NAVY NEWS WEEK 25-4

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PACIFIC OCEAN (June 12, 2017) F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets assigned to Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 2 fly over the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier **USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70),** front, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers **USS *Wayne E. Meyer* (DDG 108),** right, **USS *Michael Murphy* (DDG 112),** left, and the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser **USS *Lake Champlain* (CG 57)** in the western Pacific. The U.S. Navy has patrolled the Indo-Asia-Pacific routinely for more than 70 years promoting regional peace and security. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sean M. Castellano/Released)

Whichever way one looks at this picture, it shows Naval power in all its facts (assuming a submergd submarine).

Royal Navy amphibious transport dock HMS *Albion* returning to sea

Photo: Royal Navy

The Royal Navy amphibious transport dock **HMS *Albion*** is scheduled to sail from Devonport Naval Base at the end of the week after spending almost six years tied to port in "*extended readiness*". In late 2011 the ship was placed at extended readiness, following the decision by the UK Government in the Strategic Defence and Security Review to operate only one of two amphibious ships at a time. To be able to return to sea from mothballs, **HMS *Albion*** underwent a £90 million mid-life technical upgrade. In 2015 Babcock Marine began work on the ship's rejuvenation. In one of Devonport's largest dry-docks Albion rested temporarily whilst her hull was inspected, and major invasive structural work and re-preservation of the paint scheme was undertaken. Twelve months later, she was refloated and moved to the non-tidal basin at which point the propulsion and weapon systems were brought alive. In January of this year 350 sailors and royal marines of her ships company moved back on board and in March the ship was moved to her home berth at Weston Mill. The capability improvements are significant and necessary and will allow the ship to serve well into 2030s. During the refit 110 improvements have been made. The most significant being the state-of- the-art Phalanx defensive Close in Weapon System, a new propulsion cooling system to allow the ship to operate more effectively in warmer climates, upgraded surveillance radar and combat system computer brain to manage all the weapons and systems. **HMS *Albion*** now undertakes an intensive sea trials package to confirm performance of all her systems, followed by operational sea training. The ship is scheduled to sail from Devonport Naval Base at the end of the week. **Source: Naval Today**

Extended readiness = reserve?

Resolve-class supply ship for Royal Canadian Navy to be unveiled next month

Chantier Davie has issued invitations for the unveiling of the Resolve-class interim Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment (AOR) ship. That will happen July 20. All members of the public are welcome according to the invitation. In November 2015, the Liberal government tried to derail the $669 million project for the supply ship but backed down after their attempt became public. Project Resolve was approved by the previous Conservative government and involved Davie shipyards in Quebec quickly converting a commercial vessel into an AOR. The ship had already been delivered to Davie to begin the conversion process when James D. Irving, co-chief executive officer of Davie's rival, Irving Shipbuilding, wrote a letter on Nov. 17, 2015, to then procurement minister Judy Foote and Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan. Irving requested its proposal for a similar vessel, already rejected by the Conservative government, be examined. After receiving Irving's letter the Liberal government put Project Resolve on hold. Details about the Liberals' decision to put Project Resolve on hold, as well as Irving's letter and details of cabinet discussions about the matter, were leaked to the CBC in November 2015. The leak embarrassed the new Trudeau government and sparked outrage in Quebec about the potential loss of hundreds of jobs if Davie were to lose the ship deal. The Liberals beat a quick retreat and shortly afterwards, Project Resolve went ahead. The RCMP has claimed that Vice Admiral Mark Norman was involved in leaking information on Project Resolve to Davie officials. Norman denies any wrongdoing. The RCMP have not laid any charges against the vice admiral who was suspended from his job in January by Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Jon Vance. Norman's supporters have raised questions about how the respected officer has been treated. The ship will be leased to the Canadian government, which has an option to buy the vessel if so desired. **Source: Ottawa Citizen**

PACIFIC OCEAN (June 12, 2017) An F/A-18E Super Hornet assigned to the "Golden Dragons" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 192 conducts a high-speed flyby during an air-power demonstration in the western Pacific. The U.S. Navy has patrolled the Indo-Asia-Pacific routinely for more than 70 years promoting regional peace and security. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Matthew Granito/Released)

Another impressive picture.

