

PART I: The Law Of Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid War is one of the most significant strategic developments that the US has ever spearheaded, and the transitioning of Color Revolutions to Unconventional Wars is expected to dominate the destabilizing trends of the coming decades. Those unaccustomed to approaching geopolitics from the Hybrid War perspective might struggle to understand where the next ones might occur, but it's actually not that difficult to identify the regions and countries most at risk of falling victim to this new form of aggression. The key to the forecast is in accepting that Hybrid Wars are externally provoked asymmetrical conflicts predicated on sabotaging concrete geo-economic interests, and proceeding from this starting point, it's relatively easy to pinpoint where they might strike next.

Part I begins by explaining the patterns behind Hybrid War and deepening the reader's comprehension of its strategic contours. Afterwards, Part II proves how the previously elaborated framework has indeed been at play during the US' Wars on Syria and Ukraine, its first two Hybrid War victims. Part III reviews all of the lessons that have been learned thus far and applies them in forecasting the next theaters of Hybrid War and the most vulnerable geopolitical triggers within them. Subsequent additions to the series will thenceforth focus on those regions and convey why they're so strategically and socio-politically vulnerable to becoming the next victims of the US' post-modern warfare.

Patterning The Hybrid War

The first thing that one needs to know about Hybrid Wars is that they're never unleashed against an American ally or anywhere that the US has premier preexisting infrastructural interests. The chaotic processes that are unleashed during the post-modern regime change ploy are impossible to fully control and could potentially engender the same type of geopolitical blowback against the US that Washington is trying to directly or indirectly channel towards its multipolar rivals. Correspondingly, this is why the US won't ever attempt Hybrid War anywhere that it has interests which are "too big to fail", although such an assessment is of course contemporaneously relative and could quickly change depending on the geopolitical circumstances. Nevertheless, it remains a general rule of thumb that the US won't ever intentionally sabotage its own interests unless there's a scorched-earth benefit in doing so during a theater-wide retreat, in this context conceivably in Saudi Arabia if the US is ever pushed out of the Mideast.

Geostrategic-Economic Determinants:

Before addressing the geo-economic underpinnings of Hybrid War, it's important to state out that the US also has geostrategic ones as well, such as entrapping Russia in a predetermined quagmire. The "[Reverse Brzezinski](#)", as the author has taken to calling it, is simultaneously applicable to Eastern Europe through Donbass, the Caucasus through [Nagorno-Karabakh](#), and Central Asia through the [Fergana Valley](#), and if synchronized through timed provocations, then this triad of traps could prove lethally efficient in permanently ensnaring the Russian bear. This Machiavellian scheme will always remain a risk because it's premised on an irrefutable geopolitical reality, and the best that Moscow can do is try to preempt the concurrent conflagration of its post-Soviet periphery, or promptly and properly respond to American-provoked crises the moment they emerge. The geostrategic elements of Hybrid War are thus somewhat inexplicable from the geo-economic ones, especially in the case of Russia, but in making the examined pattern more broadly pertinent to other targets such as China and Iran, it's necessary to omit the "Reverse Brzezinski" stratagem as a prerequisite and instead focus more on the economic motivations that the US has in each instance.

The grand objective behind every Hybrid War is to disrupt multipolar transnational connective projects through externally provoked identity conflicts (ethnic, religious, regional, political, etc.) within a targeted transit state.

This template can clearly be seen in Syria and Ukraine (which will be explained in Part II) and is the Law of Hybrid Warfare. The specific tactics and political technologies utilized in each destabilization may differ, but the strategic concept remains true to this basic tenet. Taking this end goal into account, it's now possible to move from the theoretical into the practical and begin tracing the geographic routes of various projects that the US wants to target. To qualify, the multipolar transnational connective projects being referred to could be either energy-based, institutional, or economic, and the more overlap that there is among these three categories, the more likely it is that a Hybrid War scenario is being planned for a given country.

Socio-Political Structural Vulnerabilities:

Once the US has identified its target, it begins searching for the structural vulnerabilities that it will exploit in the coming Hybrid War. Contextually, these aren't physical objects to be sabotaged such as power plants and roads (although they too are noted, albeit by different destabilization teams), but socio-political characteristics that are meant to be manipulated in order to attractively emphasize a certain demographic's "separateness" from the existing national fabric and thus 'legitimize' their forthcoming foreign-managed revolt against the authorities. The following are the most common socio-political structural vulnerabilities as they relate to the preparation for Hybrid War, and if each of them can be tied to a specific geographic location, then they become much more likely to be used as galvanizing magnets in the run-up to the Color Revolution and as preliminary territorial demarcations for the Unconventional Warfare aspect afterwards:

- * ethnicity
- * religion
- * history
- * administrative boundaries
- * socio-economic disparity
- * physical geography

The greater the overlap that can be achieved among each of these factors, the stronger the Hybrid War's potential energy becomes, with each overlapping variable exponentially multiplying the coming campaign's overall viability and 'staying power'.

Preconditioning:

Hybrid Wars are always preceded by a period of societal and structural preconditioning. The first type deals with the informational and soft power aspects that maximize key demographics' acceptance of the oncoming destabilization and guide them into believing that some type of action (or passive acceptance of others' thereof) is required in order to change the present state of affairs. The second type concerns the various tricks that the US resorts to in order to have the target government unintentionally aggravate the various socio-political differences that have already been identified, with the goal of creating cleavages of identity resentment that are then more susceptible to societal preconditioning and subsequent NGO-directed political organizing (linked in most cases to the Soros Foundation and/or National Endowment for Democracy).

To expand on the tactics of structural preconditioning, the most commonly employed and globally recognized one is sanctions, the implicit goal of which (although not always successful) has always been to "make life more difficult" for the average citizen so that he or she becomes more amenable to the idea of regime change and is thus more easily shepherded into acting upon these externally instilled impulses. Less known, however, are the more oblique, yet presently and almost ubiquitously implemented, methods of achieving this goal, and this surrounds the power that the US has to affect certain budgetary functions of targeted states, namely the amount of revenue that they receive and what precisely they spend it on.

The global slump in energy and overall commodity prices has hit exporting states extraordinarily hard, many of which are disproportionately dependent on such selling such resources in order to satisfy their fiscal ends, and the decrease in revenue almost always leads to eventual cuts in social spending. Parallel with this, some states are facing American-manufactured security threats that they're forced to urgently respond to, thus necessitating them to unexpectedly budget more money to their defense programs that could have otherwise been invested in social ones. On their own, each of these 'tracks' is designed to decrease the government's social expenditure so as to incubate the medium-term conditions necessary for enhancing the prospects of a Color Revolution, the first stage of Hybrid Warfare. In the event that a state experiences both limited revenue intake and an unexpected need to hike its defense budget, then this would have a compound effect on cutting social services and might even push the Color Revolution timeframe forward from the medium- to short-term, depending on the severity of the resultant domestic crisis and the success that the American-influenced NGOs have in politically organizing the previously examined identity blocs against the government.

PART II: Testing The Theory – Syria And Ukraine

(Please read Part I prior to this article)

The author's book, "Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach To Regime Change" (available for free PDF download [here](#)), thoroughly makes the case that Syria and Ukraine are the US' first victims of Hybrid War, but the scope of the article is to express how the abovementioned innovations not included in the original publication have been importantly at play all along. The purpose is to prove that the newly discovered facets can seamlessly be interwoven into the overall theory and used to enhance one's comprehension of it as a result, thus positioning studied observers to more accurately project the future battlegrounds in which Hybrid Wars are most likely to be fought.

This part of the research thus follows the theoretical model that was just set out before it, in that it elaborates on the geostrategic-economic determinants that were behind the Wars on Syria and Ukraine, before touching on the socio-political structural vulnerabilities that the US attempted to exploit to various degrees of success. The last part incorporates the idea of social and structural preconditioning and briefly discusses how it was present in each case.

Geostrategic Determinants

Syria:

The traditionally secular Arab Republic was sucked into the US' theater-wide Color Revolution scheme when the "Arab Spring" was unleashed in 2011. To concisely summarize the strategic underpinnings of this grandiose operation, the concept was for the US to assist a transnational Muslim Brotherhood clique in coming to power from Algeria to Syria via a series of synchronized regime change operations against rival states (Syria), untrustworthy partners (Libya), and strategic proxy states set for inevitable leadership transitions (Egypt, Yemen). The resultant strategic environment was supposed to resemble Cold War-era Eastern Europe, in that each of the states would have been led by the same party (the Muslim Brotherhood instead of the Communist Party) and controlled by proxy via an external patron, in this case a joint condominium presided over by Turkey and Qatar on the US' [Lead From Behind](#) behalf.

This loosely organized ideological 'confederation' would have been disjointed enough to be manageable via simple divide-and-rule tactics (thus preventing it from ever independently organizing against Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States), but easily provoked into sectarian hatred for mobilizing against Iran and its regional interests, thereby making it an extremely flexible tool for promoting American grand strategy in the Mideast. Given the chaotic origins of this geopolitical gambit, it was predetermined that elements of it wouldn't go according to plan and that only the partial realization of this project could realistically occur during the first attempt, which is precisely what happened when the Syrian people defiantly withstood the Hybrid War assault against them and courageously fought in defense of their secular civilization-state.

It can be argued that Syria was always seen as the most strategic prize out of all the "Arab Spring"-affected states, and this is proven by the desperate nearly five-year-long Hybrid War that the US unleashed against it in response to its initial regime change attempt failing there. In comparison, Egypt, the most populous Arab state, has only had to deal with [low-level Qatari-managed terrorism](#) in the Sinai ever since it overthrew the American-imposed Muslim Brotherhood government. The reason for this glaring discrepancy of relative importance to American grand strategic goals is attributable to the geo-economic determinants behind the War on Syria, which will be expostulated upon shortly.

Ukraine:

The geostrategic determinants behind the War on Ukraine are much more straightforward than those behind the War on Syria, and they've mostly already been spoken about earlier when describing the

“Reverse Brzezinski” stratagem of geopolitical entrapment. Part of the motivation behind overthrowing the Ukrainian government and ushering in the subsequent anti-Russian pogroms was to lure Russia into an interventionist trap à la 1979 Afghanistan, and the War on Donbass was the epitome of this attempt. Washington failed to achieve its objective in this regard, but it was much more successful in turning the entire territory of Ukraine into a geopolitical weapon against Russia.

Brzezinski [famously quipped](#) that “Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire”, and while he had a whole different conception in mind when he said that (his thinking was that Russia would try to “imperialy re-Sovietize” the region), geopolitically speaking, his quote holds a lot of fundamental truth to it. The Russian Federation’s national security is to a large extent determined by events in Ukraine, especially as it relates to its broad western periphery, and a hostile government in Kiev that becomes amenable to hosting US “missile defense” infrastructure (which is really a euphemism for increasing the chances that the US can neutralize Russia’s second-strike capability and thus put it in a position of nuclear blackmail) would pose a major strategic threat. To rephrase Brzezinski and make his quote more objectively accurate, “If the West succeeds in manipulating Ukraine into becoming a long-term enemy of Russia, then Moscow would be faced with a major geopolitical obstacle to its future multipolar ambitions.”

The dire scenario of Ukraine hosting US or NATO “missile defense” units has yet to play out in full, but the country is still making leaps towards “Shadow NATO” membership whereby it becomes a de-facto part of the organization without the formal mutual defense guarantees. The increased military cooperation between Kiev and Washington, and by extension, between Ukraine and the bloc, is premised on aggressive maneuvering against Russian strategic interests. Nevertheless, this isn’t as bad as it could have been, since American strategic planners had naively assumed that the Pentagon would have already had control of Crimea by this time, and therefore would have been able to position their “missile defense” units and other destabilizing technologies right on Russia’s doorstep. The ultimate fallacy in the West’s thinking during the Hybrid War preparations was that Russia would back down from defending its civilizational, humanitarian, and geostrategic interests in Crimea (or that if it did so, it would be pulled into a “Reverse Brzezinski” quagmire), which as history now attests, was an epic miscalculation on par with the worst the US has ever made.

Geo-Economic Determinants

Syria:

Syria is so significant from the perspective of American grand strategy because it was supposed to be the end terminal for the [Friendship Pipeline](#) shared between it, Iran, and Iraq. This gas route would have allowed Iran to access the European market and completely nullify the sanctions regime that the US had built against it. Contemporaneous with this project was a competing one by Qatar to send its own gas through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and thenceforth to the EU, either through LNG or via Turkey. President Assad astutely rejected the Gulf proposal out of loyalty to his country’s long-established Iranian ally, and the War and Syria as waged through the post-“Arab Spring” Hybrid War against it was supported so fiercely by the US and the Gulf States specifically to punish the country for its refusal to become a unipolar satellite.

If it would have been completed, the Friendship Pipeline would have been one of the world’s most important multipolar transnational connective projects, in that it would have revolutionized regional geopolitics by providing an energy and investment corridor linking Iran with the EU. It would have thus entailed a significant alteration in the Mideast’s balance of power and played to the absolute detriment of the US and its Gulf allies. Understanding the acute threat that the Friendship Pipeline posed its decades-long hegemonic dominance over the region, the US committed itself to making sure that the project would never materialize no matter what, ergo one of the partial reasons behind the [creation of ISIL](#) smack dab in the middle of the expected transit zone. Seen from this perspective, it’s much clearer why the US would prioritize the destabilization of Syria over that of Egypt, and would actually be willing

to pour innumerable resources into this endeavor and organize a global proxy coalition to help achieve it.

Ukraine:

The US' determination in capturing Ukraine was inspired by much more than just geostrategic thinking, since those imperatives intersected with contemporaneous geo-economic realities. At the time that the urban terrorist campaign popularly known as "EuroMaidan" was initiated, Ukraine was forced by the US into an artificial "civilizational choice" between the EU and Russia. Moscow had been advancing three interlinked multipolar transnational connective projects – gas and oil sales to the EU, the Eurasian Union, and the Eurasian Land Bridge (energy, institutional, and economic, respectively) – that Washington was eager to weaken at all costs. Recalling Brzezinski's earlier cited quip about Ukraine and the author's rephrasing of it, the words now make a lot more sense, as without Ukraine as a part of this interconnected web of projects, the entire whole becomes substantially weaker than if it were otherwise.

As it relates to each of the projects, Ukraine's removal from the equation: obstructs the Russian-EU energy trade and creates unexpected complications for both sides; leaves a sizeable marketplace and labor force outside the scope of the customs union; and necessitates an infrastructural refocusing solely on relatively smaller and less economically important Belarus, which thus becomes a geopolitical chokepoint that figures even greater than before into the West's [anti-Russian schemes](#). As an added 'benefit' of poaching Ukraine from the Russian integrational orbit, the US was able to set into motion a chain of thematically preconceived events (excluding Crimea's reunification, of course) that instigated the New Cold War it was eager to spark.

It wanted to do so in order to create seemingly insurmountable obstacles between Russia and the EU, knowing that the expected security dilemmas (in military, energy, economic, and strategic terms) would dramatically impede cooperation between them and make Brussels all the more vulnerable to being cajoled into the US' massive unipolar power plays that it was planning. In order to maintain its hegemonic position over Europe, the US had to engineer a scenario that would split Russia and the EU long enough and in as intense of a manner as possible so as increase the chances that the three following categorical projects of control could be imposed on Europe: NATO's permanent on-alert deployment in the east (military); US LNG exports to the EU and the newly attractive appeal of non-Russian energy routes such as the [Southern Gas Corridor](#) (energy); and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which, among other privileges it grants the US, makes it impossible for the EU to conduct any further Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) without Washington's approval (economic).

Altogether, these three interlocked factors are intended to bolster the grandest of the US' strategic objectives, which in a mutually interrelated manner, also increases the prospects for their own success. This is the artificially engineered "clash of civilizations" between the West and Eurasia-Russia, whereby the US expects the EU to henceforth cobble in fear before Russia and consequently rush into Uncle Sam's arms as the 'defender of Western civilization'. It is this ultimate plan that the US wants to fulfill in Europe, since its successful implementation alongside its three key components (the military, energy, and economic facets earlier described) would create the conditions for multi-generational hegemonic dominance over Europe, and thus spiking the odds that multipolarity's counter-offense against the US will be a drawn-out, decades-long affair.

Socio-Political Structural Vulnerabilities – Syria

Ethnicity:

At least 90% of Syria's population is Arab while the remaining 10% or so is mostly Kurdish. From the Hybrid War perspective, one would assume that this state of affairs might be useful in destabilizing the

state, but several factors prevented it from reaching its American-anticipated potential. Firstly, the Syrian population is very patriotic due to their civilizational heritage and galvanized opposition to Israel. As a result, while there's obviously a plurality of personal political opinion among the mostly mono-ethnic society, there was never any real possibility that they would violently turn against the state, hence the need to import such a vast number of international terrorists and mercenaries to the battlefield to satisfy this Hybrid War 'requirement'.

Concerning the Kurds, they've never had a history of anti-government rebellion unlike their Turkish and Iraqi counterparts, thus implying that their state of affairs in Syria was manageable and nowhere near as bad as Western information outlets try to retroactively paint it as. Even if they could have been conjured up into a radical anti-government mass, their relatively minor role in national affairs and obscure geographic distance from any relevant power centers would have precluded them from becoming a significant Hybrid War asset, although they'd be an effective strategic supplement to any Arab terrorists based closer to the primary population centers. As is known, however, the Kurds have remained loyal to Damascus and have not broken with the government, thus adding confirmation to the thesis that they were content with their original status and not prone to "rebel".

In sum, the ethnic components of the US' Hybrid War planning against Syria failed to live up to their anticipated potential, indicating that pre-war intelligence assessments were cripplingly distorted in underestimating the unifying pull of Syrian Patriotism.

Religion:

Syria's population is overwhelmingly Sunni but also has an important Alawite minority that has traditionally held various leadership positions in the government and military. This never was an issue before, but externally managed social preconditioning (in this instance, organized by the Gulf States) acclimatized parts of the population to sectarian thinking and began laying the psychological foundation for takfiri tension to take root among some domestic elements after the Color Revolution stage was initiated in early 2011. Afterwards, even though sectarianism was never a factor in Syrian society before and still isn't a major force to this day (despite almost five years of "religiously" motivated terrorist provocations), it would be used as a rallying cry for replenishing the ranks of foreign jihadists and as a 'plausible' cover for the US and its allies to allege that President Assad doesn't 'represent the people' and must therefore be overthrown.

History:

Syrian history is thousands of years old and represents one of the richest civilizations of all time. Consequently, this imbues the country's citizens with an unshakeable sense of patriotism that would later reveal itself to be one of the strongest defenses against Hybrid War (civilizational solidarity). It's obvious that this would have been discovered by American strategists in their preparatory research on Syria, but they likely underrated its importance, figuring that they could successfully provoke a return to the destabilizing coup-after-coup post-independence years prior to the late Hafez Assad's Presidency. On the contrary, the vast majority of Syrians had grown to sincerely appreciate the contributions of the Assad family to their country's stability and success, and they never wanted to do anything that could return the country to the dark years that preceded the first family's political rise.

Administrative:

The brief legacy of [separate administrative boundaries](#) during a period of the French occupation provided the geopolitical precedent for the US to resurrect a formal or federalized division of Syria. Even though the historical memory of this time is largely lost on the psyche of contemporary Syrians (save for the mandate-era flag that represents the anti-government terrorists), that doesn't mean that there's no possibility of externally enforcing it on them in the future and "historically justifying" it after the fact. The Russian anti-terrorist intervention in Syria neutralized the possibility of the country's formal

fragmentation, but the ongoing [Race for Raqqa](#) means that the force which captures the terrorists' 'capital' will hold the best cards in determining the post-war internal makeup of the state, opening the possibility for the US and its proxies to force a federalized 'solution' on Syria that could create largely autonomous zones of pro-American support.

Socio-Economic Disparity:

Pre-war Syria had a relatively balanced distribution of socio-economic indicators, despite adhering to the globally stereotypical 'rule' of the urban areas being more developed than the rural ones. Though the rural areas comprise most of the country's geographic area, only a fraction of the population inhabited them, with most Syrians living along the western-based north-south corridor of Aleppo-Hama-Homs-Damascus, while a strategically important population also inhabits coastal Latakia. Up until 2011, Syria had been showing years of steady economic growth, and there's no reason to believe that this would have abated had it not been for the Hybrid War against it. Therefore, although socio-economic disparities surely existed in Syria before the war, they were properly managed by the government (owing in part to the semi-socialist nature of the state) and weren't a factor that the US could exploit.

Physical Geography:

This is the one characteristic that works out most to the advantage of Hybrid War against Syria. The Color Revolution component was concentrated in the heavily populated western-based north-south corridor that was written about above, while the Unconventional Warfare part thrived in the rural regions outside this area. The authorities understandably had difficulty balancing between urban and rural security needs, and the absurd amount of support that the US and its Gulf allies were channeling to the terrorists via Turkey temporarily threw the military off balance and resulted in the stalemate that marked the first few years of the conflict (with some dramatic back-and-forth changes from time to time). As this was happening and the Syrian Arab Army was focused on the pressing security matters challenging it along the population corridor, ISIL was able to make swift conventional military advances along the logistically accommodating plains and deserts of the east and rapidly set up its "caliphate", the consequences of which are driving the present-day course of events in the country.

Socio-Political Structural Vulnerabilities – Ukraine

Ethnicity:

Ukraine's demographic divide between East and West, Russians and Ukrainians, is well known and has been heavily discussed. In the context of Hybrid War, this almost clean-cut geographic distribution (with the exception of the Russian plurality in Odessa and majority in Crimea) was a godsend to American strategic planners, since it created an ingrained demographic dichotomy that could easily be exploited when the time was ripe.

Religion:

Here too is an almost perfect geographic divide between East and West, with the Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches representing the two critical population groups in the country. Further west are the Uniate and Catholic Churches, corresponding mostly to the former lands of the interwar Second Polish Republic. Christian sectarianism wasn't the most visible rallying cry behind EuroMaidan, but its radical adherents used the coup's success as cover for destroying Russian Orthodox Churches and other religious property in a nationwide campaign that sought to prompt the [ethnic and cultural cleansing](#) of the Russian population.

History:

The modern Ukrainian state is an [artificial amalgam of territories](#) bequeathed to it by successive Russian and Soviet leaders. Its inherently unnatural origins curse it with a perpetually questionable existence, and the territorial aggrandizement after World War II complicated this even further. The most nationalist chunk of modern-day Ukraine used to be part of interwar Poland, and before that, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, thus giving its inhabitants a diametrically different historical memory than those in the central or eastern portions of the state.

The Hungarian and Romanian minority communities that live in the newly added areas (acquired from Czechoslovakia and Romania, respectively) also have a natural degree of identity “separateness” from the state that only needed an externally ‘nudged’ destabilization to bring it fully to the surface.

As was argued in Hybrid War and confirmed by Newsweek’s reporting just days before the coup (suspiciously [deleted](#) from their website but [referenceable](#) on web.archive.org), the historic ethno-religiously separate region of Western Ukraine was in full-scale armed rebellion against the President Yanukovich, and it’s no coincidence that the Unconventional Warfare aspect of that regime change campaign began in this specific part of the country.

Administrative Borders:

Ukraine’s domestic divisions coincide quite neatly with its administrative borders on many occasions – be they the ethnic divide, Christian sectarianism, historic regions, or electoral results – and this served as the ultimate asymmetrical multiplier that convinced American strategists that Hybrid War could easily be rolled out in Ukraine. Had it not been for the unexpected coup in late February 2014, it’s very possible that the US would have sought to exploit the unprecedented overlap of socio-political vulnerabilities in Ukraine in order to physically separate the western part of the country from the pro-government remainder of the rump state, but only in the event that Yanukovich would have been able to indefinitely hold out against the regime change terrorists and consolidate his holdings in the rest of the non-“rebel”-controlled areas of the country.

Socio-Economic Disparity:

Ukraine is similar to Syria in the sense that it also had a near-even distribution of socio-economic indicators, however, unlike the Arab Republic and its modest wealth, the Eastern European state equally spread poverty among its citizens. The large amount of Ukrainians in poverty or very close to it created an enormous recruiting pool for anti-government ‘activists’ to be culled by the NGO masterminds of the EuroMaidan Color Revolution, and the absence of any civilizational or national patriotism (excluding the hardcore fascist perversion epitomized by Pravy Sektor and company) meant that there were no societal safeguards in preventing the emergence of multiple “rent-a-riots” from being organized beforehand and deployed when the time was ‘right’.

Physical Geography:

The only unique part of pre-war Ukraine’s mostly standardized plains geography was Crimea, which functioned more like an island than the peninsula that it technically is. This ironically worked out to the US’ severe disadvantage when the autonomous republic’s favorable geography helped its inhabitants defend themselves long enough to vote to secede from the failing Ukrainian state and correct Khrushchev’s historical wrong by finally reuniting with their brethren in Russia. The same geographic facilitating factors weren’t in play with Donbass, which thus inhibited the patriots’ defense of their territory and made them much more vulnerable to Kiev’s multiple offensives against them. In the pre-coup environment, Ukraine’s easily traversable geography would have been ideal for the enabling the western “revolutionaries” to make a swift, ISIL-like lunge at Kiev once they accumulated enough stolen weaponry, equipment, and vehicles from the numerous police stations and [military barracks](#) that they were seizing at the time.

Preconditioning

It's beyond the scope of the present research to discuss the social preconditioning aspects of Hybrid War in detail, but they can generally be assumed to comprise the social/mass media-education-NGO triad. The specifics about structural preconditioning are a bit different, as aside from sanctions pressure, the other majorly discussed element described in Part I (i.e. the energy market disruption) didn't occur until last year and thus wasn't a factor in the run-up to either of the two examined Hybrid Wars. Still, other more distinct elements were certainly in play for each of the two states, with Ukraine's coffers being bled dry by endemic and parasitic corruption and Syria having to perennially balance its military needs in defending against Israel with its social commitment to the population (a tightrope act that it managed quite well over the decades).

PART III: Predicting The Next Hybrid Wars

(Please read Part I and Part II prior to this article)

Theoretical Review

Identifying The Targets:

The first two parts of the series introduced new concepts to the Hybrid War theory and successfully tested them on the Syrian and Ukrainian cases. This proved that a certain methodology does in fact exist for explaining and analyzing Hybrid Wars, and excitingly, this rubric can proactively be applied in attempting to predict the places where this form of post-modern warfare could be directed next. To refer to Part I, one must first recall the Law of Hybrid Warfare:

“The grand objective behind every Hybrid War is to disrupt multipolar transnational connective projects through externally provoked identity conflicts (ethnic, religious, regional, political, etc.) within a targeted transit state.”

Considering this, the next step is to identify the major multipolar transnational connective projects ongoing or planned all across the world. Once this has been done, each transit state is assessed for the greatest number of vulnerable socio-political overlaps as according to the following six factors:

- * ethnicity
- * religion
- * history
- * administrative boundaries
- * socio-economic disparity
- * physical geography

From there, all that's left to do is pinpoint the most socio-politically vulnerable transit states and set out to reverse engineer the conditions necessary for emphasizing key demographics' anti-government "separateness" from the central authorities. Cultural anthropologists, historians, NGO activists, media and marketing experts, and "independent researchers", among others, play a vanguard role in this social preconditioning process and can also be of integral use to US intelligence in explaining the most efficient methods to be employed in ideologically penetrating their targeted audiences' psyches. Concurrent with this, varying degrees of structural preconditioning are also practiced in order to intensify the artificially constructed divide between the state and the strategic elements of its citizenry.

Civilizational And Civic Patriotism:

Hybrid War is essentially the weaponization of [chaos theory](#), which itself is disproportionately dependent on the initial conditions prior to the destabilization's onset. As has been discussed, the socio-political vulnerabilities in each target state are important indicators in gauging the potential success of the oncoming regime change operation, but the six main factors are difficult to modify (let alone in a short timeframe) if they don't play to the full advantage of the aggressor. Due to this, social and structural preconditioning take on an enhanced role, as ideas and economic trends are a lot easier to interfere with and change than ethnic composition and provincial boundaries, for example. Both of these constituent characteristics (affected respectively by social and structural preconditioning) can strongly impact on the target citizenry's civilizational and/or civic patriotism, which is the strongest defense that a state has in repelling Hybrid War.

It's at this point where it's worthy to once more recall the cases of Syria and Ukraine, as each of them proceeded along a completely divergent trajectory owing in large part to their differing level of civilizational/civic patriotism prior to the Hybrid War against them. This initial condition is undoubtedly the most critical in determining whether the destabilization will drag on for years or if it'll be a swift and easy success.

The Syrian people have one of the world's most vehement civilizational patriotisms, and this in turn amplified their country's resiliency to resisting the multidimensional Hybrid War aggression being waged against them. As a result, the US and its allies have had to provide continual support to their proxy elements in order to unnaturally maintain the chaotic processes that they had expected to become self-perpetuating. In the event that such assistance is disrupted, it would thus directly translate into a visible weakening of the Hybrid War elements inside the country and consequently lead to their quick eradication.

Contrarily, the situation was the diametric opposite in Ukraine, where no civilizational patriotism was present (despite the rich legacy of Kievan Rus) and scarcely any civic patriotism existed. All that the US had to do was efficiently organize the proper assets and give them the signal to initiate their destabilization in unison. The chaotic processes then proceeded as theorized and began to take on a life of their own, requiring minimal guidance from that point onwards when compared to the strategic quagmire that the US crept into with Syria. The only significant intervention that the US engaged in was the [false-flag sniper attack](#) at the end of February, and it only did so because it sensed an irresistible opportunity to maximize the chaos and quickly topple the government.

To summarize this sub-section, the two glaringly different examples of Hybrid War in Syria and Ukraine prove that the initial condition of civilizational and/or civic patriotism is the deciding factor in influencing the course of the asymmetrical conflict, and accordingly, should demonstrate to [democratic security](#) specialists the existential importance in proactively supporting such measures within their own targeted states.

Unleashing The Wrath:

Finally, it's relevant to touch upon the beginning stages of Hybrid War and briefly explain the tactical limitations of the theory as they apply to two specific categories of states. Concerning the initial stage similarities shared by the vast majority of states, a preconceived moment (typically something symbolic such as an historically important commemoration, a parliamentary/presidential vote, or a provoked instance of state-on-"protester" violence) or a fortuitous turn of events (e.g. Yanukovich's last-minute decision to postpone the EU Association Agreement) is used as a signal to merge the separate cells comprising the regime change social infrastructure into a critical anti-government mass that inaugurates the Color Revolution movement and heralds the first step of Hybrid War. Should the 'soft coup' (often interspersed with lethal urban terrorism) fail, then the 'hard coup' push of Unconventional War is eventually initiated against the beleaguered government and its patriotic citizenry, thereby fulfilling the Hybrid War template.

Not all Unconventional Wars begin with Color Revolutions and not all Color Revolutions end in Unconventional Wars, but the US' strategic aim going forward is to have the two forms of regime change seamlessly merge together into an escalatory ladder of intensified anti-government pressure whenever possible. Some societies with fully developed civil societies (relative to the globally recognized Western 'standard') and without many of the prerequisite socio-political vulnerabilities such as Denmark might never experience the Unconventional Warfare aspect of Hybrid War and would only likely fall victim to its Color Revolution side. However, a re-engineering of their demographics (e.g. the "refugee" crisis) could predictably change that and make them much more susceptible to a full Hybrid War.

Continuing along, states that don't have as robust of a civil society (or none at all in the Western traditional sense), yet overly satisfy the socio-political credentials for Unconventional Warfare like the

Central African Republic does, might just outright skip the Color Revolution stage and jump right into the identity warfare part of Hybrid War. As with the first example, this could also change via a demographic re-engineering of society, albeit in a different manner whereby rapid (most likely Chinese-supported) development leads to the birth of an emergent middle class that could potentially fill the ranks of Color Revolution insurgents.

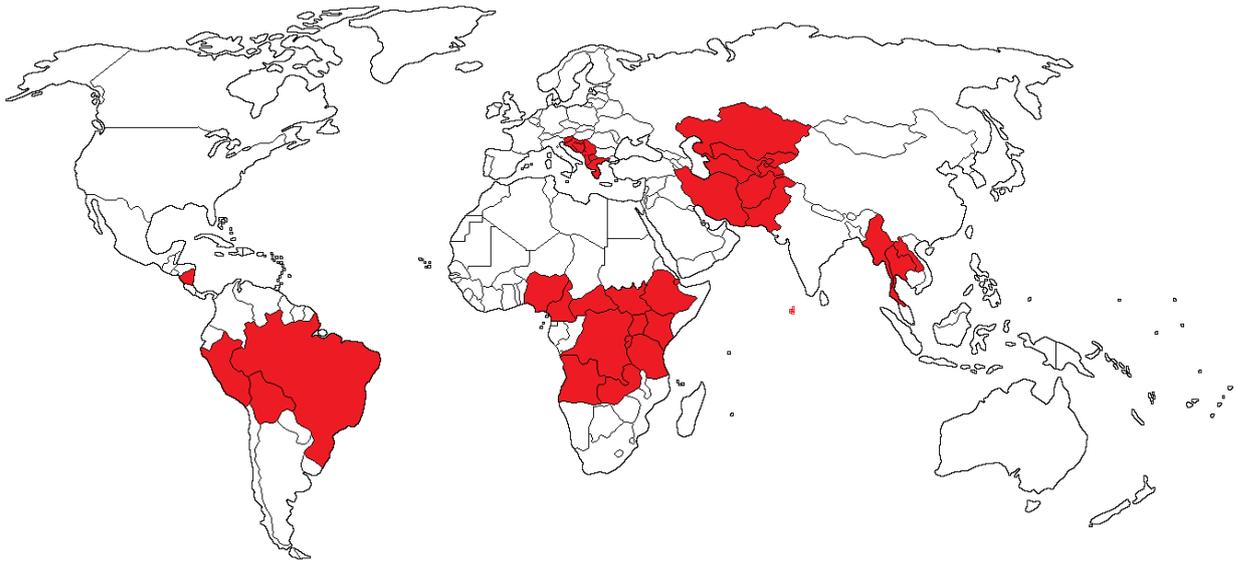
In rare situations, there's also the possibility of a "Reverse Hybrid War", whereby an Unconventional War precedes a Color Revolution. To an extent, it can be argued that Myanmar's drawn-out civil war created fertile conditions for the 1989 Color Revolution and subsequent rise of Aung San Suu Kyi. While it took over two decades for her to finally win full power, she eventually did nonetheless, and it's clear that the Unconventional War environment preconditioned the masses into accepting this with time. Likewise, something similar is currently playing out in West Africa with Boko Haram. Each of the four states in the Lake Chad region are coming under sharp pressure from the terrorist group, and the violence that has resulted is creating a situation where even a disorganized Color Revolution increases the chance of its ultimate success precisely because of the target government's preoccupation with Boko Haram.

This is especially the case with Chad, whose capital of Ndjamena is in extremely close proximity to the battleground and has already fallen victim to a few suicide bombings. A nascent Color Revolution would be the ultimate force multiplier in skyrocketing the chances that the government would be overthrown, either by Boko Haram, the urban insurgents, or a tacit and coordinated effort between the two. From a standardized theoretical standpoint, the existing Unconventional Warfighters team up with the newly active Color Revolutionaries in order to decisively shift the balance against the state and succeed in the shared regime change objective. The only alternative to this scenario would be for the military to crush the "protesters" with extreme prejudice the moment they rise up before moving on to swiftly annihilate any terrorists that try to exploit the coming fray, with the same pattern holding true for Chad as it does for any other state that finds itself at risk of "Reverse Hybrid War".

Practical Application

Taking everything that's been reviewed so far and proven by the Syrian and Ukrainian test cases, it's now time to practically apply the lessons of Hybrid War in predicting where it could strike next. The most impactful multipolar transnational connective projects are spearheaded by Russia and China, and the two most significant of them are the Eurasian Union and the One Belt One Road ("New Silk Road"). Their shared area of intersection in Central Asia means that that any large-scale destabilization in this region could accomplish the 'two-for-one' goal of offsetting both Great Powers' ambitions in one geopolitical masterstroke, which is why there's such a high risk of Hybrid War breaking out there sometime in the near future. Elsewhere, however, there's no direct integrational overlap of the [Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership](#) except [in the Balkans](#), but even there, the confluence of interests is less tightly connected and developed than it is in Central Asia. It should go without saying, however, that this makes the theater the second-most likely region to fall victim to Hybrid Wars in the future out of American 'necessity' to preempt the conclusion of the two megaprojects of [Balkan \("Turkish"\) Stream](#) and the [Balkan Silk Road](#) that could decisively tilt Europe's strategic balance towards the multipolar world.

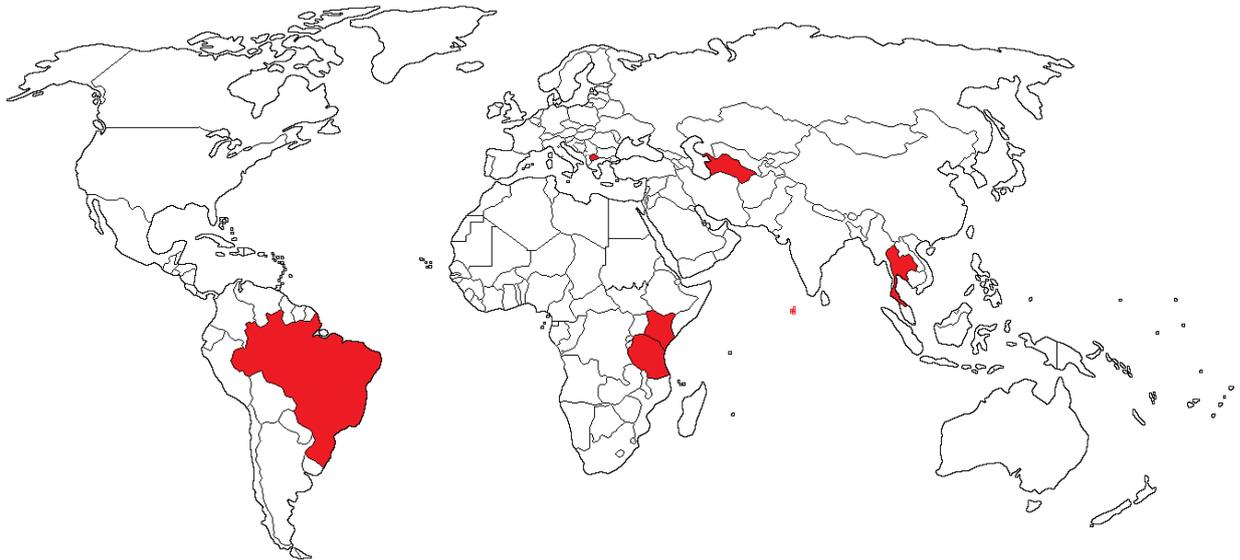
The other regions at risk of Hybrid War are targeted specifically because of their cooperation with China's New Silk Road, and they include" the Greater Heartland states of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan; the western part of ASEAN; the Indian Ocean archipelago state of Maldives; a large swath of trans-equatorial Africa that bridges the oceanic divide; and Brazil-Peru and Nicaragua in Latin America. The below is a map that clearly illustrates the aforementioned geographic zones most likely to be threatened by Hybrid War in the future:



Out of these identified regions (and with the exception of the 'stand-alone' state of the Maldives), there are core countries whose identity-based destabilization is most likely to occur due to certain context-specific reasons. Most realistically in terms of their relative probability, they are as follows: Uzbekistan in the Greater Heartland; the Republic of Macedonia in the Balkans; Myanmar in ASEAN; Djibouti-Ethiopia in Africa; and Nicaragua and Bolivia in Latin America. Simplifying the earlier map, here's what it looks like with only the geopolitical triggers highlighted:



The above map does come with a caveat, however, and it's that the core triggers in the Greater Heartland, ASEAN, Africa, and Latin America could possibly be usurped by less likely but regionally more impactful Hybrid Wars in in the countries of Turkmenistan, Thailand, Kenya-Tanzania, and Brazil. Destabilizations in these countries might even be more effective in disrupting the multipolar transnational connective projects that they're a part of than if they happened in their aforementioned regional counterparts. Here's a modified map that reflects the caveats:



Having revealed the core targets of Hybrid War, the forthcoming sections of the research will focus on each designated region, with an emphasis on the highlighted triggers that are expected to either set off a wider conflagration or irreversibly sabotage the transnational integrational projects that they're a part of. The only exception to the outlined format is the Maldives, since the author has already written an exhaustive [three-part analysis](#) about its Hybrid War risk and the broader geopolitical implications of its destabilization. On that account, the next parts of the research will proceed along the order of Central Asia, the Balkans, ASEAN, Africa, and Latin America.

Each section will begin by describing the region's geo-economic importance, or in other words, how it adheres to the Law of Hybrid War. Afterwards, a brief overview will be given whereby some of the most relevant socio-political vulnerabilities for each state will be touched upon and incorporated into broad Hybrid War scenarios. Finally, the last part specifically focuses on the core target in each region by explaining how a Hybrid War there would quickly shatter the multipolar transnational connective project that they're a part of, and when appropriate, it discusses the comparative differences in probability and impact between the core and caveat states.

PART I: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

China is the only Great Power with the economic wherewithal to challenge the US all across the world, and as such, these qualities neatly complement Russia's military capabilities in assisting both civilizational poles as they jointly forge a multipolar world order. The manifestation of their shared global vision and the framework through which they cooperate in achieving it is the [Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership](#), and because of Beijing's intimate closeness with Moscow, it too has been targeted for full-scale proxy destabilization by the US. Washington's strategy isn't limited to solely obstructing multipolar transnational connective projects (as ambitious of a goal as that is already), but also in physically containing China in its own home region, similar in many respects to what it's been attempting to do to Russia ever since the end of the Cold War.

These two strategies intersect to a large degree and have a major commonality between them in that they can both be furthered by American-driven Hybrid Wars. This part of the book explores the applicability of this method to ASEAN, the strategic 'backyard' and 'soft underbelly' of China. In many ways, ASEAN is to China just what Central Asia is to Russia, although it can be strongly argued that ASEAN is of much more critical economic importance to China than Central Asia ever will be for Russia (though both regions have equal strategic value as relative to each respective Great Power). The first part of the book mapped out the three ASEAN states most vulnerable to Hybrid Wars (Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand), but their geopolitical significance and the attractiveness that the US has in targeting these specific states can't be fully understood if explained in isolation from the larger ASEAN region.

For that reason, it's integral for the first parts of this geopolitical study to focus on ASEAN as a whole in explaining its strategic saliency in general and then in describing how the US plans to weaponize the bloc for macro-regional proxy rivalry against China. Along the same lines, it's also relevant to detail China's grand strategic plans in responding to this aggressive encirclement and the unipolar militarization of the international waterways through which so much of its economic growth depends. This naturally brings the research along to a thorough discussion about why China selected Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand as the host countries for its multipolar transnational connective projects and how these are envisioned as suitable countermeasures in evading the trap that the US is setting in the South China Sea. The socio-political vulnerabilities of all ASEAN countries will then be touched upon before the research goes fully in-depth investigating the Myanmar and Thai case studies, after which these two scenarios will be compared with one another in highlighting the difference between their respective likelihoods and overall strategic impact.

The Global Economic Crossroads

ASEAN's [solid growth](#) in the past few decades has made it an enviable partner for many, and the economic bloc has entered into several high-profile free trade agreements (FTAs) in the past couple of years. As of the end of 2015, it has bilateral FTAs with [Australia and New Zealand](#), [China](#), [India](#), [Japan](#), and [South Korea](#), essentially making it the formal economic crossroads between these leading world economies. Furthermore, it's currently engaged in free trade negotiations with the [EU](#) and the [Eurasian Union](#), which if ultimately sealed, would give ASEAN free trade rights with almost the entirety of the supercontinent with the exception of the Mideast and a small handful of other countries. With the convergence of so many economic interests over ASEAN, it's only a matter of time before this smattering of bilateral agreements is expanded into a multilateral framework that progressively includes each of the given parties.

Such an arrangement would represent a major victory for Eurasia and the multipolar world because it would tie each of the Great Powers together and make them collectively more interdependent on one another than either of them individually would be with the US. This is obviously a long-term vision and isn't something that can be actualized in the scope of just a few years, but the path is already being paved the closer that ASEAN comes to inking free trade deals with the [EU](#) and the [Eurasian Union](#). The increasingly intertwined FTAs that these respective economic partners reach with one another will

inevitably bring them all closer together with time, despite existing political and structural differences between some of them such as the current American-dictated chill in the EU's relations with the Eurasian Union.

TTIP Tramples Everything

If given the chance to behave freely, the EU would likely intensify bilateral ties with the Eurasian Union as evidenced by [Junker's late-November 2015 outreach](#) to the bloc, but US grand strategy has always been based on keeping the two divided, hence the manufactured Ukrainian Crisis and subsequently planned New Cold War. Should a breakthrough in bilateral relations occur, perhaps due to the structural changes that Balkan Stream and the Balkan Silk Road would generate inside the EU if either of them is successfully completed, then it's probable that their overlapping economic interests in ASEAN (independently negotiated up until that point) could represent the perfect catalyst for banding together and formalizing a larger and more inclusive economic framework between all actors. The reasoning behind this is because the current American-attributed deterioration of EU-Eurasian Union relations is the only 'non-natural' structural impediment preventing all of the supercontinent's trade blocs from cooperating on the all-inclusive scale suggested above.

From the American strategic standpoint, however, this would represent the ultimate failure of its divide-and-rule policy in Eurasia, and it's for this institutional reason why the US is so adamant about pursuing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the EU. In the event that this neo-imperialist proposal ever enters into force, then the US would have the dominant say in deciding whether its junior EU 'partner' is allowed to continue its existing free trade negotiations with [Japan](#) and [India](#). More likely than not, it would indefinitely freeze these already-stalled processes in order to consolidate its economic control over the bloc, and only after it exercises indisputable control over it will Washington allow the talks to proceed. By that point, the goal would be to link TTIP and the TPP (which will be expanded upon shortly, but whose Asian component will be [led by Japan](#)) together to make the US the institutionally essential actor between them, and then complete the unipolar-dominated economic envelopment of Eurasia by bringing India into the mix to some capacity.

This strategy is contingent on the US using the New Cold War hype that it's created to scare its partners into agreeing to the TTIP and TPP out of the manufactured perception that they need to contain Russia and China, respectively. In the scenario being describe above, if the US doesn't succeed in pushing through TTIP and the EU independently aligns itself with either of those major Asian economies (let alone that it begins free trade negotiations with China), then the US could rapidly lose its [present preeminence](#) over the EU economy. In a short time, Brussels might finally come to the conclusion that everyone else in the world has already arrived at and realize that the future of the global economy rests in the East, not the West, and enter into wider and freer trading relations with the rest of its prospective partners. This would of course naturally include Russia and the Eurasian Union, and with the two economies already converging on their own as it would be (remembering that it's only because of American-attributed political impediments that they aren't doing so already), it's foreseeable that they could coordinate their respective FTAs with ASEAN as a final stepping stone before engaging in a similar one amongst themselves.

Multilateral Backup Plans

As positive of a picture as the above section paints, it probably won't happen for at least the coming decade, if at all, seeing how serious the US is in 'playing for keeps' within the New Cold War rivalry. Whether through the institutional workings of the TTIP or outside of it via more unscrupulous measures if the said agreement isn't passed by that time, the US will do everything in its power to prevent the EU from expanding its independent economic relations with the Eurasian Union, China, and ASEAN. It might potentially be allowed to deepen its ties with Japan and India (per the unipolar grand strategy described previously), but even that is debatable unless the US feels assured enough that it can maintain control over the bloc after those prospective agreements are clinched. It probably wouldn't have the confidence

to do so unless it formally controlled the EU through TTIP, thus making these potential free trade areas unlikely, at least in the short- to medium-term timeframes, barring of course any unexpected geopolitical shifts. For the most part, then, the EU can be safely discounted from any serious discussions about intra-Eurasian free trade zones, but that doesn't mean that such dreams should be discouraged simply because the bloc realistically can't take part in them for a while (if at all).

RCEP And FTAAP:

To compensate for the expected non-participation of the EU inside the envisioned multipolar economic frameworks, a few modified proposals have been suggested. Two of the most talked about are the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#) (RCEP) and the [Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific](#) (FTAAP), both of which are actively supported by China. The RCEP is the formalization of a multilateral FTA between ASEAN and each of its already-existing free trade partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea), while the FTAAP takes things a lot further and proposes a grandiose free trade zone among all the countries that constitute the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, thereby including Russia, the US, and a few other Western Hemispheric countries but at the expense of a full free trade deal with ASEAN as a whole (Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia are not APEC members).

Nevertheless, it's still significant that most of the countries within the bloc would be participants in that framework, highlighting just how important ASEAN economies are for transregional free trade deals nowadays. At the same time, however, the inclusion of the US would greatly erode the multipolar flexibility of the intended grouping and turn it into more of an apolitical economic organization that can't be used in a relative way to weaken the US' unipolar standing. It's probable that Russia and China only support this idea so as to score political points of their own in contrasting it with the US' exclusionary TPP plans that threaten to undermine both Great Powers' existing trade connections and future opportunities with the involved states.

Russia's Vision For GEFTA:

The latest proposal to be brought up for creating a multilateral transregional trading bloc came from Russia and was pronounced during President Putin's [Address to the Federal Assembly](#) on 4 December, 2015. The Russian leader announced his country's intention to form an economic partnership between the Eurasian Union, ASEAN, and SCO states (including the two ascending members of India and Pakistan), arguing that the new organization would "make up nearly a third of the global economy in terms of purchasing power parity." This is the most realistic of the three suggestions and the most likely to be implemented in practice. China already has a FTA with [Pakistan](#) (the '[zipper](#)' of Eurasian integration), and the Eurasian Union is exploring the possibility of sealing similar deals with [India](#) and official SCO-prospect [Iran](#). Of note, Russia and China are also engaged in a [trilateral partnership with Mongolia](#) that could predictably become a free trade area sometime in the future as well.

Assuming that Moscow will be successful in reaching these (and there's no reason to doubt that at the moment), then joining the Eurasian Union and the SCO together in an economic partnership would be a natural fit, with ASEAN offering a perfect complementary touch that would economically excite all of the members. Furthermore, India and Pakistan's inclusion into the discussed framework would likely lead to the rest of the [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation](#) (SAARC, and which has its own internal free trade area) joining in as well, which would then push the proposed organization's ranks to also include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Taken together, Russia's vision amounts to a Grand Eurasian Free Trade Area (GEFTA) that's supposed to encompass the vast majority of Asia and one day merge with the EU, with the notable exclusions for now obviously being the European economies (both EU and non-EU-member states), the Mideast (except for perhaps [Syria](#) and [Israel](#) [an odd combination to be sure, but pursued for [entirely separate](#) reasons]), the Koreans, and Japan.

The Indian Impediment Opens Up An ASEAN Opportunity

Even assuming a minimum of external (American) interference in trying to offset Russia's vision, it's foreseeable that India will present a major challenge for GEFTA's implementation. India and China are engaged in a [very intense security dilemma](#) at the moment that neither side publicly wants to acknowledge, and under such conditions, it's not likely that either of them is serious about pursuing a FTA with the other. From New Delhi's perspective, India has no motivation whatsoever to sacrifice what it feels to be its national economic interests by entering into a FTA with China, no matter if it's in RCEP or GEFTA. Relating to RCEP, India already has FTAs with [Japan](#) and [South Korea](#), and it doesn't believe that including Australia and New Zealand into the proposed multilateral framework would compensate for the economic unbalancing that it thinks it would experience through the tariff-free trade with China that it would have to agree to as part of the deal. With respect to GEFTA, the concerns are very similar. India is currently in a free trade relationship with ASEAN and might eventually enter into one with [Iran](#) after the latter proposed such an idea in spring 2015. With progress looking quite positive in reaching a free trade deal with the Eurasian Union one day soon, India doesn't see any need to jump into GEFTA when it's already all but assured to receive every benefit that it would be seeking out of the arrangement minus the foreseen complications that would happen if it has to do so with China as well (and to which its leadership presently sees no benefit).

India's expected absence from GEFTA doesn't translate into the vision's failure, but it does raise its dependency on ASEAN's inclusion in order to be geopolitically broad-based enough to become a defining point in the global economy. By itself, the Eurasian Union and its bilateral free trade arrangements are positive developments in and of themselves, especially if they lead to a prospective Eurasian Union-China FTA that multilaterally incorporates the other deals reached prior to that point (such as with Iran), but multipolarity would be infinitely more enhanced through the addition of ASEAN to this accord. Vietnam is already party to such a deal with the Eurasian Union, and even though it's a robust component of the bloc's partnership portfolio, its mutual potential pales in comparison to if both economic groupings had their own inclusive bloc-to-bloc pact. One of the steps in advancing this possibility would be for Russia to make efficient use out of [ASEAN's SEZs](#) in Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia in order to reach individual FTAs with the rest of the organization's mainland members (including [Thailand](#), whom Medvedev offered the possibility to in [spring 2015](#)) so that they can collectively lobby their insular counterparts in this direction.

The TPP Strikes Back

The greatest threat to the multipolar world's economic relations with ASEAN comes directly from the TPP. The US is pushing this exclusionary trade arrangement in order to obstruct the existing trade partnerships that non-allied countries (Russia and China) plan on enhancing with each of the bloc's members. In a sense, it can be thought of as a preemptive declaration of economic war because the US is taking proactive steps in carving out a restricted market that will fall under its primary control. Washington is keenly aware of Moscow's envisioned Pivot to Asia and understands that it must be diversified past China in order to achieve its full economic potential, and regarding Beijing, the US recognizes how obstructive a disturbance in bilateral Chinese-ASEAN economic relations could be for the New Silk Road plans that it hopes to complete in the coming years. The US would like to use the economic hegemony that it would acquire over each of the TPP's ASEAN members in order to bully them away from these multipolar centers and firmly entrench them in the unipolar camp, and there are concrete reasons that this strategic threat should be taken seriously.

The AEC:

ASEAN reached an historic milestone during its 27th summit at the end of November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, agreeing to form the [ASEAN Economic Community](#) (AEC) in order to coordinate the bloc's economic relations with the outside world and strengthen social, cultural, and security cooperation among its members. It's expected that the AEC will seek to enact bloc-wide trade agreements from this

point on, striving to eventually expand the TPP to include the rest of the organization with time. The reasoning for this is quite simple, and it's that ASEAN would like to standardize the trade deals that its members have with outside countries and blocs so as not to create an internal structural imbalance between its economies. If Malaysia is in the TPP but Vietnam has a FTA with the Eurasian Union, the thinking goes, then that creates a disadvantage for the Philippines which doesn't have institutionalized ties with either, for example, and the mishmash of various external actors interacting with ASEAN on a member-to-member basis instead of dealing with the entire group creates an unnecessarily complex intra-bloc situation that makes it all the more difficult for the AEC's diverse members to economically integrate with one another.

Although it's not the most accurate comparison in general, in this case it's somewhat fitting to pair the AEC with the EU since both blocs want to control their members' institutionalized economic relations with other states and organizations. Even though this objective hasn't been formally proclaimed by the AEC as of yet, it's functionally inevitable that it will move in this direction sooner or later once its members get more serious about their shared integration goal. This means that the AEC will one day have to make the decision over which non-bloc-including bilateral agreements it wants to expand to cover the entire organization and which ones its respective members must be forced to abandon. It's significant to note at this point that most of the AEC seems to be moving in the direction of the TPP, judging at least by the statements coming out of the group's top two economies, Indonesia and Thailand. President Joko Widodo [told](#) Obama during a White House meeting in late October that "Indonesia intends to join the TPP", while one of Thailand's deputy prime ministers [proclaimed](#) at the end of November that his country "is highly interested in joining TPP...chances are high that Thailand will seek to join TPP."

Thailand And Indonesia:

Thailand might be trying to publicly defer to the US for as long as possible in order to deflect some of the hostility that many in Washington harbor towards it ever since the multipolar coup ousted the pro-American leadership and the country largely reoriented towards China. It's probable that Bangkok doesn't sincerely intend to join the TPP, or at least at this point, because it would endanger the strategic partnership that it's rapidly developed with Beijing over the past year and a half (and which will be addressed more in the research later), but the situation with Indonesia is a lot more straightforward. Unbeknownst to most observers, the West has been engaging in a [mini-containment of sorts](#) against the country in order to further pressure its leadership into making pro-unipolar decisions when the appropriate time comes. Widodo is already recognized as being Western-friendly as it is, but he's still the steward of one of the largest economies in the world and has a tricky role to play in strategically hedging against China (as the Indonesian leadership sees it) while simultaneously preventing itself from falling under the US' full supremacy as its latest proxy state.

Rewriting The Rules

Regretfully, however, it looks as though Indonesia is about to use its economic leadership role over the AEC to misguide the rest of the organization into moving along the path of unipolar servitude. If Jakarta commits to the TPP, then it's foreseeable that this will be the deciding factor in whether the rest of the AEC accepts the US' disadvantageous trade offer at the expense of upgrading its ties with the Eurasian Union. In fact, the implementation of the TPP might even result in the eventual nullification of ASEAN's FTA with China, thereby dealing a double-whammy to the multipolar world's institutional influence in Southeast Asia.

While scarcely any details are known about the TPP (the [leaked text](#) is around [two million words](#) in length and nearly impossible for a single individual to read through and totally comprehend on their own), it's already been [well-established](#) that the "preferential" legal adjustments that it mandates each party abide by are nothing more than a smokescreen for major corporations to acquire decisive political rights. One of the controversies herein is that companies could sue national governments if the

respective state enacts or enforces any “environmental, health or other regulatory objectives” that inhibit the said organization’s legally enshrined trade advantages or endanger its profits (it doesn’t even have to result in any actual decline, just the possible threat thereof).

Recalling that Vietnam is already in a FTA with the Eurasian Union and all of ASEAN has a similar arrangement with China, it’s definitely possible that the US would find a pretext within each of these existing agreements to argue that they violate the TPP and must be rewritten or outright abandoned. If they fail to rectify the problem within the given period of time, then the US’ supportive companies will take each of the ‘violating’ states to court on Washington’s behalf to squeeze a punitive settlement out of them and/or force them to make the dictated changes. US-ally Japan may also direct some of its major companies to do the same as part of a coordinated push to maximize the ‘legal’-economic pain being inflicted on the targeted state.

How It Could Be Stopped

As extreme as such a scenario may sound at the moment, it perfectly correlates to the US’ strategic objectives of pushing multipolar Great Power influences out of Southeast Asia and hoarding the region’s economic potential all to itself. Doing so also has very specific geostrategic underpinnings that will be described in the next chapter, thus adding another layer of motivation for the US to move forward in this direction. As much as Washington wants to carry out this strategy, however, it doesn’t mean that it’s guaranteed to be successful, and there’s still the very real possibility that its plan could be stopped in its tracks before it ever has the chance to come to full fruition.

The greatest obstacle to the US’ TPP-dominating dream for Southeast Asia is China’s ASEAN Silk Road, the [high-speed rail line](#) that’s expected to run from Kunming to Singapore and traverse through Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The first two transit states have the most to gain from this proposal and are thus anticipated to remain the most ‘loyal’ in safeguarding China’s FTA with ASEAN in the event that the AEC ever tries to revise it (perhaps under a TPP-influenced Indonesian initiative). There’s also the [China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor](#) that was launched in early 2015 to transfer Mideast oil and gas to Yunnan Province via a more thought-to-be geostrategically secure route than the Strait of Malacca (which is questionable and will be explained later in the work), with the envisioned potential of evolving into a full-scale trade corridor with time. This theoretically gives Naypyidaw a stake in preserving the institutional FTA status quo with China, although this could (and probably will) change with Suu Kyi’s increased role over the state. Cambodia is also a [close Chinese ally](#) nowadays, but it’s not institutionally tied to any major infrastructure projects, thereby meaning that it’s capable of being ‘bought off’ by the ‘highest bidder’ and isn’t fundamentally dependable. Therefore, the most reliable partners that China has to defend its economic interests in the AEC are Laos and Thailand.

It’s predicted that these two states have already made the conscientious choice among their top leaderships to economically tie themselves closer with China through their participation in the ASEAN Silk Road project. For this reason, they have vested interests in making sure that their TPP-adhering AEC counterparts don’t enforce their unipolar trade terms on the rest of the bloc and/or compel the others to restrict their established economic ties with China (at the behest of the US, of course). An intra-organizational split could easily occur under these conditions, with the TPP-affiliated states facing off against the non-TPP ones as the AEC struggles to streamline its institutional economic engagements in its quest for greater coordination and integration among its members. The anticipated friction that this will produce would lead to a likely deadlock in implementing any institutionally revisionist (or expansionist, as per the TPP) policies within the AEC and prevent the US from achieving its full unipolar objectives in the theater. Consequently, due to Laos, Thailand, and to an extent, Myanmar’s highly strategic economic relations with China (the first two being party to the ASEAN Silk Road and the latter being host to the China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor) that are standing in the way of the US’ full-spectrum unipolar dominance over ASEAN, all three of these states are ‘valid’ targets for a Hybrid War sometime in the future.

The Global Perspective

The economic proxy war going on between the unipolar and multipolar camps over ASEAN is of immense significance in terms of its global impact, but in order to truly appreciate how it relates to the rest of the world, it's essential for the reader to be reminded of certain elements of contemporary American grand strategy.

The US capitalized off of the end of the Cold War by exporting its neo-liberal economic practices all across the world, with the ultimate intent being to entrap Russia, China, and to an extent that's ever more relevant nowadays, Iran, in an institutional net of Washington-dominated control from which there'd be no escape. It's taken some time to advance, but right now the US is steadily moving forward with great speed in tying the four corners of Eurasia into its matrix of control, de-facto encircling these three Great Powers and making them disproportionately dependent on a shared center of economic-strategic gravity.

