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Recent News in Global Maritime Affairs

[1] Climate Change and Blue Carbon Economy [1]

[Kelp connection: Maine studies seaweed's power to slow climate change](#)

September 22 - *Portland Press Herald*

[United States]

After considering the storage capacity of forests in the U.S. state of Maine, which covers 89% of the state, leaders have started to consider the carbon storage potential of seaweed in its carbon budget to ultimately help offset more locally-produced greenhouse gas emissions.

[HC appointed panel takes concrete steps for mangrove protection](#)

September 18 - *Hindustan Times*

[India]

India's Konkan Divisional Commissioner Kalyankar has ordered immediate action to counter mangrove destruction. The committee agreed to install CCTV cameras to monitor mangroves for protection, and the feasibility of methods like transferring mangroves areas to the forest department was also discussed.

[Most Brits have never heard of "blue carbon" despite huge future impact, study finds](#)

September 17 - *The Mirror*

[Europe]

According to a new study in Britain of 1,000 parents with primary school children, 69% of them had never heard of the term "blue carbon," 55% did not know what "seagrass" is, and 58% wanted to see sustainability as part of the national curriculum.

[Racing Sailors Pick Up Parasite eDNA in Warm Water Samples](#)

September 14 - *Bloomberg* [Paywall]
[Global]

A racing sailboat that won this year's The Ocean Race scooped up eDNA samples that may help scientists build a greater understanding of marine plastic pollution and the dangers of overheating seas.

[Seychelles Aims to Fully Protect Seagrass to Curb Climate Change](#)

September 13 - *Bloomberg* [Paywall]
[Indian Ocean]

Seychelles aims to protect its seagrass by 100% by 2030 from 87% this year to safeguard its natural blue carbon sinks. Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust Chief Executive Officer Marie-May Jeremie said that protection measures include preventing erosion of the coastline and preserving marine habitats.

[Blue Carbon Market Expected to Witness the Highest Revenue Growth Over Forecast Period From 2023 to 2031](#)

September 11 - *Benzinga*
[Global]

Market Research Inc. recently released a comprehensive report on the global Blue Carbon Market, and the report includes insights into key players, market shares, business revenue, and growth analysis. The report presents current market trends, investment opportunities, and strategies to address challenges to generate market-growing factors of blue carbon.

[Fastest underwater flow on Earth created by the most explosive volcanic eruption ever recorded](#)

September 7 - National Oceanography Center
[Pacific Ocean, Global]

An international research team, led by scientists from the UK National Oceanography Centre, uncovered the unprecedented speeds of underwater flows triggered by the collapse of the submerged Hunga Volcano in January 2022. The flows created by the eruption caused extensive damage to critical seafloor cables vital for global telecommunications.

[Ocean Warrior begins Arctic science expedition](#)

September 6 - *Sea Technology*
[The Arctic, Europe]

Ocean Warrior, Europe's largest wooden schooner, launched its first 10-day leg of Arctic expedition from Svalbard on September 1, aiming to install and test scientific and technological equipment and

collect vital data on Arctic changes. The entire project plans to cover 10,000 nautical miles annually over ten years to better understand the Arctic.

[South Korea turns to blue carbon to help mitigate climate crisis](#)

September 4 - *Forest News*

[East Asia]

South Korea is shifting its focus to blue carbon such as mangroves and wetlands to store carbon as their forested areas reach capacity in carbon storage due to aging trees. Scientists from various countries and organizations are exploring the potential of growing Indonesian mangrove species on Jeju Island to enhance carbon absorption capabilities and biodiversity preservation in critical ecosystems.

[2] Maritime Economy and Shipping [2]

[Amid Black Sea Threats, Ukraine Steps Up Use of New Shipping Route](#)

September 24 - *The New York Times* [Paywall]

[Europe, Global]

In September, Ukraine began using a new shipping route, allowing it to restart grain exports. According to officials, at least two ships have successfully used this new route, with more to follow. Russia had sent a drone strike to a Ukraine grain port and is currently blockading the preexisting three Black Sea ports in Ukraine, which has forced Ukraine to create an alternative.

[Strong maritime defense, security key to flourishing blue economy](#)

September 20 - *The Manila Times*

[Southeast Asia, Global]

At the Blue Economy Annual Trade and Conference (Beacon) 2023, the Philippines emphasized the need to protect their archipelago for a successful blue economy. The Department of National Defense's undersecretary for strategic assessment and planning, Ignacio Madriaga, stressed the importance of addressing internal and external threats for economic activities related to oceans and coasts.

