic, a 34,900 gross ton bulker built in 2016 in Japan. Managed by Marfin Management, the 656-foot long vessel was outfitted with the PV panels working with solar panel specialist Solbain. Other segments of the shipping industry have also been testing the use of solar panels, including outfitting on a Dutch inland cargo vessel, and Royal Caribbean International has installed solar panels on some of its newer cruise ships.

Marfin said that special attention was devoted to fitting the solar panels on the Paolo Topic to ensure that they would not create constraints for the loading and unloading of the vessel. A special removable structure was developed and the panels were fitted on the top of the hatches. After the initial tests on the solar production, the second phase involved work with Wartsila on the hybridization of the three Daihatsu main diesel gensets that generate 650 kVA. The gensets had been the only source of electric power on the ship but it is now being integrated with the solar power and batteries that deliver auxiliary power to the grid. "This is an extremely exciting development that will lead the way to a more sustainable future," said Alex Albertini, CEO of Marfin Management. "We will be able to provide our customers and partners with the most advanced vessel performance and environmental quality, and it is without compromising operational effectiveness or flexibility."

The integrated Wartsila HY Module solution, which is in a container, was placed on the ship's deck to save space and was installed without the need for dry-docking. The HY module combines and integrates the energy storage system and additional energy sources, including solar power. Wärtsilä's Energy Management System (EMS) has overall control of the engines, batteries, power distribution to deliver auxiliary power and optimize the onboard power production, consumption, and management. This installation represents a truly significant breakthrough in enabling the bulker fleet to increase both its economic competitiveness and environmental performance," says Giulio Tirelli, Director, Business Development, Wartsila Marine Power. According to Wartsila, when coupled with other sources of energy such as PV panels the benefits are enhanced. The system addresses the marine sector's challenges to lower operating costs while simultaneously reducing environmental impact. The solution achieves this through significant reductions in fuel consumption and maintenance needs while

offering cleaner, safer, and more efficient operations. It also contributes to the vessel's compliance with the industry's Energy Efficiency Existing Ship (EEXI) and Carbon Intensity Indicator (CII) indexes.

Source: [The Maritime Executive](#); 21 December 2021

MARINE ENVIRONMENT

COURT SENTENCES CAPTAIN AND FIRST MATE OF MW WAKASHIO TO PRISON

In Mauritius a court sentenced the captain and first mate of the MW Wakashio, whose grounding in 2020 caused the worst oil spill on the coast of Mauritius, to 20 months in prison. The judge added that both defendants pleaded guilty and apologised.

The Japanese bulk carrier ran aground on July 25th, 2020 on a coral reef southeast of Mauritius, releasing more than 1,000 tonnes of fuel oil into its crystal clear waters. The Panamanian-flagged vessel was on the way to Brazil from Singapore with 3,800 tonnes of fuel oil and 200 tonnes of diesel on board, which soon began to leak but most of which could be pumped out. During the hearing, the Indian captain, Sunil Kumar Nandeshwar, admitted that he had been drinking at a party on board the ship. The oil spill was the worst marine pollution in the history of the country, which depends on its waters for food security and eco-tourism, in an area that has some of the world's most beautiful coral reefs.

Source: africanews.com; 27 December 2021

RUSSIA TO CONTRIBUTE OVER \$4MLN TO UN PROGRAM TO COMBAT PLASTIC POLLUTION IN CASPIAN SEA

- Faizan Hashmi

Russia will allocate over \$4 million for the implementation of a UN program to combat plastic pollution in the Caspian Sea, according to an order of the Russian government published on Tuesday.

"To contribute in 2021-2024, at the expense of the Federal budget, up to \$4,039,200 to the budget of the United Nations Development Program to finance the costs associated with the implementation of the joint project of the United Nations Development Program and the Environment Program 'Assistance in developing a systematic approach to address the issue of marine litter and plastic in the Caspian Sea,'" the order read. The Russian Foreign Ministry was instructed to inform the relevant UN programs about the decision and to provide funding for the expenses.

Source: urdupoint.com; 29 December 2021

ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY HOLDS DRILL TO CLEAN UP EILAT OIL SPILL

The Environmental Protection Ministry held an exercise this week to practice its response to a potential oil spill in Eilat Port. Initiated by the Sea Pollution Prevention Station, which belongs to the ministry's Marine Unit, the teams drilled scenarios including a malfunction in a ship located in a pier at the port resulting in oil pouring into the sea.

