

Southeast Asian Nations Wary of Choosing Sides in Rift Between U.S., China

WASHINGTON – Although China is exerting pressure on the nations in Southeast Asia to side with it in the growing global struggle with the United States, most of them want to avoid having to choose, preferring to maintain strong economic ties with both while seeking close security relations with America, a panel of Asian experts said Nov. 19.

But the lack of a strong and steady military presence in the region, partly due to a shortage of Navy ships, and inconsistent demonstration of interest from Washington have caused some Southeast Asian countries to question U.S. staying power, the four think tank scholars and former government officials told a Hudson Institute forum.

Some of the panel members argued that America weakened its influence in the region when President Donald Trump decided to abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which allowed China to take the lead in forming a version of the trade agreement that excludes America from the economically growing region.

The experts also expressed concern that fear of antagonizing their powerful and aggressive regional neighbor has prevented the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from reaching unified positions on regional issues, allowing China to seek to influence them individually, which is its preferred tactic. The ambivalence also threatens the viability of the association itself, they said.

Noting the sharp differences in proposed visions for the region expressed by Chinese president Xi Jinping and U.S. Vice President Michael Pence at an ASEAN conference last week, “the long-standing concern in the area that they would be forced to

choose is at an all-time high,” said Amy Searight, director of the Southeast Asia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“Clearly, they do not want to be forced to choose. They want strong economic ties with both, but want strong diplomatic, security ties with the U.S., but not at the expense of economic ties with China,” Searight said.

“China is very good at trying to create false binary choices ... creating the sense that the countries have to choose,” she said. That is strengthened by China’s claim that “America is part of the past, while China is part of the future,” and if the Southeast Asian nations are partners with the United States they cannot have close ties with China.

“That reinforces the strategic choices China is trying to make them make,” she said.

Searight and John Lee, a senior fellow at Hudson, argued that it was not wrong for the ASEAN countries to avoid a sharp choice between the competing powers if they would make unified stands on the principles they stand for.

“Refusal to choose a set of principles allows China to do what it wants,” Lee said. Although the ASEAN countries want to remain neutral, “that only works when the major powers agree. China clearly wants to change the international order in Asia,” which is not in the interest of the ASEAN countries, or the United States and its regional partners Japan and Australia, he said.

Having recently returned from a trip to the region, Patrick Cronin, director of the Southeast Asia Program at the Center for a New American Security, said there is a “real fear” that the China-U.S. tension could lead to economic disruption. Although the smaller countries want the money China offers for infrastructure and other purposes, they are suspicious of the frequently onerous conditions the loans carry, Cronin said.

“But they are uncertain about America’s staying power,” he said, repeating a statement made by Eric Brown, a Hudson senior fellow who moderated the program.

Cronin noted that the United States could use its maritime power to increase its influence in the region, but he and Searight said that potential has not been realized because there has been little evidence of a U.S. military buildup in Southeast Asia, despite the recent jump in defense spending.

Cronin said the number of ASEAN countries who have requested Navy port visits has increased, but “the problem is the strength of the Navy. It needs more ships.”

Spencer Returns to Boston After 80-Day Counter-Narcotic Patrol

BOSTON – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Spencer returned to its homeport of Boston Nov.12 after an 80-day patrol in the Eastern Pacific interdicting drugs, rescuing sea turtles and saving a mariner off the coast of North Carolina, the 1st Coast Guard District said in a release.

During the deployment in the Eastern Pacific, Spencer’s crew interdicted a smuggling vessel with 4,497 pounds of cocaine on board, an estimated street value of \$65 million.

The crew also rescued two sea turtles entangled in fishing nets, including a Hawksbill sea turtle.

On the return home from their deployment, the crew diverted to assist in a search-and-rescue case off the coast of Cape

Hatteras, North Carolina. The crew rendezvoused with the crew of the 48-foot sailboat, Marie Elena, launched their small boat crew and transported the distressed 57-year-old crew member aboard the cutter.

An MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crew from Air Station Elizabeth City, North Carolina, hoisted the crew member from the Spencer and transported him to Sentara Norfolk General Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia.

Spencer's crew also participated in hurricane recovery efforts during Hurricane Florence.

"The crew of the Spencer is looking forward to spending the holiday season with family and friends after a successful and eventful 80-day patrol," said Cmdr. John McTamney, commanding officer of Spencer.

Spencer is a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter with a crew complement of 100.

