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Those who expected talks between ASEAN and China to ride on the momentum built up by the draft framework and single draft negotiating text to achieve swift realisation, might be sorely disappointed after Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said the code might take three years to finalise. Inasmuch as one would want to see the code expeditiously agreed upon and operationalised, rushing the code does not appear to be the wisest thing to do.

If one bothers to look back at the history of multilateral arms control negotiations it is not difficult to identify the intricate set of challenges all parties face in the process of agreeing to such a treaty. The CoC is by all intents and purposes an arms control mechanism, albeit not the classical type which endeavours to limit the quantity and quality of armaments.

Rather, the CoC would be akin to what arms control theorists call “operational arms control” which, unlike its counterpart, namely, structural arms control, seeks not to limit armaments per se but the way they are being employed. While these concepts might appear to be Cold War archaic ideals, even today so-called confidence and security-building measures - such as the CoC under negotiation - aspire to accomplish precisely the same aims, which is to promote transparency and necessary constraints upon state parties’ behaviour in the context of interstate rivalry.

And the challenges faced in the past are nowhere different from today’s CSBM enterprises. Progress, longevity and eventual outcomes in the negotiations are highly dependent on the state parties’ national interests. The more parties are involved, the more potential spoilers in the works of the negotiating process since a multitude of national interests, which may conflict with each other, have to be taken on board with the hope that those at the discussion table can reach a consensus. This entire process can take a long time, reaping uncertain returns both good and bad.

And history is replete also with arms control treaties that became stillborn in the process of negotiations because parties could not come to terms with each other, or, even after pacts are signed, implementation became problematic because violations by any party could not be satisfactorily redressed through proper provisions for compliance, verification and enforcement (i.e. the CVE challenge).

It is therefore through the lens of heeding history of arms control negotiations that one tampers with expectations about the CoC, an unprecedented mechanism of this scale and ambition in a region that has traditionally not been well socialised with formal, institutionalised CSBMs - or operational arms control mechanisms.

There are 11 parties, each having its own varying national interests with respect to not only the SCS disputes but more broadly, their relations with each other and with external stakeholders. There is not plausibly going to be a common ASEAN stance with respect to the CoC precisely because of this. Hence, one should not expect the talks to be dealt with on a bloc versus China basis. The diversity of interests amongst 11 parties is real and needs to be taken into full

account. This also means an inherent uncertainty that will fraught the process.

As such, it might actually not be a bad thing if the talks would require more than a year, going up to three perhaps as suggested by the Chinese premier, or even longer if the aim is to promulgate an effective CoC - one that transpires from a collective recognition of the CVE challenge and therefore, the collective desire to overcome those hurdles.

Of course, the caveat for accommodating the idea of a longer CoC process is that all parties have to engage in it in good faith. And that is most likely what makes or breaks the whole CoC process.

Even as talks continue, some if not all claimants in the SCS continue to spruce up their physical hold over the occupied features within the disputed waters. Call that militarisation or anything else - truth of the matter is that such moves, despite efforts to sugar coat them as “defensive” measures, do not lend to the promotion of mutual confidence amongst parties engaged in the CoC talks. Yet from the realistic standpoint, until all concerned parties - which likely have to include even external stakeholders not party to the CoC talks - can derive a consensus on what “militarisation” means and the activities it encompasses, having a moratorium on buildup and associated activities in the SCS seems a tall order.

So perhaps, if all parties are either going to exercise limited self-restraint or none at all in carrying out their activities in the SCS business-as-usual, then the very least parties should do to maintain a cordial atmosphere for CoC talks to go on is to refrain from untoward incidents between forces operating in the area.

ASEAN and China only have one chance to succeed. But the one who stands to lose most from a CoC stillborn or ineffectually implemented code would be none other than ASEAN. It would lose its credibility if the CoC either fails to materialise as talks collapse, or that the code is poked numerous holes by recalcitrant violations after its promulgation. Yet China would under all conceivable scenarios remain in a physically advantageous position in the SCS - those militarised artificial islands are still there regardless whether the talks succeed or otherwise.

The alternative of course, will be to keep the CoC process as an ongoing iteration of continuous talks, nothing more but talks, verbal promises, rhetorical expression of the desire for this code to eventually materialise through the boilerplate political declarations customarily issued by ASEAN and China. One may criticise the merits of this. But at least in the face of an intractable situation where the multiple parties at the CoC negotiating table could not reconcile their differences, the appearance of an ongoing process may still give ASEAN some saving grace .

