

Realizing the Global Maritime Partnership: Strategies for Enhancing Cooperation within the Asia Pacific Region

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Abstract:

The Global Maritime Partnership (GMP) initiative embraces the ambitious objective of providing a secure global maritime commons. This article analyses how the GMP may evolve in the Asia Pacific, given the changing regional security environment, challenges in implementation, and arising opportunities. While the United States (US) will continue to be the predominant power in the Asia Pacific for the foreseeable future, China and India will continue to build up their military capabilities. It argues that in order to maintain its leadership role within the Asia Pacific region, the US needs to recognize the emergence of China and India and adopt a GMP policy that is inclusive of these two countries by leveraging on existing multilateral frameworks of cooperation.

Keywords: Asia-Pacific; Global Maritime Partnership; Maritime Cooperation; Maritime Security

GMP AND HOW IT IS TAKING SHAPE IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

In 2005, ADM Michael Mullen, former Chief of Naval Operations, United States Navy (USN), introduced the vision of a “1,000-Ship Navy” which was “made up of the best capabilities of all freedom-loving navies of the world ... [that] would integrate the capabilities of the maritime services to create a fully interoperable force.”¹ The concept of the “1,000-Ship Navy” is now widely referred to as the Global Maritime Partnership (GMP). The objective of the GMP is to leverage willing partners to provide for a secure maritime commons by tackling transnational challenges such as piracy, human smuggling or slavery, illegal drug smuggling, environmental degradation, illegal weapons smuggling, and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).² In promoting the GMP, ADM Mullen emphasized that the USN cannot, by itself, preserve the freedom and security of the entire maritime domain. It will have to count on the contributions from like-

minded nations who are interested in using the sea for lawful purposes and denying its use by those who threaten national, regional, or global security.³

In the current environment, it is likely that contemporary threats like piracy and maritime terrorism will persist while emerging maritime-related challenges such as non-proliferation, energy security, and natural disaster consequence management will gain prominence. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden will continue to pose challenges, with “ships report[ing] 445 attacks in 2010, up 10% from 2009.”⁴ Concerns over the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) via the sea will remain. Natural disaster consequence management gained prominence in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami disaster that hit Thailand and Indonesia, the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Southern Myanmar, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake. In the years ahead, various maritime security threats will continue to confront maritime services of

the world, and the GMP initiative will be a meaningful operational solution to harness the collective capabilities of the global maritime services to provide a secure global maritime commons.

In recent years, the Asia Pacific navies have increased their capacity and willingness to participate and cooperate in maritime security efforts within the region and globally. A noteworthy example of the GMP in action is the ongoing counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, where navies from the Asia Pacific countries such as Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea work together with the United States (US) and other coalition partners as part of the Combined Task Force (CTF) 151. Also contributing to the counter-piracy mission are the Chinese, Indian, and Japanese maritime forces under the ambit of respective national tasking. It is noteworthy that the role of Commander CTF 151 has been assumed by non-US commanders, including a Turkish Navy admiral in 2009 and a Republic of Singapore Navy admiral in 2010 and 2011. It demonstrates a similar potential for the GMP leadership role to be played by other nations. Overall, the experiences and interoperability that the Asia Pacific maritime forces have cultivated through various multilateral and bilateral operations and exercises provide a good foundation in building the “1,000-Ship Navy.”

Five years have passed since the inception of the GMP, and it seems opportune to evaluate how the GMP is taking shape in the Asia Pacific and identify strategies to enhance its potential.

While the US will continue to be the predominant power in the Asia Pacific for the foreseeable future, China and India will continue to build up their military capabilities. Thus, the way the GMP will take shape in the Asia Pacific in the future will depend not only on the US maritime security strategy but also on the evolving regional security environment. In order to maintain its leadership role within the Asia Pacific region, the US needs to recognize the emergence of China and India, and adopt a GMP policy that is inclusive of these two countries by leveraging on existing multilateral frameworks of cooperation.

