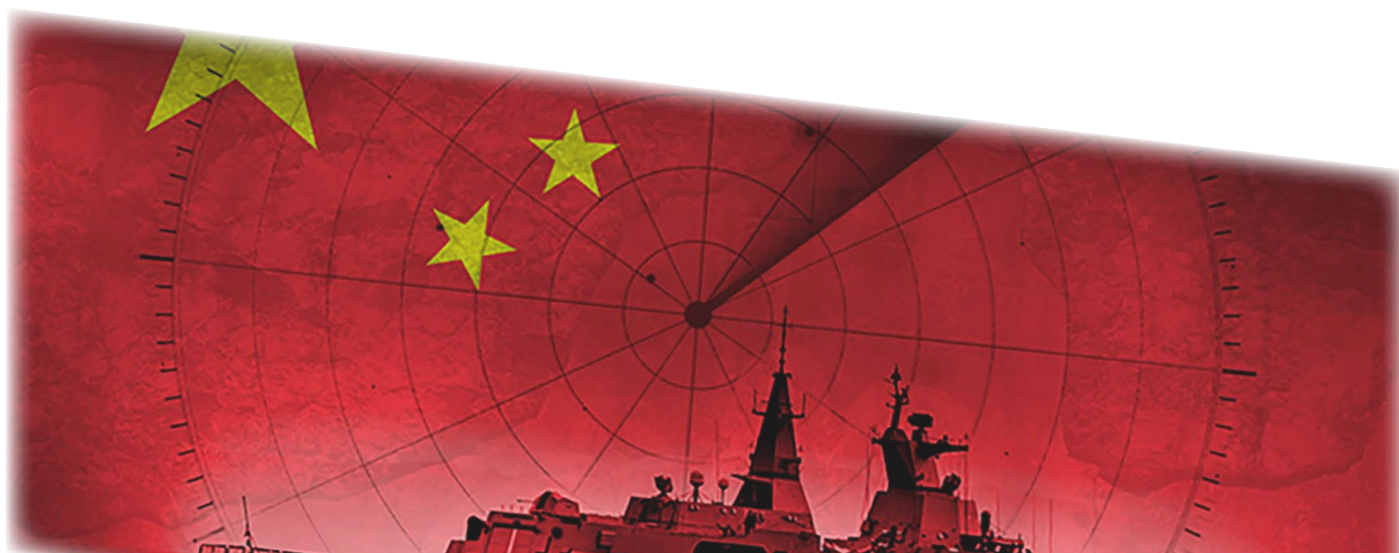


# BLUE ECONOMY, STRATEGIC SEAS: CHINA'S MARITIME STATECRAFT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND BAY OF BENGAL

Jessica C. Liao



*This issue brief analyzes China's evolution into a proactive maritime power, a transition central to its "Great Rejuvenation" and national security. Beyond mitigating the "Malacca Dilemma," Beijing seeks to establish a stable maritime order aligned with its strategic interests. The research examines a dual-theater strategy that links China's domestic "Blue Economy" with regional infrastructure development to promote maritime industrial and supply chain integration across Southeast Asia and the Bay of Bengal. While these initiatives expand Beijing's influence, the intensification of assertive gray-zone activities in disputed waters has also triggered regional counter-balancing. Ultimately, Beijing employs normative rhetoric to position itself not merely as a participant in maritime governance, but as a primary architect of frameworks that institutionalize its influence. Although still in its early stages, this effort signals a long-term intent to formalize a China-led maritime order that could reshape regional waters and beyond.*

## Introduction

Historically a land-centric continental player, China's transition into a proactive maritime power is a central tenet of modern Chinese nationalism and its pursuit of world-class status. From the dynastic era through the Republican period, leaders have long viewed maritime capability as the indispensable prerequisite for safeguarding national interests and establishing the stable order

required for global commerce. In the modern era, this vision has evolved from a secondary ambition into an existential strategic necessity. Propelled by an inescapable reliance on global trade, post-reform China views maritime stability as the bedrock of its continued growth and prosperity.

