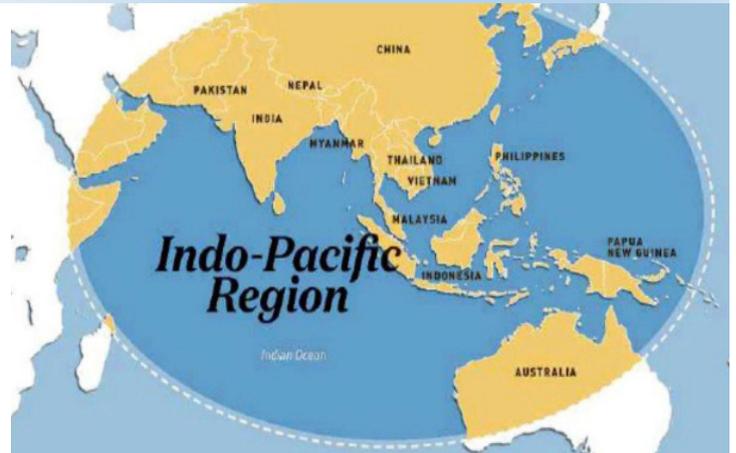




CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

INDO-PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



A Monthly Newsletter on Security and Strategic Issues on Indo-Pacific Region from
Centre for Air Power Studies

From the Editor's Desk

This month the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis paid a state visit to India. He was also the Chief Guest and the Keynote Speaker at the 9th Raisina Dialogue, India's premier conference on Geopolitics and Geoeconomics held in New Delhi. The Dialogue witnessed the participation of Foreign Ministers from many countries, like Bhutan, Mauritius, Nepal, and Panama. India also hosted the 8th meeting of the India-Nordic-Baltic states on the sideline of the Raisina Dialogue 2024.

In Southeast Asia, Prabowo Subianto won the Indonesian presidential elections by a huge margin. The President of the Republic of the Philippines, Ferdinand R Marcos visited Australia for a bilateral visit, following which Australia will host the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Melbourne. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet is engaging with his fellow ASEAN members, making his first official visit to Thailand and Malaysia to renew, restrengthen, and progress bilateral ties.

In East Asia, the South Korean Foreign Minister participated in the G20 foreign ministers meeting in Brazil where he met Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu. He also participated in a trilateral meeting with the US and Japan and a bilateral meeting with Japan and Canada. Japanese PM Kishida participated in the G7 leader's meeting and expressed their unwavering support for Ukraine and its people. He also met with Ukrainian PM Shmyhal visiting Japan for the Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction.

This month we present specially selected opinions and cherry picks covering all this and more. Do check out our Social Media Corner for some engaging and insightful content, including debates, interviews, and podcasts from eminent experts

Jai Hind

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<https://fulcrum.sg/liu-jianchao-new-foreign-minister-same-foreign-policy/>

QUOTE

"A divided world needs more tangible, and physical connections as well. The integration of our two seas, the Indo-Pacific on the one hand and the Mediterranean on the other will benefit not just India and Greece but our neighbours too"

-Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis,
Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic

Opinions/Review/Expert View

Maritime Cybersecurity: An Emerging Area of Concern for India

Source: Abhishek Sharma | *The Diplomat*

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/maritime-cybersecurity-an-emerging-area-of-concern-for-india/>, 09 February 2024



Credit: Depositphotos

The ongoing conflict in the Red Sea highlights how vital maritime choke points are for the free movement of global trade. Simultaneously, the situation also emphasizes the emerging non-conventional maritime risks to the communications lines that pass through these points. One non-conventional threat emerging in the Indo-Pacific region that needs urgent attention is maritime cybersecurity.

The maritime sector, considered the backbone of the global economy, is now increasingly dependent on operational technology (OT) and information technology (IT) systems, such as industrial control systems and satellite communications. This digitalization increased the sector's cybersecurity risks – with implications for national security.

In India, cybersecurity still does not attract the attention it needs – let alone cybersecurity of the maritime domain and its assets.

The maritime sector covers critical organizations and institutions, ranging from ports and the shipping industry, to ships and satellites. With technology proliferation and the adoption of emerging technologies, the vulnerability to cyber risks and threats has grown.

Maritime Cyber Risks

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) defines maritime cyber risk as a “measure of the extent to which a technology asset could be threatened by a potential circumstance or event, which may result in shipping-related operational, safety or security failures as a consequence of information or systems being corrupted, lost or compromised.” Maritime cybersecurity includes the systems overseeing ships’ operating software, navigation information, and traffic monitoring. However, the current cyber infrastructure available onboard civilian ships is not lacking in defensive cyber capabilities and tools.

Maritime sector cyber threats have become serious due to the complex operationalization of IT and OT systems. These systems can be the subject of ransomware, malware, phishing, and man-in-the-middle (MITM) attacks. The motives behind such attacks can vary from traditional applications like naval warfare to espionage, to non-state causes like cyber terrorism, and hacktivism. Maritime cyberattacks can thus act as an instrument of foreign policy or be undertaken by criminal groups or individuals.

