Maritime Governance and South Asia
Trade, Security and Sustainable Development in the Indian Ocean

Editor
Jivanta Schöttli
Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS)
NUS, Singapore
Contents

Foreword by Tommy Koh ix
Preface and Acknowledgements xv
List of Contributors xvii
Editorial Introduction by Jivanta Schöttli xxix

Section I. Order 1

Chapter 1 Security in the Indian Ocean Shivshankar Menon 3

Chapter 2 Sri Lanka’s Role in the Indian Ocean and Changing Global Dynamics Harsha de Silva 13

Chapter 3 Resolution of Maritime Boundary Disputes among Bangladesh, Myanmar and India in the Bay of Bengal Md. Khurshed Alam 23
Chapter 4  Maritime Safety and Security and Development of the Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)  
K. V. Bhagirath  

Chapter 5  Does India Use Trade Effectively?  
Frank Lavin  

Section II. Leadership  

Chapter 6  India as a Net Security Provider in the Indian Ocean Region: The Strategic Approach of a Responsible Stakeholder  
Abhay Kumar Singh  

Chapter 7  Indonesia’s Maritime Vision in the Indian Ocean: Negotiating National Interest and Regional Commitment  
Adriana Elisabeth  

Chapter 8  The United States and the Indian Ocean: Power Shifts and Uncertain Leadership  
Deepa M. Ollavally  

Section III. Institutions  

Chapter 9  New Maritime Governance and Cooperation Arrangements in the Eastern Indian Ocean: Challenges and Prospects  
David Brewster  

Chapter 10  Organized Against Organized Maritime Crimes — The National Maritime Single Point of Contact  
Martin A. Sebastian RMN (R)  

Chapter 11  IORA, The Blue Economy and Ocean Governance  
V. N. Attri  

Chapter 12  The Jakarta IORA Summit: A Way Ahead for a Stable Indian Ocean Maritime Order?  
Yogendra Kumar  

Section IV. Prospects and Perspectives  

Chapter 13  The Indian Ocean and China’s Expanding Influence: Prospects for Cooperation among the Key Asian Energy Importers  
Christopher Len  

Chapter 14  Governing the Ocean: Perspectives from Tanzania  
Hoseana Bobela Lunogelo  

Chapter 15  Governing the Ocean: An EU Perspective  
Marianne Péron-Doise  

Postscript  

The Blue Economy Beckons  
James Alix Michel  

Index
Chapter 8

The United States and the Indian Ocean: Power Shifts and Uncertain Leadership*

Deepa M. Ollapally

Introduction

The United States is a relative late-comer to the Indian Ocean. Its first ventures into the third largest ocean were led by narrow military interests derived from Cold War concerns. These interests came in the wake of British withdrawal east of the Suez in 1967. This stands in stark contrast to US strategy in the Pacific, where a tremendous thrust of American military, economic and cultural power since the 1850s made deep imprints, epitomized by the Philippines, Japan and the Korean peninsula. As a consequence, the US has been rendered a partial player in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) in comparison to its comprehensive power and presence in the Pacific.

Hillary Clinton’s invocation of the idea of the Indo-Pacific as a vast politico-strategic expanse, “stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas” as an American priority in 2011, was a marked departure from Washington’s previous outlook toward the region.1 The idea of the “Indo-Pacific” itself was hardly new in

*The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the MacArthur Foundation for research on Indo-Pacific security.
the region. For the littoral states, it reminded them of historic trading relations that straddled East Africa to Japan for millennia. Strategically, the memory most likely stimulated is of being conquered by European naval powers and the ensuing colonialism. Whether in worldviews, historical imagination or military encounters, the US stood outside this orbit. During the Cold War, US interests turned to the Indian Ocean but these always remained far behind its core naval interests that lay in the Atlantic and Pacific. Further, US entry into the Indian Ocean was marked only by its Middle East preoccupation.

Thus, the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” or “rebalance” was a historic decision, no matter how we view the decision. However, even while President Barack Obama was in office, the inevitable tug of the Middle East pulled his attention back, leaving the rebalance in the Indian Ocean rather unbalanced. Under President Donald Trump, American strategy in Asia, leave alone the rebalance or an Indian Ocean strategy, has become further clouded, if not confused.