The TTIP, should it enter into force, would place the EU's external economic relations under the control the US, thereby meaning that Brussels would be powerless to enter into any FTA or similarly privileged trading accord with other countries without the US' explicit blessing. Moving along in a counterclockwise direction, the US and the GCC are working on [intensifying their economic relations](#) to the point of an eventual FTA. This isn't too important right now because of the lopsided dependence that the Gulf economies have on energy sales, but eventually they'll have to transition to a more 'normal' economy based on material trade, and at that point, their hefty financial reserves that they've been saving will go towards purchasing products from the US and any other country that it's likely to be in a FTA with by that time. The next object of American focus is ASEAN, which has just been comprehensively described, and the final part of the supercontinental strategy is South Korea and Japan. The US already has a FTA with the [former](#), and it's planning to use TPP to enter into the same arrangement with the latter.

Altogether, one can clearly see that most of the cardinal directions in Eurasia are covered by America's FTA plans. To reexamine the US' plans from this perspective, the EU represents West Eurasia, the GCC is Southwest Eurasia, ASEAN is Southeast Eurasia, and South Korea and Japan are Northeast Eurasia. The only missing link is South Eurasia, mostly India, which is being wooed by the US anyhow as it is, although it's still a far time away from entering into a FTA with the US. Nonetheless, if TTIP and TPP are allowed to enter into practice, then it's only a matter of time before an irresistible offer is made to New Delhi in coaxing India into this unipolar economic web. Even without India's formal incorporation into the US' global neo-liberal scheme, it's already been argued that it'll most likely remain outside of GEFTA because of concerns for its strategic sovereignty vis-à-vis neighboring rival China. In that case, Russia, China, and Iran would then share the same economic-strategic space in Central Asia, one of the last parts of the supercontinent to remain outside of the US' formal institutionalized control. This would make Central Asia the unquestionable center of multipolar gravity between these three Great Powers, but conversely, it would also make them disproportionately vulnerable to American-engineered Hybrid Wars there.

In order to avoid a three-for-one ultra-dependency on Central Asia, it's urgently imperative for the multipolar world to maintain and defend its inroads in the AEC, ergo the importance that goes into China's counter-TPP efforts via the ASEAN Silk Road and the China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor. A retreat from these fronts and the cession of Southeast Asia to America's unipolar clutches will create a strategically dangerous situation for China, and by extension, the rest of the multipolar Great Powers, and resultantly push up the US' timetable for corralling their shared economic interests into Central Asia. China also has very clearly defined geostrategic interests in sustaining its influence in ASEAN (or at least in part of its mainland component) in order to halt the advancement of the US' ['Chinese Containment Coalition'](#) (CCC) and maintain non-American-controlled outlets to the Indian Ocean that allow it to safely access the burgeoning African markets on which its future growth depends.

PART II: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

(Please read Part I prior to this article)

The global economic position of ASEAN is of pivotal importance in contemporary international relations, but similarly just as significant is the region's strategic one vis-à-vis China and the unipolar world. There's a multitude of complex variables impacting on the current state of affairs, and in order to properly understand the present situation, one needs to become briefly familiarized with the region's past.

Revisiting The Pages Of Time

The history of Southeast Asia is characterized by a rich intermingling of indigenous and foreign elements that combined to produce a unique regional identity. Some of these interactions are millennia-old while others are much more recent, but only the most lasting and relevant will be enumerated below. The following is by no means comprehensive and has been limited for the sake of space and focus, but the reader is recommended to independently pursue any of these leads if he or she is inclined to learn more. The highlighted selections are specifically curated in order to draw attention to the origins of how each of the five most currently powerful and geopolitically pertinent actors (China, India, Japan, the US, and Russia) affected Southeast Asia in their own specific way:

Civilizational Overlap

It's not for naught that Europeans used to broadly describe Southeast Asia as "Indochina" since this is actually the precise region where Indian and Chinese civilizational influences intermingle to a large degree. The standard non-Asian individual nowadays likely has no idea why that neologism was initially chosen, but the history behind it is actually quite important and is increasingly returning as a factor in the present day.

India:

What most foreigners are completely unaware of is that India exerted [tremendous civilizational influence](#) over Southeast Asia for almost the past two millennia, with the effect being so strong that some scholars have [controversially referred](#) to the Indianized kingdoms of the time as being part of 'Greater India'. While this is a highly sensitive term to use, it does carry with it much truth in a tangible sense. India's civilizational footprint is still visible in the architecture of many of the temples dotting the Myanmar, Thai, Cambodian, and Indonesian landscapes, and it's a well-established fact that Hinduism and Buddhism (both of which originated from India) have become inseparable parts of the region's historical identity.

In fact, taking it a step further, the Islamization of modern-day Indonesia, the largest and most populous country in Southeast Asia and incidentally also the largest Muslim one in the world, is thought to have been largely facilitated by [Muslim traders from Gujarat](#) in contemporary India. Conclusively, while it may not be common knowledge to many outside observers, there is absolutely no denying that Indian civilization played a guiding role in influencing the progressive development of Southeast Asia's identity, and that the historical reserves of soft power that India commanded could potentially be reactivated in part in order to advance its current geopolitical agenda, dependent of course on their skillful application and the appeal that various factors have to their respective targeted audiences.

China:

Imperial China played a much more direct and 'hard' role over Southeast Asia than India's kingdoms ever did. The Emperor formally incorporated Vietnam into the realm for over a millennium and forced the lion's share of the region to pay tribute to him at one time or another throughout their history. It

doesn't necessarily mean that the entirety of Southeast Asia was continually in a state of proxy servitude to China, but this sort of relationship with the Empire was noticeably and qualitatively different than that which was previously enjoyed with India and which had no formal power hierarchy between them. Nonetheless, this type of interaction wasn't the only one that Southeast Asia had with China. Commercial ties between both of them were very deep and mutually beneficial owing to the region's location along the maritime Silk Road to India and the Mideast, and this resulted in a moderate level of Chinese migration spurred on by the many merchant traders that dealt with the region.

The modern-day consequences of these ties are evident. China's historical incorporation of Vietnam into the Empire is seen as a dark era of outright colonialism by many in the latter country, and it bred a level of resentment and distrust that became such an integral part of the Vietnamese national identity that it continues to impact on the present despite the nearly 1,000 years that have passed since that time. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the effect of China's historical relations is much more positive in many respects and has given rise to a large ethnic diaspora community. According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), there are approximately 7 million ethnic Chinese each in Thailand and Indonesia, with about 6 million residing in Malaysia (where they constitute a relatively larger proportion of the population). Reports [indicate](#) that ethnic Chinese are [much more integrated and assimilated](#) in Thailand than they are [in Malaysia](#), and politically speaking, this creates both advantages (as in Thailand) and obstacles (like in Malaysia) for the application of Chinese foreign policy.

The attitude of the majority of the titular nationality towards the Chinese minority inevitably affects how they view China proper, so in the case of negative communal interactions such as in Malaysia, it's difficult for the Chinese government to reassure the locals of their regional policies and gain their lasting trust. The same issue, however, is less of a factor in Thailand because of the much more harmonious relations between the ethnic groups. Of importance to mention is also that [three-quarters of Singapore's population](#) are ethnic Chinese but that this doesn't seem to be an influencing element one way or another due to the specific island identity that Lee Kuan Yew fostered over the decades. While China is the developed city-state's [top trading partner](#), political and security ties between the two are much more muted. It was only in 1990 that both sides [formally entered into bilateral relations](#) with one another, and it was announced in early December 2015 that Singapore would be [hosting US spy planes](#) that will [provocatively operate](#) over the South China Sea. Overall, while China's ethnic diaspora is a positive soft power asset in Thailand, it is also a complicating variable in Malaysia and surprisingly even a non-factor in Singapore, illustrating that Beijing's potential utilization of this instrument is wholly dependent on the national conditions of the host country and cannot be patterned in any way.

The Lasting Legacy Of Imperial Japan

Fast-forwarding the historical record closer to the present, Japan's World War II occupation of Southeast Asia can arguably be seen as being much more influential than the European colonialism that preceded it for decades. In more ways than one, Japan's brief legacy of direct and bloody involvement in the region was cataclysmic in setting off the chain reaction of independence that would follow after the war, and it is also responsible for the rise of indelible national heroes in Vietnam, Myanmar, and Indonesia.

The War Years:

The Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia was promoted by Tokyo as a liberation campaign against the Western Imperialists, but in actuality it was the reimposition of the same oppressive system under a slightly tweaked format and racially different overseers. While at first being welcomed by many in the region as a welcome respite from European dominance, the regretful reality soon seeped in that nothing had in fact changed on a structural-political level. The resource exploitation and economic mismanagement that the Japanese engaged in helped contribute to the devastating famines in Vietnam and the most populous Indonesian island of Java, culminating in the deaths of [one to two million](#) and [2.4 million](#) people, respectively. The Japanese were also very brutal with their subjects and would wantonly kill them for the slightest disobedience, to say nothing of the rampant torture they carried out against

prisoners of war and suspected rebels. The only country that had it slightly better than the rest was Thailand, but that was simply because its formal World War II alliance with Imperial Japan required minimal occupation efforts to keep it in line.

If there is any 'positive' that can be gleaned from this destructive period, then it's that the Japanese proved that the European colonizers were not undefeatable and that Asians are in fact just as capable as any other race in rising up against their oppressors. In a similar vein, the temporary removal of the American and European colonial administrations and their gradual replacement with progressively more autonomous Japanese-occupied ones (especially in the closing days of the war) brought about an irreversible precedent that would inevitably lead to independence. The pace in which this achieved varied widely throughout the region, with Myanmar receiving it in 1948 for example, while Brunei didn't experience it until 1984 (with the latter being explained by the Sultanate's own self-interested unwillingness to part as a British protectorate earlier). In general, however, the Japanese occupation can be seen as a watershed event that completely upended the old European colonial system and greatly sped up their struggle for independence.

Independence Heroes:

One of the ways in which the Japanese occupation most directly shaped the contemporary national identity of some Southeast Asian states is through the independence heroes that emerged from its aftermath. These men left a very impressionable mark on their home countries that continues to resonate to this day, but they would not have ever had their chance to shape their countrymen's national identity had it not been for their role in leading their states to independence in the first place. Each of the three heroes that will be mentioned rose to prominence due to the roles that they played in World War II, with their most noteworthy difference being the level of collaboration that they had with the Japanese occupiers.

The most independent of the bunch was Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, who wholeheartedly refused to accept Japan's occupation of his homeland. He bravely fought against them and eventually assumed leadership of North Vietnam after expelling the French who had returned in their wake. Aung San from Myanmar (then called Burma) was cut from a completely different cloth, as he came to power during the war precisely because of his collaboration with the Japanese. He was trained in Japan and sent back to Myanmar just prior to the Axis invasion as a means of legitimizing it on national liberation grounds. He was later made War Minister of occupied Myanmar but became disillusioned with the Japanese and eventually rebelled against them near the end of the war. He subsequently helped lead his country to independence from the UK after the war but was tragically assassinated before he could ever see that day arrive. The third and last independence hero to come to power immediately after the war was Sukarno in Indonesia. The Japanese freed him from prison after invading the island nation and planned to use the renowned independence activist as their proxy for controlling the country. Sukarno took great strides in advancing Indonesian independence in the final months of the war, but he never rebelled against his masters and only declared independence after the Japanese had already surrendered.

These three independence heroes have rich personal backgrounds and performed their roles under extraordinarily complex conditions, which thus explains why Sukarno partnered with the Japanese while Ho Chi Minh vehemently fought against them, so it's highly suggested that the reader explore their personal biographies more in-depth if there's an interest in finding out the specific contexts in which they came to power. These individuals' incorporation into the research was made in order to demonstrate the effect to which Imperial Japan inadvertently shaped the emerging national identities of some of the key states in the region, since these three men are indisputably recognized as the fathers of their respective modern nations. For better and for worse, Southeast Asia's current independence is firmly linked to the events that transpired during the period of Japanese occupation, and it's worthwhile to be aware of this relationship in order to make sense of why some actors are enthusiastically

welcoming Japan's return to the region (as strange as that may seem after having just recently been victimized by it).

Reparations And Re-engagement:

Part of the reason why some regional elite are actively or passively supportive of Japan's re-engagement with Southeast Asia is because they feel that it has absolved itself of its World War II guilt by [paying financial reparations and "grant aid"](#). These were made after the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco and Japan's 1954 US-supported membership in the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific, a multilateral trade and development grouping. Washington backed Tokyo's reintegration into the region in order to use it as a proxy vehicle for complementarily spreading its influence there. The US also knew that the then-recovering Japanese economy would need nearby export outlets and outbound investment opportunities in order to continue its growth, and since American grand strategy stipulated that a strong (occupied) Japan is beneficial to its Asian interests, it did whatever it institutionally could to make this happen.

Perceptively, one can discern the nascent beginnings of a [Lead From Behind](#) prototype that would later be rolled out in full force to contain China decades later and which will be discussed at a further point in the research. Simply put, Japan would never have been allowed to re-enter Southeast Asia had it not been for the full complicity and support of the US, which supported this move in order to advance its geostrategic considerations. Financially 'atoning' for World War II was just the normative gateway that the US led Japan to in order to 'legitimize' its return to its preplanned area of future proxy influence.

The Cold War

The first period of global superpower confrontation was important for Southeast Asia because it heralded the introduction of the US and the USSR (now Russia) as important players in the region. For the most part, American influence was a lot more deeply entrenched and broadly applied than its Soviet counterpart was, but that doesn't mean that it was necessarily more effective. One needs only to recall the Vietnam War to vividly remember the limits (some of which were self-imposed) of American power in Southeast Asia during the time and the hefty toll that meagerly funded guerrilla fighters could inflict on the capitalist superpower. Additionally, the fear of a communist uprising in British-occupied Malaya was enough to compel the crown to commit tens of thousands of soldiers over the 12-year period prior to independence to quelling the disturbance, which stretched the slowly disintegrating empire past its limits and was an unnecessary financial burden that reaped no direct geopolitical dividends (besides being ultimately successful in rooting out the communists).

The US:

Returning the focus back to the two superpowers, the US' sphere of influence was over the breadth of ASEAN, but at the time, the organization obviously didn't include all of its current members. Initiated in 1967, it began with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, but later expanded to include Brunei in 1984. Its other enlargements didn't occur until after the Cold War was finished, so for the entirety of the proxy conflict, it can truthfully be said that the whole organization was fully under American control. The only time this was ever endangered was during the twilight period of Sukarno's presidency, when the Indonesian leader was suspected of becoming too close to local communist influences and was consequently overthrown by a [CIA-engineered coup](#) (the politically driven aftermath of which killed between [200,000-1,000,000](#) people).

Prior to the reunification of Vietnam, the US obviously had influence over South Vietnam, but this ended in 1975 with the communist liberation of Saigon. The contained 'domino effect' that swept over the other two Indochinese countries of Laos and Cambodia put an end to the [US' covert anti-communist wars in each](#) and gave rise to the conditions under which stout US-ally Thailand [asked the Pentagon](#) to surprisingly withdraw [almost all of its forces](#) a year later. This didn't extend to covert ones, however, as

the US and Thailand [worked closely together](#) in supporting Khmer Rouge guerrillas after they were overthrown as a result of Vietnam's 1979 intervention in Cambodia.

In Thailand's other neighboring direction, the US' ties with Myanmar (then Burma) had been pragmatic since independence but were complicated by the military-run government that came to power in 1962. The new authorities espoused a 'non-aligned' form of socialism that didn't quite put the country under the Soviets' sway, but was serious enough in its implementation that it scared the US away. In the last years of the Cold War, the US tried pulling off an unsuccessful Color Revolution in Myanmar that was eventually smashed by the military. In response to that and the associated jailing of proxy provocateur Aung San Suu Kyi, Washington imposed a harsh sanctions regime that inadvertently pushed the country closer into arms of China. The final event of significance of Southeast Asian significance that involved the US during the Cold War was the 1986 People's Power Revolution that ousted corrupt US puppet Ferdinand Marcos from power and eventually engendered enough anti-American sentiment that the new government kicked the US out of the [Clark Air Force Base](#) and [Subic Bay naval base](#) in 1991.

USSR (Russia):

The Soviet Union never happened to gain as wide of a presence in Southeast Asia as the US, but the inroads that it did make proved to be quite stable and long-lasting. The core of Moscow's influence in the region came down to Hanoi, and after the reunification of Vietnam, the Soviet Union gleefully took over the US' former naval base in Cam Ranh Bay. This allowed the Soviet Navy to exert a very strong role in Southeast Asia and continually keep the US on edge in the region that had hitherto treated as an extension of its own backyard (an 'Asian Caribbean', if one will). The Soviet Union had historically patronized the Pathet Laos, and when the communists finally overthrew the pro-US monarchy, Vientiane also came under Moscow's strategic purvey.

However, Vietnam always played a much larger role in Laotian affairs than the Soviets ever did, and although the USSR had independent bilateral relations with Laos, both sides were ultimately dependent on Hanoi's supportive goodwill in geographically facilitating their relations. Relations with Cambodia were less physically constrained but under stronger and more direct Vietnamese influence because the state was essentially under the total control of the People's Army of Vietnam until its complete withdrawal in 1989. To put it another way, Vietnam was the lynchpin of the Soviet Union's Southeast Asian policy, and this strategic partnership has continued into the present with the Russian Federation, albeit to a dramatically scaled back degree.

China:

Beijing's role in Southeast Asia during the Cold War was not commensurate with its size and historical footprint, and for the most part, it was kept at bay by most of the regional states. While it's true that China supported North Vietnam during the Vietnamese War, this didn't translate into the type of patron-proxy relations that some in Beijing may have anticipated afterwards. The reason for this is clear and it has to do with China's millennium-long control over Vietnam. Although occurring almost one thousand years ago, the historical memory of this period continues to play a decisive role over the Vietnamese identity even to this day and has resulted in an ingrained suspicion of China being implanted in the national psyche. Due to the sensitivities that many in Vietnam had of unwittingly falling under China's de-facto control, the authorities made moves to align their country more closely with the Soviet Union as a strategic counterbalance to this perceived threat, and accordingly, they also did the same for their Laotian allies after the 1975 as well.

China's only significant geopolitical advance at this time was in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, but Vietnam's late-1978 regime change intervention there dealt a hard blow to Beijing's regional ambitions. It was partly for this reason why China attacked Vietnam a few months later in early 1979 during a limited engagement conflict, but the end result was an embarrassing loss that few in China could have expected at that time. Faced with a cluster of three anti-Chinese states south of its border (Vietnam and

its Laotian and Cambodian allies) and the complete reversal of any soft power gains it had made in supporting each of their communist liberation movements there, China realized that it had to revolutionize its policy in Myanmar (known as Burma at the time) in order to compensate. Thus, Beijing decreased the support that it had previously given to the Communist Party of Burma in order to repair relations with Yangon (then the capital). This led to a gradual rapprochement between the two neighbors that culminated in a strategic partnership after the failed Color Revolution of 1988 and the US' determined and mostly successful efforts to make Myanmar a 'pariah state'.

Post-Cold War

Russian Retreat:

The years after the Cold War were marked by important processes that rapidly transformed Southeast Asia. The first thing that obviously marked this new era was the absence of Russia from the region. Following the Soviet collapse, Moscow was plainly much too weak to maintain such a far-flung (albeit highly strategic) presence in Southeast Asia, and pressing domestic budgetary concerns guided the government's decision in halting all forms of foreign aid. Minimal relations were still maintained with Vietnam, but Russia's leadership spent most of the decade trying to build relations with the West, not the East. Although this misprioritization was partially corrected by the pragmatism of Yevgeny Primakov, it didn't have much of an immediate effect on Southeast Asia, and Russia eventually withdrew from Cam Ranh Bay in 2002 and pretty much abandoned the region until it became strong enough to return during the beginning of the New Cold War.

Chinese Renaissance:

Around the same time as Russia's sudden disengagement from Southeast Asia was China's renewed engagement with it, brought about because both sides decided to put aside their prior ideological differences and enter into an economic renaissance that has been mutually beneficial for both parties. A large amount of credit goes to the Chinese leadership for pragmatically moderating their previously strict ideological adherence to internal and external communist precepts, thus allowing a domestic economic renewal to take place that made long-term trade engagement with it more attractive to the capitalist countries of Southeast Asia. The tempering of Cold War-era tension between China and Vietnam was important in getting both sides to realize the benefits of mutual economic cooperation, and Vietnam's military withdrawal from Cambodia reopened the country to Chinese influence. All in all, up until the US decided to purposely heat up the long-dormant South China Sea dispute following its announced "Pivot to Asia" in 2011 (the Asian beginning of the New Cold War), it can objectively be ascertained that relations between China and Southeast Asia were at unprecedentedly historic levels, which of course is one of the main reasons why the US decided to mischievously disrupt them.

Intra-Bloc And Inter-Bloc Integration:

The post-Cold War years for ASEAN were importantly marked by its enlargement to include the entirety of Southeast Asia. Vietnam joined in 1995 and Myanmar and Laos followed in 1997. Cambodia, the last member to enter the bloc, became an official party to the organization in 1999, thus completing ASEAN's formal pan-regional incorporative efforts and setting the foundation for the AEC that would follow in November 2015. In the 16 year gap that followed, ASEAN took measured steps in partnering itself with other major economic poles across the world, ergo the plethora of FTAs that it signed in the late-2000s. The combined effect of the intra- and inter-bloc integrations that ASEAN engaged in was to make it a recognizable economic force in the world that has consistently boasted one of the highest growth rates. Also, by incorporating the rest of the region and reaching out to other areas across the globe, ASEAN has been able to position itself as the go-to organization for all actors interested in trade with Southeast Asia, thus raising its global profile even more. In hindsight, it looks almost inevitable that it would eventually become one of the most economically attractive regions in the world and transition

itself to the AEC, but the bloc did face a near-existential crisis in 1997 that threatened to unravel all of its gains up until that point.

The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis:

The Event

PBS assembled a [very detailed and accurate timeline](#) of everything that transpired during this prolonged and eventually geographically broad economic crisis, and the reader is enthusiastically urged to reference it for further specifics, but in the meantime, a concise summary will suffice for the scope of the present research. In the summer of 1997 and right before ASEAN's phased incorporation of Myanmar and Laos, a speculative financial attack nearly took down the Thai currency. Within a few months, it quickly spread throughout the region to Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with Singapore also being slightly affected as well. Conceptually, it can be understood that the post-modern attack that was launched against Thailand was intended to spread as it did throughout the core of 'traditional ASEAN' (the member countries before the 1990s mainland expansions). George Soros is largely suspected of having plotted the attack, being [directly blamed for the regional financial fiasco](#) by then-Malaysian Prime Minister Mathir Mohamed, and his involvement in the scheme helped solidify his present notoriety for disruptive interventionism.

Lessons

By the time the crisis had largely dissipated in 1999 (at least in that part of the world, as it later spread to South Korea, Russia, and Brazil), Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia had all accepted IMF 'assistance', with the latter of the three actually experiencing a regime change against long-term American ally Suharto. It was inevitable that the unpopular and aging leader would eventually office at some point, and it's very possible that the US sought to guide the leadership transition that was bound to take place, just as it would later do with Mubarak in the 'Arab Spring' theater-wide Color Revolutions. Also, this was the era in which the US was still working to perfect its Color Revolution techniques and synchronize the complex interplay between multitudes of non-state actors, both those wittingly involved (like Soros) and those unintentionally manipulated (such as the protesting students). The ultimate lesson that can be gleaned from this experience is that non-state actors such as Soros and the IMF, most likely working at the behest of the US, collaboratively attempted to sabotage ASEAN's increasingly independent economic trajectory and forcibly bring it more in line with the 'Washington Consensus'.

Good Intentions

It can be somewhat inferred that as a response to what had transpired, ASEAN felt more motivated to expand its trading relations with other major actors so to make its stability invaluable to the global economic system and proactively preempt a future repeat of the US/Soros/IMF disruption that had occurred. This motivation somewhat explains the determined commitment that the bloc made to entering into as many FTAs as possible in the coming decade, ultimately cumulating in Southeast Asia becoming the global economic crossroads that was discussed at length in Part I. It can be interpreted that most of the leadership in ASEAN's member states at the time understood just how troublesome the 'Washington Consensus' is for their economies, given its unequal structural hierarchy and inherently imbalanced nature, and sought to find a way to extricate themselves from this system.

The TPP Trap

This makes it all the more pitiful that some of them later retreated on their multipolar principles and enthusiastically embraced the US' TPP. There are undoubtedly some internal economic and political elements (the so-called "elite") that stand to profit handsomely from this arrangement at the expense of their country's sovereignty, but it may also be that some of those in charge just don't realize that the US

will obviously use the 'trade pact' (if such an unequal arrangement can even be called that) to institutionalize its control over economies and usher in the 'Washington Consensus 2.0'. Many of them, such as those in Vietnam, are too blinded by the US' pressure to 'spite China' that they don't realize that they're being led directly into a unipolar trap. The US played its cards well, though, it must be said – it anticipated quite accurately that the timed and US-initiated thawing of the South China Sea dispute would lead to a flurry of nationalism and manufactured fear in Southeast Asia that could be easily manipulated to divide the region to America's grand strategic advantage.

PART III: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

(Please read Part I and Part II prior to this article)

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

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

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

China's Geo-Economic Lifeline To Africa

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

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

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

With the South China Sea gradually coming under heavy American influence and the Strait of Malacca already an American-controlled waterway, the impetus organically developed for China to spearhead a

pair of overland ASEAN routes to the Indian Ocean that avoids both of them. The China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor and ASEAN Silk Road are the geo-economic solutions to this dilemma, but they're also the reason why the US has set its sights on swaying Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand away from China. If any of these governments steadfastly reject the respective outreaches presented to them, then the US will carry through on its tacit Hybrid War threats in order to destroy China's containment-escaping infrastructure plans.

Stirring Up Trouble In The South China Sea

The Strategic Underpinning:

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

Nevertheless, for the time being, the China-Myanmar Pipeline Corridor is still in its early stages, and the route itself is exceptionally vulnerable to rebel attacks, despite none having happened as of yet. Additionally, the non-resource economic aspect of this corridor has yet to be actualized, leaving a lot of valuable potential still waiting to be tapped. Concerning the other project, the ASEAN Silk Road hasn't even been constructed yet and will still need a few years before it's fully built and operational (if not over its entire route, than at least partially through Thailand and up to the Indian Ocean).

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

The Escalation Ladder:

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

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

stronger position to enforce their respective demands, and this could have easily allowed the US to step in and take charge of the waterway.

By standing up for itself in the face of American proxy aggression, China startled American decision makers that had been convinced that it would back down, and this in turn prompted them to harness all available information means at their disposal to discredit Beijing's moves. Furthermore, while the US had earlier enjoyed 'escalation domination' in the South China Sea, it was now China that had seized the initiative and was fortifying its island locations, leading observers to wonder whether this ambiguously had defensive and/or offensive applications. Taken largely off guard, the US realized that the tables had turned and that China had regained its strategic position at Washington and its allies' expense. In order to compensate for this, the US responded by pushing forward its preplanned strategy of multilateral escalation to evolve the dispute past its regional origins and into a larger Asian-wide one that draws in India and Japan.

The Excuse:

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

The Chinese Containment Coalition

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

Membership Roster:

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

US

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

Japan

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

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

India

New Delhi's strategy in all of this is to constrain the rise of its natural geopolitical rival, and this has seen it take a gradually more vocal stance in addressing the South China Sea crisis. For the most part, India's leadership has played coy with China in pragmatically interacting with it in large-scale multilateral frameworks such as the AIIB, BRICS, and the SCO, but in being noticeably less constructive when it comes to indirect bilateral relations. To explain, India's dealings with states and regions of mutual interest to it and China tend to be much more competitive and reek of zero-sum proxy intentions on New Delhi's part, for example, when addressing 'freedom of navigation' in the South China Sea [together with Japan](#) or in unilaterally [blockading Nepal](#). There's an undeclared but [clearly observable Cold War](#) going on between both Asian great powers, despite neither of them willing to publicly admit it, and it's in this context that India has a desire to provoke China in Southeast Asia. Although it has yet to send any naval vessels to the region, the possibility hasn't been explicitly discounted by New Delhi, and it's quite

probable that it could find some pretext to do so in the future (be it under ‘freedom of navigation’ auspices or to participate in a multilateral CCC drill there).

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

Vietnam

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

Information warfare specialists were likely consulted well in advance in order to craft the most effective ways in which the Vietnamese audience could be misguided into interpreting unrequested American diplomatic interventionism as ‘Chinese aggression’. The sum effect of this nationalist-appealing information manipulation has been that the anti-Chinese forces in the country decisively won out over the pragmatic ones and that Vietnam ultimately made its choice in aligning with the unipolar-oriented forces that are militarily and economically circling China. By becoming the US’ mainland beachhead in the CCC, Vietnam likely hopes for American acceptance of what will probably soon be a renewed attempt at resurrecting its leading role in the former French lands of Indochina. Hanoi still has sizeable institutional influence over Vientiane (particularly [military](#) and [economic](#)), although it’s of course been relatively dwindling since the end of the Cold War, while Vietnam has urgently been trying to play catch-up with China in Cambodia ever since its military withdraw in 1989 re-opened the door to Beijing’s influence. Vietnam’s counter-proposal to both of its neighbors’ chummy ties with China is a so-called “[development triangle](#)” between them, which will in reality serve as a vehicle for the return of Vietnamese influence to these countries.

The Philippines

The former American colony is much weaker than China by all metrics, and its population is easily riled up by simple fear mongering techniques. In turn, it presents itself as a tantalizing target for the US’ anti-Chinese information operations there, which are ultimately predicated on returning the Pentagon’s presence to the island chain. The American footprint is all over the Philippines owing to the colonial and post-World War II past (essentially a continuation of the former arrangement albeit under the more

acceptable-sounding label of 'independence'), but Washington's overbearing presence had the predictable aftereffect of engendering strong anti-American emotions that eventually manifested themselves in the 1986 overthrow of proxy leader Ferdinand Marcos and the 1991 order for the US' full military withdrawal. The military campaign against southern separatists and Muslim terrorists (which have regrettably merged into a semi-unified movement that mostly discredits the former at this point) resulted in the [return of US special forces](#) to the country in 2002 on the basis of anti-terrorist cooperation.

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

The present situation in the Philippines is actually somewhat of a paradox – for as nationalistic and proud as most of the population is, many people are apathetic (or even welcoming) to the return of American forces to their country, having been misled to the point of believing that a re-occupation by their former occupier whom they previously ousted is somehow more preferable than a full-spectrum and pragmatic partnership with China. This confounding contradiction only serves to demonstrate the effectiveness of the US' information warfare operations, and it also speaks volumes about the subservience and outright collaboration of various elements of the Filipino elite. The political individuals that publicly support the US' military return to the Philippines either naively don't realize that this is a reiteration of the same imperialist blueprint, or more realistically are well aware of this but have positioned themselves so as to profit quite handsomely from this arrangement. It cannot be underscored enough just how much of a contravention of the Philippines' national interest it is for the country to 're-invite' the US military back onto its territory, and while private individuals could be somewhat forgiven for having fallen victim to the US' rabid anti-Chinese nationalist information warfare, their governing elites have no such excuses and are fully complicit in their country's reoccupation.

Australia

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

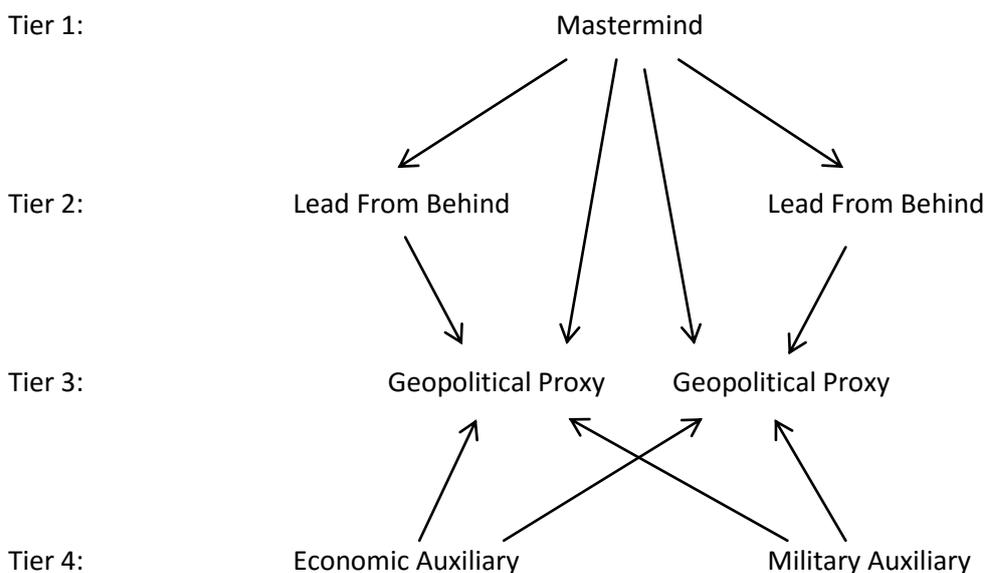
Anglo-Saxon peers and gain their 'acceptance' at the tangible expense of endangering ties with its [number one economic partner](#).

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

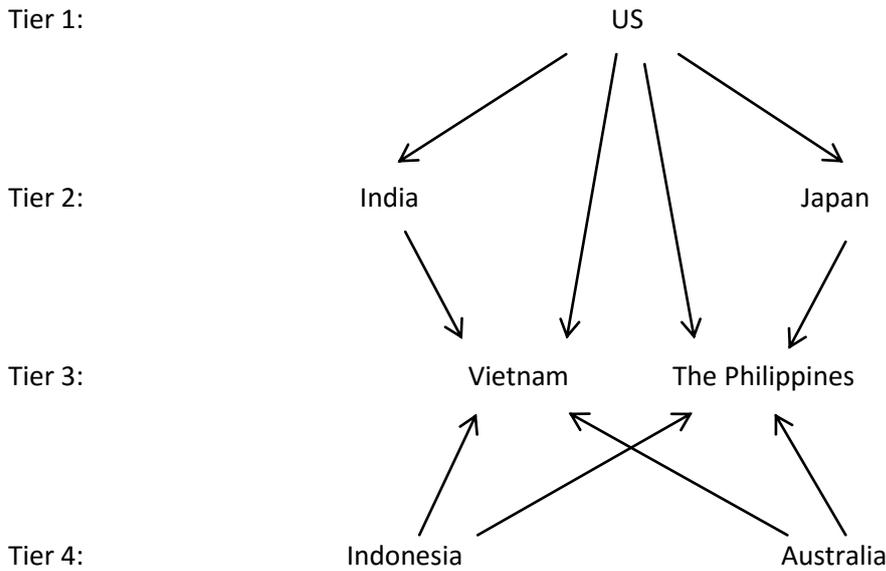
Canberra probably didn't anticipate this when it initially signed on to the CCC (however low-commitment it may thought it would be), so eventually it's going to be pressed into making a difficult decision in choosing between its main economic and strategic partners (China and the US, respectively). The caveat, however, is that China's iron ore-purchasing dependency on Australia will make it reluctant to take any concrete measures against its 'partner' even if it ramps up its anti-Chinese activity, and until it finds a third major partner to diversify its imports from besides [Brazil](#), it's probably going to be inclined to preserve the status quo of economic relations. On the other hand, as the FTA enters into full swing and begins more actively involving sectors outside the mining one, it's possible that China could establish a few unforeseen strategic footholds in the Australian economy that might come in handy for 'leveling the playing field' and deterring any further unnecessary Australian aggression in the South China Sea.

Power Hierarchy:

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

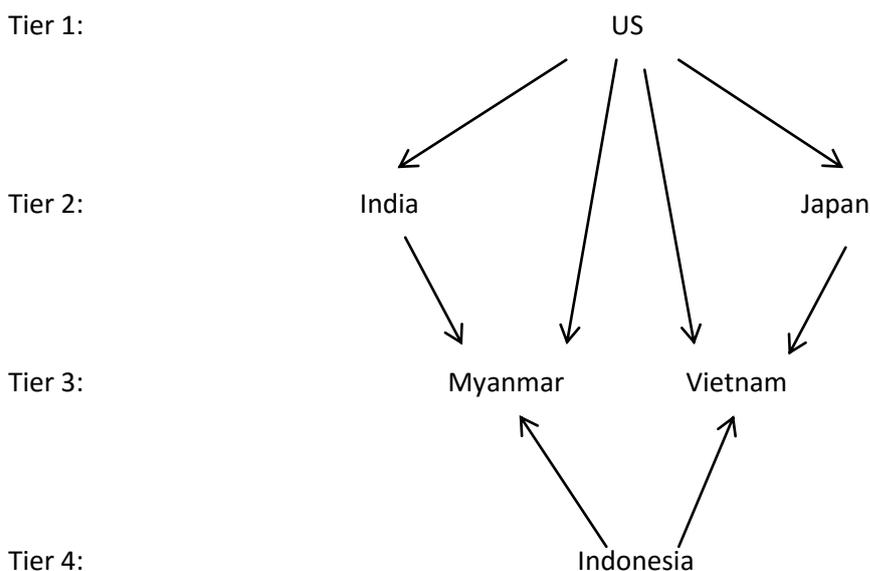


The following model adds detail to the framework and accommodates it for the specificities of the CCC's South China Sea mission:



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

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



The first two tiers and power motivations remain the same in this adaptation, with the only differences being that Myanmar substitutes for the Philippines and Australia is removed from the equation. The

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

Geopolitical Convergences:

The two above-cited conceptual models aptly illustrate the geopolitical convergences between the CCC's maritime and mainland missions, with Vietnam functioning as the consistent proxy element between them because of its dual identity. Partially speaking, Vietnam is a maritime nation because of its extensive coastline and claims over part of the South China Sea, while it's also equally a mainland country as well and has the potential to reestablish its sphere of influence over Laos and Cambodia, two of China's most important ASEAN partners. This makes it doubly important for the US and its Lead From Behind partners to enter into its good graces so as to fully exploit the geopolitical advantage this would provide for them in their shared CCC goal.

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

Maritime

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

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

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

Mainland

Matters are infinitely more complicated, and therefore dangerous, in the CCC's strategy for mainland ASEAN. As seen from the previously mentioned model, Myanmar and Vietnam are the 'geopolitical

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

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

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



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

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

The Indian-Japanese Double Flank

It's relevant at this juncture to highlight the CCC's guiding geopolitical concept for 'countering China' in the Greater Mekong Subregion (mainland ASEAN), and that's the 'Indian-Japanese Double Flank. It's been thus far described that India's primary avenue of approach into the region is via the ASEAN Highway through Myanmar (the "Western Corridor" as described by the ADB in the above-cited map), while Japan's strategy has been to link the region's two coasts through the East-West and Southern Corridors. What's pretty much happening here is that India is moving eastward into the region while Japan is moving westward, and their point of ultimate convergence is Thailand, which also just so happens to be China's primary focus as well.

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

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

PART IV: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

(Please read Part I, Part II, and Part III prior to this article)

The first part of this transitional chapter explains how the strategic friction between China and the CCC in the Greater Mekong Subregion sets the foundation for American-directed Hybrid Wars against Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. After that, the second part explores some of the strategic reasons why the US could potentially apply this weapon towards its own nominal 'allies' in order to pressure or punish them for their respective stances towards the CCC.

Explaining The Impetus

The multiple geopolitical convergences in Thailand between China, India, and Japan have the constructive potential to have all parties multilaterally cooperate in ensuring their shared ASEAN partner's stability, but this is the last scenario would be absolutely contrary to the US' grand strategic designs. Washington believes that the passive cooperation between China and the CCC over their intersecting interests in Thailand would basically result in 'ceding' Southeast Asia to Beijing by allowing it to successfully build its non-South China Sea 'escape route' to the Indian Ocean. This would in effect nullify everything that the US is trying to accomplish in ASEAN's maritime front and would represent a major victory for multipolarity.

The US' dilemma then becomes one of figuring out how to disrupt China's plans without endangering India and Japan's, and in finding ways to do so unilaterally since it's unlikely that neither New Delhi nor Tokyo is willing to take any geostrategic risks that could possibly backfire against their projects. Given these situational constraints, US strategists likely see Hybrid War as their best (and perhaps only) option. The trick in this specific regional application would be in limiting the destabilization to northeastern Myanmar, north-central Laos, and the northern regions of Thailand just shy of the East-West Corridor, but the nature of chaos is that it's inherently uncontrollable and unpredictable, and it's very likely that the debilitating chain reactions that it could unleash would spread well past the US' 'chaotic containment zone'.

Scorched Earth

In any case, that wouldn't be absolutely anathema to the US' grand strategy because its primary concern is to prevent China's 'containment breakout' by one way or another. Geopolitical 'scorched earth' tactics are not beyond its operational capability and it would certainly apply them if it saw the need to do so, regardless of the collateral damage this could have on its Indian and Japanese allies' infrastructure projects. Unipolarity's tightening grasp over Southeast Asia would be irreparably weakened if China were successful in circumventing the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca through the construction of its two mainland 'detour routes' through Myanmar and Laos-Thailand, thus explaining the urgency with which the US aspires to destabilize all three countries (or at least portions thereof) if it can't 'convince' their governments to halt the Chinese projects. US strategy dictates that the Greater Mekong Subregion must be thrown into total chaos as a last resort to stopping China's geostrategic-infrastructure ambitions if all else fails because the resultant combination of an impassable war-zone mainland and American-controlled waterways is the only possibility the US would have left for containing China in its 'backyard'.

The Only Unipolar Back-Up Plan

It doesn't matter that much to the US if the destabilization extends beyond the 'chaotic containment zone' in northeast Myanmar, north-central Laos, and the northern reaches of Thailand and begins to interfere with and possibly disrupt the Western Corridor (India's ASEAN highway), the East-West Corridor, and even the Southern Corridor because it knows that India and Japan are not as dependent on this region for their strategic growth and geopolitical security as China is. As the only back-up plan in

cushioning some of the geopolitical blowback that could result from Hybrid War breaching the 'containment zone' and disrupting the East-West Corridor, the US could simply suggest that India redirect its ASEAN highway to Dawei and then connect it with the Southern Corridor. This would result in sacrificing one of the region's landmark unipolar trade routes, but the strategic recompense would be that the Southern Corridor could still fulfill this function while China has no such alternatives available. However, there's also the possibility that the chaos would extend well past the 'front lines' that the US is anticipating and could come to envelop the entirety of Myanmar and Thailand, thereby preventing this back-up plan from being actualized and leading to the full cancellation of all of the Greater Mekong Subregion's connective infrastructure projects.

A Zero-Sum Game

Both Lead From Behind partners could still sustain their trade and operate freely despite the absence of the convenient connective infrastructure that they're planning in the Greater Mekong Subregion due to their American ally's naval power in the South China Sea, but conversely, this scenario would leave China wholly vulnerable to the Pentagon's blackmail in this area and the Strait of Malacca and thereby threaten the viability of its economically necessary [Africa policy](#). For American planners, this course of events would be more than ideal for the indefinite retention of unipolarity and it would represent a back-breaking defeat for China's global strategy and that of the multipolar world in general. Therefore, from the perspective of the US, it doesn't matter that much if the planned Hybrid Wars remain in their 'containment zones' or not, since ultimately, 'the ends justify the means' for them so long as the final result is China's full geostrategic containment.

Hybrid War 'Friendly Fire'

As history plainly shows, it's impossible for the US to fully control the chaotic processes that it unleashes, and more often than not, they seem to always have a way of boomeranging back and ultimately dealing some form of unintended collateral damage. This is most popularly recognized in the cases of Al Qaeda and ISIL, and interestingly enough, as most of the Hybrid War destabilizations in maritime ASEAN (the part of the organization most closely aligned with the US) deal with Islamic terrorism, the US would ironically be repeating the same pattern that it's already gone through twice before, even using the same organizational actors in the most probable cases. The only thing that can explain this seemingly illogical fallacy, especially in the sense that it could be targeting the US' own allies with Hybrid War 'friendly fire', is that it's actually precisely what Washington wants. The reader should hopefully have acquired a sense of cynicism and a deep understanding of the unprincipled nature of American foreign policy after having arrived at this point of the book, so it shouldn't come as a shock that 'controlled chaos' is used by the US in order to advance its divide-and-rule policies all across Eurasia, even in regards to official partners.

Backstabbing Motivations

When low-intensity Hybrid War threats are purposefully manufactured against its supposed 'allies', the geopolitical arsonist-firefighter is intending to put pressure on their leadership and create the conditions where they're prompted to request American military assistance in order to quell the upstart destabilization. The formalization of the target/'host' nation's relationship with the American military (even if done behind closed doors) is expected to tighten the patron-proxy relationship between them and craft the conditions for a prolonged Pentagon presence inside the country. Understandably, it wouldn't just be military servicemen that are deployed, but also their associated support and intelligence staffs (whether or not the target/'host' nation is even aware of this), the latter of which could then be operationally reoriented towards embedding their network even deeper into the country and engaging in anti-government organizational and informational activities.

The sum effect of all of this stage-managed subterfuge is to cripple the targeted/'host' government's sovereignty and transform it into a full-fledged American vassal. The strategically manufactured Hybrid

War crisis or reasonably imminent fear thereof (purposefully kept at low-intensity at the beginning but which could predictably get out of control) is nothing more than a calculated ruse by the US to strengthen its hold over its so-called allies and/or punish some of them for their perceived strategic intransigence (i.e. not cooperating as closely as the US would like in the CCC or outright refusing to take part in the destabilizing venture). It will soon be seen in the next chapter just how susceptible the maritime members of ASEAN are to these scenarios, but Vietnam and Cambodia are also somewhat vulnerable too, albeit more in the sense of NGO- and intelligence-organized labor disturbances than to Wahhabist terrorism.

Indonesia

The most likely case of the US using Hybrid War against one of its allies is undoubtedly Indonesia, as this state has yet to fully commit to the China Containment Coalition (CCC) despite the US' implied urging to do so. Like was earlier discussed in the previous chapters, it did state that it wants to join the TPP in the near future, but this may not be the desired level of CCC coordination that some influential hawk-like decision-makers in the US are anticipating, especially if Indonesia's accession talks stall for whatever reason (note: they have yet to even formally begin). In that case, it's very likely that some of the Hybrid War scenarios that will later be discussed could be facilitated or outright engineered in order to put Indonesia's 'feet to the fire' and compel it to request the type of insidious American assistance described above. Washington's end goal is to turn the geostrategic island chain into its largest-ever proxy state, thus cementing the CCC with a coerced and totally manipulated Lead From Behind actor that can provide the regional economic and political finesse that's required to majorly disrupt China's soft presence in the maritime reaches of ASEAN.

Blowback

The strategic flaw in this approach is that the target/'host' state is not voluntarily joining the CCC, but is being forced and manipulated into it, whether it's cognizant of this process occurring or not. Should the leadership or influential elite (likely concentrated in the military and/or political spheres, with their economic counterparts expected to be pro-US) become aware of the scheme that's being played, they may instigate an internal revolt or outright coup against the US-manipulated authorities, which would then have the consequence of reversing the US' 'successes' and possibly provoking it to unleash an all-out Hybrid War if the new administration drifts too close to Beijing.

None of this would be unprecedented either, since investigative journalist Tony Cartalucci [convincingly argued](#) that Thailand's 2014 military coup was a patriotic move against the pro-US proxy leadership that was earlier installed in the country. Similar blowback could occur in Indonesia, the Philippines, or any of the active or probable CCC-member states in the future, and the reader must always keep this in mind. Accordingly, because of the instrumentality of Hybrid War in pressuring and punishing nominally allied states vis-à-vis their position to the CCC as well as disrupting China's regional infrastructure projects, it's worthy to explore all of the ASEAN-member states' socio-political vulnerabilities to this post-modern weapon, which is exactly what the proceeding chapter will do.

PART V: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

(Please read Part I, Part II, Part III, and Part IV prior to this article)

The research up until this point has focused on the regional geopolitics of the ASEAN region, establishing a solid foundation for the reader to acquaint themselves with its general dynamics. It also delivered insight into the US' strategic machinations in using Hybrid War to manipulate its friends and foes alike, proving this stratagem's wide-ranging versatility in promoting American policy. At this point, the work will now transition into a detailed investigation of the socio-political vulnerabilities inherent in each of the ASEAN states. It will begin by discussing the insular members of this bloc and then transition to their Indochinese counterparts. The sections on Myanmar and Thailand, the most likely and most impactful Hybrid War battlegrounds respectively due to their geographic enablement of China's Silk Road projects, and they thus will constitute the tail end of the Southeast Asian research in this book.

Since the first part of the Hybrid War scenario examination begins with the insular, non-Chinese-infrastructure-supporting states, readers may feel antsy to skip this section in favor of immediately reading the more presumably relevant research of mainland ASEAN. While that may be tempting to do, it's advisable that the reader familiarize themselves with insular ASEAN as well because it's already been argued that there's a potential for the US to backstab its allies to a certain degree if they don't fully conform to the Chinese Containment Coalition (CCC). Washington strategists may feel inclined to provoke what they plan to be (but may unwittingly not ultimately result in) limited 'controlled' Hybrid War scenarios as a form of pressuring decision makers in the targeted capitals, or they may outright unleash this potential as a punishment for any preemptive 'backstabbing' these states do to the US in pragmatically bandwagoning with China.

Therefore, although it may not seem immediately relevant to study the Hybrid War threats facing the insular ASEAN states, there's a certain likelihood that some of them could be activated in the coming years. Indonesia is rife with Hybrid War possibilities and it's predictable that some of these factors may even organically destabilize the state without any external encouragement. Because of this island nation's critical positioning in between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as well as its demographic and economic potential, extra emphasis is duly allocated in helping the reader understand it and the various nuances of its asymmetrical security. The author sincerely hopes that the reader will take the time in examining what he's written about insular ASEAN so that they can come away from the study much more educated and well-informed about what may eventually turn out to be the verge of Hybrid War battlefields.

The Philippines

The main domestic challenge beleaguering the Philippines is the long-running and ever-simmering Mindanao conflict, which has descended into a multifaceted insurgency between the government and a scattering of rebel and terrorist groups. Some of the rebels have reached agreements with the government and plan to cooperate with it in actualizing the autonomous ambitions of their movements, while the more radical elements, some of which are Islamic terrorists, have split from the moderates and continue to wage a provocative, albeit still low-intensity, war. It's this ongoing violence that holds the greatest risk of escalating into a larger destabilization, and it'll be seen in the below sections that the problems in Mindanao have the realistic potential to broadly spread to Palawan, the Sulu Archipelago, and even the Malaysian state of Sabah and the Indonesian reaches of Northern Sulawesi.

Bangsamoro Basics:

The Southern Philippines conflict is very complex and has been officially ongoing since 1969, although supporters claim that the people of Mindanao and the affiliated Sulu Archipelago have been continuously fighting for their independence ever since the Spanish colonization in 1521, carrying their struggle over against the American, Japanese, and finally what they view to be the Christian Filipino

colonists. To begin with, it's important for one to understand just how strong of a role regional and religious identity plays in the conflict, as it's principally the driving catalyst here. Filipino Muslims encompass a variety of ethnic groups and inhabit a handful of islands other than Mindanao, but they collectively have come to be referred to as the "Moro", apparently a derivation of the word "Moors", and they call their homeland "Bangsamoro".

An interesting facet about Filipino history is that the Philippine islands were never integrated under a unified power (be it local or regional) and historically retained a strong degree of separateness, despite engaging in mutually beneficial trading contacts with one another. For example, up until the eve of the Spanish colonization, most of the islands were either Sinicized, Islamified, Indianized, or Malaysified, and resultantly had an identity closer to that of their cultural patron than with their nearby insular neighbors. It goes without saying that the Moro were of the Islamified portions of the island chain, which, to remind the reader, included Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and Palawan. Inter-island migration (what the Moro term 'internal colonization') during the Spanish, American, and independent Filipino periods diluted the Muslims' total percentage in their home provinces, hence why the majority of Mindanao is now Christian, for example.

The Moro crystallized their identity after the US occupation began in 1898, motivated in a large part by what they viewed as the creeping 'internal colonization' of northern Christian Filipino settlers over their resource- and agricultural-rich land. The Moro waged a fierce insurgency against the US military that wasn't officially subdued until 1913. A state of low-level tension was the norm from then until 1968, during which some native Moro fought back against encroaching Christian settler militias, which especially became an issue in the post-independence period after 1946. The trigger for the Moros' full-scale revolt was the 1968 Jabidah Massacre, the exact circumstances of which are still murky, but during which it was believed that the government killed between 11-68 Moro recruits that were supposed to be used for destabilizing Malaysia's Sabah state.

The lingering territorial issue between the Philippines and Malaysia comes down to a mistranslation of a 1878 agreement between the Sultanate of Sulu (now part of the Philippines) and the British colonizers in North Borneo. The Sulu-based Moro insist (as their document proves) that they simply leased their claims on the island to the British, whereas the British assert (as their version of the document also proves) that the territory was ceded to them. This bone of contention came to the forefront of regional politics in the post-World War II era and remains a contentious, albeit largely untouched, issue to this day. The importance in mentioning this seemingly obscure territorial dispute is because it could play a significant role in the future transnational expansion of the Philippines' Moro destabilization over to eastern Malaysia and possibly even northeastern Indonesia, but this will of course be investigated later on.

For the time being, in educating the reader about the basics of the Bangsamoro Conflict, it's now relevant to turn towards a discussion about the various militant groups that sprouted up in Mindanao after the 1968 Jabidah Massacre.

Mindanao Militants And Their Interplay:

Moro National Liberation Front

The military's slaughter of the Moro recruits engendered such anger among the identity community that a rebel group was finally formed in response. The [Moro National Liberation Front](#) (MNLF) was created a year later in 1969 and is still active to this day, but in 1976 it renounced its former goal of full-fledged independence and entered into prolonged talks with the government over the creation of an autonomous region. This would later become the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989, and which is slated to be transformed into the [Bangsamoro](#) entity sometime in 2016. Various revisions and controversies over these peace talks have plagued the process since its inception four

decades ago, but for the most part, it helped to moderate the MNLF and give them a stake in the Philippines' unitary success.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front

Unwittingly, however, it also gave rise to a splinter group that would go on to become the second-largest Mindanao-based military organization, the [Moro Islamic Liberation Front](#) (MILF). MILF disagreed with their MNLF brethren's peace talks with the government and broke off from the group in 1978 in order to continue the fight for an independent Mindanao, although one that followed Islamic law. This was a very contentious move that added another layer of complexity to the conflict. What was once an ethno-regional struggle for independence and later autonomy had become one of Islam versus Christianity, and its overt Islamification attracted the attention of several Islamic terrorist groups. Although never substantiated with incontrovertible evidence, it was [widely disclosed](#) that MILF had received funding from Al Qaeda and had a relationship with the Indonesian-based [Jemaah Islamiyah](#) and Sulu-centric Abu Sayyaf terrorist groups.

Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters

No matter what their previous ties may have been, MILF did not pursue them after the mid-2000s out of fear of being labelled a terrorist group itself and therefore collapsing the peace talks that it was presently engaged in with the government. The dissident group that split from its parent organization back in 1978 out of disagreement with the latter's acceptance of government-offered autonomy ironically ended up doing the exact same thing that it had once militantly disowned. History then had a curious way of repeating itself when the [Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters](#) (BIFF) left the MILF in 2008 in protest and formed their own militant group. They weren't satisfied with their parent organization's autonomy-accepting decision either and vowed to continue the fight for an independent Islamic state in Mindanao. Interestingly, this was the MILF's vision before they finally decided to moderate themselves and follow the path of their MNLF predecessors, although they did [receive guarantees](#) that Sharia law could be applied to all Muslims living in the proposed Bangsamoro entity.

Abu Sayyaf

Other than the diehard Islamic-separatist BIFF, there's also the [Abu Sayyaf](#) terrorist group that espouses a similarly stubborn approach to the conflict. The organization was created in 1991 in the Sulu Archipelago and has been responsible for a spree of bombings, kidnappings, and beheadings all across the Philippines since then. To make matters even worse, it also [pledged its allegiance to ISIL](#) in July 2014, with [BIFF following](#) shortly thereafter. Taken together, BIFF and Abu Sayyaf represent the terrorist vanguard that's currently active in the southern Philippines and could realistically function as ISIL's gateway proxy into the country. These two obstinate organizations have mixed relations with the MNLF and MILF, not exactly being partners, but at the same time, not fighting with one another to the point of being diehard enemies.

Insurgent Interplay

It's not necessarily to suggest a level of collusion between the two sides (the government-negotiating MNLF and MILF and the terrorist BIFF and Abu Sayyaf), but one should remember that the differences between each of them aren't all the great. All four groups advocate a level of separateness for the Moro, be it autonomy or independence, and each of them wishes that Bangsamoro would encompass the historically Muslim majority islands of Mindanao, Palawan, and the Sulu Archipelago. The only thing that they principally differ on is that the MNLF doesn't formally advocate an Islamic state (although [selective Sharia law was a staple](#) of the proposed ARMM since 1977), and that it and MILF don't believe that terrorist means should be used to justify their shared ends. Other than that, it's fair to say that the main difference between each of the two camps of Mindanao militants is a simple disagreement over which tactic they feel is more efficient to employ in actualizing their shared end goal.

ARMM and the forthcoming Bangsamoro include only a slice of southwestern Mindanao as opposed to each group's desire that the full island come under the entity's control, and although the entirety of the Sulu Archipelago is incorporated in each construction, Palawan is completely omitted in both cases. It can be inferred that MNLF and MILF believe that a piecemeal, state-approved approach should be utilized in expanding their future domain, while BIFF and Abu Sayyaf obviously favor terrorist tactics and have total disdain for the Manila-based authorities. Additionally, if the Philippines grant Bangsamoro enough broad-based autonomy, it might become a moot point whether or not the entity ever gains formal independence, as aside from not having externally focused privileges such as its own foreign and defense policies, it'll pretty much be independent in all other instances, especially over its domestic affairs. This would accomplish the de-facto independence that all four Moro groups have been agitating for in one capacity or another, with the only challenge then being over which method they should pursue in incorporating the rest of Mindanao and all of Palawan.

Moro On The March:

Palawan

The Moro movements, be they government-sanctioned or terrorist-designated, will have difficulty creating a pretext for absorbing the rest of Mindanao under their Bangsamoro control owing to the largely Christian identity that the rest of the island now embodies, but matters would be considerably easier with Palawan, which has a [substantial Muslim minority](#) along its southern coast. It should be noted that MILF [gave up](#) its Bangsamoro claim for southern Palawan in 2012 as part of its peace talk arrangement with the government, but this doesn't mean that it can't be reactivated at a given time in the future, especially considering that the Muslim-majority demographic presence in that part of the island obviously wasn't impacted by the group's tactical political decision.

In a possible vision of the future, Palawan Muslims might engage in or be provoked into Mindanao-like disturbances, a Color Revolution scenario, or even terrorist activity as part of a larger agitation campaign to join Bangsamoro. This would be especially destabilizing for the Philippines since Palawan forms the basis of the country's claim to the contested South China Sea islands, and a Muslim insurgency or outright terrorist war could have debilitating consequences for the viability of Manila's maritime reach. At the same time, however, the US might see a strategic opening in all of this to increase its presence in the island.

The Pentagon already plans to have access to both [air](#) and [naval](#) bases there as part of the "Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement" that was signed in spring 2014, and under the pretext of defending these facilities and/or assisting the Philippine forces with quelling the "terrorist" disturbances there (whether or not they actually get to the form of terrorism is moot, as they'll undoubtedly be labelled that way out of political considerations), the US might even be offered access to a conventional ground base there as well. If this happens, then the US would be in a position to establish full military dominance over this island and its surrounding territory in the air, land, and sea domains, essentially transforming this geostrategic location into its primary springboard for projecting force into the southern reaches of the South China Sea.

Sabah

The internationalization of the Moros' struggle could easily occur if the conflict migrates to Malaysia's northeastern state of Sabah. If the reader calls, it was earlier touched upon that this part of Borneo used to be under the control of the Sultanate of Sulu, and that the disagreement over its current status is an [official source of disagreement](#) between Malaysia and the Philippines, the latter of which inherited the Sultanate and his heirs' claims to the territory. Non-state actors have already created a precedent for interference in this spat through the early 2013 [Invasion of Lahad Datu](#), during which [hundreds of armed terrorists](#) landed on the Malaysian state's fringes in the name of the self-proclaimed Sultanate of Sulu

Jamalul Kiram III and attempted to violently usurp control from the legitimate authorities. The standoff that this created eventually ended with the deaths of 68 people, and the regretful incident highlighted just how prone the far-flung state is cross-border destabilization from the Philippines.

The problem in this theater of potentially forthcoming conflict is twofold, since it involves both the inability of the Philippine authorities to assert law-and-order control in the Sulu Archipelago and the still-unresolved issue over Sabah's status. As regards the first issue, it's difficult for Manila to directly involve itself in Sulu affairs owing to the latter's incorporation in ARMM and the soon-to-be-established Bangsamoro autonomous entity. If the central government presses too deep into Moro territory, be it mainland (island) or maritime, it could provoke a violent response from the locals and endanger the MNLF and MILF peace processes in Mindanao, which is arguably more important and of much more urgent concern to Manila than enforcing border control over its distant island provinces. Additionally, the Philippines don't seem eager to drop their formal claim, and with Malaysia not budging over its sovereign rights to Sabah, a diplomatic deadlock has most certainly set in. This creates a deficit of trust between the two sides and could contribute to an immediate escalation of bilateral military hostility if another border provocation takes place.

