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# RUSI VI

*To promote national defence and security issues through discussion and engagement*

**Newsletter of the Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island**

The Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island is a member of the Conference of Defence Associations. The CDA is the oldest and most influential advocacy group in Canada's defence community, consisting of associations from all parts of the country.

The CDA expresses its ideas and opinions with a view to influencing government security and defence policy. It is a non-partisan, independent, and non-profit organization.



## June 2020 Special Issue

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# U.S. Withdrawal from Open Skies Treaty Presents Canada with a 'Serious' Challenge, says expert

Canada might have to choose between offending the White House and being a U.S. 'toady,' says academic

Levon Sevunts · CBC News · Posted: May 26, 2020 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: May 26



*U.S. President Donald Trump chats with Russia's President Vladimir Putin at the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting Nov. 11, 2017. Trump is citing alleged Russian violations of the Open Skies Treaty to justify the United States' pending withdrawal. (Mikhail Klimentyev/AFP/Getty Images)*

Washington's pending withdrawal from a confidence-building international treaty that permits member nations to conduct observation flights over each other's territory is going to present Canada with a difficult strategic challenge, according to one Canadian defence expert.

Rob Huebert, who teaches political science at the University of Calgary, said the Trudeau government could be faced with an awkward choice between sticking to Canada's decades-long policy of supporting international arms control treaties and running the risk of looking "like a toady to the United States" by following Washington's lead and withdrawing from the Open Skies Treaty.

Huebert said the treaty, which was signed in 1992 and came into effect in 2002, permits each of the 34 treaty members to conduct short-notice, unarmed reconnaissance flights over the entire territories of other treaty members to collect data on military forces and activities.

Canada is one of the original signatories to the treaty, which gives it the right to conduct two reconnaissance flights a year over Russia — and the obligation to allow two Russian flights over Canadian territory annually.

"It's a form of verification. You don't have to necessarily like someone or trust someone, but you can see for yourself if they're doing what they say they're going to do," Huebert said.

Claiming that Russia is violating the pact, the Trump administration informed other members of the treaty last Thursday that the U.S. plans to pull out in six months. The White House also says that imagery collected during the flights can be obtained quickly at less cost from U.S. or commercial satellites.

### **'A very serious political challenge'**

"If the Russians pull out, then we'd sidestep one potentially very serious political challenge with our American neighbours," Huebert said.

"But if the Russians decide to stay in the treaty, then it means we either have to say yes, we're in the treaty and Russians and us, we can still have the overflights, and that means flying over the Canadian part of North America. One could imagine what the Americans' response to that will be."

Syrine Khoury, a spokesperson for Foreign Affairs Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne, said Canada views the Open Skies Treaty as a key tool of global arms control.

"We understand and share many of the U.S. concerns regarding Russian non-compliance with the Open Skies Treaty," Khoury told Radio Canada International.

"Nonetheless, we continue to believe that if Russia returns to full compliance, the treaty could continue to serve as an important tool for promoting military transparency, building mutual confidence and reducing misunderstandings."

Canada will consult with other state parties to determine the impact of the Trump administration's announcement on the treaty's continuation, Khoury added.

Trump suggested Thursday that "there's a very good chance" he'll come to a new agreement with Russia if Moscow adheres to the treaty.

"So I think what's going to happen is we're going to pull out and they (the Russians) are going to come back and want to make a deal," Trump told reporters at the White House.

### **'Everything changes'**

Huebert said a U.S. withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty must be seen in the context of a new American strategic doctrine and the Trump administration's broader moves to withdraw from arms control treaties.

"If one starts reading the latest American strategic policies — they're now, for example, putting low-yield nuclear weapons on their ballistic missile submarines — it's almost as if the Americans are going towards a greater possibility of a nuclear warfighting environment," Huebert said.

"If that's true, everything changes."



*Russian military officers stand by as the 9M729, center, its launcher, left, and the 9M728, right, land-based cruise missiles are displayed in Kubinka outside Moscow, Russia, Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2019. (Pavel Golovkin/The Associated Press)*

While Trump's assertion that Russia is cheating on its obligations under the treaty is correct — particularly when it comes to allowing overflights of breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia — few Canadian experts agree that it's something worth destroying the entire treaty over, Huebert said.

"But obviously, Trump has shown very little inclination to try and fix any multilateral organization," he said. "This is part of the philosophy 'America First.' And that goes to the defence and the use of nuclear weapons, and all that entails."

### **'An ultimatum'**

Russia decried the U.S. withdrawal as "a deplorable development for European security."

According to a statement from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow sees Washington's move "as an ultimatum rather than a foundation for discussion."

"That said, Moscow was not surprised by Washington's decision, which characterizes its approach to discarding the entire package of arms control agreements and trust-building measures in the military sphere," the Russian statement continued.

Russia has denied U.S. accusations of non-compliance and said it has questions of its own about U.S. compliance, but prefers to resolve these issues through the mechanisms provided by the treaty.

"Russia's policy on the treaty will be based on its national security interests and in close cooperation with its allies and partners," the ministry said.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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## **The End of Hong Kong**

**BY TIMOTHY MCLAUGHLIN** [THE ATLANTIC](#) MAY 25, 2020

Over the course of April and throughout May, while much of the world's attention was trained on the coronavirus's spiraling death toll, hardly a day passed in Hong Kong without news of arrested activists, scuffles among lawmakers, or bombastic proclamations from mainland officials. Long-standing norms were done away with at dizzying speed.

In that time, Beijing was undertaking aggressive actions across Asia. A Chinese ship rammed a Vietnamese vessel in the contested waters of the South China Sea, sinking it. Off the coast of Malaysia, in the country's exclusive economic zone, a Chinese research vessel, accompanied by coast-guard and fishing ships—likely part of China's maritime militia, civilian vessels marshaled by Beijing in times of need—began survey work near a Malaysian oil rig. The standoff that followed drew warships from the United States and Australia, as well as China. Beijing then declared that it had created two administrative units on islands in the South China Sea that are also claimed by Vietnam. Chinese officials have reacted, too, with predictable rage to

Taiwan, whose handling of the pandemic has won plaudits and begun a push for more international recognition.

The moves were capped this week when China's National People's Congress announced that it would force wide-ranging national-security laws on Hong Kong in response to last year's prodemocracy protests. In doing so, Beijing circumvented the city's autonomous legislative process and began dismantling the "one country, two systems" framework under which Hong Kong is governed, setting up what will likely be a fundamental shift in the territory's freedoms, its laws, and how it is recognized internationally.

The announcement late Thursday evening stunned prodemocracy lawmakers, diplomats, and many of the city's 7.4 million residents, who awoke Friday questioning Hong Kong's future. The stock market plunged, interest in VPNs shot up, and Hong Kongers wondered whether 2047, the year in which China was set to take back full control of the city, had arrived more than two decades early. "I'm heartbroken," Tanya Chan, the convener of the prodemocracy camp in the city's legislature, told me. "Last night was a complete setback."