Central to this shift is a critical geographic vulnerability: approximately 80 percent of China's

crude oil imports transit the narrow, highly contested Strait of Malacca. This strategic bottleneck, famously termed the “Malacca Dilemma” by former President Hu Jintao, remains a primary driver of Beijing’s maritime insecurity.<sup>1</sup> While his predecessors identified the problem, President Xi Jinping inherited a China with the financial and military resources to resolve it. Over the past decade, under Xi’s leadership, China has undergone a profound strategic metamorphosis, transitioning from a reactive coastal defender into a dominant, proactive maritime power.<sup>2</sup>

To resolve its strategic vulnerabilities and secure critical supply chains, Beijing has deployed a comprehensive, dual-theater maritime strategy. This issue brief argues that China’s approach relies on a calibrated triad of economic “carrots,” normative rhetoric, and coercive “sticks.” Specifically, Beijing integrates large-scale infrastruc-

***“The landmark 2015 China’s Military Strategy White Paper explicitly mandated that the “traditional mentality that land outweighs the sea must be abandoned.” This directive catalyzed the structural transition of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) from a localized, reactive doctrine of “offshore waters defense” to a globalized operational focus on “open seas protection.”***

ture investment and a coordinated maritime diplomacy campaign with the proactive application of coercive tools to achieve deterrence.

The following analysis examines how this strategy has manifested in Southeast Asia—the operational heart of China’s maritime grand strategy and the center of an emerging Sino-centric order. It subsequently compares these developments to Beijing’s westward expansion into the Bay of Bengal, highlighting the distinct strategic logic applied in that theater. Finally, this brief evaluates the empirical results of this dual-theater strategy and considers its broader implications for the regional security architecture.

## **Evolving Policy Doctrines and the Centrality of Southeast Asia to China’s Maritime Interests**

To discuss China’s maritime strategies and related actions, one must first trace the evolution of the high-level policy doctrines that catalyzed them. Under Xi Jinping, the ambition to transform China into a “strong maritime power” (*haiyang qiangguo*) has been elevated from a peripheral defense contingency to a core pillar of the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.”<sup>3</sup> This paradigm shift has been operationalized through a synchronized overhaul of China’s foreign, domestic, and defense policies.

The foreign policy vanguard of this shift began with the 2013 launch of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road—the oceanic pillar of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Announced by Xi during his state visit to Indonesia, this initiative leverages physical infrastructure and economic connectivity to project strategic influence. By designating Southeast Asia as the indispensable primary node, Beijing set the stage for deep regional integration across Asia and the Indo Pacific with China at the center.<sup>4</sup>

Integral to this geoeconomic expansion is Beijing's promotion of the "Blue Economy" (*haiyang jingji*)—a framework that illustrates how China's domestic economic imperatives serve as a primary engine for its maritime foreign policy. From the 12th, 13th, and 14th Five-Year Plans, Beijing has consistently prioritized the expansion of maritime space, framing the ocean as the next critical frontier for national wealth and a vital engine of growth.<sup>5</sup> This economic offensive was fortified by a profound reorientation of China's defense policy. The landmark 2015 *China's Military Strategy* White Paper explicitly mandated that the "traditional mentality that land outweighs the sea must be abandoned."<sup>6</sup> This directive catalyzed the structural transition of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) from a localized, reactive doctrine of "offshore waters defense" (*jinhai fangyu*) to a globalized operational focus on "open seas protection" (*yuanhai huwei*).

Furthermore, Beijing is working to establish a China-led normative framework to legitimize its new maritime strategy. Since taking office, Xi has pushed for a more proactive Chinese stance in global governance.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the 2019 Defense White Paper introduced the concept of the "Maritime Community with a Shared Future",<sup>8</sup> which is reinforced by the 14th Five-Year Plan.<sup>9</sup> This framework guides China's growing efforts to reshape maritime multilateralism, challenging the long-standing dominance of Western norms and policy discourses.

