



## Editorial

As the world gradually began to evolve engagement models that enabled it to cope with the protracted Covid-19 pandemic, the mode of interaction metamorphosed from the earlier predominance of physical meetings to one characterised by a multiplicity of online exchanges, peppered by occasional “hybrid” ones. As so often in the past, human beings tend to eventually learn how to cope with radically altered patterns and perhaps the age of online interactions is upon us for good. It is daunting but nevertheless exciting to think that “virtual” discussions, meetings, seminars, workshops, symposia, and even conferences, could well be the norm even once the pandemic comes to an end.

To return, however, to the physical world, even while nations struggled with the myriad challenges thrown up by Covid-19, the maritime domain witnessed two oddly contradictory trends. On the one hand, there was a decrease in mercantile shipping as trade volumes dipped sharply across the globe. Stranded mariners became a major problem that the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were forced to address with increasing urgency, as crewmembers aboard ships could not be relieved thanks to restrictions imposed on air travel by several countries. On the other hand, there was an increase in humanitarian missions by navies to both support the ongoing battle against Covid-19, as well as in furtherance of national interests. The Indian Navy, for example, was deployed on a near-continuous basis, to repatriate stranded Indian citizens, provide food, water and medicines to afflicted countries of the Indian Ocean Region, and bring back much-needed oxygen equipment in bulk to assist the country’s population, which was being ravaged by the second Covid wave. And amidst these several extensive and complex humanitarian missions and tasks, there remained the need for the navy to maintain a heightened state of presence and combat preparedness to deter Chinese adventurism and aggression. It, therefore, comes as no surprise to find that this Summer 2021 Issue of *Maritime Affairs* contains a wide range of articles that underline the importance being placed by nations on matters maritime.

In “Mahanian’ Dreams and Geopolitical Realities: Can India and China Co-exist Peacefully in the Indian Ocean?”, Jyotishman Bhagwati argues that India and China, in their quest for maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean, are adopting the seminal ideas and strategies propounded by the naval strategist and historian, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. The article analyses the reasons behind what the author believes to be India’s and China’s adoption of the Mahanian naval doctrine and the increasing maritime outreach of both nations towards the Indian Ocean region. The article also delves into the implications of naval strategies adopted by the two states and highlights weaknesses in these strategies. It concludes by arguing that although the two States are unlikely to engage in a naval conflict with each other in the foreseeable future, an occasional face-off in the maritime domain, as witnessed recently on the land border in Ladakh, cannot be ruled out.

Captain (Dr) Nitin Agarwala’s article, “India’s Evolving Engagements in the Arctic”, considers how the Arctic has attracted world attention in recent years, as global warming began melting sea ice at a much faster rate than had been recorded in 1979, the year when record-keeping began for the region. This aspect is also linked with greater accessibility to the Arctic

Ocean, which is creating geopolitical competition for access to resources and control of maritime areas. So far, the world media has focused primarily on the efforts of China in the Arctic, largely due to the economic heft of Beijing, resulting in numerous academic papers. In comparison, the efforts of India in the Arctic have been more sparsely researched and discussed. Available literature has provided conflicting and sometimes debatable opinions. It is against this background that the article discusses India's past and present engagement in the Arctic and looks at possible future trends while suggesting recommendations for India's evolving engagement in this region.

In "India's East Asian Outreach", Ryan Mitra considers the possibilities of New Delhi's enhanced engagement with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in the coming years. India's evolution as a maritime power has reached a point from where the country has begun looking far beyond its proximate littorals (perhaps akin to what the erstwhile Soviets used to refer to as their "near abroad") in pursuit of maritime security cooperation and strategic presence. The author finds that India's ambitions in East Asia are both, evident and pragmatic. It has a strong strategic relation with Japan on a bilateral level and within multilateral frameworks as well. Mitra has taken into consideration multilateral arrangements and larger international relations with countries such as China to explore the limitations of India-Japanese relations and provides some interesting recommendations on how to overcome these. Further, the article explores the possibility of a larger multilateral security regime with the Republic of Korea and Taiwan, considering mutual interests and the winds of multilateralism that have swept Asia in the twenty-first century. Tellingly, it observes that India's role in East Asia does not have to be defined by or structured based on the actions of a third party.

Apila Sangtam's article "Vietnam's Strategic Engagement in the South China Sea" looks at the manner in which rising tensions between China and Vietnam with regard to the South China Sea have changed Hanoi's national defence policy. No longer benign or mute, Vietnam is taking an assertive stance and vocalising its opposition to the historical claims and actions of Beijing. Hanoi, she opines, is also becoming much more open to the American presence in the South China Sea. The article examines the impact of geostrategic competition in the South China Sea on the United States-Vietnam and India-Vietnam bilateral relations.

