

Featured *MSP Perspectives*:



Myanmar's Evolving Maritime Security Landscape

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By Rajni Gamage

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The increasing dependence of Myanmar's newly-open economy on maritime trade, coupled with rising tensions in regional waters may appear to drive an ambitious naval modernisation programme. Myanmar's security challenges, however, remain predominantly land-based, although they do by extension aggravate security threats in its maritime domain.

Recent political and economic reforms have already had significant impact on national trade flows. According to the Central Statistical Organization, the annual total trade (exports and imports) during 2004-2010 remained below US\$ 5,000 million. In 2014-2015, this figure increased to US\$ 29,000 million. Of this trade, more than 85% is maritime-based. However, while the security of SLOCs remains vital to the nation's economic outlook, it is unlikely to feature high on the national security agenda until the current internal situation stabilises.

Since 2008, Myanmar has been steadily modernising its navy, through a mix of domestic manufacturing and acquisition. The former includes development of frigates, corvettes, and missile craft in domestic shipyards with foreign assistance, especially from China. Discussions on possible submarine acquisitions from the Chinese and Russians have also been reported. The Navy aims to become a blue-water navy in response to its neighbours' naval modernisation initiatives, and to protect its long coastline and extensive EEZ from both traditional and, to a lesser extent, non-traditional security (NTS) threats.

In recent years, two major NTS threats have emerged foremost on the country's maritime security landscape: boat refugees and arms smuggling. The transit of boat refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar who attempted to cross the Bay of Bengal for refuge in Southeast Asian countries further south and were stranded in the Andaman Sea first grabbed international headlines in May and June 2015. The ongoing crisis could very well result in a similar situation, with the tragedy of a capsized refugee boat en route to Bangladesh killing more than 60 being reported in late September 2017.

Arms smuggling, and its nexus with vulnerable refugees at sea, is another serious problem for Myanmar. The border area between Bangladesh and Myanmar is a sanctuary for arms smugglers, mainly due to its extensive coastline and weak maritime surveillance capabilities. Against a backdrop of a fast-growing ISIS presence in South and Southeast Asia,

trafficking of arms has become an imminent threat to Myanmar's national security.

Recurrent waves of conflict in Northern Rakhine have also heightened condemnation of the National League for Democracy (NLD) government by certain sections of the international community. This may have varying implications for Myanmar's maritime security cooperation in the region.

India is among Myanmar's major maritime security partners, given their long shared maritime boundary. In September 2017, Prime Minister Modi made his first bilateral visit to Myanmar, where 11 agreements were signed, including on maritime security cooperation. This bodes well for bilateral maritime security cooperation. China too has high stakes in Myanmar's strategic location, having also invested significantly in its maritime infrastructure development. In May this year, for instance, it was reported that China's CITIC Group proposed taking a 70-85% stake in the US\$ 7.3 billion deep sea port in Kyaukpyu, Rakhine state. Given Myanmar's strategic importance to these two rising Asian powers it is expected that they will continue to actively engage Myanmar in the maritime security realm, regardless of the ongoing Rohingya crisis.

More ambiguous is the impact of ongoing internal instability on Myanmar's maritime security prospects with key ASEAN partners. While ASEAN is coming increasingly under fire for its inaction on the Rohingya crisis on grounds of non-interference, it is unlikely that this would negatively impact Myanmar's participation in regional maritime security exercises. In August 2017, for instance, Myanmar participated for the first time in the Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) maritime security exercises co-hosted by Singapore and the US. With ASEAN being criticised openly on its non-interventionist stance by some of its Muslim states (notably Malaysia), however, Myanmar's bilateral maritime security relations with certain regional states may be negatively impacted.

For decision-makers within Myanmar, the danger of international pressures over the Rohingya crisis leading to a seaborne direct military invasion by foreign powers (especially certain Western states) is very real. Such deep-seated concerns over external aggression were all too evident in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, when American, British, and French warships stood at Yangon's shores to deliver aid to affected communities following the government's protracted reticence to receive this assistance.



SINGAPORE-UNITED STATES | 4 SEPTEMBER | CHANNEL NEWSASIA

Singapore, US navies complete inaugural exercise off Guam

The Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and the United States Navy (USN) have completed the inaugural bilateral Exercise Pacific Griffin in the waters off Guam, the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) said on Monday (Sep 4).