### **Infrastructural Statecraft and Blue Economy in the South China Sea**

Southeast Asia, geopolitically indispensable as the vital maritime conduit bridging the Pacific and Indian Oceans, naturally serves as the epicenter of China's economic and infrastructural statecraft. Under the auspices of the BRI, Beijing has

***Under BRI, Beijing has financed maritime infrastructure across Southeast and South Asia to engineer economic path dependency, integrate regional economies into its proprietary supply chains, and secure strategic logistics nodes. The most high-profile manifestation of this strategy is the proliferation of port networks that, while primarily commercial, possess clear latent military utility.***

systematically financed maritime infrastructure across Southeast and South Asia to engineer deep economic path dependency, integrate regional economies into its proprietary supply chains, and secure strategic logistics nodes.<sup>10</sup>

The most high-profile manifestation of this strategy is the proliferation of port networks that, while primarily commercial, possess clear latent military utility.<sup>11</sup> This dual-track calculation is best exemplified in Cambodia, where the commercial development of Sihanoukville established an economic foothold that facilitated major Beijing-funded expansions at the nearby Ream Naval Base beginning in June 2022. While Beijing and Phnom Penh deny that Ream is a Chinese base—citing Cambodia's constitutional ban on foreign military facilities—the facility reportedly operates under a secret 30-year agreement.<sup>12</sup> This arrangement grants the PLA exclusive access to specific areas, a de facto reality underscored by

the persistent, “rotational” docking of Chinese corvettes. Upgrades at Ream include a 5,000-ton dry dock and a 650-meter deep-water pier designed to accommodate aircraft carriers and large combatants. This expansion culminated in the April 2026 transfer of a Type 056C guided-missile corvette to the Royal Cambodian Navy.<sup>13</sup> While Ream has recently hosted non-Chinese vessels, this transfer—paired with a near-permanent rotation of Chinese personnel and PLAN ships since late 2023—grants Beijing sustained logistical access to the Gulf of Thailand. This presence positions Chinese naval power perilously close to the Malacca Strait’s critical eastern approaches.<sup>14</sup>

Still, the bulk of Beijing’s maritime infrastructure development centers on commercial interests. State-supported Chinese firms are aggressively embedding themselves into the region’s economic fabric through integrated, multi-modal “port-

***China’s diplomatic campaign is further codified in the 2026–2030 ASEAN-China Plan of Action. By prioritizing non-traditional security over sovereignty debates, Beijing aims to outflank rivals’ critiques with cooperative initiatives across four vectors: marine environmental sustainability, Blue Economy development, sea line security, and maritime safety protocols against transnational crime.***

park-rail” complexes. In Malaysia, the Kuantan deep-water port operates in tandem with adjacent Chinese-invested industrial parks that support mining and petrochemical sectors, facilitating the export of minerals, timber, and palm oil to China.<sup>15</sup> It also links to the development of the Chinese-financed East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) in Malaysia that, when completed, may support the expansion of these commercial activities.

In Indonesia, Chinese maritime infrastructure explicitly targets the vertical integration of critical minerals. The Morowali port complex in Central Sulawesi and the North Kalimantan Industrial Park (KIPI) fuse Chinese capital with dedicated port infrastructure to dominate localized processing for global nickel and EV battery supply chains. Simultaneously, Chinese-backed capacity expansions at Indonesia’s Kuala Tanjung and Bitung ports position them as high-volume competitors along the Malacca Strait and Pacific lanes.

This outward expansion is also driven by China’s domestic “Blue Economy” modernization.<sup>16</sup> Since the 2010s, Beijing has established “National Maritime Economic Development Demonstration Zones” in coastal hubs like Shenzhen and Qingdao to incubate high-end marine manufacturing, deep-sea technologies, and commercial shipbuilding. These zones serve as domestic springboards, generating the maritime industrial and facility surplus and technological standards that China now exports to regions like Southeast Asia.<sup>17</sup>

Crucially, the 14th Five-Year Plan accelerated the integration of domestic development with regional trade, positioning Hainan Island as the centerpiece of efforts to tether China’s Blue Economy to the Indo-Pacific. Since its 2018 designation as a Free Trade Port, Hainan’s transformation culminated in the landmark December

2025 “island-wide customs closure” (*fengguan yunzuo*). As an autonomous, zero-tariff territory defined by seamless capital flows and specialized commercial courts, Hainan exemplifies Beijing’s ambition to redraw regional and global shipping routes. Most recently, the port has become the anchor for the newly operationalized Batam-Hainan Corridor, which links Indonesian industrial zones to the island to institutionalize bilateral cooperation and deepen supply chain integration.<sup>18</sup>

