

Blinken Meets ASEAN: Turning Southeast Asia Against China

By [Brian Berletic](#)

Asia-Pacific Research, August 02, 2023

[TheAltWorld](#) 17 July 2023

Region: [China](#), [South-East Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Politics](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

*US **Secretary of State Anthony Blinken**'s meeting with ASEAN in mid-July, focused on convincing the bloc to confront Beijing, follows a long-running US strategy to transform Southeast Asia into a united front against China. By doing so, nations in the region are encouraged or coerced to antagonize China, despite the growing superpower being their largest trade partner, investor, and source of tourism as well as their most important infrastructure and development partner.*

Reuters in its [article](#) preceding the meeting titled, "Blinken to press ASEAN to take tougher line on Myanmar, China," would claim:

Washington hopes to rally Southeast Asian nations to take tougher action against Myanmar's military junta and to push back on China's actions in the South China Sea as top U.S. diplomat Antony Blinken heads to the region for meetings next week, a State Department official said on Friday.

By turning Southeast Asia into a battering ram against its largest, closest, and most important regional partner, it will be undermining its own peace, stability, and prosperity simply to serve Washington's foreign policy objectives which not only include the encirclement and containment of China, but preventing the rise of all of Asia.

Secretary Blinken's agenda is not unique to the current administration of US **President Joe Biden**. Transforming Southeast Asia into a US-controlled front against China has been a US foreign policy objective since the end of World War 2.

In a 1965 [memorandum](#) from then US **Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara** to then US **President Lyndon Johnson** titled, "Courses of Action in Vietnam," Secretary McNamara

would describe a *“long-run United States policy to contain Communist China”* which he said, *“looms as a major power threatening to undercut our importance and effectiveness in the world and, more remotely but more menacingly, to organize all of Asia against us.”*

In the same memorandum, Secretary McNamara defined the three primary fronts along which the US sought to contain China, *“(a) the Japan-Korea front; (b) the India-Pakistan front; and (c) the Southeast Asia front.”*

The US policy of containing China has continued, unabated, ever since, with Secretary Blinken’s attempts to coerce Southeast Asia to turn on its largest, closest, and most important neighbor, simply the latest attempt to fulfill it.

Eliminating Chinese Allies - Starting with Myanmar

The US seeks to use all of Southeast Asia as a united front against China, much in the way it has transformed Eastern Europe into a united front against Russia. To do this, the US has engaged in interference in each of Southeast Asia’s nations’ internal political affairs, creating and building up political opposition parties, supporting “civil society” networks to help them take and maintain power, creating powerful media networks to dominate Southeast Asia’s information space, and even organizing and supporting violent street movements and militant groups.

The worst hit by US interference is Myanmar, a nation with a particularly close relationship with not only China which it shares a border with, but also Russia, another chief US adversary.

Myanmar has been plunged into violence since the nation’s military [ousted](#) the US-backed government of **Aung San Suu Kyi** and her National League for Democracy (NLD) in 2021. Since then, the US has both attempted to isolate Myanmar’s military and central government, as well as assist armed militants fighting the government and [terrorizing](#) Myanmar’s civilian population.

Part of this support includes the “Burma Act,” passed by the US Congress and included in the 2023 US National Defense Authorization Act. It provides “non-lethal assistance” to militant groups engaged in violence. It is similar to other assistance programs accompanying US regime change operations elsewhere in the world, including in Libya and Syria in 2011, both of which evolved from “non-lethal assistance” and into US military interventions.

In order to effectively provide this “non-lethal assistance,” and eventually arms, ammunition, and other military equipment, the US requires nations along Myanmar’s borders to willingly serve as partners. As a result of the 2023 general elections in Thailand, US-backed opposition parties are poised to take power and have already [vowed to adopt](#) the US “Burma Act” as part of Thai foreign policy despite ASEAN’s fundamental principles of non-interference.

This provides a clear example of how the US is interfering across the entire region to either coerce governments into siding against their neighbors and their largest trade partner, China, or face being removed from power and replaced by a US-backed client regime that will.

The South China Sea: Subverting, Not Securing Maritime Security

Myanmar is only one engineered crisis of many the US is using to organize Southeast Asia against China. Another is centered on the South China Sea.

In the same aforementioned Reuters article, the State Department's Daniel Kritenbrink would claim that, *"countries in the region should make progress in resolving maritime disputes with each other in order to strengthen their collective voice in disputes with China in the South China Sea."*

The US government and the Western media have attempted to depict China as an aggressor in an otherwise peaceful South China Sea, threatening to disrupt the free flow of commerce.

In reality, the vast majority of commerce flowing through the South China Sea is between China and its regional trade partners. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in a [presentation](#) titled, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?," includes a graphic clearly depicting China and its largest trade partners in the region as dominating trade through the South China Sea.

