



The “Indo-Pacific”: Maritime insecurity & instability

China’s shadow

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**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**

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

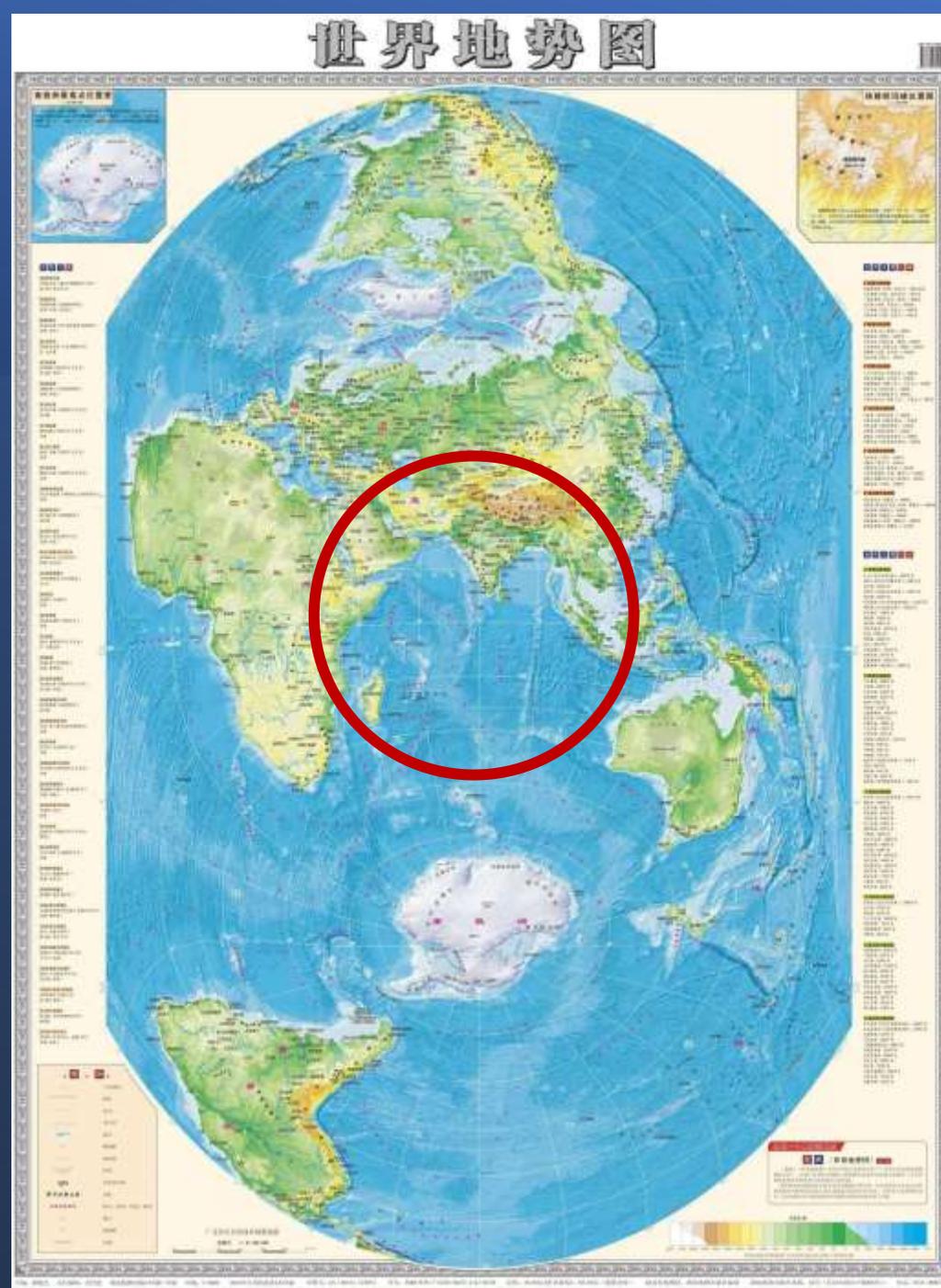
China to regain its rightful place on the global stage





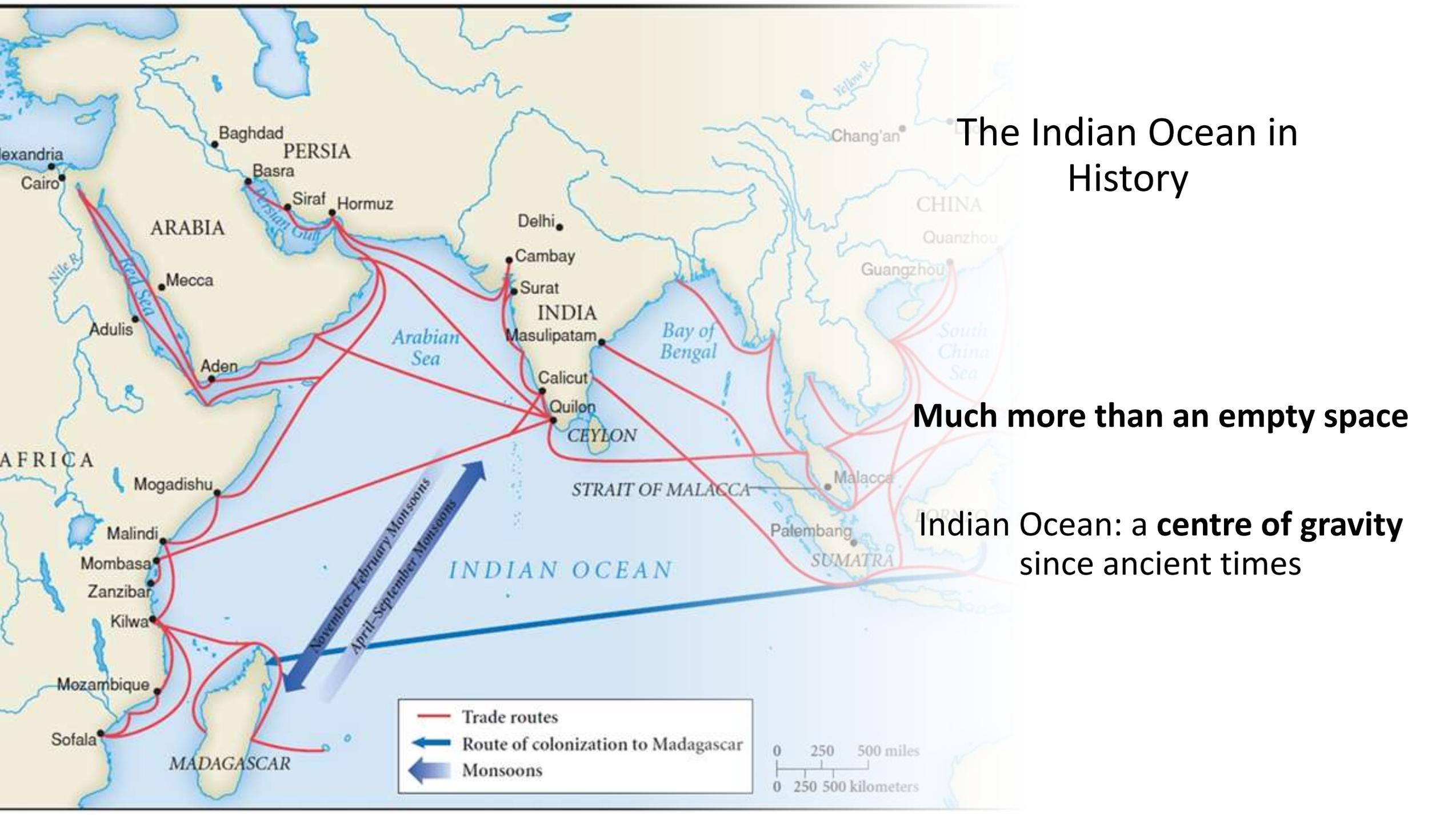
Chinese cartographer Hao  
Xiaoguang

Asia-focused world map  
authorized by the Chinese  
government (2013)



How China sees the world

A map centered on the Indian  
Ocean



# The Indian Ocean in History

**Much more than an empty space**

**Indian Ocean: a centre of gravity since ancient times**

- Trade routes
- ← Route of colonization to Madagascar
- ← Monsoons



# A political reality for Rome, Greece, Egypt and Persia



ITALY  
GREEKS  
Wine

PONTUS

CASPIAN SEA

LAKE MAEOTIS

BACTRIA  
"The very Greek nation of the Bactrians" (Chap.47)

PERSIA

PERSIAN SEA

LYBIA

ARABIA

PARTHIANS

SCYTHIA

ARIACA

AETHIOPIA

AFRICA

ERYTHRAEAN SEA

CYENEUM

AZANIA

Diospolis

Mussel Harbour (Myos Hormos)

Berenice

Ptolemais of the Hunt

Meroe

Axumiles (Axum)

Adulis

Coloe

Avalites

Mundus

Mosyllum

Pano

Opone

Sarapion

NABATAEANS

Petra

White Village

CARNAITES

Wine Grain

Frankincense

CHARIBAEI

Muza

Saphar

HOMERITES

OCELIS

Spices

Cinnamon

Slaves

Apologus

Charax

Spasini

Semiramis Mts

Asabon Mts

Asich

Sabath

Moscha

Cania

Eudaemon Arabia (Aden)

Cape Elephant

Cape of Spices

Dioscoridus Island

Opone

Opone

Opone

PARSIDS

Wine Dates Gold

Oraea

Ommana

Calxi Islands

Zenobian Isl.

Suppala

Sopara

Calliena (Kalyan)

Semylla (Chaul)

Mandagora

Palaepatmoe

Melizigara

Byzantium

Togarum

Aurannoboas

Naura (Ganganore)

Barbaricum

Abiria

Syrastrene

Barigaza

Bucephalus

POCLAIS

GANDAREI

Minneapolis

Barbaricum

Ozene (Ujjain)

Paethan (Paithan)

Tagara

MASALIA

DAKINABADES

(DAKSHINAPATHA)

SANDANES

Spices

CEREBOTHRA

CHERAS

DAKSHINAPATHA

Colchi (Korkai)

Colchi (Korkai)

Colchi (Korkai)

Agate Carnelian Cloth

Iron Steel Cloth

Palaesimundu Island, Taprobane



Land wars

No Chinese shipping in  
the Indian Ocean until the  
11<sup>th</sup> century

# Tanxia: “All under heaven”

A **Sino-centered vision** of the world:  
the world divided in concentric  
circles around the emperor

China: the source of all civilization

The “Barbarians”: the little known  
Western world

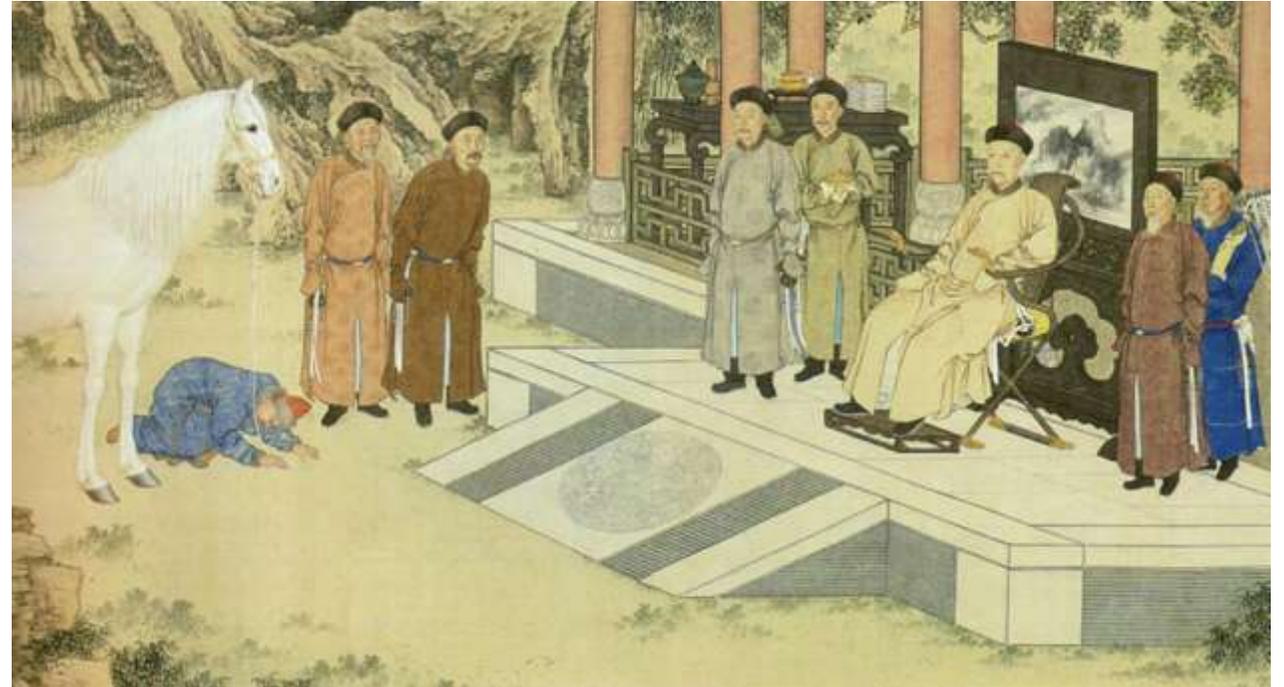
**Tributary system:** neighboring states  
acknowledged China’s superiority by  
sending envoys



## Triple kowtow

A sign of submission

Kowtow: kneeling and bowing  
so low that the head touches  
the ground



Zhu Yuanzhang (the Hongwu Emperor):  
founder of the **Ming dynasty** (1368)

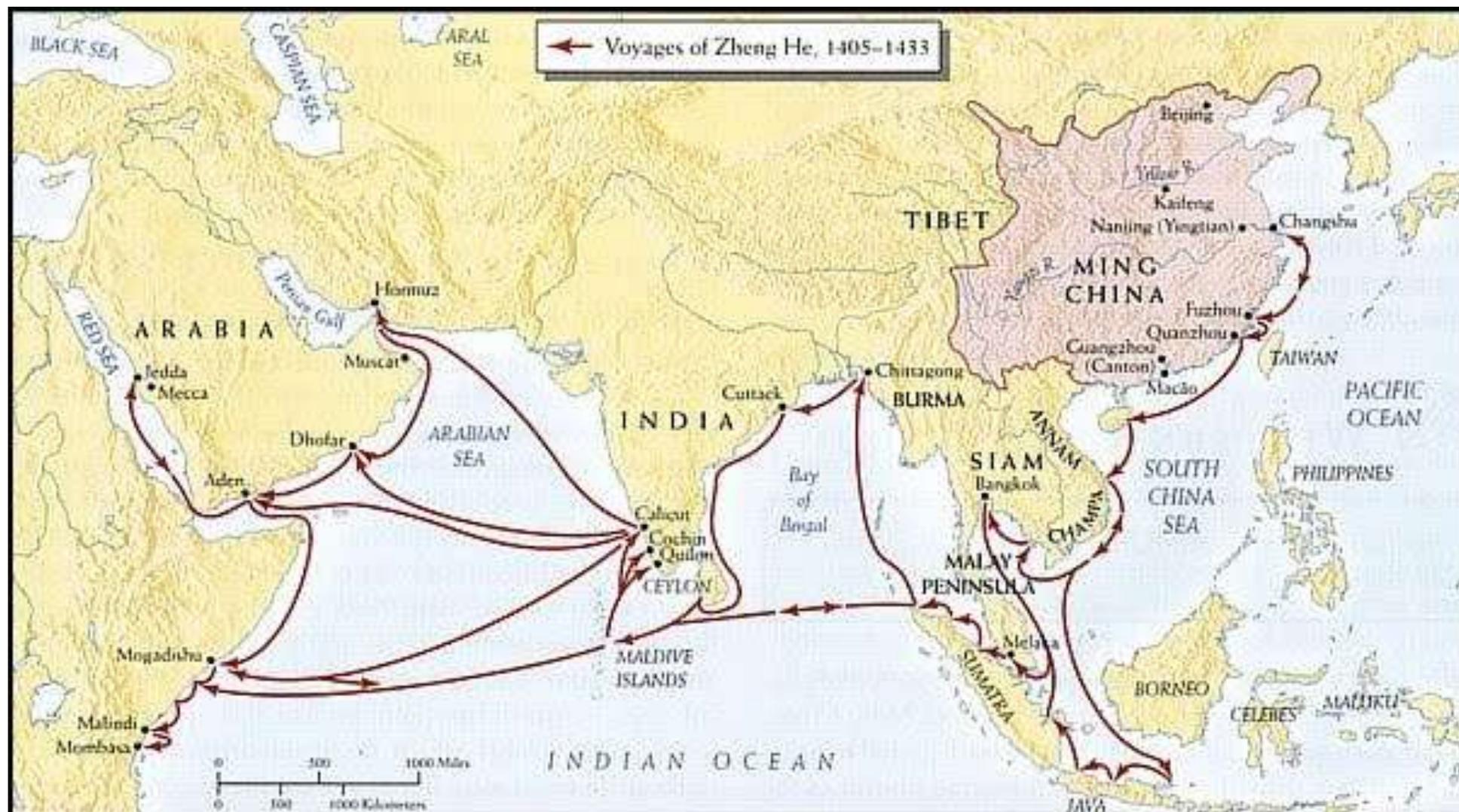
A new ruler in search of political  
legitimacy & prestige





**Grand Admiral Zheng He's expeditions:**  
Hundreds of "treasure ships" carrying thousands of soldiers

Backing up the call for tribute with a **show of force** while initiating diplomatic and trade contacts