The teams practiced pumping fuel from the sea into special vessels. Oil includes all types of fossil fuels that are transported at sea, including crude oil and distilled products such as diesel fuel and gasoline. The ministry carried out the exercise as part of the annual training and exercise regimen in the framework of TAMA – the National Program for Readiness and Response to Sea Pollution Events – in order to maintain the competence and skill of the various units. In September, three environmental organizations threatened to file a lawsuit against the Eilat Ashkelon Pipeline Company after approximately 100 cubic meters of oil leaked from the pipeline near Ashkelon in August. That leak led to the need to clear 5,000 tons of contaminated soil and concerns that the fuel had contaminated groundwater. The organizations, including the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), the Israel Union for Environmental Defense and Zalul, warned that they would file a lawsuit if no concrete steps are taken to correct the issues in the pipeline and prevent the recurrence of environmental damage.

Source: [The Jerusalem Post](#); 29 December 2021

GEOPOLITICS

SIGNIFICANCE OF SRI LANKA-BANGLADESH-INDIA MARITIME COOPERATION

- Pathik Hasan

The Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) is a greater regional initiative taken by India, Sri Lanka and Maldives simultaneously to tackle the maritime threat in the Indian Ocean. Then Sri Lankan Defence Secretary (Now President) Gotabaya Rajapaksa took this significant initiative. In 2011, on the proposal of then Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Colombo Security Conclave Alliance was formed with the countries of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). At first, the alliance included Sri Lanka, Maldives and India. After that, this alliance did not have much activity. The alliance has recently been reactivated by the rise in smuggling, arms trade, and human trafficking in the Indian Ocean Region. The headquarters has been established in 2020 in Sri Lankan Capital City Colombo. Maritime threats matter really in the modern world. Now the Indian Ocean is a piece of interest among world powers. These powers eye a shift towards the Indian Ocean.

Maritime security and countering terrorism and other crimes in the Indian Ocean have emerged as a focus area for India as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy and the doctrine of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). The main task of this alliance will be to maintain security in the sea area and stop human trafficking and smuggling. The members of the alliance will also work on providing mutual humanitarian assistance. To this end, they will provide mutual training to their Navies and Coast Guards for the next one year. Member States will conduct Naval exercises that would be a milestone for the IOR.

Strategic significance

The Indian Ocean gets its strategic significance for various reasons. It was a great maritime route for Asian, European and African States for many years. The Indian Ocean has been considered as a hub of the maritime connectivity project. China's 'String of Pearls' and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project and India's International North South Transport Project (INSTP) go through this Ocean. Even the US Government has transformed its strategy from the Asia Pacific to the Indo Pacific to include the Indian Ocean. The Japan and India proposed 'Cotton Route' is also a big issue that can be taken into consideration. But there are some problems too. Transnational crimes such as illegal narcotics trade, weapons and human trafficking issues, piracy, armed robbery, drug smuggling, illegal fishing, terrorism, environmental degradation issues are some issues. The Indian Ocean has been used as a safe passage by some evil players. States on the Indian Ocean face these serious challenges every day. Illegal drug trafficking from India and Afghanistan, Iran through the Indian Ocean route is known to all. According to some sources, the UNODC has

estimated that 54 per cent of the heroin in India is produced domestically, while 45 per cent originates from Afghanistan. India is particularly vulnerable to the Southern route due to its Western border with Pakistan. Near this border, in the Western Indian States of Punjab and Haryana, is where many of the heroin seizures occur. In 2012, 105 kg of drugs were seized, which had been trafficked from Pakistan along rail routes. In 2013 alone, the Indian Narcotics Control Bureau reported seizures totaling 4,609 kg. Data collected through seizures by various authorities has confirmed India as a transit country for Southeast Asia, West Africa and North America.

