

The New Search for Global Influence



History and Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region



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Indo-Pacific Region

1. A global centre of strategic and economic gravity

An Indo-Pacific fever... except in China!





“Indo-Pacific”: a recent concept

“An attention-grabbing idea” that will “dissipate like ocean foam” (Wang Li, 2018)

An **emerging concept** (since 2012) to define how to respond to the **China challenge**

Chinese Foreign Affairs
Minister **Wang Li**

What does “Indo-Pacific” mean?

A **changing approach** to security, economics and diplomacy


A concept adopted by many nations: how to respond to a strong (and getting stronger) China?



“The **great renewal** of the Chinese nation”

China to regain its rightful place on the global stage following a “**century of humiliation**” (1842-1949)





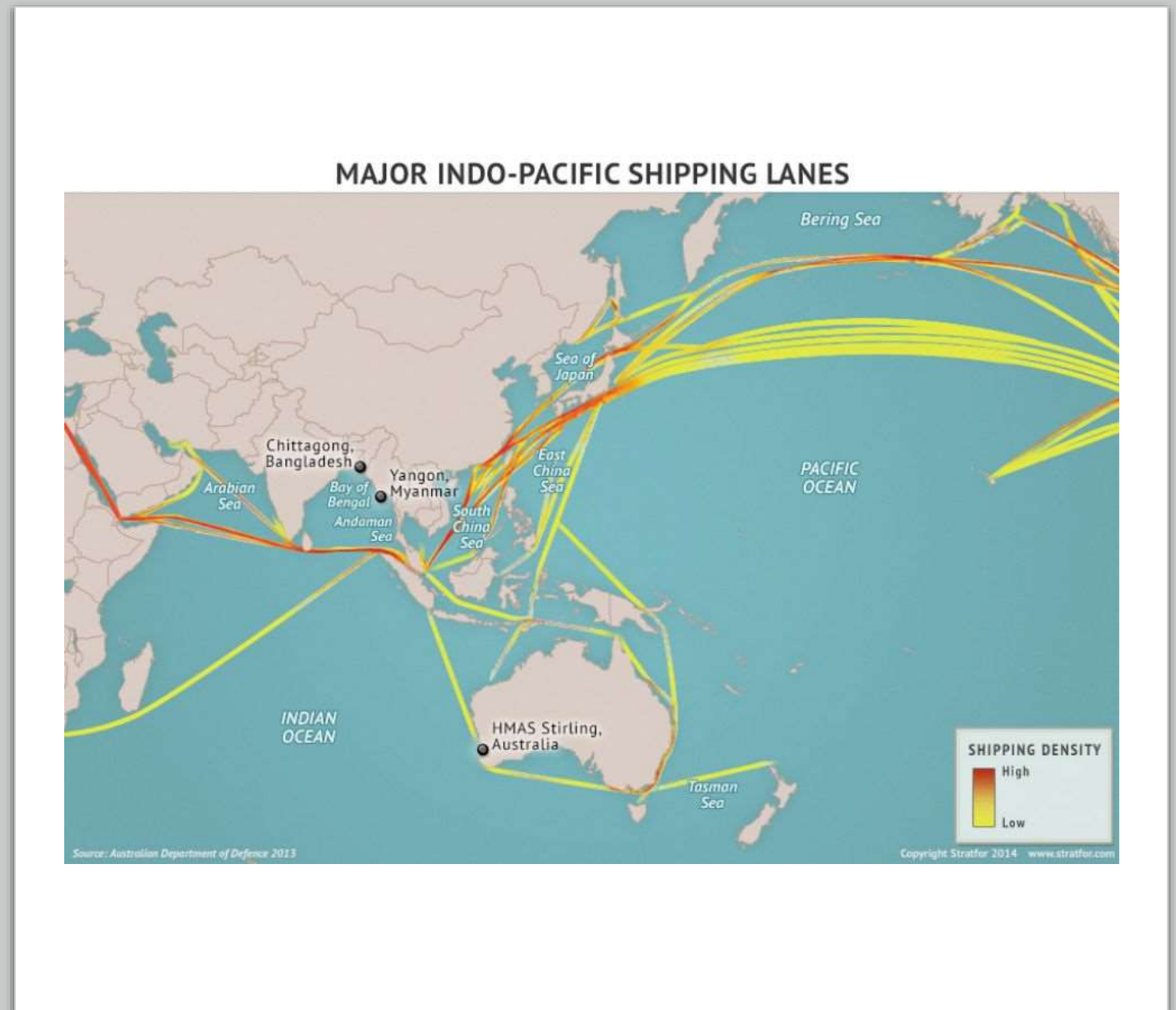
The Opium Wars (1839-1860)

When Great Britain &
France humiliated
China



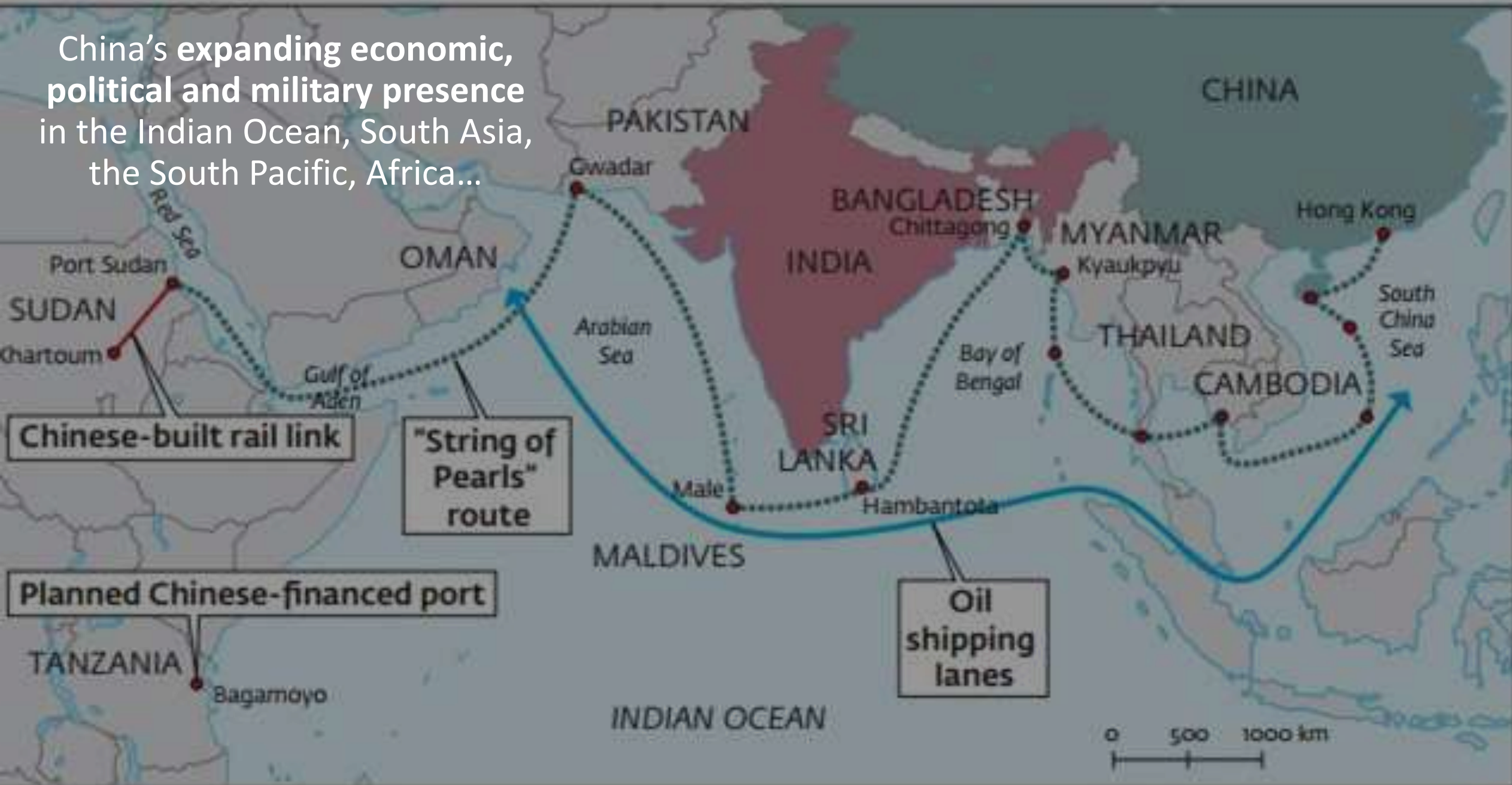
Responding to the “China Challenge”

Securing commercial shipping lanes (among the busiest in the world)



Strategic routes and lanes in the Indian Ocean

China's expanding economic, political and military presence in the Indian Ocean, South Asia, the South Pacific, Africa...



Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy

The *Belt & Road Initiative* (BRI)

A colossal **infrastructure** and
lending spree

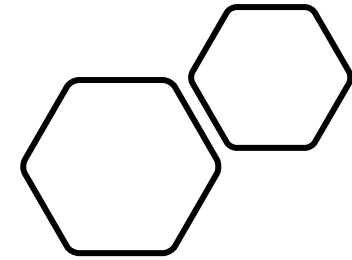
Strategic powerplay

Marketing campaign





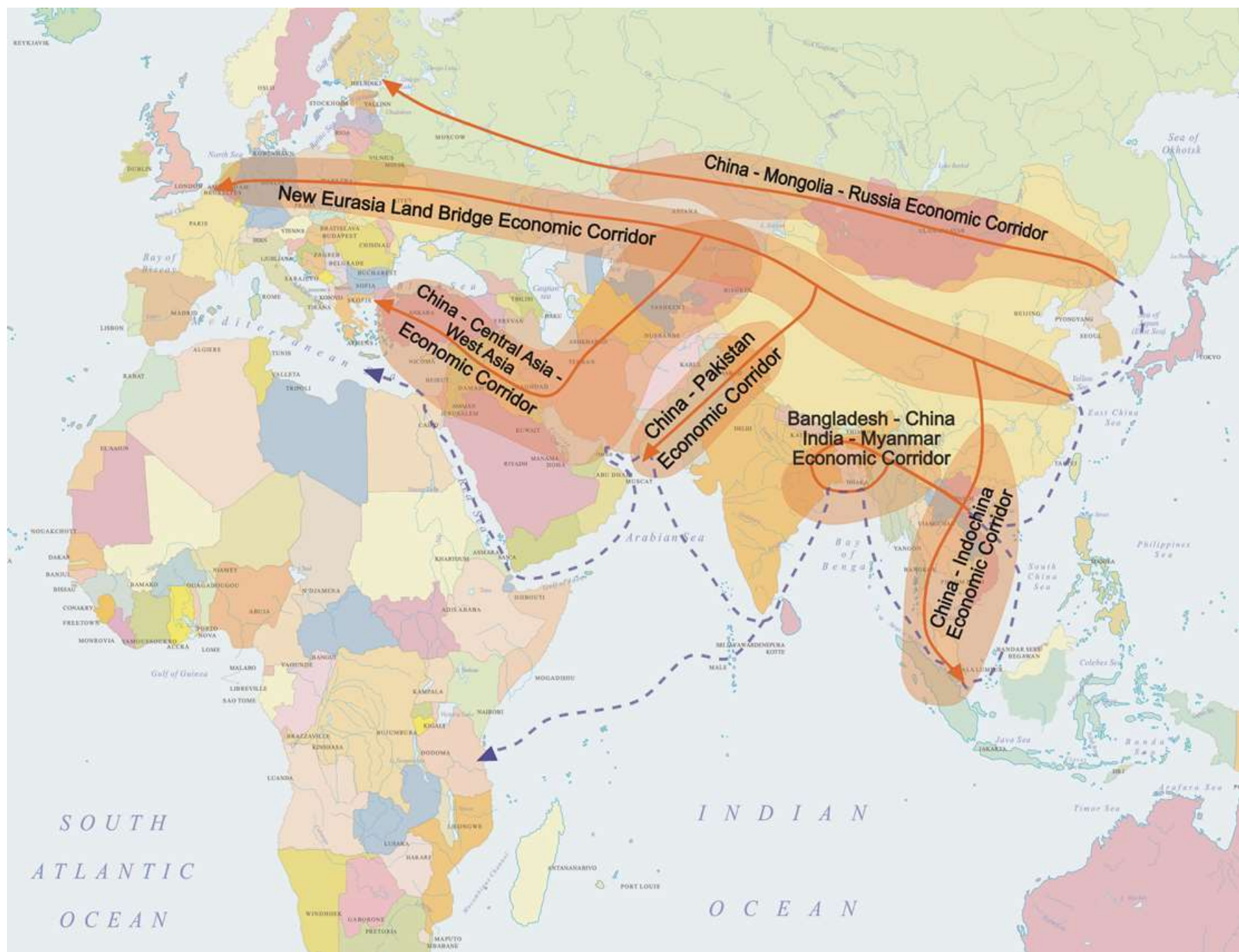
- Stepping up policy communication
- Improving road connectivity
- Promoting unimpeded trade



China's Proposed New Silk Roads

The "Belt": Land routes (6 corridors)





China's Proposed New Silk Roads

The "Road": Maritime routes via the Malacca Strait, the Indian Ocean & the Red Sea





China's territorial disputes with India

Heightened state of tension





China's territorial disputes with India

India: a new determination to collaborate with the U.S. and others (France)