MAP 2-6 VOYAGES OF ZHENG HE, 1405-1433



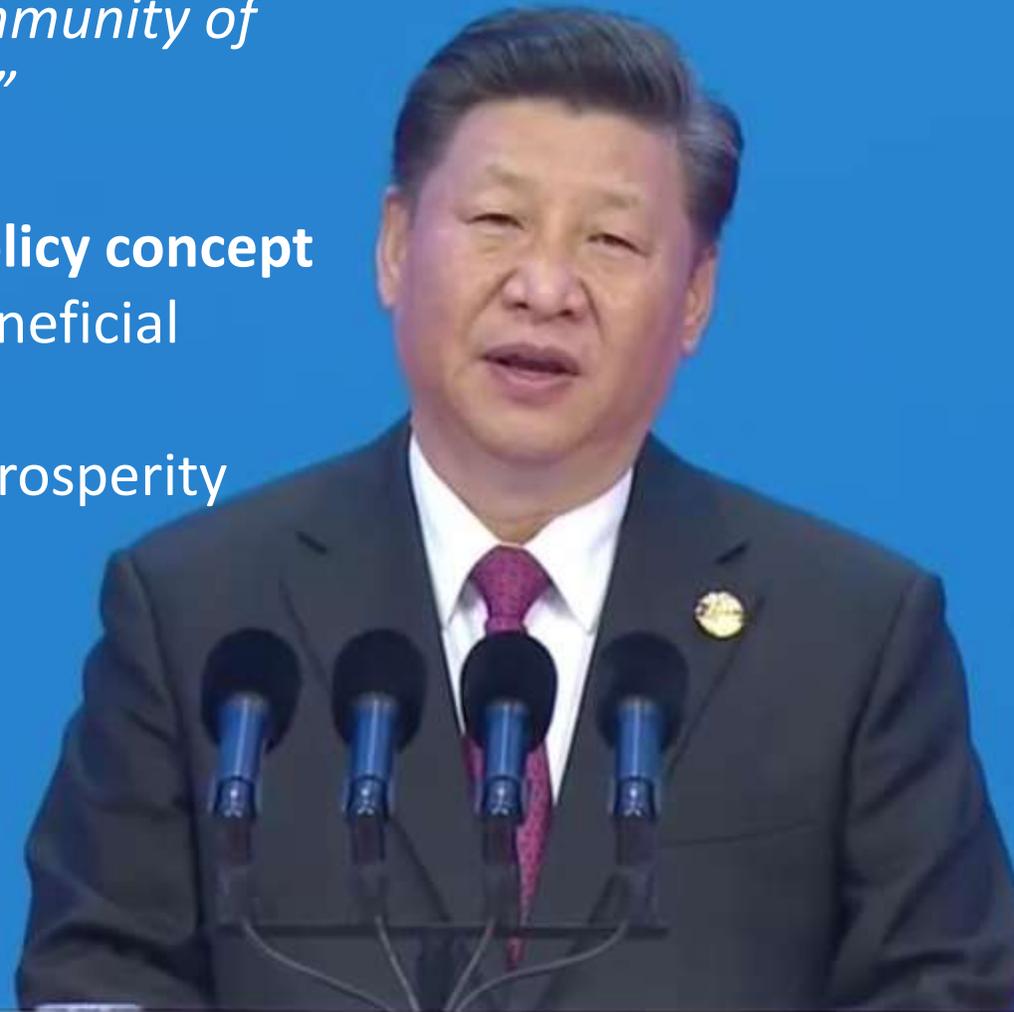
Chinese state  
propaganda today

The purpose of Zhen He's voyages: peace and  
diplomacy, "win-win" and shared prosperity

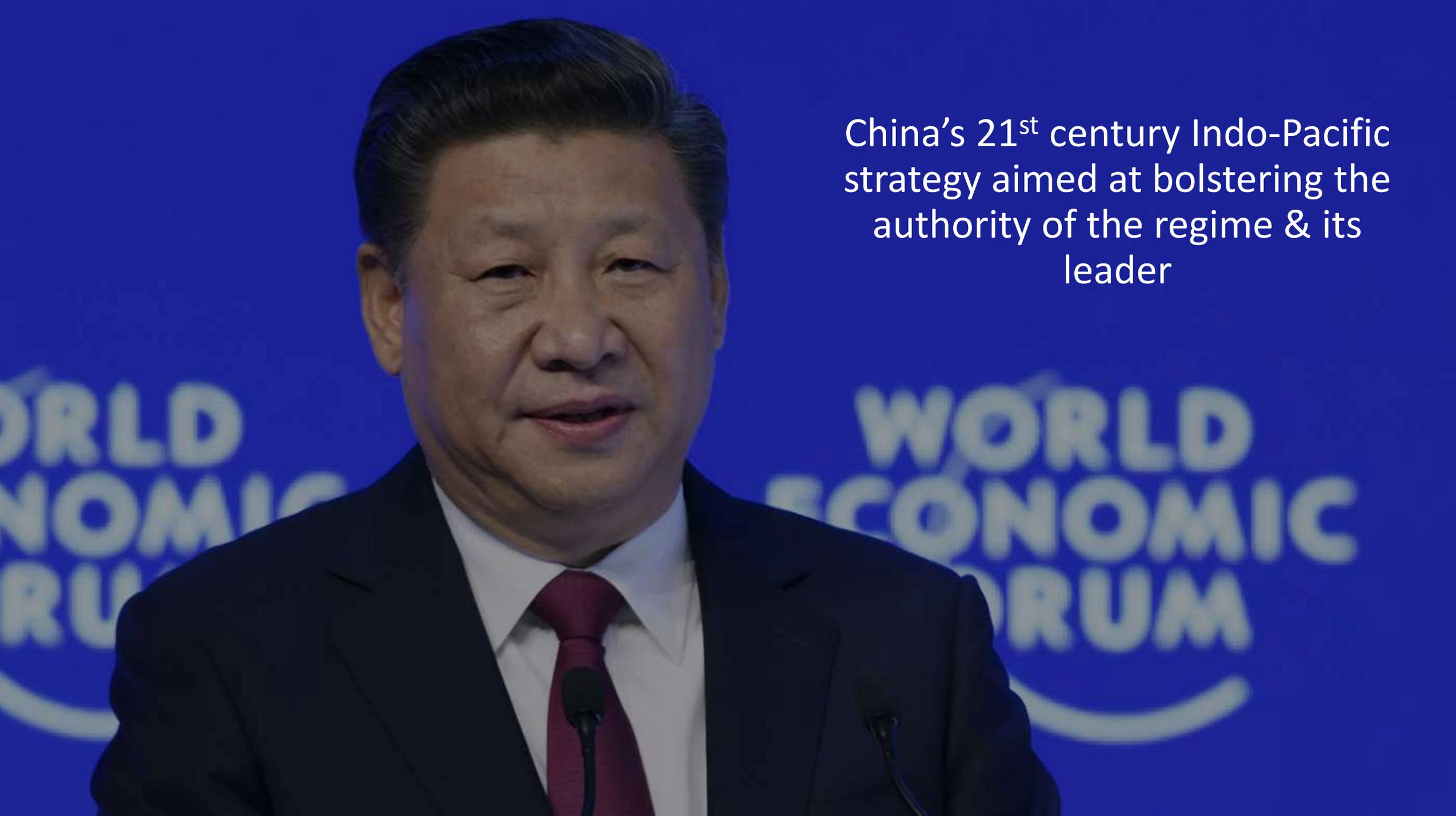
2015 Xi Jinping Asia's "*Community of  
Common Destiny*"

China's "**win-win**" foreign policy concept  
spelled out: "mutual beneficial  
cooperation"

Coexistence and shared prosperity



博鳌亚洲论坛2018年年会  
BOAO FORUM FOR ASIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2018

A photograph of Xi Jinping, the leader of China, speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. The background is a blue wall with the text 'WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM' repeated in white. The text is slightly blurred and partially obscured by the speaker.

China's 21<sup>st</sup> century Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at bolstering the authority of the regime & its leader

**1433:** the collapse of China's  
seaborne dominance

Political instability at home  
Multiple land border conflicts  
Economic crisis

The Indo-Pacific **open for  
exploration** by European powers





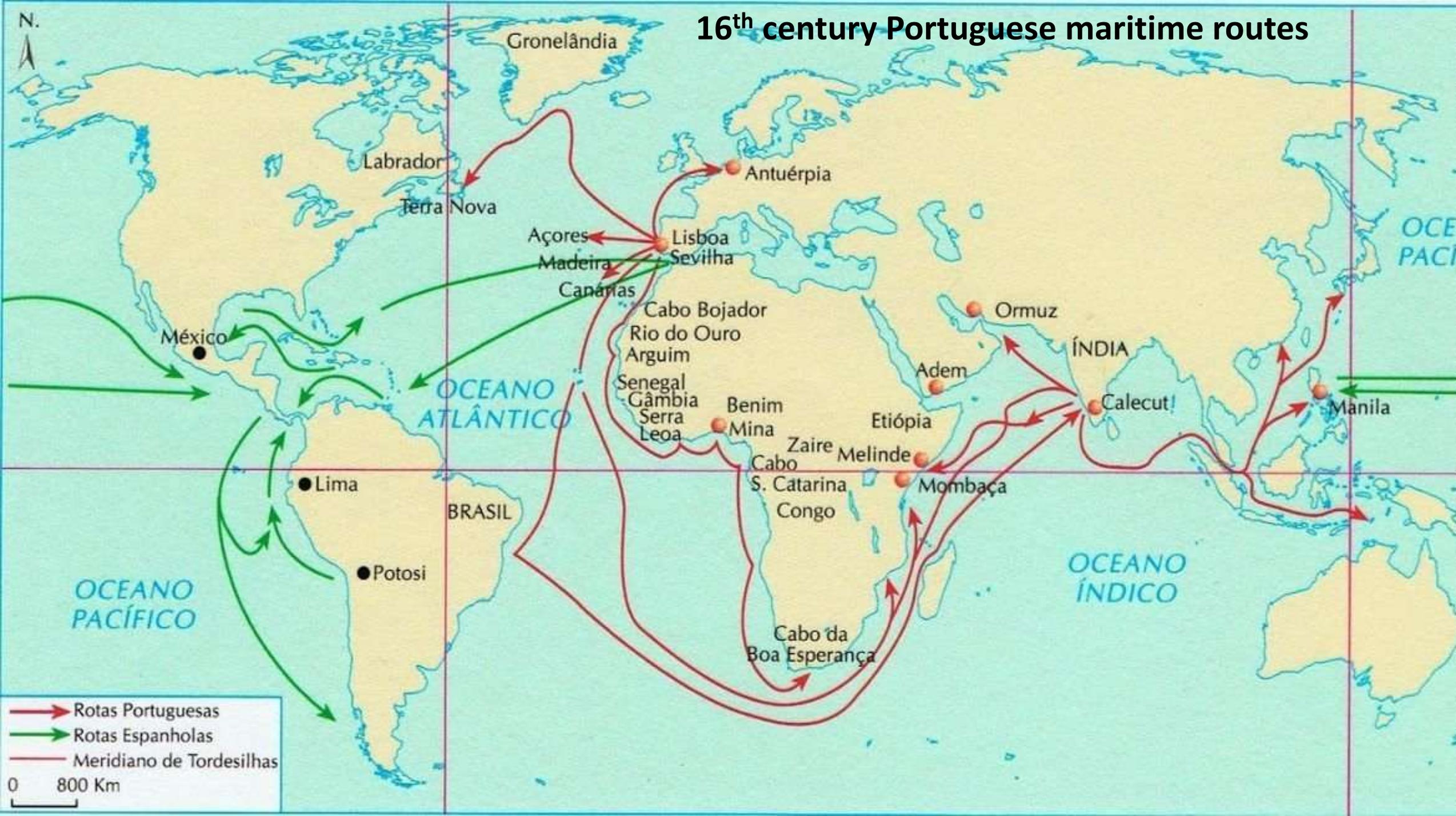
## Vasco de Gama

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

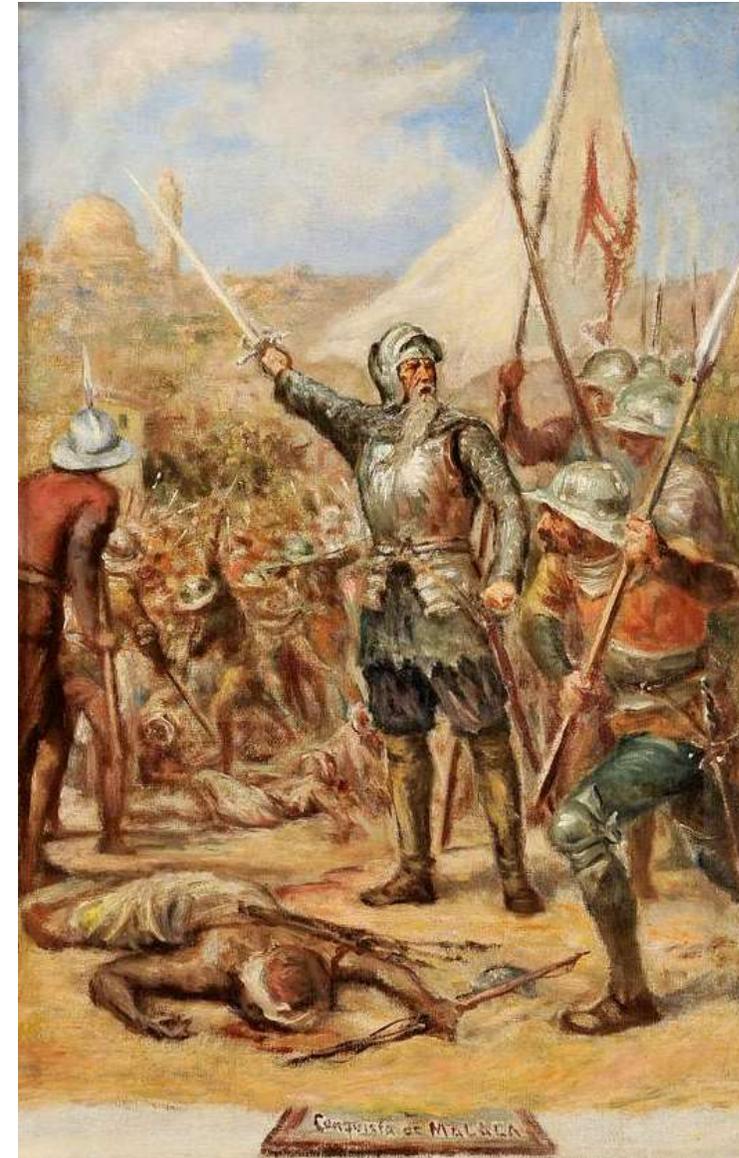
Outflanking the Muslim world

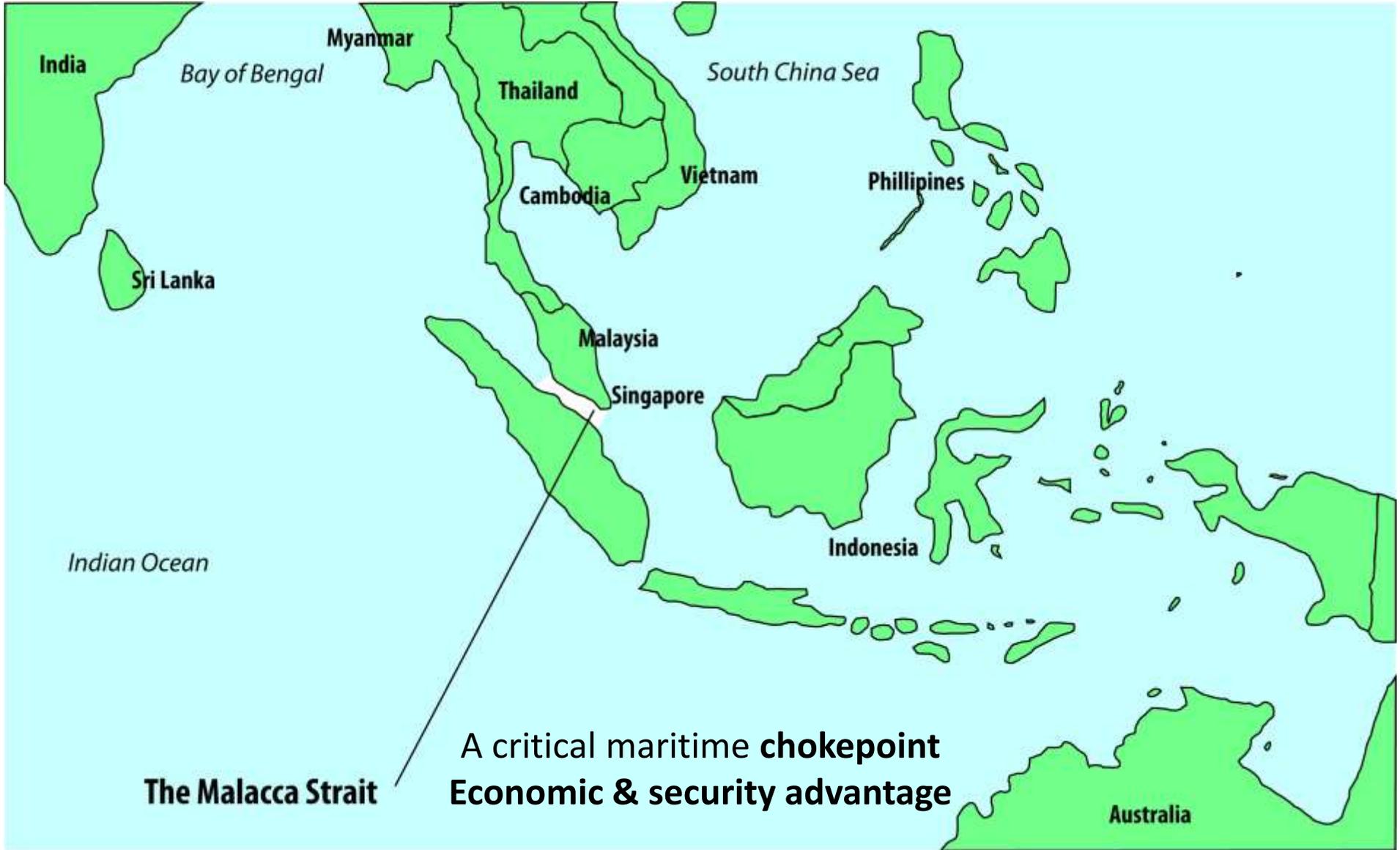
May 1498: Gama landed in Calicut (India)

