

# MARITIME PERSPECTIVES 2023

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## MARITIME SECURITY DYNAMICS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: STRATEGIES AND TRENDS

*Edited by*

Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan  
Commodore Debesh Lahiri  
Captain Kamlesh K Agnihotri



MARITIME PERSPECTIVES 2023: MARITIME SECURITY DYNAMICS  
IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: STRATEGIES AND TRENDS

Editors: Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan, Commodore Debesh Lahiri and Captain Kamlesh K Agnihotri

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# Foreword

The Indo-Pacific, which encompasses the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean in their entirety covers some two-thirds of the Earth's surface, is home to over 60 per cent of the world's population, contains 20 of the world's 33 megacities, accounts for some 60 per cent of the global GDP and two-thirds of global growth, with almost 50 per cent of all global trade moving upon its waters, and includes seven of the world's largest militaries. A corollary is that it also faces a number of traditional and non-traditional challenges and geopolitical contestations, some pre-existing, and others of evolutionary nature. The region is underlaid with significant fault lines and, consequently, has a high potential for conflict and instability. A large number of nations — both, resident and extra-regional ones — look to maximise their national interests in this volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment.

On one hand, China — which still refers to the region as the 'Asia-Pacific' — has not formally articulated its strategy for the region, although its maritime agenda for becoming a great power has been enunciated by successive Presidents with increasing clarity ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress of the Communist Party of China, held in 2012. On the other hand, the United States, the European Union (as a bloc), France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Republic of Korea, and India have promulgated or enunciated their respective maritime strategies, either specifically for the 'Indo-Pacific', or have included the region within the broad rubric of their grand strategies. Russia, under tremendous pressure from western powers on account of the ongoing Ukraine conflict has, nevertheless, also released its own maritime doctrine in July 2022 wherein it has included the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean separately amongst the main regional priority areas of its National Maritime Policy.

Thus, it would not be too much of an exaggeration to state that it has been raining Indo-Pacific maritime strategies over the past few years. This volume of the ‘Maritime Perspectives-2023’ accordingly focuses upon the nuances of maritime strategies of the so-called ‘global stakeholders’ of the Indo-Pacific, and the emerging trends in the resultant security dynamics playing out in the region. The articles in this volume range from the broad context of geopolitical interplay in the region from an Indian lens — in the first section; to detailed analyses of maritime strategies of different ‘stakeholder’, in the second; and finally conclude — in the third section — with some thoughts on the manner in which these strategies are translating into action the ‘on the ground’.

The first section begins with the premise that while the ‘Indo-Pacific’ may just be a concept for the global community, for India this is its ‘strategic geography’, within which the country has striven to carve out its specific maritime identity. The first article, elucidating the challenges in the development of military capability within the littoral states the Indo-Pacific region, is quite well juxtaposed against the second, which explains the expanding role of the Indian Navy in the changing regional geopolitics. The last article argues that this positive naval diplomacy has enabled India to make subtle adjustments to its outlook towards ASEAN and beyond, which have been well appreciated.

The second Section analyses the maritime strategies of specific countries, with special focus on the Indo-Pacific. While the first article argues that various US national and maritime strategies concerning the Indo-Pacific since 2018 are proving to be ‘fragile exercises’ due to shifting geopolitical priorities, the second posits that China appears to be quite focused in its aspiration to become a great maritime power, as is evident from the exhortation of President Xi Jinping in the Party’s 20<sup>th</sup> plenary of 2022. The third and fourth articles cover high points of South Korea’s strategy for a ‘free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific’ and its general congruence with India’s “National Maritime Security Strategy” of 2015. The fifth article, details Canada’s strategy for the Indo-Pacific from its vantage point in the far north, while the sixth and final one in this section, explains Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) 2050. Taken in aggregate, these articles cover the Indo-Pacific from end-to-end.

The third section is an amalgamation of articles on somewhat more varied themes. However, the common thread that runs through them relates to the translation of certain conceptual formulations into practice, and the implementation of country-specific strategies at the operational- and even the tactical level. The first article argues that ‘self-reliance’ — rather than ‘self-sufficiency’ (which would lead India to a dead-end) — is the correct path for an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. Building further on this argument, the next article recommends the integration of indigenous unmanned systems and technologies in all domains so as to create operationally viable manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) capabilities within the Indian defence forces. The third article analyses the adverse implications for ASEAN and its individual constituents of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. The penultimate article focuses the reader’s attention on the upcoming *Matarbari* Port in Bangladesh and highlights the likely economic benefits for the proximate region as a result of improved commercial maritime connectivity. The final piece, critiquing the article entitled, *The Chinese Concepts of Face* published more than half a century ago, succinctly brings out the cultural drivers of China as a nation and asks whether this cultural trait can be cognitively leveraged by India in its interactions with the Chinese ruling elite.

This compilation presents a kaleidoscopic panorama of the security dynamics and developing trends within the Indo-Pacific region and provides insights into the maritime strategies of a number of concerned stakeholders. I extend my felicitations to the authors and am confident that this book will make a meaningful contribution to much-needed ‘maritimity’ within the ever-growing community of strategists, analysts, and scholars, both, within India and across the globe.

*Jai Hind!*



Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan  
AVSM and Bar, VSM, IN (Retd.)  
Director-General  
National Maritime Foundation



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# *The Context*



# India's Maritime Identity

*Captain (IN) Ranendra Sawan*

To the average Indian, the sea might evoke a sense of adventure, occasionally a thrill of the unknown, or even a streak of philosophical musing arising from the seemingly infinite expanse of the ocean. For many, especially those dwelling in the coastal states, the sea may represent a more intimate relationship with Nature's elements – a source of livelihood and, perhaps, a vignette of their daily lives. However, it would be nigh impossible to say, with any reasonable degree of assurance, that the Indian public shows a sustained interest in oceanic affairs, in the belief that India's future greatness lies on the sea — something that KM Panikkar, at the dawn of the nation's independence, had exhorted in his seminal work *India and the Indian Ocean*.<sup>1</sup> This is surprising, given the fact that India has had a rich maritime tradition for much of her glorious history.

India, whose dependence on the sea for merchandise trade is nearly absolute, is poised for a giant leap in the maritime sector. The Government's "Maritime India Vision 2030" (MIV-2030) and 'Project SAGARMALA' (which has now been subsumed within the MIV-2030) exemplify India's conscious endeavour towards port-led development and boosting performance and productivity in the maritime sector. However, as Panikkar had observed, citing the examples of Turkey and France, it is not sufficient for governments to merely realise the importance of maritime power if "*the public as such had no enthusiasm*".<sup>2</sup>

The 'sustained interest in oceanic affairs' of the public to which Panikkar has alluded, is similar in some respect to the 'National Character' that the American Admiral Mahan referred to as one of the six conditions that determined sea power.<sup>3</sup> Mahan compared how the English and the Dutch, characterised by him as "*nations*

*of shopkeepers*”<sup>4</sup> were, amongst other things, driven by their tendency to trade, which involved the necessity of producing something to trade with, and were thus able to use their seapower to propel their nations to prosperity and greatness. On the other hand, Spain, with its characteristic pride and “*supercilious contempt for peaceful trade*”, — and France, with its timidity — turned away from commerce, and eventually failed to capitalise their seapower over the long term.<sup>5</sup>

This concept of ‘national character’ can be extended to identity, and, in the context of maritime affairs, a ‘maritime identity’. Therefore, it may not be incorrect to say that while the English ‘national character’ was ‘trade and commerce’, their maritime identity was perhaps defined by the Royal Navy or naval prowess in general which, to quote William Blackstone, was England’s “*greatest defence and ornament... the floating bulwark of our island*”.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, it is hard to find a definition of ‘maritime identity’, and therefore, the term must be understood in a broader, loosely aggregated form. In so doing, it would be useful to examine the possible constituents that could define this term.

In some ways, maritime identity may be understood as a cultural connection with the sea — the extent to which the sea influences the way of life a people. For example, many cultures revere the earth. The connection is so strong, that to them, their land personifies a collective ‘mother’ (or ‘father’). Similar instances of deep cultural bonds can be found with the forest, the desert, the rivers, the mountains, and indeed, the sea as well. This connection is reflected in mythology and folklore, art and architecture, rituals and tradition, lexicon and such other things that make up ‘identity’. Another aspect is a society’s sustained interest in oceanic affairs, which could also define how well it identifies with the sea. This is measurable through the frequency of occurrence of public debate and discourse in mainstream media, the importance accorded to maritime subjects in schools and colleges, and the number of educational institutions that run curricula on these, the volume of literature on maritime themes, and its readership. Another feature of ‘maritime identity’ is the ‘sea-friendliness’, or the ease with which a people take to the sea. This should, of course, be substantiated by tangible manifestations such as the number of professionals in the marine sector, boat-ownership among the citizenry, and the quality and extent of marine infrastructure.

However, perhaps the most significant constituent — one that encompasses within it almost all other aspects of maritime identity — is what some authors have called ‘maritime consciousness’. It is an inherent knowledge a people possess and demonstrate of a history that is rooted in the sea, and of a future that is inextricably linked with it. In the case of Australia, for instance, some authors have limned the dichotomy of an island nation that celebrates the bush and the outback,<sup>7</sup> and have lamented its “*absent maritime identity*”.<sup>8</sup> Yet, by most metrics, Australians cannot be called ‘sea-unfriendly’ — as a people, they take to the sea for recreation, almost all of their commerce is transacted through the sea, and they certainly have a modern and capable navy. All this notwithstanding, they nevertheless lack maritime consciousness.

Clearly then, for a nation to be said to have a ‘maritime identity’, it is not sufficient to have a strong navy or even a teeming maritime sector. Indeed, historically, many nations, that were strong land powers, such as Germany, France and Russia, took to the sea, not out of any natural affinity, but simply because their geopolitical ambitions required seapower to complement the role of their armies.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, even though the island nations of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific never developed any naval power of consequence, they could be said to have a strong maritime national character by virtue of their dependence on the sea and the value that those nations attach to it.

The obvious question which arises, therefore, is “*does India have a maritime identity?*” Many authors — Indian and foreign — have declared that India, for a long time, has had a continental mindset. In the ‘continentality-maritimity’ construct, they have placed India squarely within the ‘continentality’ box.<sup>10</sup> Others, while extolling India’s maritime heritage, have rued India’s “*maritime-blindness*”<sup>11</sup> and lamented the fact that Indians had “*deluded themselves into believing that India is a continental power*”.<sup>12</sup> Most of these comments tend to view ‘maritimity’ or ‘maritime identity’ in terms of power, without considering a synoptic sense of the term.

The question of India’s maritime identity, therefore, does not permit an easy or forthright answer, which is why it is necessary to flip back to the earliest pages of our history when our ancestors sang hymns in praise of *Varuna*, the Lord of the Oceans<sup>13</sup>

and verses were dedicated to the goddess *Aditi*, invoking her benediction for safe sea voyages. Maritime trade — as archaeological evidence shows — was a predominant characteristic of early Indians, dating as far back as 1200 BCE. So, too, was cultural and ideological exchange through the medium of the sea, a fact borne out by the overseas missions sent by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, and later, the foundation of the Hindu kingdoms in Southeast Asia, such as in Funan (Kamboja) by a Brahmin named Kaundinya.<sup>14</sup> Ancient Indian shipbuilding, as embodied in the sixth century treatise, the *Yuktiukalpataru*, was highly sophisticated and enabled long mid-ocean voyages to distant ports. Yet, India's magnificent maritime past in the halcyon centuries of what can truly be called as the 'Golden Age' of her history, gradually, but ineluctably, dwindled to a mere reminiscence, and the maritime prowess of her people was rendered dormant. India's maritime history, therefore, offers invaluable insights into her maritime identity, the peripeteia in her oceanic glory notwithstanding. History also establishes, indubitably, a strong maritime tradition in India.

What about the contemporary collective maritime consciousness of Indians? Deeply embedded in mythology, India's cultural and religious traditions continue to venerate the ocean. Each year, millions take pilgrimage to the coastal towns of Gangasagar (Sagar Island), Rameshwaram, and Dwarka, and hundreds of other smaller, yet not less significant, locations. India's coastal communities, spread over 70 districts with a population of over 170 million,<sup>15</sup> have readily adopted the sea in their daily lives, cuisine, and culture. The monsoon, which originates in the Indian Ocean, is deeply imprinted in the Indian consciousness, and dictates a significant slice of Indian lifestyle. If language is any reasonable measure of identity, then Indian languages quite evidently reflect the influence of the sea in words such as *navigati* in Sanskrit (from which, possibly the Latin word 'navigatus', and the English word 'navigation' are derived) and *kattumaram* (catamaran)<sup>16</sup> in Tamil.

The sea, as in ancient India's literary tradition in religious texts, has been celebrated in the poems of Tagore and Sarojini Naidu,<sup>17</sup> and continues to inspire contemporary literature, albeit not necessarily in the medium of English. It is also reflected frequently in contemporary popular music and cinema in India.

The more tangible aspect of maritime identity is, of course, sea power — a term that includes not only a military component, but also an economic one. To begin

with, the visible manifestations of India's maritime military power are the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard. Both forces are technologically advanced, modern, and credible. More importantly, they draw manpower almost equitably from the coastal states and the hinterland, emphasising once again, India's maritime identity. With a fishing population of about four million,<sup>18</sup> India is the third largest producer of fish globally. In comparison, the fisheries industry in the EU employed a mere 160,000 people in 2019.<sup>19</sup> Indian seafarers currently account for a healthy 12-13 per cent of the global seafaring community.<sup>20</sup> India also has a dynamic shipping sector and a burgeoning maritime trade. Even in terms of the sea as a grand arena of adventure, Indians are (quite literally) embarking upon voyages of 'rediscovery' rather than ones of 'discovery'. Writing about the dismally low proportion of Indians who take to the sea for adventure or recreation, Vice Admiral MP Awati, in 2005, had lamented that "an Indian has yet to sail around the world".<sup>21</sup> That lament may be put firmly to rest. In 2010, Captain Dilip Donde (Retd) successfully undertook the first unassisted solo circumnavigation under sail,<sup>22</sup> and three years later, in 2013, Commander Abhilash Tomy became the first Indian yachtsman to circumnavigate the globe nonstop *and* solo<sup>23</sup>. These two magnificent solo achievements were temporally bracketed by two successful team-endeavours — one in 1985-87 by an all-male team from the Indian Army's Corps of Engineers,<sup>24</sup> and the other (the most recent one) being by an all-women crew of six intrepid Bravehearts of the Indian Navy.<sup>25</sup>

And yet, all that has been written above — and much else that has been omitted for the sake of brevity — regarding the traditional and contemporary facets of maritime India, still does not complete a definitive picture of India's maritime identity. Beyond the limits of the horizon that might be visible from the shoreline, the 'mental map'<sup>26</sup> of most Indians is a large expanse of blank areas. There is also no gainsaying that the maritime thought, discourse, discussion, and debate in India has not permeated the different social strata, which otherwise actively participate on other issues, and is largely restricted to a thin slice of Indian society. Perhaps, one of the reasons why this is the case is because of India's primary focus toward its northern borders. Fighting four wars with Pakistan and China, as also battling terrorism and insurgency for decades in areas bordering these countries, has shaped the nation's psyche with a continental bias, which is justifiable to a large degree because survival

and sovereignty are the core vital interests of any country. This might well be the reason why India's leadership is so often preoccupied with the security of its land boundaries, even though it is, almost exclusively, the sea that drives India's economic growth.

This leads to the *continentality-maritimism* debate, which is often presented as if it were purely a binary system in which nations must choose one side or the other. It would be evidently puerile to imagine that nations are either 'continental', or, 'maritime'. Most nations retain both, a continental as well as a maritime focus, although they would often be biased towards one or the other outlook. Similarly, India has, and must have, a continental and a maritime outlook, and there is a need to reconcile India's continental focus — an offshoot of the immutable fact of geography — with her maritime consciousness, which, of course, is in need of revival. Further, the vast geographic expanse of India must necessarily be considered. People have a natural tendency to orient themselves to their surroundings and take affinity to what is proximate to them. To expect a community in the hills of Kumaon or in the forests of Chhattisgarh to inculcate a maritime consciousness within them would be as far-fetched as expecting someone in the Czech Republic to do so.

Even though India has demonstrated an admirable and sustained economic growth in the last three decades, much remains to be achieved as far as the maritime sector is concerned. Domestic shipbuilding and shipping industry must grow in tandem with the country's ports and waterways. So, too, must the hundreds of ancillary industries that are necessary to support these primary industries and sectors. There is also a need to review the existing legislative framework that governs India's maritime zones and the maritime sector. India's education policy should provide the necessary focus in school and college curricula to promote greater knowledge and awareness among the younger generation on matters maritime. India's foreign policy, which has finally begun tacking towards the ocean, must continue to extend India's reach seaward.

It might appear that it would devolve upon the Government to rebuild or reinforce the nation's maritime identity. Indeed, much of the onus does, indeed, rest with policymakers because it is they who have the wherewithal, through various

mechanisms, to facilitate the public's orientation towards the sea. In this context James R Holmes and others write that India's strategic leadership needs to orient the people, the government, and the armed forces seaward; and the hardest task among these would be managing popular sentiments.<sup>27</sup> Much as India's strategic or national leadership can shape public perception and outlook to a large extent, it simply cannot contrive a *deus ex machina* that would immediately and magically create a maritime identity amongst the people. What the leadership could, however, do is to sustain the current impetus which has been accorded to maritime policies, infrastructure, and connectivity. The Government could also consider reviewing the 'Maritime India Vision' to include additional thrust areas such as education and research in maritime subjects, holistic maritime security, marine environment and ecology, ocean sciences, and incorporate Project Mausam in the vision.

It is true that India has been a land of seafarers, maritime traders, and shipbuilders. It is equally true that India has also been a land power, whose influence across South Asia has been remarkable. India's maritime identity, must therefore be reinforced, as also harmonised with the nation's continental outlook. As the nation progresses through the twenty-first century, a multipronged and focussed effort, cutting across the various aspects of the maritime domain, must be made in order to reinvigorate India's maritime consciousness.

18 January 2023

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## About the Author

Captain Ranendra Singh Sawan, a specialist in navigation, aircraft direction and naval operations, is currently a Research Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation. The bulk of his research remains focused upon the Indian Ocean, with specific reference to maritime facets of hard security but he refuses to be unduly fettered by any given geography. As such, he is also an insightful analyst of Indian maritime endeavours and their historical, societal, and cultural underpinnings. He may be contacted at [pcrt2.nmf@gmail.com](mailto:pcrt2.nmf@gmail.com)

# Challenges in Military Capability Development of the Indo-Pacific States: Collaboration is the Key

*Captain (IN) Kamlesh K Agnihotri (Retd.)*

## Abstract

The Indo-Pacific Region is presently beset with many maritime security problems, both, traditional as well as non-traditional. While traditional problems can only be solved by the States directly concerned; the broad spectrum of non-traditional challenges adversely affect all States in some ways or the other. Most States are hard pressed to develop their maritime capabilities to a level wherein they can address such threats on their own. The trans-national nature of such threats arising at-, from-, or through the vast seas creates additional complexities and consequent burden on national resources. It is therefore well nigh impossible for a single State to effectively respond to all these challenges. This article, while advocating the use of the term 'Indo-Pacific' in preference to 'Asia-Pacific' — so as to highlight the salience of Indian Ocean part of Asia in popular imagination — argues that there is great merit in collaborative engagement of all affected parties to synergise their efforts. Towards this, the raising of a '50-60 ship collective force' as the first line of response strategy has been recommended. While it may take some time to get this endeavour off the ground, a case has been made out for more countries to join the relatively easy construct of IPOI, in the interim.

**Keywords:** *1000-Ship Navy, ADMM-Plus, Asia-Pacific, Drug Running, Indo-Pacific, IPOI, IUU Fishing, Paracels, Seven Pillars, Spratlys, Strategic Geography*

The Indo-Pacific region forms about two-third of the Earth's surface and comprises equivalent share of ocean extent, global population, resources and GDP. Alongside

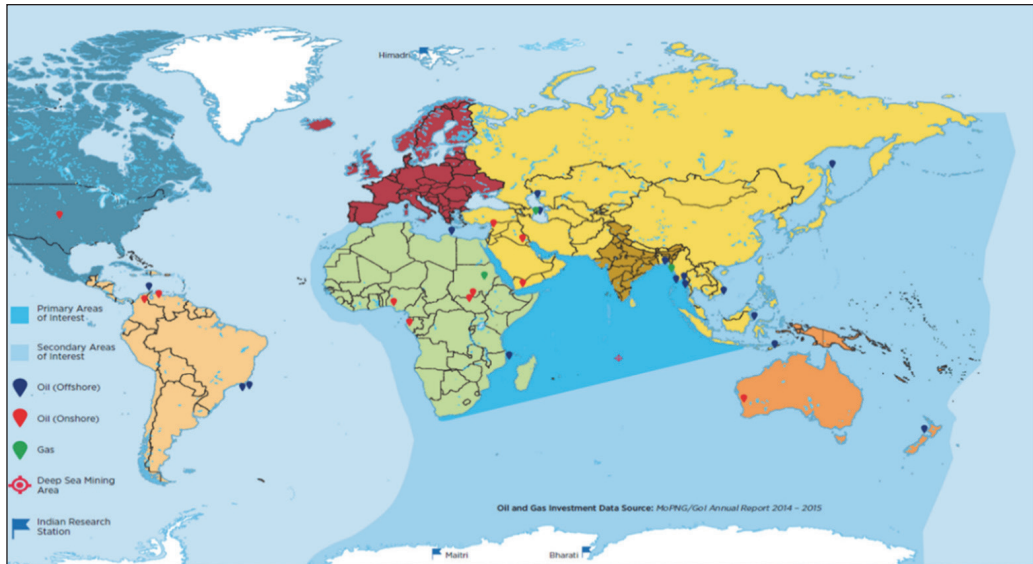
these factors, the Indo-Pacific is also home to commensurate number of geopolitical contestations, simmering tensions, underlying fault lines and consequent potential for conflict and instability.

However, before elucidating on the core dynamics which contribute to a largely unstable environment in the region, and the challenges of military capability development to address or at least mitigate risk factors therein; it would be prudent to point out the nuanced difference between the terms ‘Indo-Pacific’ and ‘Asia-Pacific’. These terms often tend to be used interchangeably, either intentionally or inadvertently. The aim of the exercise is, of course, to bring the much-desired focus of the global strategic community on the Indian ocean littorals of Asia; as opposed to the conceptualisation of the ‘Asia-Pacific’ region, which connotes the dominance of East Asian and North Pacific countries therein. Consequently, the Indian sub-continent, and indeed the entire sub-region extending up to the eastern shores of Africa, gets pushed to the periphery — both spatially and cognitively. The resultant effect is that the problems, interests, and indeed every aspect of human and economic development in the Indian Ocean side of Asia-Pacific region gets relegated to the fringes.

On the other hand, the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ places this Indian ocean sub-region on par with the Pacific Ocean littoral. This in turn, helps in gauging the entire region holistically in terms of the interests and challenges lying therein. It is thus important for the ‘World at large’ to preferably use the term ‘Indo-Pacific’, so that the Indian sub-continent and its geo-strategic dynamics receive the required salience, whenever and in whatever context, the region is referred to.

Now that the rationale for using the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ instead of the ‘Asia-Pacific’ has been presented, it would be in the fitness of things to argue that while the ‘Indo-Pacific’ may just be a theoretical concept for the global community; it is the ‘strategic geography’ of India, within which the country seeks to accord full play to its maritime security objectives.<sup>1</sup> India’s areas of maritime interest — both, primary and secondary — occupy substantial sea-space within this strategic geography, as apparent from the map shown in Figure 1. While the primary areas generally lie in the Indian Ocean, where India’s trade and energy sea lines of communications

(SLOCs) as well as critical choke points are located; the secondary areas of interest extend well into the mid-Pacific Ocean, right up to the Russian tip of Sakhalin off the Bering Strait.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1:** India's primary and secondary areas of maritime interests  
*Source:* Indian Maritime Security Strategy-2015

## Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region

The 'Indo-Pacific' region faces many traditional and non-traditional challenges some pre-existing, and others of evolutionary nature. Traditional challenges span the entire Indo-Pacific land scape — rather seascape. Underlying animosity in the Korean peninsula, with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) threatening the neighbourhood with its nuclear devices and missile systems, poses huge risk of conflict. Longstanding territorial disputes and consequently overlapping maritime claims — Kurile and Dokdo islands for instance — between the Northeast Asian countries continue to persist as major irritants. Similarly, conflicting sovereignty claims between China and Japan, over Japanese held Senkaku islands and Chunxiao offshore gas fields in the East China Sea, keeps both the countries on a proactively offensive pitch. The situation on both side of the Taiwan strait continues to remain tenuous, whereby the PLA Navy and Air Force have displayed blatant brinkmanship

as a ‘new normal’ — particularly after the contentious visit of US House of Representatives’ Speaker, Nancy Pelosi.

The situation in the South China Sea, where conflicting territorial claims between China, Taiwan, Vietnam and Philippines over islands, rocks and other features in the Paracel and Spratly chain of islands and contentious overlapping maritime zones has persisted for more than half a century, has been on slow boil. The brazen large-scale reclamation of many features, followed by erection of dual-use infrastructure — including airfields on four of them<sup>3</sup> — by China has caused huge consternation among other disputants. Subsequent Chinese efforts at militarisation of these artificial islands is causing great anxieties to the global stakeholders on account of possible disruption of their trade and energy flows through this vital lifeline. The propensity of China to press its territorial and maritime claims in the region by unilateral and unreasonable interpretation of existing international norms, conventions and judgements totally threatens to unravel the international rules-based order. The long-drawn-out negotiations — particularly with ASEAN countries — has created further trust-deficit instead of resolving these vexed issues. In such an uneasy environment, concerted opposition to the Chinese revisionist agenda by regional States as well as affected stakeholders from beyond the region — particularly backed by the proactive US naval stance — does tend to assume ominous portends.

The discordant dynamics in the northern Indian ocean littoral — though a little better than the Pacific side — are still driven by the leftovers of colonial legacy; wherein one odd revisionist State seeks to resolve territorial disputes to its advantage, by resorting to the largely unethical, unfair and sometimes unlawful means. Covert or even overt collusion with some extra-regional States which harbour similar sense of animosity, and dubious expansionist agenda, create serious challenges to the peace and stability in the region. The possibility of precarious situations building in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman due to the offensive posture often adopted by Iran vis-à-vis US naval presence and related activities, cannot be ruled out. Sporadic attacks on oil tankers in the area in recent past have raised apprehensions about the possibility of energy supply chain disruption; which could prove to be detrimental to the economic wellbeing of many countries across the Globe.

Apart from these traditional concerns, there are numerous non-traditional challenges plaguing the region. Such threats to national security which arise at-, from- or through the sea are either manmade or take the shape of natural calamities. One just cannot forget the State-supported terror attack at Mumbai in November 2008 — better known as 26/11 — the perpetrators of which used the sea route to execute their perverse agenda. The other threats of major consequence are the piracy, drug running and ‘illegal, unreported and unregulated’ (IUU) fishing. While piracy has been effectively contained through sustained multi-national collaborative effort; continued existence of underlying causes, does raise the possibility of its re-emergence. Of greater concern is the possibility of sinister linkages occurring between pirates and terror groups. The recent seizure of drugs — 2,265 kg heroin and 242 kg methamphetamine — with a market value of \$108 million from the Arabian Sea, by the French naval ships of Combined Task Force (CTF)-150 in April-May 2023, indicates the extent of this Malaise.<sup>4</sup> IUU fishing causes huge losses to global economy, in addition to depleting this valuable source of global food security. A Global Financial Integrity report has estimated the annual retail value of drug trafficking up to \$ 652 Billion and IUU at \$ 36.4 Billion.<sup>5</sup> Natural calamities like cyclones and tsunamis that bring untold misery to the coastal population, need no elaboration. The effects of continuing civil war in Yemen and factional conflict in Sudan tend to spill over into the maritime domain in the shape of refugee crisis and illegal migration; and the consequent need for humanitarian non-combatants’ evacuation operations (NEO) through the sea.

## **Capability Development to Address Security Challenges**

It is therefore all too apparent that the broad spectrum of threats — ranging from traditional ones to multifarious non-traditional types — requires massive capacities and capabilities if they are to be credibly addressed/mitigated. Traditional threats to the national security would, inherently, be country-specific, based largely on their strategic geography, geo-political situation in the neighbourhood, nature and intensity of differences if any, and closeness of alliances/strategic partnerships. Hence, these would, per fore, have to be addressed by individual countries largely by themselves,

on the basis of their threat perception. Be that as it may, the countries would still require to invest heavily in naval security hardware, associated infrastructure and operational architecture, in order to ensure that large varieties of non-traditional challenges arising at-, from- or through the sea are either nipped in the bud, or not allowed to assume threatening proportions.

Since the types of resources required to tackle both kind of threats are different in scale, scope and size, the overall force and military capability development would always present a great challenge for a country; particularly against the backdrop of competing national priorities and commensurate fiscal support. Such capabilities should enable the Force to perform its assigned military, diplomatic, constabulary and benign roles in the Country's areas of maritime interest. The predominant challenge would lie in getting the right balance between the blue-water combat fleet and coastal security vessels. Other issues to consider would be the size and endurance of different-role ships, specific equipment fit thereon, associated training and manning policy, as also integration of military elements with relevant civilian maritime agencies for executing effective response strategies.

The complexity and scale of military capability development would increase further when the vastness of ocean areas that require monitoring, is taken into account. Since the seas are connecting highways through which traditional and non-traditional threats flow quite easily, a nation's security cannot be assured just by deploying own resources. It, in fact, depends a lot on the response capacities and wherewithal of all States comprising the whole littoral.

## **India's Maritime Security Capabilities**

Though India has a reasonably robust maritime security set-up, it is just about sufficient to maintain viable security in its surrounding maritime zones. However, the Country would per force, have to contend with additional challenge of keeping its extended maritime neighbourhood secure. This would entail even larger scale development of its military capability, requiring much greater fiscal support — a tall order indeed in the times of pre-existing and omnipresent budgetary constraints. Despite these constraints, India as the de-facto 'first responder and preferred security partner'<sup>6</sup> in the Indian Ocean, is doing its best to support Sri Lanka, Maldives,

Seychelles and Mauritius in increasing their response capacities and capabilities. It is also providing emergency services to other countries, either as humanitarian gesture, or on request. For instance, at China's request, the Indian Navy's P8I maritime aerial surveillance aircraft helped in locating the crew of a Chinese fishing mother vessel that capsized about 900 nautical miles (NM) South of India on 18 May 2023; and subsequently guided other Chinese rescue ships to its location.<sup>7</sup> Yet another example is that of Indian Naval Ship *Sumedha*, which was deployed to evacuate a large number of Indian immigrants — and also other nationals — from Port Sudan in April 2023, as part of OPERATION KAVERI, when that country faced civil war-like situation.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the Indian Navy, in addition to being a combat-ready force, has developed credible HADR, SAR, post-disaster response and emergency medical relief capabilities to effectively deal with natural calamities. However, it is obvious that one country alone cannot achieve the desired level of security against wide-spectrum threats, particularly when the area in question is really large. This is where the synergistic collaborative approach between all stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region is strongly called for.

### **Strong Case for Jointness in Response Strategies**

The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, while opening a debate at the United Nations Security Council in August 2021, in his capacity as its rotational Chair, laid due emphasis on this very imperative of building international cooperation towards enhancing maritime security. He enunciated the following five basic principles to make the maritime domain safe, secure and stable:<sup>9</sup>

- Remove barriers from legitimate maritime trade.
- Settle maritime disputes peacefully on the basis of international law.
- Face natural disasters and maritime threats created by non-state actors, together.
- Preserve maritime environment and maritime resources.
- Encourage responsible maritime connectivity.

This call for jointness becomes all the more important since many small states in the region do not possess adequate maritime security resources to address myriad challenges in the vast maritime space under their jurisdiction. Seychelles in particular, presents a stark case with regard to woeful lack of maritime security capacity vis-a-vis its entitled Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), extending for about 1.35 million square kms.<sup>10</sup> Maldives and Mauritius also face similar predicament, albeit at comparatively lesser scale. Going by the dictum that “a chain is as strong as its weakest link”, it is argued that maritime security of the entire region would collectively fall on a few countries which have reasonably strong maritime security capacities and capabilities. The subsequent paragraphs provide a couple of prima-facie recommendations.

Two American Admirals, John Morgan and Charles Martoglio, mooted an ambitious ‘1000-Ship Navy’ concept in 2005, which would entail a network of assigned maritime forces from various States collectively protecting the maritime commons against a wide variety of sea-borne threats.<sup>11</sup> While the idea did not find adequate traction at that time, possibly on account of sheer scale and audacity; the present-day stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region may seriously consider the same at a much smaller scale, say at about 50-60 ships dispersed across the region in two or three ‘ready response’ flotillas. The concept would possibly require the littoral States to commit some naval or coast guard assets and associated aviation resources to the collective partnership.

Since most of the Indo-Pacific stakeholders acknowledge the centrality of ASEAN in handling matters maritime in the region, an ASEAN body like the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meet Plus (ADMM-Plus) mechanism could initially exercise operational control over these flotillas. The system, once kick-started, could be refined progressively to suit all States’ non-traditional security requirements and contingencies. The existing data processing centres like the India-based Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), Singapore-based Information Sharing Centre (ISC) and Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar could synergise the collation and dissemination of integrated maritime domain awareness (MDA) picture to all partners in the region. Absolute synergy in this endeavour could of course, be achieved if the MDA infrastructure of the US and

France — including information from their space-based assets — also gets plugged in.

While the above suggestion may require a certain timeframe for the stakeholders for generating consensus, firm commitment of hardware, formulation of commonly acceptable Command and Control hierarchy and joint operating instructions/procedures; the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) as an overarching umbrella of collective maritime security effort, is a more readily available option in the interim. Mooted by the Indian Prime Minister during the 14<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit in 2019, the IPOI, as an open global initiative, seeks collective endeavour from States to address various issues in the regional maritime domain across seven interconnected pillars.<sup>12</sup> The IPOI is gradually gaining traction and greater acceptability on account of more and more countries joining its specific pillars. The seven pillars of IPOI<sup>13</sup> are mentioned below, along with the names of States which have consented to actively participate therein — either as leads or otherwise:

- Maritime Security – United Kingdom and India (Joint leads)
- Maritime Ecology – Australia
- Maritime Resources – France
- Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
- Disaster Risk Reduction and Management – India
- Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation – Singapore and Italy
- Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport – Japan (Connectivity only)

## **Conclusion**

It is quite apparent from the above collation that there is adequate space and enough scope for the other countries to join in the IPOI construct and contribute meaningfully towards collective growth of the regional maritime domain. While this initiative presents the obvious low-hanging fruit with the level of participation/commitment being decided at the discretion of the participant State; the execution of

the '50-60 ship collective security plan' will signal firm resolve of the stakeholders in jointly addressing maritime security issues. It would also provide the much-needed teeth and credibility to the venture.

Even though the implementation of such a proposal would certainly be easier said than done, particularly when broad-based consensus — entailing long-term commitment of physical assets and fiscal support from States which have different geopolitical orientations, aspirations and economic situations — could be hard to come by. However, pragmatism dictates that such a collaborative endeavour to address the broad spectrum of maritime security challenges staring the Indo-Pacific region in the face, must be seriously explored. The author is sanguine that with due collective perseverance, the regional maritime security environment will progressively improve; ultimately leading towards a 'free, peaceful and prosperous' Indo-Pacific region.

