

A historical map of Southeast Asia, featuring various islands and archipelagos. A large red oval with a white border is positioned on the right side, containing text. A grey rectangular box is located at the bottom left, containing the author's name and affiliation. The map includes labels such as 'INSULA', 'PHILIP', 'ARCHIPE', 'LAGUS', 'NOVA GUINEA', and 'SINGAPORE'.

# PERILOUS WATERS

Common  
Aversions,  
Uncommon  
Cooperation &  
ASEAN's South  
China Sea Test

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## OVERVIEW

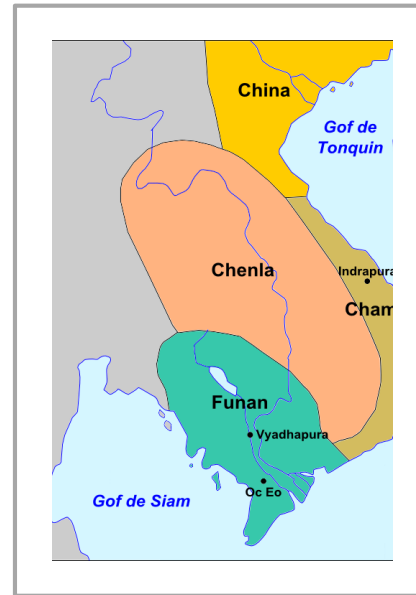
- I. Southeast Asia & the South China Sea
- II. The 'ASEAN Way' Revisited
- III. ASEAN & the South China Sea
- IV. Temptations of Buck-Passing & Pre-eminence
- V. Getting to Lose-Lose
- VI. Reaching for a Pass





# SOUTHEAST ASIA & THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

- Important for Southeast Asia "since ancient times"
- Maritime access key for communications & prosperity in Southeast Asia
- Sea as historical crossroad & source of prosperity in Southeast Asia
- Control of maritime traffic basis for creation of major empires
  - Funan
  - Srivijaya
  - Majapahit
  - Malacca

