

Cambodia Rumors: “Secret Chinese Bases” or “Argument over Semantics?”

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The Western Mainstream Media is going into overdrive spreading the rumor that China is supposedly planning to set up naval and air bases in southern Cambodia, but the fact of the matter is that China might only have signed logistical agreements for using those facilities and that the entire dispute therefore boils down to an argument over semantics.

Provocative Claims Of A Chinese-Cambodian Military Conspiracy

All of Southeast Asia is abuzz with the [Wall Street Journal's recent report](#) supposedly confirming last year's rumor that China is planning to set up naval and air bases in southern [Cambodia](#), which has provoked a global controversy about the expanding military capabilities of the People's Republic. The Western Mainstream Media outlet alleges that Beijing already clinched a deal to use the Ream naval base, which is also interestingly the same facility that Cambodia recently [declined to receive American funds](#) for repairing in what was most likely a response to the US' backing of a [failed Color Revolution attempt](#) against long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen nearly two years ago. In addition, the Wall Street Journal added that a nearby airport (which will be the country's largest upon completion) being constructed by a state-run Chinese company might be used by the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), which would expand Beijing's military reach as far as Singapore and the strategic Strait of Malacca through which a significant share of its trade traverses.

Sensitive Semantics

Cambodia denied that anything of the sort is in the cards, [reiterating](#) that the hosting of foreign military forces would violate its constitution and even [bringing foreign journalists](#) to the Ream naval base so that they can see with their own eyes that it isn't controlled by China. The West isn't buying it, though, since commentators have pointed to a particular part of China's [newly released military white paper](#) to justify their suspicions that there's more going on behind the scenes than it seems. The policy-defining passage in question reads as follows: “To address deficiencies in overseas operations and support, it builds far seas forces, develops overseas logistical facilities, and enhances capabilities in accomplishing diversified military tasks.” According to the Western [and Indian](#) interpretations (which are almost always more or less the same when it comes to the so-called “China threat”), this means that China can be expected to commence a massive worldwide naval expansion under the cover of so-called “overseas logistical facilities” like its first-ever base in Djibouti is officially called.

American & Indian Hypocrisy

Therein could lie the core of the problem, however, and it's that the Mainstream Media

might have overreached in equating China's plans to construct more "overseas logistical facilities" with its supposed intend to build more "military bases" such as the ones that they believe will eventually be opened in Cambodia. It should be said at this critical juncture of the analysis that the US' 2016 "Logistics Exchange Memorandum Of Agreement" ([LEMOA](#)) enables the American Armed Forces to use certain Indian military facilities on a case-by-case "logistical" basis, just as the [possible one](#) that India [might soon sign](#) with Russia could do as well, though the Mainstream Media (both Western and Indian) regularly refutes the characterization of LEMOA as enabling the establishment of US military bases in India. It doesn't matter that the deal's provisions essentially amount to the same thing, albeit only in certain locations and on a temporary "logistical" pretext, since the issue is so polarizing even in modern-day pro-American India that neither side wants to recognize it as such.

Making Sense Of The Aformentioned Insight

The same sensitive state of military-strategic affairs might actually in play with Chinese-Cambodian relations as well, since any prospective logistics deal between the two country wouldn't technically amount to the opening of Chinese military bases per se (which would be in violation of the Cambodian Constitution) even if it would still give the Chinese Armed Forces de-facto access to the reported naval and air facilities on a similar case-by-case "logistical" basis. There's nothing unusual about any military clinching such agreements in the first place, but hypocritically employing double standards to describe China's speculative deal as opening "military bases" in Cambodia while refusing to do the same when it comes to the US' own in India reveals a clear political agenda behind these reports, one that deserves to be elaborated on more thoroughly in order to better understand the strategic drivers behind this latest infowar salvo and the ultimate outcome that this perception management operation aims to achieve.

The Infowar Impetus To "Containing" China

The US is presently in the process of assembling a broad coalition of countries to "[contain](#)" China under the euphemistic umbrella of the "[Indo-Pacific](#)", whose main component is the "Quad" of itself, Japan, India, and Australia. Hying up the threat perception of China and misportraying its possible logistics deal with Cambodia as an aggressive move instead of the defensive one that it would be in practice is designed to add an urgent impetus to its plans to form the aforesaid coalition. The innuendo is that the next Chinese logistical facilities might eventually open up in [Pakistan](#) and the [South Pacific](#), thereby supposedly impacting India and Australia's security respectively and therefore giving them a reason to preempt this scenario by more closely integrating their military capabilities with the US and Japan in order to achieve the highest degree of multilateral interoperability with one another. On top of that, the Wall Street Journal's claim that the PLAAF could hit targets as far away as Singapore from its "base" in Cambodia is intended to bring that country and Indonesia into the nascent coalition, too.

Concluding Thoughts

It's unclear at this moment whether or not any logistics agreement was or ever will be signed between China and Cambodia, but what's self-evident is that such a scenario is already being weaponized by the West through infowar tactics in order to spread the theory of the so-called "China threat" and consequently accelerate the creation of a multinational coalition to "contain" it. Although China's speculative logistics agreement with Cambodia would probably be functionally identical to the one that the US already has with India, the

key difference would be that Beijing's use of this arrangement would be for strictly defensive purposes since it would be economically suicidal for it to disrupt shipping through the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea whereas Washington's employment of the same would be for aggressive purposes intended to embolden the [rogue state of India](#)'s regional aggression. As such, the Mainstream Media's "argument over semantics" with Cambodia reveals that they've discredited themselves for self-serving political reasons, which isn't anything new in principle.

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