This threat extends to onshore and

offshore maritime assets. Ports particularly are prominent targets for cyberattacks aimed at disrupting goods flow and supply chains. These disruptions have huge economic impacts; the NotPetya cyber attack of 2017 led to a loss of \$300 million for the Danish shipping firm Maersk alone. A 2019 Cyber Risk Management report estimated that a hypothetical Chinese cyberattack on a major port in the Indo-Pacific would cause damage between \$40 billion and \$110 billion.

In December 2023, an Australia-owned defense shipbuilder was targeted by a ransomware attack trying to exfiltrate confidential information. Another attack on DP World, Australia's largest port operator, led to the suspension of operations for three days, impacting 40 percent of goods flow in and out of the country. In 2023, Japan's biggest Nagoya Port was attacked by Russian hackers Lockbit 3.0.

Among all the existing threats, ransomware presents major risks to the maritime sector, particularly the transportation system, supply chain management, and logistics. Ransomware allows hackers to engage in double extortion, making ransom demands for recovery and demanding money to refrain from leaking sensitive data. Even software supplier companies like DNV have been targeted with ransomware, impacting 1,000 vessels via ShipManager software.

Permeability into systems and insecure and outdated equipment make maritime commercial shipping easy targets. Apart from just the IT systems, routers are also prone to

exploitation by hackers. CISCO and Fortinet routers used in maritime assets have been exploited for their software vulnerabilities.

Cyberattacks can compromise navigation and monitoring and control systems, which can be leveraged to disrupt information sharing between ships and on-shore teams. Cyberattacks could also be used to gain control of onboard systems including water treatment, communications, and the engine room. In this process, the risk of sensitive and confidential system leaking becomes high.

Cyberattacks can compromise navigation and monitoring and control systems, which can be leveraged to disrupt information sharing between ships and on-shore teams.

Lack of training of crews in IT systems is the leading reason for lax cybersecurity onboard ships. Organizations such as the IMO, BIMCO, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), and the International Union of Marine Insurance (IUMI) have issued guidelines for the industry. Still, the sector suffers from a lack of awareness, education, and understanding of cybersecurity risks in the broader maritime sector.

This is due to many factors, including the fast adoption of emerging technologies coupled with the lack of dedicated government policies, targeted safety guidelines, and regional discussions in multilateral organizations. It seems that the regulatory and policymaking sectors are struggling to keep up with the threats.

India and Maritime Cybersecurity

In India, cybersecurity still does not attract the attention it needs – let alone cybersecurity of the maritime domain and its assets. India

aspires to develop mega ports, modern port infrastructure, and transshipment hubs per its Maritime India Vision (MIV) 2030 and Amrit Kaal Vision 2047. This would require increased automation and better management systems and facilities. Increased interconnectedness with online systems, in turn, would make India's maritime critical infrastructure more vulnerable to cyberattacks.

To address the emerging maritime cyber risks, India must look at maritime cybersecurity as a different segment, taking into consideration the severe risks linked to targeted cyberattacks on its shipping industries, ports, vessels, and the crew aboard.

As geopolitical tensions mount, Indian ports and maritime industries will see more cyberattacks from adversaries, particularly with antagonizing projects such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, which threatens traditional trade routes. In 2022, India's JNPT was targeted by a cyberattack that crippled its automated system, and forced the system to return to offline methods, exposing the vulnerabilities.

Further improving India's logistics performance in the international shipment category requires more robust, secure, and safe digital systems at its ports as well as tracking applications like Sagar-Setu made for ease of doing business. To address this India must formulate a comprehensive policy for its maritime domain.

On the military front, some important issues for India are cyber espionage, ransomware,

and data exfiltration. In addition, satellite communication (SATCOM) is another critical system that plays an important role in ship-to-ship and ship-to-land communication, GPS navigation, and tracking and is increasingly vulnerable to hijacking or attacks, as seen in recent incidents.

India's JNPT was targeted by a cyberattack that crippled its automated system, and forced the system to return to offline methods, exposing the vulnerabilities.

For this, the Indian Navy must ensure adherence to cybersecurity protocols, strict inspections, regular software upgrades, risk assessments, establishing best practices, and upgrading the necessary skills to deal with cyberattacks. Spreading awareness through seminars and workshops regarding avoiding, identifying, and reporting cybercrimes is another critical step that needs urgent attention, particularly with increasing attacks targeting Indian Navy personnel and their families.

In addressing the maritime cyber challenges, India can learn from the Danish Cyber and Information Security Strategy for the Maritime Sector. Based on the "principle of sector responsibility," the strategy establishes a dedicated authority that oversees the cyber environment and security of its maritime infrastructure, assets and systems, working closely with private sector companies.

Overall, India needs to look at its maritime sector holistically – including ports, shipping industries, and the military – and formulate robust cybersecurity policies incorporating incident response plans, risk assessments, and guidelines for a safe cyber environment. The threat is only going to increase; India must be ready.

