



***From Non-State to
Inter-State Security Threats
in Asia's Maritime Domain:
The case of China and India***

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From Non-State to Inter-State Security Threats in Asia's Maritime Domain: The Case of China and India

Security has come a full-circle. After a period of mounting concern over non-state security threats following the 9-11 terrorist attacks a decade ago, international security is returning to the realm of traditional inter-state security issues. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the maritime domain in Asia where concerns over piracy and terrorism appear to have been overtaken by maritime rivalries between major powers.

Piracy and other non-state security threats represent a prevalent though receding-threat to the maritime domain in Asia. The lasting threat to the maritime domain in Asia will likely emanate from traditional, state-to-state rivalries fuelled by the growing interest of major regional powers to protect their burgeoning seaborne trade, access offshore energy resources and project power amid ambitions of 'Great Power' status. Case in point is the on-going shift in China and India of their military doctrines, narratives and capabilities, as they reorient themselves from being continental to maritime powers. In the process, the Sino-Indian relationship and their latent rivalry could gradually be shifting from their long-standing land border dispute to the maritime domain with strategic implications for freedom of navigation and the regional security architecture. Though, the maritime dimension will increase in importance but it may not lessen the continental tensions.

To be sure, nonconventional and conventional maritime threats are not mutually exclusive. Maritime terrorism and piracy threats are providing state actors with the justification to project power. For instance, under the pre-text of protecting maritime trade routes from piracy threats, China is expanding its blue water naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean. The multi-nation response to the maritime piracy threat in the Horn of Africa has also offered global navies the opportunities to exchange intelligence on each other's capabilities and operations. Nonetheless, non-state and inter-state maritime security threats demonstrate divergent pressures on a state's naval resources. The tools required combating maritime piracy, armed robbery, and terrorism

and trafficking are different from those required to assert a claim over a disputed maritime territorial boundary or project power over sea-lines of communication (SLOCs).

The maritime security interests of regional powers are also moving further from their coastline as military capabilities and ambitions grow in line with expanded economic and political influence. China's recent launch of its first aircraft carrier – making it the third Asian country to acquire such a capability and only the tenth in the world to do so – demonstrates the growing power projection interests of regional navies.¹ China's interest in acquiring a carrier capability demonstrates its proclivity to look beyond local maritime security interests such as deterring U.S. intervention in a conflict in the Taiwan Strait where Beijing's need for sea-denial capabilities makes carriers less relevant than other platforms such as submarines. Similarly, Japan's establishment of a military base in Djibouti to support the Maritime Self Defence Force anti-piracy operations in the Horn of Africa region are indicative of Tokyo's ability to project maritime power despite continued constraints imposed by the country's pacifist constitution.² Similarly, revelations that Vietnam has granted Indian Navy vessels permanent berthing rights at Na Thrang port has confirmed New Delhi's ability to extend its "sustainable maritime presence" in the South China Sea beyond its traditional zone of influence in the Indian Ocean.³

Ultimately, an integrated, holistic and cooperative approach is necessary to address the range of divergent but overlapping threats facing the maritime domain in the Asia-Pacific Region. Sustainable cooperation in the maritime domain will be contingent on confidence-building that transcends the maritime security sphere and addresses the root causes of mutual mistrust through a multilateral, inclusive and multi-level process of regional interaction. This needs to be complemented by a move away from informal codes of conduct toward institutionalised mechanisms and open regionalism aimed at protecting freedom of navigation in the region.

Non-state Threats Receding

Nowhere is the shift from non-state to inter-state maritime security threats more apparent than in Southeast Asia where piracy has been effectively tackled through a process of improved regional coordination, greater political stability and economic opportunities. The main catalyst for the

receding piracy threat in the region has been greater political and economic stability in post-Suharto Indonesia. Notably, the separatist movement in Aceh has been quelled through a carrot-and-stick approach of rapprochement with the rebels, improved law enforcement and aweakening of the rebels' material capabilities following the 2004 Asian tsunami.⁴ This has been complemented by greater cooperation between littoral navies, namely Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand under the aegis of the Malacca Straits Patrol initiative. These developments have together weakened the maritime security threat emanating from non-traditional, non-state actors though the possibility for renewed insecurity remains in the region given the plethora of insurgent and terrorist threats that continue to face the region. These include the separatist movements in Southern Thailand and the Philippines and transnational terrorist organisations such as Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf.