### Maritime Diplomacy and Ocean Governance

Since its categorical rejection of the 2016 arbitral tribunal ruling, Beijing has intensified its efforts to challenge the Western-led maritime order. This strategy seeks to reshape the domain’s underlying norms and discourses to better reflect Chinese interests and narratives. In multilateral forums and foreign policy venues, Chinese diplomats systematically critique the status quo as an unfair, U.S.-centric construct, promoting instead a “Maritime Community with a Shared Future” that positions China as a primary provider of maritime public goods.<sup>19</sup> This shift was encapsulated by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the 2024 Symposium on Global Maritime Cooperation and Ocean Governance, where he advocated for “blue partnerships” and sustainable development.<sup>20</sup> Notably, his emphasis on resolving disputes through consultations between “parties directly concerned” uses cooperative rhetoric to delegitimize and exclude non-claimant states—specifically the United States—from the regional security architecture.

This diplomatic campaign is further codified in the 2026–2030 ASEAN-China Plan of Action. By prioritizing non-traditional security over sovereignty debates, Beijing aims to outflank rivals’ critiques across four vectors: marine environmental sustainability, Blue Economy development,

**“Beijing’s approach to maritime disputes reflects a stark dichotomy: while it offers economic incentives and “blue” cooperation, it simultaneously projects a robust deterrence posture by wielding coercive tools to enforce its maximalist territorial claims in the South China Sea.**

sea line security, and maritime safety protocols against transnational crime. Crucially, these initiatives also bolster China’s standard-setting power. For example, joint search-and-rescue and navigation safety operations provide a normative pretext for the presence of Chinese maritime law enforcement within ASEAN Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Simultaneously, Beijing promotes “green shipping lanes” using proprietary digital systems. Integrating systems such as the National Public Information Platform for Transportation & Logistics (LOGINK) platform, which already connects 21 ports across China, East Asia, Europe, and ASEAN, including Malaysia’s Kuantan and Klang, is a key component of Beijing’s digital maritime strategy. As it expands into regional trade corridors, LOGINK’s ability to centralize logistics data could grant China “data supremacy” over Southeast Asian commerce.<sup>21</sup>

This diplomatic offensive is reinforced by defense diplomacy. The PLAN has long deployed non-kinetic assets, such as the hospital ship *Peace Ark*, to project soft power and cultivate regional goodwill.<sup>22</sup> Medical engagements in Southeast Asia have expanded rapidly since the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>23</sup> Concurrently, institutionalized joint

exercises—such as Golden Dragon in Cambodia and Falcon Strike in Thailand—foster military ties while expanding a non-confrontational naval presence.<sup>24</sup>

### **The “Dark Side”: Deterrence through Gray-Zone Coercion and Lawfare**

Beijing’s approach to maritime disputes reflects a stark dichotomy: while it offers economic incentives and “blue” cooperation, it simultaneously projects a robust deterrence posture by wielding coercive tools to enforce its maximalist territorial claims in the South China Sea. Despite decades of posturing regarding a binding Code of Conduct (COC), negotiations remain stalled.<sup>25</sup> Amid this diplomatic stalemate, Beijing has been unilaterally altering the status quo. At the forefront of this strategy are the China Coast Guard (CCG) and the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia, which have conducted over 500,000 “rights protection” sorties since 2021.<sup>26</sup> By employing swarming, water cannons, acoustic weapons, and physical ramming—specifically against the

Philippines at Second Thomas Shoal and Sabina Shoal—China seeks to exhaust rival claimants and assert de facto control while remaining below the threshold of kinetic conflict.<sup>27</sup>

This physical coercion is supported by a “lawfare” strategy, wherein Beijing institutionalizes domestic legal frameworks to provide a veneer of sovereignty to its extraterritorial aggression, pushing back against the 2016 international arbitral tribunal ruling. The 2021 Coast Guard Law, which authorized lethal force against foreign vessels, marked a pivotal shift. This was escalated by CCG Order No. 3 in June 2024, which authorized the detention of foreign vessels and crews for up to 60 days for “trespassing” in contested waters. By criminalizing routine maritime activities within neighboring EEZs, China has established a system of legal intimidation, forcing regional states to choose between compliance with Chinese domestic law or physical confrontation.<sup>28</sup>

Simultaneously, Beijing resorts to large-scale engineering to weaponize the maritime domain. The transformation of submerged reefs into fortified outposts has continued since the mid-2010s. More recently, a significant escalation occurred between late 2025 and early 2026 at Antelope Reef in the Paracel Islands. Utilizing dredging fleets that damage local ecosystems, China reclaimed approximately 1,490 acres of land, a scale comparable to the militarization of Mischief Reef.<sup>29</sup> Satellite imagery reveals a 250-meter-wide canal for heavy naval cruisers, electronic warfare arrays, and foundations for a 10,000-foot runway capable of supporting H-6K strategic bombers. These forward-deployed hubs project a robust counter-intervention capability that secures operational supremacy over the northern South China Sea while deterring Vietnam’s concurrent island-building activities.