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ASIA PACIFIC: AN EVOLVING REGIONAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

In his address at the Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore in May 2009, the US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates succinctly summed up the evolving security environment in the Asia Pacific: (1) new and re-emerging centers of power—from China and Russia to India and Indonesia—combined with other shifts, give impetus to the search for a new security architecture in the region; (2) military modernization has continued apace, with rising states seeking forces commensurate with their economic power and smaller states trying to preserve their position in the regional order; and (3) emergence of multiple transnational challenges—some new, some old—calls for greater cooperation between all nations.⁵ Indeed, a dynamic shift in power is taking place in the Asia Pacific. China and India will desire to play a bigger role in the Asia Pacific to equal their emerging power status. Regional



USS Farragut (DDG 99), part of the Combined Task Force 151, destroys a suspected pirate skiff

countries, especially Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), will continue to emphasize a multilateral approach and maritime cooperation to ensure that they are not marginalized.

Shift in Balance of Power in favor of China and India

The shift in the balance of power in favor of China and India has gained momentum. Based on the December 2009 economic forecasting conducted by Goldman Sachs, China may overtake the US to become the largest economy in the world by 2027, while India may overtake Japan to become the third largest economy the same year.⁶ These economic forecasts suggest that India and China will become regional maritime powers by the middle of the 21st century, on the premise that their military modernization programs will match their future economic prowess.

The US National Intelligence Council estimates that by 2025, China will be the world's second largest economy and will be a leading military power.⁷ According to Frost and Sullivan estimates, China is currently the fourth largest military spender globally with a defense budget of \$70.2 billion, which is equal to that of France, although below both the UK and the US.⁸ Frost and Sullivan estimate that the Chinese may procure two aircraft carriers by 2015 (which are likely to be complemented by Sukhoi Su-33 fighter aircraft), five Type 094 submarines, and transport aircraft (similar in size to C-17 Globemaster III).⁹ These military capabilities will enable China to project force on a sustained basis beyond its coastal periphery within the next 10-20 years.¹⁰

China has enhanced its military exchanges and cooperation with various counterparts and is an active participant in multilateral activities such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)¹¹ and the

Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS).¹² China actively participates in the ARF because it sees the potential to further its interests with the ASEAN countries. China actively participates in the WPNS because it views the WPNS as a truly multilateral maritime arrangement rather than one that is US-centric.

China's outreach to the international maritime community demonstrates its desire to play a leadership role in the regional and global domain. In April 2009, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) organized multinational activities in conjunction with its 60th Anniversary's International Fleet Review with the intent of providing "a platform for naval leaders around the world to the topic of strengthening maritime

security and cooperation and jointly building a harmonious ocean."¹³

Over the next 15-20 years, the US National Intelligence Council predicts that Indian leaders will strive for a multi-polar international system in which New Delhi will be one of the poles. India's impressive economic growth has spurred its military modernization, its ability to influence the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and extended its strategic interests beyond the Gulf of Arabia and IOR to the Malacca Strait and beyond.¹⁴ Frost and Sullivan reported that India's defense budget reached \$27.5 billion in 2008—a 10 percent increase over the previous year—and made it the ninth largest defense spender in the world.¹⁵ It is noteworthy that the Indian defense expenditure has almost doubled in five years.¹⁶ The impressive economic growth is translating into rapid military modernization, and continues to boost India's confidence as an emerging power in the world.

With its growing international confidence, the Indian Navy held a two-day Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in New Delhi in January 2008 in an effort to enhance trust between the naval leaders of the region. During Exercise MILAN in February 2010, the Indian Navy hosted 12 nations in the multilateral exercise,¹⁷ with ships from Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand; and representatives from navies of Brunei Darussalam, Philippines, Vietnam and New Zealand.¹⁸ The implication of an emerging India is that the Indian Navy will be a key player in the GMP initiative in the region. However, the US National Intelligence Council postulates that India's new multilateral outreach program may be aimed at maximizing India's autonomy, and not at aligning India with any country or international coalition.¹⁹ One thing for certain, though, is that India and China will desire to play a bigger role in the Asia Pacific.



Sailors aboard the USS Gettysburg assisting the crew members from the Republic of Singapore Navy amphibious ship – RSS Persistence.