20 June 2023

## ENDNOTES

- 1 For maritime security objectives of India and the strategy to be followed towards their fulfilment; see Indian Navy, "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy" (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), New Delhi, 2015); hereinafter referred to as 'IMSS-2015'.
- 2 For extent and coverage of India's primary and secondary areas of maritime interest; see IMSS *ibid*, 32.
- 3 China has built 3000 meters long runways on Woody Island in Paracels; and Subi, Fiery Cross, Mischief Reefs in Spratly chain of islands.
- 4 America's Navy, "French Warship Seizes \$108 Million in Drugs during Indian Ocean Seizures", May 24, 2023, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3405576/french-warship-seizes-108-million-in-drugs-during-indian-ocean-seizures/>
- 5 Global Financial Integrity, "Transnational Crime and the Developing World", March 27, 2017, xi, [https://www.gfintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Transnational\\_Crime-final.pdf](https://www.gfintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Transnational_Crime-final.pdf)
- 6 The terms 'first responder' and 'preferred security partner' were mentioned by Shri Ram Nath Kovind, President of India at Visakhapatnam on February 21, 2022. See 'Address

by the President of India on the Occasion of Presidential Fleet Review – 2022,’ <https://presidentofindia.nic.in/speeches-detail.htm?900>.

- 7 ANI News, “Indian Navy’s P-81 aircraft locates capsized Chinese fishing vessel in Indian Ocean”, May 19, 2023, <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/indian-navys-p-81-aircraft-locates-capsized-chinese-fishing-vessel-in-indian-ocean20230519205959/>
- 8 Arindam Bagchi/MEA India, Twitter post, April 25, 2023, 2:56 p. m., <https://twitter.com/MEAIndia/status/1650793277812260865>
- 9 Prime Minister of India Official website, “PM’s remarks at the UNSC High-Level Open Debate on “Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case for International Cooperation”, August 9, 2021, [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/pms-remarks-at-the-uns-c-high-level-open-debate-on-enhancing-maritime-security-a-case-for-international-cooperation/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-remarks-at-the-uns-c-high-level-open-debate-on-enhancing-maritime-security-a-case-for-international-cooperation/)
- 10 Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan Initiative, “Supporting healthy oceans, communities, and the Blue Economy”, <https://seymsp.com/the-initiative/planning-scope/>
- 11 The proposal was made by the two Admirals at the International Sea Power Symposium at Rhode Island. See Stephen Saunders, “Executive Overview: Jane’s Fighting Ships”, [http://www.janes.com/defence/naval\\_forces/news/jfs/jfs060612\\_1\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/defence/naval_forces/news/jfs/jfs060612_1_n.shtml)
- 12 Ministry of External Affairs,” Indo-Pacific Division Brief,” February 7, 2020, [https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo\\_Feb\\_07\\_2020.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf)
- 13 Ibid.

## About the Author

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# The Indian Navy in the Changing Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific

*Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan*

In analysing the Indian Navy's functioning in the changing geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific, it would be prudent to first ensure conceptual clarity in respect of "geopolitics" itself and to establish exactly what one means by the expression "*the Indo-Pacific*".

It is a common mistake to consider geopolitics, geoeconomic, and geostrategy as three separate choices and to debate whether something (China's Belt and Road Initiative, for example) is a geopolitical move or a geoeconomic one or a geostrategic one. Such debates are conceptually flawed because the truth is that every nation has a set of geoeconomic objectives and complementary set of non-geoeconomic objectives that it wishes to attain. While geoeconomic objectives are fairly self-evident, examples of non-geoeconomic objectives might include prestige, cultural connectivity, people-to-people engagement, and so on. The nation in question now formulates "*strategies*" by which it would attain these geoeconomic objectives as also its non-geoeconomic ones. A "*strategy*" differs from a "*plan*". A "*plan*" will always address questions such as "What is to be done?", "Who is to do it?", "Where does it have to be done?" "When does it have to be done?", "For how long does it have to be done?", and so on. A "*strategy*", on the other hand, not only provides answers to these very same questions, but in addition, answers the critical question, "why is it being done?". In addition, of course, a "*strategy*" will often contain numerous subordinate "*plans*" that are spread over space and time. When these strategies need to be executed through interactions outside of the country's border, they become known as "*geostrategies*". It is obvious, therefore that "*geostrategy*" lies at a lower level

than “*objectives*” (whether geoeconomic or non-geoeconomic ones) and one cannot make a choice between the two. It is also important to note that “*strategic*” is an adjective and cannot exist without its noun, namely, “*strategy*”. Having formulated one or more geostrategies, the nation now tries to guarantee (to the extent that it can) that these geostrategies will, in fact, succeed. It does so by putting in place a set of “*assurance*” mechanisms. At the same time, the nation also tries to guard against the adverse fallout should one or more of these geostrategies fail. It does so by putting in place a set of “*insurance*” mechanisms. These “*assurance*” and “*insurance*” mechanisms constitute the nation’s “*foreign policy*”. There are only two instruments of any nation’s foreign policy. One is “*diplomacy*” and the other is the “*military*”. Both these instruments lie at a level below “*geostrategy*” in that they are the means by which a geostrategy is moved towards success and away from failure. This entire typological structure from the determination of geoeconomic and non-geoeconomic goals to the formulation of the geostrategies to attain these goals and the assurance and insurance mechanisms that will support the geostrategies that have been formulated, is now known as “*geopolitics*”.

Every geostrategy must fit into some geographical context. This brings us to the “*Indo-Pacific*”.

Thanks to the pervasive grip that the USA, as the planet’s sole hyperpower, has over media-driven imagination across the world, many people understand the “*Indo-Pacific*” to be as had been conceptualised by the US administration led by the erstwhile President, Donald Trump. He conceptualised the “*Indo-Pacific*” as a “*geostrategy*” that was designed to contest the aggressive rise of China. In sharp contrast, however, India does not conceptualise or view the “*Indo-Pacific*” as being in and of itself a geostrategy. India perceives the “*Indo-Pacific*” as a “*strategic geography*” within which India formulates and executes a number of “*geostrategies*” designed to achieve its own set of geoeconomic and non-geoeconomic goals that would promote the economic, material, and societal wellbeing of the people of India. India firmly believes that the Indian economy cannot rise without the simultaneous rise of the economies of our region. In other words, it does not believe that the Indian economy can ride upon the crest of a wave while the economies of its neighbours within the

region are wallowing in some trough. This region-wide “desired end-state” — one of sustained and sustainable economic growth within an environment of stability and security — is given expression through the acronym “SAGAR”, which stands for “Security And Growth for All in the Region”<sup>1</sup> and is, consequently, the “*maritime policy*” of India. The “*region*” in question is the “*Indo-Pacific*”. For India, as also for an increasing number of nations, the “*Indo-Pacific*” is a predominantly (but not exclusively) maritime expanse that encompasses the entire Indian Ocean and the entire Pacific Ocean. It accordingly stretches, as was clearly enunciated by Prime Minister Modi in 2018, from the eastern shores of Africa to the western shores of the Americas.<sup>2</sup> It is within this space that India formulates its several geostrategies, and the Indo-Pacific is, therefore, for India, a single “*strategic*” space.

Seven contemporary geopolitical trends have contributed to the changing geopolitical context of the Indo-Pacific. The first is the assertiveness and military aggressiveness of the rise of China and the global apprehension that this aggressiveness will not be limited to the South China Sea and the East China Sea alone but will spread across the entire maritime expanse of the Indo-Pacific. The second is the effort of the US, its allies, and its like-minded partners, including India, to balance China and maintain a *status quo* that is founded upon comity amongst nations — which itself is built upon a respect-for and adherence-to a consensually-derived rules-based order, especially (although not limited to) the maritime domain. China, too, has been trying to muster a grouping of like-minded countries (Russia, North Korea, Pakistan, Turkey, and possibly Iran) that are opposed to the US even if they are not overtly pro-Beijing. The third is the rise of India as a global economy with significant dependence upon maritime merchandise trade. The fourth is the increasing involvement of the European Union as a serious maritime-security stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific. The fifth is the impact of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine armed conflict upon supply chains and value chains throughout the Indo-Pacific. The sixth is the adverse impact of climate change, especially as manifested in extreme-weather events and sea-level rise. The seventh is the impact of pandemics such as COVID-19 — as also its predecessors and, far more worryingly, its successors — and their impacts upon regional economies through restrictions in global trade, maritime connectivity, and regional health.

This brings us to the “assurance” and “insurance” mechanisms. As has already been mentioned, these mechanisms are the two instruments by which the foreign policy of every nation (including, of course, India) is executed, namely, “*diplomacy*” and the “*military*”. It would be a profound error to think that these are two mutually exclusive instruments, wherein diplomacy is exercised to avoid armed conflict while the military is used to prosecute armed conflict. The truth, of course, is that the military is very frequently is used (through dissuasion, deterrence, and defence-diplomacy) to prevent conflict, while diplomacy could and often is used to shape the external security or military environment so as to favourably influence one’s national endeavours in the run-up to armed conflict and even during the prosecution of armed conflict.

Insofar as diplomacy is concerned, in attempting to deal with the seven factors outlined above, a growing number of countries (as also collectives such as ASEAN and the EU) have promulgated outlooks, guidelines, strategies, and initiatives, which are specifically contextualised to the Indo-Pacific. These include ASEAN, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, the EU, France, Germany, India, Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, and the US. Another major diplomatic trend is that while not abandoning major multilateral forums, countries located within the Indo-Pacific geography, as well as those who have national interests in this predominantly maritime expanse, are gravitating towards minilateral groupings such as the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, and the US), the SCO,<sup>3</sup> the I2U2 (India, Israel, USA, and the UAE), the Colombo Security Conclave,<sup>4</sup> AUKUS (Australia, the UK, and the US), as also a variety of trilaterals, many of which involve India (e.g., India-Japan-Australia; India-Japan-Italy; India-Japan-USA; India-France-Australia; India-Indonesia-Australia; India-France-UAE; India-Maldives-Sri Lanka; etc.)

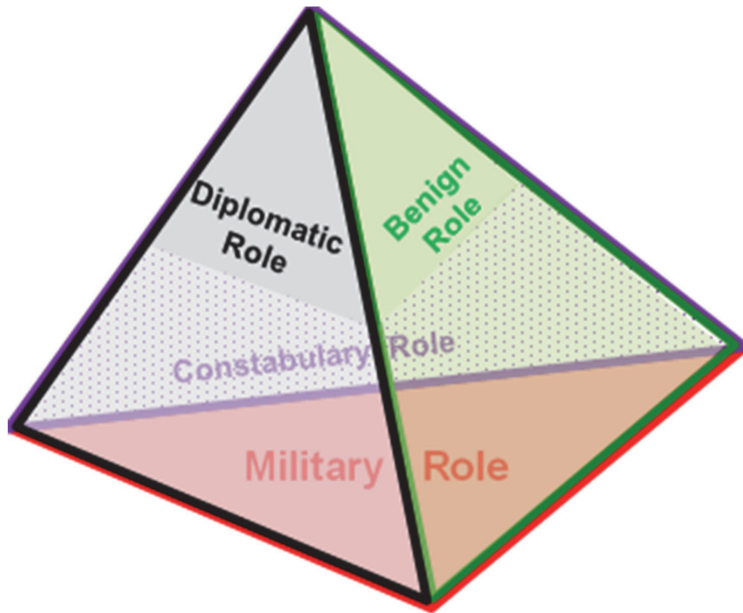
Turning now to “*insurance*” mechanisms, although within the Maritime Zones of India, the Indian Navy works in seamless coordination with the Indian Coast Guard and a number of other maritime agencies of the country, in maritime spaces beyond the country’s Legal Continental Shelf, the Indian Navy is the sole maritime manifestation of the sovereign power of the Republic. Since the Indo-Pacific is a predominantly maritime space, the Indian Navy is India’s option of choice to

undertake shaping-operations through naval diplomacy designed to signal national intent, as also to reassure, dissuade, and deter wherever appropriate and necessary. In many ways, “*Reassurance*” is the converse of “*Deterrence*” in that the former seeks to convince an ally or partner that it will, indeed, be supported in the face of coercion or aggression, but like deterrence, the success of reassurance is crucially dependent upon perceptions of capacity, capability, and resolve.

Where India and her navy are concerned, even amidst the rapidly changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, as described thus far, there are three great constants. The first is that India’s principal national interest remains the economic, material, and societal wellbeing of the people of India.<sup>5</sup> The second is that as a maritime nation, India’s principal maritime interest remains freedom from threats arising in the sea or from the sea or through the sea. (These threats could be manmade ones incorporating a slew of traditional and non-traditional aspects, they could also be natural ones such as cyclones and *tsunamis*, and they could even be combinations of these two, such as maritime impacts of climate-change, ocean acidification, ocean pollution, overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, etc.). The third is that India’s eight principal maritime objectives remain unchanged, namely: (1) protection from sea-based threats to India’s territorial integrity; (2) Stability (peace & prosperity) in India’s maritime neighbourhood; (3) the creation, development, and sustenance of a ‘Blue’ Economy that is resilient against adverse maritime effects of climate-change; (4) the preservation, promotion, pursuit and protection of offshore infrastructure and maritime resources within and beyond the Maritime Zones of India (MZI); (5) the promotion, protection and safety of India’s overseas and coastal seaborne trade including her Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), and, the ports that constitute the nodes of this trade; (6) support to marine scientific research, including that in Antarctica and the Arctic; (7) the provision of support, succour, and extrication-options to the Indian diaspora; and (8) obtaining and retaining a favourable geostrategic maritime-position.<sup>6</sup>

The consequence of the changing geopolitics juxtaposed against the three constants just described is that the criticality of all four roles (the military role, the diplomatic role, the constabulary role, and the benign role) of the Indian Navy is underscored

more than ever. These four roles of the Indian Navy are often represented by the four faces of a solid pyramid, as shown in *Figure 1*. The military role is the base, while the remaining three faces respectively represent the diplomatic role, the constabulary (policing) role, and the benign (humanitarian) role.



**Figure 1:** The Solid Pyramid of Roles  
*Source:* Author

As an all-round balanced force, the sheer competence, steadfastness, determination, and resolve of the Indian Navy and the demonstration of these competencies in several significant operations, as also in numerous combined exercises conducted throughout the Indo-Pacific with foreign navies of considerable military renown, have cemented its reputation as the preferred security partner throughout the Indian Ocean. In the western Pacific, too, its reputation is steadily growing.

It is this enormously favourable perception that makes the Indian Navy such an attractive partner for the US and its allies as they strive to deal with the assertiveness and military aggressiveness of the rise of China. They recognise that the Indian Navy is quite competent to hold its own in the western segment of the Indo-Pacific,

thereby enabling them to concentrate upon the western and southern Pacific Ocean in general and the South- and East China Seas in particular. The growth of the hardware (capacity) of the Indian Navy is impressive by any standard, as may be seen from the following Order of Battle (ORBAT) of major combatants, to which the latest inductions of 26 *Rafale* carrier-borne fighter jets and three follow-on AIP-equipped *Scorpene* Class diesel-electric submarines will add considerable additional heft in the coming few years:<sup>7</sup>

- 02 x Aircraft Carriers [Air Wing Fighter: MiG 29K] (+ 1-3 planned for induction) [Air Wing Fighter: Rafale-M]
- 11 x Guided-missile Destroyers (+ 8 [Project 18] planned for induction)
- 12 x Guided-missile Frigates (+ 11 [Project 17A & Project 1135.6] under construction / planned for induction)
- 07 x Guided-Missile Corvettes (+ 07 under construction / planned for induction)
- 07 x Guided-Missile ‘Light Corvettes’ (+ 6 under construction / planned for induction)
- 04 x ASW Corvette
- 01\* x ASW ‘Light-Corvettes’ (+ 16 under construction / planned for induction)
- 10 x Offshore Patrols Vessels [OPVs] (+ 5 under construction / planned for induction)
- 01 x LPD (+ 4 x LPD under procurement / planned for induction)
- 03 x LST (L)
- 04 x LST (M)
- 04 x Fleet Tankers (+ 05 under construction / planned for induction)
- 02 x Nuclear-powered submarines (+ 11 under construction / planned for induction)
- 17 x Diesel-Electric submarines (+ 09 under construction / planned for induction)

## Major Airborne Combatants

- 41 x MiG-29K/KUB (+ 4 planned for induction)
- (+ Induction of 23 Carrier-borne Rafale-M fighters in progress)
- 12 x P-8 (India)
- 25 x Dornier-228 (+ 12 planned for induction)
- 08 x Dhruv Mk-1 (+ 33 Mk-3 planned for induction)
- 06 x UH-3H Sea King
- 25 x Sea King Mk-42B/C
- 02 x MH60R (+22 planned for induction)
- 14 x Kamov-31 (+ 10 planned for induction)
- 10 x Kamov-28
- 06 x Heron + 07 x Searcher UAV
- 02 Sea Guardian (+ 10 Sea Guardians planned for induction)

As depicted in **Figure 2**, The pattern of deployment of these assets is in accordance with the Navy's mission-based deployment strategy, whereby naval forces are on continuous deployment in multiple segments of the Indian Ocean, quite apart from increasingly frequent deployments to the western and southern reaches of the Pacific Ocean.

The belief amongst far too many maritime analysts that the Indian Navy is seldom seen in the Pacific and is, therefore, only an Indian Ocean player, is not borne out by facts. In 2022, for example, the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of Exercise MALABAR was held off Japan with participation by two indigenously built Indian Naval warships, the *Shivalik* and the *Kamorta* and a P-8 (I) aircraft.<sup>8</sup> Farther south, the INS *Satpura* along with an Indian Naval P-8(I) aircraft participated in the 2022 edition of the Royal Australian Navy's Exercise KAKADU<sup>9</sup> and also showcased Indian Naval presence in the port of Suva in Fiji.<sup>10</sup> *Continuing to stamp its footprint on the Pacific segment of the Indo-Pacific*, the INS *Delhi*, the INS *Satpura* and the ASW Corvette, INS *Kavaratti*, were extensively deployed to ASEAN countries in May and June of 2023.<sup>11</sup> The



Figure 2: Indian Navy: Representative Pattern of Mission-Based Deployment  
 Source: Author

effectiveness of Indian naval diplomacy was evident at the Langkawi International Air and Maritime Exhibition (LIMA-2023) in May of 2023 where, despite the presence of a large number of warships from across the world, the Sultan of Kedah, His Royal Highness *Al-Aminul Karim Sultan Sallehuddin ibni Almarhum Sultan Badlishah*, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, *Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim*; and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, *Dato' Seri Diraja Dr. Zambry Abd Kadir* chose the *INS Kavaratti* as their ship-of-choice — the first instance of any Malaysian Prime Minister attending an onboard reception and dinner on an Indian Naval Ship.<sup>12</sup> In August of this year, the Indian Navy will once again demonstrate its ability to range far and wide across the Indo-Pacific when it participates in the 2023 edition of Exercise MALABAR, off Sydney, Australia.<sup>13</sup>

India's impressive economic rise is a function of the country's significant dependence upon maritime merchandise trade and the protection of all elements of this trade in

the geopolitically turbulent waters of the Indo-Pacific is a task that the Indian Navy takes extremely seriously. For instance, a staggering 110 billion US dollars-worth of India's merchandise trade (60 billion dollars-worth of exports and 50 billion dollars-worth of imports) flows through the Gulf of Aden each year. Even more significantly, a mind-boggling 190 billion US dollars-worth of India's merchandise trade flows through the South China Sea — and this does not include India's merchandise trade with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand, all of which are Indian Ocean States! Likewise, countries and collectives located in the western Pacific are equally dependent for their economic wellbeing upon trade flows through the Gulf of Aden, around the Cape of Good Hope, and through the Strait of Hormuz. This is as true of Japan and South Korea as it is of the eleven constituent States of ASEAN. Thus, the protective abilities of the Indian Navy are vital to not just India or countries of the Indian Ocean but those of the western Pacific as well, as they struggle to mitigate and de-risk the disruptions caused to global- and regional supply- and value chains by the triad of China's economic coercion, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Where the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned, the Indian Navy, functioning in its 'benign' role, has risen brilliantly to the challenge — whether it be in terms of Operation SAMUDRA SETU in May and June of 2020 involving the repatriation of Indian nationals stranded in Iran, Maldives, and Sri Lanka<sup>14</sup>, or the five regional relief missions under the rubric of SAGAR (SAGAR-I involved the provision of medical and food supplies to Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, and Mauritius; in November 2020, IN ships executing SAGAR-II, extended this aid to Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, and South Sudan; in December 2020, IN ships executed Mission SAGAR-III, providing much needed succour to Vietnam, which was reeling from widespread flooding on top of the COVID pandemic; in September of 2021, SAGAR IV saw the Indian Navy transporting COVID relief material including critical supplies of oxygen to Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam; while in SAGAR-V the Indian Navy supplied food and medical aid to drought-hit Mozambique.<sup>15</sup>

The transformation of the European Union from an acknowledged normative actor into as a serious maritime-security stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific and its initiatives vis-à-vis the Coordinated Maritime Presence – North-West Indian Ocean (CMP-NWIO), and the CRIMARIO-II action that now promotes maritime domain

awareness (MDA) in South and Southeast Asia, is something that the Indian Navy has welcomed wholeheartedly. The EU's closing ranks against China's economic coercion has provided a welcome overarch to the extremely strong cooperation between the Indian Navy and the French Navy, as typified not only by the bilateral IN-FN exercise whose 2023 edition was held off Goa in January 2023,<sup>16</sup> but even more emphatically by the multinational exercise LA PEROUSE in mid-March 2023, which was led by France and witnessed participation by the navies of India, Australia, Canada, the United States, France, Japan and the United Kingdom.<sup>17</sup> Strong strategic signalling is being effected through these exercises and the signals go across at least half the width of the Indo-Pacific, all the way to Beijing.

A few years ago, after climate science had comprehensively vanquished the Trump administration's nay-sayers, it was widely felt that China was and would remain a valued partner in terms of both mitigation and adaptation in the face of climate change. However, this is no longer the case in 2023. Even within the EU, which was the most vocal advocate of this value, China is now perceived as an impediment to reaching the Paris climate target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Beijing did not sign up to the Global Methane Pledge, which over one hundred countries signed at COP26 in Glasgow and Beijing does not, in fact, appear to be particularly interested in any climate partnerships and instead, is cynically arguing that climate cooperation is dependent upon how the West engages with China in other areas.<sup>18</sup> This is in sharp contrast to India, which is the only G20 country to have met its 2015 Paris climate change targets.<sup>19</sup> All this is, however, cold comfort in dealing with the increasingly evident maritime impacts of climate-change, especially as manifested in extreme-weather events and sea-level rise. Six major impacts that affect the mission readiness of the Indian Navy are: (1) disputes over maritime boundaries, and competition for new resources; (2) strains on naval capabilities, given increasingly complex Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) 'first responder' missions across the region; (3) vulnerabilities of ports, harbours, and naval coastal installations, due to sea-level rise and increased storm surges; (4) demands for establishing more intensive and extensive international maritime partnerships to address heightened maritime demands for capacity-building and capability-enhancement by Small Island Developing States [SIDS] of the Indo-

Pacific (especially the IOR), as a function of the IPCC’s climate-change scenarios; (5) impacts on the technical underpinnings that enable, in part, naval force capabilities; and (6) impacts upon submarine- and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations, as a result of changes in salinity levels in different coastal areas.

It may thus be seen that the Indian Navy has, as always, made the nation proud along all seven of the drivers of geopolitical change that are evident in the Indo-Pacific. It remains only for us to salute the indomitable spirit of the valiant men and women that make the Indian Navy a force that is combat ready, credible, cohesive, and future proof — one that we can truly rely upon in our collective journey through the ongoing *Amrit Kaal*.

31 August 2023

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# India's Outlook Towards South-East Asia and Beyond: 'Changing Tack' in the Contemporary Environment??

*Captain (IN) Kamlesh K Agnihotri (Retd.) and Mr. Nirmal Shankar M*

## Abstract

In recent years, growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea has been a source of increasing discomfiture, particularly, for those south-east Asian countries — as also Taiwan — which have a long-standing dispute over territorial sovereignty and associated maritime claims in the region. India, on its part, finds great commonality of interest with these countries over its long-held and consistent position on the 'freedom, openness and inclusivity' of the Indo-Pacific — of which the South China Sea forms a vital sub-region. India as an important stakeholder, and a likely affected party by the possible disruption of its trade lifeline through the South China Sea and connected seas, must look afresh at the maritime facets of its 'Look East' policy. India is accordingly seeking to overcome its customarily diffident external outlook, in promoting engagement with the South China Sea littorals, which stand to be similarly affected by the propensity of a revisionist power to unilaterally change the status-quo in a 'zero-sum' game of sorts. This nuanced 'change of tack' on India's part is indeed apparent from certain foreign policy initiatives of recent past, in the region.

**Keywords:** *Arbitral Tribunal Award-2016, ASEAN, China, Indo-Pacific, NMF, Philippines, Scarborough Shoal, South China Sea, TAEF, Taiwan*

The 5th meeting of India-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC) jointly chaired by the foreign ministers of India and the Philippines in June 2023 generated quite a lot of interest in the global media.<sup>1</sup> The joint statement released after that meeting mentioned that *“both countries have a shared interest in a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. They underlined the need for peaceful settlement of disputes and for ‘adherence’ to international law, especially the UNCLOS and the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea ...”*<sup>2</sup>

Some geopolitical analysts — who perennially keep a hawk-eye for proverbial ‘straws in the wind’ — raised a question whether India had ‘subtly’ changed its stance vis-à-vis its earlier articulated position, when the Arbitral Tribunal’s award on South China Sea was pronounced in 2016. The non-committal position of New Delhi at that time was quite apparent from its official response, wherein the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated that *“India has noted the award of the Arbitral Tribunal constituted under Annex VII of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) in the matter concerning the Republic of the Philippines and the People’s Republic of China”*.<sup>3</sup> The statement, without naming any country, further elaborated that *“... States should resolve disputes through peaceful means without threat or use of force; and exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes affecting peace and stability”*.<sup>4</sup>

## Background

The long-standing dispute between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea involves conflicting claims over various islands, islets, reefs, and shoals, which lie within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Philippines, but also fall inside the ‘unilaterally declared’ Chinese ‘nine-dash line’. China particularly chose to adopt an increasingly confrontationist posture around the Scarborough and Second Thomas shoals; with the Chinese fishing fleet, maritime militia vessels, and coast guard ships, systematically blocking, obstructing, and harassing the legitimate activities of the Philippines’ maritime community.

In response to China’s proactive assertion of its claimed historic and sovereign rights over such features — and unable to withstand the blatant Chinese coercion

in contravention of existing conventions — Philippines filed for arbitration under Annex VII of UNCLOS in 2013. In July 2016, the Arbitral Tribunal issued an award favouring the Philippines submission; and urged China to respect other States' sovereign rights. The Tribunal ruled that:<sup>5</sup>

- Maritime areas of the South China Sea encompassed by the 'nine-dash line' are contrary to the Convention and without lawful effect.
- China has violated the sovereign rights of the Philippines over various features within that country's EEZ.
- China has breached its obligation with respect to the protection and preservation of the marine environment in the South China Sea.

The Tribunal also declared that Scarborough Shoal, Johnson Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef (North) and McKennan Reef were high-tide features; while Subi Reef, Hughes Reef, Mischief Reef, and Second Thomas Shoal were 'low tide elevations' in their natural condition. While China refused to recognise the award, the country nonetheless progressively reduced its usage of the phrase 'nine-dash line' in its public pronouncements and official submissions; replacing it with the Government-legislated 'SanSha' geographical construct.

While Philippines is one of the disputants in the South China Sea, other South-east Asian countries which are adversely affected to different degrees by the Chinese assertion of 'absolute sovereignty' over the maritime area encompassing the so-called 'Nine Dash Line' are Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. Even though China claims Taiwan to be its own province the latter also has territorial sovereignty claims in the area. Some Chinese officials have tried to consolidate the idea of 'indisputable sovereignty' by referring to the encompassed area as the country's 'blue national soil' — a phrase used to refer to the country's offshore waters.<sup>6</sup>

This dispute is becoming increasingly irreconcilable, with claimant States adopting a non-negotiable stance in recent years. Meanwhile, China continues to bolster its military presence in the South China Sea, having built seven artificial islands, with 3000+ metre-long airfields on three of them. It has also installed military equipment like aircraft hangars, radar stations, missile batteries, and gun emplacements on these

islands. Japan’s Ministry of Defence has collated the details of such islands and the Chinese infrastructure development therein.<sup>7</sup> The same is depicted as a graphic at Figure 1.

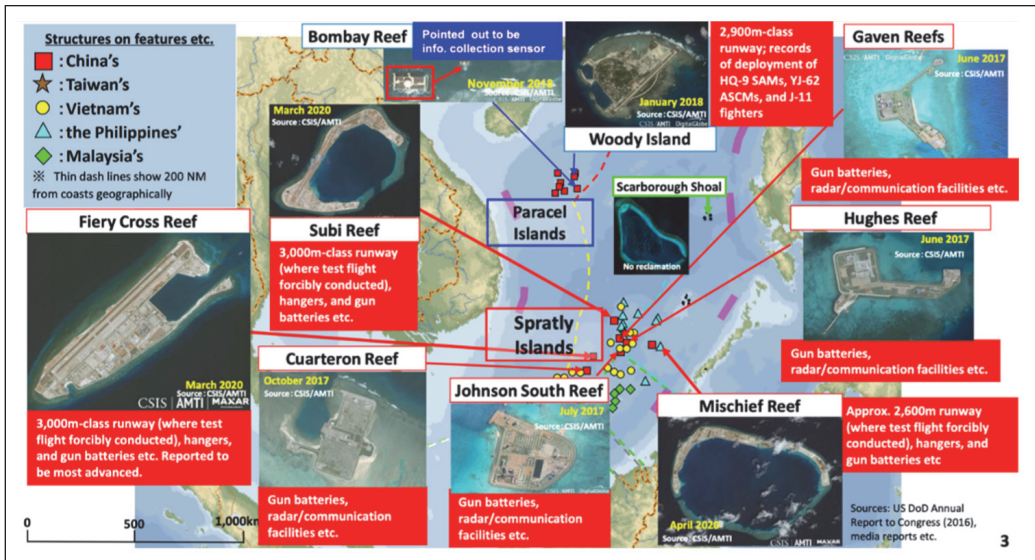


Figure 1: China’s Occupation in the South China Sea after Reclamation  
 Source: Japan Ministry of Defence

## Philippines-India Maritime Cooperation

In recent years, the relationship between India and Philippines has witnessed an upward trajectory as part of India’s ‘Act East’ Policy. And one would not be far off the mark in positing that both nations are further enhancing their engagement in the face of distinct rise in undesirable Chinese influence in the region. Philippines is clearly alarmed about China’s aggressiveness in the South China Sea. On the other hand, India’s concern stems from the possibility of these disputes disrupting the ‘freedom, openness, and inclusivity’ of the Indo-Pacific — an issue that India has been consistently propagating for the last decade. The two countries have been working assiduously to expand their military and maritime security cooperation. In 2022, Philippines and India signed a deal for the acquisition, by the former, of BrahMos missiles — the first ever sale of this state-of-the-art ordnance.<sup>8</sup> BrahMos is a supersonic cruise missile that may be deployed from land, sea, or air platforms.

This acquisition will certainly provide a substantial boost to the military capability of the Philippines.

Indian Navy ships have been regularly ‘showing the flag’ and calling at Manila Port for more than 25 years, as part of their ‘overseas deployments’ (OSD) to the Western Pacific Ocean. A representative list of recent ship visits is placed at Table 1.

**Table 1:** Representative list of Indian Navy Ship visits to Philippines

Year	Indian Navy Ships	Other Countries visited
2014 (August)	INS Shivalik	Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, Japan, South Korea
2015 (October)	INS Sahyadri	Vietnam
2016 (30 May-3 June)	INS Satpura and INS Kirch	Vietnam
2017 (23 September)	INS Satpura, INS Kadmatt	Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, South Korea, Japan, Brunei and Russia
2021 (August)	INS Ranvijay and INS Kora	Vietnam
2023 (02-08 May)	INS Delhi and INS Satpura	Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia

*Source:* Authors (from various media reports)

Philippines and India have also conducted combined maritime exercises — both bilaterally and multilaterally — in recent years. Naval delegations from the Philippines have also been participating in the MILAN series of multilateral exercises hosted by India, with the most recent one being MILAN-2022 at Visakhapatnam. These exercises have served to increase the interoperability of the navies of India and the Philippines, as also other participating naval forces. In August 2021, the Indian Navy and the Philippines Navy conducted a ‘maritime partnership exercise’ in the West Philippine Sea. The operational exercises included anti-submarine warfare (ASW), surface warfare, and air defence (AD) manoeuvres. In May 2023, naval ships of both countries engaged each other within multilateral settings during the

inaugural ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME) in the South China Sea. The exercise also included ships, aircraft and naval personnel from six other ASEAN nations.<sup>9</sup> In July 2023, yet another bilateral naval exercise was conducted in the Sulu Sea, which featured anti-piracy drills, search and rescue, and maritime domain awareness exercises.

Thus, the expanding military cooperation between India and Philippines is certainly a favourable development for both nations. It is an indication that the two nations are dedicated to working together, in order to rise to the maritime security challenges of the 21st century within the Indo-Pacific.

### **India's Interaction with other Claimants in South China Sea**

In addition to Philippines, India also has a vibrant set of ongoing interaction with other South-east Asian nations, all of which are affected to varying degrees by the Chinese aggressiveness in the South China Sea. Vietnam which, like India, shares a land border with China but has managed to delineate its maritime boundary in the Beibu Gulf, is nevertheless locked in overlapping territorial sovereignty and associated maritime zones claims in the Paracel and Spratly chains of islands.