Though much of the world has come to a standstill as a result of the pandemic, China's regional ambitions and grudge settling clearly have not. Beijing has offered provocations—with a dash of propaganda and medical diplomacy—pushing forward its agenda despite the unfolding public-health crisis. "This is business as usual—in the South China Sea, towards Taiwan—it's all the same," Greg Poling, a senior fellow with the Southeast Asia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., told me. "Business as usual during a pandemic that people partially blame on you—it is more scandalous."

Beijing's unwelcome conduct has caused alarm as it moves especially in Hong Kong to impose its will by decree. (Attempts to pass similar laws via the city's mini-Parliament in 2003 sparked mass demonstrations and the effort was scrapped.) Though China has failed to pass a law through its allies in Hong Kong that would allow extraditions to the mainland, it will, through the newly announced national-security legislation, effectively bring its law directly to Hong Kong instead: targeting "secessionist or subversive activity" and "foreign and external interference," while paving the way for mainland security forces to operate in the city, which, although part of China, has maintained its own laws, courts, and police. The legislation will give Beijing a new tool with which to crack down on protesters and dissidents and push forward education that trumpets the successes of the Communist Party.

The American response has also fit a pattern. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called it a "death knell" for Hong Kong's autonomy, U.S. lawmakers unveiled legislation aimed at Beijing's reach into the city, and the State Department is preparing a report on the issue. Similarly, Congress displayed rare unity last year when pushing for a bill that sought to defend Hong Kong protesters and sanction those who chip away at their freedoms. But vague and scattershot efforts, coupled with President Donald Trump's uncoordinated leadership, have left other countries in Asia questioning Washington at this inflection point.

Despite China's mixture of soft and hard power—it has sought to dull criticism of its initial response to the coronavirus outbreak with aid, while still pushing its territorial, legal, and political claims—and Beijing's growing military and diplomatic might, countries in the region have not taken kindly to its aggressive maneuvers.

The sinking of the Vietnamese ship, for example, prompted officials in Hanoi to lodge an official protest with China, but Huong Le Thu, a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, told me there is a growing belief among Vietnamese leaders that these types of responses are now insufficient. Beijing, she said, "is getting into the mode of making the most of this opportune time when very few are looking." China's actions have again given rise to the possibility of a lawsuit by Vietnam in an attempt to hold China to account. (Successful legal challenges to China's maritime aggression are not unheard of: In 2013, the

Philippines lodged a complaint challenging Beijing's expansive claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea. Three years later, Manila was handed a victory when the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in the country's favor. By then, however, Rodrigo Duterte, who has been friendly toward China, had been elected president.)

Beyond China's actions, its messaging has also had a largely negative impact on public perceptions, oscillating between ill-advised friendly overtures and pugnacious statements. Much of the latter has come through Beijing's "wolf warrior" diplomacy, which has seen dozens of Chinese diplomats and spokespeople take to social media, predominantly Twitter, to target detractors and sow misinformation. In most places, "Chinese officials are not making any attempt to calm things down or be conciliatory," Poling said.

The attempts to play nice have been equally unsuccessful and more publicly embarrassing. In April, while much of the Philippines was under lockdown, the Chinese embassy in Manila released a song and accompanying music video that were meant to promote being "friendly neighbors across the sea." The maudlin ballad—" *lisang Dagat*" ("One Sea")—was written by the Chinese ambassador, yet its timing was curious, coming just days after the Philippines had lodged a diplomatic protest over two incidents involving Chinese maritime aggression. The song was roundly panned and, perhaps aided by weeks of shut-in boredom, the perfect target for relentless online mocking and meme-ifying by netizens. An opinion piece in *the Philippine Daily Inquirer* declared that it had displaced Frank Sinatra's "My Way," a song linked to a string of drunken bar fights, many of them deadly, to become "the ditty most likely to provoke a brawl anywhere it is sung."

Antonio Carpio, a former supreme-court judge who retired last year and who is a critic of Beijing's provocations, told me that as long as Beijing maintains its claim to Philippine maritime territory, "China can never expect the Filipino people to trust China." It would, he continued, "always be viewed as stealing, through deceit, intimidation, and force, what lawfully belongs to the Filipino people."

The pandemic has helped accelerate growing bipartisan support in Washington around a more hawkish approach to China. And successive administrations have stated, though hardly fully articulated or implemented, goals of shifting focus, particularly in defense, to counter China. Beijing's unabated aggression, diplomatic stumbles, and poor early response to the emergence of the coronavirus would seem, then, to provide an opportune moment for the U.S. to assert itself, but American actions have gotten an uneven reception in the region.

When the U.S. sent ships to Malaysia to counter the presence of the Chinese survey vessel, Kuala Lumpur reacted with some hesitation, Shahrizan Lockman, a senior analyst at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Malaysia, told me. Some believe that the arrival of U.S. vessels inflamed the situation, leading to further escalation by Beijing. "They [the U.S.] don't think about the potential calamity they might cause other people with all their good intentions," Lockman said. And Malaysia is not the only place the American military is less than welcome: This year, Duterte announced the termination of the U.S.-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement, a two-decade-old troop-rotation pact.

The time difference between the U.S. and most of Asia means that Trump's unhinged outbursts often bookend the days. His rambling, falsehood-filled press conferences run into the Asian morning, and as evening rolls around, he begins firing off his trademark bellicose, difficult-to-decipher tweets. People are "pretty appalled at the lack of coherence in response from the United States, and that is drowning out a lot of other facts," Aaron Connelly, a research fellow on Southeast Asian political change and foreign policy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore, told me.

Pompeo said during a recent call with Southeast Asian leaders that Beijing had "moved to take advantage of the distraction" created by the pandemic. He also mentioned the findings of a recent report by the

Washington-based Stimson Center that Chinese dams on the Mekong River, which flows through numerous Southeast Asian countries, cause severe drought conditions downriver. But Pompeo's attempts to force Southeast Asian leaders to make a choice between the U.S. and China fell flat. By framing the situation as a competition in which countries had to pick sides, the call "played really badly in Southeast Asia," Connelly said. (Similarly, Poling described Pompeo's form of diplomacy as a "bull in a China shop.")

In Hong Kong, Chan, the prodemocracy lawmaker, told me that before she entered politics, she believed that mainland officials would honor their 1997 pledge to allow the city to operate with greater autonomy. The new legislation has made clear to her that this was certainly not the case, and that Beijing cares little about winning over Hong Kongers. "Even after 23 years," she said, "they still can't [win over] Hong Kong people."

## Canadian-led NATO battlegroup in Latvia targeted by pandemic disinformation campaign

Alliance commanders are pointing fingers at Russia

Murray Brewster · CBC News · Posted: May 24, 2020 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: May 25



*A Canadian soldier carries light anti-tank weapons following the conclusion of Exercise Steele Crescendo, which took place outside of Riga, Latvia earlier this month. (NATO Handout)*

The Canadian-led NATO battle group in Latvia was the target of a pandemic-related disinformation campaign that alliance commanders say they believe originated in Russia.

