

THE 2020 EDITION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC REGIONAL DIALOGUE (IPRD-2020)

CONCEPT NOTE

1. The Indo-Pacific, which is a predominantly maritime space connecting three continents, is fast emerging as the most important geopolitical region in the world, including as it does, an economically resurgent Asia. Despite efforts of the current US administration to promote inward-looking nationalism and to abandon globalisation, the transnational interests of countries have moved well beyond the strict geographical categorisations of earlier times. Consequently, it is, today, neither practical nor useful to view various Asian sub-regions as isolated entities as was the case in times gone by. We are witnessing a reconceptualisation of this region, wherein the historical view of the Indo-Pacific as a single, cohesive geopolitical entity is being restored, and its horizontal and vertical interconnections, which encompass a wide swath of economics, connectivity and culture, are increasingly recognised as being of the utmost importance to the world.

2. For India, the term 'Indo-Pacific' reflects the core conceptual, spatial and temporal framework that underpins the country's engagement with its external environment. It is not, in and of itself, a strategy but is, rather, an articulation of India's proximate 'strategic geography'.¹ While the Indo-Pacific is a predominantly maritime regional construct, it is not exclusively so. As such, it accommodates both littoral States and hinterland or landlocked ones within its ambit. In spatial terms, it extends from the Indian Ocean littoral of Africa to our West, encompassing the seas fringing the Indian Ocean and proceeding eastward, incorporating the seas bordering the Pacific Ocean, to the western littoral of the Americas, and from the southern littoral of Asia proceeding southward to the continental landmass of Antarctica.

3. Inclusivity, and, transparency, are fundamental to India's Indo-Pacific formulation. For India, 'inclusiveness' implies the use of existing regional mechanisms to promote dialogue-based approaches to the resolution of differences, the enhancement of economic cooperation, the sharing of maritime space and airspace, and the willingness to work with all countries in the region. Likewise, India holds that 'transparency' denotes openness of both intent and action. India seeks to meaningfully contribute to the creation and consolidation of an Indo-Pacific built upon

¹ This assertion brings in its wake the question of how 'strategic geography' differs from 'real' geography. If one were to take a chart or map that depicts 'real' geography and then place upon it a set of coordinates defined by specific latitudes and longitudes, and, within the area that has been so bounded or enclosed, if one were to then give special focus — at the national-level — in terms of the planning and execution of one's geopolitical strategies, this enclosed or bounded area would define one's 'strategic geography'. Obviously, the strategic geography of one country, can hardly be expected to be the same as that of another. For spoken and written convenience, a name has to be given to this area that has been bounded by the coordinates under reference. The name that we have chosen to give to this geographic space is the 'Indo-Pacific'. Other sovereign nations may well have given the same name to their own respective strategic-geographies, but this is no more or less than the ill-founded expectation that the several persons who bear the same name should be identical to one another. Thus, the fact that India's spatial construct of the Indo-Pacific might differ from that of another country is perfectly normal and entirely unexceptional.

five key principles: Respect, Dialogue, Cooperation, Peace, and Prosperity — **‘Respect’** for all, as well as for an international order that is underpinned by established international law; **‘Dialogue’** to resolve differences, and, to use existing fora, as relevant, including ASEAN-led fora such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), and, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA); **‘Cooperation’** as the basic means of intercourse between nations and their respective peoples; **‘Peace’** as the *sine qua non* for the attainment of **‘Prosperity’** through environmental sensitivity and the sustainable harvesting of the Earth’s resources and the equitable distribution of the wealth that accrues from such sustainable exploitation.

4. The ability to identify both, opportunities and challenges, and, equally important, to listen-to — and be sensitive-to — the varying perspectives of other States located-in or operating-within the Indo-Pacific, is a clear and evident prerequisite — for both India and the region — to jointly arrive at a mutually beneficial set of solutions. It is this realisation that has driven the Indian Navy to launch an annually-recurring and regionally-focussed series of international conferences, named “The Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue” (IPRD), which constitutes the Indian Navy’s annual apex-level international conference of that year. The National Maritime Foundation is proud and privileged to be the Indian Navy’s knowledge-partner and the chief organiser of each successive edition of the IPRD.