India and Vietnam have a strong maritime cooperative engagement as part of their comprehensive political, military, and economic relations. These are of course, built upon their mutual national interests. This relationship has become stronger, particularly after the increased assertiveness of China in the Indo-Pacific, in the new millennium. In 2011, an Indian Navy Landing Ship, the *Airawat*, while transiting well within the Vietnamese EEZ, was challenged on radio, supposedly by the Chinese Navy thus: “*You are entering Chinese waters*”. This ‘non-incident’<sup>10</sup> spurred the Indian MEA to respond publicly by reiterating that “*India supports the freedom of navigation in international waters, including in the South China Sea, and the right of passage in accordance with accepted principles of international law. These principles should be respected by all.*”<sup>11</sup> Chinese maritime militia and coast guard ships have been regularly harassing the oil exploration ships and Vietnamese vessels engaged in other legitimate activities in Vietnam’s own EEZ. India’s major oil company, ‘*ONGC Videsh*’, which is engaged in exploration and exploitation of offshore blocks

assigned by Vietnam, has also faced severe pressure tactics of the Chinese maritime agencies, albeit sporadically.<sup>12</sup>

There is, thus, a natural compulsion for both the countries — particularly their navies—to actively cooperate and collaborate with one another in the interest of an ‘open, free and inclusive’ Indo-Pacific. Accordingly, it has become an annual feature for Indian Navy ships to visit one or another of Vietnam’s ports, during which they also participate in bilateral naval exercises with their counterparts. Personnel of the Vietnam Navy have been receiving regular naval operational and engineering training in India, including in specialised fields like aviation and submarine operations. The transfer of a fully operational missile corvette, the *Kirpan*, to Vietnam in July of 2023 — by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral R Hari Kumar, during his visit to that country — was the latest and the most significant demonstration of close ties between the two navies.<sup>13</sup> It is thus posited that India’s maritime security — even in its primary areas of maritime interest, viz. the Indian Ocean — would be well served to a large extent by leveraging these close maritime ties, as explained by the author in another article.<sup>14</sup>

Although Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei do not have any sovereignty dispute over any of the features in the South China Sea, occasional Chinese activities in assertion of its own jurisdictional claims in certain areas which lie within the Chinese ‘nine-dash line’, are of grave concern to these countries. China often deploys its fishing fleet, militia vessels, and Coast Guard ships in close vicinity of the Natuna Islands, where the Indonesian offshore gas fields are located. Malaysia too is worried about the Chinese maritime activities near *Swallow Reef* in its EEZ. The rise in instances of infringement by Chinese government vessels off Luconia Shoal near the Sarawak coast — the most recent being the presence of the *Haiyang Dizhi No. 8* survey ship for two weeks in June and July 2023<sup>15</sup> — is yet another contentious issue. Wary of a direct confrontation, ships of the Malaysian and Indonesian Navy have resorted to ‘shadowing’ of such Chinese vessels.<sup>16</sup>

On its part, India has been assiduously working with Malaysia and Indonesia to jointly address critical challenges such as maritime security, counter-terrorism, and other non-traditional threats in the maritime domain.<sup>17</sup> Indian naval ships regularly visit Malaysian and Indonesian ports and carry out bilateral exercises with

their counterparts. The navies of India and Indonesia have also been conducting coordinated patrols since 2002 and institutionalised exercises since 2015. The first naval exercise between Malaysia and India was held in 2013, while the first combined air drills were conducted in 2016. The first ever ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME), conducted in the South China Sea in May 2023, saw the participation of *INS Delhi* and *INS Satpura*, along with naval ships from Indonesia and Malaysia — as also those from the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.<sup>18</sup>

These exercises and other interactions have helped to increase the interoperability of the three nations' forces, and have also conveyed a signal to the regional hegemon that India, along with like-minded South-east Asian nations, values mutual security, and is ready to safeguard its interests in the area. India has all along, expressed its support to the ASEAN members towards preservation of their 'sovereignty and territorial integrity,' vis-à-vis unilateral Chinese efforts to alter the status-quo in the South China Sea. It has been calling for "*peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and laws,*" as highlighted by the Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, while articulating India's vision for the Indo-Pacific, during the 2018 Shangri La Dialogue.<sup>19</sup>

## **Looking Beyond ASEAN – Strengthening India-Taiwan Relations**

Territorial sovereignty issues and excessive maritime zone claims in South China Sea are not limited to China and South-East Asian disputants only. Taiwan has its own share of territorial claims vis-à-vis China, in that it claims all the islands and features that China occupies and claims. However, these issues have been pushed into background, as Taiwan contends with a far greater challenge — that of a possible reunification push — from an increasingly belligerent China. The situation in the Taiwan Strait — particularly since the visit of Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the US House of Representatives, in August 2022 — stands precariously poised, with China resorting to ever-increasing brinkmanship using its naval ships and aircraft on a daily basis.

India's interactions with Taiwan have been quite constrained, owing to its recognition of the 'One China Policy'. However, this inhibition is slowly but surely

waning. In recent years, India has adopted a more proactively open posture while engaging with Taiwan. India's trade with Taiwan has expanded substantially in recent years. In 2022, the overall bilateral value of commerce was \$12.5 billion, up from \$10.5 billion in 2021, and \$8.5 billion in 2020.<sup>20</sup> The investment of Taiwanese corporations in India — mainly in electronics and semi-conductor industries — have seen a significant uptick in recent years. In 2022, Taiwanese corporations committed \$2.5 billion in India, up from \$1.5 billion in 2021. Investments from Foxconn, Taiwan Semi-conductor Company (TSMC) and United Microelectronics Company (UMC) are helping to strengthen India's semi-conductor manufacturing capacity; and also generating local employment.

In 2023, Taiwan announced its intention to establish a new cultural centre in Mumbai — the first two being in Delhi and Chennai. The centre will become fully functional in 2024. The new cultural centre in India's commercial capital, will be a forum for enhancing financial and trade ties between the two countries, in addition to promoting cultural and economic exchanges.<sup>21</sup>

Even though both, India and Taiwan, recognise existing foreign policy constraints, they have, especially in recent years, shown the will to engage in preliminary discussions on the maritime security situation obtaining in the Indo-Pacific. Taiwan apparently identifies 'think-tank diplomacy as the fifth pillar' of its 'New Southbound Policy (NSP)' of 2016 for establishing regional connections. Accordingly, the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF), a think tank mandated to progress and publicise the vision of the NSP, entered into a three-year institutional partnership with India's Observer Research Foundation in 2022.<sup>22</sup> The two think tanks also held the first Taiwan-India Dialogue in October 2022 to deliberate on the stability and security in the Indo-Pacific, the roles of Taiwan and India therein, and the prospects of their partnership.<sup>23</sup> TAEF also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 'maritime cooperation and regional development' with the premier maritime security think tank of India, the National Maritime Foundation (NMF), in 2020.<sup>24</sup>

Taiwan has been offering language and academic fellowship courses in Taiwanese universities and other institutions to Indian students and scholars, thus preparing a ready pool of scholarly human resource, which can act as a vital geostrategic bridge

between the two countries. Distinguished academics, geostrategic analysts, and senior retired service officers have occasionally been visiting Taiwan. Admiral Arun Prakash, former Chief of the Naval Staff and a renowned maritime strategist, avers that the recent visit of the three former Chiefs of Indian Armed Forces to Taiwan albeit in their individual capacities, and solely for academic deliberations, certainly signals mutuality of interest — though he hastens to add that this must not be overread.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

In recent years, growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea has been a source of increasing discomfiture, particularly, for those South-east Asian countries that have a long-standing dispute over territorial sovereignty and associated maritime claims in the region. Taiwan also grapples with an existential threat on account of increasingly tenuous situation in the Taiwan Strait. India, on its part, finds great commonality of interest with these countries over its long-held and consistent position on the ‘freedom, openness and inclusivity’ of the Indo-Pacific — of which the South China Sea forms a vital sub-region. Peace and stability in the area, as also in the Taiwan Strait, is essential for the unimpeded flow of seaborne energy and commerce, which in turn are so essential for the economic wellbeing of the world.

It is, therefore, high time that India, as an important stakeholder, as also a likely affected party by the possible disruption of its trade lifeline through the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, must look afresh at the maritime facets of its ‘Look East’ policy. It must accordingly ‘change tack’ and think of new and novel ways to promote engagement with other nations that stand to be similarly affected by the propensity of a revisionist power to unilaterally change the *status quo* in its favour; and to the consequent detriment of everyone else. And the subtle ‘change of tack’ — a sailing term that implies a decisive change of direction — on India’s part is indeed quite apparent from the few instances cited above.

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*Maritime Strategies of  
Indo-Pacific States: An Analysis*



# US National Strategies of the Biden Administration: A Fragile Exercise in Shuffling Priorities

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## Introduction

As per the Goldwater-Nichols Defence Reorganisation Act of 1986, the President of the US is required to submit to the US Congress an annual report on the National Security Strategy.<sup>1</sup> The last National Security Strategy (NSS) was released in 2017 by the Trump administration.<sup>2</sup> The incumbent Biden administration, has since assuming office, released a number of strategies that flow from the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance published in March 2021.<sup>3</sup> This document provided guidance to various offices and agencies to align their actions to the administration's thought-process, even while the National Security Strategy itself was being worked-upon. These strategies, apart from the NSS released in October 2022 include the following:

- The Indo-Pacific Strategy, February 2022.<sup>4</sup>
- The Pacific Partnership Strategy, September 2022.<sup>5</sup>
- The National Strategy for the Arctic Region, October 2022.<sup>6</sup>
- The classified 2022 National Defence Strategy (NDS) forwarded to the US Congress on 28 March 2022<sup>7</sup> has recently been followed by the NDS meant for public consumption on 27 October 2022.<sup>8</sup> This 2022 NDS also includes the Nuclear Posture and Missile Defence Reviews of 2022.

It is interesting to note that the unclassified summary of the NDS 2018 was the US Department of Defence's (DoD's) first congressionally mandated NDS and was made available in January 2018.<sup>9</sup> While the 2018 NDS covered the budget requests

for fiscal period 2019 to 2023, the classified 2022 NDS document accompanied the budget request for fiscal year 2023. The NSS is the keystone document based on which the Secretary of Defence issues the NDS. The next document expected to flow is the National Military Strategy (NMS), which will be based on the NSS and NDS, and is issued by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The last NMS was issued in 2018.

It is evident that there is a significant change in the US approach, from the 2017 *America First* centric NSS to the 2022 *Cooperation in the Age of Competition* approach. This change is clearly espoused in the strategies released so far under the Biden administration, and the four QUAD leadership summit meetings held over the last two years. This paper will analyse the 2022 NSS and link up with salient features of the recently released strategies, thereby seeking to provide clarity on the US approach and identify convergence and divergence factors, which can impact cooperation.

## Constants and Variables

The absence of annual NSS reports as mandated by the Goldwater-Nichols Defence Reorganisation Act of 1986 provides an easier comparison of the last two NSS's (2015 and 2017) with the recent 2022 NSS, which were released by the three different white house administrations. The broad areas of focus as sequenced in the three NSS's are placed at Table 1.<sup>10</sup>

The 2015 NSS sought to reposition the US as a trusted and reliable ally and strategic partner, as well as a global leader. This approach came from the cusp of seeking reduction in US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan and the parallel rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, while addressing violent and non-violent non-traditional threats. The 2015 NSS hence sought to “*provide a vision and strategy for advancing US interests, universal values, and a rules-based international order*” by “*leading with purpose; with strength; by example; with capable partners, with all instruments of US power; and with a long-term perspective*”.<sup>11</sup>

The 2017 NSS, in a way, followed the path of the 2015 NSS and sought “*to restore respect for the United States abroad and renew American confidence at home*”.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1: NSS 2015, 2017, and 2022 Focal Areas**

2015 NSS (Barak Obama)	2017 NSS (Donald Trump)	2022 NSS (Joe Biden)
Advance the security of the United States, its citizens, and US allies and partners	Protect the homeland, the American people, and American way of life	Invest in the underlying sources and tools of American power and influence
Advance a strong, innovative, and growing US economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity	Promote American prosperity	Build the strongest possible coalition of nations to enhance our collective influence to shape the global strategic environment and to solve shared challenges
Advance an international order that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges	Preserve peace through strength	Modernize and strengthen our military so it is equipped for the era of strategic competition
	Advance American influence	

Source: Fact Sheets of NSS 2015, 2017, and 2022

However, the emphasis was on *America First*,<sup>13</sup> and hence mainly inward looking. One major change was the adoption of the term Indo-Pacific, which replaced the term Asia-Pacific in the official US lexicon.

In comparison, the 2022 NSS has acknowledged that the contemporary security environment is highly competitive and has thus sequenced cooperation above all other issues and also seeks to break down the “*dividing line between foreign policy and domestic policy*” as US strengths abroad and at home are “*inextricably linked*”.<sup>14</sup>

The three NSS’s lay similar emphasis on common non-traditional threats, especially climate change, cyber activity, pandemics, terrorism, and transnational crime. Another common aspect is the focus on international order and associated stability and security spin-offs, essentially rising from the action by nations who are viewed as *non-democratic* and challenge the existing internationally accepted order, norms, and laws and conventions.

While the three NSS’s constantly identify Russia, Iran, and North Korea as the nations that pose the highest degree of challenges and threats, there has been a nuanced change with respect to China. The 2015 NSS saw China as a rising nation

with which a “*constructive relationship*” could be developed to deliver benefits for the US and Chinese people and to promote “*security and prosperity in Asia and around the world*”.<sup>15</sup> The 2017 NSS posited China and Russia as “*revisionist powers*”<sup>16</sup> seeking to erode American power and influence. In contrast, the 2022 NSS places China as “*the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective*”, and views Russia posing a different challenge as “*an immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the basic laws of the international order today, as its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown*”.<sup>17</sup> As per Russia’s Maritime Doctrine 2022<sup>18</sup>, which was released on 31 July 2022, Russia sees its existence and development as a great continental and maritime power in the 21st Century on the basis of several enabling factors that include possessing the largest territory in the world; the length of its maritime borders, its huge reserves and the diversity of its marine energy, mineral and biological resources; and the quality and quantity of its population. Though this statement can be considered an overstretch presently, Russian activities to realise this aim could add to the complexities of the contemporary global security environment.

The 2022 NSS places the US and the world at an “*inflection point*”<sup>19</sup> and has accordingly analysed the threats, challenges, risks, and opportunities, which are contained in the string of strategies issued so far.

## **Threats, Challenges, Risks, and Opportunities**

The 2022 NDS has divided the world into six major regions as shown in table 2. The table also indicates associated threats, challenges, risks, and opportunities assessed from the 2022 NSS and NDS.

While both the documents identify the main adversarial nations as Russia and China, there is dividing line which places both the nations in different slots, as competitor and an immediate threat, respectively. While the view on Russia has remained generally unchanged since the 2015 NSS, the approach vis-à-vis China has progressed to a relatively harder stance. This would require the US to take more harder actions on ground than hitherto if the Biden administration wants to be seen as following its strategies more consciously and seriously as compared to earlier

**Table 2: Security Scan Region Wise**

Region	Threats/ Challenges/ Risks	Opportunities
Indo-Pacific	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. China</li> <li>2. North Korea</li> <li>3. Nuclear environment</li> <li>4. Land and sea disputes</li> <li>5. Grey zone coercion</li> <li>6. Power projection in a contested environment</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work with allies and partners to build a resilient security architecture to sustain a free and open regional order</li> <li>2. Enhance technology cooperation through QUAD and AUKUS</li> </ol>
Europe	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Russia</li> <li>2. Grey zone coercion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capability development and military modernisation of NATO</li> <li>2. Improving the relationship with the European Union (EU)</li> </ol>
Middle East	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Iran</li> <li>2. Syria</li> <li>3. Violent Extremist Organisations (VEOs) - terrorism</li> <li>4. Rightsizing of forward military presence</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cooperation with regional and global partners</li> <li>2. Support security coalitions within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)</li> <li>3. Improve collective intelligence and warning</li> </ol>
Western Hemisphere	Non-traditional security threats to the homeland	Build own capability and those of regional nations
Africa	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. VEOs</li> <li>2. Presence of China and Russia</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Build capacities of nations to degrade terrorist activities</li> <li>2. Disrupt Chinese and Russian activities</li> </ol>
Arctic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Threats to the homeland</li> <li>2. Balance Arctic posture vis-à-vis Indo-Pacific focus</li> <li>3. Russia</li> <li>4. Increasing presence of China</li> <li>5. Sustain the Arctic Council and other Arctic institutions</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve ISR and Early warning capabilities</li> <li>2. Improve MDA</li> <li>3. Enhance capabilities of the North American Aerospace Defence Command</li> </ol>

Source: 2022 NSS and NDS

administrations. This could be a more challenging task as the 2022 NDS further recognises that the China-Russia relationship “*continues to increase in breadth*” and acknowledges that “*either state could create global dilemmas*” for the US joint force in the eventuality of a US conflict or crises situation with the other nation.<sup>20</sup> This

relationship could have more impact in the Indo-Pacific, especially South China Sea, where parallels have been drawn out between the ongoing Ukraine conflict and a possible Taiwan Conflict. Putin's 2012 *Pivot to Asia*<sup>21</sup> and pointed interest in the *Asia-Pacific* (a term favoured by Russia) elaborated upon in Russia's Maritime Doctrine 2022<sup>22</sup>, which was released on 31 July 2022, is perhaps an indicator of more Russian presence and interest in the Indo-Pacific. The 2022 NDS also acknowledges that China and Russia both pose "*more dangerous challenges*" to the safety and security of the US homeland.<sup>23</sup> Hence, given the growing complexities, time may not be on the side of the Biden administration to follow through the strategies in one term. In this regard Joseph Nye recently stated about the 2022 NSS that "*Unfortunately, policymakers are always under time pressure and must formulate strategic objectives for the here and now. Biden has properly done that. The question for the years ahead is whether he can implement his policies in ways that do not foreclose the possibility of more benign future scenarios, even while recognising that they are distant*".<sup>24</sup>

'*Integrated Defence*', highlighted by both 2022 NSS and NDS, appears to be the main pillar to address the threats and challenges posed by the identified adversarial nations. This integration part covers five areas, that could provide opportunities, as it is intended to work across domains, regions, the spectrum of conflict, the US government, and with allies and partners.<sup>25</sup> The deterrence part will be either by denial, or resilience, or by direct and collective cost imposition.<sup>26</sup> This wide ambit would require both domestic cohesion and a common hard-line approach by US allies and partners. With respect to the hard-line approach the US would perhaps work on a twin prong engagement policy, especially in the Indo-Pacific. The 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy clearly "*lays great emphasis on working with intra-regional allies and partners to address challenges and threats; and places them in two groups — regional treaty-alliance partners, and leading regional partners. The first group comprises Australia, Japan, the ROK, the Philippines, and Thailand, and the second includes India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands*".<sup>27</sup> The hard-line approach would be an easier subject with treaty alliance partners and allies as compared to strategic partners. For example, the 2022 NDS looks at advancing the defence partnership with India to "*enhance its (India's) ability to deter PRC aggression and ensure free and open access to the Indian Ocean Region*".<sup>28</sup> It is not clear if this role envisaged for India is under any mutual

understanding, which is highly unlikely given India's strategic autonomy approach and stance to be seen as part of any military alliance. Therefore, the US may have overpitched its expectations from its Indo-Pacific partners that could impact the aims of the existing and future strategies. A harder stance could also further unsettle ASEAN, given the common entreaty in not forcing ASEAN to choose sides. This is also perhaps the reason why the Indo-Pacific strategy states that the "*objective is not to change the PRC but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favourable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share*". This relatively softer approach to China vis-à-vis the more hard-line approaches in the 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance document and 2022 NSS and NDS could lead to a degree of uncertainty amongst the US allies and strategic partners regarding the path the US plans to follow while addressing China.

With regard to Russia and the ongoing Ukraine conflict, there is a clear demarcation of nations who follow the US lead and those who do not. The US push in *forcing* nations to reduce their support dependence on Russia may not find favour, and hence may stall the US outlook of cooperation in many fields mentioned in the 2022 NSS and other strategies. For example, the US approach urging India to reduce its dependency on, and slowly transit away from Russia<sup>29</sup> did not find favour in India. Such a continued approach would have contradicted the aspect of "*countries must be free to determine their own foreign policy choices*", which has been mentioned as part of the *Enduring Vision* mentioned in the 2022 NSS.<sup>30</sup> However, the associated remark which stated that India importing oil from Russia does not violate the sanctions imposed on Russia<sup>31</sup> indicates that the US would exercise flexibility to keep doors of cooperation with strategic partners open.

The positing of Russia as an immediate threat and the recognition of the growth of the Russia-China relationship enforces the thought process of the 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance document and covers up for the absence of Russia in the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy document. This approach could have been tempered by Russia's Maritime Doctrine 2022 that places the Arctic as a region of vital interest.<sup>32</sup> As per this 2022 doctrine, Russia plans to implement its doctrine, in six maritime regions, namely: Arctic, Pacific, Atlantic (Baltic, Azov-Black Sea

and Mediterranean basins), Caspian, Indian Ocean, and Antarctica. Based on the emphasis on these regions, starting with the Arctic, it can be safely assumed that this listing subscribes to a given priority of focus. Two pertinent points from Russia's Maritime Doctrine of 2022 that merit attention are as follows<sup>33</sup>:

- Development of the Arctic zone as a strategic resource base and its rational use, including full-scale development of the continental shelf of the Russian Federation beyond its EEZ, after securing its external border in accordance with article 76 of UNCLOS.
- Development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as a national transport corridor.

The upgradation of the Northern Fleet to a military district on 01 January 2021 also “reflects the increased prominence given to the Arctic and the Northern Sea Route in Russia's strategic plans”.<sup>34</sup> This accrued focus of Russia on the Arctic, the ongoing Ukraine conflict, and the resultant stopping of work of the Arctic Council by seven of the eight members in the middle Russia's chairmanship of the council have clearly influenced the 2022 US National Strategy for the Arctic Region.<sup>35</sup> The US Navy's 2021 document, *A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic*, acknowledges that “*A changing Arctic Region increases the potential for competition and conflict*”<sup>36</sup> and covers most of the hard power and other associated aspects reflected in both the 2022 NSS and NDS. However, the ongoing impasse between the US and Russia could impact the security environment of the Arctic and the stalling of discussions in the Arctic Council will only aggravate the situation.

The 2022 NSS also lays equal stress on non-traditional aspects. Apart from the 2022 NSS, the relevant aspects for the Indo-Pacific find mention in the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy and the 2022 Pacific Partnership Strategy. The Indo-Pacific Strategy seeks to expand the role of the QUAD beyond the oft-perceived notion of it being a hard-security construct aimed at containing China. The approach extends the role of the QUAD to address issues that will aid prosperity, stability, security, and peace in the region. This approach could broaden acceptability of the QUAD by dispelling the notion of it being solely a hard-security dialogue and further the cooperative aspects discussed since the first QUAD Leaders' Summit held in March 2021.<sup>37</sup>

Along with the QUAD the 2022 NSS places AUKUS as critical to addressing regional challenges and thereby looks towards reinforcing “*collective strength by weaving our allies and partners closer together*” and “*encouraging tighter linkages between likeminded Indo-Pacific and European countries*”.<sup>38</sup> France is the sole European and Indo-Pacific nation, hence can navigate the region with ease. However, other European nations will need to approach the region with an *Indo-Pacific lens* and not a *European lens*.

## Conclusion

The 2022 NSS has drawn a lot of criticism, as is evident from a long line of hard-hitting tweets to articles that shun the requirement of the NSS and NDS.<sup>39</sup> One advantage the Biden administration could possibly have, is the Republican support, especially with regards to Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Ukraine, and engagements with nations of the Indo-Pacific. However, some issues like climate change may not be fully supported by the Republicans. Further, the outcome of the US 2022 midterm elections will dictate the degree of domestic support to the present and forthcoming strategies of the Biden administration.

To ensure optimum cooperation the US needs to review its approach to issues that impact the security environment of its strategic partners. For example, the recent USD 450 million package support to Pakistan for sustainment of the Pakistan Air Force’s F-16 fleet for counter terrorism purposes has been criticised by India, while keeping the doors of cooperation open.<sup>40</sup>

Notwithstanding the criticism, the strategies clearly outline the US approach to contemporary threats, challenges, risks, and opportunities, and the plan to “*achieve a better future of a free, open, secure, and prosperous world*”<sup>41</sup>, which is line with the past administration strategies, with a reshuffling of priorities.

Though differences over engagements with China and Russia will continue to impact US relations with nations, especially strategic partners and ASEAN, there is the greater chances of success in addressing non-traditional threats and challenges due to convergency and cooperation based on the common aim of a *free, open, and inclusive* Indo-Pacific.

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# China's *Mantra* for Great Maritime Powerhood: President Xi's Speech at 20<sup>th</sup> NPC Sets the Agenda

*Captain (IN) Kamlesh K Agnihotri (Retd.)*

## Abstract

The 'work report' speech of the Chinese President in the 20th National Party Congress (NPC) of the Communist Party of China (CPC) had domestic orientation covering various themes related to the governance of the nation and the indispensable role that Party's had to play therein. Even though maritime security and the measures required to achieve it did find fleeting mention, the same were somehow missed by the China watchers and maritime analysts. This article highlights these vital issues related to the Chinese endeavours to 'strengthen the safeguards for ensuring maritime security', 'strengthen its capacity to ensure overseas security', 'safeguard China's maritime rights and interests', 'resolutely defend the Country's sovereignty, security, and development interests'. All these imperatives indicate stepped-up efforts to build China into 'a strong maritime country', under a 'means' and 'end' matrix. It is also argued that once a coercive military capability is built up by China, then it can be used in any form, and at any time, in support of its national interests. The US is naturally concerned by these developments; and so should India be too.

**Keywords:** *13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, 20 NPC, China Coast Guard, Marine Economy, Maritime Rights and Interests, Overseas interests, PLA Navy, SLOC, Xi Jinping, Work Report*

The 20th National Party Congress (NPC) of the Communist Party of China (CPC) commenced on 16 October 2022. The opening item of the agenda was the presentation of the work report on behalf of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC in the form of a speech by the Party General Secretary — and the President of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) — Xi Jinping. The speech, as expected, presented the achievements of CPC in last five years in a positive light, and along predictable lines. The crux however, lay in the articulation of an envisioned road map for the CPC to steer the nation towards achieving the “... second centenary goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects, and to advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernization.”<sup>1</sup> (sic) The Presidential speech spanned 15 themes covering a broad spectrum of inter-connected strands. Table 1 lists all these themes.

Table 1: Themes of President Xi Jinping’s Speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> NPC

Section	Theme
i.	The work of the past five years and the great changes in the first decade of the New Era
ii.	A new frontier in adapting Marxism to the Chinese context and the needs of the time
iii.	The new journey of the New Era: Missions and Tasks of the Communist Party of China
iv.	Accelerating the creation of a new development pattern and pursuing high-quality development
v.	Invigorating China through science and education and developing a strong workforce for the modernization drive
vi.	Advancing ‘Whole-Process People’s Democracy’ and ensuring that the people run the country
vii.	Exercising law-based governance on all fronts and advancing the rule of law in China
viii.	Building cultural confidence and strength, and securing new successes in developing socialist culture
ix.	Improving the people’s well-being and raising quality of life
x.	Pursuing green development and promoting harmony between humanity and nature
xi.	Modernizing China’s National Security System and Capacity; and Safeguarding National Security and Social Stability

xii.	Achieving the centenary goal of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and further modernizing National Defense and the Military
xiii.	Upholding and improving the policy of One Country, Two Systems and Promoting National Reunification
xiv.	Promoting World Peace and Development and building a human community with a shared future
xv.	Exercising full and rigorous self-governance and advancing the great new project of party building in the New Era

*Source:* Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

While major issues in the speech related to the imperative for the CPC to promote Marxist thought with Chinese characteristics, chart future 'Party' course towards retaining primacy in all affairs of the nation, guide national governance and explore the means to build a prosperous society; the need to modernise the national security apparatus and its capabilities also found substantial mention. The fact that a separate section was devoted towards 'promotion of national reunification', logically leads to the utmost necessity of reforming the PLA structures, and modernising its capabilities to ensure that all aspects of holistic national security are adequately addressed. The Chinese leader, in his speech, appeared to suggest a substantial compression in the timeline for 'building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects' by a good 14 years — from earlier announced timeline of 2049 to new goal of 2035.

The global media, which was watching the build-up to the 20<sup>th</sup> NPC with great interest, flooded the news-space after President Xi Jinping's speech. The Chinese media obviously extolled the virtues of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the focus of the CPC towards wholesome development of a modern socialist country.<sup>2</sup> The western media discourse, on the other hand, ranged from discussing the nuances of zero-Covid policy, hardline approach towards Taiwan and national economic management, to global ambition fulfilment; and analysing the implications arising therefrom.<sup>3</sup> A few commentaries did discuss the Chinese focus on revamping of its national security system, particularly the need to safeguard national security through more robust 'strategic deterrence' measures.<sup>4</sup>

However, very crucial Presidential statements portraying his overarching vision towards making China into a 'great maritime power' appeared to have missed the

media scrutiny altogether. This could possibly be due to ‘matters maritime’ finding rather unobtrusive mention in the middle of long, winding paragraphs sub-titled with rhetorical jargon like ‘*accelerating the creation of a new development pattern*’, ‘*safeguarding social stability*’, or ‘*pursuing high-quality development*’. Another more plausible explanation is that the bulk of global media — like many scholars, academics, and strategists — suffers from a sense of ‘sea-blindness’,<sup>5</sup> where ‘matters maritime’ often do not find adequate salience in their collective mind-space, and hence do not generate enough interest.

Be that as it may, the scholarship undertaken at the National Maritime Foundation — India’s foremost institution for maritime research — critically looks at all ‘matters maritime’ which underpin the economic and societal well-being of the global populace, predicated upon ocean governance, trade, connectivity, rules-based order, and related mechanisms. This article thus, analyses those statements of Presidential intent that distinctly relate to the Chinese maritime domain, and which have huge implications for the world at large. Following four clear pronouncements merit further attention, and are dealt in subsequent sections:

- (a) *“We will develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, and step-up efforts to build China into a strong maritime country.”*<sup>6</sup>
- (b) *“We will strengthen the safeguards for ensuring economic, major infrastructure, financial, cyber, data, biological, resource, nuclear, space, and maritime security.”*<sup>7</sup>
- (c) *“We will strengthen our capacity to ensure overseas security; and protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese citizens and legal entities overseas.”*<sup>8</sup>
- (d) *“We will safeguard China’s maritime rights and interests; and resolutely defend our country’s sovereignty, security, and development interests.”*<sup>9</sup>

## **Develop the Marine Economy; Protect the Marine Ecological Environment; Build China into a Strong Maritime Country**

This Presidential statement is just a reiteration of Beijing’s national effort of becoming a global power through comprehensive ascendancy in all aspects encompassing the

maritime domain. President Hu Jintao, during his keynote address as the General Secretary of CPC, had made a similar pitch for ‘building China into a maritime great power’, during the 18th National Party Congress in November 2012. President Hu, at that time, envisioned four ‘must-dos’ for China to be considered as a ‘maritime great power’: the ability to exploit ocean resources; be a developed maritime economy; preserve the marine environment; and resolutely protect the maritime rights and interests.<sup>10</sup>

The progression of the ‘maritime growth’ agenda has also transcended the leadership change, as is evident from the follow-up actions by President Xi Jinping — since assuming the top office — in 2013, wherein he propounded a ‘four transformations’ plan during a study session.<sup>11</sup> These broadly translate as follows:

- Transform maritime economy towards quality and efficiency
- Transform marine development methods towards sustainable use
- Transform marine science and technology (S&T), mainly through innovation
- Transform the ‘protection of national maritime rights and interests’ to enable unified planning

This absolute consistency in the national thought process — right from top to bottom, and across all functional departments of the CPC and the Chinese national governance structures — was quite apparent when the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan (2016-2020) promulgated by the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) for implementation, virtually articulated the same goals. The document stated that “*We [China] will pursue coordinated land and marine development, develop the marine economy, effectively develop marine resources, protect marine ecosystems and habitats, and safeguard China’s maritime rights and interests, building China into a strong maritime country.*”<sup>12</sup>

The 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan also spelt out science, technology and innovation as enabling tools for achieving the three laid-down objectives — strengthening marine economy, protecting marine resources and environments, safeguarding maritime rights and interests — towards attainment of ‘maritime great power’ status. The plan laid down the following road map for action:<sup>13</sup>

- Develop marine S&T
- Achieve breakthroughs in advanced marine technology to enable deep-sea operations
- Make innovations in market-based allocation methods for ocean and island resources
- Strengthen research on marine climate change, marine disaster monitoring, risk evaluation, disaster prevention and mitigation

The 13th Five Year Plan, accordingly, identified the following four specific projects relating to the maritime realm, to be driven by science, technology and innovation efforts:<sup>14</sup>

- Restore the natural state of shoreline, bays and gulfs under ‘Blue Bay’ environment improvement project.
- Achieve breakthroughs in key technological developments related to marine and deep-sea exploration platforms, submersibles, equipment and applications.
- Construct a multi-dimensional global ocean observation network for real-time online monitoring of ocean space and its characteristics.
- Expand the scope of polar exploration by building advanced icebreakers; setting up new research and observation stations in the Arctic and the Antarctic; and improving polar aviation capabilities.

## **Strengthen the Safeguards for Ensuring Maritime Security**

While the Presidential statement has combined the imperative to strengthen the safeguards for ensuring national security — covering economic, infrastructural, financial, cyber, data, biological, resource, nuclear, space and maritime domains — in one sentence,<sup>15</sup> the measures adopted towards enhancing maritime security over the last decade are all too apparent. The latest reform and reorganisation process of the PLA — the PLA Navy being a component thereof — that was kickstarted in 2015, has sought to overhaul the entire thought-process on national security. The maritime security imperative has found greater salience with the increase in the strength of

the PLA Navy hardware and personnel. The PLA Navy has since grown to be the largest navy in the world with about 355 ships and submarines, and the capabilities to conduct naval combat missions in its ‘near seas’ as well as sustain non-traditional maritime security tasks into distant seas.<sup>16</sup>

The other major reform has been the placement of the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) — which was earlier subordinated to the State Oceanic Administration — under the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 2018. The CCG now forms a component of the People’s Armed Police (PAP), with its role and terms of employment in times of peace and war governed by the Chinese Coast Guard Law which came in force on 01 February 2021.<sup>17</sup> The CCG, over the past decade, has grown into the largest maritime law enforcement organisation in the World with more than 200 ships — of which 130 vessels displace more than 1000 tonnes.<sup>18</sup> In order to further bolster the capacity of the Coast Guard for ‘near seas’ protection, 20 out of 72 PLA Navy’s Type 056 corvettes — all less than 10 years old — have reportedly been transferred to the CCG.<sup>19</sup>

The Chinese Coast Guard Law also provides legal sanction for the CCG to engage in maritime security missions in ‘maritime areas under Chinese jurisdiction’ without actually defining the spatial extent of these seas. A Japanese Ministry of Defence communique however, cites a 2018 interpretation of ‘maritime areas under Chinese jurisdiction’ by the Chinese People’s Supreme Procuratorate as “*areas [encompassing] internal waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf of the People’s Republic of China, as well as other maritime areas over which the PRC has jurisdiction.*”<sup>20</sup> This ambiguity in operational areas of responsibility (AOR) of the Chinese Coast Guard legally empowers the force to carry out its tasks even in the areas under dispute, as has been witnessed in the South China Sea, and off Senkaku islands.

## **Strengthen the Capacity to Ensure Overseas Security, and Protect the Lawful Rights and Interests of Chinese Citizens and Legal Entities Overseas**

The Chinese Defence White Paper of May 2015 entitled ‘China’s Military Strategy’ states that “*It is necessary for China to develop a modern maritime military force structure*

*commensurate with its national security and development interests, safeguard its national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, protect the security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests, ... so as to provide strategic support for building itself into a maritime power.*"<sup>21</sup>

The 'overseas interests' were further disaggregated into those involving overseas energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), Chinese nationals, and legal persons overseas. The protection these 'overseas interests' was recognised as a crucial requirement for China, in its Defense White Paper of 2012 — released in April 2013.<sup>22</sup> The Chinese Defense White Paper of 2019 brought the security of 'overseas interests' to the centre stage by asserting that these interests were "... endangered by immediate threats such as international and regional turmoil, terrorism, and piracy"; and that one of the missions of China's armed forces was to "... effectively protect the security and legitimate rights and interests of overseas Chinese people, organizations and institutions".<sup>23</sup>(sic)

The very fact that the 'protection of Chinese overseas interests, citizens and legal entities' has been included in the country's consecutive Defence White Papers since 2012 as one of the missions for the Chinese 'Defence Forces', clearly indicates Beijing's intent to utilise its rapidly modernising navy for this task too. The continuous and ongoing deployment of anti-piracy task forces — each comprising three PLA Navy ships — to the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia for last 14 years is a live testimony to the seriousness accorded by Beijing to the security of its 'overseas interests'. It thus came as no surprise that the issue found prominent mention in the Presidential 'work report' speech of October 2022.