Chinese Navy task group visits New Zealand

Type 054A frigate ***Hengyang*** in Auckland, New Zealand. **Photo: RNZN**

After completing port calls in Madagascar and Australia, ships from the Chinese PLA Navy's 25th Task Group arrived in Auckland, New Zealand, on June 15. The ships are on a goodwill visit tour in Asia Pacific following their counter-piracy deployment

in the Gulf of Aden. Composed of two Type 054A frigates, ***Hengyang*** and ***Yulin***, and replenishment ship ***Hongh***, the Task Group is led by Rear Admiral Zhao Jicheng who will call on senior New Zealand Navy leadership while the task group ships will take part in maneuvers and drills with New Zealand units. The Chinese Navy has another three-ship group conducting overseas port visits and training. The type 052C destroyer ***Changchun***, the type 054A frigate ***Jingzhou*** and type 903A replenishment ship ***Chaohu*** are currently in the Persian Gulf where they are set to visit Iran after concluding their visit to Pakistan on June 14. **Source: Naval Today**

Chinese naval fleet holds military exercise with Russian navy in St Petersburg

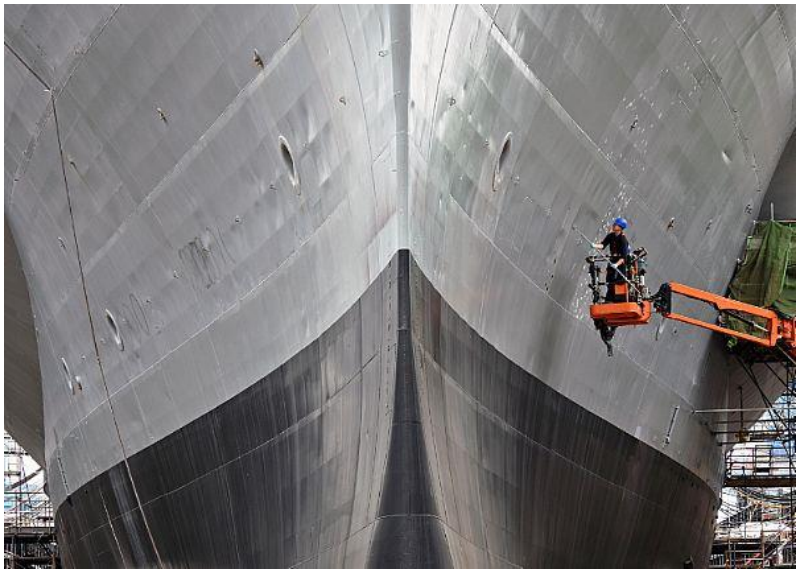
WorldReutersJun, 19 2017 11:46:17 IST

A Chinese naval fleet held a scheduled military exercise with the Russian navy in St Petersburg and Kaliningrad on Sunday in the first of planned exercises this year to strengthen their cooperation, state news agency *Xinhua* reported. The "**Joint Sea-2017**" exercise follows similar ones held last year, and more exercises will be held in late July in the Baltic Sea, and in mid-September in the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk, it added. The Chinese fleet, which sailed out from Hainan province in southern China, consisted of the missile destroyer ***Changsha***, missile frigate ***Yuncheng***, a comprehensive supply ship, ship-borne helicopters and marines, it said. China and Russia are veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council, and have held similar views on many major issues such as the crisis in Syria, often putting them at odds with the United States and Western Europe. They have previously held naval drills in the fiercely-contested South China Sea which China, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam have rival claims over. *Xinhua* said the theme of this year's drills was "*joint rescue and protection of maritime economic activities*". **Source: http://www.firstpost.com**

