

INTERNATIONAL FLEET REVIEW (IFR) SERIES**Common Public Good at Sea: Evolving Architecture in the Indo-Pacific Region**

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The concept of ‘Common Public Good(s) at Sea’ has lately gained much traction in the context of maritime safety and security in the Afro-Asian swath of the Indo-Pacific region.ⁱ As the centre-of-gravity of world’s economic power shifts eastwards, the salience of this predominantly maritime-configured region is increasing, and the attendant emphasis on security and stability in its maritime domain.

One does not recall coming across a precise definition of the phrase ‘Common Public Good(s) at Sea’ (CPGS). The closest one gets is to define it is through exemplification of a navy’s ‘constabulary’ and ‘benign’ tasks at sea, ranging from counter-piracy and counter-terrorism to search and rescue (SAR), and humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief (HADR). This essay attempts to understand CGPS as a concept, examine the trends in context of the said region, and postulate the emerging CGPS architecture.

The Concept

Most of us are familiar to the term ‘public good(s)’ used in the economic context. It draws its genesis from the renowned economist Paul Samuelson, who defined it in his 1954 paper as:

“[goods] which all enjoy in common in the sense that each individual's consumption of such a good leads to no subtractions from any other individual's consumption of that good.”ⁱⁱ

A ‘public good’ is, therefore, something that is a collective good *sans* exclusions. Further, it is not amount to a ‘zero-sum’ reckoning; in a sense that its consumption by one entity does not reduce its availability to other entities. In the maritime domain, a public good are best represented by ‘lighthouses’ that beacon weather-beaten seafarers to the ports and safe waters.

Much of the world’s ocean realm wherein humans undertake multifarious maritime activities is ‘international medium’ not subject to the laws of any single country. The delivery of safety and security in such space of global commons thus becomes a logical extension of ‘public good’. Further, such ‘good’ could be extrapolated to the littoral. The watery medium provides transnational access to maritime security forces to undertake humanitarian missions during adverse contingencies on and off foreign shores. It is pertinent to note that while undertaking such benign tasks – whether at high seas or in the foreign littoral – the maritime forces perform a valuable function for their respective governments as ‘instruments of foreign policy’. Given the above, in the contemporary context, CPGS may be defined as:

‘measures taken by the maritime security forces to meet their respective States’ international commitments towards facilitating good and lawful order in the maritime global commons, while also meeting their respective foreign policy objectives’.

It is necessary to note, however, that the maritime domain – represented by the seas and oceans of the world – constitutes the most unregulated and treacherous realm on Earth. To develop situational awareness in this domain, deliver safety and regulate activities therein presents a formidable challenge for maritime forces, including those belonging to major naval powers.

The Regional Context

In geographical terms, the Indo-Pacific region has a predominant maritime configuration. While geography has been a ‘constant’ in history, the so-called ‘rise of Asia’ and the attendant maritime-economic activity in the region has made the CPGS concept highly relevant to the regional countries and the extra-regional stakeholders. Traditionally – or at least in more recent times since the beginning of the post Cold War era – CPGS across the globe, and particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, has been provided by the maritime forces of the United States (US); at times, assisted by the forces of what the US calls, its “allies and partners”.

The regional countries, beset by the lack of adequate capacity – besides limited national objectives in terms of geographical scope – have been largely content with the arrangement, and have adopted a ‘free-rider’ approach to security. However, clearly, such a measure is not sustainable, neither for the regional countries, not for the global stakeholders. It is not easy – even for a superpower like the US – to deliver CPGS incessantly in the nearly ‘endless’ stretch of the world’s maritime realm. The military/ naval resources of the US have been increasingly stretched since the end of Cold War due to its increasing military-strategic commitments overseas. The geopolitical challenges added to the US resource ‘overstretch’, best exemplified by the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)ⁱⁱⁱ and the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI)^{iv}. This led to the US Navy Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) propound the concept of ‘Thousand-Ship Navy’ (TSN)^v concept propounded by the in 2005.

Seeking support of the allies and partners to partake the responsibility of CPGS, the TSN concept continued well into the later years, even though ‘TSN’ concept was later rephrased as the ‘Global Maritime Partnership’ (GMP) initiative, and the same was highlighted in the US Maritime Strategy document of 2007.^{vi}

In the long run, however, the reliance of the Indo-Pacific region on a single power (or even on a group of ‘monolithic’ western powers) for providing CPGS may not be in the interest of the regional countries and global stakeholders alike, including for the US itself. There are nascent indicators of a change, which augurs well for both categories of nations!