# 16th century Portuguese maritime routes



## Alfonso de Albuquerque: the fall of Malacca (1511)





India

Bay of Bengal

Myanmar

Thailand

South China Sea

Cambodia

Vietnam

Philippines

Sri Lanka

Malaysia

Singapore

Indonesia

Indian Ocean

The Malacca Strait

A critical maritime chokepoint  
Economic & security advantage

Australia

# Strait of Malacca: a much coveted strategic chokepoint

## European imperial rivalries

**1641:** the Dutch took Malacca

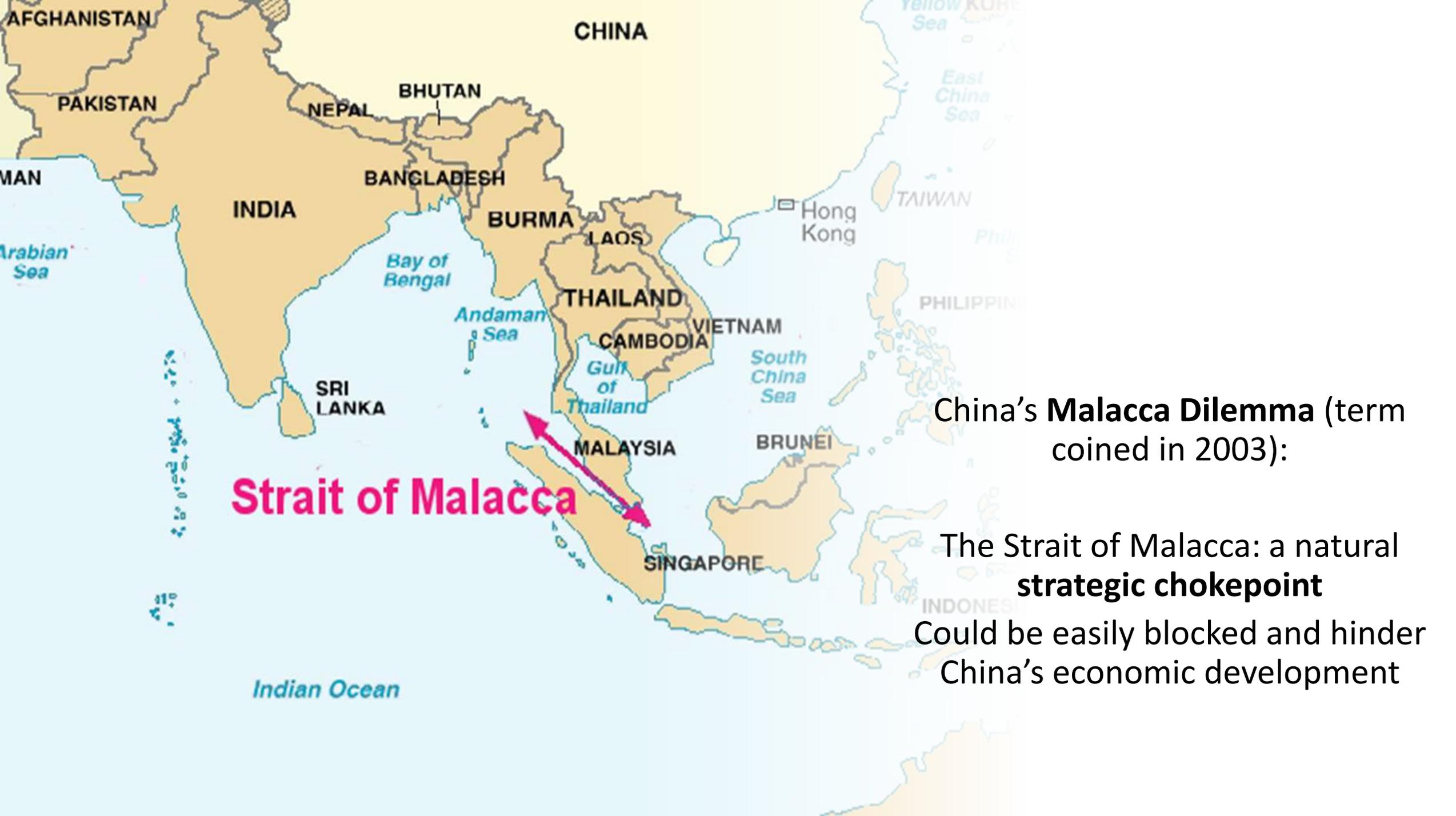
**1819:** the British seized Malacca and established a new military base at the strait's eastern end  
(**Singapore**)



## Japanese expansionism (December 1941-Early 1942)

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





**Strait of Malacca**

China's **Malacca Dilemma** (term coined in 2003):

The Strait of Malacca: a natural **strategic chokepoint**

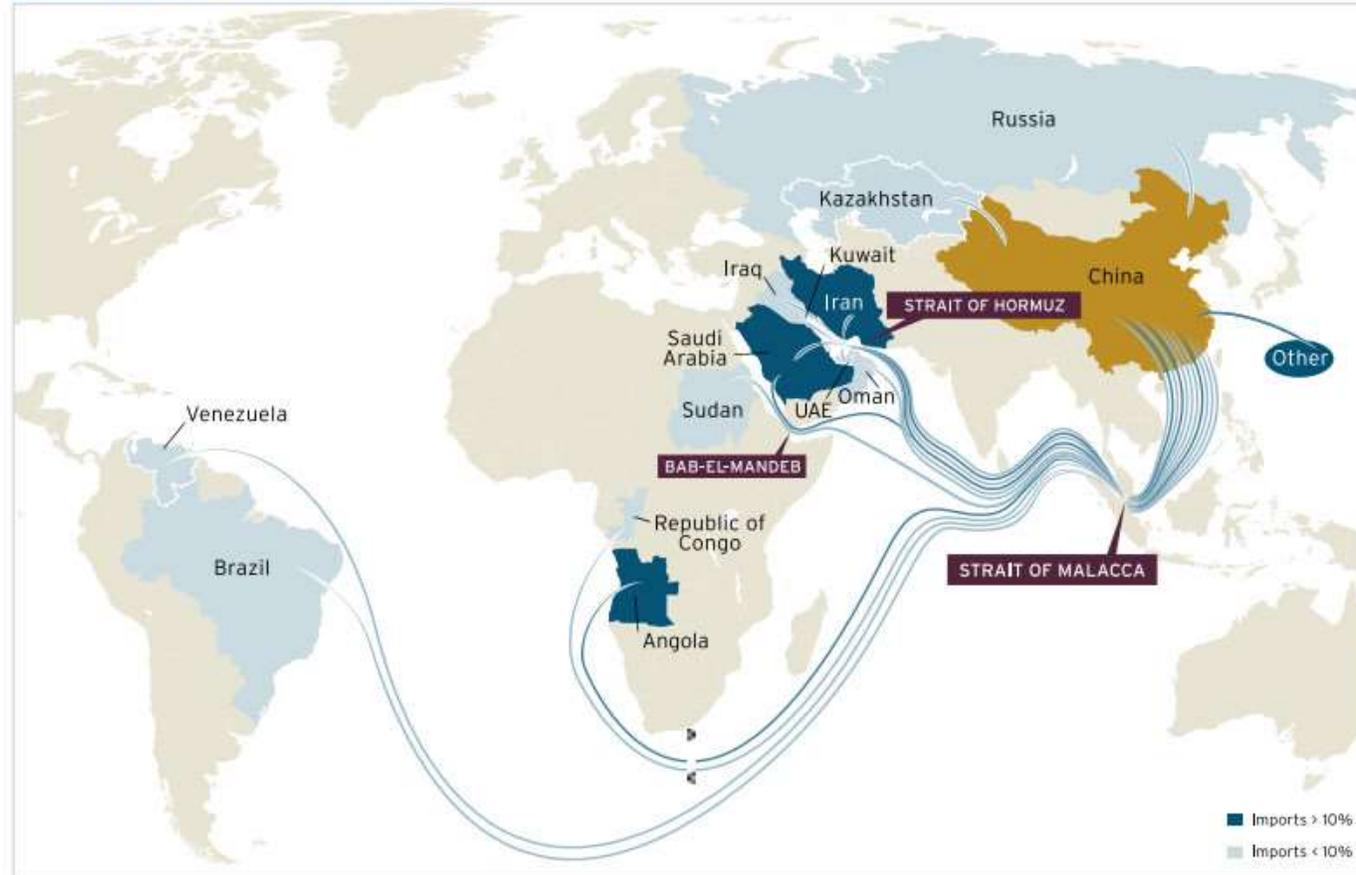
Could be easily blocked and hinder China's economic development

# Question

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**Could China not obtain oil from Russia?**

## China Import Countries, 2011



Country	Saudi Arabia	Angola	Iran	Russia	Oman	Iraq	Sudan	Venezuela	Kazakhstan	Kuwait	UAE	Brazil	Republic of Congo	Other
Percentage of Imports	19.8	12.3	10.9	7.8	7.2	5.4	5.1	4.5	4.4	3.8	2.7	2.6	2.2	11.3
Thousand Barrels	366,825	227,395	202,575	144,175	132,495	100,740	94,900	83,950	81,760	69,715	49,275	48,910	41,245	208,780

Created by Marcia Underwood of the Brookings Institution with data compiled from the U.S. Energy Information Agency's China Country Report 2012. <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=CH>.

## China's crude oil imports by source, 2019

thousand barrels per day

0  2000



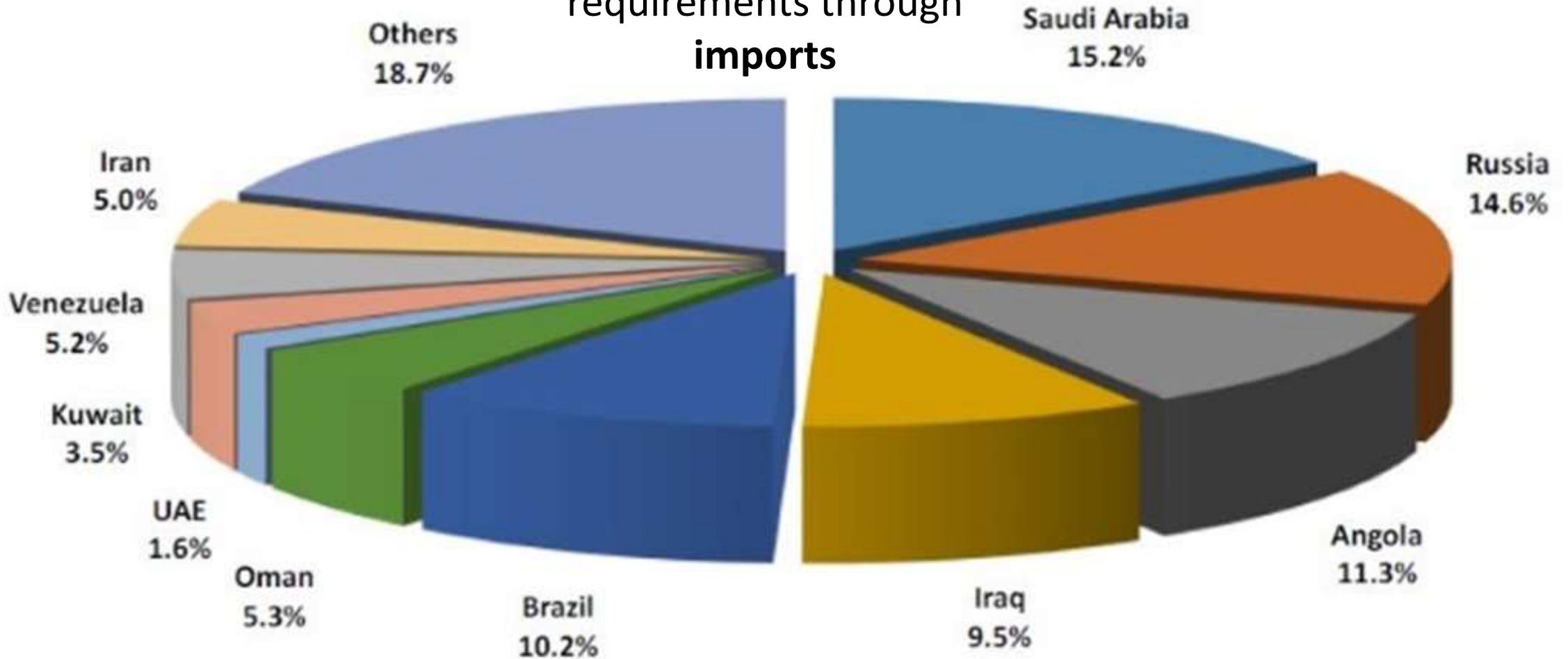
Source: [U.S. Energy Information Administration](#) • Chart: Michael Albanese

# 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

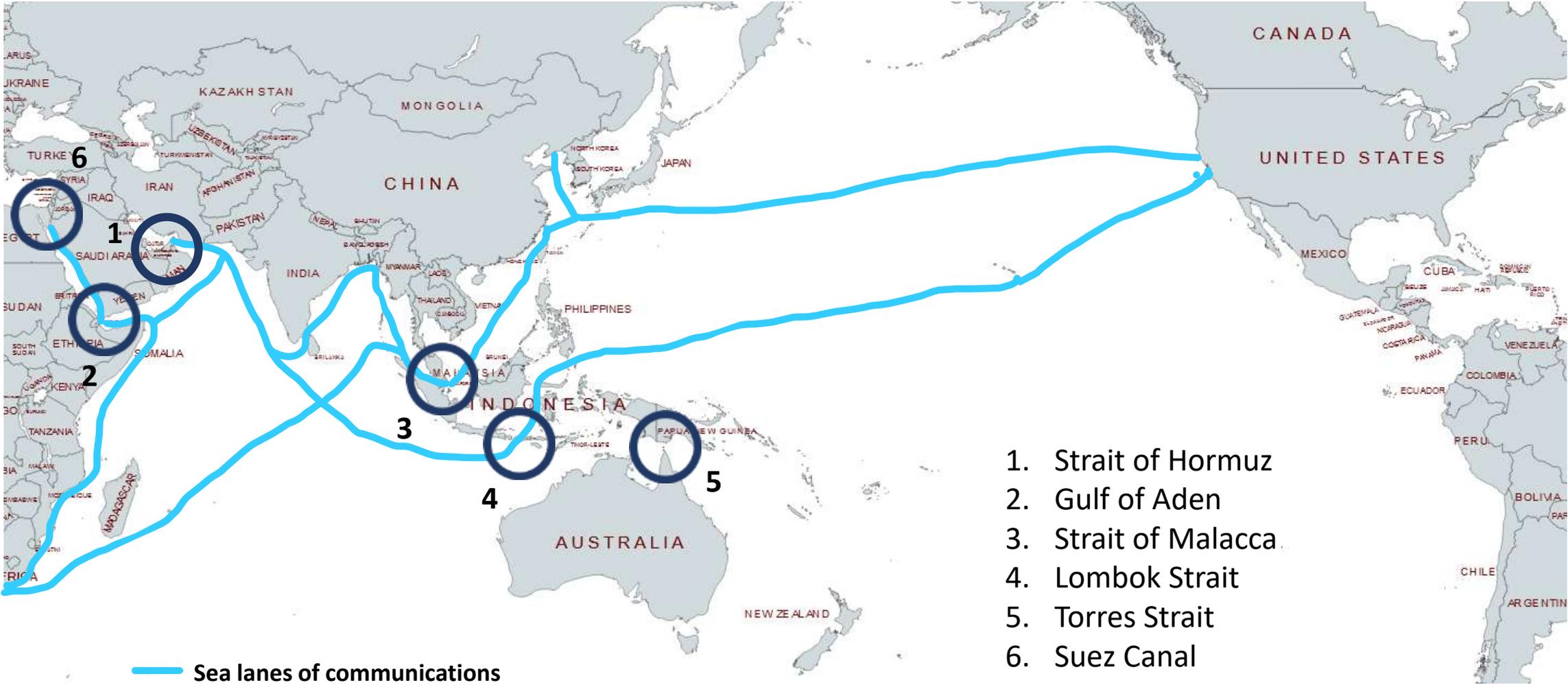


# Question

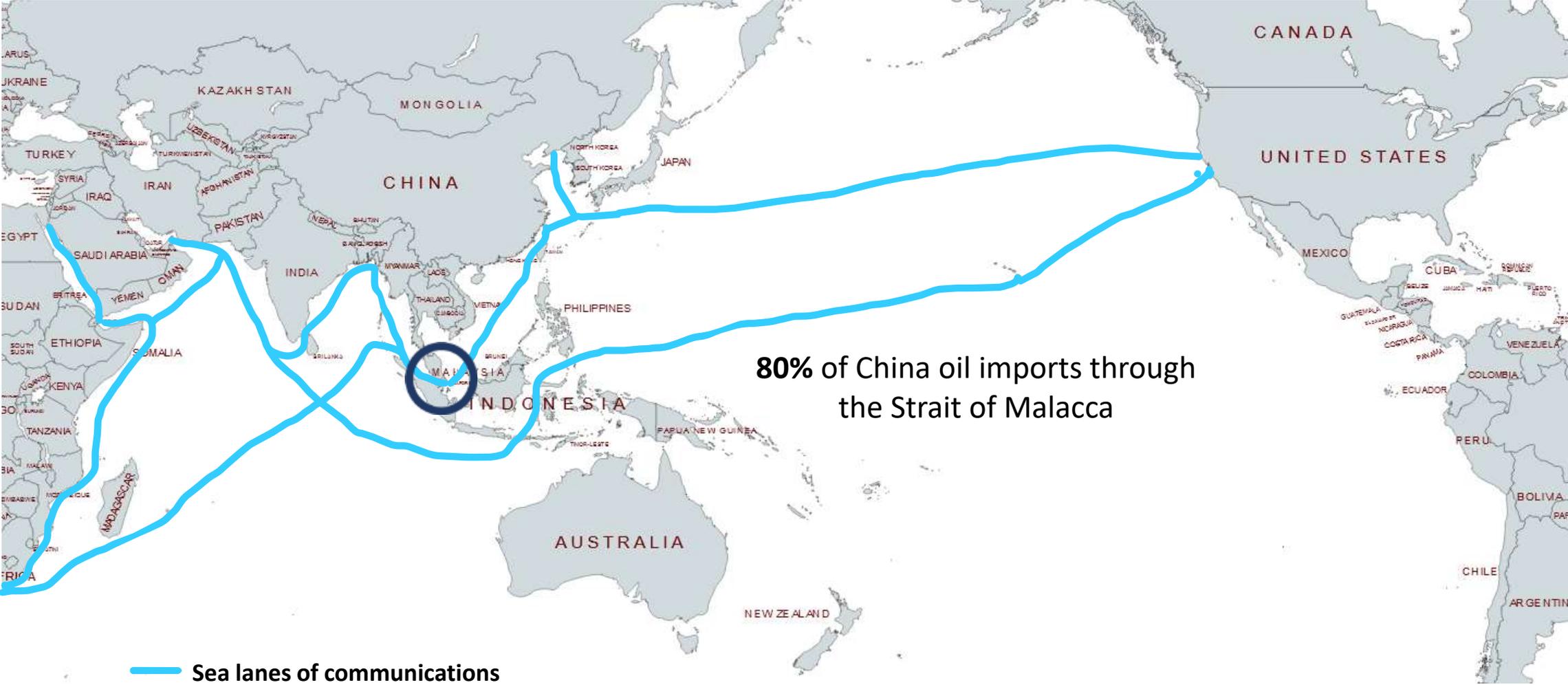
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**Aren't there alternative routes besides Malacca?**