The next article – "Applicability of UNCLOS for Landlocked States: The Case of Chabahar Port and Afghanistan" – by Sundeep Kumar S, dwells upon the India-Iran-Afghanistan tri-lateral trade relationship and the legal and geopolitical implications attendant thereto. As a landlocked country, Afghanistan has the right of access to the sea, at par with coastal nations, as stipulated in several articles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This access is via transit States. The author avers that Pakistan, as a transit state for Afghanistan, has violated several provisions of international treaties duly ratified by it, by blocking transit routes for Afghanistan trade with India and by denying access to the Port of Karachi. He finds that India's Chabahar Port project in Iran acts as an alternative for Afghanistan to trade and aims to reduce the latter's vulnerability by reducing Kabul's dependence upon Pakistan. The article highlights Chabahar as an example of multilateral cooperation in fulfilling commitments made to international regimes, such as the UNCLOS, while bringing out the geopolitical challenges that India faces to complete the Chabahar project. The article also emphasises India's role in the region, as it is responsible for implementing the Chabahar Port project.

In "Balancing China: Indo-US Relations and Convergence of their Interests in the Indo-Pacific", J. Susanna Lobo analyses how the Indo-Pacific has emerged as an important region wherein the rules-based order, and hence the existing security architecture, is being challenged. She observes that over the last few years, India and China have drawn-up their policies by employing competitive strategies that cement as well as strengthen their respective

power positions in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in Indian Ocean Region and the South China Sea. China's "String of Pearls" strategy and the "Belt and Road Initiative" are seen by her as undermining India's influence in the Indian Ocean Region, where the changing geo-economic and geostrategic imperatives pose challenges to India's national interests. This mounts pressure on New Delhi to respond by pursuing counter-strategies to secure its own interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The article further explains how India and the United States' interests find convergence against an assertive China in the Indo-Pacific and how their security, especially maritime cooperative mechanisms, are balancing China by maintaining a favourable status quo in the region.

In "An Analysis of the French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific", Amruta Karambelkar undertakes an in-depth analysis of French ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. France has territories, population, and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific, all of which necessitate a coherent national security policy towards this region. She points out that even before the promulgation of its Indo-Pacific strategy, France has been involved in maritime Asia, primarily through defence sales, and via platforms such as IORA, IONS, WPNS, and ASEAN. The article examines the drivers of the French Indo-Pacific strategy and goes on to explore the fundamentals that have led to French attention to this region. A careful study of major French policy articles lays bare the strategic thinking in Paris. It briefly presents the bilateral and multilateral engagements of France. While traditional and non-traditional security issues and normative drive are apparent in the public discourse, the author finds it apparent that the major drivers are actually the military-industrial complex of France and the desire of Paris to be able to influence the regional order in a manner favourable to this military-industrial nexus.

Prakash Panneerselvam's commentary, "Maritime Narcotics Trafficking in the Western Indian Ocean: Threat to Regional Maritime Security", looks at an important security challenge in the Indian Ocean maritime space. The maritime trafficking of narcotics in the Indian Ocean has become an increasingly central security concern for India as well as for other countries in the region, with the Afghanistan-Pakistan corridor being the primary conduit facilitating illegal drug trade, especially via the sea route. However, the author finds that there is a gap in understanding the extent and manner of the involvement of criminal syndicates in the maritime trafficking of narcotics in the region. This commentary accordingly analyses the modus operandi of criminal syndicates in Pakistan that enable them to evade detection by law-enforcement agencies. It also examines the role of the US-led Combined Maritime Force (CMF) and regional navies operating independently, in detecting and tracking maritime trafficking of narcotics in the Western Indian Ocean.

The next commentary by Deekhit Bhattacharya and Ashley Eadon – "Oceans of Churn: Australia's 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the Indo-Pacific" – looks at the strategic update of 2020 to Australia's 2016 Defence White Paper. The update represents a portentous shift in Australia's understanding and response to its strategic environment. Canberra's push to actively seek robust anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities, the authors feel, must be seen in the light of China's increasingly belligerent stance, its use of grey-zone activities, and, an increasingly jittery the United States. In addition, Australia intends to focus on its neighbourhood while shedding its anxieties regarding the Quad. The commentary also analyses Chinese behaviour on the world stage and argues for greater synergy in defence coordination between the Quad partners.

Finally, this particular issue features two book reviews: Jay Maniyar reviews *The Politics of South China Sea Disputes*, authored by Dr Nehginpao Kipgen and published by Routledge; and Narendra Yadav reviews *The Royal Indian Navy: Trajectories, Transformations and the Transfer of Power* by Kalesh Mohanan, also published by Routledge.

Successive issues of *Maritime Affairs* continue to provide a platform for the articulation of predominantly Asian (and especially Indian) perspectives and analyses of developments in the maritime domain. Given that this is arguably the busiest, most dynamic, and fastest growing of the world's maritime spaces, it is encouraging to see the growing competition amongst Indian maritime analysts to supplement, complement, and, where deemed necessary, even contradict opinions and analyses emanating from other parts of our increasingly interconnected planet. More power to their pens!

Pradeep Chauhan

 [directorgeneral.nmfindia@gmail.com](mailto:directorgeneral.nmfindia@gmail.com)