The Changing Dynamics of the Japan-Sri Lanka Relationship

Source: Varuna Shankar | 9dashline

<https://www.9dashline.com/article/the-changing-dynamics-of-the-japan-sri-lanka-relationship>

26 February 2024

Since 2023, Japan has extended its investment in South Asian infrastructure and connectivity projects to strengthen its soft power diplomacy in the region. As part of this extension, Sri Lanka hosted then-Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi in July 2023 and invited Tokyo to resume its investment in Sri Lanka's infrastructure projects and its green and digital economies, after some of them were halted due to Chinese investments in similar projects. The meeting also had a specific focus on funding power projects, roads, and ports. This comes after the cancellation of the previous MOU on port development with Japanese assistance.

Sri Lanka has experienced its worst financial crisis in more than seven decades. The previous Gotabaya government's dependence on Chinese financial assistance contributed to Sri Lanka's default. However, Sri Lanka is now fostering alternative alliances with dependable Asian partners through smaller forums to counter Chinese dominance, and Japan is a major player in this strategy. While the relationship is based on cooperation as opposed to dependence, Japanese infrastructure funding is still a vital part of Sri Lanka's strategy to restructure its debt repayment plan and unlock the USD 2.9 billion bailout from the IMF. Therefore, a closer look at developments in the Sri Lanka-Japan relationship is essential

to understanding future trajectories in the Sri Lankan economic crisis.

Failed Financial Investments

Sri Lanka's post-pandemic economic freefall resulted in a political and humanitarian crisis largely attributable to mismanagement by successive Sri Lankan governments. For years the country has been plagued by the "twin deficit", or deficits in both state fiscal and current accounts. This twin deficit is accompanied by high inflation, high levels of foreign debt, endemic corruption, and COVID-19 stagnation, which also ravaged the island's vital tourism industry. The geopolitical fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war has exacerbated the food and energy crises. The previous Gotabaya administration's economic plans, such as banning chemical fertilisers, also devastated the tea industry, adding to the economic pains.

Japan provides the opportunity for Sri Lanka to reduce its dependence on China for economic reform, while Sri Lanka provides Japan an opening to penetrate deeper into the South Asian market.

Among the projects that the Sri Lankan government has mismanaged over the years is the Jaya Container Terminal project. The container terminal in Colombo is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sri Lanka Ports Authority, and was initially funded by Japan in the 1980s. On 28 May 2019, India and Japan agreed to invest between USD 500-700 million to jointly develop the East Container Terminal. However, Sri Lanka halted this agreement to develop and operate the crucial terminal, stating that the terminal would be wholly owned and developed by the state-run Ports Authority.

Furthermore, the government explained it had offered foreign participation in the West

terminal primarily because it required a large investment. The East terminal, on the other hand, was constructed and required little additional financing. After the USD 500 million Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was cancelled and the Japanese-funded light rail transit (LRT) project was suspended, there was a freeze in ties between Tokyo and Colombo. While a key reason was Tamil mistreatment by the Rajapaksa government and port workers protesting Indian control over port operations, Japan was caught in the crossfire of domestic politics and the India-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship.

Recently, with the change of government, the Japan-Sri Lanka relationship has been improving as Sri Lanka announced the co-development of the West Container Terminal with Japan and India. Unlike previous projects, this one will be operated as a public-private company. The Ports Authority and companies selected by the Japanese and Indian governments will be the major players.

Current Japanese investment in Sri Lanka

China, as of June 2022, held 52 per cent of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt. Japan was the second largest creditor, at 20 per cent, followed by India at 12 per cent and France at three per cent. Japan had offered to take the lead in establishing a meeting of creditor nations to promote the restructuring of Sri Lanka's debt, with India and France launching a common platform to aid Japan in this endeavour. The high-level meeting took place on the sidelines of the annual spring meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in Washington on 13 April 2023. Other international organisations, along with the private sector, also participated.

Japanese Ambassador to India Hiroshi Suzuki said that Japan was keen to work with India on projects in South Asia, and sees both India and Sri Lanka "as indispensable partners" to realise Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's vision of a "Free and Open Indo Pacific", which he unveiled in a speech in Delhi in 2023. Japan and India have also taken the lead in setting up humanitarian and rebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka. India has been a primary source of assistance, providing about USD 4 billion in currency swaps, loans, and humanitarian assistance. However, Japan has also provided Sri Lanka with emergency grant aid worth USD 3 billion.

As per official data, about 60 enterprises with USD 350 million in Japanese investments are operating in Sri Lanka. However, due to the current political instability and economic crisis, several projects have been halted including the suspension of loans by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), putting on hold USD 464 million for the construction of a new multilevel terminal and viaduct at Bandaranaike International Airport which was to be completed by 2023.