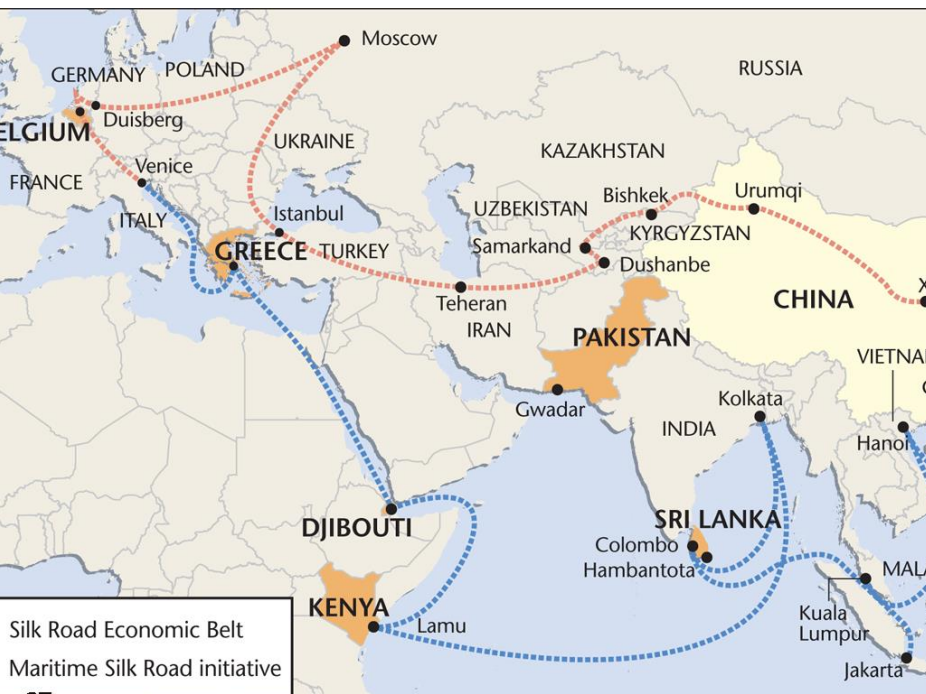




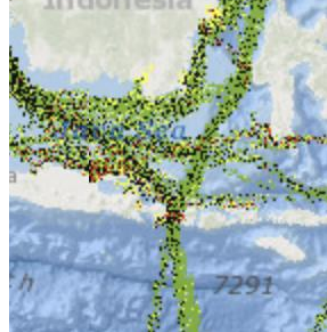
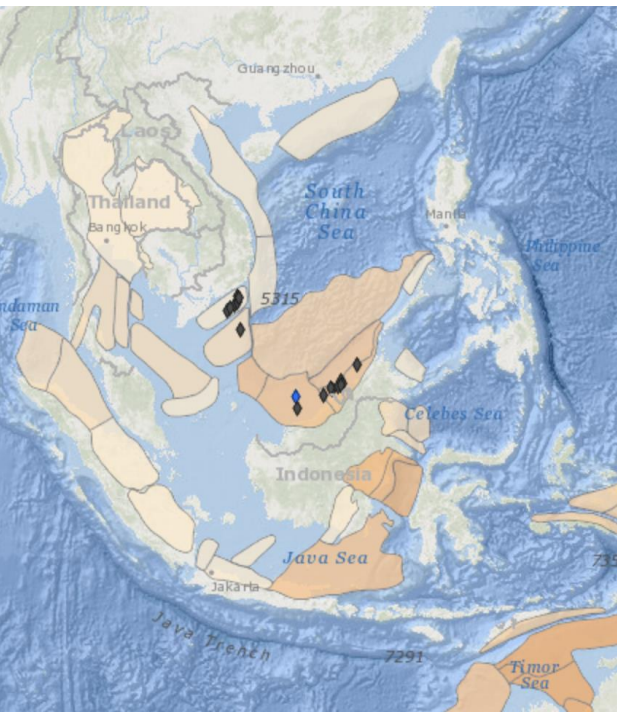
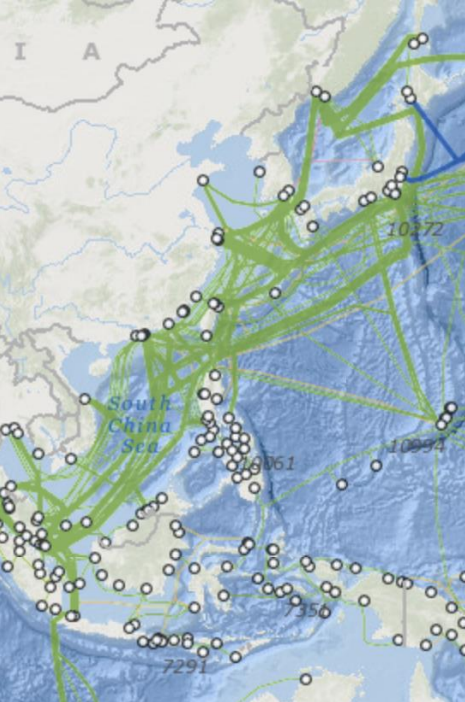


# SOUTHEAST ASIA & THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

- Basis for European colonial expansion
  - Portuguese
  - Spanish
  - Dutch
  - British opium trade
  - American access to China market
  
- Key concern for World War II in the Pacific
  - Oil fields in Dutch East Indies for Japanese war effort
  - Access to oil fields & disruption of Japanese war effort
  
- Importance continues for Southeast Asia after World War II
  - Domino theory & Southeast Asia
  - Rebuilding of Japan
  
- Cold War & extending through the present-day
  - 21st Century Maritime Silk Road







Major crude oil trade flows in the South China Sea (million barrels per day)



# SOUTHEAST ASIA & THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

- Importance in other areas today
- Oil and gas
  - Routes for energy imports to Northeast Asia
  - Oil & gas reserves under the South China Sea
- Container traffic
  - One-third of global shipping (2016)
  - Value of US\$3.37 trillion (2016)
  - Values according to UNCTAD & CSIS
- Submarine cables
  - Backbone of internet communications
- Fishing
  - Major source of protein for Southeast Asian populations
  - Export
  - Environment & trash





# THE 'ASEAN WAY' REVISITED

- **The 'ASEAN Way' we know:**

- From the 1967 ASEAN Declaration, 1976 Bali Concord and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, reaffirmed in the 2003 & 2011 Bali ConCORDs:
- Non-intervention
- Sovereignty
- Consensus decision-making

- **What this means:**

- Central problem one of coordination
- Overriding focus on common aversions—the avoidance of conflict & confrontation, especially among ASEAN members
- Emphasis on autonomy of members & supremacy of domestic political authority
- Every actor has a veto on what the grouping's direction & decisions

- **Significant success in containing intra-ASEAN conflict**

- Minor skirmishes (Thailand-Cambodia; Myanmar-Thailand) notwithstanding





# THE 'ASEAN WAY' REVISITED

- **What this does not mean:**

- Collective action—there is little focus on achieving collective goods Issue of common wants unresolved
- Demonstrating & sustaining initiative is a high bar

- **Exacerbation of challenges to collective action:**

- Reduced Cold War common understanding among ASEAN members
- ASEAN originally club of conservative, authoritarian, anti-Communist developmentalist states
- Despite ASEAN charter & discussion of common legal as well as other types of identity, to have ASEAN governments see each other as similar enough to move beyond transactional ties still difficult