In South Asia, the defeat of the separatist insurgency of the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009 has removed the most potent source of maritime terrorism in Asia. At its peak, the LTTE's naval wing, the Sea Tigers, maintained a fleet of merchant vessels, gunboats and suicide squads (known as the Black Sea Tigers) that engaged in smuggling and attacked ports, government vessels and international merchant shipping. The group's senior ranks were eliminated in May 2009 when the Sri Lankan coastline was brought back under government control. Nonetheless, the absence of a sustainable process of reconciliation with the country's ethnic Tamil minority holds the possibility of renewed hostilities with dire consequences for the country's coastal security.

The smaller-scale threat of maritime piracy and crime off the coast of Bangladesh also appears to be receding as noted earlier this year when the International Maritime Bureau removed the country from the list of "high-risk" piracy-prone regions.⁵ Pirates have been known to target ships approaching and anchoring at Chittagong while seeking sanctuary in the Sunderbans region though attacks remain relatively crude with fishing vessels being the primary targets, and most attacks being petty thefts or robberies rather than acts of piracy. Nonetheless, the growing strategic importance of the Bay of Bengal as a source of offshore energy resources could lead the piracy threat to gain prominence unless prompt and coordinated action is taken by littoral states.

In recent years the most prominent source of maritime piracy has been the Gulf of Aden through which 20 per cent of the world's shipping transits. However, even in this region the number of successful pirate attacks have declined amid the emergence of a more coordinated regional approach between the various multilateral, joint command operations in the region (EU-led Operation Atalanta, NATO-led Operation Ocean Shield and the US-led Combined Taskforce-151) and the adoption of increasingly bold rules of engagement, including the implementation of ship protection measures such as maintaining high cruising speeds, practicing evasive maneuvers, the use of physical barriers and water cannons, and employment of private security companies aboard merchant ships, as well as prosecuting captured pirates in regional states with functional judicial systems, such as Kenya, Tanzania and the Seychelles. However, this has also led to a mutation of the maritime security threat as pirates have adapted their tactics by increasingly attacking softer targets such as private yachts and coastal resorts, increasing their ransom demands, and using captured merchant vessels as pirate 'mother ships', which has broadened the range of their operations in the Indian Ocean.⁶

As in the case of Southeast Asia, a sustainable solution to the piracy threat off the coast of Somalia will entail not only greater regional cooperation but also combating the root causes of piracy that emanate onshore from the absence of political stability and economic security in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Issues of poverty and environmental degradation from commercial overfishing in the waters surrounding the Somali coast have been a catalyst for the proliferation of the piracy threat in the region, as well as the absence of a stable functioning government in Somalia since the collapse of the short-lived government of the Union of Islamic Courts in 2006. The Hawiye and the Darod clan have been the primary sources of piracy activities in the ungoverned spaces around the Harardheere region of central Somalia and the semi-autonomous Puntland region.⁷

A possible convergence of interests between pirate groups, whose attacks are mainly economically motivated and ideologically and politically-motivated groups, such as the *al-Shabaab* Islamic extremist terrorist organisation, would signal a significant shift and escalation in the nature of the piracy threat. For instance, a piracy-terrorism link could lead to a ban on the payment of ransom demands and coverage by marine insurers, which could prompt a growing

frequency of attacks on captured crews. Pre-empting such a transformation will require effective collaboration and coordination between local, regional and international powers through such initiatives as implementing a ban on foreign fishing vessels in Somali waters in order to reinvigorate the country's fishing industry, strengthening the Puntland police force in north-eastern Somalia and developing rules of engagement for armed guards defending commercial vessels.⁸

Inter-state Threats Re-emerging

To be sure, the immediate threat facing the maritime domain will remain piracy and other non-state or non-traditional security threats. Despite its receding trend, maritime piracy remains prevalent, inflicting an economic cost of between US\$7 billion and US\$12 billion in 2010, of which an estimated \$5 billion to \$7 billion was incurred in the Indian Ocean Region.⁹ Furthermore, conventional maritime security concerns remain dormant given that no major regional power is in a position to exercise unilateral maritime dominance over the Asia-Pacific region while the United States remains the Asia-Pacific region's predominant military power and effective sea-based balancer.