Bangladesh also faces significant problems due to the drug trade through the Indian Ocean and India. The country suffers from illicit drug use among its population, such as in Dhaka where there are an estimated 2.5 million people using drugs. India is a large provider of heroin to the Bangladeshi market, and it is trafficked over the Western and Eastern borders. However, it is unclear whether the heroin originates from Afghanistan or India, as this data has not been sufficiently collected. Both India and Bangladesh are becoming ever more dependent on maritime trade, with these states importing goods worth over US\$ 52 million and US\$ 447 million respectively. Therefore, to function effectively they require an absence of maritime crime in order for trade to be uninterrupted, and for their economies to thrive. Bangladesh faces piracy, illegal fishing and human trafficking in the Bay of Bengal. Although the Bangladeshi Navy and the Coast Guard are very active in the region, the perpetrators are very clever. The Rohingya crisis worsened the situation. Various gangs are involved in human trafficking. Bangladeshis are trafficked to Malaysia, Thailand and North Africa to Greece and Italy (Europe) through the marine route via the Mediterranean Sea.

Marine resources

Many fishermen from Myanmar and India are involved in illegal fishing in the jurisdictional area under Bangladesh. So, Bangladesh faces economic losses in terms of marine resources. Some armed groups kidnap Bangladeshi fishermen for ransom. Basically, fishing in the Sundarbans region has become very dangerous. Sri Lanka has also faced an increase in heroin use within the country, as well as becoming a transit country for trafficking destined for other places. Much of the heroin entering Sri Lanka arrives on fishing boats or by air, often coming through India or Pakistan. The numbers of seizures which Sri Lankan authorities have conducted remains relatively small, meaning that the data collected is not always reliable. Smugglers in Sri Lanka have come from a variety of countries, including Pakistan, India, Iran and the Maldives. Environmental degradation in the sea is common now. Climate Change and the rise in sea levels are among other issues. The transnational terrorist threat is seen as a serious threat.

Bangladesh is a rising South Asian Miracle. The country is developing fast under the leadership of its Premier Sheikh Hasina. She focuses on the Blue Economy. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Hasina inaugurated the third Ministerial Conference titled “Promoting Sustainable Blue Economy – making the best use of opportunities from the Indian Ocean” of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) at the Inter-Continental Dhaka in 2019. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India can work together in this regard. All these states are members of some regional platforms such as BIMSTEC and SAARC. Not only Bangladesh, countries like India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and all States

across the Indian Ocean face the same problems. In the disaster period, regional cooperation is much needed. In the past, regional countries helped each other through various operations during disasters. Now Bangladesh has got a regional platform to address these problems. To ensure better maritime security, all regional countries should work together to tackle the problems. India and Sri Lanka have given their full support to this alliance. They have promised to hold bilateral or joint military exercises with each of the countries in the alliance.

The Colombo Security Conclave is such a platform. Bangladesh expects cooperation from the other stakeholders and wants to help others to face the challenges. Bangladesh with Mauritius and Seychelles are going to become full members of regional maritime security blocs. Currently serving as the group's observers, Bangladesh, Mauritius and Seychelles joined the first meeting of National Security Advisers (NSA) of the CSC, hosted virtually by Sri Lanka on August 4, 2021. A meeting of the Security Conclave will be held next year in the Maldives where the three observers will become Members. In this regard, a director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh said that this initiative has been supported to make the country's maritime borders more secure. The waters of this area are very important for geopolitical reasons. There, countries like Bangladesh can collectively deal with geopolitical influences. At the same time, it will be able to protect the security of the sea. If Bangladesh gets full membership, then some more issues should be added to this alliance.

Thus, there are some opportunities for Bangladesh and also other partners to focus on countering terrorism and extremism, transnational crimes such as narcotics, weapons and human trafficking, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and protecting the maritime environment.

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Source: [Daily News](#); 20 December 2021

WHY THE SAUDI ARABIA WEAPONS DEAL WAS A STRATEGIC NECESSITY

- Rebecca Heinrichs

Libertarians on the right and progressives on the left cooperated to try to defeat an effort to replenish the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) of critical defenses. But Congress remained unconvinced of their objections and rightly approved of the weapons sale. The argument often focused on the technical abilities of the weapons themselves, but objections based on technicalities were easily refuted, and they

distracted from a larger ongoing debate that is worth untangling. The Biden administration's foreign military sale package to KSA included \$650 million in air-to-air munitions. These systems are purely defensive and every time one of those Advanced Medium-Range-Air-to-Air-Missiles (AMRAMM) or Guidance Enhanced Missiles (GEM-Ts) is fired, it knocks down a drone that could take out a hospital or orphanage. And these defenses are not new; the Saudis need them because they depleted their munitions in the ongoing war with Iranian proxies in Yemen. The Saudis will absolutely defend their people, so if they do not buy defenses from us, they will buy them from countries that are eager for their business. So why the bipartisan pushback led by Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) and Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.)? Their main reasons for opposing were that the AIM-120 air-to-air missiles and hundreds of missile launchers are not exclusively defensive and can reasonably be used to support offensive operations, and selling the arms would perpetuate the bloody war that has brutalized the population and included direct attacks on civilians.