Seen from this perspective, it's possible to predict that Bangsamoro's formal incorporation, concurrent with Manila's receding influence in the newly created territory, could create a destabilizing combination where non-state actors such as the self-proclaimed Sulu Sultanate's heirs take the lead in unilaterally and more regularly trying to resolve the stalled dispute. Raising the stakes even more would be if the Sulu-based Abu Sayyaf adopts this cause as part of its official ideological portfolio and declares a jihad against Malaysia. The ISIL-affiliated group might even try to emulate its organizational role model's style and opt for a formal method of territorial aggrandizement in replicating the 2013 Invasion of Lahad Datu. If it attempts such a move and actually makes landfall, then the Malaysian security services might somewhat justifiably accuse the Philippine authorities of negligence in allowing the terrorist group to launch a raid from their official territory, however autonomous it legally is. This would only contribute to the further collapse of bilateral ties and raise tensions between the two ASEAN member states. The Philippines could feel pressured to intervene in the Sulu Archipelago in order to prevent a similar attack, and this would of course inflame the Bangsamoro autonomous authorities. In another variation of this scenario, Malaysia might be tempted to stage its own limited intervention, which would then set off a surefire conflict escalation with the state and non-state actors in the Philippines.

The Bangsamoro Republik

In a startling timing of events, not even half a year after the Invasion of Lahad Datu, the leader of the MNLF declared the [Bangsamoro Republik](#) and prompted the [Zamboanga City Crisis](#). Nur Misuari and his group only controlled a small fraction of the territory that they unilaterally claimed, but all in all, their proposed country was envisioned as comprising all of the proposed Bangsamoro areas (southwestern Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago), the rest of Mindanao, Palawan, and Sabah. In sum, what was purportedly the most 'mild' of the Mindanao militant groups made a far-reaching power play for everything that it and its three counterparts were hoping for, although it was ultimately in vain. What's important, however, was that the MNLF played its hand and showed the full extent of the territory that it and the others have been after all along, despite the incoherence over their tactical disputes. This left no doubt in the minds of many that the Moro militants would eventually make a move on Palawan and Sabah, whether in concert with one another or independently thereof, sometime after the formalization of Bangsamoro.

The Mindanao-Sulawesi Arc:

The most disruptive manifestation of the Moro insurgency would definitely be its spread into Palawan and Sabah, but it's possible for the chaos that this generates to make the leap into Indonesia as well. Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in May 2015, Francisco Acedillo, a member of the Philippine House of Representatives, warned against "ISI[L] gaining a foothold in what we would call the Mindanao–

Sulawesi Arc.” The Moro militants already have a transnational expansionist plan in regaining control over the Sulu Sultanate’s North Borneo holdings, and the terrorist members among them (Abu Sayyaf and BIFF) have close ties with the Indonesian jihadist group Jemaah Islamiyah. Abu Sayyaf is literally [fighting side-by-side](#) with them in Sulu while BIFF is [reportedly](#) being trained by them, so this creates an international nexus of terrorism as it is. Another issue to take into consideration is that the Philippines-based terrorists are also aligned with ISIL, and it was just spoken about how the ‘caliphate’-building project could be easily transplanted to Southeast Asia by superimposing it over the Moro claims to Palawan and Sabah, and, provocatively enough, perhaps even linking it together with Jemaah Islamiyah’s ambitions in Indonesia.

On the surface, one would be inclined to doubt the last scenario of a linkup between ISIL-affiliates Abu Sayyaf and BIFF and Al Qaeda ally Jemaah Islamiyah due to their patrons’ heated rivalry with one another, but technically speaking, they do have overlapping and complementary objectives in Southeast Asia that would best be served by a tactical alliance. Another thing to keep in mind is that Southeast Asia, despite having fallen victim to terrorists in the past, isn’t as much of a ‘conventional’ frontline region as the Mideast and Afghanistan are, for example, meaning that the competition between these two terrorist ‘franchises’ might not be as severe and bloody as what they’re experiencing in those aforementioned two theaters. This leaves open the opportunity for an unprecedented alliance between them, even if this isn’t officially sanctioned by either of their respective leaderships. Being located so far away from their ‘corporate’ terrorist centers, these Southeast Asian ‘franchises’ are relatively free to do as they please, and there’s never been any hard evidence confirming the degree of closeness that they have with their ‘headquarters’ in the Mideast. Although regional fighters have received their terrorist training in this theater or Afghanistan, they might not be as directly controlled by their proclaimed patrons as people may think, thus giving them the operational freedom to make an ‘unholy’ alliance with their regional peers irrespective of the ISIL-Al Qaeda rivalry.

In the event that the examined scenario of a Philippine-Indonesian terrorist alliance is ever actualized to some degree, then it would by far be the most internationally disruptive event to occur in insular ASEAN’s recent history, especially if it dragged in Malaysia, as has been anticipated. It’s not to say that this scenario is probable in the immediate term, but that it convincingly seems ever more likely as largely autonomous Bangsamoro enters into fruition and Southeast Asian-originating jihadists return home from the Mideast and Afghanistan. The emergence of a black hole of chaos in this distant corner of ASEAN would be troublesome for every actor involved, as they each have more prioritized locations to protect than these far-off regions: the Philippines must secure the rest of mainland Mindanao, Palawan, Luzon, and the Visayas; Malaysia must look after the more populous and economically productive peninsular part of the country; and Indonesia must struggle to secure Sumatra and Java, the population and economic centers of the island nation. Thus, an outbreak of chaos ringing the Sulu and Celebes Seas would strike at the blind spot of each of these three countries and hit them in the most multilaterally destabilizing manner possible and instantly disrupt the application of whatever other policies they were pursuing up until that time.

Malaysia

The federal state of Malaysia is vulnerable to more destabilization scenarios than just the Philippines-originating “Greater Moro” one, although that in and of itself has the capability of being a crippling crisis on its own. The other possibilities facing its leadership are a stereotypical Color Revolution (with the Chinese minority being tricked into playing a leading role) and the cross-border terrorist issue with southern Thailand. A breakdown of order in Malaysia could have immediate global consequences because the country is a financial hub for Southeast Asia and part of its territory is critically located along the Strait of Malacca. Anti-government protests here typically make the [global news](#) in some capacity or another (although usually not as the main headline event of the day), showing just how highly foreign observers value the country’s stability due to the aforementioned reasons.

Historical Backgrounder:

General Information

Malaysia has a very rich history, but for the context of the research, only its recent past after independence is relevant. Still, it's worthwhile to add a few words about its civilizational legacy because of the broad impact that it's had on the region. The Malay people were part of the Indianized Srivijaya Empire that existed from the 7th to the 14th centuries, and afterwards they led the Malacca Sultanate that sprouted up in its wake. In both instances, Peninsular Malay (in which the majority of the contemporary population and economy are based) was the gateway for foreign influences to enter the larger Southeast Asian archipelago, be it the Indonesian islands or the Philippine ones further afield. At the same time, there was also a diffusion of other cultures into the peninsula as well, and it's for this reason why Indonesian can be considered as [mutually intelligible](#) with Malay language. The similarities between Malay and Tagalog (officially called the Filipino language) are less evident due to a variety of factors, but nonetheless, they [still exist](#) to a small extent. All of this information is useful in grasping the historical interconnection of soft power elements between the modern-day states of Southeast Asia since each of them still engages with one another to an ever-increasing extent, which is only expected to grow with the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Relevant Post-Independence Facts

The modern-day territory of Malaysia used to only comprise the peninsular portion of the country, and the entity wasn't even officially termed "Malaysia" until 1963. The Malay Union is the name of the polity that emerged in 1946, but it was quickly transformed into the Federation of Malaya two years later. From 1948-1960 it underwent a violent communist insurgency known as the [Malayan Emergency](#) that required the heavy participation of British troops to quell, and this disturbance was [prominently led](#) by the Chinese minority in the country. These citizens have always felt ostracized by the authorities, and their particular situation as it relates to the present will be discussed later on. To continue, the counter-insurgency methods utilized during that time are still [noted to this day](#) as being among the most effective, and their successful implementation created the conditions where the British felt comfortable enough granting the Federation of Malaya its independence in 1957.

It wasn't until 1963 that the modern borders of Malaysia and the name of the country itself came into play. That was the year when Sarawak, North Borneo (now called Sabah), and Singapore joined the Federation of Malaya, which then became Malaysia. Internal disputes led to Singapore's expulsion in 1965, but other than that, the newly formed country's borders have remained intact since that time. Of strategic pertinence, Kuala Lumpur's newly acquired control over most of the northern coast of Borneo entitled it [copious oil and gas reserves](#) that would later be used to help fund the country's development. [Petronas](#), the national resource company that was founded in 1974 to extract and manager these deposits, would soon thereafter go on to become a prominent name in the industry. This only underscores the value that the underpopulated but resource-heavy eastern regions of Malaysia have to the federal government in Kuala Lumpur, and it goes to show that they'll be protected at all costs despite their distance from the core of the country.

It's also important to highlight that Malaysia's 1963 formalization produced a very negative reaction in Indonesia and the Philippines, with the former believing that it had the right to control all of Borneo while the latter laid claim to North Borneo owing to the disputed treaty that it inherited from the Sulu Sultanate (and which was just discussed previously). Indonesia's reaction to the creation of Malaysia was to commence a tense period of what was then known as "[Konfrontasi](#)", while the Philippines' was to attempt the failed destabilization of Sabah, which culminated in the tragic Jabidah Massacre. Despite the Philippines retaining its claim even after then, for the most part, Malaysia's neighbors worked past their differences in the mid-1960s to the point where they peacefully proclaimed ASEAN in 1967. It should be remarked, however, that Indonesia's change in policy was heavily influenced by the [CIA-influenced coup against then-President Sukarno](#), and that without Suharto's rise to power, Konfrontasi may have lingered for a few years longer or might never have been repealed. Therefore, one could draw

an inferred connection between the CIA coup in Indonesia and the subsequent founding of ASEAN, and it's worthy to note at this junction that the organization was vehemently anti-communist, so there may be more to its American-suspected origins than initially meets the eye.

Filipino Fracas:

To present as smooth of a continuum as possible, the Malaysian segment of the scenario research will pick up where the Philippine portion left off and continue discussing the possible destabilization of Sabah state. The Philippines don't just have a territorial claim over the region, they've also settled it with many of their citizens via "refugee flows" to the area. It was [ascertained](#) in 2013 that 73,000 refugees entered Sabah from 1976-1985, driven away from their homes partly due to the intense fighting that was taking place in Mindanao at the time. While there certainly are humanitarian reasons for their exodus, it can't be ignored that this was still a large influx of Philippine citizens into a disputed area that continues to be claimed by Manila. To be fair, corrupt Malaysian authorities were responsible for crafting various pull incentives in the 1990s via the "[Project IC](#)" scam, whereby identity cards (IC) were given to "refugees" solely for the purpose of adding them to voting rolls and tilting local elections in a predetermined direction. The mixture of legitimate humanitarian push factors caused by the Mindanao Conflict, the Philippine government's implicit colonization agenda, and Malaysia's own corruption contributed to producing a situation where Filipino refugees/migrants are a problem in eastern Sabah state.

In the future, it's conceivable that this expatriate community could form a vanguard force in destabilizing the rest of the province, or at the very least, in welcoming and assisting any Sulu-originating invaders (perhaps led by Abu Sayyaf). Additionally, community-wide disturbances by this demographic could provoke the Malaysian security forces into a resorting to violence or a large-scale deportation operation, both of which could then be manipulated by the American-influenced global media into "Malaysian aggression" against "Filipino refugees" as part of a larger information campaign against Kuala Lumpur. The "humanitarian"-centric narrative that predominates the unipolar media wouldn't be able to resist falling for the tempting bait of maligning Malaysia's name, and it might even hit such a feverish pitch that the anti-government message sets a preplanned Color Revolution attempt into motion. No matter if it gets that far or not, the scenario of Malaysian-on-Filipino violence (whether stage-managed or of legitimate concern) would certainly be met with harsh consternation from Manila and as sharp of a rebuke as possible, leading one to believe that the entire incident could be prompted by outside forces that are interested in seeing a deterioration of Malaysian-Philippine relations.

Overall, the significance of the Sabah region to Malaysia is that it represents an exceedingly vulnerable frontier that's susceptible to terrorist infiltration and Color Revolution provocations. This means that it could possibly become the scene of a low-intensity Hybrid War, whereby social agitation quickly gives way to anti-government violence. Even if it isn't sustainable in the long-term and is extinguished just as quickly as the terrorist invasion of early 2013, it could still be strategically offsetting for the state if it's timed to coincide with another incidents of violence elsewhere in the country. Like what was mentioned earlier, it might turn out that a Filipino fracas in Sabah might just be a signal to jumpstart a Color Revolution in Kuala Lumpur and keep the security establishment's attention divided so as to facilitate the more serious destabilization in the capital. Malaysian-on-Filipino violence could become a symbolic incentive for Chinese Malays to take to the streets in protest, especially as they're already concerned about being discriminated against themselves and were at the forefront of the last major anti-government rallies in September 2015. Accordingly, it's now appropriate to transition the research in the direction of exploring this group's role in any forthcoming Color Revolution attempt, whether it's connected to destabilization in Sabah or separately initiated.

The China Card:

Background

Unless one is native to Malaysia, ethnic Chinese themselves, or they're already familiar with the country's demography, most people would be surprised to learn that [24.6% of the population](#) is Chinese and that just most of them are concentrated in Peninsula Malaysia. Proportionally speaking, the Chinese are also the [third-largest plurality in Sarawak](#) at about 22% of the population, but their 585,000 ethnic compatriots pales in comparison to the many millions more that reside in the western reaches of the country. This identity group has technically been present in the area for centuries, but it wasn't until the 20th century that significant enough migration occurred to give them a strong stake in the country's overall population metrics. For the most part, the Chinese community was relatively successful in Malaysia and came to occupy a privileged position in the overall economy due to their trade links and investment capital. Since the end of World War II and the beginning of the Malayan Emergency in 1948, the Chinese population fell victim to discriminatory policies motivated by the fact that this ethnic category incommensurately contributed to more communist insurgents than any other. Another issue was the widespread perception that the British colonizers favored this group over the ethnic Malay majority, which is in accordance with the Crown's stereotypical divide-and-rule approach.

The Breaking Point

Tensions between the two communities hit a climax during the [deadly race riots of 1969](#), after which the government implemented an [affirmative action policy](#) designed to enable the Malays to gain a more proportionate foothold in the economy. With time, the Chinese began to allege that this policy had turned into an anti-minority discriminatory regime that was keeping non-Malays in a position of indefinite second-class status. The reality is of course a lot more complex than this simple summary can provide for in the context of the Hybrid War discussion, but what's noteworthy for the reader to remember is that Chinese-Malay intercommunal relations have progressively gotten worse over the past few decades. This isn't inconsequential either, considering that the Chinese constitute nearly a quarter of the population and have the potential to harness deep reserves of social and economic capital in the event of an anti-government revolt.

Sharia Law

Another relevant factor to bring up is that most Chinese are areligious and do not follow Islam, the privileged religion of Malaysia. In a country that [selectively implements Sharia law](#), this could be troublesome to both the majority and the minority. On the one hand, the piously abiding Malays may become offended at some of the behavior exhibited by the Chinese community, feeling it's extraordinarily disrespectful for non-Muslims to not abide by or respect certain Islamic statutes. On the other hand, however, the Chinese may feel uncomfortable knowing that there's a separate legal system for Muslims and non-Muslims, and this could enhance the feeling of separateness that they feel towards the state and the majority ethnic group that comprises it. This doesn't only relate to the Chinese, however, as secular Malays, however much of a minority of the population that they are, are also somewhat at odds over Sharia law. For example, a secular activist who made a viral video in spring 2015 mocking a proposal to extend Sharia law to yet another province was [investigated by the police](#) for blasphemy and sedition. One can only imagine the type of communal uproar that might have happened if the individual was Chinese and their ethnic affiliates started rallying against the government in response.

Foreign Manipulation

The previously mentioned information clearly points in the direction of preexisting Malay-Chinese tensions that could predictably be exploited by foreign powers. China's policy of non-interference indicates that it's not likely to use this ethnic card to its geopolitical advantage, and not only that, but it wouldn't have much to substantially gain even if it decided to do so. Foreign media and intelligence agencies (sometime one and the same organization) are already scrupulously investigating any rumored link that China may have to Southeast Asian protest movements, be it the anti-government events that led to the 2014 military coup in Thailand or the more recent half-hearted Color Revolution attempt in

Malaysia (which will be commented upon soon). Anytime there's any event whatsoever that could be speculatively pinned on China, the unipolar media will jump at the chance and try to do so, expending whatever effort is necessary in order to find even a smidgeon of circumstantial 'proof' behind the occurrence. In an environment of such intense scrutiny, China has nothing to gain and everything to lose if it took to the path of mischievously contracting its diaspora to carry out its foreign policy objectives in whichever state it may be. It's of course very possible that the independently organized actions of ethnic Chinese activists could coincide with Beijing's particular strategy in certain states, but in that case it's more of a coincidence of action and less the fulfillment of a given command.

What makes China's Southeast Asian diaspora especially interesting is that there's the possibility that elements of this community could fall under foreign influence and be used in false-flag events to implicate China. To elaborate a little bit, with the prevailing presumption being that the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia and elsewhere could be political pawns of the Chinese Foreign Ministry (no matter how false this narrative actually is, just as it's alleged about the Russian diaspora in some countries), whatever political actions they engage in can become fodder for besmirching Beijing. The US' unipolar-aligned information services would go into overdrive in their campaign to link the protesters with China, even going as far as propagating unfounded rumors alluding to this connection, all in an attempt to delegitimize whatever the cause is that they're protesting around and/or to spread the myth that China is 'interfering' in the foreign affairs of its neighbors. The first element could be used to discredit authentic protest movements before they have the chance to become popular among the titular majority and affect tangible change, while the second strategy could be called upon to provoke tension between China and the targeted nation. In light of ethnic Chinese taking the forefront role in organizing the recent Color Revolution unrest that plagued Malaysia, the connection between this group and the unwitting manner in which they were exploited by the US deserves to be expanded upon in order to understand the direction that this dynamic is headed.

Color Revolution Pawns

The latest Color Revolution deployment in Southeast Asia took place in Malaysia during the months of August and September 2015. The cause for the event was relatively benign, motivated by corruption allegations against Prime Minister Najib Razak, with many in the Chinese Malaysian community siding with the protesters while the majority Malay stood with the government. The resultant Malay-against-Chinese standoff that developed thankfully didn't descend into the violence of 1969, but it once more brought identity tension to the surface, albeit under a thin veneer of political differences. To recall the author's earlier comments on the topic, there are irrefutably legitimate reasons for the Chinese Malaysians to be upset against the government and the ethnic majority in the country, but by and large, they hadn't significantly organized as a unified identity bloc against the authorities until then. In hindsight, one can state that while the "Bersih 4" movement was ultimately unsuccessful in its regime change demands, it did achieve quite a lot in unifying the Chinese diaspora under a semi-integrated political banner, and it's this accomplishment which presents the most profound Color Revolution threat in the future.

Ethnic Malays may now be under the impression that the Chinese community is inherently anti-government, thereby making it a sort of 'sleeping cell' that can be reactivated when need be. The distrust that this creates is perilous for Malaysia's multiethnic society and will inevitably lead to a [further distancing](#) of interethnic relations in the future, provided of course that the present trajectory continues (and there's no indication that this decades-long process will be reversed anytime soon). On a geopolitical level, ethnic Malays and some of their governing officials may have associated the mostly Chinese-comprised protests as being part of a larger policy of supposed South China Sea 'destabilization' by Beijing, guided towards this false conclusion by the US and its allied media outlets operating in their country. The Chinese Ambassador's principled statements against racism in Malaysia were [perverted](#) into a message of "interference" into the country's internal affairs, thereby proving how eager some media outlets are to warp the words of Chinese representatives, regardless of how apolitical and common sense-driven they may be. Fortunately for Kuala Lumpur-Beijing relations, it doesn't appear as

though the Prime Minister or his cabinet fell for the deceptive media image and blamed China for the unrest, but the fact remains that civil society is more divided than ever because of this, and that's of course going to remain a major problem and source of potential trouble.

On a different international tangent than the one just described, the Bersih 4 movement also attempted to unify international civil societies. The organization [called](#) for 'support rallies' all across the world, encouraging Malaysians to demonstrate in their respective diaspora communities. Particular attention should be drawn to the planned gatherings that were supposed to be held in China, Thailand, and Singapore, but thankfully were [cancelled](#) by the authorities before they could take place. In each of these states, the target audience that the protesters wanted to invite to their event was undoubtedly the ethnic Chinese. Aside from the obviousness for why this relates to China itself, around [14%](#) and [76%](#) of Thailand and Singapore, respectively, are composed of ethnic Chinese. Clearly, the Bersih 4 wanted to draw this group into the protest in order to provoke the ethnic Malay into thinking that the most prominent regional Chinese communities were against their legitimate government. The purpose of this stunt was none other than to deepen the trust divide between these two ethnic communities and to create a source of tension for bilateral relations between Malaysia and whichever country it would have been that would have allowed the ethnic Chinese-comprised protests to go forward. Wiser heads thankfully prevailed and the events were banned in each of these three countries, but that in and of itself could have also been a trigger for collateral preplanned destabilization if the purported 'activists' decided to protest against their own governments in response. That scenario didn't come to pass, but the strategic likelihood of it occurring in the future during another forthcoming Chinese-driven anti-government protest in Malaysia can't be ignored.

Color Revolution And Chinese Overview

Overall, it can be ascertained that the Chinese Malaysian community is a viable political force that has yet to flex its full political muscle, with recent events showing what it's capable of but stopping just short of a being a full-fledged Color Revolution attempt. This can be interpreted partly by the fact that the ethnic Malays constrained themselves from carrying out the ethnic pogroms that some actors were goading them into, but also by the stereotypical discipline of the Chinese in refusing to get totally carried away with their protest activity. The social chasm that exists between the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups hasn't disappeared, and if anything, it only widened in the months since the disturbance took place. It's therefore possible for a repeat of these events to occur, where the Chinese lead an anti-government protest movement against the legitimate ethnic Malay authorities. To reemphasize what the author has said before, the Chinese do have sincere grievances, but their social capital appears to have been exploited by an external actor (i.e. the US) that was interested in a low-level Color Revolution test run as opposed to a diehard desire to commit regime change. If it really was the case that the external organizer (whose role most protesters were unaware of) really wanted to overthrow Prime Minister Razak, then it's probable that a larger-scale destabilization would have unfolded.

To explain the movement's progressive diminishment, it's worthwhile to remember that the US is always experimenting with different Color Revolution tactics, and the recent trend as judged by events in the Republic of Macedonia, [Armenia](#), and then Malaysia has been to use so-called "corruption" allegations and "civil society causes" to provoke anti-government movements. The previous template had always been to use a dramatic, tangible, and timed event such as elections in producing this effect, but the field data gleaned from these three aforementioned scenarios proves that Color Revolutions could be summoned on command through the 'convenient' disclosure of a supposed corruption scandal or a heightened emphasis on an existing controversial issue (such as Armenia's electrical grid). Also, the events in Malaysia cannot be interpreted outside the large geopolitical context in which they occurred, which is the US' Pivot to Asia and New Cold War containment policy against China. It becomes increasingly clear that the US may have wanted to put pressure on Prime Minister Razak in order to compel him to agree to the TPP's controversial conditions, seeing as how his country had been one of the few that [stalled](#) the trade pact's negotiations in late July. Unsurprisingly, after the Bersih 4 Color Revolution scare, Malaysia [agreed](#) to the TPP shortly thereafter in early October.

Thai Trouble:

The last destabilization scenario that could realistically wrack Malaysia sometime in the future deals with the militant problem along the Thai border. In order to fully understand all of the factors at play here, the reader needs to be briefly educated about the conflict's history. This issue principally involves Thailand, but because of the potential for escalatory cross-border violence in Malaysia, some commentary needs to be given about it at this time. To broadly simplify the situation, a few southern Thai provinces are populated mostly by Malay Muslims and identify substantially less with Buddhist Bangkok than they do with their ethnic co-confessionals in Kuala Lumpur. There's also the tricky issue of how and why Thailand has maintained its rule over these Muslim-majority regions, which basically boils down to a late-18th century military conquest that was recognized by the British in the [Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909](#). It was after this international legitimization that Bangkok upped its presence in the provinces from one of extracting tribute to actual Thaiification.

To speed through decades of simmering discontent, Thailand stoked the flames of nationalist and religious fury by annexing several northern Malaysian provinces during World War II. After its Japanese-sponsored Axis conquests were rescinded at the end of the war, some of the Malaysian Muslims still living in pre-World War II Thai-administered territory were aggrieved that they weren't able to also free themselves from Bangkok. A separatist struggle broke out afterwards that was largely put down in the ensuing years, but the memory of perceived and unfair occupation remained and the identity separateness of Thailand's southern provinces from the rest of the country only widened since. Being that religious differences laid at the forefront of the region's hostility to the central government, it was expected that Wahhabist terrorists would seek to exploit the conflict for their own purposes, slyly disguising their true motives behind a cover of 'ethnic separatism' and other more plausibly acceptable slogans than militant jihad. The astute observer can identify quite a few structural similarities between this conflict and the one in Mindanao, as both may have started as justified protests against their respective central governments, but unfortunately devolved into terrorist outbursts that have completely discredited most of the legitimacy that they may have previously enjoyed.

The present state of play is that a large military presence is needed to keep the peace in the southern provinces, as the explosion of terrorism in the mid-2000s sent a shock down the spine of the entire Thai establishment. Malaysia is interwoven into this dispute whether it knowingly wants to be or not because of the religious and ethnic similarity that it has with the southern Thai insurgents, to say nothing of the mutual border between them. It's not to suggest that Malaysia is currently supporting the movement or is in favor of using the scourge of Islamic terrorism to promote suspected irredentist ends, but that it is bound to be affected by the conflict in one way or another. The heavy Thai military presence in the south may prompt a situation where overzealous recruits chase suspected terrorists across the border into Malaysia or fire their weapons into its territory, thus sparking a scandal or perhaps even an outright crisis.

Even if this doesn't happen, if it is revealed or even suspected that the terrorists are enjoying some sort of safe haven on the Malaysian side of the border (whether government-sponsored, due to the state's administrative neglect, and/or supported by non-state actors), then Bangkok might loudly make its claims public and attempt to put pressure on Kuala Lumpur. If substantiated or convincing enough, then this could lead to Malaysia's relative isolation from its neighbors and sow the seeds of distrust into ASEAN. Another consequence could be Thailand and the Philippines diplomatically teaming up against Malaysia, each supporting their respective anti-Malaysian claims in parallel with the other. Finally, the last projected problem that could occur along this shared border could unfold if the Thai military makes a concerted push in the region and expels the terrorist groups that are still embedded within it. As these sorts of operations have a tendency for doing, they could also engender a refugee crisis as well, and the cross-border population flows that enter Malaysia could upset the existing balance in its northern provinces. Not only that, but if some of the terrorists use the refugee movements as a cover for

infiltrating into Malaysia, then they could eventually rebuild their bases on that side of the border and truly usher in an international crisis if they one day strike Thailand from Malaysian territory.

Brunei And Singapore

These two tiny Southeast Asian states are typically overlooked by most analysts, owing largely to the fact that their physical reach doesn't extend anywhere near as wide as their counterparts'. Leaving these two countries out of any regional analysis is a huge oversight, even if neither of them is all that susceptible to Hybrid War. In their own way, however, there are certain destabilization triggers that could be activated in the event of any forthcoming asymmetrical hostilities, and it's these factors which deserve a few moments of commentary.

Brunei:

The smallest state in Borneo, the Sultanate of Brunei used to be a sizeable empire that controlled the entirety of the island's coast. It even exercised sovereignty over the Sulu Archipelago, Palawan, Mindoro, and the extreme western portions of Luzon and Mindanao. Its heyday is long gone, but its legacy remains firmly in the minds of the country's ruler and its citizenry, and it would be curious to observe whether they attempt to revive their glorious past in one form or another in the event that Malaysia's Sarawak and/or Sabah states are destabilized to some extent in the future. The shrunken sultanate that remains in the present day is largely dependent on [oil and gas exports](#), and its miniscule population (fewer than half a million people) means that the trappings of this exorbitant wealth remain heavily concentrated and easily visible for all to see.

Brunei doesn't have much of a military to speak of, but it allowed the British to retain their basing rights after the country's 1984 independence, and the UK currently has [around 2,000 troops](#) presently stationed there. The "special relationship" that the US enjoys with the UK essentially provides it privileged access to Brunei as well, and the Pentagon and its Bruneian counterparts [regularly stage](#) interoperability drills. From the geopolitical perspective, this territorially miniscule state is exceptionally strategic because of its position along the southern reaches of the South China Sea, and with the US engaging in the Pivot to Asia, its importance is only expected to spike in the coming years.

In terms of self-identity, the vast majority of Bruneians are Muslim and the country has been [administered under Sharia law](#) since 2014, but the issue that emerges is that the majority of guest workers in the country don't follow that religion. The Diplomat [cites](#) that "Thirty-two percent (of the population) are non-Muslim made-up largely of foreign workers, many of them from the Philippines, which is predominantly Catholic", thus setting the stage for potential conflict between the local natives and foreign workers. Brunei's ruler has the sovereign right to govern his country as he sees fit, but his [banning of Christmas celebrations](#) in the sultanate has provoked global outrage, scorn, and mockery, indicating that powerful international forces are intent on stirring up the pot of trouble and casting an extremely negative light on the country.

The 2015 holiday celebrations passed without incident, but there's always the possibility that each future Christmas might create a pretext for the Filipinos or other Christian-identifying migrant workers to protest and spark a domestic debacle, especially if they're goaded into violence by various foreign influences (media, NGOs, etc.) and the state is compelled to crack down on them. It's difficult to project the direction that the forecasted conflict could take because its dynamics would be totally unprecedented, but if the brief and unsuccessful [1962 Brunei Revolt](#) is any indication, then the British will possibly play a decisive role in stopping the uprising. The US could also supply additional support to the government in the aftermath of the disturbance in order to entrench its position along the southern rim of the South China Sea.

Singapore:

The smallest state in ASEAN and one of the tiniest in the world, Singapore punches well above its weight in geopolitical affairs. Located in the ultra-strategic Strait of Malacca, its position gives it leverage over the chokepoint through which almost all East-West maritime trade between the two sides of Eurasia must pass. Singapore has exploited its advantageous location in order to become a bustling economic and financial hub, and the city-state is recognized as one of the most affluent places in the world. When it was expelled from the Malaysian Federation in 1965, many observers doubted that the island backwater would ever become stable and successful, but the visionary leadership of Lee Kuan Yew ensured that Singapore's future would be secure.

The father of the nation, as he can rightfully be called and is popularly recognized as, was a proponent of the strong state method of development, whereby the government plays the guiding role in all national affairs. The concept of "liberal democracy", as it's commonly understood in the West, is not only foreign to Singapore, but also structurally taboo, as its official implementation would have derailed the Zen-like focus for the country to prosper during its darkest days of early development. Even today, "liberal democracy" is frowned upon by the state and is seen as a dire threat to Singapore's future. The country's Western partners continually apply soft pressure on it to move in the direction of their favored governing model, and unipolar-influenced media have been [taking steps](#) to inform the world of the "[undemocratic](#)" practices prevalent in the country.

At the same time, they (and chief among them, the US) know that the most important thing is to keep Singapore as an ally no matter what disagreements they may have about internal governing procedures, although the genie of "liberal democracy" that they've been trying to let loose could eventually result in unexpected turmoil if 'rogue' NGOs and their radical followers stir up trouble at an 'inopportune' time. Singapore's pro-Western trajectory and domestic stability are what the US cares about more than anything, and it has a stake in the island's success due to the strategic partnership between the two. Accordingly, it's not expected that it will support any NGO-organized clashes within the country, although it might stand to benefit from a few low-intensity engagements between them and the security forces if this can somehow be blamed on China.

The US' interests in Singapore transcend the economic sphere (embodied by their shared TPP membership) and incorporate elements of the anti-Chinese containment strategy, which is why it's so pivotal that the US maintain its good standing with the island state. The US [officially plans](#) to base four warships in the country by 2018, but in all probability, it'll likely have many more assets there than that in the coming future. The end of 2015 saw Singapore agreeing to [host US spy planes](#) too, despite the Pentagon's intention that they'll explicitly be used for gathering intelligence about China's activities in the South China Sea. These military-strategic imperatives occupy a higher place in the US' list of priorities than Singapore's supposedly "undemocratic" form of governance, and it stands to reason that Washington won't ever let its ideological objectives get in the way of its pragmatic pursuit in sustaining unipolarity there.

PART VI: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

(Please read Part I, Part II, Part III, Part IV, and Part V prior to this article)

All of the insular ASEAN states aside from Indonesia have already been discussed, but there's so much to analyze about the organization's largest member that only its own separate chapter will properly suffice. As the archipelagic gatekeeper between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and a country whose geographic, economic, and demographic characteristics portend quite well for future regional leadership status, unparalleled attention will be given to introducing the reader to Indonesia and helping them acquire a full understanding of the country. As such, this portion of the work begins by presenting a general overview of Indonesia's history and landmark developments, followed by a strategic summary of the Indonesian state and its vulnerabilities. Afterwards, those said weaknesses are they investigated in-depth in order to raise awareness about the extreme susceptibility that Indonesia has to Hybrid War, provided of course that the US chooses to aggravate any of these given factors in order to incite it. Even if that's not the case, it's the author's sincere hope that the reader will come away after perusing this publication a lot more educated about the country and able to hold a conversation about it the next time it enters the global headlines.

Big Country, Bigger History

Indonesia is both the largest country in ASEAN and the most populous majority-Muslim state. Numbering around 250 million people, it's also the fourth most populous country in the world. As can be expected, such a gigantic state also has an extraordinarily rich history, and it's integral for observers to acquire a general understanding of this in order to grasp the nature of the Indonesian story. Once one has a better idea of how modern-day Indonesia came to be, they will then be in a better position to forecast where it's headed and in predicting how it may respond to forthcoming challenges along the way.

Ancient Civilizations:

Prior to the over three hundred year long period of Dutch colonization that commenced in the early 1600s, modern-day Indonesia was an eclectic mix of varied polities. The island chain was strongly influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist religions, and many of the earlier kingdoms identified with these larger civilizations, either culturally and/or in terms of the ruling dynasties. Two of the most influential of them were the [Srivijaya](#) and the [Majapahit](#). The Srivijaya was mentioned earlier in the research when discussing Malaysia, and to remind the reader, it was a powerful naval kingdom situated on both sides of the Malacca Straits. Ruling from the 7-14th centuries, the entity played a critical role in facilitating Indo-Chinese trade, a possible foreshadowing to Indonesia's future geopolitical position. As for the Majapahit, this upstart power came to age between the late-13th and early 16th centuries, during which it amassed a network of tributary states stretching almost throughout the entirety of Indonesia's modern-day boundaries. If Srivijaya set the precedent for cultural and economic transfusion between India and China in the Malay-Sumatra-Java population centers of Southeast Asia, then Majapahit flexed this out to its maximum geopolitical extent and shaped the contours of the modern archipelago-civilization.

Spread Of The Sultanates:

Indonesia is nowadays a predominantly Muslim state, with its former Hindu-Buddhist identity being largely relegated to the past and existing in small ethno-geographic communities. The process began in the 13th century with the arrival of Islam, which was thought to have been brought by traders from the Indian subcontinent. It became the majority religion a few centuries later and gave birth to a scattering of sultanates, the most important of which were the [Mataram](#) and [Banten](#). Both of them were formed in

different periods of the 1500s, but the first one was concentrated solely on Java and existed until the mid-1700s, while the second one was split between western Java and southern Sumatra and stayed around until the early 1800s. What's important to note here is that these sultanates were located in the most populous portions of Indonesia, while the outlying islands scarcely were influenced by the religion. Later on this would become an important differentiating factor that would create identity tension and result in communal violence, but it wouldn't be until the tail end of the 20th century that such conflicts arose (or as one could cynically say, were actually provoked).

Colonial Captivity:

Moving closer to the modern era, Indonesia eventually came under the dominance of the Dutch, beginning with the Dutch East India Company in the early 17th century and eventually transitioning directly to the [Dutch Empire](#) itself in 1800. The Portuguese had actually preceded the Dutch via their trade ties with the Spice Islands (contemporarily referred to as the Maluku Islands), but they weren't formidable enough to hold on to their conquests. Also, Dutch control in Java was briefly interrupted during the Napoleonic Wars but it was quickly returned in the subsequent peace negotiations between London and Amsterdam. Although the Dutch formally claimed what would correspond to the borders of modern-day Indonesia, they weren't able to establish firm control over all of it until the early 1900s with the end of the [Aceh War](#). This conservative sultanate in the northern tip of Sumatra fiercely resisted the colonizers and fought tooth and nail for their independence, only to later reinitiate their struggle in 1976 against what they considered to be the occupying Javanese authorities (which will be discussed later).

Another important aspect of Dutch rule was that Amsterdam proselytized Protestantism to the eastern isles, with some Catholic missionaries being involved as well. All told, they succeeded in turning most of the people living in the contemporary provinces of West Papua and Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, North Sulawesi, and a near-majority of the people in the (South) Malukus into loyal Christian subjects. Their identity separateness and loyalty to the crown would become a problem in the immediate years after World War II and will be discussed in the subsequent section, but in order to be realize why they felt this way, it's necessary to speak a few words on the policy of [transmigration](#). This ultra-controversial act started in the early 1800s and dealt with the incentivized and forced population transfers of Javanese Muslims to the outer isles of the Dutch East Indies colony, ostensibly in order to ease the overpopulation problem on their home island and provide labor for the far-off plantations. When this policy was continued and actually accelerated for some time during the post-independence era, it reactively led to accusations of "internal colonization", especially among the Christian natives of the east that were opposed to overwhelming Javanese Muslim migration (whether via the transmigration program or carried out independently). Like the Aceh conflict that was mentioned in the above paragraph, this issue will also be discussed later on when it's relevant to do so in depth.

World War II:

The Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies was a monumental turning point in the islands' history, as it quickly crippled the European colonialism of centuries' prior and irreversibly set Indonesia on the course of independence, albeit after a brief but extraordinarily brutal occupation by Tokyo. The Japanese Empire had long been eyeing the islands due to their copious export of oil, but it wasn't until the Dutch [embargoed](#) its sale to Japan in July 1941 that the later seriously considered militarily intervening to seize this crucial resource. The invasion began in December of that year and continued until the end of the war, since the Allies pretty much ignored most of the colony in their regional liberation operations. This was much to the woe of the local population, however, as they had to endure a disastrous famine that [killed over two million people](#), suffer under physical hardships such as forced labor and summary executions, and put up with the Japanese's large-scale resource plundering.

If there was any silver lining to this dark cloud, it's that the Japanese worked hand-in-glove with [pre-war nationalist and independence leader Sukarno](#) in order to keep control, but this ironically had the effect of the purported 'puppet' using his patrons in order to cleverly create the conditions for an independent

state. Sukarno's collaboration with the Japanese is well-documented and the reader can research the specifics of how he manipulated his country's occupiers to develop and expand the institutions necessary to guide Indonesia to independence after the war, but in short, the Japanese had earlier envisioned granting the islands independence at some undetermined time and were thus amenable to his structural suggestions. The Allied advance had a lot to do with why Tokyo sped up their implementation and granted Sukarno and his country considerably more freedom in the latter days of the conflict, as they didn't want to fight a stay-behind occupation war at the same moment as they were confronting the Allied surge. These later factors combined in such a way so as to set the stage for Sukarno's declaration of Indonesian independence on 17 August, 1945, two days after the Japanese formally surrendered.

From Colony To Outright Independence:

Indonesia's path to independence wasn't as clear-cut as unaware observers might have assumed. The island nation had to fiercely fight back against their Dutch re-occupiers in the immediate post-war aftermath, with their struggle being referred to as the [Indonesian National Revolution](#). The Dutch gained international notoriety for undermining the various peace accords that were signed, while at the same time some of the Indonesian revolutionaries earned a fear-inspiring reputation for the wanton violence that they unleashed during the [Bersiap](#) period. For the most part, global opinion stood on the side of the Indonesians, and even the Netherlands' Western allies eventually abandoned it in favor of siding with Jakarta.

As Amsterdam reluctantly lurched towards granting its long-held colony independence, it attempted one last hurrah in the form of thrusting the federalized [United States of Indonesia](#) format onto the fledgling state. The freedom-fighting Republic of Indonesia was a constituent entity of this arrangement and comprised most of Sumatra and half of Java, while the rest of the colony was broken up into 15 other states, the most notable of which was "[East Indonesia](#)". This unit was comprised of all of the islands east of Java and Borneo, with the exception of West Papua which remained under direct Dutch rule until 1962. Geographically speaking, East Indonesia was the largest territorial unit in the nascent country and also had a comparatively separate identity, being heavily Christian, non-Javanese, and relatively loyal to the previous colonial authorities.

The United States of Indonesia, and consequently, the state of East Indonesia, only existed from December 1949 until August 1950. Sukarno understood the divisive intentions of the Dutch when they foisted the federalist form of government onto his country, and despite the certain strategic benefits that this may have bequeathed the constituent states, it was seen as largely being contrary to the country's overall unity. Accordingly, he took steps to centralize control of Indonesia step by step, absorbing the federal states nearest the Republic of Indonesia until only the state of East Indonesia remained. It, too, was eventually dissolved and a unitary state was proclaimed in its place, but not before a minor rebellion in the South Maluku islands.

The self-proclaimed [Republic of South Maluku](#) rose up in opposition to what they proclaimed was a blatant violation of the autonomy clauses inherent in the constitution, and despite this movement having the support of the Dutch, it did somewhat encapsulate legitimate concerns in that part of the country. Nonetheless, it was quickly defeated and the federalist structure was replaced. To this day, however, the idea of a specific region and/or ethnic group agitating for broader autonomy or outright federalization (to say nothing of the independence movement in West Papua) has been a perennial fear in the minds of the country's decision makers, as they're acutely aware of the degree to which uncontrollable decentralization or outright devolution could impact on national cohesion. While it will later be seen that the government is open to pragmatic cooperation with such movements like in the case of Aceh, it is resolutely opposed to granting regions independence (e.g. West Papua) or ever returning to the federal structure that was temporarily in place during the United States of Indonesia.

Cold War Challenges:

Ideological Consolidation

One of the first things that Sukarno after the success of his unitary consolidation was to promote the ideology of [Pancasila](#), the five-point “embodiment of basic principles of an independent Indonesian state” formally enshrined in the Constitution. It stipulates the unofficial ideology of Indonesia as being a monotheistic, nationalist, just, welfare state that practices representative democracy. Another tactic that Sukarno attempted was to tacitly ally himself with the Communist Party of Indonesia in order to strike a balance between the nationalist and Islamist opposition in the country, which woefully had the effect of making the US highly suspicious of his motives.

Early Revolts

This led to Washington covertly supporting the 1958 dual destabilizations caused by the so-called Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI, based in Sumatra) and the Permesta Rebellion in North Sulawesi, both of which were defeated rather quickly. While the PRRI was more of an outright coup attempt, the Permesta had the carefully constructed veneer of representing local grievances that had lingered since the dissolution of the East Indonesian federal unit. These sentiments, however widespread they may or may not have been among the locals, likely wouldn't have resulted in anything of notice had it not been for the [CIA's supportive involvement](#), but it's still worthwhile to draw attention to the fact that the center-periphery divide still existed to a certain degree. This – the divide between the capital and the provinces, and the potential for foreign intelligence agencies to incite and aid anti-government rebellions there – will later come back to reemerge as a defining theme when the research analyses the contemporary Hybrid War threats facing Indonesia.

Islamist Fears

Even prior to the PRRI and Permesta revolts, there was some contained tumult brought about by a sporadic Islamic insurgency fought by [Darul Islam](#). This group was the progenitor of mostly all other Islamic movements in the country, including the terrorist group Jemaah Islamiya, and it was specifically agitating for the nationwide imposition of Sharia law. It sparked disturbances in Aceh, Central Java, and South Sulawesi before it was put down in 1962. Up until that time, it played a role in inspiring the “Islamist opposition” to Sukarno and actively proliferated its militant ideology throughout the country. As a result, the general concept of creating an Islamic State in Indonesia continued to persist even after the group's dissolution, which correspondingly makes it the godfather of the radical Islamic threat that's currently facing the country today.

The West Papua Problem

To simplify a [complex](#), [long-running](#), and [still ongoing](#) issue, the Dutch retained control of West Papua after granting Indonesia independence and only relinquished it to the UN in 1962 per the New York Agreement. This understanding maintained that a vote would have to be held on its ultimate status before 1969, which culminated in the hyper-controversial “Act of Free Choice” that formally incorporated the mineral-rich former Dutch colony into the Indonesian state. Critics of the process allege that the latter vote was nothing more than a highly pressured intimidation campaign against local leaders and that a popular referendum (which wasn't ever held) would have unequivocally granted the territory independence. Despite largely falling out of the global consciousness, an abroad-based independence movement still vocally agitates for West Papuan independence, and there are still rebel groups active on the island itself.

In response to this, the Indonesian authorities have taken what can mildly be described as a heavy-handed crackdown in the province, enforcing extensive restrictions on foreign visitors (aside from energy- and mining-related employees) and placing thousands of troops in the region. The military has also been accused of killings and even genocide, and while this has been difficult to prove because

independent journalists are mostly prohibited from reporting there, it still raises alarming questions about the form of control that the Indonesian government exercises over the far-flung and resource-wealthy province. Similarly, in what is suspected to be a means of weakening regional identity and further splitting the independence movement there, Indonesia decreed in 2003 that the western portion of Papua Province should be separated to form its own entity called West Papua. According to reports, there are plans to further subdivide the previously unified province into a constellation of other Papuas such as [Central](#) and [Southwest](#) Papua, adding credence to the theory that the sparsely populated province is being administratively cut up for political and not practical purposes.

Konfrontasi

Just as it sounds, this was a [policy of confrontation](#) that Indonesia practiced against Malaysia from 1963-1966 in the island of Borneo. Sukarno didn't believe that Malaysia should attain ownership over the formerly separate British colonies of Sarawak and North Borneo, and he thus initiated a low-intensity jungle conflict aimed at weakening its control over these territories. No territorial changes occurred either during or after the confrontation, but the Malaysians did receive pivotal support from the British that likely made all the difference in why they were ultimately able to hold their ground. As hated as the two sides were to one another during the heat of the moment, they'd later bury the hatchet and come together in forming the ASEAN bloc in 1967, with Suharto's overthrow of Sukarno playing a major role in Jakarta's foreign policy reversal.

Suharto's CIA-Assisted Coup Against Sukarno

As was described at the beginning of this subsection, the US was alarmed by Sukarno's tacit political alliance with the Communist Party of Indonesia, and Washington grew progressively fearful that Jakarta's non-aligned and pragmatic foreign policy in bettering ties with the USSR and China would turn his country into one or the other's implicit ally with time. In response, they sought to overthrow him via a calculated and still rather nebulous coup d'état brought about via the events provoked by the still-mysterious [30 September Movement](#). This group kidnapped senior military officials ostensibly in order to preempt what they said was a CIA-inspired coup against Sukarno, but General Suharto (who by that time was a very high-ranking and influential establishment individual) reacted by using the situation as a pretext to sideline Sukarno and place himself into power.

It's not universally agreed upon what exactly happened during that time, but the author believes that that either the 30 September Movement may have been a truly pro-Sukarno supportive organization that prompted Suharto and his cohorts to initiate their coup before schedule or a group of useful idiots or outright anti-government operatives that were provoked or contracted into initiating the events in order to create a semi-plausible public pretext for Suharto's power grab. No matter where the truth lies, it's indisputable that the CIA had not only a history of interest in overthrowing Sukarno (e.g. the PRRI and Permesta Rebellion), but that it [strategically supported](#) Suharto's faction prior to their successful coup attempt.

After they seized power, they accused the 30 September Movement of wanting to have installed a communist government and consequently unleashed a bloody purge of all suspected communist elements in the country. The death toll was [at least half a million people](#) but is suspected to reach as high as [two million](#), with the [CIA having gave](#) the new authorities the names of thousands of Communist Party of Indonesia members and supporters so that they could be hunted down and slaughtered. After the orgy of bloodshed slowed down and the coup authorities attempted to exercise governance over their country, Suharto initiated what he termed the "[New Order](#)". He intended for this to represent a radical split from Sukarto's policies in all ways, and being the opposite of the deposed president, the new leader engaged in a pro-corporatist economic policy, militant anti-communism, and a stridently pro-Western foreign policy. All of these proved advantageous for the US' Cold War strategy in the region though they came at the obvious expense of the USSR's and China's, further presenting circumstantial evidence that the US purposefully engineered the coup against Sukarno.

East Timor Invasion

The most controversial foreign policy move that Suharto engaged in was the December 1975 [invasion of East Timor](#) (officially Timor-Leste), a former Portuguese colony on the eastern part of Timor Island. Due to the [Carnation Revolution of 1974](#) that had earlier resulted in a dramatic change of government in Portugal, Lisbon abandoned all claims to its overseas colonies (with the exception of Macau) and allowed them to pursue independence. East Timor entered into a transitional political phase and was eventually thrown into civil war between two competing factions, with the leftist-affiliated FRETILIN unilaterally declaring independence at the end of November 1975.

A little over a week later, Indonesia invaded the territory and forcibly occupied it, [killing almost a third of the population](#) via violence and famine. The US and Australia [secretly welcomed the invasion](#) because they saw it as an effective deterrent to stopping any communist government from taking root in the nascent country. They would eventually betray their regional proxy after throwing their weight behind the [UN-supervised independence referendum](#) that would later be conducted in 1999, one year after Suharto's own Western-engineered overthrow, but at the time, all Western and pro-Western forces saw a confluence of strategic interest in Indonesia's invasion and subsequent occupation of East Timor, no matter the human cost that this would entail and whether or not they voiced this publicly.

Aceh Insurgency

The northwestern tip of Sumatra has long been recognized as the country's most conservative Muslim bastion, and its people have historically been fighting against all manner of outside invaders. Be it the Dutch, the Japanese, or even, as some of their proponents allege, the Javanese occupiers, the Acehnese have traditionally put up a formidable resistance in the name of their own state or autonomy. The latest conflict being referred to began in 1976 and didn't end until 2005, but to describe this three-decade-long insurgency in as concise a manner as possible, it can be summed up as the dedicated efforts of the Free Aceh Movement to establish an independent Sharia-guided state in their natural resource-rich area of Indonesia.

According to the [WorldWatch Institute](#), Aceh provided 1/3 of Indonesia's LNG in the early 1970s and helped the country become the number one exporter of the world for this resource, despite only 5% of the revenue being given to the regional government. Even by 2005, the Council on Foreign Relations [figured](#) that the province was accounting for around a quarter of all of the country's oil and natural gas output. While the disparity in resource revenue sharing was the main catalyst for the insurgency, another growing problem was the [locals' irritation at Javanese transmigration](#), which some of them felt was infringing on their local cultures. Faced with these pressing issues, the Acehnese ethnicities (of which there is a handful) banded together under the banner of regional nationalism and Islam to oppose the central government in Jakarta.

Part of the reason that this region always felt separate from the unified Indonesian state is because it used to have its own [400-year-old independent sultanate](#) prior to the conclusion of the Dutch colonization war in 1903. The Javanese transmigrants were seen as internal colonizers and Banda Aceh (the regional capital) didn't want to be given the ridiculously low share of 5% of all energy revenues that originate from its jurisdiction. The Islamic factor was also an influence as well. [Tengku Hasan Muhammad di Tiro](#), a former high-ranking member of Darul Islam, was actually the founder of the Free Aceh Movement, so it's little wonder that he eventually negotiated for Sharia law to be the [official judicial model](#) for his province, despite this not having anything to formally do with the energy and transmigration grudges that the region held against the central authorities. When the conflict finally came to a close via a 2005 peace agreement, Sharia law was recognized per an earlier [2003 accord](#) and the province was allowed broad autonomy under which one of the privileges was to [retain 70%](#) of all energy revenues.

Post-Cold War Crisis Chain:

Indonesia adapted to the end of the Cold War in a pretty stable and prosperous manner, not being negatively affected by any of the immediate aftermath. In fact, the end of the Cold War actually increased its regional standing through the expansion of the ASEAN trade bloc to the countries of Indochina and Myanmar. Jakarta was able to gain a certain amount of asymmetrical clout through being the largest country of the enlarged organization, and seemingly also one of the most politically stable. All in all, Indonesia superficially appeared to be in quite an enviable position, although deep undercurrents of disaster were violently churning just below the surface.

1997 Asian Economic Crisis Provokes Anti-Suharto Riots

The [1997 Asian economic meltdown](#) that was discussed at the very beginning of the ASEAN section of the research had the effect of catalyzing these destabilizing processes and creating the social preconditions for a forthcoming regime change maneuver. The Indonesian currency was hit hard by the regional effects of this financial conflagration, which in turn led to explosive inflation and rampant unemployment. The economic boom that characterized the earlier part of the decade had abruptly stopped and begun to reverse itself with equal force, creating a panic among many whereby a craze-inducing run on the stores was set in motion. The social chaos that this induced prompted the opposition to step up their anti-government activities, which in turn led to a state backlash. Through a cascading series of grassroots events, Medan, Jakarta, and Surakarta [erupted in violence](#) in May 1998 and hundreds of people were killed, arrested, and injured. Chinese businesses were particularly targeted by the rioters due to the assumption that this supposedly 'better off' demographic had access to critical food and supplies that the rest of the population didn't. The ensuing chaos was too much for Suharto to handle and he decided to resign at the end of the month, ending over thirty consecutive years in power and leaving the country on the brink of disaster at the end of the "New Order".

The chain of destabilizing regime change events that were first set off by the regional economic crisis may have portended a new wave of asymmetrical post-modern warfare that had yet to be mastered, a sort of trial run for a forthcoming and more focused attempt. This was spoken about earlier in the work, but to conceptually simplify the specifics of what's being directly referred to at this time, a regional economic crisis was the trigger for anti-government protests in Malaysia and Indonesia. The former had behaved relatively independent under the leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed (and therefore was seen as a potential threat vis-à-vis the [Wolfowitz Doctrine](#)) while the latter was a promising economic giant presided over by an aging and unpopular leader that would inevitably be replaced in the coming years. From the strategic perspective of American policy makers, a regime change in both countries would be preferable – in Malaysia because its independent policies prevented it from coming under Western tutelage, and in Indonesia because the stale "New Order" was bound to be replaced sooner or later and it was thought to be more advantageous for the US to have a guiding role in this transition by 'wiping the plate clean', completely getting rid of the 'old guard', and working to place a new and fresh generation into power via pro-Western "liberal-democratic" means.

The latter objective of 'spreading democracy' is always preferable for American intelligence agencies because it provides them an easily manipulatable format with which to 'democratically' enact changes in an existing government, be it to support their desired candidate for whatever particular office it may be or to disrupt an opponent's campaign, both of which can be done via 'plausibly deniable' and internationally recognized 'legitimate' ways. Indonesia was obviously forecast to play a growing role in the future world order due to its geostrategic position, enormous population, and well-endowed natural resource wealth, and the US establishment interminably maintained a fear that the rise of another Sukarno could wrest the country away from their grip and undermine Washington's grand strategy. It's better for the US to have a weakened, albeit still strategically aligned, partner with which to do business and whose model is susceptible to the CIA's 'democratic engineering' than to allow it to uninterruptedly continue its existence as a potentially strong and stable state with a difficult-to-influence leadership transition model that might somehow fall under or choose to side with a non-Western power.

Indonesia's post-independence historical model was such that only a dramatic event could alter the traditionally strong role of the President and spearhead the constitutional changes necessary for limiting the leader's power.

As assessed from this angle, it makes perfect sense why the US would be interested in Suharto's violent overthrow, which not only produced the required legal amendments after the fact and for these exact reasons (and ushered in the period of "Reformasi" to go along with it), but also provided more valuable field testing for the CIA's region-wide situational preconditioning model, which had up to then been used against the Soviet Union, the Communist Bloc, and the former Yugoslavia. Utilizing economic warfare as a means for 'justifying' 'democratic' multistate (or multi-unit in the case of previously unified Yugoslavia) regime change operations would later become the US' favored coup method, with forthcoming applications in the 'traditional' Color Revolutions in Serbia and the former Soviet space (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan), the failed 'Central Asian Spring' of 2010, and then the "Arab Spring" of 2011.

Ethnic Conflicts Explode

The situationally engineered overthrow of Suharto created a governing void that decreased the authorities' hold over the ethnically diverse and identity-conflicting peripheral provinces. Deeply rooted animosities between locals and their transmigrant neighbors came to the fore in the aftermath of the state's unprecedented weakening, and as a result, large-scale and geographically broad violence began to break out. The beginning of 1999 saw [conflict erupting in the Maluku islands](#), where the Muslim and Christian communities started killing one another due to long-bubbling tensions. For the most part, the Christians were native to Ambon island and the surrounding areas that were affected, while the Muslims were transmigrants or their descendants. Violence started in the first quarter of the year then returned in the late summer/early fall and continued to the end of the year. In North Maluku, a new majority-Muslim province that was just created that year out of Maluku proper, a wave of [rolling religious and ethnic conflicts](#) crested from August until November, sometimes overlapping, sometimes not. For example, Christians and Muslims of the same ethnicity were slaughtering one another, but at other times the conflict was between different regional ethnic communities and had nothing to do with religion.

A similar sort of conflict had also broken out in mid-March in West Kalimantan, the official designation for the western part of Indonesian-administrated Borneo. Around 3,000 Muslim Madurese transmigrants were killed by local Dayaks during the [Sambas Riots](#), in what was sadly just the latest in a chain of violence that had periodically been sparked off since the 1960s. The saliency of it occurring in 1999 is that it proves that the self-evident weakening of the state after Suharto's overthrow gave the impression to various identity groups that they now had the 'opportunity' to exact their local vengeance. The situation [once more boiled over](#) in 2001 with the Sampit Conflict, during which 100s were killed and around 100,000 Madurese had to flee Central Kalimantan. It's notable that if one looks at a map of Indonesia and locates these conflict zones, then they'd see that it really does ring around the entire periphery. If one counts the ethno-religious tensions in Sulawesi island that culminated in the May 2000 [Walisongo Christian-on-Muslim school massacre](#) and factors in the near-constant threat of violence in West Papua (kept under control chiefly due to the heavy military presence in the province), then almost all of the former "East Indonesia" and its adjoining territories (West Kalimantan and West Papua) were affected by some type of ethno-religious conflict during this time.

It makes one wonder whether or not the US had stoked any of these conflicts or had advance premonitions (if not outright intentions) that something like this would happen after Suharto's manipulated departure. It conceivably looks to be the case that American intelligence was testing the theory of managed chaos and observing its 'natural' spread throughout the archipelago, monitoring which latent conflicts were successfully aroused and which dodged the bullet and remained dormant. From a strategic vantage point, the socio-demographic feedback that the US would have received simply by watching this process unfold would have been invaluable in helping to craft forthcoming region-wide

destabilization plans, to say nothing of the value that such information would have acquired if the US had a role in instigating any of the said conflicts and 'testing' their given variables. In hindsight, it certainly appears as though this was one of the US' objectives (whether it was a primary, partial, or tangential one is moot in this context), and the surrounding and pre-scheduled events in East Timor, around which the aforementioned ethno-religious violence may have been timed, convincingly make it seem as though this was indeed the case.

East Timor Independence Referendum And The Potential Unravelling Of Indonesia

Suharto's briefly tenured successor, Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, initiated an historic feat by putting Indonesia's occupation of East Timor up to a democratic vote in the besieged province, announcing his intentions in late-January 1999 to hold a referendum on whether the territory should be independent or receive heightened autonomy from Jakarta. It was later agreed that the vote would be held on 30 August of that year. The reasons for this decision are aplenty, but they're broadly understood as being part of the "Reformasi" period of change that was initiated after Suharto's overthrow, whereby the new authorities began brainstorming ways to transform (or as they termed it, 'reform') the country. It's not at all to infer that this particular decision was necessarily negative and shouldn't have been made, but that it should be seen as being part of the basket of changes that the US wanted the post-Suharto government to initiate. In this instance, it was one that was welcomed by the international community after awareness about the illegal and ultra-violent Indonesian occupation began to gradually attract increased worldwide attention after the Cold War.

If the reader accepts the author's main thesis about the US testing and deploying the new 'superweapon' of 'managed chaos' all across the world in the post-Cold War era, then it's natural to conclude that it had an ulterior strategic motive for going along with what otherwise seemed like a conventionally humanitarian move. The reader would do well to remember that the US never evokes 'human rights' and 'international justice' without some cynical sort of reason, and this despite whether or not others are even aware of what it's ultimately up to. Interestingly enough, as viewed in the context of the event timeline of domestic destabilization earlier elaborated upon, there's a possibility that East Timor's warranted independence later in the year could have been exploited by the US to create a pretext for other troublesome islands to secede as well, albeit this time ones which were formally and historically a part of Indonesian and not technically occupied by it.