## **Safeguard China's Maritime Rights and Interests; Resolutely Defend Sovereignty and Security**

China enacted the 'Law of the People's Republic of China Concerning the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, 1992', wherein it introduced the term 'maritime rights and interests' for the first time.<sup>24</sup> This has since, become an important element of the evolving Chinese maritime strategy. While the phrase 'safeguarding of China's maritime rights and interests' continued to find greater mention in consecutive

Chinese defence White Papers commencing 1998, it now finds clear mention as one of the aims of China's national defence in the Chinese Defence White Paper of 2019.<sup>25</sup>

China's 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan mentions the following activities that must be undertaken in order to 'safeguard its maritime rights and interests':<sup>26</sup>

- Strengthen the capabilities of maritime law enforcement organisations
- Deepen historical and legal research on maritime issues
- See that maritime torts<sup>27</sup> are properly handled
- Ensure navigational freedom and maritime safety within waters under China's jurisdiction
- Actively participate in the establishment and protection of international and regional maritime order
- Improve dialogue and cooperation mechanisms with neighbouring countries regarding maritime issues, and promote pragmatic maritime cooperation
- Further improve mechanisms for coordinating marine affairs

Enforcement of these objectives on the ground obviously requires China to be a more robust maritime player, and to maintain comprehensive presence in all realms of maritime domain. The Chinese leadership realised this quite early, with the then Premier, Zhu Rongji, providing State support and subsidies to Chinese State-owned shipbuilding yards in the 1980s. This policy reform, pursued relentlessly for close to three decades, resulted in China becoming the world's largest shipbuilder by 2010, overtaking the Republic of Korea in the process.<sup>28</sup> The same Chinese State-owned shipyards also build warships and submarines. The cross transfer of technology, processes and research in ancillary activities like metallurgy, chemical engineering and propulsion machinery has substantially reduced the warship construction time while raising their quality. This has enabled the Chinese shipyards to build between 12 to 16 warships and submarines annually for the last decade.

This large-sized fleet has augmented the combat capabilities of the PLA Navy to such an extent, that it is now in a position to dominate the Chinese 'near-sea' regions.

This is particularly visible in the South China Sea where the Chinese President's assertion to "*Safeguard China's maritime rights and interests; resolutely defend sovereignty and security*"<sup>29</sup> finds deliberate and well-planned implementation in and around the sea areas surrounding the dispute Paracel and Spratly Island chains.

While the PLA Navy and the CCG are Beijing's tools for exercising 'hard' options for 'defending sovereignty and security', and 'safeguarding China's maritime rights and interests'; the Chinese maritime militia, organised as an informal force comprising fishermen trained by the Chinese maritime security agencies, does so in a more subtle and nuanced manner. The Chinese Defence White Paper of 2010 also acknowledges that the militia is an important component and backup force of the PLA.<sup>30</sup> Such maritime militiamen are provided with metal hardened fishing boats and other gear by the 'agencies'; and are also funded and often given cash incentives for carrying out proactive presence and harassment tasks in supposed 'maritime areas under the Chinese jurisdiction'. This is the part of a well-thought-out Chinese strategy, whereby Beijing is able to effectively protect its maritime rights in a 'below the conflict threshold' manner in its given 'areas of interest' without use of the PLA Navy or the CCG. This, more often than not, fulfils the Chinese aim of making incremental gains on the ground, without affording the recourse of exercising 'hard' response option, to the affected adversary.

## Conclusion

All the policy pronouncements related to Beijing assiduously pursuing the *mantra* of holistic ascendancy in the maritime domain towards becoming a great power, have been articulated in brief innocuous sentences in President Xi Jinping's 'work report' of 16 October 2022. That these are just reiterations of what has consistently been under implementation in the country since at least, the dawn of the new millennium, is quite obvious. The Chinese President has now formally placed them in the most important — as also most visible — 'Party' Document, as the national 'key result areas' (KRAs).

Since the whole 'work report' speech had domestic orientation covering various themes related to governance of the nation — as mentioned at Table 1 — and the

CPC's indispensable leadership towards their successful execution; the country's foreign policy and consequently, the names of other countries did not find any mention. The same was the case with India and the Indian Ocean Region too. However, it is posited that all the 'means' mentioned in the Presidential speech towards the 'end' of "*building China into a strong maritime country*" have elements that can be leveraged quite easily at any given time towards the fulfilment of its foreign policy agenda. The US acknowledges it as such, with its concerns with regard to the aims of Chinese naval modernisation being expressed thus: "*China's military modernization effort, including its naval modernization effort, is assessed as being aimed at developing capabilities for, among other things, ... displacing U.S. influence in the Western Pacific; and asserting China's status as the leading regional power and a major world power.*"<sup>31</sup>(sic)

And if the US, lying across the vast Pacific Ocean is so concerned; India located in the Indian Ocean just adjacent to the Western Pacific — where many a Chinese interest lie — and sharing an un-demarcated land border with ongoing friction, had better be worried too.

12 January 2023

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# Republic of Korea's Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific

*Captain (IN) Sarabjeet S Parmar (Retd.)*

## Looking Beyond East Asia and ASEAN

The Republic of Korea's (RoKs) Indo-Pacific Strategy, released on 28 December 2022, signifies a major shift in Seoul's foreign policy, moving from a close regional focus to the broader Indo-Pacific. Steps taken by previous South Korean Presidents signify a mix of continuity and incremental steps taken to diversify foreign policy. A study of South Korea's policies of the late 1990's regarding Southeast Asia under President Kim Dae-jung as a start point, followed by President Lee Myung-bak's New Asia Initiative of 2009, and President Moon Jae's New Southern Policy (NSP) of 2017 indicate these steps.<sup>1</sup> The strategy released under President Yoon Suk Yeol's administration opens a new vista of foreign policy dynamics and engagements as it recognises that the Indo-Pacific stretches from the African coast in the Indian Ocean to the Americas. This wide swath of the Indo-Pacific thus aligns South Korea with India's view of the region. The strategy is ambitious and looks at engaging nations, across six sub-regions of the Indo-Pacific (including Europe), via nine Core Lines of Effort (CLOE's) to attain the vision of a *Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific*. This vision is based on three principles of cooperation: inclusiveness, trust, and reciprocity. Three aspects that clearly stand out are: the *inclusivity factor*, the aspiration to evolve as a *Global Pivotal State* (GPS), and the positing of South Korea as an *Open Trading Nation that Aspires to Contribute to Global Peace*. This paper will analyse RoK's strategy for the Indo-Pacific Region and highlight pertinent aspects that merit attention.

## South Korea as a Global Pivotal State

The use of the term Pivot State raises several questions and hence needs to be analysed. The term could be viewed in multiple ways, mainly with scepticism, due to the impact on regional and global security. Hence, there is a need to understand what South Korea means by terming itself a GPS. As per a report by the Hague Centre for Security Studies (HCSS), pivot states can be defined as states that “...possess military, economic or ideational strategic assets that are coveted by great powers.” Further, “They are caught in the middle of overlapping spheres of influence of these great powers as measured by associations that consist of ties that bind (military and economic agreements and cultural affinities) and relationships that flow (arms and commodities trade and discourse). A change in a pivot state’s association has important repercussions for regional and global security.”<sup>4</sup> The report identified pivot states based on the number of military, economic or ideational strategic goods in their possession and accordingly placed South Korea in the category of a pivotal state with economic strategic goods.<sup>5</sup>

The strategy places South Korea as “A strong democracy with a developed economy”<sup>6</sup> and hence aspires to become a GPS that “actively seeks out agendas for cooperation and shapes discussions in the region and the wider world”<sup>7</sup>, and “will contribute to the economic and social development of the Indo-Pacific through “contributive diplomacy” commensurate with its economic stature....”<sup>8</sup> The strategy thus aims at vitalising direct economic engagements through the fifth and eighth CLOEs entitled, *Build Economic Security Networks*, and *Engage in “Contributive Diplomacy” through Tailored Development Cooperation Partnerships*, respectively. In line with this approach the strategy lays out a roadmap of specific planned economic engagements with several nations across the six identified sub-regions as tabulated (See Table 1).

Apart from the specific economic engagements mentioned in Table 1, South Korea can be expected to pursue other forms of economic engagement with friendly/ like-minded nations to support mutual non-traditional threats and challenges. These will either be in some direct form of engagement or would aid development of other aspects in pursuance of the stated vision. These are highlighted in the next section of this paper.

**Table 1: Planned Economic Engagement with Nations: RoK's Indo-Pacific Strategy 2022**

Ser	Sub-Region	Economic Engagement
(a)	North Pacific	(i) Evolve the United States (US)-RoK alliance into a global comprehensive strategic alliance encompassing not just security but also economy amongst other aspects. <sup>2</sup> (ii) Increase economic security with Canada through stabilised supply chains. <sup>3</sup> Canada's IndoPacific Strategy released on 27 November 2022 also mentions suitable economic interactions with South Korea. <sup>4</sup>
(b)	Southeast Asia and ASEAN	Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI) would be the main engagement policy with ASEAN and the existing partnerships spanning trade and socio-economic cooperation would be built upon. <sup>5</sup>
(c)	South Asia	(i) Enhance economic cooperation with India by upgrading the ROK-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). <sup>6</sup> (ii) Pursue reliable and mutually beneficial economic partnerships with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and other South Asian countries. <sup>7</sup>
(d)	Oceania	(i) Continue to reap the benefits of complementary economic relationship with Australia, South Korea's largest trading partner in Oceania. <sup>8</sup> (ii) Continue to expand economic cooperation with New Zealand, as its fifth largest trading partner. <sup>9</sup>
(e)	African Coast of the Indian Ocean	Design programmes to share experiences and knowledge on economic and social development considering the different and diverse conditions of each country. <sup>10</sup>
(f)	Europe and Latin America	With Latin American nations expand partnerships and collaboration on matters pertaining to economic security and trade, amongst others. <sup>11</sup>

*Source:* Author

As a GPS with economic strategic goods the strategy seeks to balance Seoul's approach to China, the US, and its own national interests. It states that China is South Korea's "key partner for achieving prosperity and peace in the Indo-Pacific region", and that Seoul will pursue a policy to "nurture a sounder and more

mature relationship” in the pursuit of shared interests “based on mutual respect and reciprocity, guided by international norms and rules.”<sup>19</sup> Further, the strategy also states that South Korea, Japan, and China account for 25 per cent of the global GDP, and hence considers trilateral cooperation amongst the three nations as an indispensable element for establishing stability and the achievement of prosperity and peace in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>20</sup> The strategy, therefore, looks at resuming the ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit, reinforcing the capacity and structure of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), and harmoniously developing ROK-US-Japan cooperation and ROK-Japan-China cooperation.<sup>21</sup> These avenues are considered highly ambitious given the state of existing US-China relations, and any extra tilt towards China could increase the scepticism associated with South Korea’s status as a GPS. This sort of approach also signifies a change in Seoul’s foreign policy approach that strives to place its national interests first rather than perceived reactions from Beijing and Washington and the associated ‘balanced diplomacy’ approach aimed at striking a strategic balance between the US and China.<sup>22</sup> However, “Despite the complexity and multitude of challenges, the US alliances, in the region now known as the Indo-Pacific, provide a security blanket through ‘security guarantees’ that are meant to deter or address any conflict arising from power transition and balance of power struggle.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the US-RoK alliance, and its subsequent envisaged development into a global comprehensive strategic alliance, would ensure a continued alignment with the US approach to the region while balancing interactions with China. It is interesting to note that the US Indo-Pacific strategy released in February 2022 looked at engaging the region through ten CLOEs. There is a distinct convergence between the US and South Korean CLOEs which indicates the strength of the alignment between South Korean and the US approach to the region.<sup>24</sup>

## **Core Lines of Effort**

In line with its positioning as a GPS, South Korea is looking at expanding “the geographical scope and breadth of cooperation”.<sup>25</sup> This engagement across the wide swath of the IndoPacific would be conducted through nine CLOEs. The geographical area is immense and the scope of the CLOEs quite vast. Seoul would find it a difficult

task to meet all the requirements and will therefore need to persevere with patience while navigating the complexities of engagement, cooperation, and balancing. Some pertinent aspects that emerged CLOE wise are enumerated below. CLOEs five and eight have been addressed earlier hence are not included in this section.

## **Build Regional Order based on Norms and Rules**

To contribute towards strengthening the international rules-based order, Seoul “aims to serve as a hub for cooperation networks in the Indo-Pacific”.<sup>12</sup> While the strategy states that South Korea will work with like-minded nations who share the same vision and principles of a free, open, and prosperous region, the present focus would remain limited to select nations. Given the proximity and alliance driven relationship the US-Japan-Republic of Korea tri-lateral would in all probability drive the agenda of this CLOE. The statement released after the tri-lateral meeting held on 13 November 2022 clearly indicates the strong convergence<sup>13</sup> and hence the mention in the strategy of the trilateral as a useful platform of cooperation<sup>14</sup>. Termed as *Bloc Diplomacy* or *Americanisation of South Korean diplomacy* by some critics, this approach has been criticised as impacting the stability and peace of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>15</sup>

The mention of the meeting of the four Asia-Pacific Partners (AP4) leaders at the June 2022 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Summit appears out of place. This meeting essentially discussed two aspects. The first was the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The second was the indivisibility of the security of the Indo-Pacific and Europe flowing from which four nations (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and RoK) would take the lead in deepening communication between the Indo-Pacific and NATO.<sup>16</sup>

The second aspect about the security of the Indo-Pacific and Europe being indivisible is highly debatable and may not be acceptable to many Indo-Pacific nations, especially linking NATO to the Indo-Pacific. Although the strength of the US-RoK alliance and similar US strength in NATO could have influenced this inclusion, it is important to note that the dynamics of Europe and the Indo-Pacific are not the same. Hence, to include NATO in the region may not be the right approach. Further, this approach could impact the inclusivity factor. There are existing regional

initiatives that can be exploited to support this CLOE — as well as other CLOEs — like those stemming from the QUAD leader summit meetings and working with nations on the seven spokes of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). This would enhance the *minilateral cooperation* approach mentioned in this CLOE.<sup>17</sup>

## **Cooperate to Promote Rule of Law and Human Rights**

Seoul would find congruence with other like-minded nations on most of the aspects, except perhaps the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In this regard a neutral approach towards ending the conflict could provide the required congruence, especially with nations, like India, which have a strategic relationship with Russia, and are calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

## **Strengthen Non-proliferation and Counterterrorism Efforts across the Region**

Regarding nuclear issues this CLOE focusses on North Korea, and as it is a vital security national interest would remain focused largely on the Korean Peninsula. However, the issue of counterterrorism is a welcome aspect and Seoul could look at encouraging more Indo-Pacific nations to come onboard the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG). Presently, the FATF has 14 Indo-Pacific nations as members and one as an observer.<sup>18</sup> The APG has 41 active members making it the largest global FATF-style regional body (FSRB). Further, 11 members of the APG are also members of the FATE. This overlap could aid a twin pronged approach in addressing common national and regional threats and challenges stemming from terrorism.

## **Expand Comprehensive Security Cooperation**

The success of this CLOE would be dependent on South Korea's capacity and capability, available and planned, considering the vast canvas covered. Further, cooperation being the keyword it would be better to plug into existing mechanisms as this could address the lack of capacity and capability. For example, this line of

effort looks at “cooperation on real-time maritime monitoring and information sharing through participation in international discussions on the establishment of a Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) system.”<sup>19</sup> In order to take advantage of collective capacity and capability this aspect could be undertaken as part of the QUAD Indo-Pacific MDA (IPMDA) initiative.

The repeated inclusion of NATO with the intention to “to expand cooperation with NATO to effectively address transnational security challenges, including emerging technologies and climate change”<sup>20</sup> could heighten certain national sensitivities and raise issues mentioned earlier, under the first CLOE.

The reference to QUAD as a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue should have been avoided as the term *Security* raises issues and could deter nations from joining QUAD led initiatives, especially when viewed as choosing sides between China and US led forums, especially by ASEAN. This is an important aspect as the strategy “firmly supports ASEAN Centrality and the AOIP (ASEAN Outlook of the Indo-Pacific)”<sup>21</sup>.

## **Strengthen Cooperation in Critical Domains of Science and Technology and Close Digital Gap**

Due to South Korea’s standing “as a global leader in science and technology innovation”<sup>22</sup>, this CLOE could become the linchpin of the strategy. The many areas mentioned under this CLOE could complement the *Critical and Emerging Technologies* initiative of the QUAD, and the *Science Technology and Academic Cooperation* pillar of the IPOI, which presently has only Singapore onboard.

## **Lead Regional Cooperation on Climate Change and Energy Security**

While this line of effort has all the standard elements of addressing climate change and energy security, two aspects emerge that can enhance regional cooperation. The first is Seoul’s plan to contribute to the “establishment of infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region for an effective response to climate change”.<sup>23</sup> To effectively realise this aim South Korea could look at joining the Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)<sup>24</sup>, which has several Indo-Pacific nations as members including the QUAD,

and also work with India on the IPOI pillar regarding *Disaster Risk Reduction and Management*. This approach could also complement the QUAD initiative on Climate to convene a Climate and Information Services Task Force and provide technical assistance to Indo-Pacific nation, especially the small island developing states. The interlocking of these initiatives could empower Indo-Pacific nations to address climate change issues effectively.

The second aspect is nuclear energy, and Seoul looking at actively participating in the IndoPacific Nuclear Market and seeking to establish a framework for nuclear cooperation in the region.<sup>25</sup> As per the World Nuclear Association, Asia has about 140 operable nuclear power reactors, around 30 to 35 are under construction and there are plans to build an additional 40 to 50.<sup>26</sup> The status of nuclear power plants in the Indo-Pacific region is as tabulated below (See Table 2).<sup>27</sup>

**Table 2: Status of Nuclear Power/ Research Reactors in the Indo-Pacific**

Ser	Nation	Power/ Research Reactors Operable	Power Reactors Under Construction	Power Reactors Planned
(a)	Australia	-/1	-	-
(b)	Bangladesh	-/1	2	-
(c)	China	54/16	22	42
(d)	India	22/5	8	12
(e)	Indonesia	-/3	-	-
(f)	Japan	33/3	2	1
(g)	South Korea	25/2	3	-
(h)	North Korea	-/1	-	-
(j)	Malaysia	-/1	-	-
(k)	Pakistan	6/2	-	1
(m)	Vietnam	-/1	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>140/36</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>56</b>

Source: <https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/others/asiasnuclear-energy-growth.aspx>

This initiative could face some resistance from China and Russia as both nations oppose the idea of the Indo-Pacific and therefore any US or US ally/ strategic partner

led regional initiatives. Plus, nations which have nuclear power plants built by Chinese or Russian assistance may come under pressure and refrain from joining the envisaged framework. Further, there could be an increase in the list of nations whom China and Russia are offering nuclear power plants with the package of finance and fuel services. This could complicate overtures to join the envisaged framework. As per the World Nuclear Association these nations are:<sup>28</sup>

- **By China:** Cambodia, Kenya, and Thailand.
- **By Russia:** Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, The Philippines, and Vietnam.

The degree of difficulty to establish a framework for nuclear cooperation in the region would depend on the contents, and for the drafters and negotiators the devil would be in the details.

## **Promote Mutual Understanding and Exchanges**

The last CLOE seeks to benefit from the soft power of people-to-people exchanges which would exploit the digital and cultural domains as a part of a two-way cooperative public diplomacy approach. This would be an interesting line of effort to observe given the cultural diversity of the region.

## **Moving Ahead**

South Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy is a big step and major foreign policy shift as Seoul seeks to engage nations and address contemporary issues that define and delineate the Indo-Pacific. Generally, nations, especially middle powers, would prefer to pursue an incremental approach.

Having placed the strategy in the open domain, and expressed an aspiration to become a GPS, South Korea would have to pursue the CLOEs carefully and incrementally. The unilateral cooperative approach expressed throughout the document would be a good method to engage nations and strengthen existing initiatives, like those of the QUAD and IPOI, by adding value that flow from South

Korea's core strengths. Foremost on the list of these strengths is its economy, science and technological innovativeness, cultural outreach, relations with ASEAN and like-minded nations including India, Australia, and Japan, and South Korea's geographic position in East Asia. These strengths can be exploited to balance China and Russia while forging the South Korean vision of a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific, though cooperative mechanisms.

05 January 2023

## ENDNOTES

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# Congruence between India's and Republic of Korea's Maritime Strategies: Portends for Synergistic Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific

*Captain (IN) Kamlesh K Agnihotri (Retd.)*

## Abstract

India has always believed in collaborative approach as the best means to achieve the ends of a 'free, open and inclusive' Indo-Pacific region. The Indian Navy, on its part, has chalked out an action plan to implement this strategy within India's areas of maritime interest. Republic of Korea – aspiring to be a 'Global Pivotal State' using its 'Strategy for the Indo-Pacific Region' as the blueprint for future-oriented partnerships – “seeks agenda for cooperation” with equally concerned stakeholders. A Korean 'core line of effort' to 'expand comprehensive security cooperation'; also finds great commonality with India's Maritime Security Strategy. This congruence of strategic interests offers many avenues for comprehensive collaboration between the two countries in the maritime security domain.

India, by virtue of its geospatial location in the Indian Ocean, is preordained to be a maritime nation. Its 7516 km long coastline; numerous outlying islands; vast exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 2.01 million square km; and 12 major and about 200 non-major ports; provide clear testimony to this truism. The very economic prosperity and maritime security of India is inextricably linked with the Indian ocean. A noted Indian historian, KM Panikkar has in fact, summarised this linkage in these words:

“While to other countries, the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas; to India, it is the vital sea. Her lifelines are concentrated in that area. Her future is dependent on the freedom of that vast water surface. No industrial development, no commercial growth, no stable political structure is possible for her unless the Indian Ocean is free, and her own shores are fully protected.”<sup>1</sup>

The above wisdom-in-hindsight dawned on the national security discourse post-independence, after India had to endure colonisation and total loss of freedom for about three centuries at the hands of European powers because of the proverbial ‘sea-blindness’.<sup>2</sup> The founding fathers of Indian democracy therefore conceptualised the formation of a strong naval force based on aircraft carriers, blue-water ships and submarines; which would be capable of addressing the threats to national security from-, at- or through the sea.

The subsequent wars/conflicts across the land borders in 1962, 1965, 1971 and 1999 did force the Indian decision-makers back towards land-centric threat mindset. However, the temporary shift of national security focus landwards, did not hugely impact the Indian Navy (IN), which continued to modernise at a steady pace. Consequently, the contemporary Indian Navy as a ‘combat-ready, cohesive and future- ready’ Force is ready to play its designated role in furtherance of national diplomacy – coercive or otherwise. The optimum employment of this potent instrument of State power, however, requires clear and concise strategic directions.

## **India’s Maritime Strategy**

The IN, in recognition of the above imperative, published its first strategic document titled ‘*Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime Military Strategy*’ in 2007. Since ‘strategies’ are meant to address the dynamic geopolitical landscape, shifting alliances and evolving threat profiles; these per-force must be reviewed from time-to-time to reflect contemporary realities. The ‘2007 Maritime Strategy’ of the IN was accordingly revised in 2015 and promulgated as ‘*Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*’ – hereinafter referred to as IMSS-2015.

The new ‘Strategy’ is meant to respond to the changed geostrategic environment, wherein the Indo-Pacific region has progressively acquired increasingly greater

salience. Within this vast seascape, India has clearly defined its primary and secondary areas of maritime interest;<sup>3</sup> within which the Country intends achieve its maritime security objectives. These objectives have been conflated with the following specific strategies, as mentioned in the IMSS-2015:<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Strategy for deterrence
- 2) Strategy for conflict
- 3) Strategy for coastal and offshore security
- 4) Strategy for maritime force and capability development
- 5) Strategy for shaping a favourable and positive maritime environment

While the first four strategies largely have an inward-looking orientation; the '*Strategy for shaping a favourable and positive maritime environment*' inherently envisages an outward approach. This strategy – predicated on three principles of preserving peace, promoting stability and maintaining security – requires comprehensive and coordinated approach from the Indian and other international stakeholders to address broad-spectrum of sea-borne threats.<sup>5</sup>

### **India's collaborative Strategy towards Regional maritime security**

The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, encapsulated the collective concept of maritime security and economic progress within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for the first time in his vision of 'SAGAR' – Security and Growth for All in the Region – in 2015 in Mauritius.<sup>6</sup> The mantle of carrying forward this vision and providing full play to it on the ground, has naturally fallen on the IN – by virtue of its reach across the oceans coupled with its sustenance and flexibility.

Accordingly, the IN has incorporated activities related to collaboratively 'preserve peace, promote stability and maintain security' as part of its diplomatic, constabulary and benign missions in every maritime doctrine and strategy document commencing with the first Indian Maritime Doctrine of 2004.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent documents namely, the Indian Maritime Military Strategy-2007, Indian Maritime Doctrine-2009 and IMSS-2015 also mention these collaborative roles and missions, albeit with and

minor reclassification and greater refinement. These missions range from ‘presence’ and ‘constructive maritime engagements’, to ‘maritime assistance and peace support operations’. These in turn, have been further disaggregated as specific ‘tasks’ for better execution and oversight.<sup>8</sup>

Overseas deployments (OSD) are the most visible demonstration of IN’s ‘presence’ mission in India’s areas of maritime interests – which cover a substantial part of the Indo-Pacific. OSDs enable the IN ships to be ‘first and rapid responders’ in case of maritime crisis situations – both, man-made and natural – in the littoral. A case in point is the non-combatants evacuation operation (NEO) from Sudan, mounted by IN ship *Sumedha* in April 2023. In fact, the resultant goodwill generated by repeated instances of timely and efficient post-calamity HADR, SAR and humane approach by IN ships, has earned India, a well-deserved reputation of ‘preferred security partner and first responder’ within the Indo-Pacific littoral.<sup>9</sup>

The associated ‘constructive maritime engagements’ take the shape of platform and technology transfer; ship refit and maintenance support; personnel exchanges for training and inter-operability; Navy-to-Navy staff talks, maritime exercises, hydrographic surveys and the like. India presently conducts institutionalised maritime exercises with 11 countries. Some prominent ones are the MALABAR, INDRA, SIMBEX, KONKAN, VARUNA, JIMEX and AUSINDEX.<sup>10</sup> The inaugural ASEAN-India maritime exercise (AIME-23) conducted in May 2023 off Singapore, with the objective of enabling their navies to operate as ‘an integrated force’ to promote peace, stability, and security in the region, is the most recent addition.<sup>11</sup>

Yet another facet of India’s effort to promote collective maritime security in IOR – and often involving concerned stakeholders from the larger Indo-Pacific region – is the establishment of ‘high-level strategic mechanisms’. Some notable ones are the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Exercise MILAN and the India-Sri Lanka-Maldives NSA level trilateral mechanism. Other multilateral maritime security mechanisms in which India proactively participates are: the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+), Indian Ocean Regional Association (IORA) and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP).

In order to develop a common maritime domain awareness (MDA) picture, India established the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in 2018. As a repository of regional maritime data with the capabilities to collect, collate, fuse and disseminate vital MDA data, IFC-IOR has emerged as a key maritime information resource. With its activities fully aligned with India's collaborative vision of SAGAR, the IFC-IOR maintains linkages with 25 countries and 35 maritime security centres in the region. India's ready willingness to share fused MDA data is reflected in the fact that International Liaison Officers (ILOs) from 11 countries – including Japan, Australia and the US – have been appointed at the IFC-IOR.<sup>12</sup>

### **Collaborative outlook of Republic of Korea's (ROK) Maritime Strategy**

The very opening remark of the ROK's President Yoon Suk Yeol, seeking to “...*foster a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region through solidarity and cooperation with major countries including ASEAN*” underscores the predominantly collaborative focus of ROK's *Strategy for the Indo-Pacific Region-2022* (hereinafter mentioned as 'KSIP-22').<sup>13</sup> KSIP-22 lists the pursuit of '*expanding comprehensive security cooperation*' as one of its nine '*core lines of effort*' towards ensuring a 'free, peaceful and prosperous' Indo-Pacific.<sup>14</sup> The gradual expansion of cooperation with QUAD<sup>15</sup> grouping also finds mention in KSIP-22 – with emerging technologies being one of the focus areas.

ROK supports the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) construct which is premised on the centrality of ASEAN towards promotion of cooperative endeavours in the Indo-Pacific. It accordingly engages with ASEAN nations in various ways to secure cooperation in maritime security, MDA, maritime economy and maritime law enforcement. ROK is also an active participant in multilateral mechanisms like the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ADMM+. The Country has also acknowledged the benefits of participating in multilateral mechanisms like the IORA – where it is a Dialogue Partner since 2018 – Indian Ocean Commission, and ReCAAP. ROK has deployed its 'Cheonghae' unit in the Gulf of Aden since 2009 for anti-piracy patrols in coordination with China, India and Japan.

## Points of Congruence

ROK acknowledges India as a ‘leading regional partner’; and intends to advance ‘special strategic partnership’ with the Country. Natural complementarities also exist between the Korean *core lines of effort* to ‘*strengthen cooperation in critical domains of science and technology*’; and its recognition of the Indian proficiencies in cutting-edge information technology and space sciences – both mentioned in KSIP-22.

In the maritime domain, the foremost ‘point of strategic congruence’ between ROK and India lies in similar interpretation of the geographical expanse of the Indo-Pacific – that it extends till the East Coast of Africa.<sup>16</sup> In fact, most of the Korean concerns with regard to its maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, also mirror India’s concerns in its areas of maritime interest.<sup>17</sup>

The very fact that India and Korea participate in many maritime security initiatives, mechanisms and exercises in the Indo-Pacific, underscores the level of mutual congruence of interests in the region. Some such forums are the ReCAAP, ADMM+, and coordinated anti-piracy escort duties in the Gulf of Aden. Further, while ROK has been part of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)/CTF-151 for about a decade and half; India having joined the CMF as an associate member in 2022 will engender closer cooperation between naval forces of both countries within multilateral settings.

Though there have been occasional Navy to Navy interactions between India and ROK; these have not been formalised. These are in the form of ship visits to each other’s ports, passage exercises, as also participation in multilateral maritime exercises. Some such events over last two years are enumerated below: -

- 1) February 2022 – Exercise MILAN at Visakhapatnam
- 2) June 2022 – RIMPAC-22 Multilateral Maritime Exercise off Hawaii
- 3) September/October 2022 – ROK Navy Training Group ships visited Chennai
- 4) November 2022 – IN ships visited Busan. Carried out passage exercises.
- 5) March 2023 – P-8 naval reconnaissance aircraft in SEA DRAGON Joint Anti-submarine warfare exercise off Guam

## Possibilities of collaboration – Recommendations

A survey of above congruences, viz, commonality as regards the spatial extent of the Indo-Pacific region and maritime security concerns therein; complementarities in each Country's approach to address these challenges; acknowledgement of mutual capabilities and capacities in mitigating such challenges; and ongoing bilateral and multilateral naval interactions; do indicate a huge scope for synergistic cooperation between the two countries.

To start with, the visiting naval ships could progressively increase the scope, scale and complexity of the passage exercises with the host nation's navy. The IN and ROK Navy could subsequently commence biennial staff talks at respective headquarters. The fact of IN conducting institutionalised naval exercises with other established Indo-Pacific stakeholders like Russia, Japan, France, Australia and the US; offers logical grounds for the IN and ROK Navy to formalise a similar arrangement.

Since MDA forms an intrinsic part of comprehensive security cooperation agenda in KSIP-22; and India has a fully functional IFC-IOR having ILOs embedded therein; ROK must depute an Officer to this Centre.

The India proposed Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)<sup>18</sup> offers yet another ready opportunity for ROK work together with India and other like-minded nations for the greater good of the Indo-Pacific. Since ROK has expressed unequivocal support for AOIP, and both mechanisms recognise the centrality of ASEAN in addition to underlying similarities between their objectives and collaborative approach; it makes for a compelling case for ROK to join the IPOI. Given its intrinsic strengths in high technologies, heavy engineering and port infrastructure development, ROK would probably be the most suitable candidate to lead the '*Science Technology and Academic Cooperation*' pillar of the IPOI.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, ROK could consider joining the IONS, which since inception in 2008, has evolved as a vibrant multilateral collaborative platform to address all matters maritime in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). When seen in the context of extra-regional States like China, Japan and Russia having been admitted as observers; ROK definitely has a claim for 'observer' status.

Even if a few of these suggested collaborative measures come to fruition, India and ROK together would certainly play an important part in charting a collaborative course for multifarious maritime engagements in the Indo-Pacific region.

12 July 2023

## ENDNOTES

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- 4 IMSS-2015 *ibid*, ‘Contents’ page.
- 5 IMSS-2015 *ibid*, p. 81.
- 6 India’s Prime Minister used the SAGAR acronym during commissioning of an Indian built warship, the *Barracuda*, for Mauritius. See PMINDIA, ‘Text of the PM’s remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda’, 12 March 2015, [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/text-of-the-pms-remarks-on-the-commissioning-of-coast-ship-barracuda/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/text-of-the-pms-remarks-on-the-commissioning-of-coast-ship-barracuda/)
- 7 ‘Indian Maritime Doctrine-2004’ (Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), New Delhi, 2004), pp.102/103.
- 8 IMSS-2015 *ibid*, Table 5.1, p. 79.
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- 14 KSIP-22 *ibid*, p. 22.
- 15 QUAD grouping comprises Australia, India, Japan and the US.
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# Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Crossing the North Pacific

*Captain (IN) Sarabjeet S Parmar (Retd.)*

## The Attraction of the Indo-Pacific

The magnetism of the Indo-Pacific and lure of its many beneficial opportunities is attracting nations, many of which have expressed their intentions and expectations in the form of Indo-Pacific strategies. Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy released on 27 November 2022<sup>1</sup> joins the increasing list of such strategies, and perhaps lays to rest the question asked after AUKUS was announced as to “Why is Canada missing from the Indo-Pacific?”<sup>2</sup> It was therefore a natural process for Canada, which is a member of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing arrangement, to join the Anglosphere Indo-Pacific nations grouping consisting of Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Canada is “overwhelmingly dependent on Pacific-based maritime trade, freedom of navigation, and maintenance of the rules-based order of ocean governance, security, and safety of shipping”,<sup>4</sup> which adds to its major interest in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the pressure grew on Canada “to take a bigger part in the Indo-Pacific’s development and support for a rules-based order or risk getting locked out of the region’s economic, diplomatic and security benefits.”<sup>5</sup> These aspects will add to the bouquet of threats, challenges, risks, and opportunities that Canada as a North American continental nation with shorelines on three oceans faces, and Ottawa will need to address these issues to become an acknowledged Indo-Pacific Nation.