Reports circulated recently in some Baltic and Eastern European media outlets that suggested the contingent at Camp Adazi in Kadaga, outside the capital of Riga, had "a high number" of cases of the deadly virus.

"That was definitely not true," said Col. Eric Laforest, commander of Task Force Latvia.

When the reports first surfaced, ahead of a major exercise late last month, the Latvian defence ministry swung into action to counter the false information.



"The Latvian authorities here were the ones to set the record straight because it was information about troops stationed in their country," said Laforest. "Rapidly, within a matter of a few hours, they went out and explained what the situation was. It actually happened fairly fast."

NATO was also quick to spot and swat down reports that the camp was a pandemic hot zone, he added.

### A pattern of propaganda

It's not the first time Russian-backed media outlets in the Baltic country have been accused of working to drive a wedge between the western military contingent and the Latvian public. Not long after the deployment began three years ago, reports emerged online that specifically smeared Canadian troops.

NATO and Canadian commanders have countered disinformation campaigns in the past by staying active in the local community and being seen doing good deeds.

The pandemic has put a lid on that activity for the time being, but Laforest said the battle group remains active on social media.

He said he believes the effort to discount the false reports was successful because they have witnessed no further attempts to sow discord.

A European agency that tracks disinformation said the rumours and conspiracy theories surrounding the pandemic are more insidious than most — because when people believe their health is being threatened, they will lash out, sometimes irrationally.

### Dangerous rumours

Peter Stano of the European External Action Service (an arm of the European Union) pointed to the spread online of reports advising people to drink bleach to avoid being infected, or blaming 5G technology for the pandemic and calling on people to attack cellphone towers.

"This is very dangerous because then you have people who are acting on this disinformation and this misguided advice, and it can lead to problems," Stano said in a recent interview with CBC's Investigative Unit.

The propaganda campaign directed at NATO troops emerged around the time they were engaged in a training exercise which took them just outside their base.

Known as Exercise Steele Crescendo, the training involved troops and tanks simulating defences against an armoured attack on the Baltic country.



*A Canadian soldier fires his machine gun during Exercise Steele Crescendo. (NATO Handout)*

The troops had to operate in a "constrained environment" and soldiers wore masks whenever it made sense to wear them, Laforest said.

He said they also tried to respect the two-metre physical distancing rule.

Unlike the military training mission in Ukraine, which is largely shut down because of the pandemic, the rotation of troops from Canada into Latvia, scheduled for July, will go ahead as planned.

"That hasn't changed and we have all of the plans in place to ensure that we conduct a safe relief in place," said Laforest.

The other nations that are part of the battle group — Albania, the Czech Republic, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain — will also switch up their contingents.

To ensure safety, Laforest said, all of the incoming troops will be required to isolate themselves on military bases for two weeks prior to deployment.

Earlier this month, to mark the third anniversary of the deployment, the president of Latvia, Egils Levits, wrote to Governor General Julie Payette to express his country's gratitude for the Canadian presence.

In his letter, Levits made special mention of the fact that it's very difficult for soldiers to be away from their families and loved ones during a pandemic, adding Latvia is taking all necessary safety measures to protect the health of allied troops.

Laforest agreed, but said the troops stayed connected with home throughout the crisis.

# Russia Vs China – OpEd

By [Zintis Znotins](#)

Asian Review - May 26, 2020

Cooperation between Russia and China has deep historical roots, and its earliest manifestations can be found already during the Chinese civil war. It seems that both countries should be most united by their communist ideology, but the ambitions of their leaders and the willingness to be the first and the most powerful was in fact the dominating force. Relations between these nations have seen times of flourishing, as well as times of military conflict.

The relationship between both countries are currently presented as friendly, but it is difficult to call them truly friendly. Even in the past, relations between the USSR and China were based on each nation's calculations and attempts to play the leading role, and it doesn't seem like something has changed at the present, although China has become a "smarter" and resource-wise richer player than Russia.

We will now look at the "similarities" between China and Russia, the ways they are cooperating and future prospects for both of them.

Russia is a semi-presidential federative republic, while China is a socialist nation ruled by the secretary general of its Communist Party.

Already we can see formal differences, but if we dive deeper both countries essentially feel like Siamese twins. There are more than one party in Russia, but only one party decides everything that takes place in the country – *United Russia*. Russia isn't even attempting to hide the aim of establishing the said party, which is to support the course taken by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

China, too, has nine parties, but only one of them is allowed to rule and it is the *Communist Party of China* which answers to the secretary general who is also the president of the state.

Therefore, there is a single ruling party both in Russia and China, and this party is responsible for implementing and executing whatever the president wishes, meaning that both countries are ruled by a rather narrow circle of people. Forecasting election results in Russia and China is as difficult as being able to tell that the day after Monday is Tuesday. To write this piece, I spent a lot of time reading about the history of China and Russia and the current events taking place in these countries, and for this reason I figured that we also have to look at the meaning of the word "totalitarianism".

Totalitarianism is a political system in which a country is governed without the participation of its people and decisions are made without the agreement of the majority of the people; in a totalitarian regime the most important social, economic and political affairs are controlled by the state. It is a type of dictatorship where the regime restricts its people in all of the imaginable aspects of life.

## **Notable characteristics:**

- Power is held by a small group of people – a clique;
- Opposition is suppressed and general terror is a tool for governing the state;
- All aspects of life are subordinate to the interests of the state and the dominating ideology;
- The public is mobilized using a personality cult of the leader, mass movements, propaganda and other similar means;
- Aggressive and expansionist foreign policy;

- Total control over public life.

Are China and Russia truly totalitarian states? Formally, no, but if we look at the essence of it we see a completely different picture. We will look at all of the signs of totalitarianism in China and Russia, but we will not delve too deep into events and occurrences that most of us are already familiar with.

Can we say that the majority of Russian and Chinese citizens are engaged in decision making? Formally, sort of, because elections do take place in these countries, but can we really call them “elections”? It would be impossible to list all the video footage or articles that reveal how polling stations operate in order to provide the required election results. Therefore, we can say that the general public is involved in making decisions, it’s just that the results are always determined by those in power.

The last paragraph brings us to the first point: power is held by a small group of people – a clique. Both nations are ruled by presidents who appoint whoever they wish and dismiss whoever they wish. This is power held by a small group of people. The next point – suppressing the opposition and using general terror to govern the state. Media outlets have written enough about suppressing the opposition in both countries, and everyone has seen at least a video or two on this topic.

To stop their political opponents and any events organized by them Russia and China use not only their police forces, but the army as well. From time to time, information appears that an opposition activist has been murdered in either of the countries, and these murders are never solved. We will not even begin talking about criminal cases and administrative arrests of opposition activists. We can say that the point in question is completely true. Regarding all of the aspects of life being subordinate to the state and ideology – is there anyone who isn’t convinced by this?