# Geo-strategic stakes in the Indo-Pacific today...



# Geo-strategic stakes in the Indo-Pacific today...







SAUDI ARABIA

OMAN

RED SEA

Sanaa

YEMEN

ERITREA

Aden

ETHIOPIA

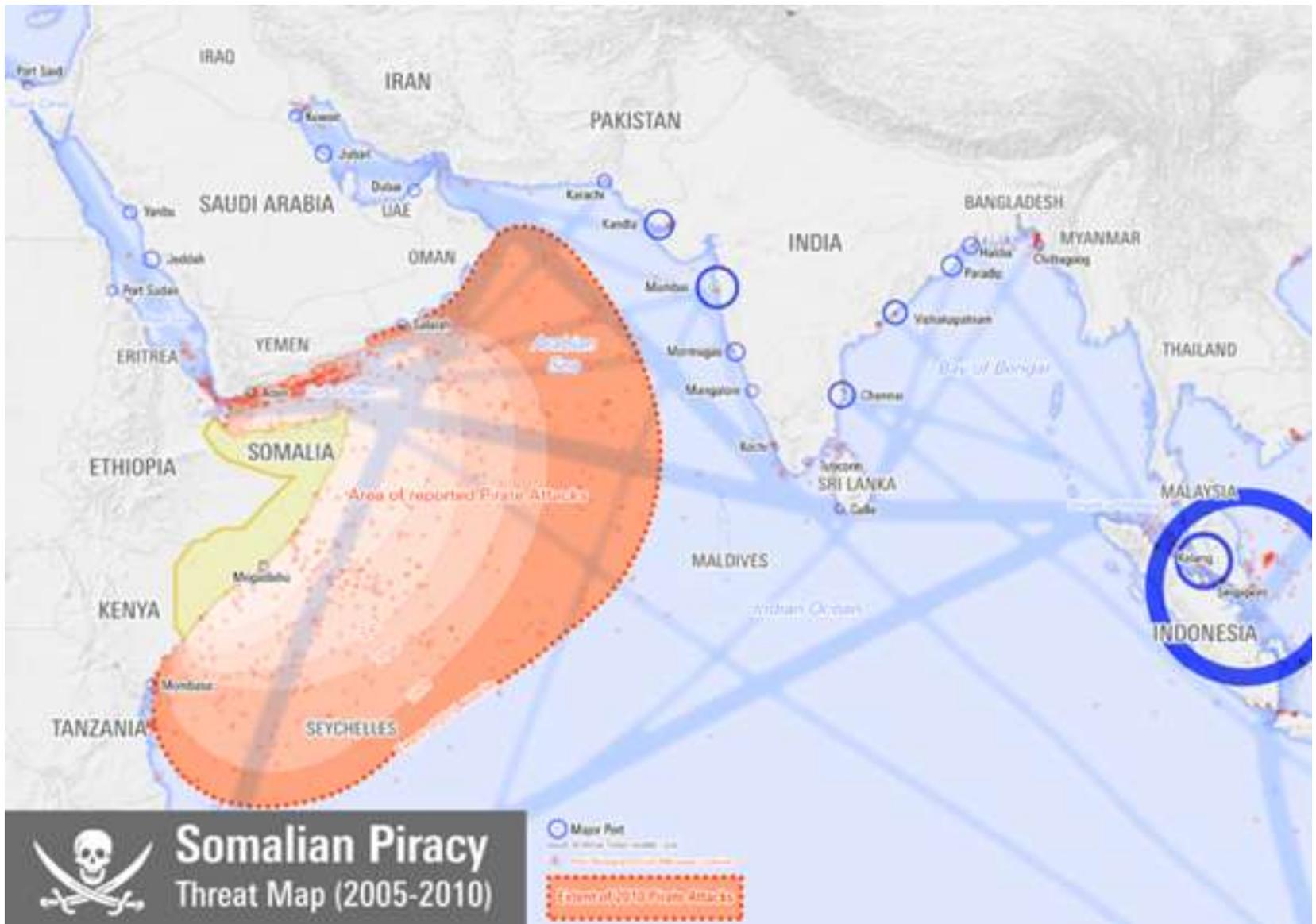
DJIBOUTI

GULF OF ADEN

SOMALIA

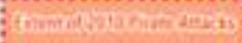
Civil war

Somali piracy: growing maritime insecurity



# Somalian Piracy

## Threat Map (2005-2010)

 Major Port  
 Area of Reported Pirate Attacks  
 1000 Kilometers

An aerial photograph of a naval fleet at sea. In the foreground, three large grey naval vessels are visible, moving from left to right. In the background, another similar vessel is visible, along with a smaller boat. The water is a deep blue with white wakes from the ships.

## An international response

**UN Security Council** calling all capable states to defeat Somali piracy “*by deploying naval vessels and military aircraft*”

### Three joint naval operations

- NATO
- The EU
- The U.S.

**China & Russia’s participation**

**14 November 2008**

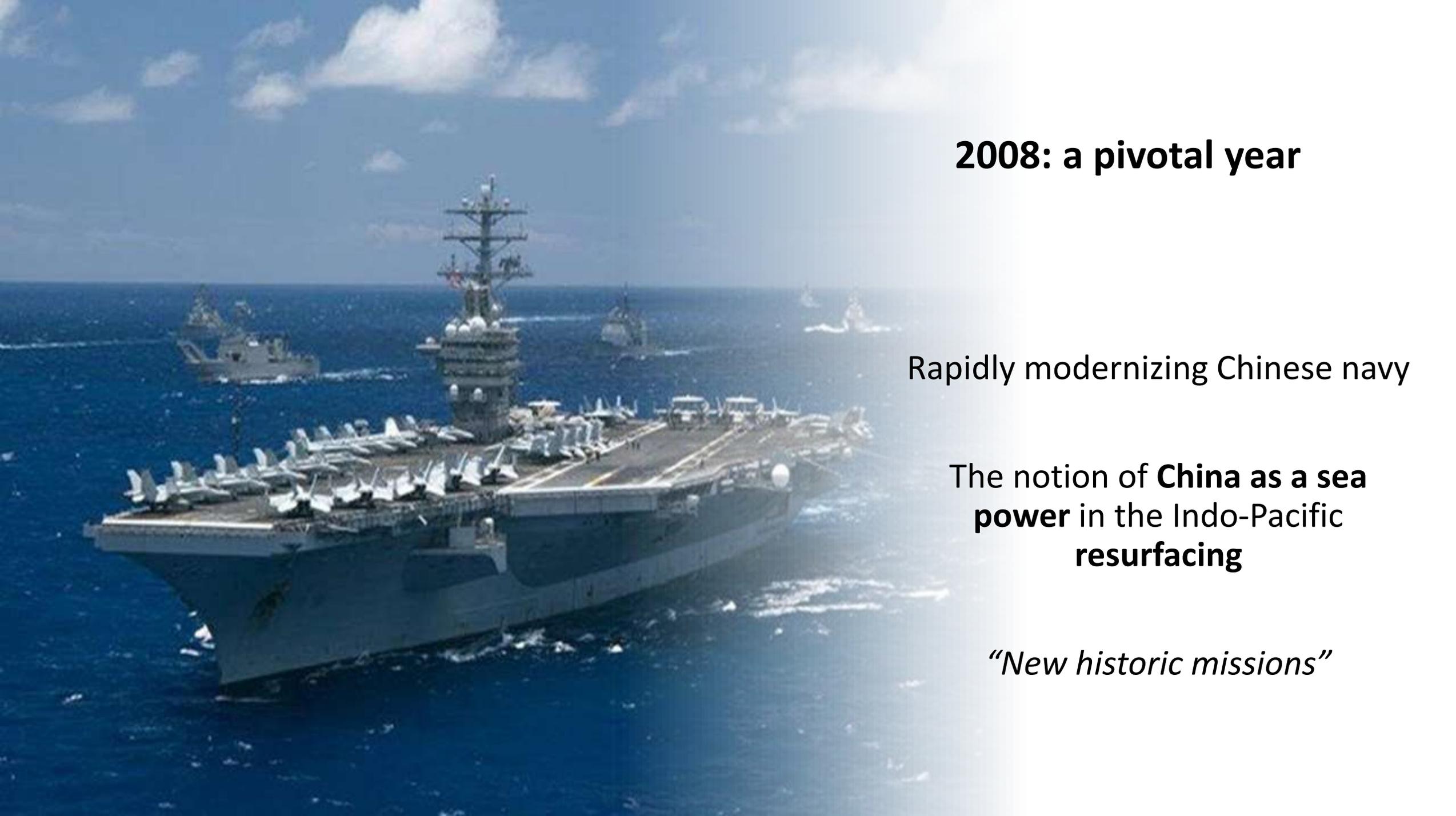
The hijacking of Chinese long-range fishing vessel *Tianyu 8*

A national humiliation

Somali piracy disrupting energy transport & trade (key to China's economic development)

China's first Indian Ocean naval intervention in centuries



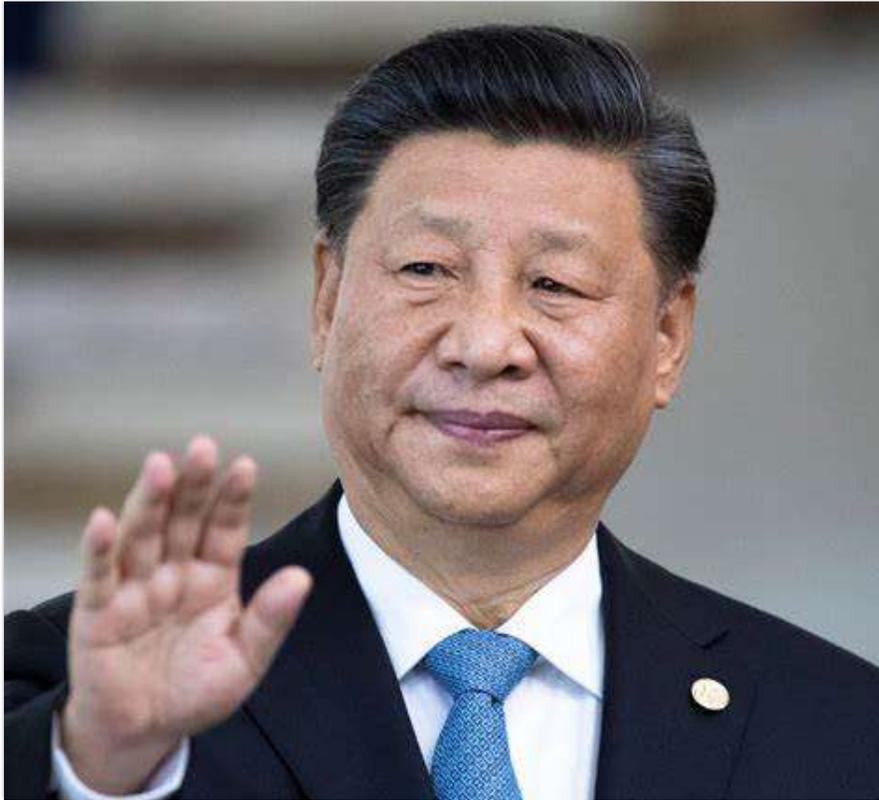


## 2008: a pivotal year

Rapidly modernizing Chinese navy

The notion of **China as a sea power** in the Indo-Pacific  
**resurfacing**

*“New historic missions”*



**2012:** *“The great renewal of the Chinese nation”*

*“The construction of a prosperous country and of a **powerful army**”*  
(Xi Jinping)

From collaboration to  
**confrontation**



## **Accelerated** modernization of China's navy

**To safeguard** China's broader  
interests (economic development):  
**securing sea lanes**

**To dispute** the U.S. military  
supremacy in Asia (Taiwan & South  
China Sea)

**To prevent** the U.S. from intervening  
in the region

Tensions in the South China Sea & the East China Sea





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## Japan-China confrontation