Nonetheless, over the medium-to-long term the lasting threat facing the maritime domain in Asia will likely emanate from traditional, state-to-state rivalries fuelled by the growing interest of major regional powers to protect their burgeoning seaborne trade, access offshore energy resources and project power amid ambitions of 'Great Power' status. Key to the renewed focus on state-to-state security threats is the growing strategic importance of the maritime domain. The maritime domain has emerged as a bridge linking together the Northeast, Southeast and South Asian sub-regions given the growth of intra-regional trade, most of which transits through maritime trade routes. Over half of the world's annual merchant traffic by tonnage passes through the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits with some 10 million barrels of crude oil transiting the region every day.¹⁰ As well as being a vital transit route the South China Sea is also a resource in itself with an estimated seven billion barrels of oil and 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.¹¹

Complementing the importance of the maritime domain as an economic lifeline to the region, a plethora of maritime territorial disputes scatter the region, which are tied to material goals of protecting freedom of navigation and accessing offshore energy resources, and more ideational objectives related to acquiring 'Great Power' status through projecting power, protecting 'spheres of influence' and fulfilling national ambitions of protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity. While these material and ideational goals are not new, the growing strategic importance of seaborne trade and dependence on imported energy resources to fuel the economies of region, coupled with the region's expanded military capabilities and growing inter-regional inter-linkages have increased both the likelihood and intensity of any armed conflagration between states. Some territorial disputes are more localised in nature, such as between North and South Korea over the disputed status of the Northern Limit Line, which culminated in the sinking of a South Korean destroyer, the *Cheonan* in March 2010, and the missile attack on Yeongpeong Island in November 2010. Others have wider implications for the freedom of navigation, such as China's claim to the nine-dash line around the South China Sea, which conflicts with Vietnam (and Taiwan's) claim to the Paracel Islands and Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei (and Taiwan's) claim to the Spratly Islands. However, the growing involvement of major regional and global powers such as China, Japan, India and the United States, increases the strategic significance of these disputes for international peace and security.

The silver lining is drawn from the fact that sovereignty in the maritime domain is more fluid or fungible and as such, there will be more room for manoeuvre in tackling maritime territorial disputes compared to disputed continental territory, which can be more permanently occupied. However, the players in the maritime domain are also more diverse. They include coastguards, local police, fishing communities, provincial, state or city-level authorities, and a plethora of government ministries as well as a state's navy. These multiple levels of interaction increase the opportunity for collaboration but also fuel the possibility for misunderstanding given that these groups often pursue conflicting interests. This increases the possibility for an escalation in tensions in the absence of cordial bilateral relations or adequate confidence building or crisis management mechanisms.

For instance, China's State Oceanic Administration, which is under the Ministry of Land and Resources, has jurisdiction over the administration of territorial waters, which it shares with the PLA Navy. This has set the stage for sometimes conflicting policy with respect to China's maritime domain, as noted by the frequency with which China Marine Surveillance vessels stray into waters claimed by Japan.¹² Similarly, the dispute between South Korea and Japan over the Dokdo/ Takeshima islets (Liancourt Rocks) has flared up as local administrative units, namely the Shimane Prefecture in Japan, have attempted to strengthen their claims to the disputed territory while South Korea has asserted its claim through educational initiatives and its Coast Guard.¹³

Illustrating the destabilising role of non-state actors, fishing communities have come to play a prominent role as triggers for regional inter-state tensions in the maritime domain. This is evinced by recent tension between Japan and China over the disputed status of the Daiyutai/ Senkaku islands, which was sparked by a rogue Chinese fishing vessel colliding with a Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force vessel in September 2010. Several recent incidents near Reed or Recto Bank, near the island of Palawan between Chinese and Filipino fishing vessels and military craft have also been the catalyst for renewed tensions between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea.¹⁴ Tensions between China and Vietnam have also been fuelled by frictions between state and non-state groups, including incidents of Chinese naval vessels allegedly damaging seismic cables of oil survey vessels inside Vietnam's exclusive economic zone, as well as the seizure of Vietnamese fishing vessels and fishermen by Chinese authorities.¹⁵