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN-SRI LANKA | 5 SEPTEMBER | DAILY MIRROR

Japan concerned over exclusive use of SL Port by one country

In response to the leasing of the Hambantota Port to a Chinese company, Japanese Ambassador Kenichi Suganuma said his country was against a particular country using a port exclusively in another country.

[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA | 5 SEPTEMBER | MARINELINK

Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2017 Begins

A group of warships departed Sydney on 4 September to participate in a series of key military exercises throughout the Indo-Pacific region – grouped as Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2017.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA-JAPAN-UNITED STATES | 6 SEPTEMBER | LIVEMINT

India, Japan to step up defence ties, deepen Malabar exercise with US

India and Japan will further step up defence ties, including a high tech Malabar naval exercise in the Indian Ocean next year, the two countries decided during defence minister Arun Jaitley's visit to Japan this week.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 6 SEPTEMBER | DEFENSE NEWS

Fixing a Navy in crisis: A conversation with House Seapower Chairman Rep. Rob Wittman

The summer of 2017 has seen two U.S. Navy destroyers sidelined by broadside collisions with slower commercial tankers, resulting in the deaths of 17 sailors.

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SOUTH KOREA | 8 SEPTEMBER | THE KOREA TIMES

S. Korea mulls beefing up own missile defense

The South Korean military is considering introducing ship-based Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) interceptors to make up for shortcomings of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery that was fully deployed here, Thursday.

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INDIA | 10 SEPTEMBER | THE PRINT

India gets moving on \$ 2.5 billion refit, lease of third Russian nuclear submarine

India is moving ahead with its plan to lease a third nuclear attack submarine from old ally Russia for an estimated \$ 2.5 billion.

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UNITED KINGDOM | 11 SEPTEMBER | DEFENSE NEWS

Royal Navy chief looks east to forge new trade partnerships

British naval forces will need to return to the Asia-Pacific region on a regular basis if the country is to forge new trading partnerships in the area, according to the Royal Navy's first sea lord, Adm. Sir Philip Jones.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-MALAYSIA | 13 SEPTEMBER | REUTERS

Chinese sub docks at Malaysian port for second time this year

A Chinese submarine has docked in Malaysia, the second such visit to the Southeast Asian country this year, as western powers fret over China's expanding reach in the South China Sea.

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INDIA | 14 SEPTEMBER | THE HINDU

Hyundai-HSL to build first of five Fleet Support Ships

The strategic partnership to be finalised between

leading shipbuilder Hyundai Heavy Industries Co. Ltd of South Korea and Hindustan Shipyard Limited, the Visakhapatnam-based Ministry of Defence Undertaking, will see construction of Fleet Support Ships for the Indian Navy in both the countries.

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JAPAN-UNITED STATES | 14 SEPTEMBER | REUTERS

Japan refueling U.S. missile defense ships keeping watch on North Korean threat: source

Japan's navy is supplying fuel to U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) ships in the Sea of Japan, in a sign of deepening co-operation between the allies amid the growing threat from North Korea, a source said.

[Full Report](#)

NORTH KOREA | 14 SEPTEMBER | UPI

Report: North Korea completing work on new SLBM submarines

North Korea may have completed 80 percent of the work needed on submarines capable of launching SLBMs, or submarine-launched ballistic missiles, according to a Japanese newspaper.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 20 SEPTEMBER | GLOBAL TIMES

PLA Navy gets new nuclear submarine

A new nuclear submarine has been turned over to the People's Liberation Army Navy, one of the largest State-owned naval shipbuilding enterprises revealed on Tuesday, but experts believe that this submarine is not the most advanced Type 096, which is China's next generation strategic nuclear submarine.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 25 SEPTEMBER | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

Live-fire show of force by troops from China's first overseas military base

Troops from China's only overseas base have staged their first live-fire drills in what military analysts said was a major show of combat readiness.

[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA | 25 SEPTEMBER | NAVAL TECHNOLOGY

Australian Navy commissions first Hobart-class air warfare destroyer

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) has commissioned the first Hobart-class air warfare destroyer, HMAS Hobart, in a formal ceremony at Garden Island in Sydney.