The Indian Ocean in US Imagination, Worldview and Grand Strategy

The lack of a deep historical interest for the US in the Indian Ocean and the IOR more generally, has meant that this arena never really caught the American imagination. In contrast, Commodore Mathew Perry had pried open Japanese trade in the mid-19th century and since then, the Pacific Ocean has long animated American thinking on trade and warfare, from US grand strategy to popular culture. There seems to be no parallel in the case of the IOR. Instead, this ocean has remained a “backwaters” in US interests and imagination.

When the Indian Ocean finally made an entrance into US strategic thinking in the 1960s, it was as a hand over from a declining Great Britain. Given the centrality of the Indian Ocean in their empire, the British had extensive understanding of the region. However, the US did not share the historic roots with the region. Consequently, the US inherited the “hardware” from Britain, but not the necessary “software.” In the post-World War II era, US interests peaked briefly when Soviet naval forces were deployed in the Indian Ocean and were seen as possible prelude to greater activity in the energy rich Persian Gulf area. Interests climbed again after the Iranian revolution in 1979, spurring the US to build up its naval capability with rapid deployment forces. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Diego Garcia naval base served as a staging area in the Indian Ocean for broader US Cold War security strategies. The base was leased from Britain in 1967 (recently renewed until 2036). With the 1970s energy crisis and increasing reliance of the US and its allies on the region, economic and strategic interests increasingly converged. By the mid-1970s, the US drew up plans to use Diego Garcia as a naval base for permanent presence allowing rapid deployment to the Middle East. Still, the American naval gaze was firmly westward with little attention to the Bay of Bengal or the Malacca Straits, which in contrast had occupied clear strategic prominence in British imperial strategy.

However, any US focus on the Indian Ocean during this period was hardly welcomed by the region’s biggest Indian Ocean power, India. India saw any extra-regional power’s naval presence especially that of the US, as an injection of cold war rivalry into the neighbourhood, as well as a threat to its own regional influence. The deployment of the US naval task force, led by aircraft carrier USS Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal during the height of the Bangladesh war in 1971 in a forceful show of support for Pakistan and a warning to India, was a low point of US-India engagement in the Indian Ocean in the long Cold War era. In the 1980s, India strongly protested the awarding of a contract for renovation of the strategic Trincomalee harbor in Sri Lanka to a US-linked Singapore company. There was also a US-India showdown over the building of a Voice of America transmission facility in Sri Lanka, with India worried about the US monitoring its naval and land communications.

The end of the Cold War and India’s economic liberalization were the structural changes that set the stage for India and the US to begin casting off their misgivings about each other. The rise of China in the new millennium and its growing assertiveness since 2008, especially in the maritime arena, further hastened this trend. The latter development is the key to understanding the recent US attention to the Indian Ocean. This shift in strategic attention occurred most notably under the Obama/Clinton team. Although it was presented as a long-term strategic swing towards the region, this policy has come under serious jeopardy under the Trump administration. So far, it seems that Trump
has returned to the past tendency of the US to focus on the Pacific aspect of the Indo-Pacific. This has been further exacerbated given that the military rather than economics is dominant in whatever strategy that evolves under the current administration. Indeed, the idea of the liberal order itself may be at stake.

This uncertainty about US intentions and its role in upholding the global liberal order (and the associated security order) has become much more acute under Donald Trump. This apprehension is giving rise to what has been called a possible “reset to regions.” In this conception, the United States would effectively reduce its role as primary regional security guarantor, leaving regional states to fend for themselves. In such a scenario, the question is how far US interests would extend into the Indian Ocean from its traditional preoccupation with the Pacific.