A 2020 National Opinion Poll (NOP) conducted by the Asia Pacific Foundation (APF) seeking views from Canadian citizens about engagement with Asia indicated

a favourable tilt, especially with respect to trade.<sup>6</sup> This support, along with the increasing strategic pressure, perhaps set the stage for Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. It is not surprising that the strategy opens with calling the Indo-Pacific a *New Horizon of Opportunity* with figures and graphics supporting *Economic Opportunity* throughout the document.<sup>7</sup> This paper examines the factors that drive Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and aspects that merit attention.

## The Indo-Pacific Viewed from Ottawa

The 2020 NOP conducted by the AFP led to 17 takeaways<sup>8</sup>, from which the following relevant figures emerged:

- 38 per cent considered Canada a part of the Asia-Pacific region, a drop from 43 per cent from 2018.
- 35 per cent considered China as an opportunity and not a threat, a reduction from 60 per cent from 2018.
- 83 per cent felt that Canada should stand up to China as Canadian national values such as the rule of law, human rights, and democracy were on the line.
- Measured on a scale of 1 to 7, China's economic importance rating dropped to 5.0 from 5.6 in 2018, while the rating of the US increased to 6.1 from 6.0 in 2018.
- 49 per cent considered trade with the US more important than trade with Asia, as against 59 per cent who thought otherwise in 2018.
- 58 per cent considered export of goods and services to Asia more of an opportunity than interprovincial trade.
- 47 per cent considered investments from Asia beneficial as against 59 per cent in 2018. However, most Canadians remain open to more investments in the high-tech and biomedical sectors from India, Japan, and South Korea vis-à-vis China.

- 63 per cent supported an FTA with India, 76 per cent with the Pacific Alliance, and 68 per cent with ASEAN member states (a five per cent increase since 2018).
- 56 per cent considered alignment with like-minded democracies such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, UK, and the European Union (EU) as top priority, while 53 per cent considered alignment with the US as the fourth and last priority.

The acceptance and usage of the term Indo-Pacific in lieu of Asia-Pacific is the first step in focussing a nation's vision of the region. There is a smattering use of the terms Asia-Pacific and Asia in the Canadian lexicon as is evident from perusing the following national security strategy/ policy documents spread over almost two decades: *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* released on 27 April 2004<sup>9</sup>, *Securing an Open Society: One Year later* (progress report on the 2004 document) released in April 2005<sup>10</sup>, and *Strong Secure Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* of 2017<sup>11</sup>. There is a webpage of the Canadian Government entitled *Canada and the Asia-Pacific* that provides details regarding Canada's engagements in the region.<sup>12</sup> This gradual shift is a natural process as Canada's attention has, till date, been focussed on the Arctic and the North Atlantic. Therefore, though the introduction and use of the term Indo-Pacific in the strategy document, though a welcome step, it is limited by Ottawa's geopolitical horizon. As per the strategy, the Indo-Pacific "comprises 40 countries and economies", stretching from Japan and the Pacific Islands in the east to Pakistan and the west coast of India.<sup>13</sup> Further, primarily for Canada "The Indo-Pacific region represents significant opportunities for growing the economy here at home, as well as opportunities for Canadian workers and businesses for decades to come."<sup>14</sup> The strategy caters for engagements for a decade, of which the first five years will cost 2.3 billion CAD.<sup>15</sup> Hence, it is evident that the geopolitical stretch is clearly based on Canadian national economic interests.

## Engaging the Indo-Pacific

The strategy identifies Canada as a Pacific nation and the Indo-Pacific as its neighbourhood<sup>16</sup>, and acknowledges that "The rising influence of the Indo-Pacific

region is a once-in-a-generation global shift that requires a generational Canadian response”.<sup>17</sup> This approach is a good start point for a nation whose major attention has been focussed on the North Atlantic and the Arctic regions since the mid-twentieth century. However, the absence of framing the idea of a *Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, which is a common element of most national Indo-Pacific strategies, is quite conspicuous. This term is used only in connection with Japan (See Table 2, para (c)). Hence, to be considered and counted as an Indo-Pacific nation, Canada will require to view the Indo-Pacific through an *Indo-Pacific lens* and not a North American or European or North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) lens. The success of Canada’s Indo-Pacific engagements would depend heavily on Ottawa’s ability to balance these areas, and the strategy identifies the need for it to “.... invest resources and build knowledge and capacity to engage”.<sup>18</sup>

The strategy also identifies the North Pacific as Canada’s neighbourhood.<sup>19</sup> To avoid subsequent confusion, this North Pacific region could be termed as Canada’s *Immediate Pacific Neighbourhood* for three reasons. Firstly, it is one of the areas that provides access to the Canadian Arctic. Secondly, it is the maritime area which connects Canada to the broader Indo-Pacific. Thirdly, due to its proximity as an adjunct area within which Canada “can count on long-standing and deepening relationships with Japan and the Republic of Korea”<sup>20</sup>. The mention of Japan and South Korea in Canada’s *Immediate Pacific Neighbourhood* could be to counter and balance the presence of Russia as well as the stated challenges posed by North Korea.

The approach to the Indo-Pacific is outlined in five interconnected Strategic Objectives (SOs)<sup>21</sup>; and the strategy also lays out a broad roadmap for engaging select nations: China, India, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN<sup>22</sup>. Canada’s approach to realize the five SOs and roadmap to engage identified Indo-Pacific nations are tabulated in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Table 2 also indicates the SOs that would be most connected with the roadmap.

**Table 1: Canada's Approach to Realize its Strategic Objectives**

Ser	Strategic Objective	Canada's Approach
(a)	<b>SO1:</b> Promote peace, resilience, and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Invest in an enhanced military presence, along with intelligence and cyber security, to promote security in the region and ensure the safety of Canadians.</li> <li>(ii) Build the Women, Peace, and Security agenda</li> <li>(iii) Build established security partnerships to reinforce regional capabilities and promote stability.</li> </ul>
(b)	<b>SO2:</b> Expand trade, investment, and supply chain resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Seize economic opportunities by focussing on trade, investment, and supply chain resilience.</li> <li>(ii) Appoint an Indo-Pacific Trade Representative to advance Canada's regional trade policy, promotion, and economic cooperation objectives in the region</li> <li>(iii) Strengthen and diversify our regional partnerships to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(aa) Strengthen economic ties across the Indo-Pacific.</li> <li>(bb) Build a stronger and more secure economy at home.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
(c)	<b>SO3:</b> Invest in and connect people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Expand education exchanges.</li> <li>(ii) Bolster visa-processing capacity.</li> <li>(iii) Empower Canadian organisations and experts to engage in the region.</li> <li>(iv) Address local development challenges by increasing feminist international assistance.</li> <li>(v) Advance collective efforts towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).</li> <li>(vi) Actively defend human rights, including women's rights.</li> </ul>
(d)	<b>SO4:</b> Build a sustainable and green future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Share expertise in clean technology, oceans management, energy transition and climate finance</li> <li>(ii) Work collaboratively to reduce emissions and prevent further biodiversity loss</li> <li>(iii) Work with G7 partners to meet the growing USD 2.1 trillion infrastructure funding gap.</li> </ul>
(e)	<b>SO5:</b> Canada as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Appoint a special envoy for the Indo-Pacific region to coordinate a whole-of-government approach and manage strategic implementation of the strategy</li> <li>(ii) Reinforce Canada's influence among partners and allies in the region.</li> <li>(iii) Offer more diplomatic, economic, military, and technical support and cooperation.</li> <li>(iv) Respond to calls from regional partners for deeper engagement.</li> </ul>

Source: Author

**Table 2: Canada’s Roadmap to Engage Identified Indo-Pacific Nations**

Ser	Nation(s) and Canada’s Base View	Canada’s Roadmap and Associated SO(s)
(a)	<p><b>China</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Canada’s approach to China is critical for the strategy.</li> <li>(ii) China is an increasingly disruptive global power which disregards existing international rules and norms.</li> <li>(iii) China’s size and influence makes cooperation necessary, and its economy offers opportunities for Canadian exporters.</li> </ul>	<p>Approach China centric issues, at the domestic, bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels, like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Challenging China’s coercive behaviour that impact Canada’s security and national interests.</li> <li>(ii) Working with partners to address China’s actions that are contrary to international rules and norms.</li> <li>(iii) Cooperating with China to address global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, global health, and nuclear proliferation.</li> <li>(iv) While following a One-China policy continue to engage Taiwan in mutually beneficial areas and oppose any action that threatens the Taiwan Strait status quo.</li> </ul> <p><b>Most Connected SOs:</b> 1, 2, and 5</p>
(b)	<p><b>India</b></p> <p>Growing strategic, economic, and demographic importance and mutual interests position India as a critical nation to engage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Enhance economic ties by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(aa) Engaging in deeper trade and Investment.</li> <li>(bb) Build resilient supply chains.</li> <li>(cc) Expand market access by concluding an Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) as a step toward a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).</li> <li>(dd) Promote implementation of the EPTA for businesses and investors by creating a Canada-India desk within the Trade Commissioner Service.</li> </ul> </li> <li>(ii) Enhance people to people contact by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(aa) Easing travel to Canada by enhancing visa-processing capacity in New Delhi and Chandigarh.</li> <li>(bb) Supporting academic, educational, cultural, youth and research exchanges.</li> </ul> </li> <li>(iii) Enhance cooperation in areas of convergence like, climate change, environment protection, renewable energy, and clean technology.</li> <li>(iv) Seek cooperation in new areas of common interest and values, including security, promotion of democracy, pluralism, and human rights.</li> </ul> <p><b>Most Connected SOs:</b> All five</p>
(c)	<p><b>Japan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Apart from the US, Japan is Canada’s only G7 partner in the North Pacific region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Implement the six shared priorities agreed to in 2021 towards a free and open Indo-Pacific.<sup>24</sup></li> <li>(ii) Work together to address free trade, sustainable energy, climate change and environmental protection.</li> </ul>

Ser	Nation(s) and Canada's Base View	Canada's Roadmap and Associated SO(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(ii) Japan is Canada's most important commercial partner, and largest source of bilateral Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Asia.</li> <li>(ii) Canada and Japan are the two largest economies in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)<sup>23</sup>.</li> <li>(iii) Japan and Canada share values and interests to address global challenges and strengthening of the rules-based international order.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(iii) Conclude an agreement on General Security of Information.</li> <li>(iv) Support defence procurement and broader national security objectives.</li> <li>(v) Support Japan's G7 presidency in 2023.</li> <li>(vi) Participate in the 2025 World Expo to be held in Osaka, and showcase Canadian innovation, resources, investment, and education to the broader Indo-Pacific region.</li> </ul> <p><b>Most Connected SOs:</b> All five</p>
(d)	<p><b>Republic of Korea (RoK)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) RoK is a strong democratic partner in the North Pacific region with which Canada shares bilateral and global strategic interests, long standing trade and cultural ties and a history of mutual support.</li> <li>(ii) RoK is Canada's seventh largest merchandise export market, and an increasing source of FDI into Canada.</li> <li>(iii) The Republic of Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy released on 28 December 2022 mentions increased economic security cooperation with Canada through stabilised supply chains.<sup>25</sup></li> <li>(iv) Continuous Canadian military presence under the UN Command to preserve peace in the peninsula.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Advance the September 2022 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and launch a high-level Dialogue as part of the partnership.</li> <li>(ii) Work together in support of resilient supply chains, the supply of critical minerals and high labour conditions and environmental protections, including the transition to clean energy.</li> <li>(iii) Establish a new annual bilateral climate change dialogue.</li> <li>(iv) Support the efforts to achieve a denuclearized, peaceful, and prosperous Korean Peninsula.</li> </ul> <p><b>Most Connected SOs:</b> All five</p>
(e)	<p><b>ASEAN</b> Respect for ASEAN Centrality and the importance of ASEAN for regional prosperity and stability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Deepen the partnership by placing ASEAN at the level of a Strategic Partner and seeking membership in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) and the East Asia Summit (EAS).</li> <li>(ii) Strengthen Canadian diplomatic presence in the region and increase security cooperation with ASEAN and its members.</li> </ul>

Ser	Nation(s) and Canada's Base View	Canada's Roadmap and Associated SO(s)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(iii) Continue to support ASEAN centrality by reinforcing alignment between Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).</li> <li>(iv) Augment contribution to the ASEAN-Canada Plan of Action Trust Fund.<sup>26</sup></li> <li>(v) Negotiate and implement a Canada-ASEAN FTA and a CEPA with Indonesia.</li> <li>(vi) Launch a Canadian Trade Gateway in Southeast Asia as a market entry point and catalyst for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(aa) Canadian businesses to grow in the region.</li> <li>(bb) Enhancing Canada's profile as a commercial and investment partner.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Most Connected SOs:</b> All five</p>

Source: Author

Apart from the nations mentioned in Table 2, which have specific sections in the strategy, the document also looks at engaging other identified Indo-Pacific nations across the full spectrum of the five SOs. SO4 addresses *all-pervasive* aspects like climate change, blue economy, sustainable development, and environmental issues like fishing, infrastructure, and biodiversity protection and conversation, etc. Hence, all 40 nations would be engaged under this SO as it would provide adequate convergency and space for cooperation. In comparison, some issues covered under the balance four SOs would require recognition and acceptance of regional and national sensitivities and outlooks, hence the reiterated need for Canada to view this region from an *Indo-Pacific Lens* (see Table 3 for a detailed breakdown of the engagement matrix of SOs 1, 2, 3, and 5 with identified Indo-Pacific nations). Some of these sensitivities arise from sovereignty related aspects, which were born from the long periods of colonisation and exploitation endured by many Indo-Pacific nations. Therefore, while pursuing its Indo-Pacific strategy, Canada, as it seeks to position itself as an Indo-Pacific nation, may like to balance its approach to the region with respect to its own national interests and domestically polled views.

**Table 3: Engagement Matrix with Identified Indo-Pacific Nations**

Ser	Nation(s)	Aim(s)
<b>SO1: Promote peace, resilience, and security</b>		
(a)	Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam.	<b>Aim:</b> Expand existing military capacity building initiatives by advancing joint priorities and interoperability by and launching new training programmes.
<b>SO2: Expand trade, investment, and supply chain resilience</b>		
(b)	Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan	<b>Aim:</b> Support the economic empowerment of the Indigenous Peoples by implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement (IPETCA).
(c)	Singapore and Taiwan (Other nations are India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea)	<b>Aim:</b> Support international co-innovation projects and commercialization-oriented research and development partnerships for Canadian small and medium-sized businesses by strengthening Science, Technology, and Innovation partnerships.
(d)	Singapore, New Zealand, and Chile	<b>Aim:</b> Secure a cultural-industries exception for the Canadian cultural sector by joining the Digital Economic Partnership Agreement with these three nations.
(e)	Indonesia	<b>Aim:</b> Improve market access through a new comprehensive free trade agreement, such as currently being negotiated with ASEAN and India.
<b>SO3: Invest in and connect people</b>		
(f)	Pakistan and the Philippines	<b>Aim:</b> Enhance visa-processing capacities to ease access for students and family members.
(g)	Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan	<b>Aims:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Pursue the path of reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples through enhanced Indigenous exchanges.</li> <li>(ii) Support education and skills development for Indigenous youth.</li> <li>(iii) Continue the implementation of the IPETCA.</li> <li>(iv) Support the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.</li> </ul>
(h)	Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam	<b>Aim:</b> Support francophone immigration objectives
(j)	Pacific Islands	<b>Aim:</b> Establish Canada's first international assistance program for the Pacific Islands region a part of Canada's membership of the Partners in the Blue Pacific initiative.
(k)	Cambodia and Laos	<b>Aim:</b> Help build demining capacity by establishing standards for landmine clearance and accelerate mine-clearing by sharing of expertise

Ser	Nation(s)	Aim(s)
(l)	Sri Lanka and Myanmar	<b>Aim:</b> Support peacebuilding and encourage truth seeking and accountability for alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian law.
<b>SO5: Canada as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific</b>		
(m)	Pacific Islands and Fiji	<b>Aim:</b> Strengthen engagement with the Pacific Island Countries by opening Canada's first mission to Fiji.
(n)	Taiwan	<b>Aim:</b> Continue to grow economic and people-to-people ties while supporting Taiwan's Resilience.
(p)	USA	<b>Aims:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Deploy the first diplomatic position in Hawaii to lead engagement with local US and international partners.</li> <li>(ii) Hold the inaugural Canada–United States Strategic Dialogue on the Indo-Pacific in 2023.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Compiled by the author from Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy<sup>27</sup>

## Crossing the North Pacific - Economics, Diplomacy, and Military Engagements

The three tables indicate a large overlap with the several QUAD initiatives that have emerged from the four leader summits held so far, as well as the seven spokes of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). However, both sets of initiatives do not find mention in the strategy. While the strategy covers a wide ambit of cooperative overtures, the strategy is largely economic centric and can be considered highly ambitious for a North Pacific nation like Canada, which is seeking to look deeper in the south-westerly direction. Hence, Canada, which is engaging the broader and complex Indo-Pacific for the first time, will face considerable threats, challenges, risks, and opportunities. These have been grouped under three major areas: economics, diplomacy, and military engagements. These aspects can also be viewed as the three pillars of the bridge Canada is seeking to cross and engage the Indo-Pacific.

### *Economics*

This first major challenge would require to be supported by continuity in terms of national leadership and a sustained budget. For a region like the Indo-Pacific and

for engaging 40 nations across Ottawa's geopolitical stretch the outlay of 2.3 billion CAD for the first five years may need to be revisited. However, this revisit would depend on the success rate of the engagements, state of the global economy, and, most importantly, continued domestic support. Putting a cost to an Indo-Pacific strategy right at the outset is debatable if not questionable. This is perhaps why most nations have not put an overall cost to their strategies.

### *Diplomacy*

This challenge will firstly require Canada to balance China and the US, especially where Canadian-China economic interests may conflict with the obligations emanating from US-Canada relations. Secondly, there will be a growing need for a better understanding of regional, sub-regional, and national dynamics and sensitivities to improve the focus from an *Indo-Pacific Lens*. This should be an easy task as barring a few nations and the Pacific Island nations, Canada has diplomatic missions and consulates in more than half of the 40 nations, it has listed in its idea of the Indo-Pacific.<sup>28</sup> The setting up of more missions, like in Fiji which will go a long way in engaging the identified 14 island nations, would greatly aid the strategy and enable greater focus on the SOs. Consistency of diplomatic efforts keeping regional and national sensitives in mind would be an important aspect of this pillar.

### *Military Engagements*

With a strength of 66,500 active members and 34,400 reservists, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) “are focused principally on territorial defence, as well as contributing important capabilities to international missions, principally through NATO.”<sup>29</sup> Further, “Canada’s deployments, although relatively small scale, underscore a determination to maintain both international engagement and power-projection capability”.<sup>30</sup> In the Indo-Pacific, the CAF are engaged in five operations from the hard military task of supporting implementation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions imposed against North Korea to four soft military tasks addressing humanitarian/non-traditional threats.<sup>31</sup> As per the strategy document, in support of SO1, “Canada will invest in an enhanced military presence, along with intelligence and cyber security, to promote security in the region and ensure the

safety of Canadians”.<sup>32</sup> These investments include committing additional resources like naval presence, increased engagement in international exercises and operations, and expanding existing military capacity initiatives, and launching new training programmes (see Table 3, para (a) for list of identified nations).<sup>33</sup>

Most of these interactions are, however, limited to Canada’s traditional anglosphere allies, North Pacific and Southeast Asian partners. Continuation on this path alone could limit its ability to engage with the broader Indo-Pacific. There will thus be a need to engage more nations either directly through a bilateral approach or minilateral/multilateral interactions depending on mutual comfort levels of engagement. Engagements towards addressing common non-traditional threats could enable these comfort levels. In so far as traditional threats are concerned, enhancing its presence while continuing to work with its traditional allies would be the best avenue for Canada.

## **Broadening the Bridge**

Canada’s bridge across the North Pacific to the broader Indo-Pacific can be broadened. The strategy, though ambitious, places Canada’s national interests first, which is a ubiquitous expected and accepted approach. The focus on economics, which flows from the national interests, is also an accepted pillar of any national strategy. However, the idea of a *Free and Open Pacific*, which is the major convergence aspect of almost all like-minded Indo-Pacific nations, and hence provides the platform for engagements needs to be incorporated. This would be an easy task for Canada as it “... can bolt in to pre-existing Indo-Pacific-focused institutions to lend its capabilities”<sup>34</sup>, and this “Bolting in co-operation in the Indo-Pacific would make Canadian engagement in the region more sustainable and meaningful...”.<sup>35</sup> As the SOs and aims of the strategy find resonance in the QUAD initiatives as well as the seven spokes of the IPOI, Canada could consider working with the QUAD and also joining suitable pillars of the IPOI and work its Indo-Pacific Strategy within its defined geopolitical stretch.

17 January 2023

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# Africa's Maritime Security: From Strategy to Solutions

*Ms Anum Khan*

## Abstract

Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy, 2050, was promulgated by the African Union (AU) in 2012 as a pan-African maritime strategy document. The maritime outlook of Africa, as reflected in the 2050 AIM Strategy, spans a heterogeneous ocean territory that comprises the Atlantic Ocean to the continent's west, the Mediterranean Sea to its north, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to its east, and the blending waters of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean to its south. Metaphorically, it appears as a kaleidoscope of 54 strategies that constantly form patterns of solutions to the challenges faced by its varying actors on their respective maritime fronts. The vision statement adopted by the Strategy indicates that 2050 AIMS aims to “foster increased wealth creation from Africa's oceans and seas by developing a sustainable, thriving blue economy in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner”. This must be viewed in the light of collective ‘Afro-optimism’ — envisioning a promising future catered by waters surrounding continental Africa. This paper seeks to explore and present lessons and intersecting solutions arising-from and lying-between the eastern shore of Africa and the broader Indo-Pacific. By synthesising the various elements of maritime security contained in this Strategy, the author hopes to create a cohesive picture of security imperatives present in east Africa's Maritime Domain (AMD). As a result, a comprehensive yet Africa-centric account of ‘maritime security’ needs to first be established in order to understand the various forms of security practices being adopted in Africa's Maritime Domain (AMD), which can contribute to the security of the Indo pacific.

**Keywords:** Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Security 2050; Indo-Pacific; Maritime Security, African Maritime Domain (AMD)

A nation's maritime strategy may be described as a documented manifestation of the manner in which the nation concerned intends to pursue its interests and attain its stated as well as unstated policy-goals, contextualised to the maritime spaces that it views as being relevant to it. It is also a manner of strategic communication that lays down a broad course of action where the sea is a substantial factor.<sup>1</sup> A commonly followed trend of formulating these maritime strategies by nations is to explicitly state their geopolitical and politico-military goals within the narrative of the strategy. In such cases, their strategies are predominantly directed towards military objectives that the nation considers will facilitate the attainment of the economic goals that it strives to achieve from the ocean. In considering the 2050 AIM strategy it is important to bear in mind the caveat that the maritime strategy of a nation cannot be conflated with the maritime strategy of a continent! The latter will often reflect the minimum acceptable common features that define the strategy of the collective in question — the African Union in this case.

Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy for 2050 was released by the African Union (AU) in 2012 as a pan-African maritime strategy document.<sup>2</sup> It covers the maritime outlook of Africa, which comprises a heterogenous oceanic space, incorporating the Atlantic Ocean to its west, the Mediterranean Sea to its north, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to its east, and the blended waters of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean to the south. The strategy not only projects the AU's perspective but also seeks to speak on behalf of the 54 African nations in a unified voice. Metaphorically, it may be seen as a kaleidoscope of 54 individual strategies, which form continuously changing patterns of solutions to address the challenges faced by the various actors on their respective maritime fronts. The vision statement enunciated in the Strategy is to "*foster increased wealth creation from Africa's oceans and seas by developing a sustainable thriving blue economy in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner*".<sup>3</sup> This must be viewed in the light of collective 'Afro-optimism' — envisioning a promising future shaped by the waters surrounding continental Africa. However, this optimism must necessarily be a guarded one, given the dire threats present around the continent. Consequently, if one is to even begin to understand

the varied security practices being adopted in Africa's Maritime Domain (AMD),<sup>4</sup> it is crucial to establish a comprehensive, Africa-centric account of 'maritime security'.

This article focuses upon the 'maritime security' of the AMD and factors the various security stakeholders in the east African littoral space. Its purpose is to examine previously overlooked security perceptions by highlighting structures that have the potential to contribute to Africa's aspirations in terms of maritime security. Within the complex network of non-African providers of security within the east African littoral space, it emphasises the critical need for the resident littoral States themselves to establish a sustainable response to the threats emanating from their territorial seas and exclusive economic zones.

## **Precepts of Africa's Maritime Security – Securitization and Subsidiarity**

'Security', 'Securitization', and 'Subsidiarity' are related concepts but with distinct and discrete applications. Within the broad sweep of the discipline of International Relations (IR), there has frequently been some contestation around the term 'security',<sup>5</sup> although it is now widely used across domains. 'Maritime Security', as highlighted by Christian Bueger, has become a 'new buzzword'<sup>6</sup> but despite being viewed within a maritime context, it lacks a uniform definition. It is possible for security to be understood as the mere '*absence of threats.*' However, this seems intuitively inadequate. In the maritime domain relevant to the eastern African littoral, security needs to be viewed in relation to maritime threats arising in the AMD. Within the 2050 AIM strategy, the segment relating to 'maritime governance' identifies ten maritime threats that afflict the AMD,<sup>7</sup> with several of them posing significant challenges within Africa's eastern seaboard.

### **(a) From Securitization to Subsidiarity — Taking a Different Path to Security**

'Security' is a handy term and is often misused without paying much heed to its applicability within a given context. In classical security approaches, the concept of 'security' encompasses the material and structural aspects of threats, including power distribution, military capabilities, and polarity. On the other hand, 'securitization' explores how an actor transforms a specific

issue into a matter of security, frequently warranting the use of extraordinary measures. The concept of ‘securitization’ helps one to understand maritime threats by focusing on the ‘actors’ responsible for both insecurity and security. This is especially relevant to eastern African coastal and island States, where the maritime space is a fairly convoluted zone with a pervasive presence of a variety of actors, all seeking to ensure regional security.

(b) **Africa’s Perception of Maritime Security and the Criticality of ‘Subsidiarity’**

Section 8 of the 2050 AIM Strategy states that security is a subset of maritime governance and forms an indispensable component of the ‘blue-economy’.<sup>8</sup> Since the ‘blue-economy’ is the lynchpin of the strategy, the entire gamut of security has also been located within it. The 2050 AIM Strategy serves as a sort of *Snell’s Window* for maritime-security stakeholders, offering a perspective that seeks to eliminate deviation and promotes Africa-centricity. This notwithstanding, African centricity in terms building a security understanding also seems insufficient — it has to be brought to bear in terms of ‘security practice’, too. Security-driven maritime governance, then, is the key feature of the strategy, and to effectively implement it, past and existing approaches to Africa’s security need to be understood. This is where ‘subsidiarity’ plays an important role. ‘**Subsidiarity**’ is a principle according to which a “*central authority should have subsidiary functions performing only those tasks which can’t be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level*”.<sup>9</sup> While subsidiarity may well have remained understated in the AU’s charter, the Charter on Maritime Safety and Security and Development in Africa, the Lomé Charter is the only AU document that explicitly defines ‘subsidiarity’.<sup>10</sup> The Lomé Charter, by making subsidiarity a guiding principle, advocates freedom at the local level, thereby, implying the sharing of competence at different levels. The explicit acknowledgement and advocacy of the principle of subsidiarity makes Africa’s case unique and allows for the comprehensive evaluation of the contributions of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to maritime security.

## Understanding East Africa as a Risk-Prone Strategic Geography

Africa comprises 38 littoral States, with a combined coastline that stretches over 26,000 nm. The total area of the territorial seas and exclusive economic zones (EEZ) covers approximately 13 million square kilometres, while the consolidated legal continental shelf covers an area of approximately 6.5 million square kilometres.<sup>11</sup> These vast swaths of ocean endow Africa as a whole with very substantial wealth in terms of marine resources, diverse flora and fauna, fish stocks, minerals, and hydrocarbons. Africa's seas and oceans are also conduits of vital trade, given that over 90% of its trade is seaborne. On the one hand, it is evident that this maritime posture of Africa serves it well in several ways. On the other, however, this vast oceanic exposure also makes it susceptible to a diverse yet substantive threats. Instability at sea could arise due to multiple factors, and to be able to successfully analyse these factors it is important to demarcate the maritime geography of the continent.

The maritime territory that falls under the purview of this paper is the eastern African littoral and the island States of the Indian Ocean, including the overseas territories of France (La Réunion and Mayotte). It stretches from Somalia to the southern tip of South Africa and encompasses Madagascar as well as the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of Comoros, Mauritius, and Seychelles.<sup>12</sup> This littoral has a combined coastline of over 19,000 kilometres, dotted with a network of ports that act as trade gateways for both coastal and landlocked east African countries,<sup>13</sup> and generates significance geopolitical significance. While the Indo-Pacific as a strategic geography is recognised by an increasing number of States, not all of them include east Africa within its ambit. India, of course, has long been advocating that the expanse of its Indo-Pacific geography extends from the eastern shores of Africa to the western shores of the Americas.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the entire lot of east African coastal States form a part of India's 'proximate maritime neighbourhood' and are, therefore, an inherent part of New Delhi's maritime security framework. India's maritime security objectives, as outlined in its 2015 maritime security strategy entitled, "*Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*", encapsulate a set of objectives aimed at safeguarding the country's principal maritime interest.<sup>15</sup> Amongst these several objectives, one that is quite explicitly stated is to "*shape a favourable and positive*

*maritime environment, for enhancing net security in India's area of maritime interest.”* India's maritime interests are derived from the eight maritime objectives steered by its maritime policy, encapsulated by the acronym SAGAR, which expands to 'Security and Growth for all in the Region'. Two of India's prominent objectives are the imperative of stability in India's maritime neighbourhood, and the promotion, protection, and preservation of India's overseas and coastal seaborne trade and her Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCS). Therefore, stability in east African littoral- and island-States is of paramount importance to India.

## East Africa's Maritime Challenges

In the evolving maritime security paradigm, concerns over non-traditional maritime threats now match, if not exceed, anxieties over traditional ones. The seas are increasingly infested by a range of maritime threats that seriously threaten maritime stability and security. The waters off the coasts of east African States are, in fact, now plagued by a mix of both traditional and non-traditional threats, as a result of which any examination of the efficacy of the 2050 AIM strategy cannot be viewed through a monochromatic lens. The entire littoral stretch from Somalia to South Africa is embroiled in sporadic State-on-State violence characterised by diverse actors with varying degrees of agency, power, and tactical asymmetry. The ephemeral presence of violent non-State actors (VNSAs) such as the *Al Shabab* group in Somalia, compounds a danger that is fast spreading southward, particularly in Kenya. Mozambique, too, is struggling with another Islamic insurgent group (the *Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa* [ASWJ]) operating under the more generic name of *Al-Shabab*, whose *modus operandi* is quite similar to that of pirates. These ongoing State conflicts tend to spill into the maritime domain, creating rents in the security fabric of the east African littoral. In addition to State-on-State violence, the littoral also suffers from a variety of forms of transnational organised crime, including piracy, seaborne and coastal trafficking in narcotics, arms, and human beings, mixed migration, illegal oil bunkering, etc.<sup>16</sup>

The risk landscape of littoral east Africa has undergone significant changes since the year 2000. In 2009, piracy in the Horn of Africa, predominantly off the coast of Somalia, reached its peak. Although the severity of this threat has abated, its

land-based origins remain unaddressed and, as a consequence, the threat still looms large.<sup>17</sup> The economic cost of piracy in 2017 amounted to \$1.4 billion, resulting in a staggering cost having to be borne for the maintenance of for security, where almost \$292.5 million went to privately contracted armed security personnel and almost \$199.7 million was incurred as the cost of international naval activities.<sup>18</sup> *Al Shabab*, utilising a pirate-like revenue model, has been running an extortion and illicit taxation enterprise at the port of Mogadishu.<sup>19</sup> The “*Stable Seas: Western Indian Ocean*” report by One Earth has highlighted key findings from the region, categorising them into issue areas that accurately capture the threat spectrum of east Africa. According to this report, in 2022 large tracts of the east African shoreline were struggling with piracy and armed robbery at sea, drugs and wildlife trafficking, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and climate change.

Due to the presence of a large number of fragile States along the east African belt, four primary migration routes exist in the region. As per the Fragile States Index Annual Report 2022 by the Fund for Peace, all east African littoral states come under one or another of the categories labelled ‘elevated warning’, ‘high warning’, ‘alert’ and ‘very high alert’.<sup>20</sup> Drugs and arms trafficking contribute significantly to the illicit trade network, further exacerbating endemic port vulnerability. According to the IUU-Fishing Index, overfishing, both leading to and resulting from IUU fishing, costs east African States up to approximately \$19.8 billion, with Somalia and Seychelles being the worst-performing countries.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the 2050 AIMS is a ‘blue economy’ inclined document that aims to harness the region’s ocean potential to the fullest. The economic security of the region is not just hampered by terrorist activities in the region but also by climatic conditions. The stretch is experiencing severe climatic change, with the Horn (Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya) undergoing an unprecedented drought and harsh temperatures which, in 2022, affected nearly 13 million people by pulling them into a descending spiral of food insecurity.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, in any given situation, climate crises have snowballing effects, where one climate-led disruption leads to many consequent interventions that can create havoc in the area. In 2019, for example, the Indian Ocean experienced the largest number of cyclones on record, severely impacting Mozambique, and Madagascar. The cyclones did not just bring flooding in their wake, but the widespread and

intense rainfall in hitherto dry areas such as the Empty Quarter (the *Rub' al Khali* is the sand desert encompassing most of the southern third of the Arabian Peninsula) and Somalia brought about substantial increases in the number and density of swarms of desert locusts, which then ravaged crops on the land, adding to food insecurity.<sup>23</sup>

## **Assessing Foreign and Domestic Actors and their Agency**

The persistent efforts of resident and non-resident navies are described in conceptual terms by Ken Booth in his book, “*Navies and Foreign Policy*,” where he has likened the functional roles of navies to the sides of a triangle incorporating military, diplomatic and policing (constabulary) roles.<sup>24</sup> This conceptual understanding adequately explains the presence of numerous navies or naval collaborations along the east African shoreline, as these navies perceive the maritime challenges faced by eastern African coastal States as being equally relevant to their own economic and non-geo-economic maritime interests. To progress maritime connectivity in general and maritime merchandise trade in particular, International Shipping Lanes (ISL) — and their equivalent in times of international armed conflict, namely, ‘Sea Lines of Communication’ are crucial. Thus, the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), which is a geographically non-specific term often used to indicate the waters encompassing the east African littoral and the island States of Africa, is a theatre of geopolitics in which many actors have stakes.

As States — particularly those that have embraced independence relatively recently — wrestle with problems related to the manner in which maritime zones created by the UNCLOS (1982) ought best to be managed, a seemingly attractive option is the creation of Joint Management Zones. Thus the ‘Combined Exclusive Maritime Zones of Africa’ (CEMZA) represents the African vision of a common African maritime space — one without barriers. Although conceived as a ‘plan of action’ in the 2050 AIMS, this vision of African strategy does not align well with the maritime security practices being implemented by various actors in and off east Africa. Joint management zones present a paradox when it comes to militaries being deployed as an instrument for the eradication of seaborne threats. Since 2009, the WIO has seen a plethora of resident and non-resident navies, all determined to

combat piracy and other forms of maritime crime, in the Gulf of Aden, as also in its proximity. This has led to the securitization of the Indian Ocean off the eastern African littoral. While the piracy and violent crime at sea validates the need for securitization, the persistence of suchlike threats indicates that this engagement is either insufficient or in need of structural updates.