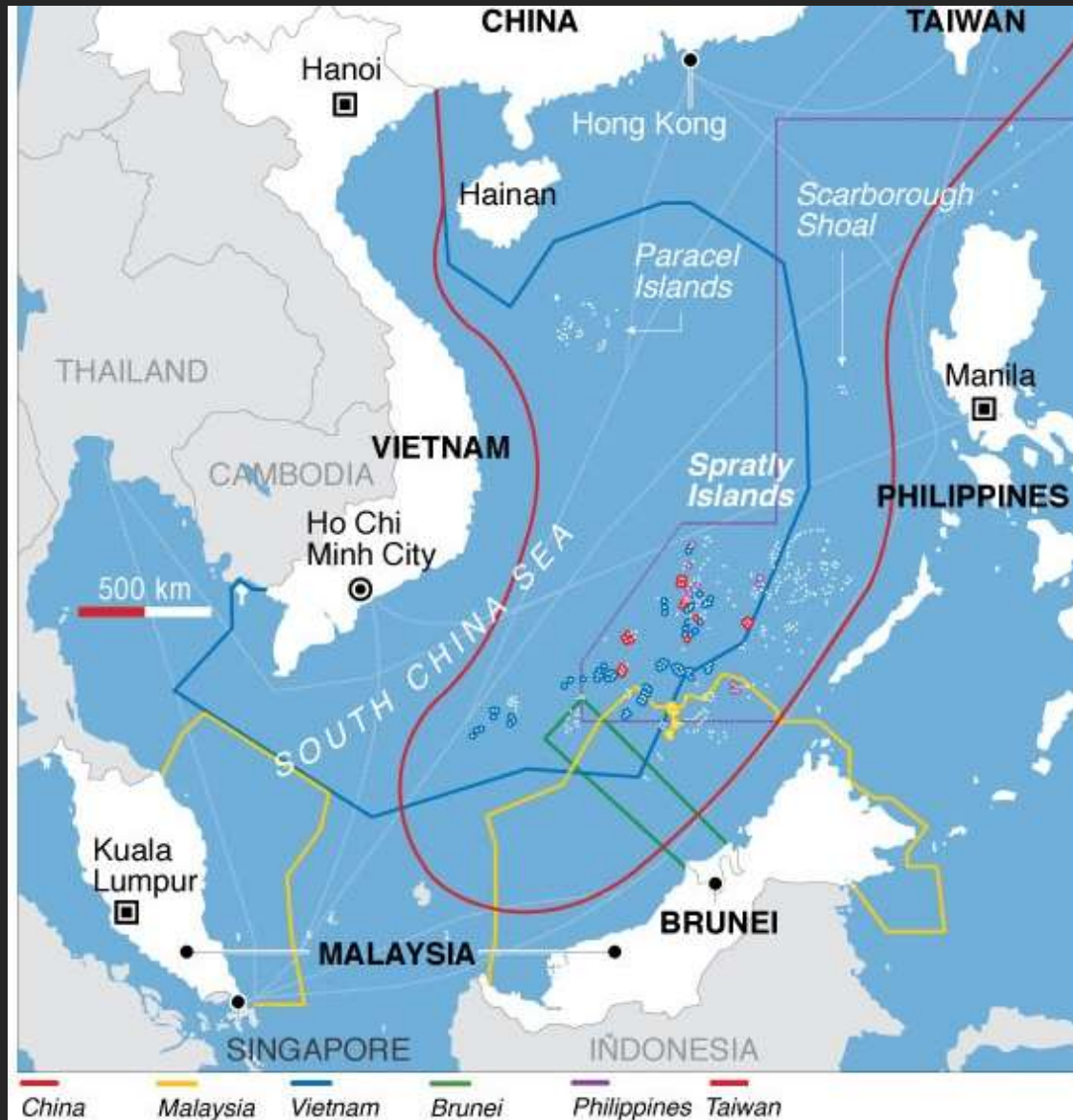
Alignment against China

China's pressure in the South China Sea & East China Sea

Southeast Asia: China's traditional **zone of influence**

Intensified pressure in contested waters and against U.S. forces and other countries passing through international waters in the South China Sea







“China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that is just a fact”

(Yang Jiechi, China's foreign affairs minister - 2010)



Japan-China confrontation

Sovereignty over a group of uninhabited islands since late 1970s (oil reserves)

Proximity to key shipping lanes & fishing grounds

2. Behind geographical concepts

Political considerations

Eurocentric view of the world: “*Middle East*”, “*Far East*”

“*Southeast Asia*” (WWII)

“*Indian Ocean*”





From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific

The concept of Asia-Pacific introduced by **Japan** in the 1960s


Japan: a re-emerging economic giant



“Asian bloc” reminiscent of Japan’s
WWII East Asia Co-prosperity
sphere

Asia-Pacific: Japan as a link between
emerging Asia and the West

1980s: growing economic influence of
Asia

A stylized map of the world with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. The landmasses are shown in a light gray color, while the oceans are white. The continent of Asia is highlighted in a solid red color, including all its major landmasses and islands. The map is oriented with North at the top.

Asia: a global economic
powerhouse

The U.S. & Australia adopted the
concept

WHY?

To acknowledge & accompany major
shift in economic power

“Asian values”

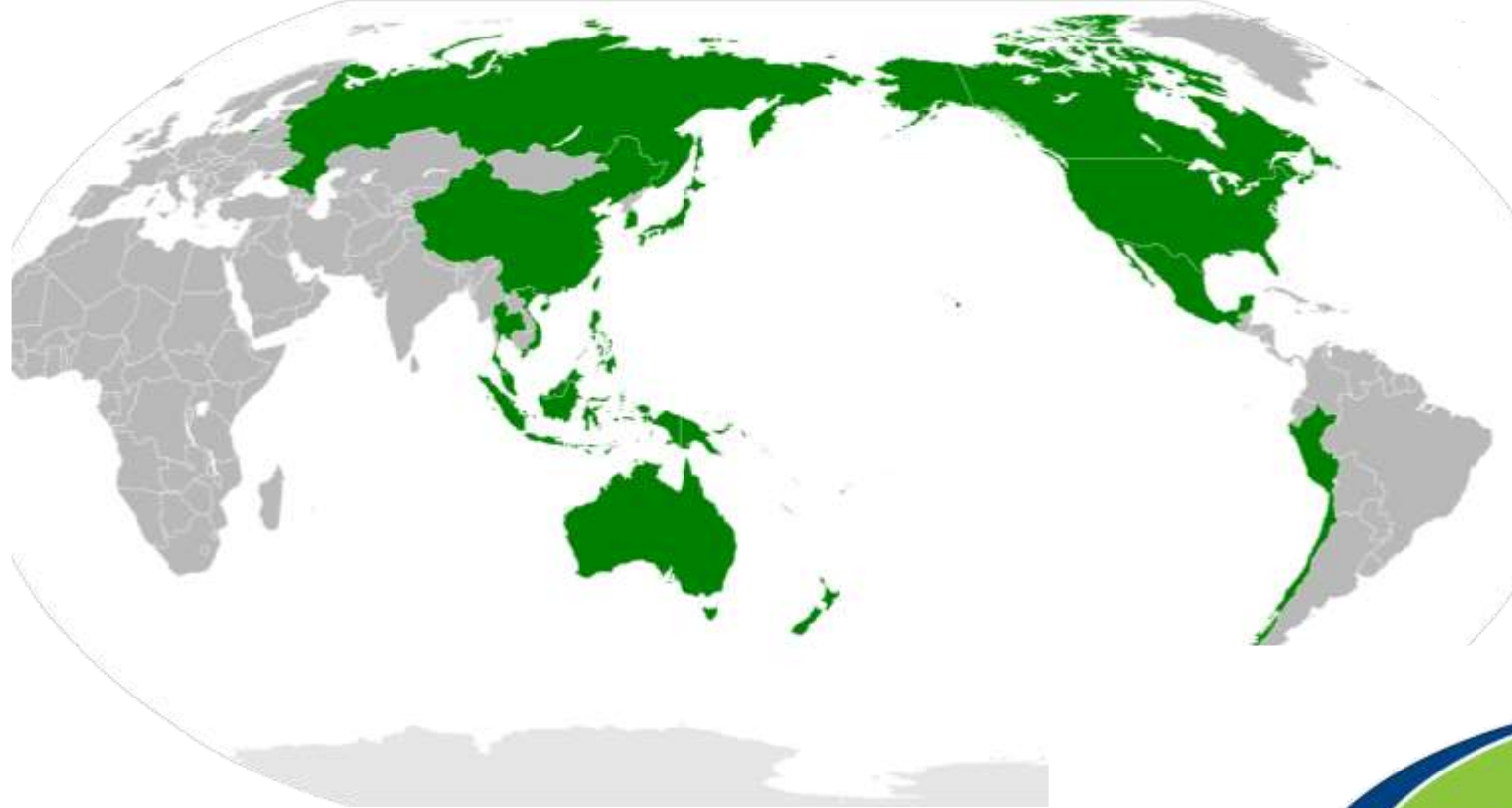
1990s political ideology

Creating a **Southeast and East Asian bloc** (the symbol of economic shift) with its own culture and common history

A pan-Asian identity



Mahathir Mohamad



To counter any pan-Asian initiatives

APEC: an Australian initiative
Economic cooperation across the
Asia-Pacific region



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**



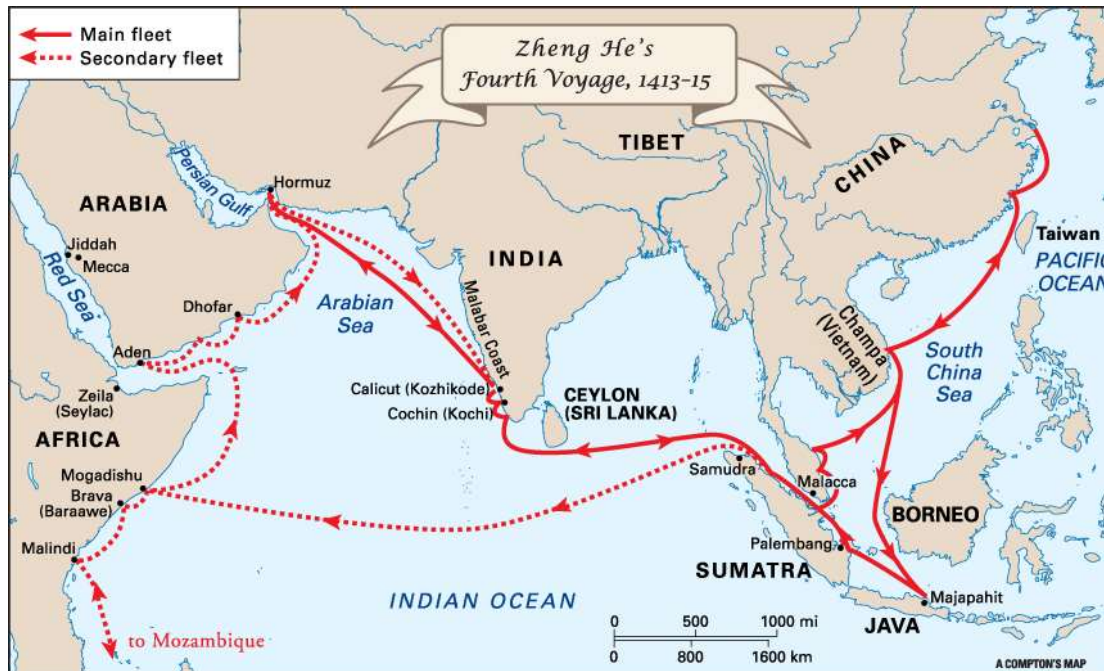
Indo-Pacific Region

3. Indo-Pacific as a **central theatre of interaction** among nations in history

The history of oceans: a **transnational** history



Grand Admiral **Zheng He**'s expeditions: spreading China's influence & initiate diplomatic and trade contacts