If Russia is engaged in restricting and “teaching” its citizens quite inconspicuously, China has no time for ceremony – the Communist Party of China has published new guidelines on improving the “moral quality” of its citizens, and this touches upon all of the imaginable aspects of one’s private life – from organizing wedding ceremonies to dressing appropriately. Is the public in Russia and China mobilized using the cult of personality, mass movements, propaganda and other means? We can look at 9 May celebrations in Russia and all of the surrounding rhetoric, and the events dedicated to the anniversary of founding the People’s Republic of China. I’m sorry, but it feels like I’m watching some Stalin and Hitler era montage but in a more modern fashion, and instead of Stalin and Hitler there are some new faces. What is left? Of course, aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. China has been very active in the South China Sea for many years now, which has aggravated tensions among the armed forces of its neighbors – Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

China is continuing to physically seize, artificially build and arm islands far from its shores. And in the recent years China has been particularly aggressive towards Taiwan, which the regime sees as being rightfully theirs. China is also willing to impose sanctions against those nations who intend to sell arms to Taiwan.

However, when it comes to armed aggression China pales in comparison to Russia, which isn’t shy to use armed aggression against its close and far neighbors in order to reach its goals. Russia’s aggression goes hand in hand with its nihilism. I am sure I don’t have to remind you about the events in Georgia, Ukraine and previously in Chechnya as well. Russia will use every opportunity to show everyone its great weaponry, and this also includes directly or covertly engaging in different military conflicts.

Maybe some of you will disagree, but as I see it China and Russia currently are totalitarian states in their essence.

History has shown us that up to a certain point even two totalitarian countries are able to cooperate. Let's remember the "friendship" between Nazi Germany and the USSR, but let's also not forget what this friendship resulted in.

It is also true that the economic sanctions imposed against Russia have pushed it to be more friendly with China, but it seems that China will come out as the winner of this relationship.

According to data from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, in 2018 the Chinese economy received 56.6 million USD in direct investments from Russia (+ 137.4%), meaning that by the end of 2018 the amount of direct investments from Russia reached 1,066.9 million USD.

In 2018, the Russian economy received 720 million USD in direct investments from China, resulting in a total of 10,960 million USD in direct investments from China by the end of 2018.

The main spheres of Chinese investments in Russia are energy, agriculture and forestry, construction and construction materials, trade, light industry, textiles, household electric goods, services, etc.

The main spheres of Russian investments in China are production, construction and transportation.<sup>5</sup> We can see from the amount of investments that in this "friendship" China has far exceeded Russia. We also cannot ignore the fact that China has launched more large-scale investment projects in other nations than Russia has.

It should be noted that China's procurement of military equipment has allowed Russian armaments programs to exist. Russia sold modern armaments to China, despite the concerns that China will be able to "copy" the received armaments and then improve them. But the need for money was much greater to worry about such things. As a result, in early 2020 it was concluded that China has surpassed Russia in producing and selling armaments.

If we look at the ways Russia and China are attempting to shape public opinion in the long term, we can see some differences. Russia tries to do this using publications, demonstrative activities and attempts for its compatriots to become citizens of their country of residence while maintaining their cultural identity in order to establish an intellectual, economic and spiritually-cultural resource in global politics.

China, in addition to all of this, has established Confucius Institutes that are subordinate to the Chinese Ministry of Education. There are a total of 5,418 Confucius Institutes or classes around the world. These institutes, named after the most known Chinese philosopher, have drawn sharp criticism globally for its foreign policy views – ones that avoid discussing human rights or believe that Taiwan or Tibet are inseparable parts of China. These institutes have been accused of espionage and restricting academic freedom.

"The Confucius Institutes are an attractive brand for our culture to spread abroad," representative of the Communist Party's Politburo Li Changchun said in 2011. "They have always been an important investment in expanding our soft power. The brand name "Confucius" is quite attractive. By using language tuition as a cover, everything looks logical and acceptable from the outside." The leadership of the Communist Party calls these institutes a crucial part of its propaganda toolset abroad, and it is estimated that over the past 12 years China has spent roughly two billion USD on them. The constitution of these institutes<sup>9</sup> stipulates that their leadership, personnel, guidelines, tuition materials and most of their funding is ensured by the *Hanban* institution which is under the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Both Russian and Chinese citizens either buy or rent property abroad. Russians do this so they have somewhere to go in case the necessity arises.

Chinese citizens and companies slowly rent or purchase large swathes of land in in the Russian Far East. There is no precise estimate of the amount of land handed over to the Chinese, but it is said it could range between 1–1.5 billion hectares.

What can we conclude from all of this? China and Russia are, in essence, totalitarian states with bloated ambitions. If Russia tries to reach its ambitions in an openly aggressive and shameless manner, then China is doing the same with caution and thought. If Russia often uses military means to reach its goals, China will most likely use financial ones. If Russia attempts to fulfill its ambitions arrogantly, then China achieves the same result with seeming kindness and humility.

Which country has gotten closer to its goal? I believe it is definitely not Russia. In addition, just as the USSR, Russia too believes it is better than China. But for those observing from the sidelines, it is evident that in many areas China has far succeeded Russia and is now even acquiring Russian land.

This brings us back to history – what happens when two totalitarian states share a border? One of them eventually disappears. For now, it seems that China has done everything in its power to stay on the world map.

Author

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## Why NATO Needs a Standing Maritime Group in The Arctic

*By Colin Barnard* [MAY 15, 2020](#) Centre For International Maritime Security

### Introduction

Since the Cold War, the U.S. has maintained a steady presence in the Arctic—specifically the European Arctic, or [High North](#)—primarily through nuclear submarine deployments while relying on NATO allies in the region for logistical support. However, melting ice caps, an increase in commercial maritime activity, and ongoing territorial disputes necessitate stronger NATO cooperation in the region to achieve a deterrence posture against Russia and safeguard maritime security. Deterring Russian aggression is important in all European bodies of water, and the Arctic will increasingly face the same maritime security issues as other parts of the world, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing by [China](#) and the movement of migrants and [refugees](#) by sea.

### Checking a Growing Russian Sphere of Influence

The Arctic has reemerged as a front for NATO in recent years, as Russia has ignored European [policies](#) not to militarize the region. Since at least 2010, Russia has been [reopening](#) and [rearming](#) much of the Arctic infrastructure used at the height of the Soviet Union. In 2012, Russia resumed its patrol of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), a commercial shipping lane running along Russia’s northern coastline from the Kara Sea to the Bering Strait. In 2014, Russia established a new joint strategic command in Severomorsk to oversee its Northern Fleet with renewed focus on the Arctic. And in 2019, following the first

successful [navigation](#) of the NSR without icebreakers two years prior, Russia [implemented](#) mandatory pilotage for foreign vessels and [demonstrated](#) its maritime interdiction capabilities.