Threats along and off the east African shoreline have not only diversified but have also shown tactical transformations, necessitating the mounting of an equally transformative defence. The geopolitics of security in the waters of east Africa has come to be defined by many disparate actors. France, with 20% of its EEZ located in the Southwestern Indian Ocean (SWIO), asserts that it is a resident Indian Ocean power.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this is widely acknowledged as France is now a full-fledged member of all three major structural organisations of the Indian Ocean Region — the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). The USA and the EU, for their part, have created dedicated task forces and launched a number of naval operations to combat piracy and ensure more generalised good order and stability across a swath from the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea extending to the waters off the Horn of Africa and southern Somalia. Combined Maritime Task Force 150, originally formed by the USA in 2006 to fight terrorism, remains in place to address contemporary and potential maritime instability, while Combined Task Force 151 and the EU Naval Forces ‘Operation ATALANTA’, which were originally sharply focused upon countering piracy in the Gulf of Aden and its maritime environs, have broadened their functional remit to one of ensuring stability and good order. India, too, has followed suit and, while maintaining its naval presence in the area that it first established in 2008, is no longer engaged solely in counter-piracy and escort missions through the internationally recognised transit corridor (IRTC) but instead, is contributing to maritime stability in the area by escorting ships of the World Food Programme and, as an ‘Associate Member’ within the CMF, participates in CMF missions, including exercises involving the USA’s combatant command (COCOM) in Africa (‘AFRICOM’). Disconcertingly for many, China, too, is maintaining, without a break, the naval presence that it established in 2008 to combat piracy.<sup>26</sup> To logistically support these naval deployments, as also more land-centric ones, Djibouti

has been selected by a number of countries (eight at last count!) as a support base. The securitization of the exclusive economic zones of a number of littoral States of eastern Africa, is quite evident — the current foreign maritime security architecture off the east African coast is spearheaded by a combination of intergovernmental and governmental organisations. These include, inter alia, the ‘Combined Maritime Forces’ (CMF), the ‘European Union Naval Force Somalia’ (Operation ATALANTA), the ‘European Union Capacity Programme in Somalia’ (EUCAP-Somalia), the Africa-centric ‘Intergovernmental Authority on Development’ (IGAD), the ‘Indian Ocean Commission’ (IOC), INTERPOL, INTERPORTPOLICE, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations (UKMTO), etc. — not to mention a slew of ‘maritime domain awareness’ (MDA) portals and programmes ranging from India’s MSIS, to the EU’s CRIMARIO-2, the USA’s MSSIS and CENTRIX, and a host of others.

However, in several of these non-African maritime-security frameworks, east African coastal and/or island States have only token representation, and the active participation of their maritime security forces is minimal. This is not to say that the presence of foreign maritime security initiatives in the proximity has not positively contributed to the building of capacity and enhancement of capability within east African littoral and island States. The Maritime Security in Eastern and Southern Africa (MaSé) programme, which is solely funded by the EU but implemented by IGAD, COMESA, EAC, and the IOC, is intended to enhance the resilience of regional States and has certainly helped the latter prepare a strategy and action plans to improve their individual and collective maritime security. Nevertheless, it is clearly desirable for eastern Africa (and Africa more generally) to have an efficient maritime security architecture of its own in place. The Djibouti Code of Conduct (Jeddah Amendment) [DCoC (JA)] is a good example. Although it was conceptualised by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the DCoC-JA has a predominant presence of African States and has been instrumental in the maintenance of stability and good order at sea off the African coast. It, too, has revamped its functional structure in recognition of the fact that while piracy as the most immediate and visible threat the maritime security might well have been suppressed, other forms of maritime crime remain rampant. Thus, the 2017 Jeddah Amendment to the DCoC

has included all contemporary maritime threats that are active (or could become so) along and off the coast of eastern Africa.<sup>27</sup> A major positive result of is that every DCoC (JA) signatory state has established (or is in the process of establishing) a ‘National Maritime Security Committee’ to oversee the operationalisation of a ‘National Maritime Information Sharing Centre’ (NMISC). Thus, in the heavily securitized maritime space off the east African coast, resident domestic State actors are, indeed, asserting that they do have agency. It is for the plethora of international actors to strengthen this African agency rather than simply imposing their own.

## Maritime Security Governance Architecture of Africa

The focus of the 2050 AIM Strategy is to harness ocean wealth for the sustainable economic development of the African people. African States are acutely aware of the importance of the oceans, and the African Union has declared 2015-2025 to be the decade of “African Seas and Oceans”, with the objective of harnessing the ‘blue economy’ to achieve the African Union Agenda 2063. A range of African initiatives incorporate a clear maritime dimension. Similarly, Agenda 2063, a pan-African transformational vision adopted in 2013, aims to accelerate the economic growth in its ‘Goal 6’ through the blue economy by focusing on marine resources and energy, port operations, marine transport, and the sustainable management of natural resources along with conservation of Africa’s rich biodiversity — including its marine biodiversity. A number of African ‘Regional Economic Cooperation’ (REC) structures have maritime security action plans nested within their agendas. Therefore, for the successful implementation of Africa’s ‘Blue Wall Initiative’ — *“an Africa-led effort toward a nature-positive world that enhances the planet’s and societies’ resilience to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030. It aims to create interconnected, protected, and conserved marine areas to counter the effects of climate change and global warming in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region.”*<sup>28</sup> — a process-based maritime-governance model must be put in place. The implementation plan for such a model of ocean governance) can be synthesised from the African Union’s ‘Agenda 2063’, ‘Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy’ (2050 AIMS) of 2012, the 2014 ‘Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa’ (PFRS), the 2015 ‘UN

Agenda 2030' (Sustainable Development Goals), and the 2016 'African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa' (Lomé Charter).<sup>29</sup>

East Africa's integrated maritime orientation and national policy goals provide space for both resident and the non-resident geopolitical actors. Stability in the region is crucial for the blue-economy development goals of the populace, necessitating the establishment of an overarching security-governance model. Moreover, it is also important to take cognisance of the fact that there are significant differences amongst States of the east African littoral in terms of both, capacity (material wherewithal) as well as capability (human skills and organisational structures that could maximise the effect of whatever capacity does exist). While most navies (though not all) of these States have navies or maritime-security forces that are capable of controlling their respective Territorial Sea, this is seldom true of their EEZs and their Legal Continental Shelves. South Africa was considered to be anchor State in this regard, given that it has the strongest navy in this subregion. However, the State is in a state of societal transformation and South Africa's navy, like all its other national institutions, is wrestling with the socio-political transition in which the nation currently finds itself. Kenya has a navy that has a reasonable ability to operate within and control its EEZ. However, the maritime forces of other States of the littoral are severely lacking in terms of their capacity and capability to operate meaningfully within and beyond their EEZs.<sup>30</sup> The question that then arises is whether maritime security could in fact be achieved not by relying solely upon the prowess of navies, but rather by synergising the efforts of national and subregional institutions, civilian and/or commercial maritime stakeholders, and civil society as a whole. Could such an amalgam generate the sort of 'holistic' maritime security envisaged by the '2050 AIMS'? What sets 2050 AIMS apart from other maritime strategies is its emphasis on governance-induced security mechanisms. The strategy urges the utilisation of relevant global and regional legal and institutional structures to build a maritime security-governance mechanism for Africa. Weaving together diverse elements of the strategy, the author has prepared a schematic presenting a coherent global, regional, and sub-regional governmental network of initiatives and partnerships which, taken in aggregate, could yield an effective model of security-governance within the maritime domain of eastern Africa. (**Figures 1 (a) and 1 (b)** refer)

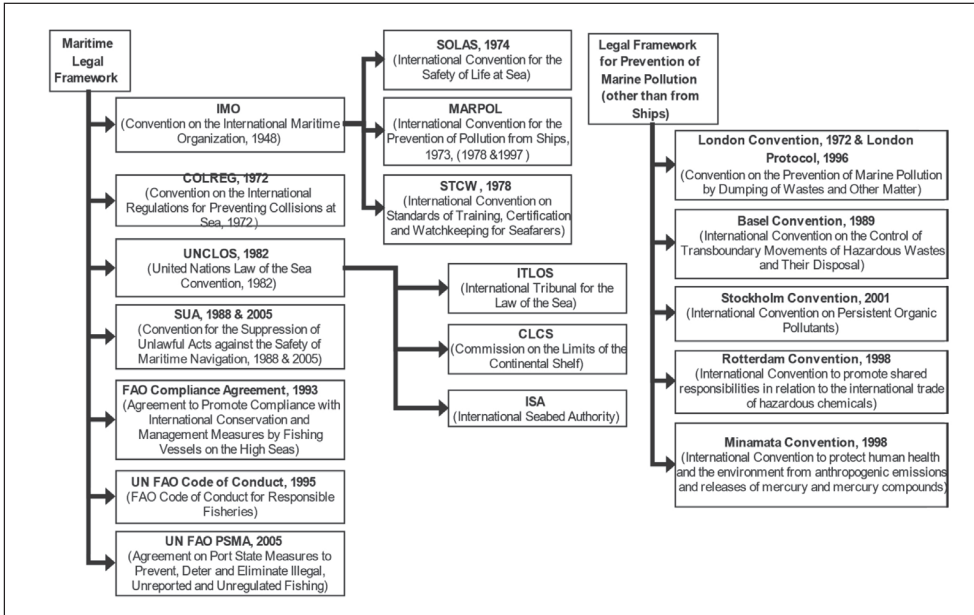


Fig 1(a)

Source: Author's Compilation

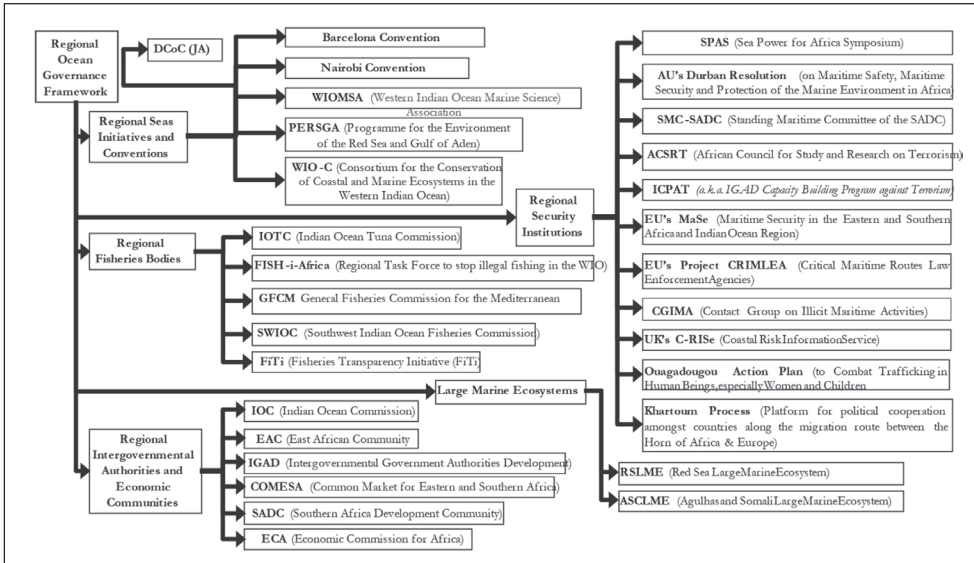


Fig 1(b)

Source: Author's Compilation

It is evident from the foregoing figures and the arguments presented in this paper that coastal- and island-States of the eastern African littoral have, indeed, come a long way in developing structures to counter the challenges and maritime threats that they perceive. Unfortunately, the attained capacity and capability, that is, the agency of these States, is not as yet sufficient for them to play a leading role in their own affairs in their coastal waters, their EEZs and their LCS, leave alone challenges that emanate from the high seas themselves.

The Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), whose launch was enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 4, 2019, at the East Asia Summit held in Bangkok, Thailand, holds out enormous promise for all States of the Indo-Pacific, but especially for those States whose shores are lapped by the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. To deliver on this promise that the IPOI holds, India must look as keenly westward towards the shores of East Africa as it does eastward towards those of Southeast Asia and East Asia. There is considerable evidence that the present government in New Delhi is doing just that. It is time for one of more States of the eastern Africa littoral to step up to take a joint lead in one or more of the spokes of the IPOI, leveraging the impressive and entirely commendable structures and legal frameworks that have been put in place.

Now is the time of Africa. Is India ready?

30 June 2023

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*Translating Concepts into  
Action: Indian Perspective*



## *Atmanirbhar Bharat* — Choosing *Swavlamban* (Self-Reliance) Over Self-Sufficiency

*Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Retd.)*

As the Indian Navy gears up for the 2023 edition of its indigenisation and innovation perspective plan, generically known as *Swavlamban* (which translates to “self-reliance”), it is germane to explore a question that often arises in the collective mind of India watchers and the global strategic community in general — just what do India’s periodic statements of ‘vision’ mean? This is particularly because these are often aspirational statements that are originally articulated in Hindi and then have much of their nuance lost in translation into other languages, most especially English. The clarion call to all Indian societal structures to create an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*<sup>1</sup> is all the rage at the present juncture and would appear to have taken over from the ‘*Make-in-India*’ mantra that was being chanted with equal fervour, accompanied by matching hype and hoopla, only a few short years ago (September 2014 to be precise).<sup>2</sup>

However, the current articulation of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* is actually part of a natural Indian progression — a logical broadening of the 2014 campaign which had sought to encourage the global manufacturing sector to perceive India as an opportunity rather than a risk. It invited global manufacturing ‘majors’ to set-up shop (so to speak) in India and, in so doing, transform the country into a global design-and-manufacturing hub. Yet, in both, the 2014 call to ‘*Make-in-India*’ and the present, there is much that has been ‘lost in translation’ — as the aphorism goes.

Given that these slogans are the product of sophisticated but largely Hindi-thinking and Hindi-speaking minds, once they were translated into the English

language, it was (and is) quite unsurprising to find that they created, particularly amongst the English-speaking lay public, a fair degree of misunderstanding. In 2014, there was discernible confusion between the terms '*Make-in-India*' and '*Indigenisation*'.

The fact is that the former was meant to encourage largely-foreign major manufacturing-companies to set-up manufacturing-units in India — whether for consumption by the Indian market itself or for export from India to markets in other countries. As such, its principal aims were job-creation, skill-development, and the transfer and absorption of cutting-edge manufacturing-technology and management-techniques. '*Indigenisation*', on the other hand, is, perhaps, better described by the less well-used slogans, 'Make-by-India' or 'Make-for-India'. In short, 'indigenisation' involves *Indian* industry manufacturing products and processes that would otherwise have had to be imported by India.

Fast forward to 2020 and the call for an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. An admittedly small number of economists and analysts have since pointed out that *atmanirbhar* can be translated either as 'self-reliance' or as 'self-sufficiency'. Different levels of the bureaucracy have applied their own interpretation as to which is the meaning that is denoted by the adjective *atmanirbhar*, adding to the policy-level confusion. 'Self-sufficiency' is what India tried through the three economically-challenged decades between the 1950s and 1970s, wherein India could manage only a 3.5% rate of growth — derisively called the '*Hindu Rate of Growth*'.<sup>3</sup> This term was coined in the late 1970s by Professor Raj Krishna, who had argued in one of his lectures that "*..no matter what happens to the economy the trend growth rate in India will be 3.5%*". A few economists later took the statement completely out of context; and sought to link the low growth-rate of this period to Hindu beliefs of "*Karma*" and "*Bhagya*". In any event, the average *per capita* income grew by a mere 1.3%. The country's birth-rate, however, continued to be high, with the net result that 30 years after Independence, the number of poor people had nearly doubled.

Nevertheless, some bureaucratic echelons have taken *atmanirbharta* to denote import-substitution. Clearly, this is the wrong approach, as may be readily shown by the fact that contemporary India has the fourth largest petroleum-refining capacity

on the planet,<sup>4</sup> and our largest single export is petroleum- products.<sup>5</sup> Of course, our single largest import commodity, too, is petroleum (crude oil).<sup>6</sup> If we were to slavishly promote the wholly incorrect meaning of *atmanirbharta* and reduce our import, we would be cutting off our collective nose to spite our face because this would have an adverse and severe impact upon our exports, with consequent reduction in the GDP. If, on the other hand, *atmanirbharta* were to be accepted as denoting ‘self-reliance’, India would endeavour to be strong enough to import what was necessary and inescapable, add value to whatever the country imports, and then export these value-added products.

This thrust on ‘self-reliance’ rather than ‘self-sufficiency’ does, indeed, promote both, “Make in India” endeavours as well as indigenisation ones, as has been amply and repeatedly shown by the Indian Navy. The navy’s indigenisation drive — launched in the 1960s — has, over time, matured into a success story worthy of both consistent praise and emulation across an impressive range of naval capabilities, incorporating inductions and acquisitions as well as capacity-building and capability-enhancement for both, the domestic requirement as well as the export one. Contrary to what some profess, the two are not mutually exclusive. The fact that the Indian Navy’s ‘Directorate-General of Naval Design’ (DGND) has generated as many as 19 different warship-designs, leading to the construction of a staggering 121 surface and sub-surface combat-platforms (i.e., ‘warships’ and ‘submarines’) in Indian shipbuilding yards<sup>7</sup> is, by any standard, a track-record of which to be proud. However, even more impressive have been the Navy’s successes by way of the indigenous development, production, and deployment of a whole slew of systems and sub-systems that go into the ‘float’, ‘move’, ‘fight’ and ‘survive’ capabilities of modern naval combatants; and are now being exported with the tag “world class”. These incorporate surface and sub-surface propulsion systems, power-generation systems, and state-of- the-art weapon-sensor suites — all of which, taken in aggregate, have made the Navy’s ships, submarines, and aircraft, both admired and respected.

The Navy’s efforts at self-reliance are guided by a 15-year ‘Science and Technology Roadmap’, which identifies fourteen contemporary technologies that the Navy feels have significant defence-related applications:<sup>8</sup> (1) Robotics and Artificial Intelligence;

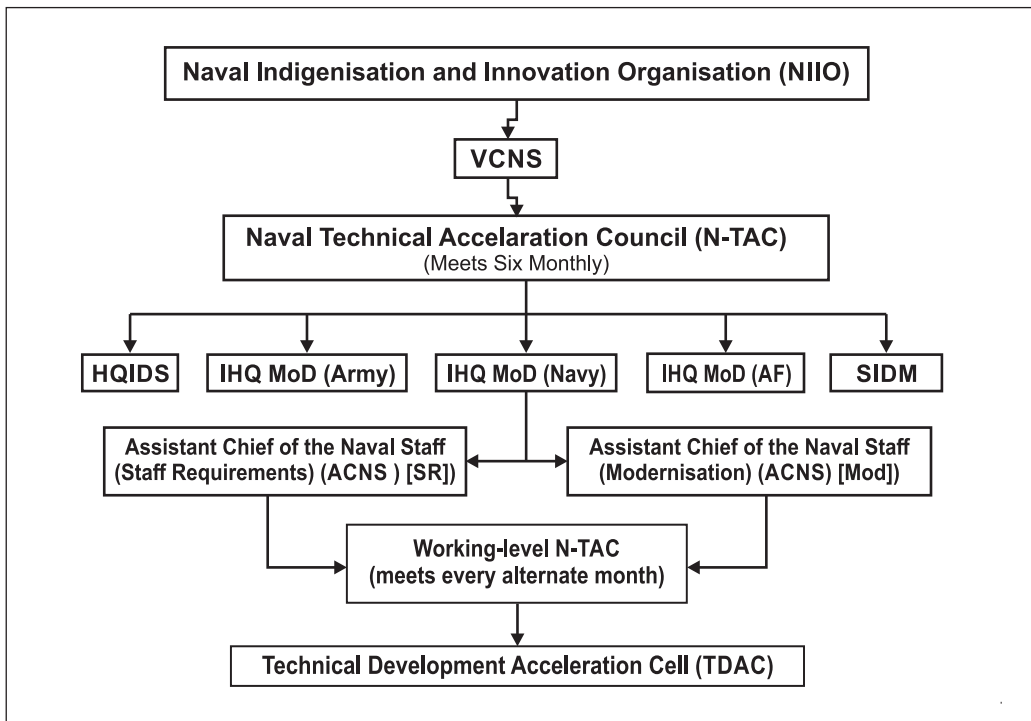
(2) Sensor-technologies; (3) Materials Technology (Stealth, Meta-metals, etc.); (4) High Energetics technology (Explosives, Anti-matter, Thorium, etc.); (5) Fusion Technology; (6) Space Technology; (7) Hypersonic Missile Technology; (8) Nano Technology; (9) Bio-technical Weapons-technology; (10) IT and Cyber Warfare Technology; (11) Unmanned Weapon Delivery-Systems; (12) Ocean-acoustics in littoral waters; (13) Networking technologies; and (14) Bio-fuels.

It is noteworthy that this roadmap affords requisite centrality to India's MSME sector. In the medium term, conventional maritime conflict under the India-Pakistan-China nuclear overhang is very likely to be time-compressed and 'Special Ops'-intensive. There is much that the MSME Sector can achieve here: paper-batteries to power hand-launched 'micro-UAVs'; camouflaging of the ends of GPS-trailing-wire antennae for use in specific environments (such as the creek areas of Gujarat and Sindh or the swampy areas of the Sundarbans); electrical high-speed outboard motors (OBMs) and noise-cancelling/sound-blanking solutions for two-stroke and four-stroke IC-engine OBMs; portable power-ascenders for boarding operations, amphibious raids, etc.; 'Low Observable Technology' semi-submersible craft; diver-scooters and diver-propulsion vehicles; image-recognition software that can provide 'suspicion-indicators' (such as a fishing-vessel not conforming to the local design or layout, or, a trawler streaming demersal-fishing gear but operating in the deep waters off our east coast); etc.

Predictably, the Navy's indigenisation endeavour has already paid rich dividends, to the great benefit of industry as well as the nation. As things currently stand, Indian shipyards have as many as 39 indigenously designed surface and sub-surface warships in various stages of construction, of a current induction figure of 41 ships and submarines.<sup>9</sup>

In recognition of the criticality of the PPP-model and guided by the recommendations of the 'Dr Vijay Kelkar Committee' that had been set-up to investigate the issue of private sector participation in the defence industry,<sup>10</sup> the Navy has taken a number of measures to optimise the potential created by the growing capability of Indian Industry coupled with the shift in Government policy to allow for private partnership in the defence sector. Regular buyer-seller meets, and vendor-

development programmes are conducted by several nodal organisations within the Navy, most especially the ‘Directorate of Indigenisation’ (DOI), which was set-up in 2006, and the newer (established in the year 2020) “Naval Indigenisation and Innovation Organisation” (NIIO), within which has been nested a dedicated “Naval Technology Acceleration Council” (N-TAC). A Technology Development Acceleration Cell (TDAC) has also been created for the induction of emerging disruptive technology in an accelerated time frame. These structures, depicted schematically in Figure 1, enable naval end-users to meaningfully interact with both, academia, and industry, to foster innovation and indigenisation for self-reliance in defence, in keeping with the vision of *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1:** Schematic Depiction of the Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation  
*Source:* Author

Insofar as the Navy’s own indigenisation and innovation perspective plan, which (as had already been mentioned at the very commencement of this piece) is generically known as *Swavlamban* or “self-reliance”, is in full execution.

*“On an average, more than two IPR applications have been filed by naval personnel every month since the launch of the NIIO by the Hon’ble Raksha Mantri on 13 August 2020. Patent applications have been filed for military-specific as well as dual-use innovations. Many dual-use products have already been transferred to the MSMEs for mass production through the National Research & Development Corporation (NRDC) and the Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU)...*

*“An online monthly interaction with the industry in coordination with the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM) has also been instituted. Deep-tech start-ups are also being recognised as ‘Innovation Industry Partners’ and are provided handholding to better understand naval requirements...*

*“To engage young minds in premier educational institutions, the ‘Indian Naval Students Technical Engagement Programme’ (IN STEP) provides a five-month online internship to work on naval problem-statements. An ‘open challenge’ under IN STEP was announced during the [2nd] NTAC meeting... in partnership with SIDM and BharatShakti.in.”<sup>12</sup>*

The Indian Navy hosted the *Swavlamban-2022* seminar in October 2022 to highlight the expanding strength of the Indian defence sector and provided them with solutions to their security needs. The Navy’s plan for the defence-manufacturing industry was announced, which will help improve the collaboration and coordination between the two. Procedures involved in companies registering themselves as defence vendors are already being tweaked to make them both simple and transparent. If industry can adhere to the specifications that are needed and deliver the desired products at competitive prices, there is immense scope for collaboration for mutual benefit.

However, not everything can — or even should — be produced indigenously. At the high-end of warfighting capabilities, Indian industry is increasingly entering into several new and exciting partnerships with global players on the one hand and the Indian Navy, on the other. The stark truth in terms of self-reliance is that there is room for all three facets — imports, value-addition, and exports. The Navy’s relentless drive for self-reliance has already yielded impressive and encouraging results in several critical war-fighting areas. Obvious examples include major systems

required for aircraft carrier operations, such as Electro-Magnetic Launch Systems (EMALS), arrestor-wires and aircraft-lifts; air-cushion landing craft (LCAC) for deployment from Landing Platforms [Dock] (LPDs); Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) systems, super-cavitating torpedoes, electromagnetic railguns, hyper-velocity projectiles, blue-green lasers, ship-borne anti-ballistic missile systems, etc.

The number of success stories are impressive by any standard. The range of Electronic Warfare Suites such as the revamped 'AJANTA', as also the 'ELLORA', 'KITE', 'HOMI' and 'PORPOISE', all of which are fitted on the Navy's latest frontline surface, airborne and subsurface combatants; and which are designed to detect the presence of enemy combatants without disclosing one's position or identity, are certainly success stories of which we can be justifiably proud.<sup>13</sup> It cannot be averred that they are without any import components, but the value-addition and export-potential are entirely Indian. The same is true of the Navy's advanced underwater-sensors such as the APSOH, HUMSA NG and USHUS family of sonars that have been developed by the Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL), Kochi.<sup>14</sup>

Likewise, an indigenous state-of-the-art electro-optical Fire Control System (FCS) the 'EON 51 Mk II', designed by the Instruments Research & Development Establishment (IRDE), Dehradun,<sup>15</sup> and productionised by industries such as BEL and VEM technologies Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad,<sup>16</sup> is now a standard fit. Pitching-in directly with its own formidable developmental expertise, the Navy's WESEE (Weapons and Electronics Systems Establishment), along with the Centre for Development of Telematics, has rendered yeoman service to the overall effort at self-reliance through its series of world-class 'Combat Management Systems' (CMS) productionised by Tata Power Strategic Engineering Division,<sup>17</sup> 'Integrated Machinery Control Systems' (IMCS), 'Integrated Bridge Management Systems' (IBMS), 'Integrated Propulsion Management Systems' (IPMS), and 'Battle Damage Control Systems' (BDCS), which now equip all major classes of the Indian Navy's warships.<sup>18</sup>

Then there are state-of-the-art data-link systems (LINK-II Mod 3), that are now being manufactured by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). These form the heart of the entire C4I2SR set-up on board most classes of the Navy's frontline warships.

Likewise, the indigenously designed and developed ‘REVATHI’ three-dimensional ‘Central Acquisition Radar’ (CAR), which is installed aboard the Kamorta Class Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) corvette is a good example of the rapidly growing ‘Public-Private Partnership’ (PPP) in defence production.<sup>19</sup> The design and production of this radar has been undertaken through a collaborative effort between the Navy, the DRDO and M/s L&T, Mumbai.

The successful leveraging of Navy- designed IT networks and IT-security platforms stands in sharp contrast to the grave concerns often expressed in respect of the country’s remaining critical infrastructure. Even outside of ‘equipment’, there is much to cheer about. The Defence Metallurgical Research Laboratory (DMRL), Hyderabad, in collaboration with M/s Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL), and with active participation from the Indian Navy, has successfully undertaken the indigenous development and production of warship-grade ‘DMR249A’ steel plates and bulb structural sections for ship and submarine applications.<sup>20</sup> This represents an enormous step in freeing ourselves from the yoke of pressures and prices associated with the import of steel, as was the norm until very recently. The results are evident (and will be increasingly so) in the construction of the Navy’s big-ticket platforms such as future aircraft carriers and the submarines that are to be constructed under ‘Project 75-India’.

To conclude, the Navy for one, seems to be quite clear that a slavish adherence to the chant of self-sufficiency will take the country down a dead-end street, and it is, instead, self-reliance that is the correct path for an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.

17 July 2022

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# Unmanned Systems and Manned-Unmanned Teaming: Capability Development Imperatives for India

*Captain (IN) Kamlesh K Agnihotri (Retd.)*

Unmanned systems – aerial, underwater, surface, or ground vehicles – by definition, operate without an integral pilot/crew. They can be categorised as follows on the basis of their modes of operation:-

- Automated or remotely piloted vehicles,<sup>1</sup> which refer to systems that are firmly controlled by the operator and do not allow for self-deviations during operational deployment. Most of the contemporary UAVs, USVs and UUVs would fall in this category.
- Autonomous systems,<sup>2</sup> meaning they have the ability to independently assess the situation from pre-programmed circumstances during deployment and choose between different courses of action. Artificial intelligence (AI) which refers to the ability of computer systems to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, including learning and self-correction, is the basic foundational ingredient for effective functioning of autonomous systems. These would generally include cruise missiles, though UAVs and UCAVs are increasingly being developed with AI algorithms to make them more and more autonomous.

The use of unmanned systems – which includes all UAVs/UCAVs, USVs and UUVs/submersibles – has seen accelerated expansion since the start of new Millennium, both, in civil and military domains. In fact, unmanned systems have become the preferred option for many missions which may either be highly repetitive,

requiring longer sustenance or dangerous. Their use in hostile environment – besides being cost effective – is also seen as less escalatory as compared to usage of other conventional military hardware or platforms.

As the diversity of tasks has increased, so have the types of unmanned systems. They come in all shapes, sizes and configurations, and are generally made as per role and mission specifications. Some such roles and missions of unmanned systems in the military domain may either be one or a combination of the following:<sup>3</sup>

- ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target acquisition and Reconnaissance)
- Armed missions
- Swarming
- Electronic warfare
- Logistics
- Security

This Paper seeks to discuss latest development in the realm of unmanned systems in all three domains in brief. These mainly include contemporary developments by China, as also current progress by the Indian defence and scientific community. It is followed by specific and innovative usage of unmanned systems in collaboration with manned systems, so as to create vast asymmetries vis-a-vis the adversary. Finally, the implications arising out of employment of unmanned systems – including manned-unmanned-teaming applications – employed by Chinese maritime assets in the Indian Ocean region are investigated; along with certain recommendations for Indian maritime establishment to address the challenges emanating therefrom.

## **Latest development in Unmanned Systems**

There has been significant progress world-wide, in developing and deploying automated unmanned systems. The US, Russia, China and Israel in particular, have displayed strong interest and capabilities in developing autonomous programmes. Though the scale and scope of development in USVs is far lower than that of UAS, a growing ambition to develop more capabilities in USV and UUV platforms has been seen, of late. This section discusses the latest developments in the realm of UAS,

USVs and UUVs and incorporation of high-technologies therein, which make their innovative employment in combat scenarios possible.

## Unmanned Aerial Systems

The contemporary UAS – inter-changeably referred to as UAVs too – are of fixed wing, rotary wing and hybrid types. These can either be close-in or personal types requiring little or no launch infrastructure; or small tactical ones for short/medium range missions. They can also be medium-altitude Long Endurance (MALE) types capable of flying between 25,000 to 50,000 feet; or high-altitude Long Endurance (HALE) types which are able to operate up to 65,000 feet height.

The US is an acknowledged global leader in production of unmanned aerial systems and their very effective combat exploitation, both, for battlefield surveillance, as also pin-point targeting anywhere in the World. RQ-4 Global Hawk surveillance UAVs, and MQ-9 Reaper and Predator attack drones are the best unmanned systems in the World. Innovative concepts like loitering munitions, search and attack anti-radiation UCAVs and manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) between aircraft and AI-enabled smart UAVs were all pioneered ab-initio in the US.

Closer home, rapid progress in the field of design, development and production of UAS by Chinese technologists, both, in State-owned and private sectors, has brought about a revolution in the quantum, scale and innovativeness of these systems. In fact, this revolution – primarily led by private enterprises – has made China the World's leading supplier of drones for multifarious civil applications. According to informed estimates, Da-Jiang Innovations (DJI) – a private Shenzhen-based Chinese drone manufacturing firm – accounted for about 70 percent share in the global commercial personal drones market.<sup>4</sup> In fact, seven of the top 10 drones for personal use, as ranked by PC Magazine were built by DJI, while the eighth ranked model was also Chinese, manufactured by Yuneec's Typhoon Company.<sup>5</sup>

A natural spin-off of this technological expertise has been that a large number of UAVs for broad-spectrum of military applications have also been produced; and exported to countries looking for comparative cost competitiveness. Some of

these models include Wing-Loong (1,2) and Caihong (CH-3, CH-4, CH-5) series of UAVs/ UCAVs.<sup>6</sup> Other latest Chinese UAS development projects include the following types:-

- 'Rainbow' High Altitude Solar Powered UAV
- 'Divine Eagle' (Shen Diao) twin-fuselage surveillance UAV
- 'WJ-600A/D' high speed Stealth UAV
- 'Xianglong' (Soar Dragon) HALE UAV
- Cloud Shadow HALE UAV
- Gongji-11 (GJ-11) stealth UCAV
- 'Sky Hawk' (Tian Ying) high-speed HALE UAV (MUM-T capable)

As for India, most of the UAVs currently operated by the Indian Defence Forces are imported, though the DRDO has been running a robust indigenous UAV programme from quite a while now. The imported systems mainly include Heron, Harop and Searcher UAVs from Israel. The Predator and Guardian UAVs are also slated to join the Forces in near future after renewed technological collaborative understanding with the US in recent times. In fact, two predator drones were taken on lease from the US in November 2020, for operation from Indian Navy's aircraft carrier 'Vikramaditya.'<sup>7</sup> The Indigenously developed systems – most still under trials/ development with mixed results – include 'Nishant' and Rustom UAVs; 'Rustom-II' and 'Ghatak' UCAVs; 'Nethra' quadcopter and 'Lakshya' Pilotless Target Aircraft.<sup>8</sup> The Indian private sector is also trying to indigenously develop UAVs under collaborative ventures. However most of their components continue to be imported.<sup>9</sup>

## **Unmanned Surface Vessels**

As mentioned in the case of UAS, the US, as also some European countries, are at the forefront of development, production and operational trials of unmanned surface vessels (USVs). The US Navy built a 132 Feet long, twin-engine USV named 'Sea Hunter'; and conducted autonomous sailing experiment from San Diego on mainland till Hawaii, and back in October 2018.<sup>10</sup> Enamoured with the success of this trial, the US Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Greenert envisioned

that future USVs would be able to support US Navy operations by acting as radar or Sonar scouts for the Fleet ships; and supplying ammunition, missiles and other modular payloads to warships at sea. Such USVs could also be tasked to carry out the proverbial 3D – dull, dirty and dangerous – work. The US Navy apparently wants to induct at least 10 large USVs in near future, and has asked the industry to present ideas to this effect.<sup>11</sup>

China – following in the US footsteps – is progressing its own USV programme, mainly for use by the PLA Navy. It is developing a number of USVs – and UUVs too – for envisioned military roles like ‘near sea’ protection, power projection and capacity-building for future warfare. Some USVs either produced or under development include the following models:-<sup>12</sup>

- Sea Fly USV
- M-80 series USVs for hydrographic survey/ intelligence collection
- ‘Huster 68’ USV
- A-1150, B-850, C-1500 and D-3000 series of USVs built by China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation<sup>13</sup>

To conduct end-to-end testing and trial of these USVs and pursue many more ambitious projects like World’s first unmanned cargo ship; a large unmanned vessels test range has been built off Zhuhai coast in southern China. The test range – first of its kind in Asia – covers a sea area of 771.6 sq km; and has separate designated areas for simulated, model and actual vessels.<sup>14</sup> In fact, design, development and construction of World’s first unmanned cargo ship, ‘Jindouyun Yi hao’ (magical cloud No. 1) was done in this test range commencing 2017; finally culminating in its first autonomous sea sailing trial in December 2019.<sup>15</sup>

Though the Indian Navy has been using imported radio controlled target boat (RCTB) since 1990s for practice firing by ships’ guns, the Indian indigenous USV effort – as compared to China – is virtually non-existent. The Indian Navy has sought to develop an indigenous RCTB through private industry participation, as mentioned in its Indian Naval Indigenisation Plan (2015-2030) document. Another indication that a USV may be produced in India came, when a model of Seagull

USV was presented by Elbit Systems of Israel to the Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE) during Def-Expo 2018. The attendant insinuation was that the two companies would jointly build this USV. However, further progress about both these projects on ground, if any, is not known.