***China’s strategy in the Bay of Bengal emphasizes economic enticements and infrastructure-led statecraft to enhance its geopolitical and geoeconomic interests. By prioritizing regional integration, Beijing has operationalized its “Corridor Space” framework, tethering the Bay’s deep-water ports directly to China’s landlocked southwestern provinces.***

## Bay of Bengal as a Necessary Expansion of China's Maritime Ambitions

As a critical link to the Middle East, the Bay of Bengal represents a deliberate strategic expansion for Beijing. Unlike its coercive approach in Southeast Asia, China's strategy here emphasizes economic enticements and infrastructure-led statecraft to enhance its geopolitical and geoeconomic interests. By prioritizing regional integration, Beijing has operationalized its "Corridor Space" framework, tethering the Bay's deep-water ports directly to China's landlocked southwestern provinces.

This strategy is exemplified by the \$7.3-billion Kyaukphyu Deep-Sea Port in Myanmar, a critical node of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).<sup>30</sup> Located on Madaya Island, the port serves as the terminus for a 770-kilometer pipeline system that has delivered oil and gas to Yunnan Province since 2017. What is particularly illustrative of China's strategic resolve is the project's continuity amidst profound chaos. Amid Myanmar's descent into a fragmented civil war and the Arakan Army's encirclement of the Kyaukphyu region, the military junta has become increasingly dependent on Beijing. Leveraging this desperation, Chinese state conglomerates, including CITIC, and junta officials met in March 2025 to accelerate the deep-sea port and industrial zone construction.<sup>31</sup> The deployment of Chinese personnel to Madaya Island through early 2026 for site preparations underscores Beijing's resolve to secure a Malacca bypass and insulate energy supply chains from potential naval blockades.

This strategic footprint is reinforced by the region's proximity to key junta installations, such as the Thit Poke Taung Naval Base, which docked a new Chinese-built submarine in 2022, and Great Coco Island, which reportedly houses expanded military facilities.<sup>32</sup> Although direct

Chinese activity on Great Coco remains unverified, Beijing's status as the junta's primary military benefactor ensures that these assets remain central to China's regional power projection.

Further south, Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port highlights the dual-use utility within China's commercial investments. Following the sovereign debt crisis that resulted in a 99-year lease to China in 2017, the facility has raised strategic alarms, underscored by visits from the *Yuan Wang 5* and other hydrographic vessels capable of maritime reconnaissance. In response to pressure from India and the U.S., Colombo established a new standard operating procedure in April 2026 to regulate foreign research vessels and safeguard its neutrality. While Beijing views Hambantota as a key "Corridor Space" node, Sri Lanka has thus far maintained its agency by barring foreign military bases and combat operations.

Recently, the most significant maritime development has been the operationalization of the \$1.21-billion BNS Sheikh Hasina submarine base at Pekua. Built by a Chinese state-owned enterprise to support Bangladesh's "Forces Goal 2030," the facility can berth six submarines and eight warships simultaneously.<sup>33</sup> While the project was initially viewed as a cornerstone of the defense relationship between Beijing and the administration of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, its status following the political transition in August 2024 demonstrates the durability of the bilateral economic and security ties. Despite the change in leadership in Dhaka, the relationship has remained resilient, grounded in significant ongoing infrastructure projects and trade commitments that the new government has found pragmatic to maintain. More significantly, China has deepened its commercial footprint through multidimensional involvement in the development of three major Bangladeshi ports: Chattogram, Mongla, and

Payra. This engagement fulfills Beijing's pledge of extensive infrastructure investment designed to facilitate bilateral commercial ties and enhance connectivity across the manufacturing and trade sectors.<sup>34</sup>

