



Editorial for Summer Edition 2020 of Maritime Affairs

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These are trying times for world in general and India in particular. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the global economy and India's economic growth has hit a formidable speed-bump, if nothing worse. India, in common with several other countries afflicted by the pandemic, is struggling to adopt a process of retrodiction — using past influenza-based pandemics (especially the “Spanish Flu” pandemic of 1918-20 that accounted for some 500 million deaths in a global population of just 1.8 billion) — to develop reliable predictions of when we might see a ‘post-Covid’ world emerge, and how different that world might be from the one that we have built our economic models upon. Moreover, the jury is still out on whether or not the Covid-19 pandemic is a natural occurrence or a Chinese-engineered one, and whether it was, in fact, a case of covert biological-warfare or simply a careless but costly mistake on the part of the Chinese. China's assertiveness has been the subject of a whole host of discussions and analyses over the past few years. Several Indian strategic analysts, along with a growing number of China-watchers from abroad, have been cautioning that there is a strong possibility of this Chinese assertiveness transforming into aggressiveness. These dire warnings would appear to have been justified, given that the recent offensive actions taken by China in the trans-Himalayan border with India have been met by a robust military response from New Delhi. While the possibility of a major escalation can certainly not be dismissed out of hand, at the very least there is a clear nosedive in bilateral relations between the two emerging major powers.

In the aftermath of both the aforementioned events, there is increasing evidence of a coalescing of States that believe in an international order that is underpinned by a set of consensually-derived rules, especially in the global maritime common. India, Japan, Australia, the USA, Vietnam and several other member-States of ASEAN, are all demonstrating solidarity at the politico-military level and giving tangible ‘naval’ form to their refusal to countenance a regional or global international order whose rules and norms are devised solely by Beijing. The political establishments of many of these countries echo — at least privately — the recent comment of the US Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, that China cannot be allowed to treat the South China Sea as its maritime empire.

There is also evidence of a growing pushback against China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from several countries. Some of the names of countries that are rejecting all or some of Beijing's enticements and inducements have surprised analysts — especially those in China. Importantly, this pushback appears to be driven not merely by the debt-trap risks involved, but is more generally directed against what are now seen as inherently exploitative and mercantilist features of the BRI. Concerns over China's intentions in the Arctic High North are at least as large as the worries over what the opening of the Northern Sea Route might portend for maritime trade. The probability of further degradation of the underwater acoustic habitat as a result of increased merchant ship traffic and its deleterious impact upon biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) is so worrisome as to transcend the very ‘iffy’ economic-benefits that might accrue.

These issues, and some allied ones as well, draw one's attention to the one silver-lining that glimmers at the edges of the dark geopolitical clouds that stretch across much of the maritime horizon. This is the growing momentum that is discernible in the halting, hesitant, yet unmistakable, transition from a 'Brown' economic model to a 'Blue Economy', at national, regional, and global levels. The truly encouraging feature of this transition is that more and more countries are recognising that the Blue Economy reflects an economic model that is far more inclusive in its scope and content than merely that of an 'Ocean Economy'.

It is against this backdrop, composed of an intricate mixture of darkness and the promise of light, that the 'Summer 2020' edition of *"Maritime Affairs"* — the flagship journal of India's "National Maritime Foundation" — is being published.

China and Japan are the twin cynosures of the contributing scholars within this edition. For instance, Commodore Somen Banerjee's thoughtful addressal of the question, "*Will the Security Architecture of the Western Pacific Change Post-Covid 19?*" highlights that instability and disorder are most palpable in the maritime expanse of the western Pacific, with China having intensified its assertiveness in the South China Sea in 2020. Enhanced US posture in the region seems to have little effect on Chinese revanchism as the Commodore assesses the spurt of developments in the South China Sea during the COVID-19 pandemic. He establishes a conceptual framework for analysing the change in the regional order and evaluates the regional security architecture of the western Pacific, as also the efficacy of the putative order.

The impact this has on Japan is central to Ulupi Borah's analytical exploration as she undertakes a slightly more granular analysis of the Sino-Japanese dyad in her article entitled, "*The South China Sea Dispute: Will it Impact Japan's Security Policy?*". Borah emphasises Japan's heavy dependence upon the security of international shipping lanes within the South China Sea for its external trade, including critical energy-imports from the Persian Gulf, and highlights the adverse impact that any serious confrontation within the contested waters of South China Sea will have upon Japan's trade and economy. The paper shows that Chinese assertions have caused Japan to steadily revise its own security policies in a fundamental way.