5. Utilising a series of both, plenary and break-out parallel sessions, the 2020 edition of the **Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD-2020)** will focus upon **six** themes of contemporary relevance, so as to enable a better appreciation of the opportunities and challenges that each brings in its wake. IPRD-2020 will be held on **Tuesday, 17 and Wednesday, 18 March 2020** at the **Manekshaw Centre, New Delhi** and will feature detailed discussions and analyses — by globally renowned analysts and thought-leaders of the strategic firmament, drawn from India and abroad — of the undermentioned six themes insofar as they impact the Indo-Pacific:

(a) **Theme 1: Maritime-India within the Indo-Pacific: Convergences, Divergences, Expectations and Apprehensions.** As the principal maritime manifestation of the sovereign power of the Republic of India, the Indian Navy is acutely aware of the fact that India is not the sole maritime entity operating within the Indo-Pacific. Consequently, it is only natural for there to be varying regional- and country-specific perceptions of ‘maritime-India’ as it establishes its footprint across the Indo-Pacific. It is critical for India to take these perceptions into account and to explore areas of perceived convergence as reflected in the hopes and expectations of other maritime powers operating within this strategic geography, as also to assuage any apprehensions that might possibly lead to points of divergence or dissonance. Following India-focussed perspectives on the following five specific aspects would be deliberated:

- (i) What he/she **hopes** 'maritime-India' will do.
- (ii) What he/she **expects** 'maritime-India' to do, and
- (iii) What he/she hopes 'maritime-India' will **not** do;

and then, based upon the foregoing three assessments:

- (iv) Which areas of practical maritime-convergence can be identified by identified by him/her, and
- (v) Which areas of potential or actual divergence he/she feels need to be guarded against.

(b) **Theme 2: The Impact of Climate Change upon Maritime Security.** It is a matter of deep irony that despite the fact that the impact of climate-change upon **maritime**-security is ubiquitous across the Indo-Pacific and is pervasive across both space and time, this is amongst the least studied of the many regional challenges that confront us. This is an attitudinal challenge — and one that has been heightened by the scepticism that has, over the past few years, been emanating from the apex levels of the current US administration. However, as Professor Mark McCaughrean, the Senior Advisor for Science and Exploration at the European Space Agency, has quite correctly asserted, *“The laws of physics are going to continue heating up the planet in response to increased levels of CO2 whether we'd like them to or not. Whether we deny them or not.”* Whether or not the major contributor to these changes is anthropogenic or geophysical, the need to impart urgency to a regionwide comprehensive examination of the manner in which maritime security is impacted by ongoing and future changes in the Earth's climate is a critical one. It is an incontrovertible fact that enormous amounts of energy are being added to the Earth system — equal to the energy of four nuclear bombs of the size dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — every second! This is inevitably warming the Earth, raising temperatures, melting ice-caps, and, raising sea-levels. Although the speed and extent of the warming of the climate are moot issues, global scientific consensus does exist on five 'climate certainties' that are in abundant evidence: (1) enhanced emission of Green House Gases; (2) higher surface, tropospheric, and ocean temperatures; (3) more extreme occurrences of both, precipitation and drought; (4) the melting of sea ice, ice sheets, and mountain glaciers; and (5) rising sea levels. With resilience in maritime-infrastructure and associated genuine mitigating and/or coping strategies being either absent or grossly inadequate, there is a pressing requirement to discuss the maritime — and naval — impacts of climate change. A variety of perspectives, all of which will be germane and relevant to the development and refinement of India's own strategies for resilience and adaptation and mitigation of the adverse impacts of climate change within the maritime domain will emerge from the presentations that would be made in this session by the speakers.