- **Increased hurdles to commonality:**

- Lower bar of coordination over the avoidance of common aversions still achievable

- Higher bar of collective action to initiate cooperation to achieve common goods more difficult than before

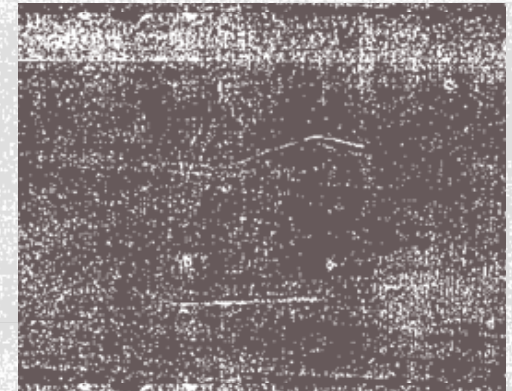
"ONE VISION, ONE IDENTITY, ONE COMMUNITY"





# THE 'ASEAN WAY' REVISITED

- **Incremental approach to issues to avoid friction**
- **Built into various ASEAN-related mechanisms (e.g. ARF, ADMM+, ASEAN+)**
- **Limited movement on political & social issues (e.g. security community, social-cultural community)**
- **Greater progress on liberalization (free trade area, FTAs)**
- **Dispute resolution outsourced to third-party (e.g. ICJ on Malaysia-Singapore & Malaysia-Indonesia)**







# ASEAN & THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

## Within Reach for ASEAN?

- **Avoid direct intra-ASEAN conflict & confrontation with each other**
- **Encourage dialogue among all interested parties (jaw jaw, better than war war!)**
- **Float ideas:**
  - e.g. DOC, COC
- **Confidence building\***

## A Bridge Too Far for ASEAN?

- **Preventive diplomacy\***
- **Dispute resolution\***
- **Collective bargaining over behavior, not resolution:**
  - **See time taken for progress on DOC & possibly COC**
- **Constrain action by any actor:**
  - **Including ASEAN members & other interested parties**
  - **Powerless in face of provocation**

\* ASEAN Regional Forum objectives





## ASEAN External Economics Relations



## ASEAN Centrality



# TEMPTATIONS OF BUCK-PASSING & PRE-EMINENCE

- Buck-Passing on the South China Sea
- Emphasis on ASEAN centrality without recognition of limitations
- Expectation of ASEAN to keep an even keel
- Suggest disinterest, foster stagnation
- Inability to get beyond common aversions & basic avoidance of conflict within ASEAN
- Silence on other interested actors in the South China Sea
- Lack of restraint set stage for greater friction
- *Avoid direct commitment*







# TEMPTATIONS OF BUCK-PASSING & PRE-EMINENCE

- Pre-Eminence on the South China Sea
- Use opportunities opened by limits to collective action
- Prevent consensus by peeling away ASEAN members through side payments
- Lack of effective resistance from ASEAN
- Create space for initiative to alter status quo
- Option especially available to major powers
- *Avoid direct commitment*







# GETTING TO LOSE-LOSE

- Buck-passing & pre-eminence play up ASEAN constraints
- Reduce already limited effectiveness of ASEAN
- Over time, erode whatever buffer ASEAN provides on the South China Sea
- Atrophy of ASEAN
- Set major actors up for more direct confrontation
- Potential for greater friction & instability
- Perhaps what major powers cannot escape from—i.e. Thucydides Trap playing out in Southeast Asia, over the South China Sea







## REACHING FOR A PASS

- Short-term acceptability vs. long-term sustainability
- 'Not choosing sides' in current from reaching end of shelf life
- Difficulty of action for ASEAN in its current form
- Absence of investment in ASEAN reform or impetus for reform
- Uncertainties increased with US-China tensions & trade war
- Lack of interest & ability to effect change from other interested parties





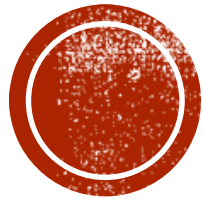


## REACHING FOR A PASS

- For ASEAN to succeed going forward Beijing, Washington & others must
  - Urge & promote ASEAN reform
  - Simultaneously commit to self-restraint
  - Assist ASEAN to develop autonomous institutional capacity
- Above unlikely, temptation for action too great for both major powers
- ASEAN members themselves must:
  - Commit to reform
  - Accept restraints on autonomy
  - Find new ways of binding decision-making on certain matters (majoritarian, super-majoritarian etc.)
  - Accept some limits to non-intervention on matters with regional consequences
- ASEAN members unlikely to find political will for forward movement
- Risk of reform suggesting failure







**THANK YOU!**

Questions welcome