The Regional Power View from India: Evolving Approaches to the US

The uncertainty over US commitment to the Indian Ocean comes at a time when India stands at an inflection point on maritime and naval cooperation with the US in Asia. The Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region was inked by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Obama in January 2015. This was the first bilateral declaration by the two powers referencing freedom of navigation and overflight on the South China Sea (SCS). Give that it came as Chinese assertiveness was escalating and the controversy was reaching a fever pitch, it was a signal of changes afoot in Indian strategic thinking. The statement called on all parties to settle disputes through international law, while specifying that, “We affirm the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over-flight throughout the region, especially in the SCS.” Whereas the rebalance evoked mixed reactions from India in 2011, with some suggesting that the US was being overly presumptuous about the willingness of India to be a naval partner, a page seems to have been turned by Obama’s second visit to India in 2015.

US–India naval ties are still subject to debate in India, with differing views on just how far to go in the relationship. There is a three-way split in opinion which can be described in short-hand fashion as nationalist, realist and globalist. The realist strand of opinion sees clear virtue in forming a strong and deep naval partnership with the US; idealists are wary of military instruments and partnerships and want to privilege economics; and nationalists are all for military instruments but prefer more of a go-it-alone or, with other regional states like Japan and Vietnam, and not as a junior partner with the US. Indian opinion seems to be inching closer to the realist outlook but the question of how much to commit in cementing naval military relations with the US is still open. This is because nationalist tendencies have hardly evaporated; and globalists do not want a rising India to lose focus on its economic growth agenda.

For example, India has come some distance with the signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, which had been under consideration for more than a decade. Some experts have pointed out that it can be described as “India-specific,” with certain built in checks such as India not being bound to give automatic logistical support for US overseas military operations; in other words terms that “prevent India from getting into a military alliance with the United States.” To allay such fears, the Indian Defence Ministry released a statement after signing the agreement which asserted that, “the Agreement does not create any obligations on either Party to carry out any joint activity. It does not provide for the establishment of any bases or basing arrangements.”

For India, the simultaneous move toward the US and its careful distancing from the US, are both partly connected to its views on China (apart from New Delhi’s historic attachment to strategic autonomy). On the one hand, India wants to leverage the US relationship against an increasingly assertive China, but at the same, India is keenly aware of the need to avert any overt conflict with its much more powerful neighbour, especially one stimulated by a Sino-American confrontation. The latter outcome could lead to a permanent Sino-Indian rupture and seriously complicate India’s security calculus, and could well derail India’s economic growth.

Besides, it is the area of the Indian Ocean on the western flank of the Indian peninsula that still features most in India’s core security concerns, despite increasing tensions with China. The 2015 Indian
Maritime Security Strategy document lays out primary and secondary areas and the SCS for example falls into the secondary category. The noticeable shift from the last maritime doctrine in 2009 is that more areas of the southwest Indian Ocean and Red Sea are brought into the primary category. Moreover, the western coast of Africa and Mediterranean Sea are now added into the secondary area, signalling the importance of the significant increase in energy imports from Africa. India’s eastward concerns are more diffuse whereas the US interests in that region are highly concentrated. Even operationally, US naval command structure between PACOM and CENTCOM divide the Indian Ocean in a way that reduces US incentives to be engaged in the Western Indian Ocean versus the Indo-Pacific. One attraction for India from LEMOA is that it theoretically gives India the right to access US bases in Africa, especially in Djibouti.

Power Shifts and Shifting Interests

When viewing power shifts in the Indo-Pacific, multiple shifts need to be considered. China’s expanding power and America’s relative decline is occurring at the same time as India’s rise and Japan’s seeming resurgence, not to mention Australia’s aspirations to become a bigger player. Among these states, the interests of resident powers are becoming more sharply defined, in contrast to US interests that are getting more uncertain. One outstanding question is whether Asia writ large will be increasingly multipolar or China-centric. This question may be extended to the IOR as well. For reasons of geography, history and security, it can be argued that the Indian Ocean is a “core interest” only for India. No other major power has the pressing security imperatives that India has, which explains in large part the focus of India’s 2015 maritime strategy document and its determination to retain primacy in the Indian Ocean.