[A Luxury Cruise Ship, Stuck Off Greenland's Coast for 3 Days, Is Pulled Free](#)

September 14 - *The New York Times* [Paywall]

[North Atlantic]

The Ocean Explorer, an Australian luxury cruise ship that ran aground off the coast of Greenland, was rescued on the morning of September 14. The ship had been carrying 206 passengers and crew members and was heading towards a remote corner of Greenland named Alpefjord.

[Chinese firm launches satellite from mobile sea platform, testing potential tech for national space programme](#)

September 6 - *South China Morning Post* [Paywall]

[China, Pacific Ocean]

On September 5, Beijing-based commercial space company Galactic Energy successfully launched a satellite rocket from a transport erector launcher fixed to a mobile barge off the coast of Shandong, marking the first such launch using such technologies.

[China's exports, imports likely contracted more slowly in August, Reuters poll shows](#)

September 6 - *Reuters*

[China]

A new *Reuters* report showed that the contraction of China's exports slowed down in August. According to the median forecast of the 33 economists who took place in the poll, exports in August are projected to show a 9.2% decrease from last year.

[Alaska watches, nervously, as Ukraine war pushes more Russian oil through Bering Strait](#)

September 4 - *ArcticToday*

[Arctic]

Many in the U.S. state of Alaska are growing concerned over the increase in the number of shipments of oil from Russia to China through the Bering Strait. According to Ben Pungowiyi, the president of a tribal government, the main worry for those living in the Arctic is an oil spill since the Bering Sea is the "main source of food security" for those living in the region.

[China's food security: Xinjiang develops seawater aquafarming in desert region amid agriculture focus](#)

August 31 - *South China Morning Post* [Paywall]

[China]

An aquaculture firm in Xinjiang says it has developed a process to create simulated seawater for fisheries in the desert region. According to the project team lead, the salt content in water in the region is "close to the level in seawater," which allows the firm to create fisheries environmentally similar to natural saltwater habitats.

[NOAA commissions two unmanned underwater vehicles](#)

August 29 - *Sea Technology*

[United States]

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has ordered two customized REMUS 620 unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) to be finished by 2024. The REMUS 620 is capable of mine countermeasures, hydrographic surveys, intelligence collection, surveillance, and electronic warfare.

[3] Ocean Governance and Maritime Cooperation [3]

[PCG removes floating barrier from Bajo De Masinloc](#)

September 25 - *CNN Philippines*

[South China Sea, Southeast Asia]

On September 20, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) discovered the Chinese Coast Guard had installed a 'floating barrier' just 124 nautical miles off the Philippine coast in the Southeast area of the Scarborough Shoal; a move that the PCG and Philippines' fishery agency "strongly condemn" as it is preventing Filipino fishing vessels from entering the contested shoal. Since it falls within the Philippines' 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone, the PCG removed the floating barrier five days later.

[Nations Link First-Ever Treaty Protecting International High Seas](#)

September 24 - *Voice of America Africa*

[Global]

On the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York City, 67 countries signed the groundbreaking High Seas Treaty, also known as the agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction or 'BBNJ.' The first-ever treaty designed to protect the world's international oceans, the High Seas Treaty was formally adopted by the UN in June of this year and is being seen by many as a sign of hope and cooperative achievement.

[Philippines weighs legal options against China over coral reef 'destruction'](#)

September 21 - *Reuters*

[Southeast Asia, Global]

The Philippines is exploring plans to file a second legal case with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) against China for the destruction of coral reefs within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea. Beijing responded that this planned filing is an attempt to "create political drama."

[Japan should take China to WTO over seafood ban, ex-U.N. official says](#)

September 18 - *The Japan Times* [Paywall]

[East Asia, Global]

Former United Nations official Kiyotaka Akasaka says it would be a "tactical move" if Japan filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization over Beijing's decision to ban imports of Japanese fishery products following the scheduled release of treated radioactive water from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Akasaka also said Japanese diplomats should directly address the safety issue at upcoming UN General Assembly meetings being held this month in New York.

[US, Vietnam jointly reject ‘threat or use of force’ to settle disputes](#)

September 11 - *South China Morning Post* [Paywall]

[South China Sea]

On September 11, both U.S. President Joe Biden and Vietnam’s Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong warned against the use of force in the South China Sea, defending that the competing claims in the region must be resolved through the use of international norms.

[China rejected call to join Fukushima water framework](#)

September 6 - *The Japan Times* [Paywall]

[East Asia]

Sources say that China has rejected a proposal by Japan to join an international verification framework for radiation level monitoring of the treated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant now being released into the sea. Also, Japanese officials say Beijing has so far ignored repeated offers for a science-based dialogue on the issue.