Chinese trade alone consists of over a quarter of all trade flowing through the sea. This is larger than the US-led anti-China "Quad" and "AUKUS" associations combined. It should also be noted that China is, in fact, the largest trade partner of both [Australia](#) and [Japan](#) despite their participation in US-led anti-China associations.

However, there are indeed disputes in the South China Sea, but despite US claims, China is not only at odds with other claimants, including Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, all of these nations are also at odds with one another.

Maritime disputes are common around the globe, as are the sometimes heated incidents that erupt because of them.

While US government-funded media outlets like Benar News will publish [articles](#) like, "US Condemns Sinking of Vietnamese Fishing Boat by China's Coast Guard," reinforcing the perception that Beijing is at the center of South China Sea tensions, local media regularly reports on Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam sinking each others boats as well.

Vietnam Express International, in an [article](#) titled, "Indonesia sinks 86 Vietnamese fishing boats," would also admit, *"Among the sunk vessels were 86 Vietnamese-flagship boats, 14 from the Philippines and 20 Malaysian."*

The Star in an [article](#) titled, "Kelantan MMEA disposes of seven seized Vietnamese boats," admits:

The Kelantan Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) disposed of seven Vietnamese fishing vessels forfeited by courts by sinking the boats and turning them into artificial reef 5.3 nautical miles from Kuala Besar in Kota Bharu on Tuesday (Feb 14).

The article also discusses the scale on which this takes place:

"Since 2007, Kelantan Maritime has disposed of a total of 264 Vietnamese fishing boats through a variety of disposal methods like sinking, destroying, auctioning and

selling and gifting with an estimated value of more than RM380 million.”

Quite clearly then, China isn’t “bullying” the rest of the region, the South China Sea is an area of multiple overlapping and highly contested claims which result in all nations harassing, seizing, and even destroying each other’s boats. As heated as these disputes may be, they are always bilaterally resolved before they spiral out of control, all while bilateral and even regional relations continue to expand and improve positively.

The United States, including through Secretary Blinken’s mid-July meeting with ASEAN, is attempting to insert itself into these heated but relatively ordinary maritime disputes, escalate them into a regional or perhaps even global conflict to then serve as a pretext for a continued US military build up in the region and Washington’s growing belligerence toward China in the South China Sea itself.

Secretary Blinken attempting to convince Southeast Asia to resolve their own overlapping claims and disputes among themselves, but only so they can unite and escalate their disputes with China, is an overt admission that the US doesn’t seek to underwrite stability in the Indo-Pacific, only to more effectively *undermine* it.

The US Is Dividing Asia Against Itself

While the US describes its “[Indo-Pacific Strategy](#)” as supporting “*open societies and to ensure Indo-Pacific governments can make independent political choices free from coercion*,” it is clear that nations in the region are not given the opportunity to make independent political choices specifically because of US interference and coercion. Southeast Asia in particular is one of the chief beneficiaries of China’s rise. If Southeast Asia were allowed to make independent political choices free from coercion, it would clearly continue building its ties to China to further benefit from its rise.

That at least some in Southeast Asia are not only on a path opposite of doing so, but on a path that leads off the cliff of US-sponsored proxy conflict, demonstrates just how overwhelming US interference and coercion is in the region. It also demonstrates how this US interference and coercion, not Beijing and its policies, constitutes the biggest and most enduring threat to peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has discussed at length a number of security issues to enhance the self-defense of both the organization itself and the individual states that constitute it. Among these issues is the defense against US-sponsored “color revolutions,” which in one form or another is the primary tool the US is using now in Southeast Asia to coerce nations into belligerence toward China and in forfeiting their own best interests in the process.

Will the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopt similar measures as the SCO? Could ASEAN work closely together with the SCO to once and for all throw off Western influence, interference, and coercion, persistent since the age of European colonization, and move forward into the future able to truly, genuinely determine Southeast Asia’s destiny? Will the nations in the region finally be able to work with partners around the globe, including both China and the United States, but purely on their own terms?

Clearly in order to do so, the process Secretary Blinken was sent to ASEAN to advance must first be exposed, then stopped, and eventually reversed.

*

Note to readers: Please click the share button above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

Brian Joseph Thomas Berletic, is an ex- US Marine Corps independent geopolitical researcher and writer based in Bangkok, writing under the pen name “Tony Cartalucci” along with several others.

Featured image is from TheAltWorld

The original source of this article is [TheAltWorld](#)
Copyright © [Brian Berletic](#), [TheAltWorld](#), 2023

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Brian Berletic](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). Asia-Pacific Research will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. Asia-Pacific Research grants permission to cross-post Asia-Pacific Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Asia-Pacific Research article. For publication of Asia-Pacific Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com

www.asia-pacificresearch.com contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com