## **Unmanned Underwater Vehicles/submersibles**

The US, as in case of other unmanned systems, continues to be a technology leader in the domain of underwater vehicles and submersibles. However, the Indian maritime security establishment has to be more cognisant of the challenges posed by rapidly developing Chinese expertise in this field; as the Chinese maritime bandwagon inexorably marches towards permanent presence in the Indian Ocean – the very area of utmost importance to India's security and economic well being. In this context, the latest development of UUVs/ submersibles and their employment patterns by China requires to be monitored carefully.

China has progressed quite comprehensively in designing and manufacturing a broad range of UUVs. In fact, it is envisioned that China's autonomous UUV programme could lead to a new generation of PLA Navy's underwater patrol vessels in future.<sup>16</sup> Chinese UUVs/submersibles are currently of two major types, namely, 'Qianlong' series (1,2,3) of submersibles and 'haiyi-7000/Haiyan' underwater gliders. 'Qianlong' autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) which are capable of operating up to 4,500 meters depth, are being regularly carried onboard Chinese research vessels cum mother ships for undertaking deep-water deployment in the Indian Ocean. For instance, 'Xiangyanghong-10' mother ship, along with Qianlong-2 AUV, was deployed in the South-West Indian Ocean for eight months commencing December 2017.<sup>17</sup>

'Haiyi' (meaning 'sea wings') underwater glider – and its suffix denoting maximum depth to which it can dive – looks like a torpedo with a pair of wings. It can glide beneath the sea without human intervention for days, months, or even one year – all the while collecting data for scientific research and environment monitoring.<sup>18</sup> Haiyi-7000 underwater gliders have also been deployed in the Indian Ocean by their mother ships in similar manner as AUVs. The latest mission of Haiyi gliders in the Indian Ocean was reported between mid-December 2019 and mid-February 2020,

wherein 12 sea-gliders were deployed from their mother ship 'Xiangyanghong-6' for conducting 3,400 plus observations.<sup>19</sup>

China's latest achievement relates to the building of an unmanned submarine – also referred to as Extra-large UUV (XLUUV). China unveiled this XLUUV during its National Day military parade on 01 October 2019, referring to it as autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) HSU-001.<sup>20</sup> While details are not known as yet, maritime analysts believe that such XLUUVs can be carried to deployment locations onboard warships, landing ships or even large helicopters. These XLUUVs in turn, can carry smaller UUVs, mines or torpedoes, which can be autonomously deployed by the XLUUV.<sup>21</sup>

Research and development scenario in India, in respect of UUVs is decidedly better than that of USVs. DRDO is currently designing and building multiple types of AUVs to meet naval requirements. These range from small slow-speed vehicles, flat-fish types, to military-class, free-flooding ones weighing up to 1.7 tons. These AUVs can perform various roles like surveillance, mine counter measures etc, in harbours, coastal waters, as well as in deep seas.<sup>22</sup>

Another UUV named as AUV-150, is built and patented by the Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CMERI) with active collaboration of DRDO. This AUV measuring 4.9 meter long with half meter diameter, is capable of seabed mapping, coastal surveillance, mine counter-measures, oceanographic measurements, surveying, underwater photography and inspections.<sup>23</sup> Indian private sector is also developing AUVs for the Indian Navy. M/S Larsen and Toubro Defence have designed and are producing 'Adamyā', 'Amogh' and 'Maya' series of AUVs for the Indian Navy.<sup>24</sup> These can be carried onboard a submarine, and can be launched through its torpedo tubes for various underwater tasks.

## **Employment of unmanned systems in collaboration with manned platforms**

Unmanned systems in their initial phase of development were more like tethered extensions of manned platforms, and were fully controlled by operators from such manned platforms. The advent of wireless communication, digitisation and

miniaturisation of components made it possible for unmanned systems to get rid of limitations related to umbilical dependency. Subsequently, large increase in processing speeds, global connectivity through satellites, and integration with GPS has enhanced the ability of unmanned systems to perform increasingly complex tasks. Rapid strides in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) – coupled with infusion of AI algorithms in operating software – has also enabled unmanned systems to progressively become more autonomous. These developments have opened up innovative and exciting possibilities for unmanned systems to operate alongside manned platforms, and enhance their mission capabilities like never before.

### **US and European Manned-Unmanned Teaming (MUM-T) initiatives**

The US – as has been the precedence in initial roll out of every high technology – has been experimenting with joint and synergised operation of manned and unmanned systems – particularly between aircraft and UAS – for over a decade, under the Manned-Unmanned Teaming (MUM-T) concept. The US Army Aviation Centre (USAACE) defined MUM-T in 2013 as “*synchronised employment of soldiers, manned and unmanned air and ground vehicles, robotics, and sensors to achieve enhanced situational understanding, greater lethality, and improved survivability.*”<sup>25</sup>

The Airbus Industries of Europe carried out live demonstration of MUM-T concept over Baltic Sea in October 2018, wherein five Airbus-built Do-DT25 drones were controlled from an airborne manned command and control (C2) aircraft. Airbus claimed that MUM-T trial flights served multiple purposes, including validating aspects such as connectivity and human-machine interface; and the concept of teaming intelligence through mission group management on the manned aircraft.<sup>26</sup> American Boeing Company followed suit soon after. The US and Australian Air Forces are already conducting trials between their fighter aircraft and pilot-controlled UAVs acting as their ‘loyal wingmen.’

### **Integration efforts of Chinese Fighter Aircraft and UAVs**

China’s UAV technologists – in a bid to acquire similar capabilities as western countries in MUM-T domain – are also seeking to develop UAS which would be

able to communicate and collaborate with manned aircraft during surveillance and combat operations. A Chinese stealth drone which would be equipped with such a capability has been provisionally designated as the ‘Sky Hawk’ (Tian Ying). This high-speed HALE UAV with flying-wing design, would be capable of conducting patrol and reconnaissance missions. It was showcased in a static display during Zhuhai Air show in China’s Guangdong province in November 2018 (Figure-1).<sup>27</sup>

Some over-ambitious Chinese narratives claim that in the next five years, PLA Air Force fighter aircraft like the J-20 and J-31 could have the capability to control several UAVs while in flight; and alter the mission profiles of UAVs under their active control, in real time if required. Trials of the technology are expected to commence with twin-seat fighters such as the J-16. Possible utilisation of advanced AI algorithms to control ‘UAV Wingmen’ will certainly enable the PLA Air Force in gaining advantage in high risk missions; though mastering of the technology involved for effective MUM-T, is easier said than done.



**Figure 1** – Sky Hawk (Tian Ying) MUM-T Capable HALE UAV  
*Source:* South China Morning Post

## **India's development of Combat Air Teaming System (CATS)**

Some Indian media reports suggest that a Bengaluru based start-up, M/S New Space Research and Technologies, is collaborating with HAL to develop futuristic systems like the air-launched swarm drone systems, smart glide bombs and robot-wingman drones, as part of Combat Air Teaming System (CATS) programme initiated in 2017. The ALFA-S (Air Launched Flexible Asset-Swarm) drones are about 1 meter long, can carry explosive payload and are designed to be air-launched from panniers – types of dedicated canisters – carried aboard fighter jets. When deployed, these drones would fly in formation at speeds of 100 km per hour, search for targets of opportunity using their infra-red/electro-optical sensors, and carry out autonomous attack on designated targets. A Sukhoi-30 fighter aircraft can apparently carry 30 to 40 such drones, because of their compact size. The drones are supposedly interconnected through electronic data-links, which enables them to relay possible target details back to control aircraft/station and receive target allocation for attack.<sup>28</sup>

The new robot wingman, on the other hand, is an unmanned aircraft half the size of a regular fighter, generally endowed with stealth features. Such AI-enabled drones are designed to fly 50-100 km away from the controlling manned fighter aircraft, either to forewarn/engage the threats ahead, or to protect it from rear sectors. The efficacy of CATS concept was apparently tested by the Indian Air Force in 2019, though further details are not known.<sup>29</sup> The fact that these futuristic UAS find no mention in official website of HAL, points to their classified nature of development.

## **Manned-Unmanned Teaming in surface and sub-surface realm**

Currently, major portion of ongoing global MUM-T narrative is dominated by activities in the aerial domain – probably on account of highly visible nature of the medium, relatively lesser technological challenges, and possibility of spectacular results. However, the potential of this concept and its applications to transform the nature of future warfare in surface and sub-surface domains, is no less exciting. The USVs and UUVs, in concert with manned platforms like ships – or submarines in some cases – can provide relatively inexpensive alternatives for countering the adversary's maritime superiority in off-shore areas by deterring, dissuading or delaying their offensive missions.

The USVs, operating synergistically with other networks of manned and unmanned systems in sea, under-sea and air domains can also act as force multipliers for coastal surveillance, protection of off-shore installations, and limited engagement of opposing forces. USVs, when carried by blue water naval assets and employed in distant waters, can also support in power projection and out-of-area missions. They can also provide additional capabilities to the naval ships in maintaining situational awareness at high seas, by engaging in ISR and serving as remote sensors. USVs can also play a vital role as particularly important element of future warfare. For instance, networked swarms of inter-connected AI-enabled USVs, operating in tandem with each other and controlled from a manned platform far from the scene of action, can render an enemy warship greatly vulnerable by inundating its defensive systems.

The UUVs/AUVs can be carried onboard bigger submarines or dedicated naval or research ships to the intended mission areas; and employed – either autonomously or under control of manned platforms – for various benign-looking survey tasks, but of great value for anti-submarine warfare. They can also carry out covert military tasks like mine laying; acting as mobile mines themselves; underwater cable laying, repair or shifting; or even planting underwater sensors for monitoring movement of enemy warships and submarines. There are, of course, great challenges in undertaking MUM-T below the sea because of connectivity, communication and sustainability issues. However, technologists worldwide are striving hard to overcome them, and hoping for early technological breakthroughs.

### **Chinese unmanned systems and MUM-T applications: Implications for Indian maritime security**

The sheer range and variety of task-specific UAS available with China enables it to innovate upon their mission profiles in ingenious ways. This provides a large number of deployment options to the PLA Navy also, against the adversary in IOR. Larger scale usage of UAS in combat situations in collaborative regime with manned assets, will obviously reduce the attrition of both, manpower and platforms. This in turn, will extend their combat utility and ensure more effective operational results. While VTOL type UAVs launched from PLA Navy ships and mobile landing platforms

(MLPs) would provide tactical surveillance, MALE UAVs and UCAVs operating from Chinese aircraft carriers or Landing Helicopter Dock ships (LHD) could assist the Force in building long range MDA, detect and track targets over prolonged duration, and also prosecute certain opportunity targets. Exploitation of such UCAVs from control stations far away in China using satellite communication and data relay, or AWACS/fighter aircraft under MUM-T regime in future – like the US does so effectively – is very much feasible.

While the scope of using unmanned surface vessels by PLA Navy for the kind of proactive posture it is likely to adopt in IOR could be quite limited; there can be immense utility of UUVs in restricting the availability of operational maritime space to the adversary. Extra-large UUVs (XLUUV) – of the type showcased during October 2019 Parade – carried by the Chinese MLPs ‘in ready to deploy’ state to a location of its choice, would provide it the mobility and flexibility to disrupt the entire operational plans of the adversary. Incorporation of AI would further increase their lethality by improving stealth, navigational ability, sustenance, survivability, and reliability during classification, tracking and prosecution missions.

Further, submersibles carried by Chinese non-military research vessels could be used for developing underwater domain awareness (UDA) at selected locations in IOR. They would, at the very least, also provide daily updated underwater hydrological conditions data and sea water temperature, density and salinity profile around operationally vital locations to the entire Force. These vital inputs would enable the PLA Navy ships and SSNs to plan their undersea operations against the adversary, more effectively. These UUVs/AUVs operated and controlled by their respective mother ships could also lay underwater buoys with hydrophones at critically assessed locations to detect the adversary’s submarine movements.

Similarly, small chains of underwater sonar sensors could also be laid on the seabed – akin to US SOSUS chains – at selected narrow straits, navigable gaps between islands in Andamans and Lakshadweep, or due south of Sri Lanka by these submersibles, to monitor the movement of India’s maritime and naval traffic in near-real time. This will ultimately enable the PLA Navy platforms to plan undersea warfare against its adversary, much more effectively.

## Way forward

Shri Narendra Modi, India's Prime Minister, while addressing the delegates during Def Expo-2018, stated thus:

“New and emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Robotics will perhaps be the most important determinants of defensive and offensive capabilities for any Defence Force in future. India with its leadership in information technology domain would strive to use this technology tilt to its advantage.”<sup>30</sup>

While the vision of the Indian Prime Minister is articulated quite well, the challenge lies in its implementation. The future outlook and requirement of unmanned systems for the Indian Defence Forces has been clearly laid out in the ‘Technology Perspective and Capability Roadmap (TPCR)-2018’ published by the Headquarters, Integrated Defence Staff (HQIDS). This document has quantified future requirement of various types of UAVs for next 10 years. These include 100-150 MALE, more than 20 HALE, 25-30 VTOL, 10 submarine launched, 50 short range and 30 hybrid remotely-operated pilotless aircraft (RPAs). In addition, 50 ship-borne systems for Navy – each comprising 3 RPAs – are projected for induction.<sup>31</sup> It also details the planned induction of at least 10 multi-mission high-endurance AUVs/ROVs with expected life cycle of 15 years. These AUVs are expected to undertake MCM operations including mine neutralisation. In addition, they would have to be capable of conducting ISR missions, carry different payloads and act as communication relays/links for submarines.<sup>32</sup>

The Indian Naval Indigenisation Plan (2015-2030) has, in addition, included the development of micro and mini UAVs – launched either from shore or ship – for specialised operational support requirement in its list of future technologies.<sup>33</sup> This document also flags inescapable requirement of UUVs as part of future technologies, for conducting wide range of sub-surface warfare missions.<sup>34</sup>

While the above projections are indicative requirements for the Global industry, Indian designers and developers – in public or private sector – need to move rapidly for providing indigenous solutions; lest some foreign vendors bag the contract on account of original technology, and criticality of the equipment for the Navy. It is quite apparent from the ongoing efforts of DRDO – and private sector to some extent

– towards indigenous UAV and UUV programmes; that domestic technological capacity and infrastructure to meet bulk requirement of Indian Armed Forces does exist. All it requires is more concerted effort in mission mode, rather than the current practice of ‘process-based’ approach with attendant inefficiencies leading to large time and cost overruns.

Thus, the first imperative is to make sufficient quantities of preferably domestically designed and produced multi-domain unmanned systems available to the Indian maritime security establishment. Thereafter, the Indian Navy and Coast Guard can go about formulating operating doctrines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for their employment and optimum exploitation in both, standalone mode as well as under MUM-T regime.

The utmost need of the hour therefore is to radically speed up the assimilation of high technologies involved in indigenous design, development and production of unmanned systems – specifically Artificial Intelligence and Robotics as reiterated by the Indian Prime Minister – in ‘national mission’ mode.

Only then can the Indian maritime security establishment hope to proactively address similar Chinese capabilities which would tend to give asymmetric operational advantage to their maritime forces in India’s primary areas of maritime interest.

15 February 2021

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# Ukraine Crisis: Implications for ASEAN's Maritime Security

*Ms Apila Sangtam*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has impacted the maritime security environment in distant geographic regions such as Southeast Asia. The geopolitical anxieties generated amongst member States of ASEAN from this conflict have exacerbated extant levels of concern over Beijing's expansive maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea (SCS), with other claimant States becoming significantly more worried about the possibility of similar Chinese maritime aggression. The succeeding paragraphs offer an analysis of the challenges that could confront maritime Southeast Asia as a result of a potential change in world order wrought by the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict.

ASEAN's response to this armed conflict has typically been a divided one, with Vietnam and Laos abstaining, and the remaining nations voting for the UNGA resolution condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine. This is not the first time that the ASEAN has been unable to take a clear position on a global dispute or conflict. ASEAN's inability to take a clear stand throughout the Cold War<sup>1</sup> between the United States and Soviet Union is a case in point. ASEAN's fractured approach to China's claims in South China Sea, too, is telling. In the South China Sea case, only a few of the member States of ASEAN — such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, and the Philippines — have a territorial dispute with China, while others such as Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, are neither a party to the dispute nor have had any direct confrontation with China. This has resulted in ASEAN as a collective being unable to address China with a united and uniform voice.

ASEAN's history of being unable to take a firm position is repeating itself in the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This article will critically analyse maritime

Southeast Asia's response to the conflict in Ukraine and the challenges it might face with a potential change in world order.

## Southeast Asia's Response to the Ukraine Crisis

In the recent UN General Assembly resolution against the Ukraine invasion, a total of 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution. Five countries — Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (commonly referred-to as North Korea), Eritrea, Russia, and Syria — voted against it, while 35 abstained. Among the countries of Southeast Asia, Vietnam, and Laos, which have historically been aligned to Russia, abstained, while the rest voted in favour of the resolution.<sup>2</sup>

**Vietnam.** Vietnam abstained from voting against the Ukraine invasion primarily because of its close security ties with Moscow. Among Southeast Asian nations, Vietnam is the largest buyer of arms from Russia, spending about \$1.7 billion, which, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2016-2020), accounts for 5.9% of Russia's 20% share of global weapons sales.<sup>3</sup> Further, Vietnam is overwhelmingly dependent on Russia's legacy weapons and technology. With an anticipated GDP increase of 7% in 2022, Vietnam is expected to continue to procure more arms — a trend that is reinforced by Vietnam's declared objective of building a formidable military by 2025.<sup>4</sup> In the same vein, it is also theorised that Vietnam is interested in acquiring the Brahmos Missile — a joint venture between India and Russia — Russian wariness against upsetting China notwithstanding.<sup>5</sup>

However, Vietnam's reasons for abstention extend beyond solely military considerations. Russia is Comprehensive Strategic Partner of Vietnam. Moscow's trade with Hanoi has increased 7% from 2019, reaching US\$ 4.05 billion in 2020. In addition, Russia plans to increase its energy business in Vietnam. *Russian state-owned oil and gas producer, Zarubezhneft, has reportedly agreed to buy out shareholdings in two offshore exploration and development projects in Vietnam from its compatriot Rosneft, along with offshore gas and condensate pipeline via Vietsovpetro, its joint venture with PetroVietnam. It is estimated that Vietsovpetro produces one-third of Vietnam's oil.*<sup>6</sup> The two countries are also planning to launch the "Azov-Haiphong Sea line by 2024 and develop port terminals that would facilitate civilian cargo transport."<sup>7</sup>

At the level of grand strategy, too, it is crucial for Vietnam that Russia continues to act as a buffer against China in the South China Sea. China invaded Vietnam in 1979 on behalf of the Khmer Rouge<sup>8</sup> and Hanoi most certainly does not want to see history repeating itself. All this makes Russian goodwill indispensable to Hanoi. Overall, the military balance in the South China Sea is a delicate matter for all concerned and the underlying cause for many a maritime strategic decision or abstention, as the case may be.

**Singapore.** Standing strikingly apart from its ASEAN counterparts, Singapore has strongly condemned Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine, following up the condemnation with sanctions.<sup>9</sup> This is not the first time Singapore has taken a clear anti-Russian stance — in 2005, too, it opposed Russia's entry into the East Asia Summit (EAS).

Stating that while they “*value their good relations with Russia and the Russian people*”, Singaporean Foreign Affairs Minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, had declared in no uncertain terms of censure that “*small countries must avoid becoming sacrificial pawns, vassal states or ‘cat’s paws’ to be used by one side against the other.*” He went on to assert that Singapore will not accept such flagrant violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of another sovereign State.<sup>10</sup> Singapore has announced sanctions on certain Russian banks and financial transactions connected to Russia and blocked all crypto transactions with Russia, despite criticism of these actions by the Russian envoy.<sup>11</sup> The Singapore Government, through the Singapore Red Cross, also announced a contribution of US\$100,000 to humanitarian operations in Ukraine.

**Philippines.** The Philippines voted against Russia in the UNGA resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Philippine's statement at the Emergency Special Session of the UNGA on Ukraine is, however, tellingly indicative of reluctance on the part of Manila to go the full distance in terms of alienating Russia. Despite unequivocally condemning the invasion of Ukraine and the consequent violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and calling for “*massive assistance commensurate with the growing humanitarian crisis*”, the statement does not include the word “Russia” anywhere, nor does it make any direct call for action from Russia.

The statement ends with an urgent appeal to “resort to the 1982 Manila Declaration on Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes.”

Former President Rodrigo Duterte, in power from 2016-2022, had maintained and advocated closer ties with China and Russia while distancing itself from the United States, its former colonial power.<sup>12</sup> Duterte’s successor, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., has adopted a far more conciliatory stand towards Washington DC, but it is widely felt that that his pro-US stance is unlikely to last<sup>13</sup> beyond the Ukraine crisis. Adding to the confusion evident in Manila is the fact that after initially ignoring appeals from Ukraine and stating quite unequivocally that the Philippines would continue to buy 16 Russian Mi-17 helicopters and had no plans to scrap the deal, Manila did, indeed, scrap the deal!<sup>14</sup>

Manila’s unwillingness to take an unequivocal and strong anti-Russian stance also probably has much to do with the Russia-Philippine’s trade flow.<sup>15</sup> Russian goods in the Philippine market moved to 44.8% in 2021, up from 32.4% in 2020. Further, 50% of Manila’s steel billets<sup>16</sup> come from Russia.

**Indonesia.** Indonesia reluctantly voted for the UN resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo called for a ceasefire and appealed for a resolution through dialogue rather than economic sanctions, seeking to uphold the principles of the UN Charter.

Indonesia’s reluctance to outrightly condemn the invasion fits well within its historical policy of non-alliance.<sup>17</sup> However, it is also likely that the primary reason for Jakarta’s weak response to the Ukraine invasion is because of Indonesia and Russia’s consistently increasing economic and defence ties. Trade between the nations in 2021, generating US\$ 1.49 billion and US\$ 680.98 million for Indonesia and Russia respectively, is anticipated to grow to 50% in 2022.<sup>18</sup> In late 2021, a partnership was announced between Indonesia’s national energy company, Pertamina, and Russia’s Rosneft to develop an oil refinery and petrochemical complex in Tuban, East Java — a deal that is reportedly worth US \$14 billion. In addition, according to SIPRI,<sup>19</sup> about 15.7% of Indonesian weaponry is Russian made. In December 2021, *“Jakarta hosted the first-ever joint maritime exercise between Russia and ASEAN.”*<sup>20</sup>

Not surprisingly, Indonesia's somewhat passive stance in the Russia-Ukraine conflict has raised questions about its commitment to "independent and active policy." As a middle power, Indonesia is capable of shaping the international order and is, therefore, expected to take a strong position in matters such as the Russian invasion. If Indonesia holds back, strategic initiatives for building peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, such as the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-Russia Summit,<sup>21</sup> are at risk. Jakarta's seeming passivity begs the question of whether, in the event that China attacks smaller nations like Taiwan, Jakarta will remain silent.

**Malaysia.** Much like Indonesia, Malaysia voted in favour of the UN resolution condemning Russia but has refused to put sanctions on Russia. Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Saifuddin Abdullah, stated that Malaysia could not agree to unilateral sanctions<sup>22</sup> on principle. Nik Mohamed Rashid Nik Zurin, a former special officer to a Deputy Defence Minister, suggested "*banning Russian firms from upcoming arms exhibitions such as Defence Security Asia (DSA2022) and future Langkawi International Maritime Aerospace (LIMA) exhibitions.*" European partners have asked Malaysia to take a clearer stance, but so far, the Malaysians have not explicitly condemned the invasion and have maintained held a more nuanced stance, probably so that the country's their trade relationship with Russia (Malaysia is one of Russia's Top 30 trading partners).<sup>23</sup>

**Myanmar.** Myanmar, surprisingly, voted in favour of the UN resolution and stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> It must, however, be noted that the nation remains in a state of emergency following a February 2021 coup, in which the Myanmar's democratically elected leaders were deposed by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) which then vested power in a military junta. "*Myanmar's vote was lodged by its Permanent Representative, who does not represent the junta.*"<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, General Zaw Min Tun, a Burmese military council spokesperson representing the junta, made a clear statement supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions in Ukraine. This is unsurprising because Russia was amongst the few nations that supported the military junta in the February 2021 coup. According to UN experts, Russian fighter jets and armoured vehicles were used by the military junta against civilians during the military coup.<sup>26</sup> Following the coup, the relationship between Myanmar and Russia has strengthened significantly. On 29 October 2021, the two

sides discussed an “exchange of maritime technology and information and technical cooperation to build warships. The ‘Gremyashiy’, a Russian frigate, with 115 Russian military personnel on board arrived at Thilawa Port on October 28 and remained there for three days.... Russia has also promised to continue cooperation with Myanmar’s military in the fields of defence, science, and technology.”<sup>27</sup>

In summary, it is clear that the UNGA vote does not reflect Myanmar’s relationship with Russia or its position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

**Brunei Darussalam.** Brunei Darussalam’s response to the UNGA resolution against Russia is quite clearly encapsulated in its statement that the Sultanate “condemns any violation of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of any country” and urges the parties to “settle all differences by peaceful means, without resorting to the threat or use of force, following the UN Charter and international law, in the interest of maintaining international peace and stability.”<sup>28</sup> The most revealing aspect of this statement is that the nation has communicated its position without naming Russia.

**Laos.** Like Vietnam, Laos, too, abstained from the UN resolution against Russia’s invasion. Both nations have deep historical ties and a compelling military dependency on Russia. 44% of Laos’s military equipment comes from Russia. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Laos has called for the utmost restraint from all parties.<sup>29</sup>

**Cambodia and Thailand.** Both these nations have voted in favour of the resolution. However, both nations have said that condemning Russia is not the solution and that the conflict must be resolved only through negotiation. Cambodia’s vote also reflects its trade dependency on China and a reluctance to come out in clear opposition to China’s position vis-à-vis Russia, which has consistently led to “Phnom Penh’s history of acting as a proxy for Beijing’s positions in multilateral forums.”<sup>30</sup>

**Timor-Leste.** This tiny nation, which has, for the past two decades been aspiring to become a full member of ASEAN, took a clear and brave stance through its outright condemnation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In taking a strong position, Timor Leste is finding its international voice and validating its credentials as the only ‘free’ country in Southeast Asia.<sup>31</sup>

## **ASEAN's combined response to the Ukraine Crisis**

Over the years, ASEAN-Russia maritime cooperation has increased steadily. In December of 2021, Russia and the ASEAN conducted their first joint naval exercises in the South China Sea, marking a new security dimension in the region and sending a signal to China and AUKUS, the new military partnership between Australia, the UK and the US.<sup>32</sup> The deepening ties between ASEAN and Russia are evident in the statement issued from the Russia-ASEAN Summit in 2021, ensuring maritime connectivity, freedom of shipping and unimpeded commerce to promote economic growth. One must note, however, that Russia's economic commitment to the ASEAN now stands somewhat impeded due to the sanctions imposed by nations such as the US, the UK, and Canada.

Under the current chairmanship of the King of Cambodia, ASEAN has expressed a position condemning the war on Ukraine, albeit without naming Russia. ASEAN has expectedly appealed for maximum restraint to be exercised by all relevant parties and the resolution of the conflict through dialogue.

In summary, ASEAN's main concerns remain threats to maritime security, and the preservation of its centrality. The primary question then becomes, with the economic, military, and diplomatic consequences of its war on Ukraine, can Moscow still provide security to ASEAN member States?

## **Implication of the Ukraine Crisis on the Maritime Space of Southeast Asia**

While Ukraine's invasion has provided the West with a common new purpose and enabled the generation of a unified stand, the member States of ASEAN remain mired in ambiguity and uncertainty, as they have often been in the past as well. Most Southeast Asian nations avoided the use of "Russia" and "invasion" in their statements and have only called for peaceful dialogue and negotiation. The restraint in the ASEAN response is evidence of the close ties between Russia and several key ASEAN members.

Besides economic, infrastructure, energy, and military dependencies upon Russia, members of the Southeast Asian political elite tend to look up to Putin as a strong leader who has the courage and wherewithal to rally nations against a US-led world order. Major General Zaw Min Tun, the spokesman for the Myanmar junta, told The New York Times that Moscow had “*done its part to maintain its sovereignty*,” and that the attack was “*the right thing to do*.” Despite warnings, Russia has continued to sell arms to Myanmar after the coup, even as a humanitarian crisis unfolds.<sup>33</sup> The former Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte, had hailed Putin as his “favourite hero.” Cambodia’s Prime Minister, Hun Sen, awarded the Russian leader with an “Order of Friendship.”

While evaluating ASEAN’s response to the Russian invasion as a whole, besides the above factors, it is important to consider the micro-motivations of individual member nations and the macro-motivation of Chinese influence in the theatre. Vietnam’s energy security in the oil and gas sector is deeply intertwined with that of Russia. Some of their joint projects fall in the disputed South China Sea region, which perforce creates a dependence on Hanoi’s capacity for maritime defence.

In Myanmar’s case, although the big companies like Total, Chevron Mitsubishi, Petronas have withdrawn their gas projects in Myanmar, after the military coup, Russia’s Rosneft announced plans for exploration in Myanmar.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, *Thailand’s state-owned energy company, PTT Exploration and Production (PTTEP), has announced its intention to bid for the Yadana gas field in Myanmar*<sup>35</sup> Both these developments have reduced Myanmar’s need to fall in line with the western response to Russia. In fact, the sanctions imposed by the West in response to the military coup have only driven Myanmar to cooperate even further with Russia in oil and gas exploration.

A similar situation can be seen in Indonesia, with “*the PT Pertamina Rosneft Processing and Petrochemical which is a joint venture (JV) of Indonesia’s state-run oil and gas company Pertamina (55%) and Russian energy company Rosneft (45%)*.”<sup>36</sup>

Moving on to the Philippines, it would be recalled that in 2018, Manila and Beijing had agreed to work on joint oil and gas exploration in the contested waters of the South China Sea, without addressing the issue of sovereignty. In recent news

reported by the South China Sea Morning Post, President Duterte had warned the new Philippine leader to honour a joint exploration agreement with Beijing or face conflict.<sup>37</sup> While time will tell where the new Philippine leader stands, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that with the commitments currently in place, Manila will also fall in line with an anti-West — and therefore pro-Russia and consequently pro-China — leaning.

All this notwithstanding, member States of ASEAN would be well served by a critical evaluation of the lessons that Ukraine has learned. Despite humanitarian support and military equipment as well as the imposition of sanctions from major world powers such as the US, the UK and Canada, Ukraine stands alone in its own defence against the Russian invasion. How then, would a small Southeast Asian nation fare in the face of a Russia-backed Chinese invasion? Such an event would mark a seismic shift in the entire geopolitical order, with Moscow wielding a greater influence in Asia. It would bring the global power balance closer to Putin's goal of pushing back Western influence in what it continues to call the Asia-Pacific region. Russia will then have the potential to build a greater Eurasia that would include an Eastern Economic Forum, the expansion of SCO, maintain focus on a Eurasian Economic Union and ASEAN.

So, the question remains, is an alignment towards Russia or at least a pro-Russia leaning the right strategic position for ASEAN? It is clear that ASEAN needs to align with one or the other major global power for strategic and security reasons. Most of its member nations have most certainly done so in the past, each choosing a partnership between the West or Russia. Given Russia's support for ASEAN centrality and unity, its security cooperation, and its active participation in various ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), Russia may appear to be the more attractive strategic alignment. However, ASEAN needs to critically evaluate this conclusion, keeping in mind its stake in the South China Sea. Russia's reaffirmation of ASEAN centrality notwithstanding, the invasion of Ukraine and the global consequences to Russia as a result, bring Russia's capacity to assist — diplomatically, militarily, or economically — into question. To put it bluntly, if

China were to attack Taiwan, a claimant in the South China Sea, would Russia truly be inclined or able to stand up in defence of Taiwan?

ASEAN must choose its alignment with care because a global gestalt is playing out in the Southeast Asian theatre — the global consequence of alignment being significantly greater than the sum of ASEAN member nations current trade, military, and energy security interests. While coming out in clear support of Russia would potentially result in Russian support should China assert dominance with regard to South China Sea sovereignty, the Russian invasion of Ukraine could also serve as a dangerous precedent for the Indo-Pacific region.

Either way, the Russia-Ukraine conflict opens up the Southeast Asian sub-regional space to hard geopolitical threats. ASEAN must protect its maritime boundaries by coherently reformulating its ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). ASEAN would do well to recall that the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (also known as the SEANWFZ Treaty or the Bangkok Treaty), is yet to be signed by either Russia or China. While the Chairman's Statement<sup>38</sup> at the 36th ASEAN Summit, reiterated the commitment of ASEAN member States to preserving Southeast Asia as a region free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, the statement seems more than a little hollow, given the current global dynamic.

Will Southeast Asia continue to juggle alignments between the major powers as it has done in the past? In the Southeast Asian theatre, Russia serves as a powerful counterbalance against China and the United States — but whether this remains true will depend upon the outcome of the invasion on Ukraine. Whether Russia wins or loses will serve as a tipping point in the global jockeying that is playing out in Southeast Asia.

While much remains unknown and much lies in the balance, a conclusion may be drawn that ASEAN must remain united in order to maintain its centrality and neutrality. ASEAN's failure to take a clear and unified position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its inability to broker a sensible Code of Conduct in the South China Sea put it at risk of becoming irrelevant and losing its power to be a catalyst for peace in the wider Indo-Pacific. Therefore, ASEAN's immediate and most strategic

mandate must be to become a unified, clear, and powerful voice in the Southeast Asian theatre.

