

Editorial: *Maritime Affairs* Summer 2017 Edition

The past few months have witnessed tumultuous events across the globe, the effects of which have been felt rather acutely in Asia. Uncertainty looms large as a chain of seemingly unrelated occurrences have created significant turmoil in the waters of what is now widely accepted as the Indo-Pacific region. While certain factors such as economic growth, maritime trade, commerce and indeed competition among major players continue to define the regional landscape, the assumption of office by Donald Trump as the President of the United States, and North Korea's reinvigorated brinkmanship, have raised significant questions on the future security environment in the Indo-Pacific. While the US' "rebalance" to Asia is now punctuated by a prominent question mark, what is also now an imponderable is the extent to which the sole superpower will continue to remain engaged with its allies in the Asia-Pacific.

This edition of *Maritime Affairs* focuses on perspectives from around the Indo-Pacific region which analyse various political, economic and geo-strategic factors that have come to play in the regional maritime security architecture. It also looks at the strategic articulations of major powers, and their impact as well as effectiveness in mitigating contemporary challenges and uncertainties in the region. As can be anticipated, Chinese activities and articulations find prominence in this discourse.

Shah evaluates China's first ever White Paper on Asia-Pacific security cooperation, released in January 2017. While analysing the semantic nuances of the White Paper, the author also draws attention to the frequent incongruence between what China says and what it eventually does.

Khurana assesses India's maritime security strategy promulgated by the Indian Navy in October 2015 and peers beyond the text of the document. The article provides a deeper understanding of four key underpinnings of India's strategy, i.e. historical and societal factors, maritime geography, political geography/ jurisdiction and the China factor.

Gopal's paper examines the role of US and its allies, namely Japan and Australia, in the maritime security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. The author also deliberates on India's engagement with each of these powers, and the prospects for the continued inclination of these countries to uphold the established maritime order.

There is an increasing salience of maritime security cooperation between Japan, India and Sri Lanka, especially in the context of the Trump presidency, and the associated uncertainties. Nagao underscores the importance of the trilateral mechanism, especially in balancing the skewed access available to China in the Indian Ocean Region, by virtue of its deep pockets.

Continuing the Sri Lanka-centric narrative, Senaratne discusses the island nation's geographical, commercial and strategic elements and examines their influence on US foreign policy for the region in general, and for Sri Lanka in particular. It is argued that there is merit in Sri Lanka leveraging its natural assets, for a favourable policy that allows the small island nation to realise its economic and social goals.

Conrad's paper builds upon the animated debate on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and analyses the security implications of Chinese access to the Pakistani port of Gwadar, for India. However, the shifting maritime balance due to increasing Chinese influence in India's backyard is a cause for concern for the South-Asian power.

In the larger Indo-Pacific, Vinh discusses the scope and potential for cooperation between India and Vietnam in the maritime domain. Drawing on historical engagement, the paper makes a compelling case for increasing Indian engagement in the West Pacific for the mutual benefit of India, and other South East Asian countries.

The contours of security cooperation between India and the US, and its implications for the Indian Ocean Region, are a continuing theme. Mishra argues that closer cooperation with the US affords to India the possibility of assuming a firmer posture against Chinese activities that may be somewhat belligerent.

Srivastava examines the prospects for India–Russia relations in the Indian Ocean Region and highlights the fact that Russia feels it expedient to remain engaged in the Indian Ocean, as a means of furthering its resurgence. There is, however, a sense of caution that India cannot afford to lie low, especially in face of the emerging Russia–China–Pakistan triad.

Tsering’s paper dwells on the advancements in Chinese maritime technologies, specifically those related to deep sea exploration. While expounding on the technological aspects, the paper also highlights possible military applications of such technologies, and the consequent security implications for the region.

Two books are reviewed in this edition of *Maritime Affairs*. Patrick reviews the book titled *The Ocean of Churn – How the Indian Ocean Shaped Human History*, by Sanjeev Sanyal, and Rudra reviews *China’s Strategic Interests in the South China Sea: Power and Resources* by Sigfrido Burgos Cáceres.

I am hopeful that this diverse collection of academic papers will contribute to our collective understanding of the regional maritime domain, and provoke debate and discussion on the future trajectory of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. I look forward to constructive feedback on the contents of this edition of the journal.

The past 6 months have been extremely busy for the National Maritime Foundation (NMF). We conducted our Annual Maritime Power Conference in February 2017, on the topic “The Blue Economy: Concept, Constituents and Development”. It is always challenging to deliberate simultaneously on developmental issues and security considerations, but it is obvious that the future of maritime development and security will rely heavily on synergy between these two facets.

We also conducted our annual bilateral dialogue with the Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore, in March 2017, which was, as always, an enriching and educative interaction. Looking ahead, we will be partnering with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for a conference in Delhi on “Human Safety and Security at Sea”, in the first week of June 2017. Later in the same month, a delegation from the NMF will head to the US, for the annual dialogue with the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), which assumes great significance in the backdrop of increasing imperatives for closer US–India naval cooperation.

These are indeed exciting times in the regional maritime environment. I encourage our patrons, readers, researchers and members to join us on this journey, as we try and unravel the multiple threads that run through this region. We look forward to your participation and contributions to our efforts.

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