The growing frequency and intensity of rhetoric and incidents between China and rival claimants in maritime territorial disputes in the South and East China Sea signals an attempt by China to challenge the regional status quo by abandoning its mantra of maintaining a low profile.¹⁶ At the same time, other claimants in these disputes have become bolder in challenging China's claims amid the adoption of a more coordinated regional approach and growing engagement with extra-territorial powers. This has come to the chagrin of China that maintains a preference for a bilateral, non-internationalised approach in resolving these disputes. Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines have been the most vocal in challenging China in their maritime territorial disputes in

the East and South China Sea.¹⁷ For instance, in October 2011 the Philippines and Vietnam signed several bilateral maritime pacts, which included information sharing and a coordinated response to piracy and protecting marine resources.¹⁸ This came months after the naval chiefs of the ten-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) held their fifth meeting in Vietnam aimed at improving regional maritime coordination and cooperation.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the United States is taking an increasingly active role in maritime territorial disputes in South China Sea as noted by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declaring the peaceful settlement of the issue a “national interest”.²⁰ The United States has increasingly taken sides in the dispute by echoing the Philippines’ position on its claim, referring to the South China Sea as the West Philippines Sea, conducting war games with the Philippines and Vietnam near the disputed territory in 2011, and reaching an agreement to modernise the Philippine Navy.²¹ Other extra-territorial powers are also getting in on the act by increasing their maritime engagement with countries that face contested territorial claims with China. At the end of October the defence ministers for Vietnam and Japan concluded a memorandum aimed at enhancing bilateral defence cooperation. This was preceded a month earlier by the Philippines and Japan reaching an agreement on enhancing cooperation between both countries’ navies and coastguards.²² Russia has also been reinvigorating its strategic relationship with Vietnam in the maritime domain, which has included the sale of *Kilo*-class submarines, upgrading naval facilities in the deep-water port at Cam Ranh Bay and a Russian-Vietnamese joint venture for offshore oil exploration and production off Vung Tau.²³

These attempts to draw extra-territorial powers into regional maritime territorial disputes in order to increase leverage vis-a-vis China could either serve to tone down China’s rhetoric or prompt it to adopt more aggressive posturing. So far the latter appears to be the case. Reports in July that an Indian Navy vessel, the *INS Airavat* received alleged radio contact from the Chinese Navy demanding that the vessel depart disputed waters in the South China Sea after completing a port call in Vietnam illustrates that the growing presence of extra-territorial navies in the region is unlikely to go unchallenged by China.²⁴ Beijing has also voiced opposition to Indian company ONGC Videsh exploring for offshore energy resources in disputed waters under a contract with Vietnam. So far extra-territorial powers have merely recognised the *de facto* sovereignty

exercised by rival claimants over disputed maritime territory. A shift toward *de jure* recognition of sovereignty over disputed territory would signal clear grounds for escalation of tensions between China and extra-territorial powers that are siding with opposing claimants in maritime territorial disputes in the region.

Despite a plethora of areas of mutual interest in the maritime domain, such as joint exploration of offshore oil and gas resources, joint patrolling of sea-lanes of communication and combatting non-state threats such as piracy, regional and global multilateral initiatives are likely remain of limited utility amid the persistence of a regional trust deficit. This explains why the eight-point guidelines reached at the 18th ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in July 2011 aimed at making the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea a binding code of conduct has failed to quell the war of words and sporadic skirmishes in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, global norms such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and Global Maritime Partnership Scheme (“1000-ship navy”) are only selectively supported amid concerns that they could impinge on state sovereignty. This is illustrated with the example of China’s “nine-dotted line” claim in the South China Sea that stretches 1,600km from its coast, in contravention to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.²⁵

Tensions are likely to persist in the absence of sufficient measures aimed at addressing the root causes of regional rivalries, including historical, cultural and power considerations. These need to be complemented by a move away from informal codes of conduct toward institutionalised mechanisms that provide ruled-based binding covenants aimed at enforcing the demilitarisation of disputes by all claimants. Finally, there needs to be recognition by all parties, particularly China that the era of seeking bilateral local solutions has passed. The strategic significance of these disputes calls for a multilateral solution and more open regionalism that takes account of the views of extra-territorial, non-claimant stakeholders, such as Japan, India and the United States that have an interest in the peaceful resolution these territorial disputes and maintaining the freedom of navigation at sea.