Similar to Russia, NATO needs to improve its capability and capacity to operate on the Arctic front. In order to deter the Russian threat and safeguard maritime security, sustained presence in the region is needed. To this end, NATO should create a new standing maritime group dedicated to the Arctic and separate from the [maritime groups](#) focused elsewhere. While likely to be hotly debated, a new standing maritime group should gain traction among many of the Arctic states, especially Iceland, Norway, and Denmark, who have long recognized the growing Russian threat in the region. With sustained presence, so too will come sustained situational awareness, which is fundamental for conducting successful operations.

Currently, NATO's maritime component commander, HQ Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), maintains operational control of NATO's four standing maritime groups: two destroyer/frigate groups and two mine countermeasures groups. These groups are already overtasked, posturing against a resurgent Russian Navy across the North Atlantic, Baltic, and Black Seas, and lending support to NATO's maritime security operation in the Mediterranean, [Operation Sea Guardian](#), as well as the EU refugee and migrant [crisis](#). Regardless of these ongoing tasks, these groups are not tailored for [Arctic naval operations](#). For this reason, a new group needs to be formed.

Instead of relying exclusively on frigates and destroyers from NATO navies to form the new group, NATO should look to its coast guards as well, recognizing that many of these forces field ships that are optimized for Arctic operations. The U.S., Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Iceland, and Norway all have Arctic maritime borders, and most have [ice-class](#) ships. Denmark has *Thetis*-class and *Knud Rasmussen*-class patrol vessels, the latter of which double as icebreakers. Norway has the patrol vessel *Svalbard*, which also doubles as an icebreaker and recently completed the first Norwegian [voyage](#) to the North Pole. Three new patrol vessels will soon [join](#) her. Iceland, too, can lend support with their aging but capable *Ægir*-class or newer *Thor*-class patrol vessels. *Thor* is not capable of icebreaking, but it can still operate in the Arctic.



*HDMS Knud Rasmussen (P570) shown in the Nares Strait during an exercise with the U.S. Coast Guard, Aug. 23, 2011. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Luke Clayton)*

Of course, these examples are just from the smaller NATO navies and coast guards of the Arctic; the U.S. and Canada would have a responsibility to support the group as well. U.S. *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers can [operate](#) in the Arctic, as recently [demonstrated](#), and where capabilities are lacking, the [NATO Defense Planning Process](#) should abide. NATO partners Sweden and Finland have land borders in the Arctic region and would likely contribute to the group, if not with tangible patrol and surveillance assets, then with information exchange. Beyond historical cooperation with NATO states through agreements such as [NORDEFCO](#), Sweden and Finland have increased cooperation with NATO in recent years, joining the UK's [Joint Expeditionary Force](#) (JEF), improving on existing agreements with the [U.S.](#), and participating in NATO [exercises](#) in the Baltic Sea.

One potential, but not required, outcome of establishing a standing maritime group for the Arctic is the feasibility for NATO to conduct freedom of navigation operations, or FONOPS, against Russia's excessive maritime claims in the region. For years, the world has read [stories](#) of FONOPS in the South China Sea to challenge China's excessive claims. [According](#) to the Department of Defense (DoD), FONOPS are conducted to "consistently challenge excessive maritime claims made by a variety of coastal States, including allies, partners, and competitors." However, despite [excessive maritime claims](#) made the world over, high-profile FONOPS are rarely conducted outside of the South China Sea, including against [Russia](#). [Concerns](#) over whether or not FONOPS in the Arctic would do more [harm](#) than good are valid, but these concerns are mostly due to the U.S. Navy's current lack of capability and capacity in the region, which the new standing maritime group would help address. Nevertheless, objections to FONOPS in the Arctic, especially NATO-led, are still likely to be made for fear of escalation with Russia. However, even if Russia were to cite a NATO FONOP, it does not require one to justify its continued aggression, nor did it require one in Georgia in 2009 or in Ukraine in 2014 and 2018. Russia justifies its aggression because of NATO's continued expansion into once Soviet territory, something which George Kennan, the architect of the Cold War containment strategy, [predicted](#). Russia is going to act regardless of NATO conducting FONOPS.

With this tension between NATO and Russia in mind, some believe a military "[code of conduct](#)" is needed for the Arctic. While the recommendation for the deployment of a standing maritime group to the region may appear hardline in contrast, such a group would operate professionally alongside Russian units, as is already done by the other maritime groups. Moreover, such a group would be part of NATO's increasing role in Arctic maritime security. From assisting with search and rescue operations to helping deter illegal/illicit activity ranging from IUU fishing to trafficking in persons or goods, NATO's role in the region would be two-fold: deter Russia while safeguarding maritime security. Neither role precludes a code of conduct for the region, and the latter presents an opportunity for de-escalation and possibly even a measure of cooperation with Russia.

### **The China Angle**

Another potential outcome of NATO's sustained presence and situational awareness in the Arctic is a better deterrence posture against China. China, declaring itself a "near-Arctic" state and achieving observer status on the Arctic Council, is increasingly becoming a player in the region. While for now most of the play has been economic, [investing](#) large sums in Arctic states—including NATO allies—and adding the Arctic to its Belt and Road Initiative ([Polar Silk Road](#)), it can be assumed that its economic investment in the region will eventually be followed by militarization.





*HMS Albion is shown operating near the coast of Norway as part of Exercise Hairspring in 2008. (Royal Navy photo by POA Angie Pearce)*

How China might move to militarize the Arctic is anyone's guess, but its 2018 white paper on the Arctic, as [summarized](#) by Lieutenant Commander Rachel Gosnell, USN, clearly states China's interests in the region, and it has plans to protect them. While much of the paper touts adherence to international law, the world has very little reason to believe China will do so. One example of how China could move to militarize the Arctic is on the back of its seemingly benign fishing fleet. China has stated it has inherent rights to the fish migrating to the Arctic because of its large population. And where China's fishing fleet goes, militarization will soon follow, as has been demonstrated already by Chinese fishing "[militias](#)."