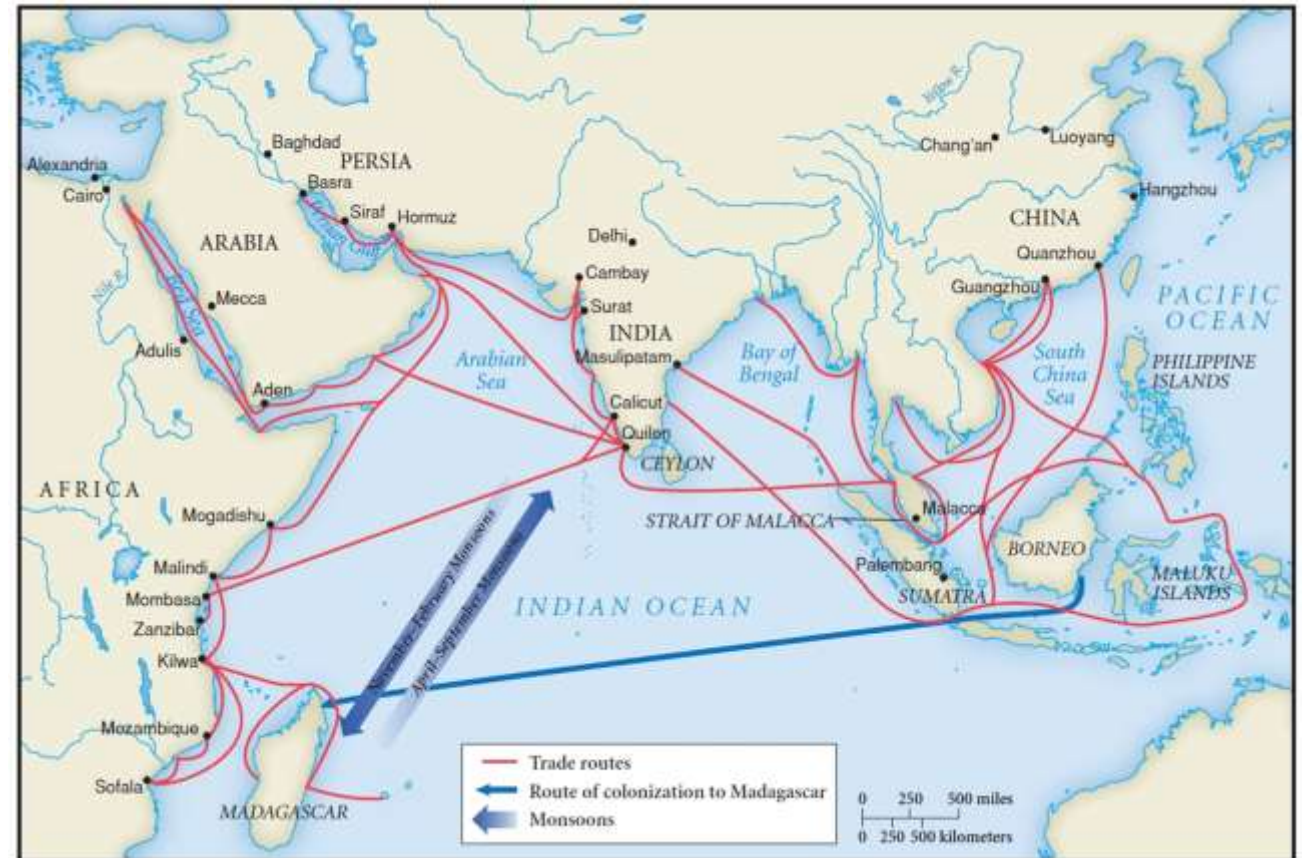


Commerce in the Indian Ocean (Late 15th century)

The most active in the world
(Persian Gulf, India, Malacca &
China)

Europe at the periphery

Muslim, Jewish & Indian
merchants connected a politically
& culturally diverse world



16th century: European imperialism



Vasco de Gama

Initial voyage to India: the first to **connect Europe and Asia** via a **maritime route** (connecting the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean)

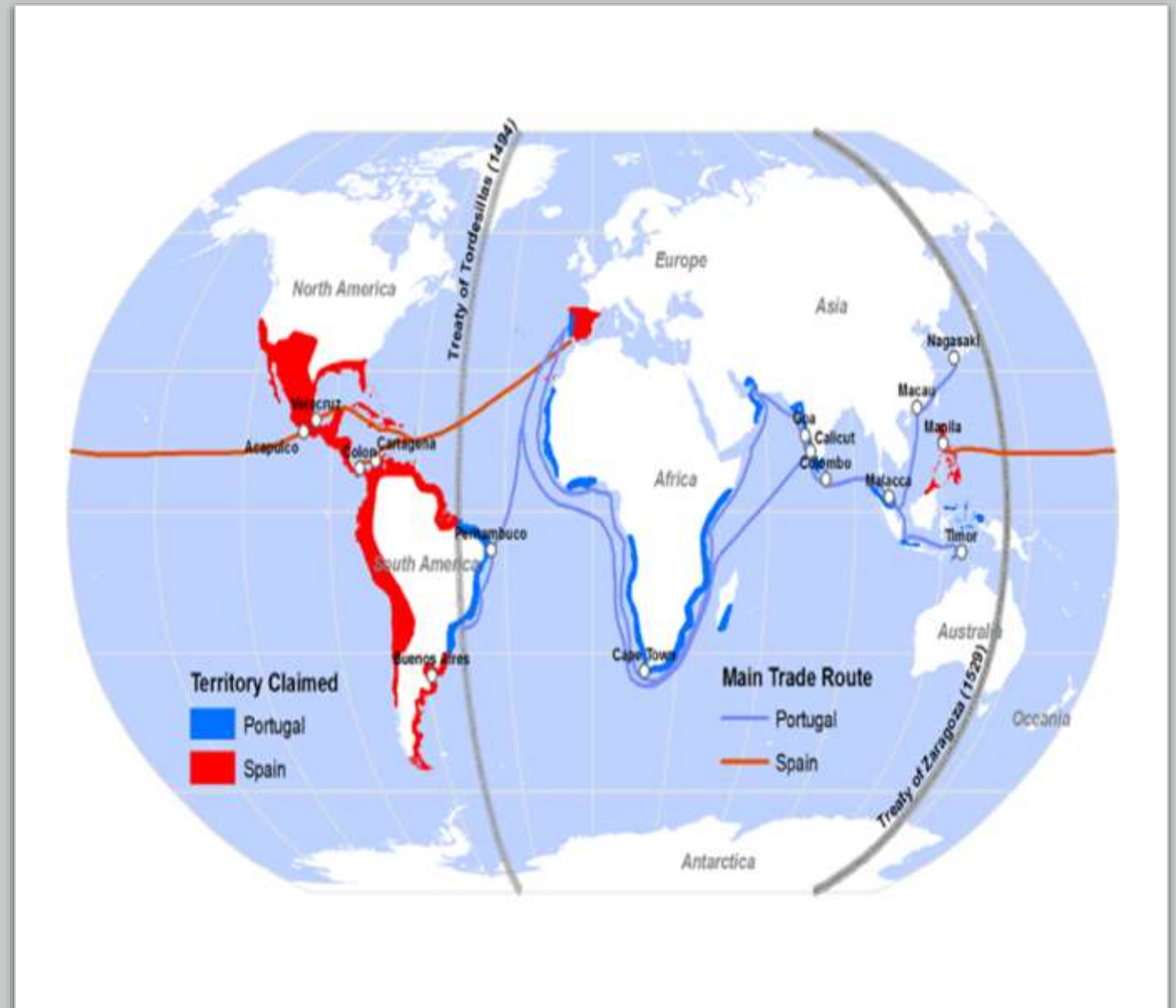
May 1498: Gama landed in **Calicut** (India)



1494 (Treaty of Tordesillas):

when Portugal and Spain divided
the newly discovered lands
outside Europe between
themselves

Spain & Portugal's agreement not
validated by the other
Europeans!



Hugo Grotius (1583-1645)

The division of the world by the Iberians **illegal**

***Mare Liberum* (1609)**: the sea as international territory and all nations free to use it for seafaring trade



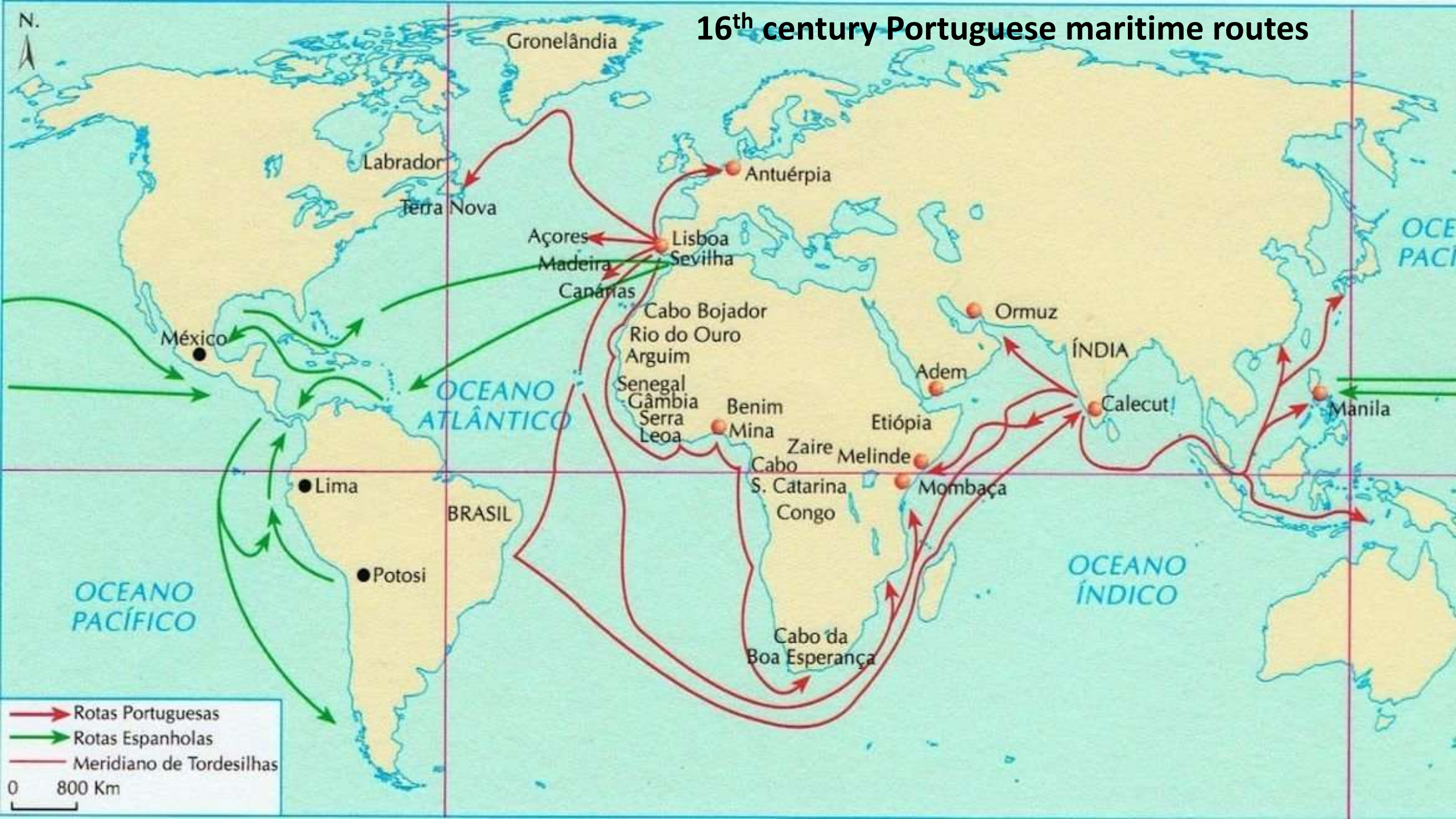
heightened competition amongst European states

The Iberians unable to stop the
other Europeans from claiming
new maritime routes & territories

Intense **rivalries** in the Indo-Pacific
(16th-19th centuries)



16th century Portuguese maritime routes



The Indian Ocean in the 16th century

A “Portuguese lake”?

The founding of the first European colonial empire in Asia

The “*Estado da India*”



A **thalassocracy**
(Seaborne empire)

A **network of fortified
trade posts**

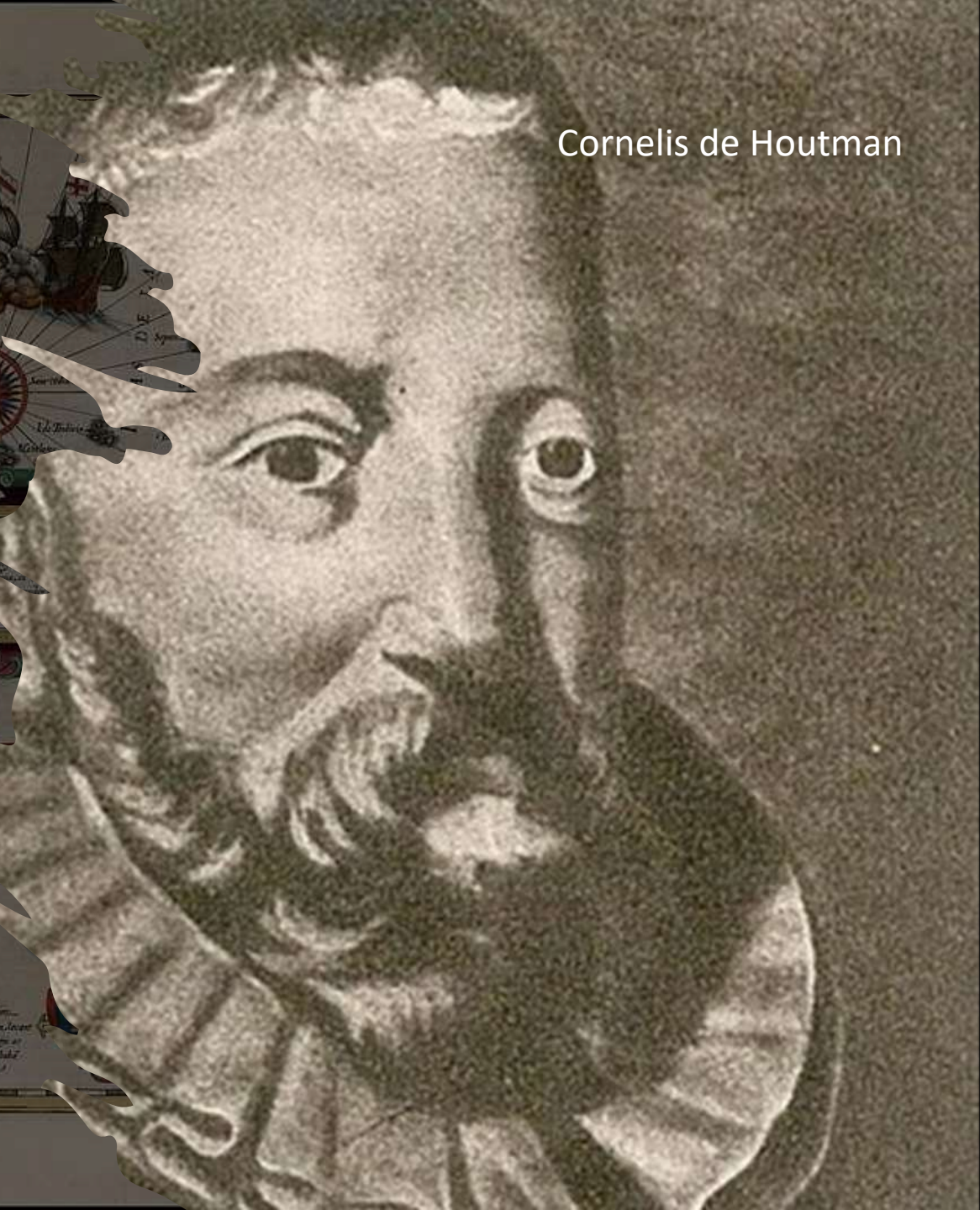
Little inland penetration



The Dutch: the first to enter the competition

Cornelis de Houtman

1595: the First Navigation
(expedition to the East Indies)



A second armed
expedition in 1598

Dutch captains permitted by
the State to open fire on
Portuguese merchant ships



Evicting the Portuguese

By **1665** all Portuguese settlements (except Jakarta) had been captured

Extreme brutality towards local populations



A world map with a dark blue background. Landmasses are shown in a light greyish-brown color. Numerous small red dots and larger red-shaded regions are scattered across the map, primarily in the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans, representing Portuguese colonial territories. A solid orange horizontal bar is located in the top-left corner.