Regional Multilateral Approach and Maritime Cooperation

To maintain stability, regional countries will continue to emphasize a regional multilateral approach and maritime cooperation to ensure that they are not marginalized in the evolving security environment. Other Asian countries continue to leverage regional economic and security frameworks, such as ASEAN and ARF, in negotiating their interests. For example, in 2002, ASEAN negotiated with China to sign a “Code of Conduct” agreement to restrain from activities that may escalate tensions or lead to conflicts over the disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea.²⁰

As maritime nations, the Asia Pacific countries have also worked together to demonstrate their ability to contribute to maritime security of the region. Some examples of regional and extra-regional initiatives include the Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP), the North Pacific Coast Guard Forums (NPCGF),²¹ the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP),²² and the International Maritime Security Conference.²³ In particular, the MSP initiative has been lauded for its effectiveness in countering piracy. The MSP is a cooperative effort which started in 2004 between Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand joined in October 2009. It comprises Eyes-in-the-Sky (EiS) aerial patrols, sea patrols (formerly known as Operations MALSINDO), and an Intelligence Exchange Group (EIG). Referencing the MSP as a successful cooperative action between four countries, then Chief, Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN), RADM Chew Men Leong said that “cooperation between navies, coast guards, maritime agencies, and the shipping community has proved to be particularly useful in deriving operational solutions to combat

operational challenges.”²⁴ The experience and interoperability cultivated through such regional maritime cooperation allows these countries to make significant contributions to the GMP.

KEY CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE GMP

While the foundation for GMP may exist, implementing the GMP will require overcoming key challenges such as power dynamics, regional geo-political sensitivities, and interoperability issues.

Power Dynamics

In a maritime consortium such as the GMP, using Geoffrey Till’s analogy of a western sheriff organizing a posse, the sheriff shall be the defendant of common law and will need the active support of members of the community.²⁵ In its effort to play a larger maritime leadership role and establish legitimacy, China has urged all countries to adopt the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the legal framework for action. China will continue to leverage the United Nations and seek global legal agreements through UNCLOS in establishing its influence.²⁶ Military modernization programs will extend the sphere of influence of both China and India, and some level of competition may arise with the shift in power. However, the US will continue to be the global sheriff in the foreseeable future, while it grapples with transitional challenges arising from the shift in power within the Asia-Pacific region.²⁷ The power dynamics may impede the effectiveness of the GMP.

Regional Geopolitical Sensitivities

Another challenge is that geopolitical sensitivities and border and maritime disputes may continue to impede further cooperation and

integration between the Asia Pacific countries. While recent achievements in maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Aden, Malacca Strait, and rest of the region indicate an increasing ability and willingness of the Asia Pacific nations to act together on common interests, the region continues to be saddled with “a fierce sense of national sovereignty, enormous variations in culture and civilization, and a struggle for power and influence among the region’s great powers.”²⁸ As a result, even though the Asia Pacific navies may act in coalition from time to time, they will be primarily focused on their traditional roles in national defense and limited to only some collective and regional interests.²⁹ In addition, national caveats may limit contributions to the GMP where differences in rules of engagement and national constraints inhibit the full integration of the coalition forces. Thus, while the GMP can be effective, optimism may have to be checked by a sense of realism given the geopolitical sensitivities within the region.

Interoperability Issues

In any form of coalition or cooperation, navies “need to practice and to acquire the technology, operational and logistic procedures and doctrinal approaches that are needed for effective interoperability.”³⁰ For the GMP to work, regional maritime services have to address gaps in maritime information sharing and interoperability at sea.

First, there is a lack of concerted information sharing at the regional level in maritime domain awareness (MDA). To catalyze the collaboration, the Republic of Singapore Navy in 2009 established a military Information Fusion Center (IFC) which works closely with the maritime industry’s ReCAAP Information Sharing Center (ReCAAP ISC).³¹ The IFC functions as a regional

information-sharing hub, and currently links to the operational centers of 15 different countries through an internet-based multilateral information sharing system called ReMIX.³² The Indian Navy also has a Maritime Shipping Information System (MSIS) for the Indian Ocean region. The US Maritime Safety and Security Information System (MSSIS) is already linked to Singapore’s IFC system, and it is in the process of being linked to India’s MSIS.³³ The Royal Malaysian Navy is exploring the idea of a Maritime Information Region (MIR) in the Sulawesi and Sulu region between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Despite these efforts, regional countries are slow to join in the MDA movement. Stronger participation by regional governments and industries is necessary to generate greater comprehensive maritime domain awareness.

