

# Hybrid Wars: America's Strategic Plan to Contain and Destabilize China

## Part 6

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Global Research, July 02, 2016  
[Oriental Review](#) 1 July 2016

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Military](#), [Military and WMD](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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*The research has thus far extrapolated on Southeast Asia's global economic importance and the most relevant points in its recent history, which therefore set the appropriate situational backdrop for grasping ASEAN's geostrategic significance. The region plays a critical role in facilitating China's international trade network, and it's for this reason why the US has sought to destabilize it and bring the waterways under its control. In response, China has endeavored to break through the containment bloc being constructed against it and streamline two mainland corridors as partial geopolitical compensation.*

Herein lies the New Cold War tension in ASEAN – the US is alternatively synchronizing both mainland and maritime portions of the Chinese Containment Coalition (CCC) in order to preempt Beijing's 'breakout' from this region-wide geopolitical trap, while at the same time China continues to bravely push through its maritime and mainland agendas. On the waterborne front, the US can only resort to conventional power mechanisms to keep China in check and traditional alliance politicking, whereas the continental aspect of this containment campaign can incorporate more insidious tactics.

The major headway that's been made so far with the China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor and the ASEAN Silk Road has raised fears in Washington that Beijing has adeptly sidestepped the US' South China Sea containment trap. In response, the US feels pressured to do whatever it can to seize control of the mainland 'escape routes' that China is charting in ASEAN, and if they can't be geopolitically commandeered (like what appears to be happening in Myanmar at the moment), then the US won't hesitate to unleash a Hybrid War to stop them.

### **China's Geo-Economic Lifeline To Africa**

ASEAN's [steady](#) and consistent growth is attributable to a number of reasons, but first and foremost this has to do with its convenient geography that allows it to connect Eastern and Western Eurasian maritime trade. Ships passing back and forth from China, Japan, and South Korea on one hand, and the EU, Africa, the Mideast, and South Asia on the other absolutely must transit through Southeast Asia. A growing exception is emerging to this geo-economic rule, however, in that melting Arctic ice will soon make the [Northern Sea Route](#) a much more commercially viable option for EU-East Asian trade, but that won't at all take away from Southeast Asia's transit role for South-South economic interaction between China and Africa, the Mideast, and South Asia.

More specifically, though, the Indian Ocean and related Strait of Malacca and South China Sea access routes will progressively become more important for Chinese-African trade than any other as a result of the continental “Silk Roads” directly linking China with the Mideast (through the [China-Iran railroad](#)) and South Asia (through the [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor](#) and proposed [BCIM corridor](#)), provided of course that they’re successfully constructed. Whether they are or not, it won’t have an impact on China’s links with Africa because of the geographic incongruity of the continent to Eurasian connective infrastructure, ergo the motivation for the maritime portion of the One Belt One Road project.



Xi Jinping and South Africa President Jacob Zuma co-host the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, December 2015

China’s [second Africa policy paper](#) that was revealed in December 2015 emphasizes the priority that Beijing allots to strengthening full-spectrum relations with all of its African counterparts, specifically in regards to the economic sphere. Likewise, a [Silk Road conference in Lianyungang](#) in September 2015 confirmed that China needs African markets as destinations for its outbound investment, which in turn is predicted to sustain the country’s growth rates well into the future and tangentially secure social stability. Understood in this manner, it’s of paramount importance to China to guarantee itself free access to its African partners and prevent any geopolitical impediments to bilateral trade.

With the South China Sea gradually coming under heavy American influence and the Strait of Malacca already an American-controlled waterway, the impetus organically developed for China to spearhead a pair of overland ASEAN routes to the Indian Ocean that avoids both of them. The China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor and ASEAN Silk Road are the geo-economic solutions to this dilemma, but they’re also the reason why the US has set its sights on swaying Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand away from China. If any of these governments steadfastly reject the respective outreaches presented to them, then the US will carry through on its tacit Hybrid War threats in order to destroy China’s containment-escaping infrastructure plans.