They are right about the tragedy of the Yemen war. What they are wrong about is the cause of it, the way to end it and the role the U.S. military support plays. The United States is focused on China as the pacing threat, and we are rightly seeking to reorient our defense planning and operations to deter Chinese aggression in the Pacific. But that does not mean we can afford to wash our hands of the European or Middle East theaters. The United States is still inextricably tied to the global energy market, our Asian allies remain reliant on Gulf petroleum and the energy market is a critical factor in geopolitics. Iran is the greatest cause of the violence and turmoil in the Middle East and has brandished its ability to affect the availability and price of energy by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz. Saudi Arabia leads the Gulf coalition in maritime security to keep critical shipping lanes open. And should the United States and allies like Saudi Arabia lose control of the security of those shipping lanes, countries like Iran and its increasingly bold partners — large nuclear powers China and Russia — would be greatly empowered to blackmail and coerce the United States and our allies more effectively.

Iran is funding and arming the Houthis in Yemen. And if Iran succeeds in helping the Houthis take control of Yemen, it would gain control of the contested area along Bab el-Mandeb, one of the world's crucial oil chokepoints. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration's (EIA) fact-sheet on global oil chokepoints, 3.8 million barrels of oil and "refined petroleum products" passed through the Bab el-Mandeb each day on its way to Europe, Asia, and the United States. The KSA and the United Arab Emirates are partnering to thwart Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen. The partnership between Gulf states and the United States is critical to counter Iran. During the previous administration, the United States backed the coalition by selling offensive and defensive arms and providing military advice. But when President Biden entered office he ended U.S. support for offensive operations, including the sale of precision-guided munitions to KSA and UAE. Now, we only provide defensive systems.

The Iranian-backed Houthis have been attacking Saudi targets with drones. And the Houthis deliberately attack civilian targets like airports. The 280 AIM-120 (Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles) are desperately needed to defend against those dangerous drones. And the sale of those defensive systems comes with contractor support. The United States maintains a close military partnership with the Saudi-led

coalition. It does not simply send them arms and look the other way. Concern for the way the Saudis conduct operations in Yemen, and the insistence that they do it in a way that minimizes civilian loss of life has been a bipartisan imperative that has spanned the Trump and Biden administrations. The U.S. would have much greater insight and influence on Saudi operations if we are the ones providing the weapons, oversight, and contractor support. The Saudis and Emirates will not stop defending their interests from an aggressive Iranian regime. And the Saudis will not simply let Houthis attack civilians. The Biden administration's tough KSA approach has already been causing them to look toward Russia and China. Saudi Arabia can procure additional air defense systems from Russia if they cannot buy them from the United States.

Further entanglement in the Middle East is something Americans rightly wish to avoid, and with a revanchist China, it is critical that we do avoid it. But the best way to avoid it is not simply abandoning the entire region. We must provide our allies and partners who share our strategic objectives with the necessary arms they need to defend themselves. Progressives and libertarians would do well to learn these lessons.

Rebecca Heinrichs is a senior national security fellow with the Hudson Institute and contributing foreign policy editor at Providence Magazine.

Source: [The Hill](#); 28 December 2021

US-CHINA TUSSE ON IDEOLOGY, TECHNOLOGY AND GEOPOLITICS

- Ajish P Joy

WHEN JOE BIDEN addressed his first news conference as president on March 25, it took a while before he was asked a question on China. The president did not mince words. "China wants to become the leading country in the world, the wealthiest country in the world, and the most powerful country in the world. But that is not going to happen on my watch," he said.