The exclusion of Portugal from the East Indies

Portugal replaced by another competitor, much more powerful: the English

No empire building without the Indo-Pacific

The New Search for Global Influence



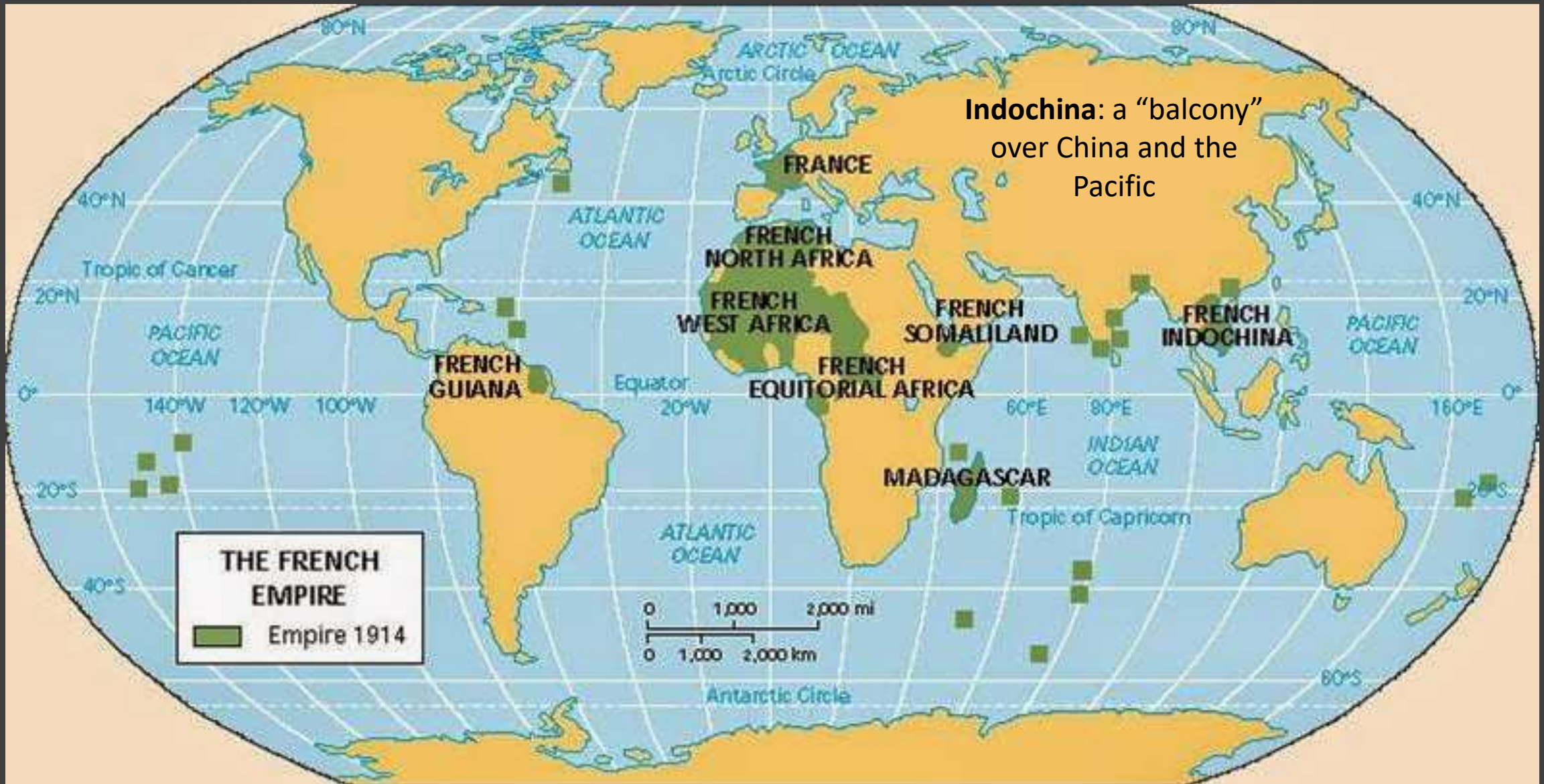
History and Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region



British Empire in 1914



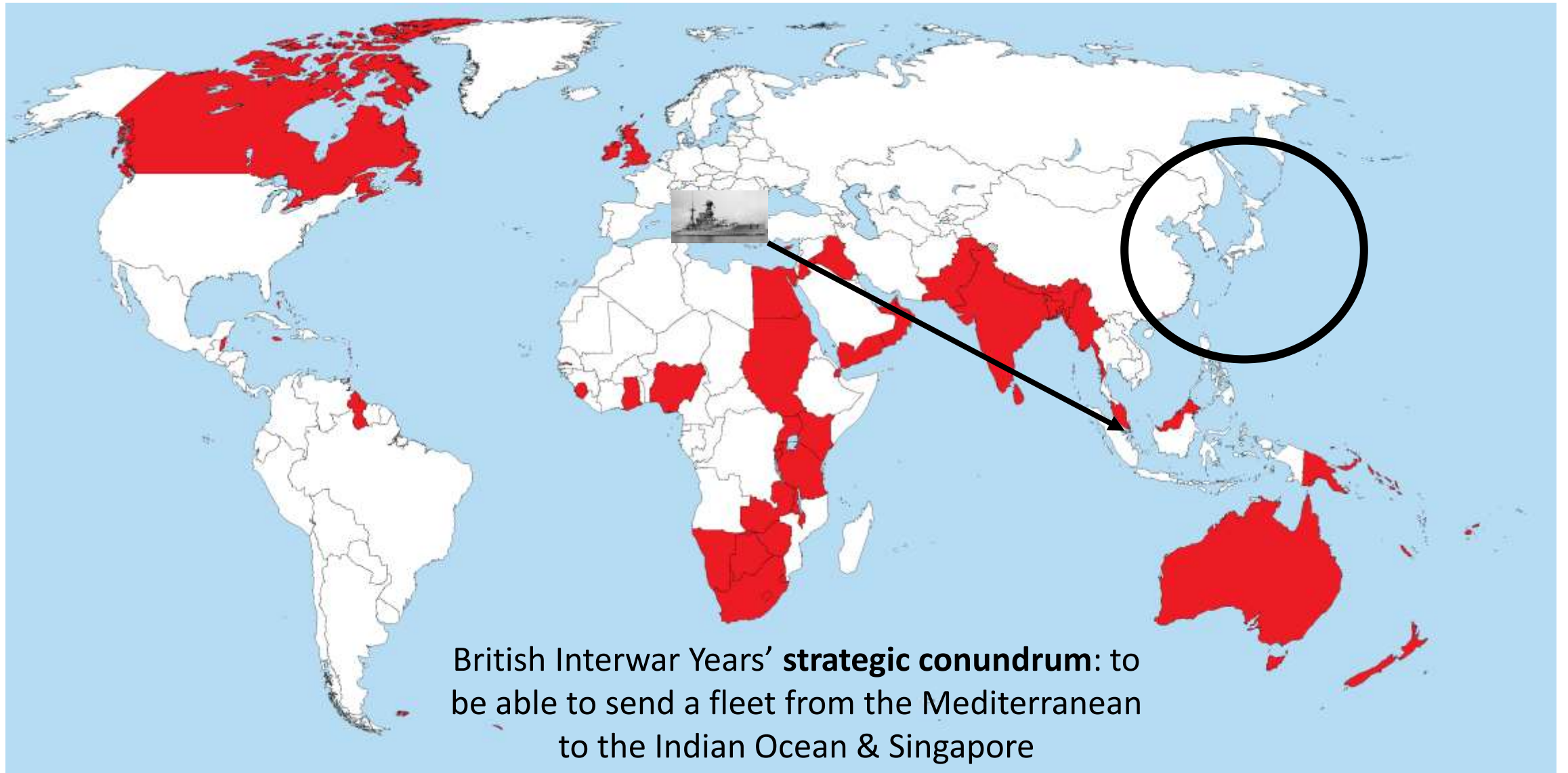
Connectivity Indian & Pacific
oceans: a **self-evident** fact



British Empire in 1914



WWI: Indian Ocean **critical** to the war – **Control over sea lanes:** constant stream of troops and resources from the empire to the battlefronts of Europe and the Middle-East



British Interwar Years' **strategic conundrum**: to be able to send a fleet from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean & Singapore



The British and Hitler: “Appeasement” 1936-1939





The British **nightmare**: a war against
Germany in Europe, Italy in the
Mediterranean Sea & Japan in Asia

A world map with a light gray background. Territories of the British Empire are highlighted in dark red, including Canada, the United Kingdom, India, and Australia. Allied territories are highlighted in blue, including France, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The map shows the global scale of the conflict during World War II.



Italian fleet: a **threat** to vital British communication lines in the Mediterranean

Mediterranean key to the British defense system in the Far East

40% of British oil imports transited via the Mediterranean

Nazi Germany on the March, 1936-1939



Munich Agreement (September 1938)



The Pact of Steel (22 May 1939)

A Germano-Italian
alliance



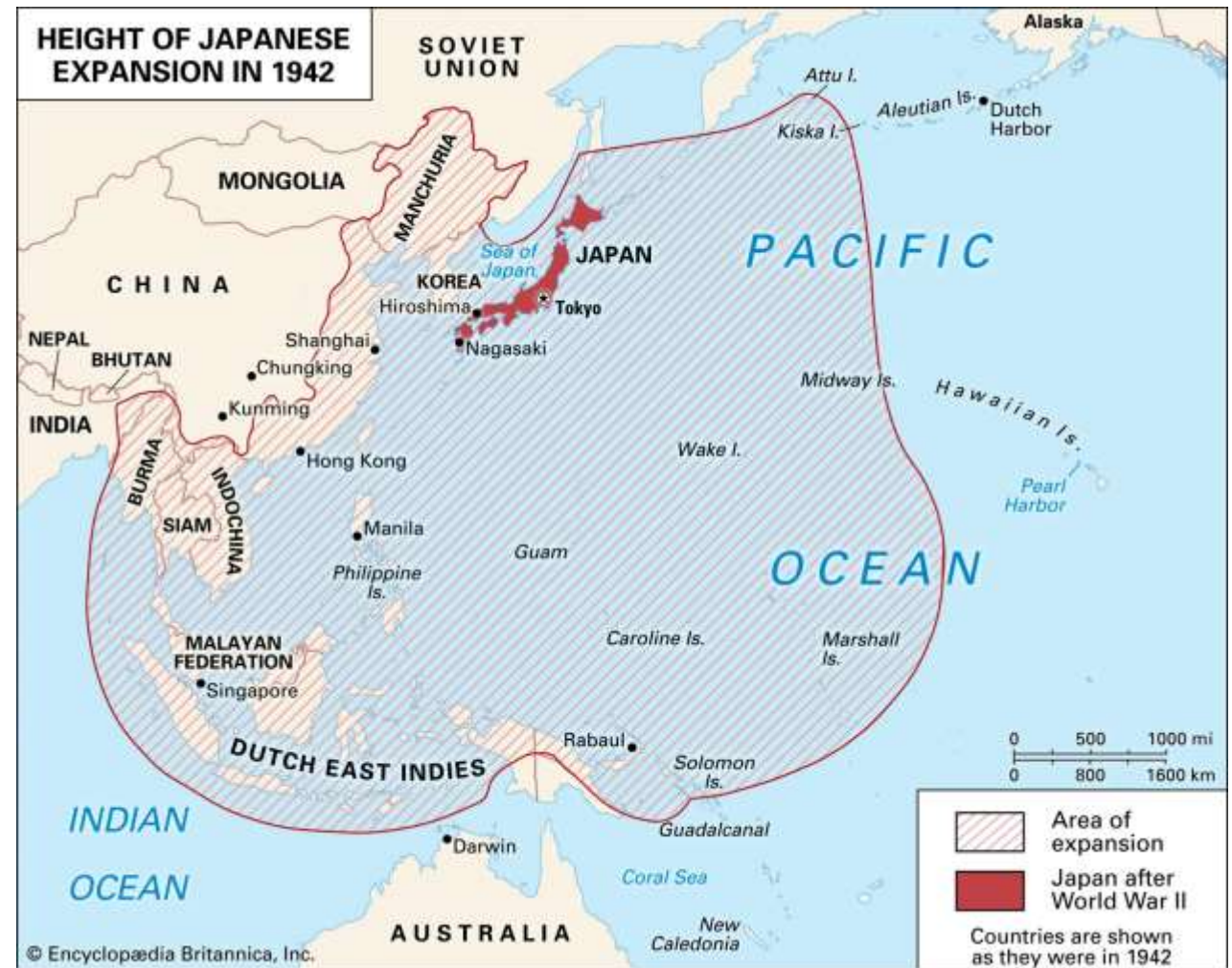
27 September 1940: **Tripartite Pact**
(Germany, Italy and Japan)
A **defensive** military alliance