Iran, China hold joint naval exercise

June 19, 2017

TEHRAN – Iranian and Chinese warships held a joint naval exercise on Sunday, IRNA reported. An Iranian destroyer and two Chinese destroyers participated in the war game, which was held in the eastern portion of the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman. The Chinese flotilla included a support vessel and a helicopter as well. They had docked at Iran's Bandar Abbas on Thursday, after leaving the Pakistani port of Karachi. Iran's Navy assigned its ***Alborz*** Destroyer and a helicopter to the exercise. Some 700 Iranian navy personnel and about 700 Chinese servicemen took part in the exercise. China's Ambassador to Tehran, Pang Sen, accompanied his country's sailors as they met Iranian officials. Dozens of Iran-based Chinese nationals traveled to Bandar Abbas to welcome the servicemen, waving the national flags of the two countries. Back in 2014, two Chinese warships docked at Bandar Abbas port to take part in a joint naval exercise in the Persian Gulf for the first time. **Source: http://www.tehrantimes.com**



YOKOSUKA, Japan (June 12, 2017) Seaman Daniel Keaton, assigned to the U.S. 7th Fleet flagship **USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC 19)**, paints the hull of the ship. ***Blue Ridge*** is in an extensive maintenance period in order to modernize the ship to continue to serve as a robust communications platform in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Patrick Semales/Released)

Remember your days as yong sailors, painting the ship's side?

U.S. Navy holds joint naval drills with Qatar despite recent diplomatic tensions

June 19, 2017 3:36 pm

Two U.S. Navy ships conducted military exercises with their Qatari counterparts in the Persian Gulf on Friday.

Qatar denies accusations by its neighbours that it funds terrorism, foments regional instability or has cosied up to their enemy Iran. The dispute has opened a rift among some of the main U.S. allies in the Middle East, with U.S. President Donald Trump backing tough measures against Qatar even as his State Department and Defense Department have sought to remain neutral. Washington has sent mixed signals despite Trump's firm personal backing for the sanctions: Trump called Qatar a *"funder of terrorism at a very high level,"* but five days later his Pentagon approved selling Qatar billions of dollars wirth of warplanes. The U.S. warships arrived at Qatar's Hamad Port on Wednesday as part of defence co-operation between the United States and Qatar. The joint exercise will cover areas such as surface and aerial combat as well as defending an oil platform, according to Qatari and U.S. Navies Joint Exercise Commander, Staff Commander Mohamed Desaml Al Kuwari. The move came as Qatar's Ministry of Defense said on Wednesday the country signed off on a deal to buy F-15 fighter jets from the United States for $12 billion.

Source: http://globalnews.ca

Is This the Future of Chinese Submarine Power?

There are hints that China might pursue foreign basing for its submarine force.

A Chinese Kilo with the red flag. Wikimedia Commons

Lyle J. Goldstein

June 19, 2017

Between major decisions on a new deployment to Afghanistan and a wholly new Persian Gulf crisis, not to mention the boiling crises in Syria and North Korea, Washington strategists can be forgiven for putting China's naval buildup on the back burner. As Beijing fills the "*near seas*"—and now the "*far seas*"—with new frigates, destroyers and aircraft carriers, the orientation and larger strategy guiding its future submarine force remains an open question that this column has tried to focus on. Moreover, the tendency of Washington analysts has been, rather predictably, to exaggerate the potential threat posed by China's naval buildup; this columnist has repeatedly argued against that tendency. Objective assessments of China's rapid naval modernization must be based on the best possible information regarding the Chinese Navy's objectives and future plans. An early 2017 paper published as the lead article in a prestigious naval research journal and written by research personnel at the Qingdao Submarine Academy [海军潜艇学院] provides such a baseline document to evaluate Beijing's developing undersea ambitions. Some of the revelations detailed below are sure to exhilarate Washington's many hawks, such as the declared imperatives for Chinese submarines as "*offensive forces* [进攻性兵种]" to operate on "*exterior lines* [外线兵种]" to "*actively defend the 'Belt and Road'* [积极维护'一带一路']," to mix it up with adversary ASW forces to gain intelligence [侦察] about enemy doctrine and capabilities, not to mention hints regarding the future overseas supply [海外保障] of Chinese submarines and expected emphasis on developing nuclear submarine capabilities as an "*assassin's mace*" [杀手锏] for far-seas operations. Yet before broaching these points, one should stop and sincerely congratulate the Chinese Navy for so openly discussing such issues. The paper under discussion here represents a significant stride forward for Chinese military transparency, and most Western naval strategists would admit that such a document, while quite unusual in the Chinese context, would not be out of place in U.S. Navy doctrinal statements. In other words, China is hardly the only country to have grandiose undersea ambitions—even if they are still fairly new to the game. With a nod to the history of the PLA Navy and its unique experience with submarines, the Qingdao Submarine Academy (hereafter QSA) authors assert

