



Maritime Governance and South Asia: Trade, Security and Sustainable Development in the Indian Ocean

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The rise of China, emergence of India and expansion of other economies in Asia are dramatically changing the Indo-Pacific maritime space. Technological advancements are making our accessibility to resources in, and access to oceans for political, economic and strategic purposes much easier than before. Amidst rising political and other uncertainties and the apparent threats to the ecology of the world's oceans, there is growing attention among policymakers and researchers towards the management and governance of the oceans. *Maritime Governance in South Asia* is a timely book. This volume is an outcome of a conference organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies, an autonomous think tank at the National University of Singapore and an institutional member of ARTNeT.

The editor, in her introduction writes that 'maritime space has been valued for its openness where the high seas are free for all to use and benefit from'. Over the years, unprecedented growth of commerce and unorganised use of oceanic resources had badly affected the sustainability and health of oceans, and so, maritime space requires good governance. Being an effort to study some of the aspirations, challenges and initiatives that are being taken in Southern Asia maritime space, this book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on maritime governance in the Indian Ocean region.

The book, comprised of fifteen chapters, is divided into four parts, namely, order, leadership, institutions and prospects and perspectives and examines the Indian Ocean's potential for trade, security and sustainable development. Tommy Koh, in his foreword, proposes a liberal interpretation of South Asia and lays out his vision of maritime governance in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). He underlines the interconnected destinies of the peoples in the IOR and emphasises the need to take up responsibilities

for ocean's health and to promote freedom of navigation and open seas.

Prosperity of the IOR countries depends very much on the seas, and hence, safe, secure and open seas become indispensable for all. Also, there is an increasing recognition of Indo-Pacific narrative recognising the growing economic, geopolitical, and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions, creating a single "strategic system". S. Menon, in his chapter "Security in the Indian Ocean", makes an important point that the security outlook of the Indian Ocean is not as stark as it is made out to be in public discourse and the existing literature. He adds that the maritime order in the IOR is largely calm but fragile and examines the factors responsible for such deceptive calm and offers possible solutions to deal with security challenges in the changing strategic environment. Menon urges some practical steps rather than building an overarching institution. He also urges cooperative arrangements from the bottom up and underlines the imperative of naval risk-reduction measures.

Harsha de Silva describes Sri Lanka as the heart of the Indian Ocean and highlights optimism about the pivotal position of Sri Lanka in a changing global dynamic. While he underlines repositioning of Sri Lanka to make it a hub of the IOR, he also underlines the dangers of a strategy resulting in an increased national debt. Md. Khurshed Alam analyses resolution of maritime boundary disputes and shows how acceptance of arbitration by India and Myanmar and their

settlement of disputes with Bangladesh peacefully demonstrated their commitment to international law, regional peace and stability. K V Bhagirath examines the significance of maritime safety and security for taking advantage of the emerging Blue Economy paradigm in the IOR and suggests measures for improved regional cooperation through the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

India is eager to step up its engagement and interactions in the maritime domain in a changing strategic and geopolitical landscape. Other major powers too are keen to involve India in the region more effectively. Abhay K Singh's chapter is useful to understand India's dynamic approach to the evolving regional situation in the Indo-Pacific. Through his conceptual analysis, he deciphers the obligations associated with the terms "responsible stakeholder" and "net security provider" and outlines India's emerging policy contours as a net security provider in the IOR. Adriana Elisabeth's chapter is about Indonesia's vision of Global Maritime Fulcrum and the seven pillars of Indonesia's ocean policy. She explains domestic compulsions withholding the country from embracing these ideas and underlines that Indonesia needs greater ocean literacy.

The significance of institutions has been examined in the third section of the book. David Brewster analyses causes of weaknesses of regional and sub-regional institutions and explores opportunities for building new governance arrangements in the Eastern Indian Ocean. Individual security of different

regions/sub-regions of the IOR requires separate considerations. Brewster suggests putting together new multilateral maritime cooperative arrangements focused on the Bay of Bengal and surrounding areas. He also proposes the creation of an inclusive Indian Ocean-focussed dialogue among Indian Ocean coast guards and maritime police. Martin A. Sebastian's professional knowledge and experience make his analysis useful to understand the nature of organised maritime crimes and the nexus between land and sea. V.N. Attri examines the functioning of IORA and its potentials for ocean governance and blue economy. He underlines the need to focus on local, national and regional perspectives for a sustainable governance model.

Christopher Len, in the concluding section of the book, sees the construct of the Indian Ocean as a political macro-regional entity as a hindrance to substantial multilateral cooperation. He underlines that China's broad objective is aimed at maximizing its strategic and operational autonomy in the IOR. He observes that suspicions towards China's intentions in the IOR are undermining efforts towards building a collective framework. The other chapters in this section deal with linkages between Asia and Africa and the European Union's role in strengthening governance in the IOR.

Overall, contribution from experts has delivered a rich book. However, a more attention to the growing influence of China in the IOR and its implication could have made the book more valuable. An examination of China's ambitious

use of loans and aid to gain influence and also an analysis of accusations that the Chinese investment and lending program amounts to a debt trap would have been useful to understand complexities of the IOR much better. Surprisingly, the editorial introduction is shorter than the collective biographies of contributors. What is lacking is a detailed editorial analysis of the overall theme of the book. Nevertheless, the book is a valuable resource for policymakers and researchers.

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