Austal Delivers Expeditionary Fast Transport Burlington to Navy

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA delivered the expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Burlington (EPF 10) to the U.S. Navy during a ceremony onboard the ship at the company's headquarters Nov. 15, the company said in a release. This is the fourth ship Austal has delivered to the Navy this year.

The EPF program provides the Navy with a high-speed intra-theater transport capability. The 338-foot long Burlington is

an aluminum catamaran capable of transporting 600 tons, 1,200 nautical miles at an average speed of 35 knots and is designed to operate in austere ports and waterways, too shallow and narrow for the larger ships in the surface fleet, providing added flexibility to U.S. warfighters worldwide. The ship's flight deck can also support flight operations for a wide variety of manned and unmanned aircraft, including a CH-53 Super Stallion.

"Today's delivery of Burlington marks the 10th EPF we have delivered to the U.S. Navy, a milestone achieved as a result of the dedicated shipbuilding team made up of Austal employees, our Navy partners, industry suppliers and both local and state community and legislative support," said Austal USA President Craig Perciavalle. "These ships continue to deliver exceptional capability around the globe. The U.S. Navy is taking these great ships and expanding their work to support a variety of operational needs, demonstrating their significance, flexibility and value to the future 355-ship Navy."

Upon delivery of USNS Burlington, two additional Spearhead-class EPFs are under construction at Austal's Mobile shipyard. Puerto Rico (EPF 11) was launched this week and will now prepare for sea trials and Newport (EPF 12) is being erected in final assembly. Austal also recently received instruction from the Navy to order long lead-time materials for EPF 13. MIAMI – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter James offloaded approximately 18.5 tons of cocaine Nov. 15 in Port Everglades worth more than an estimated \$500 million wholesale seized in international waters in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a release.

The drugs were interdicted off the coasts of Mexico, Central and South America by multiple U.S. Coast Guard cutters.

The offload represents 15 separate, suspected drug-smuggling vessel interdictions by the Coast Guard:

- James was responsible for nine cases seizing an estimated 19,288 pounds of cocaine.
- Bear was responsible for one case, seizing an estimated 44 pounds of cocaine.
- Stratton was responsible for one case, seizing an estimated 440 pounds of cocaine.
- Active was responsible for two cases, seizing an estimated 3,148 pounds of cocaine.
- Dauntless was responsible for two cases, seizing an estimated 2,050 pounds of cocaine.
- Venturous was responsible for two cases seizing an estimated 3,100 pounds of cocaine.
- Spencer was responsible for one case seizing an estimated 4,497 pounds of cocaine.
- Campbell was responsible for one case seizing an estimated 5,441 pounds of cocaine.

Numerous U.S. agencies from the Departments of Defense, Justice and Homeland Security are involved in the effort to combat transnational organized crime. The Coast Guard, Navy, Customs and Border Protection, FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, along with allied and international partner agencies, play a role in counter-drug operations. The fight against transnational organized crime networks in the Eastern Pacific requires unity of effort in all phases from detection, monitoring and interdictions, to prosecutions by U.S. Attorneys in California, on the East Coast and in Puerto Rico.

Bear is a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Portsmouth, Virginia. Stratton is a 418-foot Legend-class cutter homeported in Alameda, California. Active is a 210-foot Reliance-class cutter homeported in Port Angeles, Washington. Dauntless is a 210-foot Reliance-class cutter homeported in Pensacola, Florida. Venturous is a 210-foot Reliance-class cutter homeported in St. Petersburg, Florida. James is a 418-foot Legend-class cutter homeported in North Charleston, South

Carolina. Spencer is a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Boston. Campbell is a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Kittery, Maine.

Coast Guard Offloads 18.5 Tons of Cocaine in Port Everglades

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Naval Strike Missile System

Planned for Installation on LCS 27

ARLINGTON, Va. – Lockheed Martin is in the process of integrating the Over-the-Horizon (OTH) Weapon System on its Freedom-variant littoral combat ship (LCS) and has identified the ship to be built ready for the missile system.

The first Freedom LCS to be built ready to receive the Naval Strike Missile (NSM), the weapon of the OTH system, will be LCS 27, the future USS Nantucket, Joe DiPietro, vice president of Small Combatants and Ship Systems, said Nov. 15 in a teleconference with reporters from Annapolis, Maryland.

The NSM, developed by Norway's Kongsberg, is a ship- and ground-launched anti-ship cruise missile that will be integrated by Raytheon Missile Co. into the OTH system. It will give the LCS an OTH anti-ship capability as an initiative to improve the lethality of the Navy's warships.