The violence in Maluku and North Maluku certainly raises this intriguing prospect, and it's curious to wonder whether or not the rioters on either side of the conflict there (but more so in Maluku than North Maluku [which began to be destabilized right when the East Timor referendum was to be held]) were inspired by the forthcoming vote and may have thought they could use its precedent to push for their own autonomy or independence. It also can't be discounted that any potential organizers of the island violence and their affiliated 'narrative writers' in the international mainstream media may have also had this in mind at the time as well, especially if one considers the earlier theory that the US was using the post-Suharto environment as a tropical testing ground for various degrees of chaos theory implementation and/or 'natural' field observance.

Under this specific branch of scenarios, Washington may have wanted to stretch the limit of public opinion and see how far it could take the recently unveiled media stratagem of "humanitarian intervention" in the event that something 'went wrong' with the vote (as would later happen). It should be recalled that it was in March 1999 that the US began its War on Yugoslavia ostensibly under the publicly presentable and totally fabricated pretext of 'preventing genocide'. With East Timor, at least such claims would have historically been true, and in both instances (Yugoslavia and Indonesia), the information operations necessary for convincing the general public of the potential need for a militant intervention had already been prepared in advance.

For a brief moment of time, however, it looked as though the US was actually ready for a militant intervention in East Timor, albeit under less conspicuous anti-state grounds than ones used against

Yugoslavia earlier that year. When the referendum resulted in over three-quarters of the population voting for independence, frenzied pro-Indonesian mobs and military-affiliated militias wracked havoc throughout the occupied territory and started randomly killing the locals. Some estimates state that around 1,400 people died in the under one-month period between the referendum and the introduction of an Australian-led force on 20 September. Referred to as [International Force for East Timor \(or INTERFET\)](#), it wasn't UN-sanctioned and was more of a 'coalition of the willing' that also included Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, the UK, France, Germany, and a handful of others. The US "[Led From Behind](#)" via intelligence and logistical support but didn't actively take part in the operation, but the fact that it was playing coy about doing so until about one week before the mission was formally launched may indicate that it understood the strategic value of implicitly threatening to do so.

The once-strong Indonesian state, which previously would never have allowed a multinational coalition to 'liberate'/re-occupy its own occupied territory (no matter how wrong and unjust it was for it to do so in the first place), had now been reduced to scrambling all of its allied militias out of the zone and holding its breath that the East Timorese island foothold wouldn't be used for launching other formal or asymmetrical destabilization operations further into the peripheral insular interior. This fear never fully panned out, but strategically speaking, it was definitely a risk that the Indonesian military accounted for and had prepared a contingency response if need be. After all, it's was commonly understood among experts that Indonesia was "damned if they do, damned if they don't" leave East Timor after having occupied it for so long, since the thinking went that the liberation of this territory might set off a chain reaction in the former lands of "East Indonesia" that might lead to a rapid unravelling of the unitary Indonesian state (whether in terms of formal secessionism or a return to federalism).

In the situational context of what was unfolding in that part of the country at the moment (the North Maluku and Maluku ethno-religious clashes and the foreign intervention in East Timor), the disintegrative processes could have been taken to their conclusion if the US had mustered the political will to do so, but it opted instead to remain passive after the fact and gain valuable field data about its new asymmetrical weapon of chaos. Additionally, it may have been that influential forces in Washington realized that the cost-benefit analysis (in terms of the military resources necessary for procuring a given natural resource or strategic end) wasn't acceptable for the necessary commitment, especially as plans were already underway for tightening the noose around Russia and re-instigating a hot war in the Mideast. Rather, it may have been assumed, it was decided that the strategic goal of weakening the structure of the Indonesian state was already accomplished and that the final ethno-religious centrifugal hit could indefinitely wait to be unleashed until later, perhaps if necessary to pull Indonesia away from China in a forthcoming scenario. For the time being, a weakened, subservient, but still-unitary Indonesia that was firmly in the pro-Western orbit and outfitted with a rotating 'liberal-democratic' government was seen as the most preferable strategic 'solution' for the US' pre-Pivot to Asia policy in ASEAN.

The Dawn Of Wahhabist Terrorism

The last of the post-Suharto crises to rock Indonesia was the emergence of Wahhabist terrorism as a major source of instability, especially in the sense that it was one which captivated worldwide attention after 9/11. [Jemaah Islamiyah](#) is perhaps the most notorious 'homegrown' terrorist group in the country, although it does have sizeable ties with Al Qaeda and other likeminded foreign organizations. The group skyrocketed to international attention after it staged the [2002 Bali bombings](#), but it had earlier become infamous in Indonesia for the [2000 Christmas Eve bombings](#) that targeted churches and other soft targets in nine separate cities, including Jakarta. Seeing as how Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, it has a greater risk than any other that even a statistically insignificant proportion of terrorist-supporting citizens could wrack disproportionate damage on the country.

For example, if even 0.5% of the people are susceptible to the violent Wahhabist ideology (which is a conservative number, if anything), then that means that 1.25 million people out of the total 250 million citizens in the country could become potential terrorists, terrorist financiers, or supportive operators. With the massive population density present in Java and most of Sumatra, it means that this ultra-

minority percentage of the population could inflict terrible harm to the rest of the country throughout the coordinated targeting of multiple soft areas such as cafes, churches, and schools. Worse still, they may not even have to go abroad for their training, as Al Qaeda, ISIL, and their affiliated groups could easily train in one of Indonesia's thousands of islands, most of which are uninhabited, or even in [tense Sulawesi](#), if not in nearby Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Indonesia is frankly much too populous and geographically large for the government to fully monitor, and it's inevitable that certain blind spots will be or are already being exploited by Wahhabist terrorist groups, be they Jemmah Islamiyah, Al Qaeda, ISIL, their affiliates, a new organization, and/or a hybrid combination thereof.

The View From Jakarta

At this point, quite a lot of history and other national specifics have been laid out in the research, and it's a given that the reader might feel slightly overwhelmed with everything they've encountered so far. The inclusion of so much information was necessary in order to create the strategic backdrop for exploring the Hybrid War threats to Indonesia, the primary purpose of this text. Before getting to that point, however, it's beneficial to summarize everything that's been learned up until this time and present it from the perspective of Jakarta's decision makers. This will help the reader to better comprehend the strategic imperatives of the state and more wholly understand how the forthcoming Hybrid War scenarios pose the direst of dangers to the country's existence.

The Core Basics:

Indonesia is a geographically broad country filled with thousands of islands and thousands of square miles of seas, but at the end of the day, its core concentration lies in [Java](#) and the southern part of Sumatra. If one includes the entirety of the latter island, then these two pieces of land combined comprise around [80% of the country's total population and economy](#). Looked at in this way, what may have initially seemed like a staggeringly large country is reduced instead to the study of the two largest islands entirely under Jakarta's domain, with the rest of the space essentially being relegated as the literal and figurative periphery of Indonesian affairs. Ironic as it is, these two islands constitute only 31.5% of Indonesia's total landmass, further highlighting just how densely populated and economically productive they are when compared to the rest of the country.

Therefore, from a security standpoint, Wahhabist terrorism on either of these two islands appears to warrant the greatest urgency for the state. As was mentioned just earlier, a small number of radicals could inflict an exponentially destructive amount of force with relatively minimal effort, which of course necessitates that this threat be taken as seriously as possible and a large number of security resources directed towards tackling it. There's no disputing the logic in this decision since it's obvious that any country should place a heightened priority towards defending 80% of its population and economy more so than the other 20%, especially if this is densely concentrated enough as to make it practical to do so (being only 31.5% of the given physical territory), but one mustn't forget the festering problems in the periphery that could easily get out of hand and endanger the entire state's stability.

If religious tension (in the sense of co-confessional moderates versus misguided radicals) is a threat in the core territories of Java and Sumatra, then the periphery must confront not only this problem (as it has threatened to arise in Sulawesi), but also ethno-religious conflict between disparate identity groups. In some cases there's an overlap of religion and identity such as when a certain ethnic group largely practices a given religion and these combined ethno-religious factors of differentness form a source of conflict (e.g. the Javanese transmigrants are overwhelming Muslim whereas their recipient host population is mostly Christian and of a different ethnicity), but in the other instances there's no such double-layered difference between the antagonists and the only element of separateness is solely religion or ethnicity (e.g. the [2010 Muslim-on-Muslim riots](#) between the Tidung natives and Bugi migrants in Tarakan, North Kalimantan). Both situations present a dilemma for decision makers to rectify, with each having their respective challenges standing in the way of communal reconciliation.

Pancasila As Indonesia's Panacea?:

The multisided identity conflicts that Indonesia faces have been known about for a long time, and the godfather of the state, Sukarno, was wisely aware of them as well. He knew that no polity had managed to formally unify the region's islands to the extent that the Dutch had been able to with their East Indies colony, and that the only way to maintain the unified state that he envisioned was to employ an inclusionary and effective ideology, ergo the pronouncement of the Pancasila. To refresh the reader's memory, the work earlier described this as being Indonesia's constitutionally incorporated unofficially ideology that stipulates that the country must remain a monotheistic, nationalist, just, welfare state that practices representative democracy. Having been made aware of just how deep Indonesia's identity divisions run, it should make sense to the reader why the government would need to resort to ideology to keep the peace and sustain nominal unity.

In the absence of a strong state (like had happened after the situational preconditioning that made Suharto's overthrow possible), there's no authoritative entity to enforce the existentially necessary ideology that had kept Indonesia together for so long, which is why identity conflicts exploded in the years after his political demise. As an individual man, Suharto himself didn't have any particularly commendable leadership characteristics that played a decisive role one way or another in maintaining the country's unity (except, one could cynically say, his penchant for overbearing state-directed violence), but what's important to realize is that he represented the national strongman, of which there have only been two in Indonesia's modern history. The structural stability that came with a long-serving leader presiding over the ethno-religiously and geographically divided state is what's chiefly important when discussing Suharto's role over Indonesian affairs, and his abrupt resignation at the heat of the unprecedentedly violent protests on Sumatra and Java (recall that this the national core) shook the system to its foundations and exposed it to its most vulnerable state since the brief federalist United States of Indonesia period.

In the post-Suharto period of "Reformasi", it's been all but compulsory for the country's leadership to espouse and physically practice one or two of Pancasila's principles in order to maintain the country in its present governing-administrative and physical form. The two ideals that were most commonly exercised after 1999 were nationalism (as in a unified Indonesian identity transcending religion and ethnicity) and representative democracy. As could be expected, nationalism took the form of enforcing the country's unity and putting down the chaotic riots that broke out in North Maluku and Maluku, whereas representative democracy could most clearly be seen by the series of constitutional amendments that were passed in the following years, most of which broke Indonesia closer to fulfilling this ideal in a more substantial manner than its symbolic practice in the past decades. Related to this idea has been the systemic decentralization of administrative responsibilities in spearheading the establishment of [8 new provinces since 1999](#), in one case in order to dilute [Papuan nationalism](#) (hence the creation of West Papua Province), but in the others in order to more effectively govern the given states and appease concerns that had arisen or had the potentially to destabilizingly do so in the future. Regardless of whatever tactical reason is being employed at a certain time, viewed in sense of the general picture, it appears as though the "Reformasi" governments in Indonesia have been even more dependent on Pancasila's precepts (in whatever form they're practiced or symbolically evoked) than their two pre-1999 predecessors were.

The Fine Line Between Decentralization And Devolution:

Having expanded on the role of Pancasila in recent Indonesian history, it's now time to speak a bit more specifically about the last aspect of its practice that had been described, the decentralization of certain administrative regions into new governing entities. It's true that this is an effective solution to stymying certain identity conflicts and paying preemptive token service to any nascent but possibly one day effective independence or regionalist movements, but there's also a dual side to this practice that observers may not be aware of. If taken to too far of an extreme, decentralization can cross over into the slippery territory of devolution, whereby the unitary government grants or is pressured to grant

autonomy or de-facto privileges thereof to certain regions, which could thus set off a chain reaction of copy-cat movements if it's not kept tightly under control. The threat of Wahhabist violence is also pronounced, but the nature of that particular danger is less of a geo-demographic issue that can be rectified via an administrative reform than an ideological virus that must be fought against in a completely different manner.

East Timor

East Timor, West Papua, and Aceh are perfect precedents for this, but thus far the government has succeeded in convincing the citizenry that they were isolated cases that called for exceptional solutions. Portugal's prior possession had never been integrated into the Dutch-unified East Indies space, and thus was an historical-regional anomaly in many ways. Even so, after the government decided to put its decades-long occupation up to a democratic vote there, it still offered residents what would have at that time been an unprecedented autonomous regime. Although they didn't agree to it, the government set its own precedent by proposing such a measure.

West Papua

Afterwards, the former colony of Netherlands New Guinea was [granted autonomy](#) in 2001, but this still hasn't been enough to placate the people's yearnings. Also, the supposed autonomy was never granted in practice to the substantial extent that Indonesia routinely tries to present it as on both the world and domestic stages. Nevertheless, even if one cynically sees it as only being a symbolic public relations gesture, then it's still much more than other beleaguered provinces have received, particularly North Maluku and Maluku [after](#) their identity destabilizations (which, it must be noted, never took a particularly anti-government and/or separatist/autonomist platform).

Aceh

The same can't be said for Aceh, which like the work earlier described, had fought against Jakarta since right around the time of East Timor's struggle, but ended up agreeing to and consequently receiving actual broad-based autonomy. To reference what was mentioned before, Aceh is the only region in Indonesia that implements Sharia law to all of the people within its territory ([both Muslims and non-Muslims alike](#)) and for every kind of crime. Additionally, it also has the right to receive 70% of all energy revenue that the state derives from the province, which makes it doubly unique in the country in terms of its administrative privileges.

Structural Summary

To reiterate the pattern that's been explicitly expressed so far, the only regions that have been offered autonomy (whether of the symbolic or substantial forms) have been the ones that seriously rebelled against the government at one time. Intercommunal bloodletting like the kind present in North Maluku, Maluku, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan, while undermining state stability due to the contagion effect of identity conflict that it could spark elsewhere in the country, doesn't explicitly pose as much of a threat to Indonesia's unity as the anti-state rebellions/liberation campaigns (however the reader personally describes them) in East Timor, West Papua, and Aceh.

Going Too Far

Proposing autonomy in one form or another may seem like or actually has been the proper solution in each case, but the central government can't continue to do this each and every time an anti-government insurgency sprouts up. If it did, then the end result would be that the most of the country would end up "autonomous", essentially setting the stage for a federalized entity quite similar to the fleeting United States of Indonesia period, albeit likely without the geographically large and nominally unified "East Indonesia" administrative entity.

There's always the risk that the government could be pressured to go too far, too fast, and this in turn could unintentionally (or purposefully so, if it's engineered from abroad and for this very reason) create a semi-uncontrollable momentum towards what would in effect be a state-breaking federalization that could administratively undermine the entire country if implemented clumsily enough like in Bosnia. The difference between the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina and any theoretical Indonesian Federation is that the second one is the geo-maritime gatekeeper between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the two littoral areas predicted to be the engines of the 21st-century global economy.

Jakarta's Worst Nightmare:

The last thing that Indonesia's leaders want to have happen is that the governing-administrative model devolves to the point of becoming unmanageable. The federalization fear that was described above could likely only come about via a series of nationwide destabilizations, whether synchronized with one another or separately carried, and only in the scenario that the country and its military are too weak to propose anything other than autonomy as a solution. The catalyst for debilitating the state to the point where it's largely helpless in effectively defending its integrity and/or is distracted with a swarm of crises is to manufacture another economic meltdown similar to the one from 1997, whether or not it goes regional or global in its aftershocks or originates outside of or inside of Indonesia. It's also not clear at this point whether it would be more effective for the autonomist-federalist cause if this happens before or during a series of nationwide identity clashes (be they coordinated with others or independently carried out), but either way, this is the decisive scenario development that would need to take place in order to actualize Jakarta's greatest fear.

In the eventuality that this occurs for whatever the strategic reason may be (even if the scenario spirals out of control and negates its intended objectives), an incoherent and semi-functioning failing state at this key global junction would create a disastrous and easily manipulatable situation which could predictably impact quite negatively on the global economy. The external actors that hold sway over the federalized remnants of the once-unified country would be in a major position to influence trade between these two oceans, alternatively obstructing their competitors' routes (e.g. blocking the Straits of Malacca and Sunda with calculated ship sinkings) while securing their own heavily defended detours (e.g. via the 'island-fortresses' that they may occupy in "East Indonesia") in order to tax and control the trade that resultantly passes by them.

This reality would have been preceded by a scramble for maritime influence unseen before in history, with the only relative comparison being the Scramble for Africa which took place over a much larger space and decades-long period. Instead, the 'Scramble for (Former) Indonesia' would be a lot quicker and concentrated in a much tighter space, possibly even set off by a rapid Yugoslav-like dissolution of the unitary Indonesian state and/or its autonomous-federal entities in this scenario. Conceivably, the 'rationale' of "humanitarian intervention" could be called upon by outside powers to intervene in any of the given quasi-independent island states or chains there, modeled off of the approach that was utilized in East Timor in 1999 and 2006, and conceptually even in the footsteps of the 2003 Solomon Islands operation (all three of which were led by Australia, one of the US' Lead From Behind partners). Each of the presumed rival actors partaking in this scramble would eventually seek to consolidate their gains after some point, which might lead to unexpected alliances between various parties, either of the formal nature or something more tacit such as limited anti-piracy missions that belie deeper cooperation.

The Seven Pressure Points

All told, there are seven pressure points inside Indonesia that could be organically activated or externally provoked either separately or in synchronization in order to destabilize the authorities and move the country ever closer to the autonomy-federalization model. The CIA's history of anti-government activity in Indonesia bodes particularly worrisome for what the country's future may hold if it doesn't assuredly enough commit to the TPP and other Chinese Containment Coalition measures in

the coming years. Other than situation-specific Color Revolution attempts that could be unleashed against the authorities, the rest of the Indonesian research will read as a curated summary of the conflicts that have been discussed thus far, conclusively putting them in the context of Hybrid War and explaining the nature of their danger to the state.

Wahhabist Terrorism In The Javanese and Sumatran Cores:

This threat is the most obvious to all observers and with fair reason. Like it was earlier explained, these two islands form the core of Indonesia's population and economy, and the high density of both (especially on Java) makes them extremely vulnerable to large-scale and highly effective attacks. The domestic Muslim community has been [very useful in preaching the true tenets of the faith](#) and dispelling foreign-proselytized (Saudi) misinterpretations, but it lamentably appears almost inevitable that sooner or later the country will be struck by a global headline-grabbing terrorist attack. If the state is caught off balance by this and/or if security shortcomings are later revealed to have been partly responsible for the magnitude of the tragedy, then it could provide a calculated spark for Color Revolution elements to begin their anti-government destabilization. Even if the scenario coordination isn't taken to that far of a level, the perception that Indonesia has turned into a Wahhabist battleground could augur negatively for foreign investment and tourism, which by themselves could quickly lead to a compound effect of economic damage that might circuitously result in the said anti-government demonstrations after some time.

The worst thing that can happen in this possible eventuality is if an urban-rural caliphate is forcibly carved out in or near one of the main densely populated centers of Sumatra and/or Java. The government will do whatever it can to prevent this from happening, but if it comes to pass even for a brief period of time such as a day or two, then it would crucially illustrate the state's weakness and might irreversibly encourage other terrorist groups (religiously and/or ethnically affiliated) to do the same elsewhere in the country. There is no solution more fitting for the government to apply in such a situation than the imposition of martial law, whether in the targeted areas or as further afield as the whole country itself, and although initiated in the interests of national security, it would undoubtedly damage the country's economic security with time per the pullout/suspension of foreign investment and tourism as was earlier described.

Although this possible prognosis may seem unduly pessimistic for some observers, the symbiotic relationship that exists between the (media-influenced) international public's perception of a given state's security and that country's external economic interactions is hard to deny, and just as it's been the case with other previously stable states that have befallen regular large-scale terrorist violence (e.g. Algeria in the 1990s, Libya post-2011), the same will likely happen to Indonesia as well in such an event, no matter that it's much larger in both economic and demographic metrics. Approaching the situation from the position of cautious optimism, investment and tourist flows might be diverted to other parts of Indonesia if the demand is high enough that Java- or Sumatra-based terrorism can't severely curtail it, and while this would surely be a welcome change of economic priorities that could definitely benefit the distant and deprived provinces, it also comes with its own set of situational vulnerabilities. Chief among these is the state's concern over whether or not it would be able to adequately defend any rapid influx of foreign soft assets (physical capital and tourists) from his part of the country's own unique destabilization threats (i.e. becoming collateral damage or being outright targeted in ethno-religious riots), especially given what by that time and in the presumed context could be an already tense security situation in the prioritized western core.

The Anxiety About Aceh:

In the present, it superficially appears as though all worries pertaining to Aceh have ceased and that there's nothing left to be concerned about. In a sense, that's technically true if one is speaking about the traditional separatist conflict that had been raging there for nearly 30 consecutive years, but over a decade afterwards a new type of threat has the potential to emerge. The population and provincial

government seem content to remain part of Indonesia so long as they can maintain their 70% share of the natural resource revenue coming from their territory and implement Sharia law as they see fit, so there's close to little or even no chance that they'll reinstate their anti-government insurgency.

Instead, the new threat paradigm has to do with the selective exploitation of these administrative privileges by domestic and international Wahhabist-sympathizing actors. These terrorist enablers may have their own non-state objectives of exporting their regions governing model throughout the rest of the country, just as Darul Islam did before them and Jemmah Islamiyah currently endeavors for. Whether affiliated with the latter group or not, these local individuals, newly founded organizations, and/or foreign actors could use the province's broad autonomy as a cover for evading the watchful gaze of the Indonesian central authorities and training terrorist groups and/or facilitating terrorist financing. For example, supposedly "local" 'Islamic' charities could become conduits for processing terrorist payments all across the world following the Saudi model, and the jungles and mountains of this small province could obscure covert training exercises.

Aceh's territory could thus become an economic and militant node in a worldwide terrorist network, whether with the complicity of some of its governing figures or not, and Wahhabism could be exported from here either further into Indonesia or to the countries abutting the Bay of Bengal (India, Bangladesh, Myanmar [with particular attention paid to the 'Rohingyas' Rakhine State], Thailand, and Malaysia). In all probability and from the Aceh-based terrorists' 'safest' operational standpoint (as in delaying the neutralization of their operations as long as possible), they may opt to direct their focus away from Indonesia itself and in destabilizing comparatively weaker targets abroad such as Bangladesh and Myanmar. Additionally, if their actions serve some of the foreign policy goals of the US, Washington may enact pressure on Jakarta to delay its punitive operations there for as long as possible, perhaps even unearthing the buried threat that any central crackdown could revive the separatist threat. It may even be so that an Indonesian military response to a Wahhabist terrorist attack in Java and/or Sumatra (per the aforementioned scenario above) that turns out to have been planned or facilitated in any fashion from Aceh could also lead to the return of separatist tensions, thus embroiling Indonesia in two major and interconnected destabilization scenarios.

Identity Cracks In Kalimantan:

Moving along in an eastwards direction, the next pressure point in Indonesia is its administered part of Borneo, formally called the "Kalimantan" provinces by Jakarta. It was previously touched upon only briefly how there has been long-running animosity between the local Dayaks and the Madurese transmigrants, with large-scale violence breaking out in 1999 and 2001 with the Sambas Riots and Sampit Conflicts in West and Central Kalimantan, respectively. The Dayaks' grievances that Muslim transmigrants from Madura are elbowing them out of their own communities is still present, and it's this retained resentment that can easily bubble over whenever the next structural opportunity presents itself (e.g. another 1997-like economic crisis that drastically weakens the state).

Since most of the Madurese escaped Central Kalimantan in 2001, it's not likely that this province would be the scene of any forthcoming identity violence between them and the Dayaks, but their continued presence in West Kalimantan might one day form the basis for a continuation conflict, and if it does, then it could conceivably spread into Malaysia or even be sparked by events there. The reason this could happen is because the Dayak are very closely related to the Iban people who form the greatest plurality in Sarawak state, and statistically speaking, both native groups are gradually being sidelined by the non-native populations that have migrated into their region. Dayak and/or Iban violence on either side of the border, especially if it dramatically gets out of control, could lead not only to cross-border refugee flows, but might even have a destabilizing copy-cat effect.

Another notable incident and possible scenario to discuss when examining Kalimantan's identity 'combustibility' is the 2010 Tarakan Riots between the native Tidung and the Sulawesi-originated (but not governmentally transmigrated) Bugi people. This conflict killed only a handful of people but led to

the [displacement of 32,000 others](#) over the couple of days in late-September that it transpired. To add [some context](#) to the situation, the Tidung are also related to the Dayak and have a native presence in Malaysia's Sabah state, which as was earlier elaborated upon, is strategically vulnerable to Sulu-based terrorist groups or Filipino "refugee" uprisings. Provided that either of these two scenarios occurs and Tidung find themselves caught in the crossfire, some of them may either fight back or flee towards their ethnic brethren in Indonesia. Similarly, a repeat of the Tarakan scenario between the Tidung and Bugi or any other non-Borneo-based migrants could lead to a similar situation of simultaneous fight and flight. Both instances, there's a chance that the cross-border Tidung community would be affected, whether it be through housing refugees (which they may or may not have the capability to do), supporting their ethnic brothers-in-arms, or starting their own anti-migrant uprising.

Should Kalimantan's stability crack and the Dayak, Iban, and/or Tidung engage in some form of cross-border destabilization, the Malaysian and Indonesian militaries would be forced to respond in their respective areas of control. If the disturbances spread from the city to the countryside and into the jungled interior, then the conditions would be met for a possible guerrilla insurgency, provided of course that the political willpower is present, supplies and ammunition are available, and the either government is weak enough to not extinguish this movement right away. Projecting a bit further, this scenario might lead to jungle raids by both the Malaysian and Indonesian militaries that place both of them within operable distance of the other, potentially even resulting in (unintended) cross-border fire. If there were reason for one of the sides to believe that the other was benefiting from or might have even provoked the original destabilization using their cross-border counterparts, then bilateral trust would be damaged and the deterioration of political relations might even lead to a revived period of Konfrontasi.

Sulawesi Slides Into Instability:

The oddly shaped island of Sulawesi might become the next hotbed of ethno-religious destabilization in Indonesia, and its crucial position between Borneo/Kalimantan, Mindanao, and the minor isles of "East Indonesia" means that its [conflict potential](#) could certainly radiate outwards to other territories that are already primed for unrest. To concisely summarize the Hybrid War situation in Sulawesi, it's advisable that the reader reference this [short report](#) that describes the violence that broke out between 199-2005. The issue comes down to local conflicts between Christians and Muslims that have routinely taken on an ethnic cleansing tilt, and the 21st century has seen an upsurge in Wahhabist terrorism here, which has sometimes taken the form of [gruesome beheadings](#). Most of the attacks have taken place in Central Sulawesi province around the coastal town of Poso (such as bus bombings in [2002](#) and [2004](#)), but the terrorists' presence has also begun to spread to other parts of the island such as [South Sulawesi](#). While the current dynamic of the conflict is overwhelming that of Muslim-on-Christian violence, it mustn't be forgotten that the 2000 [Walisongo school massacre](#) outside Poso was a noticeable outlier of Christian-on-Muslim terrorism, and that similarly motivated hate groups once more form in the future, potentially as a symmetrical response to rising Wahhabism.

It's impossible to completely predict the exact nature and location of whatever forthcoming terrorist attacks might happen in Sulawesi, but judging by the trend of Muslim-on-Christian violence, it might be tempting for the Wahhabists to attack North Sulawesi, the only Christian-majority province on the island. If the 'caliphate'-creating influence of ISIL is ever transplanted onto Sulawesi by Jemmah Islamiyah or any other similar group, then it can be assumed that they'd inevitably put the North Sulawesi Christians in their crosshairs out of a matter of jihadist 'principle'. Christians are an influential plurality in Central and West Sulawesi provinces, but attacking the territory where they're the majority of its citizens would send a strong and fear-inspiring message to the rest of the world that the terrorists are serious in implementing their un-"Islamic State" agenda in the region. It would also place immediate global pressure on Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country, to take immediate action in safeguarding the livelihood of its religious minorities, thereby abruptly putting it on the spot and potentially forcing the military's hand before it's ready to properly act.

Other than the possibility of lone wolf attacks disconnected from any larger jihadist movement, there are two distinct forces that could carry out this destabilization, especially on the level of organizational planning necessary in order to make it as bloody, large-scale, and globally news-inviting as possible. The first one is endemic to Indonesia and it's the terrorist Santoso and his Wahhabist clique from the "East Indonesia Mujahidin". He's presently the [most wanted man in the country](#), and the government had earlier [devoted over 3,000 troops](#) in trying to eradicate them from the Poso region back in March 2015. The operation was motivated in part by fears that Santoso's group had become [ISIL's Indonesian affiliate](#), but regrettably the authorities were unable to catch him and he's since remained elusive. They tried a second large-scale attempt at bringing him to justice in September by [deploying over 1,100 personnel](#), but this too was in vain, as was the [latest attempt in December](#). The longer that this high-value and ultra-violent terrorist remains at large, the more likely it is that he and his group will plot and eventually carry out more anti-Christian violence, although they could strike against their fellow Muslims as a fear-inciting gesture or as a distraction to divert the attention of government forces.

The second militant possibility for attacking majority-Christian North Sulawesi province comes most realistically from the Abu Sayyaf group in the southern Philippines. This organization was discussed earlier in the research when examining the Hybrid War scenarios facing Manila at the moment, but as a refresher, it claims to be ISIL's partner in the Philippines and is the most extreme Islamic group fighting against the government. In early January 2016 they even [declared](#) part of the country a province of the un-"Islamic State", though their ties with the group still remain unclear. Nevertheless, it's not for naught that a Filipino representative [spoke](#) about the terrorist threat of a "Mindanao-Sulawesi Arc" at the 2015 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, and considering this and what was earlier researched previously in this work, it's possible that Abu Sayyaf may not only expand their operations to Malaysia's Sabah state, but perhaps even to Sulawesi island (whether to attack North Sulawesi and/or link up with Santoso). Being sandwiched between two ravenous groups of Wahhabist terrorists, North Sulawesi might end up being attacked sooner than later, but even if it's not, the link-up potential between the self-proclaimed ISIL-affiliates of Abu Sayyaf and the "East Indonesia Mujahidin" is enough to make Jakarta's military and strategic leaders spend many a sleepless night.

The Maluku Mess:

The dual crises in North Maluku and Maluku in 1999 were earlier identified as two of the most dramatic events of the immediate post-Suharto era, and it's presumable that the destabilization they engendered could one day return. Looking at the causes of each respective conflict, it's evident that their causes still remain in play today. Both spates of violence stemmed from local grievances brought about by the ethnic and religious differences of their transmigrated neighbors, and the resultant identity tension hasn't gone away after 17 years. To a visible extent, it's definitely been kept out of the streets, but that doesn't mean that it couldn't re-erupt the moment the 'opportunity' arises, which as the author expects, could either be the 'right' set of circumstances or more probably a repeat of the 1997 economic crisis that drastically weakens Jakarta's central authority. Just as a gun without ammo won't fire when the trigger is pressed, socio-political disturbances have difficulty breaking out unless there's a destabilizing factor present on the ground already (whether naturally occurring or externally arrived), with the same principle holding true for the Malukus. An economic crisis by itself wouldn't have been enough to spark the bloodshed of 1999 had there not be preexisting socio-political tensions just waiting for the right moment to burst, and a near-identical situation is thought to exist to this day.

The Malukus are important not so much because of the number of people present within them (which amounts to no more than 3 million between both of them), but due to their symbolism and their geopolitical position as a 'buffer archipelago' to West Papua. Addressing the first point, the Maluku violence of 1999 was representative of a brief period of peripheral anarchy that the government had difficulty efficiently putting down. Disturbances continued to break out all throughout the year in one of the two provinces, demonstrating that the post-Suharto authorities were either unwilling or unable to put the lid on it completely. The driving force behind the violence was the identity conflict between

Christians and Muslims, locals and transmigrants, and these two identity pairs repeat themselves all throughout the lands of “East Indonesia”.

Therefore, a repeat of what happened in Maluku could become a trigger in the interconnected 21st-century reality of modern-day Indonesia for similar outbreaks of communal killings all throughout the country, thus making these demographically tiny provinces disproportionately influential ‘gateway scenarios’ for initiating copy-cat movements. Kalimantan and Sulawesi don’t hold as much of a chance in doing this because their corresponding destabilizations lasted for a shorter period and were generally more contained than the near-anarchy that overtook the Malukus for certain lengths of time. Back then, the conflict was chiefly an identity one which didn’t harbor any explicit anti-government objectives, but in a second possible iteration, it can’t be ruled out that the [Netherlands-based “Republic of South Maluku” separatist organization](#) won’t try to exploit the situation for their individual ends. If they emerge at a decisive time and manage to make inroads in disseminating their message locally and/or attracting international media attention, then it might encourage a chain reaction of other separatist movements (whether dormant or nascent) to rise up against the government as well, provided of course that the military doesn’t make a quick example out of them by immediately squashing the rebels.

In any case (but especially more so in the event that the “Republic of South Maluku” movement tries to exploit local events), any identity destabilization in the Malukus would create a strategic opening for the West Papua rebels and independence activists to promote their cause, mostly because the island chain lies along the maritime route connecting the western part of New Guinea with the rest of Indonesia. This makes it a critical zone for securing the sea lines of communication necessary for administering West Papua, and any extensive disruption of this could embolden the West Papua movement to intensify their on-the-ground and international information operations. This will be described a bit more in detail in the following section, but at this juncture and as it relates to the Malukus, it’s important to realize that destabilization in this island chain could become an enabling variable for spreading the anti-government and/or identity resistance activity further afield to Papua. Jakarta could still theoretically administer and control the territory even in the midst of a massive rebellion or ethnic cleansing in the Malukus, but it may have to immediately divert some of its Papua-based troops in order to do so, which by itself could also signal to the rebels that they have an historic but limited opportunity for launching a grand offensive.

Problems In Papua:

Indonesia’s administration of West Papua continues to be plagued by scandal and controversy even nearly half a century after it began. The long-running and still-contentious dispute has galvanized a simmering international activist community and inspired many Papuans, both civilians and rebels alike, and it’s predicted that this issue could one day become patronized by foreign forces. While one is entitled to their own opinion about whether this is a just cause to adopt or a convenient cover for preplanned geopolitical designs, it’s indisputable that increased foreign involvement in the conflict, even if it’s initially limited solely to supportive information operations, could unexpectedly tilt the strategic balance against Indonesia. Also, just as how the US has absolutely no track record of supporting legitimate independence movements and other humanitarian concerns all across the world for their own sake, so too would it have cynical reasons for covertly intervening in West Papua if it eventually decides to do so. It should also be remarked that the US obviously wouldn’t do this alone, but in coordination with its Australian “Lead From Behind” ally, whom it would undoubtedly contract to assist in this endeavor.

Before going further, it’s necessary to speak about why or how this could even come to be in the first place. As it stands, Western companies have spoiled access to the region’s mineral and natural resource wealth, but if this were to be impeded for whatever reason, then there may be a strategic incentive to react via limited patronage of the Papuan independence movement. It’s not expected that Jakarta would voluntarily restrict their access, and if the rebels did something independently on their own to accomplish this, the US would have more to gain by supporting a punitive military expedition from the

center (as they historically did) than they would in backing the periphery's separatist ambitions. 'Betting on the wrong horse', as they say, isn't something that the US wants to do in this case, nor can it strategically afford to when it comes to the Pivot to Asia and the Chinese Containment Coalition (CCC).

However, there are two scenario developments that could dramatically change the US' calculations. The first one is quite general and is the entire reason why the author has gone to such lengths in elaborating on the Hybrid War potentials for Indonesia, and it's that Washington may seek to punish Jakarta for not fully committing to the CCC (or even worse, completely turning its back on this design) or enact what it believes to be semi-controllable asymmetrical 'pressure' in order to get it to comply. The second scenario is slightly more complex and could also be connected to the first one in some aspects, and it's that tribal violence in the independent nation of Papua New Guinea next door crosses the national divide and begins to enflame Indonesian-administered West Papua.

Most readers may not be aware of it, but Papua New Guinea is one of the world's poorest, least developed, and most violent countries – in many ways, an actual failed state – but which largely stays off of the global radar due to its quasi-functioning government's submissive attitude towards all Western companies' natural resource and mining requests (with the Bougainville Conflict being an [extenuating anomaly](#)). Nonetheless, the international (Western) community largely avoids drawing attention to or dealing with the hinterland's tribal conflicts, which are essentially ignored so long as they don't impede with the mining and energy extraction profits being made. This produces a socio-'political' environment (if the latter term can even be used to apply to actors unaware of or disinterested in modern political traditions) that opens up the possibility for a conflict spillover into West Papua. This unforeseeable cascading series of event that this may lead to could change the US' calculations in unexpected ways, or it might even be purposefully provoked as part of a 'managed' chaos theory attack on Indonesia's most peripheral and contested domestic interest, but seeing as how it's possible for this to happen (although the chances are presently quite low), it's worthy to have explained this to the reader.

However it happens to come about, if West Papua becomes to the Western world what East Timor was to it back in the early and mid-1990s, then a climate of inevitable independence could settle over the region and embolden the locals to more substantially rise up against Jakarta, regardless of the very real risk to their lives that this would predictably entail. It may be that the US decides to back down or never even intended to get directly involved in the first place. Using the Papuans as cannon fodder would be similar to how the Americans used the Hungarians in 1956 by offering them false hopes of a supportive intervention, but only to let them down after the fact. The strategic reason for the US setting the Papuans up for failure would be to punish the Indonesians with an offsetting domestic destabilization but not carried through to the point of full geopolitical punishment, either in accordance with the US' own predetermined limitations or because of a deal of sorts that eventually gets made with Jakarta in exchange for abandoning support for the rebels.

East Timor Time Bomb:

The last Hybrid War scenario that could predictably strike Indonesia comes not from the country itself, but from its formerly occupied territory of East Timor. The work had earlier explained how much of a mess East Timor is, as it's strictly divided along tribal and geographic lines. The 2006 destabilization that occurred was sparked by a mutiny among soldiers from the country's western enclave and was calmed down only after an Australian-led "humanitarian intervention". Looking at recent history, this somewhat mirrors the 1999 destabilization, albeit in a more endemic manner. Back then, it was Indonesian-affiliated militias that were sowing chaos throughout the country, but this time, the problem clearly came from society itself. In both cases, the violence was quelled because Australia took the lead in pushing for an "humanitarian intervention", which provides a template for projecting future scenarios.

Currently, East Timor has all of the indications of a failing state, although to be fair, some of these factors such as the lack of social and physical infrastructure are likely part of the inherited legacy of

brutal Indonesian occupation. Although there's natural resource wealth around its shores, the money isn't being properly invested into the country's development, and East Timor still remains heavily dependent on foreign aid. The ethno-tribal divide still exists, and there's no guarantee that violence won't re-erupt once more in the future, especially as government revenue declines due to the global energy glut. Seeing as how identity conflict is on the rise all across the world, it's foreseeable that East Timor may repeat the domestic carnage of 2006 in some iteration or another, be it of another ethnic-motivated military mutiny or an all-out ethnic cleansing campaign. No matter how it starts, one can easily predict that yet another Australian-led "humanitarian intervention" would be called in to stop it, and herein lies the strategic challenge for Indonesia provided that the conflict occurs in a certain geopolitical context.

If East Timorese violence breaks out concurrent or close to the time that Indonesia is caught up in its own domestic destabilization, then it might present the intervening "humanitarian coalition" with the possibility of projecting influence deeper into "East Indonesia", whether directly or indirectly. In the event that West Papua and/or the Maluku Islands are embroiled in their own identity and/or anti-state conflicts, an "humanitarian intervention" into East Timor could provide the US' "Lead From Behind" Australian partner with the momentum to issue vague yet understandable threats of further intervention into Indonesia proper. Canberra is in absolutely no military position to do this on its own, of course, which necessitates that it be backed up by Washington and the regional naval assets that it's deployed as part of the "Pivot to Asia". If the two Western allies coordinate their activities and bring in the multilateral participation of other affiliated Asian states (e.g. "peacekeepers" from the CCC states of Japan, the Philippines, and perhaps even Vietnam), then they may be in a position to exert predominant pressure on Jakarta under the pane that it acquiesces to their CCC demands or risk being isolated in its region.

In an extreme scenario, the "humanitarian intervening" CCC in East Timor would take unilateral Australian- and/or American-led action in "pacifying" some of the conflict ethno-religious actors in "East Indonesia", although it's not predicted to ever get to this point. But, a heavy CCC presence in East Timor under the guise of an "humanitarian intervention" could place pressure on Jakarta to West Papua or even influence the rebels to intensify their anti-state/liberation campaign there, giving them the implicit understanding that they will be supported in one way or another (e.g. covert weapons shipments) by the forces stationed nearby in East Timor.

There's also the possibility that East Timorese tribal violence spreads to the Indonesian-administered portion of West Timor in the state of East Nusa Tenggara, which would be catastrophic for national unity if the country is already experiencing ethno-religious tumult in Sulawesi and the Malukus, to say nothing if a full-blown Wahhabist insurgency is raging in the Sumatran and Javanese cores by that time. In summary, East Timor's role in any prospective Hybrid War scenario against Indonesia is to act as a trigger for inviting a multilateral military force onto Indonesia's doorstep, possibly even traversing its waters en route to their destination. This would raise the strategic alarm of Indonesian military strategist who may feel that the passing of numerous naval assets through its territorial waters or nearby sends a signal of state weakness in an already ethno-religiously tumultuous region. It would be a case study of irony if formerly Indonesian-occupied East Timor becomes Jakarta's Achilles' Heel and catalyzes a conflict contagion in the eastern part of the country, and using Indonesia's historical-demographic matrix as a guide, it doesn't seem all that impossible either.

PART VII: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

Insular ASEAN has a strategic role in presiding over maritime access points to the region and beyond, but it's mainland ASEAN and its political stability that most directly affect China's core strategy at the moment. It's highly unlikely that circumstances will rapidly change to the point where China is completely cut off from the South China Sea and the international waterways around it, but it looks ever case that its access will come under the watchful gaze of the Chinese Containment Coalition (CCC) and that the potential for military-strategic blackmail might one day arise. In order to counteract this crippling scenario, Beijing is progressively taking steps to circumvent its full dependence on the waterways and balance this with a more substantialized on-the-ground infrastructure presence, the ASEAN Silk Road and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor.

Both of these ambitious projects were comprehensively discussed at the beginning of the research's ASEAN focus, and it's predicted that the US will go to extraordinary lengths to disrupt their full implementation. To remind the reader, the Law of Hybrid War is "to disrupt multipolar transnational connective projects through externally provoked identity conflicts (ethnic, religious, regional, political, etc.) within a targeted transit state", so it naturally follows that Color Revolution and Unconventional War schemes will be hatched against these countries in order to stop China's strategic 'escape' from maritime containment. There are essentially three situational theaters in mainland ASEAN – Indochina, Thailand, and Myanmar – and the research will progress to examining each of these Hybrid War battlefields in that sequential order.

Indochina Backgrounder

The first area to be studied is Indochina, taken to mean the former French colonies of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. As with the other countries that have been geopolitically dissected thus far, it's imperative that the reader first acquaint themselves with a relevant historical background prior to commencing the Hybrid War investigations. This will imbue the individual with an understanding that allows them to recognize the utility of certain socio-political variables to the scenarios that are subsequently described.

The Indosphere Meets The Sinosphere:

Indochina lies precisely at the geographic convergence point of Indian and Chinese civilizations, and as such, there's actually a clear delineation point between them inside this subregion. For the most part, [Cambodia](#) and [Laos](#) fell under Indian cultural influence and their historical kingdoms were "Indianized" to a broad extent, while Vietnam was under Chinese control for [over a millennium](#) from 111 BC to 938 AD. The effect of these separate civilizational forces on such a small geographic area was to accentuate identity differences between these two adjacent parts, the legacy of which continues into the present day and is likely to once more become a driving factor in forthcoming events.

By itself, the civilizational separateness that "Indianized" Cambodia and Laos feel towards "Sinified" Vietnam wouldn't coalesce into a sufficient agent for political action on its own, but the historical trend of Vietnamese expansionism at their expense (some of it subjectively so, other parts only perceived as such) reveals itself to be the catalytic cause. Neither country outright rejects Vietnamese influence, nor are they in an economic position to do so even if they wanted to, but the point is that their history of relations with Vietnam undoubtedly plays a role in why these two states want to diversify away from their former mono-dependence on their neighbor (experienced from 1975-1991) and achieve a balance through complementary relations with civilizationally similar Thailand and economically expanding China.

Caught In The Middle:

Being situated between their larger Thai and Vietnamese neighbors, Cambodia and Laos have historically been under pressure from both of these powers and eventually turned into the object of their conquests. The golden age that each of these modern-day states had prior to their submission came during the era of Cambodia's [Khmer Empire](#) and Laos' [Lan Xang](#) kingdom, stretching between 802-1431 and 1354-1707, respectively. After that, each of these once-glorious entities fell under the control of the [Kingdom of Ayyuthaya](#), nowadays referred to as Thailand. Vietnam didn't become a significant player in the rest of Indochina until after it completed its centuries-long "[Nam tiến](#)", which was the state's piecemeal incorporation of the southern parts of the country that only ended in the early 1800s.

Siamese Ebb, Vietnamese Flow:

After Vietnam's contemporaneous consolidation, it fought two wars with Thailand from [1831-1834](#) and [1841-1845](#) over Cambodia, but the object of their mutual rivalry eventually requested French "protection" in [1867](#) and threw off both of its neighboring rivals. It became France's second colony after "Cochinchina", the southern part of Vietnam, fell to an invasion and was occupied by the Empire a couple years earlier in [1862](#). Just a little over three decades later, Laos was added to the list of French conquests in [1893](#) following the Franco-Siamese War of the same year.

With their Indochinese imperial realm acquiring a great deal of strategic depth and coming to encompass almost the entirety of its eventual territory, the French were in a comfortable position to accelerate the economic exploitation of their colonies, with a concentrated focus on what is today Vietnam. It should be noted, however, that modern-day Vietnam was actually divided into three separate colonies by the French – Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina – but taken as an aggregate, Vietnam's colonial economic output was much more valuable to Paris than Cambodia and Laos'. The period of French Indochina was also the first time that these two states were grouped together under the same umbrella as Vietnam, heralding a state of affairs that would go on to continue with various ups and downs until the end of the Cold War.

World War II And Greater Thailand:

Indochina was largely spared from the ravages of Japan's traditional wartime occupational practices, although by no means was it totally immune. Still, Tokyo had less of a militant presence in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos than it did in Indonesia and the Philippines, for example, and the entire territory of French Indochina remained under their control until the end of the war. What's notable about this period though isn't necessarily the influence that Japan exercised over the former French colonies, but the role that Thailand played in reasserting its territorial claims eastward.

Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (popularly known as Phibun) became Prime Minister of Thailand in 1938 and led his country on an irredentism campaign to re-annex parts of Cambodia and Laos after the [Franco-Thai War from 1940-1941](#). He also [expanded Thailand's territory](#) into northeastern Myanmar's present-day Shan State and the northern territories of Malaysia, [all](#) of which he claimed used to be part of his kingdom prior to the advent of colonialism. Thailand was able to get away with all of this because it was an ally of fascist Japan at the time, and it wasn't until 1946 that it rescinded all of its irredentist claims as part of a deal in exchange for joining the UN.

Despite representing an outburst of militant Thai nationalism, this brief period was not overly influential in determining the future attitudes of Cambodians and Laotians towards Bangkok, partly because of the civilizational similarities between all three peoples and also due to the fact that only portions of their respective territory (and not all of it) were annexed. Another factor that played a role was that the annexations were only in effect for five years. After World War II, Vietnam's influence replaced Thailand's and remained the paramount social factor impacting on these two countries' affairs.

The First And Second Indochinese Wars:

The struggle against the French and Americans was a heroic one of epic proportions, and readers should look more into it on their own time if they have an interest in these exploits. For the sake of time and scope, the summarized relevance of this period of time to the research at hand is that it represented the on-the-ground expansion of (North) Vietnamese influence into Cambodia and Laos, with the Vietnamese communists training and supporting their Khmer Rouge and Pathet Laos counterparts during the entire conflict. In fact, if it wasn't for crucial support from Hanoi, neither Phnom Penh nor Vientiane would have cast off their respective pro-Western governments, with all three countries liberating themselves from imperialism in full during the dramatic year of 1975. Alas, the conclusion of these two anti-imperialist wars weren't a harbinger for the end of the region's conflicts in general, and a few forthcoming ones would soon break out that would derail Indochina's dynamics.

Post-Imperialist Conflicts:

Vietnam vs. Cambodia

The first war that broke out after the end of the anti-imperialist struggle was the one between [Vietnam and Cambodia in 1978-1979](#). Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge government had turned on its former Vietnamese benefactors and began aggressively demanding territorial revisions in southern Vietnam's Mekong Delta region. The supposed reasoning for this is that the lands of the late Cochinchina had historically been inhabited by ethnic Khmer (the majority demographic in Cambodia) and were only forcibly incorporated into Vietnam after the end of Nam tiến. There were also intra-communist Cold War considerations at play too, with Vietnam and its Laotian ally being aligned with the Soviet Union, while Cambodia's Khmer Rouge authorities were very close to China (partly in order to balance against Vietnam's 19th-century historic interests over the country). Although Vietnam righteously and quite accurately claimed that it was liberating Cambodia from the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge (which had killed up to a quarter of the country's population in only four years' time), it's clear in retrospect that it was also pursuing clear geopolitical interests at the same time, installing a [pro-Vietnamese government](#) in Pol Pot's wake and bringing the country fully under its influence as a result.

Vietnam vs. China

As an immediate response to the overthrow of China's regional ally, Beijing [invaded](#) the northern part of Vietnam in mid-February 1979, intent on punishing its erstwhile partner and sending the strongest possible message that it totally denounced its actions. Neither side gained anything tangible from this brief but bloody campaign, but it's worthwhile to remind the reader that this conflict occurred after China had already de-facto sided with the US in the Cold War. Seen from this vantage point of contextual insight, it's evident that Beijing was enforcing Washington's will by proxy against its hated Vietnamese enemy, whether it wittingly did so or was unknowingly guided into this scenario.

The exacerbation of intra-communist Cold War tension between China and the USSR also played to the US' grand strategic advantage, and it was shortly after this conflict ended that the US took the decision to [provocatively arm the Afghan Mujahedin](#) on 3 July, 1979 in order to provoke a Soviet intervention. In the grand global scheme of things, China had put the Soviets' position in Southeast Asia on the relative defensive while also ensuring that it would redirect a sizeable number of its forces to defending the joint border. Concurrently, the US started using radical Islam to stir up trouble in the USSR's southern front with Afghanistan, and it was only one year later in 1980 that the anti-Soviet, [CIA-influenced](#) Solidarity movement would be created in order to tempt an Afghan-like intervention in Eastern Europe.

Taken together, the situationally coordinated anti-Soviet advances that had popped up in this short two-year period in Southeast Asia, the Chinese frontier, Afghanistan, and Poland are evidence that the US was serious in influencing a concerted effort aimed at destabilizing the USSR along as many of its strategic fronts as possible. Seeing as how this also coincided with the "[Reagan Doctrine](#)" of 'rolling back' the Soviet influence in Africa (e.g. Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique) and Latin America

(Nicaragua), it can be said that the Sino-Vietnamese War was actually the opening salvo in this forthcoming worldwide campaign.

Vietnamese-Thai Border Skirmishes

After militarily withdrawing from Indochina, the US resorted to using Thailand as its [Lead From Behind](#) to promote their strategic vision in the region. Both Washington and Bangkok [supported](#) the Khmer Rouge and other insurgents against the Cambodian-based Vietnamese forces and newly installed pro-Hanoi government, effectively giving the [Cambodian Civil War](#) the foreign support that it needed to continue indefinitely. As part of its anti-insurgent campaign, the Vietnamese military would launch raids along the joint Thai-Cambodian border, even engaging in select cross-border attacks against fleeing militants.

The tensions that boiled up with Vietnam all along Thailand's southeastern border with Cambodia would later directly express themselves in the [Thai-Laotian Border War](#) of 1987-1988, during which Bangkok and Vientiane (the latter supported by the Vietnamese forces that were based in the country) had a brief military conflict over their disputed frontier. Despite not resulting in any status quo changes, the incident was symbolic in the sense that it showed that the entire Thai-Indochinese border region was 'fair game' for proxy conflicts, especially considering that the Vietnamese military was based in both Cambodia and Laos at the time. The escalation of border tension with Laos was significant in that it occurred at the period of time when hostilities between Thailand and Vietnam were subsiding over Cambodia, thus showing that the US-backed authorities in Bangkok were insistent on advancing their anti-Vietnamese goals in some form or another no matter what third-party state was used to achieve these ends.

Interestingly enough, the US' proxy policy of Southeast Asian destabilization via its Lead From Behind partner of Thailand carries with it a strong foreshadowing of what would later happen in the Mideast after the formal US military withdrawal in 2011. Just as the US [withdrew from South Vietnam](#) in 1973 but later used Thailand as its base of covert operations to destabilize its regional foe, so too did it do something similar by withdrawing from Iraq in 2011 but using Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to continue promoting its anti-Syrian and anti-Iranian agendas, albeit in a more accelerated manner than it had done vis-à-vis Vietnam. Therefore, clear links of strategic continuity can be witnessed between the US' Cold War policy in Indochina after 1973 and its current one in the Mideast after 2011, with both being characterized by an asymmetrical proxy offensive that follows a conventional retreat.

Indochina After The Cold War:

The changing global dynamics brought about by the end of the Cold War had a monumental impact on Indochina. First off, the most noticeable change was that Vietnam formally withdrew its military from [Cambodia](#) and [Laos](#), thereby lessening the direct expression of its influence over these two neighboring states. In turn, Vietnam was able to concentrate its focus on internal economic affairs as opposed to external military-political ones, and the Western community [lifted](#) its anti-Vietnamese sanctions that were initially implemented in response to the 1978 Vietnamese-Cambodian War and subsequent military presence there. Due to the institutional relief that Vietnam experienced from this and the positive reaction that the pro-Western members of the region had to these dual developments, Hanoi was able to rapidly incorporate itself into the global economy, joining ASEAN in 1995 and establishing very close trade ties with the US, Japan, and South Korea afterwards.

Cambodia and Laos would go on to join ASEAN as well, albeit in 1999 and 1995, respectively. Instead of moving closer to the US and its East Asian allies, however, they would actually opt to intensify full-spectrum relations with China and Thailand. While both maintain cordial and somewhat close ties with Vietnam (Laos much more so than Cambodia), it can subjectively be assessed that they are no longer as strongly under its influence as they once were. Laos is [integrating](#) itself into the ASEAN Silk Road and

becoming the literal link between China and Thailand, whereas Cambodia has [blossomed](#) into a bastion of Chinese economic and diplomatic influence. The current governments of these two Indochinese states are firmly in the sphere of the multipolar world, with their position exponentially increased by Thailand's new pro-multipolar leadership.

That isn't to say that Vietnam isn't somewhat multipolar as well, seeing as how it beneficially cooperates with Russia in the [economic](#) and [military](#) realms, but overall the country has come under the strong influence of the unipolar anti-Chinese states of the US and Japan, with the TPP being the ultimate epitome. Going forward, it's expected that Vietnam will balance its South China Sea maritime strategy with ambitious asymmetrical mainland inroads into its former 'backyards' of Cambodia and Laos, partly out of its own desire to economically entrap these two states into its subregional TPP influence zone, but also due to the US' strategic guidance in using Hanoi's historical proxy leadership over them to complicate China's One Belt One Road plans.

The Vendetta Against Vietnam

Vietnam is currently one of the US' closest strategic partners in the South China Sea, with bilateral relations on the strong upswing out of the shared economic interests and the joint vision of containing China. While ties are unprecedentedly positive between these two states, Vietnam might one day begin reasserting its strategic sovereignty against the US vis-à-vis a possible improvement of relations with China.

That doesn't look all that probable in the given moment, but it certainly can't be disregarded, especially since China is Vietnam's [largest trading partner](#) and likely will remain so for at least the rest of the decade (despite the TPP and barring any anti-Chinese sanctions over the Spratly Islands dispute). In the event that Vietnam more pragmatically engages China and perhaps even chooses to fully participate in the One Belt One Road project, then it would draw the strong consternation of the US, whether this is publicly expressed or relegated to backdoor talks.

Just as the US stands to manipulate domestic Hybrid War factors in the presently pro-American countries of insular ASEAN, so too could it do so in Vietnam if Hanoi doesn't behave as "loyally" as Washington envisions it to be. One of the possible 'symptoms' of an assuredly sovereign state policy would be if Vietnam refuses to go along with some of the US' CCC practices, for which it would obviously experience certain punitive repercussions. For this reason, it's useful to explore what kind of destabilization potentials exist in Vietnam and game out the various means for how the US could possibly manipulate them if its newfound ally wavers in its strategic anti-Chinese commitment.

The six most realistic variables and scenarios can be categorized into those that deal with ethnic, regional, and social divides, and they will be examined in that order below. The ethnic groups function as support actors, while the social ones are expected to be the primary ones that take the lead in sparking the destabilization. The regional divide that's explained below allows for a supportive and encouraging backdrop for ideological predisposed or indoctrinated individuals, and it also creates high hopes for those that are already entertaining anti-systemic notions.

Ethnic:

Khmer Krom

A little [more than one million Khmer](#) inhabit the southern reaches of Vietnam, and in the past their presence was used by Pol Pot as justification for Cambodia's historic claims over the Mekong Delta. While the issue itself has largely receded in the decades since Vietnam put a stop to the aggression in 1979, it still remains possible that this demographic could be used in some manner to [stir](#) local anti-government discontent. As it currently stands, the Cambodian government is anathema to such suggestions, both out of multipolar pragmatism and stark remembrance of how disastrously it turned

out last time around, but that doesn't mean that a third-party actor (either the US directly or via one of its many NGO pawns) could do aggravate the situation instead.

There's no practical way that the Khmer Krom could ever destabilize the whole of Vietnam, but a coordinated campaign could be implemented to use them as bait for provoking a military crackdown that leads to collateral damage against ethnic Vietnamese and/or international condemnation, especially if this scenario is mixed with a labor rights dispute of some sort. What's pivotal in this example is that the Khmer Krom, separate in culture and language from the majority Viet ethnicity, are vulnerable to identity mobilization and thenceforth to being led into a bloody confrontation with the state, with the end result of the clashes (collateral damage, misleading media exposure) being more important than whatever short-term aims the ethnic group had been misled into coalescing around.

Hmong

Infamous for their [collaboration](#) with the US military during the Vietnam War, this scattered ethnic group poses a joint destabilization threat to both Vietnam and Laos. The Hmong are [divided through dialect](#) but united through geography, occupying a crescent of territory from northern Vietnam into northeast Laos. There are estimated to be [over one million](#) Hmong in Vietnam and less than half of that in Laos, so altogether they only form a recognizable percentage of the population in the latter (which has about 6.7 million people). The Hmong's significance derives from their identity in being a restive, anti-communist demographic with experienced cross-border travel between Vietnam and Laos, raising the tactical prospects that they could once more be used for [drug](#) and/or [weapons](#) smuggling.

While the ones that remained in both countries after the US retreat have mostly been re-incorporated into society, if they were to resort back to their illegal transnational practices (whether being contracted by an intelligence agency to do so or out of their own pursuit of profit), they could create some trouble in this rugged and underpopulated frontier despite their miniscule numbers. Strategically speaking, any eruption of instability in Laos could then more easily spill over into Vietnam, with the Hmong communities once more plying their militant trade across the border and potentially arming distressed factory workers that are preparing for a local, regional, and/or nationwide uprising. Just like with the Khmer Krom, the Hmong by themselves are not in any position to destabilize Vietnam aside from being an isolated nuisance, but if their specific on-the-ground advantages are utilized in a certain manner, then they could be used as a force multiplier in any larger unfolding scenario.

Degar/"Montagnard"

These mutually synonymous terms are used to refer to the native people of the Western Highlands. These Christianized tribal groups were allied with the French and US forces during the First and Second Indochinese Wars, and in terms of geopolitical importance, they abut the country's borders with Cambodia and Laos and are located at a critical position in the country's south. They have a history of rebelling against all aspects of Vietnamese rule, be it from the former South or the current reintegrated state, and they partook in a [low-intensity anti-government insurgency](#) that wasn't disbanded until 1992.

The Degar join the likes of their fellow Khmer Krom and Hmong minority compatriots in being unable to affect significant disturbances on their own (especially with the current Cambodian government being unwilling to offer them any type of sanctuary to do so), but having the opportunity to maximize the potential of other destabilization scenarios if their actions are coordinated in sync. For example, if the [2001 "land rights" unrest](#) and [2004 Easter protests](#) (both of which were instigated from abroad) were to repeat themselves in some form concurrent with violent labor disputes elsewhere in the country, then it could possibly offset the authorities and create an opening for asymmetrical advances such as a renewed insurgency.

Furthermore, Degar destabilizations could ultimately lead to a large refugee flow into Cambodia if they end up failing, and this carries with it a risk to the Kingdom's overall balance. The northeastern

provinces bordering the Western Highlands are rural and mostly underpopulated, so it's possible that this demographic could exploit the feeble governance there in order to set up anti-Vietnamese training camps. For now, at least, this doesn't seem likely at all, but if Phnom Penh were in the midst of putting down its own anti-government riots (likely initiated under the cover of a labor revolt and to be explained in the relevant section), then it could be expected that this might occur to some extent.