‘Great Game’ at Sea

Confirming the reinvigoration of inter-state maritime rivalries, the relationship between China and India is emerging as a harbinger of the emerging maritime security architecture in Asia. China and India have traditionally been viewed as continental powers. Both countries' economies have historically been largely inward-looking and self-sufficient with little trade beyond their immediate sub-region (Northeast Asia for China and South Asia for India). As such, maritime trade has played a marginal role in economic activities aside from a few brief historical periods. Furthermore, in the period as modern nation-states the navy has traditionally played second-fiddle to the army in forging both countries' military doctrines and strategies. Both countries have traditionally pursued relatively modest maritime security interests confined to playing a supporting role to land-based operations and protecting their respective coastlines. China's focus has been on sea-denial capabilities aimed at deterring US intervention in a conflict in the Taiwan Strait while India has focused on coastal defence and surveillance given the presence of latent maritime terrorist threats along the country's porous, poorly demarcated and disputed maritime border. With respect to their bilateral strategic relationship, the disputed land border has traditionally been the primary source of contention as noted by their brief border conflict in 1962.

However, both nations have demonstrated a growing interest in the realm of maritime security in recent years given the strategic importance of waterways as transit points for growing trade and resource imports and concerns over possible disruptions along maritime chokepoints from a plethora of state and non-state threats. This in turn has transformed the nature of their bilateral relationship from a land-based rivalry toward a competition increasingly taking place in the maritime domain with greater implications for the regional security architecture and transnational security issues such as energy security. Notably, China and India's growing dependence on imported hydrocarbon resources, most of which are transported by sea, has made energy security an integral part of the maritime security domain. China has been a net oil importer since 1993 and India since the 1970s. Oil accounts for approximately 20 per-cent of China's total energy consumption, and a quarter of India's total energy consumption, of which over half is imported in the case of China, and 70 per cent in the case of India.²⁶ Some 80 per

cent of China's oil imports transit the sea lanes of the South China Sea while more than 50 per cent of India's trade passes through the Strait of Malacca. This has fuelled their need to expand naval power projection capabilities in order to secure sea-lanes of communication.

Both countries' expanding maritime security interests have manifested in shifts to their maritime security doctrines and the growth of historical narratives that reaffirm the importance of their maritime traditions. China has moved beyond "near-coast defense" toward "near-seas active defence" and increasingly into the realm of "far-sea operations".²⁷ Meanwhile, the Indian Navy's maritime doctrine has defined its domain as stretching to the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea.²⁸ Both countries' historical narratives have also been adapted to accommodate their renewed focus on maritime traditions. Renewed focus in China on the naval voyages of Zheng He during the Ming Dynasty in the 15th century and in India on the naval expeditions of the Chola Dynasty during the 11th century has demonstrated a concerted effort by both states' to elevate the strategic importance of their naval traditions.²⁹ The views of proponents of expanding naval power, such as former Chinese naval chief Admiral Liu Huaqing and India's first ambassador to China, KM Panikkar, have also found renewed support during the current maritime renaissance in both states.

Beyond rhetoric, both countries have pursued a combination of internal balancing (military modernization) and external balancing (building alliances) in the maritime domain. Their ambitious plans for the development and acquisition of naval platforms aimed at strengthening blue water naval capabilities illustrate both countries' growing naval power projection capabilities.

The 225,000-member PLA Navy now maintains a fleet of some 200 vessels, including over 75 "principal combatants", 55 large and medium amphibious ships, 85 missile-equipped warships and over 60 submarines.³⁰ To be sure, much of the hype surrounding the launch of China's first aircraft carrier – the refitted 67,000-tonne former Soviet aircraft carrier, the *Varyag*, which held its first sea trials in August 2011– has been exaggerated in the absence of a full carrier battle group to support its operations.³¹ The fact that the likely candidate for carrier-based aircraft, the J-15, is still under development while the Navy also lacks an offshore depot to support long-

range operations has further reaffirmed the challenges facing the country's carrier ambitions. Nonetheless, despite the operational vulnerability of aircraft carriers amid the proliferation of sea-denial platforms such as submarines, anti-ship ballistic missiles and improved surveillance capabilities, any state seeking to project power beyond its immediate region and exercise sea-control will require carrier group capability to secure sea-lines of communication and support land-based operations, including expeditionary and humanitarian activities.