By modernizing the naval and logistical infrastructure of key regional partners, China has transformed defense and economic diplomacy into strategic partnerships within politically permissive environments. This approach bolsters Beijing's maritime posture and signals a persistent capacity to deter regional rivals without resorting to overt coercion. The strategy's efficacy is evidenced by India's burgeoning "Three-Front Dilemma".<sup>35</sup> Pressured by Bangladesh and Myanmar to the east, Sri Lanka to the south, and Pakistan to the west, New Delhi is increasingly forced into a reactive posture. This encirclement compels India to divert critical resources toward its eastern seaboard and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, while expanding strategic partnerships with Japan and Australia to maintain its regional influence.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

While Beijing has undeniably expanded its maritime influence and logistical reach across the Indo-Pacific, characterizing this strategy as an unmitigated success overlooks significant structural headwinds. China's infrastructural statecraft frequently encounters complex local realities; for instance, the Morowali Industrial Park in Indonesia has faced persistent labor unrest and environmental protests, while the Kyaukphyu project in Myanmar remains vulnerable to the country's internal political volatility. Moreover, enduring controversies over debt sustainability in Sri Lanka and the latent dual-use nature of commercial hubs have prompted regional governments to approach Chinese financing with heightened scrutiny.

Strategically, Beijing's coercive gray-zone tactics in contested waters have generated a paradox: rather than ensuring compliance, these maneuvers have catalyzed regional counter-balancing. This trend is most evident in the Philippines' recent expansion of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the United States<sup>37</sup> and Vietnam's accelerated modernization of its maritime law enforcement capabilities.<sup>38</sup> By driving neighboring states to expand joint patrols and deepen defense ties with regional partners like Japan and Australia, Beijing's assertive posture has inadvertently strengthened the very security architectures it sought to restructure.

Despite these setbacks, China's commitment to expanding its maritime power remains resolute under the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). This blueprint aims to elevate the Blue Economy into a phase of "high quality" development and technological leadership. Beijing is accelerating breakthroughs in advanced manufacturing and deep-sea extraction while promoting proprietary digital platforms to secure global supply chain data supremacy.<sup>39</sup> Importantly, China is also prioritizing its transition from a participant in maritime governance to a primary architect of its rules and institutions. This shift is highlighted by Beijing's bid to host the UN's BBNJ (High Seas Treaty) Secretariat in Xiamen and the implementation of the 2026 Arbitration Law, which has the potential to expand China's judicial reach over foreign-related maritime disputes. Through these maneuvers, Beijing seeks to construct a China-led "rule-of-law" framework that legitimizes its strategic interests through a new normative order.<sup>40</sup>

Beijing's maritime strategy in Southeast Asia and the Bay of Bengal underscores the high cost of long-standing neglect by other regional and global powers toward smaller states in both regions. To prevent the emergence of a closed, Sino-cen-

tric maritime order, these powers must transition from reactive posturing to revitalized, sustained engagement. Ensuring an open and rules-based maritime domain requires a comprehensive approach: first, providing viable economic alternatives—ranging from infrastructure financing to green energy—that offer small states genuine choices; second, maintaining a unified front against maritime encroachment; and third, fostering deeper regional partnerships to achieve these ends. The burgeoning collaboration between India and Japan serves as a prime example of this model, offering a sustainable path toward integrated security and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>41</sup>

The coming decade will determine whether the Indo-Pacific remains a “public sea” governed by international law or fragments into exclusive spheres of influence. For the international community, the challenge is no longer just observing China’s rise, but actively building a competitive, inclusive architecture that protects the autonomy of smaller nations and the integrity of the global maritime commons.

*This issue brief is a part of the ISDP SCSA-IPA research project, “The Silk Noose: China’s Power Architecture in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region”.*

#### **Author –**

*Dr. Jessica C. Liao is an Associate Professor of Asian Studies in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College, a non-residential fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service. Previously, she served as an Associate Professor of Political Science at North Carolina State University (2016–2025). A 2020–21 Wilson China Fellow, she also served as an Economic Development Specialist at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, where her portfolio included China’s relations with Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. She holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Southern California. Her research focuses on China’s foreign policy and economic statecraft, US-China relations, and China–Southeast Asia relations.*

#### **Disclaimer –**

*The author’s views expressed here are personal and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Department of War or any U.S. government entity.*

© The Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2026. This Policy Brief can be freely reproduced provided that ISDP is informed.