Second, an interoperability gap exists amongst various Asia Pacific navies, which must be narrowed in order to realize the GMP. The current state of interoperability is largely based on the derived interoperability facilitated by the US Geographic Combatant Commander’s Theatre Security Cooperation Plans (TSCPs) and other standardization and interoperability efforts. Some regional navies have enhanced their interoperability through bilateral exercises and the conduct of regional maritime cooperation, such as the Malacca Strait Patrols. However, a gap in interoperability clearly exists between those navies that have significant interactions with the US Navy (such as Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand) and those with little or no US military exchanges (such as Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Vietnam). Hence, the interoperability gap and limited willingness to

share information will impede the effectiveness of the GMP.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE GMP WITHIN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

The GMP is a US-led initiative that appeals to willing partners who seek the common interest of providing a secure maritime commons. Many navies in the Asian Pacific are fully on board with the GMP initiative, especially Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN countries. However, its appeal has yet to resonate strongly with India and China. Taking into account the potential contribution that these two emerging powers can bring to the maritime security environment, it would not make sense to exclude them from the GMP. Two strategies for enhancing the GMP within the Asia Pacific region include (1) engaging China and India in the GMP, and (2) leveraging on the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) frameworks to realize the GMP.

Engaging China and India in the GMP

While the US will continue to be the predominant power in the Asia Pacific for the foreseeable future, China and India will continue to build up their military capabilities. Since it is not a zero-sum game, the US Navy has the opportunity to take a different tack—instead of focusing on competing with China and India, the US can be inclusive of both emerging powers. It can even be argued that, in order to maintain its leadership role within the region, the US needs to adopt a GMP policy that is inclusive of both China and India and recognizes their growing power in the Asia Pacific region. By integrating emerging powers into a system where the major power continues to play a significant role, it is

more likely that its predominant power will be accepted. Actively integrating China and India into the GMP accords them legitimacy, raises their profile, and recognizes their power. When these emerging powers benefit from the system and feel fairly represented, they are much less likely to challenge the status quo.³⁴ As such, efforts should be made to maximize engagement with the two emerging powers in the maritime domain through both the maritime services and the maritime industry.

In order to maintain its leadership role within the region, the US needs to adopt a GMP policy that is inclusive of both China and India and recognizes their growing power in the Asia Pacific region.

There are various ways to engage and integrate China and India into the GMP. Since the current level of Sino-US military exchange is relatively low, emphasis should continue to be placed on establishing baseline interoperability, to include (1) deepening dialogues like the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA),³⁵ (2) leveraging on the US Coast Guard via the North Pacific Coast Guard Forums (NPCGF)³⁶ and its Pacific Tactical Law Enforcement Team for further cooperation with the PLA-Navy, (3) establishing interoperability through WPNS workshops and sea exercises, and (4) integrating the PLA-Navy into the network of coalition ships conducting counter-piracy in the Gulf of Aden as a starting point. On the other hand, the level of Indo-US military exchange is relatively high, and emphasis should continue to be placed on higher-order interactions, such as (1) enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness by integrating information-sharing networks

such as the Indian Navy's MSIS and the US MSSIS, (2) enhancing interoperability through bilateral and multilateral sea exercises, and (3) exchanging doctrinal and operational expertise.³⁷ Integrating China and India into the GMP will allow the international community to harness their potential contributions to global maritime security.

Leveraging ARF and WPNS Frameworks to Realize the GMP

Projecting ahead, the US-led TSCPs in the Asia Pacific may not suffice in delivering the desired effectiveness of the GMP because (1) it is not an initiative that is formulated and driven by member states, and (2) emerging powers will want their share of leadership in the region. To propel the GMP into the future, there is a need to leverage platforms other than the TSCPs, so as to garner the involvement of more regional countries. An opportunity to realize the true potential of the GMP is to leverage existing frameworks that work—such as the ARF and the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS). Additionally, these two frameworks have extensive outreach – the membership in the ARF includes all of the regional navies and the US, while the WPNS includes many of the Asia Pacific navies.