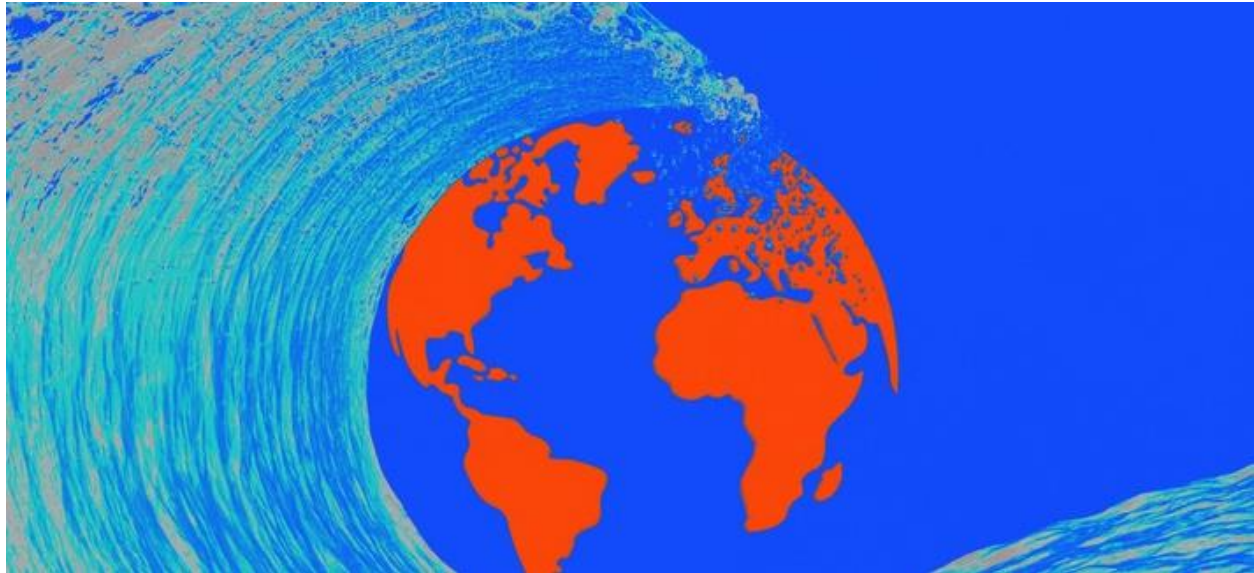
### **Conclusion**

NATO's sustained presence and situational awareness are needed to achieve deterrence against both Russia and China while safeguarding maritime security in the Arctic. The first step toward achieving this goal is to increase NATO capability and capacity to operate in the region, centered on a new standing maritime group that is dedicated to the Arctic and separate from NATO's maritime groups operating elsewhere. This group should be formed by NATO states with Arctic maritime borders and ice-class ships. As NATO becomes the recognized authority for maritime security in the region, de-escalation and even cooperation with Russia could be possible. It is time for NATO to invest in this future, starting with a standing maritime group for the Arctic.

### *Author*

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# The Pandemic's Geopolitical Aftershocks Are Coming



BY TOM MCTAGUE [THE ATLANTIC](#) MAY 19, 2020

Western capitals aren't just worried about the risk of a resurgence in coronavirus cases.

With most European countries confident that they are past the worst of the coronavirus pandemic, their attention is turning to the chance of its resurgence once society returns to some semblance of normal. But beyond the epidemiological challenges lies a slowly amassing threat that is not pathological in nature, but economic, political, and military. This is the *geopolitical second wave*, and its power is already starting to concern Western leaders.

Imagine a scenario: Just as Europe and the United States begin to feel as if they have the coronavirus under control, it takes hold in the developing world. Exhausted, indebted, and desperate for their own economies to get back up to speed, richer countries are too slow to help. Panic ensues. Migrants mass in southern Europe, which is still struggling to pull itself out of a coronavirus-induced depression. Somewhere, a state defaults on debt held largely by Western financial institutions. In the chaos, an autocrat eyes an opportunity for a land grab. A United States already unwilling to take the lead leaves China to step into the void.

This is just one (invented) scenario of a number that are raising concerns in Western capitals and that were laid out to me in conversations with more than half a dozen leading security experts, academics, and government advisers in recent weeks. Of those I spoke with, few doubted that a second wave was coming. The real concern was where it would land.

History, as Barack Obama said of American progress, zigs and zags. Great changes set off chain reactions: The Wall Street Crash of 1929 ushered in the New Deal era; Allied victory in 1945 created the conditions for the Cold War. Each event creates political aftershocks and trends that we can see clearly only afterward. The decade that followed the 2008 financial crisis saw the euro zone teeter on the brink of collapse, Britain vote to leave the European Union, and Donald Trump elected president. Today, the global economy has suffered another sudden seizure, shifting geopolitics as U.S.-China tensions have risen, trade

has slowed markedly, and structural divisions between northern and southern Europe have widened. The question, then, is what might happen in the decade after *this* crisis?

“Historians love chapter breaks,” said Robert Kaplan, an American foreign-policy expert and former member of the U.S. Defense Policy Board, who this month briefed officials at 10 Downing Street on the potential second-order effects of the coronavirus crisis. “COVID-19 will come to be seen as a chapter break.”

Among Kaplan’s concerns is how Russia and its leader, Vladimir Putin, will act, a fear echoed by some of the most influential voices in British foreign policy, who worry that the geopolitical second wave of COVID-19 will hit Europe the hardest. Michael Clarke, a defense-studies professor at King’s College London and former special adviser to Britain’s national committee on security strategy, who remains plugged in to the country’s foreign-policy establishment, told me that an economically weakened Russia, hit by the recent collapse in oil prices, poses a greater danger to Western security interests. “Putin’s aggressive opportunism will probably get worse,” Clarke said. “The nature of Putin’s leadership is that he can’t stand still; he has to keep pushing forward. This makes him more volatile.” What happens if the Russian leader, spooked by the country’s collapsing economy, eyes an opportunity to test NATO’s resolve? Others, such as Bruno Maçães, Portugal’s former Europe minister, told me that the crisis might not embolden Russia, but cripple it, leaving it more dependent on China and bringing Beijing’s sphere of influence to the borders of continental Europe. “Crises,” Kaplan noted, “put history on fast-forward.”

The array of possible second-wave consequences is dizzying: the prospect of the disease taking hold in a developing G20 country—think India—which could see the virus quickly doubling back to Europe and the U.S.; the uncertain impact of technological advances in fields such as artificial intelligence as they are used to help combat the disease’s spread; a recession pulling at the ties between the European Union’s poor south and wealthy north. Clarke is particularly concerned about an arc of instability from West Africa through the Middle East to Asia, where conflict and instability have in recent years forced people to flee. Karin von Hippel, the director general of the Royal United Services Institute, an influential British defense and international affairs think tank, told me that “some kind of reckoning with China” is likely as well. “Some countries will emerge from this trying to cling to China ... but most others are likely to try to decouple,” she said. For Britain, Germany, France, and other major European economies reliant on the American security umbrella but wanting to maintain strong economic ties with China, the difficulty of managing the fallout from the Trump administration’s anti-China rhetoric may now only increase.

This is the world in which countries such as Britain are having to think about their strategic vision. Some of the challenges might be entirely new but many others are likely to be ones already at play that have been accelerated by the pandemic, such as worsening relations between Washington and Beijing.

More than anything, though, for Western governments there is a simple underlying reality to the geopolitical second wave: cash, or a lack of it. “You’ve got more problems but less money to deal with them,” one senior adviser to the British government, who asked for anonymity to speak candidly about internal deliberations, told me.

After more than a decade of public-spending cuts, for example, Britain’s military—capable of helping the United States invade both Iraq and Afghanistan less than 20 years ago—has morphed into a “one shot” force that is unable to sustain itself for longer than six months outside Europe, according to Clarke. What will its capacity look like after another set of cuts? Britain and France required American support to intervene in Libya in 2011. Could a joint European force do so again anywhere along its exposed underbelly on the North African shore? Could it even be used in a purely medical capacity, as it was during the Ebola outbreak in 2014?