Regional:

The days of a distinct division between North and South Vietnam are long gone, but certain socio-cultural differences still remain between the two. The reunification of the two entities after 1975 was fraught with many challenges, but none so more difficult than integrating the formerly capitalistic market of the South into the state-controlled system of the North. After experiencing some economic turbulence related to this undertaking and feeling the winds of American-supported global change that were sweeping across the world, the Vietnamese authorities decided to progressively open up their economy through the 1986 Doi Moi reforms. What's ironic about this is that it represented an about-face for the communist state, which had just gone through great lengths to implement a strict top-down system in the South, but only to retreat from this policy about a decade later.

Other than some of the global and structural factors that were at play and exerting an undeniable impact, it's unmistakable that Southern-based liberals also had a role over this decision. It's not to insinuate that they had any ulterior motives in doing so, but that they genuinely believed from their experience that the economic model previously in place in South Vietnam was relatively more efficient than the one that they were later ordered to transition into by the North. No matter the degree of influence that the Southern liberals had over initiating the Doi Moi reforms, the fact remains that they were a comparative reversal of the previous system and an embrace of capitalist principles, the same operating structure that had earlier been in place in the South.

The pertinence of that period to the present is that the pro-Western economic thinking of that time is once more on the ascent in Vietnam, and with it, the possibility of a complementary pro-Western foreign policy. The last time that Hanoi followed the lead of Western influencing factors in the mid-1980s, it ended up unassumingly doing the West's foreign policy bidding a few years later by withdrawing from Cambodia and Laos at the end of the Cold War. This time, Vietnam is on the verge of entering into the forthcoming TPP arrangement, and it's playing a more militant role in the CCC hand-in-hand with this development. Whereas in the past it may have been contextually pragmatic for Vietnam to implement Doi Moi and remove its troops from the rest of Indochina, no such rationale can be evoked when it comes to the TPP and the CCC, both of which Vietnam is lunging into head-first.

It's the author's understanding that the 1980s Doi Moi and Cambodian and Laotian withdrawals symbolized the victory of the 'spirit of the South', or in other words, of certain policies that wittingly or unwittingly corresponded to Western preferences. In the same vein, joining the TPP and the CCC, and perhaps reinvigorating soft (economic) Vietnamese influence in Cambodia and Laos, accomplishes the same thing, albeit this time in full and witting compliance to the US' regional vision. Therefore, the regional differences in Vietnam are less of a geopolitical nature and more of an ideological one, with the North (in ideas, not necessarily in terms of actual politicians) typically representing independent pragmatism, whereas the South symbolizes pro-Western bandwagoning. Ultimately, it's the rivalry between these two camps that defines the current state of Vietnam's international economic and political decision making, with the South obviously in charge at the moment. Should that change, then it's likely that the US would fall back on utilizing the country's ethnic and/or social destabilization variables in order to enact pro-Southern pressure on the government to bring it back in line with its CCC preferences.

Social:

Banned Religious Groups

One of the largest social disruptors in Vietnam could potentially come from the religious community in the country. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in Vietnam per the [1992 Constitution](#), and the country currently [boasts](#) a belief rate of around 46%, with 16% practicing Buddhism, 8% partaking in Christianity (be it Catholicism or Protestantism), and the rest following unorganized traditional beliefs. On the whole, these individuals are peaceful and apolitical, and it's very rare for regular believers to encounter any sort of trouble from the state. The issue arises when adherents of banned Buddhist and Christian organizations such as the [Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam](#) and the [Vietnam Evangelical Fellowship](#), to name just two of them, illegally gather for services and proselytization practices. As a general rule, such groups are banned because they have a track record of engaging in political practices, and this is why they could present such a difficult challenge for the authorities if they go out of control.

To expand on this idea, so-called "religious freedom" is a powerful rallying cry for indoctrinated individuals and those susceptible to Western liberal-democratic thought. The general concept holds that governments should unrestrictedly allow any and all religions to be practiced, including obscure cult beliefs affiliated or unaffiliated with a major religion. Obviously, the individuals experiencing some type of state restriction on their religious practices (whether semi-conventional or outright cultish) are the ones most eager to reverse this state of affairs, and they may go about recruiting related co-confessionals (as in the case of the banned Buddhist and Christian organizations) in order to assist them in this endeavor. At this point, what's important to concentrate on is broader religious affiliation (be it Buddhist, Christian, or sympathy to both) being used as a mobilization issue for non-state agenda-driven actors. It doesn't matter whether they use their socio-physical networks to agitate against state atheism and certain religious "restrictions" or any other object of protest, since the saliency lies in them simply organizing a critical mass of demonstrators that can ultimately disrupt the state's stability.

Another critical component of this disruption strategy is that the religious-driven organizations and their affiliates could easily mislead their congregants to the conclusion that the only way for them to achieve their goals is through a violent overthrow of the state. They might point to "state-suppression" of their prior 'activism' as 'evidence' that working within the system is futile, thus compelling them to resort to Color Revolution and Unconventional Warfare practices (Hybrid War) in order to actualize their objectives when the time is right. While keeping their faith and religiously motivated end goal of regime change a secret, they can then take to recruiting other citizens to join their 'dissident' cause, most likely using a more encompassing and non-religious rallying issue such as workers' rights to broaden their movement's base. There's a high chance that the majority of people brought into this fold might not be aware of the regime change purposes of the growing underground movement, being guided instead into thinking that they're lending their support to a short-term, low-intensity protest movement about a seemingly 'legitimate' issue such as workplace safety. Unbeknownst to them, they're actually being attached to a preplanned provocation that will inevitably result in violence, with the most ardent of the religious believers leading the way in sparking the militant conflict against the authorities.

To summarize the strategic framework that's been articulated above, select members of the banned religious community in Vietnam and their supportive state-approved counterparts could quite easily band together in building a covert anti-government network. The more radical of the bunch could have already been convinced that the only way to affect the tangible change that they're aiming for is to violently overthrow the government, and they'll probably keep these intentions hidden from the more moderate members of the group. Even if this religiously affiliated organization sought to commence a destabilizing protest or an outright putsch, they'd likely fail without garnering enough supporters in advance. Since it can safely be assumed that the vast majority of Vietnamese are against a violent overthrow of their government, the only way to get them to physically support the regime change movement is to conceal its ultimate intentions, using more inclusive and broad-based language such as protecting/advancing labor rights and other non-religious issues that the majority of people could relate to in order to motivate them enough to come out in the street with their support. Even then, it's not guaranteed that the scheme will appeal to enough people to make it effective, but the vehemence of the religiously motivated core organizers might be enough to give it some gusto.

Labor Rights Activists

The final Hybrid War factor impacting on Vietnam is also the most important, and it deals with the forthcoming institutionalized unionization in the country. One of the TPP's precepts is that it [mandates](#) that Vietnam "legalize independent labor unions and workers' strikes", which in and of itself is certainly a welcome and positive gesture, but considering the regime change reputation that Washington has mustered, such a seemingly innocuous and well-intentioned prerequisite must defensively be viewed with the utmost suspicion. The author doesn't intend to imply that all labor unions and workers' strikes are potentially nefarious fronts for anti-government plots, but that under certain national conditions, there's no doubt that they could be used as vehicles for advancing this agenda.

Vietnam has been dragged into a stereotypical dilemma – on the one hand, it needs to ensure and better workers' rights and conditions, but at the same time, it needs to prevent its reforms from being abused by politically motivated actors. The crux of the problem is that the state waited so long to legalize these labor privileges, so that neither it nor the citizenry fully know what to expect. Hanoi is predicating its decision on the notion that this move will strengthen the government's appeal and preempt socio-economic disturbances, but it might inadvertently end up weakening its power over the country and ushering in the same type of destabilization that it hopes to avoid.

It's inevitable that some of the unions will be co-opted by politically motivated elements or outright created as front organizations for them, yet their magnetic appeal and the popular acceptance that they're expected to attain in Vietnamese society could indicate that an uncontrollably large segment of the population might vehemently be in support of them. As was earlier stated, there's nothing inherently wrong with labor unions, but from the Hybrid War perspective, these groups are capable of gathering a large amount of people and assembling highly charged and easily manipulatable crowds that could be turned against the government. For example, if the unions and their supporters enter into a confrontation with the authorities (which is bound to happen in any organized labor dispute and/or strike) and provocateurs steer the situation along a preplanned scenario of violence, then the government reaction, no matter how justified it may be, could end up upsetting many people and enflaming anti-government sentiment.

There's no clear-cut solution to handling this dilemma, and it's obvious that both the state and the citizenry will have to learn as they go along. As regards the government, it needs to be able to identify the difference between a peaceful and legitimate labor-related protest and one which is on the verge of bubbling into an anti-government riot. It also needs to learn how to handle such incidents so that it doesn't unwittingly do more harm than good in the tactics that it uses in breaking such demonstrations up. Alternatively, the public needs to get a handle on what sorts of behaviors are acceptable and which aren't, and legitimate protesters need to learn how to police their own ranks to root out any provocateurs before they have the chance to act. The issue, as mentioned previously, is that neither side has the necessary experience to engage in this sort of civil society discourse without there being some unavoidable 'growing pains' such as Color Revolution infiltration and/or overreactive government crackdowns, both of which may serve to exacerbate preexisting anti-state sentiment and advance an externally directed regime change scenario.

Out of all of the variables discussed thus far, the "labor rights activist" one is the most all-encompassing, since it can conceivably envelop most of the working-age population within its ranks in some form or another. It doesn't matter if they're card-carrying members or sympathetic citizens, what's important for the Hybrid War observer to realize is that the banner of labor rights is capable of organizing millions of people for the same shared objective, and that this critical mass of individuals can be guided against the government by adept practitioners of crowd-control psychology. Put another way, an untold number of regular, law-abiding, and well-intentioned citizens could get drawn into participating in what they believe to be a labor rights-focused protest, but only in effect function as human shields protecting a radical core of urban terrorists that are intent on attacking the state. These political and/or

religious radicals aim to provoke 'incriminating' and visually-documented police-on-protester violence that could then deceptively be disseminated as 'truth' and used to help recruit more people into the growing anti-government movement.

Along the same lines, nationwide or strategically focused regional labor disputes and strikes could be used to enact economic war against a targeted state from within, especially if the "union" has been co-opted by externally directed anti-government elements or is an outright front organization for them. In the circumstances where this is the case, the external actor (in mostly every imaginable situation, this would be the US and its intelligence/NGO apparatus) can inflict a two-for-one destabilization against their target. If the state is compelled to violently crack down on the rioters in order to restore order, then this could be manipulated against it via the social and physical anti-government 'activist' networks in generating even more dissatisfaction against the authorities; but at the same time, if the government doesn't react and it allows the labor dispute and/or strike to continue indefinitely, then it risks experiencing a prolonged economic loss, especially if the factory, industry, and/or locale chosen for the disruption is of a strategic nature. In both instances, there isn't a 'win-win' solution for the authorities, and they're pressed to choose what they believe will be the lesser of two evils.

Putting the state on the defensive and forcing it to continuously react to these sorts of strategic lose-lose dilemmas are precisely the sort of tactics that Hybrid War practitioners specialize in. No matter what specific form they take or whatever particular issue the infiltrated or front organization claims to support at the time (be it labor rights, "free elections", or the environment, for example), the indisputable pattern is that they always find a way to lure as many civilians into their ranks as possible in order to use them as human shields and 'collateral damage' for their preplanned anti-government provocation. The next step follows naturally enough, and it's that the average citizen who hears about what happened (either on their own or via a nifty NGO-directed social media campaign) starts to lose faith in the government, largely unaware that what they had seen or read was totally staged and/or guided to occur by a foreign intelligence agency. The compound effect of this occurring on a large enough scale and with a certain context-specific frequency is that the population begins to either actively turn against the authorities and/or passively comes to accept the individuals that are fighting against them and whatever new state entity emerges in the wake of the current one's possible defeat.

The Chances For A Hybrid War Crisis In Cambodia

Moving along in the book's examination of Hybrid War threats in mainland ASEAN, it's time now to turn to Cambodia, the first of the studied states to most likely be in the US' regime change crosshairs. Up until this point, the research was addressing countries where engineered Hybrid War scenarios were possible only in the event that their governments strayed from the general anti-China line (to varying degrees of rhetoric and form) that the US had 'preferred' that they abide by. Cambodia is a completely different matter altogether, since it's the first ASEAN state that the book addresses in which bilateral relations with China are at an extraordinarily high level.

Although not a key node in Beijing's primary ASEAN Silk Road from Kunming to Singapore, there are plans in motion to make it a supporting spoke, and the close ties between Beijing and Phnom Penh have drawn the ire of the US. Cambodia occupies a strategic position in China's ASEAN strategy, and thereby it's likely that it will experience some sort of renewed regime change destabilization in the coming future despite not being a chief transit state for Beijing's transnational connective infrastructure designs. Additionally, the US is aware of the strategic regional advantages that it would gain from overthrowing Cambodia's current government, and these calculations further increase the odds that long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen might become Washington's next regime change target.

This segment of the research begins by explaining the geopolitical significance that Cambodia has to China and the mainland ASEAN region. Afterwards it looks into the present political situation in the country and highlights the determined efforts of the 'opposition' in trying to topple Hun Sen. Finally, the last part draws attention to the most realistic Hybrid War scenario facing Cambodia, which just like in

Vietnam, is the infiltration of the labor rights movement and its hijacked repurposing into the optimal regime change instrument.

Why Strategists Care About Cambodia:

The average reader might be perplexed about why ASEAN's poorest state has any significance whatsoever in terms of Great Power planning, but the answer lies no so much in economics (although there's plenty of opportunity there, as will later be explained), but in geopolitics. This is partly explained by China's historical relations with Cambodia and general strategy towards ASEAN, but it's also due to the demographic and state-to-state destabilization potential that Cambodia could potentially release towards its neighbors if it ever became a pro-American satellite state.

The China Factor

The most important issue to address in describing Cambodia's geostrategic significance is its relationship with China. In the eyes of Beijing's decision makers, Cambodia occupies a similar geopolitical importance to China as Serbia does to Russia, in that the strong partnership between the two allows the Great Power to 'jump' past a wall of obstructionist states. In the instance of mainland ASEAN, these historically had been Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, with the first two actually becoming pretty pragmatic towards China since the end of the Cold War. Even if those two diplomatic successes hadn't been achieved, the relationship with Cambodia allows China to maintain a strategic presence in the Gulf of Thailand and have a firmly committed ally in the ranks of ASEAN. Most importantly in terms of China's contemporary global strategy, Cambodia has proven to be the ideal testing ground for China's overseas investment vision. The lessons that it learned by investing [\\$9.17 billion](#) in the nearby state during the period from 1994-2012, begun during the early days of China's international rise and carried into the present, were obviously instrumental in helping it acquire the feel for managing similar overseas projects. Altogether, these experiences would blend together and contribute to forming the global One Belt One Road vision, with China's initial investment forays in historically allied Cambodia undoubtedly playing an influential role.

From the Cambodian perspective, its leadership has historically looked to China as a type of 'big brother' in helping it hedge against Thailand and Vietnam. The historical memory of having been an object of rivalry between these two powers, and in one sense or another, the military basing ground for each of them at different times, weighs heavily on its decision-making imperatives. The collapse of the Khmer Empire brought Cambodia under the Siamese (Thai) fold for centuries, whereas the country was institutionally closer with Vietnam during the French imperial period. During the Vietnam War, its territory was continuously traversed by the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong, and although the Vietnamese later liberated Cambodia from the genocidal Khmer Rouge, nationalist elements interpret the subsequent years as an unnecessary military occupation by an historic rival. Aside from the decade-long Peoples Republic of Kampuchea period from 1979-1989 when it hosted Vietnamese troops and was barred from dealing with China, there's a clear continuity of pragmatic relations with its 'big brother' that was practiced by Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and then Hun Sen. Nowadays, other than the political-economic benefits that it reaps from its partnership with China, Cambodia also gains elevated prestige in ASEAN simply by being so closely aligned with Beijing, which has thus transformed the country from a diplomatic backwater to a premier outpost for regional states to engage China's interests in the region.

From an overall perspective, Chinese-Cambodian relations are a win-win for both sides, and they're about to be taken to a totally new level of mutual benefit through the Greater Mekong Region's "[Central Corridor](#)" project. To remind the reader, this is one of the various connective projects in mainland ASEAN, with this particular route being a branch of the North-South Corridor through Laos. The Central Corridor branches off from Vientiane and slithers southwards down the country's spine towards Cambodia, following the Mekong River along the way. This variation of the ASEAN Silk Road is important in its own right because of the potential that it has for deepening trade between China and Cambodia

via an optimal unimodal system (solely ground-based as opposed to transshipment from boat to land), but it lacks the geostrategic capability of providing Beijing with an alternative route to the Indian Ocean. The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor fully avoids the South China Sea headache and Strait of Malacca bottleneck, while the primary ASEAN Silk Road through Thailand has the possibility of doing so in the region of southern Thailand. This explains why Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand have a higher chance of falling victim to the US' anti-Chinese plans (either in co-opting their elite or wreaking havoc) than Cambodia does, although Phnom Penh's chummy ties with Beijing unquestionably puts it on the target list as well, albeit in a relatively lesser prioritization.

Transnational Ethnic Trouble

The Khmer ethnic majority in Cambodia are a very proud people, infused with the civilizational glory of the ancient Khmer Empire. Accordingly, they're also very patriotic, and their manifestations of pride could sometimes translate into nationalist demonstrations that put Thailand and Vietnam in an uncomfortable position. The reason that Cambodia's neighbors feel uneasy at the exercise of Khmer patriotism is because they have their own Khmer minority within their borders, a legacy that nationalists have tried to exploit by attributing it to colonialism. In the case of the Thailand, these are the [Northern Khmer](#) that inhabit the northeastern region of Isan and [live close](#) to the Cambodian border. They constitute around a quarter of the population in Buriram, Sisaket, and Surin provinces. There are also scattered segments of the Western Khmer living in Chanthaburi and Trat provinces, although they have less of an impactful contemporary presence than in Isan. All told, it's estimated that there are a little over one million Khmer living in Thailand. The situation with the Khmer Krom in southern Vietnam was already discussed in the earlier section about that country's Hybrid War vulnerabilities, but to revisit the details for a moment, there are also about one million Khmer living there as well.

The geographically contiguous presence of ethnic Khmer diaspora living in the Thai and Vietnamese border regions means that a nationalist-driven Cambodia could pose a serious threat to the region's stability. At the moment, it's extraordinarily unlikely that Hun Sen would ever proceed down this destabilizing path, but in the event that he's overthrown by a Pravy Sektor-like band of ultra-nationalists, it's foreseeable that this demographic variable could become a complication in Cambodia's bilateral relations with each of these states. If history is an indication, then a future nationalism-obsessed government might follow in the Khmer Rouge's footsteps and stage aggressive border provocations against Vietnam, possibly to the point of tempting Hanoi to launch a retaliatory strike to snub out the threat just as it did back in 1979. Drawing a parallel to the present, this might turn out to be a Southeast Asian variation of the "[Reverse Brzezinski](#)" stratagem, with the entire provocation predicated on the intent of dragging Vietnam into a quagmire (in this scenario, possibly as punishment for bettering relations with China).

Using these strategic principles, the same concept can actually more realistically be applied towards Thailand in the Khmer-populated areas of its [already distressed Isan region](#). Bangkok has been rapidly warming up to Beijing since the 2014 military coup and is now an integral transit state for the ASEAN Silk Road, thus meaning that any future Khmer-nationalist government in Cambodia would most likely be directed or implicitly guided by the US to targeted Thailand before Vietnam. The only thing that needs to happen to turn this Hybrid War projection into an actual plan is for an ultra-nationalist opposition movement to seize power in Phnom Penh just as they did in Kiev two years ago, most likely following a similar template of urban terrorism as their pro-American predecessors on the other side of Eurasia. In fact, such a possibility is actually being actively prepared for, the specifics of which will be explored more in-depth when the research discusses the internal political situation in Cambodia.

Border Rumbles

Aside from the asymmetrical destabilization that a hyper-nationalist Cambodian government could bring to its Thai and Vietnamese neighbors, there are also more conventional dangers that would go with this type of American-imposed government as well. As the reader likely realized by this point, Cambodia

hasn't always had positive relations with its two largest neighbors, and these have also manifested themselves into border disputes, the most recent and acute of which is the one with Thailand. The two countries almost went to war in 2008 over a disputed patch of land right near the Preah Vihear Temple in northern Cambodia. The reasons for the disagreement extend well past the physical territory in question and broach the larger historical and cultural issues, but the immediate root of the problem was the use of differing imperial-era border maps to support either case. The problem was eventually settled in Cambodia's favor by the International Court of Justice in 2011, but because of the broader historical-cultural disagreements at play and the potential for a Khmer-nationalist Cambodian government to aggravate the situation with Northern Khmers, there's a plausible chance that Phnom Penh might render irredentist claims against Thailand one day. Adding a branch to this scenario, the US might extend some form of outward or implicit diplomatic support for this initiative in order to pressure the Bangkok authorities and incite grassroots reactionary violence against the Northern Khmer in Isan.

The border situation with Vietnam hasn't been as dramatic as the one with Thailand since the time of the Khmer Rouge, and currently there aren't any feasible scenarios that it could apply against its eastern neighbor. The Khmer Krom are vastly outnumbered in southern Thailand when compared to the majority ethnic Viet, unlike the situation in the underpopulated provinces of Isan where they form a critical mass concentrated nearby the border. The prospective problem, then, isn't so much ethnic irredentism (which is logically impossible to pull off against Vietnam), but a militant dispute over their [recently delineated border](#). Historic flukes and random kinks along their frontier had long marred bilateral relations after the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, and even now, the border demarcation issue been exploited by the nationalist opposition in the latter in an attempt to score political points. Sam Rainsy, head of the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNPR) and the country's main opposition leader, [criticized](#) Hun Sen for allegedly ceding land to Vietnam. His politically ally, Senator Hong Sok Hour, was [arrested](#) in August 2015 for presenting a forged government document that purportedly 'proved' Rainsy's accusation, and the opposition leader himself was later issued his own [arrest warrant](#) in early January 2016 for involvement in the case. By that time he had already fled to France to avoid doing jail time for an unrelated defamation offense, but the fact that this issue has continued to bubble indicates that Rainsy may militantly act on his supposed claims if he ever succeeds in violently seizing power.

King Of The Cambodian Political Jungle:

The mentioning of Sam Rainsy is a perfect time to transition the research into discussing the internal political setup in the country. In a sense, it can read as a lead-up to what most likely will be a forthcoming Color Revolution attempt sometime between now and the July 2018 general elections. There are only two main players – Prime Minister Hun Sen and opposition leader Sam Rainsy – but only one can be king of the Cambodian political jungle.

Hun Sen

Cambodia's prevailing leader has been in some capacity or another of the premiership since 1985, making him one of the world's longest-serving heads of state. He was briefly a member of the Khmer Rouge before defecting to Vietnam, after which he reentered his homeland following its liberation by the Vietnamese military. He became Prime Minister in 1985 and served under the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party, which later rebranded itself as the Cambodian People's Party in 1991 and continues to hold power to this day. Hun Sen was almost booted from the government after losing the disputed 1993 elections, but after protesting the result and threatening that he'd lead the eastern part of Cambodia to secession, an agreement was reached whereby he'd serve in the position of co-Prime Minister.

His counterpart Norodom Ranariddh attempted to clandestinely seize power in 1997 through the use of covertly infiltrated Khmer Rouge and mercenary units to the capital, but Hun Sen was able to preempt the coup and stage his own countermoves that removed his rival from power and solidified his sole

leadership. The next and last threat to his premiership came during the aftermath of the 2013 elections, whereby Sam Rainsy and his newly formed Cambodian National Rescue Party clinched 44.46% of the vote compared to Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party's 48.83%, which prompted Rainsy to accuse the authorities of fraud. The resultant protests descended into riotous behavior and closely resembled a Color Revolution attempt at times, but the drama was officially resolved when both parties agreed to a parliamentary power-sharing proposal on 22 July, 2014. Still, the close election results and the regime change behavior that was exhibited for a prolonged period afterwards indicates that a repeat of such events is very likely to happen in 2018, if not beforehand.

Looked at more broadly in an international perspective, Hun Sen is an adept pragmatic, skillfully able to maneuver his country between its two historical rivals and still retain the dominant political position within his country. Although he began his career as being ardently pro-Vietnamese during his premiership of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, he moderated his approach the moment that his nominal ally's military forces departed from his country. While never taking any anti-Vietnamese moves, he then swiftly sought to replace his former patron's role with that of China, as has been the historic post-independence tradition of most Cambodian leaders. This decision was made on geopolitical grounds in hedging against both Vietnam and Thailand, although not doing so in an aggressive security dilemma-like manner that would jeopardize profitable relations with each. Consequently, he was able to retain his country's friendship with Vietnam while making positive inroads with Thailand, and his partnership with China allowed Cambodia to secure its strategic independence and safeguard its decision-making sovereignty in what otherwise could have been a complicated geopolitical situation (especially after having just emerged from a ravenous US-supported civil war).

Sam Rainsy

Cambodia's main opposition leader is the son of Sam Sary, one of the organizers of the Dap Chhuon Plot. Also known as the Bangkok Plot, this failed 1959 coup attempt sought to remove Sihanouk from power and is [suspected](#) of having been assisted by the CIA. Rainsy moved to France in 1965 and remained there for 27 years until 1992, after which he returned to his homeland and became a member of parliament. Since then, he has consistently remained involved in politics and founded the Khmer Nation Party in 1995, before changing its name to the Sam Rainsy Party in 1998. It's interesting to note that he initially chose nationalistic name for his organization, which corresponds to the thesis that his opposition movement seeks to capitalize on such sentiment and may plan to take it to a destabilization international extent against Thailand and/or Vietnam if he ever attains full power.

Rainsy's own actions attest to his nationalist bent, since he was arrested in 2009 for encouraging villagers to destroy border markets along the Vietnamese frontier, for which he was [found guilty in-absentia](#) for inciting racial discrimination and intentionally damaging property. He was pardoned by the King in July 2013 and [returned](#) that month to run in the general elections under the newly formed Cambodian National Rescue Party, a merger organization composed of his namesake party and the "Human Rights Party". He eventually lost the vote and used his defeat as a rallying cry for organizing a Color Revolution attempt to seize power, which as was mentioned, ended up diffused after a parliamentary power-sharing proposal was agreed to.

True to his nationalist 'credentials', he continued to agitate that Hun Sen was apparently 'ceding' land to Vietnam, and he worked hand-in-hand with his political ally Senator Hong Sok Hour in having the latter produce a forged government document 'proving' this outrageous charge. His sidekick was soon arrested, and when Rainsy's own parliamentary immunity was stripped from him and a warrant issued for his arrest during a visit to 'supporters' in South Korea, he opted to [evade](#) the courts and currently remains abroad. Days before, he had gone on social media to [intimate](#) that Suu Kyi's electoral victory forebodes well for what he believes will be his own forthcoming one in Cambodia, seemingly confirming that he too might also have been groomed by the CIA for future leadership. Overall, in assessing Sam's political strategy, it's evident that he has repeatedly gone out of his way to emphasize Khmer

nationalism, which for the reasons described in the previous section, could end up being very destabilizing for the region if he ever succeeds in seizing power.

Constructing Cambodia's Next Regime Change Scenario:

Rainsy The Rascal

Wrapping up the research on Cambodia, it's now time to finally address the most likely scenario in which Hun Sen's government could be overthrown. Sam Rainsy, like has been earlier described, is a clear nationalist and has sought to fuse his aggressive ideological rhetoric and provocations with Color Revolution tactics. His near-victory in the 2013 elections demonstrates that there's a sizeable proportion of the population that agrees with him, although not quite enough to democratically legitimize his leadership aspirations. Rainsy will face arrest due to his two outstanding warrants (one for defamation and the other for his involvement in Senator Hour's forged government documents case) if he returns to Cambodia, and Hun Sen has recently [said](#) that he'd "cut off [his] right hand" before he allows his rival to be pardoned again. In all probability, he's likely to do whatever it takes to make sure that Rainsy doesn't come back to Cambodia before the July 2018 elections, seeing as how he so bluntly put his entire reputation on the line through his dramatic threat.

Thematic Backdrop

What will probably happen then is that Rainsy will become a type of political symbol either through his 'self-imposed exile' (as he styles it) or the 'political martyrdom' that would result in his return to Cambodia. If he chooses the latter, it might be a lot easier to stir the Color Revolution pot and paint him as following in the footsteps of Tymoshenko or Suu Kyi, two of his regime change predecessors whose imprisonment catapulted them to global (Western) media stardom. No matter how it occurs, it's certain that the Color Revolution movement will aim to socially precondition both the Cambodian masses and the foreign media into viewing the upcoming vote as a battle between a pro-Chinese (and possibly even falsely slandered as a pro-Vietnamese) "dictator" and a pro-Western "democrat", bringing the tiny Southeast Asian state into the forefront of global attention. By that time, the Color Revolution infrastructure would be in place and the opposition can then commence their regime change operation, knowingly taking it as far as urban terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, thus representing the latest Hybrid War battleground.

Tactical Considerations

Be that as it may, the scenario can actually be fast-forwarded and deployed before the elections. Like with the newer Color Revolution templates that have been experimented with across the world, a concrete "event" such as a 'disputed election' or some other conventional rallying cry need not actually happen in order to spark the premeditated insurgency. What's most important is that the necessary social infrastructure be capable of gathering large crowds of 'human shields' (civilian protesters) in order to protect a small core of violent provocateurs and engineer what can later manipulatively be made to appear as a "bloody government crackdown" against "peaceful protesters". While nationalism is visibly a strong unifying force in Cambodian society, patriotism is equally as strong, and even though these two could clash (manifested by anti-government and pro-government demonstrators, respectively), the patriots might neutralize the disruptive "nationalists" and spoil their plans for a larger uprising. Along the same lines of thinking, a minor border spat in one of the frontier villages might not be enough to motivate people in the capital to come out to the streets in protest, especially since they have to worry about their own mouths to feed in ASEAN's poorest state.

Labor Unions' Unifying Role

That last point is actually the most important, and it's precisely the one that's capable of bringing large segments of the population out to protest against the government. Unlike in Vietnam, labor unions are

already legalized in Cambodia and have played an active role in the country's post-civil war history. The threat of labor disturbances has become increasingly common in the past few years, and garment workers recently prevailed in pressuring the government to once more raise their minimum wage in October 2015, this time to [\\$140](#) a month from the previous [\\$128](#) that they succeeded in gaining the year prior. To put this into context, the minimum wage had earlier been \$80 a month in 2012, before being raised to \$100 a month for 2014 prior to the aforementioned increases, all of which were the result of threatening labor strikes and engaging in selective clashes with police. Just like the author argued in the preceding analysis for Vietnam, there's nothing at all inherently wrong with an organized labor movement that agitates for worker's rights, but the danger presents itself when these organizations are exploited by politically minded actors working for regime change ends.

Unleashing The Dogs Of Hybrid War

In the prospectively forthcoming scenario for Cambodia, labor rights activists take center stage in leading a renewed anti-government movement, perhaps even before the July 2018 elections. They may either do so independently as part of their strategy to continuously raise the minimum wage, or they might craft a provocation in order to prompt a "government crackdown" against the "peaceful protesters". Additionally, if Hun Sen accepts [Washington's offer to join the TPP](#) but then gets cold feet like Yanukovich did with the EU Association Agreement, then that event in and of itself might be the spark needed to 'justify' the preplanned anti-government movement. No matter which route is finally decided upon, the end result is that the labor movement, particularly one which involves the country's 700,000 garment factory workers (responsible for [\\$5.8 billion](#) in exports for 2014), takes the leading role in opposing the authorities.

This critical mass of individuals could then enact or threaten to enact a paralyzing strike that would cripple the country's economy and immediately cast it as an unpredictable and unstable place to do business in. The nationalist appeal of this campaign would be maximized if it's coordinated in such a way as to target Vietnamese business, which account for [\\$3.46 billion](#) worth of projects in Cambodia and are the country's sixth largest investor.

Expectedly, the 'labor protesters' will link up with the Cambodian National Rescue Party to create a unified front against Hun Sen, and the combined sum of their efforts might realistically be enough to topple the government. The only alternative in such a case would be large-scale state-inflicted violence, which even if it's done in the interests of self-defense and the preservation of overall peace and harmony, could damage the authorities' legitimacy to the point of unwittingly engendering even more anti-government sentiment. Worse still, Western countries could pull out their investments and cooperate with ASEAN in sanctioning Phnom Penh. In this dire scenario, Hun Sen hangs on to power by a thread and the consequent economic warfare that's launched against the country is impactful enough to lead to his government's dissolution within the next few years.

PART VIII: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

China Stands To Lose Big By A Hybrid War In Laos

The research has finally proceeded to the point where the countries most relevant to the Law of Hybrid War will now be discussed. To remind the reader, this stipulates that:

“The grand objective behind every Hybrid War is to disrupt multipolar transnational connective projects through externally provoked identity conflicts (ethnic, religious, regional, political, etc.) within a targeted transit state.”

Remembering that China’s ASEAN Silk Road must first travel through Laos en route to Thailand and eventually Singapore, it becomes absolutely geopolitically necessary for Beijing to do everything that it can to support stability in this key transit state. Reversely, from the American perspective, it becomes one of Washington’s most pressing geostrategic imperatives to either flip Laos over to the pro-American camp or throw its internal balance into such disorder that the railroad is all but impossible to build.

The US would further its interests in both scenarios by either gaining proxy control over the critical Laotian Corridor (thereby nullifying the sovereign and strategic usefulness of the entire project) or creating the conditions for the ASEAN Silk Road’s indefinite suspension or outright cancellation. It can thus be argued that Laos is the bottleneck on which China now depends, being the mainland counterpart of the maritime Strait of Malacca and fulfilling a similar strategic purpose vis-à-vis Beijing’s ambitions in directly connecting to the Indian Ocean. Accordingly, while the Strait of Malacca is vulnerable to conventional military disruption by the China Containment Coalition (CCC), Laos is similarly susceptible to its asymmetrical manifestation via Hybrid War.

Building On The Past

Laos is a mysterious country that has never been fully understood by the outside world, despite the forefront position that it held during the US’ War on Indochina. Its people are inward-looking and always seemed uncomfortable being in the global spotlight, and the opacity that has pervaded since the Communist Party’s 1975 victory in the Laotian Civil War contributed to the dire lack of information about the state. Although it’s difficult to get a handle on the specifics of what’s happening inside the country, it’s much easier to study the state from afar by examining its recent historiography.

Some people may not expect such an approach to be very revealing, but the author argues that it can in fact provide sufficiently relevant information about Laos’ structural situation and is actually the only real option that interested observers have at their disposal. The following subsections are curated so as to touch on the most applicable aspects of Laotian history, framing them in such a way that the reader can receive a generalized understanding of the country which can then establish the appropriate foundation for further analyzing its regional significance and Hybrid War vulnerabilities.

Colonialism:

The French acquired Laos from Siam after defeating the latter in a brief 1893 war. Up until that point, Laos had been interlinked with Siam for centuries, and it is civilizationally affiliated with it due to the close ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and historical similarities between them. The modern-day territory of the country used to be the independent Kingdom of Lan Xang from 1354-1707, but even during that sovereign period, it still experienced a symbiotic relationship with Thailand’s political predecessors. Thus, when the French conquered Laos, they had in effect expanded their empire into a new civilizational sphere separate from the Vietnamese and Khmer ones that they had previously occupied.

While the strategic opportunity certainly existed for the French to use Laos as a forward operating base for incrementally chipping off more pieces of Siam (in particular, the very closely Laotian-related

northeast region of Isan), they opted instead to have it function as a buffer zone and largely ignored it from then on out. Laos never acquired any economic significance whatsoever for the French, remaining mostly a backwater buffer that was totally forgotten in terms of any potential socio-economic development that it could have theoretically received from Paris. The only time it ever really returned to the French consciousness was after Imperial Japan mediated the peace treaty that ended the 1940-1941 Franco-Siamese War and wound up giving part of its territory back to Bangkok. This was reversed after World War II and Laos was returned to its imperial and present-day borders.

Cold War: 1946-1975:

Laos gained its independence in 1953 but was immediately thrown into a brutal civil war between the Royalists and Communists, which thus turned it into a major Cold War hotspot. The [1962 Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos](#), signed in Geneva and agreed to by 14 separate states (the US, USSR, China, France, and the two Vietnams chief among them), was little more than a global public relations stunt, and the country's civil war only intensified in the following years.

The US, legally barred from conventionally intervening in the conflict, chose instead to launch the CIA-organized "[Secret War](#)" in supporting the government, training Hmong guerrillas, and killing Laotian and Vietnamese Communists. The result of Langley's War on Laos was that the US dropped more bombs on the country [than it did on Europe](#) during the entirety of World War II, slaughtering thousands of people and leaving a legacy of unexploded munitions that still maim and kill civilians to this day.

North Vietnam was instrumental in helping the Laotian people during this very trying period, and its Army helped to create and continually support the Pathet Laos, the anti-imperialist communist movement in the country. The shared experience of suffering and the glorious exploits of their battles forged a fraternal bond between the two peoples and their governments that has survived into the present day. If it wasn't for North Vietnam, it's highly unlikely that Laos would have ever freed itself from the US' clutches and emerged victorious in the civil war, marching triumphantly into Vientiane in December 1975 and completing the liberation of Indochina.

Cold War: 1976-1989:

Laos and Vietnam signed the [1977 Lao-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation](#) which formalized the alliance between the two and allowed Vietnam to legally base its troops in the country. Being the loyal Vietnamese ally that it was, Laos froze relations with China in response to the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979, thereafter making itself fully dependent on its eastern ally. The USSR provided support to Laos during this time, but Vietnam was the geographical gatekeeper through which all aid had to pass, further underlining the controlling role that it exerted over all of its neighbor's affairs. Laos also had tense relations with Thailand at this time as well, which boiled over into a short border war between December 1987 and February 1988. Taking all of these geopolitical factors into consideration, it's accurate to assess that Laos had become one of the world's most isolated countries by the end of the Cold War, with its only real access point for international interaction being via Vietnam, whether it be its physical territory or national airspace.

Post-Cold War:

The changing international and regional conditions that characterized the end of the Cold War led to the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops after 1989, although the political-strategic relationship between both countries and their communist parties remained intact. Laos rapidly moved to reestablish its relations with China and Thailand, entering into pragmatic economic cooperation with both of them and alleviating the earlier mono-dependence that it had on Vietnam. Laos' historical-civilizational links with Thailand and the concentration of most of its population along the Thai border gave Vientiane a vested interest in connecting its physical infrastructure with its larger and more prosperous southern neighbor, ergo the [four Friendship Bridges](#) that have been built between them since the end of the Cold War.

China's new geostrategic interests in circumventing the nascent cordon zone that the CCC is constructing in the South China Sea and along the Strait of Malacca gave Beijing the necessary impetus to accelerate its relations with Laos and spearhead the ASEAN Silk Road, the high-speed rail network that it envisions will connect Kunming with Singapore and potentially even the Indian Ocean via a branch route in southern Thailand. The 2014 military coup in Thailand that removed the pro-American proxy leader created the amenable geopolitical conditions whereby China's plans could securely and feasibly become a reality, and Beijing and Vientiane [sealed the deal](#) to construct the initial \$6.28 billion section between them in November 2015. Curiously, it was right afterwards that a spree of [killings](#), [shootings](#), and other violent acts broke out in Xaysomboun Province, which previously was the site of the US' Long Tien "Secret War" headquarters and had earlier come under a [region-wide curfew](#) in early December after "bandits" (as the government referred to them as) killed a couple of soldiers.

January 2016 was a very influential month for Laos. For starters, the country was chosen for this year's ASEAN chairmanship, thus elevating its profile to global proportions for the first time in its history. Former Vice-President Bounnhang Vorachith, thought to be [favorably biased](#) towards Vietnam, was appointed General Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, and the first foreign leader that he met with was John Kerry, who paid a pit stop to Laos as part of a wider Asian tour that would later take him to Cambodia and China. While there, the US' top diplomat [publicly announced](#) that the Laotian Prime Minister issued a series of euphemisms that are commonly interpreted as being against Beijing's South China Sea maritime claims, which the Laotian government interestingly didn't confirm nor deny. What may have been a factor over the authorities' ambiguous position on the matter is that two Chinese citizens were [killed by a bomb attack](#) and a third one critically injured in Xaysomboun Province the day before Kerry's arrival, in what likely was an advance Hybrid War threat from Washington in pressuring Vientiane to get in line with the CCC or risk suffering even greater destabilization.

Laos In The Line Of Fire

Laos is clearly being caught up in a geopolitical mess which its leadership and people want no part of, but it's centrally located position in mainland ASEAN and [pivot state potential for China](#) made it inevitable that it would get dragged into the New Cold War sooner or later. Of all the forces directly impacting on Laos at the present moment, China and Thailand are the most positive and pragmatic, whereas Vietnam and the US are the most disruptive and self-interested. Concurrent with this geopolitical rivalry, it mustn't be forgotten that Laos has its own sovereign set of policies that it wants to advance, too. Before proceeding to an examination of the Hybrid War vulnerabilities afflicting the land-locked state, it's useful for the reader to become familiarized with each regional actor's interests in this multifaceted struggle so as to most accurately predict their behavior there during any possibly forthcoming destabilization.

Laos:

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is the "[cork in the bottle](#)", as former US President Eisenhower once called it, meaning that its prime geopolitical position allows the country and whatever processes are ongoing within it to affect the rest of the region. The government has come to understand this strategic precept and is thus endeavoring to transform what it had earlier thought to be its stagnant land-locked detriment into a [dynamic land-linked advantage](#). This ambitious strategy takes two complementary forms in the energy and physical infrastructure sectors. To address the first one, Laos wants to harness its enormous hydroelectric potential in order to become the energy-exporting "[battery of Southeast Asia](#)", thus making it an indispensable partner in helping to power the larger and comparatively wealthier Thai and Vietnamese economies.

Per the second aspect, Laos provides valuable transit territory to two separate regional high-speed rail projects, the Chinese-financed ASEAN Silk Road and the Asian Development Bank- and Japanese-supported Greater Mekong Subregion's East-West Economic Corridor (all of mainland ASEAN's

prospective transport corridors are mapped out [here](#)). The basics of Beijing's project have already been discussed, but commenting on Tokyo's, this route is [planned](#) to connect Myanmar's fourth-largest city of Mawlamyine on the Indian Ocean (also a [terminal](#) on India's ASEAN Highway) to Vietnam's third-largest city of Da Nang on the South China Sea. Of relevance, this project will intersect northern and northeastern Thailand before cutting across southern Laos. These two region-wide projects are not mutually exclusionary and can profitably co-exist within Laos, but the US would prefer that the multipolar ASEAN Silk Road be cancelled and Vientiane's full priorities be shifted to focusing on the unipolar-facilitating East-West Economic Corridor linking together both coasts of mainland ASEAN.

On a final note, Laos is [very generously endowed](#) with a [plethora of mineral resources](#) that [includes](#) gold, silver, copper, bauxite, alumina, potash, coal, tin, and precious gemstones. These buried riches are alluring to all sorts of global investors, but are especially attractive to those that are based in neighboring countries and who have easier and more cost-effective access to them. Whether its Chinese or Canadian companies that end up mining more of this natural wealth, the end result is that this industry is capable of attracting billions of dollars of investment and tangential development into the surrounding areas, bringing with it the potential for Laos to leapfrog out of least developed country status and achieve its [goal of becoming a developing nation by 2020](#) if the expected windfall of profits is properly managed. Considering the possible influx of billions of dollars of mineral investment (\$5.9 billion of which has [already materialized](#)), the country's envisioned regional energy 'superpower' status as a major hydroelectric exporter, and the two transnational connective railroad projects (both unipolar and multipolar) that are planned to run through its territory, Laos objectively has quite a lot of potential to become a stable and prosperous state in the geographic center of mainland ASEAN.

China:

China's overall interests in Laos were already discussed, and they deal primarily with the completion of the ASEAN Silk Road and the creation of a multipolar corridor to the Indian Ocean. Laos was chosen as the premier transit state over Myanmar and Vietnam because the former's unresolved civil war and pro-Western government make it unreliable (as has been learned through the experience of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor that will be described at a later time) and the latter's generally hostile attitude due to the South China Sea dispute makes it untrustworthy. Laos' role as a facilitative transit corridor to the Indian Ocean isn't the only interest that China has in the country, since Beijing knows that if it can reach a strong enough degree of strategic partnership with its neighbor, then it could be able to influence "the battery of Southeast Asia's" energy exports and indirectly increase its position over Thailand and Vietnam (with Hanoi being much more important to influence than Bangkok in the present framework). Furthermore, as with any Great Power, China has a natural interest in Laos' varied mineral wealth, which might explain some of the more direct and immediate economic benefits that it hopes to attain from the ASEAN Silk Road's construction through that country.

Vietnam:

Hanoi's primary objective is to restore its late-Cold War influence over its neighbor and reestablish as much of the former mono-dependency that Vientiane had on it. It's impossible to recreate the specific geopolitical and global conditions that isolated Laos and made it wholly dependent on Vietnam, but it's much more likely that Hanoi could capitalize on its groundswell of existing soft power influence, political goodwill, and physical investments to give China a 'run for its money' in Vietnam's 'backyard'. From the perspective of the Vietnamese leadership, such a strategy is a symmetrical mainland counter-response to what it perceives as China's "aggression" in the South China Sea, so it has every intent to carry through on this plan out of its self-understood national security priorities. The East-West Economic Corridor that was described earlier is the expected means through which Vietnam will launch its forthcoming influence offensive, and despite there being barely any dependable physical infrastructure connecting the northern and more populated capital region of Vientiane and its surroundings to the country's rural southeast rail-transiting extremity, the Mekong River can be used as a riparian ['highway'](#) of sorts to link the two regions.

Along the same lines of Vietnam's desire to increase its sway over its neighbor via economic means, it's entirely predictable that it will seek to market its forthcoming membership in the TPP in the most favorable light possible so as to lure Laos even deeper into its orbit. If Vietnam is successful in its plans to have the East-West Economic Corridor (aided and abetted by the connective access that it has to the Mekong River and its upstream locations) become the prime access point for Laos' international trade, then it will by extent make the land-locked country totally dependent on a TPP-member state, thus indirectly putting it under the US' grand strategic control. This disproportionate and strategically vulnerable arrangement would make Laos much more pliable to economic blackmail and probably lead to its eventual incorporation into the unipolar-dominated trans-Pacific framework. By these means, the US would then be able to extend its institutional hegemony into the heart of mainland ASEAN and acquire control over China's ASEAN Silk Road and all the trade that passes along it, that is, if the project is even still being built by that point and hadn't been suspended or altogether scrapped.

Thailand:

Like it was explained earlier, Thailand has deep civilizational links with Laos which prompt a mutual desire for enhanced relations, with the four Friendship Bridges (and the [two more proposed ones](#)) bearing strong testimony to this natural intent. The present Bangkok government is multipolar and aligned with China, and while not "anti-American" by any measureable standards, its antipathy to the former American-supported authorities combines with the latter two policies in making Thailand a prime target for Washington's forthcoming regime change efforts.

This will be discussed later in the research when directly addressing the Hybrid War vulnerabilities of Thailand, but what's relevant to mention at this point is that the reimposition of a pro-American government in Bangkok could lead either to the suspension or cancellation of the ASEAN Silk Road, or perhaps even to its use as an instrument of blackmail against China, similar to how the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor stands to be exploited by the Suu Kyi government. There's also the possibility that Thailand's new authorities could enact negative pressure on their Laotian counterparts in pressuring them to stop their segment of the project. Another thing that they could do is host anti-government militant camps (probably focused on the Hmong but theoretically including any number of the country's ethnic minority groups) and return to being the center of anti-Laos destabilization that it once was during the US' War on Indochina and the "Secret War".

To return back to the cases of strategic blackmail that were mentioned as occurring in present-day Myanmar and a future pro-American Thailand, if both of these scenarios come to pass and remain as geopolitical constants, then China's strategic goal in forging mainland trade routes that evade the US' unipolar maritime influence (such as is being centralized in the South China Sea and already exists in the Strait of Malacca) would be totally nullified, leaving Beijing indefinitely dependent on Washington's "good will" and reinforcing Chinese decision makers' fears of American CCC encirclement. The mainland Eurasian Silk Roads would still be formidable spokes in China's supercontinental economic vision, but without reliable non-unipolar-controlled access to the sea (aside from the prospective Gwadar project along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which itself has its own fair share of challenges in becoming operational), China could potentially be cut off from the East African economies that it pressingly needs to interact with in order to sustain its stable growth.

With all of the above being considered, Thailand reveals itself as occupying a premier geopolitical position in this entire arrangement, which is why it was originally forecast back in the beginning of the book as being the most regionally impactful of all the prospective ASEAN Hybrid War scenarios. This will of course be explored more comprehensively later on, but maintaining the focus on Laos for the moment, it should be understood by the reader that Thailand is the single-most important regional state actor in effecting potentially negative influence on Vientiane, and that it can do so on a state-to-state basis or by supporting rebel groups. Both scenarios represent the fulfillment of the US' envisioned Lead From Behind role for Thailand, but so long as the present government or its successors retain their

country's new geopolitical trajectory and synergetic strategic partnership with China, then the unipolar plans will amount to naught and the multipolar ASEAN Silk Road could still be completed and maintain its original purpose.

Hatching The Hybrid War

The last part of the research looks at the myriad of Hybrid War scenarios that could predictably break out inside of Laos. The country is deeply afflicted with both Color Revolution and Unconventional Warfare threats, and the only factor holding everything together and maintaining stability is the military, which itself might even end up pulling a coup under certain conditions. Although it doesn't seem at all probable at this time, a major situational disruptor would be if Vietnam is invited by the Laotian government to assist in putting down a menacing and potentially transnational Hmong rebellion, as that would eventually lead to Hanoi gaining direct military control over Beijing's ASEAN Silk Road, provided of course that China doesn't proactively deploy any conventional or private military forces to protect it.

Color Revolutions:

There are four separate Color Revolution variables that could predictably intertwine with one another to produce the type of socio-political unrest needed to destabilize the state:

Student Organizations

This factor is by no means unique to Laos, although the country did have its own unique student-organized "uprising" attempt when the "Lao Students Movement For Democracy" tried to unsuccessfully overthrow the government. The US government-financed information organ "Radio Free Asia" [quoted](#) a participant from the failed 1999 Color Revolution who said the following:

"Our plan was to start a protest in front of 'Ho Kham,' the presidential palace," he said. "We chose that day, October 26, 1999, because it was the end of the Buddhist lent and the day that the annual traditional boat race along the Mekong River was held. We wanted to hold the protest banner up and use the loudspeaker to announce that we were protesting for democracy, and then wanted to march along the grand avenue toward the victory monument. We anticipated that every point we marched past, there would be a group of students who would join us."

As can be gathered from above, the regime change organizers assumed that not only would they succeed in drawing naïve students into their marauding mob, but they specifically planned their operation to begin right after the Buddhist lent so as to lure more religiously minded individuals into their movement.

It'll be discussed soon after how the Buddhist factor could be exploited to become a major element of destabilization in Laos (as well as in Thailand and Myanmar, which will be discussed separately at the appropriate time), but for now, it's relevant to make the reader aware that a [successive "student"-organized protest](#) sought to succeed where its predecessors failed and staged a repeat scenario one decade later in 2009. This one was also neutralized before it could enact any significant destabilization, although it did attract the coordinated attention of various "human rights" "NGOs" (likely informed in advance about the anti-government provocation) who then tried to [spin](#) its failure into a public relations spectacle designed to damage the reputation of the Laotian government.

It will be an oft-repeated trope when discussing Laos' Hybrid War scenarios, but because of the country's opacity, it's very challenging to assess the likelihood of another "student"-organized Color Revolution attempt being made, but judging by the progressive 'openness' that has occurred in Laotian society over the years (principally through educated- and foreign-based-compatriots' access to the internet, social media, and pro-Western information portals and 'activists'), it's not at all improbable

that a forthcoming push is being planned right now and could be combined with some of the other variables that will be discussed in order to achieve maximum anti-government effectiveness.

Buddhists

[According](#) to the Pew Research Center, 66% of Laos' population professed Buddhism in 2010, making it the single-most popular belief in the country and ahead of the 30% of people who follow folk religions. Laotian historical and cultural identity (even amongst almost all of the many ethnic groups in the country, which itself will be addressed later on) is deeply connected with the Theravada Buddhist faith, and herein lies a major factor of convergence that it shares with neighboring Thailand and Myanmar.

The research has yet to elaborate on Myanmar's hyper-nationalist Buddhist organizations such as the Ma Ba Tha, but to bring the reader up to relevant speed, this group and others like it are identity extremists that exploitatively fuse religious sentiment with ultra-nationalist ideals and are easily guided into committing Color Revolution violence. The same template that was applied in violently stoking up hyper-nationalist Buddhist violence in Myanmar against the Muslim "Rohingya" of Rakhine State could foreseeably be used the same way in misleading Buddhist Laotians into carrying out attacks against the areligious Chinese workers, businessmen, and immigrants that will predictably move into Laos during and after the construction of the ASEAN Silk Road.

The exploitation of hyper-nationalist Buddhist violence is actually a transnational threat that afflicts all three of the Hybrid War-forecasted countries of Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar, and this point will be emphasized near the end of the ASEAN research. For now, however, it's useful for the reader to simply keep in mind that Buddhism has a magnetic pull in gathering large amounts of people in each of these countries and creating the critical mass of 'human shields' that Color Revolution provocateurs need to hide behind in order to most effectively carry out their planned destabilizations.

Laos has a much smaller population than either of the other two aforementioned states, meaning that a radical Buddhist-organized anti-government "protest" of a few thousand followers which would otherwise be a small-scale event in terms of the regional perspective could disproportionately impact on the centrally positioned country's stability, especially if even a handful of these individuals attack the authorities or try unleashing an anti-Chinese pogrom. The media-manipulated and out-of-contextualized image of communist security services physically responding to "peaceful Buddhist protesters" could easily be used as 'misinformation kerosene' to fan the flames of regime change sentiment inside Laos and abroad, and could also be proffered as the "proof" needed to enact unilateral sanctions against the government.

Labor Activists

The trend throughout all of Indochina is that the nascent labor movement could function as a front for certain Color Revolution elements to mobilize the masses, inflict damage on strategic industries, and destabilize the state. To reiterate what has previously been written, labor unions in and of themselves are not vehicles for regime change plots and inherently nefarious organizations, but they can be systemically disruptive in countries unaccustomed to their presence and activism, even more so in the event that they're commandeered for externally directed political aims. Laos is no exception to this subregional paradigmatic threat, although it has yet to experience a large-scale labor disturbance.

That might change in the future, however, since the government [announced](#) in 2013 that it needs nearly 100,000 more foreign workers in order to help sustain the economy's rapid growth rates. Many Lao are not capable of filling the highly skilled sought-after positions that some foreign firms are hiring for, which is why the government has a specific law stipulating that "any company operating in Laos may employ unskilled foreign laborers to fill up to 10 percent of its workforce" and that "another 20 percent may be foreign technical specialists, but at least 70 percent of its total workforce must be local hires." The same "Radio Free Asia" source previously cited above wrote that "companies may receive special

permission to hire more foreigners, and many of them do, while others bring in more workers illegally”, mentioning in the next sentence that “at the same time, thousands of Lao laborers flock across the border to work in Thailand.”

What’s discernably developing in Laos is a two-tiered labor system whereby foreign workers (the majority of which will probably be Chinese in the near future, if they aren’t already) from foreign firms have the likely potential to occupy the best-paying and most prestigious positions in many of the country’s growing sectors whereas local workers are relegated to working “grunt positions” for lower wages. The problem is obviously more complex than it superficially appears, but to the average citizen that’s experiencing this type of divide, especially through the prism of their communist education, it can be a source of personal frustration and make them likely candidates for joining an underground labor union or a rare labor protest. Remember, this isn’t necessarily a bad action, but if the labor union and/or its affiliated protest organizers have been co-opted by a regime change group, then this means that they can easily exploit the well-intentioned individuals who take part in their movement.

Furthermore, locals that are displeased about the situation concerning foreign workers in their country are susceptible to the religious-nationalist rhetoric that might be espoused by a forthcoming Myanmar-modeled Buddhist “protest” organization. It also doesn’t help that a Vientiane-based Chinese potash company [withheld some of the locals’ salaries](#) early last year, thus sparking a very brief and exceptionally rare protest. The government doesn’t acknowledge that the incident occurred, but considering some of the management errors that Chinese companies have made abroad in the past, it wouldn’t be entirely surprising if it did in fact happen. Should there be any repeats of the scenario where a Chinese-owned company is mistreating its local Lao workers, possibly punctuated by the visibly better situation that foreign (Chinese) workers probably enjoy, then it’s conceivable that the (underground) labor rights movement that might organize around the issue could quickly take on an ultra-nationalist and anti-Chinese character, thus generating plenty of hostile social capital that could thenceforth be geared towards regime change ends.

Environmental NGOs

The last group of actors that could realistically involve themselves in a future Color Revolution in Laos are environmental NGOs and their local followers. To be clear, many of these groups are not “non-governmental” but are “government-organized NGOs” or GONGOs, and the risk is that these political GONGOs are masquerading under the guise of being environmental NGOs in order to more freely pursue their strategic aims. Laos has recently caught on to this gimmick and has thus emulated Russia in [carrying out scrupulous NGO legislation](#) designed to pinpoint and sanction transgressive organizations, but despite this, some analytical commentary still needs to be said about this threat.

The environmental NGOs galvanize around the two main issues of [hydroelectric dams](#) and [factory pollution](#), both of which together have the potential to involve most of the country’s population. Traditional NGO canvassing, organizational, and protest activities inside of urban centers are already well known, although the final portion of this “non-state” triad is noticeably missing from Laos. What’s less recognized, however, is that the aforementioned environmental NGOs are also operational in the rural and identity-rich countryside due to the specific nature of their work (especially in the case of those that are against the hydroelectric dams).

Most outsiders have barely any substantiated knowledge about the ethnic, tribal, and regional relations that exist outside of Vientiane and a few of the other larger cities in the country, but the NGOs are in a prime position to conduct valuable field research under the cover of their “social-environmental” work. In a perfect world, there wouldn’t be any problem with this, but Western intelligence agencies could effortlessly exploit the “plausible” cover and access that “environmental NGOs” have in interacting with the inhabitants of the Laotian hinterland, thereby allowing them to carry out field reconnaissance, mapping, general intelligence gathering, cash payouts, “resistance” organizing, and the spreading of anti-government information messages (whether in print or just orally).

Looked at from this strategic perspective, the rurally active “NGOs” in the country are perhaps the greatest Hybrid War threat that Laos actually has because of the access that they have to the country’s ethnic minority population and the potential that they could exploit the ‘plausible’ cover of their professions to organize Unconventional Warfare fighters. They’re the connective bridge that would tactically link the rural and urban elements of any forthcoming Hybrid War scenario in Laos, as they have the realistic capability of organizing varying degrees of destabilization in each respective area of the country.

In the cities, all that they have to do is link up with the other Color Revolution elements and connect their established on-the-ground networks into a larger politically oriented front organization at a prearranged point in time, and in the countryside, they could easily agitate the rural population to engage in aggressive and violent “protests” against the foreign-owned “polluters” (whether in fact or in myth) and the hydroelectric dams. If synchronized to the right degree and preplanned in the proper fashion, then the simultaneous launching of an urban Color Revolution and a rural Unconventional War would lead to an utterly devastating Hybrid War scenario that could quickly cripple the country and throw Laos’ entire future into limbo.

Unconventional Wars:

Laos’ heightened susceptibility to Hybrid War stems from the ethno-regional differences of its population, which theoretically could turn into a cauldron of conflict under certain manufactured conditions. Out of all the groups in the country, however, it’s most foreseeable that the Hmong minority would take the forefront in any forthcoming anti-government insurgency due to the historical relationship that they’ve enjoyed with the CIA and the bastion of support that they have among their diaspora community in the US. Alongside these identity-based factors of potential destabilization, random riffraff such as drug gangs and mercenaries could turn an already complicated situation more complex and help fuel the cycle of violence that the US would need to provoke in order to achieve its broader anti-Chinese mission in Laos.

Identity Warfare

As it stands, the Asian Development Bank [cites](#) institutional sources in the Laotian government as stating that there are between 47-49 recognized ethnic categories and 149-160 subgroups. Ethnologue, a prestigious online linguistic publication, [lists](#) the country as having 85 different languages. Instead of demarcating each separate ethno-linguistic group’s territory, the government uses a novel “terraced” approach in broadly categorizing the population as belonging to one of three geographic regions – lowland, midland, or upland. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development’s [2012 report](#), 68% of the population lives in the lowland areas near the Mekong River, 22% are in the rural and southern midland regions, and the remaining 10% are in the northern mountainous territories (represented most prominently by the Hmong).

It’s very plausible that most of these groups other than the Hmong are not aware of their particular ethno-linguistic “separateness” to the majority lowland-dwelling Lao in the sense of wanting to agitate against them, but that doesn’t imply that they can’t be externally pushed into accepting such a geopolitically convenient ‘conclusion’. Identity conflict between these disparate communities might be entirely foreign to them and have to be ‘taught’ and ‘provoked’, ergo the tactical usefulness of “environmental NGOs” in going into the countryside and subtly canvassing such ideas to the local villagers. The intent might be something as short-sighted and simple as getting them to attack the authorities or a neighboring community and provoking a destabilizing bloodbath, or more foresighted and complex such as setting the foundations for an easily manipulatable post-conflict “ethno-linguistic federalism” such as what’s already occurred in South Sudan, seems almost imminent in Nepal, and might be on the horizon in Myanmar quite shortly.