(c) **Theme 3: Distributed Lethality and the Continued Relevance of Aircraft-Carrier Battle/Strike Groups (CBG/CSG).** There are several

challenges being articulated by strategic analysts and media-pundits in respect of the continued relevance of aircraft carriers and their associated Carrier Strike- or Battle Groups (CSG / CBG). Some extol the advantages of the concept of 'distributed lethality' as an alternative to the CBG. Others base their arguments upon their assessments of the increased range, accuracy and kill-probability of land- and sea-based cruise and/or ballistic missiles as a result of enhanced identification, tracking and targeting — all enabled by multiple constellations of relatively-inexpensive miniature-satellites in low-earth orbits. Still others point to the increased lethality and stealth of modern submarines, howsoever propelled. There are some who forecast the imminent establishment of 'Mature Precision Strike Regimes' (MPSR) that will upend established theories of sea control. Several expound a view that with the advent of hypersonic missiles and glide bombs, the age of the CBG as a combat-unit is effectively over and that large-deck carriers retain utility only in 'shaping-operations' through the sheer awe they inspire. On the other hand, several better informed-analysts aver that the concept of 'distributed lethality' is platform-agnostic. They point to the fact that no carrier-operating navy has ceased building aircraft carriers, a few are commencing the building-process afresh, and, several that had abandoned the concept are embracing it again. The latter categories include the navies of the UK, Japan and South Korea — all of which are located in the immediate proximity of China and are consequently even more vulnerable to shore-based anti-ship attrition than more distantly-located ones. It would be most instructive to listen to their perspectives, particularly as the Indian Navy itself is deeply and firmly committed to the deployment of CBGs as a central tenet of its operational philosophy in combat. Following would be deliberated:

- (i) Cogently present the concept of '*distributed-lethality*' as one that is platform-agnostic, rather than being an 'either-or' option vis-à-vis aircraft carriers;
- (ii) Dilate upon the continued relevance of the aircraft carrier — especially as an integral component of a CSG/CBG rather than being considered as merely a single ship/platform;
- (iii) Offer his/her views on the contemporary threats faced by a CSG/CBG — particularly in terms of enhanced battlefield-transparency through the deployment of a multitude of military and civilian nano-satellites in Low Earth Orbit, the advent of glide-bombs and hypersonic missiles, and, the purported-development by China of land-based and ship/submarine-launched DF-26 ballistic-missiles specifically designed as 'carrier-killers' — and opine whether these threats are so radically different from earlier ones as to make a CSG/CBG an unviable battle-formation;
- (iv) Provide his/her own perspective of the rationale (in the face of these much-trumpeted threats) underpinning the USN's continuing Aircraft Carrier building programme, as also the initiation/re-initiation of

aircraft carrier building programme programmes not only by traditional carrier-navies such as those of the UK, France, and Russia, but also by countries such as the Republic of Korea and Japan.

(d) **Theme 4: Energy-Insecurity and Mitigating Options.** Energy demands and concerns relevant thereto continue to be major determinants of the regional security environment within the Indo-Pacific. On the one hand, the USA has emerged as a major exporter of petroleum-based energy, largely thanks to shale-oil and shale-gas. While there are serious misgivings over the medium-to-long-term availability of shale-oil, there is a much greater degree of comfort in respect of shale-gas. However, the geopolitical vulnerabilities of the associated oil/gas-bearing shipping are large, particularly as much of this shipping is flagged in third countries, some of which are notorious for the laxity of the legal stipulations that underpin their 'open registries'. Closer home, in a wide swath that encompasses the hinterland of sub-Saharan Africa, the Mozambique Channel, and the Persian Gulf and its environs, several new energy-strategies are being executed simultaneously by States deficient in petroleum-based resources and those that depend upon the profusion of these very resources for their respective economic wellbeing. These multiple strategies are interacting with one another in frequently unpredictable ways, creating both opportunities and challenges for both sets of players. Other energy-mitigating strategies involving hitherto exotic options ranging from the extraction of gas-hydrates, the direct gasification of coal, ocean-mechanical energy, ocean thermal energy, offshore wind-energy and solar energy are also being advanced with a renewed sense of urgency and a reassessment of economic viability. Energy remains a ubiquitous theme across the maritime domain and its multifaceted impact upon the fabric of the Indo-Pacific merits near-continuous focus. Following would be deliberated:

