

Navigating Non-Traditional Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific

Need for a United Approach

17 OCTOBER 2023

1400-1500 CET / 1730-1830 IST / 0800-0900 EST/2000-2100 CST / 0800-0900 EDT (Virtual)

Webinar Report

Summary

The webinar titled “Navigating Non-Traditional Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific: *Need for a United Approach*” provided deep insights into the various non-traditional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. This webinar highlighted the need for the cooperation of all the countries involved in the Indo-Pacific throughout the geo-political and economic landscape to navigate various non-traditional security challenges. During the discussion, panelists suggested effective solutions to overcome challenges and emphasised the need for united efforts from all countries involved in the Indo-Pacific construct. This webinar became even more engaging with the presence of over 50 enthusiastic participants spanning various countries and member organisations of the IPCSF

Panelists

- Purushendra Singh, *Senior Research Associate, CUTS International (Chair & Moderator)*
- Aman Thakker, *Adjunct Fellow, Chair in US-India Policy Studies, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*
- Kristy Tsun Tzu Hsu: *Director, Taiwan ASEAN Studies Centre, Chung Hua Institution of Economic Research (CIER)*
- Pramod S. Jaiswal, *Research Director, Nepal Institute of International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE)*
- Kiran N. Meetarbhan, *Director, CUTS International (Closing Remarks)*

Background & Context

The region of the Indo-Pacific has gained immense importance in the current geo-political landscape of the World. It is the convergence of two oceans and touches the maximum landmass of most continents. The region is home to 60% of the world's population and holds 65% of the world's GDP. The area has emerged as an ocean of economic opportunities and strategic commitments. Approximately 70-80% of the world's trade passes through this region. The Indo-Pacific is also a hub of various natural resources, rare earth minerals and human resources.

The growth of the Indo-Pacific region is being affected by terrorism, piracy, climate change, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, Natural disasters, cyber threats or digital vulnerabilities, etc. Dealing with such non-traditional security challenges requires combined and collaborative efforts by all the stakeholders of the Indo-Pacific. Joint efforts at government and non-government levels can help in mitigating these threats. Civil society can play a pivotal role as a bridge among stakeholder countries, thereby positively contributing to a Peaceful, Open, Free and Prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

The IPCSF is a coalition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), think tanks and academia which work with governmental organisations towards realising the shared vision of peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Moving further, the moderator introduced all the eminent speakers of the webinar.

Key Takeaways

In the initial minutes of the webinar, **Purushendra Singh** mentioned that the region of Europe and other landlocked countries on the west coast of Africa and Asia are also part of the larger Indo-Pacific construct. These areas in the Indo-Pacific are often regarded as the “Maritime Under Belly” of the globe.

He added that the Indo-Pacific region accounts for 60% of the world's population, more than 65% of the world's GDP, 67% of the world's indigenous people, 37% of the world's poverty or poor people, and 40% of the International migrants. All these give rise to many challenges in this region. He firmly emphasised that no single country alone can find solutions to the existing and emerging non-traditional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, which we call the *hope of the future*.

Pramod S. Jaiswal in his presentation said that the vast and dynamic geopolitical space of the Indo-Pacific, which encompasses much of the world's most populous and economically significant countries, also possesses tremendous non-traditional security challenges. Among several other

issues of maritime terrorism and piracy are of great concern. He further added that terrorism has a political, ideological or religious background, the same is true with maritime terrorism which has a great impact in the Indo-Pacific. Terrorists, in maritime terrorism, always target the most critical infrastructures of the industrialised world to have a greater impact and visibility.

Their major focus is on the choke points and mega harbours that can greatly impact International trade. He provided an example of the strategically important Strait of Malacca, as one of the critical choke points. It connects the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. It is the most significant trade route between the far East, the Gulf States and Europe. More than 90,000 ships use this strait every year and 1/3rd of the world trade, 80% of the oil exports to East Asia and 2/3rd of energy exports pass through the Strait of Malacca. Major shipping ports of Asia like Shanghai Port, Tokyo Port, Singapore Port, Pushan Port, Hong Kong Port etc. can become the target focus of terrorists in the Indo-Pacific region. It's important to safeguard these ports.

Further, he said that in the last couple of years, the cooperation among Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia have successfully combated piracy in the region. Piracy has been mostly eradicated as various states have leveled-up their anti-piracy efforts. These efforts included the *Eye in the Sky* and *Malacca Strait Patrolling*. These initiatives involve coordinated and joint patrolling, sea surveillance and considerable information exchanges among Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. They have also initiated cooperation from outside powers such as India, Japan, and the US among others. The number of hijackings of vessels has declined because several countries have improved the security measures taken by shipping companies.

Furthermore, analysts believe that the increased use of private security guards, international naval patrols, sharing of intelligence by countries and several other new measures have put control on terrorism and piracy. In this whole process, the role of non-governmental organisations is really important. But First, there should be a new look at maritime laws governing the use of force on high seas and within the territorial coastal areas. Second, the rules of engagement of the naval units have to change to protect the trade routes to be coordinated and agreed on. Moreover, a close look needs to be taken at the kind of vessels which might be required to combat piracy more cost-effectively. The banking community should take a much closer look at money laundering and report all suspicious transactions to the authorities.

He concluded his remarks by saying that there is a need to spread awareness among the people and policy groups and encourage more such debates and discussions to create an environment for policy coordination.