[U.S. Seized Iranian Oil Over Smuggling Incident That Escalated Tensions in Gulf](#)

September 6 - *The New York Times* [Paywall]

[Persian Gulf, Middle East]

In the first week of September, Washington said it had seized the M/T *Suez Rajan* and its almost 1 million barrels of Iranian crude oil that was reportedly being smuggled to China in violation of U.S. sanctions against Iran. An anonymous high-ranking Israeli defense official said the seizure raised new fears that Iran could hijack more tankers in an effort to deter further U.S. seizures.

[Yoon urges ASEAN to align with 3-way bloc of S. Korea, US, Japan](#)

September 6 - *The Korea Times*

[Southeast Asia, Indo-Pacific]

During a South Korea-ASEAN summit in Jakarta, South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol urged members of the Association of Southeast Asian States to align with the U.S. and Japan on Indo-Pacific maritime issues. Directly following a historic trilateral declaration between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan, Yoon likely hopes that more regional states will ease away from conciliation with China in favor of balancing against Beijing through new initiatives born of the trilateral.

[Philippines joins Malaysia, India in rejecting new Chinese map over disputed territories](#)

August 31 - *The Straits Times*

[South China Sea, Indo-Pacific]

The Philippines, in tandem with Malaysia and India, is disputing a map featuring a 10-dash line in the South China Sea issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources in Beijing. The Philippines claims that this new 10-dash line map, like Beijing’s 9-dash line, has no legitimacy in international law.

[U.S. Seeks to Block Recovery of Titanic Artifacts](#)

August 30 - *The New York Times* [Paywall]

[United States, North Atlantic]

The U.S. government is now taking legal action to limit control over the ability to recover artifacts from the wreck of the *Titanic*, located in the North Atlantic, after the June 18 *Titan* submersible disaster brought attention to the legal rights to such artifacts.

[4] Maritime Security and Defense [4]

[Taiwan expects to deploy two new submarines by 2027, security adviser says](#)

September 24 - *Reuters*

[East Asia]

Taiwan's national submarine task force—a modernization program initiated by President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016 when she took office—announced plans to launch at least two Taiwan-made submarines by 2027 as part of Taipei's plan to protect key supply lines and strengthen deterrence against the Chinese navy. President Tsai is expected to launch the first of eight new submarines on September 28 and have it enter sea trials in October before delivery to the navy by the end of 2024.

[ASEAN nations hold first joint navy drills near disputed South China Sea](#)

September 20 - *Taipei Times*

[Southeast Asia]

Members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) held their first non-combat drill, the ASEAN Solidarity Exercise, in Indonesia's Natuna waters. The five-day exercise included joint maritime patrol operations, search-and-rescue operations and humanitarian and disaster relief.

[PLA holds drills in Yellow Sea days after US and allies flex muscles near northeast China coast](#)

September 18 - *South China Morning Post* [Paywall]

[East Asia]

China's People's Liberation Army Navy announced it would be holding two military drills in the Yellow Sea and Bohai Strait, directly following joint drills being held in the same area by American, South Korean and Canadian vessels.

[Philippines says Japan and Australia keen on joint naval patrols](#)

September 17 - *The Japan Times* [Paywall]

[Indo-Pacific]

The Philippine military said that their Japanese and Australian counterparts had "expressed willingness" to participate in joint maritime patrols with the Philippines and the U.S. in the disputed West Philippine Sea. The announcement follows another between the Philippines and Australia

earlier this month on an upgrade of their military ties to the level of 'strategic partnership' and committed to joint maritime patrols to deter Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea. The Philippines noted that "other countries who are open to the idea will be identified later."

[Taiwan seeks U.S., Japan, Philippine support to deter Chinese navy](#)

September 14 - *Nikkei Asia*

[East Asia, Indo-Pacific]

Amidst an uptick in the presence of Chinese vessels around the island of Taiwan, Adm. Huang Shu-kuang, a Taiwanese security official in charge of Taiwan's submarine program, openly urged the U.S., Japan and the Philippines to set up a 'joint report mechanism' with Taiwan to counter China's naval threats, saying Taiwan could be "doomed" if encircled.

[China unveils Taiwan economic 'integration' plan as warships conduct maneuvers off coast](#)

September 13 - *The Guardian*

[East Asia]

On September 12, the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee and State Council released new measures detailing a "new path towards integrated development" with Taiwan. Simultaneously, Beijing sent the largest number of warships to gather in years to waters off the east coast of Taiwan.

[Ukraine Claims to Have Retaken Oil and Gas Platforms in the Black Sea](#)

September 13 - *The New York Times* [Paywall]

[Black Sea]

Oil and gas platforms are emerging as a new strategic target in the contested Black Sea for both Ukraine and Russia, highlighted by a skirmish on August 22 around a rig near Snake Island.