A longer version was originally published with the *South China Morning Post* (see [link](#))



Wikimedia Commons

INDIA-SINGAPORE | 19 NOVEMBER | FINANCIAL EXPRESS

India-Singapore Navies celebrate 25th anniversary of bilateral exercises – SIMBEX

The 25th edition of India-Singapore SIMBEX the largest ever participation by the Singapore Navy in any bilateral exercise was held onboard INS Sahyadri at Visakhapatnam on Monday.

[Full Report](#)

KOREAS | 1 NOVEMBER | THE KOREA HERALD

Eight years on, artillery sound silenced on Yeonpyeong Island

When North Korean artillery shells slammed into a residential area on the island of Yeonpyeongdo in 2010, the barrage of fire blew up houses, reducing them to smoldering ruins.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 1 NOVEMBER | USNI NEWS

CNO: U.S. Still Committed to Littoral Combat Ship Deployments in Southeast Asia

The Navy is still committed to resuming rotational deployments of the Littoral Combat Ship to Southeast Asia, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson said, though he declined to specify when the deployments would resume.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 5 NOVEMBER | NDTV

India's 1st Ballistic Missile Sub Fully Operational, Can Target China

INS Arihant, India's first nuclear ballistic missile submarine, has completed its first "deterrence patrol", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said today.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 5 NOVEMBER | THE MAINICHI

Japan to develop large underwater drone to monitor remote islands

Japan plans to develop a large underwater drone that automatically navigates in the sea to collect information, amid China's military expansion and assertiveness in regional waters, a government source said Sunday.

[Full Report](#)

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CHINA | 7 NOVEMBER | GLOBAL TIMES

China's first unmanned missile boat revealed at Airshow China 2018

A Chinese company has revealed an independently developed unmanned missile boat with reconnaissance and attack capabilities, claiming it as the first of its kind in China.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES | 11 NOVEMBER | MANILA BULLETIN

Duterte won't allow stockpile of weapons in Palawan

President Duterte said he will not allow any country to stockpile any weapons in Palawan to avoid the country being caught in a crossfire in case a war breaks out.

[Full Report](#)

TAIWAN | 14 NOVEMBER | TAIWAN NEWS

Taiwan MND confirms plans for 45 micro-class missile assault boats

Minister of National Defense Yen Teh-fa confirmed Taiwan has commissioned a fleet of 45 domestically made micro-class missile assault boats at a cost of NT\$31.63 billion (US\$1.02 billion), reported CNA.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 15 NOVEMBER | MALAY MAIL

Dr M welcomes US govt's Indo-Pacific vision, but not warships into Asean

The Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) is receptive towards the Indo-Pacific vision announced by the US vice-president Mike Pence today, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

[Full Report](#)

CAMBODIA | 19 NOVEMBER | THE PHNOM PENH POST

Government denies Koh Kong Chinese naval base 'rumour'

Two ministries have denied plans for a Chinese naval base in Cambodia and that the Kingdom is caught in the middle of US-China "cold war".

[Full Report](#)

INDIA-RUSSIA | 20 NOVEMBER | TASS

Russia, India sign contracts on building 4 Project 11356 frigates

Russia has signed contracts with India on the construction of four Project 11356 frigates for the Indian Navy, Russia's Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation said on Tuesday.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES | 21 NOVEMBER | PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

PH Navy on the uptick with Spike-ER missile integration

The Philippine Navy (PN) is now on the upgrade with the successful capability demonstration of its newly-acquired and installed Rafael Advanced Defense Ltd. Spike-ER (extended range) surface-to-surface missile system during a live-fire exercise off Lamao Point in Limay, Bataan on Wednesday morning.

[Full Report](#)



MALAYSIA | 26 NOVEMBER | THE STAR ONLINE

Scorpene submarines go to Sabah's east coast after ten years in the state

A decade after becoming part of the nation's defences, the "famous" Scorpene submarines of the Royal Malaysian Navy have made its first appearance in the waters off Sabah's east coast.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 27 NOVEMBER | THE MAINICHI

Japan mulls upgrade of helicopter destroyer into aircraft carrier

Japan is considering upgrading its helicopter carriers to enable them to transport and launch fighter jets and include the decision in its new defense guidelines, a government source said Tuesday, indicating a departure from the country's strictly defense-oriented policy.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 29 NOVEMBER | CNN

US sails warship past contested islands in South China Sea, drawing protest from China

The US Navy sailed the guided-missile cruiser USS Chancellorsville near contested islands in the South China Sea Monday, an action that drew a diplomatic protest from Beijing, two US officials told CNN.

