
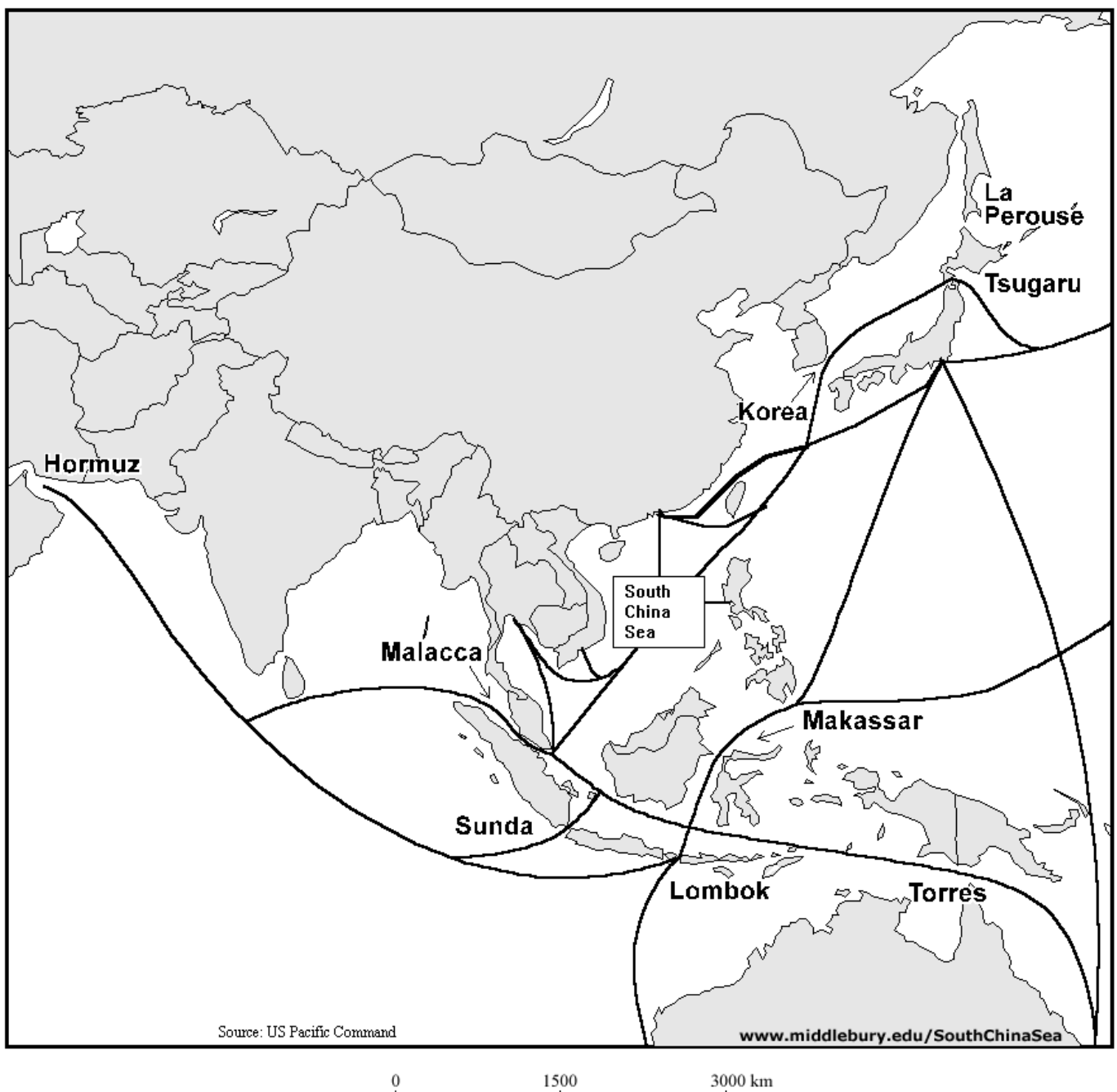


Shining Missile, Troubled Shipping

 The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.



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OK, North Korea successfully launched a missile/rocket and stole the spotlight again like a shaman chanting wild incantations to tout a thus far wholly disastrous "ism". North Korea launched a missile, the Mayan calendar ended, and yet here you are alive - reading this. Time to calm down and recognize that a missile-tipped but defunct ideology can cause a lot of damage, but can't fundamentally alter the strategic military balance in Asia.

Sending the Coast Guard into huge swathes of international shipping lanes WILL fundamentally alter world trade, security arrangements, and jeopardize or at a minimum call into question security guarantees and re-shape the world balance of power -now, that's extremely de-stabilizing.

Pirates can find quite a few ships by just relying on two eyeballs and rusting hulks about to go to Davy Jones' locker. Imagine what kind of situational awareness a full-fledged maritime power with fleets of drones for persistent surveillance maintains. Finding maritime shipping and calling the Coast Guard to come check it out is sorta tough. But rocket science, it is not.

One country enacted a law to allow its Coast Guard to stop any shipping anywhere within what they claim as their territorial waters. If Coast Guards unilaterally stop shipping through those watery highways rich with the seaborne energy, raw materials and the supplies that keeps the world economy humming, then how will international commerce be viable anymore? There are so many questions. What happens to world shipping rates and costs? Where will energy importing countries get their energy? Even if they were to start building nuclear reactors today (and they can't) what will they do in the interregnum? Switch to dirtier fuels? Agree to live like their ancestors and make do with far less of everything but manual labor? Will necessity and pain spur long hoped for technological solutions? The only clear answer is we don't want to be in a situation to have to ask those questions.

From the more general to the more specific, anything less than the absolute freedom of navigation that not some revisionist version of it, indicates that many in Asia and particularly on the Korean Peninsula will be hostage to conditions set by larger powers.

The Korean people therefore, both South and North, would benefit from at least - gasp - talking to each other. The more they talk to each other and expand common ground, the lower the incentive to resolve the situation militarily. North Korean can now enter talks more confidently, right?

Focusing on noisy, prickly but failed "isms" enables dangerous "militarism" while distracting from the "globalism" that has raised living standards around the world and led to a relatively predictable world. While failed "isms" make a narrowly defined group extremely wealthy, they come at a "beggar thy neighbor" price none of us should have to pay.

- Roger Cavazos, NAPSNet Contributor

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