Apart from Japanese investments, Tokyo has become an important partner in the maritime security of the Indian Ocean Region. Between 2011 and 2015, vessels of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force visited Sri Lankan ports on 22 occasions. Sri Lanka is supported under three priority areas: promoting quality growth, development cooperation for inclusive growth, and mitigating vulnerability, amounting to approximately USD 97 billion (31 March 2020).

China, as of June 2022, held 52 per cent of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt. Japan was the second largest creditor, at 20 per cent, followed by India at 12 per cent and France at three per cent.

Japan has also provided a total of approximately USD 36.5 million for major grant assistance in 2022. In May of the same year, the Government of Japan announced USD 1.5 million (LKR 600 million) of funding to help the Government of Sri Lanka respond to the ongoing economic crisis, indicating increased funding from Japan both as grants and investments.

A credible structural reform program, along with necessary macroeconomic adjustments, is critical to correct overall fiscal imbalances.

Challenges and Further Opportunities

Developing connectivity infrastructure in Sri Lanka requires large investments, which necessitates foreign participation. A credible structural reform program, along with necessary macroeconomic adjustments, is critical to correct overall fiscal imbalances. In these economic conditions, the financial performance of Japanese and Indian businesses that have direct operations in Sri Lanka will be impacted amid a huge devaluation of the local currency. Since international investments in Sri Lanka are limited at the moment, the performance of these companies will be used as an indicator of investment potential by other investors and bleak conditions could diminish confidence in the Sri Lankan economy. Furthermore, the rise in mini-lateralism offers an opportunity for Colombo to gather Asian donors and investors to facilitate better consensus-building and effective decision-making.

The revival of projects between Japan and Sri Lanka during the current Wickremesinghe government marks an improvement in bilateral relations. The government's near bankruptcy coupled with the worst economic crisis in the post-independent era challenged Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with old partners like Japan. Although

Japan has long been considered a key Sri Lankan partner, the aid from Tokyo has remained in the low millions, which is not enough to counter Chinese presence in the island nation. Japan could increase its investment in Sri Lanka through projects such as critical infrastructure, power projects, port and road development, dedicated investment zones and green and digital technologies. Japan provides the opportunity for Sri Lanka to reduce its dependence on China for economic reform, while Sri Lanka provides Japan an opening to penetrate deeper into the South Asian market.

India's Anti-Piracy Missions Were Years in the Making

Source: Khyati Singh and Gaurav Sen | *The Diplomat*

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/indias-anti-piracy-missions-were-years-in-the-making/> 29 February 2024



In this handout photo from the Indian Navy, an Indian destroyer assists the Palau-flagged vessel MV Islander, which caught fire after a suspected drone attack, in the Gulf of Aden, Feb. 22, 2024. Credit: Indian Navy

India seems to have a considerable amount of influence in the Indian Ocean, even though China's assertive advancements have placed India under a substantial amount of pressure.

Today, the Gulf of Aden and Western Arabian Sea are seeing the greatest deployment of the Indian Navy (IN) to date, as India seeks to secure global shipping lanes against attack by non-state actors. This deployment is separate from the current U.S.-U.K. military campaign in Yemen against the Houthi rebels, who are backed by Iran.

Twelve warships make up the IN's extraordinary naval armada. Two of the most modern ships are stationed in the Gulf of Aden, while the other 10 are spread around the northern and western Arabian Seas. Both in terms of strength and the scope of the mission being carried out, this deployment represents a substantial departure from earlier ones in these regions. The IN's continuous mission around anti-piracy and anti-hijacking activities demonstrates a profound shift in its approach.

India's Maritime Approach: A Recap

India has always been a seafaring nation; its vast coastline necessitates a robust naval strategy to fend off both traditional and non-traditional security threats. But it took a long time for India to contemplate threats coming from its coastline. For decades after independence, the threats emanating from land borders with Pakistan and China monopolized India's security strategy.

However, India's increasing maritime might, coupled with the tumultuous global situation, has encouraged the country to modernize its navy. The process began when the country started a blue water navy modernization program in the mid-1990s and significantly increased military spending. The Indian Navy released "Freedom of use of seas: Indian maritime military strategy,"

its inaugural maritime doctrine, in 2004. It was later revised in 2007. The budget for the IN increased by 5 percent between 2000 and 2005 and by 10 percent between 2005 and 2008, along with an increase in the navy's portion of the yearly defense budget.

The navy's force structure and sea control capabilities improved as a result of these increased resources. India acknowledged the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) as a vital hub for international maritime commerce in the early 21st century, but then it was not the highly contested arena as it is today. India at the time still saw itself as a developing nation with a small fleet that could only operate in coastal seas. But Indian strategists were conscious of the way the IOR was shifting, particularly with regard to China's rising military might and its heightened hostilities with the United States.

India's goal during the initial years of the 21st century was to selectively dominate the Indian Ocean by maintaining a naval presence in the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and Bay of Bengal in addition to growing the Indian Coast Guard to conduct additional police operations in addition to the navy. New Delhi has concentrated on strengthening its security relationships on the Arabian Peninsula (near the Straits of Bab al-Mandab and Hormuz), the Indonesian archipelago (including the Straits of Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda), and chokepoints leading from southern Africa into the Indian Ocean.