[Full Report](#)



CHINA-UNITED STATES | 3 NOVEMBER | CNN

US Navy has had 18 unsafe or unprofessional encounters with China since 2016

The US Navy has had 18 unsafe or unprofessional encounters with Chinese military forces in the Pacific since 2016, according to US military statistics obtained by CNN.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 1 NOVEMBER | THE STAR ONLINE

MMEA wants a mothership for better enforcement of local waters

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) is applying to the government to acquire a mothership to further strengthen existing assets for the safety of the country's waters.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA-SINGAPORE | 1 NOVEMBER | THE JAKARTA POST

Singapore Marine Police clash with Indonesian fishermen after encroachment

Eight Indonesian fishing boats were run out of Singaporean waters by the city state's Marine Police on Wednesday.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 2 NOVEMBER | NEW STRAITS TIMES

More funds needed for Esszone security, say tourism operators

Tourism operators on Sabah's east coast are hoping that more funds will be channeled to intensify security and defence in the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone (Esszone) under the 2019 Budget.

[Full Report](#)

KOREAS | 2 NOVEMBER | YONHAP

(LEAD) Koreas resume exchanging information on illegal fishing near sea border

South and North Korea exchanged information on foreign boats illegally fishing through their military communication line for the first time in about 10 years Friday, Seoul's defense ministry said.

[Full Report](#)

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VIETNAM | 6 NOVEMBER | VIET NAM NEWS

NA discusses Coast Guard's role

In an afternoon session, the NA discussed the draft Law on Vietnamese Coast Guard, which defines the force's mission as to fight criminal activities, ensure safety and support fishermen.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 9 NOVEMBER | THE PRINT

Navy set to sign logistics & coastal surveillance pacts with 10 Indian Ocean countries

The Indian Navy is set to sign logistics support and coastal surveillance arrangements with about 10 countries in the Indian Ocean Region.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN-UNITED STATES | 11 NOVEMBER | THE MAINICHI

Japan, US to help Pacific island nations counter illegal fishing

During a roughly three-week program in Japan, officials from 12 nations, including Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Micronesia will learn how the Japan Coast Guard conducts policing and visit related facilities, according to the source.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 13 NOVEMBER | MALAY MAIL

Esscom weigh mandatory flare guns for fishermen in new security move

Security officials here could make flare guns required equipment aboard seafaring vessels here along with the installation of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) for safety purposes.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 13 NOVEMBER | NEW STRAITS TIMES

Esscom suggests colour coding pump boats to enhance security

Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom) is looking at colour coding pump boats as a way to better

manage and monitor encroachment of foreign boats into Sabah waters.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 19 NOVEMBER | THE SUN DAILY

MMEA identifies areas off Johor coast as smuggling hot spots

Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) director-general Datuk Seri Zulkifli Abu Bakar said MMEA has identified the waters off the east coast of Johor as the hot spot for smuggling of illegal immigrants, goods and other criminal activities.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-THE PHILIPPINES | 22 NOVEMBER | GMA NEWS

China Coast Guard shoos away Reporter's Notebook team from Scarborough waters

Almost six months after we first traveled to Scarborough or Panatag Shoal, my team from GMA News' Reporter's Notebook returned to the area earlier in November.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES | 22 NOVEMBER | PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

New assault craft ideal for anti-piracy missions off Sulu

Aside from deterring intruders off Philippine waters, the country's newest multipurpose assault craft (MPAC) are also ideal for suppressing the pirate threat off the waters of Sulu, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Wednesday.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-SOUTH KOREA | 28 NOVEMBER | KOREA JOONGANG DAILY

Beijing refuses to tell Seoul why spy plane entered Kadiz

A Chinese spy plane entered Korea's air defense identification zone (Kadiz) without notice three times on Monday, but Beijing didn't respond to Seoul's requests for an explanation over their military hotline.

[Full Report](#)

VIETNAM | 29 NOVEMBER | VIETNAM PLUS

Ministry speeds up installation of fishing boat-tracking devices

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) has urged authorities in Vietnam's coastal localities to speed up the installation of satellite-positioning Movimar devices to monitor fishing boats.