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

Proximity to key shipping lanes & fishing grounds



# Disputes over the South China Sea





**A semi-enclosed sea**

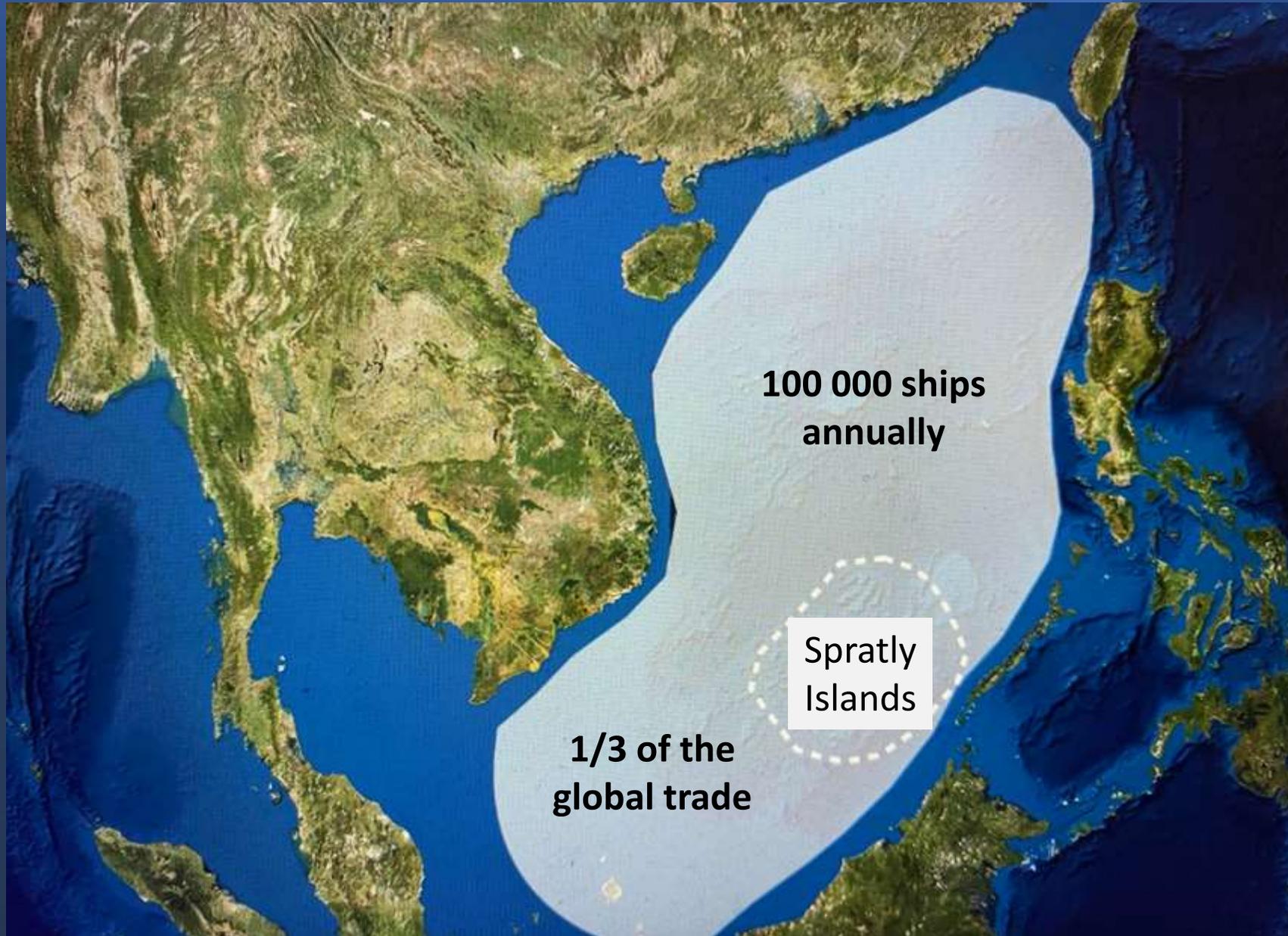
**South China Sea**

**MALAYSIA**  
**INDONESIA**



**27% of the world  
economy (2018)**

**Spratly  
Islands**



**100 000 ships  
annually**

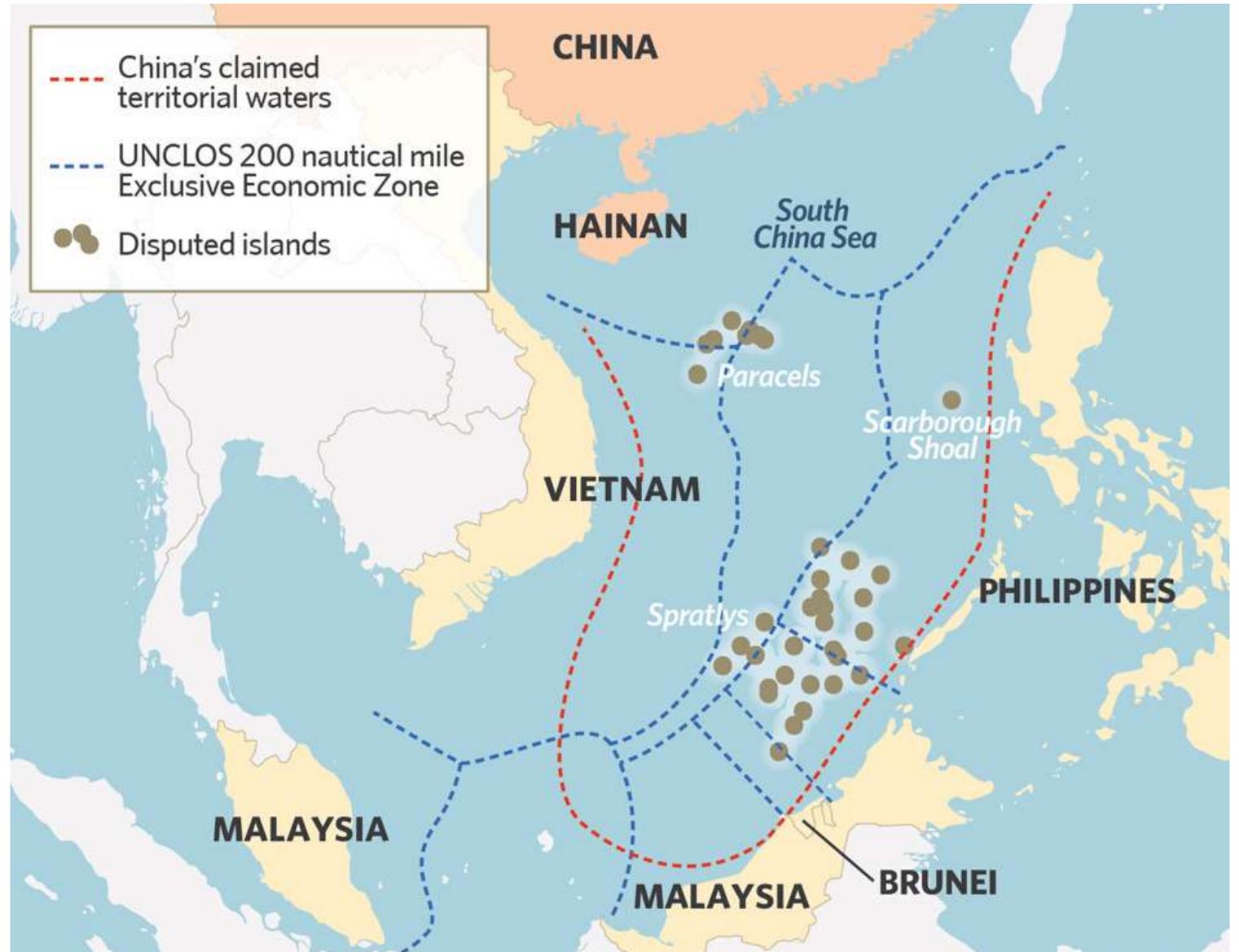
**Spratly  
Islands**

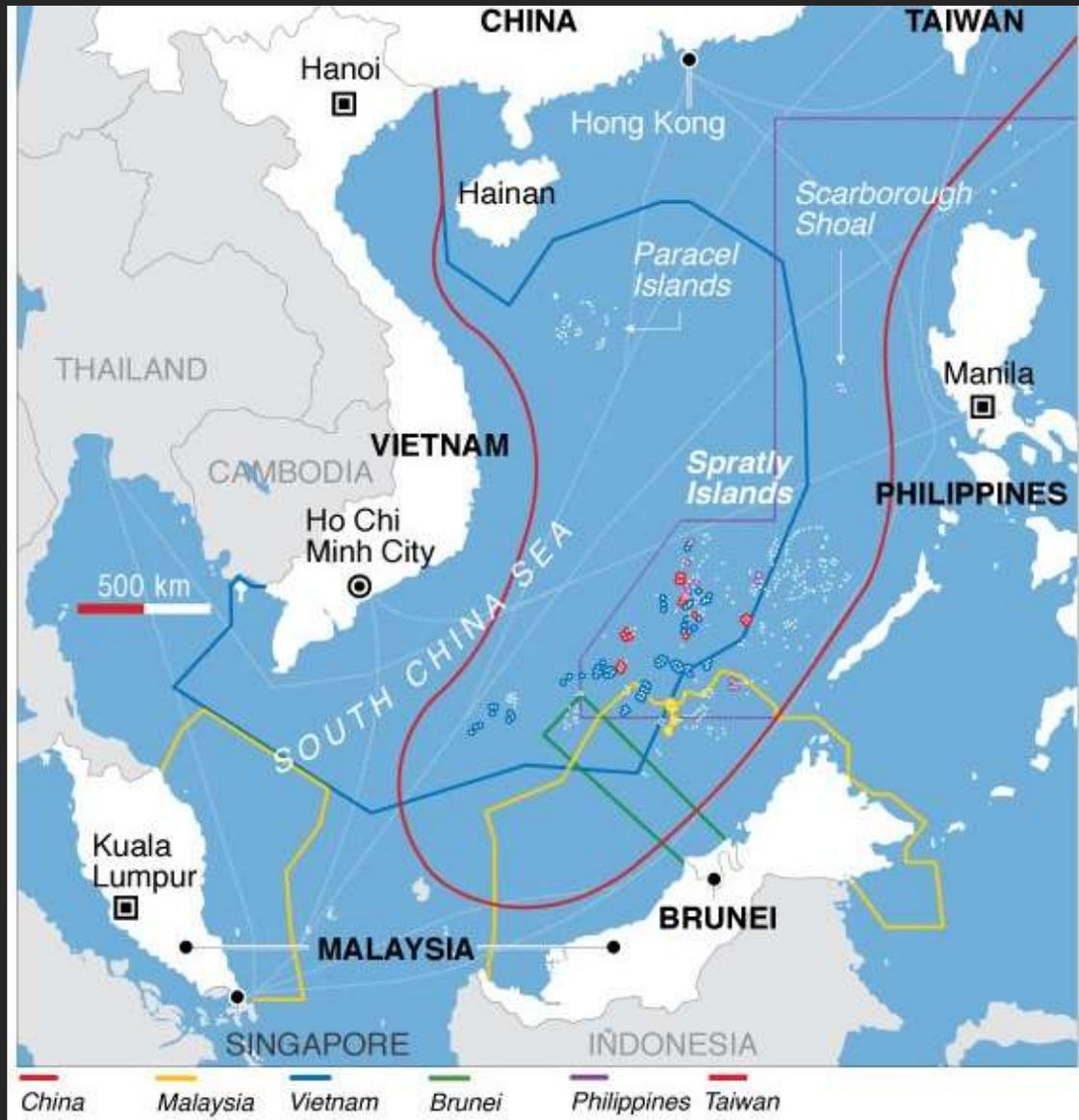
**1/3 of the  
global trade**

## China's "historical rights"

The claim: China discovered the islands centuries ago

1947: the Nine Dash Line







China's "historical rights"

2013: a Tenth line added to include Taiwan

China's "Nine-Dash Line"

Claimed by the Philippines

Thailand-Malaysia boundary

South China Sea

PHILIPPINES

Claimed by Malaysia

MALAYSIA

Claimed by Brunei

Claimed by Malaysia

Claimed by Indonesia

INDONESIA

INDONESIA

Indian Ocean

CHINA

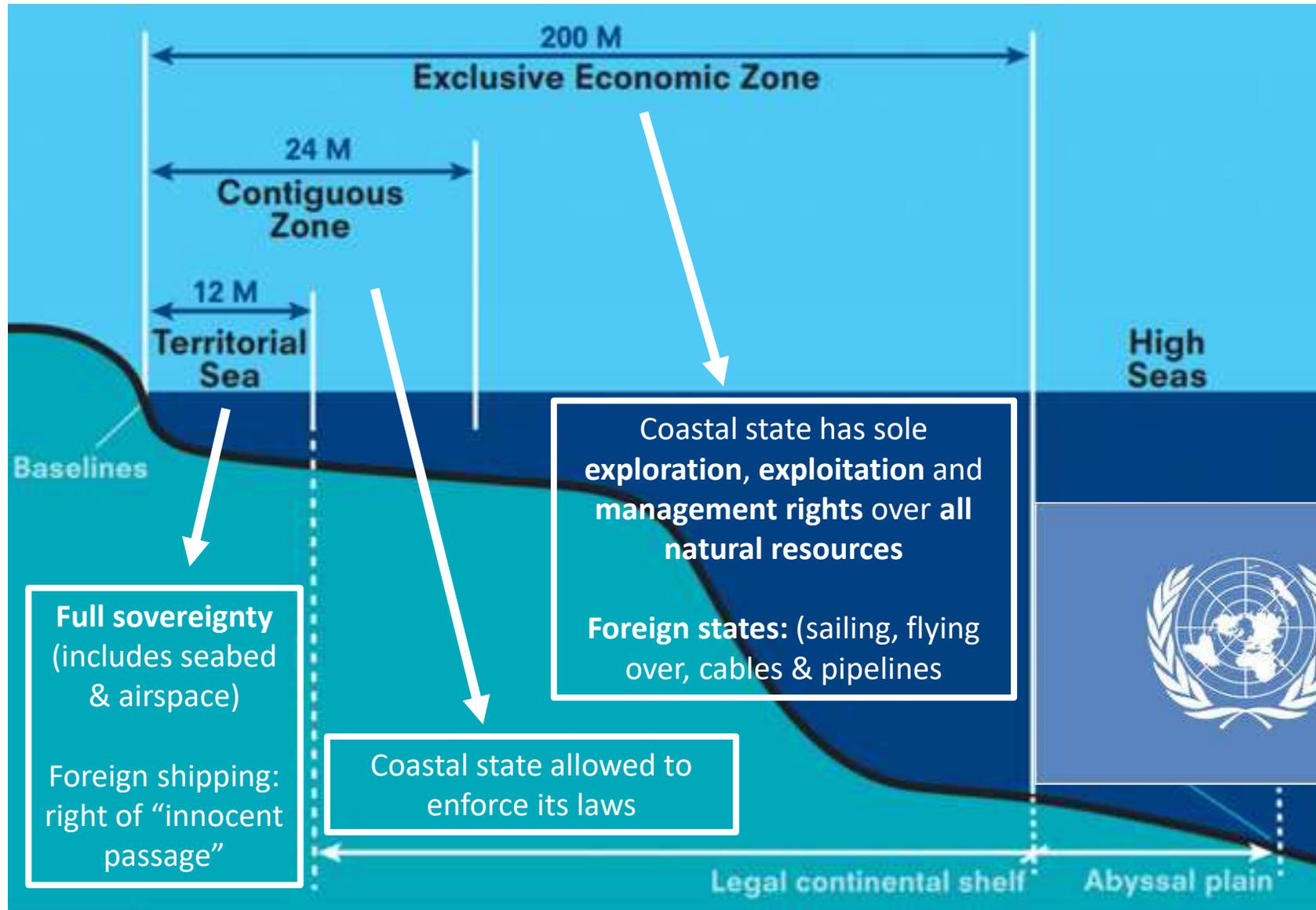
Pacific Ocean

Pacific Ocean

# The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

**International agreement**  
establishing the **legal framework**  
for all marine and maritime  
activities





**Full sovereignty**  
(includes seabed & airspace)

Foreign shipping:  
right of "innocent passage"

Coastal state allowed to enforce its laws

Coastal state has sole exploration, exploitation and management rights over all natural resources

Foreign states: (sailing, flying over, cables & pipelines)



ECUADOR  
Maritime Claims

- Internal Waters (claimed)
- Territorial Waters (claimed)
- Exclusive Economic Zones
- Maritime Boundaries



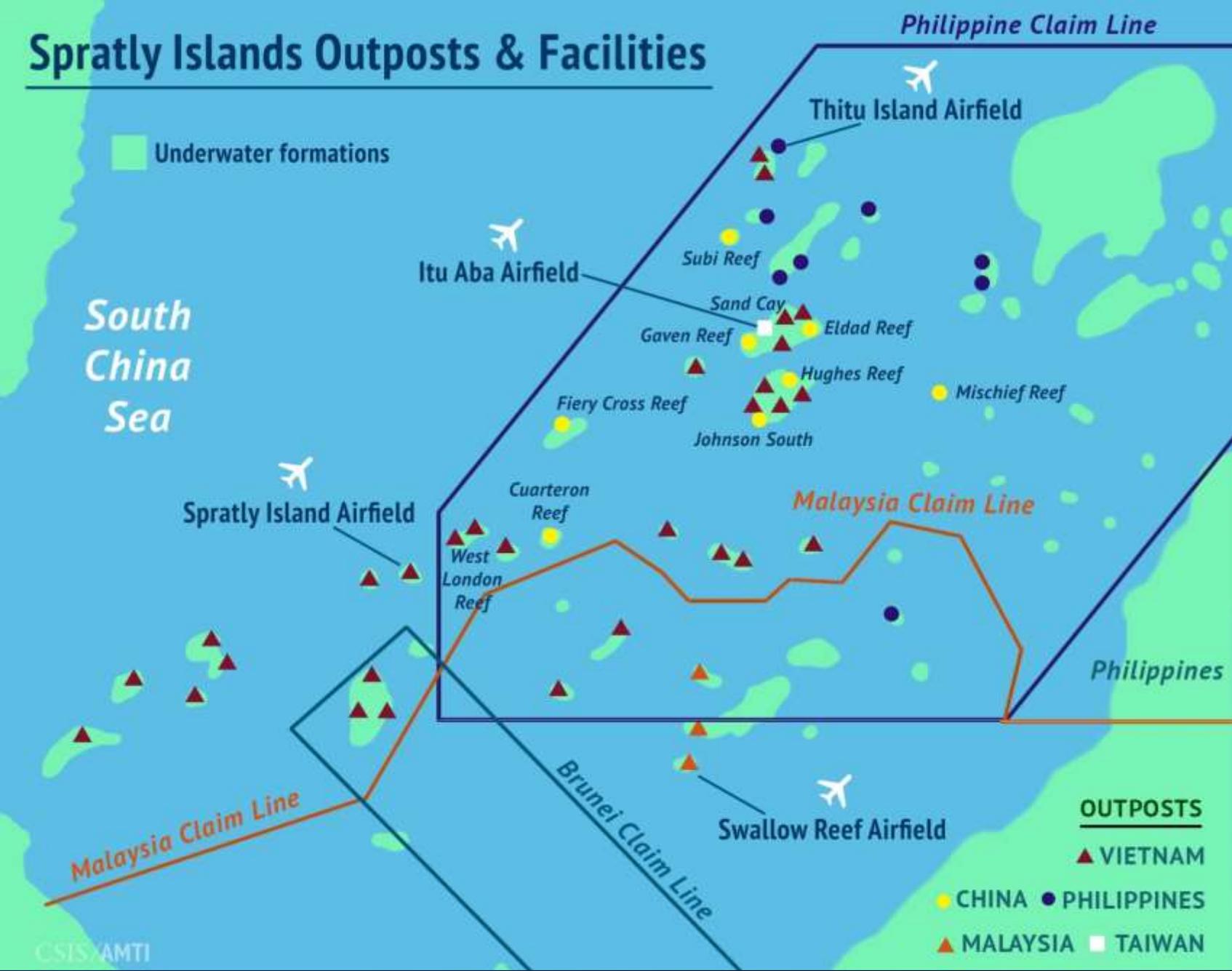
Fiery Cross Reef



Building infrastructure on disputed islands



# Spratly Islands Outposts & Facilities



Building infrastructure:  
a common practice

Tensions

## The 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff

The unofficial interventions of Chinese coast guards and their paramilitary militia (the “little blue men”)

Fishing boats manned by civilian sailors trained militarily





China's objective

To support the official message of military "restraint"

Chinese navy rarely intervenes

If escalation: the other side accused of overreacting!

# Spratly Islands Outposts & Facilities



The “*salami tactic*”

To advance one small step at a time

Small steps to avoid reactions from opponents

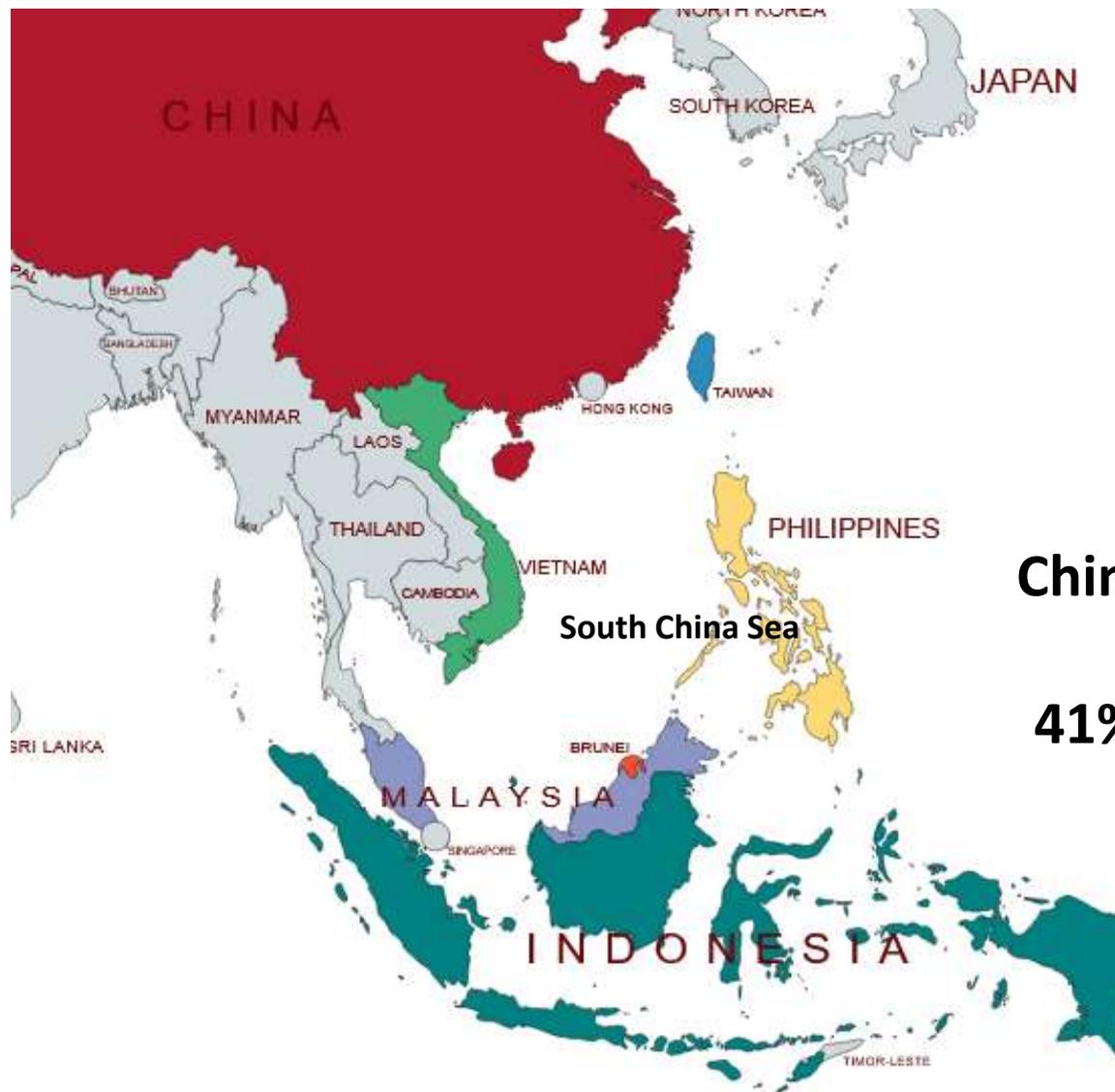
Addition of small steps to reach the objective