"We're working on the design and integration of that," DiPietro said. "[The Navy] had us do space and weight on our previous hull that was awarded for the Naval Strike Missile and now we're working on the modernization package to be able to put that in to an in-service asset as well."

Rear Adm. Joseph P. Neagley, program executive officer, Unmanned and Small Combatants, told Seapower last month that the NSM will be installed on all LCSs, regardless of which mission package is installed.

DiPietro said Lockheed Martin also is working on a backfit of the NSM, but that the Navy will determine the schedule of ships to be fitted with the NSM.

DiPietro also said the company is working on the integration of the Surface Electronic Warfare Improvement Program Block II

Lite into the Freedom variant.

“We actually already have put that test asset on LCS 1 Freedom and ran through the range and tested it with our COMBATSS21 configuration, being a derivative of Aegis,” he said.

MBDA: Successful First Launch for Marte ER missile

PARIS – MBDA’s Marte ER anti-ship missile has completed its first firing, successfully passing a major phase in its development, the company said in a release.

The firing trial was carried out on Nov. 9 in an Italian test range. The Marte ER missile flew for more than 100 kilometers on a planned trajectory that included several waypoints and sea skimming flight, successfully testing all flying phases.

“This test is a further confirmation of the robustness of the ER version of the Marte family of multiplatform anti-ship missiles that can be launched by ships, helicopters, coastal batteries and fast jets,” said Pasquale Di Bartolomeo, executive group director for Sales & Business Development and managing director MBDA Italia.

“The Marte family has a strong and successful history both at domestic and international levels: most recently with Marte ER being ordered earlier in 2018 by the Qatar Emiri Air Force for their new NH90 helicopters. Marte is a single product family that can cover several missions, offering our customers a high level of operational flexibility in the area of maritime superiority, a domain where MBDA in Italy has been able throughout its long history not only to maintain but also to

grow as well as further develop competencies and know-how.”

The Marte ER program is progressing at full speed in order to meet customers’ requirements. Having completed the 18-month system definition phase, the full integration of Marte ER on the Eurofighter Typhoon platform is proceeding at pace in order to implement an anti-ship capability onto the fighter.

Navy Orders F-35s Under Contract Modification

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded Lockheed Martin a \$22.7 billion contract modification for 255 F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighters, the Defense Department said in a Nov. 14 release. Of the order, 42 aircraft are for the Navy and Marine Corps.

Naval Air Systems Command awarded the low-rate initial production contract modification for Lot 12 aircraft plus more added by Congress for fiscal 2018-2019.

The 255 Lightning IIs in this order include 36 F-35Bs for the U.S. Marine Corps and 16 F-35Cs for the U.S. Navy. The order includes 64 F-35As for the U.S. Air Force; 60 F-35As for Foreign Military Sales; and 71 F-35As and 18 F-35Bs for nations partnered in the F-35 program. Work under the contract is expected to be completed by March 2023.

The F-35’s production remains in low rate because it has not yet completed its operational test and evaluation.

The Marine Corps’ F-35B made its first operational shipboard deployments this year and on Sept. 27 Marine Fighter Attack

Squadron 211 conducted the Lightning II's first combat missions, over Afghanistan in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel. The Navy's first F-35C fleet squadron, Strike Fighter Squadron 147, has been formed and is training in its new aircraft.

CSBA: Layered Defense, Mix of Weapons Needed to Fend Off “Salvo” Attacks

WASHINGTON – Despite decades of investing in missile systems to defend the homeland and forward-deployed forces, the military is not prepared to protect its overseas bases against the “salvo” attacks with multiple types of precision weapons that Russia and China could throw at them.

“Despite these investments, the U.S. military still lacks the ability to defeat large numbers of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, unmanned aircraft and other emerging guided weapons threats. Indeed, tangible progress toward fielding high-capacity air and missile defenses has been, to date, barely noticeable,” the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment (CSBA) said in a new study released Nov. 14.

That dangerous condition has to change because the U.S. military must be able to operate forward to reassure and defend its allies and partners, which puts its airfields, seaports and land bases in the western Pacific and Europe within range of swarms of Russian and Chinese guided munitions, many of which are relatively cheap, the CSBA report warned.

Attempting to counter those “salvo” attacks with the current defensive missile systems, such as the Army’s land-based Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) and the Navy’s Aegis Weapon System/Standard Missile, is impractical due to the limited numbers and high cost per shot of those kinetic weapons, the report said.