Emerging CPGAS Architecture

Tier One

For the US, since the beginning of the current decade, delivery of CPGS in the Indo-Pacific has assumed greater salience than ever before in consonance with its national-strategic concept of ‘Rebalance to Asia’. Strategy-2015 furthers the appeal for the partnership, with the ‘Global Maritime Partnership’ (GMP) – of the 2007 Maritime Strategy document – now rephrased as a “global network of navies” in the 2015 Maritime Strategy. The 2015 document effectively communicates to the potential partners the rationale for such “plug and play” cooperation with the US forces *sans* “commitment”.^{vii}

While the US has been a ‘constant’ in terms of delivery of CPGS in the region, and it may continue to be the ‘lead actor’ for some time, it is unlikely to be the ‘only’ provider of ‘net security’^{viii} in the longer run. The Indo-Pacific is witness to the emergence of new major and middle powers with increasing geopolitical, economic and military stakes in the entire Indo-Pacific region. For geopolitical and military-strategic reasons, China is likely to contest the primacy of the US in delivery of CPGS. Notably, however, the Chinese refer to

CPGS differently, as 'Military Operations Other than War' (MOOTW), **as indicated in China's Defence White Papers since the 2012 document titled 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces'**.^{ix}

Tier Two

While the US-China dialectic may soon emerge as the first tier of the regional CGPS arrangement, other medium powers are likely supplement it and form the second tier. These include Australia, India and Japan: middle powers, all of whom have gained considerably from their alliance/ partnership with the US, but would like to form a concert to hedge against being entangled in the US-China tussle. Towards this end, analysts are increasingly promoting the idea of "middle power coalitions" to offset big-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific.^x

Australia's strategic focus has traditionally been on its eastern seaboard facing the Pacific. Lately, however, Canberra is increasingly looking westwards, akin to a "pivot to the Indian Ocean",^{xi} and reminiscent of events of the 1970s leading to Australia's 'Two-Ocean Navy' policy enunciated in 1986.^{xii} Sam Bateman writes, "Australia's approach to the Indian Ocean in recent decades might appear to have waxed and waned (but) it never withered away...I don't see any prospect of the current 'pivot' withering away!"^{xiii}

India's new maritime strategy released in October 2015 indicates its intention to be a provider of 'net security' in its areas of maritime interest, which have been significantly expanded within the Indo-Pacific region, and even beyond. Such enunciation is in consonance with the Indian Prime Minister's vision of "SAGAR" (hindi word for 'Ocean' and an acronym for 'Security and Growth for All in the Region').^{xiv} Furthermore, the role emerges not only from India's normative responsibility as a regional power, but is also closely interwoven with its own economic growth and prosperity.^{xv}

The Japanese maritime forces have played an active role in maintaining good maritime order in the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean despite the constraints imposed by their national Constitution, specifically relating to the concept of ‘collective security’. Notably, in June 2011, Japan established a forward operating base at Djibouti to facilitate its counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden. As Japan’s only military facility on foreign soil, new base is being reinforced with more resources and accorded added responsibilities.^{xvi} The base would enable the Japanese Self Defence Forces (JSDF) to respond to any contingency involving humanitarian and good order missions in the area. With the constraints of domestic law eroding, Japan’s CPGS role – in concert with other countries – is likely to increase in the coming years.

The tier two is likely to be reinforced by the European Union (EU). Through the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Operation *Atalanta*, the has already proved itself to be a reckonable actor in the Indian Ocean, and the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS)^{xvii} promulgated in June 2014 is likely synergise the role of EU navies to provide CPGS – and least in the IOR, if not further eastwards – through its “integrated approach to global maritime security”.^{xviii} The Strategy would support the role of France – the only major power besides the US that has maintained a continuous naval presence in the Indian Ocean – and would draw support from the re-establishment of the Royal Navy’s permanent presence east of the Suez after a hiatus of nearly 45 years. ^{xix}

Tier Three

In due course, some other medium powers and other relevant countries are likely to share the stage by taking on the gauntlet of CPGS in the Indo-Pacific, forming the third tier of the regional CPGS architecture. The potential medium powers include Indonesia and Iran. Indonesia has enunciated for itself the sobriquet of “*Porus Maritim Dunia*” (global maritime axis)^{xx} that envisions developing of the maritime power of the archipelagic nation

to its full potential. Further, in consonance with its geo-strategic centrality, it seeks to shape events in the maritime space of the Indo-Pacific region. Although Jakarta has accorded priority to internal consolidation, it is likely to play a significant CPGS role in the region.

Iran could be an effective counter to the global threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and bears a high potential of contributing to stability in West Asia and maritime security in the western Indian Ocean. The international community needs to realize the potential of ISIS to disrupt the West Asian international shipping lanes (ISL) by targeting oil and gas tankers, particularly in the maritime choke-points. The Iranian Navy may be a bulwark against the ISIS in securing the global energy trade sourced from the Persian/ Arabian Gulf. The positive trends in P+1 negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme represents an opportunity for the stakeholders to engage with Iran.