Moving from a landlocked presentation to an Island perspective, and the challenges faced by the Island countries, **Kristy Tsun Tzu Hsu** shed some light on the COVID-19 pandemic and how climate change is affecting the global supply chain. The global geopolitical and economic landscape, she claimed has been altered by the pandemic, and issues such as food scarcity, natural disasters, economic sustainability, supply chain resilience, and the capacity to adapt to and resolve climate crises. Small developing open economies in Southeast and South Asia like Taiwan, are highly dependent on International Trade. Thus, the supply chain disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and other reasons such as geopolitical conflicts, made the world understand the importance of keeping smooth operations of supply chains on necessary consumers, products and critical materials such as vaccines and semiconductors. Hence, to reduce the chance of future disruption, the majority of Southeast Asian nations have prioritised enhancing the supply chain's resilience after the epidemic.

Mentioning about the climate change vulnerabilities faced by Taiwan, which is a small island nation with a population of about 23 million people. It is very vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters such as typhoons, floods, drought and earthquakes. Since most of Taiwan's industrial sectors rely heavily on imports of energy, such as natural gas and petroleum, energy security is another major concern. Thus, in addition to providing stable water and electricity to all chip makers, which is crucial for Taiwan and the rest of the world. The government also needs to help businesses achieve a green transformation and provide affordable green power, which are currently the main obstacles faced by the majority of the Taiwanese industry.

Citing other mitigation measures, she said that Taiwan's president proclaimed the 2015 Net Zero transition as Taiwan's approach to climate action in response to the worldwide net-zero trend in April, 2021. The government published Taiwan's Pathway to Net Zero Emission in 2050 on March 20, 2022, a year later, to support the green transition of all industrial sectors and foster green growth as a new economic engine. Taiwan will prioritise technology, R&D, and innovation in these important areas as part of this strategy.

Here, in Taiwan's 2050 Net Zero transition road map, Green and smart agriculture are other important segments. Though Taiwan is a net importer, agriculture is politically, economically and socially important to its National Security. However, in recent years, Taiwan's agriculture has faced challenges brought by structural and environmental challenges including agents, agricultural population, labour shortage, global competition and climate change which have caused instability in the production and supply of stable food. Thus, the National Climate Change Adaption Action Plan from 2011 to 2016 work on agricultural production and biodiversity was carried out by the Council of Agriculture, which was recently upgraded to the Ministry of Agriculture. This ministry also carried out the smart agriculture programme over the following five years, from 2017 to 2022. The program's two primary methods were *smart production* and *digital service/delivery*. For

instance, farmers in Taiwan may obtain digital knowledge, smart production optimised goods, convenient operation, and cloud tracking by adopting sensors, smart devices, the Internet of things, and Big Data analysis. These are the two main components of Taiwan's post-pandemic economic recovery strategy as well as its reaction to climate change.

Aman Thakker mentioned that the US stakeholders have recently recognised India's increasingly digitizing economy. He cited that data for development, digitization for development, and technology for development were the main topics of discussion at the just-completed G20 summit. These topics also covered India's presidency and its bilateral discussions with the US, other nations, the EU, the African Union, France, Germany, and India.

He further added that Non-traditional security concerns in the digital sphere are categorised into three layers: (1) Actual connectivity, such as digital devices and hardware; (2) Actual connectivity locations, such as broadband connectivity, 5G and 6G rollouts, research and development, and digital public infrastructure; and (3) Apps and software. Non-traditional security concerns, such as supply chain disruptions, cyberattacks, and development interruptions, affect all three of these.

Government statistics from India indicate that in 2022, there were around 1.39 million cybersecurity incidents that affected government organisations alone. Regarding the private sector, 66% of Indian businesses said that they believe their state-of-the-art, Internet of Things connected gadgets are vulnerable and that they should be better equipped to handle new global threats. He went on to say that there have been some fraud incidents involving India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI), one of the country's most important soft power instruments. 95,000 fraud events involving non-state actors and non-traditional security actors were reported on the UPI network and the bulk of these incidents had ticket values ranging from medium to high. Between the values of one rupee and one lakh, 98% of those transactions and scams occurred.

He said that *Atmanirbharta*, or self-reliance, is a key component of the strategies that both the US and India are pursuing to address these issues. Both nations are striving for self-reliance through different programmes including the US's Inflation Reduction Act and India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes. Both countries are talking more and more about trustworthy sources and trustworthy jurisdictions. They are also discussing how to identify reliable geographic areas and where to acquire critical equipment that may be susceptible to these sorts of non-traditional security risks. The US and India are cooperating bilaterally on several issues, with the creation of the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies marking a turning point in the two countries' relationship. These issues include the digital economy and countering challenges in the digital sphere.

At the recent Quad Summit, it was stated that open and interoperable telecom equipment be deployed in Palau to combat the digital security risks that the West Coast of the US faces. Additionally, efforts will be made to develop security measures against non-traditional threats in other countries. He also outlined the difficulties and additional steps that need to be taken to lessen these dangers. To safeguard these technologies using a global strategy, he suggested that there should be more conversations and debates regarding collaboration between the US and India in areas like DPI, artificial intelligence, their negative consequences and safety concerns, and communication technologies, particularly 5G equipment. He said that civil societies, think tanks and academia can play an important role in outlining threats and opportunities for collaboration in these areas.

The panel discussion was followed by a Q&A session. Various imminent questions were put up in the chat box around the role of APEC, IPEF and other such groupings and their significance in the Indo-Pacific.

The closing remarks were delivered by Kiran N. Meetarbhan, Director, CUTS International. As a citizen of Mauritius, she laid the importance of tackling issues faced by the blue economy, unregulated fishing and piracy in order to have a prosperous Indo-Pacific. She added that the upcoming newer technologies are paving the way for human interaction with the oceans. They drive economic growth and bring benefits to society. She closed by saying that this century is known as the *Maritime Century* and we as CSOs have a large role to play in it.