[Full Report](#)



SINGAPORE | 30 NOVEMBER | CHANNEL NEWSASIA

Singapore to ban discharge of 'wash water' at top ship refuelling port

The Maritime Port Authority (MPA) said on Friday (Nov 30) that it is banning with effect from Jan 1, 2020, the discharge of "wash water" used in ships to scrub engine exhaust.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA | 1 NOVEMBER | THE JAKARTA GLOBE

Protection of Marine Resources Must Include an Insurance Mechanism, Minister Says

Coordinating Maritime Affairs Minister Luhut Pandjaitan has raised the importance of protecting Indonesia's coral reefs and called for the establishment of an insurance mechanism for marine resources.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-MYANMAR | 8 NOVEMBER | THE MARITIME EXECUTIVE

China and Myanmar Agree to \$1.3 Billion Port Project

The government Myanmar has reached a final, scaled-down agreement with Chinese engineering conglomerate CITIC for an expanded seaport at Kyaukpyu, on the Bay of Bengal.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA-IRAN-UNITED STATES | 8 NOVEMBER | ECONOMIC TIMES

USA moves to grant waiver to India on Chabahar Port and rail link to Afghan border

The US, which has allowed India to continue importing oil from Iran, has granted a waiver from sanctions for New Delhi's role in the Chabahar port and the construction of a railway line from the Iranian port city to the Afghan border.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-SOUTH PACIFIC | 13 NOVEMBER | SEATRADE MARITIME NEWS

China Navigation earmarks \$2.5m to develop low-carbon ships in South Pacific

The China Navigation Company (CNCo) and Suva-located University of the South Pacific (USP) have penned a memorandum of understanding to research new-generation, low-carbon ships for the Pacific region.

[Full Report](#)

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CHINA-SINGAPORE | 13 NOVEMBER | XINHUA

China, Singapore to boost connectivity cooperation on new land-sea transport corridor

China and Singapore have agreed to intensify joint efforts in building a new land-sea transit route so as to further improve connectivity between the two countries and beyond.

[Full Report](#)



CHINA-DJIBOUTI-UNITED STATES | 14 NOVEMBER | REUTERS

U.S. senators alarmed if China gets control of Djibouti port

Two prominent U.S. senators expressed alarm on Tuesday about the military and political consequences if China gains control of a port terminal in Djibouti, and said they were concerned it could further boost Beijing's influence in East Africa.

[Full Report](#)

GLOBAL | 15 NOVEMBER | SPLASH 24/7

World's largest liners launch new container shipping association

Maersk, CMA CGM, Hapag-Lloyd, MSC and Ocean Network Express plan to establish a container shipping association, which they say in a release today is to pave the way for digitalisation, standardisation and interoperability in the container shipping industry.

[Full Report](#)

PAPUA NEW GUINEA | 15 NOVEMBER | REUTERS

In APEC host Papua New Guinea, China and the West grapple over strategic port

When Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Peter O'Neill flagged the possibility of China bankrolling a port development off his country's northern coast in June, the consternation in neighboring Australia set off a lightning-fast response.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES-UNITED STATES | 20 NOVEMBER | PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

USD25-M Fish Right program kicks off in Iloilo

A partnership program between the United States and Philippine governments to promote sustainable fisheries in the county was launched in this city on

Tuesday (Nov. 20).

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-SINGAPORE | 21 NOVEMBER | THE BUSINESS TIMES

Cosco-PSA joint venture terminal to add two new berths

CHINA'S Cosco Shipping Ports is launching two new berths at its joint venture container terminal with PSA Corporation, having signed a memorandum of understanding on Wednesday with PSA Corp for the two berths.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTH KOREA | 22 NOVEMBER | AJU BUSINESS DAILY

Aid package for small shipyards includes orders for 140 LNG-powered ships

Along with financial aid, small and mid-sized shipbuilders will receive orders for 140 vessels powered by liquefied natural gas (LNG) in a government campaign to recharge South Korea's ailing shipbuilding industry.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA | 23 NOVEMBER | FISH INFORMATION AND SERVICES

First Indonesian tuna fishery to gain MSC certification

The PT Citraraja Ampat Canning, Sorong pole and line skipjack and yellowfin tuna (PT CRAC) has become the first fishery in Indonesia, and the second in Southeast Asia, to be certified to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard for sustainable fishing.

[Full Report](#)

VIETNAM | 27 NOVEMBER | FISH INFORMATION AND SERVICES

Modified Fisheries Law to come into effect in early 2019

The 2017 Vietnamese Law on Fisheries, which will come into force on January 1, 2019, includes very detailed ideas about joint-management in the protection of fisheries resources, including the concept of co-management, particularly community involvement in the protection of fisheries resources.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-SRI LANKA | 29 NOVEMBER | REUTERS

Sri Lanka signs port deals with China amid political upheaval

Sri Lanka penned two multi-million dollar contracts with Chinese firms for a port upgrade project on Thursday in the middle of a political hiatus that has raised doubts over the legitimacy of the government and the legality of the deals.

[Full Report](#)