

# **US GEOSTRATEGIC CONTROL OF SEAS AND OCEANS**

Seas and oceans play a decisive role in today's economy and diplomacy

All the countries today depend on them for trade and geostrategic control

Oceans and seas are huge assets for trade but also for military deployment .

The USA puts the control of seas and oceans as a priority as it's a naval power .

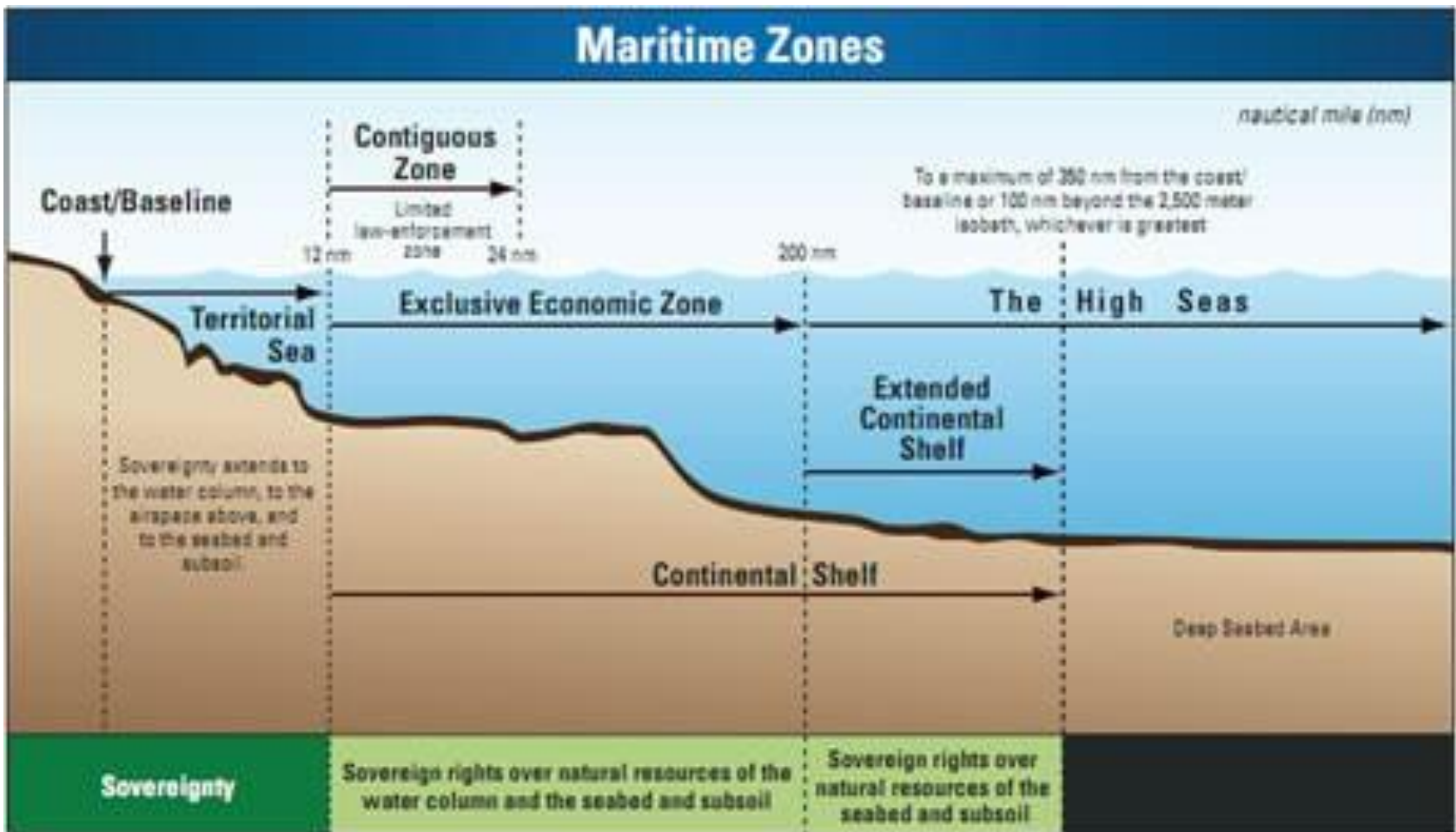
Let's see what it entails

# **I/ US GLOBAL PRESENCE IN SEAS AND OCEANS**

## **A-Importance of seas and oceans**

# 1-keep in mind:

Since the 1982 Montego Bay convention ( UN convention) , seas and oceans are shared as followed:



## **2- A great economic asset :**

### **Why is the sea increasingly being discussed as a geopolitical issue?**

Good question. The answer is multifactorial. On one hand, we are reaching the limits of possible exploitation on land, and, in the face of population needs and the associated political challenges, we are turning our attention to what remains exploitable—the sea. One economic reason for this growing interest in the ocean can be identified. We are witnessing a race for marine resources, from fish stocks to critical metals, as well as the exploitation of offshore oil and gas. Any economic activity requires a stable and regulated framework, so there is an increasing focus on regulating maritime spaces more than they already are. These economic activities often revive historical disputes and sometimes serve as justifications for controlling maritime zones. The politics of faits accomplis frequently arises when we discuss the geopolitics of the sea.