Indian domestic opinion on the need to be the primary player in the Indian Ocean is practically unanimous; only the means to achieve this goal are debated between realists, nationalists and globalists. The United States has since the early 2000s recognized India’s primacy in the IOR, consistent with India’s own goal. This is despite the US’s unchallenged position as the biggest naval power in the Indian Ocean. Thus, in stark contrast to the rise of China as a threat in the Pacific to predominant US naval power, the growth of India’s naval power vis-a-vis US naval dominance in the Indian Ocean is being welcomed in no uncertain terms. Indeed the issue for Washington is the extent to which it can get India to do more by way of being a security provider beyond the Indian Ocean in the broader Indo-Pacific.

In principle, there is a convergence of interests between India and the US on ensuring that China’s maritime activities will, in no way impede freedom of navigation, give Beijing de facto if not de jure control over critical sea lines of communication, or allow it to acquire clear coercive power over littoral states. Ensuring this in practice is rendered difficult due to two factors: (1) Chinese incrementalism in projecting its naval capabilities and influence and (2) the dual nature of Chinese maritime infrastructure building.

The Chinese tendency seems to be to take a long-term strategic perspective on the region, including the Indian Ocean, with gradual steps that over time can shift the status quo in its favour. Chinese submarines first began appearing in the Indian Ocean in 2013, with the latest being deployed in July 2017, apparently to monitor the annual India–US–Japan Malabar naval exercises.9 Interestingly, it was the US that had invited the Chinese navy into the Indian Ocean for anti-piracy operations back in 2008. When a Chinese submarine docked in Sri Lanka in 2014, India expressed apprehension but there was also an air of inevitability that Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean could not be stopped and that there was a limit as to what actions can be taken to preclude it. Chinese submarines have reportedly been seen around India’s tri-service base at the Andaman and Nicobar islands near the Malacca Straits, through which more than 80% of China’s energy sources flow.

The ambition of the Chinese navy and its assertiveness in the SCS in particular, and the challenge it poses to Indian dominance in the Indian Ocean have also raised US concerns. It has reportedly led India and US to hold talks on anti-submarine warfare (ASW), an area of sensitive military technology, usually reserved only for allies.10 It may be assumed that maritime domain awareness (MDA) will only grow in importance and thus for the United States, its relations with the dominant Indian Ocean naval power will be more and more critical. With India now flying P-8 aircraft, the US’s most advanced submarine hunting weapon, both are in
a position to share information more easily. The build-up of India's MDA by the United States allowing increased surveillance of the Indian Ocean is something hard to object to — by the Chinese or Indian sceptics — since it is more of a defensive than an offensive measure.

Apart from Chinese "gradualism" in the Indian Ocean, Beijing's potential dual use maritime infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan pose challenges without easy responses. The heart of China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) launched in 2014 lies in the Indian Ocean, and as long as other regional states continue to accept Beijing's largesse, both India and the US risk becoming sidelined. As India's economic rise is creating unprecedented capability gaps between it and its smaller neighbours, China's moves into South Asia as a commercial powerhouse with loans for much needed roads, ports and airports threaten to negate India's growing advantage. To many realist and nationalist-minded policymakers and strategic analysts in New Delhi, the MSR is simply an economic disguise for a long-term strategic power play to dislodge India from its position of primacy in the Indian Ocean. While this concern occupies a very important position in India's threat perceptions, there is little evidence that the United States shares similar urgency in this regard.

Chinese activism, specifically in India's maritime neighbourhood, does not seem to have significantly alarmed the US. Beijing's decision to start building its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2016, has however stimulated new concern. Chinese presence that extends across the entire arc of the Indian Ocean presents greater challenges to US naval freedom of action than ever before. Still, the United States operates from a position of extraordinary naval supremacy vis-à-vis China. Furthermore, the Chinese ability to threaten American interests or allies in the Indian Ocean is still a long way off. This might explain the US's more relaxed attitude and consequently, the apparent lack of convergence on the level of threat in the Indian Ocean between India and the US. For India, China's expanding infrastructure construction in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar (leave alone Pakistan) is a core and high level concern because it goes to the heart of just what kind of maritime order is in the offing if no countervailing measures are taken. The dual nature of Chinese activism, with the potential of commercial ports to be converted to bases or the prospects of exclusive areas of influence still well into the future, the US has a disadvantage in formulating countervailing actions. This is because American capabilities are too limited to military options at the very time that the region is clamouring for infrastructure investments. Under the current administration, the American economy is decidedly turning more inwards, making such investments even less likely.