In this edition of *Maritime Affairs*, analytical comment on China's assertiveness is not limited to the South China Sea alone, or even to the western Pacific. Bipandeep Sharma ranges much farther afield in his article entitled "*China's Emerging Arctic Engagements: Should India Reconsider its Approach Towards the Polar North?*". He points out that China is quite firmly in the geopolitical race to dominate emerging economic and strategic opportunities of the Arctic. China's effort to become a Polar 'Great Power' has generated new Asian perspectives of the region. The paper reflects upon what the contours of India's own approach towards the Arctic ought to be and this rumination forms a useful backdrop against which to broaden and deepen ongoing policy-discussions within India.

The Japan-India dyad, too, receives focussed attention, as exemplified by the thoughtful and thought-provoking piece by the well-known scholar and foreign-policy analyst, Hideshi Tokuchi, entitled "*Cooperating with 'Maritime India' in the Indo-Pacific Context - A Japanese View*". Drawing upon his vast experience, both in and out of government service, he emphasises the need for Japan and India, as maritime democracies, to work together for the maintenance and enhancement of a rules-based liberal international order at sea. He exhorts security experts of both countries to intensify and deepen the scope of their maritime security-cooperation dialogue, so as to develop of clearer 'division-of-labour' between Japan and India in terms of their individual and collective contribution towards maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. He also stresses the need for synergy between the engagement-mechanisms adopted by Tracks '1', '1.5' and '2', in the face of the large variety of challenges that confront the region, especially the assertive rise of China as a maritime power of great consequence.

Jay Maniar in his article titled “Japan in the Indian Ocean: An Integral and Holistic Involvement in South Asia” assesses the emerging maritime interests of Japan in the Indian Ocean and aspects of maritime security, maritime cooperation, infrastructure investments, food security, etc. and attempts to devise an approach for Japan in the twenty-first century security scenarios of the world’s third largest ocean.

Mrittika Guha Sarkar’s article, entitled “*China and Quad 2.0: Between Response and Regional Construct*”, encapsulates the Chinese reactions to this upgraded grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the USA. This is an oft-overlooked aspect and, as such, the piece has much that is of value. Whether and how the Chinese perceive that the Quad might impact the ‘Chinese Dream’, is a subject that merits more attention that has currently been spent on it. The paper argues that Beijing’s response to the Quad and the underlying apprehensions of the former in respect of the latter, is structurally linked to China’s rise vis-à-vis that of India, not limited to military capacities and capabilities alone.

Will Chinese assertiveness deteriorate into aggression involving India? The trans-Himalayan border is deeply enmeshed in what might well be the preliminary shudders of just such a slide into conflict. Consequently, Surinder Mohan’s article, “*Shaping the Regional and Maritime Battlefield? The Sino-Indian Strategic Competition in South Asia and Adjoining Waters*” offers a timely perspective on the maritime dimension in the Sino-Indian confrontation. He argues that China is seeking to establish a balance of power favourable to its interests in South Asia and the adjoining waters to curtail India’s rise. He analyses the dynamics of power play between India and China. In the process, he posits that in order to neutralise Beijing’s assertiveness, New Delhi has evolved an Asia policy clearly aimed at enhancing its ties with key Indo-Pacific States — the USA, Japan, Australia, and the Southeast Asian bloc — so as to develop countervailing capability against China and simultaneously manage its own rise as a major Indo-Pacific power.

Moving away from confrontational and conflictual issues to potentially cooperative and collaborative ones we have Dinoj Kumar Upadhyay’s article, entitled “*Blue Economy: Emerging Global Trends and India’s Multilateral Cooperation*”. The author brings out that the ‘Blue Economy’ has become a crucial element of the broader ecosystem of sustainable and inclusive development of the region as a whole. Technological innovation, new avenues for investment, and a growing impetus to multilateral cooperation all hold great potential whose realisation will benefit India as well as the region. With her excellent geographical position and blessed with a vast exclusive economic zone (EEZ), India is excellently placed to lead a national and regional transition to a ‘blue economy’, for long-term, sustainable future-development.

This edition also has a review, by Nabam Tunia, of a recently (2020) published book by the celebrated economist and coordinator of the ASEAN-India Centre, Dr Prabir De. The book, entitled, “*Act East to Act Indo Pacific: India’s Expanding Neighbourhood*” is a must-read for all those following the coming of age of maritime India.

“*Maritime Affairs*” has become an important voice in the Indo-Pacific regional maritime space and it is hoped that the articles in this edition will inspire future authorship of even greater analytical value, with each successive edition providing educative and absorbing content to the NMF’s large and growing readership and following.

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