This politics of fait accompli also, and especially, responds to political ambitions. In fact, there is a maritime reflection of the return of power, and this is particularly evident through military investments: naval fleets are being strengthened, with more high-seas vessels and submarines. China is a striking example, as its military fleet has grown significantly over the past few decades. Tension zones, such as the Indo-Pacific, are at the center of research by many institutions, showing the return of the oceanic space as a place of power.

We have also understood, and this is at the heart of the book we offer, that the sea is the cornerstone of the climate system, upon which our survival depends, as well as of our globalized economy. Witnessing the degradation of the ocean alarms and mobilizes us. The sea is a determinant for the continuity of our ways of life. This issue is attracting particular attention from major maritime states, but also from UN spheres, which are at the heart of ocean governance and responsible for the better management of this shared space

## **2- A great economic asset :**

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Seas and oceans are very important because they provide resources which are important because

- we have reached the limits of what is exploitable on Earth

- population needs are increasing along with the population itself

- Seas and oceans offer a wide range of resources both energetic and halieutical / fish-based

## 2- A great economic asset :

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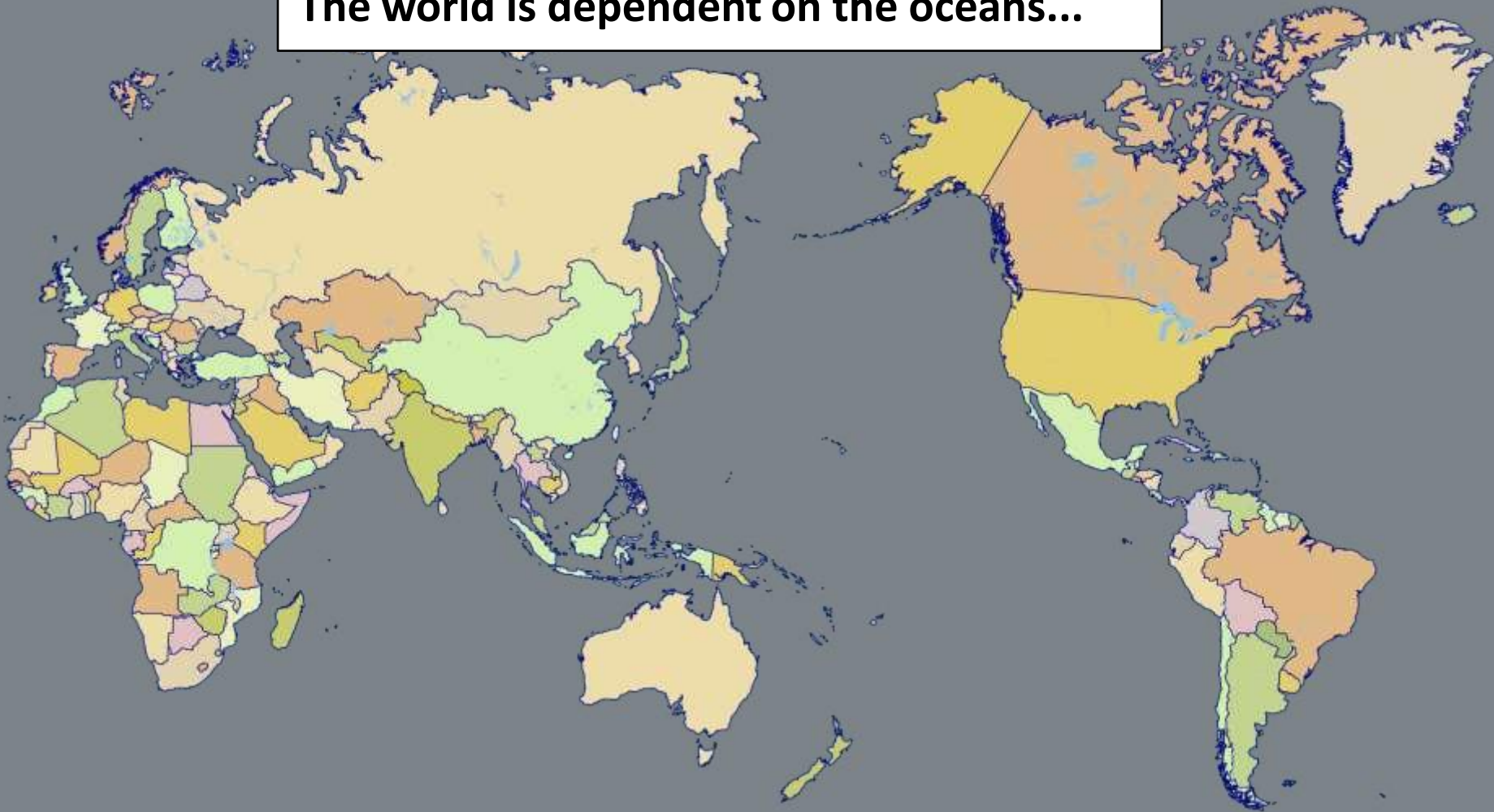
## **Oceans and seas are important in diplomacy :**

