Preface

The melting of the polar sea-ice induced by climate change has lately placed the Arctic region in the forefront of global strategic and academic interest. The discourse involves a number of issues such as claims of the littoral countries to the continental shelves of the region, the management and exploitation of its living and non-living resources, the rights and interests of indigenous communities, and the prospects of new ice-free shipping routes. These issues have given rise to new geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic dynamics amongst the Arctic littorals, and have led to the growing interest of non-Arctic states in the affairs of the Arctic.

The contemporary discourse also suggests that the Arctic region presents challenges and offers opportunities for the international community. The salient challenges arise from the melting of the permafrost leading to the release of greenhouse gases. This can have an adverse impact on the fragile ecosystem of the region, which can affect the livelihood of the local people. Safety of shipping and seafarers navigating across Arctic waters is another major challenge. Further, the competing territorial claims of the littoral states may result in militarization of the Arctic. At another level, several non-littoral states are exploring ways to engage in the evolving politico-economic-strategic dynamics of the Arctic region.

The Arctic region is often referred by some as an extended frontier of the 'global commons' that offers new opportunities in the form of vast untapped reserves of hydrocarbon and mineral resources, unexploited marine living resources and shorter shipping routes connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. It may, therefore, be averred that the future prospects in the Arctic are likely to create new frontiers for commercial and resource extraction activities, providing a fresh impetus to the evolving process of globalization in a manner never witnessed before in the region.

The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum of eight founding members (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States), Permanent Observers comprising a number of non-Arctic states, and the indigenous communities. The council has emerged as an effective international forum for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among its members.

Five Asian countries—China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea and Singapore—joined the Arctic Council as Permanent Observers in 2013. China has been the most proactive in exhibiting its interest in the natural resources and sea routes of the Arctic. It is actively pursuing resource diplomacy involving joint ventures in exploration and infrastructure development projects with Russia, Norway and Iceland. India has developed substantial expertise in Arctic scientific research, which is underpinned by decades of experience from its Antarctica research programme. Japan was the first Asian country to undertake Arctic scientific research and to determine the viability of the Northern Sea Route. Republic of Korea has the advantage of a well-developed ship building industry to provide ships capable of traversing through the ice. Singapore has a technological edge in marine industries, particularly in management of ports, deployment of offshore marine and engineering, and has a keen interest in the development of international maritime policy.

It is evident that the Asian countries have a variety of interests in the Arctic, and the grant of permanent observer status to these countries is an acknowledgement of their capabilities. These countries are keen to make use of the emerging opportunities in the Arctic, and are thus formulating appropriate long-term national strategies. The preliminary approach of the Asian Observer countries has rightly been to graduate from 'involvement' to 'engagement' in the Arctic, which seems to have generated significant interest amongst analysts.

This book is an attempt to understand the approaches of various Arctic and non-Arctic stakeholders, in light of the evolving dynamics in the region. This volume is based on the papers presented in the Annual Maritime Power Conference 2015 organized by the National Maritime Foundation and attempts to answer certain key questions.

The first session set the backdrop for the conference and discussed the evolving dynamics in the Arctic, the drivers of change and their impact. Scientific endeavours to understand climate change is a leading area of research among various countries. Access to resources and opening up of new sea routes is also driving the commercial interest of national governments. Resolving maritime boundaries disputes within the framework of 1982 LoS is a priority. The threat of environmental degradation in the region also needs to be mitigated by proactive governance. The key questions addressed were as follows:

- What are the systemic changes underway in the Arctic that impact on the political, socio-economic, security and legal dynamics?
- What are the likely regional and international ramifications of these systemic changes?

The next two sessions were devoted to understanding the interests, strategies and policies of Asian countries with regard to the Arctic region. The key questions deliberated during this session were as follows:

- How does the Arctic region figure in the Asian countries' national interests and their broader strategic thought?
- What are their national strategies and policies for the Arctic?

The emerging imperative of climate change is often seen as the driver for engagement by Asian countries in Arctic affairs. Understandably, some Arctic countries have expressed reservations on Asian involvement, attributing it to their agenda of gaining access to the region's natural resources. Session four discussed the perspectives of the Arctic countries on the involvement of the Asian states in the region. The key questions discussed were as follows:

- How do Arctic littorals perceive the engagement of Asian countries in the region, including their prospective contribution to Arctic governance?
- What type of institutional framework will ensure greater engagement by Asian countries in the Arctic?

It is evident that all stakeholders in the Arctic region, including the Asian countries, have shared interests in the sustainable development of the region. As mentioned above, the last academic session explored whether there is a case for Asian countries to present a collective approach on the Arctic. Accordingly, the key questions to be brainstormed during this session were as follows:

- Is a pan-Asian approach to the Arctic feasible?
- What are the potential benefits and limitations of such a collective approach?
- Is it possible to develop a common approach by the Arctic and Asian states to maximize opportunities while effectively overcoming the challenges?

The book provides a comprehensive view of the regional maritime dynamics and its implications for India. We hope that the book throws light on the myriad of issues interwoven into the complex regional interplay between various stakeholders in the region.

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