A major British government review of the country's foreign-affairs, defense, and intelligence strategy was due to be published this year, but it has since been pushed back indefinitely because of the pandemic. The immediate consequence is that the review, when it happens, will be less strategic and more tactical—driven by financial considerations rather than any grand vision the government wanted to set out for post-Brexit Britain. Officials in London will have to focus more on “What can we afford?” and less on “What do we want to do?” an approach that is short-term, ad hoc, and defensive.

Inside Downing Street, concern about COVID-19's geopolitical second wave is real, with work under way to understand the potential threats and prepare for them. The British government expects protectionism to increase, supply chains to be brought back under national control, nation-states to be strengthened, and the U.S.-China relationship to become more antagonistic—changes that could be seen as simply the “firming up of some fundamentals,” in the words of the government adviser I spoke with.

Whether the pandemic brings about revolutionary change or simply accelerates the currents already working under the surface, the fact is that the epidemiological second wave isn't the only one we need to worry about.

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## Canada Must Divide its Military Resources Along Foreign and Domestic Lines



***Canada can learn from its allies: home and away need not be zero-sum games, especially when a country spends as little on its armed forces as Canada does. Christian Leuprecht writes that we will need a better-organized military that is actually structured to optimize taxpayers' return on investment.***

*By Christian Leuprecht, May 25, 2020 Macdonald-Laurier Institute*

The deployment of 1,700 regular force and reserve military members for duty in long-term care homes in Ontario and Quebec has been widely applauded by Canadians. At the same time, we seem ambivalent about the decision to scale back or suspend several of the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) international commitments. As far as the public is concerned, the military's away game is discretionary – a distraction used to keep busy when forces are not needed at home.

The problem is that the country's stability, prosperity and harmony have long hinged on an expeditionary military force. The CAF asserts the country's geostrategic interests by bolstering allies and promoting stability abroad. With the globalization of transnational threats, many of Canada's allies have adopted a similarly expeditionary posture, and our allies have just as much difficulty selling the necessity of these actions to their domestic constituencies as Canada does.

But other countries' civil-military relations differ from Canada in an important respect: under their social contract, there is a broad consensus to keep the military out of domestic operations. The sentiment they hold is that just because the military can do a job at home does not mean that it should.

These countries want their military to defend their interests; so, in response to a non-security-related emergency, their civil society largely has to cope on its own. That functional logic has informed Canada's allies and partners in creating organizations that jointly address civil defense and disaster preparedness. Examples include the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the United States, State Emergency Service (SES) in Australia, the Technisches Hilfswerk (THW) in Germany, the Sécurité Civile in France and the Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) in Sweden. These organizations provide surge capacity across a broad spectrum of expertise, as well as trained volunteers and equipment to assist with disaster response.

Canada has no equivalent. Provincial emergency measures organizations have no deployable operational capacity. So, the CAF ends up backstopping emergency response. That is the consequence of a peculiarly Canadian anachronism.

Under subsection 91(7) of the Constitution, the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over matters concerning the "militia, military and naval service, and defence." While provinces and municipalities are precluded from forming their own militaries, American states maintain their own national guards. Those state militias provided a catalyst that hastened the U.S. civil war. In negotiating Confederation during the 1860s, a deeply divided and politically deadlocked Canada was intent on not replicating the Americans' mistake.

At the time, only the federal government possessed the necessary police forces to ensure peace and order. Under the "aid to civil power" provision in the Militia Act of 1868, a local official (e.g., a mayor, warden or magistrate) could requisition the militia and a local military commander would have to oblige. Back then, it guaranteed that there would always be sufficient resources available to ensure the administration of justice in Canada's provinces. Today, it is a moral hazard: knowing that they can call in the CAF, provinces underinvest in critical infrastructure.

Over time, the mechanism for aid to civil authority has evolved without much political oversight, debate or public awareness. Canada's 2017 defence white paper "Strong, Secure, Engaged" (SSE) explicitly provides for the reserves to take on new roles and capabilities. Civil response is precisely the mandate the reserves should have. Yet many of the members deployed under Operation LENTUS – the CAF's standing mission for domestic operations – belong to the regular force. The reserves should focus on the home game, so the regular force does not get distracted from the away game.

Such a division of labour would entail a fundamental restructuring of the CAF. The army reserve is based on an obsolete model of mobilizing militia for war: a shadow infantry and artillery waiting to be filled out in case we deploy our forces for battle.

Canada can learn from its allies: home and away need not be zero-sum games, especially when a country spends as little on its armed forces as Canada does. Pandemics aside, as climate change brings more frequent and greater floods, snowstorms, and forest fires, the CAF would do well to consider alternative models to deliver on its civil-response mandate. Its current approach is manifestly inefficient and unsustainable.

Canadians will not pay for a bigger military. So, Canada will need a better-organized military that is actually structured to optimize taxpayers' return on investment.

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## The Conventional Wisdom on China's Island Bases Is Dangerously Wrong



GREGORY B. POLING JANUARY 10, 2020 <https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/the-conventional-wisdom-on-chinas-island-bases-is-dangerously-wrong/>

Last month, during [a conference](#) on China's maritime ambitions, I was asked a question I often get about Beijing's artificial island bases in the South China Sea. That question goes something like this: Couldn't the United States easily neutralize these remote outposts in a conflict, negating their value? The assumption is understandable given how seemingly remote the facilities are and how accustomed Americans have become to uncontested dominance over the sea and air. But it is flawed. In fact, China, not the United States, would control the sea and airspace of the South China Sea at the outbreak of hostilities thanks to its artificial island bases. And given current American force posture in the region, it would be prohibitively costly for the United States to neutralize those outposts during the early stages of a conflict. That would make the South China Sea a no-man's land for most U.S. forces (submarines excepted) during the critical early stages of any conflict — giving the islands considerable military value for Beijing.

This answer provoked enough of a stir among conference attendees that I [took to Twitter](#) to see what fellow South China Sea watchers and security experts thought. Their responses were overwhelmingly consistent with my argument and added several concerns for the United States that I had overlooked. This confirmed a worrying disconnect. Most of those who follow the South China Sea most closely see China's artificial island bases as major gamechangers in any future Sino-U.S. conflict. Yet the conventional wisdom throughout Washington still seems to be that they can be safely dismissed as lacking strategic value. That's wrong.

The main purpose of China's artificial islands is not to help fight a war against the United States. Beijing's primary strategy in the South China Sea is to use civilian and [paramilitary pressure](#) to [coerce](#) its Southeast Asian neighbors into abandoning their rights. Thanks to the facilities on its island bases, hundreds of militia vessels and a large number of coast guard ships are based hundreds of miles from the Chinese coast for months at a time. They engage in frequent harassment of civilian and law enforcement activities by neighboring states, making it prohibitively risky for Southeast Asian players to operate in the South China Sea. The threat of Chinese naval and airpower, meanwhile, dissuades neighboring states from using more forceful military responses against these illegal actions. Left unchallenged, this primarily nonmilitary strategy will secure Chinese control over the waters and airspace of the South China Sea in peacetime and undermine America's role as a regional security provider. It will make clear to Southeast Asian partners that a security relationship with the United States cannot safeguard their interests in the face of a rising China and will thereby undercut the rationale for governments like the Philippines and Singapore to support the U.S. military presence in the region.