#### **ABOUT ISDP**

*The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute’s primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe’s neighborhood.*

[www.isdp.eu](http://www.isdp.eu)

## Endnotes

- 1 Marc Lanteigne, "China's Maritime Security and the "Malacca Dilemma"," *Asian Security* 4, no. 2 2008: 143–161.
- 2 Sukjoon Yoon, "Implications of Xi Jinping's "True Maritime Power": Its Context, Significance, and Impact on the Region," *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 3 (2015): 40–63.
- 3 "Xi Focus: Steering China toward a strong maritime country," *Xinhua*, June 8, 2022, <https://english.news.cn/20220608/53889bd6e8dc4a6baa566a652dc83ea6/c.html>.
- 4 Nadege Rolland, "China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative," National Bureau of Asian Research, May 23, 2017.
- 5 M. Fabinyi, A. Wu, S. Lau, T. Mallory, K. Barclay, K. Walsh, and W. Dressler, "China's Blue Economy: A State Project of Modernisation," *The Journal of Environment & Development* 30, no. 2 (2021): 127–148.
- 6 State Council Information Office of the PRC (SCIO), "China's Military Strategy," May 2015.
- 7 Liza Tobin, "Xi's Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and Its Allies," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (2018): 154–167.
- 8 State Council Information Office of the PRC (SCIO), "China's National Defense in the New Era," July 2019.
- 9 Edward Chan, "China's maritime power in the 14th Five-Year Plan," Blogpost, March 19, 2021, <https://www.edwardsychan.com/archive/chinas-maritime-power-in-the-14th-five-year-plan/>.
- 10 "Weaponizing the Belt and Road Initiative," Asia Society Policy Institute, September 8, 2020, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/weaponizing-belt-and-road-initiative>.
- 11 Isaac B. Kardon, and Wendy Leutert, "Pier Competitor: China's Power Position in Global Ports," *International Security* 46, no. 4 (2022): 9–47.
- 12 Rahman Yaacob, "Partnership of convenience: Ream Naval Base and the Cambodia–China convergence," Lowy Institute, December 4, 2024, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/partnership-convenience-ream-naval-base-cambodia-china-convergence>.
- 13 "Cambodia receives first Type 056C missile corvette from China at Ream Naval Base," Global Defense News, April 14, 2026, <https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/navy-news/2026/cambodia-receives-first-type-056c-missile-corvette-from-china-at-ream-naval-base>.
- 14 Jonathan Head, "Does China now have a permanent military base in Cambodia?" *BBC*, October 7, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2k42n54kvo>.
- 15 Angela Tritto and Alvin Camba, "State-facilitated Industrial Parks in the Belt and Road Initiative," *World Development Perspectives* 28 (2022): 100465.
- 16 Dong Yu, "China's 'blue economy': A State project of modernization," *People's Daily*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/384043>.
- 17 Clark Banach and Jacob Gunter, "Report: How the BRI is shaping global trade and what to expect from the initiative in its second decade," Mercator Institute for China Studies, December 2023, <https://merics.org/en/tracker/how-bri-shaping-global-trade-and-what-expect-initiative-its-second-decade>.
- 18 Genevieve Donnellon-May, "How China's COSCO is redrawing global shipping routes through Southeast Asia," September 16, 2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/economy/how-chinas-cosco-redrawing-global-shipping-routes-through-southeast-asia>.
- 19 Minran Liu, and Edward Sing Yue Chan, "Imagined Weakness: The peaceful riser identity and Beijing's policy overcorrection in the South China Sea," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 25, no. 3 (2025).
- 20 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, "Coexisting in Harmony and Working Together to Bring Global Ocean Governance to a Higher Level," November 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjzbzhd/202411/t20241126\\_11533290.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjzbzhd/202411/t20241126_11533290.html).
- 21 "LOGINK: Risks from China's Promotion of a Global Logistics Management Platform," U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, September 20, 2022; Andre Wheeler, "Global smart supply chain integration: is a trap being laid with the Logink platform?" *Asia Power Watch*, August 26, 2021, <https://asiapowerwatch.com/global-smart-supply-chain-integration-is-a-trap-being-laid-with-the-logink-platform/>.

