

Maritime Security in East and Southeast Asia — Political Challenges in Asian Waters. Tarling, Chen. Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2017.

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“Maritime Security in East and Southeast Asia - Political Challenges in Asian Waters” is an edited book by Nicholas Tarling and Xin Chen, published in 2017 by Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. It contains eight articles, written by prominent scholars and university professors based in Southeast Asia.

There are misty clouds of doubts and misperceptions surrounding the waters of South East Asia. Despite being home to some of the world’s most strategic Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs), not much is known about the complexities and concerns of the region. The Malacca and Singapore Straits, for example, is arguably the busiest international waterway, with more than one-third of the global trade and half of the world’s energy traversing them annually. Yet with the rival claimant countries rapidly improving their naval and coast guard capabilities and with surging nationalism in their domestic politics, there are increasing discussions about the risk that the maritime disputes will lead to military clashes in the Asian waters.

The book does a decent effort to deconstruct all the misperceptions and clear the clouds of doubts by first identifying the issues in Southeast Asia and then coming up with solutions. For decades, the Southeast Asian waters have been plagued by piracy. To make sure that the readers understand the impact of piracy, the first chapter is aptly titled Maritime Security and Piracy. Written by one of the editors of the book, this chapter goes in detail to explain the impact and build a co relationship between Maritime Security and Piracy.

The second chapter takes the discussion to Malaysia and explains its perspective under the title “The Straits of Malacca: Malaysia’s Threat Perception and Strategy for Maritime Security.”The chapter highlights the

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importance of Malaysia in Southeast Asia as it is also a littoral of the Malacca Strait. The authors to argue that Malaysians actually look beyond the ambit of their naval forces and would like a more dominant role in securing the waters. The author also highlights the Malaysian efforts in the past to eradicate piracy. Even though they don't have the capacity at the moment to become a leading maritime player in the region, their actions or pursuit might raise doubts in the minds of other states.

The third and fourth chapters are dedicated to the Singaporean perception of maritime security, terrorism, piracy and regional cooperation. The authors of these chapters have highlighted the importance of Singapore as a littoral of the Malacca Strait. They have clearly identified the challenges that might arise in the future and the challenges that were dealt in the past. Furthermore, the authors change the discourse and bring it in line with the perceived threats of Singapore. Then the writers discuss the modern challenges and highlight the importance of Singapore both in terms of its geography and also due to its dedication to address the challenges. The authors then chart a road map to cope up with the problems that might arise. The authors also build up their case by incorporating the Singaporean efforts in line of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and explain the steps taken up by the government.

The fifth chapter discusses the challenges faced by Philippines. The country has been the home to piracy and other illegal maritime activities for decades. As a result, the waters of Philippines have been considered to be troublesome and has been a challenge to the maritime security in the region. In this chapter, the author argues that no matter what happens in the Philippines waters, it will continue to rely on its maritime economy. To fuel its economic needs, Philippines has effectively degraded its biodiversity but lost the mangrove system by 75 per cent, which poses severe challenges to its coral reef. The challenges faced by Philippines are multi-faceted and, still, the government is not taking the right steps. Despite having skilled personnel available, the government has not taken the right efforts to curb piracy and mitigate the damages it has caused to the nature. The author suggests that the people of the country need to take the responsibility on their shoulders if they want to preserve the natural balance of the archipelago.

The sixth chapter is about the maritime security of Japan and how the country has evolved from its role of cold war era to the present. Japan has

been an active player during the Cold War and it carried on with its role after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Today, Japan hopes to exercise its muscle till the eastern rim of Africa. The author in this chapter has touched on how the Japanese are coping up with the Chinese naval build up and how this can be a destabilizing factor in the region. The author then moves on to discuss ideas of resource competition and managing threats emerging from North Korea. The author has also talked about the Japanese role in the Malacca Strait and how Japan can contribute to the collective security of the region.

The seventh chapter is a historical assessment of the maritime security policy of Thailand from 1932 to 2012. The author has described the policy in terms of periods and has identified a total of 5 periods. The author then goes on to highlight the development of these periods in terms of International Relations and regional politics. In summing up this chapter the author accepts that Thailand has played an important and vital role in the improvement of Maritime security of the region and continues to contribute even more.

The last chapter is based on China and is written by one of the editors. The author has primarily used the theory of Thomas Hobbs and John Locke to discuss the maritime security measures of China. Later on, the author explains why it is important for China to deter threats and how the naval power plays an important role in it. After shedding light on the importance of deterrence, the author gives details of the existing maritime disputes of China and explains their nature. Then the author suggests how China can use hard power (aircraft carriers) and soft power (diplomatic maneuvers) to resolve differences in the region and make the Malacca Strait a safe passage for trade.

In conclusion, it can be argued here that the book is not presenting anything new to its readers but it is a good read for those who are unaware of what is happening in the maritime arena in East and Southeast Asia. The strength of this book is that it is heavily backed by strong research and this makes the information credible. The book is advised to be read at the beginners' level to get the basic knowledge of the region. Based on this book, one can also chart the future course of actions that may occur in the coming future.