Regardless of how it starts and for what reasons it occurs, the guided self-awareness that some of Laos' disparate communities achieve and the outbreak of violence between them would signify an existential threat to the People's Democratic Republic and throw its entire internal arrangement into jeopardy. Until now, the only identity conflict that persisted after 1975 has been focused on the Hmong and the low-scale violence that some reclusive armed groups have inflicted, but by and large, the communist ideology, the "terraced" ethno-regional internal categorizations, and the military have kept the peace for over the past four decades. All of the structural successes that the government has thus far achieved could rapidly unravel if a coordinated identity "uprising" and/or significant scale of communal violence occurs, as that would undermine the very existence of the centralized mono-identity ("Lao") state and could completely disorient the authorities if they're caught off guard by this.

It goes without saying that the theorized identity conflict would need to have at least some element of external material support to be sustainable (among other types of assistance), but if the "Secret War" is any historical indication, then the CIA is more than capable of providing this. Where matters get tricky, however, is that the amount of support that might be necessary would be very difficult to provide under the framework of current regional geopolitics, seeing as how the US doesn't have a formalized presence in any country directly bordering Laos like it did during the War on Indochina era in Thailand and "South Vietnam". It could still smuggle weapons and other required supplies into the country, but just not on the scale that might be needed in order to safeguard against certain military-tactical contingencies. Without a regime change in Thailand or Cambodia, or a constellation of scattered covert bases in the former's northeastern Isan region, the US would have to depend on transnational drug gangs in outfitting their regime change proxies in Laos. The research will return to this soon enough, but for now, it's timely to talk about the Hmong factor in any possible Unconventional War.

Hmong

The US' intelligence and military apparatuses cultivated very strong relations with the Hmong during the War on Indochina, using them as a "behind-the-lines" anti-communist vanguard for carrying out missions in areas that American troops could not legally enter, such as in Laos and (North) Vietnam. This transnational ethnic group resides mostly in the mountainous northern areas of both of those countries and numbers around slightly less than half a million in Laos and a little over one million in Vietnam. After the CIA stopped its "Secret War" in 1975 and withdrew from Laos, it didn't want to evacuate all of its Hmong collaborators and instead opted to leave a large number of them inside the country to face their fate.

While seen at the time as an abandonment of close and loyal allies (which technically speaking, it definitely was), there may have been strategic motivations behind this unethical decision, namely to maintain a disruptive, armed, and identity-separate force inside the country that would fight to the death for their survival. While not directly under the command of the CIA anymore, they'd independently serve its strategic aims solely through their existence and the occasional disruption that they could produce inside the country. It's implausible that the Hmong fighters could have [lasted for over four decades](#) without receiving some sort of supply refreshments, however infrequent, no matter if they were even just outdated ammunition. Considering this, they were probably resupplied by the drug gangs that operate in the "Golden Triangle", with the culpability likely resting on one or some of the myriad rebel groups that operate out of Myanmar.

The armed Hmong stragglers never posed a serious enough threat to Laos to warrant a concentrated campaign aimed at their eradication, and in hindsight this might one day prove to have been a dangerous oversight. The Laotian military could have realistically engaged in a joint coordinated campaign with their Vietnamese Cold War counterparts to stamp out this threat once and for all, but for whatever reason, this either didn't occur or wasn't carried out comprehensively enough. The end of the Cold War and the full restoration of ties with the US in 1992 might have lulled the Laotian establishment into a false sense of ease, whereby they may have been led to believe that this ethnic variable would never again be used to destabilize their country. For the most part, that seemed to be the case, and the

Hmong issue apparently receded into the background of bilateral relations and looked to be getting ready for permanent dormancy.

That suddenly changed in 2007 when the Hmong threat unexpectedly catapulted to the forefront of global headlines after former rebel leader and CIA asset Vang Pao and his collaborators were arrested in the US for conspiring to illegally obtain automatic and heavy weaponry in order to overthrow the Laotian government. He was eventually acquitted of all charges, but the case raised serious questions about the motivations of competing American security agencies and whether the US still aspired to use the Hmong to destabilize Laos. It's an unconfirmed possibility that part of the funding for this operation might have come from some of the hundreds of thousands of Hmong immigrants in the US and their wide array of charities and NGOs, which if ever proven to be true, would then make these ethnic activist organizations and their patrons the strategic equivalent of the "Islamic charity" terrorist-funding fronts that have proliferated the Western world.

About the arrest itself, the author proposes the believable explanation that the CIA was assisting Vang Pao for this forthcoming power grab but had kept their plans so secretly compartmentalized that other American security agencies such as the Bureau for Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms were totally unaware of this plot. They somehow caught wind of the conspirator's plans to illegally procure the large amount of firearms and explosives required for their operation and went public with their arrests in order to show off their investigative competency at foiling such a movie-like scheme. Unbeknownst to them, the entire crime that they had exposed was orchestrated by the CIA, which obviously didn't inform any other agencies of its activities owing to their highly classified and internationally sensitive nature. To evoke a clichéd metaphor, "the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing". Embarrassed, yet with the cat publicly out of the bag, the US was forced to go through the lengthy motions of the "justice system" in order to reach an internationally recognized and 'uncontroversial' prearranged acquittal.

Whether it was the case that Vang Pao's coup plot was a secret CIA mission or a "privately organized" endeavor, the military-mercenary network that was involved in the scheme largely remained intact, along with the regime change intent of using Hmong fighters to overthrow the Laotian government. The US government's acquittal of Pao and his conspirators gave off the obvious impression that their actions were legally accepted and that the authorities are willing to turn a convenient blind eye to any forthcoming activities (as well as guarantee that there are no more clumsy and embarrassing blunders between its security services).

In what doesn't look at all to be a coincidence, an expert from Council on Foreign Relations, in an article [republished](#) by The Diplomat, links the outbreak of "bandit" violence in late 2015 and the bombing deaths of the two Chinese citizens at the end of January to what he believes to be Hmong insurgents, which most likely is the case. After all, the attacks took place in Xaysomboun Province, which is where the scattered bands of armed Hmong still operate and had traditionally been based during the CIA's "Secret War". It's predictable that this group is connected with Vang Pao's coup conspiracy and is currently receiving American support (whether directly provided by the CIA, funneled through Hmong "charities" and "NGOs", and/or indirectly received via the region's drug gangs)

), with the obvious implication being that violence will be ramped up if Vientiane doesn't comply with the US' CCC dictates. Of note, any large-scale outbreak of Hmong-led warfare could also have immediate consequences for Vietnam, so Washington might either be planning to apply a more urgent lever of pressure against its tacit "ally" or setting up the Machiavellian front for a Vietnamese intervention that would be aimed at establishing control over the ASEAN Silk Road (which will be described at the very end of the Laotian research).

Random Riffraff

The last Unconventional Warfare variables that could potentially come into play in Laos are those related to drug gangs and mercenaries, which are sometimes one and the same entity. Laos is part of the “Golden Triangle” of opium trafficking in Southeast Asia and directly abuts the rebel-controlled areas of Myanmar, thus putting it at the forefront of drug- and weapons-smuggling activity. The military ostensibly keeps everything under control, but in a country as economically destitute as Laos, corruption is [thought to be rife](#), which in turn means that the establishment authorities cannot be fully depended on to fight back against these scourges and might even be partaking in these activities to varying extents out of profitable self-interest. Differing degrees of institutional complicity in the drug and weapons trade complicate any political decision that might be imposed from above in cracking down on these enterprises and could even engender some mild pushback depending on the seniority of the individuals involved in these rackets and how much they have to lose from the oncoming crackdown.

Even taking aside the connection that members of the military and government probably have with criminal organizations, these destabilizing non-state actors undoubtedly have some element of local civilian support within Laos that facilitates their activities. Collaborating locals predictably have more loyalty to the non-state actors that more thoroughly provide for their physical means than the state-affiliated ones that don't, thereby presenting yet another potential opportunity for the “environmental NGOs” to seize in producing more anti-government resistance, especially if the government carries through with a crackdown on the illegal organizations that consequently affects the livelihood on which certain communities have come to depend. Expanding on this insight, such groups, if coopted by a foreign intelligence service or directly operating as a front on their behalf, could serve as the necessary vehicle for transporting the weapons and other types of material support that the “environmental NGOs” promise their rural anti-government partners. In this projected hierarchy, the NGO employees are the managing overseers whereas the random drug and weapon ruffians are the on-the-ground conduits for carrying out the deals that their more publicly presentable counterparts agree to, with both occupying an equally important role in organizing the planned Hybrid War.

Military Coup:

The last destabilization possibility facing Laos is a military coup against the government instigated by the domestic pressures related to the aforementioned Hybrid War scenarios. The military is the most important institution in Laos and is the whole reason why the state is able to continue functioning in its present format. There's no available information about its loyalty, but considering the full-spectrum ‘toolkit’ that the US often employs in its regime change operations, it's foreseeable that this institution will at some point be approached or influenced to accede to Washington's anti-government vision. In such an eventuality, military support for the initiative could take either an active or passive form.

Concerning the first, the military could “revolt” against the government and throw its weight behind the “protesters” and rebels (the Color Revolution and Unconventional Warfare participants, respectively), helping them to make a concerted move at overthrowing the authorities and most likely getting rid of the communist party while they're at it. In this scenario, it wouldn't necessarily be all of the military that takes part, but rather just the units that are tied with top-ranking and co-opted influential officials. These traitors could possibly be linked with the lucrative drug trade or the speculative one in arming Myanmar's rebels, and the US could either buy off their loyalty with cash (possibly facilitated using the “environmental NGOs”) or promise them power in the post-conflict governing formation.

The second way in which the military could assist the regime change movement is more passive. Instead of actively going out and assisting in the government's overthrow, strategic units affiliated with the aforementioned category of compromised military leaders could simply refuse to follow the authorities' orders to disperse nascent Color Revolution “protests” or responding to unequivocal terrorist and insurgent activity in the urban and rural areas. They could also just step aside whenever these movements make a march on the capital and start to loot the buildings where governing organs and authorities are located. Other than receiving a relatively handsome payoff for their betrayal, the military leaders involved in this described scenario might want to foster a positive and “neutral” image of their

institution so that it doesn't lose any power in the forthcoming national reformatting, which would likely do away with the communist party and probably lead to some form of identity federalism.

DISRUPTOR – Vietnamese Military Intervention:

The final situational factor to be discussed when analyzing Laos' Hybrid War vulnerabilities is the potential for a Vietnamese anti-Hmong military intervention. Hanoi is suspected of having discreetly maintained a limited troop presence in Laos following its 1989 internationally publicized withdrawal. If such a presence exists, then it's definitely per a secret understanding with Vientiane but not large enough to the extent that it can easily and convincingly be exposed by Western businessmen and "environmental NGO" workers active in the country. Per the scenario that will be described, Laos-based Hmong insurgents become strong enough that they pose a real danger for Vietnam, particularly in the sense that their weapons and fighters might spill over the border and lead to a similar outbreak of identity violence in the northern Hmong-populated regions. This in turn could also encourage other ethnic minorities such as the Khmer Krom and Degar to stage similar uprisings, especially if they get their hands on the available weaponry streaming in from Laos. If some labor representatives get armed and decide to organize a "workers' rights" disturbance, then the prospective provocation could set the stage for a Color Revolution outbreak inside the country.

It's for these described reasons why a CIA-supported Hmong uprising in Laos poses such a dire threat to Vietnam's stability, and accordingly, could create the motivational conditions where Hanoi decides to stage a cross-border intervention to squash the problem once and for all. More likely than not, they'd be invited to do so by their allied Laotian counterparts, but if they decided to act unilaterally, then it would be entirely on the pretenses of undermining their neighbor and possibly carrying out a regime change against what by then could be assumed to be a hostile state. Hanoi might be upset by Vientiane's inefficiency in dealing with the insurgents and be perturbed by its refusal to ask for "allied" assistance, which in Vietnam's view would have prevented the crisis from proportionately growing to the point where it presents a transnational danger. However it happens, whether by invite or invasion and whether as an American-inspired "[Reverse Brzezinski](#)" trap or a coordinated Washington-Hanoi "Lead From Behind" power play, the Vietnamese military would enter Laos with the intent of carrying out a few primary objectives that their speculated in-country force is not capable of achieving.

Vietnam would have forecast that such a move would make the global headlines, and it would do its utmost best to send a forceful "deterrent" message to China. In practice, this would see the Vietnamese military carrying out coordinated joint operational attacks interweaving conventional military troops, special forces, helicopter raids, and bombing runs. The Western international community would probably be completely against this, even if Vietnam was formally invited into the country by the Laotian government, but Hanoi is such an indispensable partner to the TPP and the US' Pacific unipolar ambitions that there would probably be no tangible consequences (unless the US had purposefully tempted Vietnam into Laos as a form of asymmetrical punishment for its unlikely demur in intensifying its CCC commitment). Once inside its neighbor's territory, Vietnam would aspire to gain control even more control over the operational area than the Laotian military has and then use its predominant position as a springboard for either forcibly or 'diplomatically' advancing its troops into the area of the ASEAN Silk Road. The ultimate goal that Hanoi would be moving towards in any prospective military intervention in Laos and which would make even the most unexpected circumstantial shortcomings worth it would be to establish direct control over China's ASEAN Silk Road and absolutely neutralize the multipolar function of this transregional access route.

On the other hand, there are a couple very negative contingencies that could occur which neither Vietnam nor its assumed American ally might anticipate or be prepared to deal with. For starters, China could call upon its [2015 defense policy white paper](#) in justifying the dispatch of military forces abroad to Laos in securing its ultra-strategic ASEAN Silk Road asset. In this case, Beijing would try to do everything it can to be formally invited to do so by Vientiane, but if what might then be a moderately pro-unipolar government (albeit naive in a Gaddafi-esque way) which doesn't allow such a force deployment, then

Beijing might unilaterally find other plausible justifications for this decision, foreseeably on national security grounds or the defense of railroad-working Chinese nationals from insurgent attack. A counter or preemptive intervention on China's behalf would prevent Vietnam from acquiring control over the ASEAN Silk Road and would essentially split Laos into two separate military zones, with Vietnam likely gaining hold of the entire northeast and southern portions of the country. Another thing that could happen, either together with this particular scenario or separate from it, could be an unanticipated ethnic-unifying nationalist uprising against the Vietnamese (modelled off of the Cambodian experience from 1978-1989 except without the US and Thai military support) and possibly even against the authorities that may have invited them. Finally, the last forecasted possibility that might happen is that the military stages a pro-sovereignty coup against the pro-Hanoi government that invited Vietnam into the country and helps to safeguard the country's sovereignty and China's strategic assets from unipolar seizure.

PART IX: Hybrid War Is The Trick To Containing China

Can Thailand Tackle Its Hybrid War Threats?

Thailand is the most crucial country in mainland ASEAN's current geopolitical framework, bringing together the infrastructural interests of China, India, and Japan, and also being a sizzling political battleground between the US and China. It has a strong and stable [economy](#) (the largest in ASEAN behind Indonesia), and its centrally positioned population of nearly 70 million people outnumbers those in neighboring Laos, Cambodia, and the eastern region of Myanmar. With centuries of rich history behind it, Thailand is also one of the region's civilizational leaders, but unlike contemporary Laos and Cambodia, it actually has the means with which to project its soft power and promote its political interests abroad. Ironically, however, just as much as the idea of civilization is a potentially unifying element for Thai society, it could also lead to its ultimate unravelling if this three-pronged concept is undermined in any significant way. Should naturally occurring, provoked, and/or manufactured factors negatively impact on the monarchy, military, and/or the idea of Central Thai-led "[Thaification](#)", then Thailand could easily slide into a period of internal pandemonium that might reverse its leading regional status, subvert some or all of its planned transnational integrational projects, and might even lead to its partial territorial disintegration.

The geopolitical significance of Thailand cannot be overstated. The country's dual maritime and mainland identities allow it to exert influence in either direction, and by tangential extent, so too can its premier allies. For decades, the US had used Thailand as a springboard for promoting its unipolar interests deeper into the heart of mainland ASEAN, but with Prime Minister Prayun Chan-o-cha's decisive [pivot towards China](#), Beijing can now reversely utilize its strategic advances in the country in order to acquire unrestricted access to the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, China isn't the only country that has identified Thailand's geopolitical potential, since both India and Japan are partnering with it in order to construct their own transnational connective infrastructure projects, the [ASEAN Highway](#) and the [East-West Corridor](#), respectively. In the case of the latter two, their combined projects create the possibility of linking both of the Indochinese Peninsula's coasts, which would of course complicate China's multilateral economic diplomacy with the subregion via the [ASEAN Silk Road](#). Finally, Thailand is a distinct civilizational center in mainland Southeast Asia that has previously been a force of strength and stability, and the undermining of its unifying identity of Thaification and its structural support mechanisms of the military and monarchy, no matter in which manner this may be, could create a burst of chaotic energy that collapses Thailand's multipolar bridgehead potential and converts it into a geopolitical sinkhole.

The book's research on Thailand begins by commencing a speedy overview of the country's history, regrettably glossing over some of the finer elements of its past in favor of offering a concise synopsis most pertinent to the topic at hand. The work then identifies Thailand's leading historical themes and explains their relevancy to the present. The final part of the study elaborates on the three interlaced Hybrid War threats afflicting Thailand and games out various scenarios for how they could unfold.

Building "The Land Of Smiles"

Regional Engagement And Territorial Retreat:

The modern-day territory of Thailand has historically played a very influential role in regional affairs, either as an important component of other empires (the Khmer Empire, Lan Xang, and the Burmese Toungoo and Konbaung Dynasties) or a center of power in its own right (the Rattanakosin Kingdom). Whether it was on the receiving or promoting end of regional influence, its centrally positioned location made it indispensable in facilitating engagement between the various powers and peoples of mainland Southeast Asia, and this geopolitical constant has remained in force up until the present. Furthermore, Thailand's role was heightened by the "[mandala](#)" [model of political relations](#) that prevailed prior to the region's colonial period, which saw civilizational cores radiating their influence and authority,

sometimes even with geographically overlapping results with neighboring rivals. The interests of Burma (as scholars casually refer to what is now known as Myanmar during that time), Lan Xang, and the Khmer Empire thus intersected over contemporary Thai territory and the “mandala” of Ayutthaya (located north of Bangkok), stimulating a unique centuries-long civilizational engagement between these diverse actors and underlining the hub role that Thailand has traditionally fulfilled.

To begin describing some general points of Thai history, the modern-day state’s progenitor was the [Ayutthaya Kingdom](#) that existed from 1351-1767, and just like the Rattanakosin Kingdom that would later succeed it in 1782 after a brief regency transition to the Thonburi Kingdom, it had its fair share of territorial ebbs and flows. Its full history is quite detailed, but as a cursory summary, it promoted its interests eastward at the expense of the Khmer Empire but was later ransacked and destroyed by the invading Burmese Toungoo and Konbaung Dynasties from the west. All told, there were 20 different [wars between Siam and Burma](#) throughout the 16th to 19th centuries, representing a staggeringly high incidence of conflict between these two neighbors. While the historical memory of this rivalry still partially remains in each country’s contemporary psyche, it’s obviously no longer as influential of a force as it once was, although it could possibly be revived by either side for domestic political purposes and/or provoked from abroad to achieve certain geostrategic ends.

The [Rattanakosin Dynasty](#) that rose from the ashes of the Ayutthaya and Thonburi Kingdoms succeeded in halting the Burmese blitzkrieg and generally stabilizing its western frontier. This allowed it to more forcefully expand eastwards and incorporate the lands of the weakened Lan Xang into its empire and begin making concentrated moves against the Khmer. By the early 1800s, however, Vietnam had completed its incorporation of the southern Champa Kingdom and the Khmers’ holdings along the Mekong Delta via its Nam tiến (“southern advance”), thus placing it into direct rivalry with Siam for control over the rest of Cambodia. The two expansionist states of Siam and Vietnam inevitably ended up clashing over the Cambodian lands that were caught between them, bringing the two to war in [1831-1834](#) and [1841-1845](#). France began its imperial occupation of Indochina shortly thereafter through the [1858 invasion of Cochinchina](#) (the area around contemporary Vietnam’s Mekong Delta) and its [1863 “protectorate” over Cambodia](#), the latter of which pushed back against Siam’s interests and put the French military directly along its southeastern border.

French imperial expansionism had its next major spurt during the [1893 Franco-Siamese War](#) when Paris was successfully able to wrest control over most of Laos. Right around this time the UK also took the initiative in bringing the remaining Shan States in then-Burma under its control, thus cutting off what had earlier been Siam’s northern border with China. The French finalized their imperial frontier with Siam from 1904-1907, and right afterwards the British pressured Bangkok into acceding to the [1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty](#) that surrendered the latter’s control over some of its southern Malay-populated territories. The combined French and British moves from the past half century were interpreted as a massive humiliation for Siam, albeit ones that were seen as strategically necessary in order to retain the Kingdom’s formal independence. Both imperial powers envisioned Siam functioning as a neutral geopolitical buffer between them, and for the most part, it played this role quite well. However, the territorial losses that multiethnic Siam suffered during this time in what are now modern-day Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Malaysia would play into the nationalist hands of World War II leader [Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram \(Phibun\)](#) and inspire the country that he had renamed “Thailand” to side with fascist Japan.

Thaification, Phibun, And World War II:

Siam experienced a [swift military coup in 1933](#) that degraded the absolute power of the monarchy and led to quasi-democratic advancements. This event is notable because it was the first of many forthcoming significant times that the military would intervene in domestic political affairs, as has since regularly happened in the decades afterwards. In the years following the coup, the state began to accentuate its majority-Thai ethnic identity, particularly focusing on the Central Thais as the cultural core of this movement. At the time, a multitude of ethnic minorities still resided within Siam’s borders,

although they weren't as numerous or geographically concentrated as they previously were when the country controlled Laos and Cambodia, for example. Nonetheless, in the prevailing nationalist zeitgeist that was sweeping the world in the 1930s, Siam felt compelled to exercise its own version of these ideals, and the legacy of this initiative has continued into the present. It'll later be described how the Laotian-affiliated Thai nationals of Northeastern Thailand ("Isan") are ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and historically distinct from their Central Thai counterparts, but at this moment of time, it's enough for the reader to understand that there were strong enough ethno-regional disparities in Siam to somewhat warrant the authorities' belief that an identity-unifying program was necessary.

The concept of Central Thai nationalism was enthusiastically promulgated by Field Marshal Phibun after he ascended to power in 1938 and became the country's Prime Minister and Commander of the Siamese Army. One year later, vehemently believing in the idea of Thaification, he renamed the country to "Thailand" (understood as meaning "land of the ethnic Thais") and issued 12 socio-cultural decrees that have been referred to as the "[Cultural Mandates](#)". They dealt mostly with nationalism (i.e. renaming the country) and various behavioral actions (e.g. banning female toplessness, implementing a national dress code, suggesting optimal meal times and recreational activities, etc.), but what's most relevant to the current study is how some of them sought to erode ethno-regional divisions, thus indicating that this form of identity was not only embedded into the minds of certain peripheral inhabitants (northern Hill Tribes, northeastern Lao, eastern Khmer, southern Malays, and western Karen), but that it was visible enough to pose what Phibun had by then considered a threat to national unity. Of pertinence, Mandate One includes a statement stipulating that "The people and nationality are to be called 'Thai'"; Mandate Three says that citizens should "cease referring to Thai people inconsistently with the name of the nationality, or according to the preference of the group" and "use the name 'Thai' to refer to all Thai people, without subdividing them"; and Mandate Nine was specific wording that "Thai people must not consider place of birth, residence, or regional accent as a marker of division".

Phibun's nationalist ambitions extended beyond Thailand's borders and into the territories that his country had humiliatingly been forced to cede to the French and British during the late-Siamese period. The territorial expansionism of fascist Japan was therefore attractive to the Thai leader, and he moved to [ally his country](#) with the rising imperial power in the hopes that it would aid and abet his own international designs in the region. The two states [signed](#) the Treaty between Thailand and Japan Concerning the Continuance of Friendly Relations and the Mutual Respect of Each Other's Territorial Integrity in June 1940, and by the end of the year, an emboldened Thailand launched a war against France's Indochinese possessions in Laos and Cambodia. The resultant [Franco-Thai War](#) ended with a Japanese-mediated peace in May that granted Bangkok control over some of the Laotian and Cambodian territories that it had earlier lost to Paris. Later that year, however, Japan ended up invading Thailand on 8 December, 1941, in order to secure transit rights for its planned attack on British-controlled Burma. That same day, Tokyo also attacked Pearl Harbor, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Phibun quickly capitulated and soon thereafter formalized his alliance with Japan, which later ended up leading to his country receiving certain territorial "rewards". Specifically, Thailand reversed the losses that it had suffered in then-Burma's Shan States east of the Salween River and the Malay-dominated provinces that it had formerly administered before 1909. After the end of the war, however, Thailand was forced to relinquish its control over these areas once more, thus solidifying the present-day borders of mainland Southeast Asia.

The War On Indochina:

After World War II, the US [was insistent](#) that Thailand not be punished for its actions and should only have to return the territory that it earlier occupied due to Japan's diplomatic and military assistance. The French and the British were adamantly against such a lenient approach, but the US clearly enforced its will over its weakened allies in getting them to acquiesce to the slight 'slap on the wrist' that it envisioned. Washington's strategy was simple but very successful – it knew that if it could co-opt Thailand by offering it a post-war 'olive branch', that it could then become the country's implicit

'protector' in guaranteeing its sovereignty and security amidst the two vengeful empires that it was between and thereby establish its influence over the crucial mainland Southeast Asian state. The US had earlier granted independence to the Philippines but still commanded predominant influence over its affairs, but it needed a mainland component to complement its insular foothold in the region and diversify its geopolitical holdings, ergo the reasons for reaching out to Thailand.

Soon enough, the seeds of this policy ripened into geopolitical fruit when the US began involving itself in the War on Indochina, using its [network of air force bases in Thailand](#) to conduct bombing raids all throughout the region. Thailand was also facing a [mild communist insurgency](#) in its northeastern region, so its leaders felt the need to side even more closely with the US in order to receive its full support (which Washington happily provided in return for the basing rights). The country was undeniably at the forefront of the US' War on Indochina and continued to occupy a chief anti-communist position even after the formal American withdrawal from the subregion in [1975](#) and Thailand in [1976](#).

Thailand played host to insurgent Khmer Rouge units that were fighting against the Vietnamese units stationed in their country after the 1978-1979 war, coincidentally evoking shades of the conflict that both of them had over their neighboring in the 1830s and 1840s. The Vietnamese [launched border raids](#) against the [US](#)- and [Thai](#)-supported Khmer rebel forces, and Thailand and Laos entered into a brief border war from 1987-1988. Bangkok's position during this period was greatly increased through its [neutralization](#) of the northeastern communist insurgency in the early 1980s, which allowed it to secure its territory and more assuredly destabilize its Laotian and Cambodian neighbors without fear of consequential internal reprisals. All in all, it can be accurately surmised that Thailand consistently remained the US' most stalwart ally in mainland Southeast Asia throughout the entire Cold War, proving that Washington's post-World War II policy of punitive leniency was successful in achieving its tacit objective of strategically acquiring a forward operating position in the region.

The Student Factor:

One of the most important domestic political developments during the Cold War era was the rise of student advocacy groups during the 1970s. These were the vanguard of popular anti-military movements that wanted to return the country to civilian rule, although quite a few of the students envisioned that the future government should espouse socialist-like characteristics. A series of [student-organized mass demonstrations](#) took place in October 1973 that eventually led to the military stepping down from power, but the brief period of civilian rule was cut short after the [October 1976 student massacre](#) that placed a different group of generals into power. What's critical to point out in both of these monumental historical events is that the students played a key role in triggering the regime changes that ended up taking place, whether they were the kind that they anticipated (such as in 1973) or not (like in 1976).

The precedent of nationally significant student political activist movements is a socio-cultural factor that cannot be erased from the Thai psyche owing to the impact that the two regime change events in the 1970s had on the country. It can be said that student-driven movements have been somewhat of a tradition in Thailand ever since, a national ideal that is cherished yet controlled. Nowadays this type of anti-establishment resistance is once more returning to the forefront as Thaksin Shinawatra and his proxies seek new and creative methods to weaken the multipolar-oriented military government and return themselves to power.

The student movements of 1973 and 1976 didn't have the [Color Revolution works of Gene Sharp](#) to guide them, but in the early 21st century, their modern counterparts could predictably employ such measures as a means of maximizing their regime change efficiency, which in either case could evoke strong historical emotions among regular Thais. For example, some sympathetic segments of society would naturally view such a movement as following in the footsteps of 1973, while others might be fearful that it could end in a violent way like in 1976. If the military actually does crackdown just as it did 40 years ago, then this time it would likely receive intense Western criticism and might even be dubbed

'the new Myanmar', possibly with a similar sanctions regime imposed against it just like the ones that were enacted against its neighbor. If the US takes the lead in trying to "isolate" Thailand as a result of this, then it would only succeed in drawing the government closer into China's arms, just like it did with Myanmar after 1989.

Economic Boom And Bust:

Thailand's economy began to surge in the mid-1980s and exhibited the [world's fastest growth from 1985-1994](#), averaging 8.2% per year over that that period. The lightning-fast development that took place catapulted Thailand into Newly Industrialized Country status and placed it on the global investment map. However, such rapid growth also had its detriments, since it resulted in financial and sectoral bubbles that would inevitably be popped. Be that as it was, there was no guarantee that Thailand's economy absolutely had to tank, as is what ended up happening as a result of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

To remind the reader about what was written at the very beginning of the book's ASEAN research, that [regional economic crisis](#) was spurred by George Soros' speculative and vulture-like practices, which when combined with Thailand's existing structural deficiencies and bubble vulnerabilities, created an economic storm of catastrophic proportions. It should also be reminded at this time that the incident also served the dual goal of testing the degree to which a manufactured economic crisis can trigger regional anti-sovereignty processes, be it regime change like what later happened in Indonesia or capitulation to the IMF like Thailand ended up doing.

Thaksin's Thailand:

The economic difficulties of the immediate post-crisis years gave birth to the socio-political conditions that would be necessary for Thaksin Shinawatra's political career to take off. The multimillionaire businessman had a knack for populism and in presenting himself as a non-establishment figure, which garnered him exceptional support among the rural citizens of the country, especially those in the northeastern region of Isan. Aided by handouts and generous subsidies, his policy of "[Thaksinomics](#)" endeared him to a wide subsector of the previously apolitical masses, getting many of them involved in the political process for their first time and thereby irreversibly widening the country's electorate.

While he was busy generating his groundswell of support among the rural poor, Thaksin was also engaged in a lot of self-enriching corruption (which he was [later found guilty](#) of in 2008), but he hoped that his close ties to the US establishment would be enough to help him weather through any domestic crisis. In order to endear himself closer to Washington, he [contributed troops](#) to the War on Iraq in 2003 and was 'rewarded' later that year by having his country [designated](#) as a "major non-NATO ally", thus allowing it to purchase a different caliber of American military equipment that it had earlier not been able to. The announcement also symbolized the close nature of strategic ties between the two decades-long 'partners', which essentially has always been that of a patron-client relationship. Ingratiating himself even closer to Washington, Thaksin unilaterally pushed for a [free trade agreement](#) between Thailand and the US without consulting the country's legislature, an arrogant political move that eventually contributed to his 2006 ouster. Prior to his overthrow, he intensified military operations against the [Muslim Malay separatist movement in southern Thailand](#) that had recently been rejuvenated, some members of which had begun to resort to terrorist attacks and affiliate with Al Qaeda. The legacy of this dual-sided escalation has been that [150,000 troops](#) were deployed in the region as recently as 2014, and the Hybrid War vulnerabilities that this conflict entails will be discussed later on in the work.

Thaksin's direct dominance over the Thai political scene would soon come crashing down in 2006 after the military staged another coup. The political situation in the country had become markedly polarized in the year beforehand, with Thaksin's corruption having become a galvanizing force for the nascent opposition. His political opponents boycotted the [2005 elections](#) that he held three years before

schedule, and they were marred by widespread accusations of fraud. Thaksin wanted to centralize his power while he still had the support of the rural masses, predicting that his popular appeal might falter after the introduction of the US free trade agreement that he planned to implement (but was never able to successfully conclude). The country was thrown into political turmoil right after the vote was held, and the crisis continued until September 2006 when the military acted to restore order. Thaksin was abroad at the time in New York City and was charged with corruption, which he was found guilty of two years later, and his political party was dissolved. A new one was promptly formed in its place, and it capitalized off of the social capital their leader had cultivated during his premiership to [win the 2007 elections](#), which in turn set off a new round of political turmoil in the country.

Thailand became divided between [pro-Thaksin "Red Shirts" and anti-Thaksin "Yellow Shirts"](#), and street violence began to regularly break out between each competing camp. The Prime Minister was changed a few times within a couple year period until the 2011 election brought Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, to power. She was commonly perceived as being a political stand-in for her brother, and while this earned her the full support of the Red Shirts, it equally brought upon her the full consternation of the Yellow Shirts. The opposition reorganized and commenced a massive protest movement against her in 2013, and she responded by unleashing her Red Shirt hordes against them. Just like the destabilizing situation that her brother engineered before her, the military was forced to intervene to restore order in the face of the rapidly uncontrollable chaos that had broken out, and the coup authorities led by former Commander in Chief and current Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha are still running the country until new elections can be held.

A New Beginning?:

In a sense, the 2014 coup signaled a new beginning for Thailand in terms of its domestic and economic policies, but at the same time, the main underlying source of internal political destabilization remains. To briefly expand on the latter point, Thaksin's supporters, the Red Shirts, will stop at nothing to see their political hero return to power, even if they must once more put one of his political proxies into office first. The US is now supporting the Red Shirt movement because it's extremely unhappy at the foreign policy moves that Chan-o-cha has made. What he's done is enact a [geopolitical reorientation towards China](#) precisely at the time when the US is throwing much of its resources behind the "Pivot to Asia" and building the Chinese Containment Coalition (CCC). While it was predictable that some sort of internal military intervention would have likely occurred to calm the Red Shirt-inspired unrest that had spread throughout the country, the US probably didn't predict that the coup authorities would so ambitiously alter their country's geopolitical trajectory.

The US doesn't care about Yingluck or Thaksin personally, but what it simply wants to see is a loyal pro-American proxy government installed in Bangkok to facilitate the creation of the CCC, and it just so happens that the Shinawatra family has enough convincible (rural) popularity to 'justify' their imposition in the eyes of the international community. If need be, the US could conveniently find a fill-in candidate to assist with the political 'transition' before either of those two 'legally' return to power, but the national vision that Chan-o-cha has set out to achieve is in stark contrast to the US' plans. Being a professional military man of the nation's highest caliber, he has deep knowledge about how the US operates within his country, and he's thus taken to using that privileged information in order to craft the most efficient strategies for combating Washington and ensuring his country's sovereignty. No leader in Thailand's post-World War II history has taken moves as bold as he has to defend his country's independence, thus making Chan-o-cha's rise to power completely unprecedented in the history of US-Thai relations. He's not "anti-American" per say, but it's just that he does not want to see his country become a sacrificial vassal state in the New Cold War against China, ergo the pragmatic multipolar balancing measures he's undertaken in accelerating Bangkok's relations with Beijing (while refraining from open criticism of the US).

Perhaps most controversially, and what's triggered the [strongest public outcry](#) from the US, has been his curtailment of certain civil liberties as a precautionary measure in defending against Washington's

trademarked Color Revolution intrigue. As a military expert, Chan-o-cha is keenly aware of the skill with which the Red Shirts and its US patrons have exploited these rights before, so he undertook the measures that he did in order to ensure that he and his administration can remain in power long enough to see their domestic and international reforms succeed. Unintentionally, however, by almost fully neutralizing the US' "legal" Color Revolution toolkit, he forced Washington's strategists into a regime change corner and pressed them to move forward with Unconventional Warfare tactics instead (e.g. the [August 2015 Bangkok bombing](#)), albeit of a 'soft' and 'less chaotic' nature than what has been employed in other battlegrounds like Ukraine. The reason for the US' relative 'restraint' is that it simply wants to engineer the type of destabilizing conditions that can push the military off balance and make it easier for a follow-up Color Revolution to succeed.

Thailand's hub status in connecting India's ASEAN Highway to Japan's ASEAN transoceanic railroad between Myanmar and Vietnam is of the utmost critical importance to the CCC, and it would only be in the most desperate of circumstances that the US would sacrifice these projects in the name of an all-out and uncontrollable destabilization of Thailand. There's a very real risk, however, that the Hybrid War games that Washington is playing against Bangkok might quickly and expectedly become uncontrollable, thereby needlessly endangering its own allies' transnational unipolar infrastructure projects all in order to obsessively stop China's ASEAN Silk Road. Chan-o-cha is therefore facing a quite formidable challenge in opposing the US' anti-Chinese strategic dictates while simultaneously maintaining domestic stability within his own country. If he can contain the Hybrid War escalation that the US has initiated and proactively deal with the myriad of threats that it might foreseeably unleash in the coming future (whether intentionally or unwittingly), then the military leader will solidify himself as Thailand's greatest and most successful post-war visionary. Precisely because of the sheer enormity of what's at stake, however, the US can be expected to employ all possible means of pushing back against him and spoiling his multipolar plans.

Time-Tested Themes

Thailand's post-World War II history can be summed up by describing five time-tested themes, each of which exhibits immense influence on current events and can expectedly play a role in any forthcoming Hybrid War destabilizations:

Military Management:

Thailand has undergone [19 separate military coups](#) in its history, underscoring the frequency at which the military involves itself in domestic political affairs. The country's very close relationship with the US has both political and military contours, with the latter being relevant precisely because it demonstrates how deep American influence runs within the Thai establishment. Oftentimes, Thailand's military coups were the result of domestic squabbles, but the US' influence over the military meant that Washington could potentially exploit this institution as it saw fit, especially if there was a perceived geostrategic advantage to be had. For example, the 1976 coup may have been triggered by unpredictable protest circumstances, but it convincingly looks to have occurred to the grand strategic advantage of the US.

Observers would do well to remind themselves that the 1973 civilian government asked the US military to leave two years later, which just so happens to be the year that communist forces liberated all of Indochina and won the wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The US was unquestionably at a strategic disadvantage through its withdrawal from Indochina and removal from Thailand, and given the "domino theory" fear mongering that prevailed at the time, many decision makers may have sincerely thought that Thailand would be the next country to "fall". A military government would be more attuned to the US' strategic interests than a civilian one would, which turned out to be exactly the case in the context of post-1975 Cold War Indochina. Although a civilian government would later be reinstated, the 1976 coup was responsible for reverting Thailand back to a reliable American proxy state and backpedaling on all of the pro-sovereignty steps that its civilian predecessors had made. Throughout the 1980s, Thailand

was working hand-in-glove with the US in supporting Khmer Rouge rebels along its eastern frontier and engaging in a proxy war against Vietnam, whom the US still had a fiery vengeance against.

From the perspective of bilateral relations, the Thai military used to be the US' most dependable instrument of power over the country, essentially functioning as a regional extension of the Pentagon itself (albeit much less poorer). Whenever there'd be some kind of domestic disruption that could be forecasted to possibly result in the temporary diminishment of Thailand's regional influence (and to a degree, the US' influence vis-à-vis that country), then the military would step in to restore order and offset that possibility. It's not to infer that every single coup in Thailand's history was the result of some American plan, but that the US strategically gained each and every time that this occurred, and it never allowed these sorts of events to negatively impact on bilateral relations. The only exception to this time-tested 'rule' has been the 2014 military coup, which Washington did not at all expect to turn out as it did.

Prayun Chan-o-cha obviously planned his moves long in advance, as can be evidenced by the calculated domestic and foreign political steps that he's undertaken since coming to power. It's highly unlikely that his geopolitical pivot towards China was a spur-of-the-moment decision, nor was his decree to limit certain civil liberties in order to prevent a Color Revolution against his rule. He clearly had the foresight to identify what steps needed to be done in order to restore and strengthen Thailand's sovereignty, thus indicating that he had thought long and hard in advance of his actions. Furthermore, Chan-o-cha plainly anticipated that there'd be a strong degree of American pushback against his moves, and that it would be a lot more substantial than the empty window-dressing rhetoric that typically accompanied each of Thailand's previous coups. For the first time in Thailand's history, the military isn't managing the country on the US' behalf, but is doing so with the Kingdom's true geopolitical interests at heart.

The American Alliance:

The next mainstay of Thailand's post-World War II history is the privileged relationship that its political, economic, and military elite have enjoyed with the US. This was largely expanded upon above, but to shed some additional insight into it, the US uses key individuals and institutions in order to assert its hegemonic dominance over Thailand. Washington's utilization of the military for this purpose has just been described, but it does something very similar with the economic and political leaders in the country as well. For example, Thaksin Shinawatra satisfied both criteria in this regard due to his multimillionaire business background and his later leadership over the state, which allowed him to simultaneously exert pro-American influence over these two spheres. While Shinawatra is the most well-known and popular of the bunch, he isn't by far the only one, as there's an institutional cadre below him – both within the Red Shirt movement and those not formally affiliated with it – that are promoting the US' influence within Thailand.

The US' ideal plan for the Southeast Asian country is for it to become a loyal member of the CCC, capitalizing off of the 'historic friendship' that it has with the US in order to 'justifiably' transform into a continental version of the Philippines. Just as the insular island chain is Washington's premier puppet state in the South China Sea, so too does the US want to see Thailand become its mainland equivalent, with both states potentially exercising negative influence on China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy. The Philippines has the possibility of becoming a maritime nuisance in the South China Sea and being built up into the US' next "unsinkable aircraft carrier", while Thailand could renege on its commitment to the ASEAN Silk Road. Taken together, Thailand and the Philippines were supposed to be the crucial anchors of the US' "Pivot to Asia", but this calculated strategy was thrown into disarray when Chan-o-cha came to power and revealed himself to be a multipolar visionary and a firm proponent of Thailand's sovereignty. Without Bangkok's participation in the CCC, the US' approach to 'containing China' has been totally lopsided, as Beijing is able to counter any of Washington's relative advances on the naval front simply through the existence of its ASEAN Silk Road project.

The US therefore wants to restore its hegemony over Thailand in order to either cancel or control the ASEAN Silk Road, which in either case would nullify China's strategic 'detour' through mainland Southeast Asia and ultimately put its regional trade networks under the Pentagon's blackmail. It doesn't seem likely that there'll be an intra-military coup to overthrow Chan-o-cha, which is why the US is now seeking to leverage the economic and political allies that it still has inside the country. It'll be described later on more in-depth, but the Red Shirts and their followers are expected to form the vanguard of any future Color Revolution movement, and they could possibly be joined by radical Buddhist monks that follow the [Myanmar model](#) of religious-nationalist destabilization. On the economic front, these two groups could encourage their supporters to carry out labor strikes and street traffic disruptions, all in an attempt to grind Bangkok's economy to a halt as a means of provoking anti-government resentment and Color Revolution sympathy. More institutionally, however, the US could also incentivize its allied economic elite to commence an information campaign extolling the 'benefits' of the TPP, which when combined with affiliated NGOs and the aforementioned political actors, could help shape a more robust anti-government campaign by offering a 'positive vision' for Thailand after the violent reimposition of pro-American civilian rule.

In The Shadow Of The King:

Often neglected by the international media in their coverage of the military-political drama that regularly breaks out in Thailand, the monarchy is one of the most influential institutions in the country and quite frequently the normatively decisive voice that many in the population listen to. The present ruler is King Bhumibol Adulyadej, also known as Rama IX, and he's been on the throne since 1946. Having presided over the constitutional monarchy for so long, Rama IX has experience in dealing with literally every aspect of Thailand's post-World War II history, although sometimes his legal restraints have prevented him from exercising his preferred will over whatever the given situation may be. Regardless, he's revered as a grandfatherly figure that most Thais can depend on, a familiar steward that has the country's best interests in mind. When Rama IX vocally gives his support in one direction or another, be it to a group of protesters or to the military authorities, it's seen as a stamp of approval that the population typically abides by.

That being said, at the same time, there's a movement to decrease the 'social sanctity' of the monarch and dispel his normative authority. Thaksin and the Red Shirts are chief among these advocates, and they provocatively want to "modernize" society by removing Rama IX's influence over it. Many traditionalists oppose the Red Shirts simply on this principle alone, not wanting the most enduring symbol of their past to be sacrificed as a victim of one or another political party, let alone a group which is presently supported from abroad. The Red Shirts are capitalizing off of the country's anti-defamation laws and the current curtailment of certain civil liberties in order to mock the monarchy and provoke highly publicized arrests, cognizant of the fact that the military authorities would then be cast in a very negative light by sympathetic Color Revolution media outlets in the West. These publicity stunts have infringed on the near-sacred sensitivities that many Thais feel towards their monarch, further heightening the political polarization inside the country and increasing the potential for street clashes between the competing groups.

The pro-American "opposition" inside Thailand therefore intends to whip up emotionally driven tension related to the monarchy issue as a means of both impugning the military authorities and deepening the socio-political divide inside the country. Pro-monarchist Chan-o-cha and his government are enforcing what the average Western individual interprets as "draconian anti-free speech legislation" in imprisoning social media 'activists' that criticize and disrespect the King, and the Red Shirts are gleefully manipulating their strategically planned provocations in such a way as to create a false association between the monarchy, the military, and "dictatorships". This has the effect of generating even more Western civil and governmental support for their "pro-democracy" movement and in preparing the international (Western) consciousness for the policies that they'd like to implement if they're able to seize power.

Just as Erdogan sought to neuter the military's capability of carrying out a pro-constitutional coup against his rule, so too will the Red Shirts likely do something similar in order to safeguard their physical position. In parallel, they'll also make a move against the monarchy so that it can never present a normative threat to their rule again. This would see them either totally eliminating the institution altogether (possibly using the inevitable passing of the elderly king as a trigger for this), or completely sidelining its significance over national affairs by pigeonholing it into irrelevancy just like its Scandinavian counterparts. Both of these policy enactments would generate a storm of controversy within the country, but if the Red Shirts were able to hold on to power and weather the challenge, then they'd qualitatively transform the existence of the Thai state and put it on the trajectory for prolonged one-party rule.

The military is a critical precautionary institution in physically preempting this eventuality, but the monarchy might have even more influence in preventing this process because it's the only actor capable of galvanizing wide segments of public support in its given direction. If the King came out strongly enough against one or another political party, then that said organization would lose the critical normative approval that's traditionally needed in Thai society. It doesn't seem as though Rama IX will ever change his mind and support the Red Shirts, even if they come to power in a Color Revolution, so this is why the movement is so strongly against him. Additionally, his successor and son, Maha Vajiralongkorn, is a military man who inherently understands the importance of that sister institution, so he'd naturally seek to strengthen both of them once he assumes the throne. From the perspective of the Red Shirts, this is a major threat that would undermine everything that they're working for. Since they don't feel confident enough in their ability to co-opt either the king or his heir apparent, they'd rather do away with the monarchy entirely than risk having it as a perpetual enemy in the future.

"People's Power":

The idea of a popular anti-government uprising became enshrined in the Thai consciousness after the 1973 student-led revolution, and from that point on, civilian and military leaders alike became aware of how quickly mass protest movements can topple the state. Likewise, the people learned just how much power they truly have, especially if it's applied in a strategic way against certain elements of the establishment. This tactical revelation and its successful implementation in 1973 forever changed the nature of Thai politics, although it of course took some time for the lessons to sink into the minds of each respective actor.

The state had to come to terms with the fact that it could be overthrown by a mass of protesting civilians, and that when confronted with such a challenge, it must tread quite carefully in order to avoid enflaming the situation even more. The wrong response, perhaps a militant crackdown leading to a disproportionate number of casualties among unarmed civilians individuals that have nothing to do with the Color Revolution disturbance, could spell the end of the authorities' rule by generating such a scandal that the newly protesting masses are literally impossible to control without resorting to large-scale and seemingly random violence. On the other hand, the protesters, while conscious of their capabilities, also became familiar with their physical limitations and vulnerabilities. Finding the perfect balance between these two is the ultimate goal of every anti-government leader, and if the right equilibrium is finally struck, then the state is thrust into a grand strategic dilemma that typically results in it making the sort of fatal errors that lead to its imminent downfall.

In Thailand, "people's power" movements can manifest themselves either in whole or in part as being composed of students (like in 1973), street activists (such as the Red Shirts), and/or Buddhists (following the Myanmar model). Additionally, the term "people's power" was even trademarked by a political party in Thailand that later turned into a safe haven for Thaksin's allies following his ouster. The "People's Power Party" basically functioned as a front organization for the banned Thai Rak Thai Party until it too was dissolved by constitutional order in December 2008. What's essential to note when describing the role of "people's power" movements in post-1973 Thailand is that they are one of the most effective methods for enacting regime change, especially in the past decade.

When employed to their full potential against a civilian government, this social weapon can provoke the type of street disturbances and chaotic outbreaks that necessitate a domestic military intervention (coup). Similarly, when it's turned against the military authorities that have assumed responsibility for the state (as in the current situation), "people's power" movements can either enact enough pressure against them that they're forced to step down (like what happened in 1973) or provoke a harsh crackdown that prompts sharp Western criticism and leads to the coup government's isolation from the Western international community, both of which are unfavorable to the state. The trick here is for the "people's power" organizers to find the delicate balance between maximizing their physical capabilities and minimizing their associated vulnerabilities, all the while crafting ingenious marketing plans in order to make their movement as societally broad-based as possible. In select circumstances, there's also the possibility of the Color Revolution vanguards emphasizing identity differences in order to purposefully sow strategic societal differences among the population, which thus leads to a progressively complicated domestic situation for the authorities to deal with. In particular, this sort of scenario forms a critical component of the US' Hybrid War toolkit in Thailand, and it'll be expanded upon at the end of the research.

Thaification:

The last time-tested trend in Thailand's recent history has been the policy of Thaification, modelled off of the culture and dialect of the Central Thai, which is the most populous group in the country. It's understandable why Thailand ended up promoting a unifying sense of identity. There are many ethnic minority groups concentrated in particular regions of the country, most prominently including the Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand; the Lao-affiliated population of Northeastern Thailand; Khmer in Eastern Thailand; the Muslim Malays of Southern Thailand; and the Karen of Western Thailand. Each of these identities is separately distinct from one another and from the majority Central Thais, yet they all still cumulatively form a minority of the country's population. The promotion of Central Thai identity as the unifying aspect of Thailand and all "Thais" is not just the expression of the majority's cultural and dialect preferences over that of the minority, but also that of the literal geographic center over the periphery.

It's important to keep in mind that the core mass of the population is gathered in the central region, and that this group represents the cradle of Thai civilization. From Bangkok's perspective, it only makes sense that national cultural standards are modeled off of the Central Thai, as doing otherwise could have been met with uncontrollable revolt among the group most numerically and geographically capable of overthrowing the authorities. That being said, Thaification has not been without its controversies. Some members of the peripheral ethno-regional groups feel that their identities have been infringed upon and that the enforcement of Central Thai cultural standards is leading to an erosion of their own. They worry that the cultural peculiarities that mark their communities will one day be lost, and [some](#) have attributed this fear to being one of the reasons behind the Cold War communist insurgency in Northern and Northeastern Thailand. While it's debatable to what extent identity separateness was to blame for the conflict, it still objectively exists as one of the contributing causes.

The crystallization of ethno-regional identities independently of or in spite of Central Thai-based Thaification is one of the greatest threats to the country's social and administrative unity. Thailand had been a multicultural society for centuries before the idea of identity homogeneity was first promoted in the 1930s. Ironically, it seems that while the policy itself was designed to eliminate peripheral feelings of separateness and proactively counter possible separatism (which the authorities may have feared could be promoted by the neighboring imperial powers so as to further infringe on the kingdom's sovereignty), it looks to have had the unintended aftereffect of retaining, and in some cases, even aggravating these issues. Such appears to be the case with Northeastern and Southern Thailand, both of which have a strong and very different sense of ethno-regional identity than the Central Thais do. Isan, as the Northeast is sometimes referred to, is one of the most populous yet impoverished areas of the country, and the people are descended from ethnic Lao and speak a dialect of that language. In the

extreme southern provinces, most of the population is Muslim Malay and don't have anything in common with the Buddhist Thai, be it religion, ethnicity, language, or even a common sense of history.

The identity contrast between the majority population in the governing center and the minority peripheral groups forms the basis for what might under certain circumstances escalate into an existential struggle in defining the nature of the Thai state, let alone whether or not the country itself should even still be referred to as "Thailand". This prospective scenario of identity conflict, both among the country's ethno-regional populations and between themselves and Bangkok, is a nascent process that looks to have already begun in part. It hasn't yet approached the breaking point and exploded into an all-out crisis, but it also hasn't receded in recent years either. Quite the contrary, identity tension appears to have crept even closer to the mainstream, dragged near the spotlight by Thaksin and his Isan-based populist supporters as part of the political game that they're playing against Bangkok. If Central Thai-led Thaification and the nominal unity that it espouses come under threat by the Red Shirt supporters in Isan, then the entire social foundation on which post-World War II Thailand rests would be thrown into question, with potentially far-reaching and unpredictable consequences.

Throwing Thailand Into A Hybrid War Tumult

The research has finally progressed to the point where it's applicable to more comprehensively discuss the Hybrid War scenarios facing Thailand. The previous historical and thematic reviews familiarized the reader with the contextual background that's necessary in comprehending the intricacies of why the following scenarios are the most plausible ones that could occur. Each of the three could theoretically happen on their own and independently of the others, but it's highly probable that they'll follow the sequential order in which they're examined.

Categorically speaking, they represent the phased transition from a Color Revolution to identity tension and an Unconventional War. It should be reminded at this time that the US would ideally prefer not to totally destroy Thailand in the same manner as it has attempted to do to Syria, thereby meaning that it would like to contain the destabilization to the first and second discussed categories, but if it absolutely needs to sacrifice its Indian and Japanese allies' unipolar infrastructure projects within the country to destroy the ASEAN Silk Road (or if it can't control the chaotic forces that it unleashes), then it'll belatedly accept this eventuality and proceed to the third and final regime change step.

The Red Buddhists:

The pro-American Red Shirts are at the helm of the Color Revolution movement in Thailand, and their aggressive agitation is expected to continue until they either achieve their desired regime change objective or are organizationally crushed by the military (which is of course easier said than done). Their tactical aim is to assemble a widespread and inclusive front of various grievance-motivated protesters in order to form the critical mass of discontented citizens that they need in order to arrange a major destabilization. While this isn't necessarily an unquestionable prerequisite, it would greatly aid their efforts if they were able to gather a more diverse grouping of 'human shields' than those that are simply pro-Thaksin, since any preplanned provocation against the military could realistically result in casualties among those other members and the increased involvement of their respective protesting groups into the Color Revolution movement.

Continuing with this tactical theme, it would be a public relations masterstroke if the Red Shirts were able to co-opt radical Buddhist nationalists such as [Phra Maha Apichat Punnajantho](#) into their street demonstrations. The sacred role that Buddhism holds over the nation's psyche means that many of the masses hold deep respect for the monks that represent it, and the international public is largely unaware of the violent nationalist subsects within this stereotypically peaceful religion. Protesting Buddhist monks, no matter what their nationalist and aggressive intent may be, could conjure up a unifying and normatively positive image that would shift public and international acceptance in favor of the Red Shirts just as equally as it would reflect negatively on the military authorities that they're

demonstrating against. Something almost exactly similar was attempted in Myanmar during the 2007 “[Saffron Revolution](#)” and it had the immediate effect of boosting Suu Kyi and her Color Revolution movement’s prestige.

Back then in Myanmar just as it looks to soon be in Thailand, the inclusion of violent Buddhist radicals is actually something that the Color Revolutionaries desire because that would give them cleverly disguised foot soldiers that they could deploy against the military in their oncoming provocations. The media-distorted pictures of supposedly “helpless, unarmed, and peaceful” Buddhist monks being beaten by the military would be presented completely out of context and used to attract new followers that are incensed by the misleading images that they saw. Since most Thais are pious to various extents, what they were artfully made to believe was the military’s use of “wanton violence” against the “peaceful” Buddhist monks could leave an impression on them personally and inspire them to join the protest movement, which in turn would really go a long way in broadening the Color Revolution’s base and generating an inclusive anti-government front.

One of the most effective ways in which the aforementioned front could be expanded to its largest proportions would be if the Red Shirts found a way to more fully incorporate “progressively modernizing” anti-monarchist forces into their ranks. This could of course generate some conflict among the pro-monarchist Buddhists that are involved in the Color Revolution movement, but as with almost all of the politically convenient front organizations that existed before it everywhere else across the world, they might temporarily put aside their visionary differences in favor of uniting to overthrow the government and bicker about their post-regime change preferences afterwards. The death of the elderly King could be a trigger for bringing these sorts of “activists” out to the street, predictably ‘celebrating’ the ‘end of an era’ and proclaiming that the military’s normative authority died with Rama IX. It’s not too important what they take to saying, but rather that they go out to the streets in the first place and are absorbed into the already existing protest movement.

The more radical of the anti-monarch “demonstrators” could even decide to violently target grieving funeral processors and disrupt other commemorative public expressions of sorrow, which would immediately induce an outbreak of communal conflict between the two camps. Predictably, the all-out unrest that would consequently break out would prompt the military to step in one way or the other, and depending on the intensity of the expected riots, this could likely result in a heightened risk of civilian casualties. Again, from the perspective of the Color Revolutionaries, it’s not important exactly who falls victim to the collateral state-inflicted damage that they’ve provoked, but that the victimized individuals and their associated groups (be they ethnic, confessional, professional, etc.) simply get drawn into the anti-government movement as a reflexive result. If the provocation is serious enough, then it might serve its worth in functioning as a ‘justifiable’ trigger for escalating the Color Revolution hostilities into open urban terrorism, and if tactically synchronized with the prior inclusion of a wide protesting mass united under a single regime change banner, then it could end up being too much for the authorities to handle short of stepping down or commencing the controversial imposition of martial law.

Reforming Thaification: Chao Phraya vs. Mekong:

The greatest domestic challenge that has historically plagued Bangkok since the end of World War II has been in fostering and sustaining a sense of identity unity among its disparate ethno-regional groupings. The authorities can’t of course disregard the culture that the majority Central Thai practice, but at the same time, they can’t fully commit to policies that endanger the culture of the peripheral population and cause them to seethe with anti-government resentment. The need for a national culture is apparent, but the difficulty comes down to how this should be implemented and which identities should contribute to the state-wide standard. As it stands, only the Central Thai along the Chao Phraya River are officially seen as being worthy to emulate, and this has led to the government-enforced imposition of their culture and dialect onto the rest of the country, which has been especially resented among the Lao-affiliated citizens of the Northeastern and Mekong River regions. While some of the Hill Tribes of

Northern Thailand, the Khmer of Eastern Thailand, the Muslim Malays of Southern Thailand, and the Karen of Western Thailand may also take issue with the state's promotion of the Central Thai identity, they don't occupy as important of a geo-demographic role as the people of Isan do.

Thailand's Northeastern region, referred to as Isan by those that support the recognition of [its distinct identity](#) (the author is neutral but uses them interchangeably for variety's sake), contains [about a third](#) of the country's territory and a similar percentage of its entire population. [Most of its people](#) are engaged in agriculture and it's one of the poorest areas of the Thailand. What's significant about Isan is that it recorded the [highest rate of growth](#) during the Thaksin-Yingluck years and is regarded as the [stronghold of their support](#) within the country. Furthermore, the people there are culturally, linguistically, and historically [distinct](#) from the rest of their national counterparts, as most of them are ethnic Lao that socially identify more with their cross-border cousins than with their own countrymen. They may still pride themselves in being Thai citizens, but that doesn't mean that they accept the government's official classification of their ethnicity or their Lao-dialect language as "Thai", and herein lays the crux of what may foreseeably become a looming identity crisis in Thailand.

The Northeastern region's importance to the national fabric is substantial, be it in human, economic, or geographic terms, and it's definitely not a part of the country that any leader can afford to ignore. Thaksin was successful in co-opting most of its population because his populist subsidization policies appealed to the impoverished masses, and the undeniable physical infrastructure growth that accompanied the 2000s made many of the locals there lifelong loyalists to his cause. The longer that the Red Shirts agitate against the government, the more likely it is that they'll capitalize off of their ethno-regional origins up until the point that they publicly embrace their identity separateness and begin formally incorporating into their political platform (possibly following the advice of supportive Western-financed NGOs). While this prospective development could also lead to internal divisions among those that favor the Central Thai standard of Thaification, it could be framed in such a way as though they're pushing back against a seemingly inherent "racist" and "discriminatory" system, wanting to "reform it from within" more so than flirt with sedition and imply any claims to secessionism (even if that's what they'd tacitly threaten if their demands aren't met).