that a new era requires new thinking, and so they wish to promote transformative concepts and innovation. They suggest that two major ideas from the past need to be shelved and replaced. One idea that dates from the PLA Navy's strategy of "*coastal defense* [近海防御]" is the notion that submarines are primarily defensive platforms that have the primary mission of "*watching the house and guarding the courtyard* [看家护院]." Another dated strategic idea that the QSA authors wish to dispense with is the strategic concept that Chinese submarines should only operate "*near to the island chain* [岛连附近活动]." Instead, this piece advocates strongly for an expansive, even global submarine strategy, as implied by the research paper's title: "**Several Thoughts on Advancing the Submarine Force to the Far Seas** [推进潜艇兵力走向远洋的几点思考]." As for developing a rationale for this expanding role, the article reliably cites the pronouncement of the Eighteenth Party Congress that China should become a maritime power [海洋强国]. Also predictably, it includes discussion of China's booming maritime trade and the new requirements to protect this trade. "*As national maritime interests are expanding continuously, the ocean's significance for the survival of the Chinese nation is more and more important*," the QSA authors explain. Without mentioning the "*Malacca Dilemma*" explicitly, the vulnerability of China's lengthy maritime "*strategic energy corridor* [能源战略通道]" is outlined. They assert, moreover, that China faces a definite external threat and must therefore expand it maritime strategic space, observing: "*At bases in both Northeast Asia and in Southeast Asia, as well as the base on Guam, the US has deployed advanced air and sea forces in order to control our country's maritime passages out into the Pacific. By constructing strategic arcs to contain our country, our space for maritime activities has been strictly confined*." It is, moreover, asserted that the United States and Japan have developed an elaborate antisubmarine system that aims to a "*permanent blockade* [永远地封锁]" of Chinese submarines within the first island chain. At this point, the authors state emphatically: "[*China's] submarine forces must not only go the Asia-Pacific, [but] they must also go to the Indian Ocean, and then they must go to the Atlantic and to the Arctic Oceans. In this way, the current operational problems of submarine operations can be alleviated and it will also provide a vast maritime strategic space for our country's rise* [...可有效缓解我国当面海区潜艇兵力活动困难, 也能为我大国崛起提供广阔的海洋战略空间]." Elsewhere, I have pointed out the likelihood that Chinese periscopes will soon be found in the Atlantic, and here is rather concrete evidence of such intentions directly from the Chinese submarine force itself. This Chinese naval analysis, undertaken by the Qingdao Submarine Academy, offers firm evidence of China's evolving and increasingly global undersea ambitions. For American strategists, there certainly are troubling implications—for example, the likelihood that a military conflict that ignited in the Western Pacific could spread rapidly into the Atlantic sea area, a theme I explored in more detail recently using an additional, credible Chinese evidentiary source. More obvious still are the dangers inherent in the increased intensity of cat-and-mouse games, which are set to become ever more common across the world's oceans. Such dangerous interactions could cause tragic accidents, and also fuel crises and rivalry in unpredictable and costly directions. There is substantial evidence in this piece that the PLA Navy has an acute sense of threat perception. The authors matter-of-factly state: "*We are facing the United States' nuclear blackmail, nuclear menace, and conventional threats* [面临着美国的核讹诈、核威胁及常规威胁]." To state the obvious, exaggerating the threat or challenge posed by China's submarine force could well intensify rivalry, and thus make the problem even worse. It is worth emphasizing that all points of doctrine advocated in this piece are ones routinely practiced by Western navies, including obviously the U.S. Navy. China is hardly alone in coming to the conclusion that formidable and wide-ranging undersea power can be an effective tool to "*influence the judgements, decisions, and actions of target state authorities* [影响目标国家当局的判断, 决策和行动]." Deterrence, defense of widespread and legitimate economic interests, as well as cooperative maritime security endeavors, are all also major themes of this important doctrinal statement for the future Chinese submarine force. Thus, American strategists should take this revelation regarding Chinese undersea ambitions in stride, maintaining an open mind with respect to a greater Chinese naval presence on and indeed under the world's oceans, even as the United States itself must energetically seeks to maintain robust undersea warfare capabilities into the future.