[Full Report](#)



INTERNATIONAL | 14 SEPTEMBER | THE JAPAN TIMES

Coast guard leaders from 34 nations gather in Tokyo for inaugural summit

Heads of coast guards from more than 30 countries gathered in Tokyo on Thursday to discuss a wealth of issues, including how to cope with pirates, an increase in the number of boat people, and environmental pollution caused by a massive oil spill at sea.

[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA-TIMOR LESTE | 3 SEPTEMBER | ABC NEWS

Australia and Timor-Leste strike deal to end maritime boundary dispute

Australia and Timor-Leste have resolved their bitter and long-running dispute over maritime boundaries in the Timor Sea, in what is being described as a "landmark day" in the relationship between the two nations.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA-MALAYSIA-THE PHILIPPINES | 4 SEPTEMBER | THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Phi, Malaysia, Indonesia eye joint border counter-terror patrols

The Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia are eyeing a joint task force against security threats and may open their borders to each other to chase terrorists and other armed groups, President Duterte said.

[Full Report](#)

BANGLADESH-MYANMAR | 6 SEPTEMBER | AL JAZEERA

Children drown as Rohingya boat sinks off Bangladesh

At least five children have drowned after a boat carrying Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar sank early on Wednesday, Bangladeshi border guards have said.

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THE PHILIPPINES | 7 SEPTEMBER | PHILIPPINE INQUIRER

PCG acquires French sea vessels for maritime security

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has inked a deal Wednesday afternoon with a French shipbuilding firm for the acquisition of five shipping vessels for maritime security.

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INDIAN OCEAN | 7 SEPTEMBER | GCAPTAIN

Naval Forces Establish Maritime Security Transit Corridor Off Horn of Africa

The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) has established a Maritime Security Transit Corridor to protect merchant ships off the Horn of Africa in response to recent attacks against merchant shipping in the Gulf of Aden and Bab Al Mandeb strait.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA-JAPAN | 7 SEPTEMBER | THE JAKARTA POST

Japan to help Indonesia monitor seas near Natuna

Amid ongoing tension with China over conflicting territorial claims near the Natuna Islands, Indonesia has received a boost from the Japanese government, which decided to help enhance surveillance and supply patrol vessels for the disputed area.

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ASIA | 7 SEPTEMBER | THE MARITIME EXECUTIVE

Japan and UNODC Join Asian Piracy Battle

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is joining several countries in Asia to battle ISIS-inspired pirates in the Sulu and Celebes seas.

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MALAYSIA | 7 SEPTEMBER | THE STAR ONLINE

MMEA foils hijacking of Thai tanker, 10 pirates arrested

Malaysian authorities thwarted the hijacking of a Thai oil tanker on Thursday and arrested 10 suspected Indonesian pirates on board the ship.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 8 SEPTEMBER | NEW STRAITS TIMES

MMEA stepping up patrols in anticipation of Rohingya refugees influx

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA)

is ramping up its patrols in several areas in preparation of a probable influx of displaced Rohingya refugees fleeing the violence in Myanmar.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 9 SEPTEMBER | THE MAINICHI

Fisheries Agency to update patrol boats for illegal fishing crackdown

Japan's Fisheries Agency plans to update part of its chartered patrol fleet to strengthen its crackdown on illegal fishing by ships from neighboring countries, according to its latest budget request.

[Full Report](#)

SINGAPORE | 13 SEPTEMBER | PLATTS

Oil product tanker collides with dredger in Singapore; no traffic disruption, oil spill

Indonesia-registered Medium Range oil products tanker Kartika Segara collided with Dominica-registered dredger JBB De Rong 19 in Singapore waters early Wednesday, but there is no disruption to shipping traffic in the area nor an oil spill.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 19 SEPTEMBER | USNI NEWS

Navy Stands Up Naval Surface Group Western Pacific To Train, Certify Forward-Deployed Surface Ships After Recent Collisions

The Navy is creating a new Naval Surface Group Western Pacific to train and certify forward-deployed surface ships operating out of Japan and has begun additional readiness assessments and certifications, after four surface ship collisions and groundings in the region that killed 17 sailors this year.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES-VIETNAM | 24 SEPTEMBER | ABS-CBN NEWS

2 Vietnamese fishermen killed in West PH Sea encounter

Two Vietnamese fishermen were killed in an encounter with the Philippine navy in the West Philippine Sea on Saturday.

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AUSTRALIA | 29 SEPTEMBER | ABC NEWS

Australia launches \$10m satellite program to help spy planes detect warships, asylum seeker boats

Australia is building three new satellites that will conduct audio and visual surveillance for the Defence Force.