In late 2008, the Indian Navy started stationing ships in the Gulf of Aden to conduct anti-piracy missions. Offering naval escort to commerce vessels sailing under any flag is a commendable

The recent uptick in activity is the culmination of a long-term shift that has largely gone unnoticed.

global initiative taken by countries such as India.

A Shift That Must Be Recognized

India was motivated by a number of considerations to change its emphasis from being a passive navy to a true net security provider for the region. The change in the perspective of Indian foreign policy from a “Euro-Atlantic” focus to an “Indo-Pacific” one, as well as the realignment of global military and economic power toward Asia, has had a tangible impact on India’s maritime environment and caused significant political, economic, and social changes in the Indian Ocean region.

In addition, the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008 made a reassessment of India’s offshore and coastal security necessary. The development of a comprehensive and accommodating plan was aided by the increasing acknowledgment of the importance of maritime security to national advancement. Furthermore, the explicit encroachment in the Indian Ocean by China resulted in India’s increased alertness.

India released a new maritime doctrine in 2015, “Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy,” which substitutes “strategy” for “doctrine” and commits to “securing” rather than “using” the Indian Ocean’s waters. The approach not only clarified the IN’s regions of interest but also used tougher language when it came to the use of force. Other remote parts of Africa and Australia were referred to as India’s secondary zones of interest, while the oceans surrounding the Indian possessions were designated as primary areas of interest. The

recent anti-piracy operations by the Indian Navy demonstrate its commitment to securing these primary areas of Interest.

The IN’s new proactive approach is reflected in the growing number of rescues carried out by the force. Early in January, a Liberia-flagged vessel carrying 21 crew members, including 15 Indian nationals, was towed to Bahrain by the IN’s Marine Commandos. The troops, who were stationed on the guided-missile destroyer INS Chennai, had boarded the vessel after an attempted hijacking, and saw the ship safely to port.

On January 26, the INS Visakhapatnam responded to a distress call following a Houthis missile attack on a British ship.

India was motivated by a number of considerations to change its emphasis from being a passive navy to a true net security provider for the region.

Later in January, two hijacked vessels were saved off the coast of Somalia by the patrol boat INS Sumitra. In the first rescue, which took place on January 28, the Indian warship freed the crew from pirates who had taken control of a ship flying the Iranian flag. Within 48 hours, the INS Sumitra saved another Iranian-flagged ship with 19 Pakistani crew members on board.

All these operations show the Indian Navy’s ability to respond quickly and maintain continuous functioning. The frequency and intensity of the most recent wave of pirate attacks doesn’t seem to be as great compared to the 10 years between 2008 and 2018. However, the recent surge in piracy did not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is a result of West Asia’s continued status as a geopolitical hotbed, which requires India to maintain a high level of naval vigilance.

Previous Indian naval doctrines depict a force that is restricted to presence, observation, and constructive maritime engagement. However, as the regional security dynamics have changed and India's main objective has evolved from "using" the seas to "securing" the seas, India's strategic involvement in the IOR has grown. The present deployment suggests that the IN has more capability and knows how to carry out intricate anti-piracy operations quickly, efficiently, and even without using force across a large body of water.

A single navy would find it difficult to control a large swath of waters, but the Indian navy has proved that it can rightly claim to be a net security provider in these regional waters.

Greece Charts a Course in the Indo-Pacific

Source: Rushali Saha | *The Diplomat*

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/greece-charts-a-course-in-the-indo-pacific/> 24 February 2024



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) walks with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis at Hyderabad House, New Delhi, Feb. 22, 2024.

Credit: Indian Ministry of External Affairs

In recent years, several European countries have shown a keen interest in playing a greater role in the Indo-Pacific. When the European

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis was the chief guest at the Raisina Dialogue, a clear indication of Athens' growing interest in the region.

Union came out with the Indo-Pacific strategy in 2021, it was largely driven by France, Germany, and the Netherlands, which had already released their respective documents

outlining public positions on the Indo-Pacific. Other EU members states were still viewed as largely uninterested in the events taking place in what was perceived as a distant geographic theater.

However, such a perception is fast changing, especially with Italy's active embrace of the Indo-Pacific. Greece is the latest European country to turn toward the Indo-Pacific, and holds great potential to emerge as a significant regional actor.

As the country with the longest coastline

within the EU, Greece has effectively utilized its geographic potential and has emerged as the world's largest ship-owning nation. Currently, shipping contributes an impressive 8 percent of the country's GDP. Not only does Greece actively participate in international maritime security initiatives such as EUNAVFOR ATALANTA, but it also plays an instrumental role in shaping the EU's maritime security agenda. It was under the Greek presidency that EU adopted the EU Maritime Strategy in 2014.