## **Stirring Up Trouble In The South China Sea**

### The Strategic Underpinning:

The whole reason that China has to resort to ‘escape routes’ in Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand is because of the trouble that the US has stirred up in the South China Sea. China’s merchant marine fleet can still navigate the waters as they see fit, but the growing strategic threat to their future freedom of movement is obvious. The Chinese have never been one to take unnecessary chances, especially when national security is at stake, so Beijing made the decision to lessen full dependency on the waterway and streamline two complementary mainland solutions in response.

Nevertheless, for the time being, the China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor is still in its early stages, and the route itself is exceptionally vulnerable to rebel attacks, despite none having happened as of yet. Additionally, the non-resource economic aspect of this corridor has yet

to be actualized, leaving a lot of valuable potential still waiting to be tapped. Concerning the other project, the ASEAN Silk Road hasn't even been constructed yet and will still need a few years before it's fully built and operational (if not over its entire route, than at least partially through Thailand and up to the Indian Ocean).

This means that China's dependency on its southern sea is still an important factor that could be exploited by the US until then, with the strategic window of opportunity narrowing by the year as the mainland 'detour' projects make progress and gradually come into use. In the event that either or both of the two projects is sabotaged or 'indefinitely delayed', then the US would predictably prolong and enhance the strategic vice grip that it's gaining over one of China's most vital trade conduits. Should Washington be successful in unleashing full-scale chaos in Central Asia and disrupting the Eurasian Land Bridge to Europe, then China would most certainly remain almost fully dependent on the South China Sea, and thus exceptionally vulnerable to US geopolitical blackmail there.

### The Escalation Ladder:

The modern-day history of the South China Sea dispute is convoluted and controversial, but what's less muddled is that China has had historical claims in the region for centuries that form the basis for its present position. Without getting into the nitty-gritty of the matter, it's important to still document the general escalation progression that's occurred since the US took the initiative to thaw out the long-frozen conflict. While there were clashes over some of the participants' overlapping claims in the past, the issue had largely been put on the backburner of regional affairs, with all parties implicitly recognizing that it's in everyone's shared interest to maintain the peaceful and stable status quo. That dramatically changed after the US announced its [Pivot to Asia](#) at the end of 2011, and in the years since, Washington put tremendous pressure on Vietnam and the Philippines to aggravate the situation.



### South China Sea dispute

Hanoi and Manila's revisionist actions (in the sense of modifying the earlier established status quo) appeared to be a coordinated attempt at goading Beijing into an irrational and emotional response. China's leadership is well-versed in making calculated moves and it thus wasn't tricked into doing anything that could put its position in jeopardy. Actually, what it had decided to do was surprisingly take the initiative in asserting its sovereign claims while cautiously avoiding any sort of unnecessary military engagement (no matter how provocative) that could embroil it in a preplanned Pentagon trap. China presciently saw the writing on the wall and realized that if it didn't take the determined steps that it had in reclaiming its island possessions, then Vietnam and the Philippines would have been in a relatively stronger position to enforce their respective demands, and this could have easily allowed the US to step in and take charge of the waterway.

By standing up for itself in the face of American proxy aggression, China startled American decision makers that had been convinced that it would back down, and this in turn prompted them to harness all available information means at their disposal to discredit Beijing's moves. Furthermore, while the US had earlier enjoyed 'escalation domination' in the South China Sea, it was now China that had seized the initiative and was fortifying its island locations, leading observers to wonder whether this ambiguously had defensive

and/or offensive applications. Taken largely off guard, the US realized that the tables had turned and that China had regained its strategic position at Washington and its allies' expense. In order to compensate for this, the US responded by pushing forward its preplanned strategy of multilateral escalation to evolve the dispute past its regional origins and into a larger Asian-wide one that draws in India and Japan.

### The Excuse:

The US' progressive heightening of the escalation ladder has the disturbing but very real potential to hit a ceiling of inevitable conflict sometime or another in the future, which might very well be what its ultimate plans are anyhow (albeit under conditions in which it has a monopoly of control). Washington's first-tier Lead From Behind partners are entering the Southeast Asian theater through both maritime and mainland means, and India and Japan's anti-Chinese involvement there (be it in economic, infrastructure, and/or military manifestations) are raising the barometer of proxy conflict to unparalleled levels. It should be remembered that India and Japan each of their own respective self-interests that they feel they are promoting through their provocative engagements there, and that to be fair, some of the governments (like in Myanmar, Vietnam, and the Philippines) are more than willing to enable them in order to reap the ensuing anti-Chinese advantages. These will be discussed more in the next section, but what's important to realize is that the preplanned escalation that the US had initiated in the South China Sea has served as a very convenient excuse for all manner of tangential escalations since, every one of which is related to containing China in as multilateral of a fashion as possible.

### **The Chinese Containment Coalition**

To accomplish the gargantuan task of containing China, a large-scale informal coalition of sorts is being assembled under American tutelage. The author comprehensively explored this massive undertaking in the article "[Asian NATO-like Project To Be Stopped](#)", but it's necessary to review some of its most important tenets in order to familiarize the reader with the neo-containment taking place. The Chinese Containment Coalition (CCC) is the neologism used to describe this de-facto alliance, and it has both maritime and mainland components to it. The most relevant utilization of the CCC of course relates to the South China Sea, and the US has a vested interest in maintaining the stability of each of its participating members in this geo-critical theater. It may, however, tinker with punitive Hybrid War threats to keep some of the members in check and/or create a plausible front for 'justifying' a deeper military commitment to each of them, although of course this could unintentionally spiral out of control and lead to unexpected consequences. The Hybrid War possibilities for each of the ASEAN states (both those that could 'unintentionally' erupt in the CCC and the ones purposefully planned against specific targets) will be extensively investigated later on in the work, but the focus right now is on the general shape and power relations within the CCC.

### Membership Roster:

The CCC is a broadly inclusive strategic bloc whose members have their own motivations for containing China. The following is an enumeration of the states that are involved, as well as an explanation of what they believe to be their self-interested reasons for participating:

*US*

Washington is most of all motivated by concrete geostrategic considerations, believing that the containment of China is a necessary action in order to indefinitely prolong American hegemony over Eurasia. China is one of the three Great Power multipolar centers pushing back against the US' dominance over the supercontinent (with the other two being Russia and Iran), and the US wants to acquire geopolitical leverage over it by controlling its vital mainland and maritime economic conduits in Southeast Asia. The US is fearful that a rising China could spearhead a revolutionary system of post-modern international relations based on win-win benefits and genuine partner equality (the very concept behind the One Belt One Road endeavor), and coupled with Beijing's rising naval capabilities, it believes that China might become powerful enough to weaken Washington's unipolar stranglehold over the region. If the US' control over Southeast Asia begins to deteriorate, perhaps concurrent with a parallel process underway in the Mideast, then the US would suffer a major geopolitical blow from which its hegemonic control might never be able to fully recover.

### *Japan*

The island state has always been China's chief geopolitical and civilizational rival, and the present tensions between the two amount to nothing more than an American-manufactured return to history. Japan aspires for leadership of the entire East and Southeast Asian space, believing that its historical naval superiority and maritime identity entitles it to play a premier role in guiding regional events. To add some substance to its grand ambitions, it's also the only country aside from the US that has the excess capital and management experience necessary to compete with China in developing this rapidly growing bloc. Furthermore, while Japan's World War II history of conquest in Southeast Asia was objectively a very dark and brutal time for the region, much of the public and their corresponding leadership have been whipped up into such an anti-Chinese nationalist frenzy as of late that they seem willing to overlook the negative facts during this time period and dwell only on its positive anti-colonialism connotations.

The relevance of this to the present day is that the US has been largely successful in convincing people in Vietnam and the Philippines that China is the latest colonizer to creep into the region, with the subtle intimation being that a 'reformed, non-imperialist' Japan can preemptively liberate them from their coming servitude. Tokyo already wants to deepen its hold over the ASEAN's markets (both commercial and [military](#)) as it is, and being literally called in by some of the region's members to do so and with the full backing of the US is just about the greatest soft power boost that it could have ever hoped for. The constructed narrative at play here is that the Chinese 'bad guy' is trying to control the region and its maritime resources, while the 'anti-Chinese good guy', Japan, is willing to do whatever it takes to counter it, with the 'trusted' US keeping an eye on it to make sure it doesn't relapse into any of its colonialist habits. The irony is that it's Japan and the US, not China, which are bent on a neo-colonialist power grab in Southeast Asia, but the unipolar-influenced information services in the region have largely mirrored their European counterparts in parroting their patron's talking points and disseminating a false reality.

### *India*

New Delhi's strategy in all of this is to constrain the rise of its natural geopolitical rival, and this has seen it take a gradually more vocal stance in addressing the South China Sea crisis. For the most part, India's leadership has played coy with China in pragmatically interacting with it in large-scale multilateral frameworks such as the AIIB, BRICS, and the SCO, but in



being noticeably less constructive when it comes to indirect bilateral relations. To explain, India's dealings with states and regions of mutual interest to it and China tend to be much more competitive and reek of zero-sum proxy intentions on New Delhi's part, for example, when addressing 'freedom of navigation' in the South China Sea [together with Japan](#) or in unilaterally [blockading Nepal](#). There's an undeclared but [clearly observable Cold War](#) going on between both Asian great powers, despite neither of them willing to publicly admit it, and it's in this context that India has a desire to provoke China in Southeast Asia. Although it has yet to send any naval vessels to the region, the possibility hasn't been explicitly discounted by New Delhi, and it's quite probable that it could find some pretext to do so in the future (be it under 'freedom of navigation' auspices or to participate in a multilateral CCC drill there).

Adding to that, India is clearly a rising power in its own right, and the self-confidence that this comes with has encouraged its elite to spread their country's influence to surrounding regions. The so-called "[Cotton Route](#)" that was suggested as an institutional counter-weight to the New Silk Road will likely stretch into Southeast Asia, considering the historical bond between India and the region that was described in the second chapter. India's political basis for doing so is termed "[Act East](#)", and it's Modi's evolved version of his predecessor's much more passive "Look East" policy. It includes not only ASEAN, but also Japan as well, and the interplay between both of the US' Lead From Behind proxies in the geographic middle ground of Southeast Asia will be described soon enough. Physical proximity is an obvious enabler in accelerating India's bilateral relations with ASEAN, and the [Trilateral Highway](#) between it, Myanmar, and Thailand (the 'ASEAN Highway') is designed to physically integrate the subcontinent's SAARC with the neighboring ASEAN bloc. Suffice to say, this project's successful completion would directly infuse Southeast Asia with a steady stream of Indian economic and institutional influence that could pose a sizeable challenge to China, and its particular effect on Myanmar's anti-Chinese pivot will certainly be elaborated on later in the research.

### *Vietnam*

The mainland ASEAN leader of the CCC has a vehement dislike for China, despite its larger neighbor ironically being its [biggest trade partner](#). In some ways, this actually plays into the anti-Chinese rhetoric and political ambitions of [some of Hanoi's elite](#), since they were able to spin this successfully enough as a form of 'Chinese hegemony' that the rest of the government fell for the nationalistic knee-jerk reaction of agreeing to get on board with the US-led TPP. Anti-Chinese nationalism is at such a high level among the most influential elements of Vietnam's leadership that the once-proud country has even backtracked on its historical principles by closely allying with its former US tormentor in 'countering' its northern neighbor. As was earlier discussed when describing the long history of Chinese-Vietnamese relations, there's definitely an ingrained distrust of China interwoven into Vietnamese identity due to the country's millennium-long incorporation into the Empire, but the US plainly exploited this psychological trait by initiating the timed thawing of the South China Sea dispute.

Information warfare specialists were likely consulted well in advance in order to craft the most effective ways in which the Vietnamese audience could be misguided into interpreting unrequested American diplomatic interventionism as 'Chinese aggression'. The sum effect of this nationalist-appealing information manipulation has been that the anti-Chinese forces in the country decisively won out over the pragmatic ones and that Vietnam ultimately made its choice in aligning with the unipolar-oriented forces that are militarily and

economically circling China. By becoming the US' mainland beachhead in the CCC, Vietnam likely hopes for American acceptance of what will probably soon be a renewed attempt at resurrecting its leading role in the former French lands of Indochina. Hanoi still has sizeable institutional influence over Vientiane (particularly [military](#) and [economic](#)), although it's of course been relatively dwindling since the end of the Cold War, while Vietnam has urgently been trying to play catch-up with China in Cambodia ever since its military withdraw in 1989 re-opened the door to Beijing's influence. Vietnam's counter-proposal to both of its neighbors' chummy ties with China is a so-called "[development triangle](#)" between them, which will in reality serve as a vehicle for the return of Vietnamese influence to these countries.

### *The Philippines*

The former American colony is much weaker than China by all metrics, and its population is easily riled up by simple fear mongering techniques. In turn, it presents itself as a tantalizing target for the US' anti-Chinese information operations there, which are ultimately predicated on returning the Pentagon's presence to the island chain. The American footprint is all over the Philippines owing to the colonial and post-World War II past (essentially a continuation of the former arrangement albeit under the more acceptable-sounding label of 'independence'), but Washington's overbearing presence had the predictable aftereffect of engendering strong anti-American emotions that eventually manifested themselves in the 1986 overthrow of proxy leader Ferdinand Marcos and the 1991 order for the US' full military withdrawal. The military campaign against southern separatists and Muslim terrorists (which have regrettably merged into a semi-unified movement that mostly discredits the former at this point) resulted in the [return of US special forces](#) to the country in 2002 on the basis of anti-terrorist cooperation.

The one-and-off insurgency that has been fought since then provided the necessary pretext for embedding the US' military personnel deeper into the country and making them an integral part of the Philippines' anti-terrorist 'tool set', but it wasn't sufficient for the full return of forces that the Pentagon initially had in mind. The 2011 Pivot to Asia and subsequent American agitation of the South China Sea dispute served the purpose of stoking nationalist sentiment in the country that was professionally channeled by the US and its affiliated information actors (both formal TV and web ones and informal ones such as NGOs) into a self-serving anti-Chinese direction. The US' plan was to have the Philippines, once formerly colonized by it, go as far as formally inviting the US military presence back into the country on the grounds of defending its South China Sea claims from an 'aggressive China'. Even still, domestic political sensitivities to such a move evoke heightened emotion even to this day, ergo why the US had to euphemistically 'settle' for an [Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement](#) in April 2015 that gave it the right to periodically "rotate" its forces out of 8 or more Filipino bases but stopped short of outright giving it formal control of the facilities there. For all intents and purposes, this amounts to the exact same thing, but it's described differentially via the 'rotating' loophole so as to assuage patriotic Filipinos that are dead-set against a US military return to their formerly dominated nation.

The present situation in the Philippines is actually somewhat of a paradox - for as nationalistic and proud as most of the population is, many people are apathetic (or even welcoming) to the return of American forces to their country, having been misled to the point of believing that a re-occupation by their former occupier whom they previously ousted is somehow more preferable than a full-spectrum and pragmatic partnership with China. This confounding contradiction only serves to demonstrate the effectiveness of the

US' information warfare operations, and it also speaks volumes about the subservience and outright collaboration of various elements of the Filipino elite. The political individuals that publicly support the US' military return to the Philippines either naively don't realize that this is a reiteration of the same imperialist blueprint, or more realistically are well aware of this but have positioned themselves so as to profit quite handsomely from this arrangement. It cannot be underscored enough just how much of a contravention of the Philippines' national interest it is for the country to 're-invite' the US military back onto its territory, and while private individuals could be somewhat forgiven for having fallen victim to the US' rabid anti-Chinese nationalist information warfare, their governing elites have no such excuses and are fully complicit in their country's reoccupation.

### *Australia*

Canberra's involvement in the CCC is minimal but symbolic, and it proves the extent that Australia is willing to go to behave as the 'junior America' in its corner of Southeast Asia. The Australian elite generally harbor political ambitions that don't correlate to their country-continent's actual potential, and militarily ruffling China's feathers in a high-stakes game of chicken is certainly one of them. It's been revealed that Australia has been carrying out [provocative 'freedom of navigation' flights](#) over the South China Sea, despite formally having positive relations with China through a [recently signed Free Trade Agreement](#). It's necessary at this point to draw a distinction between Australia's economic and military loyalties, as these don't correspond to one another. The FTA with China hints at a pretense of pragmatism, yet Australia's military-strategic loyalty to the US is completely counter-productive to any of the broader positive inroads that the economic pact could yield in the future. The clear abrogation of national interest that this entails is symptomatic of the Australia political elites' prevailing inferiority complex vis-à-vis the US and other Western countries, as Canberra seems intent to score points with its Anglo-Saxon peers and gain their 'acceptance' at the tangible expense of endangering ties with its [number one economic partner](#).

This shortsighted policy is inherently untenable and cannot continue to exist indefinitely, however, it's not likely that China would respond with any punitive economic measures so soon after signing the FTA. Additionally, Australia is betting that China needs its [iron resources](#) more than it needs China's economic patronage for them (although this is a [dubious gamble](#)), but given that the arrangement is mutually beneficial for the time being, Beijing isn't prone to cut it loose anytime soon. Provided that Australia keeps its provocations to a bare minimum and at as low of a scale and intensity as possible, China will probably ignore it aside from possibly issuing a strongly worded statement against it, but it's extraordinarily difficult to maintain such an unnatural balance when the US will inevitably encourage it to do more in the future. Australia also believes that its present actions of anti-Chinese provocation are endearing it closer to some of its [new ASEAN free trade partners](#), but they too (especially Vietnam and the Philippines) will likely join forces with the US in calling for a more active Australian presence in the South China Sea.

Canberra probably didn't anticipate this when it initially signed on to the CCC (however low-commitment it may thought it would be), so eventually it's going to be pressed into making a difficult decision in choosing between its main economic and strategic partners (China and the US, respectively). The caveat, however, is that China's iron ore-purchasing dependency on Australia will make it reluctant to take any concrete measures against its 'partner' even if it ramps up its anti-Chinese activity, and until it finds a third major partner to diversify its imports from besides [Brazil](#), it's probably going to be inclined to preserve the status quo of



economic relations. On the other hand, as the FTA enters into full swing and begins more actively involving sectors outside the mining one, it's possible that China could establish a few unforeseen strategic footholds in the Australian economy that might come in handy for 'leveling the playing field' and deterring any further unnecessary Australian aggression in the South China Sea.

#### Power Hierarchy:

The CCC operates under a simple power hierarchy that is expressly dominated by the US. It can be conceptualized via the basic model below:



The following model adds detail to the framework and accommodates it for the specificities of the CCC's South China Sea mission:



It's pretty easy to understand the power flow in the abovementioned hierarchies. The US, as the militant enforcer of unipolarity, has partially contracted its regional responsibilities to its two trusted Lead From Behind partners, India and Japan. In turn, the three of them (albeit on different levels and to varying degrees) cooperate with Vietnam and the Philippines, the CCC's most geopolitically relevant proxies in the South China Sea. Bringing up the rear, Indonesia's potential inclusion in the TPP would provide a serious boost to the CCC's economic efforts, while Australia's military presence, although extraordinarily minimal at the moment, could be beefed up to a bit more of an impactful contribution in the future.

The concept is also relevant for explaining the CCC's activities in mainland ASEAN, with scarcely any membership modifications needed:



The first two tiers and power motivations remain the same in this adaptation, with the only differences being that Myanmar substitutes for the Philippines and Australia is removed from the equation. The reasoning for this is obvious, since the Philippines aren't a part of mainland Southeast Asia and Australia has no realistic possibility for militarily assisting in any CCC operation in this region. If anything, the UK's [base in Brunei](#) gives it the faint possibility of replacing Australia as the auxiliary military actor in this framework, but even that appears to be unlikely owing mostly to the fact that the mainland portion of any forthcoming containment campaign will result in a lot less of a direct military presence for all actors. As will be argued later on in the research, it's much more foreseeable that Hybrid Wars will be utilized in place of the type of conventional military containment witnessed in the South China Sea.

#### Geopolitical Convergences:

The two above-cited conceptual models aptly illustrate the geopolitical convergences between the CCC's maritime and mainland missions, with Vietnam functioning as the consistent proxy element between them because of its dual identity. Partially speaking, Vietnam is a maritime nation because of its extensive coastline and claims over part of the South China Sea, while it's also equally a mainland country as well and has the potential to reestablish its sphere of influence over Laos and Cambodia, two of China's most important

ASEAN partners. This makes it doubly important for the US and its Lead From Behind partners to enter into its good graces so as to fully exploit the geopolitical advantage this would provide for them in their shared CCC goal.

There are a few particulars that deserve to be expanded upon in order to understand nuances of the CCC's overall mission in each of these two sub-theaters:

### *Maritime*

To approach the maritime region first, the common space between Vietnam and the Philippines is the South China Sea and the myriad islands between them, ergo the present focus on provocative 'freedom of navigation' [bomber flyovers](#) and [warship transit](#). There's little in terms of strategic asymmetry that the US and its allies can do in 'countering China', so for the most part (save for creative military-technical innovations), conventional alliance dynamics predominate this vector of geopolitical competition. Therefore, events here are a lot more predictable because they simply boil down to whether or not there will be a direct military clash between China and the CCC, although the situation does get increasingly tense and dramatic the more that the US provokes China into acting.

Eventually, it seems almost inevitable that one side or the other will lose their cool and make a regretful decision, but even in the event that this happens, it's very likely to be contained. The exception would occur under the circumstances that the US chooses to escalate an engagement between China and either of the two geopolitical proxies (Vietnam, or more likely, the Philippines) to the point of bringing in the Lead From Behind partners (India, but more foreseeably, Japan) to provide indirect back-up support and institutionalize the CCC. This scenario is easier to conceptually understand if the reader replaces the Philippines with Ukraine and China with Russia, thus allowing one to perceive of the strategic structural continuities between both Eurasian containment operations. Just as Ukraine's US-provoked aggression against Donbass created the pretext for NATO to deepen its involvement in the former's affairs, so too would the Philippine's possible US-provoked aggression against China in the South China Sea function as a pretext for the CCC (especially its US and Japanese elements) to further embed themselves into the island nation.

Even so, the China vs. CCC dynamic still remains largely linear and conventional, thus making it predictable to a large extent. The same, however, certainly can't be said for the mainland portion of this rivalry.

### *Mainland*

Matters are infinitely more complicated, and therefore dangerous, in the CCC's strategy for mainland ASEAN. As seen from the previously mentioned model, Myanmar and Vietnam are the 'geopolitical bookends' in this sub-theater, with each respectively falling deeper under their nearby Lead From Behind overseer's influence. For example, India's ASEAN Highway stands to position New Delhi as one of Myanmar's most vital economic partners, while Japan is heavily investing in all sectors of Vietnam's economy and is one of its most important [full-spectrum strategic partners](#). Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia are critically positioned in between the CCC's mainland proxies, with Japanese-led investment projects strategically bridging the physical gap between them.

For example, the Asian Development Bank (ADB, commonly understood as an institutional

tool of US-Japanese policy) and direct Japanese investment are being used to help fund a bunch of multisided physical integrational projects in the [Greater Mekong Subregion](#) (the ADB's official jargon for mainland Southeast Asia plus southern China). One should keep in mind that the CCC's funding extends mostly (but [not exclusively](#)) to the East-West and Southern Corridors that link both coasts of mainland ASEAN, and that Japan is [building the Thai sections](#) of both high-speed rail projects. Tokyo is also a major investor in Myanmar's [Dawei SEZ](#), so taken together with its railroad ambitions, it's plain to see that Japan has staked its Greater Mekong Subregion interests in facilitating connective infrastructure projects between both of the region's coasts.