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ASIA | 1 SEPTEMBER | NIKKEI ASIAN REVIEW

Asia's main archipelagos eye bigger share of maritime trade

Indonesian and Philippine ports seek to catch up with neighbours, but will have to invest heavily if they want to catch up with their wealthier neighbours' maritime infrastructure.

[Full Report](#)

BRUNEI | 8 SEPTEMBER | BORNEO BULLETIN

Brunei opening up maritime and shipping sector: Minister

Efforts are under way towards further improving and opening up the country's maritime and shipping sector, moving it towards more liberalisation and increasing shipping activities.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 11 SEPTEMBER | THE STRAITS TIMES

Port Klang business hit as key firms shift operations to Singapore

Business at Malaysia's main shipping hub in Port Klang has taken a hit this year as major shipping companies shift their operations to Singapore under new alliance agreements.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 10 SEPTEMBER | THE GLOBE AND MAIL

China used research mission to test trade route through Canada's Northwest Passage

China's official government news agency says Beijing used a scientific icebreaker voyage through Canada's Northwest Passage to test the viability of sailing Chinese cargo ships through the environmentally fragile route that links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

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WORLD | 11 SEPTEMBER | WORLD MARITIME NEWS

Promised automation benefits hard to deliver?

According to the MUA President, and its General Secretary Stephen Cotton, consequences of automation have not been carefully thought through.

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WORLD | 12 SEPTEMBER | LLOYD'S

The top risks in shipping today

Carrying 90% of world trade, the shipping industry forms the backbone of the global economy. We explore some of the biggest threats to the sector with insight from Lloyd's market marine experts.

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WORLD | 19 SEPTEMBER | BBC

The ship that could change the seas forever

Transporting cargo across the oceans is vital in a global economy - yet ships sully our already polluted planet.

[Full Report](#)

NORTH KOREA | 20 SEPTEMBER | REUTERS

From Russia with fuel – North Korean ships may be undermining sanctions

At least eight North Korean ships that left Russia with a cargo of fuel this year headed for their homeland despite declaring other destinations, a ploy that U.S. officials say is often used to undermine sanctions.

[Full Report](#)



[Wikimedia Commons](#)

MALAYSIA | 21 SEPTEMBER | TODAY

Malaysian ports unaffected despite firms shipping south: minister

Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai has said that Malaysian ports will remain competitive, although five major global shipping firms under the Ocean Alliance have ditched Port Klang for Singapore in April.

[Full Report](#)

SINGAPORE | 22 SEPTEMBER | THE STRAITS TIMES

IMC 2030 charts roadmap to secure the future of Maritime Singapore

The International Maritime Centre (IMC) 2030 Advisory Committee has laid out its vision for Singapore in its next phase of growth: to become the global maritime hub for connectivity, innovation and talent.

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WORLD | 25 SEPTEMBER | MARINE ELECTRONICS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Shipping got off lightly in first cyber security attacks, say legal experts

Maritime law firm Ince & Co told Riviera Maritime Media that shipping has been slow to acknowledge the risks posed by cyber security threats – particularly from a business standpoint.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 27 SEPTEMBER | THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan sucks up mineral treasure spat out from the ocean floor

Japan has pulled off a world-first by continually mining seabed deposits formed by mineral-laden water gushing from the ocean floor.

[Full Report](#)

PAKISTAN | 29 SEPTEMBER | THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE

Gwadar port to receive first major cargo shipment on Oct 18

Multi-billion dollar projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Gwadar are moving towards completion at a rapid pace, Minister of State for Ports and Shipping Chaudhry Iqbal Jafri said.

[Full Report](#)

CAMBODIA | 29 SEPTEMBER | PHNOM PENH POST

Vessels still flying Cambodia flag

It has been a year since the government rescinded its notorious flags of convenience scheme yet foreign-owned ships appear to be flying the Cambodian flag with impunity, raising questions about whether the government has the resolve to fully abandon the controversial practice that allows merchant ships to avoid restrictions and financial charges in their home countries.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTH KOREA | 30 SEPTEMBER | YONHAP

Container shipping biz improves for September

South Korea's container shipping sector showed signs of recovery this month following a protracted slowdown in the overall shipping industry.

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