The other relevant powers that could potentially contribute to CPGS in the region are South Africa, Pakistan and a cohesive group of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Their highly capable and professional maritime forces could contribute significantly to regional CPGS effort. However, the political leaderships in Islamabad and the GCC capitals need to realize the emerging imperative to look beyond their respective sub-regional rivalries.

Concluding Remarks

The postulated CPGS architecture for the Indo-Pacific region conforms to the so-called “inclusive approach to maritime security”, which has been the ‘mantra’ of all the multilateral security institutions of the region: the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting - Plus (ADMM+), the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). However, in the longer term, a formulation of regional security and stability on a select group of regional countries and non-resident powers does not auger well for regional and global security.

The CPGS effort would need to be pan-Indo Pacific and collective, and enmesh the IOR and Western Pacific spheres of multilateralism. While it may be too ambitious and unrealistic to expect ‘all’ regional countries to acquire ‘surplus’ capacity for CPGS, even if the smaller countries develop adequate capacity to police their respective maritime zones and areas of SAR responsibility, they could contribute significantly to the collective regional CPGS effort. The efforts of multilateral institutions and major and middle powers would need to be directed towards such ‘capacity-building’.

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ⁱⁱ Paul A. Samuelson , ‘The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure’, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Nov., 1954), pp. 387-389

ⁱⁱⁱ The Proliferation Security Initiative: Can Interdiction Stop Proliferation?’ *Arms Control Association*, June 2004, at https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_06/Joseph. Also see, Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Proliferation Security Initiative: An Assessment’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Apr-Jun 2004, p.237

^{iv} Joshua Ho, ‘Operationalising the Regional Maritime Security Initiative’, *IDSS Commentary* (18/2004), 27 May 2004 at <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CO04018.pdf>

^v Address by the US Navy CNO Admiral Mike Mullen to the students and Faculty of the Naval War College, 31 August 2005 at the Naval War College Newport, R.I. See US Navy website at <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/leadership/quotes.asp?q=11&c=2>

^{vi} 'A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower', October 2007, at https://www.ise.gov/sites/default/files/Maritime_Strategy.pdf

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^{viii} The concept of 'net security' is defined as "...the state of actual security available in an area, upon balancing prevailing threats, inherent risks and rising challenges in the maritime environment, against the ability to monitor, contain and counter all of these". 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy', Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015, New Delhi.

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^x Rory Medcalf and C Raja Mohan, 'Responding to Indo-Pacific rivalry: Australia, India and middle power coalitions', *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, August 2014, at http://www.lowyinstitute.org/files/responding_to_indo-pacific_rivalry_o.pdf

^{xi} Gurpreet S Khurana, 'AUSINDEX-2015: Australia 'Pivots' to the Indian Ocean', Web-publication of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, 12 October 15, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635802023056774316.pdf>

^{xii} In the 1970s, Australia was wary of Soviet naval activity in the Indian Ocean, which led to the establishment of its lone naval base in west (HMAS Sterling) in 1978 and enunciation of 'Two Ocean Policy' in 1986, through which Canberra intended to relocate half of the Navy's fleet to the Indian Ocean seaboard.

^{xiii} E-mail communication with Commodore Sam Bateman (Retd.), Royal Australian Navy (RAN), 24 October 2015.

^{xiv} 'Mr. Modi's Ocean View', *The Hindu*, 17 March 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/mr-modis-ocean-view/article7000182.ece>

^{xv} ‘Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy’, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015, New Delhi. For an analysis of the Strategy, see Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘Net Security Provider’ Defined: An Analysis of India’s New Maritime Strategy-2015’, Web-publication of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, 23 November, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635838396645834619.pdf>

^{xvi} ‘Japan to reinforce SDF anti-piracy base in Djibouti for broader Middle East responses’, *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 January 2015, at http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201501190036

^{xvii} ‘European Union Maritime Security Strategy’, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 24 June 2014, at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2011205%202014%20INIT>

^{xviii} European Commission Press Release data base, Brussels, 6 March 2014, at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-224_en.htm

^{xix} In December 2015, Britain began construction of its new military base at Bahrain. ‘Work starts on new UK military base in Bahrain’, *The Gulf News*, 18 December 2015, at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/work-starts-on-new-uk-military-base-in-bahrain-1.1610885>

^{xx} ‘Jokowi’s Inaugural Speech as Nation’s Seventh President’, *The Jakarta Globe*, 20 October 2014, at <http://jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/jokowis-inaugural-speech-nations-seventh-president/> Also see, Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘The Maritime ‘Rise’ of Indonesia: Indicators, Intentions and Inferences’, Web-publication of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi, 16 Jan 2015, at <http://www.maritimeindia.org/CommentaryView.aspx?NMFCID=5381>