The highly publicized internal and external awareness that Thailand's major "opposition" movement has officially recognized an ethno-regional distinction separate from the nationally unifying intent of Central Thai-led Thaification would automatically trigger an unparalleled identity crisis within the state, made even more pronounced by the international (Western) pressure that would correspondingly come down to bear upon it at this critical moment. The perceived failure of Thaification in unifying the masses would lead to a call from the Red Shirts and their foreign patrons that the long-standing ideology be reformed, either through the creation of a compromise national identity that incorporates portions of the peripheral ones, or the casual enforcement or outright cultural autonomy of certain provincial areas. Any formal step in either of these directions would likely be seen as a threat to the Central Thais' soft power dominance and probably elicit a rebellious response from them, with their newfound rage being directed against the Red Shirts and their Isan supporters and/or the military authorities if they give in to their identity-reforming demands. The Isan Red Shirts might even push for legally enshrined safeguards for their own cultural autonomy, not necessarily because they believe that they'll actually get this, but because they know the reaction that it will provoke within the country (negative among the Central Thai, positive among all minority groups) and abroad (full Western support).

To expand a bit off of the domestic reaction to such a possible pronouncement, other than the expected violence that this might provoke among the Central Thai, it would probably lead to some minority groups in the North, East, and/or South aligning themselves with the Isan Red Shirts. This is because no single ethno-regional demographic is powerful enough to unilaterally succeed in their identity demands on their own, and even though Isan has the greatest chance of all of them in having this happen, it's still not guaranteed. However, if other peripheral groups begin siding with them and coordinating certain on-the-ground measures in their support (e.g. anti-government protests and other disruptive rallies), then it could have a noticeable effect in triggering a chain reactive existential threat to the present

formation of the Thai state. Once one ethno-regional organization attempts to advance its agenda of constitutionally mandated separateness (no matter how benign and seemingly justified it might appear, such as in safeguarding the widespread use of indigenous languages), let alone if this group teams up and joins together with another of its counterparts elsewhere in the country, then the groundwork is set for easily transitioning this campaign into a political one that agitates for autonomy, federalization, or clear-cut separatism. Should this come to pass in any iteration, then the potential that the governing center could be pitted against an array of peripheral rebel movements would inevitably rise, thus raising fears that the structural model of the Myanmar Civil War would have found its way to Thailand.

The Ethno-Regionalist Civil War:

The outbreak of ethno-regionalist conflict in Thailand would be in direct reaction to the country's internal identity crisis, with the possibility that certain external variables could aggravate the preexisting tension to the breaking point. Isan is envisioned as being the central battleground, although it'll likely be supported by one, some, or all of the other peripherally identity-separate parts of the kingdom. In particular, these could be the Hill Tribes of the North, the Khmer of the East, the Muslim Malay of the South, and possibly even the Karen from the West.

All of the possible insurgencies could theoretically be backed up with some element of state support in the event that Thailand's neighbors undergo their own successful regime change experience, which in that case would dramatically escalate the stakes that are at play.

The US' desired goal in any of these instances would be to see the Thai authorities weakened by the multidirectional and multi-issued destabilizations to the extent that an accompanying Color Revolution push would be enough to unseat them and restore its proxies into power. Like it was mentioned at the beginning of the research, however, if the 'final solution' to getting rid of the ASEAN Silk Road necessitates an all-out civil war that disrupts or even destroys India and Japan's transnational infrastructure projects in the country, than that's apparently the price that Washington is willing to pay in order to contain its chief geopolitical rival in the region.

Laos and Isan

If the Laotian government is overthrown and replaced with a pro-American proxy, or possibly even if its new leadership is somehow co-opted by the US and its CCC, then there's the possibility that it could offer some minimal amount of support to the Isan rebels in this specific scenario. Nonetheless, it's not predicted that Vientiane would under any circumstances play a major role in a Thai Civil War, partly because its military is too weak and its capital too exposed to withstand a coordinated counter-attack from the Thai Armed Forces, and also due to the fear that it has of being demographically and economically overshadowed by a quasi-independent Lao-identifying Isan. There's no realistic scenario where the Laotian elites would pursue formal irredentism in Northeastern Thailand because they know that they'd be the junior partner in any forthcoming political structure. The only possible interest that Laos might one day have would be in forming a "union state" with Thailand modeled off of the one that Belarus has with Russia in order to acquire concrete economic and political guarantees without sacrificing its sovereignty, but even then, this possibility is still exceptionally unlikely in the near- or medium-terms barring the emergence of unforeseen and exceptional circumstances.

Cambodia And The Khmer

Moving along in a clockwise direction, Cambodia under the Hun Sen government would be very reluctant to get involved supporting its cross-border ethnic Khmer kin, no matter what happens on the ground in Thailand. China, the government's main ally, would firmly advise against it at all costs, knowing that even the reporting of rumors that Phnom Penh was as much as considering this could set off a nationalist reaction in Thailand and lead to unpredictable civilian and military actions there. It wasn't even a full decade ago that the two countries almost went to war over a sliver of territory on

their border, so if Bangkok felt as though Phnom Penh might make a far-reaching power grab under the guise of assisting its rebellious cross-border compatriots, then it might disastrously take the prerogative to make a preemptive strike. Another factor to be considered in this scenario is that Sam Rainsy and his oppositionist “Cambodian National Rescue Party” are very nationalistic, so it’s entirely possible that they could use Hun Sen’s reluctance to intervene in a Khmer-involved Thai Civil War as a means of rallying more opposition against him and adding to their Color Revolution cadres. They might even send volunteer groups of fighters to help their ethnic compatriots, and if they’re injured, captured, or killed, it could be enough to provoke an international crisis or trigger a calculated anti-government uprising in Cambodia. Of course, in the event that Rainsy seizes power there (either before or during the possible conflict), then Cambodia would definitely intervene in its neighbor’s ethno-regionalist affairs and contribute to what would predictably by then have become a downward spiraling situation.

Malaysia And The Southern Muslims

On the southern front, the current Malaysian government led by Prime Minister Najib Razak doesn’t seem too inclined to throw its neighbor into disarray, no matter the events surrounding the Muslim Malays there. It doesn’t have an interest in seeing the insurgency explode along its border because of the danger that terrorist groups could infiltrate into the country either independently or under the guise of being “refugees”. Kuala Lumpur’s agenda isn’t to expand its territory or become the protector of its ethnic compatriots living in Thailand, but to see to it that Bangkok guarantees that they have a respectable life free from ethnic, religious, and linguistic discrimination. In all actuality, the most practical way to ensure this and pacify the insurgent groups would be to implement a legally mandated framework similar to what the Philippines has tried to do with the Bangsamoro Basic Law in its own southern Muslim-populated region of Mindanao. Given the Thai context, however, it’s not likely that the government wants to go anywhere near granting the region autonomy, predicting that this would just set off a chain reaction of similar separatist sentiment in the other ethno-regionally diverse parts of the country that would eventually result in the state’s full autonomization, federalization, or political dissolution. Malaysia could facilitate this destructive process if it concedes to any US pressure to militantly assist its transnational ethnic kin (whether directly or indirectly) or if a new Color Revolution government comes to power and pursues a policy a radical ethno-religious nationalism.

Myanmar And The Karen

Finally, the last of Thailand’s neighbors that could possibly get involved in the examined civil war scenario would be Myanmar via its support of the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand or the Karen in Western Thailand. Both of these identities are separate from the Central Thai, but the Karen pose a greater risk than perhaps any of the other aforementioned ethno-regionalist groups because of their militant experience in fighting the Myanmar Civil War. Most of the Karen living in Thailand are refugees that have fled across the border, but like in any case where there’s a cross-border community of war-ravaged expatriates, some of them are undoubtedly fighters, whether currently retired or presently active in the field. Thailand was ironically [suspected of supporting](#) the Karen rebels when they were fighting against the Myanmar government, especially during the Cold War, but in the examined scenario, Myanmar could flip the dynamic around and encourage some of the Karen within its territory to carry out attacks in Thailand. There’s also the possibility that Naypyidaw for whatever reason (be it choice or incompetence) does not take part in this scheme, but that the largely independent non-state actors and ethnic militias active in Kayin State independently do so on their own, possibly invigorated by the idea of cross-border irredentism. This feeling could be further promoted if Suu Kyi’s government advances a federal solution to the country’s civil war and the Karen’s homeland is bestowed with de-facto independence in a broad-based and loosely federated system.

PART I: How The US Could Manufacture A Hybrid War Mess In Myanmar

The last ASEAN country to be studied within the book is Myanmar, which is by far the most susceptible of the entire bunch to Hybrid War. Truth be told, it's been experiencing some form or another of Hybrid War since its independence in 1948, although this mostly took the form of Unconventional Warfare prior to 1988. From that point on, Color Revolutions were reversely integrated into the destabilization model there and offered as a "solution" to the world's longest-running civil war, earning them the automatic support of the international (Western) community and lending them false normative "justification" in the eyes of the easily misled global masses.

Myanmar functions as the ideal case study for examining Hybrid War in practice, and it's more relevant in the current geopolitical climate than ever before. All of the pieces are in place for a violent explosion and the country is rife with asymmetrical risks to its stability. The reason that Myanmar is such a powder keg is because foreign actors have been conspiring against its unity since independence, wanting to exploit one or another peripheral ethnic group for their own particular purposes. The decades-long military government can't avoid shouldering some of the responsibility for the country's present woes, as it was unsuccessful in crafting an inclusive and lasting sense of nationhood, though to be fair, the challenge that it was confronted with was immense.

As it stands, the Suu Kyi government intends to institutionalize the state's internal divisions through the implementation of Identity Federalism, whereby each rebel-controlled and identity-dissimilar part of the country receives a high degree of sovereign 'self-rule' over its internal affairs. This could essentially fracture the country and prevent it from ever functioning as an integrated unit again, although the primary beneficiaries of this externally imposed "Balkanization" would most assuredly be foreign (Western) resource companies and their affiliated state militaries, the latter of which are eager to use the forthcoming federalized statelets as 'lily pads' to in their quest to 'leapfrog' as close to China's border as they can.

The geostrategic intent is to either control or cripple China's transnational multipolar infrastructure projects in the country, with the [China-Myanmar Energy Corridor](#) that recently opened in January 2015 being the specific target of both types of intrigue. The US already succeeded in pressuring the Myanmar government to abandon China's ambitious plans for a [\\$20 billion railroad](#) along that route, thus demonstrating the degree of control that it exercised over Naypyidaw even before their proxy Suu Kyi came to power. However, China saw the writing on the wall and unprecedentedly began [courting the "opposition" leader](#) and directly involving itself in the domestic affairs of one of its partners for the very first time. If China somehow manages to clinch a deal with Suu Kyi that preserves its influence in the country and safeguards its strategic pipeline assets there (to say nothing of possibly expanding its infrastructure investments), then it's predicted that the US would respond by unleashing a Hybrid War against the country, preferring to see Myanmar totally destroyed than ever again functioning as a reliable multipolar springboard for Beijing.

The situation inside the country is extraordinarily complicated owing to the multilayered variables that have been impacting on events for decades, but a quick review of the most relevant aspects of Myanmar's history is the most suitable first step for better understanding the existing state of affairs. As such, the research proceeds from this point and then naturally segues into the country's history of Color Revolution attempts, detailing how Suu Kyi was able to successfully come to power over twenty years after the US first intended for her to. After that, the study dives deep into the contours of Myanmar's civil war before highlighting the country's pivotal geopolitical role in facilitating three separate transnational connective infrastructure projects, two of which are instrumental in deepening the influence of unipolarity over the state. Finally, the last part of the work applies all of the previously examined information in constructing the most likely Hybrid War scenarios that the US could engineer in order to maximally destabilize China's periphery and put an end to what used to be its most promising chance to strategically alleviate its dependence on the Strait of Malacca.

A Nation In Flux

The country that's currently called Myanmar used to be known as Burma, and governments that refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the ruling authorities still refer to it by its pre-1989 name. For the sake of consistency, the author will use Burma when referring to the lands of present-day Myanmar up until the name change was initiated, and thenceforth the country will be referred to by its constitutional and legal name when describing all events afterwards. Myanmar's history is extensive and dates back thousands of years, but the scope of the present study can only accommodate for the most relevant aspects of its past. That being said, it categorizes events into four distinct time periods ranging from the country's early history until World War II; the post-independence years of U Nu and Ne Win; the failed 1988 "8888" Color Revolution to the equally failed 2007 Saffron Revolution; and Myanmar's current role in the Pivot to Asia and electoral transition to the Suu Kyi-led government.

From Kingdom To Colony

Burma's [historical story](#) can be summed up as one in which the Bamar demographic majority progressively became the dominant force within their area. Being located in the Indochinese Peninsula and directly across the Bay of Bengal from India, Burma's people underwent a strong degree of Indianization and consequently came to adapt a very pious attitude towards Buddhism. This is most vividly represented in the historical city of [Bagan](#), the capital of the ancient Pagan Kingdom, where the rulers erected thousands of Buddhist structures. This polity ended up falling apart by 1287, after which most of the territory of Burma split into three generally separate entities: the [Kingdom of Mrauk U](#) in current-day Rakhine State; the [Kingdom of Ava](#) in what came to be known as "Upper Burma" (or upstream/central Burma); and the [Hanthawaddy Kingdom](#) of "Lower Burma" (or the Irrawaddy Delta area).

The ethnic Rakhine/Arakanese-majority Mrauk U Kingdom was able to retain its sovereignty until 1784 because of the geographic protection afforded to it by the Arakan Mountains, but ethnic Bamar Ava and Hanthawaddy Kingdoms struggled between themselves for leadership along the entire Irrawaddy River, with Ava's former satellite of Toungoo eventually coming out on top in 1541. That was the year when both "Burmas" were unified, following which the rivalry between the Upper and Lower portions receded into history and the legendary Bayinnaung began building his regional empire. This historic figure succeeded in uniting the modern-day areas of Northeastern India (the "Seven Sisters"), Myanmar (minus Rakhine State/Mrauk U), Thailand, and Laos under his rule, although his conquests fell apart shortly after his death. In response, Burma and Siam entered into a regular period of warfare that would continue until the mid-1800s, although most of this focused on the areas of Northern Thailand and the Tenasserim Peninsula, roughly measuring out to around the modern-day border between Myanmar and Thailand.

The Toungoo Dynasty was succeeded by the Konbaung Dynasty in 1752, and at its height, it achieved control over Northeastern India and Mrauk U, the latter occurring in 1785 and remaining in effect until the present day. This means that the contemporary territory of Rakhine State had remained historically separate from Burma for hundreds of years, thus fostering a unique sense of identity and pride among its inhabitants. This factor will be returned to a future point, but it's important for the reader to not forget that the area has a deeply ingrained sense of identity separateness and historical pride, as it directly relates to the current situation of Buddhist nationalism against the so-called "Rohingya"/Bengali Muslim minority. As it turned out to be, the Konbaung Dynasty didn't last long, since the British soon set their imperial sights on Burma and steadily colonized it through a series of three wars between 1824-1886.

The first Anglo-Burmese War lasted from 1824-1826 and resulted in the UK gaining control of Northeastern India, Mrauk U, and Peninsular Burma near the Tenasserim Hills. In effect, this meant that Mrauk U was only part of unified Burma for less than 40 years before it separated once more for another 60 years, further underlining the different historical development that it experienced separate

from the rest of the country. After that war, the British Empire attacked the country again from 1852-1853 in order to obtain control over the former Hanthawaddy lands of Lower Burma, and finally, it completed its colonization after the Third Anglo-Burmese War from 1885-1886. Despite nominally ruling over all of the Burmese lands, the British struggled to exert their influence in the frontier areas of modern-day Shan, Kachin, and Chin states, thus marking the beginning of Myanmar's ongoing predicament whereby the peripheral regions actively resist the central authority's push in exercising its sovereignty there.

During the occupation, the British sought to mitigate this issue by recruiting frontier locals into the colonial administration and army, specifically targeting those that had earlier converted to Christianity. American missionaries had a heavy presence in the frontier areas and had been actively proselytizing there since the early 1800s. They importantly converted a large number of ethnic "Karen", a nebulous exonym given to a variety of Thai-bordering tribes, and this group was among the most loyal to the British throughout the colonial period. Unsurprisingly, faced with the loss of their administrative privileges after independence, this was the first of the peripheral groups to formally rebel against the government and ignite what would later grow into the world's longest-running civil war. The relevance in pointing all of this out is that the identity separateness of Burma's frontier groups had already posed a governing challenge to the authorities since the beginning of the occupation, but that this factor of tension was co-opted in some ways in order to leverage influence against the ethnic Bamar and mostly Buddhist central majority, all to the divide and rule benefit of the British.

The UK had initially administered Burma as part of India, and it wasn't until 1937 that it granted it the status of a separate colony. Burmese nationalism and anti-colonial sentiment began growing in the early 1900s and progressively remained steady until World War II. The colony was invaded by the Japanese in early 1942, and they used a locally sourced but foreign-trained fighting force called the "Burmese Independence Army" to attack alongside them in order to 'justify' their aggression. Notably, this group included Aung San and the Thirty Comrades, the collective term that's now used in referring to the Burmese who went abroad to seek pro-independence support. Most of them reached positions of influence under the Japanese regime that they later used to foster a legitimate independence movement against the fascists. Aung San, for example, was appointed War Minister in 1943 of what the Japanese proclaimed to be an "independent Burma", but he would eventually turn on his patrons and arguably become the country's most famous independence hero and the internationally recognized founder of the modern state. After the end of World War II, Burma was able to secure international support in convincing Thailand to abandon its annexation of eastern Shan State (the territory east of the Salween River) and restore Yangon's nominal pre-war sovereignty over the area.

U Nu And Ne Win

Burma was basically only ruled by two men from 1948-1988, and these were U Nu and Ne Win. The former was the first Prime Minister of Burma whereas the latter had been Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces prior to his 1962 coup (having served a brief interim period as Prime Minister beforehand). The only reason that they were able to come to power is because popular independence hero Aung San was assassinated in summer 1947, just before his country formally gained its independence the year afterwards. Prior to his death, he had importantly helped negotiate the Panglong Agreement with the country's diverse minority groups which instituted a loose federal arrangement as a compromise solution for national unity. Particularly, the frontier areas of Shan, Kachin, and Chin states were allowed to practice "full autonomy in internal administration", but the Karen had weren't granted such legally enshrined privileges because they chose to boycott the event. Resultantly, they began simmering anti-government insurgency soon thereafter which evolved into a full-blown war of independence in 1949, which marked the official start of the civil war that soon came to involve all of the other peripheral minorities.

Despite the war that was playing out in the countryside, U Nu hoped that Burma would evolve into a stable, non-aligned state. His foreign policy didn't pander to either of the two blocs, although he and his

military were opposed to the communist rebels that were fighting in the hinterland. Nevertheless, Yangon never particularly sided with the West on the international arena and endeavored to retain an air of independence during the Cold War. Try as the government may, it wasn't able to pacify the insurgent frontier, and the communist rebellion continued to pose a threat to the country's stability. U Nu and Ne Win reached a backdoor political arrangement whereby the latter would temporarily rule the country from 1958-1960 in order to mollify the growing anti-government crisis within the country, which had by then begun to dangerously turn some urban dwellers against the authorities. The ruse was ultimately unsuccessful, however, and when another substantial political crisis erupted in 1962, Ne Win simply seized power for himself and carried out a coup.

This power grab proved to be internationally unpopular and led to Burma's isolation from the West. Part of the reason for this is because the then-General Secretary of the UN from 1961-1971, U Thant, was a Burmese national, so the general public was more aware of his country and its corresponding major political events, and they tended to see the coup as a negative development. Part of the reason behind this perception is because Ne Win quickly implemented what he referred to as the "Burmese War To Socialism", which was a centrally controlled economic model that nationalized most of the country's businesses. Considering that this occurred at one of the peaks of the Cold War, there was no way that the US and its allies could have supported it, yet despite their disdain and general condemnation, Ne Win did not use this strategic opportunity to fully ingratiate himself with the Soviet bloc.

The military leader believed that the country should pursue a stringently non-aligned foreign policy, and furthermore, it was still under threat from the Chinese-supported Communist Party of Burma (CPB). While the USSR and China had by then already begun to express hostilities towards one another, the fear in Yangon was that allying too close with Moscow might result in the CPB falling under Soviet influence instead and consequently being used as a Russian tool for geostrategically pressuring the government (e.g. to set up military bases). For these reasons, the USSR was kept at arm's length, yet bilateral relations were still quite fruitful and the two states never experienced any significant problems. Burma was thus able to pragmatically depend on the Soviet Union during this time, although the level of economic engagement between the two still trailed significantly behind what Burma had earlier enjoyed with the West.

On the domestic front, Ne Win fended off a couple of student protests that threatened his rule early on, but his suspension of the country's constitution (and with it, the Panglong Agreement) unwittingly exacerbated ethno-regional tensions and caused insurgent activity to explode in the periphery. This was especially evident in Shan and Kachin states, and it prompted the government to reactively increase its operations in these regions, which thereby intensified the civil war. Ne Win sought to decrease tensions after the enactment of the 1974 Constitution, which symbolically allotted these regions and their Rakhine and Karen counterparts with "state" status. As part of his reforms, Ne Win also abolished military control over the government and moved towards administering it via the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) that he established right after his 1962 coup. Although the country was nominally civilian-led from this point up until the reestablishment of military power in 1988, it was still under the strong influence of individuals from the armed forces, with the perfect example being how General Ne Win simply assumed leadership of the BSPP in order to prolong his leadership over Burma.

The "8888" Color Revolution, China, And The Saffron Revolution

Suu Kyi:

Regretfully, Ne Win wasn't able to revitalize his country's economy, and it continued its downward spiral throughout the next 14 years. Food prices spiked and the government's social expenditure plunged, obviously combining to produce the stereotypical conditions necessary for imminent destabilization. The state fell into debt, yet the authorities were compelled to continue pumping large amounts of money into the military in order to confront the threats emanating from the never-ending civil war. Central mismanagement enflamed the already brewing economic crisis, and short-sighted currency

decisions sparked a financial meltdown. The deteriorating domestic conditions breathed life into a simmering opposition movement that finally began to make itself public via student protests in late 1987. Despite its ups and downs, this anti-government force continued into the summer of 1988 and had by August displayed the obvious characteristics of what is now known as a Color Revolution. The military was provoked into violence and the state was predictably thrown into chaos soon thereafter, which unexpectedly prompted Ne Win to resign on 8 August 1988 after what the West has supportively taken to calling the “8888 Uprising”.

The country remained in chaos until the military’s State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) reestablished order on 18 September, but the brief interim period provided an opportunity for Color Revolution proxy Aung San Suu Kyi to become a global icon. She’s the daughter of the assassinated pre-independence leader Aung San and lived most of her life abroad, having resided in the UK prior to her return to Burma. She was in the country at this politically opportune time in order to care for her elderly mother, and just so happened (if one is to believe the Western mainstream media narrative) to decide to seize the moment and become an anti-government icon. She was totally unheard of beforehand but quickly and aptly capitalized off of her father’s namesake in order to tap into the patriotic historical memory that most Burmese have retained when reminiscing about the run-up to their country’s independence. With Burma now burning before their eyes because of the Color Revolution that was unleashed against it, many people felt a romanticist attraction to Suu Kyi simply because her family name made them imaginatively ponder how different their country could have been like had World War II hero Aung San not been assassinated.

These raw emotions, purposely summoned at a time of preplanned national collapse and manipulated fear, were easily exploited by Suu Kyi and her Color Revolution supporters as they sought to seize power over the country, but the SLORC’s surprise reestablishment of order preemptively offset their expected plans. A little over a week later on 27 September 1988, Suu Kyi responded by founding the National League for Democracy (NLD) in order to institutionally ‘legitimize’ her regime change plans and to serve as a vehicle for propelling her into the seat of power that she had earlier failed to acquire. The year afterwards, SLORC changed the country’s name from Burma to Myanmar, and then went through with holding elections in May 1990. The NLD had productively used the past 20 months to actively campaign for their “pro-democracy” cause, and despite Suu Kyi having been placed under house arrest since July 1989, they ended up receiving nearly 60% of the vote in this election. Sensing that an NLD-led government would be a Color Revolution success for the US alongside its forerunners in Eastern Europe, the military retained control of the country and did not recognize the results, pledging instead to maintain national unity until the domestic conditions are suitable for a political transfer.

In the meantime, they continued Suu Kyi’s house arrest for most of the time between then and her ultimate release in 2010, but instead of being seen as the necessary step in safeguarding national security that it was, it was widely interpreted by the American-influenced global media as “political oppression” and inadvertently transformed her into a worldwide icon for “democracy”. The decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize to her in 1991 ensured that she’d become a household name all across the globe and that the ensuing years until her eventual release would be marked by a slow-motion, low-intensity Color Revolution and never-ending regime change pressure on the authorities. In hindsight, it’s difficult to propose a more acceptable solution to the obvious threat that Suu Kyi posed in facilitating a foreign proxy takeover of the state, so it’s challenging to consider what other options the military authorities would have had at their disposal short of killing her, which they clearly would never have done simply because of the unquestionable reverence that all Myanmar citizens have for her bloodline (despite whatever disagreements they may have with her policies and patrons).

The China Factor:

Following the emergency restoration of military rule over the country, the state authorities speedily moved towards striking a strategic partnership with China. Their largest neighbor had long been the one which it had the most tepid relations, drawing back to the Sino-Burmese War of 1765-1769 when the

country preserved its independence against the Qing Dynasty's advances. That hadn't really been many significant interactions after that, partly owing to Burma later having to fight against the British and subsequently falling under London's imperial control. The famed Burma Road was used to supply anti-Japanese forces during World War II, but relations with the country's northern neighbor quickly fizzled after the People's Republic of China started sponsoring the Communist Party of Burma and relations remained tense until Beijing reversed its policy in the 1980s. The timing couldn't have been more advantageous for Myanmar, since its economy had collapsed by that time and the Soviet Union was unable to provide it with any sustainable support. The newfound international isolation that it experienced after SLORC (later to be rebranded the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC) abruptly halted Suu Kyi's Color Revolution pushed it into finding whatever alliances were available to provide it with arms, money, and international support, and China was more than willing to oblige with all three.

From the Chinese standpoint, Myanmar has copious untapped resources that could greatly aid in developing neighboring Yunnan Province. Additionally, clinching a strategic partnership with Myanmar would stabilize its southern periphery and safeguard against any strategic surprises (or so it was thought). China correctly identified Myanmar as being the most viable conduit for facilitating its non-Malacca access to the Indian Ocean, thereby bestowing the country with an immense strategic importance to Beijing. Diversifying away from its dependence on the Strait of Malacca is one of the grand strategic objectives of the Chinese leadership, and being able to access Myanmar's physical (including hydroelectric) resources was an added benefit in this arrangement. Extrapolating further, having yet another strategic ally along India's borders would increase Beijing's position vis-à-vis New Delhi and complement nicely with its existing relationships with Pakistan, Bangladesh, and for a period of time, Sri Lanka. By being the first Great Power to directly ally with the Myanmar military government, China hoped to acquire a premier foothold in the country's economy that could further embed its influence. The reasoning in Beijing was that if a relationship of complex interdependence could be established, then it would become increasingly likely that Myanmar would see its relationship with China as absolutely indispensable to its interests and therefore be less likely to drift out of Beijing's influence.

The Color Of Blood:

The US grew to be displeased with the fact that the Myanmar military authorities still remained in power, especially since it was largely due to Chinese full-spectrum support and Beijing was receiving major geostrategic benefits from the bilateral partnership. As it often does in such situations, the US convened an asymmetrical covert intervention aimed at toppling the government, albeit this time using Buddhist monks as the proxy of choice as opposed to student demonstrators. This was a calculated decision which demonstrated that the US intelligence services were well informed about the critical role that Buddhism plays in the country, especially in terms of the normative influence that monks have traditionally exercised over their local communities. If the US could engineer the manipulated perception that the dispensers of "normative judgement" in Myanmar society had turned against the government, then it hoped that this would spark a larger rebellion among the masses that could repeat the widespread destabilization of the "8888 Uprising" and topple the military.

The immediate trigger for the events was the government's unannounced decision to remove fuel subsidies [after a visit](#) by IMF and World Bank officials in August 2007. Both of these organizations had been pressuring the government to 'loosen up' its control over the economy by rolling back or rescinding its subsidization policies, and as expected, the moment that it was implemented, it led to catastrophic results for the country. Fuel prices obviously spiked, and this in turn increased the prices of food and other goods that are dependent on motorized transport in order to reach their markets. Quite quickly, then, with the country found itself in the midst of another socio-economic crisis that was easily 'nudged' by the US into becoming a political one. Buddhist monks arose as the anti-government vanguard, with the more radical elements within them leading the seditious charge in agitating the rest of the masses into a full-blown riot.

Provocateur-monks functioned very similarly to and in close coordination with their provocateur-protester counterparts, as both groups endeavored to mislead more people within their ranks into joining the burgeoning movement. Due to heavy information warfare component that was utilized during these events, it can be surmised that many of the participants may not have been fully aware of the treasonous role that they were playing in joining the protests, having no idea about the violent regime change ambitions that the provocateur elements had in mind to pursue. On an informational level, the simultaneous organizing of separate but coordinated religious and secular “protest” elements was useful in bestowing the organizers with a multitude of angles from which to cover the events, and it also invented the perception that the monks were leading people into the streets to follow them due to their religious influence over society (conveniently forgetting the existence of independently organized secular regime change actors). Most importantly, however, these two compatible Color Revolution forces acquired a critical mass of power and influence when they finally combined in the streets of Yangon, representing a tactical regime change innovation whereby separate autonomously organized anti-government blocs unify on command into a united front. This tactic would later be repeated and perfected during EuroMaidan seven years later.

PART II: How The US Could Manufacture A Hybrid War Mess In Myanmar

(Please read Part I prior to this article)

The Unipolar Transition

Structural And Social Preconditioning:

Although the Saffron Revolution failed in achieving its regime change goals, what it did succeed in was sending an ominous warning sign to the Myanmar generals of the sort of destabilization scenarios that they could expect in the coming future if they don't begin reorienting towards the US. By enacting even more sanctions against Naypyidaw than they previously had, the Western community inversely increased Myanmar's dependence on China, although this time, it appears to have been done with that presumed reaction in mind. The US and its affiliated information organs would soon thereafter begin promoting the media narrative that Myanmar is becoming adversely dependent on China to the point of resembling a satellite state, knowing that this rhetoric would frighteningly resonate to some extent or another with the country's military leadership. Myanmar had only entered into strategic relations with China owing to immediate international circumstances, and it was never its original intent to overly rely on the same northern neighbor that had spent decades trying to subvert it with communist insurgents.

The contemporaneous model of China's early forays into international development, whereby Beijing would ship or promote the migration of a large amount of its culturally insensitive workers to the country in question, inadvertently resulted in tense relations between the new arrivals and the locals. Without realizing it, while China scored positive inroads on the state-to-state level, it was simultaneously weakening its soft power foundation in Myanmar and undermining bilateral trust on the plane of civil society. The US would then adroitly manipulate these resultant sentiments into "Sino-suspicion", if not outright Sinophobia, as a means of scaring Myanmar away from China and preconditioning its national psyche into considering a possible break with its partner. The closer that Myanmar was forced into working with China as a result of the new Western sanctions, the more strategically dependent it became on it, but occurring concurrently with a fierce anti-Chinese information campaign and Beijing's own bumbling missteps inside the country, it made many in Myanmar resent what otherwise should have been seen as a privileged and highly respected ally to have.

The Deal And Its Shortcomings:

When it was appropriately identified that the asymmetrical destabilization operations (Saffron Revolution, anti-Chinese psyop campaign, and sanctions) had met their desired objectives, and in anticipation of the forthcoming and years-long-planned Pivot to Asia, the US discreetly approached the Myanmar authorities to offer them what many of their people had been artificially made to want, which was a strategic alternative to China and a lifting of the sanctions regime against their country. While dangling the carrot of these lusted-after perks, the US also held out the stick of another Saffron Revolution in order to pressure Myanmar into acceding to what basically amounts to a "deal that they can't refuse'. The only thing that the Myanmar generals would have to do for them and their country to reap the perceived benefits is "democratize" through the two-step process of releasing Suu Kyi from house arrest and holding elections that they promised to recognize and abide by. In effect, this would lead to the Color Revolution leader ascending to the height of power and allowing the US and its allies to control the country by proxy.

As an insurance policy against being completely removed from their privileged positions in the slow-motion "democratic" regime change that they agreed to carry out against themselves, the military inserted an important clause into the 2008 Constitution that guaranteed them automatic control over 25% of both chambers of parliament and thereby empowering it with de-facto veto rights over any 'reforms' that the forthcoming government chooses to enact. Still, such a defensive strategy is

inherently unstable. The veto privileges enshrined in the constitution are such that over 75% of both legislative houses must agree to any proposed constitutional changes, meaning that if a single military representative from both chambers defects to the Color Revolutionaries and the non-military politicians vote unanimously for whatever the given amendment may be, then two individuals could dangerously undermine the entire system.

More than likely, however, it doesn't seem foreseeable that a unified non-military bloc could be created anytime soon, especially since some of the various parties and people in power are favorable towards the military. Still, the point being made is that a strategic number of military defections alongside skilled politicking at the legislative level are all that's needed in order to 'legally' change the constitution in Myanmar and roll back the armed forces' influence over the country, thus raising the prospects that the US could engage in personally directed operations (bribery and/or blackmail) against strategic politicians in order to bring this scenario about. One of the ways in which intelligence agencies could combine bribery and blackmail in controlling Myanmar's top military brass is through granting influential power makers lucrative contracts in the post-sanctions environment and then holding out the threat that the economic restrictions could be re-imposed on a personal level if they don't comply with whatever political action is asked of them.

It appears as though a [test run of this strategy](#) was applied against pro-military businessman Steven Law right before the country's historic elections. In early November 2015, it was reported that the US 'circumstantially' found out that the port through which half of Myanmar's trade flows just so happens to be owned by someone who has a set of personal sanctions enacted against him, raising the prospects that the enforcement of US law "could amount to a de facto trade embargo" against the country. Mysteriously, Reuters did not follow up on this story afterwards, but incidentally the military did not object to the National League for Democracy's (NLD) historic win and have been faithfully abiding by their pledge to proceed with a 'democratic transition', raising questions as to whether the threat of enforcing sanctions against this singular individual and endangering the vast moneyed military class that he associates with was enough to bring Myanmar's armed forces to heel. It conceivably appears to be the case, and this template will certainly continue to be applied as needed on a case-by-case basis to enact further political concessions from the country's military establishment in entrenching unipolarity's growing influence in Myanmar.

The Pivot to Asia

Grand Strategy:

The US is seeking to employ a three-pronged policy of personal enrichment, domestic rearrangement, and international benefits as a means of enhancing the viability of its Pivot to Asia and tightening its control over Myanmar. The overall purpose that each of these measures are supposed to achieve is to take Myanmar on a diametrically opposite course of development than the one it had previously embarked on alongside China, widening the strategic differences between the two and creating complications for China's One Belt One Road (New Silk Road) strategy of multipolar engagement:

Personal Enrichment

While the US didn't officially announce its [Pivot to Asia](#) policy until October 2011, it obviously had been planning it for years, as topically evidenced by the backchannel diplomatic outreaches that it engaged in with Myanmar prior to its "democratization". The ruling generals were promised personal enrichment via payments that would be laundered through post-sanctions "contracts" with Western companies, and the people that they represent would have an opportunity to entrepreneurially jump in on the bonanza if they were able to. As quickly as the US opened up the gate to riches, however, it can also just as quickly shut it down when needed, strategically threatening to do so in order to increase its leverage over the country's key players.

Domestic Rearrangement

The cornerstone of Suu Kyi's domestic policy and anticipated leadership legacy is expected to be her effects to end Myanmar's civil war by implementing an Identity Federalist 'solution'. While the military may oppose this on principle and has spent over the past 60 years fighting tooth and nail to avoid this scenario, they may be unable or unwilling (whether on their own regard or due to the US' 'personal enrichment' influence over them) to do anything about it. If each of the country's ethno-regional components acquire a broad degree of quasi-independent 'self-rule' (which is what Suu Kyi is likely to advocate as a 'compromise' to all parties), then they'll become political-economic springboards for the US and its allies as they strive to carry their influence closer to China's borders.

International Benefits

On the international level, Myanmar's military and moneyed elite (basically one and the same at this point) were promised investment from their fellow ASEAN counterparts in exchange for "behaving" and not disrupting the "democratic" process of slow-motion, 'legally' institutionalized regime change. Included in this package of benefits are India's Trilateral Highway to Thailand and its [Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Program](#) to the "Seven Sisters", Japan's East-West and Southern Corridors in the Greater Mekong Subregion, and potentially even the US' TPP restrictive trading arrangement. New Delhi and Tokyo's projects are designed to make the country an indispensable part of the China Containment Coalition's non-Beijing vision of mainland ASEAN development, while the TPP would institutionally lock Myanmar into an unbalanced trading relationship with the US and prevent it from ever fully actualizing its natural economic potential with China.

The Trade-Off:

In exchange for the promised benefits that the US is holding out before the Myanmar elite, it required from them that they first cancel two major infrastructure projects with their Chinese strategic partner and thus purposely make Beijing disproportionately dependent on the only major one that remains. Myanmar made its first large step in this direction when it [indefinitely suspended](#) the Mysitone Dam in fall 2011, and it took its second one in summer 2014 when it cancelled the [\\$20 billion railroad](#) that was supposed to run between the Yunnan capital of Kunming and the Indian Ocean deep sea port of Kyaukpyu.

The only one of the three major projects that's left is the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor between these two very same cities, which opened up in January 2015 and carries both oil and natural gas.

Interestingly, it was reported by The Diplomat in January 2016 that China [secured a contract](#) to develop the deep water port in Kyaukpyu, which could of course have the dual purpose not only of accommodating large LNG vessels, but also super large "[Panamax](#)" ships for commercial shipping use. The latter is very important because it could signify that China hasn't completely abandoned its hopes to one day build a high-speed railroad between the two energy-linked cities and thereby diversify the China-Myanmar (Energy) Corridor with the full-spectrum connectivity that it was originally intended for.

Beijing's Pushback:

The US' Pivot to Asia is conditioned on encircling China and strategically cutting it off from non-unipolar-controlled access routes to the global economy. Beijing's response is all of this is to push back in the most creative ways possible, expertly deflecting the detrimental geopolitical conditions that Washington is trying to create for it and cleverly turning them around to its own advantage if it can't outright reverse them in full.

For example, if China's dwindling influence on the Myanmar establishment isn't sufficient enough to prevent the Identity Federalization of the country, then it could proactively reverse its established

policies and seek to ingratiate itself with the Kachin- and Shan-based rebels in order to preempt their future federalized entities from being co-opted by the US and its allies, thereby establishing a measure of strategic depth to insulate the People's Republic from any Hybrid War destabilizations that the US tries to engineer afterwards. If anything, China might even one day be in a secure enough position to use its influence over these Identity Federalized areas as a complementary component to its state-to-state diplomacy in promoting its policies in Myanmar.

Likewise, if Suu Kyi ends up becoming the political kingmaker in Myanmar and is able to successfully wrest tangible control over most or all of its affairs from the military (again, in coordination with the US' 'personal enrichment' strategy against the armed forces), then it doesn't necessarily mean that all is lost for China. Building off of the unprecedented outreach that it extended to her while she was still an "opposition" candidate, Beijing could theoretically succeed in 'wining and dining' her to the point where 'The Lady' agrees to reestablish the Kunming-Kyaukpyu Railroad and revitalize the China-Myanmar Strategic Corridor (the Myanmar Silk Road).

Contingency Measures

The US intends to further its grand strategic plans for Myanmar via the personal diplomacy that it practices with the country's military elite and Suu Kyi, but the success of its ultimate ambitious is far from assured. As was just argued above, China has the possibility of turning the US' own plans against it and trapping it strategists in an unexpected dilemma of their own making. The US has invested way too much political capital in Suu Kyi to ever publicly betray her, and the Myanmar Color Revolution icon already enjoys firmly established support among the Western public. Should she switch sides and ally herself with the Chinese for whatever self-interested reason she may have, the US would be unable to credibly reverse the decades-long narrative that it so carefully crafted about her being a 'pro-democracy goddess', and although it could still deploy a Color Revolution against her, such a regime change tactic wouldn't have any 'normative' support among the domestic or international audiences.

Instead, the most plausible way that the US could destabilize a pro-China Suu Kyi government is through manipulating the country's civil war factions against one another and her. It would need to take care in ensuring that this is contained as much as possible to the Kachin and Shan states that border China (and the latter being the area through which the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor runs) so as not to unnecessarily jeopardize its Indian and Japanese allies' transnational infrastructure projects in the country. If the strategic need arises, though, then the US would likely be willing to see the renewed civil war's area of operations expand and endanger its partners' projects so long as this increased the odds that it would also sabotage China's.

An escalation of ethno-regional violence (no matter whether it's contained to Kachin and Shan states or not) and the highly publicized failure of her legacy-making efforts to bring peace to the country could tarnish her reputation among the people and lead to a measureable decline of support for her leadership both at home and abroad. Additionally, if her government found itself depending on the same military that she had railed against for decades in order to restore stability to the periphery and/or chastise rebel groups that refuse to abide by a prospective peace treaty, then it could damage her image by making her appear to be "just another politician" that "sold out" her principles and simply did and said whatever was necessary in order to get into power.

It doesn't matter if this is actually the case or not – the importance lies in how it's represented via media and NGO platforms and the effect that this has on the domestic and international public's perception of her. If it makes headway in conditioning the people that Suu Kyi might not be "administratively qualified" to lead the country despite her "democratic credentials", then the US could much more easily go forth with an in-party coup or enact a corresponding Color Revolution to reverse-engineer yet another regime change Hybrid War in Myanmar. The key to understanding how this interconnected strategy could work is for one to become acquainted with the complexities of the country's civil war,

which brings the research along to its next section before concluding with the actual Hybrid War scenarios that could be summoned.

PART III: How The US Could Manufacture A Hybrid War Mess In Myanmar

(Please read Part I and Part II prior to this article)

Neophytes might understandably feel intimidated when they begin delving deep into Myanmar's internal complexities, finding out firsthand why the country's civil war is perhaps the world's most difficult to comprehend. There's an overwhelming amount of information available about the ethnic and military situation inside of Myanmar, but most references tend to pander to one or another extreme when attempting to describe this. For example, the mainstream media narrative stereotypically simplifies the issue by misleadingly painting it as a basic struggle between a "military dictatorship" and "ethnic minority freedom fighters", whereas the plethora of academic texts that are available have a propensity to overanalyze minute identity traits about one, some, or all of the players and entangle the reader in a mess of unfamiliar and daunting lingo.

What's crucially needed is an easily readable briefing that balances between these two media and academic extremes and provides the reader with a solid understanding of the general dynamics that are at play. The present research endeavors to satisfy this imperative by presenting a review of the dueling dichotomies that characterize Myanmar's internal situation. Following that and after having informed the reader of the unstable foundations on which the country rests, the work then moves along to describing the main theaters of current and potential conflict and explaining the goals that their varied rebel forces one day hope to attain. Finally, the last part of this section illustrates the present state of affairs in Myanmar's civil war by relevantly juxtaposing it on a map of the transnational infrastructure projects that are passing through the country, thus allowing the reader to recognize the connection between the two and more better understand the Hybrid War forecasts that the author will make in the concluding part of the research.

Dueling Dichotomies

The ethnic and civil war situation in Myanmar is most easily and effectively encapsulated as a set of four interconnected dualities:

Center vs Periphery:

The broadest theme that one can observe in Myanmar is how the country's geographic periphery is at conflict with the center, which geophysically speaking, pits the mountainous border regions against the low-lying plains and river valleys (except in the case of Rakhine State).

Titular Nation vs Minorities:

Digging deeper into why the center and periphery are at odds, it's relevant to indicate that the ethnic-majority Bamar inhabit the central region while a diverse group of ethnic minorities live in the periphery. The Bamar constitute around 60% of the population whereas the over 135 ethnic minorities account for the remaining 40%, the greatest proportion of which are the Shan, Karen, and Rakhine.

Neither of these two categories are inherently racist against the other, but it's just that the identity separateness between them encourages the minorities to seek autonomy, federalization, and/or independence from the titular majority, with this sentiment clearly being susceptible to foreign manipulation.

Labor Resources vs Natural Resources:

Extrapolating further into the center vs periphery dichotomy, it's revealed that the former is rich in labor resources whereas the latter is extraordinarily wealthy in natural ones such as rare minerals. This

complicates the existing arrangement, since theoretically speaking, on their own, each of the two categories of central/titular and peripheral/minorities can economically subsist without the other.

In fact, the sparsely populated peripheral areas, especially Kachin State, could convincingly make the argument that they would have a greater GDP per capita if they were allowed to retain all of their natural resource revenue and fully develop their deposits without what they consider to be central inference into their internal affairs. Contrarily, Naypyidaw's consistent position has been that the peripheral regions constitute an integral part of the unitary country and that no region should be allowed to hoard its internal wealth all to itself.

The difference between these two positions is naturally irreconcilable, ergo the reason for the world's longest-running civil war, and the only foreseeable solution is if one side or the other compromises on their deeply ingrained position owing to a change of situational circumstances.

Unitary vs Federalist:

The final, and perhaps the most substantial, dichotomy in facing Myanmar today is how each side has a diametrically divergent vision for how the country should be internally organized. The military has been fighting to maintain a unitary state, whereas the ethnic peripheral rebels, wowed by their substantial natural resource wealth, want to revert back to the federal-like system enshrined in the Panglong Agreement. As was just mentioned above, the only way to resolve this conundrum is for one of the sides to enact a concession on their previously held position, which in this case appears to be what's happening with the Myanmar state as a result of the US' multipronged Pivot to Asia that's being waged against it right now.

The synchronized combination of 'personal enrichment' for the generals alongside the rise of Suu Kyi has created a situation where Naypyidaw is much more flexible to the federalist solution that the rebels have been agitating for, and which in the context of the New Cold War and the Pivot to Asia, is exactly what the US would like to happen as well. At this point, it appears unlikely that Myanmar will remain a unitary state in the coming future, with the civil war conflict progressively shifting from the battlefield to the boardroom. The highest echelons of the military seem to have been bought out and/or pressured into acceding to this scenario, and the main bone of contention will now be the specific details pertaining to the forthcoming federalism, which will be addressed in the final Hybrid War section.

Recalcitrant Rebels

There are 15 primary rebel groups fighting against the Myanmar government, over half of which signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in October 2015. There's a lot of information that can be learned about each and every one of them if the reader commences a Google search on these groups, but it's not the aim of the present research to reiterate easily retrievable details. Rather, this part of the study aims to describe the general dynamics of what's going on in each area and highlight only the most important details that are relevant for the reader to know. All other information can be accessed via simple internet searches, whereas the contextual analysis offered below uniquely integrates everything that's been already been discussed and sets the stage for understanding the Hybrid War scenarios that will be examined later on:

Shan State:

This is the largest geographic region in Myanmar and is inhabited by the Shan, the most populous ethnic minority in the country and around 9% of the total population. Both Shan State and its namesake ethnicity are extremely complex and comprised of a varied amount of separate identities. For example, the Shan ethnicity itself is a categorical term used to refer to a number of closely related identity subgroups that inhabit the Shan Hills. It's unascertainable whether all of the "Shan" self-identify with that label or if some of them prefer to be more associated with their specific sub-ethnic identity. It's

reasonable to infer that there's a richness of self-aware identities within the Shan community, especially since Shan State itself used to be a federated entity of 34 separate units during the period of British occupation. With varying degrees of civil war tension occurring in Shan State since 1947 and fully taking off after Ne Win's 1962 coup and revocation of the Panglong Agreement, it's very probable that the kaleidoscopic identity present in this region was retained to a large extent and probably even strengthened in some areas.

Shan state's internal identity arrangement is very important in the larger context of Myanmar's civil war because it gives rise to the suggestion that this internally divided ethnos-region might continue its fratricidal conflict even after the full cessation of hostilities. For example, a significant amount of the lingering violence that continues in the country to this day is between dueling rebel groups in Shan State, which despite having been fighting against the government for over 60 years already, have never managed to totally unite during this long period of time. The rebel divisiveness that has plagued Shan State can presumably be attributed to the multitude of identities present in the region, some of whom might have remained mutually suspicious of one another to this day.

From the standpoint of the military, this is actually an ideal situation that allows the authorities the opportunity to divide and rule the rebels by playing off one group against the other, and truth be told, this is actually what's been thought to have occurred for some time already. Correspondingly, this state of internecine affairs has been totally against the interests of the overall Shan State autonomy, federalization, and independence movements, and it's a problem that they urgently need to rectify as the country predictably lurches towards federalization. Failure to resolve this long-running internal spat could lead to a renewed outbreak of hostilities among the various rebel groups here, which of course in the grand scheme of things would play to the military's interests.

Given the existing situation and its long-documented development, it's not likely that all of the Shan State rebel groups will ever unify into a cohesive and long-lasting front, with any possible successes in this direction being only ephemeral tactical conveniences for each side. With this in mind, it's probable that Myanmar's imminent move towards internal reorganization could see the region doubly federalized, first in the sense of its entire territory being a separate federal unit on the national level, and then through a sub-entity federalization between the internally opposing elements within it (which might nowadays be less than the 34 that existed under the British).

The result of this complex internal overlay is that Shan State's individual component parts will become prized geostrategic trophies for the US and its allies as Washington gradually proceeds unimpeded in its march towards the Chinese border. Along the same lines, however, China could also play this game in order to acquire a degree of strategic depth via the de-facto creation of pro-Beijing buffer territories inside of the divided Shan States, motivated to a large part by the need to protect the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor. Taken together, it's projected that the US' New Cold War proxy aggression against China might eventually lead to a Shan State civil war inside of post-federalized Myanmar, since the US wants to acquire controlling influence over China's prospective strategic corridor through the country (which specifically runs through Shan State), while China actively wants to defend its Malacca-detouring investment.

Rakhine State:

The civil war battleground in Rakhine State has been an off-and-on problem since the beginning of the conflict, with the specific nature of this ethno-regional conflict taking on a different nature throughout the years. It's important for observers to understand that there are two primary identity groups in this region, and those are the original inhabitant Buddhist Rakhine ethnic majority and the recently immigrated Muslim Bengali "Rohingya" minority. At this point, a few words need to be said about these actors, since the rampant and self-interested "political correctness" of Western mainstream media outlets has blurred the reality of the conflict between the two and presented it in a completely decontextualized manner that's easier for them to manipulate.

Rakhines and "Rohingyas"

To begin with, the Rakhine and the state that they inhabit used to be the Kingdom of Mrauk U, which the research has earlier confirmed used to be totally separate from the present-day Myanmar state for centuries before its incorporation. Thus, it's understandable why there's such a strong degree of identity separateness among this ethnic group and historical pride in its verifiable uniqueness, both of which were strongly insulated by the Arakan Mountains that kept outside influences and invading forces at bay. The ethnic Bengali "Rohingyas", on the other hand, are new arrivals to this territory and are mostly concentrated along the international border in the north. They're the descendants of ethnic Muslim Bengalis that found themselves in Burma after the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent, and in the decades afterwards, they facilitated the illegal immigration of many of their identity kin to their new host country. In the early days after independence, they even waged a Mujahedin Islamic insurgency against the government, capitalizing on the regional trend of religious identification as the premier factor of separateness and self-determination. This conflict then evolved into a Salfist terrorist campaign after the 1971 independence of Bangladesh, and there have been reports that Al Qaeda has infiltrated the movement and currently uses it for recruits.

The Bengali "Rohingya" issue only received international attention a few years ago when the Western media began focusing on the legal plight of this community, as technically speaking, they are ineligible for citizenship due to the 1982 Nationality Law. The government formally refuses to recognize the "Rohingya" as a separate ethnic group, rightfully describing the presence of most of them in the country as the direct or indirect consequence of illegal immigration from Bangladesh. Granted, there were Muslim Bengalis in the British colony of Burma prior to independence, but their number and concentration weren't as large as they currently are. Even accounting for high birth rates, it seems implausible that this community naturally increased on its own to its present size, thus circumstantially confirming the government and the native Rakhines' accusations that rampant illegal immigration is to blame. Given that the West typically disguises its self-interested geopolitical activities with "humanitarian" rhetoric, it can be ascertained that its information campaign in support of the Bengali "Rohingyas" was merely a ruse designed to add pressure to the Myanmar government and contribute to its destabilization. There are certainly legitimate humanitarian concerns to be expressed when discussing the Bengali "Rohingyas", but they've been manipulated for geopolitical purposes by the very same information organs that purport to be acting in their interests, thus regretfully discrediting the international media blitz about this issue and doing nothing to resolve the intercommunal conflict between them and the native Buddhist Rakhine.

Pertaining to that, the Bengali "Rohingyas" burst into the international limelight after they became victims of a targeted pogrom by hyper-nationalist Buddhist monks in Rakhine State. After a series of escalations between these two communities, the details of which are disputable and not independently confirmed, the ethnic majority Buddhist Rakhines attacked the minority Muslim Bengali "Rohingyas", causing many of them to flee for their lives into the ramshackle internal refugee communities that a large number of them still live in to this day. To avoid the impression that the author is taking sides in this conflict, it's necessary to add a few words about the local Buddhist position towards the Bengali "Rohingya", not to in any manner excuse the violence committed against this community, but to provide a framework for understanding the perception that the ethnic Rakhine have towards them and how this could realistically be manipulated in the future.

The Buddhist Rakhines believe that the illegal immigrant Muslim Bengali "Rohingyas" are carrying out a strategic repopulation campaign so as to promote the creeping Islamization of the region and facilitate their separatist ambitions. From the way that they see it, the historically Buddhist homeland that they're so proud of is under threat by this group, yet the central authorities are not properly dealing with the problems there out of concern that their international reputation would be adversely impacted by any heavy-handed response, especially as Naypyidaw warms to the West and embraces the US as part of the latter's Pivot to Asia. In their view, provoked by what they interpreted as the government's neglect of

their native interests and reacting to simmering provocations from the Bengali “Rohingyas”, the Buddhist Rakhines felt compelled to act in one way or another, and this unfortunately turned into a one-sided bloodbath.

Multisided Mayhem

To reiterate so as to preempt any potential misunderstanding, the author does not hold a partisan viewpoint towards the Rakhine-“Rohingya” conflict and endeavors only to help the unfamiliar reader better understand all aspects of this situation. Having once more emphasized that point and recognizing that the conversation has already entered into “politically incorrect” territory from the viewpoint of Western pundits and “human rights” activists, the author can speak more freely about the current state of affairs surrounding this topic. No matter what their individual or group motivations may be, the present status is that a looming Hobbesian conflict appears to be on the horizon between the three primary actors in Rakhine State: the majority Buddhist Rakhine, the minority Muslim Bengali “Rohingya”, and the military.

Certain groups of Rakhine are hostile to the Bengali “Rohingya”, whereas others are antagonist to the authorities both because of their reluctance to decisively intervene in addressing the Bengali “Rohingyas” issue and because they also harbor ambitions of autonomy, federalization, and/or independence. The Bengali “Rohingyas” do not like the Buddhist Rakhines and clash with them to defend themselves from pogroms and agitate for autonomy, federalization, independence, annexation to Bangladesh, and/or the imposition of Sharia law. Similarly, they’re suspicious of the central government for passively allowing the recent pogroms against them to take place and having carried out multiple security operations against them in the past decades. Altogether, from the government’s perspective, both groups can be troublesome in their own way and represent unique asymmetrical threats to the country’s stability and unity, especially since the Rakhine-“Rohingya” conflict has distinct contours of a provoked Buddhist-Muslim civilizational clash. International Western sympathy for the latter might lead to a scenario where a “[South Asia Kosovo](#)” is a possibility, and this potential eventually will be returned to when describing the Hybrid War threats against Myanmar.

Geostrategic Designs

The destabilization in Rakhine State doesn’t exist in a geostrategic vacuum, and it’s closely connected with the US’ grand plans to contain China and disrupt its multipolar transnational connective infrastructure projects. The China-Myanmar Energy Corridor transits right through this territory on its way to the Indian Ocean, thereby making it just as pivotally important for Beijing as its counterpart entity of Shan State is. Furthermore, Myanmar’s recent decision to allow China to [develop](#) a deep-water port at Kyaukpyu indicates that Beijing is capable of cutting strategic deals with Suu Kyi’s government and portends that it might one day seek to revive the Myanmar Silk Road. In such a case, it’s absolutely predicted with near-certainty that the US would utilize its influence over one, some, or all of the abovementioned multisided conflict actors in order to destabilize the project and sabotage its eventual fulfillment. After all, this is the very essence of what Hybrid War is about, and China’s infrastructural investments in such a potentially volatile area as Rakhine State, despite its ideal geographic location, is a serious vulnerability for Beijing.

Of pertinent interest, however, is that India’s [Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Program](#) also runs through Rakhine State, thus presenting what on the surface would be a strategic conundrum for the US. Conventional wisdom dictates that the US would not want to sabotage its allies’ infrastructural projects unless it felt as though there was no way to realistically avoid doing so, and that’s exactly how it plans to proceed concerning this dilemma. Washington would rather avoid disrupting India’s plans if it could help it, but it’s not shy about throwing its partner under the bus if this was the only way to increase the chances of Rakhine State being destabilized to the degree that it adversely affects China’s prospective Myanmar Silk Road. From the American-Indian perspective, while it would be inconvenient if a scenario develops that interferes with the Kaladan Program, this doesn’t necessarily mean that New Delhi’s

general strategy for diversifying its Northeast trade routes is irreparably damaged. After all, it can still utilize the ASEAN Highway that it's constructing through Myanmar to Thailand, this project does not pass through Rakhine or Shan States, although its eventual vulnerability in Kayin and Mon States will be addressed in the next section.

Kayin And Mon States:

Mon

These two ethno-regional territorial units are located right next to one another along Myanmar's eastern/southeastern border with Thailand. Although they're identity-separate from one another, they're grouped together in this present analysis out of the geostrategic imperative to more clearly describe the US' Hybrid War intrigue. As a simplistic backgrounder, the Mon used to rule over a broad swath of southern Myanmar for hundreds of years, using the Hanthawaddy Kingdom as their vehicle of administration. They were finally defeated by the ethnic Bamar Toungoo Dynasty in 1539, which began a steady outmigration of Mon from the region and towards their current location along the Thai border. While most of the remaining population in the Irawaddy Delta assimilated and integrated into the developing Bamar-majority state, those that moved to the eastern/southeastern border region strove to retain their traditional identity and culture. After Myanmar's independence, they some of them started to fight against the authorities, unhappy at the administrative status that they were given. This conflict continues into the present day, although it's generally one of the most subdued elements of the country's civil war and isn't as dramatic or dynamic as the events in Kachin and Shan States.

Karen

The situation with the Karen in Kayin State is remarkably different than it is with the Mon, since the Karen National Union was the first organization to formally rebel against the government in 1949 and spark the entire civil conflagration. As some useful background information, the word "Karen" is actually an exonym given by American missionaries in the 1800s to refer to the composite identity of a diverse group of frontier-dwelling tribes. In that sense, the Karen are very heterogeneous and have struggled to foster a sense of communalism ever since they were first categorized together by the Christian outsiders.

Most of this group is still Buddhist, although around a third of the Karen are Christian, as is the majority of the Karen National Union. It should also be noted that Christian Karen collaborated with the British and were handsomely rewarded with prestigious colonial positions and imperial prestige, whereas the Buddhist Karen were mostly disregarded by the authorities and treated with the same type of contempt as all the others.

The growing intra-communal divide between Christian and Buddhist Karens eventually became one of the contributing factors to why the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army splintered from the Karen National Union in 1994, which undoubtedly hindered the Karen's overall anti-government efforts. Even within these separate religiously affiliated camps, the Karens are still a very diverse people because of their separate languages and cultures, and most of this demographic lives outside of Kayin State and in the other parts of Myanmar. Taken together, it's very challenging for the Karen's rebel elite to foster a unified identity that could later translate into an autonomous, federalized, or autonomous state.

Unipolar Crossroads

Mon and Karen States are very important for Myanmar because they are the only two minority regions through which India and Japan's unipolar transnational connective infrastructure projects must pass, and accordingly, the Hybrid War chokepoint at which they're most vulnerable to being destabilized. To elaborate in detail, India's ASEAN Highway will connect to Mawlamyine in central Mon State, which is the fourth-largest city in the country. From there, it will then proceed alongside Japan's East-West

Corridor, which actually begins in that city, to the southern Kayin city of Myawaddy that's located right next to the Thai border. Both of these projects, which can in a sense be seen as two strategically compatible and mutually complementary endeavors, strongly promote the non-Chinese unipolar vision in Southeast Asia.

These integral initiatives are essential to the viability of the Chinese Containment Coalition's efforts in Myanmar, and as such, it's highly unlikely that the US would encourage their disruption, even more so because both neither of these regions are connected to China in any physical or infrastructural way whatsoever. In view of this, it can be confidently forecast that that US and its allies will contribute whatever developmental and economic means necessary in pacifying and co-opting the rebellious Mon and Karen groups in this pivotal part of the country. Even in the unlikely instance that a disruptive conflict somehow re-erupts in these states, so long as it can be contained from affecting north-central Mon and southern Kayin (or in other words, occur only in southern Mon and northern Kayin), then the unipolar world will have nothing significant to worry about.

Chin State:

The next battleground in Myanmar's civil war to be discussed is Chin State, which is important from the perspective of Hybrid War as a result of India's Kaladan Project transiting through its territory. By and large, Chin State is one of the poorest, mountainous, sparsely populated, and least-developed areas in all of Myanmar, and it's been relatively isolated from the rest of the country ever since independence. The Chin were Christianized by Baptist and Protestant missionaries during the colonial period, and most of them have still retained the religion that they converted to, thus giving them an added layer of identity separateness when compared to the majority Buddhist Bamar. Other than that, not much else is publicly available about this group and its ethno-regional state, underlining just how disconnected its half a million people remain from the rest of the world to this day.