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The ARF has tremendous potential because it is an organic architecture to the region and therefore more astute to sensitivities of the regional geopolitics. ASEAN will continue to be the focus for the region, because it acts as

a neutral ground where major powers of the world can meet and interact without being overtly threatening. In the past decade, the ARF members have engaged each other at numerous workshops that address Maritime Security, Counter-Terrorism, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), and non-traditional security issues including drug trafficking, and sea piracy.³⁸ The strength of the ARF is the whole-of-government approach in the organization, which allows it to facilitate greater interagency involvement. However, the current shortfall of the ARF is that it is still primarily a talk-shop, even though its navies do participate in bilateral and multilateral exercises with each other outside of the framework. To address this inadequacy, Singapore's then Defense Minister Teo Chee Hean proposed in March 2009 that the ARF should "move beyond dialogue on maritime security and work towards conducting an ARF maritime security exercise in the near future."³⁹ Once the ARF members are able to effect cooperative action in the maritime domain, it should be able to realize the full potential of the GMP in the Asia Pacific because of its extensive membership and the organization's whole-of-government approach.

The WPNS presents great potential because it is an arrangement that is ready to effect collective action. Apart from dialogue, navies participating in the WPNS have extensive experiences in operating together on maritime security operations and training. In maritime domain awareness, all countries within WPNS can access and share information via the internet-based ReMIX system provided by Singapore's Information Fusion Center. For example, in June 2009, the ReMIX was used to share information

between some WPNS partners on the movement of the North Korean-flagged ship *Kang Nam I* which was suspected of carrying military equipment intended for Myanmar. Compared to the ARF, the limitation of the WPNS is in its membership—it does not include a number of the regional countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Pakistan. While India is an observer, it is not a member. However, the strong appeal of WPNS is that it is largely regarded as an equal-partnership initiative amongst its members.

CONCLUSION

The GMP initiative embraces an ambitious objective of providing a secure global maritime commons. Contemporary and non-contemporary maritime security threats will continue to confront maritime services of the world, and the GMP initiative will be a meaningful operational solution to garner the collective capabilities of the global maritime services to counter maritime threats. Implementing the GMP will require overcoming challenges such as power dynamics, regional geo-political sensitivities, and interoperability issues. However, most of these challenges are not insurmountable, given the Asia Pacific countries' shared interest and experience in maritime security cooperation. Integrating China and India into the GMP by leveraging existing multilateral frameworks of cooperation has the potential to increase the outreach and capacity of the GMP. As a global maritime leader, the US needs to recognize the emergence of China and India, and adopt a GMP policy that is inclusive of these two emerging countries. 🌐

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27. Pant, 52.
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32. ReMIX stands for Regional Maritime Information Exchange System. It was set up to facilitate information sharing between operation centers of the participants of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium community.
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34. Michael A. Glosny, "China and the BRICs: A Real (but Limited) Partnership in a Unipolar World," *Polity* 42 (2010): 116.
35. On 19 January 1998, US Defense Secretary William Cohen and China's Defense Minister General Chi Haotian signed the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA). The MMCA is the first agreement on confidence building measures between the armed forces of China and the United States, as well as the first official military agreement since 1990.
36. The North Pacific Coast Guard Forums (NPCGF) started in 2000 as a cooperative forum to foster multilateral cooperation through the sharing of information on matters related to combined operations, exchange in information, illegal drug trafficking, maritime security, fisheries, enforcement, and illegal immigration. Its membership includes agencies from Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Russia and United States.
37. Bharat Verma, "Interview: Admiral Nirmal Verma, Chief of the Naval Staff," *Indian Defense Review* 25, no. 1 (2010), <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/2010/02/indin-defence-review-interview.html>.
38. "List of ARF Track I Activities," ASEAN Regional Forum, 30 March 2010, <http://www.aseanregionalforum.org/PublicLibrary/ARFActivities/ListofARFTrackIActivitiesBySubject/tabid/94/Default.aspx>.
39. "Singapore Proposes Maritime Security Exercises for Asian Security Forum," ASEAN, 30 March 2010, <http://www.aseansec.org/afp/100.htm>



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