[Ukraine Strikes the Headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea](#)

September 12 - *The New York Times* [Paywall]

[Black Sea]

On the morning of September 13, Ukraine launched 10 cruise missiles at a shipyard in Sevastopol, Crimea, the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea fleet, seven of which Russia's Ministry of Defense reported as successfully shot down by Russia.

[Philippines keeps eye on Chinese workers over potential 'covert activities' amid South China Sea tensions](#)

September 14 - *South China Morning Post* [Paywall]

[South China Sea, Southeast Asia]

Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said his department is closely watching Chinese employees for signs of "covert economic activities and information activities that are not overtly happening" such as misinformation campaigns about the territoriality of the South China Sea.

Japanese, U.S., the Philippines Drill in the South China Sea; China Contests U.S. Position on Territorial Disputes

September 5 - *USNI News*

[South China Sea]

On September 4, the South China Sea was rife with military activity following an uptick in Sino-Philippine tensions. Japanese naval units carried out anti-submarine drills while U.S. and Philippine ships sailed together in a show of solidarity over the disputed Second Thomas Shoal. Meanwhile, the Chinese Ministry of Defense blasted “meddling” by extra-regional powers in South China Sea disputes and directed the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to participate in joint naval exercises with Thailand.

Russia proposes joint naval drill with China, North Korea

September 4 - *Radio Free Asia*

[Eurasia, East Asia]

According to an assessment by South Korea, during a visit to North Korea in July, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu formally proposed to China and North Korea that they hold a trilateral naval drill.

Australia and Singapore partner up on maritime AI and robotics

August 30 - *Naval Technology*

[Australia, Southeast Asia]

During Australia’s annual engagement event with neighboring partners, the Indo-Pacific Endeavour, representatives from both the Royal Australian Navy and Defence Science Technology Group met with Singaporean counterparts in order to discuss maritime AI and robotics technologies.

U.S military in talks to develop port in Philippines facing Taiwan

August 30 - *Reuters*

[Southeast Asia, United States]

According to a local Philippine governor, the U.S. military is discussing a plan to create a civilian port in a remote northern island of The Philippines. If this comes to pass, this move would give the United States greater access to certain islands facing Taiwan.

Peer-Reviewed Research on Maritime Issues

- Intergovernmental Release: United Nations - [10. Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction](#) [Updated September 22]
- Government Release: U.S. Congressional Research Service - [“U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress”](#) [Updated September 14]
- Government Release: Government of Jersey - [Bailiwick of Jersey Strategy for the International Maritime Organization Instruments Implementation Code](#) [September 2023]
- Press Release: European Commission - [“A win for the ocean: High Seas Treaty signed at United Nations”](#) [September 20]
- Press Release: United States Department of State - [“Signing of the High Seas Treaty”](#) [September 21]
- Government Interview: Republic of Korea - [“Yoon Suk Yeol: ASEAN-Republic of Korea, Partners That Are Mutually Beneficial”](#) [Kompas - September 5]
- Report: Climateworks Centre - [Sea of opportunity: Ocean-based mitigation to support Indonesia’s climate ambition](#) [September 13]
- Podcast: U.K. National Oceanography Centre - [“What Corals Tell Us About the Health of the Ocean and Scuba Diving Stories”](#) [Into the Blue - August 30]
- Opinion: [“Riddle Of Varying Warm Water Inflow In The Arctic Now Solved”](#) [Eurasia Review - September 24]
- Opinion: [“Global shipping has a new climate strategy – it’s vague, obscure and almost noncommittal, but it may be pointing the industry in the right direction”](#) [Big Rapids News - September 23]
- Opinion: [“Roadblock to Strategy and Fleet Design: Platform-Centric Thinking”](#) [Center for Maritime Strategy - September 19]
- Opinion: [“Sinking or Soaring: The Digital Dilemma of India’s Maritime Future”](#) [Indian Defence Review - September 19]
- Opinion: [“To Build Ships That Break Ice, U.S. Must Relearn to Cut Steel”](#) [The Wall Street Journal - September 17] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“America Prepares for a Pacific War With China It Doesn’t Want”](#) [Foreign Policy - September 16] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“No time to lose on ocean treaty as threats to high seas rise – Greenpeace”](#) [Arab News - September 14]
- Opinion: [“Ukraine and Russia in High-Stakes Battle for the Black Sea”](#) [The Messenger - September 13]
- Opinion: [“Tending to a Distributed Maritime Operation: The Ongoing Need for More Navy Tenders”](#) [Center for Maritime Strategy - September 12]
- Opinion: [“The US Navy should build a robot armada to fight the battle of Taiwan”](#) [The Telegraph - September 12] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“Up for Debate: Do Navy Readiness Woes require Drastic Action?”](#) [Center for Maritime Strategy - September 7]