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Source: http://nationalinterest.org

Is it Time for Australia to Buy Nuclear Submarines?

Image Credit: Reuters.

Geoffrey Barker
June 19, 2017
Australia's decision to spend $50 billion on 12 French diesel-electric Shortfin Barracuda submarines reflects a long-

established government preference for non-nuclear submarine forces. But will this preference remain strategically credible in future years if our strategic circumstances continue to deteriorate and if potential competitors continue to expand and to modernize their submarine fleets? Australia's new submarines are a conventional variant of a French nuclear-powered submarine design, and are scheduled to enter service from the early 2030s to the 2050s. So perhaps we need to remain open to possibly acquiring some nuclear-powered Shortfin Barracudas during the lengthy building period. A mix of conventional and nuclear submarines might prove to be an optimum outcome for Australia. Of course it would be necessary to consider serious questions including cost, capability, crew training and availability, submarine numbers, local access to nuclear technology and nuclear technicians, inter-service rivalries, and domestic political acceptability among other things. But if changing circumstances were to force a decision on government, there's at least some intriguing fairly recent history to help guide decision-makers. The history is detailed in the prize-winning **The Silent Deep** by Peter Hennessy and James Jinks (Penguin Books, 2016), a history of the British Royal Navy submarine service since 1945. Hennessy and Jinks reveal the impact on the Royal Navy of the October 1957 visit to the UK of the **USS *Nautilus***, the world's first operational nuclear submarine, to take part in **Operation Rum Tub**, an exercise that matched Nautilus against Royal Navy ships. In the exercise, Nautilus tore the Royal Navy apart so comprehensively that Lord Louis Mountbatten, the First Sea Lord, was moved to write at the time '*we now appreciate that we are in the presence of a revolution in naval warfare in some ways more far-reaching than the transition from sail to steam'*. The Commander in Chief Home Fleet, Admiral Sir John Eccles, summed up the four key advantages of the nuclear submarine. It had complete freedom of action in three dimensions, it could disregard threats from the air because it could stay submerged, it had a good picture of what was happening on the surface, and it was 'vastly superior' to surface ships and conventional submarines in the attack role. The Admiralty Board declared: '*If the Royal Navy did not acquire these submarines it would cease to count as a naval force in world affairs'*. It's worth underscoring that these judgements on nuclear submarines were written 60 years ago. Hennessy and Jinks detail the saga of Britain's initial acquisition of four nuclear submarines with what passed for assistance from American Admiral Hyman G. Rickover. They show how the acquisitions transformed Britain's ability to deliver nuclear weapons from the sea rather than from the air. It's a remarkable narrative of Cold War strategic evolution. Given the changing and increasingly fraught strategic environment facing Australia, defense planners cannot sit back contentedly as the new submarine construction gets underway. It may be that conventional submarine technology today is far superior to what was available to the Royal Navy during **Operation Rum Tub** in 1957. But it is also certain that nuclear submarine technology has advanced since the era of **USS *Nautilus***. Australia needs to remain nimble and flexible in its force structure judgements. A fleet of conventional Shortfin Barracuda submarines would doubtless contribute to Australia's ability to deter potential foreign intrusions and to support international naval coalitions with allies like the United States and Japan. But Australians would do well to recognize that in regional terms it is a very small fleet indeed. North Korea, for example, has the region's biggest submarine fleet with some 70 decrepit old tubs. China has some 68 submarines including around 10 nuclear submarines and it is working ferociously to increase and modernize its fleet. Indonesia has two submarines in service, two under sea trials and one under construction and it's moving to update and modernize. Of course these sketchy and imprecise raw numbers mean little. What matters is the quality of the boats and the lethality of their arms. Happily Australia's key ally, the United States, has far and away the most powerful submarine fleet globally with some 66 boats, all nuclear-powered. What is much less clear is whether the US will remain a fully engaged partner in the Trump and post-Trump eras. Which is why there may be some sense in noting the lessons of history. Back in 1957, as Hennessy and Jinks argue, the question was not whether the UK could afford nuclear submarines. After Nautilus, the question was whether the UK could afford to be without them. That question might, in time, confront Australia. *This first appeared in ASPI's The Strategist here.*