The objective is reached: too late for the opponents to react



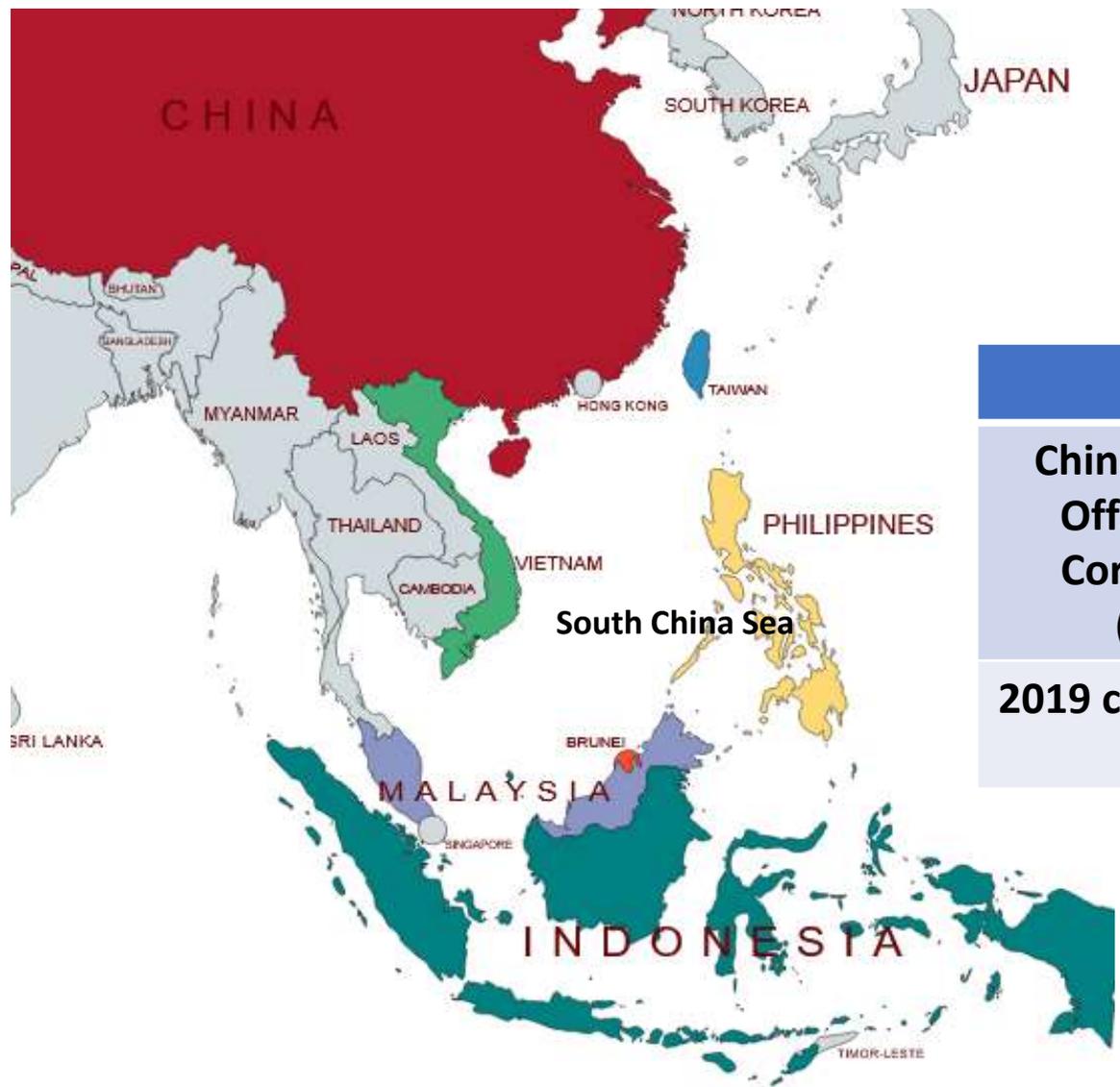
Why is China so interested in controlling the South China Sea?

## 1. Economic considerations



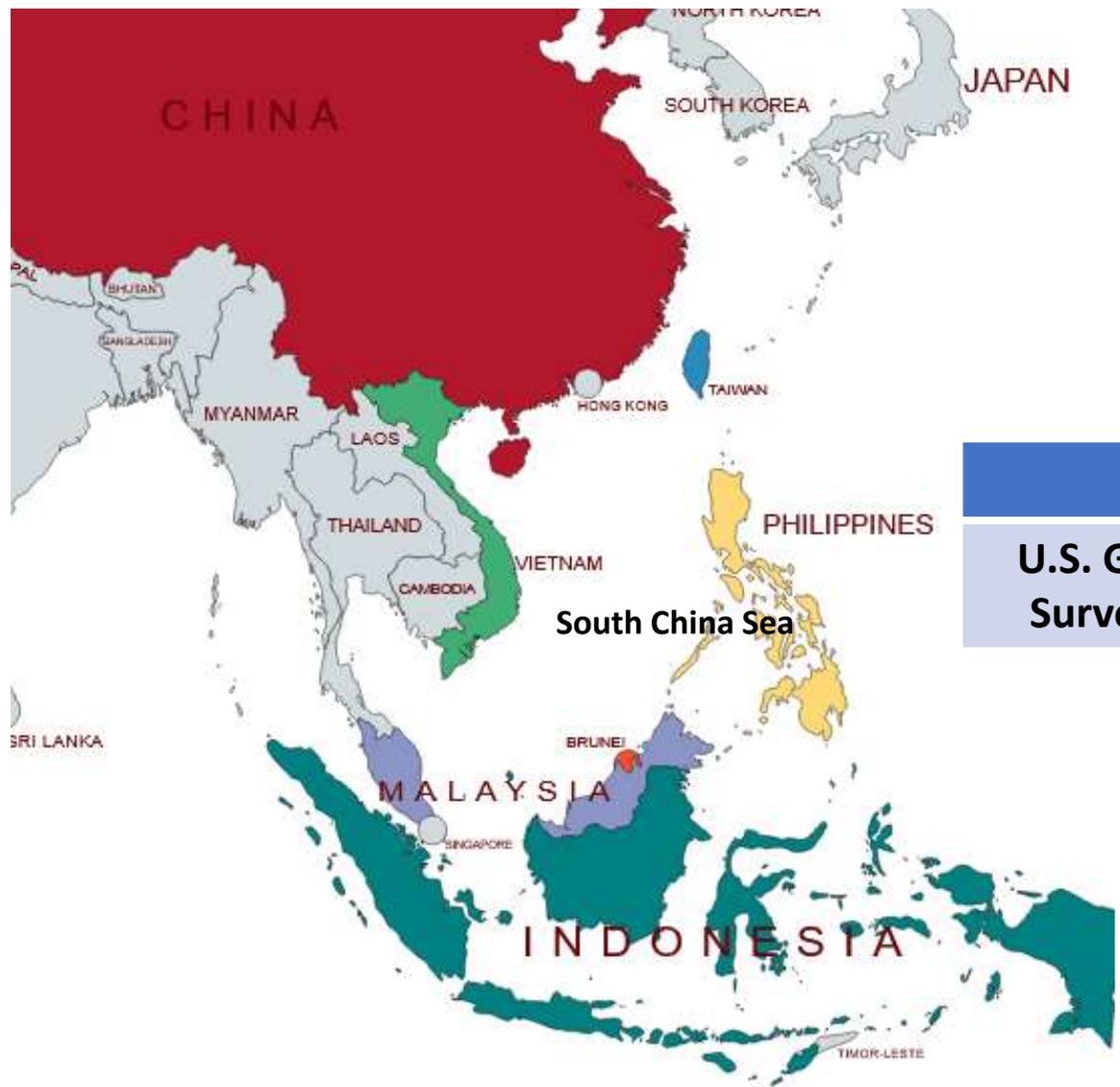
## Fishing

**China:** 28 million tons of fish consumed on a yearly basis  
**41% of total fishing activities in the region**



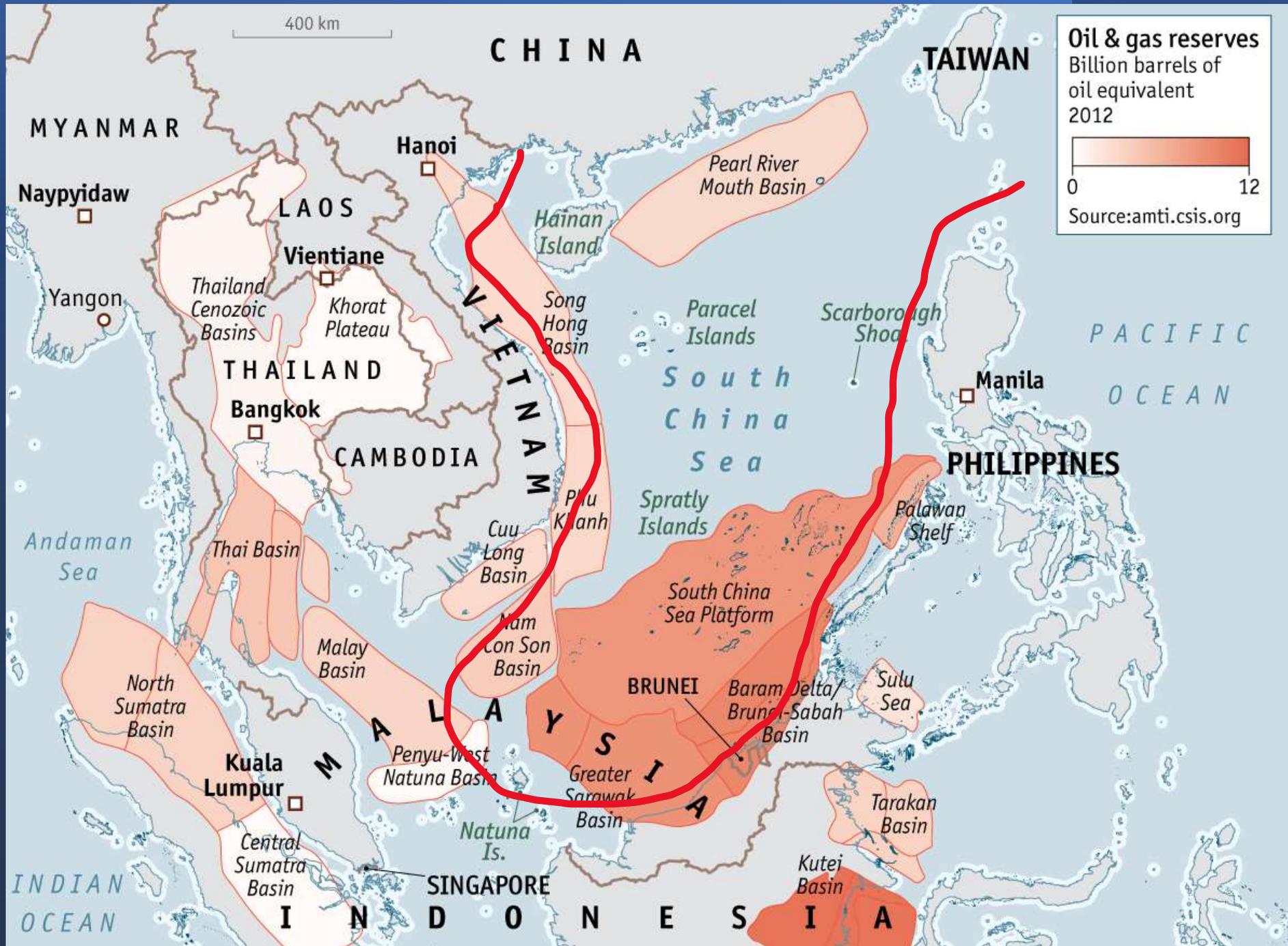
## Oil

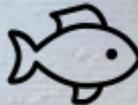
	Oil (projections)	Gas (Projections)
<b>China National Offshore Oil Corporation (2012)</b>	125 billion barrels	500 Trillion Cubic Feet (TCF)
<b>2019 consumption</b>	5 million barrels <b>25 years</b>	11 TCF <b>45 years</b>



## Oil

	Oil (projections)	Gas (Projections)
<b>U.S. Geological Survey (2010)</b>	5-22 billion barrels	70-290 Trillion Cubic Feet (TCF)





**Zone economically &  
geopolitically  
strategic**

**Spratly  
Islands**

**Major shipping  
lanes (vital to  
China's  
economy)**

## Major crude oil trade flows in the South China Sea (2016)

total 15.0 million barrels per day



## SECURING THE OIL SUPPLY CHAIN



2/3 of global oil and  
50% of container  
traffic transit **via the  
Indian Ocean**



75-80% of China's exports pass through the **Strait of Malacca**

Remember China's **Malacca Dilemma?**

The Strait of Malacca: a natural **strategic chokepoint**  
Could be easily blocked

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

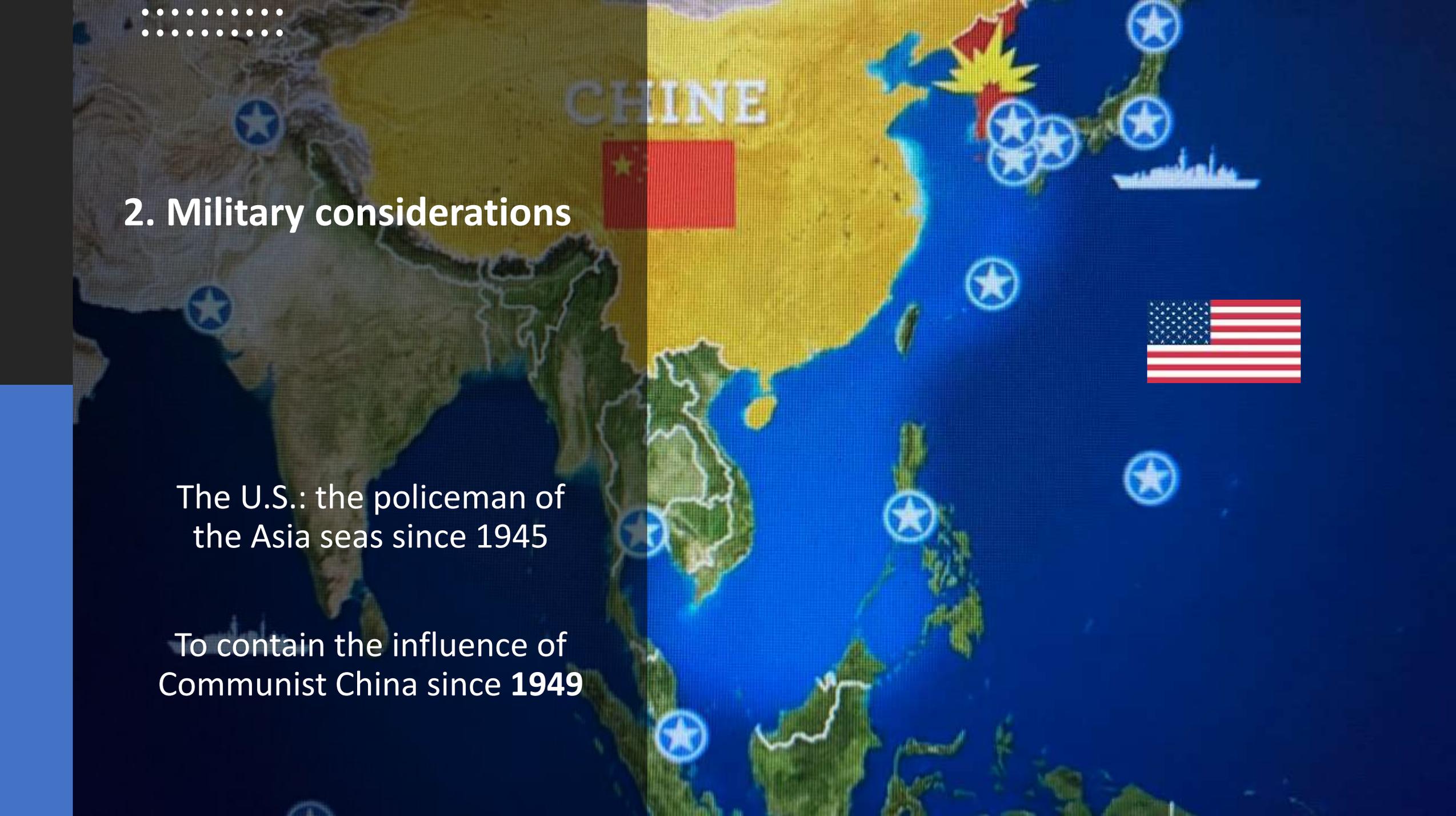
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## 2. Military considerations