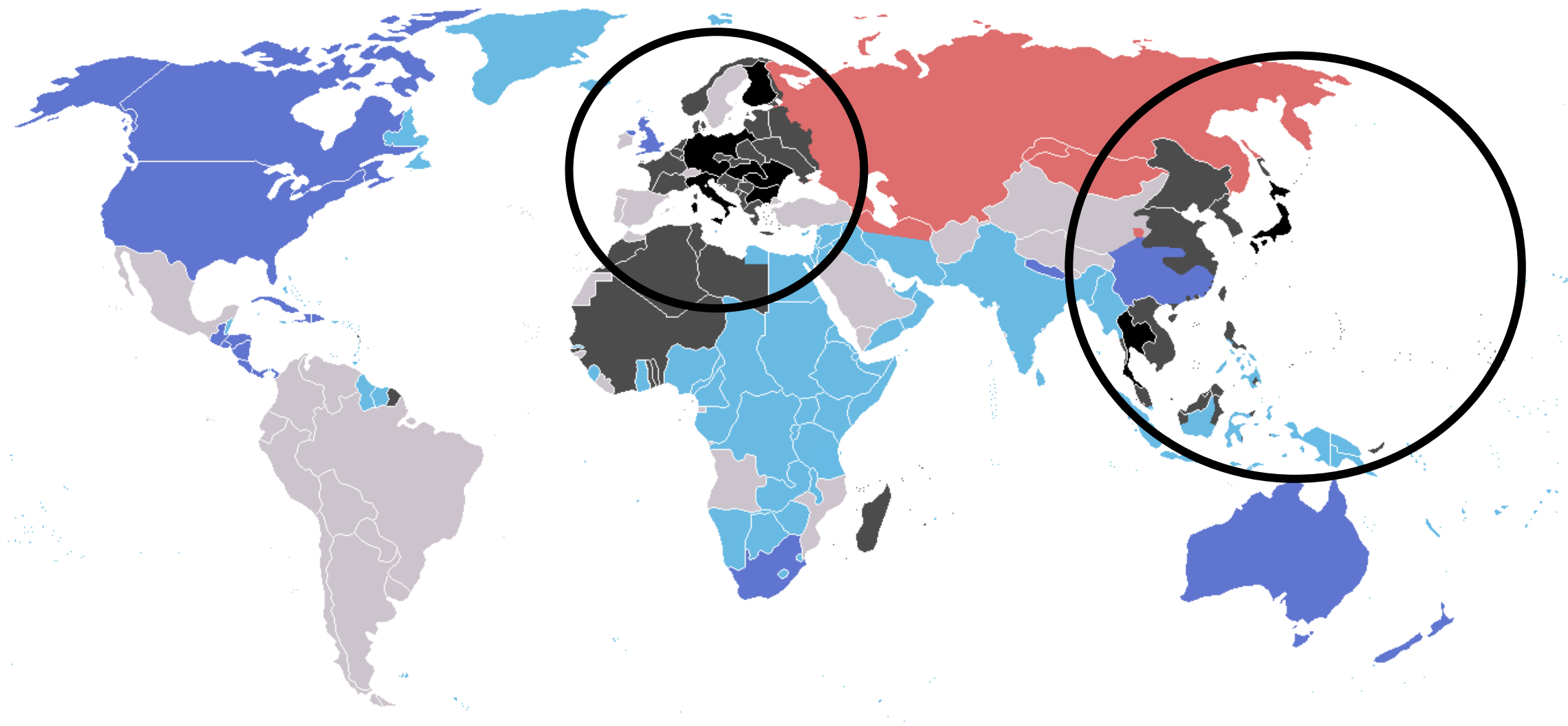


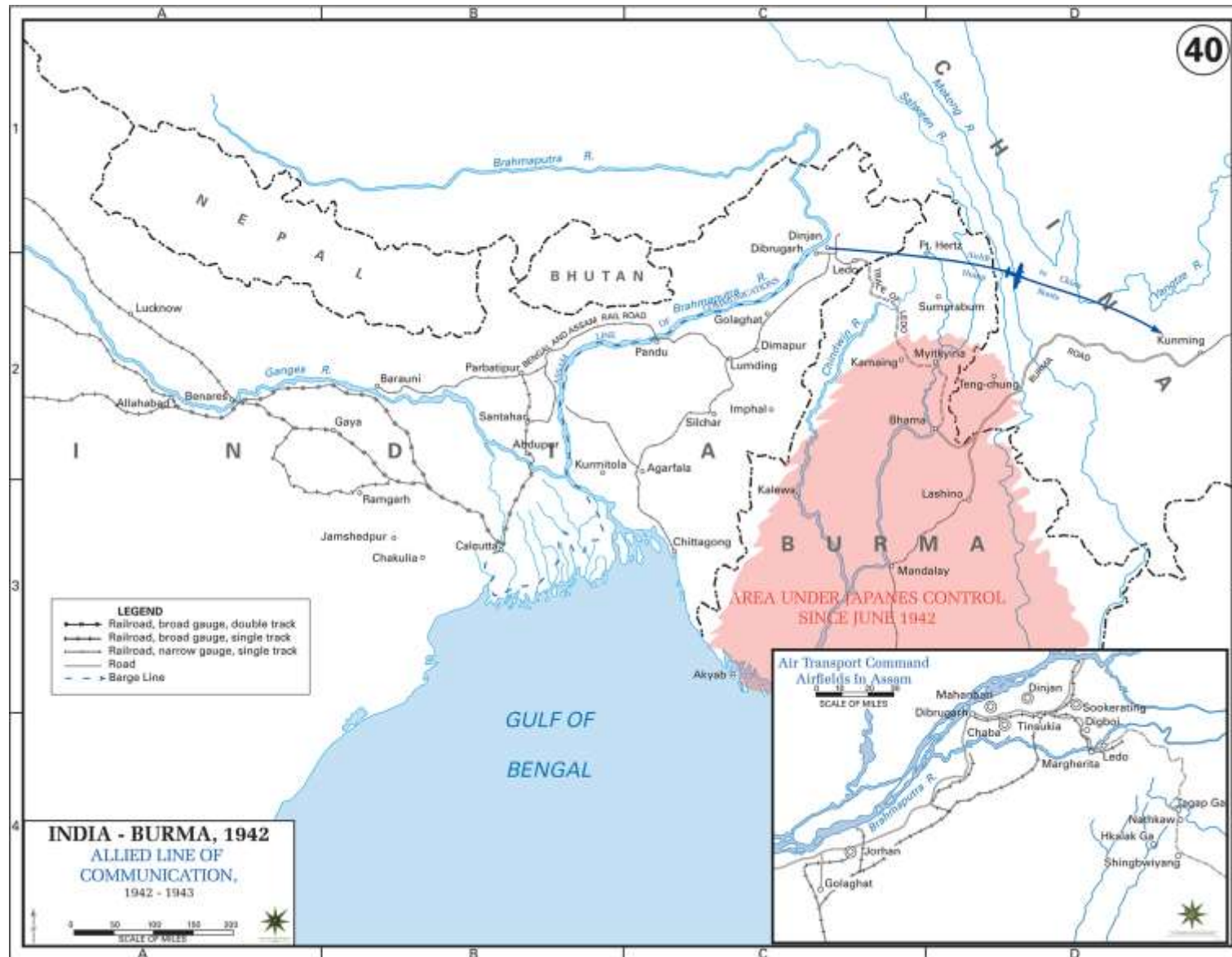
Japanese expansionism (December 1941-Early 1942)

India threatened

London's greatest fear: the
possible junction between
Germany & Japan in the Indian
Ocean & the Persian Gulf







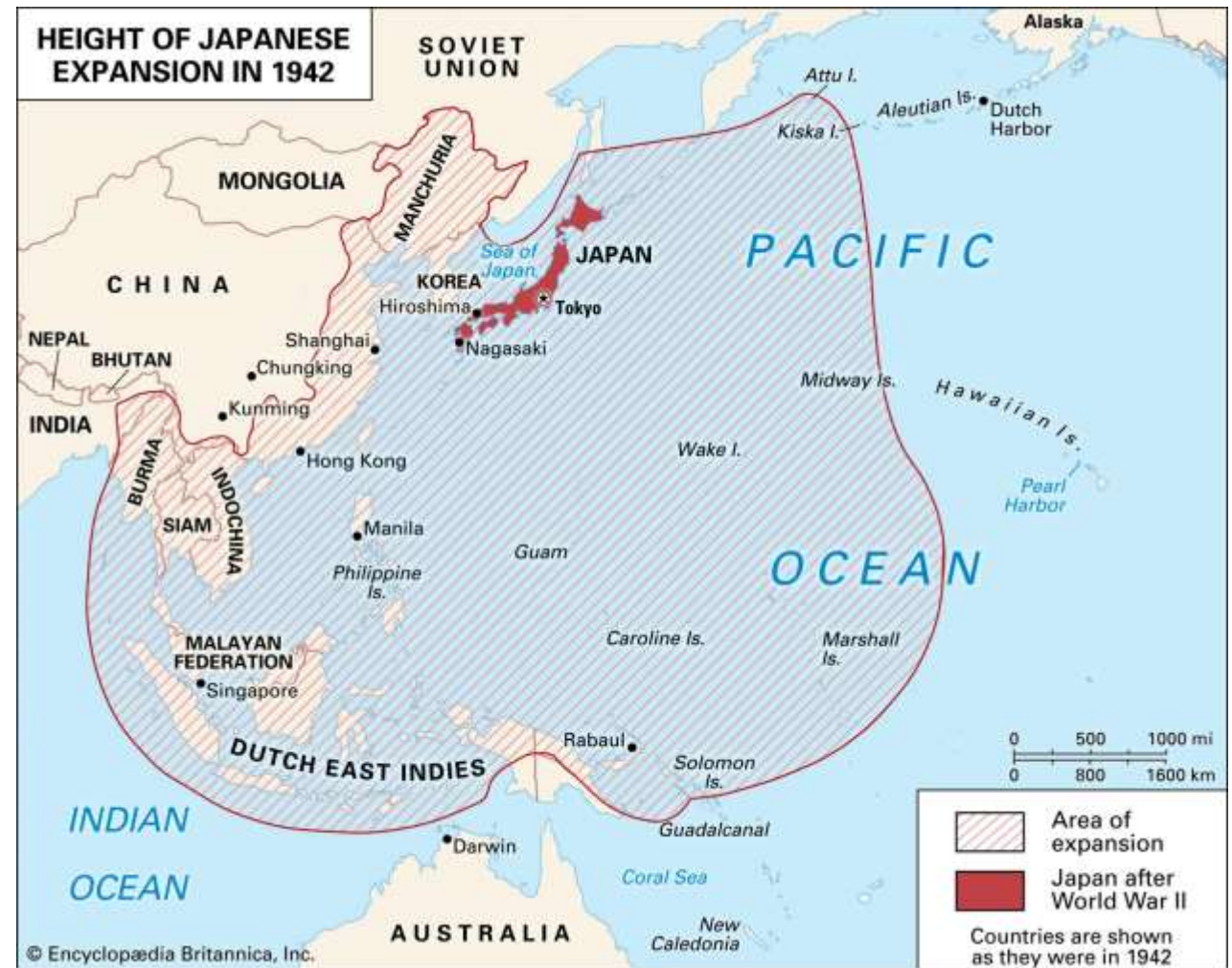
Japanese expansionism (December 1941-Early 1942)

In the name of Japan's survival

An Indo-Pacific footprint of
domination and exploitation of
resources

Control over vital objectives:
Singapore, the **Malacca Strait** and
Indo-Pacific sea lanes

Isolating India and Australia from
British and US-led Allied war effort







China's **Malacca Dilemma**
(term coined in 2003): the
potential factors that could
hinder China's economic
development through
chocking oil imports