Greece also has one of the strongest naval forces in the EU, with 11 submarines, three frigates, three mine/countermine warfare ships, and 36 offshore patrol units, as of November 2023. In 2022, Athens approved what is being described as the "biggest naval modernization" endeavor in 20 years. A further testament to Athens' maritime capabilities is the fact that the European Union's Red Sea mission, Operation Aspides, is being headed by Greece with the operational command center based in Larissa.

Evidently Greece is a strong maritime power in its immediate periphery, but the key question is whether it can expand its influence in distant geographies – or is even interested in doing so. The answer is a resounding yes. Athens' interest in the Indo-Pacific is linked to its desire to emerge as a bridge between Europe and Asia. For Greece, closer strategic ties with India provides the key entry point into Asia, where its influence is very limited.

During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Greece in August last year, both sides "shared their vision of a free, open

and rules-based Mediterranean Sea and Indo-Pacific..." After the visit, in an op-ed for an Indian daily, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, in context of growing defense and security ties with India, announced that the Hellenic Air Force and Navy would "soon be present in the Indo-Pacific."

Less than a year later, Mitsotakis made a state visit to India on February 21-22 during which he also served as the chief guest and delivered the keynote address at the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geostrategy co-organized by the Ministry of External Affairs.

Last year, it was Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni who delivered this address, where she repeatedly referred to the Indo-Pacific and even said "what happens in the Indo-Pacific has direct repercussions in Europe." Unsurprisingly,

Mitsotakis in his address reiterated the importance of the region to EU, and highlighted how Greece in undertaking measures to "intensify the partnership between the EU and countries of the Indo-Pacific."

Beyond India, Greece has also expressed interest in working with Japan in the Indo-Pacific. In January 2023, Mitsotakis met with Japanese Prime Minister, Kishida Fumio and both sides affirmed the "inseparability of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security" and reflected on the "necessity of further strengthening cooperation between both countries and like-minded countries in order to respond to the changing strategic environment." This comes at a time when Greece is looking to deepen its relations with United States, including expanded defense cooperation

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through the updated U.S.-Greece Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement.

For Indo-Pacific regional countries, Greece’s participation is a welcome move as it reflects Athens’ commitment to a truly inclusive Indo-Pacific. Notably, Greece has a positive relationship with China; the fact that this has not prevented Athens from participating in the “free and open Indo-Pacific” discourse bellies Beijing’s claims of it being exclusionary in nature and directed at “containing” China. Indeed, Greece continues to be an important maritime partner for China and the role Chinese investment has played in transforming the Piraeus Port is positively acknowledged in Greece. The China-Greece partnership will only grow, proving that embracing the Indo-Pacific concept does not preclude cordial ties with Beijing.

With Greece set to host the Our Ocean Conference in April this year, Athens is keen to expand cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries. The stage is set for Athens to make its presence felt in this region where countries are vying for influence. Athens also sees a great opportunity in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, where it is keen to become an “integral member,” which will further allow Greece to become an important actor in shaping the regional connectivity agenda. Now it remains to be seen how active regional countries will be in capitalizing on Athens’ increasing alignment and substantive engagement, which is unfolding steadily.

Don’t Forget the “Indo” Side of the Indo-Pacific: How the United States should Approach the Indian Ocean Region

Source: David Santoro | Pacific Forum

<https://pacforum.org/publications/pacnet-10-dont-forget-the-indo-side-of-the-indo-pacific-how-the-united-states-should-approach-the-indian-ocean-region/> 14 February 2024

The strategic significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is considerable and growing. Consisting of vast and diverse maritime geography of several subregions, including the Indian subcontinent, parts of Australia and Southeast Asia, West Asia, and Eastern and Southern Africa; it is home to 2.7 billion people — over a third of the global population — with an average age of 30 years old; it is resource-rich; and it is comprised of some of the fastest growing countries.

The IOR also connects peoples and economies worldwide via sealines and telecommunication fiber optic submarine cables; significantly, 80 percent of global maritime oil shipments traverse Indian Ocean waters.

The IOR also connects peoples and economies worldwide via sealines and telecommunication fiber optic submarine cables; significantly, 80 percent of global maritime oil shipments traverse Indian Ocean waters.

The IOR, of course, faces major challenges, including actions by nefarious non-state actors, such as pirates, smugglers, and terrorists. The ongoing attacks by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in the Red and Arabian Seas that are wreaking havoc on global maritime trade exemplify this problem. Other challenges include the impact of climate change, which affects the IOR disproportionately, and growing naval competition, notably as China is increasingly flexing its muscles in the region.

How should the United States Approach the IOR?