Biden won the presidential race by running as the antithesis of Donald Trump. But on China, his playbook is remarkably similar to that of Trump's. The Biden administration has made it clear that its China policy will be marked by "stiff competition" across sectors. As President Xi Jinping seems to have cemented his hold over party and government, there are three broad areas where US-China competition will be felt the most: ideology, technology and geopolitics. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Chinese expert at Hong Kong Baptist University, said the US and China were already in a cold war. "There is fierce technological competition and geostrategic and ideological rivalries. But this will be a new type of cold war because of the level of interdependence between China and the west," he said. On the ideological front, Biden will host a virtual 'Summit for Democracy' on December 9 and 10, bringing together leaders from around 100 countries. For the US, it is important to show that the existing system of democratic capitalism still works. The financial crisis of 2008, the chaotic Trump presidency and the growing polarisation within American politics have made

Biden's hand weaker, while China's economic growth and political stability have shown that democracy is not a prerequisite for development. While the US portrays the ideological battle as one between democracy and autocracy, for China, it is about "effective versus ineffective governance", and it is ready to offer an alternative to the world. China says its method of selecting leaders is much better than the democratic system. It identifies promising young people who are tasked with running small towns, then big cities, followed by provinces. Only those who prove their mettle will be promoted to national leadership roles.

As sinologist Jude Blanchette tells *The New Yorker*, Xi's narrative is that the "western democracy is a path to infighting, polarisation and institutional atrophy", while the "Chinese political system is demonstratively superior in its ability to deliver practical governance outcomes". The immediate future of the ideological battle will, however, depend a lot on Europe. China could leverage its deep interlinkages with the European economy and could make use of the long-standing differences between the US and Europe over trade, technology and taxes. Still, Biden's outreach efforts and Xi's increasing authoritarian tendencies could help the US. "Europe will be a challenge for China," said Avinash Godbole, Chinese expert at OP Jindal Global University, Haryana. "The UK has changed its policy and Germany, too, is moving away."

"When the history of the 21st century is written, much of it will be centred right here in the Indo-Pacific," said US Vice President Kamala Harris, in a speech aboard a US combat ship in Singapore during her Indo-Pacific tour in August. The region is of critical importance for the US. The world's two most populous states (China and India) and the two most populous Muslim majority nations (Indonesia and Pakistan) are in the Indo-Pacific. The region is home to seven of the world's ten largest standing armies. Nearly 60 per cent of the global maritime trade passes through the Indo-Pacific. According to the US department of defence, "Indo-Pacific is the most consequential region for America's future". China, it says, seeks to reorder it by military modernisation and predatory economic practices. For China, however, expanding its influence in its extended neighbourhood is a matter of strategic and economic necessity. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is Xi's signature project, is essentially an endeavour to establish a China-centric maritime and continental zone of influence in the Indo-Pacific. Also at the centre of the Indo-Pacific conundrum is Taiwan. China, of late, has been quite vocal about annexing Taiwan, which would allow it to project power into the western pacific, threaten Japan and take over the province's high value semiconductor sector. The fate of Taiwan will also determine America's credibility in the Indo-Pacific.

"Biden has so far ticked all the boxes in the region by bolstering the US presence through the Quad (India, Japan, Australia and the US) and AUKUS (Australia, the UK and the US) summits, while also ensuring through the summit with Xi that the differences will not escalate into open confrontation," said Uma Purushothaman, US expert at the Central University of Kerala. "This is something that will reassure countries in the region which are unwilling to accept Chinese hegemony, but do not want to get caught in the US-China rivalry." That rivalry is only likely to intensify as China woos the region with its economic might, while the US relies on its security credentials. On September 2, Nicolas Chaillan, the first chief software officer of the US air force, put in his papers, saying he could not bear to watch China overtake the US in

technological transformation. “We have no fighting chance against China in 15-20 years,” he told the Financial Times, listing China’s advances in artificial intelligence, machine learning and cyber capabilities. Although some of Chaillan’s claims sound far-fetched, a US-China technological battle is brewing, and it could well be the final frontier of the confrontation between the two superpowers.

According to a report by the US National Counterintelligence and Security Center, America’s status as a global superpower depends on maintaining a lead in five key sectors: artificial intelligence, quantum computing, bioscience, semiconductors and autonomous systems. “These sectors produce technologies that will determine whether America remains the world’s leading superpower,” the report said. Biden’s response to the Chinese challenge has been a slew of legislations aimed at increasing research and development spending on high-tech industries. Optimists in the Biden administration hope that with the Innovation and Competition bill, the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure law and the \$2.2 trillion Build Back Better bill, the US will be able to perform better in the technology race. The Chinese government is, meanwhile, taking control of critical high tech industries and tech giants such as Huawei and Alibaba. It also plans to reduce its reliance on foreign suppliers. In 2020, China imported microchips worth \$350 billion. It has also learned the lessons from American punitive strikes against Huawei and ZTE. According to John Lee, senior analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies, Berlin, one of the reasons for the tightening policy towards China’s internet platform giants is to shift resources towards strategic technology development to counter the growing pressure on China’s access to such technology. “Platform giants like Alibaba and Baidu are leading China’s push into cutting-edge chip design, supporting its development of industries and partnering with Chinese defence conglomerates,” he said.