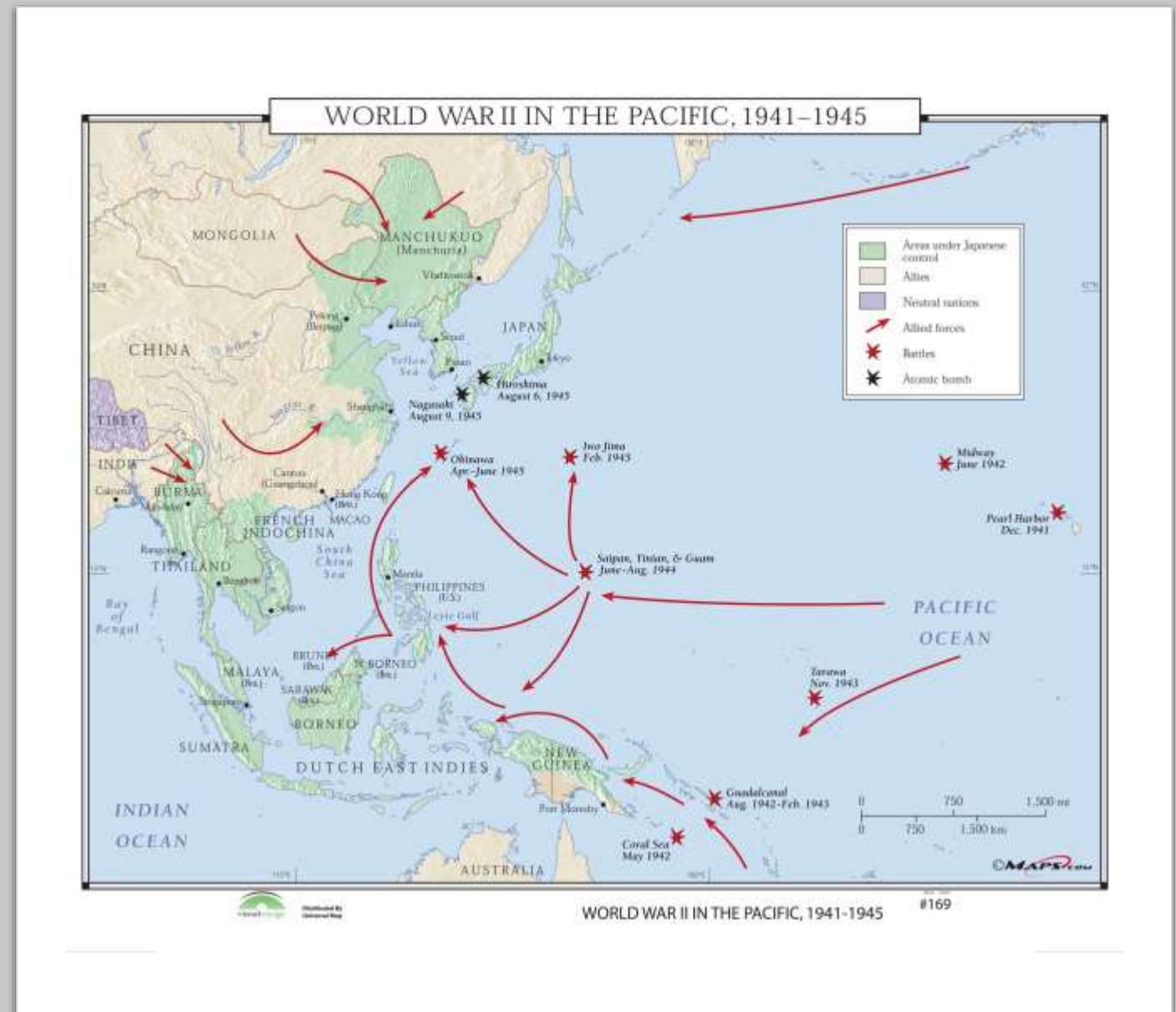
An (Indo)-Pacific war

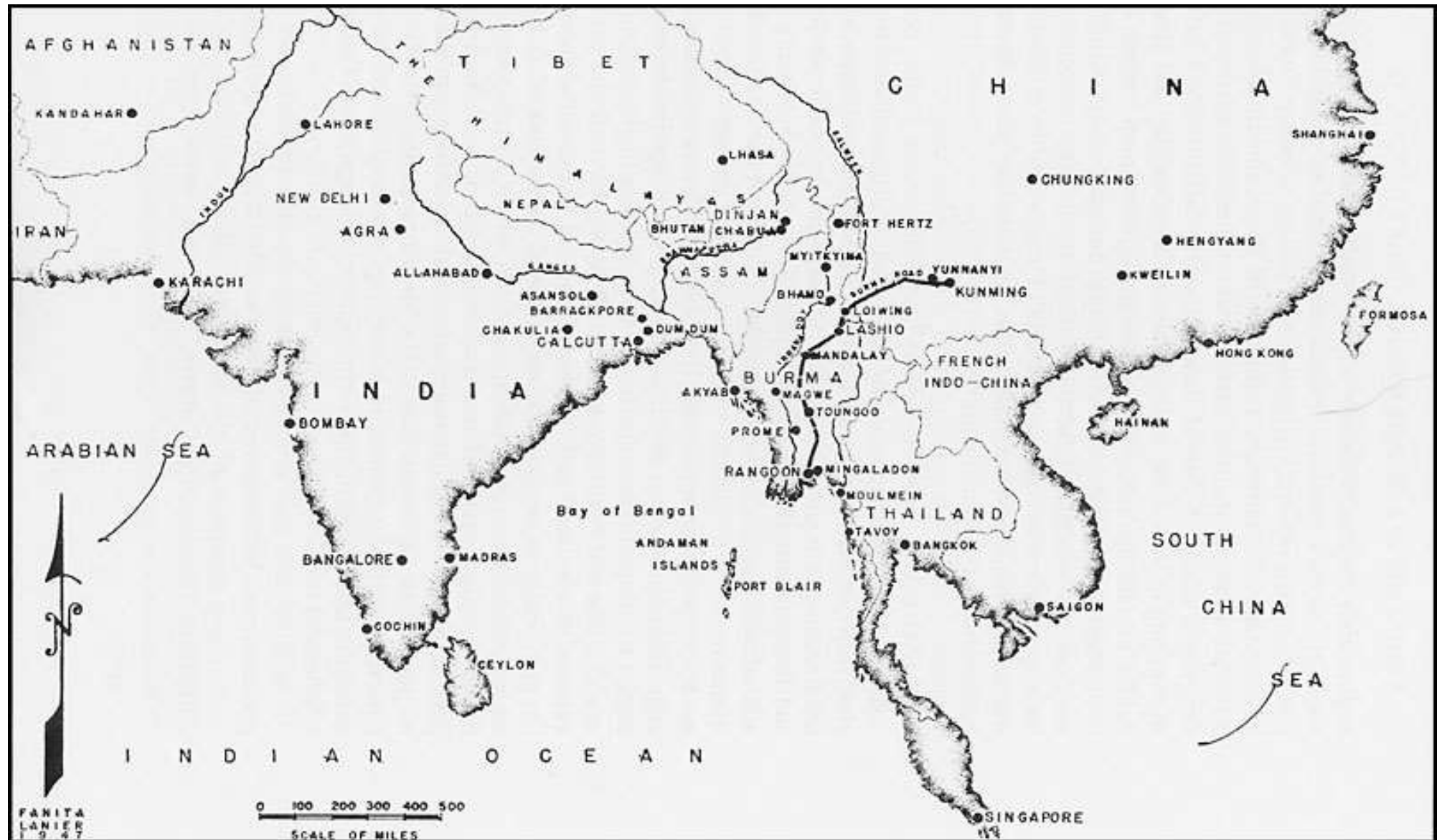
The crucial role of India

British Indian Army: the largest volunteer force in history

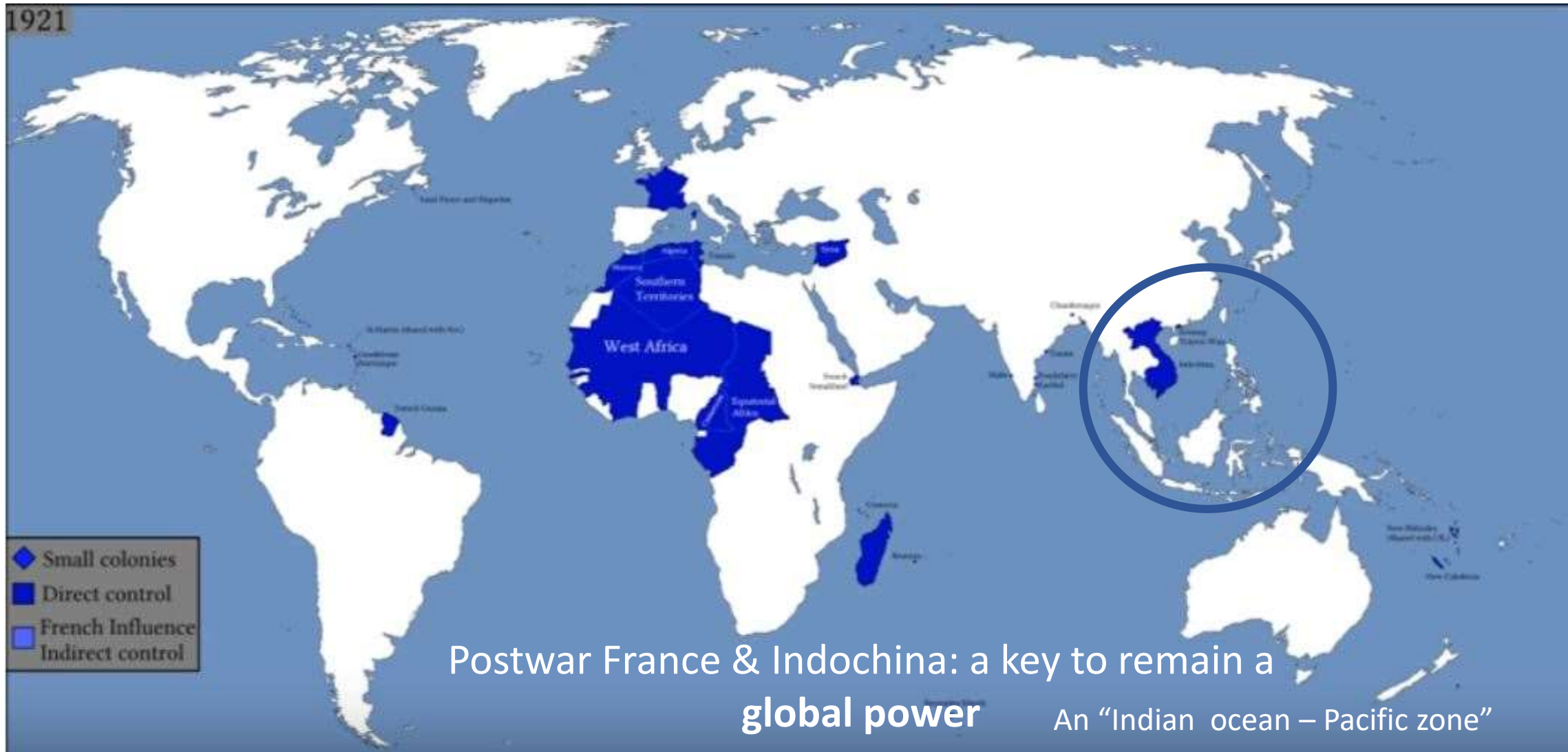
Key to resisting an rolling back Japanese forces

Supplying the Chinese nationalist army though Burma and India







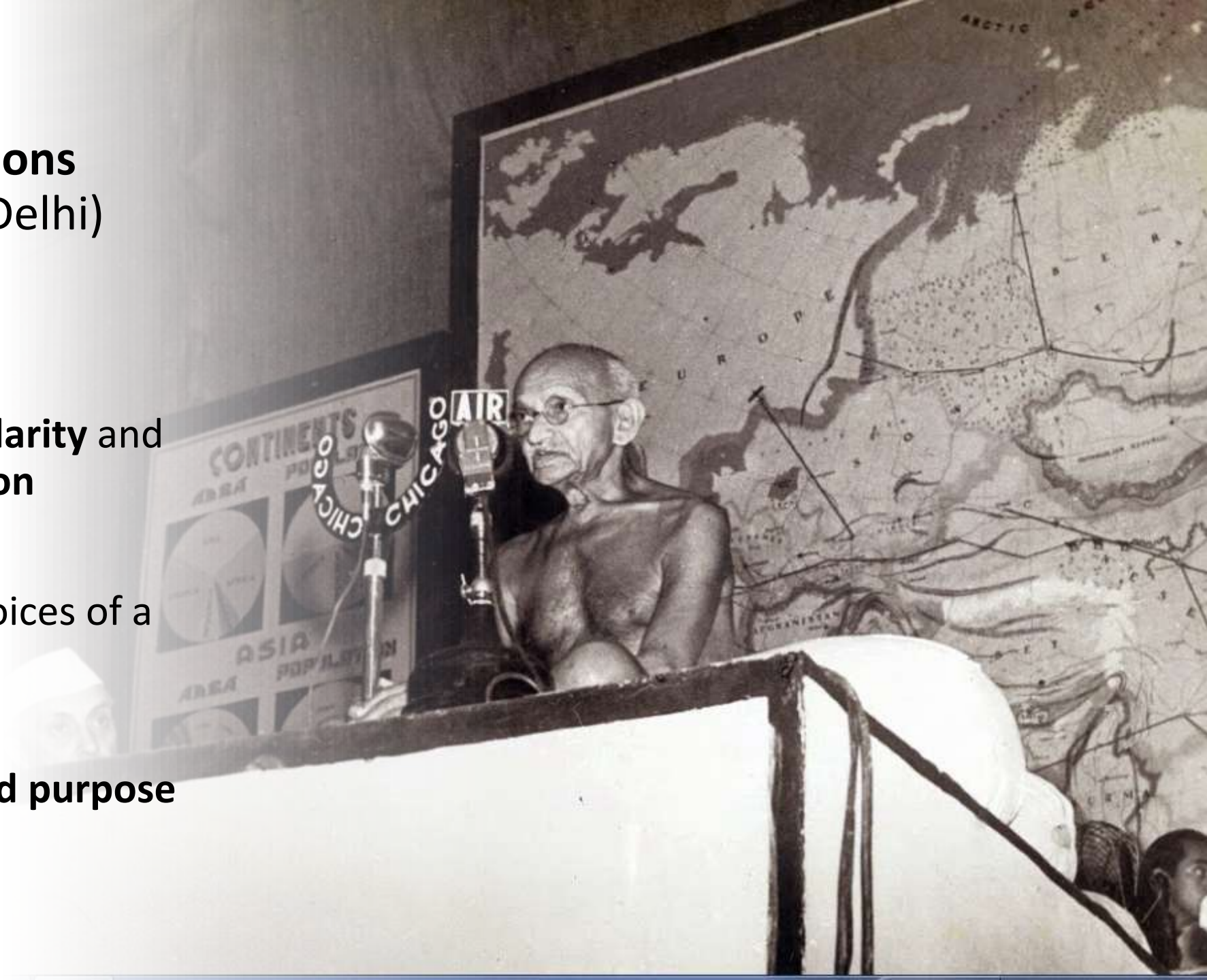


1947 Asian Relations Conference (New Delhi)

A message of Asian **solidarity** and
self-determination

Bringing together the voices of a
unified Asia

Building a sense of **shared purpose**
and **identity**



The first of 4 wars with
Pakistan



India and the bloodshed of
Partition



1 October 1949: the triumph of the Communists

The birth of the **People's Republic of China**

Chiang Kai-shek and over 1.5 million of continental Chinese sought refuge on the island of **Taiwan**