Furthermore, there has been a gradual modernization of the country's submarine fleet from the older *Romeo* and *Han*-class submarines to the newer *Kilo*, *Song* and *Yuan* class vessels.³² China's development of the *jiaolong* submersible craft, which will enhance the country's ability to conduct deep-sea, ocean-floor mining operations, also demonstrates the growing sophistication of the country's indigenous maritime capability.³³ While some 36 countries maintain submarines in their navies, China and India are two of only six countries with a nuclear submarine capability. China and India's interest in building up their nuclear submarine capability beyond their predominantly conventional diesel submarine fleet points toward a growing interest in power projection beyond their littoral regions. The country's indigenously developed *Type 071* amphibious assault vessel also has significant implications for China's naval power projection given its multidimensional capability to support expeditionary operations.³⁴

To accommodate its expanding naval ambitions, China is in the process of establishing a fourth fleet that may consist of 2-3 aircraft carrier battle groups in Sanya on the southern island of Hainan. This fleet, which indicates China's growing maritime interests in the South China Sea and beyond, will complement the North Sea Fleet based in Qingdao, East Sea Fleet in Ningbo and South Sea Fleet based in Zhanjiang.³⁵ These expanded capabilities have been manifested in demonstrations of China's growing projection of power beyond its traditional sphere of interest around the first and second "island chains".³⁶ These include China's first naval exercises in the Pacific Ocean in 2011, which follows in the footsteps of the Navy's revolving three-ship deployment for anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean since 2009.³⁷

Meanwhile, India has ambitious plans for the development of a 160-plus-ship navy, comprising three aircraft carrier battle groups by 2022.³⁸ The country currently maintains a fleet of 132 warships, including 50 “major combatants” and 14 submarines with 49 warships and submarines on order aimed at transforming the navy into “a brand new multi-dimensional Navy” with “reach and sustainability”.³⁹ Despite delays in procuring some naval platforms, such as the Russian aircraft carrier *Admiral Gorshkov (INS Vikramaditya)*, India has stepped up the indigenous development of naval platforms; including (Advanced Technology Vessel) nuclear-powered submarines; Kolkata-class stealth destroyers, and a submarine-launched supersonic missile that modifies its *BrahMos* cruise missile.⁴⁰

The tri-services Andaman and Nicobar (Southern) command, which was established in 2001, and Eastern Command headquartered in Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh have received a growing proportion of the Navy's resources, correcting for a traditional bias in favour of the Western Command in Mumbai. The *USS Trenton*, renamed *INS Jalashwa* has been assigned to the eastern command, while the Indian Navy's only aircraft carrier, the *INS Viraat* will be deployed to the eastern command along with the country's first nuclear submarine, the *INS Arihant*, which is undergoing sea trials.⁴¹

Protecting the ‘Global Commons’

While India has traditionally been dwarfed by China in the military sphere, in the maritime domain India demonstrates the greatest potential to challenge China's military capability. While not superior to China in the quantity or quality of its naval platforms, the Indian Navy – the world's fifth-largest – has outpaced the PLAN in the sphere of protecting the global commons, including maintaining the free flow of maritime trade and transport, addressing humanitarian disasters, and combatting the scourge of maritime piracy, illicit trafficking, and the latent threat of maritime terrorism. Humanitarian operations have emerged as a catalyst for India to expand its maritime influence in the Southeast Asia region as noted by its assistance following the Asian tsunami of 2004 and the cyclone that struck Myanmar (Burma) in 2008.⁴²

India has also been more successful at regional confidence building in the maritime domain fuelled by the growing frequency of joint naval exercises with regional navies. Several Southeast Asian countries have taken part in the biennial *Milan* naval exercises with India since they commenced in 1995, including Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore while India has also conducted joint naval exercises with Singapore (*SIMBEX*) since 1993 and with Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia as part of the Search and Rescue Operations (*SAREX*) since 1997. India has conducted several bilateral naval exercises with South Korea while the bilateral *Malabar* naval exercises with the United States have acquired an increasingly trilateral format with the participation of Japan in 2007 and 2010. In contrast, China's naval exercises tend to be a source of sabre-rattling as they often coincide with a surge in tensions over disputed territories.⁴³