But China also recognizes that its strategy might fail. It could miscalculate, provoking a violent conflict with the United States. Or a fight could start in Northeast Asia and spread south. The People's Liberation Army has therefore invested in facilities and deployments in the Spratly Islands that not only support its current peacetime coercion but also favorably shift the balance of power in any future conflict. As a result, the islands not only guarantee China air and surface dominance in the South China Sea in the opening stages of a conflict, but they are also far more difficult to neutralize than conventional wisdom suggests. The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at CSIS has exhaustively documented the growth of these capabilities using commercial satellite imagery and other remote sensing tools.

China has constructed [72 fighter jet hangars](#) at its three airbases in the Spratlys — Fiery Cross, Mischief, and Subi Reefs — along with [another 16](#) on Woody Island in the Paracels. It has so far held off on deploying combat aircraft to the Spratlys but [rotates J-11 fighters](#) frequently through Woody. Assuming it was the first mover in a conflict, it would be able to deploy combat aircraft rapidly to the airfields in the Spratlys, instantly establishing air dominance in the theater. Unless the Chinese happened to pick a fight when U.S. forces were engaged in a major exercise like Balikatan in the Philippines, the closest U.S. ground-based combat aircraft would be in Okinawa and Guam, approximately 1,300 and 1,500 nautical miles away, respectively. The only U.S. military planes in the region would be patrol aircraft in the Philippines and potentially Malaysia.

China has, meanwhile, deployed [YJ-12B and YJ-62](#) anti-ship cruise missiles to its outposts in the Spratlys and Paracels, backed by longer-range missile capabilities from the mainland. And it has invested heavily in [radar and signals intelligence](#) capabilities on all the islands, making it a safe bet that it sees just about anything moving on or above the South China Sea. A U.S. Navy vessel sailing in those waters would be well within the range of Chinese fire when hostilities broke out. Lacking supporting ground-based fire or air cover, the only rational option would be to pull back to the Sulu and Celebes Seas, and probably beyond, as quickly as possible. This would be especially true of any U.S. aircraft carrier that happened to be in the theater, since it would be far too valuable to leave in such an indefensible position.

In the face of these Chinese advantages, could the United States still neutralize the island bases early in a fight? Probably, but not at an acceptable cost. Doing so would require expending a lot of ordnance likely desperately needed in Northeast Asia, diverting important air and naval platforms and placing them at risk out of proportion to the potential battlefield gains.

The island facilities are considerably larger than many observers seem to realize. As Thomas Shugart, then a visiting fellow at the Center for a New American Security, once [pointed out](#), most of the District of Columbia inside the I-495 beltway could fit inside the lagoon at Mischief Reef. Pearl Harbor Naval Base could fit inside Subi Reef. The critical infrastructure that would need to be hit to seriously degrade Chinese capabilities is spread out across a considerable area. That amounts to a lot of ordnance to drop, even if the goal were just to hit critical nodes like sensors, hangars, ammunition depots, and command and control facilities.

Disabling the airstrips themselves would be an even taller order. The United States fired 59 Tomahawks at the Shayrat Air Base in Syria in 2017, all but one of which hit, yet the runway was back in operation just a few hours later. Considering that China has deployed [HQ-9 surface-to-air missiles](#) and constructed [point defenses](#) at all these bases, some percentage of missiles fired would never reach their target. And much of the infrastructure has been hardened, including China's [missile shelters](#), [larger hangars](#), and [buried ammunition depots](#). The most effective means of cratering the runways themselves would be to drop heavier ordnance from the air, but that would put high-value U.S. bombers at unacceptable risk in a secondary theater (more on that below). So a safer bet would be to just focus on hitting key information nodes with longer-range munitions. A hundred cruise missiles per outpost would not be an unreasonable estimate to effectively disable the bases. That amounts to 300 missiles just for the major bases in the Spratlys, another 100 for Woody Island, and dozens more if the United States wanted to disable smaller facilities (for instance, the [heliport](#) on Duncan Island that would likely be used for anti-submarine warfare operations).

What platforms would launch these hundreds of cruise missiles? The only thing safely operating in the theater after hostilities started would be U.S. submarines. They would find it a lot harder to remain undetected in the face of active Chinese anti-submarine operations once they started shooting. Every launch would put them at some risk. And in that environment, U.S. subs would likely be busy attacking Chinese surface ships and other high-value platforms, not trying to blanket thousands of acres of infrastructure at Mischief or Subi Reefs with valuable ordnance with no guarantee of success. Anything else sent into the theater — long-range bombers from Guam, surface ships, etc. — would be operating at high risk given Chinese dominance of the sea and air space.

No matter how the ordnance was delivered, the math would be the same. Effectively neutralizing China's bases would require hundreds of missiles, emptying the magazines of valuable U.S. platforms that don't have ordnance to spare. And it would do so in what is sure to be a secondary theater. It is hard to imagine a scenario in which the United States would be seriously considering kinetic strikes on Chinese bases in the South China Sea that would not also involve fighting in Northeast Asia. That would mean that anything



the United States launched against the Spratlys would be something it could not use for operations in defense of U.S. and Japanese forces or for the relief of Taipei.

This punishing math could be changed, especially by the full implementation of the [Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement](#) to allow rotational deployments of key U.S. capabilities in the Philippines. These should include combat aircraft at Basa Air Base on Luzon and Antonio Bautista Air Base in Puerto Princesa to contest Chinese air dominance over the South China Sea. And it should include preparations to rapidly stand up U.S. fire bases at these and other facilities in case of hostilities to hold Chinese outposts and ships in the South China Sea at risk.

Barring an unexpected change of heart, these plans are unlikely while Rodrigo Duterte remains president of the Philippines through 2022. In the meantime, the United States can lay the groundwork for full implementation of the defense cooperation agreement by undertaking more ambitious infrastructure projects at agreed-upon sites and pushing the Armed Forces of the Philippines to support those upgrades. It should also push for more opportunities to deploy combat aircraft to defense cooperation sites as part of bilateral exercises, as American F-16s were for the [first time](#) at Basa last year. This would help acclimate both sides to U.S. fighters operating from these bases and, if frequent enough, could strengthen deterrence by giving the United States some rapid-response capability in the South China Sea. But these steps will not fundamentally alter the math.

Without the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, or some undiscovered (and unlikely) stand-in, U.S. forces would have little choice but to concede the waters and airspace of the South China Sea to China in the opening stages of a conflict. The logistics and maintenance hurdles China would face during wartime would likely prevent its island bases from effectively operating over the long-term. But for several weeks at least — time that would be critical in a Taiwan contingency, for instance — they would pay huge dividends for Beijing. So long as the United States lacks ground-based combat aircraft and fire bases along the South China Sea, American planning needs to acknowledge that reality.

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