The US approach to the Indian Ocean Region – ambitions and realities

The United States recognizes the importance of maintaining a peaceful, secure, and prosperous IOR. In recent years, Washington has embraced the terminology “Indo-Pacific,” as opposed to “Asia-Pacific,” and in 2018 it renamed the US Pacific Command the US Indo-Pacific Command. Even if US strategy documents say little about the IOR, several US officials have recently stressed that Washington is committed to elevating its engagement there, notably through new partnerships. Adm. Eileen Laubacher, special assistant to US President Joe Biden and senior director for South Asia at the US National Security Council, reiterated this commitment at the just concluded 2024 Indian Ocean Conference, an annual event spearheaded by the India Foundation, which this year was hosted by the Perth USAsia Centre in Australia and supported by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

There are problems, however. The US bureaucracy is not structured to engage the IOR. The US Department of State approaches it through four different bureaus: African Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, and South and Central Asian Affairs. The US Department of Defense, for its part, separates it into three combatant commands: the Indo-Pacific Command, Central Command, and Africa

Command. These divisions make it difficult for the United States to appreciate and address dynamics of the IOR as a whole, especially maritime developments.

Another problem is that the United States does not include the Western Indian Ocean or the eastern coast of Africa in its conceptualization of the Indo-Pacific, unlike India, Australia, Japan, and a few others. The US framing of the Indo-Pacific coincides with the Indo-Pacific Command’s area of responsibility, which ends with India. That further complicates the US ability to craft a unified strategy for the IOR.

The United States recognizes the importance of maintaining a peaceful, secure, and prosperous IOR. In recent years, Washington has embraced the terminology “Indo-Pacific,” as opposed to “Asia-Pacific,” and in 2018 it renamed the US Pacific Command the US Indo-Pacific Command.

Perhaps partly due to these bureaucratic and conceptual issues, US engagement of the region has been limited. Recognizing the IOR as a priority route and theater for US military power projection, the United States has of late improved its technology and facilities, notably its joint naval base (with the United Kingdom) at Diego Garcia, and increased logistics and supply cooperation with India, with which it wants to strengthen relations, notably as both countries worry about China’s rising power. But the United States has been slow to roll out non-military programs and engage smaller IOR countries. It only has one “ship-rider” agreement in the IOR (with Seychelles), constraining its ability to promote security cooperation, and only three embassies and two defense attaches to cover seven IOR island countries. The United States also participates as a dialogue partner in one of the two primary IOR multilateral bodies – the Indian Ocean Rim Association – but not the other – the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium.

More worryingly, in terms of assistance for the development of small IOR countries, the United States is falling behind China, which is investing massively in ports, fiber optic cables, and other maritime infrastructure.

Adapting the US approach to the Indian Ocean Region

The United States, therefore, should take immediate steps to adapt its approach to the IOR. It should do so by embracing the region as a whole and ramping up engagement, notably by acting as a problem-solver and committed partner.

Embrace the Region as a whole

The United States should begin by clearly defining its interests, goals, and priorities in the IOR as a whole and developing a strategy for it. That work, as mentioned, has not been done.

Broadening the US Indo-Pacific construct to include the Western Indian Ocean and eastern coast of Africa would be a good start. Not only would it bring the United States in line with many of its key partners, notably India, Australia, and Japan, but it would also help identify ways to implement the US Indo-Pacific Strategy in the IOR.

Meanwhile, the United States should probably steer clear of undertaking a major bureaucratic restructuring to better grasp, and act on, dynamics in the IOR because it is too labor-intensive and time-consuming. Yet the appointment of nodal points or coordinators for the IOR in both the US departments of State and Defense would be a good, easy fix to address the problems associated with the current US bureaucratic structure.

Act as a problem-solver

The United States could be tempted to engage the IOR primarily — even only — with an eye to countering China because, after all, that goal is driving much of its foreign policy. Some have made that case, advocating that Washington focus its competition with Beijing in the IOR because it has a bigger advantage there than closer to China's coastline. A blockade in the IOR, the argument goes, could help deter Chinese adventurism in the Pacific because it would force Beijing to devote resources to a distant area where it has disadvantages and trigger greater balancing by IOR countries, notably India, who would feel threatened by a larger Chinese presence in the theater. The idea is that horizontal escalation in the IOR could replace vertical escalation in the Pacific.

It is unclear that this approach would work, however, either at the required speed or at all. Balancing by IOR countries would also not be

The United States should begin by clearly defining its interests, goals, and priorities in the IOR as a whole and developing a strategy for it. That work, as mentioned, has not been done.

given because many have a favorable view of China, and even those that do not, are not prepared to go “all in” against China. Of note, virtually no one participating in the Indian Ocean Conference in Perth last week uttered the words “China” or “deterrence,” let alone in the same sentence. Even S. Jaishankar, India's Minister of External Affairs, only took oblique swipes at China in his keynote address, never mentioning it explicitly. Besides, many IOR states are suspicious about, and some even opposed to, cooperation with the United States, and there is a deep tradition of non-alignment in the region.

Rather than “countering China,” then, the

organizing principle for US engagement in the IOR should be “fixing problems.” The United States should present itself as a problem-solver, a country that can help address issues of direct concern to IOR countries. Although regional countries have different goals and priorities, by and large that means helping respond to non-traditional security threats, including, but not limited to, nefarious non-state actors; illicit trafficking of all sorts; illegal, unregulated, unreported fishing; or climate change.