Regional Order and the US

The most feasible prospect for injecting more economics into US leadership in the Indo-Pacific was the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Championed by President Barack Obama but ultimately shelved due to the lack of Congressional support, the TPP provided a softer integrationist touch against the military edge of the rebalance. Although India and China were not participants, their potential membership remained on the cards, as their economies underwent further liberalization and met labour and other standards in the future. With the TPP no longer in play, the Chinese led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) may be rejuvenated, despite apprehensions of countries like India and Vietnam. The RCEP together with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stand to give China at minimum, an enormous boost to its economic statecraft and more maximally, geo-political heft in the future. Under the Trump administration, which has led with its military instruments of power, attention has shifted more than ever to the SCS and Korean peninsula. This has effectively left the westward direction of the Indo-Pacific to other regional powers.

This creates a particular dilemma for India and Japan who have strong common reservations about Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific, but for their own reasons, are not ready or willing to adopt a solely naval-military response. Japan's historical reluctance and constitutional inability to project military power is well known. Meanwhile, India's Indo-Pacific outlook and its continuing Look East/Act East policies have led with economics, not military. It is fair to say that the leading edge of New Delhi's strategic orientation eastwards is economics, even under Prime Minister Modi who has put forward a more forceful image for India. In somewhat of a parallel, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has
been more of an activist in asserting Japanese regional leadership, and has shown unprecedented interest working with India in the maritime sphere to counter China. Indeed, the idea of the Indo-Pacific, with India and Japan as key anchor points dates back to Abe’s first term in power. This time around, a notable development is the willingness of Japan to work closely with India in the specific area of Indian Ocean maritime infrastructure, in what is clearly an attempt to provide an alternative to Chinese blandishments to littoral countries.

Indeed, most Indian Ocean states may well be open to such an alternative as some of the ill effects of earlier Chinese infrastructure projects become clear, including unsustainable debt burdens and unacceptable political conditions as in the case of the Hambantota port and airport in Sri Lanka. Bangladesh has recently shown receptivity to joint Indo-Japanese proposals to develop ports beyond the Chittagong port built by China which is now silte. From a regional perspective, maritime infrastructure construction is not a zero-sum game — demand is surging and the need for connectivity is no longer debated. What has been in short supply is capital which has given China a great advantage over India. But with Japan in the picture, access to capital is more assured. Moreover, Japan has had some success in promoting itself as the purveyor of “quality infrastructure”, presumably a swipe at China’s technology.

From the US point of view, a Japan–India partnership in the Indian Ocean is highly welcome and it has been encouraging new efforts to this end. For the US itself, there is a structural impediment to infrastructural funding and construction. These projects would have to be led by American private sector firms which are not particularly keen on projects that tend to have payoffs mostly in the long term. Besides, for some time now, American firms have been leaving the infrastructure sector and moving into higher value goods and services. So when Modi called for an Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) with Japan’s involvement in May 2017 at the meeting of the Africa Development Bank, quickly followed the very next day by a joint vision document for the project by Japan and India, the US no doubt took heart. Back in 2011, the US, Japan and India decided to set up an annual trilateral meeting, comprising what can be termed the “oldest, largest and most responsible democracies.”

Their common concern over China is the underlying strong strategic drive uniting all three.

Within the trilateral grouping however, it is the Japan–India leg that seems to be on the move in the Indian Ocean. Japan’s role is particularly important to get the group going; its commitment to a long-term Asia strategy and apparent patience with India can help “neutralize America’s impatience to socialize India to play a bigger role in regional strategic affairs.” Under Prime Minister Abe, Japan has been attempting to translate the discourse of the “Inco-Pacific” that tends to focus on Pacific side for the US, into greater attention towards the Indian Ocean. This is hardly surprising since Japan is highly dependent on energy resources coming via the Indian Ocean, up to 66%. It has taken on greater urgency as China’s presence is going from strength to strength in the IOR, and Japan (and India and the US) hardly want China to acquire power of denial. As a commentator in Forbes put it, “India and Japan have been on a new mission lately: to tame China’s ambitions to take control of the trade routes in the Indian Ocean.”