This focus on tackling non-state threats, such as piracy and natural disasters, and confidence-building through joint exercises demonstrate that both countries' expanding naval power projection capabilities need not emerge as a source of insecurity in the regional security architecture. While India has so far taken the lead on this front, China's rhetoric of maintaining "Harmonious Seas", countering non-traditional security threats and engaging in military operations other than war (MOOTW) suggest that China's potential for cooperation in the maritime domain could grow as its maritime security interests move further from its coastline and become less geographically-bounded.⁴⁴ This is illustrated in the case of the country's anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean where in 2010 China co-chaired the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings that provides overall coordination for the multi-nation naval operations in the region.⁴⁵ Furthermore, while the PLA Navy's (PLAN) initial justification for deployment to the Indian Ocean was to protect Chinese flagged merchant shipping, the PLAN has increasingly escorted non-Chinese vessels, including UN World Food Program convoys.⁴⁶ The deployment of a Chinese missile frigate to the Mediterranean in early 2011 to support the evacuation of Chinese nationals from Libya has been further evidence of the Chinese navy's growing MOOTW capabilities.⁴⁷ Such operations are likely to become increasingly commonplace given the growing outbound investment by Chinese companies, much of which is in pariah states with unstable regimes. China has also been enhancing the humanitarian response capabilities of its navy, as noted by the deployment of one of the world's largest hospital ship, the *Peace Ark* in 2008.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, despite the fact that China and India face several shared dilemmas in their maritime security agendas there has been limited success in forging a cooperative approach toward regional issues in the maritime domain. Both countries have generally played a marginal role in the evolution of regional approaches toward addressing maritime security issues with most initiatives either driven by ASEAN (e.g. Malacca Straits Patrols), the United States (Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), Container Security Initiative (CSI), International Ship and Port Security Facility Security (ISPS) Code) or other regional powers such as Japan (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combatting Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP)). India and China have also failed to forge ad-hoc regional strategic dialogues that have developed a maritime security component, as seen with the trilateral strategic dialogue between Australia, Japan and the United States and between India, Japan and the United States.

Rather than being a source of regional confidence-building and cooperation, the Sino-Indian maritime rivalry is increasingly moving onshore, as manifested by China's 'string of pearls' strategy of developing ports and transshipment hubs along maritime trade routes, including Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Sittwe in Myanmar. In the case of Myanmar, China has gone a step further with the construction of an oil and gas pipeline from the port of Kyaukryu to Kunming in Yunnan Province in China's southwest aimed at bypassing maritime chokepoints and thus alleviating the so-called 'Malacca Dilemma'.⁴⁹ Similar ambitions have been expressed by Beijing to develop overland infrastructure from other 'pearls' into China to reduce the vulnerability of the country's overwhelming dependence on maritime trade routes. To be sure, at present other initiatives remain mere rhetoric as demonstrated in the case of Gwadar where the port has failed to meet expectations regarding its commercial viability amid bureaucratic delays and security concerns. Nonetheless, the establishment of the country's first "turn-around" naval facility in the Seychelles demonstrates that China's "string of pearls" strategy remains alive.

India has been attempting to counter China's so-called 'string of pearls' strategy through improving its relations with its immediate and strategic neighbours. India's 'Look East' policy which was purely based on improving connectivity and trade and commercial relations with its

South East Asian neighbourhood has off late acquired some strategic undertones. India has developed good defence relations with a number of ASEAN nations. There are some reports which indicate that Vietnam has granted Indian Navy vessels permanent berthing rights at Na Thrang port. While claims that these port facilities have a military role are exaggerated at present, it is not inconceivable that both countries could eventually utilise these commercial ports for military-strategic purposes, including resupply, refuelling and even surveillance and signals intelligence. One only need look at discussions of China acquiring a blue-water naval capability and projecting power into the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which until recently was perceived as mere rhetoric.

Conclusion

For the foreseeable future inter-state maritime rivalries are unlikely to manifest in the form of armed conflagration between the region's major powers. Rather, as most countries remain focussed on internal growth, development and the consolidation of political power, any rivalry is likely to manifest itself in the realm of rhetoric, economics, military modernisation and a competition for allies. Over the next year, several internal political transitions will keep all the region's major powers preoccupied; this includes a shift from the fourth to the fifth generation of Chinese Communist Party leadership following the 18th National Congress in 2012; presidential elections in the United States; and the precarious hold on power by the Democratic Party of Japan-led government in Japan and Indian National Congress-led government in India. This suggests that these countries are unlikely to 'rock the boat' on the foreign policy front though anti-foreign rhetoric could also grow fuelled by shaky domestic political transitions.