- Opinion: [“Mother Nature Is Staging a Climate Intervention”](#) [Bloomberg - September 5] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“U.S. Deterrence Against China Is Not Working”](#) [Foreign Policy - September 5] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“The Importance of Seabed Critical Minerals for Great Power Competition”](#) [Center for Maritime Strategy - September 5]
- Opinion: [“Fukushima waste water release: how mainland China and Hong Kong got it wrong”](#) [South China Morning Post - August 30] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“US can’t rely on military prowess to counter China in Asia, despite partnership with Japan, South Korea”](#) [South China Morning Post - August 29] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Blasting Bullhorns and Water Cannons, Chinese Ships Wall Off the Sea”](#) [The New York Times - September 23] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“The Grand Voyage of the Amerigo Vespucci and Italy’s Lost Opportunities”](#) [Center for Maritime Security - September 21]
- Analysis: [“Revamping fleet design and maritime strategy: An integrated naval campaign for advantage”](#) [Center for International Maritime Security - September 18]
- Analysis: [“How a Squiggly Line on a Map Got ‘Barbie’ Banned in Vietnam”](#) [The Wall Street Journal - September 17] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Navy, Marine Corps test warfighting concepts”](#) [NavyTimes - September 15]
- Analysis: [“Aligning Ambitions: State Strategies for Offshore Wind”](#) [Center for Strategic & International Studies - September 14]
- Analysis: [“China’s newest aircraft carrier prepares to take to the seas”](#) [Financial Times - September 12] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“ASEAN Remains Divided Over China’s Assertiveness in South China Sea”](#) [Voice of America - September 12]
- Analysis: [“North Korea Launches New Ballistic Missile Submarine”](#) [Beyond Parallel: CSIS Korea Chair - September 11]
- Analysis: [“Navies get their feet wet with UUVs”](#) [International Institute for Strategic Studies - September 11]
- Analysis: [“In U.S.-China AI contest, the race is on to deploy killer robots”](#) [Reuters - September 8]
- Analysis: [“Sushi restaurants in China left scrambling after Fukushima-linked seafood ban”](#) [The China Project - September 7]
- Analysis: [“In Depth: Low-Carbon Transition Has China’s Shipbuilders Seeing Green”](#) [Caixin Global - September 6] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Faced With Evolving Threats, U.S. Navy Struggles to Change”](#) [The New York Times - September 4] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“In China’s shadow, U.S. rushes back to neglected Indian Ocean island”](#) [The Washington Post - September 3] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“The day an underwater volcano almost wiped out a nation”](#) [The Washington Post - September 1] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“China’s new map draws outrage from its neighbors”](#) [The China Project - August 31] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Achieving More with Less: The U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet Bets on Unmanned Vehicles and AI Systems to Bolster Maritime Domain Awareness”](#) [Center for Maritime Strategy - August 31]