The U.S.: the policeman of the Asia seas since 1945

To contain the influence of Communist China since **1949**

CHINE

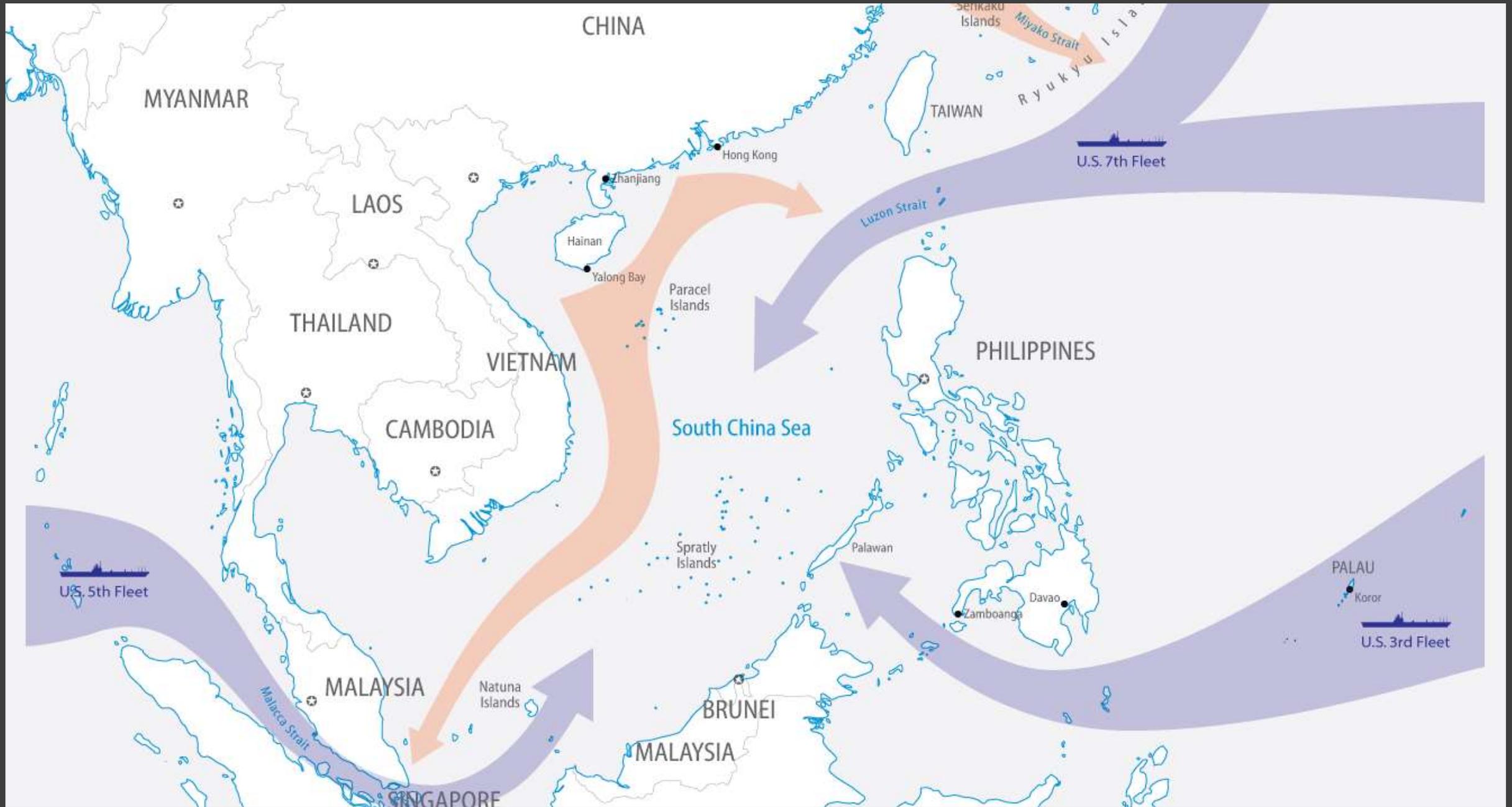


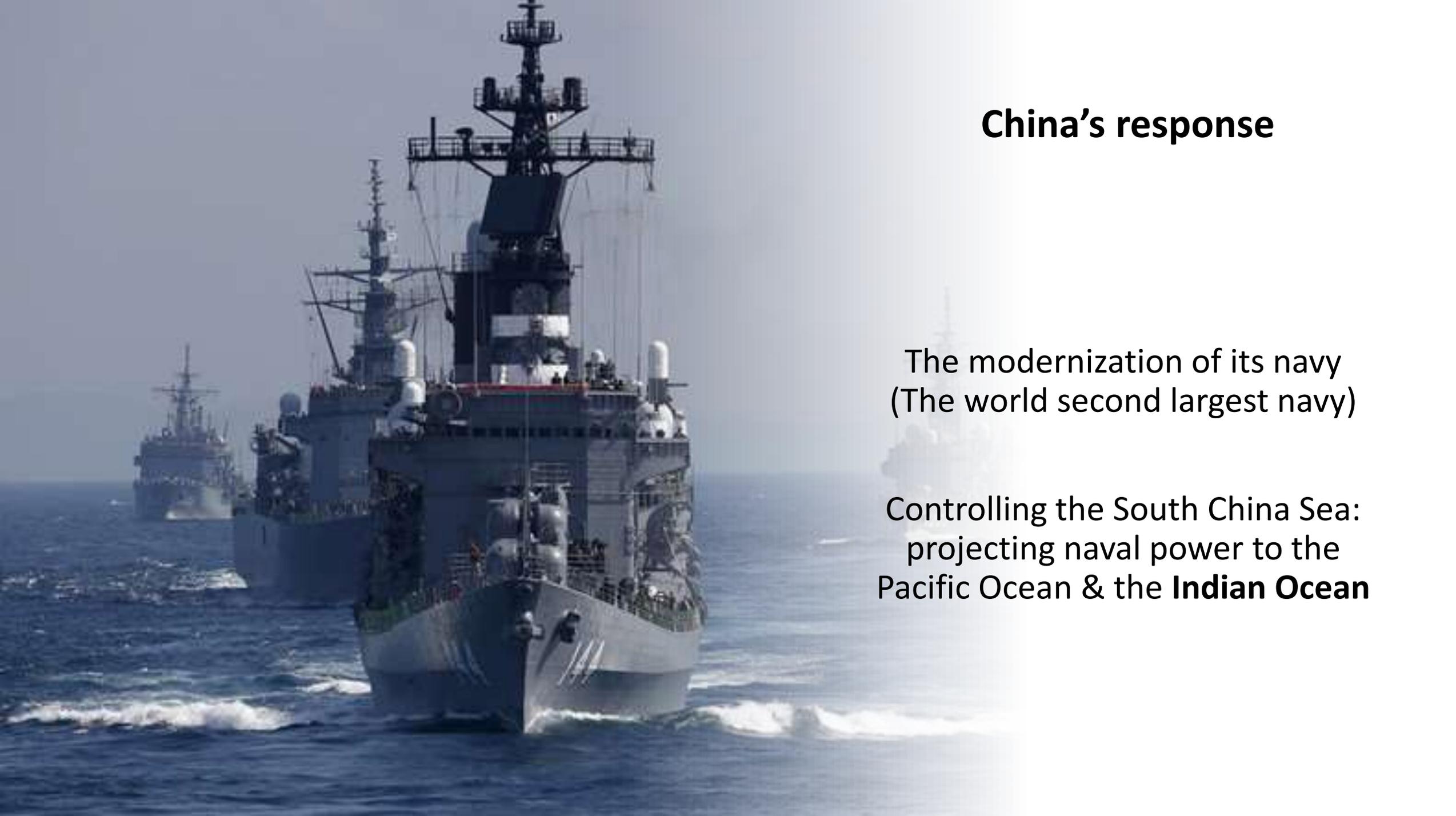
U.S. strategy of encirclement

A network of military bases  
**Strategic alliances** (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, The Philippines, Australia...)

CHINE



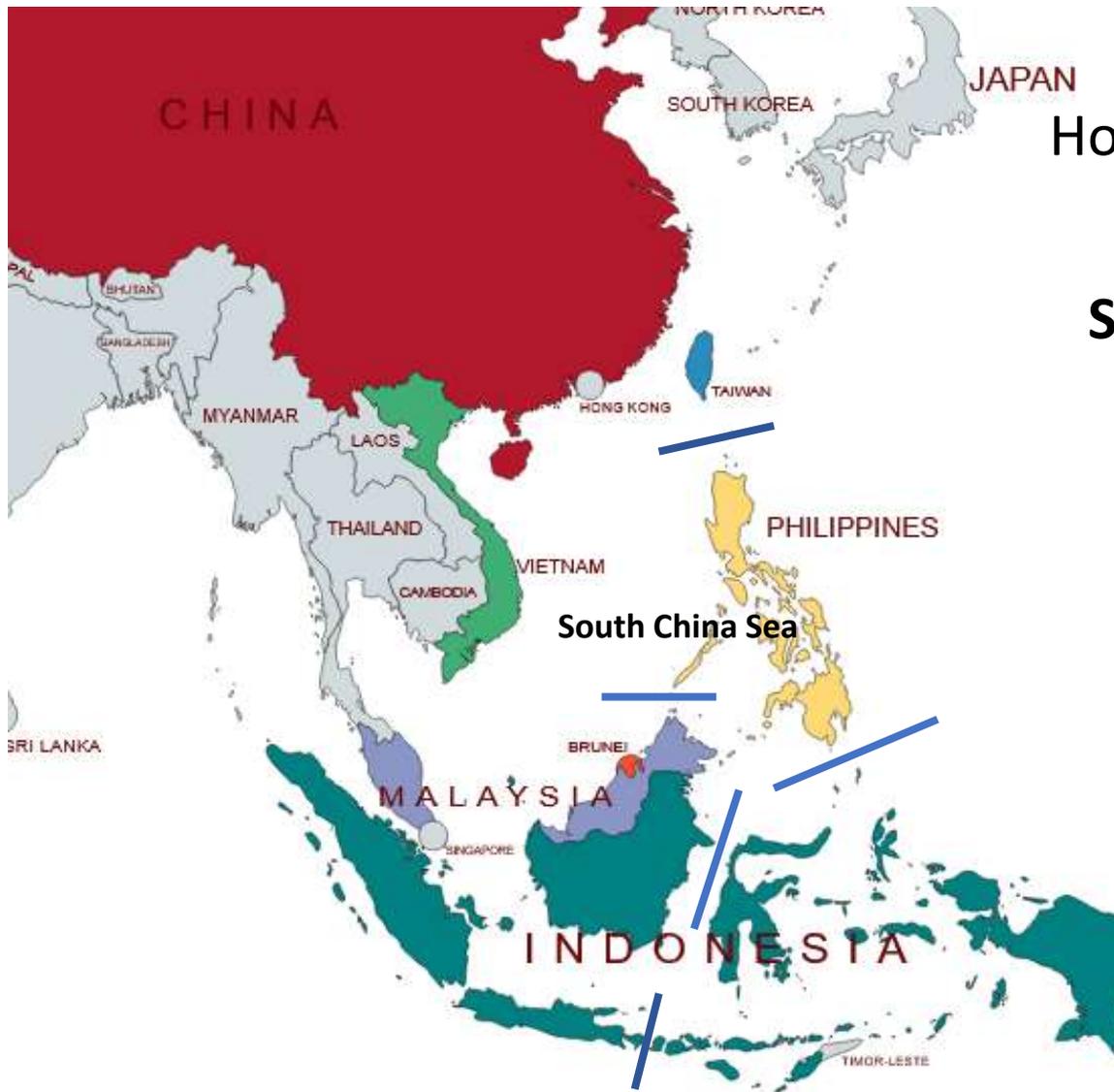




## China's response

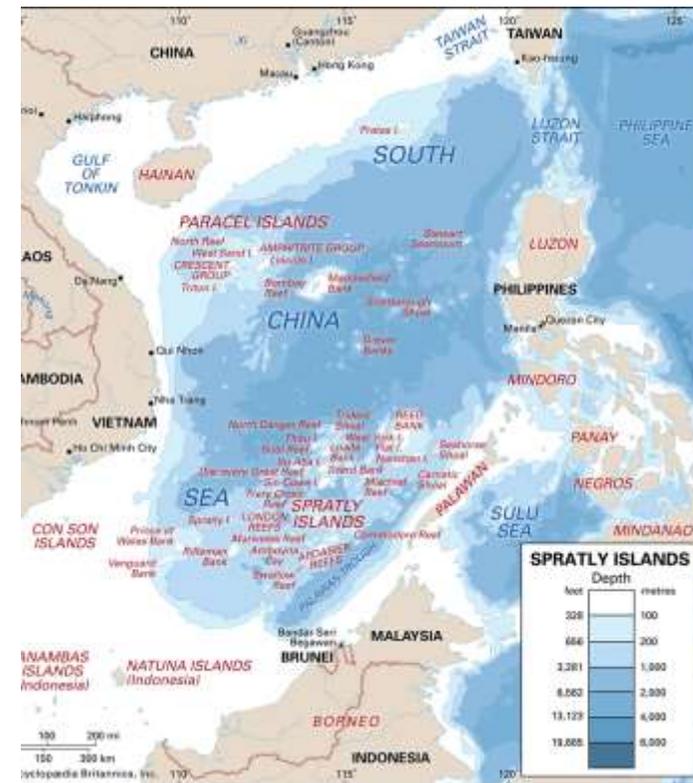
The modernization of its navy  
(The world second largest navy)

Controlling the South China Sea:  
projecting naval power to the  
Pacific Ocean & the **Indian Ocean**



How to safely reach the Pacific & the Indian Oceans (fleet & nuclear submarines?)

**South of South China Sea: shallow waters**



# Surveillance of potential adversaries in the region

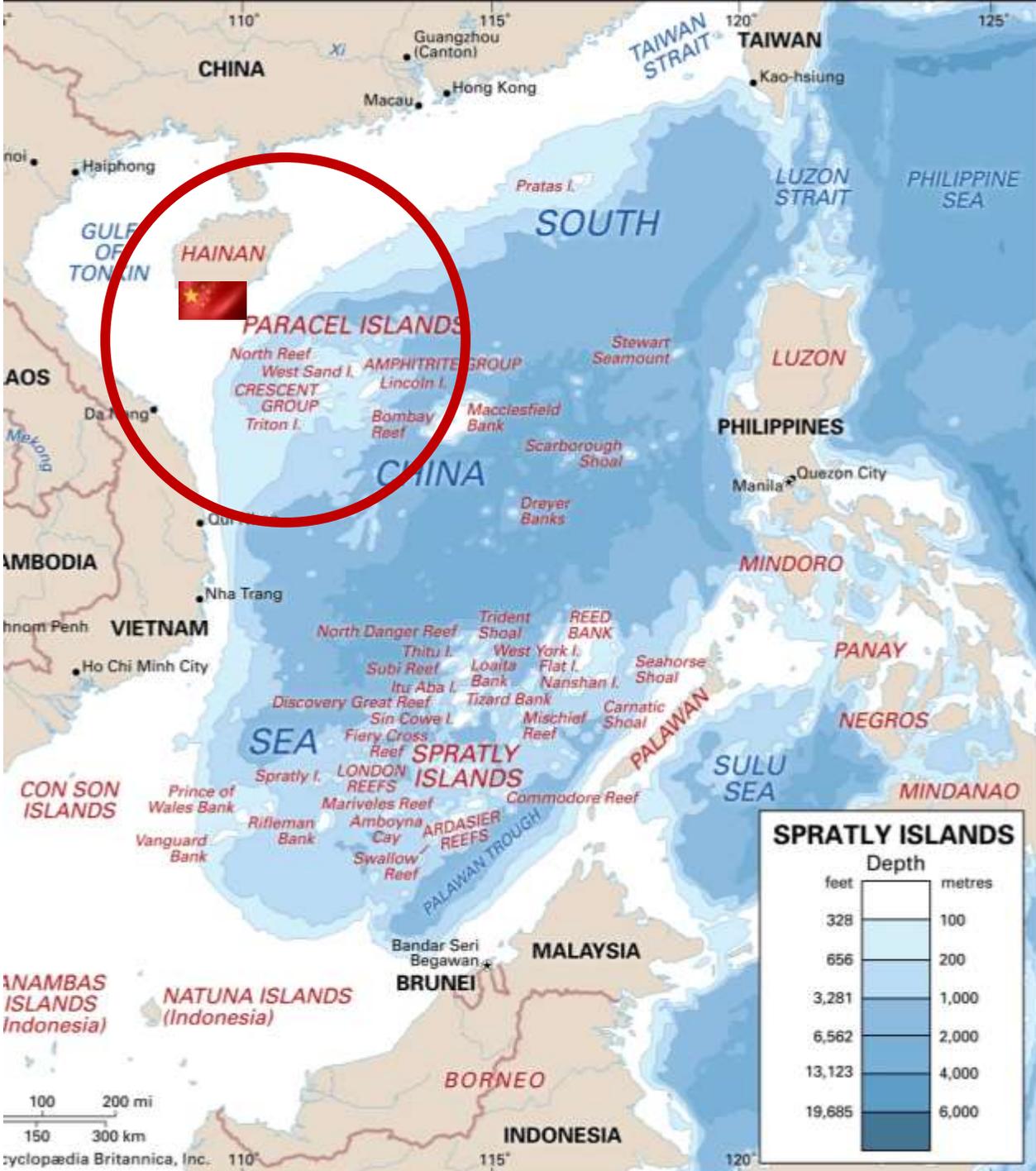
Zone of Spratly Islands: **not easily navigable** (multiple reefs & shallow waters)

Controlling the few navigable lanes & the islands close by (Fiery Cross Reef)



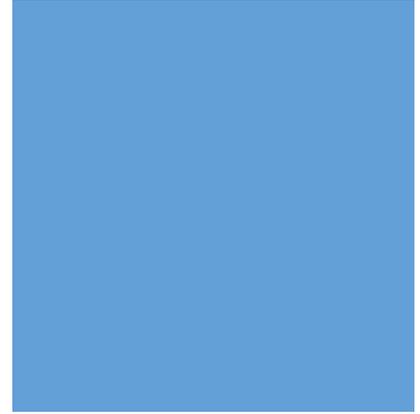
# Securing naval base on the island of Hainan