China isolated



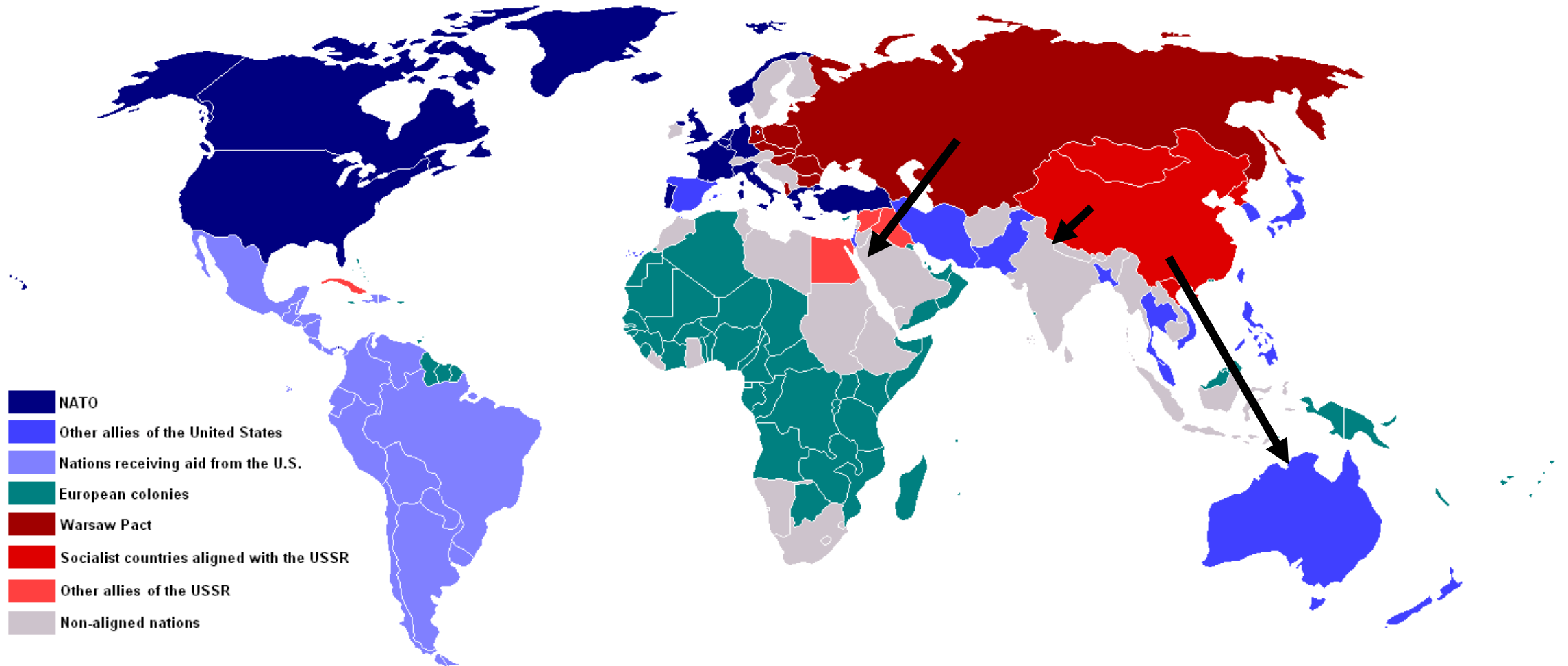
Mao's “**Great Leap Forward**” (1958): to transform China into a world power through industrialization and collectivization in the shortest possible time

A total failure

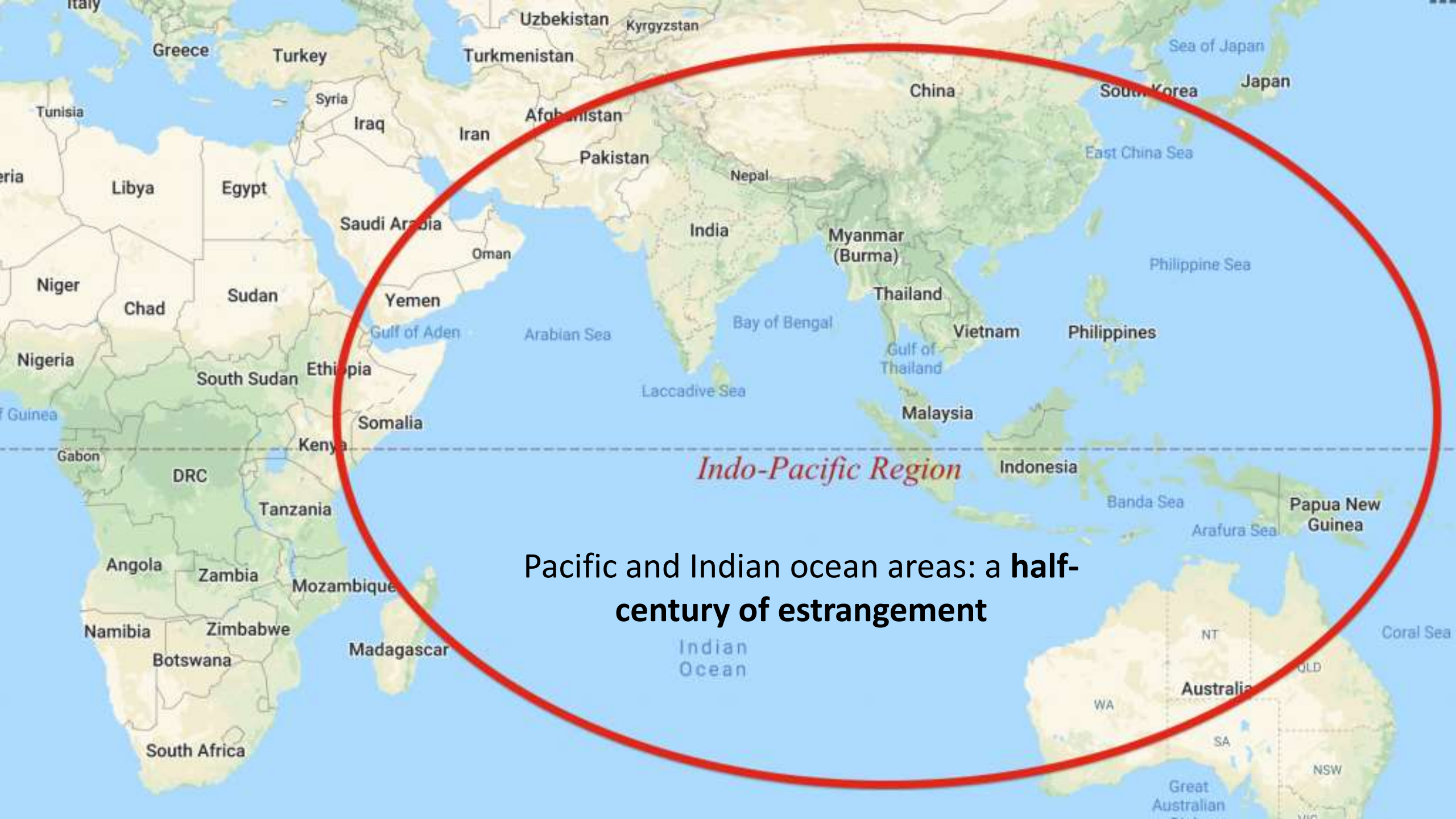
1966: Cultural Revolution



The **Cold War** & the perceived threat of communism: Soviet Union's **military strength** + China's **demography** + **anticolonial message**



The U.S.: **alliances** & military interventions **to contain** Soviet power and the spread of communist ideology



Indo-Pacific Region

Pacific and Indian ocean areas: a **half-century of estrangement**



September 1976: the death of Mao

Deng Xiaoping's growing influence within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

All powerful in the summer of 1977



Deng Xiaoping's **ambition** (1980s): to put China on a path towards **development**

Confirming the end of China's diplomatic isolation (initiated in 1971)

China **to regain** its rightful place on the global stage

Far-reaching **economic reforms** aimed at transforming China into an industrial powerhouse

Heavy reliance on energy (oil) to keep fueling China's economic growth



Remember China's **Malacca Dilemma**?

The Strait of Malacca: a natural **strategic chokepoint**
Could be easily blocked by the U.S.

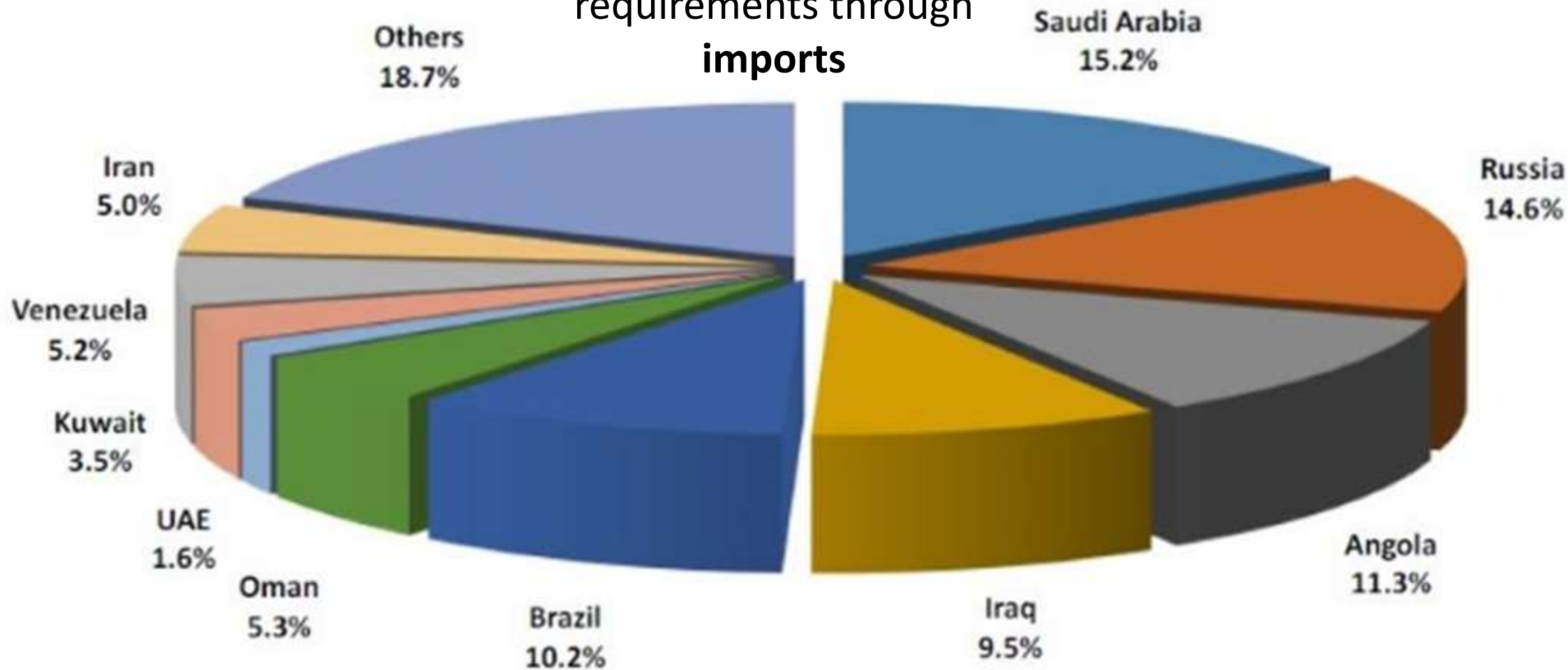
Steps to reduce China's **over-reliance** on the Strait of Malacca

China - Crude Oil Imports by Source - Feb 2019

(source: GAC ; in % of import volume)

China: the **world's largest oil importer** since 2017

70% of China's oil requirements through imports



“The **great renewal** of the Chinese nation”

China to regain its rightful place on the global stage

Self-image as the centre of the region and the world

4. **What responses** to China’s growing assertiveness?






