

***Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific.* By C. Raja Mohan. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. Softcover: 329pp.**

Raja Mohan's book is premised on three inter-related assertions: first, the persistence of Sino-Indian rivalry; second, the "spill-over" of their traditionally land-based rivalry into the maritime domain; and third, the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a new geopolitical space. While there is some validity in each of these assertions, all three are open to some scrutiny.

The first — the persistence of Sino-Indian rivalry — is probably the least controversial. Mohan is right to note that "since the emergence of modern independent states in China and India during the middle of the last century ... the dynamic between the two nations in Southeast Asia has been a competitive one" (p. 31), though this competitive dynamic has been somewhat tempered by semi-institutional ties, such as the recent conclusion of a Border Defence Cooperation Agreement in October 2013. However, the unresolved territorial dispute between the two countries in Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin remains a thorn in the bilateral relationship, one that has fuelled a climate of mistrust, as demonstrated most recently by tensions in the Depsang Valley of Eastern Ladakh in April 2013. Despite official rhetoric claiming otherwise, there remains a propensity for misunderstanding between both states that is fuelled by limited people-to-people contacts and rising levels of nationalism, which is reflected in jingoistic media reporting in both countries. Mohan notes that "while the political leadership repeatedly affirms that they (China and India) are not a threat to each other and that Asia is large enough to accommodate their aspirations and simultaneous rise, the strategic communities on both sides have nurtured adversarial images of each other" (p. 204).

There is also evidence of the second assertion of Mohan's book that Sino-Indian rivalry has "spilled over" into the maritime domain from being a traditionally continental competition. The maritime domain has emerged as an increasingly important theatre of interaction for both countries amid their emergence as major trading and resource-consuming powers. In China, this growing dependence on imported resources has prompted concerns over a so-called "Malacca Dilemma" while India maintains ambitions to develop, in the words of Admiral Nirmal Verma, the former Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy, "a brand new multi-dimensional Navy" with "reach and sustainability" (*Times of India*, 21 December 2011).

As such, Mohan's thesis is correct to the extent that it captures both countries' growing maritime interests and ambitions. However, the idea that growing maritime competition has supplanted their longstanding land-based rivalry may be taking it too far. In both India and China the navy continues to play second-fiddle to the army when it comes to forging military doctrines and strategies.

Furthermore, both countries' growing maritime interests do not automatically translate into rivalry and competition. Mohan asserts that "as New Delhi and Beijing define their maritime approaches in terms of the US Monroe Doctrine, the two would seem bound to step on each other's toes" (p. 205). To be sure, the naval discourse in both countries increasingly reflects Mahanian thinking — with an emphasis on sea-control and competitive naval diplomacy — thus moving away from a traditionally defensive maritime posture. In China, debates over maritime strategy have moved beyond the first and second "island-chains" and increasingly into the realm of "far-sea operations" while New Delhi has declared — in its 2007 *India's Maritime Military Strategy* — that its maritime interests extend "from the north of the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea". Mohan also notes the potential for China and India's growing maritime interests to move onshore as India counters China's "string of pearls" with its own so-called "necklace of diamonds" (p. 135). This alludes to both countries' ambitions to develop a forward naval presence through the development of transshipment hubs along maritime trade routes.

However, China and India's growing naval power projection capabilities need not be a source of mutual insecurity. For instance, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations have emerged as a catalyst for India to expand its maritime influence; this includes Indian relief operations following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the cyclone that struck Myanmar in 2008. Similarly, China's rhetoric of maintaining "harmonious oceans" and carrying out "new historic missions" that include countering non-traditional security threats suggest that the country's potential for cooperation in the maritime domain could grow as its maritime security interests move beyond its coasts to the world's oceans. This is illustrated in the case of the PLA Navy escorting non-Chinese vessels through the Gulf of Aden since 2010, as part of its on-going counter-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean.

Finally, despite their growing maritime interests and capabilities, China and India remain peripheral to the maritime security architecture in Asia. Rather, most regional initiatives have been driven by other regional powers. These include the Malacca Straits Patrols (comprising Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand), the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combatting Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (a Japanese initiative) and the US-led North Pacific Coast Guard Forum. Moreover, while

the United States remains the region's predominant military power, neither China nor India are in a position to exercise unilateral maritime dominance over their respective maritime theatres, a situation that is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future.

While Mohan's final assertion — regarding the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a single integrated geopolitical space — is an increasingly popular concept, it is still in its infancy. Mohan notes that “the perception that South and East Asia are two very different geopolitical entities ... is of recent origin” (p. 91). Rather, he argues that the broadening of Asia's strategic geography to the Indo-Pacific is merely a reversion to its earlier state when “South and Southeast Asia were not always seen as separate geopolitical entities” (p. 91). This has been facilitated by the growing strategic importance of the maritime domain, which has led to the emergence of “the seas of the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean” as a “single integrated geopolitical theatre” centred on maritime Asia (p. 212).

However, the security dynamics of the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific are vastly different, with the latter characterized by contentious maritime territorial disputes while the threats facing the former emanate primarily from non-state actors. Furthermore, the tools required to combat non-state threats such as maritime piracy, armed robbery, terrorism and trafficking are different from those required to address traditional security threats such as asserting a claim over a disputed maritime territorial boundary, accessing offshore energy resources or protecting sea-lines of communication. In this context, the equivalence and integration of the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans as espoused by the Indo-Pacific concept seems exaggerated.

Thus, Raja Mohan's book, while relevant, may be getting ahead of itself. While it is valid to recognize the on-going reorientation of China and India's strategic interests from the continental to maritime domain, it is premature to declare that the Sino-Indian relationship and their latent rivalry has shifted from their land border to the maritime domain. Moreover, while both countries' growing maritime interests have strategic implications for the freedom of navigation, Sino-Indian rivalry and competition in the maritime domain is by no means a certainty. Nor is it the defining feature of the maritime security architecture in Asia, which remains dominated by the United States and a concert of other regional maritime powers. Ultimately, with respect to the Sino-Indian relationship, the roots of discontent remain in the Himalayas rather than on the high seas.