- an increasing number of countries are working on their military naval power to serve their political ambitions

- Seas and oceans are cornerstones/ keystones of our globalized economy

- They play a decisive role in climate regulation

**The world is dependent on the oceans...**



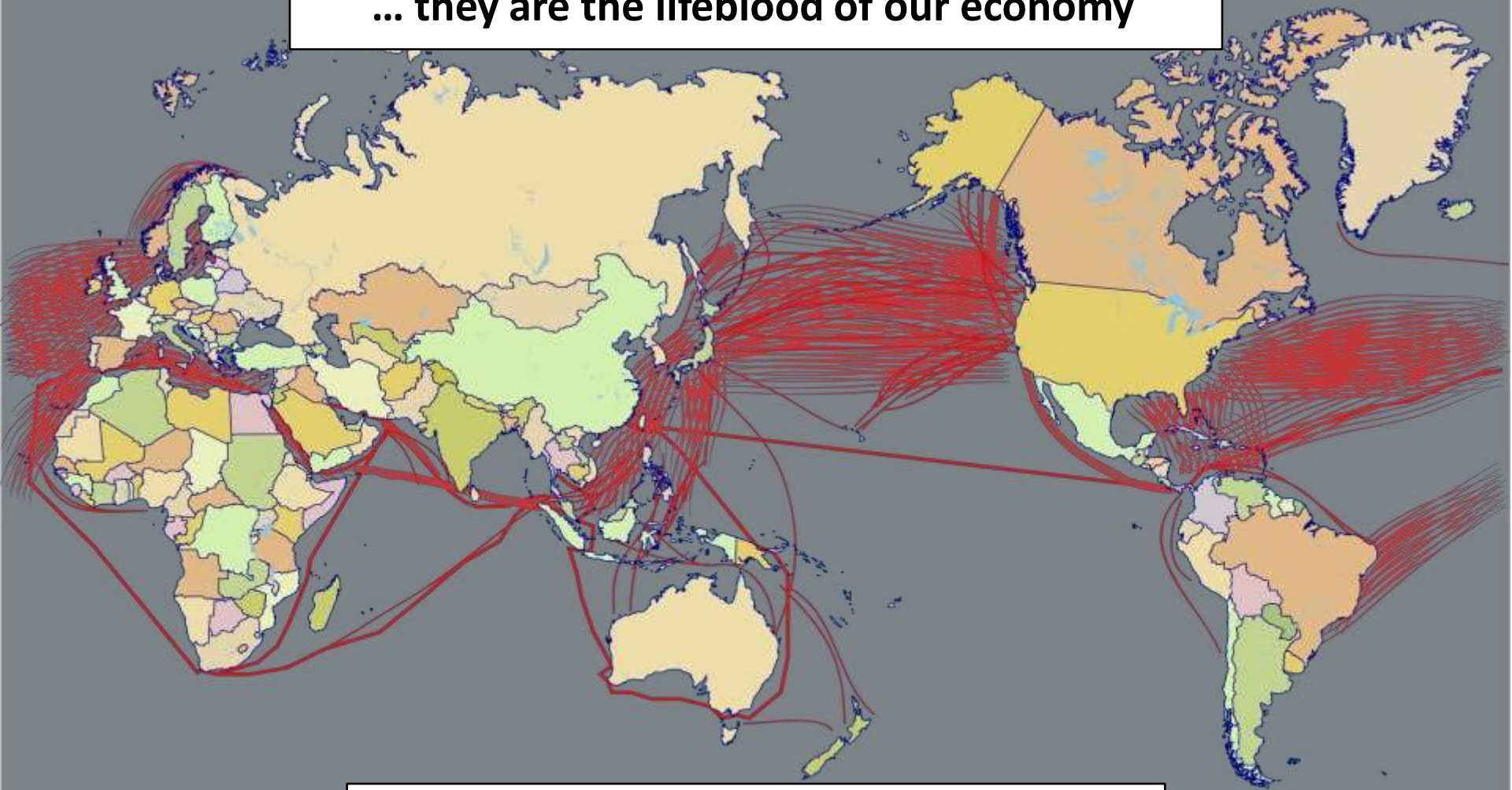
**70% of the surface is water**

**80% of the world's population lives within 100 miles of the coast**

AMERICA'S  
**NAVY**

**OPERATE FORWARD:**  
Strategic Maritime Crossroads