Source: http://nationalinterest.org

Last two Scorpene submarines from Mazgaon Docks to join Navy without AIP system

Dinakar Peri

NEW DELHI, June 19, 2017 21:07 IST Updated: June 20, 2017 12:36 IST

A file photo of the submarine ***Khanderi*** at Mazagon Dock in Mumbai | Photo Credit: PTI

It enables them to stay underwater for a longer span

Contrary to expectations, the last two Scorpene submarines will roll out of the manufacturing line without the Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system meant to extend the reach of the conventional diesel-electric submarines. "*We have studied their solution (AIP system of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)… They need more measures to make it a safe plug… For the fifth and*

sixth submarines it is too late," managing director of DCNS Bernard G. Buisson said in a conversation with *The Hindu*. The AIP module is not part of the original Scorpene contract but the Navy has been keen on having them fitted on the last two of the six Scorpene submarines being manufactured by Mazgaon Docks Limited (MDL) in Mumbai. The AIP module is being developed by the DRDO and was supposed to be installed before the submarines roll out. However, a delay in development seems to scuttle the plan. The module enables conventional submarines to stay underwater for a longer duration greatly increasing the submarines stealth characteristics.

Installation during refit

Mr. Buisson said the only option now of installing the AIP system is during the refit of the submarine, which is six years after induction. It is followed by a major refit six years after that. However, it is still not clear if the Navy wants to go ahead with the plan as it would mean opening up the hulls of the submarines. DRDO officials said the prototype of the AIP system was ready and the programme could be pushed forward once a production agency was identified to manufacture it. As reported by *The Hindu* recently, with the Strategic Partnership model for procurement of key platforms finalised recently, the Navy is not keen on ordering any additional Scorpenes and instead fasttrack the tender for procurement of new line of submarines under Project-75I. On the Project-75I, Mr. Buisson said the DCNS was ideally positioned as they have a diverse set of submarines on offer that could be quickly customised for Indian requirements. The second line of submarines, which would be built in India, would be more advanced than the Scorpenes with AIP and missiles with land attack capability.

Source: http://www.thehindu.com

Remembering K.M. Panikkar: the future of Western influence in Asia

14 Jun 2017|Sam Bateman

Over 20 years ago, at a conference in Sydney hosted by the Australian Navy, then-Indonesian Ambassador to Australia Sabam Siagian referred to the 'Vasco Da Gama Epoch'. That was a reference to an expression originally coined by the noted Indian historian and diplomat, K.M Panikkar, in his book *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History*. It described the period between the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in Southern India in 1498 and the post-World War II period. This was the period when Indonesia and most of Asia fell under European economic and political domination until the Japanese ended the aura of European colonial invincibility in World War II. The post-war period saw former British, Dutch, French and American colonies and territories in Asia gain their independence. Sabam Siagian, who died last year, was Indonesia's Ambassador in Canberra from 1991 until 1995. However, he's mainly remembered as the first Editor-in-Chief of *The Jakarta Post,* the English-language paper he helped to set up in Indonesia. He was a good communicator in English and, possessing an affable personality, was popular in Australia. Being forthright and outspoken, he wasn't afraid of 'rocking the boat' of conventional wisdom. That was evident in his reference to the *Vasco da Gama Epoch*. Well ahead of his time, he wanted his Australian naval audience to contemplate a world in which Western powers, particularly the United States, didn't enjoy the same power and influence in Asia as they had previously. Panikkar and his *Vasco da Gama Epoch* continues to have implications for Australia and our relations with Asia, particularly Southeast Asia. K.M. Panikkar is highly revered by Indian strategic thinkers, but others also subscribe to his view of Asian history. Kishore Mahbubani, currently Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore, echoes similar ideas in his book *The New Asian Hemisphere: The irresistible shift of global power to the East*, in which he argues that many Western strategic thinkers remain trapped in the past, with an inability to understand the new world, and that Western power and influence isn't the same as it was before. Pankaj Mishra is another eminent Asian writer who has picked up on insidious aspects of the Western presence in Asia, primarily in his book *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia*. Resentment of centuries of Western dominance is a major part of the strategic psyche of both India and China. Strategic thinking in India remains influenced by Panikkar's writings. India is intent on becoming a pre-eminent power across the wider Indo-Pacific region. However, memories of the deployment of an American task force led by the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal at the height of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War still linger in India's strategic consciousness. That deployment was viewed by India as an act of American 'gunboat diplomacy' that India couldn't deter at the time. That experience became part of India's strategic justification for acquiring nuclear attack submarines and bolstering its aircraft carrier capability. In that context, the current détente between India and the United States could be short-term opportunism for India. Its vision of the regional future might well follow Panikkar by seeing no significant long-term role for the United States in Asia. Similarly, repeated incursions by Western imperialist powers in Chinese history have left an indelible mark on Chinese strategic thinking, leading to an emphasis on national sovereignty and fears of encirclement. It's unfortunate that many American strategic thinkers continue to show a lack of appreciation of China's history, especially Western imperialism, and the wide extent of anti-Western sentiment in China.