The changing nature of the maritime security domain in Asia comes amid the wider strategic development of renewed US engagement with the Asia Pacific region as part of a broader policy of "forward-deployed diplomacy" in the "Indo-Pacific region".⁵⁰ Several recent developments have demonstrated a concerted effort by the United States to challenge the re-emergence of a Sino-centric regional order in Asia. These include the conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership multilateral trade agreement with nine Pacific economies in November 2011; the establishment of a permanent US military presence in Australia of a 2,500-strong Marine

taskforce by 2016; the US gaining membership to the East Asia Summit during its sixth summit meeting in Bali in November 2011; renewed US commitment to its allies facing maritime territorial disputes with China, namely Japan and the Philippines, and rapprochement with other countries maintaining precarious relations with China, including Vietnam and Myanmar (Burma); the Joint Air-Sea Battle Concept unveiled in the US 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, which aims to build an integrated long-range strike capability to overcome the anti-access capabilities of China; and the planned deployment of advanced littoral combat ships by the United States to Singapore.⁵¹

The Sino-Indian relationship is developing both independently of and through the wider prism of the Sino-US competition over varying conceptions of the emerging regional order. The United States is actively seeking to draw India deeper into the East Asian security architecture, to the chagrin of China. The US 2010 Quadrennial Defence Review proclaimed India “as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond”.⁵² Geoffrey Pyatt, principal deputy secretary for South and Central Asian affairs at the US State Department has called on India to move beyond ‘Look East’ and instead adopt a ‘Be East’ policy by playing a more proactive role in shaping the trajectory of regional integration.⁵³ US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton echoed these views when she called on India to “not just to look east but engage east and act east as well.”⁵⁴ More recently, Ben Rhodes, US deputy national security advisor for strategic communication noted that “just as the United States, as a Pacific Ocean power, is going to be deeply engaged in the future of East Asia, so should India as an Indian Ocean power and as an Asian nation.”⁵⁵ This has moved beyond the realm of rhetoric as the United States has sought to revive the George W. Bush administration’s ‘arc of democracies’ initiative. The US-Japan-India trilateral dialogue and Australia’s decision to reverse its ban on uranium sales to India in 2011, demonstrate the on-going evolution of the regional security architecture, as the US bilateral ‘hub and spoke’ alliance model is replaced by a multilateral US-led security system.⁵⁶

To be sure, the strategic environment remains fluid and shifts or reversals of policy remain possible. The so-called ‘arc of democracies’ initiative lost momentum following a change of government in each of the ‘arc’ countries – from Liberal Democratic Party to Democratic Party of Japan in Japan; from the Liberal National Coalition to the Labour Party in Australia; and from

Republican to Democratic Party in the United States. However, this demonstrates the growing complexity of the emerging regional security architecture in Asia given the recognition by regional powers of growing economic interdependence with China despite continued military interdependence with the United States.

Ultimately, regional powers, including India, China, Japan and the United States have a shared interest in maintaining open sea lanes given the strategic importance of these waterways as transit points for growing trade and resource imports and the need for a coordinated approach by littoral and extra-regional navies in combatting the scourge of non-traditional security threats, including maritime piracy, terrorism and arms, narcotics and people trafficking. Former foreign minister Shiv Shankar Menon put forward a proposal for a 'Maritime Concert' in which the region's major maritime powers would have collective responsibility to protect the Indian Ocean from non-traditional security threats.⁵⁷ In this context, the recent revelation that China, India and Japan will coordinate their anti-piracy patrols in the Indian Ocean within the framework of the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) mechanism is a step in the right direction.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, as China and India's overseas interests grow the importance of securing regional trade routes will increase as well, which set the stage for a deepened rivalry in the maritime domain, in the absence of confidence-building and strategic cooperation. At present the region is plagued by multiple overlapping forums to tackle issues of maritime security, including the South Asia Regional Port Security Cooperative (SARPSCO); the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP); and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). The competing nature of these forums is in part a reflection of the climate of mistrust that pervades the region amid the persistence of underlying inter-state rivalries.

Sustainable cooperation in the maritime domain will require confidence-building that transcends the maritime domain and addresses the root causes behind mutual mistrust. The Malacca Straits Patrols in Southeast Asia played a prominent role in quelling the piracy threat in the South China Sea. However, this functional cooperation was built upon pre-existing confidence-building mechanisms forged between regional powers by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN). A similar multilateral, inclusive and multi-level model of confidence building needs to be employed to deter the escalation of emerging rivalries in the maritime domain in the Asia-Pacific region.

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