March 2009: harassment of U.S. surveillance vessel *Impeccable*





Growing strategic rivalry  
China-India



# Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy

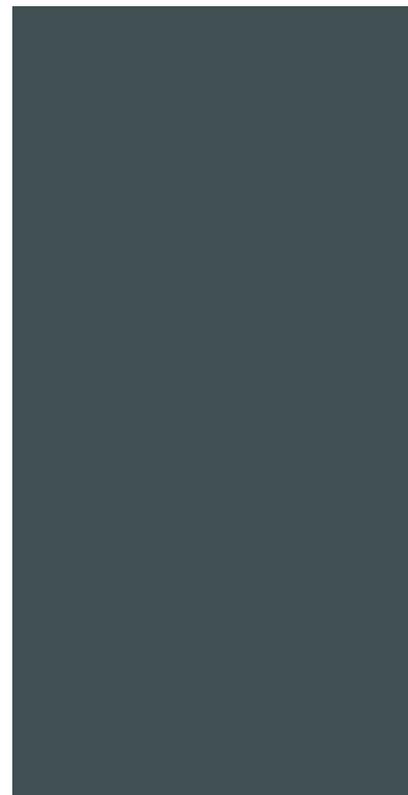
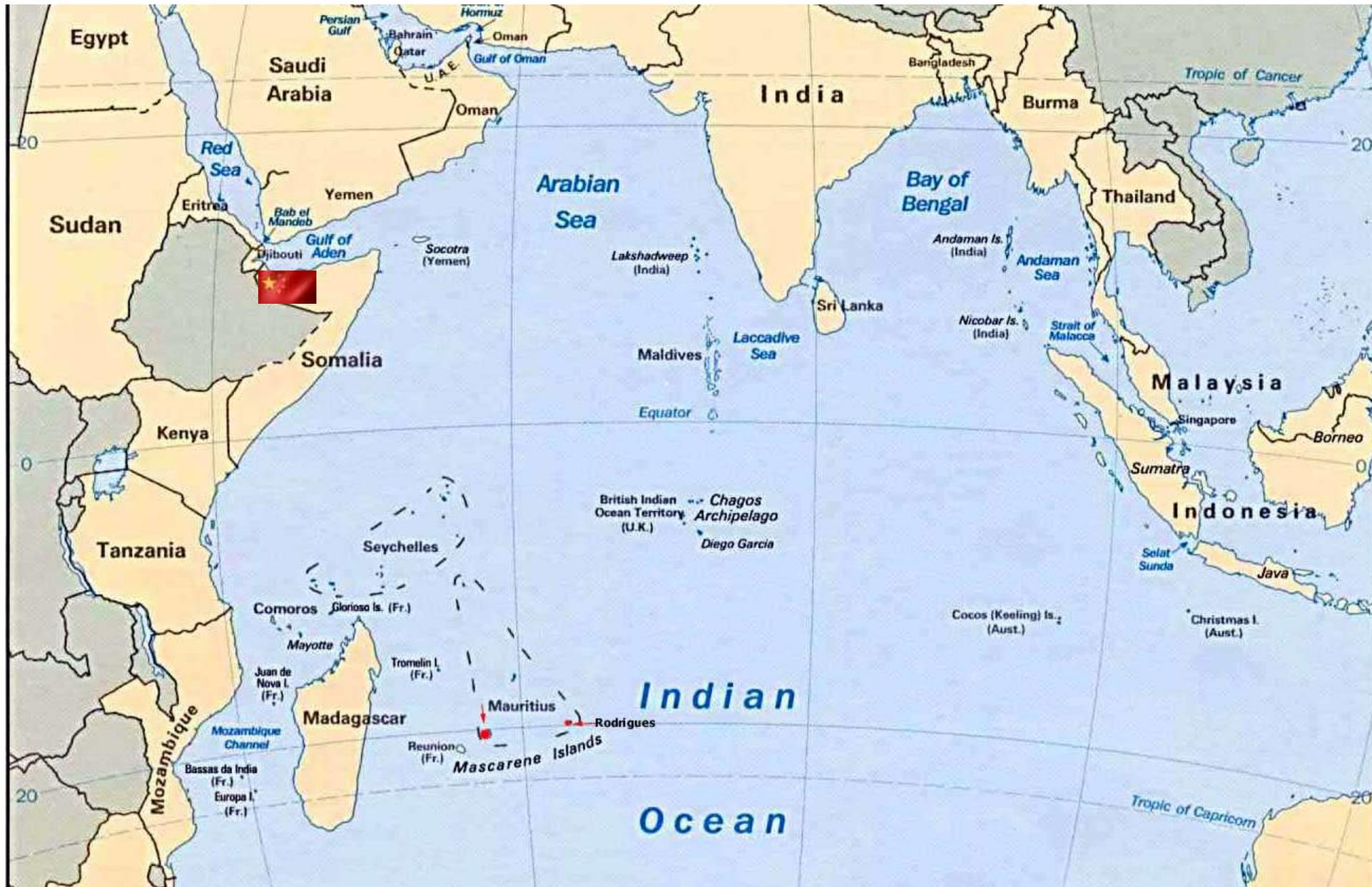
The *Belt & Road Initiative* (BRI)



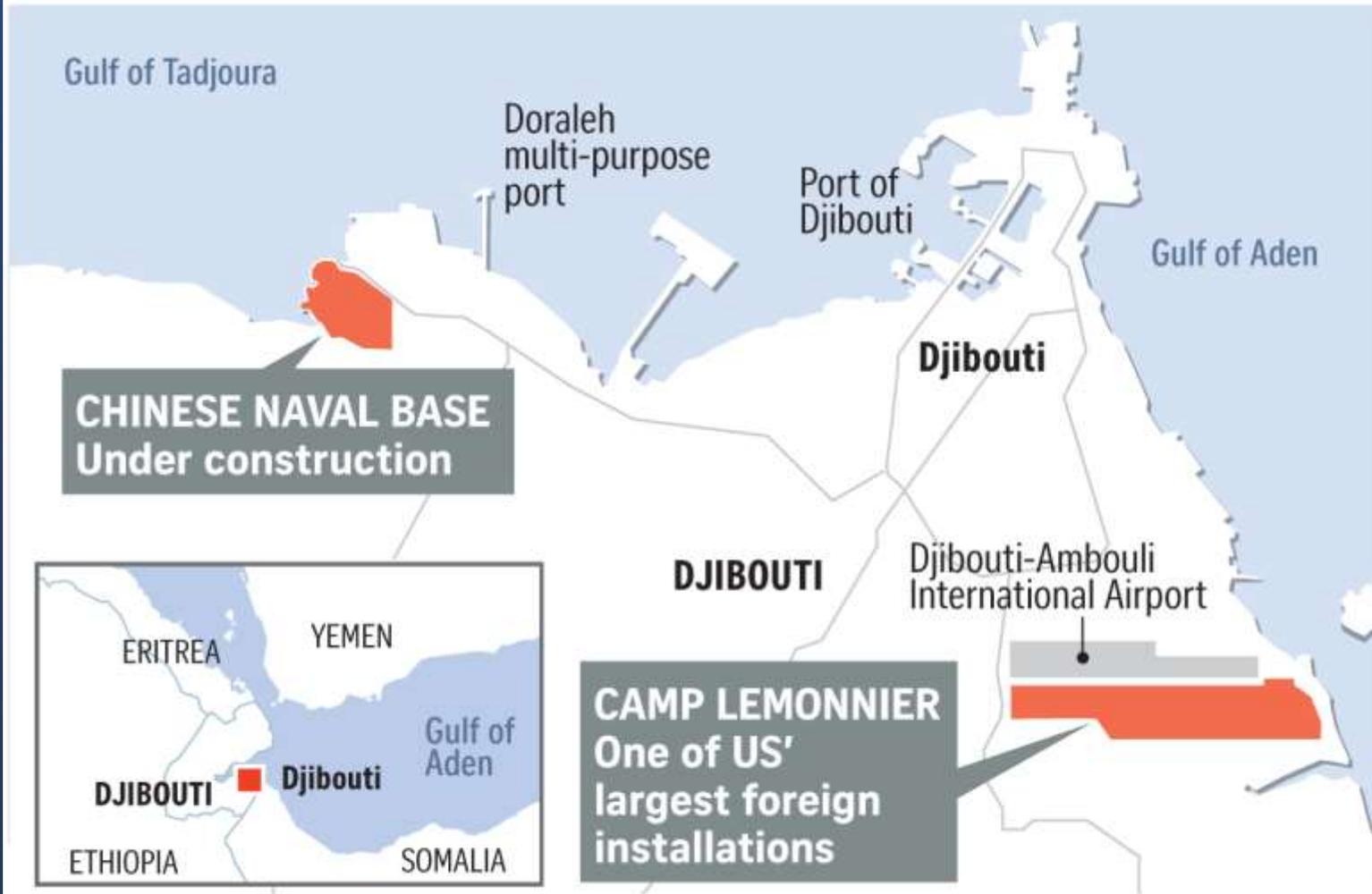
# China's Proposed New Silk Roads

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





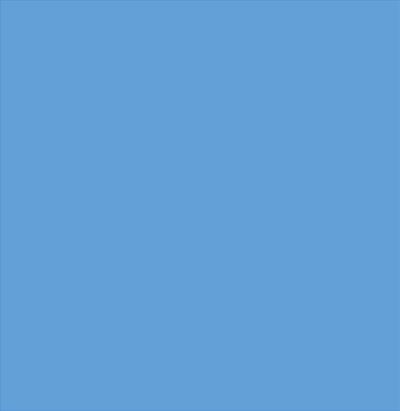
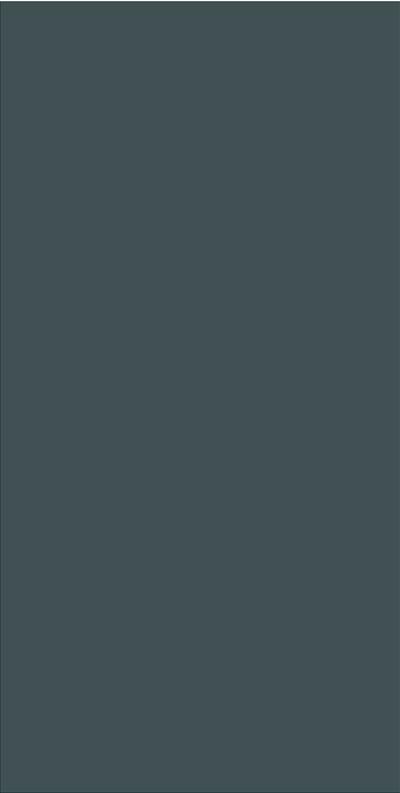
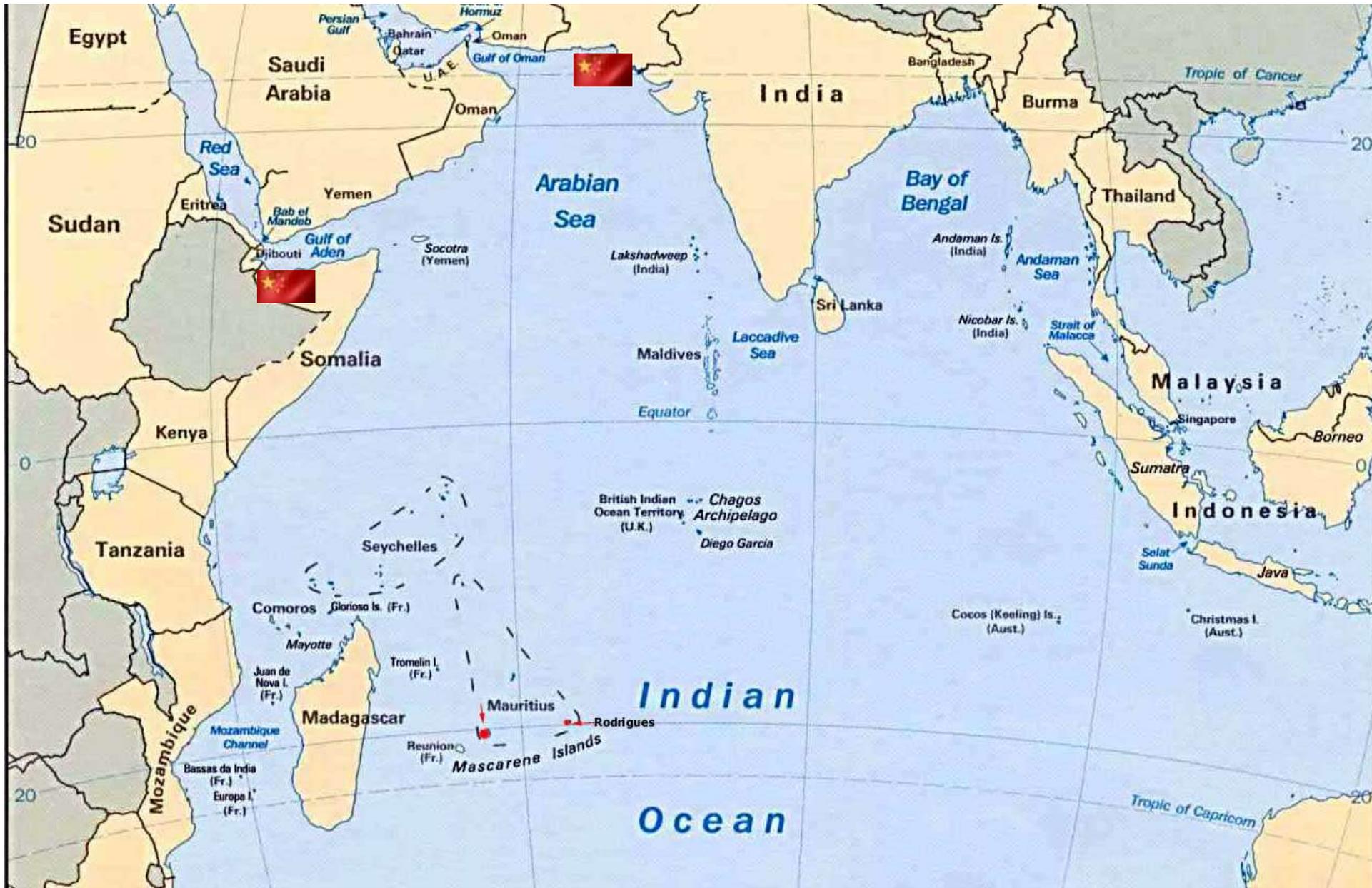
## Chinese and US bases in Djibouti



Source: THE NEW YORK TIMES STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

China's capacities to intervene in the Indian Ocean: a **taboo**

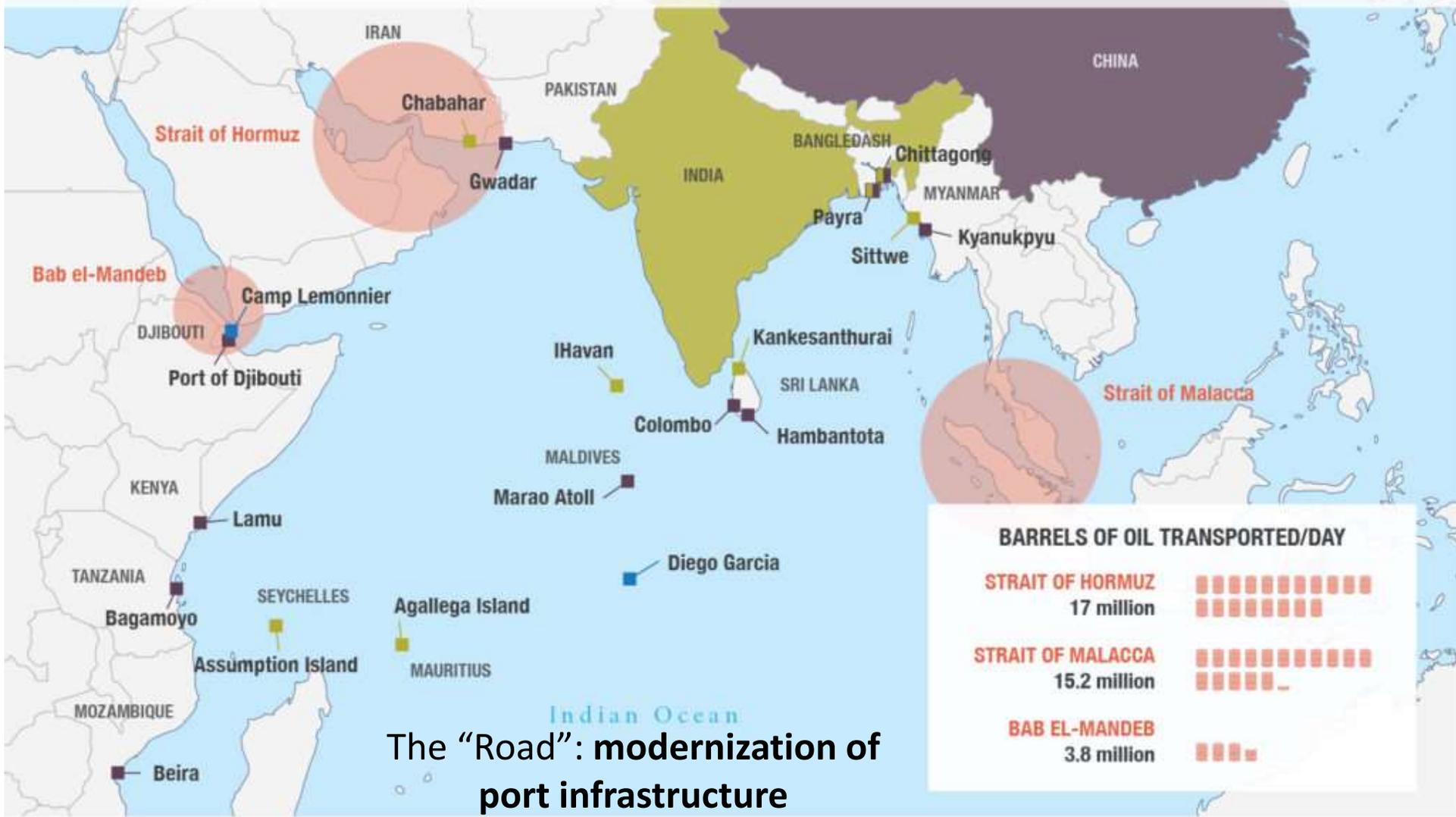
Djibouti's official purpose: logistical support





Port of **Gwadar** – 43 year lease  
A military facility?

# INDIAN OCEAN PORT DEVELOPMENT

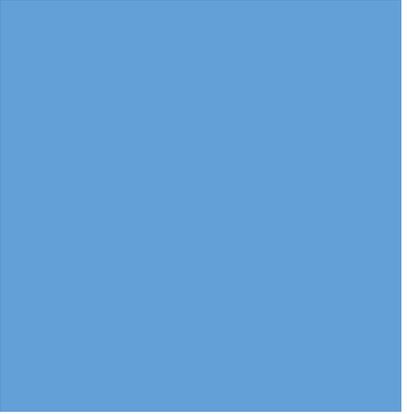


The "Road": modernization of port infrastructure

■ PORT AUTHORITIES ASSISTED BY CHINA   ■ PORT AUTHORITIES ASSISTED BY INDIA   ■ U.S. NAVAL FACILITIES

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN

China's growing presence in Indian Ocean perceived as a threat by the U.S., Japan, India & Australia





## U.S. naval doctrine in the Indo-Pacific region

Cooperation & partnerships

A reaction force **to contain**  
China's expansion