The Trump presidency in the United States, and uncertainty about its future policies in East Asia, is now serving to strengthen regional views that the *Vasco da Gama Epoch* is near an end—more quickly perhaps than had previously been anticipated. President Trump's recent visit to Europe has led to views that he's '*weakening the West*' . Those views can only support regional perceptions of declining Western influence. Those perceptions may be under-appreciated in terms of their impact on regional strategic thinking and assessments of the future of the region. Philippine President Duterte's stepping back from his country's links with the United States and moving closer to China add further to the notion of the impending end of the *Vasco da Gama Epoch*. Similarly, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, and even ASEAN itself as Southeast Asia's principal regional institution, are all showing that they're adjusting their strategic thinking to recognise the rise of China and the decline of American power and influence. What does that mean for Australia? The late Coral Bell, one of Australia's most eminent international relations scholars, addressed the implications for Australia of the end of the *Vasco da Gama Epoch in a 2007 paper*, concluding optimistically that 'The United States will remain the paramount power of the society of states, only in a multipolar world instead of a unipolar or bipolar one'. Unfortunately events of the past decade, including the Global Financial Crisis and the faster than anticipated rise of China, mean some re-assessment of that conclusion is required. The time will come when the *Vasco da Gama Epoch* does end and the West enjoys little power and influence in the region. When that happens, Australia won't be able to lift up our anchor and sail across the Pacific to anchor off the coast of California. Malcolm Turnbull also acknowledged that Australia was locked into the region when, in his address to the recent Shangri-la Dialogue, quoted one time Australian Foreign Minister Paul Hasluck as saying that 'Others can go…But we can't go home because this is our home'. In the short-term, it might suit us to maintain support for the United States in the region, but we must also be realistic about the future when the United Sates is much less paramount in the region.

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Colombian Drug Smugglers Built This Stealthy, Special Forces-Inspired Boat

Trading raw speed for stealth, so-called very slender vessels are designed to slice through the waves and deliver drug cargoes undetected.

Guatemalan Ministry of Defense photo.