The recent US commitment to do just that is a good first step, but words should quickly turn into deeds so that IOR countries can “see” more concrete deliverables, more regularly. In this regard, the United States should bear in mind that building partner capacity to respond to non-traditional security threats can have multiple purposes, and therefore multiple payoffs. Enhancing a partner’s ability to combat maritime crime, for instance, simultaneously provides tools useful vis-à-vis China’s maritime developments.

Be a Committed Partner

Doing more in the IOR does not mean that the United States will have to divert resources away from other theaters or the Pacific. The United States can – and should – ramp up engagement of the IOR while remaining focused on the Pacific. In addition to repurposing some of its in-theater resources from continental to maritime challenges and maximizing its diplomatic and military visits to regional countries as it transits in the IOR, as some have recommended, the United States can do more by building on its existing relationships with IOR countries and, more importantly, supporting

regional leaders. So, the United States should present itself not just as a problem-solver, but also as a committed partner.

Partnering with India, the predominant IOR power, should be priority number one. The United States should build upon the recent flurry of cooperation agreements it has concluded with India and work out ways it can best support Indian activities in the IOR, be it through greater coordination and burden-sharing between coast guards to preserve freedom of the seas, joint work to strengthen regional connectivity in other ways (including via the ambitious India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor or the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway), cooperation to improve management of the global commons, or mere expression of support for Indian-led IOR initiatives, such as the Colombo Security Conclave.

In so doing, the United States should let India be in the driver’s seat, both because Washington should focus on the Pacific and because of possible “backyard anxieties” from New Delhi about an overly active US presence in the IOR.

Such an approach could benefit the United States in other ways. For instance, Ram Madhav, the President of the India Foundation, has argued that US appreciation and upholding of India’s primacy

in the IOR would encourage New Delhi to “get involved in the imperatives of the Pacific region.” In other words, US support for Indian leadership in the IOR will trigger Indian support for US leadership in the Pacific, a clear upside from a US perspective.

Of course, the United States should work

A staunch US ally often described as the United States’ “southern anchor” in the Indo-Pacific, Australia immediately comes to mind.

with other regional leaders as well. A staunch US ally often described as the United States' "southern anchor" in the Indo-Pacific, Australia immediately comes to mind. So do other non-IOR countries, such as Japan, France, or the United Kingdom, all of which play important roles in the region. The United States should seek to leverage their roles to do more in the region, including to resolve longstanding issues, such as the Diego Garcia stalemate; some have proposed innovative approaches to the problem. The United States should also urge mini-lateral arrangements such as the Quad, a security arrangement that includes Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, to pivot to the IOR and perhaps even to develop ties with the "I2U2 group," a new cooperative partnership between India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

Alfred Thayer Mahan, the now famous US naval strategist, reportedly prophesied in the late 1890s shortly before he became admiral that "The destiny of the world will be decided on [Indian Ocean] waters." These words continue to ring true today, and it is thus high time the United States gave the "Indo" side of the Indo-Pacific the attention it deserves, even as it remains focused on the Pacific.

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PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.

Cherry-Picks of the Month

1. What Younger Voters in India Think About the Country's Foreign Policy - <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/what-younger-voters-india-think-about-country-s-foreign-policy>
2. Australia Must stay Engaged During Pacific Island Countries' Political Instability and Change - <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-must-stay-engaged-during-pacific-island-countries-political-instability-and-change/>
3. NATO and India: Partners for a Peaceful, Free, and Democratic World - <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/nato-and-india-partners-for-a-peaceful-free-and-democratic-world>
4. US-Japan Alliance Amid Changing Security Environment - <https://asiatimes.com/2024/02/us-japan-alliance-amid-changing-security-environment/>
5. Cambodia and Japan: Firm Friends Amid Great Power Rivalry - <https://fulcrum.sg/cambodia-and-japan-firm-friends-amid-great-power-rivalry/>

CAPS Experts- Infocus

1. Multiplying the Synergy of India and France in the Indo-Pacific Region - <https://capsindia.org/multiplying-the-synergy-of-india-and-france-in-the-indo-pacific-region/>

Debates/ Podcasts

1. Conversations: The Comeback General—Prabowo's Thumping Victory and what it means for Indonesia - <https://omny.fm/shows/lowy-institute-conversations/conversations-the-comeback-general-prabowo-s-thump>
2. Global Threats: Contrasting Views in Europe, Asia and the Pacific - <https://www.ft.com/content/e8ef0768-b6ce-4baa-86b7-49abcd3022b0>
3. Jaishankar Speaks on China, Russia, UNSC, Cricket and More at Raisina 2024 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjqwNuhuj4>
4. US views of India-China ties and their Impact on the US-India partnership - <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/us-views-of-india-china-ties-and-their-impact-on-the-us-india-partnership/>



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