Events on the Maritime Domain

- On September 4, 2023, the *Japan Maritime Daily* newspaper held its first global seminar in Singapore, titled [“Future of Shipping towards Net Zero.”](#) with the theme of ‘Decarbonization for the Future of Shipping’.
- On September 6, 2023, the Center for Strategic & International Studies Middle East Program held a live webcast on [“Cooling Tensions: Environmental Cooperation in the Gulf.”](#)
- From September 7-8, 2023, Ridge China and their partners held their 12th annual [Green Shiptech China Congress 2023](#) in Shanghai, China.
- On September 12, 2023, China Dialogue Ocean held a webinar on [“Ocean acidification: Exploring the ripple effects on local fisheries and livelihoods.”](#)
- On September 14, 2023, Stimson Center held an online event on [“Charting a Blue Future for Cooperation between West Africa and China on Sustainable Fisheries.”](#)
- On September 15, 2023, Center for Strategic & International Studies held a webcast event on [“Seafood Alliance for Legality and Traceability Forum- Taking Stock and Next Steps.”](#)
- From September 18-19, 2023, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo, held the [“Ocean Nations: 3rd Annual Indo-Pacific Islands Dialogue”](#) in New York.
- From September 20-21, 2023, The Nautical Institute held its third [Global Dynamic Positioning and Offshore Energy Event](#) in Egypt.
- On September 21, 2023, The Nautical Institute held a webinar technical seminar on [“Maritime Security: 20 Years into the ISPS Code.”](#)
- From September 25-28, 2023, the IEEE Oceanic Engineering Society and its patrons will hold the [“OCEANS 2023 Gulf Coast”](#) conference “for global maritime professionals to learn, innovate and lead in the protection and utilization of the world’s largest natural resource.”
- From September 27-28, 2023, the Wilson Center, the National Science Foundation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the US Coast Guard, and Battelle will hold the first-ever conference on Antarctic policy in Washington, DC: [“The Rules-Based Order in Antarctica and Global Challenges.”](#)
- From September 27-29, 2023, SNAME and its partners will hold the [“SNAME Maritime Convention 2023”](#) in San Diego, California with a focus on “Utilizing New Technologies to Solve Complex Maritime Problems.” Registration is still open.
- On October 2, 2023, the International Institute for Strategic Studies will hold a talk on [“Cooperative Maritime Security in the CENTCOM Area of Operations”](#) in-person in Bahrain.
- On October 3, 2023, Beookings will hold a hybrid event on [“De-risking the economic relationship with China: Views from the Indo-Pacific.”](#) Registration is still open.
- On October 5, 2023, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation will be holding a seminar on [“Like-Minded Allies? Indo-Pacific Partners’ Views on Possible Changes in the U.S. Relationship with Taiwan.”](#)
- On October 17, 2023, the Center for Strategic & International Studies International Security Program and the U.S. Naval Institute will be holding a Maritime Security Dialogue event featuring ADM Linda L. Fagan, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard to discuss [“The U.S. Coast Guard in an Era of Great Power Competition.”](#) Registration is still open.

- From November 1-2, 2023, Chatham House will be holding their hybrid [“Climate change 2023”](#) conference at Chatham House, focusing on “multi-stakeholder collaboration for increased ambition, action and impact.” Registration is still open.
- From November 15-16, 2023, DefenceIQ and its partners will hold a forum combining the [“Warships & OPV Latin America Conference”](#) and the [“Caribbean Basin Maritime Security and Coastal Surveillance” \(CABSEC\)](#), both of which focus on addressing regional security challenges such as technological advancements and information sharing. Registration is still open.
- From November 17-19, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation Ocean Policy Research Institute and their partners will hold [“The International Eelgrass and Blue Carbon Workshop.”](#) Both in-person and online registration is still open.
- From November 29-30, 2023, Active Communications International and their partners will be holding their [Arctic Shipping Summit](#) in Montreal, Canada for the first time in three years. Registration is still open.

