

Maritime Security Complexes of the Indo-Pacific Region

(Vijay Sakhuja and W. Lawrence S. Prabhakar)

ARSHDEEP SINGH DUTT¹

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Introduction

The first decade of the 21st century, has been marked by intensifying shifts and sudden movements in the world order. The world, after an extended period of time, the world is witnessing a conventional war between two European States. The Covid-19 pandemic ravaged the world, and pronounced many of the issues in the world, as well as denouncing some of them. We live in an era wherein the global hegemon – the United States is being tested by the China, and this adversarial relation between them is largely seen as a fight for maintaining a liberal-democratic rule-based order in the world.

The maritime domain is one that is of vital importance and has felt strong reverberations from these global occurrences. The global maritime trade accounts for about 90% of the world trade underscoring the need for ensuring open and secure seas. Additionally, it can be inferred that whomever controls the seas, controls trade. Those who control the trade, have sway over economies. If one controls the economies, they control the states, and by extension the entire world. It is also important to note that the sea today holds value, not only economically, but militarily as well. submarines are still used for second-strike capabilities, and as a strategic deterrent in the contemporary world.

In this context, Dr. Vijay Sakhuja, a former naval officer, and Director of National Maritime Foundation (NMF). He is also a well-known scholar who has worked extensively on national security issues and public policy in milieu of Oceanic affairs, blue economy, geopolitics and climate change, among many other topics. And Dr. W. Lawrence S. Prabhakar, a researcher and professor of international relations and strategic studies, who has worked in various capacities for the Indian government and the Indian Navy among his array of portfolios, writes on Maritime Security Complexes of the Indo-Pacific region.

¹ The author is an Undergraduate student at Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) and is a Research Assistant at Centre for Security Studies (CSS).

On Book Chapters

This book provides a comprehensive review of the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. The authors have divided the book into 7-chapters or verticals that deal with specific agendas. Some are area specific; others explore intellectual discussions and analyse discourse on international relations theory. The following are the breakdown of these verticals:

In the initial chapter, the authors engage in a discussion on the Regional Security Complex theory (RSC) by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever. This theoretical framework emphasises the importance of territories and regional security in the processes of securitisation and de-securitisation of threats faced by all involved parties. The authors identify four essential elements that constitute the framework of the RSC which are boundary (geographical), anarchic structure (interplay of regional and international systems), polarity, (distribution of power), and social construction (constructivism). The authors employ this theoretical framework to develop a Maritime version of it, in order to elucidate the security concerns plaguing the Indo-Pacific region, and examining the scope of prospective challenges, threats, securitisation, etc.

The second chapter treads into the geographical features of the Southern Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean. It highlights the distinctive idiosyncrasies and their significance within the contemporary global framework, while also delving into the historical origins and patterns of the marine realm since the colonial period. . Lastly, there is a discourse on the Indo-Pacific – how different nations view this concept and their different interpretations, of the burning agendas that fall under this region's ambit.

Chapters, three to six focus on the maritime complexities and security dynamics present in the Indo-Pacific region. Chapter three highlights the maritime security complex in the Indian ocean. It explores various aspects of the traditional and non-traditional security threats ranging from issues of piracy, terrorism, human trafficking, substance smuggling, illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, climate change induced submergence of island nation-states, to inter-state conflicts, failing nations, and naval competition. In essence, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges encountered by the international order within the Indian Ocean maritime complex and highlights the complexities in dealing with such threats.

Chapter four explores the security dynamics in the North Arabian Sea Crescent (NASC). The authors put forth that the primary challenge confronting the NASC regional complex is predominantly rooted in traditional practices. This region includes significant strategic chokepoints for the world trade dynamic, namely, the Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz, and Bab Al Mandeb strait. These maritime passages serve as crucial channels for a significant amount of freight and commerce activities. The region of NASC has gained notoriety for its inter-regional conflicts harboured in the past, as well as for the intervention from external entities. Such conflicts create space for piracy and terrorism on the cargo ships passing through these regions (Somali piracy being case in point). Therefore, the NASC regional complex has been seeing naval presence of other nations to ensure security and stability.

Chapter five centres around the examination of security dynamics in the Bay of Bengal. according to the authors this region's main challenge is non-traditional security threat. Although piracy was prevalent in the past, it has been significantly suppressed in the recent decades following the departure of the colonisers. . Currently, due to climate change this region faces more threats non-traditional in nature. The threat of rising sea levels in the Bay of Bengal littoral nations, the expansion of oxygen minimum zones, the increased frequency of cyclones, tsunami(s), and storms, etc. The challenge of

permeable boundaries allowing for trade of narcotics and illegal substances into countries. The chapter also considers migratory concerns faced by such island nations. This chapter also covers China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the ports under it, which their purposes.

The sixth chapter delves into the Indo-Pacific region's Western Pacific Ocean, an area of substantial geopolitical significance. . The chapter explores the security complex of this region. Here, the security complex is primarily characterised by China's assertive posturing in the South China Sea (SCS) and its neighbour to its East, and the West's role in mitigating it, while also looking at ASEAN's position in this matter, and confidence building measures in the region, between China and US.

The last chapter sets its anchor on the Naval Nuclear Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. This chapter emphasises the importance of having nuclear naval deployments (SSBN's or SLBMs in particular²), and it lays out country profiles of nations with naval nuclear capabilities like the USA, China, Russia, France, and the UK. The authors also provide naval nuclear country profiles of the newer nuclear states like India, Israel, Pakistan, and North Korea. They also analyse the challenges the newer nuclear states are facing some attention.

Conclusion: Analysis

Overall, the book offers an intriguing take on maritime affairs, as applying RSC theory to the maritime domain is an idea that has come into the fray recently. It has gone into grave detail when covering the Indo-Pacific. The book successfully exposed the various security concerns and hazards although it could have placed a stronger emphasis on proposing solutions. In chapters four and five, the authors should have provided a more extensive analysis of potential solutions and ongoing initiatives aimed at addressing the security challenges.

While the authors have emphasised the importance of naval nuclear capabilities, and the importance for diversifying ones nuclear arsenal launch capabilities, there is an assumption that a first strike can disable all the land retaliatory capabilities (pg.128), as Naval nuclear deployments assure second-strike capabilities. However, the same is also true for land and air power – which has not been emphasised or clarified properly in the book.

To conclude, the authors provide an in-depth and informative perspective on the Security complexes across the Indo-Pacific, the authors also provide important perspectives to the role of naval power in maintaining order in the seas, and with regards to deterrence against other states. This book is recommended for those interested in oceanic affairs, strategic studies, or even international relations to get a maritime perspective on such matters.

² SSBN: Submerged Ship Ballistic Nuclear. SLBM: Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles