

**How/in what way will the strategic situation in Southeast Asia be challenged by building of Chinese ports and naval bases in Burma/Myanmar?**

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## **Summary**

China is going through extraordinary economical growth. China's leaders must balance growing energy demands with the ability to guarantee security in the shipping lanes. Most of the oil Chinese industry depends on comes from Africa and the Middle East. The fastest route from Africa and the Middle East to China is through the Straits of Malacca. The Straits of Malacca are the most trafficked sea route in Asia and one of the most important shipping lanes in the world. The Straits of Malacca are narrow and heavily trafficked. China has invested in one of the largest military modernizations in the world to be able to protect Chinese trade and shipping against piracy in the Straits and the possibility of blockades conducted by other countries. China is also trying to find additional ways to transport natural resources. One possibility is to transport resources through Burma. Burma is considered to be the most strategically important country in Southeast Asia and the neighbouring countries are unwilling to let China gain total control over Burma. India in particular is worried that China might gain too much power in the Indian Ocean if China is allowed to develop and use ports and naval bases in Burma. As China is also claiming almost the entire South China Sea, the Southeast Asian countries fear that they may become encircled by Chinese forces. To prevent this scenario, the Southeast Asian countries have the choice to either ally with China and let China become the hegemonic power in the region, or to ally with the U.S. or India to hedge against Chinese influence and balance the power in the region.

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to see how China is becoming a major player on the global stage and how this will affect China's relationship with its neighbours. China is one of the main supporters of the Burmese military rule and has ways of building Chinese controlled ports and naval bases in Burma<sup>1</sup>. The other countries around the Indian Ocean and in Southeast Asia will have different reactions to Chinese expansion in the region and the strategic situation in Southeast Asia will be affected by this. Richard A. Bitzinger writes that "Southeast Asia can, paradoxically, be regarded as a zone of both relative calm and of relative insecurity"<sup>2</sup>. There are no open wars in the region, nor are there areas of severe tension, like in the Taiwan Strait or at the border between North and South Korea, where there are possibilities of future major conflicts or wars. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN<sup>3</sup>), a geopolitical and economic organization consisting of most of the Southeast Asian states, also serves as a medium to keep the peace between the Southeast Asian states and to keep the strategic situation stable. However, the Southeast Asian region has some of the world's most strategically important sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Some of these SLOCs, like the Straits of Malacca, are natural bottlenecks. If they are blocked they can cause major economical crisis, especially to the East Asian and Northeast Asian markets. The East China Sea, The South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal are areas of great interest to the littoral states, because of the natural resources like fish, oil and gas that can be found there. There are several disputes over islands in the South China Sea between China and the Southeast Asian countries. There are also several illegal cross-border activities and much ethnic tension in Southeast Asia. Refugees and rebels from Burma are frequently crossing the border into Thailand. Burma is also the second largest producer of illicit opium in the world. Opium and other drugs, like methamphetamine and heroin, spread from Burma through the region and to the rest of the world<sup>4</sup>. Cambodia and Thailand have had several disputes over areas where the

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<sup>1</sup> I choose to use Burma even though the official name of the state is Myanmar. I choose to do this because Myanmar is a name invented by the Burmese military junta. However, I will not change the name in quotes.

<sup>2</sup> Bitzinger, Richard A., *The China Syndrome: Chinese Military Modernization and the Rearming of Southeast Asia*, <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/WorkingPapers/WP126.pdf>, 2007, accessed 01.02.11, p. 1

<sup>3</sup> The members of ASEAN: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Burma/Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. <http://www.aseansec.org/18619.htm>

<sup>4</sup> CIA, "Burma", <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> accessed: 16.03.11

boundary markers are lost<sup>5</sup>, and fighting between Thai and Cambodian armed forces started again on 22 April 2011 around Ta Krabey temple and seven soldiers were reported killed. This area was given to Cambodia by an international court in 1962, but is still claimed by Thailand. The two countries also had border clashes in February 2011 over an area 200 km west of the 900-year-old Preah Vihear temple<sup>6</sup>. Thailand also has problems concerning separatist violence at the Malaysian border. The southern provinces of Thailand have a predominantly Muslim population, of which several want independence from Thailand<sup>7</sup>. Human trafficking is also a major problem in Southeast Asia. Men, women, and children are sold across borders as slaves. Men are mostly used as forced labour, while women and children are used in commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and as forced labour<sup>8</sup>.

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) formally established what coastal states can claim as their territorial sea. According to UNCLOS, every state has territorial rights to its adjacent waters up to a limit of 12 nautical miles. Every state also has the rights to the air space over these waters and the bed and subsoil under it. These territorial rights also cover islands<sup>9</sup>, which is one of the reasons why states claim sovereignty over strategically placed islands outside their 12-nautical-miles limit from their coasts. In seas and oceans which are rich on natural resources states will gain larger parts of these resources if they gain the sovereignty of these islands.

The UN also defines an exclusive economic zone as: “an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea”<sup>10</sup>. The coastal state has in its exclusive economic zone the

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<sup>5</sup> CIA, “Cambodia”, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html> accessed: 16.03.11

<sup>6</sup> BBC, “Thailand and Cambodia clash again along border” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13173906>, accessed: 23.04.11.

<sup>7</sup> CIA, “Malaysia” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/my.html>, accessed: 16.03.11

<sup>8</sup> CIA, “Burma”, accessed: 16.03.11

<sup>9</sup> UN, “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea” [http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.html](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.html) accessed: 10.03.11

<sup>10</sup> UN, “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea” [http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part5.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part5.htm) accessed: 10.03.11

*“sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil, and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds”<sup>11</sup>.*

The extension of an exclusive economic zone is measured in the same way as territorial sea. Exclusive economic zones, however, can extend up to 200 nautical miles from the coastal state. The coastal state shall provide jurisdiction in its exclusive economic zone, but the UN also states that other countries have, among other rights, freedom to navigate through and fly over these zones<sup>12</sup>.

China’s expansion of power and how they project it are interesting topics which should be studied and monitored closely. As China’s economy is growing China needs to become more engaged in world politics to secure interests and access to natural resources. Robert D. Kaplan writes that the Chinese government wants stability in the countries it is engaged, and therefore do not care about or demand change in countries ruled by dictators. He claims that China is more likely than the western world to gain access to natural resources in certain African and Asian countries because China cares little about what type of regime they trade with<sup>13</sup>. Clifford Shelton shares this view with Kaplan and states that “China is obtaining access to African oil in large part by providing investment without political conditions”<sup>14</sup>. Even though the ruling of the military junta has resulted in ethnic tension in Burma, the Chinese government prefer the military junta to stay in power in Burma<sup>15</sup>. China does not want the

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<sup>11</sup> UN, “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea”, part 5, accessed: 10.03.11

<sup>12</sup> UN, “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea”, part 5, accessed: 10.03.11

<sup>13</sup> Kaplan, Robert D., 2010, “The Geography of Chinese Power, How Far Can Beijing Reach on Land and at Sea”, p. 24

<sup>14</sup> Shelton, Clifford, 2008, “The Energy Component of China’s Africa Strategy”, p. 186

<sup>15</sup> China, however, is not the only country which supports dictators to preserve regime stability and stability in certain regions. Before Husni Mubarak lost the power in Egypt, he controlled the justice system, the universities, the media, the military and the religious institutions. He also placed his closest supporters in important key positions. Mubarak and his regime were supported by the U.S. Several of the regimes in the Middle East have survived for a long time partly due to the support from the US and other western countries. The largest known deposits of oil and gas are found in the Middle East and several of the countries are strategically important to the West. The U.S. and the West are the regimes external protectors and in return the regimes controls and suppress



opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the last free, democratic election in Burma, to gain her rightful place as leader of a democratic Burma. Beijing fears she will be a natural ally of the U.S. and the West and “add to China’s own long-standing fears of strategic encirclement by the U.S. and its allies”<sup>16</sup>.

The countries bordering Burma and the Indian Ocean, feel threatened by China’s growing strategic interest in expansion into the Indian Ocean. Burma holds a strategically important geo-political, -economical and -military position in Southeast Asia and China wants to use Burma as a means to reach the Indian Ocean. It is vital to the Chinese economic growth that Chinese shipping is granted free passage through the different SLOCs.

This thesis will also discuss China’s naval expansion into the East China Sea, South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, the interaction with Japanese and ASEAN naval forces and the disputes over the natural resources in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. China’s need to assert its claims over this region, has grown as fast and steadily as the Chinese economy. In the Pacific Ocean, especially, China will encounter the U.S. Navy. The U.S. Navy has had decades defending the role of global super power, a role which China seeks to establish for itself. It will be interesting to see if China in the future can draw from U.S. experience in dealing with reluctant allies, or if China chooses to make its own political and diplomatic way and mistakes.

### *1.2 Chinas historical relationship with Burma*

South China and Burma have a long history of cultural and economical ties. Trade flourished across, what is today, the border area between the two countries. During the period of Chinese division from the Han to the Tang dynasty, today’s Yunnan province was influenced by the Burmese form of Buddhism, Hinayana Buddhism. The northern part of Burma was for a time part of the South Chinese kingdom of Nanzhao which was probably ruled by people of Tai origin. Nanzhao was one of the six small kingdoms which formed in the west and central parts

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Islamic extremist groups which have the will and the means to attack western targets. Selvik and Stenslie, 2007, pp. 86-87, 170-171.

<sup>16</sup> Selth, Andrew, *Burma’s China Connection and the Indian Ocean Region*, [http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/sdsc/wp/wp\\_sdsc\\_377.pdf](http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/sdsc/wp/wp_sdsc_377.pdf) published: 09.2003, accessed: 10.04.11, p. 8

of Yunnan. Nanzhao grew in power and conquered the five other neighbouring kingdoms. As a client state of the Tang dynasty, Nanzhao was allowed to rise and expand. However, in 751 (A.D.) Tang forces were sent against Nanzhao after their forces raided Chinese settlers in eastern Yunnan. Nanzhao won the battle and the An Lushan rebellion in Tang China prevented another Tang military intervention against Nanzhao. Although Nanzhao remained independent until the late Song period, it lost its Burmese areas in the 880s. According to J. A. G. Roberts the Burmese area was too difficult for the Nanzhao forces to defend, and the failure to conquer all of Sichuan led to a further weakening of the Nanzhao forces. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century Nanzhao was, together with most of Southeast Asia, conquered by the Mongols<sup>17</sup>. Other parts of Burma were ruled by the Pyu people who came to Burma in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Pyu established city kingdoms at Binnaka, Mongamo, Sri Ksetra and Halingyi, which became a part of a trade route between China and India<sup>18</sup>.

Through series of conquests the Mongols occupied the Chinese world and established the Yuan dynasty in 1272. The last remnant of Southern Song was not captured before they capitulated in 1279. North China is quite flat and was easily conquered by mounted cavalry. South China and mainland Southeast Asia, however, is mountainous and more difficult to navigate with large troops on horses. The Song naval power was also a formidable adversary. The Mongols conquered Korea, the Pagan dynasty of Burma and most Southeast Asian countries, then turned west and defeated the Muslim world. During the Yuan dynasty there was much cultural exchange across old borders as travellers could move safely between the different areas and regions under Mongol rule<sup>19</sup>. The Burmese Pagan (Bagan) dynasty was established by 849. The kingdom developed around the city of Pagan and grew steadily in power and size. King Anawrahta managed to unify all the areas which present-day Burma consists of by defeating the Mon city of Thaton in 1057. The Pagan king Narathihapate (reigned 1254-87) advanced into Yunnan in 1277 to attack the advancing Mongol forces. The Pagan forces were defeated at the Battle of Ngasaunggyan and after that the Pagan resistance

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<sup>17</sup> Roberts, J. A. G., *A History of China, Prehistory to c. 1800*, 1996, pp. 110-111

<sup>18</sup> "Periodical history of Myanmar", [www.myanmars.net/myanmar-history/myanmar-periodical-history.htm](http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-history/myanmar-periodical-history.htm) accessed: 22.04.11

<sup>19</sup> Roberts, *A History of China, Prehistory to c. 1800*, pp. 163-175

collapsed<sup>20</sup>. King Narathihapate felt that his kingdom and leadership were strong enough to go against the Mongols, but the Pagans had not managed to unite all the different ethnic groups in their territory. Without the sense of unity the Pagan defence disintegrated quickly before the superior Mongol forces<sup>21</sup>. All of present-day Burma was united again under the Konbaung dynasty. King Alaungpaya regained control over Manipur in 1759 and established his capital at Rangoon. His son, king Hsinbyushin (Sinbyushin, Sinpyushin), continued the expansion of the kingdom and conquered Ayutthaya, parts of Siam, the Shan states, Laos and Chiang Mai (the capital of the kingdom of Lan Na). This expansion and unrest at the southern border worried the Manchu Qing dynasty in China. Between 1766 and 1769 the Qing emperor Qianlong sent four expeditions to Burma to conquer the state, but all four were successfully defeated by the Konbaung forces. In 1769 a treaty that opened for official trade and diplomatic relations was signed by Burma and China<sup>22</sup>.

According to John K. Fairbank, all of the small states in East Asia developed inside an area heavily influenced by Chinese culture, making China the natural centre of East Asia. China was “all-under-Heaven” and the Chinese emperor was “son of Heaven”. Cultures and people outside of China were categorized after how similar they were to China, but none were considered as important and civilized as “all-under-Heaven”<sup>23</sup>. Being the natural centre of East Asia, it was considered natural to receive tributes from lesser states and people. In 1818 the Qing emperor expected to receive tributes from Siam once in three years, while Laos and Burma had to pay tributes once in ten years<sup>24</sup>. However, Burma’s successful defence against the Qing forces ensured that Burma stayed independent and that the tributes were only formalities.

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<sup>20</sup> Myanmar Net, “Periodical history of Myanmar”, [www.myanmars.net/myanmar-history/myanmar-periodical-history.htm](http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-history/myanmar-periodical-history.htm) accessed: 22.04.11

<sup>21</sup> Global Security, “Myanmar”, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/myanmar/intro.htm> , accessed: 01.04.11

<sup>22</sup> Myanmar Net, “King Sinphyushin”, [www.myanmars.net/myanmar-history/king-sinphyushin.htm](http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-history/king-sinphyushin.htm) accessed: 22.04.11

<sup>23</sup> Fairbank, John K., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*, 1968, pp. 1-2

<sup>24</sup> Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, p. 11

### *1.3 Guomindang and the early Burmese state*

As Melvin Gurtov writes, Burma's long border with China and the historical relationship between the two countries have lead Rangoon to develop China-oriented politics. Burma has since the independence from Great Britain in January 1948 known the possibility of Chinese interference in political and military matters<sup>25</sup>. Burma had friendly relations with the Nationalist regime in Nanking. The Nationalists had supported Burma's entry into the United Nations<sup>26</sup>. However, when the Chinese Communists defeated the Guomindang and large parts of the Nationalist forces fled to Taiwan or crossed the border into northern Burma in the period 1949-1950, Burma did not help these forces. These Guomindang Chinese settled in the Shan States of northern Burma where they organized and ran several drug operations<sup>27</sup>. The Burmese government was worried that Communist China might invade Burma to remove the threat that the Guomindang soldiers presented to the Yunnan province.

### *1.4 Burma and Communist China*

Marxism started to influence the Burmese nationalists in the 1930s at the time the anti-colonial view in Burma started to gain more support. However, the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) did not manage to gain power in Burma and the first independent government of Burma did not develop close relations with Communist China even though it was the first Asian government to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949<sup>28</sup>. When the Government of the Union of Burma (GUB) developed the state's foreign policy in 1948, the first plan was to have close relationship with both the Western and the Eastern bloc. Burma's policy of establishing friendly relations with all countries was to signal that "Burma would reject any foreign aid that might compromise her military, political, or economic

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<sup>25</sup> Gurtov, Melvin, *China and Southeast Asia- The Politics of Survival. A Study of Foreign Policy Interaction*, 1975, p. 83

<sup>26</sup> Gurtov, *China and Southeast Asia- The Politics of Survival*, p. 89

<sup>27</sup> Seekins, Donald M., *The Geopolitics and Economics of Burma's Military Regime, 1962-2007. Understanding SPDC Tyranny*, <http://japanfocus.org/products/topdf/2573>, 2007, accessed 12.11.07, p. 7

<sup>28</sup> Gurtov, *China and Southeast Asia- The Politics of Survival*, pp. 83, 85, 90

independence”<sup>29</sup>. However, the Western bloc were little enthusiastic about an ally with ties to both sides and when the Communists took over the power in China, Burma settled for being politically neutral.

Like modern Burma’s first leader, U Nu, the military regime led by General Ne Win did not adopt friendly relations with either China or India. China openly supported the BCP which opposed the military government, and both India and China supported several ethnic groups who rebelled against the military regime. However, China quickly offered support to the military group, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), when they took power in Burma in 1988, following the brutal suppression of demonstrations against military rule<sup>30</sup>. The border area between Burma and China is home to some of the major ethnic armed groups which oppose the military rule in Burma. These groups include the United Wa State Army (UWSA), Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA). The Burmese military junta has tried to make these groups agree to become border guards, but have not been able to do so. In August 2009 the military junta attacked the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance (the Kokang Group). The Kokang Groups are ethnic Chinese and over 20 000 fled into China<sup>31</sup>.

## 2. Method and theory

The method of this thesis will be analysis of foreign affairs embedded in a historical context.

Kenneth N. Waltz wrote that “Countries that are dependent on others in important respects work to limit or lessen their dependence if they can reasonably hope to do so”<sup>32</sup>. Being dependent on other countries may challenge the security of the state. Economic failure or threats to the security of one country will inevitably affect countries which are closely linked through trade and defence to that particular state. Waltz states that “How much a country will

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<sup>29</sup> Gurtov, *China and Southeast Asia- The Politics of Survival*, pp. 87-88

<sup>30</sup> Tellis, Ashley, “China and India in Asia”, 2004, p. 151

<sup>31</sup> Kuppaswamy, C.S., “*Sino-Myanmar Relations and its impact on the Region*”, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers44/paper4357.html> published: 02.03.11, accessed: 10.05.11

<sup>32</sup> Waltz, Kenneth N., *Theory of International Politics*, 1979, pp 154-155

suffer depends roughly on how much of its business is done abroad”<sup>33</sup>. However, some states have no other choice than to be dependent on other states for survival and other states want to play major parts in the global economy. These states have to do most, or a large part, of their business abroad while trying not to become too dependent on others. To lessen the threats, states who are strong enough will work to gain as much control as they can over their international relations. Growing economy means growing demand for energy supplies and very few states are capable of being independent when it comes to energy supply. This, Waltz argues, is something only the strongest and most capable industrial states may think of becoming<sup>34</sup>. China is one of the countries whose industrial and economic growths are dependent on foreign energy supplies.

Kenneth N. Waltz’s branch thought in the school of realism has been analysed by Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhuang as “defensive realism (which) should be classified as structural realism<sup>35</sup>, as both emphasize the international system and its structural restrictions on the behaviour of states”<sup>36</sup>. According to Waltz, the international structure limits the way states develop their behaviour. This structure causes states with similar levels of power to develop the same way and to behave in the same manner in politics and foreign relations. Liu and Zhang write that there are few examples where the international structure can be used and manipulated so that a state can develop a unique foreign policy or foreign behaviour<sup>37</sup>. According to this theory rising powers will project power and behave in much the same way. Comparing the earlier development of other great powers, like Britain and the United States, to that of China today there can be found similarities in the behaviour of the states. Projecting power far away from its own borders to raise the state’s level of political and economical security is one of the most obvious similarities. The projection of power also serves to protect SLOCs. Britain was dependent on goods shipped from the colonies to secure the economical

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<sup>33</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 154

<sup>34</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 155

<sup>35</sup> Realism as a school of thought can be divided into several strands and branches, however, these strands and branches still share several similarities which can make the differences between them hard to define.

<sup>36</sup> Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhuang, *The Typologies of Realism*, <http://cjip.oxfordjournals.org/content/1/1/109.full> 2006, accessed: 09.03.11, p.5

<sup>37</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 5

growth, the U.S. is dependent on steady oil supplies to its industries like China has recently become.

According to Liu and Zhang, one of the most known branches in realism is the distinction between offensive and defensive realism<sup>38</sup>. This fraction is based on how and why states use power. Some scholars argue that states use power to secure their own existence. These scholars are called defensive realists and claim that “power is a tool for achieving a goal, not a goal in itself”<sup>39</sup>. Others argue that states use power to gain more power, these are called offensive realists<sup>40</sup>. According to the defensive realists China’s power projection, military modernization and expansion of influence are only means to secure the survival of the Chinese state. The offensive realists, however, sees this as a means to gain more power in the region and the world. By asserting its power and military might China may gain power over its neighbours, and as its control over East and Southeast Asia grows China can spread its influence to larger parts of the world. Even though Liu and Zhang classify Waltz as a defensive realist, Waltz claims that “realism is not offensive or defensive - all states use numerous means to preserve their existence. The use of an offensive or a defensive strategy is always determined by the specific context”. Waltz acknowledges that states will use power to expand their power when they can<sup>41</sup>.

By understanding the context of the Chinese economical development and security concerns one can more easily grasp some of Chinas underlying principles and concerns in connection with Chinese projection of power and military modernization. Robert D. Kaplan writes about how China wants to have access to secure ports throughout the Indian Ocean. China’s growing demand for energy and natural resources has led to growing trade with African and Middle Eastern countries. Roads and energy pipelines through Burma would make the transport of oil and minerals traded from Africa shorter, easier, and safer. This route would also make sure that the Chinese merchant fleet can avoid going through the Straits of

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<sup>38</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 6

<sup>39</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 6

<sup>40</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 6

<sup>41</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 7

Malacca. Burma is also rich in natural resources, and India and China are competing for, among other things, access to Burma's gas fields in the Indian Ocean<sup>42</sup>.

The U.S. has been the only super power in the world since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, China is rapidly gaining power in the East and Southeast Asian regions, and India is also having great influence in the development of those regions. Between the three economic giants; the U.S., China, and India, Asia has become a multipolar region. According to Kenneth N. Waltz is a multipolar system of three powers unstable and easy to change back to a bipolar system. Two of the powers will most likely ally against the third and reduce its power. He also claims that a multipolar system of four powers will be more stable<sup>43</sup>. As the economic relations within ASEAN grow stronger, ASEAN will also gain more power in the region and possibly become the fourth power in Asia. In a system of three, the U.S. and India are most likely to ally against China.

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<sup>42</sup> Kaplan, Robert D., "The Geography of Chinese Power, How Far Can Beijing Reach on Land and at Sea", 2010, p. 24

<sup>43</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 163



### 3. Challenges to the strategic situation in Southeast Asia

Most of China's border disputes with Central Asian republics and with Russia from the Cold War have now been settled. On 12 January 2011 the parliament in Tajikistan formally voted to cede over 386 square miles of land to China, the largest investor in Tajikistan. The details of the treaty are not known, but according to China this settlement "thoroughly resolved the border dispute". Not much is known about the land which was ceded to China, but it is located in the Pamir mountain range. The Pamir mountain range forms part of the border between Tajikistan and China and Afghanistan<sup>44</sup>. With most military threats on land settled, China can now use more resources on building a stronger navy. Even though China has a long shoreline to the east, it has traditionally been a continental power with limited or almost non-existent naval power. Today, however, China has the largest naval force in Asia. In addition to modern warships and submarines, China has a large number of landing crafts which can be used for ship-to-shore operations. China has also a large civilian fleet of fishing boats and cargo vessels which can be used as supportive troop transport to the naval amphibious fleet<sup>45</sup>.

#### *3.1.1 The development of Chinese naval power.*

Going back to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) we find that China has earlier been active in the Indian Ocean. The early Ming emperors wanted to restore China to the glory of Han and Tang dynasties and the tribute system which confirmed China's role as rightful ruler of East Asia. The third emperor of the Ming dynasty, Chengzu, sent emissaries and explorers further out than earlier emperors to find new tribute states. Between the years 1405 and 1433 the Ming emperor sent out several Chinese flotillas, the first was made up of 27 000 men, 62 large ships and 225 smaller ships. Some of the expeditions went to India, others as far as the Persian Gulf and the east coast of Africa. The most famous of these expeditions were commanded by the eunuch official Zheng He. The plans to enrol these foreign places into the tribute system were given up by later emperors when they were convinced by court officials that they were not

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<sup>44</sup> BBC. "Tajikistan cedes land to China", <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12180567> 2011, accessed: 13.01.11

<sup>45</sup>Global Security. "People's Liberation Navy- History", <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/plan-history.htm> accessed: 27.03.11

cost-efficient<sup>46</sup>. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, however, Ming dynasty China went from being an outward turned country with great maritime expeditions to have a more continental turned view. Ming China kept a large part of its commercial fleet, but the interest in trade diminished as China was self sufficient. Several laws regulating the size and the use of the ships were imposed. Among these laws was one that made it illegal to build ships with more than two masts, other laws called for imprisonment of people conducting overseas trade<sup>47</sup>.

## The Cold War

When the Communists won the civil war in China, the capitalistic United States became a political and ideological opponent and was seen as a threat to China. Originally, Roosevelt wanted China to take over the leading role in East Asia from Japan after the Second World War<sup>48</sup>. Beijing made the natural choice at the time and turned to Soviet for protection against the US threat. Already in 1949, Mao suspected that the U.S. would send armed forces against China. The Communist party were told by him that the U.S. would likely send forces to coastal cities in China to occupy them and fight the Chinese forces there. Mao was also convinced that there were other areas that the U.S. was likely to send its forces to attack China. During the 1950s and the 1960s, the Chinese Communist Party thought it most likely to be in the areas of the Korean peninsula, the Taiwan Strait and in Indochina that the Chinese and the U.S. armed forces would face each other<sup>49</sup>. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and the Soviet Navy cooperated closely in the first decade after the Chinese revolution. Soviet sent naval advisers and instructors to China to help establish and develop a modern Chinese Navy. Soviet also sent modern ships to replace the fleet which the communists acquired from the Guomindang Navy<sup>50</sup>. In 1958, the Soviet Minister of Defence, Radion I. Malinovskii, suggested to Mao that Soviet and China should build a powerful long-wave radio station together where money and technology would be provided by the Soviet

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<sup>46</sup> Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 2003, p. 209

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, Andrew R., "The Maritime transformation of Ming China" 2009, p. 239

<sup>48</sup> Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, p. 285

<sup>49</sup> Shu Guang Zhang, "China's strategic culture and the Cold War confrontations", 2001, p. 264

<sup>50</sup> Global Security. "People's Liberation Navy- History", accessed: 27.03.11

Union. This radio station would link the Chinese Navy and the Soviet Navy, uniting the two nations in the defence of the Far East. Together the two nations would be more than capable of deterring and hindering the U.S. as the growing superpower in the Pacific Ocean. The Soviet Union also suggested that the two navies should be joined to establish one Far East Navy<sup>51</sup>. Mao, however, was reluctant to establish a closer relationship with the Soviet Union. He believed that the Soviet Union sought to dominate and control the relationship and that China would be used in the defence system as the Soviet Union saw fit. Mao wanted China to rise and become a great world power in its own right and not to be dependent on the Soviet Union. The deepening distrust, border disputes and Nikita Khrushchev's negative reaction to the Chinese bombing of the Jinmen and Mazu Islands in 1958, led to tension between China and Soviet at the end of the decade and the final Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s<sup>52</sup>. The tension escalated into clashes between Soviet and Chinese armed forces at the Amur River in 1969.

The Jinmen and Mazu Islands came under Nationalist Chinese control when they escaped from the Communists in mainland China to Taiwan. Some of the Jinmen Islands are no further than 24 km from the Chinese mainland and were periodically shelled by Chinese artillery. In 1958 the heavy bombardment of the islands and the demand from Communist China that the Nationalists on Taiwan should surrender led to international interest in the conflict. The U.S. sent the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet to the Taiwan Strait to monitor and control the situation<sup>53</sup>. According to Shu Guang Zhang the bombardment was never meant to be a start of an invasion of Taiwan, but it was a show of strength. Shu writes that "by initiating limited and well controlled crises, Beijing expected to clearly demonstrate China's resolve to counter international pressure" and that China would fight U.S. influence in the region and the Taiwan Strait<sup>54</sup>. After the Korean War China needed to show the international community that the Chinese were ready and capable to defend themselves. Mao and the Communist party were afraid the Korean War was a prelude to a U.S. led invasion of China. In 1960 the Soviet

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<sup>51</sup> Shu, "China's strategic culture and the Cold War confrontations", pp. 264-265

<sup>52</sup> Shu, "China's strategic culture and the Cold War confrontations", p. 265

<sup>53</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online "Quemoy Island",  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/486995/Quemoy-Island> accessed: 20.03.11

<sup>54</sup> Shu, "China's strategic culture and the Cold War confrontations", p. 268

withdrew all its advisors from China and stopped sending supplies and new technology<sup>55</sup>. This was a major turning point for PLAN. 1960 marked the moment when the Chinese started their own development of a modern navy instead of receiving and copying Soviet ships and technology.

Early in the Cold War the Chinese Navy did not extend its operations and mobility far from its mainland coast. Using parts of the Soviet Naval doctrine, the Chinese naval defence strategy consisted of keeping a large number of coastal submarines, torpedo boats and other vessels capable of “brown-water” operations close to its shores. These vessels were supported by land based aircrafts. The doctrine of large number of vessels kept in close, passive defence has been called a “wall-at-sea”<sup>56</sup>. The sheer number of vessels was supposed to deter and hinder any naval attack. The CCP relied on a doctrine of superiority through numbers. The revolutionary movement adopted the slogan “People’s War” early in the civil war and kept focus on this through the Cold War. Human power was seen as the main asset to defeat any invader. The Chinese defence strategy developed according to Mao’s principles; the People’s Liberation Army was to let invaders conquer several coastal cities for so to be “lured in deep”<sup>57</sup>, lured into unfamiliar territory, where they would be defeated by the much larger, but technologically weaker, Chinese army. During the 1970s the foreign policy changed and a new doctrine was formed. Technology was given a larger part in the new defence program: “People’s war under modern conditions”. However, human power was still seen as the winning factor and even though PLAN wanted modernizations the armed forces strategy was to “rely on active defence on the home territory”<sup>58</sup>. PLAN eventually gained support for its modernization plans. During the 1980s PLAN developed some green-water capabilities and higher standard in education of personnel and technical equipment<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> Global Security. “People’s Liberation Navy- History”, accessed: 27.03.11

<sup>56</sup> Zubir, Mokhzani and Basiron, Mohd Nizam, *The Straits of Malacca: the Rise of China, America’s Intentions and the Dilemma of the Littoral States*.  
<http://www.southchinasea.org/docs/Zubir%20and%20Basiron.%20Malacca.%20America.%20and%20China-MIMA%20Online.pdf> 2005, p. 1

<sup>57</sup> Shu, “China’s strategic culture and the Cold War confrontations”, pp. 269-270

<sup>58</sup> Shu, “China’s strategic culture and the Cold War confrontations”, pp.269-270

<sup>59</sup> Global Security. “People’s Liberation Navy- History”, accessed: 27.03.11

## 1990-2011 –Modernization and rearmament

Through the period of 1990-2011 China shifted to a more aggressive navalism. The geopolitical changes in East Asia after the Cold War enabled the Chinese government to shift focus to the sea. The Chinese government has poured resources into increasing and modernizing China's maritime capabilities. In 2007 the official Chinese defence budget was 350 billion yuan (U.S. \$45 billion), almost 18 per cent more than the Chinese defence budget of 2006<sup>60</sup>. According to Ronald O'Rourke, specialist in Naval Affairs, some observers of Chinese naval affairs believe that one incident which directly resulted in acceleration of the Chinese modernization was when the U.S. sent two aircraft carrier strike groups to Taiwan after China tested missiles close to Taiwan in 1996<sup>61</sup>.

China needs a more skilled navy to claim and dominate its ideal sphere of influence. While China develops its naval capabilities, the world watches and speculates at the outcome. When Kenneth N. Waltz wrote about the amount of GNP countries were spending on military modernization in 1979, he also commented that

*“Some have worried that the People's Republic of China may follow such a path, that it may mobilize the nation in order to increase production rapidly while simultaneously acquiring a large and modern military capability. It is doubtful that she can do either, and surely not both, and surely not the second without the first. As a future superpower, the People's Republic of China is dimly discernible on a horizon too distant to make speculation worthwhile”*<sup>62</sup>.

A report from 2000 stated that “China may take a more active military role in its region, but the overall balance of power in East Asia will remain unchallenged”. The report also stated that it would take “a significant amount of time” for China to be able to develop and integrate new weapons systems<sup>63</sup>. In 2001 Greg Austin and Stuart Harris wrote that most members of

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<sup>60</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, p. 5

<sup>61</sup> O'Rourke, Ronald, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities- Background and Issues for Congress*, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf> 2011, accessed: 24.03.11, p. 3

<sup>62</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 180

<sup>63</sup> Moore, Frank W., *China's Military Capabilities*, <http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/iddschina.html> 2000, p. 10

the Japanese government believed that it would take several years, “possibly decades, before China has an effective blue-water naval capability about which Japan needs to be concerned”<sup>64</sup>. Nine years later, in June 2010, the Chairman of the U.S. Joints Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, stated that “I have moved from being curious to being genuinely concerned” when he described his view on the development of the Chinese military programs<sup>65</sup>. China’s naval modernization program involves all parts of the navy, from weapon acquisition programs, missiles and mines to different kinds of ships, naval doctrine and logistics. There is also focus on changing the education of the personnel and how they train. Of special concern to the U.S. Navy, is the belief of the U.S. Department of Defense that China is developing and testing anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM). With the additional development of proper maritime surveillance and targeting systems, China would be able to attack U.S. Navy ships or U.S. allies operating in the Western Pacific<sup>66</sup>. The speed in which China has managed to organize and start the modernization of its armed forces has surprised not only its neighbouring countries, but also countries with modern and powerful armed forces.

With no immediate threats from neighbouring countries, China has in reality no direct need for the enormous military machine it has built up and continues to expand. Neither has China a direct use of most of its growing navy in brown and green water (rivers and coastal-water) defensive matters. The smaller ships are useful in countering smuggling and terrorist threats close to shore, but the aircraft carriers and most of the submarines are designed and developed for blue water operations. This is a clear indication on China’s plans of asserting their claimed rights overseas and to be able to protect the Chinese merchant fleet along the Chinese SLOCs.

From 2001 to 2005 China invested in one of the largest military modernizations in the world. The modernization included 23 new amphibious assault ships. The amphibious assault ships are designed to carry tanks, armoured vehicles and troops. These domestically-produced ships are capable of crossing the Taiwan Strait<sup>67</sup>. PLAN has also put great effort into building a

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<sup>64</sup> Austin, Greg and Harris, Stuart, *Japan and Greater China. Political Economy and Military Power in the Asian Century*, 2001, p. 118

<sup>65</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 1

<sup>66</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, pp. 3, 7

<sup>67</sup> Global Security. “Warship Modernization”, accessed: 27.03.11

significant submarine force. PLAN has acquired 12 Russian-made Kilo-class non-nuclear-powered attack submarines since the mid-1990s and built four new classes of Chinese submarines. The U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence stated in 2009 that “since the mid-1990s, the PRC has emphasized the submarine force as one of the primary thrusts of its military modernization effort”<sup>68</sup>. In 1998 China bought an unfinished aircraft carrier from Ukraine. It is believed that the ship will be completed to enter service as an aviation training ship or for operational missions in 2011 or 2012. China may also have started the construction of its first indigenous aircraft carrier and may build a total of six indigenous carriers in the next 10-15 years<sup>69</sup>. As Taiwan is within reach of land-based Chinese aircrafts, observers believe that the aircraft carriers are build primarily for power-projection operations against smaller naval forces<sup>70</sup>. Since the early 1990s China has developed and deployed five new classes of indigenous built destroyers and four new classes of frigates, also indigenous developed and built. The aim is to produce surface combatants with advanced anti-air warfare capabilities, which has “historically been a weakness of the (Chinese) fleet”<sup>71</sup>. China has also developed types of amphibious ships with a hull with clean, sloped sides which are anticipated to decrease the ship’s visibility to radar in conflict scenarios. Amphibious ships can also be used in disaster relief operations, maritime security operations and evacuations<sup>72</sup>.

#### PLAN’s limits and weaknesses

Even if China has a large navy, it does not mean China knows, yet, how to employ and operate it to maximum effect. High numbers in ships statistics does not give an indication on how China operates its fleet. Even though the Chinese Navy started to change its doctrine more than 20 years ago it has not had an opportunity to test the execution of that doctrine. China showed after the earthquake in Sichuan in 2008 and during the recent ethnic unrest in

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<sup>68</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 16

<sup>69</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 24

<sup>70</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 28

<sup>71</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, pp. 29-32

<sup>72</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, pp. 35-36

Tibet and Xinjiang that the People's Liberation Army<sup>73</sup> is capable of moving large troops fast and a long way to respond to trouble<sup>74</sup>. However, as Kaplan refers to Abraham Denmark, this only shows that PLA is highly capable of moving personnel; it does not show whether China is capable of moving heavy machinery or maintaining supply lines which is crucial during military deployment<sup>75</sup>. In such an event China must also be able to defend its personnel from counter attacks and even though China has the largest army and navy in the region it does not mean that China employs the superior strategy. A country with a smaller army and navy, but with better strategy and which has had time to develop and test its military and naval doctrine may well be able to withstand a possible Chinese attack.

### Future plans of PLAN

China is determined to maintain its access to regional and worldwide shipping lanes and to be able to support its claims of sovereignty in the East and South China Sea. The U.S. Department of Defense also believe that the Chinese naval modernization is a part of a military strategy to solve the situation with Taiwan<sup>76</sup>.

PLAN has to develop and modernize enough to be able to protect Chinese ships against submarine attacks, not only oil and gas tankers but also transport, fishing and trade ships. A PLAN goal would be to be able to control the maritime traffic in Chinese coastal waters and the areas China claim as territorial waters. Enhancing the combat capability of PLAN's fleet of submarines will most likely be a priority. Submarines would be the main focus for developing a competent defence and attack force, especially against possible blockades of SLOCs. The presence of PLAN in the South China Sea might be a security for the Chinese SLOC through the Straits of Malacca, but it will also encourage further modernization and rearmament of the Southeast Asian navies, with the possibility of creating an arms race in the region.

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<sup>73</sup> The People's Liberation Army is the largest army in the world with 1.6 million soldiers. Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power", p. 32

<sup>74</sup> Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power", p. 32

<sup>75</sup> Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power", p. 32

<sup>76</sup> O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 4



The total amount of PLAN ships will most likely go down (see appendix) but the new ships will have greater technological strength and improved operational effectiveness. PLAN is also mostly commissioning indigenous build ships, limiting the dependency on foreign technology.

### *3.1.2 Why China needs Burma*

China has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In the late 1970s China slowly started to change from centrally planned economy to the market-oriented economy that today makes China one of the major forces in the global economy. Some of the greatest changes came in the years before 2001, when China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). To be able to compete with other member countries on the global market, China's agricultural economy had to go through several reforms<sup>77</sup>. In 2010 China became the world's largest exporter of goods<sup>78</sup>. According to Goldman Sachs, the Chinese economy will surpass the U.S. economy by 2027 if the current economic growth continues<sup>79</sup>. To be able to maintain this growth, China is dependent on reliable sources of energy. In 2008 China was the second largest producer of electricity in the world, 3.451 trillion kWh (estimated), surpassed only by the United States, 3.873 trillion kWh (estimated). Much of this energy is produced by China's own coal mining. China has low oil or natural gas reserves, but the Chinese coal reserves are estimated to last for another 100-200 years. Coal is the cheapest and easiest resource for covering most of the demands for energy from the fast-growing Chinese industry<sup>80</sup>. However, not all energy demands can be covered by coal, the severe pollution caused by coal mining has been recognised by the Chinese government, and China is becoming more and more dependent on oil. In 2009 it was estimated that China produced

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<sup>77</sup> Saich, Tony, *Governance and Politics of China*, 2004, p. 17

<sup>78</sup> CIA. "China", <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html> accessed: 12.02.11

<sup>79</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr. states that this will concern the total economy. The Chinese countryside will still be underdeveloped in comparison to the U.S. countryside. Nye, Jr., also states that 2027/2030 is the period when the demographic problems from the one-child policy will really come to light. This, Nye concludes, means that the Chinese economy will likely pass the U.S. economy in total size, but it will not be equal. Nye, Jr., Joseph S. 2010, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Cann, Cynthia W., Michael C. Cann & Gao Shangquan, "China's road to Sustainable Development", 2005, p. 8

3.991 million bbl/day (barrels a day), the world's fifth highest oil producer. In 2008 it was estimated that China used 8.2 million bbl/day and exported 388 000 bbl/day. To cover the demand for oil in 2008, China had to import 4.393 million bbl/day<sup>81</sup>. Outside interference in the import of oil will have severe consequences for the Chinese industry and economy. The outward drive for access to natural resources is going to increase and thus the problems and security dilemmas connected to the SLOCs will have greater impact on Chinese foreign policy.

While the U.S. and other Western countries import oil from the Middle East and other oil-countries supported by the West, China has developed relationships with oil-countries like Sudan, Iran, and Burma; countries which have been "isolated by Washington"<sup>82</sup>. The oil from Africa and Iran is shipped along the SLOC through the Straits of Malacca.

### *The Straits of Malacca*

The Straits of Malacca is the most trafficked sea route in Asia and one of the most important SLOCs in the world. Over 60 000 vessels, almost half the world's operative fleet, go through the straits every year<sup>83</sup>. Situated between Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, it is the shortest sea route to transport supplies and goods between Africa, The Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean and the Asian markets.

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<sup>81</sup> CIA, "China", accessed: 12.02.11

<sup>82</sup> Blumenthal, Dan, "Concerns with Respect to China's Energy Policy", 2008, p. 423

<sup>83</sup> EIA, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=WOTC>, accessed 09.02.11



Figure 1: The Strait of Malacca and the littoral states

It is possible for goods and supplies to be shipped through other Indonesian straits, but these are longer routes and will cost more time and money, slowing down the supply lines. In case of a blockade of the Straits of Malacca, tankers may reroute through the Lombok Strait. This route would take the tankers almost 3.5 days more of sailing. A larger blockade of the whole region would require the tankers to go around Australia which would take 16 days more of sailing. These routes will also increase the expenses of shipping<sup>84</sup>. At the narrowest point, between Sumatra and Singapore, the Straits of Malacca is no wider than 3 km, and has only a depth of 25 metres at the shallowest point. The heavy traffic in the narrow channel creates dangers of groundings, collisions and oil spills. Another danger is the threat of piracy. Due to the low speed tankers and other merchant vessels must keep through the Phillips Channel of the Straits of Malacca, pirate vessels have many opportunities to attack and hijack them as they navigate through the bottleneck<sup>85</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> Collins, Gabriel B. and William S. Murray, “Chinese Naval Analysts Consider the Energy Question”, 2008, p. 395

<sup>85</sup> EIA, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=WOTC> accessed 09.02.11

The security in the Straits of Malacca was further questioned when videos showing Malaysian police patrols in the Straits were found at terrorist groups belonging to the Al-Qaeda network. The importance of the Malacca Straits makes it extremely vulnerable to terrorist attacks. In 2004 there were suggestions that the U.S. Navy could help patrol the Straits to deter terrorists, showing that also the U.S. has strategic interest in the channel. Malaysia and Indonesia opposed the idea of a unit of U.S. Marines based in and patrolling the straits, stating that the littoral states were capable of organizing and performing the operations necessary for maintaining the security in the straits themselves. Singapore, however, is a close ally of the U.S. and was the country which proposed the idea at the International Conference on Asia<sup>86</sup>.

China is highly dependent on the security in the Malacca Straits. However, when the U.S. Navy suggested a joint task force to protect the Straits from terrorists and pirates, China was one of the countries which had negative responses to the U.S. The U.S. Navy is one of the greatest sea powers in the world today, and is theoretically capable of blocking China's access to the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca and strong enough to enforce the blockade if China decides to test the barriers. PLAN is not yet strong enough nor has the skills necessary to protect China's interests in those waterways. The U.S. Navy has previously executed three naval blockades in Asia, against Japan, Korea and Vietnam, and will have the advantage over China which has not had the experience with modern-warfare blockades<sup>87</sup>. The potential threat a more permanent U.S. Navy in the South China Sea poses to the free flow of commerce to China is more alarming to the Chinese government than the threat of terrorism and piracy in the Straits of Malacca, even though Chinese naval writings stated that in 2001 alone there were over 600 piracy incidents in the Straits of Malacca<sup>88</sup>.

In August 2005 the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore met in Batam, Indonesia. The three states came to an agreement called "The Batam Joint Ministerial Statement", which reaffirms the sovereignty and the sovereign rights the littoral states have in the Straits. The Statement also states that the security and the protection of the Straits are the

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<sup>86</sup> Kuppuswamy, C.S., 2004, "*Straits of Malacca: Security Implications*", <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers11%5Cpaper1033.html> accessed: 01.02.11

<sup>87</sup> Elleman, Bruce, "A Comparative Historical Approach to Blockade Strategies", 2008, p. 281

<sup>88</sup> Collins, Gabriel B., Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, "No Oil for the Lamps of China?", 2008, p. 310

prime responsibility of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, but the three states also recognises and acknowledges the interests of other states in the Straits. The littoral states also stated that the use of the Straits must be according to international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea<sup>89</sup>.

In September 2007 the Cooperative Mechanism for the Straits of Malacca and the Singapore Straits was launched by the littoral states with the support of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The Cooperative Mechanism was established to secure the further cooperation between the littoral states and other users of the Straits regarding the overall security in the Straits, safety of navigation and environmental protection<sup>90</sup>. The littoral states and IMO also started an “Aids to Navigation Found” (the Found) with specific projects connected to the Straits of Malacca. The different projects were designed to increase security in the Straits and to help protect the environment. States which use the Straits contribute to the Found. The projects include setting up tide, current and wind measurement systems, cooperation and capacity building in relation to the OPRC-HNS Protocol<sup>91</sup>, and replacement of aids to navigation damaged in the 2004 tsunami. Several countries have donated money to the Found, to specific projects or to the Found in general. Among the donators are Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Greece and China. The U.S. and Australia are also interested in contributing to specific projects. Beijing has stated that China will found the replacement of all aids to navigation damaged in 2004<sup>92</sup>. By being a major stakeholder in the Straits, China has made sure it will be more difficult for the littoral states to justify a peacetime blockade against China in the Straits. The major Chinese involvement in co-development projects in the Straits also ensures China greater influence on politics in the littoral states. The willingness to cooperate and participate in the projects helps to establish an

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<sup>89</sup> Beckman, Robert, “Maritime security and the cooperative mechanism for the Straits of Malacca and Singapore” 2010, p. 115

<sup>90</sup> Beckman, “Maritime security and the cooperative mechanism for the Straits of Malacca and Singapore”, pp. 114-115

<sup>91</sup> Protocol on Preparedness, Response and Co-operation to Pollution Incidents by Hazardous and Noxious Substances, 2000.

<sup>92</sup> Beckman, “Maritime security and the cooperative mechanism for the Straits of Malacca and Singapore”, pp. 115-118

image of stability and peace for China and further enhance China's diplomatic relations in the region.

Due to its situation at the southern end of the Malacca Straits, Singapore is one of the busiest and most important ports in the world. Singapore fears the Chinese expansion of power and has tried to take precautions against Chinese influence. Singapore has a military training program with Taiwan and has a close friendship with the U.S. The government of Singapore wants the presence of both U.S. military and U.S. diplomats in the region<sup>93</sup>. The U.S. Navy's western logistics base is situated in Singapore and Singapore has built a pier for U.S. carriers at Changi Naval Base<sup>94</sup>. The U.S. can by presence in Singapore alone control the Straits of Malacca. Disregarding the wishes of Indonesia and Malaysia, U.S. Navy ships based in Singapore can maintain security and control of the narrowest point of the Straits. This situation is highly unwanted by Indonesia and Malaysia, who wish to project power and independence, and China, who fears that the U.S. Navy will block the Straits of Malacca for Chinese ships and threaten this Chinese SLOC. China is trying to find other ways to transport goods and oil to China. One of the suggestions has been to modernize the infrastructure in and to build pipelines through Burma. This route would enable China to avoid the Straits of Malacca. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) started in June 2010 the construction of a dual oil and gas pipeline from the Burmese west coast to the Yunnan Province. China is also developing a deep sea port at Kyauk Phyu from where China will channel the oil and gas to Yunnan<sup>95</sup>.

### *3.2 Does Burma need China?*

Burma's location at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca and its coastline towards Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea makes Burma one of the most strategically important countries in Southeast Asia. As a country of several different ethnic groups, Burma has gone through a turbulent time marked by domestic ethnic tension since the independence from Great Britain.

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<sup>93</sup> Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power", pp. 30-31

<sup>94</sup> Garofano, John, "China, the South China Sea, and the U.S. Strategy", 2008, p. 289

<sup>95</sup> Kuppuswamy, "Sino-Myanmar Relations and its impact on the Region", published: 02.03.11, accessed: 10.05.11

The military dictatorship has also led to tension in Burma's international relations. While the Burmese generals want Burma to be more or less free of interference from great powers guarantees Burma's geographically position that the country has become a part of the Indian-Chinese competition for strategic control of Southeast Asia. Burma has not tried to control the entrance to the Straits of Malacca on its own, but a more powerful ally with bases in Burma will have strategic advantages over the SLOC.

In June 1989, Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Burma's National League for Democracy (NLD) appealed to the world community to stop all foreign aid and stop doing business with the Burmese government. The Burmese government, SLORC, survived on foreign aid and used it to suppress the democratic movement. Through the 1990s, the Western led boycott of Burma had some success. The United States had been Burma's fourth largest investor, but in 1997 the U.S together with the European Union tried to prevent ASEAN from including Burma in the organization and to participate in boycott. The Western boycott of Burma did not lead to a significant change of regime. SLORC was replaced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which was in reality only a change of name, not in the way of ruling. Burma was, however, accepted into ASEAN, which has a policy of not interfering with the internal ruling of other member countries. The European Union answered with more trade restrictions and the U.S. imposed an investment ban. This investment ban was to make sure that no new U.S. companies invested in the military regime and its violations of human rights<sup>96</sup>.

The Western boycott of Burma has little effect today. The SPDC have trade relations with the other ASEAN countries and Burma is one of the countries in Southeast Asia with most natural resources, like teak and natural gas. Japan was in 2007 the largest donor of official development assistance to Burma, sharing the ASEAN view that economic relations and investment are the best ways to open the Burmese dictatorship to further dialogue. India originally sided with the Western countries against Burma, but then opened dialogue and economic relations with the SLORC to hinder China in gaining too much influence over and

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<sup>96</sup> US Campaign for Burma. "US-Burma Policy", <http://uscampaignforburma.org/us-burma-policy> accessed: 19.04.11



strategic advantages in Burma<sup>97</sup>. Since the military coup in 1988 Burma has been rearming and expanding its armed forces. Most of the new ships, like patrol crafts and corvettes, and weapons systems are acquired from China<sup>98</sup>.

The Burmese government knows the disadvantages of becoming too dependent on China, or on any other more powerful state. However, how much Burma is dependent on China and how much China controls Burma are frequently discussed by politicians and scholars. According to Andrew Selth, three different schools of thought can be identified on the matter of Chinese relationship with Burma. The first school, which he calls the Domination School, is strong in India, the U.S. and Australia and argues that weaker countries inevitably will be dominated and controlled by larger and stronger neighbours, basing this view on the Cold War geopolitics. According to this school of thought, China has achieved control over Burma through loans, massive arms sales, and regional trade and will use Burma as a means to surround and control India, the Straits of Malacca and the SLOCs through the Indian Ocean. By relying on China, Burma will no longer need the support and economical relations with ASEAN<sup>99</sup>. The second school, called the Partnership School, agrees with some of the main arguments of the Domination Schools, but believes that China and Burma will over time develop a strategic alliance and military relationship. They also believe that China will not take control over Burma, but that the close cooperation will lead the SPDC to perhaps “one day grant the PLA permanent facilities in Burma” and that the U.S. demands for change will bring Burma closer to China faster than a natural development<sup>100</sup>. The third school, called the Rejectionist School, consist according to Selth of “scholars with a specialised knowledge of Burma, and Sinologists sceptical of China’s purportedly expansionist designs”<sup>101</sup>. They believe that Burma is not dominated by China and will continue to be independent and have full control of their own politics. The Rejectionists base their view on three main points. The first is that Burma did not have a close relationship with China until the Western led sanctions

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<sup>97</sup> Seekins, *The Geopolitics and Economics of Burma’s Military Regime, 1962-2007*, <http://japanfocus.org/products/topdf/2573> accessed 12.11.07, pp. 8-9

<sup>98</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, pp. 14-15

<sup>99</sup> Selth, Andrew, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma: The Explosion of a Myth*, 2007, p. 19

<sup>100</sup> Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma*, pp. 19-20

<sup>101</sup> Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma*, p. 20



started and therefore had to cooperate more closely with China not by choice but from necessity. Burma is focused on staying independent and safeguarding its territorial sovereignty. They claim that even though China has contributed greatly to the development of Burmese economy and military, Burma is capable of resisting Chinese hopes of developing permanent Chinese military bases in Burma. They also believe that Burma will model its future development of government and economy on other member states of ASEAN. The second point is that China has never been able to completely influence Burma and make Rangoon do what Beijing wants. Burma is more likely to turn to other countries, like India, Russia and ASEAN countries, for arms acquisitions and other goods than having to meet demands following trade with China. The third point is that Burma is fully capable of withdrawing from an alliance with China if China tries to demand too much of Burma. The relationship with China might be ideal for Burma right now, but there are several other states which are interested in developing a closer relationship with Burma should Burma choose to draw back from China<sup>102</sup>. As Kenneth N. Waltz states: “In multipolar systems there are too many powers to permit any of them to draw clear and fixed lines between allies and adversaries and too few to keep the effects of defection low”<sup>103</sup>. Southeast Asia has become multipolar; India, China, ASEAN, and the U.S. are all competing for power, control and influence in the region. When several powers compete for allies within one area, less powerful countries can manoeuvre between the different alliances to the one where they gain most advantages.

According to Selth it can be said that it is Burma, not China, who has control over the relationship. Selth, a follower of his own so-called Rejectionist School, argues that the military government in Burma early realised the importance of their own geo-strategic position and is continually manoeuvring their political relationship from one neighbouring state to another<sup>104</sup>. By manipulating their foreign relations the Burmese military government has made sure that it has not become dependent on one powerful state without the ability to control its own territorial sovereignty. Burma balances its relationship between its two power-growing neighbours, India and China, to make sure one country cannot completely impose

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<sup>102</sup> Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma*, pp. 20-21

<sup>103</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 168

<sup>104</sup> Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma*, p. 21

their influence on Burmese politics and development. The Indian-Chinese competition over Burma has served in Burmese favour, since the development of infrastructure, trade and military supports given by the two larger powers have benefitted Burma more than both India and China. Burma also uses its membership in ASEAN to counter the influence from India and China. Burma's largest trading partner is Thailand, with India as second and China on third<sup>105</sup>. As according to Kenneth N. Waltz's theory: Burma works to limit or lessen its dependence because it can reasonably hope to do so. However, the main reason why the military has been able to maintain control in Burma since 1988 has been Chinese support and protection. If Burma had been without support from China there is reason to believe that the generals would have succumbed to the international pressure to let the democratic movement grow. Burma can therefore not totally escape the rising Chinese influence in the region without committing to an alliance with adversaries to Chinese hegemony. It is believed that China is currently engaged in over 62 known hydro, oil, gas and mining projects in Burma. China is also constructing airports, roads, and telecommunication in Burma. There are more than two million Chinese nationals living legitimately in Burma, there are also large, unknown numbers of Chinese nationals living in the border area<sup>106</sup>.

### *3.2.1 Chinese Bases in Burma*

Whether or not China actually has naval bases in Burma is also discussed by media, politicians and scholars. The issues surrounding the discussion on the level of Chinese engagement in Burma divides all groups studying the region. Selth and the followers of the Rejectionist thinking claim they believe the military regime in Burma when it assures that "permanent Chinese military bases will never be permitted in Burma"<sup>107</sup>, and that Burmese claims that there are no Chinese military or naval bases in Burma are "simply been dismissed as untrue"<sup>108</sup>. In 2009 an Indian news channel reported that the Indian government had

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<sup>105</sup> CIA, "Burma", accessed: 16.03.11

<sup>106</sup> Kuppaswamy, "*Sino-Myanmar Relations and its impact on the Region*", published: 02.03.11, accessed: 10.05.11

<sup>107</sup> Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma*, p. 20

<sup>108</sup> Selth, *Burma's China Connection and the Indian Ocean Region.*, p. 5

discussed the reports of Chinese maritime bases in Burma with the Burmese government. According to this news channel Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Naval Command, Vice Admiral Anup Singh, stated after the meetings that “There is no report of any Chinese movement in our waters in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands” and “We have had a dialogue with the Myanmar government which has clarified there is no Chinese presence in Coco Islands”<sup>109</sup>. Harsh V. Pant, writing for The Japan Times, claims that China is highly interested in developing bases along the SLOCs and is quite capable of starting building processes. Pant writes that “For some time now, China’s expansionist behaviour has been evident. China has been acquiring naval bases along crucial “choke points” in the Indian Ocean not only to serve its economic interests but also to enhance its strategic presence in the region”<sup>110</sup>. Pant also refers to a statement made by Professor Shen Dingli, at Fudan University in Shanghai, on the issue of Chinese bases abroad. Introduced by Pant as “one of the most prominent foreign policy thinkers in China” Shen Dingli argues that China has rights to set up bases abroad to prevent other states from blocking Chinese trade routes. Shen Dingli also states that Chinese bases will “promote regional and global stability”<sup>111</sup>.

Ashley J. Tellis states that Burma “is unlikely to give up its identity and independence merely to assist China to encircle India”<sup>112</sup>. Burma has no pressing security problems with India which would lead Burma to accept a close military and defence alliance with China for protection. Reports of major development of infrastructure, ports and harbours in Burma financed by China are frequently published and discussed. Some have evidence that China has already developed bases in Burma, others confirm that China has plans to start building bases. Dan Blumenthal writes that

*“Many observers, in India especially, believe that the grand prize in China’s relationship with Burma has been the construction of ports and bases along the Indian Ocean coast, including a major base at Hainggyi Island. The fact that this base can*

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<sup>109</sup>ZeeNews. “Myanmar says no Chinese base at Coco Island”, <http://www.zeenews.com/news562442.html> published: 10.09.09, accessed: 20.04.11

<sup>110</sup> Pant, Harsh V., *Many in denial over China’s quest for bases*, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/eo20100212a1.html> 2010, pp. 1-2

<sup>111</sup> Pant, *Many in denial over China’s quest for bases*, pp. 1-2

<sup>112</sup> Tellis, “China and India in Asia”, p. 152

*port ships larger than anything in the Burmese fleet has not gone unnoticed by India*”<sup>113</sup>.

Selth writes that the first time the possibility of Chinese bases in Burma was discussed publicly was when a delegation from the Burmese Foreign Ministry visited New Delhi in August 1992<sup>114</sup>. The new, close relationship between China and Burma worried India. As China supported Burmese junta with provisions of military supplies and equipment it was believed that Chinese involvement in development of bases in Burma would be the next natural step in the military relationship. The relationship between India and China is influenced by Burma as a security dilemma, and by the assumptions and expectations of what the other states motives in Burma are.

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<sup>113</sup> Blumenthal, “Concerns with Respect to China’s Energy Policy”, p. 425

<sup>114</sup> Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma*, p. 4



Figure 2: The Burmese coast line

According to Selth Great Coco Island and Hainggyi Island in the Irrawaddy Delta are two of the first places thought to be sites where China developed strategic naval bases in Burma. On Great Coco Island China had supposedly built a large signals intelligence collection station<sup>115</sup>. Great Coco Island is situated in the Andaman Sea close to the Andaman Islands, which belong to India, and holds a strategic position at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca. Other

<sup>115</sup> Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma*, p. 1

reports have stated that there are bases built at the Ramree Island off the Arkan coast, at Monkey Point in Rangoon and on Zadetkyi Kyun off the Kra Peninsula<sup>116</sup>. Bases off the Kra Peninsula would be even more ideal for controlling the traffic in the Straits of Malacca. Bases along the Indian Ocean coast would give China several strategic advantages. China would be able to monitor the movement, tests and operations of the Indian Navy in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, the movement of U.S. Navy ships on the way to the Arabian Sea to support U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to control the traffic in and out of the Straits of Malacca. However, bases in Burma and along the Andaman Sea would also impose security risks for both China and Burma. The other countries which transport goods along the SLOC will feel threatened by the permanent presence of PLAN at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca. Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore will be encircled by Chinese naval forces and might decide to commit to closer alliances with the U.S. The bases will be far from the main concentration of Chinese military force and will be next to impossible to defend against an alliance of the Indian Navy and the U.S. Navy<sup>117</sup>.

Blumenthal acknowledges the dispute among scholars on how much influence China has had on the construction on intelligence facilities and ports in Burma, but he has little doubt that China will seek to use Burmese ports as a means to reach the Indian Ocean. He writes that China hopes to transport oil and gas through Burma and by this bypass the security risks in the Straits of Malacca. However, the development and construction of oil and gas pipes through Burma will cost a lot of money and there are limits to how much the proposed pipelines can carry. The demand for energy resources will also grow beyond the limits of the pipelines, and the transport from the Yunnan province to the designated areas will also be very expensive<sup>118</sup>.

Sittwe is one of the cities often pointed out as a potential port for Chinese ships in Burma. Situated on an island not far from the border to Bangladesh the city would be an ideal part of the “String of Pearls”. However, in 2010 there were reports that the Indian founded multinational conglomerate corporation Essar Group had signed a contract with the Indian

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<sup>116</sup> Selth, *Burma's China Connection and the Indian Ocean Region*, p. 3

<sup>117</sup> Tellis, “China and India in Asia”, p. 153

<sup>118</sup> Blumenthal, “Concerns with Respect to China’s Energy Policy”, pp. 425-426

Ministry of External Affairs for the construction of two jetties at Sittwe and Paletwa. The project, called the “Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project”, is designed to facilitate for cargo movement on the river Kaladan. The Essar Project will also be responsible for constructing a port at Sittwe and dredging and construction of cargo barges along the river. According to India, the reason of the development along the Kaladan River is to transport goods from mainland India to the North-Eastern states of India more easily<sup>119</sup>.

It must be noted that it is strange that scholars, politicians and diplomats in today’s highly developed technological society cannot agree on whether China has bases in Burma or not. All sides are equally unrelenting in their argumentation for their theoretical views, spreading tension through speculations.

### *3.3 China’s relationship with India: China in the Indian Ocean*

The relationship between the modern states of India and China has long been marked by rivalry, hostilities and border disputes. The first Prime Minister of modern India, Jawaharlal Nehru, stated that the borders set by the British were realizations of the areas that India had historical claim to. In Chinese maps from 1950, however, land claimed by India is depicted as Chinese. In 1954 Indian diplomats in Beijing was assured by Zhou Enlai that these maps were drawn much earlier by the Nationalists and that Communist China would not claim to have rights to this land. However, in 1955 Indian troops met Chinese soldiers at Bara Hoti in the Garwhal district in the northern Indian state Uttar Pradesh. The continuously disagreements and China’s refusal to withdraw led to the start of first modern Sino-Indian border war in 1962. The war lasted only about a month, but Indian forces were severely beaten. The Chinese declared a unilateral cease-fire and started to withdraw parts of the Chinese occupied land, but remained in around 14 500 square miles of territory in Arunachal Pradesh, an area in the mountain range on the border between China, India and Bhutan. The disagreements over the issue of the territorial rights to Arunachal Pradesh still cause tension between India and China. There are several other issues concerning the border area between India and China.

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<sup>119</sup> IndoBurma News. “Essar signs contract for Kaladan project in Myanmar”, <http://www.indoburmamews.net/archives-1/2010/may-2010/essar-signs-contract-for-Kaldan-project-in-myanmar/> accessed: 30.04.11

India is concerned about China's interest in Bhutan and Nepal and China long refusal to accept India's incorporation of the Kingdom of Sikkim, a Himalayan state situated between Tibet, Bhutan, India and Nepal<sup>120</sup>.

China's growing strategic interest in the Indian Ocean is worrying to India, as China is India's most likely competitor for strategic interests in South and Southeast Asia. The relationship between India and China has a direct influence on Southeast Asia and the political development there. India has founded a new "Look East" policy concerning Southeast Asia<sup>121</sup>. Southeast Asia has historically been the meeting point for Indian and Chinese culture and influence. Most of the Southeast Asian kingdoms had some form of tributary relationship with imperial China and some were considered a part of the Chinese defence system. China still sees the areas bordering to the southern Chinese provinces as its defensive perimeter<sup>122</sup>. The Chinese government is also worried about India's hegemony in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. India's navy can prevent Chinese merchant vessels and gas and oil tankers from reaching China with energy supplies vital to the Chinese industry. To secure the shipping lanes which China depends on, stretching from Africa to China, China seeks to secure rights to develop bases in countries which do not oppose the idea of having the Chinese Navy in their home waters. This network of bases and ports stretching from southern China to the Middle East has been named "String of Pearls" in the United States<sup>123</sup>. Secure ports all the way along the SLOC will enable the Chinese to send more tankers and other vessels more often. As China has paid for the upgrading of the Gwadar port in Pakistan<sup>124</sup>, the "String of Pearls" theory and a maritime encirclement of India seems more and more likely to become a reality than to remain a theoretic security concern. To be able to control the current power-balance in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, India has no other choice than to follow and match Chinese military and naval modernization. It is then likely to assume that Pakistan will

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<sup>120</sup> Ganguly, Sumit, "India and China: Border Issues, Domestic Integration, and International Security", 2004, pp. 110-115, 122-123

<sup>121</sup> Frankel, Francine R., "Introduction", 2004, p. 16

<sup>122</sup> Tellis, "China and India in Asia", p. 162

<sup>123</sup> Holmes, James R. and Toshi Yoshihara, "China's Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean", 2008, p. 125

<sup>124</sup> China provided U.S. \$ 198 mill. in 2001 for the development of a deep sea-port in Gwadar. <http://www.gwadarnews.com/gwadar-port.asp> accessed: 28.04.11



feel threatened and less secure by India's growing military and naval capabilities and answer with modernization of its own military and naval forces. Pakistan will most likely seek closer relationship and cooperation with China, forcing India to respond with further armament. Without proper dialogue and diplomatic relations this would lead to further escalation of the tension in Southeast Asia.



Figure 3: Map over the “String of Pearls”

However, according to Billy Tea, writing for Asia Times online, the “String of Pearls” theory was coined by experts at the United States-based consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton and used by journalists to “overplay China’s supposedly malevolent involvement with countries along its Sea Lines of Communication”<sup>125</sup>. James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, on the other hand, write that “the “String of Pearls” concept does help to explain China’s pattern of behaviour in the Indian Ocean”, and that both Burma and Pakistan has granted basing rights to China<sup>126</sup>.

While India is interested in blocking China from entering South Asia and the Indian Ocean, Pakistan is developing a closer relationship with China. Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and the People’s Republic of China developed early and they continue to show an allied front against India. In exchange for land in the Hunza region, Pakistan officially

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<sup>125</sup> Tea, Billy, *Unstringing China’s strategic pearls*, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/MC11Ad02.html> accessed: 19.04.11, p.1

<sup>126</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara, “China’s Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean”, p. 125

recognized Chinese claims to 5180 square km in Northern Kashmir and Ladakh, which are by most other states acknowledged as Indian territories<sup>127</sup>.

China also formed a “strategic partnership” with Bangladesh when modern Bangladesh formed. Smaller and less powerful than Pakistan, Bangladesh is the inferior part in the Bangladesh-Chinese relationship. While Bangladesh has developed its own navy, it is highly dependent on supplies and technology from China. This relationship ensures that China is quite likely to gain Chittagong as a port in the “String of Pearls”<sup>128</sup> and creates more pressure on India. With ports controlled by the Chinese on both sides, India will face the challenge of a more active Chinese merchant fleet and oil tankers and the possibility of a permanent presence of the Chinese Navy. However, several of the ports believed to be a part of the future “String of Pearls” require a lot of work and modernization before they are capable of servicing the amount and scale of the Chinese merchant fleet and the Chinese Navy.

Any development of Chinese bases in Burma and other neighbouring countries will be closely observed by India. India fears that if China manages to secure its interest in the East and the South China Sea China will turn more focus on the SLOC in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. However, it is unlikely that China will send large parts of its navy to the Indian Ocean before the tension and the disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea have been settled or at least lowered. The strong presence of the U.S. Navy in these areas and its alliance with Taiwan and Japan ensures that China will keep most of its naval forces occupied with the possible defence of Chinese home waters. It is not strategically sound to send forces away to project power while believing the greatest threat to state security is positioned just off the coast. India will always have the greatest strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean for obvious reasons, and there will most likely never come to a direct confrontation between the Indian Navy and PLAN in the Indian Ocean<sup>129</sup>. The U.S. military and naval base in the Indian

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<sup>127</sup> Dr. Pandey, Sheo Nandan, *Rise of China and the Stake of South Asian Powers*, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers43/paper4299.html>, 2011, accessed: 01.02.11

<sup>128</sup> Dr. Pandey, *Rise of China and the Stake of South Asian Powers*, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers43/paper4299.html> accessed: 01.02.11

<sup>129</sup> Unless the state of India goes through devastating political or environmental changes which would ensure credible Chinese first-strike capability.

Ocean, Diego Garcia<sup>130</sup>, can with its strategic position support the Indian Navy and cause problems for Chinese shipping.

There are also claims that China does not view India as a major threat and security concern. Cai Penghong writes that China sees India as an ally in keeping the SLOCs running from the Middle East to East Asia safe and that the U.S is viewed as the greatest threat to stability in Southeast Asia<sup>131</sup>.

### *3.4. China's relationship with ASEAN and ASEAN countries*

Melvin Gurtov commented in 1971 that “if Southeast Asia is to be a sphere of restraint for the major powers, it is the United States and not China which most needs to curb its imperial zeal”<sup>132</sup>. Today it might seem that the U.S. is needed in Southeast Asia to help balance against the rise of Chinese power and influence. ASEAN is described by Mark Beeson as a “product of the geopolitical circumstances” during the cold War<sup>133</sup>. As the region was the stage for the “hot” wars during the Cold War, and the U.S. and the Soviet Union competed for territory and resources in Asia, the countries of Southeast Asia banded together for security and economic stability.

The dialogue for a closer relationship between China and ASEAN started in 1991 at the 24<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, when the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China attended the meeting as a guest of the Malaysian Government. Since 1991 several agreements and treaties between ASEAN and China have been developed and signed. Trade between the two “blocks” has been increasing, and despite a decline in 2009 China is ASEAN's largest trading partner<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>130</sup> Holmes and Yoshihara, “China's Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean”, p. 121

<sup>131</sup> Cai Penghong, “Regional maritime security environment. A Chinese Perspective”, 2010, p. 78

<sup>132</sup> Gurtov, *China and Southeast Asia- The Politics of Survival*, p. 193

<sup>133</sup> Beeson, Mark, *Regionalism & Globalization in East Asia: Politics, Security & Economic Development*, 2007, p. 217

<sup>134</sup> ASEANsec, <http://www.aseansec.org/5874.htm> accessed 13.01.11

## ASEAN rearmament and military modernization

The countries of Southeast Asia have since the 1990s made extensive modernizations to their armed forces. Starting at the same time as the Chinese rearmament, Richard A. Bitzinger argues, however, that China is not the most important reason for the rearmament of the ASEAN countries. Bitzinger claims there are other external and internal reasons for the ASEAN countries to modernize their armed forces<sup>135</sup>. Two of the most important tasks of the Indonesian navy are to protect the country's Exclusive Economic Zone and the protection of the long maritime borders of the Indonesian archipelago. To be able to perform these tasks sufficiently, the Indonesian navy is retiring its many East German frigates and corvettes and replacing them with modern and better ships<sup>136</sup>. According to John Garofano, Indonesian military leaders have identified China as Indonesia's "greatest military threat" with Chinese claims to the Natuna Islands and the possible energy reserves there, but they are unwilling to support an alliance against China because of the strong trade between the two countries<sup>137</sup>.

Malaysia has since 2001 increased its cooperation with the U.S. both in military, naval and economic matters, but has also a close relationship with China<sup>138</sup>. Malaysia is also modernizing its navy. The Malaysian navy has plans to acquire submarines, and has sent personnel overseas for training so they will be prepared when they receive the submarines. Malaysia is restructuring its entire system of naval operations and one of the main goals is to acquire blue-water capabilities<sup>139</sup>. An upgraded navy will make joint operations with allies more easy and make Malaysia able to project power in its territorial waters.

Thailand has been described as "a major non-NATO ally" by the U.S., but has close diplomatic and economic ties with China. Thailand criticizes Taiwan and Falun Gong, two of China's most problematic political issues, and most important to the U.S.; Thailand offered

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<sup>135</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, p. 2

<sup>136</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, p. 4-6

<sup>137</sup> Garofano, "China, the South China Sea, and the U.S. Strategy", p. 289

<sup>138</sup> Garofano, "China, the South China Sea, and the U.S. Strategy", p. 290

<sup>139</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, p. 13-14

little support or understanding concerning the most recent U.S. invasion of Iraq<sup>140</sup>. The Royal Thai Navy (RTN) is a basic asset in Thai security. Thailand's naval build-up is aimed at, among other things, protection of maritime interests, littoral security, counter-terrorism and counter illegal trafficking. RTN required in 2007-8 two new frigates from the United Kingdom and missile-carrying offshore patrol vessels from China. Thailand also operates the only aircraft carrier in Southeast Asia. However, as aircraft carriers are quite expensive to operate it is rarely employed<sup>141</sup>.

The Philippines is also described as "a major non-NATO ally" by the U.S. The Philippines had three clashes with China over islands in the South China Sea in the 1990s, and after realising the Philippine Navy was too weak to support Philippine claims in the area, the Philippine government signed military agreements with the U.S. in 1998 and 2003<sup>142</sup>.

As the relationship between Vietnam and China gets worse, the relationship between Vietnam and the U.S. is slowly improving. One of the latest clashes between Vietnam and China happened in 2005 when some Vietnamese fishermen sailed into Chinese waters and China forcefully detained them. Vietnam supports the presence of U.S. military and naval forces in Southeast Asia<sup>143</sup>. Because of the bad relationship between Vietnam and China, Vietnam is willing to ally with other great powers against Chinese expansionism and influence. The Vietnamese Navy is tasked with protecting Vietnamese interests in the South China Sea from further Chinese expansion and has started a major build-up of its forces. By 2007 Vietnam had acquired three new corvettes, a dozen fast-attack craft patrol vessels and commissioned 40 new indigenous offshore patrol vessels<sup>144</sup>.

Singapore's vulnerable location and lack of strategic depth on land has made Singapore focus on expanding its naval capabilities and acquire technological advantages. Singapore has, as mentioned above, close military cooperation with the U.S. and are continuously upgrading its naval forces. The Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) acquired six new frigates, based on

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<sup>140</sup> Garofano, "China, the South China Sea, and the U.S. Strategy", p. 289

<sup>141</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, pp. 18-19

<sup>142</sup> Garofano, "China, the South China Sea, and the U.S. Strategy", p. 289

<sup>143</sup> Garofano, "China, the South China Sea, and the U.S. Strategy", p. 290

<sup>144</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, pp. 20-21

French design, bought four submarines from Sweden, and commissioned the construction of two indigenously built landing ships in 2007<sup>145</sup>.

Garofano writes that most Southeast Asian countries are not interested in allying against China and hedge against its influence<sup>146</sup>. A stable relationship between ASEAN and China will benefit both of the groups. It will enhance security and stability in the region and encourage even more trade between the two groups. Stability in the region will also ensure the survival and continuation of the existing regimes. The liberal theorists claim that China will be able to rise as a global superpower peacefully. As the world is focused on economic development, the other major economic powers will realize that they will benefit from incorporating China into their economic relations. Unlike the realists the liberalists believe that the drive for economic rise will lead to cooperation and stability. The realists believe that as each state strive to secure its own development, there will be aggressive encounters and that the U.S., India, and the ASEAN countries will try to hedge against Chinese expansion<sup>147</sup>. Robert D. Kaplan writes that ASEAN countries are working more closely together to lessen Chinese influence in the region and that “the more self-reliant these states can become, the less threatened they will be by China’s rise”<sup>148</sup>. The realist Jack Levy classifies this as a balance-of-power view within the international system. According to Levy’s distinction of the balance-of-power view, Liu and Zhang<sup>149</sup> write that “When a great power acquires a predominant position in the international system, other powers will typically ally to balance against it”<sup>150</sup>. According to this view the ASEAN countries will ally to hinder China in gaining too much power in the Southeast Asian region. The ASEAN countries are likely to resist becoming too influenced by China and to continue asserting their own rights and interests, choosing to remain in contact with, but not controlled by, China. However, China

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<sup>145</sup> Bitzinger, *The China Syndrome*, pp. 16-17

<sup>146</sup> Garofano, “China, the South China Sea, and the U.S. Strategy”, p. 289

<sup>147</sup> Glaser, Charles, 2011, “Will China’s Rise Lead to War? Why Realism does not Mean Pessimism.”, p. 81

<sup>148</sup> Kaplan, “The Geography of Chinese Power”, p. 31

<sup>149</sup> However, Liu and Zhang claim that concepts of balance-of-power realism and hegemonic realism are too broad, “and that attempts to classify them within a typology of theories can only make realism even more difficult to understand”. Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhuang, <http://cjpj.oxfordjournals.org/content/1/1/109.full> p. 9, accessed: 09.03.11

<sup>150</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 8

might claim to be threatened by the rise of ASEAN and its member countries. Close cooperation between the ASEAN littoral states to the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea might threaten the Chinese SLOCs through Southeast Asia and lead to even more tension between China and ASEAN over these areas. One of the main points of disagreement between the countries of ASEAN and China today is the ownership of the South China Sea. Almost every country in Southeast Asia claims large parts of the South China Sea. The opposition to the balance-of-power realism, hegemonic realism, claim that hegemonic powers will rise in the international system and will “establish a set of political, economic and behavioural norms to manage the international system, a concentration of power thereby bringing stability to the system”<sup>151</sup>. Liu and Zhang claim that as a power rise as a hegemonic power there will be wars between the new power and the old hegemonic power, before stability is restored through transition of power<sup>152</sup>. The political disagreements between China and the Southeast Asian states might lead to war, but China will rise as the great power in the region and then provide stability to the area. As China grows in power the hegemonic realists anticipate a war between China and the U.S. for power in the Asia-Pacific. One of China’s first hegemonic conquests might be the control over the South China Sea. The liberalist’s theories might hold if other sources of energy are found. However, if the need for oil continues to rise at the same rate it has done in the recent years, confrontations between major powers to secure access to the remaining oil supplies are inevitable.

### *3.4.1. Disputes in the South China Sea*

There have been several disputes between the littoral states of the South China Sea. Rich in natural resources, the South China Sea is also strategically very important. The country or countries which control the South China Sea controls the eastern access to the Straits of Malacca.

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<sup>151</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 8

<sup>152</sup> Liu and Zhang, *The Typologies of Realism*, p. 8





Figure 4: Map over the South China Sea with the Spratly Islands

By applying anti-access challenges to this strategic area, the dominating power will hinder free flow of commerce and can threaten security in the region. The Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam and China all lay claims to large parts of the South China Sea. Most of these claims can in theory be met by extensions of the Exclusive Economic Zones since most of the littoral states only claim partial expansions of their sea boundaries. China, however, lays claim to almost the entire South China Sea. Despite the fact that China only has the northern shore line of the South China Sea, China claims almost all of the sea down to the island of Borneo. The Chinese claims all of the Philippine and Brunei's maritime rights (according to UNCLOS) to the South China Sea, large parts of the Malaysian and the Vietnamese rights and part of the Indonesian rights<sup>153</sup>.

<sup>153</sup> Global Security, "The South China Sea", <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/south-china-sea.htm> accessed: 09.03.11



In 2002 the member states of ASEAN and China all agreed on a “Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea”. The Declaration was made to ease the tension over the South China Sea and prevent possible developments of conflicts over resources and territory. According to the Declaration, the ASEAN countries and China recognize the rulings of UNCLOS. They also stated that all territorial and jurisdictional disputes are to be settled by peaceful means and that they shall cooperate and develop trust between and among each other in all matters concerning the South China Sea<sup>154</sup>. In 2011, however, China is still claiming most of the South China Sea as Chinese territory. Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cui Tiankai, told visiting US officials in March 2010 that China considered the South China Sea one of China’s “core interests”. “Core interest” is also the words used by the Chinese when describing Tibet and Taiwan. In a press conference in July 2010, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng stated that China had “indisputable sovereignty” over the South China Sea and the islands in it. Though Geng assured that ships and aircrafts from “relevant countries” would be allowed to travel in the area, he also said that “We (China) are against internationalization of the South China Sea issue”<sup>155</sup>.

In 2005 Mokhzani Zubir and Mohd Nizam Basiron wrote a paper on behalf of the Maritime Institute of Malaysia where the U.S. security interest in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea was presented as an attempt to control the SLOCs which China depends on. By controlling these SLOCs the U.S. can control the economic growth in China and hinder a Chinese challenge “to the U.S.’s global leadership in the future”<sup>156</sup>. Zubir and Basiron refer to a Chinese Professor, Ji Guoxing, who states that “China is not interested in expanding its influence or in establishing hegemony in the South China Sea and Southeast Asia. China, however, is concerned about the security of its southern maritime realm particularly over threats from Southeast Asia and the South China Sea”<sup>157</sup>. It would seem that he claims that China, with the largest navy in Asia and most manpower, is concerned about the possible

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<sup>154</sup> ASEANsec, <http://www.aseansec.org/13163.htm> accessed: 13.01.11

<sup>155</sup> Global Security, “The South China Sea”, accessed: 09.03.11

<sup>156</sup> Zubir and Basiron, *The Straits of Malacca*, pp. 3-4

<sup>157</sup> Zubir and Basiron, *The Straits of Malacca*, p. 2

threats from smaller navies in Southeast Asia. Many of the Southeast Asian countries control areas which are strategically important in matters of Chinese export and import.

Vietnam and China have several disputes concerning their boundary in the South China Sea. During the last three decades some of these disputes have involved the military and navy of both countries and have broken out in skirmishes. In 1974 the South Vietnamese forces stationed at the Paracel Islands were attacked by Chinese forces and driven off the Islands. To counter this loss, North Vietnamese forces started an occupation of several of the Spratly Islands in 1975. Feeling threatened by Vietnam's successful invasion of Cambodia in 1978, China invaded Vietnam the year after. However, the Vietnamese forces managed to resist the invaders and China had to withdraw from the occupied areas. During the late 1970s and early 1980s Vietnam depended upon the Soviet Navy for protection. However, Gorbachev withdrew most of the Soviet support from Vietnam in the 1980s, leaving Vietnam vulnerable to Chinese forces. In 1988 there was a sea battle between the Vietnamese and the Chinese navies at Johnson Reef in the Spratly Islands. During this incident several Vietnamese vessels were sunk and over 70 Vietnamese sailors were killed<sup>158</sup>. UNCLOS article 15 states that "Where the coasts of two States are opposite or adjacent to each other, neither of the two States is entitled, failing agreement between them to the contrary, to extend its territorial sea beyond the median line every point of which is equidistant from the nearest points on the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial seas of which of each of the two States is measured"<sup>159</sup>. China claims parts of the South China Sea which according to UNCLOS is Vietnamese territorial sea. However, China is willing to have this maritime dispute to be better able to protect the SLOC through the South China Sea and to be able to claim rights to the natural resources in the area. There are still disagreements between Vietnam and China over the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands, however, the national oil companies of Vietnam, the Philippines and China agreed on conducting joint marine seismic activities in the Spratly Islands<sup>160</sup>.

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<sup>158</sup> Tønnesson, Stein, "The History of the Dispute", 2002, p. 16-17

<sup>159</sup> UN, "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea", part 2, accessed: 10.03.11

<sup>160</sup> CIA, "Vietnam", <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html> accessed: 16.03.11

Early in 2011, China announced that it would focus on more active diplomacy around the world. China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi stated that "China's diplomacy will serve domestic interests, especially associated with the country's economic development"<sup>161</sup>. It seems like China has realized that if China employ an aggressive military posture towards its neighbours in Southeast Asia it would probably lead the states of Southeast Asia into closer cooperation of hedging against Chinese influence. An aggressive and threatening China would also give the U.S. an opportunity to initiate a closer relationship with Southeast and East Asian countries. The Southeast Asian countries might also enter a closer strategic alliance with India and realize the Chinese fear of encirclement.

ASEAN will be influenced by the India-Chinese relationship, and will be the area of greatest impact in a conflict between the two countries. The countries of Southeast Asia have to plan their foreign policies and relations to protect their interests in a region that is going through rapid economic and political changes.

### *3.5. The East China Sea*

The Taiwan Strait is one of China's main security concerns. Connecting the East and the South China Seas, it is only 160 kilometres wide at the narrowest point between the coast of the Fukien province in China and Taiwan. The deepest point in the Taiwan Strait is no deeper than 70 metres<sup>162</sup>. The Taiwan Strait is not the natural bottleneck the Straits of Malacca is, but the tension between Taiwan and China is much stronger than any tension between the littoral states of the Straits of Malacca.

In March 2011 Taiwan's foreign affairs minister reminded the U.S. of Taiwan's interest in buying F-16C/D jet fighters and diesel submarines. Taiwan states that they are interested in solving the problems with China peacefully, but many believe that Taiwan cannot do so alone. Timothy C.T. Yang stated that Taiwan needs more weapons and security to be able to control the situation in the Taiwan Strait. Yang, a supporter of Ronald Reagan's "peace

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<sup>161</sup> Global Security, "Chinese Foreign Relations to Focus on More Active Diplomacy"  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/china/2011/china-110307-voa01.htm> accessed: 09.03.11

<sup>162</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online "Taiwan Strait.",  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/580987/Taiwan-Strait> accessed: 23.03.11

through strength” policy, feels that a weak Taiwan will be a natural target for Chinese military and naval aggression<sup>163</sup>. The current strategic and military situation ensures that the littoral states may test each other and have small confrontations to gain advantages in the area, but will stop short of direct conflict. However, PLAN is modernizing fast and may in a few years be able to hinder intervention from Taiwanese allies in a future crisis in the Taiwan Strait. The key to understand the tension in the East China Sea is therefore to look at the historical and turbulent relationship between the littoral states. Taiwan and China have overlapping territorial claims in the East China Sea as well as the South China Sea.

The situation in the East China Sea may become truly unstable if one of the littoral states acquired a credible first-strike capability, if that state could be certain that it could attack without fear of reprisal. According to both the offence realism and the hegemonic realism this will be a likely scenario. China would like to gain control over Taiwan, not because Taiwan is an immediate threat to survival of the PRC, but because China sees Taiwan as a natural part of China<sup>164</sup> and would like to control the island. According to hegemonic realism, war is unavoidable as the growing power seeks so establish its control of the area. Taiwan is one of the largest unsolved issues between China and the U.S.

### *3.5.1 China in the Pacific Ocean; threats to Japan.*

The relationship between China and Japan has been hostile for a long time. Japan has sent several naval expeditions to China through history, raiding and demanding payment from the Chinese. Some of the first were made by stateless samurais in the mid-fifteenth century. In this period Japan was divided into several states which were at war with each other. The samurais from the losing states joined in groups, called Wuo-kuo, and raided the Chinese coast. The latest invasion was during World War II when Japan set out to conquer all of China. The massive destruction of Chinese cities and the inhuman way the Japanese soldiers and scientist treated the Chinese population are still cause of tension and mistrust between

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<sup>163</sup> Global Security. “Taiwan calls for U.S. arms sales”  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/taiwan/2011/taiwan-110308-cna01.html> accessed: 09.03.11

<sup>164</sup> Taiwan also sees itself as a natural part of China, but would rather see the Taiwanese government as the controlling part.

China and Japan. Much of the tension also comes from territorial disputes over islands in the East China Sea<sup>165</sup>.

In the 1990's Japan started a new modernization of its military. This rearmament worried Japan's neighbours. Article number 9 in Japan's Constitution from 1947 states that Japan shall never have war potential. During the Cold War, however, the United States realised the value of having Japan as a military ally in the Pacific Ocean, serving as a military buffer zone to the Soviet Union and China. A Japanese "Self Defence Force" was set up to deter the Soviet Union from expanding into the Pacific Ocean. Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Forces (MSDF) is tasked with protecting Japanese shores and vital sea-lanes. Being described as Japan's first line of defence<sup>166</sup>, the MSDF has now been equipped with submarines, minesweepers, modern destroyers and land-based patrol aircraft unit. To further enable the MSDF to conduct international peace cooperation missions, protect Japan's maritime traffic and secure Japanese territory, the MSDF has undertaken several reforms. One of the reforms was designed to simplify the command structure of the MSDF. Due to the rearmament and the reforms, Japan now has some of the most advanced warships in the world, some of which the MSDF has deployed to protect Japanese vessels in the Indian Ocean<sup>167</sup>. However, as James C. Hsiung states, the MSDF is a defensive force, not an attack force. If there is an armed confrontation between the current Japanese and Chinese navies over the resources in the East China Sea, the MSDF will only be capable of defending Japanese interests after the conflict has started. China, however, will be able to gain the upper hand through aggressive naval forces<sup>168</sup>. Japan, as a U.S. ally, is dependent on the presence of U.S. forces in the Western Pacific to deter adversary states. The Japanese MSDF has not got all the equipment, training or tactics to be able to defend a role as an aggressor.

China's hegemonic and strategic ambitions are made clear through the language of the Chinese Navy. The PLAN defence strategy includes several islands and states in Southeast

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<sup>165</sup> Yung-deh Richard Chu, "Historical and Contemporary Roots of Sino-Japanese Conflicts", 2007, pp. 23-27, 33

<sup>166</sup> Hickey, Dennis and Lilly Kelan Lu, "Japan's Military Modernization: The Chinese Perspective", 2007, p. 99

<sup>167</sup> Hickey and Lu, "Japan's Military Modernization", pp. 99-100.

<sup>168</sup> Hsiung, James C., "Introduction: Theory and the Long-Running Tussle", 2007, p. 15

Asia. This defence strategy therefore indicates that China wants the control over these areas or close alliances with these states.

- The First Island Chain.

PLAN has divided its defence into different zones. The First Island Chain includes The Korean Peninsula, The Kuril Islands, Japan and the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia. These are states China has disputes with in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Australia is the only country in this group which China has no immediate maritime disputes with. Several of the countries are also allies of the U.S., and PLAN considers the possibility of being hindered from reaching the Pacific Ocean if these allies and the U.S. work closely together.

According to Robert D. Kaplan, a main PLAN defence goal is to build up and train the Chinese naval force to be able to hinder the free movement of the U.S. Navy in the area between mainland China and The First Island Chain<sup>169</sup>.

- The Second Island Chain

The Second Island Chain includes the smaller islands further out. Among these islands are Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands which are U.S. territories<sup>170</sup>. The islands in The Second Island Chain are outside of Chinese shooting range and PLAN will have to stretch out its resources in an attack here. The U.S. moved some 8000 U.S. Marines from South Korea to Guam, concentrating much of U.S. power in the Asia-Pacific here. This power-concentration helps to maintain the current balance of power in the Pacific<sup>171</sup>.

Japan's strategic advantage will be lost if China gains power in the Pacific Ocean. Japan already has to face the North Korean Navy in the Sea of Japan and competes for resources in the East China Sea with China, South Korea and Taiwan. A strong Chinese Navy in the western part of the Pacific Ocean will be able to enforce a blockade of Japan, cutting off all import of vital goods to Japan. However, the U.S.-Japanese alliance ensures that this is an

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<sup>169</sup> Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power", pp. 33, 35

<sup>170</sup> Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power", p. 34

<sup>171</sup> Nishihara, Masashi, "Naval Competition and Confidence Building", 2010, p. 52

unlikely scenario in the immediate future and it is giving Japan time to prepare possible counter measures. Japan also has the possibility to ally with South Korea, India, Australia, Taiwan and the ASEAN countries to hedge against Chinese expansionism and to make sure the balance of power remain in Japan's favour. China also distrusts Japan because of the historical enmity, the alliance with the U.S. and the possibility that Japan might cooperate with India in strategic issues like blocking Chinese SLOCs.

### *How Chinese bases in Burma will affect Japan*

Japan is highly interested in China's activities in the South China Sea, the Malacca Straits and the Bay of Bengal. Japan's industry and economy are dependent on imported oil<sup>172</sup>, and in 2001 over 70% of the oil Japan imported went through the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea<sup>173</sup>. In 2010 Japan shipped 85% of its imported oil through the Straits of Malacca<sup>174</sup>. If China gains more influence and power in the South China Sea, it would threaten Japan's most important sea line of communication. Any change in the strategic situation in Southeast Asia will directly inflict problems for Japanese shipping. Japan needs a navy which is able to defend its shipping lanes and maritime resources.

After the major earthquake and tsunami of northern Japan in early March 2011, several of the Japanese nuclear reactors were severely damaged. Operations in damaged plants have been shut down as workers are trying to repair the leaks. The shut-down has a major influence on the electricity production in Japan. The Japanese population were instructed to save electricity and the government decided to shut down all electricity for 3 hours a day<sup>175</sup>. The quake, the tsunami and the following electricity shortages inflicted damages to the Japanese industry and economic growth. To balance the loss of electricity produced by the nuclear reactors Japan will have to import more oil and natural gas from other countries, making Japan even more

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<sup>172</sup> In 2009 Japan was the world's fourth largest consumer of oil; China was number three, the European Union number two and the U.S number one. Japan consumed 4,363 million barrels a day in 2009. Japan was also the third largest importer of oil in the same year. In 2009 Japan imported 5,033 million barrels of oil a day.

<sup>173</sup> Austin and Harris, *Japan and Greater China*, p. 292

<sup>174</sup> Nishihara, "Naval Competition and Confidence Building", p. 49

<sup>175</sup> NRK1 news, 14.03.11

vulnerable to changes in the strategic situation in the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca.

### *3.6 World View, meeting the other major player in the Pacific Ocean*

China's aggressive maritime actions can be seen as test of other countries and navies in the area and to assert Chinese maritime territorial claims. As China's influence and power in the region continues to grow, countries in East Asia and in the Pacific Ocean will have to consider the choice on whether to start closer cooperation with China or to gain protection from Chinese hegemony by starting a closer political and military relationship with the United States. Since the U.S. Navy is the largest and most active navy in the Pacific Ocean, there will inevitable be incidents and confrontations between U.S. Navy ships and PLAN ships. While the Japan-homeported U.S. Navy aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk (CV-63) was operating in international waters in the East China Sea near Okinawa, on 26 October 2006, a Chinese Song-class submarine<sup>176</sup> surfaced approximately five miles away from it, inside of torpedo firing range<sup>177</sup>. The USS Kitty Hawk carrier strike group was also denied entry to Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong in November 2007, when it was seeking a respite from building seas. This and other manoeuvres conducted by PLAN ships, harassing U.S Navy ships in the South China Sea, are described by Robert D. Kaplan as "actions not of a great power but of a still immature one"<sup>178</sup>. States which have become "great powers" have had time to develop and perfect a "code of conduct" towards other countries. Countries which are still developing and modernizing their military and are growing in power might try to project more power than what they actually have and test the limits of their political opponents. Ronald O'Rourke, an American specialist in Naval Affairs, stated in a Congressional Research Service Report for Congress that "decisions that Congress and the executive branch make regarding U.S Navy

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<sup>176</sup> The Song-class is a fairly new type of indigenously Chinese built submarine. It is a non-nuclear-powered attack submarine which is believed to be developed from Russian submarine technology and design. O'Rourke, 2011, pp. 16-17

The fact that a Chinese built submarine managed to go undetected by a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier is alarming to the U.S. Navy and a boost to Chinese morale.

<sup>177</sup> O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 41

<sup>178</sup> Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power", p. 34



programs for countering improved Chinese maritime military forces could influence the political evolution of the Pacific, which in turn could affect the ability of the United States to pursue goals relating to various policy issues, both in the Pacific and elsewhere”<sup>179</sup>. The Chinese Navy may not have the technological capabilities the U.S. Navy has, but the Chinese Navy has made enough progress to be able to perform brown-water and green-water missions which can cause problems for the U.S. Navy and U.S. merchant fleet and hinder their free access to vital U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. A direct confrontation between U.S and Chinese forces is highly unwanted by the U.S., even though the U.S. Navy most likely will defeat PLAN. In 2009 the U.S. was China’s largest export partner. 20.03% of Chinese export went to the U.S.<sup>180</sup>. The U.S. is also the world’s largest borrower. At the end of 2010 more or less 50% of the U.S. Treasury debt was held by other states and investors, approximately 22% of it was held by China. Roger C. Altman and Richard N. Haass states that if the relationship between the U.S. and China came to a crisis over the disagreements over Taiwan, China will be able to do more damage to the U.S. by cutting back dollar holdings than by attacks from the PLAN<sup>181</sup>. As Leslie H. Gelb states “Nations do not fear China’s military might; they fear its ability to give or withhold trade and investments”<sup>182</sup>. However, the U.S. needs to show the world that they are capable of and ready to defend U.S. allies regardless encounters with other maritime forces. The U.S. would signal weakness if they ended the commitment to Taiwan and let the People’s Republic of China unify the two Chinas on PRC terms. Unless South Korea and Japan acquires stronger conventional military and nuclear capabilities to hedge against Chinese expansion in the region, the U.S. will not withdraw from East Asia.

The Chinese projection of power when in contact with navies of countries of considerable strength today strongly resembles the way China reacted towards other navies in the early years of the Cold War. The main Chinese goals are to demonstrate Chinese power, reduce U.S., especially, and other countries’ dominance in Chinese spheres of interests and limit the potential of other states to block Chinese SLOCs.

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<sup>179</sup> O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 1

<sup>180</sup> CIA, “China”, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html> accessed 12.02.11

<sup>181</sup> Altman, Roger C. and Richard N. Haass, “American Profligacy and American Power. The Consequences of Fiscal Irresponsibility”, 2010, pp. 28, 30.

<sup>182</sup> Gelb, Leslie H., “GDP Now Matters More Than Force. A U.S. Foreign Policy for the Age of Economic Power”, 2010, p. 38

The so called “String of Pearls” theory is the same theory the U.S. has used to secure U.S. interests. Since the Second World War the U.S. has built more than 1000 military bases around the world to support U.S. troops on deployment and U.S. allies. William Pfaff questions whether or not this system of bases has been a terrible error, if the system which was meant to increase U.S. national security “has actually done the opposite, provoking conflict and creating the very insecurity it was intended to prevent?”<sup>183</sup>. The presence of bases overseas has provoked local resentment and, in some cases, attacks. Osama bin Laden has claimed that the attacks on American soil on 11 September 2001 were directly provoked by the American bases in Saudi Arabia, which to him were located in sacred territories<sup>184</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

No matter if China builds bases in Burma or not, the strategic situation in Southeast Asia is changing. The East Asian, Southeast Asian and South Asian countries must readjust their geopolitics to an economical, political and military expanding China. As the Chinese security doctrine is shifting from focus on land to the sea, a large part of Southeast Asia will become, or are already a part of, China’s strategic defence plans. As the world’s economic focus is shifting to the East, less powerful countries will have to reconsider their strategic alliances. The Southeast Asian countries will have to decide if an alliance with China is more profitable than an alliance with the U.S. An alliance with China will mean close cooperation and daily encounters and let China become the hegemonic power in the region. An alliance with the U.S. will give the Southeast Asian countries the opportunity to hedge against Chinese influence and balance the power in Southeast Asia. However, even though the U.S. has large military and naval bases in the Asia-Pacific it will take valuable time for support to arrive if a war should break out. A military alliance with the U.S. will also mean to officially resist Chinese interests and the possible loss of a major trading partner. The alliances between India and the U.S. and Japan and the U.S., however, may grow stronger. Both India and Japan seeks to oppose Chinese dominance in the Southeast Asian region. It is doubtful that China will be able to truly challenge the U.S in the Western Pacific Ocean for decades yet, but the growing

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<sup>183</sup> Pfaff, William, “Manufacturing Insecurity. How Militarism Endangers America”, 2010, p. 133

<sup>184</sup> Pfaff, “Manufacturing Insecurity. How Militarism Endangers America”, p. 133

Chinese Navy will soon be able to cause more trouble for the U.S. Navy in East Asia. Through the alliances with India and Japan the U.S. will be able to ensure American presence in the region and secure their interests there.

All coastal Southeast Asian nations compete for strategic advantages and dominance in their adjacent waters. If one state should gain total control of the strategic situation it would threaten the export, import, economic development and rise and industry of the other countries in Southeast and East Asia. The vulnerability of the Southeast Asian SLOCs is the reason for much of the tension in the region. China has the largest navy in the region and greatest future potential for threatening the current strategic situation in Southeast Asia. The uncertainty of China's agenda and future strategic goals in Southeast Asia ensures that the Southeast Asian states maintain their own modernization and rearmament.

The rearmament and modernization of the armed forces of most Southeast Asian countries will influence political agendas and strategic situations in the region. The countries of Southeast Asia have different agendas as they seek to gain strategic advantages in the region, making international diplomatic and political relations more difficult to negotiate. The negotiation of territorial rights is a complex issue in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. China is claiming the entire South China Sea, but the other littoral states are not willing to cede large parts, much less all, of their territorial rights and strategic advantages in the region to China. China's increasing geopolitical influence and dominance, however, ensures that this is an issue which is not easily resolved. There is also the question on how far the countries will go in the rearmament to secure their strategic interests. If the states of Southeast Asia could be sure of that China is modernizing its forces for defence matters only, the tension might be lowered and the stability of the region will be secure. However, the Chinese drive for blue-water capabilities shows that China is building an aggressive navy with great potential for first strike capabilities, threatening the security of the Southeast Asian countries.

By becoming a global super power China will inevitably make new enemies and will have to readjust the state's diplomatic agenda as political and strategically situations changes in countries where China is involved. Bases maintained a long way from Chinese mainland project power and force that other countries may interpret as major security concerns for the independence of their own state. As India's power is growing there are four blocks competing

for advantages in Southeast Asia; China, India, ASEAN, and the U.S. A multipolar system is taking form where each block is hedging against the influence of the other three.

The strategic situation in Southeast Asia will be monitored closely by all states which have economic interests and stakes in the region regardless of the level of tension between the Southeast Asian states. Commercial interests and economic ties ensure international participation in an escalation in maritime insecurity or a worst case scenario of war.

Burma might be able to avoid being controlled by its larger and more powerful neighbours, but its strategic location and proximity to one of the world's most important SLOC ensures that neither China, India nor any of the Southeast Asian countries will withdraw their interest in Burma. The importance of this SLOC means that most of the littoral states and other countries which depend on it are prepared to use force to protect the shipping through this area, whether it is against pirates, terrorist or neighbouring states. Military and naval interventions to secure interests in SLOCs will in itself disrupt the free flow of commerce in the region and lead to economical crisis in several of the Southeast and East Asian countries.

## Appendix:

**Table 1: Republic of China (Taiwan) Navy Warships:**

<u>Type</u>	<u>Inventory</u>							
	<u>1985</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2020</u>
Submarines	2	4	4	4	4	4	3	10
Destroyers	20	24	22	7	7	9	9	9
Frigates	10	10	16	21	22	22	22	22
Patrol Craft	51	55	53	63	63	64	42	42
Mine Warfare	8	8	16	12	12	12	10	10
Amphibious	28	26	22	15	18	17	17	17
Support	0	13	19	20	20	19	19	19

Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/taiwan/navy.htm> accessed: 16.03.11

**Table 2: People's Liberation Army Navy Warships**

<u>Type</u>	<u>Inventory</u>									
	<u>1985</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2020</u>	
<b>Submarines*</b>	117	63	48	50	55	62	63	71	78	
<b>Aircraft Carrier</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	
<b>Destroyers</b>	15	18	18	19	24	27	26	25	26	
<b>Frigates</b>	31	37	32	40	46	47	47	47	47	

<b>Guided Missile Boats</b>	212	213	222	94	82	111	84	94	94
<b>Torpedo Boats</b>	230	190	120	16	9	9	0	0	0
<b>Patrol Boats</b>	420	440	440	221	233	235	231	221	204
<b>Mine Warfare</b>	136	126	116	92	92	92	92	92	90
<b>Amphibious Warfare Ships</b>	37	36	36	26	33	37	39	48	50
<b>Amphibious Warfare Craft</b>	429	401	406	369	349	339	305	305	305
<b>Surveillance</b>	34	42	42	47	45	45	45	45	43
<b>Support</b>	174	166	173	164	155	154	142	140	135
<b>Auxiliary, Merchant Marine</b>	32	31	33	32	32	32	32	30	30

\* SSB Ballistic Missile Submarines, SSN Nuclear Attack Submarines and SS Conventional Submarines.

Source: Global Security at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/navy.htm> accessed: 16.03.11

Ronald O'Rourke writes in his CRS Report to Congress that China would have cumulated a total of 31 modern attack submarines in 2010, and 32 in 2012. O'Rourke refer to a ONI report which states that China has currently six nuclear attack submarines, three nuclear ballistic missile submarines and 53 diesel attack submarines. The ONI report also anticipates China to accumulate a submarine fleet of approximately 75 submarines in the next 10 to 15 years<sup>185</sup>.

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<sup>185</sup> O'Rourke, Ronald, 2011, p. 22

**Table 3: Japans Maritime Self-Defence Forces**

<u>Type</u>	<u>Inventory</u>							
	<u>1990</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2020</u>
<b>Submarines</b>	22	18	16	16	16	16	16	16
<b>Destroyers</b>	9	11	13	13	13	13	13	12
<b>Frigates/ Corvettes</b>	48	50	44	44	39	34	34	33
<b>Patrol Combatant Craft</b>	0	3	3	5	9	7	7	7
<b>Mine Warfare</b>	26	33	30	31	34	31	30	30
<b>Amphibious Ships</b>	9	10	11	12	14	13	11	10
<b>Training Ships</b>	3	4	7	7	9	9	8	8
<b>Auxiliary Ships*</b>	14	17	17	18	22	21	21	22

\*Includes Ice Breakers, Ocean Surveillance Ships, Fast Combat Support Ships, etc.

Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/japan/ship.htm> accessed: 16.03.11

**Table 4: Indian Navy Warships**

<u>Type</u>	<u>Inventory</u>								
	<u>1990</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2020</u>
<b>Submarines N*</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	7
<b>Submarines C*</b>	18	19	18	17	16	16	16	17	24
<b>Aircraft Carriers</b>	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
<b>Cruisers</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Destroyers</b>	5	5	8	8	8	8	8	8	10
<b>Frigates</b>	15	14	8	8	13	13	14	18	24
<b>Corvettes</b>	4	4	4	4	4	8	9	14	20
<b>Corvettes-Patrol</b>	22	24	23	24	16	15	15	15	12
<b>Offshore Patrol Vessels</b>	10	11	9	8	7	6	6	6	6
<b>Seward Defence Forces</b>	11	11	9	12	18	9	11	15	19
<b>MCM</b>	20	20	18	17	14	12	12	12	12
<b>Amphibious</b>	19	18	19	17	17	19	17	18	35
<b>Fleet tankers</b>	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4
<b>Support/ MISC</b>	13	16	18	19	19	13	14	14	12

\* Submarines N = Nuclear, Submarines C = Conventional



MCM = Mine Warfare

MISC = Mine Countermeasures

Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/india/navy.htm> accessed: 01.04.11

**Table 5: The naval military balance in the South China Sea in 2002.**

<b>State</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>MP</b>	<b>OP</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>A</b>
PRC	57	0	18	35	163	228	119	73
Vietnam	2	0	0	7	10	34	11	6
Thailand	0	1	0	19	6	76	5	9
Singapore	1	0	0	6	18	0	4	3
Philippines	0	0	0	1	0	67	0	9
Burma	0	0	0	2	6	28	0	15
Malaysia	0	0	0	8	8	29	5	3
Laos	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Indonesia	2	0	0	33	4	37	13	26
Cambodia	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0
Japan	16	0	9	48	3	3	32	6
Taiwan	4	0	18	21	53	45	12	19
India	19	1	6	37	8	22	20	10
Australia	4	0	3	8	0	15	7	7

**Key:** **S:** Submarines; **C:** Carriers; **D:** Destroyers; **F:** Frigates; **MP:** Missile Patrol Ships; **OP:** Other Patrol Ships; **M:** Mine Warfare Ships; **A:** Amphibious Ships.

Source: Figures from Møller, Bjørn, 2002, "The Military Aspects of the Disputes" in *War or Peace in the South China Sea*, Timo Kivimäki, ed. P. 78, Copenhagen: NIAS Press

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