Handbill Spotlight

The Panama Canal

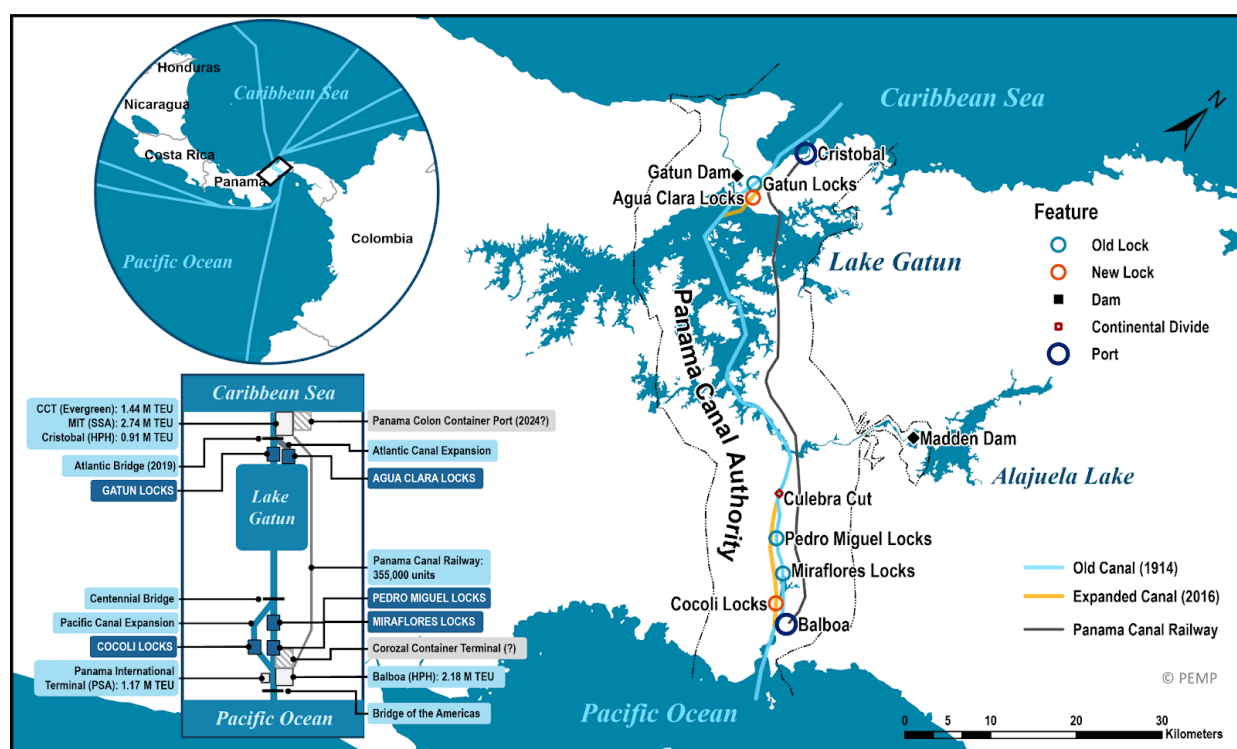
Issue Background

The Panama Canal is a 77 km man-made waterway, completed in 1914, that cuts through the Isthmus of Panama and allows ships from around the world to drastically reduce travel time between the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. Functionally, the Panama Canal operates through a [system](#) of locks with two lanes that function as ‘water elevators’ to raise ships from sea level to the level of Gatun Lake (26 meters above sea level) to allow the crossing through the Continental Divide, at which point ships are lowered through another set of locks to sea level on the other side of the Isthmus. The water used in the ‘elevator’ is [transported](#) through gravity from Gatun Lake “through a main culvert system that extends under the locks chamber from the sidewalls and the center wall.” Often called one of the [Wonders of the Modern World](#) due to being “one of the biggest and most difficult engineering projects of the modern times,” the Panama Canal has seen [more than a million ships](#) pass through since 1914—with the millionth ship passing in September 2010—and has become an invaluable feature in the global maritime shipping industry.

Debates about creating an artificial canal through the Isthmus of Panama have [existed](#) since the 16th century, with global maritime powers like Spain, the United Kingdom and France each pursuing construction of the strategically placed waterway. However, the route was not completed and made passable in full until the early 20th Century, spurred on by the Second Industrial Revolution, the simultaneous global expansion in maritime shipping and the Republic of Panama’s need to solidify its fragile independence.

On November 18, 1903, 15 years after France abandoned their construction efforts and barely two weeks after Panama declared its independence from Columbia, Panama’s ambassador to the U.S. Philippe Bunau-Varilla signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty with then-U.S. Secretary of State John

M. Hay. This Treaty, signed during the midst of regional turmoil and change, [granted](#) the U.S. with a 10-mile wide strip of land for the canal in return for a one-time \$10 million payment to Panama, an annual annuity of \$250,000 and continued guarantee of Panama's independence. Although initially [celebrated](#) as a diplomatic and engineering success, the signing of this treaty and the subsequent construction of the canal later saw much [controversy](#) over both the context of its signing and legal interpretations. In short, these controversies led to riots and legal modifications of the agreement in 1936, 1955, and 1977 when a new, [two-part treaty](#) was [signed](#) by U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian leader Brig. Gen. Omar Torrijos Herrera: the Permanent Neutrality Treaty, which declared the canal neutral and open to vessels of all nations, and the Panama Canal Treaty, which detailed the joint U.S.-Panama control of the canal until December 31, 1999 when the [U.S.](#) would [fully transfer](#) control of the Panama Canal to the Panama Canal Authority (Autoridad del Canal de Panamá or ACP), an government agency of the Republic of Panama.¹



Met with the undeniable, growing demand in maritime trade, the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) [submitted a plan](#) in April 2006 to [expand](#) the Panama Canal with a third set of locks; a program that began in 2007 and took nine years to complete. The ‘Third Set of Locks Project’ [also](#) raised the maximum operating water level of Gatun Lake [and](#) widened and deepened the existing channels to not only accommodate the expanding size of many cargo ships but also, in some cases, accommodate multiple ships at once. To date, with few-to-no nearby alternatives linking the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the Panama Canal remains a heavily depended-upon maritime route for commercial vessels.

¹ Image Source: A map detailing the main components of the Panama Canal as of 2023. (Credit: Port Economics, Management and Policy (PEMP), 2023/Permission for single-use of image granted to ICAS by PEMP)

Recent Events

In spite of how important of a route the Panama Canal may be to the world, its operations have steadily been deteriorating in regularity due to increases in global shipping traffic and climactic [droughts](#) simultaneously pressuring the Canal's locks system. Since July 30, the Panama Canal Authority was forced again to act to conserve the region's water, thus [reducing](#) the number of vessels that could travel through the canal each day to 32 and leading to a backup of dozens of ships on both sides of the waterway. The average wait time for August 2023 was almost [four times what it was in June 2023](#) and, while this average wait time reduced slightly in September, it has situated itself to levels well above historic average and is expected to remain so for a while.