- (i) What maritime impact would the development of offshore gas fields (such as the Rovuma gas field, and those off Tanzania and Madagascar) have upon the present geopolitical centrality of the Persian Gulf sub-region?
- (ii) What challenges exist in the maritime transportation of natural gas (as a 'bridging-strategy' in the regional attempt to transition from oil-intensive economic growth to one fuelled mainly by renewable sources of energy)?
- (iii) How could navies and other maritime-security forces of the region best cooperate to mitigate insecurities in the maritime-transportation of petroleum-based energy within the Indo-Pacific?
- (iv) How real and how significant is the potential-morphing of maritime crime, piracy and terrorism in terms of the maritime-transportation of petroleum-based energy within the Indo-Pacific?

(v) How could navies and other maritime-security forces of the region best cooperate to mitigate insecurities in the import sources of petroleum-based energy?

(vi) What is the impact — especially upon naval/maritime force-planning and operational-planning — of cooperative naval/mechanisms (such as IONS, WPNS, IOC, NAVAF-APS, MaSé, EUNAVFOR, etc.) for ensuring stability in the maritime areas through which oil/gas-bearing shipping currently pass?

(e) **Theme 5: Port-led Regional Connectivity and Development**

Options. Several individual countries of the Indo-Pacific, and at least three major multinational groupings, namely, the ASEAN, the European Union (EU), and the Commonwealth of Nations, are consciously trying to enhance the development of all or part of the Indo-Pacific through regional maritime-connectivity that itself rests upon the innovative development of ports. Determining the most effective manner in which the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 could be ‘proliferated’ from its current SE Asian context to other segments of the Indo-Pacific is a process that is deserving of discussion and debate. Areas of common endeavour in this regard include (*inter alia*) the promotion of a mutually acceptable protocol for shipping and logistics services; the determination of mutually-beneficial maritime cargo-routes and coastal shipping services, and, the development of regional port-infrastructure and inter-island connectivity that would realise the enormous potential available in cruise-shipping based tourism involving a variety of ships, terminals and associated infrastructure. The development of Roll-On-Roll-Off shipping as a mitigating strategy to meet the otherwise formidable challenge of the enormous financial-outlays entailed in the traditional development of greenfield ports, as also the upgrading of existing ones, needs to be deliberated-upon extensively. Likewise, there is a pressing need to discuss regional responses to challenges of physical connectivity (i.e., ‘Hard Infrastructure’ — such as inadequate maritime and port infrastructure including dry ports, inland waterways and poor port-to-hinterland road/rail connectivity, the widening of the digital divide, and a growing demand for power, etc.) as well as issues relating to institutional connectivity (i.e., ‘Soft Infrastructure’ — such as non-tariff barriers, the lack of standards and conformity-assessment procedures, shipping facilitation agreements, optimal implementation mechanisms and methodologies for direct short-sea shipping and multimodal transportation, the removal of maritime-related impediments to the movement of vehicles, goods, services and skilled labour across borders; etc.) Another important issue needing extensive discussion is the geopolitical impact of India’s SAGARMALA megaproject. Will a purely ‘India-focussed’ SAGARMALA exclude ports in the countries that constitute India’s immediate maritime neighbourhood, thereby alienating them, or can it be tweaked to actually knit the neighbourhood together? Following would be deliberated:

(i) Highlight the role that the port sector has played in the economic growth and resurgence of his/her country;

(ii) List the specific efficiency-criteria that should, as a result of his/her own country's experience, be met before a decision is made as to where the country should plan to locate a greenfield port;

(iii) Present his/her views on the viability of Roll-on-Roll-off (Ro-Ro) shipping as a way of minimising quay-side infrastructure in developing countries across the Indo-Pacific (including ports in island-States in the Indian Ocean as well as the Pacific Ocean, as also along the East African and West Asian littoral of the Indian Ocean);

(iv) Present his/her own perspective of India's outward-looking and regionally-inclusive concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and how it could best be meshed with India's port-led SAGARMALA mega-project

(v) Offer his/her own views on how India's private sector, public sector, and joint [public-private] sector could respectively contribute to port-led development, not merely on a national or bilateral basis, but rather, on a pan-regional one.