The CSBA study shows “that salvo attacks cannot be defeated by kinetic weapons alone,” said Mark Gunzinger, co-author of the report with Carl Rehberg.

Both are retired Air Force colonels with years of additional service in Pentagon offices.

Instead, they recommend a layered defense using a mix of kinetic and non-kinetic weapons with an emphasis on high-energy solid-state lasers and high-powered microwave devices, which can produce virtually unlimited shots at a tiny fraction of the cost per shot of defensive missiles.

Because those directed-energy weapons have relatively short effective range, the study recommended they be put on manned and unmanned aircraft in the outer defensive ring, along with ground-to-air and air-to-air missiles. They also would be part of the close-in defenses and, because they are comparatively mobile, could be a valuable part of the Marine Corps’ and Air Force’s plans to distribute their forces over a number of smaller expeditionary bases to complicate the enemy’s strike planning and reduce the risk of a debilitating strike.

Those weapons would be particularly useful against unmanned aerial vehicles, cruise missiles and smaller air-launched munitions, they said.

That focus on directed-energy systems was echoed by Michael Griffin, the undersecretary of defense for research and engineering, in a Nov. 13 speech. Griffin said “usable” laser weapons could be fielded “in no more than a few years,” although lasers powerful enough for ballistic missile defense

would take longer.

Effectively defending forward bases would require an integrated, extended-range network of sensors, which would include space-based assets, manned and unmanned aircraft and forward-deployed Navy warships. It also would require an integrated command and control (C2) network to link the early warning and defensive systems.

The CSBA authors suggested that in the Pacific the C2 network could be built around the already operational Naval Integrated Fire Control-Counter Air system.

Although the Navy's growing fleet of missile-defense capable cruisers and destroyers could be part of the defensive shield for forward-based facilities, Gunzinger said tying down those warships for that purpose would not be a good use of those multimission, mobile platforms.

Navy Super Hornet Crashes in Philippine Sea; Crew Rescued

PHILIPPINE SEA – A Carrier Air Wing 5 (CVW-5) F/A-18F experienced a mechanical issue that resulted in the crew ejecting while conducting routine operations in the Philippine Sea Nov. 12, Task Force 70 public affairs said in a release.

“The crew was immediately and safely recovered by USS Ronald Reagan search-and-rescue aircraft and brought back to the ship for evaluation by medical personnel, the release said. “Both aviators are in good condition.”

The F/A-18F was flown by Strike Fighter Squadron 102, one of

four Super Hornet squadrons assigned to Carrier Air Wing Five.

Two other CVW-5 aircraft have been lost in mishaps over the past year. On Nov. 22, 2018, a C-2A Greyhound assigned to Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 30 Detachment Five crashed into the Philippine Sea while en route to Ronald Reagan, killing three Sailors. On Oct. 19, an MH-60R Seahawk assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 77 crashed on the flight deck of the carrier, injuring 12 persons.

CVW-5 is embarked onboard Ronald Reagan and is currently underway in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations in support of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Ronald Reagan has resumed normal operations and the crash is under investigation.

Austal USA Christens Future USNS Puerto Rico

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal celebrated the christening of expeditionary fast transport (EPF) the future USNS Puerto Rico (EPF 11) with a ceremony at its state-of-the-art shipbuilding facility Nov. 10, the company said in a release. Puerto Rico is the 11th of 12 EPFs Austal has under contract with the U.S. Navy with a combined value of over \$1.9 billion.

“Austal is excited to christen another amazing ship,” said Austal USA President Craig Perciavalle. “Puerto Rico is one step closer to joining her sister ships in supporting important missions across the globe.”

Nine Spearhead-class EPFs have been delivered and are serving

as an affordable solution to fulfilling the Military Sealift Command's requirements worldwide. The future USNS Burlington is scheduled for delivery to the Navy later this month and two more EPFs, including EPF 11, are under construction at Austal's Mobile shipyard. Austal also received instruction from the Navy to order long lead-time materials for EPF 13 in October.

"Congratulations to the incredible Navy – Industry team for achieving this important milestone," Perciavalle said. "You should be proud of the important service you're providing our country."

In addition to being in full-rate production for the EPF program, Austal is also the Navy's prime contractor for the Independence-variant of the littoral combat ship (LCS) program. Austal has delivered nine LCSs, while an additional six are in various stages of construction.