What has importantly been established, though, is that a rebel group by the name of the [Chin National Front](#) has been active in the area since 1988, and they finally [signed a ceasefire](#) with the government in December 2012. The Chin were promised a stronger degree of cultural autonomy and that the military would notify the Chin National Front one month in advance of any incursions in certain designated areas within the state. In exchange, the rebels agreed to halt their attacks against government forces, which had the effect of stabilizing the region and securing the Kaladan Project. It's plain to see that Naypyidaw decided to strike a deal with the Chin in order to safeguard the Indian-built project, and thus far, the arrangement is still in effect and appears to be a win-win for all parties.

The intermodal transport program is expected to be beneficial in bringing some much-needed foreign development to part of this reclusive state and be advantageous for some of the locals, but overall, it's no longer as strategically important as it once was. India is also pursuing the ASEAN Highway that's much more ambitious and passes through economically productive areas that can contribute to the bilateral trade flow along the route, unlike the Kaladan Project which goes through mostly virgin territory in Chin State. It's not predicted that there'll be any significant reoccurrence of ethno-regional violence in this area because the US has no interest in encouraging rebellions that don't have any direct strategic relevance to containing China, yet there's a chance that the fallout from any possibly contentious federalization agreement might be severe enough as to once more pit the Christian Chin National Front against the majority-Buddhist central authorities (among other similar peripheral-center conflicts that would likely break out again and/or intensify in this scenario).

If it ever happens that a domestic disruption in Chin State is severe enough to the extent that India's initiative is jeopardized, suspended, or even cancelled, it wouldn't have that much of an adversarial impact on either India or Myanmar aside from the money that they already invested. Where it could really have an effect is on the local Chin people, but then again, it wasn't even predicted in the first place that most of them would benefit from this minor transit corridor in an obscure corner of their mountainous territory. Cynically speaking, the project is largely expendable and isn't an absolute

necessity to any party, functioning instead as a convenient supplement to the ASEAN Highway as opposed to its own independent trade corridor. In that sense, it's largely inconsequential to the larger paradigm at play in the region, implying that Chin State will fail to factor into any of the Great Powers' geostrategic calculations and will presumably remain irrelevantly obscure.

Kachin State:

The Jade War

The northernmost state in Myanmar is the only one of the frontier and minority-majority regions to not have any transnational connective infrastructure project running through it, but that by no means dilutes its geostrategic importance to the country's leaders and their neighbors. Kachin State is one of the territorially largest yet most sparsely populated areas of Myanmar, and its value to all players derives from its pivotal location along the Indian-Chinese border and its copious natural resource wealth. The area is renowned for its [rich mineral deposits](#) (especially its jade and gold reserves), and it has a lot of timber and hydroelectric potential as well. So profitable are these industries, particularly the mineral one, that it's been [widely reported](#) that the conflict between the military and the [Kachin Independence Organization](#) is more of a [war about resources](#) than it is about self-determination.

That's actually a pretty accurate description to a large extent, since both the military and the rebels have essentially been posturing themselves for control over these lucrative deposits and the right to legally trade them on the global market. The state has international legitimacy over the territory and its resources, and can therefore sell whatever it extracts to the rest of the world to the highest bidder that they find, but the rebels have no such legal freedom of trade and are forced out of necessity to informally sell their wares to the neighboring Chinese market. Although China has an apparently insatiable demand for jade, one of the most profitable of the many resources endemic to Kachin State, the fact that the rebels can only sell it to them illegally deflates the price below conventional market value and deprives them of the full profit that they could otherwise receive if they were legally selling it elsewhere abroad.

Out of their own economic self-interest, the Kachin rebels want to gain internationally recognized autonomy, federalization, and/or independence so that they can acquire the right to legally sell their minerals on the wider market and to major global companies, with the inference being that they would equitably distribute the proceeding wealth to the local population in a better manner than the military is currently doing. Reversely, the military does not want to lose its control over the jade mines that are presently under its command, having its own self-interest in sustaining the much-needed foreign currency flow that comes with this resource's sale on the global market. For these economic reasons, the strategic state of the civil war in Kachin has come to a standstill, despite occasional violence between both sides that slightly adjusts the tactical balance between them.

To simplify the situation, both sides want to retain control over the jade and the other natural resources within Kachin State, yet there's no ideal solution that satisfies the interests of both actors. The military's promotion of a unitary state and/or non-self-rule autonomy/federalization/independence goes against the Kachin Independence Organization's vision of economic sovereignty for the region, while the fulfillment of these aforementioned possibilities would deprive Naypyidaw of the very same revenue stream that the Kachins want to control. Even assuming that Myanmar moves towards a form of autonomy and/or federalism (whether through a standard nationwide implementation or an asymmetrical application on a case-by-case basis), there's no foreseeable scenario that would be acceptable to both parties.

The military might concede some form of autonomy or federalism to Kachin State, but only over the parts of region that it doesn't control. This plan would obviously undermine the Kachin Independence Organization's claim to have authority over all of their namesake state and deprive it of ever exercising control over the western half that the military would retain, so it's unlikely that they'd agree to this.

Additionally, it's not expected that any other rebellious ethno-regional state such as the Shan and Kayin ones would be pressured to accede to the internal administrative partitioning of their territory, so the Kachin clearly wouldn't agree to a lopsided arrangement that puts them and their people at a national disadvantage or negative asymmetry when compared to its counterparts.

Unless the military surprisingly recants its position and agrees to grant Kachin State with full control over its entire internal economic affairs via autonomy or federalization, then the only way to break the negotiating deadlock would be through a renewal of large-scale hostilities in order to force the other into submitting to its demands. Even then, if this is not accompanied with similar tense disagreements between the central authorities and the other ethno-regional representatives, then it's possible that neither side would want to make the first move and tangibly destroy the spirit of 'goodwill' that all negotiating parties are expected to abide by. Taking this into account, it can be forecast that one of the sides might engage in a false flag attack against the other in order to justify their preplanned militant response to breaking the political deadlock, which might have the consequence of unravelling the entire negotiation process through a rapid chain reaction of conflict that suddenly returns the country to civil war.

Infrastructure Interests

Just because no transnational connective infrastructure projects currently go through Kachin State does not mean that the region is forever doomed to geo-economic obscurity. Forecasting two separate, but not mutually exclusive, visions for Kachin State, it's possible that the existing [Mandalay-Myitkyna Railroad](#) could be expanded to one day connect to China's Yunnan Province and further afield to its envisioned regional transport hub of Kunming. Similarly, there's also a chance that the aforementioned train route could achieve intermodal connectivity with India's ASEAN Highway that will pass through Mandalay, thus providing New Delhi with access to the region's resources and competitively diverting them away from the Chinese marketplace and towards India's instead. It's already a [well-documented](#) fact that both Asian Great Powers are fiercely competing across the continent, so it's not unrealistic that their rivalry in Myanmar will one day extend to the shared frontier region of Kachin State. With infrastructural investments and enhanced transportation connectivity being powerful instruments of 21st-century diplomacy, and with both India and China already employing these tools in Myanmar via the ASEAN Highway and China-Myanmar Energy Corridor and prospective Myanmar Silk Road respectively, it can be safely assumed that they will also try to find a way to integrate Kachin State into their grand projects.

Should they actively compete to do this, then China may find itself to be at a relative disadvantage to India not only because the present political situation in the country is mildly hostile to its interests, but because the people of Kachin State have previously displayed a simmering sense of Sinophobia. Myanmar indefinitely suspended China's plans to construct the gargantuan Myitsone Dam project there in September 2011, ostensibly claiming that this was in response to growing environmental protests against it. To be sure, Naypyidaw took this move not in order to appease its citizens, but as a goodwill measure towards showing Washington that it was serious about implicitly cooperating with the Pivot to Asia grand strategy that was to be publicly announced the month afterwards, but its claims of doing so in order to mollify a growing protest movement are misleading but semi-plausible. The truth is that the US and its affiliated NGO organs have been waging a prolonged information campaign against the hydroelectric projects that China has endeavored to build throughout Southeast Asia, and that it was actually somewhat successful in [instigating various protests](#) in Myanmar against the Myitsone Dam. Having said that, the degree to which most Kachins were genuinely against the dam is unascertainable, but it can be strategically assessed that US' "pro-environmental" campaigns in Myanmar and elsewhere in the region carry within them a euphemistically disguised Sinophobic slant that play on existing local stereotypes in order to gain wider support.

Racist stereotypes are always wrong and can never be justified, but in the interests of seeking a better understanding as to why some Kachin are disinclined towards China, it's relevant to briefly remind the

reader about the genesis of this attitude. China's international economic forays initially began in its neighborhood through outreaches with neighboring states, especially the isolated Myanmar government during the 1990s. Totally new to the practice of targeted international investment in a newly globalized world, China sloppily made some mistakes in disregarding local sensitivities in its quest to churn out higher profit margins in its foreign areas of operation, which in this context, also included Kachin State. These missteps therefore had the unintended but predictable effect of imbuing certain members of the Kachin community with a negative attitude towards China, and regrettably one which remains partially in existence to this day and is subject to foreign manipulation. The soft power damage that China's earlier business errors and the US' ongoing overemphasized magnification of them have done to the Kachins' grassroots attraction to other Chinese outreach efforts has made it relatively more difficult for Beijing to leverage its influence in turning the state into a geopolitical buffer, which when brought back into the context of the Indian-Chinese rivalry in South and Southeast Asia, heavily plays to New Delhi's advantage.

Sagaing Region:

The Nagas

While not typically recognized as a battleground in Myanmar's civil war, Saigaing Region might turn out to be one of the most pivotal in terms of terms of the potential internationalization of the conflict. It's not the majority Bamar that pose a risk in this regard, but the minority Naga that inhabit a thin slice of territory along the northern border with India. This ethnic group was divided along state lines after the end of British colonialism, with most of the demographic finding themselves in what would later become the Northeastern Indian state of Nagaland, while a scattering of them wound up in Myanmar. Technically speaking, it was the British that first administratively divided them from one another when they imposed the 1826 Treaty of Yandabo on Burma after the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War and acquired control of what is now Northeastern India. It was only after the Third Anglo-Burmese War concluded in 1885 that the British 'reunited' both Naga groups under their imperialist yoke, before once more administratively dividing them when Burma was decreed to be a separate colony in 1937. This division remained in effect after independence and continues to this day, as has been the desire of some nationalist Naga in India to formally reunite with their Myanmar-based brethren.

The Naga Conflict

The causes of the Naga Conflict in India are varied and the situation itself is complex enough to warrant an entire study into (of which there have already been many), but for the relevance of this research and in becoming familiarized with one of the forthcoming Hybrid War scenarios that will be described in Part III, the author needs to take the time right now to briefly introduce the reader to this topic. To condense decades of history into as few words as possible, the Naga National Council began agitating for the Naga Hills District of Assam to receive separate state status in 1947, and their movement eventually transformed into an insurgency in the early 1950s. While this was happening, there were also some Naga who did not even agree with their community's incorporation into post-1947 India and started advocating for independence right away. New Delhi sought to compromise with the community by enacting a strategic decentralization in 1963 that created the state of Nagaland out of Assam, but this wasn't enough to assuage the more nationalistically inclined Naga that continued to fight for an independent state. As time wore on and the conflict intensified, the Indian government began designating some of these groups as terrorist organizations in response to their violent actions. Nevertheless, this did not deter some organizations such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, which continued their campaign and even took it transnational to Myanmar, using the latter's secluded northern jungle zones as refuge for planning new cross-border attacks and recruiting from the local population there.

"Nagalim"

The post-1963 generation of Naga nationalists has been motivated to create what they term to be “Nagalim”, or the unification of the Naga ethnic group under a single political leadership. It’s at this point where the goals of these organizations have begun to diverge. There are some Naga groups that want the Naga-inhabited regions of neighboring Northeast Indian states to be included into Nagaland, which would then either remain part of India or become an independent state. The other branch of Naga nationalists want to create a transnational independent “Nagalim” that incorporates the Naga-inhabited areas of India but also the newly created Naga Self-Administered Zone in Myanmar, thus representing a threat to the territorial integrity of both countries instead of only to India like before. The situation becomes further complicate because the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN-K) has been operating in Myanmar for years and is one of the signatories to the government’s truce agreement, which itself legitimized the creation of the Naga Self-Administered Zone after the passing of the 2008 Constitution. Therefore, while the NSCN-K is a terrorist group in India, it’s a legitimately recognized state partner in Myanmar despite having chosen to [not sign](#) the October 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. This of course makes for a tricky cross-border situation that will later be revealed in Part III of the research to be rife with Hybrid War potential.

The State of Affairs

To recap, the longest-running and most brutal episodes of Myanmar’s civil war have been fought in Shan, Kayin, and Kachin States along the country’s eastern borderlands. The destabilizations in Rakhine State, Chin State, and the NSCN-K’s activities in Sagaing Region have also been rightfully group into this larger conflagration, thus creating a situation where just about all of Myanmar’s ethno-regional periphery has been up in arms against the central government at some point. Being the world’s longest active conflict, the country’s civil war is extraordinarily complex and multifaceted, and different sides have turned against one another throughout the prolonged course of this fratricidal bloodbath. While the war stubbornly slogged on for almost the past 70 years, the international scene underwent many dramatic changes, with the most relevantly pronounced one occurring when the US military decided to pivot most of its foreign focus from the European and Mideast theaters to the Asia-Pacific one.

Even before formally announcing this policy in October 2011, the US had already taken moves to facilitate its Pivot to Asia, pressuring Myanmar’s military government to accede to its grand strategic designs through a carrot-and-stick combination of ‘personal enrichment’ and Color Revolution blackmail, both of which ultimately succeeded in enacting the geostrategic concessions that Washington was seeking from Naypyidaw. As part of this arrangement, the US seriously began considering what a post-civil war Myanmar would look like, ideally envisioning that it would be an [Identity Federalized](#) state that’s tightly integrated into a chain of unipolar transnational infrastructure projects spearheaded by Chinese Containment Coalition-members India and Japan. Corresponding to its plans, it encouraged Myanmar to move forward with its Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of October 2015, which the author analyzed in-depth in a prior publication entitled [“Myanmar: Drawn-Out Peace Or Battle Lines Drawn?”](#) Concurrently with throwing its rhetorical support behind that agreement, the US also implicitly signaled that it backed its proxy Suu Kyi’s statements that asked the rebel groups to wait until the November election and the inauguration of a new government before making any deals with the authorities.

This schizophrenic approach is clearly explainable by the fact that the US generally favors the initiation of the conflict resolution process regardless of which side is supporting it, since its grand strategy has now changed to the point of being eager to stabilize Myanmar so that it can be more useful in ‘containing China’. Specifically, the implementation of Identity Federalism could create a checkerboard of new geopolitical ‘real estate’ inside the country that sudden enters ‘into play’, which would then allow the US and its allies to advance their political, economic, and military influence closer to the mainland Chinese border. In a state of continued civil war, the possibility of doing so is much more difficult and costly in the physical, financial, and strategic senses, hence the need to resolve the conflict and craft a facilitative domestic mechanism that could masquerade as a “win-win” solution for accomplishing this. The military and Suu Kyi’s dual-track engagement with the rebel groups, despite the former pressuring them to sign a deal before November and the latter pressuring them to do so

afterwards, had in common the shared goal of advancing all parties towards an eventual ceasefire and the commencement of a forthcoming multilateral negotiation process that the author refers to as Panglong 2.0.

As taken from the previously cited article that the author published on the topic, the following is a list of signatories and non-signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement:

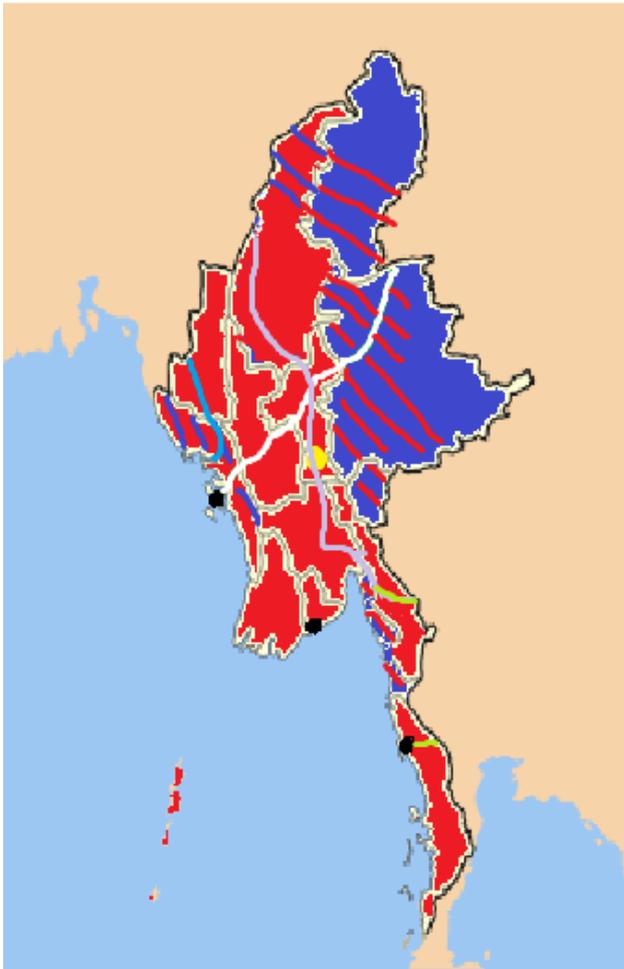
Signatories (Pro-Government)

- * All-Burma Students' Democratic Front
- * Arakan Liberation Party
- * Chin National Front
- * Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
- * Karen Natl. Lib. Army – Peace Council
- * Karen National Union
- * Pa-O National Liberation Organization
- * Shan State Army – South

Non-Signatories (Opposition)

- * Arakan Army
- * Kachin Independence Organization
- * Karenni Natl. Progressive Party
- * Lahu Democratic Union
- * Myanmar Natl. Democratic Alliance Army
- * Natl. Soc. Council of Nagaland – Khaplang
- * New Mon State Party
- * Ta'ang National Liberation Army
- * United Wa State Army

In order to aid the reader in more clearly understanding the present dynamics of the civil war after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed and incorporating the relevant infrastructure information presented in the earlier research, the author created a custom map that roughly delineates the territory of the signatory factions and illustrates the transnational connective infrastructure projects traversing through the country:



- * Red – government-controlled areas, either through direct administration or NCA rebel alliance
- * Blue – anti-government rebel-controlled areas
- * Black Dots – Myanmar’s three SEZs, from north to south they are Kyaukpyu, Thilawa, and Dawei
- * Yellow Dot – The capital of Naypyidaw
- * White Line – [China-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines](#)
- * Lavender Line – [India-Thailand Highway](#)
- * Lime Green Line – Japan’s East-West and Southern Corridors
- * Navy Blue Line – India’s Kaladan Project

A comprehensive description of the battleground situation in the country was offered in the article that was earlier cited, and it’s recommended that the reader reference that material if they’re interested in the specifics of what the map addresses. In the interests of remaining relevant to the present research’s particular focus on Hybrid Wars, the author will instead dedicate the proceeding analysis to explaining how the map relates to the overlap of transnational connective infrastructure projects and the US’ destabilization scenarios for Myanmar:

Blackmailing Beijing:

The most pertinent observation that can be gleaned from the map is that the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor (which Beijing one day hopes to expand into the Myanmar Silk Road) is doubly vulnerable to destabilization via its transit through rebel-influenced Shan and Rakhine States, a condition which does not afflict the India's ASEAN Highway nor Japan's East-West and Southern Corridors. While the areas that the Chinese project passes through are technically under government control, Naypyidaw's hold over them might be revealed to be tenuous if a renewed stage of civil conflict ensues, be it a return to large-scale conventional hostilities in Shan State or ethno-religious riots in Rakhine State. The only real factor keeping China's projects safe at the moment is the goodwill exhibited by the military, which has a vested economic self-interest in protecting Beijing's investments and would assuredly respond to any attacks against them. However, in the changing geopolitical environment that Myanmar finds itself in, it might be less interested in doing so if cooperation with its new partners equals or exceeds the profitability of cooperating with China.

For example, Naypyidaw might one day calculate or be made to believe that responding to rebel provocations against China's infrastructure investments might entail too much of a political cost to be worth it, figuring that a militant reaction to any attacks might undermine the entire national peace process and disrupt the geopolitical redirection that it's commenced towards the unipolar world. Recalling how the US has expertly employed the carrot-like tactic of 'personal enrichment' to embed its influence deep into the country's military elite, it's possible that some influential individuals in this institution might have a direct economic self-interest in doing whatever they can to avoid the perception that they're behaving in a "hostile" manner and "obstructing the peace process", desperately seeking to avoid any type of scenario that could lead to the reimplementing of sanctions.

Another vulnerability afflicting the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor and the possible Myanmar Silk Road is the degree to which any possibly autonomous and/or federalized entities in Shan and Rakhine States would exercise their economic sovereignty over the project. Just as Ukraine has become a massive obstructionist in blocking Russian-European energy cooperation, so too could either of these two transit states do something similar in hassling China's relations with the Myanmar central government and/or its outside partners via its Indian Ocean terminal in Kyaukpyu. These subnational units, emboldened by what might predictably be a strong degree of economic self-rule within their reformatted territories, might try to squeeze outrageous transit fees out of China that damage the profitability of the pipeline, thus raising the 'maintenance' costs of this strategic project so much that it eventually turns into a financial sinkhole. Beijing would likely object to any sort of economic blackmail being carried out against it, let alone by subnational governments, but Naypyidaw might be unwilling to forcefully intervene in settling any prospective dispute because it wouldn't want to risk reigniting the civil war simply over settling one of its internal states' pipeline payment disputes with China (especially if the given state's rebel groups are reconstituted into a legal subnational military).

Faced with a situation where the physical and economic security of its pipelines is uncertain, China will be less likely to enhance its strategic engagement with Myanmar on the state-to-state level, seeking instead to do so on the state-to-autonomous/federalized unit one. Beijing has already shown an indication that it's moving in this direction, having [hosted leaders](#) of the Rakhine National Party in an attempt to curry their favor. Clearly, the reason that it did this was to cultivate a pragmatic working relationship with the political individuals that might one day be more influentially positioned within the state than the national authorities themselves. The missing piece of China's dual-level diplomacy in Myanmar is fostering a friendly political force in Shan State. Right now, the area is still engulfed in civil warfare and divided amongst a diverse variety of warring factions, so it's much too early for China to commit to resolutely supporting one or the other. Besides, none of them is presently capable of exercising control over the entire administrative unit, and more than likely, no such political power might ever arise. Thus, China's best bet appears to be in waiting to see which force will ultimately control the particular portion of the sub-state access route through which its pipelines currently pass, and then rapidly finding a way to ingratiate itself with that group after they're solidly in charge of the territory.

The Mandalay Meeting Point:

Positioned almost directly in the center of the country, the city of Mandalay is a key hub in managing north-south trade throughout Myanmar. Its position is best exemplified by the fact that both the Chinese and Indian projects run through it, with the ASEAN Highway obviously being of greater tangible benefit to the city and its inhabitants than the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor. However, if China is able to one day acquire direct rail access to the city, be it through an expanded version of the Mandalay-Myitkyina Railroad or the parallel integration of a Myanmar Silk Road alongside its existing energy pipelines, then Beijing would likely enter into fierce economic proxy rivalry with New Delhi over the whole of northern Myanmar. As it stands, China already exerts a strong economic presence in the region, amplified by the migration of [tens of thousands](#) of Chinese citizens to Mandalay over the past couple of decades and their enormous influence within the city, but the lack of a reliable trading corridor between the two states has prevented this part of the country from totally falling under China's soft power purvey. Additionally, the existence of mild Sinophobia, the roots of which were explained earlier in the research, acts as an inhibitor to the advancement of further Chinese influence in the area and accordingly positions India as an attractive economic 'balancer'.

It's difficult at this point to predict the future of the Chinese-Indian economic rivalry in northern Myanmar, particularly over Mandalay and its surrounding regions, but the present state of affairs indicates that India certainly has the advantage via the ASEAN Highway. As such, it can also be said that New Delhi has the initiative because its transnational connective infrastructure project has the potential to directly benefit the local economy. In many ways, this is exactly what China's multiple Silk Roads are expected to do all across the world, and it's ironic that it's India, not China, which is physically fulfilling this vision in Myanmar at the moment. For these reasons, Beijing understands that its economic sway over the country will inevitably be mitigated with time, since each passing day that the ASEAN Highway is in service and the Myanmar Silk Road isn't represents a relative degradation of its soft power capabilities that will only get worse the longer that this asymmetry continues. Again, the supreme irony rests in the fact that it's typically China that's inflicting such indirect damage to its competitor's capabilities and not the other way around, meaning that this situation is largely unique for China and one in which it doesn't have any precedential experience to draw from.

The Mon State Juncture:

Tiny Mon State, nestled in the southeast of Myanmar between the Indian Ocean and Kayin State, happens to be one of the most geo-critical areas of the country. Its importance derives from it connecting India's ASEAN Highway to Japan's East-West Corridor, with the key junction being the port city of Mawlamyine. From here, both transnational infrastructure projects proceed along an identical route to the Karen city of Myawaddy before splitting ways once inside of Thailand. Because of the significance that these projects occupy in terms of the unipolar world's grand strategic planning, it's imperative that both of them are properly safeguarded in order to maximize their viability. For the most part, there aren't any lingering problems in Mon or Karen States since the Karen National Union, this part of the country's premier rebel group, and a smattering of its offshoots have signed on to the government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The problem, however, is that the New Mon State Party (NMSP) is [not a signatory to the agreement](#) and could therefore pose a theoretical threat to either of these projects.

It's difficult to access reliable information about the NMSP and its activities in Myanmar, but it doesn't appear as though this group is that formidable of a threat at the moment. The author wasn't able to find any information indicating that they tried to sabotage or attack India and Japan's projects, and it's probable that if they would have made an attempt to do so, it could have likely been documented and disseminated as pro-Mon propaganda on the internet somewhere. Also, such an attempt would likely have resulted in a military response, and this too would surely have been recorded and predictably used in some manner or another to impugn the government. Because of the unavailability of these resources

on the internet, it can be assumed that they either haven't happened recently, or if they did, then they were so low-scale and inconsequential as to barely merit any mention. It's questionable, then, why the NMSP would refuse to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement if it's as weak and uninfluential as it seems to be, obviously not holding any territory along either of the two transnational infrastructure projects' routes. A plausible explanation might be that the NMSP wants to hold out for as long as possible in order to hopefully reap the dividends of autonomy or federalization for their home state, believing that if they multilaterally negotiate to do so together with some of the other, more influential rebel groups across the country that have also refused to sign the agreement, then they might be able to achieve political rewards disproportionate to their size, power, and influence.

In the event that the NMSP tries to disrupt India or Japan's projects, it's very likely that the military will instantly crack down on them and put a stop to the problem before it gets out of control. The US and its allies will probably support this move because the ASEAN Highway and East-West Corridor occupy a much higher position in their list of strategic priorities than pandering to the interests of a tiny ethno-regional rebel group. It could be that the US and some of its Western European (NATO) allies issue a rhetoric denunciation of the military in order to 'save face' before the 'human rights' lobby in their countries (provided of course that they even become aware of any potential military-Mon clashes), but in that case it wouldn't be sincere and should only be interpreted as a tactic for domestic political consumption. Despite Naypyidaw making a move to snuff out the rebels, they might not be ultimately successful, especially if the NMSP has somehow acquired the proper guerrilla warfare training to effectively stage hit-and-run attacks and then seamlessly blend in with the local population. In such a situation, it might be counterproductive for the military to launch a large-scale crackdown and other means would have to be attempted.

Other than the forceful measures that could be employed if the NMSP tried to attack the unipolar project, the other most likely response could be that that Washington, New Delhi, and Tokyo proceed to bribe the group into stopping its offensive, that is, if they don't already have them on the payroll by now. The NMSP is small and thus susceptible to being easily influenced by relatively insubstantial amounts of cash, so a metaphorical 'drop in the bucket' for one of these state actors could translate into a lifetime of luxury for all of its leadership. If this didn't work for whatever reason (e.g. the NMSP is more patriotic than profit-minded) and the three actors did not want to give the Myanmar military the green light to wipe the rebel group out, then they could use their influence over Naypyidaw to ensure that Mon State receives some sort of autonomy or federalization during the forthcoming internal administrative reformation and the NMSP is guaranteed a position of legally recognized leadership within the territory.

PART IV: How The US Could Manufacture A Hybrid War Mess In Myanmar

(Please read Part I, Part II, and Part III prior to this article)

The research has exhaustively explained all of the relevant Hybrid War variables in Myanmar, and will now transition to its final section in forecasting the various scenario branches that this type of conflict could take. Before proceeding, it's useful to refresh the reader's memory and reemphasize the conditions under which a Hybrid War could be initiated in the country. The study began by remarking that Myanmar is rapidly moving towards a pro-Western political leadership and a de-escalation of its civil war, both of which are anticipated to make it a more valuable member of the China Containment Coalition and a more stable partner for India and Japan's unipolar transnational connective infrastructure projects. In the present framework, there's no urgent need for the US to provoke a Hybrid War in Myanmar because everything is smoothly proceeding in line with its grand strategic interests.

Regardless, geopolitics is of such a nature that unforeseen events regularly occur, and two of the most likely that could happen which would move the country closer to any of the following Hybrid War scenarios are a sudden outbreak of hostilities between the civil war factions and/or Suu Kyi pragmatically partnering with China. The first is self-explanatory, with the natural threat being that the presence of so many (semi-)independently active parts makes the entire conflict resolution process in Myanmar very difficult to manage, thus creating an inherently chaotic situation which gives rise to a plethora of negative possibilities. It's impossible for any single actor or even a strategic coalition of them to exert full and dominant control over all of the disparate elements in this construction, leaving open the chance that something could 'go wrong' and offset their plans.

Pertaining to Suu Kyi, she's also one of the elements that might become unpredictable. China's 'winning and dining' of her last year proves that Beijing has decided to invest in her personage, indicating that it might also be seeking to apply its own policy of 'personal enrichment' as a means to rival the US'. Furthermore, China understands the scale of the strategic threat that it's facing in Myanmar, and it wants to find a way to actualize the Myanmar Silk Road so that it can compete with India's ASEAN Highway and safeguard its privileged position in the country. If Suu Kyi makes any moves in this direction and the US was unable to diplomatically or economically convince her otherwise, then it's foreseeable that Washington would take steps to initiate Hybrid War pressure against her, likely via the reverse formulation of this concept.

To explain, it would probably exploit the preexisting Unconventional Warfare tension in the country to provoke a conflict or series thereof that undermines Suu Kyi's "peace" credentials and pushes her to utilize the 'hated' military that she previously and so publicly despised. This would immediately damage her 'pro-democracy' reputation and 'expose' her as being 'just another politician', demystifying the popular 'legend' that has meticulously been constructed around her. The implication of this would be that many people could quickly come to the conclusion (whether independently or guided by pro-Western media and "NGOs") that for as revered as she and her family name are in Myanmar, Suu Kyi is simply an incompetent leader that is not capable of properly administering the country. This manufactured sentiment could then in turn be used to 'legitimize' a Color Revolution attempt against her, ironically threatening her rule in almost the same way as she threatened the military's over two decades ago.

This last part of the study therefore begins by examining the multitude of Unconventional Warfare scenarios that could possibly unfold in Suu Kyi's Myanmar before concluding with the Color Revolution ones. The reader would do well to note that any of these could occur as a stand-alone scenario or as part of a large sequence of events, so it shouldn't be inferred that the following eventualities are in any way indicative of a rigid order. Having laid out the preconditions under which Myanmar could be thrown into a cycle of Hybrid War madness (incidental outbreaks of chaos and/or the purposeful undermining of a perceivably 'pro-China' Suu Kyi), it's finally time to explore some of the ways in which this could foreseeably play out.

Federalization Fallout

Panglong 2.0:

It's forecasted that Myanmar's internal political rearrangement is imminent in one form or another, and this forthcoming process is expected to be rife with the potential for multisided political and/or physical conflict between its participants. The differences that each of the parties have in envisioned territorial allocation and administrative responsibilities could lead to an outbreak of violence within the ranks of the competing rebel groups and/or between them and the government. The reader should be made aware that the rebels are not cohesively unified and often fight amongst one another, despite many of them nominally belonging to the umbrella [United Nationalities Federal Council](#) (UNFC). As a case in point, this 'united' front tactically splintered when some of its members signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, raising serious questions about whether it's more of a rhetorical and symbolic entity than a politically and/or militarily practical one.

Another area of expected disagreement between the participants of Panglong 2.0 (the name that the author has given to the forthcoming internal political rearrangement process) will undoubtedly come down to the nature of the changes that are to take place, particularly whether they are to be symmetrical (applied by all in the same fashion) or asymmetrical (varying depending on the actor and circumstances). The former doesn't require any further explanation, whereas the second one needs to be elaborated on in brief. It's possible that the constitutional amendments or new constitution that Panglong 2.0 attempts to implement could result in a blend of autonomy and federalization, with the determining variable for each region's particular applicability to either likely coming down to its military

strength to enforce its preference (i.e. threatening to renew hostilities or demonstrating its capability to do so if its demands are not met in whole or in part).

Into The Blender:

A complex mix of decentralization and devolution could conceivably be experimented with in Myanmar, with three possible political categories of administration being created, the most powerful of which would be the federal one. It seems likely at this point that federalization will be enacted to some extent or another owing to Suu Kyi's own predisposition to this concept and the stated objective of the UNFC, but the question of course comes down to how it's applied in practice to each constituent entity. For example, all of Kayin State might become a unified federal unit, whereas Kachin State might include a broadly autonomous prefecture within its eastern portion over which the Kachin Independence Organization would have administrative sovereignty. Although sure to be a contested proposal by any means, it realistically presents the most peaceful compromise solution to the 'jade war' and might prevent the reoccurrence of hostilities between the military and the rebels there.

In Sagaing Region, the territory might receive its own federalized status or become part of a supra-territorial one that incorporates some or all of the Bamar-majority divisions (which will be explained shortly), but no matter what its ultimate designation is, there's a chance that the Naga could retain their sub-autonomous Self-Administered Zone within it. Fusing all of the categories together, the whole of Shan State might become a federalized unit, but within it there might be various autonomous and sub-autonomous territories, possibly represented by the Wa and Pa'O respectively, for example. Depending on the political viability of either of these possible solutions and the will of the local people, the granting of autonomous or sub-autonomous status to the Bengali "Rohingya" in Rakhine State might also be one way to de-escalate tensions between them and the majority Buddhist Rakhine community, although there's the chance that simply even proposing this might be enough enflame nationalist Buddhist organizations and unwittingly provoke yet another wave of pogroms.

Bamar Bickering:

Probably the most underestimated conflict scenario in all of Myanmar is that between the ethnic Bamar themselves, principally in terms of the disagreements that they may have over the most equitable internally political rearrangement for their regional communities. It doesn't in this case whether it's a symmetrical or asymmetrical redivision of the country, since all that's important is that this process is formally pioneered in the first place (Panglong 2.0). It's a certainty that the Bamar ethnic majority will want to retain its prevailing role over federal affairs, acceding to a few concessions when necessary (e.g. if pressured by military-strategic considerations) but overall seeking to control the political redistribution process so as to preserve its prior influence. It's impossible to speculate at this point on the specifics of the parliamentary procedural and economic-sovereignty reforms that would accompany the devolution of the Myanmar state, but no matter what they end up being, the Bamar will definitely try to maneuver themselves into an advantageous position within this framework, although herein lies the potential for an intra-ethnic dispute.

If the reader recalls the very beginning of the Myanmar research, they'll remember that it spoke about the existence of two separate but important kingdoms on the country's territory before its eventual 1541 unification. The northern Ava and the southern Hanthawaddy had their respective capitals in Mandalay and Yangon, and while civilizationally similar to one another and essentially having morphed into a composite whole by this point in time, strategic differences have slightly emerged between them in the present day that could set the stage for a vicious period of self-interested Bamar bickering when the country finally redistributes its internal political responsibilities.

The northern Bamar-populated territory ("Ava") is expected to occupy a highly profitably position along India's ASEAN Highway and could foreseeably have an interest in hoarding the transit fees that China must pay for its Energy Corridor all to itself and within its relevant Mandalay and Magway Regions.

Additionally, the latter region, Magway, is also home to a lot of [oil deposits](#) and might not want to share this revenue with other parts of the country. To address the southern Bamar-populated territory (“Hanthawaddy”), this part of the country has a burgeoning service sector and a magnet for foreign investment in Yangon, the Thilawa special economic zone and maritime access to the global economy, and [large](#) offshore energy deposits, all of which might also make it reluctant to subsidize other ethno-regional groups or even its fellow northern-residing Bamar.

The possible rush for the northern and southern Bamar to secure their own region’s perceived economic self-interests could lead to a natural or (“NGO”-/media-) provoked situation where this ethnic group’s two separate historical-regional identities are resurrected into competing or complementary federalized units. If this eventuality is actualized, then Naypyidaw would also probably break off into its own federalized territory and come to represent not only the geopolitical middle ground between the centrally located Bamar and the peripheral minorities, but also the central point of convergence between the tentatively titled Bamar federal states of Ava and Hanthawaddy.

Shan State Civil War (Intensifies)

Present Situation:

This scenario is actually ongoing at the moment, although it’s not yet at the point where it represents an imminent Hybrid War threat for the country. Shan State has always been marked by its diversity of identities and localized entities, and as Myanmar moves closer to re-federalizing itself, it’s very possible that some of these internal actors will come to blow with one another as a means of settling their internal disputes prior to the formal territorial redivision under Panglong 2.0. Right now it hasn’t gotten to the point of being an Hobbesian conflict, but the current clashes that are taking place in the state could very well set it on that trajectory. What’s happening nowadays is that the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), otherwise known as the Shan State Army – South, has [been attacking](#) the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in the northern part of the state. The strategic situation is complicated by the fact that the RCSS is a signatory to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, whereas the TNLA generally operate within their constitutionally designated Pa Laung Self-Administered Zone.

The Plot Thickens:

The source that was hyperlinked above mentions that the TNLA is accusing the military of assisting the RCSS, which if true, would signify that the authorities are using their Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement partners as proxies in bringing their recalcitrant counterparts to heel. There’s no way to independently verify if this is the case or not, meaning that the research will consider both possibilities in parallel – that the RCSS is working hand-in-glove with the military, and that it’s acting on its own initiative. Should the latter be true, then this would definitely raise the risks of the forewarned threat of Hobbesian conflict, since it would show that the military is incapable of exercising influencing restraint on the ceasefire signatories. The lack of control and weakness that this would presume could encourage other rebel groups to militantly act in pursuing their own self-interests as well, which could then lead to the multilateral unravelling of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and return the country back to square one. On the other hand, if the military has in fact ordered the RCSS to attack the TNLA and/or is implicitly supporting them in this campaign, then it raises the question about just how far they’ll go in punishing the non-signatories to the ceasefire.

Cross-Border Asymmetrical Warfare:

Assessing the state of play in Shan State, it’s reasonable to wonder whether the RCSS, if they’re successful in what might be the military’s proxy campaign against recalcitrant rebels, might order their surrogate to attack the United Wa State Army (UWSA, assessed by some to be the [“largest and best equipped”](#) rebel group in the country) and/or the ethnic-Kokang [Myanmar National Democratic Alliance](#) Army (MNDAA), both of which had put up tough resistance in the past and are crucially located right next to the Chinese border. If the last [flare-up of violence](#) between the military and the MNDAA is any

indication, then a repeat of this situation and/or military-UWSA clashes could generate a humanitarian crisis that spills over the Chinese border. The brief and contained 2015 Kokang Conflict resulted in anywhere between [60,000-100,000](#) refugees crossing into China, making one wonder just how many more locals would flee abroad in the event of a longer and more multilateral conflagration in that part of Shan State. In fact, if the US were to be involved in provoking such a humanitarian crisis, then it could very well attempt to unleash what Kelly M. Greenhill has termed as a “[Weapon of Mass Migration](#)”, or in other words, the purposeful utilization of transnational human flows to achieve specific geopolitical objectives. In this specific context, one of those goals might be to destabilize Yunnan Province in anticipation of opening up a third asymmetrical warfare front against Beijing to complement the existing ones in Tibet and Xinjiang (with [Hong Kong](#) capable of being counted as a battlefield as well).

Far-Reaching Consequences:

Faced with the Fifth Generational Warfare being waged against it, China might have no choice but to launch a limited humanitarian intervention to stem the refugee tide and secure its border, which could easily lead to mission creep and drawing the People’s Liberation Army deeper into Shan State’s complex civil woes. Any Chinese military involvement in Myanmar would assuredly result in a flurry of international (Western) condemnation and harsh rebukes from the ASEAN member states, especially those such as Vietnam and the Philippines which have preexisting territorial disputes with China. It can be assumed that this prospective event would be used against China in a similar way as Russia’s involvement in Crimea had been in order to accelerate the New Cold War in this respective region, ‘isolate’ Beijing from its neighbors, and ‘justify’ enhanced American military activity along its borders. Assuming that China won’t intervene in an intensified Shan State Civil War no matter what the humanitarian and “Weapon of Mass Migration” consequences are, that still doesn’t preclude a large-scale outbreak of destabilization inside of Myanmar. The renewal of fighting between the military and/or (its proxy) rebels and the Wa and/or Kokang groups, whether prior to or during Panglong 2.0, would most probably spark a chain reaction of violence that would render the previously signed ceasefire worthless (no matter how many groups had or hadn’t agreed to it by that point) and throw the country back into multilateral mayhem.

Rakhine Riots

A Tempting Target:

There’s a high possibility that Rakhine State will once more descend into riotous tumult sometime in the future, so long as the inter-identity tension between the majority Buddhist Rakhines and the minority Muslim Bengali “Rohingya” remains unresolved. This demographic situation is the predicted vehicle through which the US could prompt a scenario aimed at destabilizing the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor and the prospective Myanmar Silk Road. Rakhine State is also important to the US and its allies simply because of its coastal location, which could make it easier for them to directly interfere in any eventuality that may arise, an option which considerably more limited when it comes to Shan State. The basic gist of the Hybrid War scenario in this part of Myanmar was already discussed in the prior relevant section, but it’s worthwhile to revisit and expand on it in order to get a fuller picture of exactly what might transpire.

The Three Players:

Muslim Bengali “Rohingya”

Not counting foreign provocateurs such as “NGOs” and other agents of destabilization, there are three main players that could predictably take part in any raucousness in Rakhine State, and each of them has a background that predisposes them to violence. Granted, there are peaceful and ‘neutral’ individuals in each category, but for the intent of the study at hand, only the most likely conflict elements within each group will be briefly described. The Muslim Bengali “Rohingyas”, for example, have a history of waging

jihad against the state, and some of them are [strongly suspected](#) of retaining their terrorist ties. The familiar and cross-border ties that many of them still have with Bangladesh also predispose them to the type of Islamic extremist sentiment that has taken the country by storm lately and threatens to turn it into [Bangla-Daesh](#).

Buddhist Rakhine

On the other hand, the Buddhist Rakhine also have a fair share of violent radicals within their ranks, as was evidenced both by 2007 Saffron Revolution and the anti-“Rohingya” pogroms, both of which discredited the naïve presupposition that all Buddhist followers are inherently peaceful. In fact, the Buddhist Rakhine could be assessed as being the most likely of Buddhist to commit further violence, owing to a combination of their previously demonstrated actions against the “Rohingya” and their fierce sense of identity separateness from the rest of Myanmar (i.e. the historical legacy of Mrauk U).

The Military

The last of the actors that could get sucked into a three-way brawl in Rakhine State is the military, which of course is the only state-based participant of the bunch and the one with the greatest firepower and crowd-control capabilities. It’s already proved its worth in crushing the “8888 Uprising” of 1988 and the 2007 Saffron Revolution, yet it also has a track record of not intervening decisively enough to stop the previous bloodletting in Rakhine State. One of the theories is that the military was tacitly in favor of the Buddhist Rakhine mobs and wanted to use them to indirectly carry out punitive action against the Bengali “Rohingya”, but no matter whether that was the case or not, the clashes resulted in the UN [declaring](#) this minority group “one of the most excluded, persecuted and vulnerable communities in the world” and turning them into a poster example of victimization and possible “humanitarian intervention”.

All Against All:

There are two scenarios that could unfold when it comes to the future outbreak of violence in Rakhine State, and both of them would unquestionably involve the participation of all three players:

Communal Bloodletting

All that it takes to set Rakhine State aflame once more and reinitiate the communal bloodletting of the past couple years is a simple provocations on behalf of either of the two demographic groups, no matter how minor the act in question might seem at the time or in terms of the larger perspective. Whether the military allows the violence to continue for a little bit like before or if it decides to intervene right away in stopping it, there’s no doubt that the central authorities will somehow get physically involved in separating the two groups sooner or later.

The most uncertain variables in all of this are the scale and intensity of the intercommunal clashes, and if either or both of the identity groups had planned in advance for this moment and received training and equipment from elsewhere in the country or abroad beforehand (which seems most likely in any case), then it’s possible that the destabilization might be much more severe than the military anticipates and lead to a situation where it either loses full control over the state or is forced to resort to heavy-handed measures to restore order.

Both of these possibilities would result in plenty of negative international (Western) media attention, with the first one increasing the call for an “humanitarian intervention” while the second would probably lead to a new set of sanctions against the authorities. In a way, the military is caught in a strategic catch-22 because there’s no ideal way for it to respond to these circumstances without some sort of negative international (Western) repercussion, which might cynically be the entire point if the US

wants to 'set up' Suu Kyi and precondition the domestic and international audiences into accepting a Color Revolution against her.

Anti-Government Uprising

The second scenario in which all three sides could come to blows in Rakhine State is if one of the non-state actors (the "Rohingya" or the Rakhine) began agitating for enhanced representation within the country, be it sub-autonomous status for the Bengali "Rohingya" or autonomy/federalization for the Buddhist Rakhine. Depending upon the degree of their political agitation, the demonstration could provoke a counter-reaction from the other identity group and/or evolve into an anti-government uprising. Per the former, this would likely lead to the communal bloodletting that was just described above, while the latter might skip that to a large extent and jump straight to the military crackdown.

Whether the state intervenes due to an outbreak of inter-ethnic conflict (no matter if it began as an anti-government demonstration or started off as a pogrom) or an anti-government uprising, its eventually response could unintentionally exacerbate negative attitudes towards the authorities on the side of one of the conflicting groups. For example, the Bengali "Rohingyas" might allege that the state was too violent in its actions against them or once more allowed the Buddhist Rakhine a 'grace period' to attack them with impunity, either of which could embolden their community to make a globally publicized stand against the government and put the authorities in an uncomfortable and constrained position vis-à-vis international (Western) opinion about them and their actions.

On the other hand, the Buddhist Rakhine might become upset if the government doesn't do enough in its crackdown efforts (assuming that the Bengali "Rohingya" are to blame for the provocation) and is perceived as pandering to the minorities in order to curry favor with its new international (Western) "partners". This would infuriate the nationalists and might push some of them to redirect their attacks against the military, and, just like the Bengali "Rohingya", exploit the international (Western) media in order to back the government into a corner and increase the odds that their demands are met in full or in part.

The Dilemma

The authorities would then be caught in a major dilemma, not only because they'd fear what their external financial patrons would think about their possible militant reaction to all of this, but also because they're aware that their actions might lead to public protests against them elsewhere in the country and the initiation of a nascent Color Revolution. Furthermore, acceding to the protesters would create a precedent that people in other parts of the country could follow in attempting to squeeze concessions out of the establishment, showing that all that's needed to get the government to back down is to stage a high-profile incident in front of the international media. If the military reacts, then it would probably lose some of the crucial international economic support on which it's come to depend, and the resultant reimposition of sanctions or threat thereof could circularly also be enough to spark the same type of Color Revolution that they want to avoid.

The greatest challenge for the authorities comes down to whether or not they can properly respond to intercommunal tensions and/or an anti-government uprising in Rakhine State without further aggravating already strained center-peripheral relations. This is a very difficult balancing act and one which is inherently susceptible to failure. The radically divergent visions of each of the three conflicting parties ensures that only the strongest one will be able to achieve their goal, and while on-paper statistics would indicate that this should naturally be the military, the essence of Hybrid War suggests that the Bengali "Rohingyas" or the Buddhist Rakhines have their own particular set of advantages that could decisively tip the odds in their favor. Actually, it seems as though the supposedly weakest of the bunch, the Bengali "Rohingyas", are the ones with the greatest asymmetrical potential because of the realistic possibility that their ethno-religious cause could be used to justify a "humanitarian intervention" to create "Rohingyaland" a la what happened in 1999 to create "Kosovo".

The South Asian “Kosovo”:

The author previously published an [in-depth scenario study](#) about the prospects for the US and its allies to create a “Rohingyaland” out of Myanmar’s Rakhine State, using the ‘convenient justification’ of a “humanitarian intervention” to facilitate their geopolitical designs. It’s recommended that the reader review that piece in detail if they’re interested in the specifics for this could come about and why, but seeing as how it’s directly pertinent to the forecasting of Hybrid Wars in Myanmar, the article will be revisited in brief at this moment.

The “Rohingya” Run-Up

To summarize, the gist of the matter is that the reemergence of Bengali “Rohingya”-related violence (whether perpetrated by and/or against this group) could be used as the grounds for staging a multilateral international invasion of Rakhine State for the purpose of carving out a “Kosovo”-like ‘protectorate’. There are a variety of ways in which the international (Western) media could manipulate any forthcoming violence there as a means of painting the Muslim Bengali “Rohingyas” as innocent ‘sacrificial lambs’ that are facing ‘genocide’ at the hands of out-of-control Buddhist Rakhine mobs (whether in fact, perception, or a blend thereof). Complementary to that, they could also overemphasize any economically motivated large-scale human flows from the area as a “refugee crisis” in order to ‘prove’ their assertion and precondition the global public into accepting their narrative, which appears to be what they tried to do with the “[Rohingya refugee crisis](#)” of summer 2015 and the one that [they’re hinting](#) could also happen (likely on command) later this year as well.

Occupation Dividends

The geopolitical reasons for such an invasion are obvious, as it’s clear that the US and its allies would love to establish direct control over the maritime terminus of the China-Myanmar Energy Corridor and its prospectively forthcoming Myanmar Silk Road counterpart. Occupying Rakhine State under the pretense of being “peacekeepers”, the China Containment Coalition would also gain commanding influence over the Sittwe deep-water port that Beijing plans on constructing, thereby preempting any strategic plans that it has of ever using this facility as a reliable non-Malacca access point to the Indian Ocean. Along those lines, the US might then find a way to reappropriate control over this zone to the “peacekeeping” authorities or their local proxy administrators, who might then allow the US Navy to use it as a de-jure or de-facto naval installation. If that happens, then the US would have its first-ever bases in the Bay of Bengal and could indefinitely exercise dominance over this region to prevent the Chinese from ever (re-)establishing a foothold here. Finally, the last geopolitical objective that the US would be pursuing in Myanmar by means of a “humanitarian intervention” in Rakhine State would be the perpetual ability to blackmail Myanmar under the pane of further “Balkanization”.

“Balkanization” Blackmail

By establishing the precedent of assembling an international ‘coalition of the willing’ (likely among select members of the China Containment Coalition, first and foremost India, and possibly some of “Rohingya refugee”-afflicted ASEAN states) to “humanely intervene” in resolving inter-identity strife in Myanmar, Washington would be sending an implicit message to Naypyidaw that this pattern could be repeated in other violence-prone areas such as Kachin and Shan States, dependent of course on whether or not it gives the “protesters” and/or “rebels” (a.k.a. Hybrid War participants) whatever it is that they’re demanding. As one could venture to assume, this threat is of such an inherent nature that it perpetually hangs over the head of Myanmar’s military elite, who understand that this scenario could theoretically be advanced against them at any chosen time. Therefore, it’s possible that the US could discretely hint about this possibility whenever it wants to ‘tighten the screws’ and put pressure on the country’s decision makers, which if that’s the case or it ever turns out to be, would make the scenario of

Rakhine Riots the easiest way to scare Myanmar's leader's into compliance with whatever it is that the US proposes.

From Rakhine State To "Rohingyaland"

If it should happen that this scenario is actually carried out in full, then it could predictably result in one of three distinct but closely related outcomes, the 'least-damaging' of which would be the occupation of all or part of Rakhine State and/or "Rohingyaland" while retaining Naypyidaw's nominal sovereignty over them. The next possibility is that Rakhine State becomes 'independent' of Myanmar in just as legally faux of a manner as "Kosovo" became of Serbia and the US' 'coalition of the willing' occupies the entire territory or only the "Rohingyaland" portion, the latter of which might receive autonomous or sub-autonomous status in this newly christened US colony. Finally, the last foreseeable geopolitical outcome of a US-led "humanitarian intervention" in Rakhine State would be the formal creation of an independent "Rohingyaland" in the majority-Bengali "Rohingya"-populated areas of the country. Just like "Kosovo" has turned into an artificial Albanian settler colony and an extension of Tirana, so too could "Rohingyaland" turn into its Bengali equivalent in Myanmar, with Washington holding out the carrot of 'recognized reunification' between the two in order to get Dhaka to indefinitely do its bidding. Playing the ethno-religious irredentist card in "Rohingyaland" would be an effective way for the US to maximize its influence over the Bengali political elite, and it could also utilize this tool in order to provoke on-command nationalist disturbances in Bangladesh that could add additional pressure on the country's politicians' from below' (albeit via management from above).

Naga Nightmare

An earlier section of the research introduced the reader to the transnational conflict threat posed by the Myanmar Nagas, hinting that this scenario will later be explained in full. As a reminder, the Naga are a transnational sub-state ethnic minority that straddles the Indian-Myanmar border, and some of them have been opposed to New Delhi ever since India's incorporation in 1947. The relative anarchy in parts of Myanmar's frontier played directly into the hands of an Indian-originated group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN-K), which exploited the calamitous state of affairs during the country's ongoing civil war in order to entrench themselves within the local Naga community of northern Sagaing Region. From there, they've plotted attacks against India and have been successful in goading it into a high-profile cross-border attack. The Hybrid War scenario that will be examined builds off of the transnational destabilizing capabilities of the NSCN-K and shows how it can succeed in provoking an Indian invasion.

Transnational Threats:

The NSCN-K provoked a global headline-grabbing incident when it [carried out a terrorist attack](#) in India's Manipur state in June 2015 that resulted in a cross-border punitive operation by the Indian military. Despite being highly publicized and creating a flurry of chatter in the nation's press, the raid did little to dent the NSCN-K's effectiveness and was mostly a symbolic move designed to appeal to India's domestic audience and show them that the government would respond in some forceful way or another to the worst attack of its kind in 20 years. Undoubtedly, there was definitely a deterrent component to the mission as well, but it's evident that New Delhi restrained itself from a full-blown response in order to avoid upsetting the neighbor that it so crucially needs to cooperate with in order to build and maintain the ASEAN Highway. Additionally, India may have also wanted to not get drawn into a cross-border jungle insurgency that might have been difficult to extricate itself from, preferring instead to send a strong message against the NSCN-K and then preemptively fall back to defensively fortifying its international border in guarding against any follow-up infiltration attempts.

Umbrella Separatism:

One of the reasons why the Indian establishment is so scared of the NSCN-K is because it operates as the leader of an umbrella organization of Northeastern separatist groups called the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFW). The author examined the ins and outs of this group last summer in an [article](#) about them and their capabilities, concluding that they pose an immense threat to the territorial integrity of India's Northeast, but only if their disparate members succeed in the tactically challenging task of unifying all of their constituencies under this banner. They've been thus far unable to do so, despite having a theoretically inclusive ideology and a similar structural model as Daesh. In hindsight, their shortcomings could likely be attributed to a couple of factors, but principally that the Northeastern Indian identity groups are so mutually distrustful of one another that it's difficult for their on-the-ground rebel supporters to convince the locals of the necessity to militarily cooperate with one another in order to attain their shared separatist visions. Another, albeit more minor, factor could even be that the regional population truly believes that Modi's "Act East" policy and the ASEAN Highway will result in a refocusing of New Delhi's priorities to the Northeast and a possible economic boom that will lift them out of poverty.

Although the UNLFW has yet to evolve into the type of threat that it's capable of becoming, that doesn't mean that it won't ever do so. India's ASEAN Highway has become the cornerstone of the country's regional foreign policy and its primary instrument in 'containing China' in mainland ASEAN, but this could be endangered if a NSCN-K-led UNLFW insurgency breaks out in the region. Given the fact that the Nagas are the only one of the umbrella separatist identities to have a significant number of cross-border ethnic kin, the soon-to-be-discussed scenario branch will focus only on their role in this possible conflict, and the reader could reference the earlier-cited piece in the preceding paragraph to acquire a more comprehensive view of how this could relate to the other nationalities in the region. Before commencing with that part of the research, however, it's necessary to first say a few words about the Naga Self-Administered Zone's political future in Myanmar.

The Political Future Of Myanmar's Nagas:

The precedent that was established by India during its cross-border counterattack against the NSCN-K indicates that New Delhi is becoming increasingly serious about responding to this group's attacks on its soil, no matter if it's reacting for domestic political reasons or to advance a tangible military solution. As Myanmar moves closer to an autonomous and/or federalized model in order to end its civil war, questions will inevitably arise about the status of the Naga Self-Administered Zone. While it's presently enshrined in the [2008 Constitution](#), it's foreseeable that any further change to the country's internal arrangement (e.g. autonomy and/or federalization) will necessitate either a series of constitutional amendments that fundamentally change the nature of the state or the total rewriting of this foundational document.

In both cases, it's possible that there might be some revision to the clause guaranteeing the Nagas their own Self-Administered Zone. Two of the possible scenarios surrounding this might be Naypyidaw reaching a secret deal with New Delhi to dismantle the territory's separate privileges at the most legally convenient time, or that the Myanmar Nagas and their NSCN-K leaders agitate for enhanced subnational representation inside the reformatting state. The former would obviously play against the NSCN-K's "Nagalim" interests, whereas the latter, if executed at a key time and with professional precision via one or both of the traditional Hybrid War elements (protesters and/or insurgents), could earn them the right to retain their sub-autonomous status or possibly even increase it to a conventionally autonomous one. It should also be said that there exists the possibility that the situation remains static and does not change at all, with the prior clause for a Naga Self-Administered Zone being unaffected by any constitutional amendments or remaining in place in a new constitution.

Sparking The Tinderbox:

"Naga rights" are an explosive issue for both Naypyidaw and New Delhi owing to their transnational nature and international conflict potential, and while neither wants to appease the separatist groups,

they also don't want to enact further concessions to them. The ideal scenario would be if nothing dynamic occurs with them, but there's no guarantee that both countries won't team up against the NSCN-K in northern Myanmar and/or that this group and its followers won't create some type of political-military disturbance there. That being said, whether it's a military attack by the Nagas or their state-based enemies, or an endemically emboldened (and possibly externally provoked) pro-Naga movement, whatever particular provocation it is that sparks this Hybrid War tinderbox will likely lead to very similar on-the-ground reactions in either case.

It's predicted that the NSCN-K will fight back against any attacks against them, but that they'd be in a stronger position if they were the ones initiating them, which in that event would probably be more so against the Indian military than the Myanmar one. No matter who strikes first or what initial position the NSCN-K finds itself in when the conflict begins, the ethnic militant group might have an interest in exploiting the transnational nature of its cause in provoking an interstate crisis, possibly figuring that this could create enough of a long-term complication for their adversaries to more than compensate for any relative short-term losses that occur as a result. There's also the chance that the group isn't even considering this as an offensive or 'defensive' tactic, but that it lashes out in this direction anyhow out of sheer desperation if it feels that its extinguishment is imminent. This could take the form of actual attacks against India or simply through the sort of (planned or unplanned) "[Weapons of Mass Migration](#)" that Kelly M. Greenhill described in her earlier referenced work on the topic.

Indian Intervention:

There's a very high likelihood that India would directly involve itself in any prospective conflict in or over Myanmar's Naga Self-Administered Zone, whether it was a preplanned and willing participant or was incidentally dragged into the fray. There's no way of telling how an Indian intervention in northern Myanmar would unfold, or whether it would be characterized in an aggressive or self-defensive manner by New Delhi's Western "partners". However, it is possible to ascertain to a certain degree of accuracy what India's strategic interests would be in this instance, and in any given order, they're projected to be as follows:

Secure The ASEAN Highway

This transnational connective infrastructure project will function as India's umbilical with mainland ASEAN, and it therefore occupies the highest strategic priority for New Delhi. An overspill of intense fighting that temporarily or indefinitely suspends passage along this route or looks ready to do so cannot be tolerated by India. If Myanmar is incapable or unwilling to resolve or contain the threat that Naga violence poses to India's prized project, then it's likely that New Delhi will intervene in some capacity in order to safeguard the part of its investment that's nearest to its borders.

Crush The UNLFW

India regards the UNLFW as an umbrella group of terrorist separatists and wants to see the organization totally destroyed before it reaches its most destabilizing potential. New Delhi also acknowledges, however discretely, that the Naga Self-Administered Zone is functioning as a terrorist safe haven, and it has a vested interest in changing this ominous state of affairs before it's once again too late. With the UNLFW out of the way, India might then be able to continue its long-standing policy of dividing the separatists between themselves and preempting their reconsolidation.

Control "Nagalim"