(f) **Theme 6: Lawfare and Goeconomics in the Indo-Pacific.** As nation-states of the Indo-Pacific wrestle with the multi-faceted challenges of the globalised world in which they find themselves, there is a growing challenge being posed by new rising maritime-powers to the more established ones. The 'geostrategies' that these rising powers are putting in place so as to attain their respective goeconomic objectives, are grating and grinding against those of the world's established 'Grotian' powers. This is an adjective derived from the consistent espousal by erstwhile colonial powers of the freedom of the seas — a concept that has been eloquently articulated by the celebrated Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius, in his seminal work of 1609 titled "*Mare Liberum*". The geopolitical friction resulting from this jostling between geostrategies is already of an order of magnitude that demands the most careful attention so as to be able to devise suitable pan-regional mitigating-geostrategies by all players within the Indo-Pacific. The ongoing struggle amongst nation-states, to formulate and execute a superior competitive geostrategy that will result in goeconomic advantage, is driving a behavioural phenomenon that is being increasingly referred-to as 'Lawfare' — a portmanteau of the words 'law' and 'warfare'. Drawing from Sun Tzu's maxim that "*defeating the enemy without fighting is the pinnacle of excellence*", lawfare might be thought-of as a form of non-kinetic inter-State confrontation involving of the clever (and often cynical) use, manipulation or subversion of the international legal system and the humanitarian values it represents, so as to damage or delegitimise an adversary, often with the aim of achieving a public-relations victory. This session will explore the goeconomic impact of

the exercise of lawfare by major maritime powers operating within the Indo-Pacific and examine the options available to ‘counter’ or otherwise deal with it. Following would be deliberated:

- (i) Cogently present his/her own perspective of the term ‘Lawfare’;
- (ii) Dilate upon the manner in which international maritime public law is being used — within the Indo-Pacific — by nation-states in order to advance geostrategies designed to attain their geoeconomic objectives; and
- (iii) Expound upon how he/she sees future Indo-Pacific maritime interactions being shaped by this sort of manipulation of the international legal system for geoeconomic ends.

Draft Broad Programme

MONDAY, 16 MARCH 2020

Ice-breaker on the lawns of Navy House, hosted jointly by the CNS and the Chairman NMF.

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2020

0800-0835: Registration

0835-0900: VIP Arrivals

0900-1015: **Inaugural Session**

1015-1045: Tea

1045-1335: **Professional Session # 1:**

‘Maritime India’ within the Indo-Pacific: Convergences, Divergences, Expectations and Apprehensions — Part 1

1335-1430: Lunch

1430-1715: **Professional Session # 2:**

‘Maritime India’ within the Indo-Pacific: Convergences, Divergences, Expectations and Apprehensions — Part 2

1715-1745: Tea

1745-1950: **PARALLEL SESSIONS:**

Professional Session # 3:

Distributed Lethality and the Continued Relevance of Aircraft Carriers

Professional Session # 4:

Energy-Insecurity and Mitigating Options

Professional Session # 5:

Port-led Regional-Connectivity and Development Options

**Professional Session # 6:
Lawfare and Geoeconomics in the Indo-Pacific**

2000-2200: **Seminar Dinner hosted by the CNS**
Venue: Manekshaw Centre

WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2020

0800-0835: Registration

0835-0900: VIP Arrivals

0900-1000: **DAY-2 Inaugural Session**

1000-1030: Tea

1030-1310: **Professional Session # 7:**

**Impact of Climate-Change upon Holistic Maritime-Security within
the Indo-Pacific**

1310-1415: Lunch

1415-1515: **Valedictory Session**