- 22 Andrew S. Erickson, and Austin M. Strange, "China's Blue Soft Power," *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 1 (2015), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1182&context=nwc-review>.
- 23 Phillip C. Saunders and Melodie Ha, "China's Military Diplomacy," Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, Institute for National Strategic Studies, *China Strategic Perspectives* 19, June 2025.
- 24 Rupert Schulenburg and Erik Green, "The PLA's expanding joint-exercise profile and modernization," IISS, November 6, 2025. <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/charting-china/2025/11/the-plas-expanding-joint-exercise-profile-and-modernisation/>.
- 25 Joanne Lin and Pou Sothirak, "The Elusive Code: Why ASEAN Needs a New Playbook for the South China Sea," *Fulcrum*, June 27, 2025, <https://fulcrum.sg/the-elusive-code-why-asean-needs-a-new-playbook-for-the-south-china-sea/>.
- 26 "China Coast Guard deploys 550,000 vessel sorties for maritime rights protection," *Xinhua*, January 30, 2026, <https://english.news.cn/20260130/892690b264974b0a93daadbcc5374533/c.html>.
- 27 Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, "China's Maritime Militia." Blogpost, May 2016, [https://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Maritime-Militia\\_Chinas\\_Erickson-Kennedy\\_CNA\\_20160307.pdf](https://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Maritime-Militia_Chinas_Erickson-Kennedy_CNA_20160307.pdf).
- 28 "Philippines president calls new China coast guard rules 'worrisome'," *Reuters*, May 29, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-president-says-new-china-coast-guard-rules-worrisome-2024-05-29/>.
- 29 "Antelope Reef Could Now Be the Largest Island in the South China Sea," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, CSIS, March 18, 2026, <https://amti.csis.org/antelope-reef-could-now-be-the-largest-island-in-the-south-china-sea/>.
- 30 Shaun Cameron, "Why is Myanmar's new deep-sea port such hot property?" *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, November 22, 2023, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-myanmar-s-new-deep-sea-port-such-hot-property>.
- 31 Maung Kavi, "China's CITIC and Myanmar Junta Discuss Progress on Rakhine Deep-Sea Port," *Irrawaddy*, March 4, 2025, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmar-china-watch/chinas-citic-and-myanmar-junta-discuss-progress-on-rakhine-deep-sea-port.html>.
- 32 Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Military construction on Myanmar's Great Coco island prompts fears of Chinese involvement," *Guardian*, April 30, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/01/military-construction-on-myanmars-great-coco-island-prompts-fears-of-chinese-involvement#>.
- 33 Monty Khanna, "The Growing Presence of Chinese-Built Submarines in the Indian Ocean Region," *Proceedings* 150/8/1,458, August 24, 2024.
- 34 Upamanyu Basu, "Bangladesh's China Turn: What It Means for South Asia?" *ISDP Voices* 100, August 19, 2025, <https://www.isdp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Blog-100-Basu.pdf>.
- 35 Sohini Bose, "Ports and Geopolitics: The Case of Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Bay of Bengal," *Behavioural Change*, ORF Occasional Paper No. 296, January 2021, Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20251104184131.pdf>
- 36 Jagannath Panda, "India, the Blue Dot Network, and the 'Quad Plus' Calculus," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Fall 2020: 4–22.
- 37 "Philippines, U.S. Announce Locations of Four New EDCA Sites," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, April 3, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/NEWS/Article/3350502/philippines-us-announce-locations-of-four-new-edca-sites/>.
- 38 Tran Van Luong, "Vietnam Coast Guard improves the efficiency of law enforcement at sea," *National Defense Journal*, April 18, 2026, <https://tapchiquptd.vn/en/theory-and-practice/vietnam-coast-guard-improves-the-efficiency-of-law-enforcement-at-sea/26008.html>.
- 39 Zhexiao Tang, "Blueprint for High-quality Development of Marine Economy," *Science and Technology Daily*, April 9, 2026,
- 40 For more discussion, see Edward Chan, "China seeks greater leadership in ocean governance," *East Asia Forum*, April 20, 2026, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2026/04/20/china-seeks-greater-leadership-in-ocean-governance/>.
- 41 For more discussion, see Jagannath P. Panda (ed.) *India-Japan-ASEAN Triangularity* (Routledge, 2022).