On 7 August 2019, the Islamabad Policy Research Institute hosted participants of the Maritime Summer School—a five-day course initiated by the Maritime Study Forum (MSF) for students, academicians and young policymakers from across the country. The participants gave presentations as part of a simulation aimed at holistically analysing Pakistan’s maritime industry and offering policy guidelines to help develop it. President of IPRI Ambassador Vice Admiral (R) Khan Hasham bin Saddique, President of MSF Dr. Syed Mohammed Anwer and MSF Board Member Dr. Aneel Salman set the stage for the presentations.

The interplay of power in the Indian Ocean is no plus ultra that Maritime Affairs have overtaken land-based dynamics in the struggle for regional influence. The discussions outlined that the focus of geopolitics has transitioned from Europe to the Asia Pacific region. Concurrently with this shift, maritime affairs have displaced land-based intergovernmental diplomacy.

The interactive session highlighted the importance of shipping and aquaculture sectors for ensuring success of Pakistan’s blue economic growth:

- The budget for maritime development needs to be increased.
- Private entities should be provided with a favourable environment for investment to encourage domestic shipbuilding and the utilisation of the Karachi shipyard which has been dormant for a significant period. Given its potential to boost domestic ship making, its upgradation to a functioning shipyard can help Pakistan significantly develop the sector.
- The Pakistan National Shipping Corporation’s monopoly has resulted in decreased competition in the shipping industry. Allowing the private sector to invest will increase projects, enhance research and analysis and raise industry standards for maritime development.
- Extensive research needs to be done about the possible limitations and prospects of AI and smart shipping for improving efficiency, reliability and safety.

It was pointed out that the Indian Ocean (IO) is prone to conflicts given lack of formal security mechanisms. Foreign major powers exercise their influence in the Ocean since it is home to various trade and energy routes. Despite the volume of trade passing through 10, conflicts have not been deterred effectively. Participants discussed how India’s claims over IO, disregarding all other littoral states, are mind directed and short-sighted.

On 28 August 2019, the Islamabad Policy Research Institute organised its second Media Workshop of the year on Strategic Importance of Maritime Affairs for Pakistan and the Role of Media. The workshop, attended by students of media communications, journalists and reporters from all major news and print agencies, concluded that achieving sea-based deterrence, developing blue economy and creating maritime awareness through the media is vital for Pakistan.

President of IPRI, Ambassador Vice Admiral (R) Khan Hasham bin Saddique, in his Welcome Address, emphasised the importance of understanding maritime affairs for Pakistan and the role of media in creating sea awareness. He said that it is imperative for nations to utilise their maritime resources for economic development which ultimately fortifies defensive capabilities. Vice Admiral Saddique remarked that Pakistan’s sea resources, if strategically used, can provide seamless connectivity and commerce with the rest of the world, and strengthen the country’s economy. He further said that Pakistan is gifted with a geostrategic position which offers opportunities to have a key role in trade and oil routes across the Arabian Sea.

Pakistan’s coastline needs to be developed if the country wants to undergo an economic renaissance. In the working session of the media workshop, Ambassador Vice Admiral (R) Syed Khawar Ali, HI (M), Director General, National Institute of Maritime Affairs, Bahria University discussed contemporary maritime dynamics in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Pakistan’s preparedness. He shared that seas are major lines of communication, and hence, nations must be able to subordinate their individual political agendas for the common good. Vice Admiral Ali pointed out that, unfortunately, the sea had become an arena for competition between states, characterised by naval build-ups and military competition to influence others. Strategic debate in modern international politics is now focused on maritime issues like the US pivot to Asia and emergence of China as a naval power, he remarked. Epicentre of Indo-Pakistan nuclear rivalry is slowly drifting outward from the sub-continental landmass into the Indian Ocean. Nuclearisation of Indian Ocean does not bode well for the peace and stability of this vital region.

Dr. Salma Malik from Quaid-i-Azam University gave a presentation on Pakistan’s Maritime Imperatives—Continued on p.2
Strategic Importance of Maritime Affairs for Pakistan and the Role of Media

Pakistan’s navy cannot ignore India’s blue water naval build-up, especially its nuclear weapons. It is important to invest in the development of Pakistan’s sea-based nuclear weapons capable of providing second-strike capability.

Concluding the media workshop, Dr. Azhar Ahmad, Head of Department, Humanities & Social Sciences, Bahria University stressed that media not only influences perceptions, but also influences decisions and policy-making. Such an important tool should therefore be used with caution and prudence. In order to do this, the media needs to understand all aspects of the issues they cover. Sea blindness is a global concern, one which the media in Pakistan needs to highlight more, he concluded.

Practical Recommendations

The workshop was followed by an interactive Q/A session between the media participants and speakers. The following practical recommendations were made:

• Given lack of understanding and coverage of maritime issues, Pakistani media needs to be galvanized and trained to project the maritime potential of the country. In this regard, universities should offer specialised Maritime journalism courses.

• Celebrating Maritime Day once a year is important, however, country-wide exposure through travelling seminars and study tours for media personnel to various ports is vital.

• Media houses should allocate more airtime to coastal communities and maritime issues such as shipping, aquaculture, maritime assistance disaster relief efforts and coastal conservation.

• Acknowledging remarkable maritime-related security work will deepen understanding about the capabilities of Pakistan’s naval forces. Naval/maritime PR offices, should therefore, become more proactive in projecting the Navy’s work, such as AMAN exercises and celebrating Naval heroes.

Unfortunately, our relationship with the US has historically suffered due to lack of trust on both sides and one word which best describes this relationship is transactional. Vice Admiral Saddique highlighted the consultative role being played by Pakistan to facilitate the US in bringing a peaceful solution in Afghanistan. He was of the view that both sides recognise that despite some policy divergences and challenges to their bilateral ties, working together will accrue mutual benefits whereas, antagonism will serve neither party.

Ambassador Riaz Khokhar opined that neither side can easily brush this relationship aside in spite of President Trump’s choice of hard words at times, and vacillating approach towards Pakistan. He shared that Pakistan’s relationship with the US cannot be analysed in isolation since the international order is in flux, with China rising phenomenally, Russia re-asserting itself, and the Middle East in extremis turmoil.

Every US security document over the past few years identifies China as a major threat for the US, followed by Russia, North Korea and Iran. Pakistan has historic relations with China that go as far back as the 1920s. This is a solid, iron-clad strategic relationship which neither side should allow anyone to undermine.

On the issue of Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to the US, Ambassador Khokhar strongly held the view that while both leaders ‘clicked’ and had chemistry, the US’ main interest remains Afghanistan. He pointed out that India was also an important actor influencing Pak-US dynamics. The US expects India to be a partner in the containment of China. In this regard, Pakistan’s overall endorsement of the Belt and Road Initiative may also be problematic for Washington. Western countries have a soft corner for Delhi. That is why India is painted as a resposable nuclear power, he said.

Discussing the rising tensions in Indian Occupied Kashmir, the Ambassador remarked that mild US statements on Indian atrocities were indicative of where their sympathies lie.

War is neither an option for India nor for Pakistan, both have nuclear capabilities. We should engage with India but not beg for dialogue.

Future Dynamics

• The US is a superpower and the only way forward is to have sustained diplomatic dialogue, and to collaborate in areas where there is convergence such as trade, energy, transport, technology and education.

• While Washington realises that there is no military solution to the Afghan tangle, Pakistan does not have overwhelming influence over the Taliban nor over the ethnic mosaic of Afghan tribes. It would not be in Pakistan’s interest to give any guarantees or get involved in the actual terms and conditions of a any future political settlement agreement.