The most recent idea to emerge is the AAGC, a sweeping concept harking back to Prime Minister Abe’s Asia’s “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” outlined in 2006. The AAGC’s foundational principles are: development cooperation, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, and people to people partnership. A notable element is the promotion of sustainable projects. The idea is to align the development priorities of the different countries and subregions of Asia and Africa with AAGC. Once set into motion, the AAGC could rival China’s Belt and Road Initiative and provide a free and more open Indo-Pacific region, with Japan, India and Africa as key anchors.

Japan’s flurry of port building — joining up to eight port building projects all in the IOR — is the clearest signal of the importance given to its westward regions. The East Asian Strategic Review of 2017 brought out by the National Institute for Defense Studies in Japan describes how the second Abe administration is positioning Japan to strengthen security relationships “across the whole region, from the western Pacific, beyond Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean as far as the continent of Africa, broadening its posture from the geographical region centering on Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific to the region known as the
‘Indo-Pacific.’ Interestingly, Japan and India are both involved in Iran’s Chabahar port, suggesting that their shifting individual national interests might not allow them to continue accommodating America’s political needs. Indeed, some observers are of the opinion that it may be already too late for Japan, India or the US to prevent Chinese expansion in the Indian Ocean, “unless they devise a smart strategy.”

The “smart strategy” for the kind of Indo-Pacific order that the US, Japan and India ideally desire — open, rules based, respecting freedom of navigation, democracy and human rights — would seem to require a vision that promotes economic growth as a first principle. Indeed, this does not seem lost on the three countries as each of their top foreign policy diplomats met on the sidelines of the September 2017 UN General Assembly. According to Japan’s Foreign Minister Taro Kono, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, “completely agreed to coordinate with each other toward the realization of a free and open Indo-Pacific.” Moreover, they affirmed that the three countries would strengthen connectivity with infrastructure investment and collectively assist strategically important coastal states in the region with maritime capacity building, centering on key ports. With Japan having joined the US-India annual Malabar naval exercises on a permanent basis earlier in the year, this trilateral grouping seems to have come full circle.

Conclusion

With the rebalance in question and the TPP out of the question under the Trump administration, American leadership in the Indo-Pacific remains uncertain. This is especially so in the Indian Ocean side of the Indo-Pacific. Donald Trump’s initial forays into the turbulent SCS and Korean peninsula have been led by military thrusts, along with demands for stepped up security contribution by US allies and partners. This kind of hard-nosed, military-first approach complicates life for allies and partners.

If the Trump administration adopts a narrow view on the Indo-Pacific and swings back to its historical priority, the American role in the Indian Ocean would most likely be a casualty. Those who argue that the US is an unreliable partner, and what’s more, even a disruptive force under Trump, would have gained credibility. The country that stands most to gain from such shifts in thinking is China, and there is no reason to doubt that it would not use it to its full strategic advantage.

However, the recent moves toward an economic security approach in conjunction with Japan and India, suggest a rethinking in America’s Indo-Pacific strategy. Unlike the Pacific, the Indian Ocean has been relatively free of maritime disputes, race for seabed resources, and military stand-offs or coercive naval actions. This was more or less the case in the long historical arc, punctuated by colonial rivalries and to a lesser extent, Cold War competition. The key democratic countries of the region, Japan and India, seem to be following an economic security script for their maritime ambitions. This could conceivably place them in a better position to challenge China in the long term. Under the Obama administration, the State Department had been increasingly recognizing the need for connectivity support in the IOR, and had been toying with the idea of an Asian economic corridor. A US-led effort along these lines seems some way off under the current administration. It is reassuring that Japan and India are seizing the initiative; the outstanding question then is whether the United States can be socialized toward this outlook or not.

End Notes


5The Obama White House. “U.S–India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region.” Office of the Press Secretary,
12Ibid.
16Mourdoukoutas.
18Author interviews with State Department officials.