12 January 2023

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# The Development of the Matarbari Port and its Significance for the Region

*Ms Sreoshi Sinha*

Currently under construction as a deep-sea port in the Moheshkhali sub district of Cox Bazar district of Bangladesh, Matarbari port is located on the southeastern coast, situated south of Chattogram Port (formerly known as Chittagong Port). The primary purpose of the construction of Matarbari was to provide maritime connectivity for the Matarbari coal plant that had been proposed in 2011 and has been in the process of construction since then. In 2018, the government of Bangladesh made the decision to transform the Matarbari port into a deep-sea port, with the estimated completion date set for January 2027. Both projects have received substantial funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which initially provided an Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan of 4 billion dollars specifically for the coal power plant in 2014.<sup>1</sup> While the Chittagong Port Authority is also providing funding for the port, Japan remains the primary investor.<sup>2</sup>

The Matarbari port project serves as a pivotal junction uniting two influential economies within the Indo-Pacific region, namely those of India and Japan. Recognising the influence they exert over the strategic stability of this area, both economies are keen on assuming more prominent roles in the multilateral dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. For Japan, the Matarbari port project presents an opportunity to deepen its economic ties with Bangladesh. Japan's financial investments and technical expertise demonstrate its commitment to supporting Bangladesh's development agenda and expanding its presence in the region. It also aligns with Japan's broader economic and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. India, however, has not provide any direct financial investment into the port, raising questions about

its actual role in the project. To properly grasp the contributions of India and Japan, however, it is essential to comprehend the port's significance for the various stakeholders involved. While India may not have a direct financial stake in the port, its involvement encompasses critical elements such as policy coordination, strategic consultations, and potential collaboration in relevant sectors. India's engagement should, indeed, be understood within the broader context of Indo-Pacific regional dynamics wherein India's objectives include promoting regional connectivity, fostering economic cooperation, and countering China's growing influence.

### **Matarbari Port: Economic Significance for Bangladesh**

As Bangladesh's first deep-sea port, Matarbari holds immense strategic significance for Bangladesh, as it promises to revolutionise the country's trade connectivity, stimulate robust economic growth, and generate a multitude of employment opportunities. This ambitious project is well aligned with Bangladesh's vision of fortifying its infrastructure and attracting foreign investments, thereby contributing significantly to its overall development goals. Presently, Bangladesh relies heavily on neighbouring deep-sea ports like Colombo, Singapore, and Malaysia, resulting in exorbitant transshipment costs for vessels entering or leaving Bangladesh. This heavy dependence imposes a substantial financial burden on the country. Dhaka hopes that once the port is opened large-draught container ships will be able to dock at the Matarbari deep-sea port, obviating the need for transshipment to access larger regional port and significantly enhancing Bangladesh's maritime trade efficiency and competitiveness. It will also streamline Bangladesh's supply chains and reduce logistic costs, bolstering Bangladesh's trade capabilities, enabling faster and more cost-effective movement of goods, and catalysing economic growth across various sectors.

Matarbari is expected to surpass the capabilities of Bangladesh's current largest port, namely, Chattogram. Dhaka also seeks to develop Matarbari port as a regional transshipment hub. By facilitating the direct docking of larger vessels, Bangladesh's competitiveness in the global market is expected to soar, ensuring smoother import and export operations, and bolstering its overall standing. Conservative estimates

suggest that the port's development alone will contribute to a notable 2-3 per cent increase in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), propelling Bangladesh towards middle-income status.<sup>3</sup> The resulting surge in job creation will not only alleviate unemployment but also uplift the lives of countless Bangladeshis, fostering socioeconomic progress and prosperity. At least where Dhaka is concerned, the Matarbari port represents a monumental leap forward for Bangladesh, hopefully ushering in an era of heightened trade connectivity, accelerated economic advancement, and unwavering self-reliance. It certainly serves as a tangible embodiment of the nation's resolute commitment to modernise its infrastructure, attract investments, and solidify its position as a prominent player in terms of global trade connectivity.

Moreover, the location of the port provides for direct access to the Bay of Bengal, enabling its positioning as a pivotal gateway for trade with neighbouring countries and beyond. This seamless connectivity would not only foster regional integration but also strengthen economic ties and promote cross-border trade, amplifying the positive spillover effects on the nation's economy.

### **Matarbari: Regional Benefits**

The development of this port in Bangladesh not only brings significant economic advantages to the country itself but also holds significant potential for neighbouring landlocked countries such as Nepal and Bhutan. These countries would experience substantial benefits through the reduction of regional transshipment costs for their goods and Bangladesh hopes to be able to do just that. The establishment of the port is expected to create an efficient maritime trade route, eliminating the need for lengthy detours, and thereby reducing transportation expenses. India, too, is expected to benefit from the improved connectivity facilitated by the Matarbari port, which is expected to provide an economic boost to the country's northeastern states. Similar benefits are likely to accrue for the broader sub-region as well. Indeed, the advantages extend beyond mere economic gains, as it is anticipated that the establishment of this port would cultivate stronger regional bonds and foster greater cooperation. It opens avenues for collaborative endeavours among nations, encouraging partnerships across multiple sectors including infrastructure, tourism, cultural integration, and of

course, logistics, and trade. The establishment of a seamless regional trade network lays the foundation for shared prosperity and sustainable development, ultimately benefiting all participating nations.

### **Strategic Shift: Matarbari and the Abandoned Sonadia Port**

In understanding the strategic significance of Matarbari, it is important to consider the adjacent proposed port at Sonadia, which is located less than 50 km away.<sup>4</sup> In 2006, it was Sonadia that had been identified as the most suitable location for a deep-sea port. China expressed a keen interest in developing the port and even presented a comprehensive project proposal for its construction. However, despite the discussions between Bangladesh and China, the anticipated — and in some quarters, the apprehended — agreement never materialised. Subsequently, in 2018, Dhaka decided to construct the deep-sea port at Matarbari with assistance from Japan, marking a shift in the country's direction. This move effectively sealed the fate of the Sonadia port and finally, in 2020, Bangladesh officially announced the scrapping of the Sonadia port project, solidifying the Matarbari port's position as the chosen deep-sea port<sup>5</sup>.

This sequence of events highlights the strategic choices made by Bangladesh in collaboration with its international partners. The decision to proceed with the Matarbari port project and the strong support by Japan, carries substantive significance in terms of regional geopolitics. It represents a strategic alignment with partners who prioritise shared values, economic cooperation, and connectivity, reflecting Bangladesh's broader interests and objectives. By opting for the Matarbari port over Sonadia, Bangladesh has shaped its strategic environment and balanced its partnerships. Its collaboration with Japan generates not only economic benefits but also underscores broader strategic implications, including the counterbalancing of influence within the region. This decision also reflects Bangladesh's strategic positioning in pursuit of its economic and geopolitical objectives. Environmental Concerns and Considerations

While environmental concerns are relevant for both ports, geopolitical considerations, strategic alliances, economic viability, technical feasibility, and

alignment with national priorities all appear to have played significant parts. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while environmental damage was a valid consideration for Sonadia, it is also a relevant factor for the Matarbari port. A report by Greenpeace Japan highlighted that the Matarbari coal power plant, which is closely linked to the Matarbari port, would result in increased air pollution and a subsequent rise in premature deaths in Bangladesh. It is crucial that environmental impacts and potential health risks be thoroughly assessed and addressed in major infrastructure projects. The challenges associated with the Matarbari port and coal power plant underline the importance of adopting sustainable practices, implementing effective pollution control measures, and prioritising the wellbeing of local communities and ecosystems.

### **Sonadia versus Matarbari Port: India's Role and Strategic Concerns**

Several scholars in Bangladesh believe that India exerted significant pressure to influence Dhaka's decision regarding the Sonadia port project. Whether or not this was actually the case, India had valid reasons to exert its influence, considering the potential implications of a Chinese-developed Sonadia port in the Bay of Bengal, which lies deep within India's sphere of influence. Geographical proximity would have been a critical factor, as the distance from Sonadia to India's Eastern Naval Command headquarters in Visakhapatnam is a mere 541 nautical miles (nm). Sonadia is even closer to Kolkata, another vital Indian naval base, the distance between the two being a paltry 173 nm.

Further, a Chinese-controlled port in Sonadia would pose an obvious threat to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which India regards as amongst its most crucial strategic assets within the Indian Ocean. While China's ostensible role in the Sonadia project was as a port developer, with Bangladesh retaining ownership, the example of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka serves as a cautionary tale. It demonstrated how ownership could be lost to Beijing, heightening New Delhi's wariness of Chinese involvement in the region's port-development projects.

India's strategic concerns about China's expanding presence and influence in the Indian Ocean region drive several of New Delhi's efforts to safeguard the country's

security interests. By advocating alternatives such as the Matarbari port with Japanese assistance, India aims to mitigate potential threats and maintain its strategic advantage in the region.

Matarbari port also plays a crucial and positive role in addressing India's strategic concerns over the 'seven sisters' that comprise the country's northeast states. These concerns include the geographical vulnerabilities that attend the Siliguri Corridor (colloquially known as the 'chicken's neck'), which constitutes India's sole land connection with its northeastern states. China's continual military meddling with the trans-Himalayan border has resulted in a number of disputes and the fact that China shares a longer land border with the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh than it does with the rest of India is not lost on anyone. The development of Matarbari is expected to enable New Delhi to redress its historical challenges of developing its northeast region and, as such, holds immense strategic importance for India.

## **Catalysing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific**

Matarbari's significance is evident not only in promoting Bangladesh's own economic development but also in enhancing Dhaka's ability to be a key participant in ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Obviously, this resonates favourably in both Tokyo and New Delhi. As members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) alongside Australia and the United States, Japan and India have common concerns over the increasing Chinese investment and naval presence across the Indo-Pacific.

Japan, in particular, holds a substantial stake in the trade that traverses the Indian Ocean and seeks to prevent the region from mirroring the turbulence that has engulfed the South China Sea. Japan and Bangladesh have recently elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership. Japan serves as Bangladesh's largest development aid partner, and the number of Japanese companies operating in Bangladesh has significantly increased over the past decade.

For India, Bangladesh holds immense importance not only as a historical ally but also as a core component of its 'Neighbourhood First' policy and a crucial partner in its 'Act East' policy. New Delhi's strategic partnership with Bangladesh aligns with

India's broader regional objectives, emphasising its commitment to fostering closer ties and promoting economic integration in the Indo-Pacific.

While New Delhi is visibly uncomfortable with the fact that Bangladesh shares close, albeit financially driven political ties with China, it recognises that India cannot match China's financial aid and investment in supporting Bangladesh's economic development. India has accordingly welcomed the involvement of its close partners, most notably Japan, to compensate for its own limitations. It is important to remember that Japan is the only foreign country that India has allowed to invest in its sensitive northeastern region and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Consequently, Bangladesh finds itself in a position of simultaneously engaging China and India, balancing the need to promote its own economic growth while respecting Indian 'red lines'. Although it is premature to declare a winner in the ongoing wooing of Bangladesh, the construction of the Matarbari port certainly represents a strategic victory for both India and Japan, as well as for the Quad as a collective entity. That said, the complex dynamics at play suggest that the competition is a long game, requiring sustained efforts and engagement from all parties involved.

## **Recommendations**

From the foregoing analysis, the following five recommendations are submitted for the consideration of policymakers:

1. India must continue to strengthen economic cooperation with Bangladesh by leveraging its own strengths in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and connectivity. This could be achieved through increased investment, trade facilitation, and joint ventures between Indian and Bangladeshi businesses. Towards this end and in order to leverage the capacities and capabilities of India's major chambers of industry commerce (such as the CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM, and the PHD, in addition to state-centric chambers such as the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry), it is recommended that a series of not just 'G-to-B' briefing sessions but also brainstorming workshops

and seminars be held in conjunction with the MEA and incorporating maritime-experts such as the NMF.

2. While the Government is already undertaking strenuous efforts in promoting the joint utilisation of the historic trade-enabling network of inland waterways in both India and Bangladesh, there is a clear need to first identify and then address the large variety of logistic challenges, ranging from last mile connectivity issues relevant to multi-modal infrastructure, the greening of the waterways themselves as well as the shipping plying or planned to ply in them, multi-faceted skill-development of Indian and Bangladeshi human resources, and the development and execution of a strong, imaginative, and protracted publicity campaign to sensitise industry to the business opportunities available. Towards these ends, the concerned ministries — particularly the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW), the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) — need to leverage the capabilities of the NMF by commissioning it to undertake, in conjunction with its partner institutions within Bangladesh, not only a process of sustained analyses but also a process of sensitisation.
3. India must proactively promote people-to-people exchanges, engage in vibrant cultural diplomacy, and promote educational collaborations, all of which would foster greater understanding and goodwill between the two nations. This can be achieved through student-exchange programs, scholarships, and cultural events that highlight the shared heritage and historical ties between India and Bangladesh.
4. India must be more proactive in developing, promoting, and executing capacity-building, capability-enhancing, and technical cooperation initiatives with Bangladesh, particularly in areas such as sustainable port-led development, green ports, green shipping, and climate-change adaptation.
5. The NMF must be tasked to continuously and comprehensively monitor and analyse the evolving maritime dynamics of the region, delivering a frequently

updated set of assessments of the geopolitical and geoeconomic impact of Matarbari Port that would enable the development by New Delhi and Dhaka of appropriate and mutually beneficial geostrategies.

15 August 2023

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# The Chinese Concepts of ‘Face’ By Hsien Chin Hu: A Critique

*Ms Krithi Ganesh*

It might, at first glance, appear odd that this critique of Ms Hsien Chin Hu’s article, *The Chinese Concepts of ‘Face’*<sup>1</sup> is being written at all. After all, the article was published in the journal, *“American Anthropologist”* in 1944 — almost eighty years ago! However, the past often holds keys to the future. Indeed, as India and China stare balefully at each other today across a rapidly widening geopolitical chasm, it is becoming increasingly important for India, her higher defence establishment, and her defence forces in general, to understand what makes China ‘act’ in a given manner and, even more importantly, to identify specific stimuli that would make China ‘react’ in a given manner.

The importance of knowing one’s enemy is one of the many precepts of Sun Tzu, who is translated as having said, *“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”*<sup>2</sup> Readers of this critique would find it instructive to recall that well before the outbreak of the US-Japanese armed conflict in the Pacific as part of the Second World War, the US military establishment had run repeated wargames by way of a series of contingency plans — known as “War Plan Orange”<sup>3</sup> — for singlehandedly fighting a war with Japan (that is, without support from the USA’s allies). Thus, contrary to the notion popularised by Hollywood films, the USA was, in fact, quite aware that Japan would be its greatest threat in the Pacific theatre — the ‘surprise’ attack on Pearl Harbour notwithstanding. Of greater relevance to the rationale underpinning this critique, was the recognition in the US military as well

as civilian establishments that there were fundamental cultural differences between the Japanese and the American peoples. Consequently, a selected small number of American anthropologists/ behavioural scientists were tasked by the United States Office of War Information (OWI) with studying Japanese behaviour in order to understand the Japanese psyche — what made the Japanese act in a certain fashion? What American stimulus could be applied that would make the Japanese react in a fashion that could be anticipated by the US? These studies are acknowledged to have been crucial to the American war effort. One of the most famous and “influential” of these studies was Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*,<sup>4</sup> which brilliantly brought out the distinction between ‘shame’ cultures and ‘guilt’ cultures.<sup>5</sup>

The question for contemporary India, in dealing with the contemporary aggressive rise of the People’s Republic of China, is whether Indian scholarship can build upon the conceptual foundation that Benedict had put in place. It is the belief that it not only can — but must — that drives this attempt to lay the first bricks of an Indian intellectual edifice that might well prove decisive to the higher defence organisation of our country. Hence the relevance of this critique.

The fact that prestige finds value and appeal cross-culturally is so evident as to bear little elaboration. As Professor Robert Gilpin of Princeton University has succinctly put it, “*Prestige, rather than power, is the everyday currency of international relations, much as authority is the central ordering feature of domestic society... Whereas power refers to the economic, military, and related capacities and capabilities of a state, prestige refers primarily to the perceptions of other states with respect to a state’s capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power ... Prestige involves the credibility of a state’s power to achieve its objectives... Prestige is enormously important because if your strength (power) is recognised, you can generally achieve your aims without having to use your power.*”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps what matters equally is the degree to which prestige is valued across different cultures and societies. On the one hand, individualistic cultures (guilt-based cultures) — spanning most of the Western world — do not lay any particular emphasis on the group’s perception of the individual, or, for that matter, the individual’s acknowledgement of the approval or disapproval of a societal group, choosing instead to focus on the individual’s uniqueness, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency. On the other hand, collectivistic cultures (shame-based cultures) —

spread over much of the non-Western world — place significant, if not inordinate, priority of the group’s needs above those of the individual and lay especial emphasis upon respectfulness, social harmony, and the perception of others.<sup>7</sup> The geographical distribution of these two cultural variants is depicted in Figure 1.

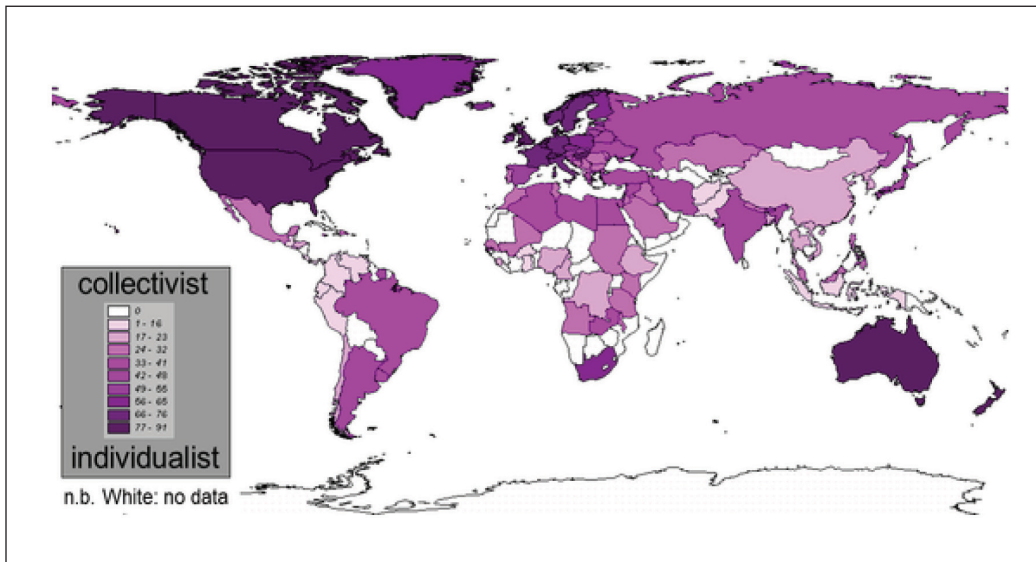


Figure 1  
Source: Geert Hofstede

When the term ‘face’ is brought to the fore, prestige, honour, respect, and renown are some of the key words evoked in the Western reader’s mind. However, these words do not quite capture the true essence of what ‘face’ actually refers to, which is where Hsien Chin Hu’s article (*The Chinese Concepts of ‘face’*) becomes quite so important, despite the passage of almost eight decades. As per Hu, ‘face’ is not a singular entity in Chinese culture. Instead, what the rest of the world attributes as ‘face’, can, in fact, be divided into “two sets of criteria by which prestige is gained and status secured or improved”,<sup>8</sup> namely, *lien* and *mien-tz*. At the surface level, both the words *lien* and *mien-tz* mean ‘face’. However, Hu expounds upon the significant differences that exist between them. Understanding these differences will, therefore, aid readers unfamiliar with Chinese culture and society in better perceiving the people. The schematic for *lien* has been depicted in Figure 2.

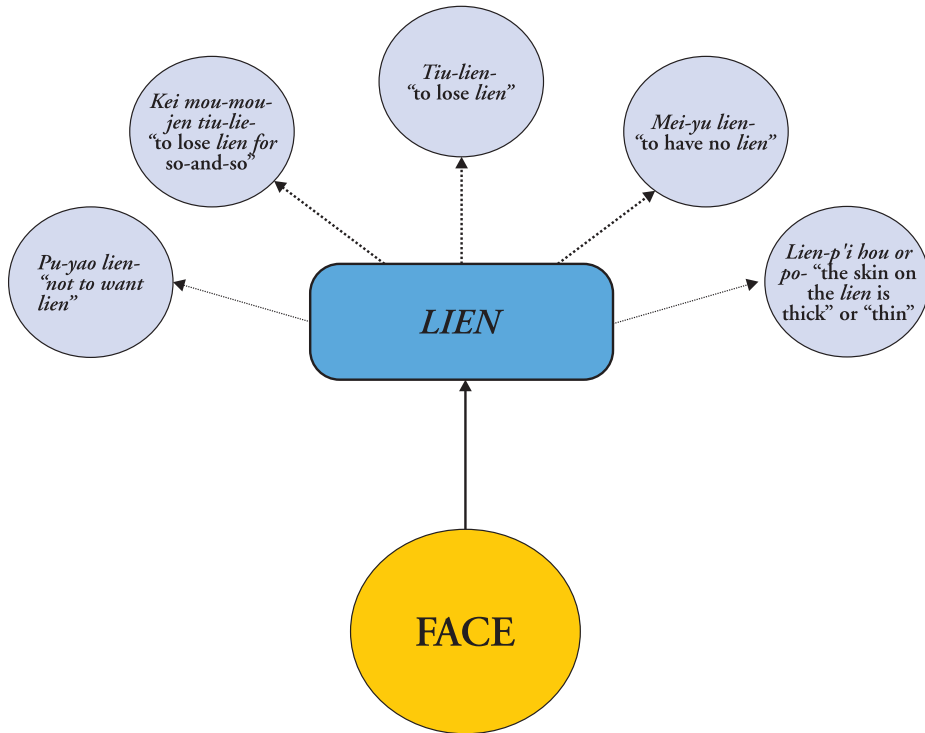


Figure 2

Source: Produced by the author's derivation of Hsien Chin Hu's text

## Concept of 'Lien'

Delving into the concept of *lien*, Hsien Chin Hu describes it as “a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction”,<sup>9</sup> and uses several situational examples to establish its social application. Hu explains that the term *lien* can be used in several ways, with different sets of meanings (as well as degrees of severity), which is why the context and examples that the author has provided are so crucial to absorb. For instance, one may lose *lien* (*tiu-lien*); one may lose *lien* for so-and-so (*kei mou-mou-jên tiu-lien*); one may just not want *lien* in the first place (*pu-yao lien*); one may have no *lien* (*mei-yu lien*)<sup>1</sup>; and one may have thick or thin skin on the *lien* (*lien-p'i hou* or *po*).

1 Or *mei-yu lien*, according to conventional Mandarin

Within much of China, the loss of *lien* is akin to social suicide, especially since public memory is as good as set in stone. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find that people have actually committed suicide due to a (perceived) loss of their *lien*. Besides, taking into consideration that people of higher social standing have more dignity to maintain — meaning that should they experience the loss of their *lien* — the consequences are likely to be far more intense and drastic than they would be for people of lower social standing. It would be prudent to understand how exactly this loss of *lien*, or degradation of character, could occur. People from collectivist (shame-based) cultures are known to downplay their achievements and abilities where domestic society is concerned. Thus, Hu describes the Chinese as often being “*excessively modest about their attainments and status*”<sup>10</sup> in order to minimise adverse societal judgement should their performance fall short of their public projection of their abilities. For instance, if a boastful person fails, he will not have much sympathy from his group, as they consider him to have poor judgement of his own capabilities and character, and the person will thus be considered as “*light and floating*” (*ch'ing-fou*) *in character*”.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, a person earnest in his work and careful in the judgement of his abilities will be considered “*sinking and steady*” (*ch'ên-chuo*) or “*reliably heavy*” (*wên-chung*)”.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Chinese society privileges people who consciously choose to project low expectations but achieve them successfully, over those who project overly ambitious plans and then fail at actualising them. By corollary, once an expectation is made public (the ‘China Dream’ for instance) the need to avoid *lien*-related societal opprobrium resulting from a failure to deliver would be a factor likely to exert an inordinate influence on those responsible to deliver the projected result. In fact, Hu argues that given the fervent commitment towards maintaining *lien*, people “*in subordinate positions can use the fact that their superiors must maintain lien at a high level*”,<sup>13</sup> to their advantage. Hu goes on to state that losing *lien* ‘for so-and-so’ refers to one losing *lien* not only for oneself, but also for his ‘inner circle’ consisting of his family and his close friends, since “[p]ublic disgrace or ridicule of a serious nature is bound to have an effect on the reputation of the family”.<sup>14</sup> Considering the function that *lien* plays in maintaining “*the consciousness of moral boundaries, [...] moral values*”<sup>15</sup> and exerting the “*force of social sanctions*”,<sup>16</sup> it could be a powerful weapon for the commoners in Chinese society to wield if the upper echelons of society are perceived to be going back on

their word. Consequently, the elites within the autocracy are deeply conscious of the need to deliver on their promises. This need is far more intensively felt in China than it might be in, say, India or the ‘west’, because of the overarching pressure that *lien* exerts in China. Could this, then, be a tool to predict the degree of freneticism that might govern Chinese behaviour as the promulgated China Dream deadline of 2049 draws nigh?

On the other hand, some scholars feel that this concept of ‘face’ as typified by *lien* is hardly unique to China. They point out that this dimension of *lien* is quite similar to the concept of honour (“*izzat*”) in some parts of India, wherein individuals are considered to be representatives of their ancestral family clans and since one’s ancestors are greatly revered, the thought that one’s actions might honour one’s ancestors — or bring disgrace upon them — is a powerful force that significantly shapes or modifies societal behaviour. Indeed, this notion of *izzat* is frequently encountered in the Indian defence forces, especially in some units of the Indian Army. For instance, the Indian Army’s Regiment of Artillery’s motto, *Sarvatra Izzat-o-Iqbal* (omnipresence with honour and glory) serves to instil that peculiar “*consciousness of collective responsibility*”<sup>17</sup> that is so deeply ingrained in collectivist societies, wherein anything that threatens the honour and reputation of the in-group will have to be dealt with, whatever be the consequences. In different sections of Indian society, honour killings, punishments handed down by a court martial, ostracization of an individual and his kin by others belonging to the dominant social group, or even by the members of one’s own family or close circle, provide examples of behaviour that is extremely similar to that driven by *lien*. And yet, for all this similarity, *lien* as a national trait in China is, nevertheless, different. This is because while such notions do apply in India, they are limited to relatively restricted subsets of Indian society and certainly do not apply to India as a whole or to its several peoples (elites or otherwise) as they do in respect of China.

As an example of the societal ramifications of individual behaviour — where the individual concerned is from a shame-based society such as China — Hu states that “[m]any Chinese feel particularly embarrassed when meeting Americans in this country: they fear that by unwittingly breaking conventions they may “lose the face of their country”.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, individual Chinese behaviour is strongly shaped by the anticipation of shaming the larger society — in this case, that of China as a whole.

Hu thereafter offers some perspectives of the two remaining — and far more damning variants — of *lien*, namely, that of ‘not wanting *lien*’, and that of ‘having no *lien*’.<sup>19</sup> Both these are strong aberrations and refer to an individual who has no concern about what the rest of his societal group thinks of his own *lien* or character, and does not care about the collective *lien* of the society itself. It seems at least theoretically possible that people in the highest social strata could be or could become indifferent to *lien*, leading a reader to conclude that Chinese leaders might then be immune from the societal pressure that might otherwise have held them accountable and responsible for any shortfalls in behaviour or conduct. It seems at least theoretically possible that people in the higher social strata could be or become indifferent to *lien*, leading a reader to conclude that such leaders could then be immune from societal pressure that might otherwise have held them accountable and responsible for any misdeeds and/or malpractices. However, in contemporary Chinese society, the leadership has almost invariably emerged from the peasantry, either by way of birth or by way of punishment (as witnessed in the Cultural Revolution where many of China’s current leaders, including Xi Jinping, were forced to undergo re-education by living and working with the masses). As a result, even while the degree of *lien* might well be eroded by personal ambition and greed for power (causing the individual to develop ‘thick skin’ on his or her *lien*), these elites are, nevertheless, already deeply imbued with the concept of *lien* and are unable (and mostly unwilling) to overcome their societal conditioning.

As is obvious from the choice of the adjective itself, a person with ‘thin’ skin on his *lien* would be highly sensitive to the perceptions of others, while a person with ‘thick’ skin on his *lien* might be less so. As per Hu, an individual seeking a career in politics ought, in fact, to have a thick skin on his *lien* “*in order to carry out many acts against his conscience*”,<sup>20</sup> implying that people successfully carrying out their duties in positions of power (for instance, members of the Communist Party of China [CPC]) might be less affected by *lien*. However, it is difficult to conclude from this that *lien* can be abandoned altogether. It is also possible for a given individual to simultaneously have ‘thick’ skin on his or her *lien* when interacting with one segment of society and ‘thin’ skin when interacting with another. For instance, the military might well demonstrate thicker skin on its *lien* when interacting with society at

large, but far thinner skin on its *lien* when interacting with other segments of the military, especially when this interaction involves a foreign military. Importantly, Hu is quite unequivocal in asserting that society favours “*the person with a thin skin, for he conforms more readily to social standards*”.<sup>21</sup> In short, ‘face’ counts for much.

## Nuance of Mien-Tz

Hsien Chin Hu then focusses on the numerous ‘concrete/literal’ and ‘figurative/psychological’ meanings of *mien-tz*. The literal meanings include the “*surface of an object*”,<sup>22</sup> its direction and aspect, as also “*face in the physiological sense*”.<sup>23</sup> However, taken figuratively (in the psychological sense), *mien-tz* has multiple connotations. For instance, one connotation is “to consider *mien-tz*” or *ku mien-tz*, wherein one ought to actively take one’s *mien-tz* into account in order to further one’s prestige. Hu offers the example where “*the head of a family will give a big feast for his birthday, arranging theatricals to last for several days for all the members of the community*”,<sup>24</sup> in order to increase his affability within his group and society. Another connotation is “to add to one’s *mien-tz*”, or *tsêng chia mien-tz*, which refers to one patronising an institution of public welfare, attaching one’s name to important documents, associating with noble endeavours — all of which bring one “*into the public limelight*”<sup>25</sup> and ensure “*favorable comment*”.<sup>26</sup> In this case too, the overt engagement in philanthropic activities serve to boost one’s *mien-tz*. The risk, of course, is that these methods prescribing a pompous display of extravaganza, as well as public endorsements of noble causes could earn the ire of other members of society. This leads to another connotation — “to want *mien-tz*” or *yao mien-tz*, which refers to the attempt made at acquiring *mien-tz* “*by ostentation or subterfuge*”.<sup>27</sup> Hsien Chin Hu offers an example by way of a tale highlighting the Manchus’ “*exaggerated desire*”<sup>28</sup> for *mien-tz*, wherein the people in question are thereafter mocked for this by the very society that they wished to impress. Hu also suggests that it can, at times, be disadvantageous for an individual or for society to give undue consideration to *mien-tz*, explaining that “[t]his is why throughout Chinese literature we find many an individual extolled for not considering anyone’s *mien-tz* when it interfered with the carrying out of a duty”.<sup>29</sup>

Further, the expression “to leave *mien-tz*”, or *liu mien-tz*, refers to allowing one some grace when one has committed a mistake by not being exposed or reprimanded in public. According to Hu, this was especially evident in the cases of powerful people being subject to trial and examination in secret when they had committed some crimes, instead of the “conventional” recourse of ‘naming and shaming’ them. This is probably what is meant by “preventing the loss of face”. As such, this could be, in and of itself, a powerful tool by which an external group could shape collective Chinese behaviour. Here, *liu mien-tz* offers more nuanced exploitation than does *lien*, as “*lien is conceived of as being maintained or lost as a whole*”,<sup>30</sup> with no provision of redressal or reform whatsoever.

## Conclusion

Hsien Chin Hu presents an elaborate and detailed article on the Chinese conceptions of ‘face’, arguing that both *lien* and *mien-tz* have their own meanings and ought not, therefore, to be used interchangeably. In interpreting Hu, much weight needs to be assigned to the socio-cultural backdrop against which the text was penned. 1944 was a year prior to the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War and predates the advent of the Communist Party of China. Chinese society has been through several major upheavals through the tumultuous years following China’s emergence as a republic, including Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, as also as the more recent Tiananmen Square protests. All these have undoubtedly impacted if not actively shaped the Chinese psyche, and the behaviour of its elites under different stimuli. Hence, while the commentary of Hu is, for the most part, convincing, there are several statements that have demanded greater scrutiny. As per Hu, *lien* is of greater importance and value than *mien-tz*, and so, the maintenance of the former is to be prioritised over the latter. Consequently, according to the author’s perspective of Chinese society, the latter seems to promote risk-aversion, favouring safety and the maintenance of a comfort zone. Perhaps in an effort to garner greater relevance for her own work, Hu attempts to link examples from international politics (specifically Western politics) to several facets of *lien* and *mien-tz*. However, it is far from clear whether Western leaders have paid as much heed to ‘face’ as a tool to

shape behaviour, especially the behaviour of military elites. Additional aspects that need further analysis include the role of age and gender in determining the manner in which *lien* or *mien-tz* is observed in society. Hu suggests that young children are treated as adults in order to develop their self-esteem, and by extension, their sense of responsibility — else, in the absence of responsibility for their actions, the *lien* of children and adolescents would not be given much importance. Moreover, Hu briefly hints that older people tend to have “*greater freedom from conventions*”<sup>31</sup> as society has great confidence in their integrity, which prompts the question of whether an individual can, over time, accumulate *lien*, as seems to be the case with *mien-tz*. Additional questions are the extent to which gender affects *lien* and/or *mien-tz*, given that another expression for ‘losing *lien*’ is *tiu-jên*, or ‘to lose [one’s] man’. Do women have a greater responsibility or stake in preserving ‘face’, or should the expression be construed to imply that men are scrutinised by society to a far greater extent than are women? Questions such as these demand further investigation and will be taken up as this study into ‘face’ as a means to shape Chinese behaviour is progressed.

17 August 2023

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Hsien Chin Hu, “The Chinese Concepts of ‘face’.” *American Anthropologist* 46, No 1 (1944), 45-64 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/662926>.
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See also: Yuen Foong Khong, "Power as Prestige in World Politics", in *International Affairs*, University of Chicago, 23 May 2020, <https://www.coursehero.com/file/62426586/International-Affairs-Power-as-Prestigepdf/>

- 7 Geert Hofstede, "The 6 Dimensions Model of National Culture by Geert Hofstede," Geert Hofstede, n.d., <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>
- 8 Hsien Chin Hu, "The Chinese concepts of 'face'." *American anthropologist* 46, No. 1 (1944): 45-64. Pg 45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/662926>.
- 9 Hu, "The Chinese concepts of 'face'." 45.
- 10 Hu, "The Chinese concepts of 'face'." 48.
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- 12 Hu, *ibid*, 49.
- 13 Hu, *ibid*, 48.
- 14 Hu, *ibid*, 50.
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- 25 Hu, *ibid*, 56.
- 26 Hu, *ibid*, 56.
- 27 Hu, *ibid*, 58.
- 28 Hu, "ibid, 58.
- 29 Hu, *ibid*, 56.
- 30 Hu, *ibid*, 61.
- 31 Hu, *ibid*, 52.

## **About the Author**

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