The [picture](#) below demonstrates these and the other associated projects:



The red line running from China to Thailand is the ASEAN Silk Road that was mentioned earlier in the work, which is China's 'escape route' for evading the South China Sea trap that the CCC is setting for it. While the map suggests that this could dually run through Myanmar and Laos, it's highly unlikely that it will ever be constructed (let alone remain secure) in the largely rebel-held portions of the former. The changing nature of domestic politics in Myanmar, which is rapidly moving along a pro-Western trajectory, also bodes quite negatively for that prospective route's political feasibility. It's much more likely then that China's ASEAN Silk Road (formally described by the ADB as the "North-South Corridor") will remain completely dependent on Laos for its transit access to Thailand, the infrastructural hub of the Greater Mekong Subregion. In fact, China is actually moving forward with two Thai-destined railroad projects simultaneously, with the relevant "Central Corridor" spoke forming an integral part of [Beijing's present railroad construction plans](#), and it's this additional 'artery' that's expected to form the actual basis of the ASEAN Silk Road.

Remembering that it was earlier written that Cambodia is a structurally unreliable ally of China owing to the lack of direct connective infrastructure to its partner, the reader returns to the conclusion that Laos and Thailand are China's only true geopolitical partners in mainland ASEAN. The situation with Cambodia could theoretically be remedied and the bilateral partnership considerably strengthened well past its already positive and pragmatic nature via the completion of the Cambodian portion of the Central Corridor route through Laos, but that project is far from a priority in the face of the much more strategically urgent North-South Corridor and "Central-North-South Corridor" linking China with Thailand. These projects acquire such strategic importance precisely because Myanmar's westward pivot is rapidly diminishing the prospects that the China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor will ever expand into an all-out economic one as was originally envisioned, and also because the ASEAN Silk Road could be modified near its tail end to reach a to-be-constructed terminal along Thailand's Indian Ocean (technically Andaman Sea) coast. Thailand might not even have the proper harbor or port conditions for what China could be planning as its ultimate contingency plan, but that's not to say that China simply couldn't build whatever it needs in its desired geographic location, considering the engineering 'miracles' it's pulled off in the South China Sea.

### *The Indian-Japanese Double Flank*

It's relevant at this juncture to highlight the CCC's guiding geopolitical concept for 'countering China' in the Greater Mekong Subregion (mainland ASEAN), and that's the 'Indian-Japanese Double Flank. It's been thus far described that India's primary avenue of

approach into the region is via the ASEAN Highway through Myanmar (the “Western Corridor” as described by the ADB in the above-cited map), while Japan’s strategy has been to link the region’s two coasts through the East-West and Southern Corridors. What’s pretty much happening here is that India is moving eastward into the region while Japan is moving westward, and their point of ultimate convergence is Thailand, which also just so happens to be China’s primary focus as well.

Just like any traditional flanking strategy, the target is moving in a linear direction while the opponents are striving to simultaneously flank it from both angles. In this actual situation, China is streaming southward while India and Japan are rushing to block it via their respective advances from the west and the east. Geostrategically speaking, the greatest point of friction for all parties lay at or near the planned perpendicular intersections of the unipolar and multipolar projects in Northern and Central Thailand, and in a theoretical sense, that’s where one would be inclined to believe that a clash of interests could occur. The reality is a bit different, though, since it’s technically possible for Thailand to accommodate both geopolitically divergent projects and create an ultimate win-win situation for everyone.

As beneficial as this may be for all of the directly involved parties, US strategists would beg to differ, since it’s their ultimate aim to keep the CCC firmly on its anti-Chinese course and not to have its main supportive members (India and Japan) partially deterred out of a shared strategic interest with Beijing, which in this case is the stability of Thailand.



To be continued...

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