

Maritime Affairs: Winter Edition 2017

Geographers distinguish between a “formal” region – one that possesses distinctive homogeneous characteristics – and a “functional” region – one that is defined by the flow of ideas, goods and people. In this context, the “Indo-Pacific” region (a term that has rapidly transited from biogeography to the geostrategic realm) is a “functional” region, and while it is true that a functional region is an artificial construct, it nevertheless reflects a reality that is receiving ever greater traction. Indeed, the term “Indo-Pacific” is now firmly anchored in the strategic lexicon around the world, having been repeatedly articulated by President Donald Trump during his recent five-nation tour of Asia, between November 5 and 12, 2017. Wider acceptance of this term, however, has also perpetrated multiple interpretations. Some for instance, quite incorrectly, view it as the inclusion of India into the Asia-Pacific construct. The term is actually a contraction of the “Indian Ocean” and the “Pacific Ocean”. From a maritime perspective, the confluence of the Indian and Pacific oceans has long been recognised as a natural consequence of a more integrated world. Viewing large geographic spaces as single strategic entities, however, has its own peculiar challenges. With greater diversity – of national interests, alignments and threats – there are inherent suspicions when states attempt to articulate a uniform strategy across a large space. This is certainly true of the Indo-Pacific, the waters of which are, figuratively speaking, somewhat murky and turbulent, not least because of the geopolitical complexity of its geographical conformation. Indeed, in the tapestry being woven within the Indo-Pacific oceanic expanse, the imprint of the United States of America is certainly to be seen on every warp yarn. However, it is the weft yarns that make the fabric, and as such, it is China and India whose complex interrelationships with each other and with the littorals of East and South-east Asia provide the texture and hues of this intricate and multifarious tapestry.

As the world tries to make sense of it all, the current issue of *Maritime Affairs* attempts to unravel some of this complexity, with perspectives on various issues linked to the maritime domain. It looks at the strategies that states are evolving, in order to deal with the increased geopolitical jostling, and to derive maximum benefits from increased physical, social and economic integration across the region. This present edition also seeks to analyse contemporary developments and initiatives of major regional actors, which are likely to have many second-order impacts.

Professor Vivek Mishra writes about India’s evolving articulation of security that creates a seamless expanse of national interests – from continental homeland to the vast maritime expanse of the Indo-Pacific. Focusing specifically upon India’s maritime security strategy, he describes the manner in which India has begun to use a combination of military and non-military means to ensure security and stability in the region.

Professor Baljit Mann presents his perspectives on the changing dynamics of India’s Indian Ocean policy. He postulates that the change is driven by economic growth premised primarily on India’s ability to use the global common, its “great power” aspirations, China’s attempts to gain influence in the Indian Ocean Region, and the USA’s renewed focus upon this part of the world.

As more and more people turn to the oceans for economic sustenance, greater demands will inevitably be placed upon maritime search and rescue, and also upon disaster-relief facilities,

so as to provide succour wherever needed. Captain Gurpreet Khurana examines the element of national will in making these efforts effective and efficient, across the Indo-Pacific region.

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is simultaneously viewed as an economic and social game-changer, and as a symbol of a Pakistan–China nexus that seeks to alter the *status quo* in this territory of India that is under illegal occupation by Pakistan. Professor Prakash Panneerselvam accordingly analyses the CPEC from a geostrategic perspective and argues that besides providing connectivity options, projects such as these have significant geopolitical ramifications for the region at large.

Within the Indo-Pacific construct, the country that occupies centre stage, both literally and figuratively, is Indonesia. As the world's largest archipelagic nation, and sitting astride major maritime choke points, its maritime pronouncements have a great role to play in the region. Shafiah Muhibat examines the external dimensions of Indonesia's "New Ocean Policy" that President Jokowi signed into legislation in February 2017.

Dr Rahul Mishra analyses the ongoing attempts by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to evolve a "Code of Conduct" for the region, especially in the context of the South China Sea Maritime disputes. He counters the optimism surrounding the recent impetus provided to these efforts, and argues that there is a great gulf that separates what China says from what it does.

Continuing the narrative of disputes between China and other states of the Indo-Pacific, Amrita Jash examines the East China Sea maritime dispute. She believes that this dispute, seen in context with other regional developments, has the potential to escalate into a full-blown conflict, which will have a significantly detrimental impact not only on Japan and China, but upon the Indo-Pacific region as a whole.

Japan, having assumed the role of a quiet facilitator in several geopolitical initiatives in recent years, plays a pivotal role in shaping the regional narrative. Shahana Thankachan discusses Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy", and argues that while the pronouncement of this strategy may be relatively recent, Japan has pursued this very strategy for over a decade, promoting an integrated and interconnected Indo-Pacific region.

We feature two book reviews in this edition of *Maritime Affairs*. Surbhi Moudgil reviews Senia Febrica's authoritative book, *Maritime Security and Indonesia: Cooperation, Interests and Strategies*. Moudgil finds that the book has stitched together a number of multidisciplinary themes and should be of immense value to a wide variety of readers. Likewise, Jyotishman Bhagwati reviews Graham Allison's *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*. He feels that the book is extremely relevant and timely in view of the current geopolitical gameplays between China and the USA, and that it offers viable options of which policymakers should take note.

As we sound the Last Post on the year 2017, the National Maritime Foundation (NMF) can look back with satisfaction at a busy, at times maddening but extremely rewarding year. The fact that we now receive a number of contributions for our online portal as well as the journal, from a large cross-section of people, indicates to us that we are making some headway in our primary aim of increasing maritime awareness in India. In the last 6 months alone, we have had wide-ranging interactions with a number of institutions, both within and outside India. In June 2017, a delegation from the NMF travelled to Washington, DC, for our annual dialogue with the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA). In August, we partnered with the Indian Navy's Eastern Naval Command to conduct a well-attended seminar as part of the Golden Jubilee commemoration of the Command. Later, in November, the second annual dialogue between the NMF and the RAND Corporation, USA, was conducted in Delhi. The faculty at the foundation has also been engaging frequently with a wide variety of external stakeholders, from academia to the various ministries of the Government of India.

Next year, 2018, promises to be even more challenging, as we embark upon a renewed mission of maritime advocacy. Our annual flagship event has assumed the avatar of the “Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue”, the first edition of which will be conducted February 27–28, 2018. We have a host of engagements lined up with our academic partners in Sri Lanka, Singapore, China, and the USA, over the next 6 months. We continue to seek active involvement and participation from all our members, stakeholders, readers and researchers, as we push forward towards the collective goal of making India a truly maritime nation. We also look forward to continued contributions from all of you, to make our discourse diverse, well informed and enriching.

Team NMF wishes each of you good health, happiness and success, in the New Year ahead.

Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan
AVSM & Bar, VSM, IN (Retd), Director, National Maritime Foundation
 director.nmf@gmail.com; billcoo@gmail.com