What this means is that ships are competing for spots in line—a line that has peaked at 160 spots at one point in August rather than the typical 36—amidst congestion that some estimate could last until 2024. One ship in the Panama Canal recently [paid](#) \$2.4 million at an auction to skip past the logjam of vessels; a price that did not include the [normal](#) canal-crossing fee which can range between \$150,000 to over \$1 million by itself.

Local authorities and regulators [continue](#) to actively monitor and report on the situation, subsequently making adjustments to its reservation system and allowances as necessary. Aside from restricting the number of daily passages, another such limitation is changing the maximum vessel draft allowance to 44 feet—a reduction of 6 feet from the typical allowance—which inevitably changes the size and the tonnage, potentially, of passable vessels. The Panama Canal has experienced [low levels](#) before (in 2016 and 2019) but neither observers nor authorities are now [expecting](#) to be able to lift restrictions on vessel traffic in 2023. During the first week of September, the Panama Canal Authority officially [confirmed](#) prior estimates on the issue, saying that the limits on daily transit and vessel draft will remain unchanged for the rest of 2023 and throughout 2024 due to insufficient rainfall. Some observers are now [wondering](#) if the Panama Canal Authority is preparing to advance yet another new round of restrictions. These unexpected limitations to Panama Canal passage—driven at their roots by [soaring](#) worldwide temperatures—are leaving global supply chains, already trying to recover from more than three years of pandemic and [preparing](#) for a major holiday season, under stress yet again.

Keep In Mind

There are several select warnings that these events bring to mind. First, there is the oncoming wariness of corporate monopolization. If gone unchecked, such a situation could lead to market monopolization by or favoritism for the largest companies who are more easily able and willing to pay higher crossing fees; as evidenced by the successfully played \$2.4 million auction payment to skip the cuing line of the Canal. Second, there is the stark realization of the value of diversification in global maritime shipping routes—and how this lack of diversification is a vulnerability. For the first time in over a century, the world may need to actively look for [alternative](#) shortcuts to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, even if such a search comes up empty. Third, there is the reminder of global supply chains functionality and its [fragility](#). One major change in the system is leading to [global](#) implications across a [variety](#) of industries, all of which depend on successfully delivering

goods to customers in a timely manner. The world was already [reminded](#) of this fragility during the Covid-19 pandemic and is now facing compounding problems.

However, of all of these reminders, the most marked is the inevitable connection between global warming and the stability of not only maritime shipping but the global maritime economy at large. Lake Gatun, the primary source of water that allows vessels to cross the Continental Divide, has been experiencing a drought for the last 20 years, and the Canal Authority themselves [identify](#) the root cause of the issue to be the ongoing drought: "To ensure the canal remains open to the world of commerce, the Panama Canal Authority has implemented strategic measures over the past several months...to mitigate the impacts from climate change and a subsequent dry season." Furthermore, with more ships lining up at the gate, the more fuel is being burned and released into the atmosphere, thus further contributing to global warming. It is understandable why many [observers](#) are frustrated and calling for systematic [change](#) across several parts of the shipping industry.

Pulling back for a moment from addressing technical supply chain concerns, it is important to note that the Panama Canal itself remains a successful symbol of diplomacy and human determination. On September 7, 2023, Panama Ambassador Francisco O. Mora [gave remarks](#) celebrating the 46th anniversary of the signing of the 1977 Carter-Torrijos Treaty: "In closing, the Panama Canal stands as a symbol of human achievement and strong bilateral cooperation between the United States and Panama. It beckons us to recognize the power of diverse contributions, the urgency of environmental protection, and the strength of Inter-American collaboration." As today's world is forced to operate in the midst of modern troubles, it is not only proper but essential to appreciate and learn from our past—especially when that past, which the world did successfully navigate through, was itself once riddled with dissent and signs of inevitable failure. To simply 'copy and paste' from the past would not be effective, as the 'battles' are different, but there is also no need to start from scratch in favor of looking for already-proven insight—that would be a detrimental waste of emotions and resources in navigating through our own modern contentions.

This issue's Spotlight was written by Jessica Martin, ICAS Research Associate & Chief Editor, ICAS Newsletters.

ICAS Maritime Affairs Program: New and Upcoming

— ICAS 2023 Annual Conference —



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Thursday, September 14, 2023

On September 14, 2023, ICAS Executive Director and Senior Fellow Dr. Nong Hong spoke on a Stimson Center event panel among other maritime scholars.

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