The US, too, is looking at minimising its reliance on products and technologies with Chinese connections. “The best illustration of the new cold war is the attempt by the US and China to decouple their economies,” said Cabestan. Despite the intense strategic competition, the US and China could find avenues of cooperation in critical areas such as climate science and global health challenges. The Xi-Biden virtual summit held on November 15 was a promising start. Moreover, despite their decoupling attempts, the two countries will remain intertwined economically in the foreseeable future. Bilateral ties are, therefore, likely to follow the trajectory predicted by Biden’s Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken in his first policy address on March 3: “Our relationship with China will be competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be. The common denominator is the need to engage China from a position of strength.”

Source: [The Week](#); 19 December 2021

CHINA SHARPLY REACTS TO GERMAN NAVY CHIEF'S REMARKS ON ITS GROWING NAVAL POWER

- K J M Varma

Beijing, Dec 23 (PTI) China on Thursday sharply reacted to German navy chief Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schonbach's remarks that Beijing's naval power build-up is a cause of worry as it grew to the equivalent of the entire French navy every 4-years, saying such concerns are misplaced. Schonbach said in Singapore on Wednesday that China's growing naval power is "explosive" and a cause for concern and urged Beijing to follow the international rules-based order. He said China is increasing the size of its navy by the equivalent of the entire French navy every four years. Schonbach made his comments as the German frigate Bayern is docked in Singapore as part of an effort to safeguard security and stability in the region. A German warship last passed through the disputed South China Sea in 2002. China claims most of the South China Sea. The other claimants included Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. Asked for his reaction, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing here that "I don't think there is any need for such concerns" claiming that China is a builder of world peace. "China is developing its military capability in order to safeguard its legitimate national security interests," he said. "It is just beyond reproach. Any country as long as they don't have any intention to threaten or harm China's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, it will never be threatened by China's national defence forces," he said. "What I want to say is that these countries don't have to make an issue out of China if they want to expand their own military build-up," Zhao said. The Chinese navy is currently regarded as the world's fastest-growing navy with new vessels being added to the fleet on a monthly basis. While it has two aircraft carriers with the third one undergoing sea trials, China plans to acquire about five to six aircraft carriers in the coming years, according to reports in the official media.

As part of a new military doctrine advocated by President Xi Jinping, the Chinese military has expanded its navy and air force manifold to enhance its global influence. The Chinese navy for the first time in its history has logistic bases in Djibouti in the Indian Ocean and developing Pakistan's Gwadar port in the Arabian Sea. China also has acquired Sri Lanka's Hambantota port as a debt swap. The German naval chief's remarks are a cause of concern for China as Germany, which shared close business and commercial ties with Beijing under the 16-year long reign of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, joined the US, UK, and Japanese navies in deploying their ships in the South China Sea challenging Beijing's claims over the area. In recent months Germany has joined the chorus of the US, the EU and other western nations criticism of Beijing's alleged human rights violations especially against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang.

On Tuesday, Chinese President Xi sought to woo new German chancellor Olaf Scholz in their first phone call, saying China and Germany should continue to see each other as partners. Hailing China's relations with Germany as the "bellwether" in navigating China's overall cooperation with Europe, Xi also urged Berlin to "play an active role in

stabilising the relationship between China and the European Union”, according to state news agency Xinhua. “China and Europe are two independent and autonomous global powers with broad strategic consensus and common interests,” Xi said in his first phone conversation with Scholz since the latter took over from Merkel two weeks ago. Germany’s deployment of its warship comes after the country issued policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region last year, which noted that European and Indo-Pacific economies “are closely connected through global supply chains,” the CNBC reported. “We’re here for the first time after 19 years to check the battlefield,” he said. “Last year, the government of Germany promulgated the guidelines for the Indo-Pacific. This is now the first step. The next step, probably, I hope that we can come on a regular basis — two or three years,” Schonbach said.

Source: [The Print](#); 23 December 2021

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