China perceived as a global
threat to U.S. standing

Barack Obama: to **bolster**
the U.S. presence in Asia

“Return to Asia” “Pivot”

Tightening relationships
with Asian countries to
contain China




A photograph of Donald Trump and Xi Jinping standing side-by-side in front of the United States and Chinese flags. Trump is on the left, wearing a dark suit and red tie, waving with his right hand. Xi is on the right, wearing a dark suit and blue patterned tie, looking towards the camera. The background is a blue wall with the flags. The image has a dark overlay with white text.

December 2017: China described as a “strategic competitor” (same as Russia)

Early 2018: China’s “economic aggression” a threat to the U.S. economy AND the global economy

A portrait of Donald Trump, looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red patterned tie. The image has a dark, semi-transparent overlay.

Profound bipartisan
mistrust of Chinese power

A portrait of Joe Biden, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. The image has a dark, semi-transparent overlay.

Joe Biden: renewing traditional alliances
against China


Building back at home to enable America to
compete with China in a position of renewed
strength

A photograph of Joe Biden, President of the United States, standing in front of a large Chinese flag. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He has a serious expression. The flag is red with five yellow stars: one large star on the left and four smaller stars in an arc to its right.

Joe Biden: a **Pentagon group** to assess U.S. military strategy for dealing with China (February 2021)

Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin: China as the most difficult and complex problem for the U.S”

A fragile balance between cooperation, competition and confrontation

A photograph of U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. His hands are raised in a gesturing motion. Behind him is a large American flag. A microphone is visible on the podium to his right.

“I said that the United States relationship with China will be competitive where it should be, collaborative where it can be, adversarial where it must be.” (U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken)

A photograph of two men in military uniforms, Antony Blinken and Lloyd Austin, standing in front of a yellow piece of equipment. Both are wearing black face masks. The image is darkened to serve as a background for text.

Antony Blinken (U.S.
Foreign Secretary) &
Lloyd Austin's visit to
South Korea & Japan

To fortify Washington's alliances in Asia: a
priority **to contain** China's aggressive policy
in the "**Indo-Pacific Region**"

An aerial photograph of a US Navy carrier battle group sailing on the blue ocean. The group includes a large aircraft carrier with many fighter jets on its deck, a large replenishment oiler, and several smaller destroyers. The ships are moving in a line, leaving white wakes behind them.

The “middle players”

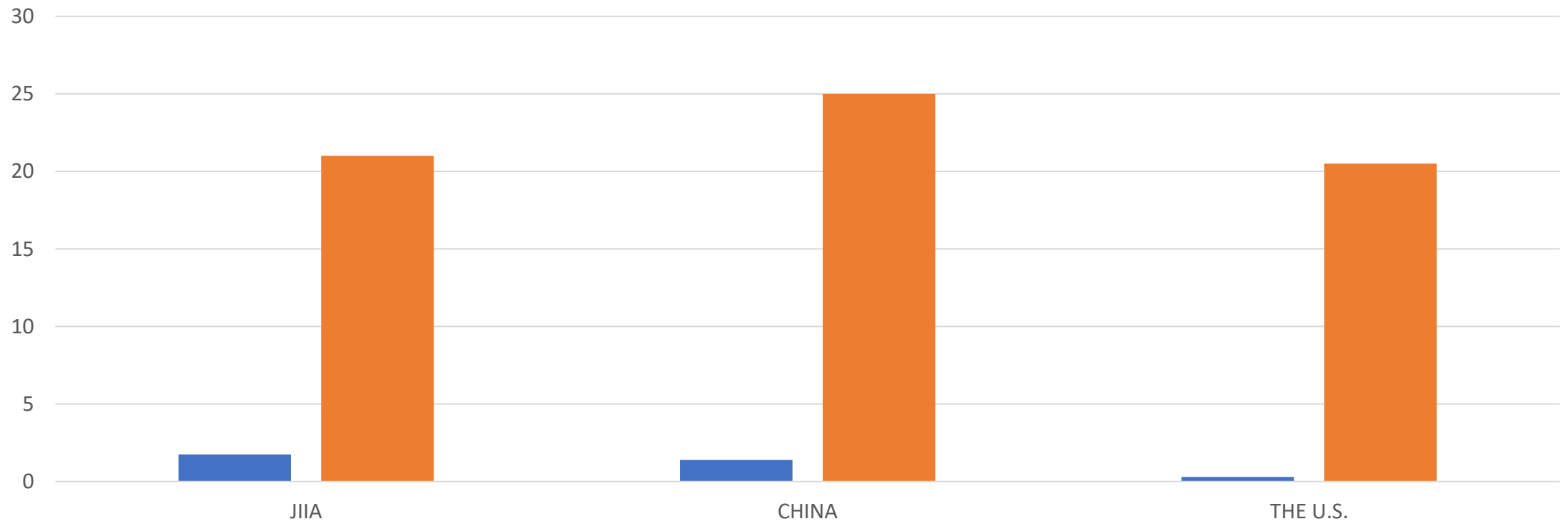
China and the U.S. are NOT the only two nations that count in the Indo-Pacific region

A group of **significant countries** seeking to affect the **balance of power** in the region



“Middle players” in Indo-Pacific region

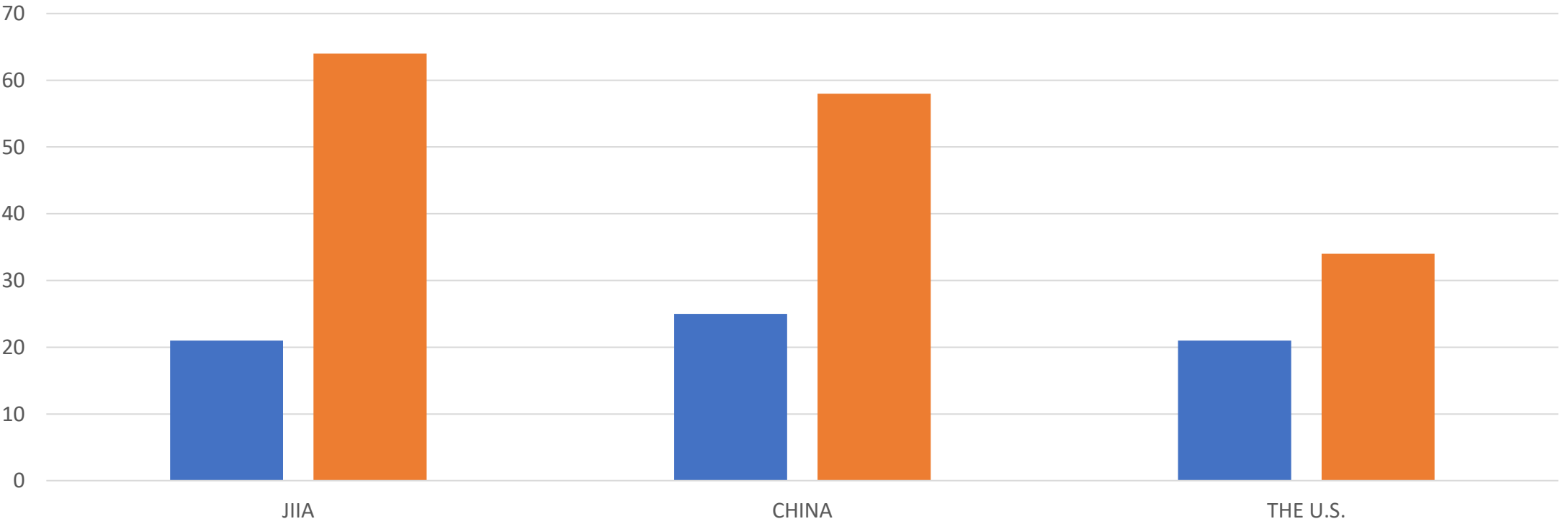
Economy & demography (2018)



JIIA: Japan, India, Indonesia & Australia

■ Pop million ■ GDP trillion

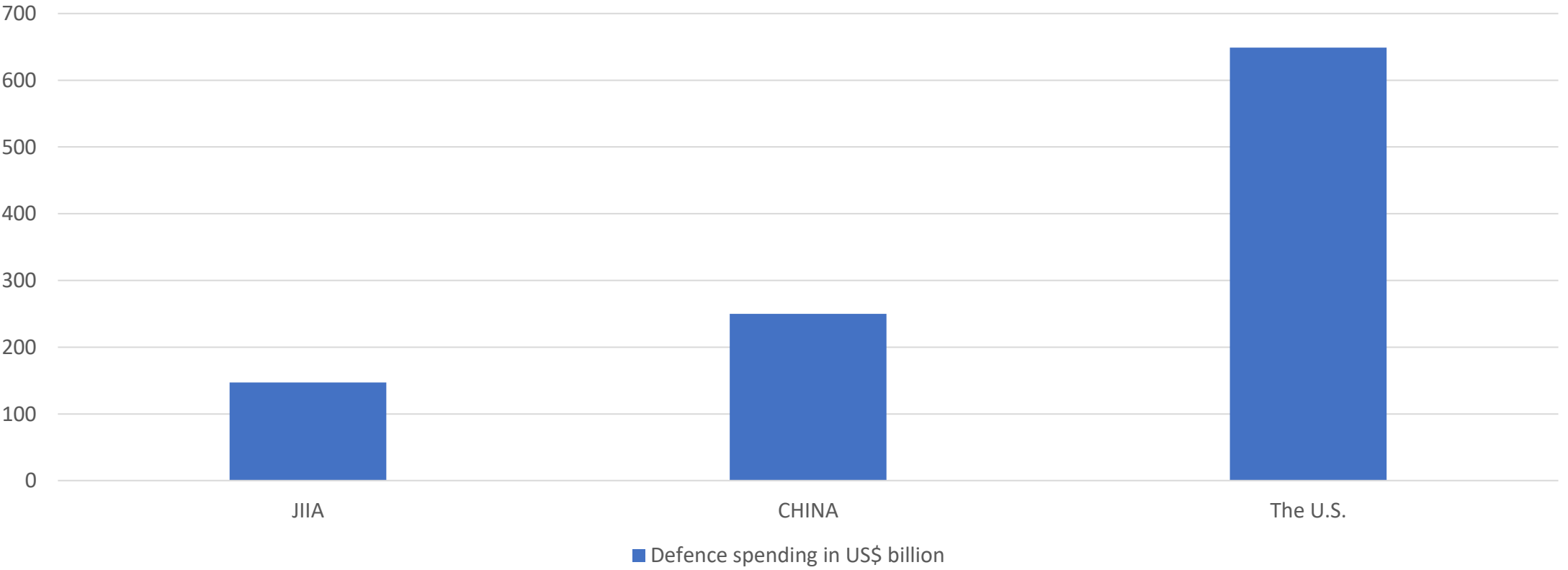
GDP in US\$ trillion



JIIA: Japan, India, Indonesia & Australia

2018 2050

Defence spending in US\$ billion (2018)



What about the European Union?

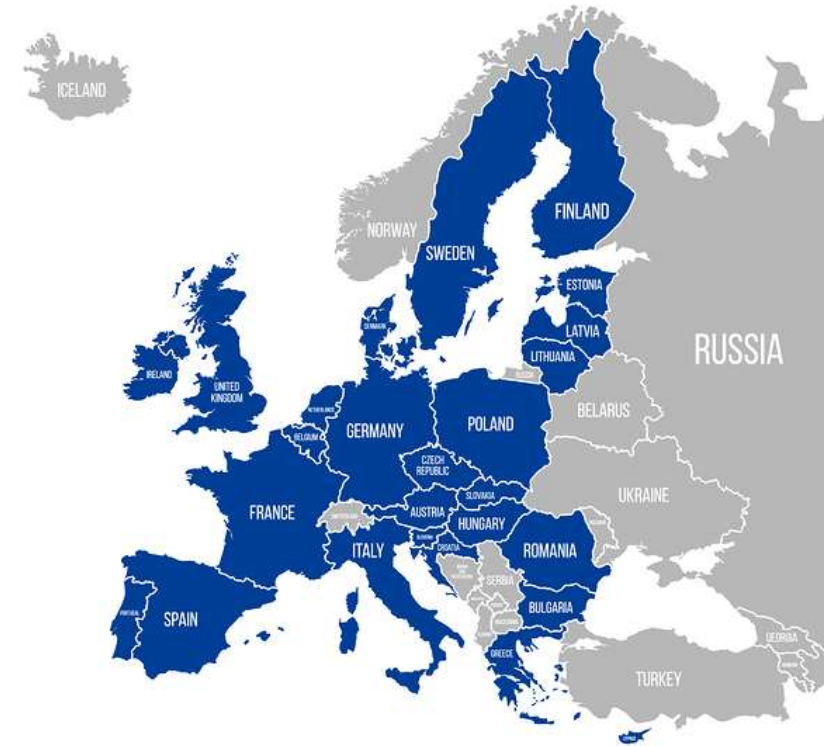
China's number 1 trade partner

The number 1 investor in the Indo-Pacific Region

Economic & political stability in the region key



EUROPEAN
UNION



FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC



KEY TOPICS

- History and concept
- Military modernisation, armed confrontation & risks of escalation
- China's foreign policy: assertive and confrontational
- Tensions with India, coercion against Australia
- Pressure in the South China Sea and East China Sea
- Threats against Taiwan
- What role for the “middle players” (Japan, Indonesia, France...)
- Africa, the forgotten actor