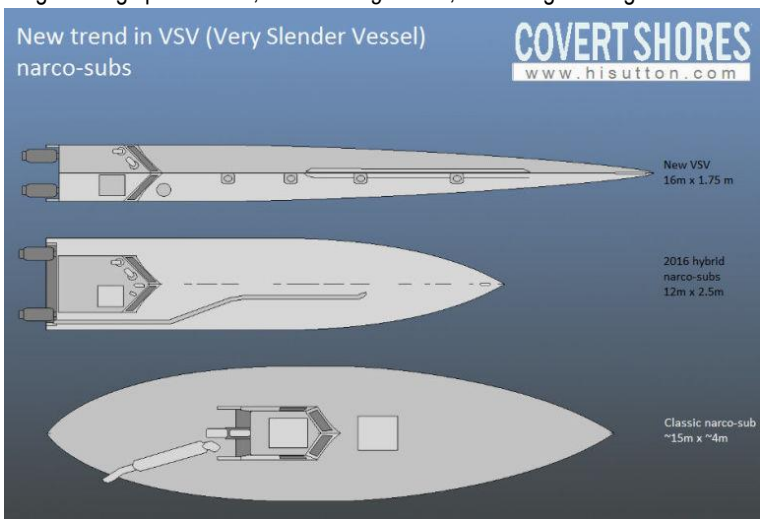
By Kyle Mizokami
Jun 13, 2017

Guatemalan police found this odd watercraft that uses the same hull technology as military vessels—a long, narrow type that is both difficult to detect and faster than other homemade drug-smuggling boats. They are called Very Slender Vessels (VSVs) and this was the first time drug cartels were seen using them. The ship was abandoned when it was discovered by the Guatemalan National Civil Police about 23 miles off the coast of Guatemala, between the Sipacate and Nahualate Rivers. According to HI Sutton, author of the *Covert Shores* web site, the ship had been stripped of its outboard motors and navigation equipment. Sutton, a naval analyst who specializes in naval special forces craft including submersibles and VSVs, says it is a sophisticated design. "*VSVs are normally associated with Navy Special Forces or racing, so this is the first time we have seen a narco-sub which uses this design*", Sutton told *Popular Mechanics*. Colombian drug smugglers started using unconventional hull designs in the 1990s. In an eerie parallel to modern air and sea warfare, the drug cartels went from fast but easy to detect speedboats to slower, low-profile semi-submersibles and actual submarines. "*The VSV form is ideal for semi-submersibles and means that it can be faster and keep a lower profile*," Sutton says. "*The downside is that there is less room inside for cargo. But the payload will still be worth millions of dollars so it is easily worth it for the drug smugglers."* VSVs are designed to be faster than other semi-submersible designs. "*The sharp bow of the VSV punches through waves instead of riding over the top like a normal boat, and the slender body, which is about as wide as it is tall, ensures that the whole boat follows. So it goes like a bullet even in heavy sea.*" Sutton estimated the ship's speed at about 20 knots, fast enough to take a 2,000 mile indirect route from Colombia to Mexico or Guatemala in four days. In 2016, U.S. Customs and Border Protection detected a semi-submersible in the eastern Pacific, painted blue green and hiding an estimated $194 million in cocaine aboard. The semi-submersible accidentally became a full submersible, however, and the

ship sank to the bottom of the ocean before the drugs could be pulled off. The year before, a similar ship carrying 12,000 pounds of drugs—the largest capture to date—sank off the coast of Mexico.

Guatemalan Ministry of Defense photo.

In response to the semi-submersible problem Customs and Border Protection maintains a fleet of eight ex-U.S. Navy P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft converted to so-called P-3 Long Range Trackers. Operating from Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas and Cecil Field, Florida, the P-3 LRTs are outfitted with APG-66V X-band pulse doppler radars originally designed for the F-16 fighter. They also have SeaVue marine search radars and a suite of electro-optical sensors that typically includes night vision, digital zoom, and video recording capability. The LRTs use these sensors to detect traditional drug-running speed boats, known as "*go-fasts*," and drug-running semi-submersibles at sea. It is not known whether or not U.S. government authorities have actually detected any cartel submarines at sea.



Evolution of Colombian drug smuggling craft. Via Covert Shores.

The drug smugglers are in a technological race with the U.S. government and its allies. As Washington improved its ability to catch go-fasts, the cartels decided to shift their emphasis from speed to stealth. Semi-submersibles and submarines are much slower than speedboats, but they had a better chance of running the gauntlet with their expensive cargoes. This is a mirror of aerial warfare in the post World War II era: the F-117A Nighthawk stealth jet and the B-2 Spirit bombers were actually slower than the aircraft that preceded them but much more likely to penetrate enemy defenses undetected. Where do drug smugglers go from here? The cartels obviously believe VSVs are the future. Low profile but still relatively fast, VSVs may be an acceptable compromise. After all, we know that at least VSV has made the trip.

Source: Covert Shores via **http://www.popularmechanics.com**