

Editorial

The last issue of 2017 is a substantial one, with a detailed perspective piece on the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence (SCoD); two insightful and scholarly articles on the maritime space and India's role vis-à-vis it; and on the complex subject of defence acquisitions. The issues highlighted by the contributions are all current and pertinent to the larger debate on India's strategic views, how it is positioning itself on key issues as well as looking at capacity building to achieve its goals.

The issue commences with 'Standing Committee on Defence's Prescription for Increasing Capital Budget May Not Work' by Amit Cowshish, a regular contributor to the journal on issues of defence finance. Cowshish analyses in detail the Thirty-first Report of the SCoD submitted to Parliament earlier in the year, and which examined the capital outlay for the defence services for the year 2017–18, procurement policy of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and defence planning. According to him, apart from a rather sketchy analysis of these issues, the committee has only ended up making hackneyed observations and recommendations that have been made repeatedly in the past without much success. Cowshish picks up five of the 17-odd recommendations made by the committee, which relate primarily to allocation and utilisation of funds for capital acquisitions, and indicates that these recommendations are unlikely to produce any perceptible change in the current or the coming years. Bringing his years of expertise to the fore, he makes some suggestions as regards the role the committee could play in channelising the current narrative into a result-oriented plan of action.

In the first of two articles on maritime issues—'Foreign Policy and Sea Power: India's Maritime Role Flux'—Zorawar Daulet Singh argues that India's maritime worldview and role conceptions have not only been evolving since the 1950s, but have also been closely interlinked with how policymakers thought about India's regional identity and the state's economic capacity to release resources towards sea power. Singh contends

that, today, there are three maritime role conceptions that are vying for the apex's strategic attention, and they are reflective of a deeper role flux in India's regional identity. While these maritime role conceptions may not be entirely mutually exclusive, each role implies a foreign policy posture, maritime doctrine and a logical force structure. The article explicates the evolution of these maritime role conceptions; offers reasons for the role flux in recent years; and highlights key, contemporary policy-relevant issues to anchor the debate on the inter-relationship between foreign policy and sea power.

Gurpreet S. Khurana's article 'High End in the Pacific: Envisioning the Upper Limits of India-US Naval Cooperation in Pacific-Asia' argues that India and the United States are poised to strengthen their bilateral strategic convergences, not only in the Indian Ocean but also in Pacific-Asia that lies eastwards of the Malacca Straits, and wherein India's geo-strategic stakes as well as its military-strategic footprint are likely to increase in the coming years. This would progressively enhance the complementarities between their navies in the western Pacific and its contiguous seas, thereby enabling substantive naval cooperation towards ensuring security and stability in the broader Indo-Pacific region. Introducing the theoretical concept of 'geo-strategic frontier', Khurana examines the various factors at play, and conceives the likely future scenarios of 'high-end' Indo-US naval cooperation in Pacific-Asia, in the short-, medium- and long-term timeframes.

In 'Examining the US Defence Acquisition Apparatus: What can India Learn?', Laxman Kumar Behera takes a close look at how the United States (US) defence acquisition apparatus, arguably the biggest in the world, has undergone several reforms in the past 100 years. He opines that the reforms, which focused on both structural and procedural aspects of acquisition, have led to establishment of authority and accountability in acquisition; articulation of a detailed regulatory mechanism; a dedicated university to impart training to acquisition workforce; and a clear incentive structure for the domestic industry. Behera suggests that some of these reforms could be useful for India as the latter has been struggling in its efforts to streamline its own acquisition system. He suggests that India could learn from the US system of having an acquisition czar dealing with all aspects of acquisition, besides imbibing the good practices pertaining to programme management, joint capability planning, human resource management and domestic industry's greater participation in acquisition.

Abhay K. Singh contributes a thoughtful review essay where he reviews *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* by C. Christine Fair and *Defeat is an Orphan: How Pakistan Lost the Great South Asian War* by Myra MacDonald, both old South Asia hands. In 'South Asian Geopolitics: Has Pakistan Lost its Plot?', Singh begins with discussing how diplomatic and military parity with India and strategic depth in Afghanistan have been the two enduring and existential challenges for Pakistan since independence. He further says that owing to its use of jihadi terrorism as the key instrument of state policy, Pakistan's fall from grace appears to be complete: due to its fallacious approach, it seems to have lost the trust of the US and diminished its equity in Afghanistan, while India has become its bigger nemesis with a more entrenched presence. The blame for this strategic debacle, says the author, can be put squarely at the doorstep of the Pakistan Army, which has been at the helm of national policy from its independence, either directly or indirectly. The narrative of Pakistan's strategic failure in resolving its key security challenge and the crucial role which Pakistan Army has played in this saga resonates in the two books that are under review. While differing in their approach and articulation, both books establish the Pakistan Army's reckless policy as a causality of strategic failure.

The issue also includes three book reviews: Alok Deb reviews *War from the Ground Up: Twenty First Century Combat as Politics*; Cherian Samuel reviews *The Darkening Web: The War for Cyberspace*; and Y.M. Bammi reviews *A Rock between Hard Places: Afghanistan as an Arena of Regional Insecurity*.