... they are the lifeblood of our economy



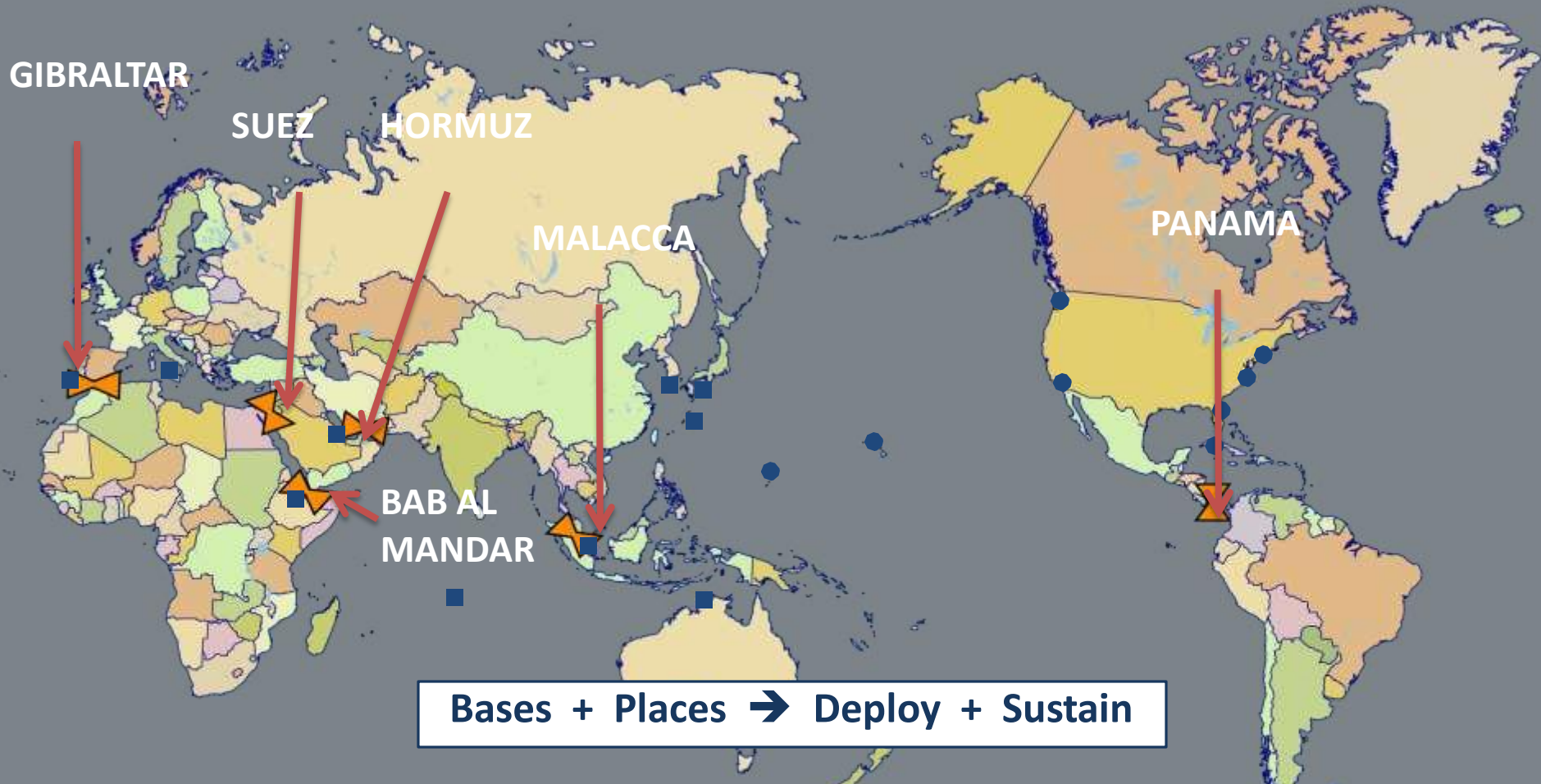
90% of global trade by volume travels by water

70% of global trade by value travels by water

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# B-US naval presence



● **Bases:** Facilities under exclusive U.S. control

■ **Places:** Overseas facilities utilized by U.S. naval forces, subject to varying degrees of host nation control

**AMERICA'S NAVY** **OPERATE FORWARD:**  
Strategic Maritime Crossroads



**3rd Fleet**

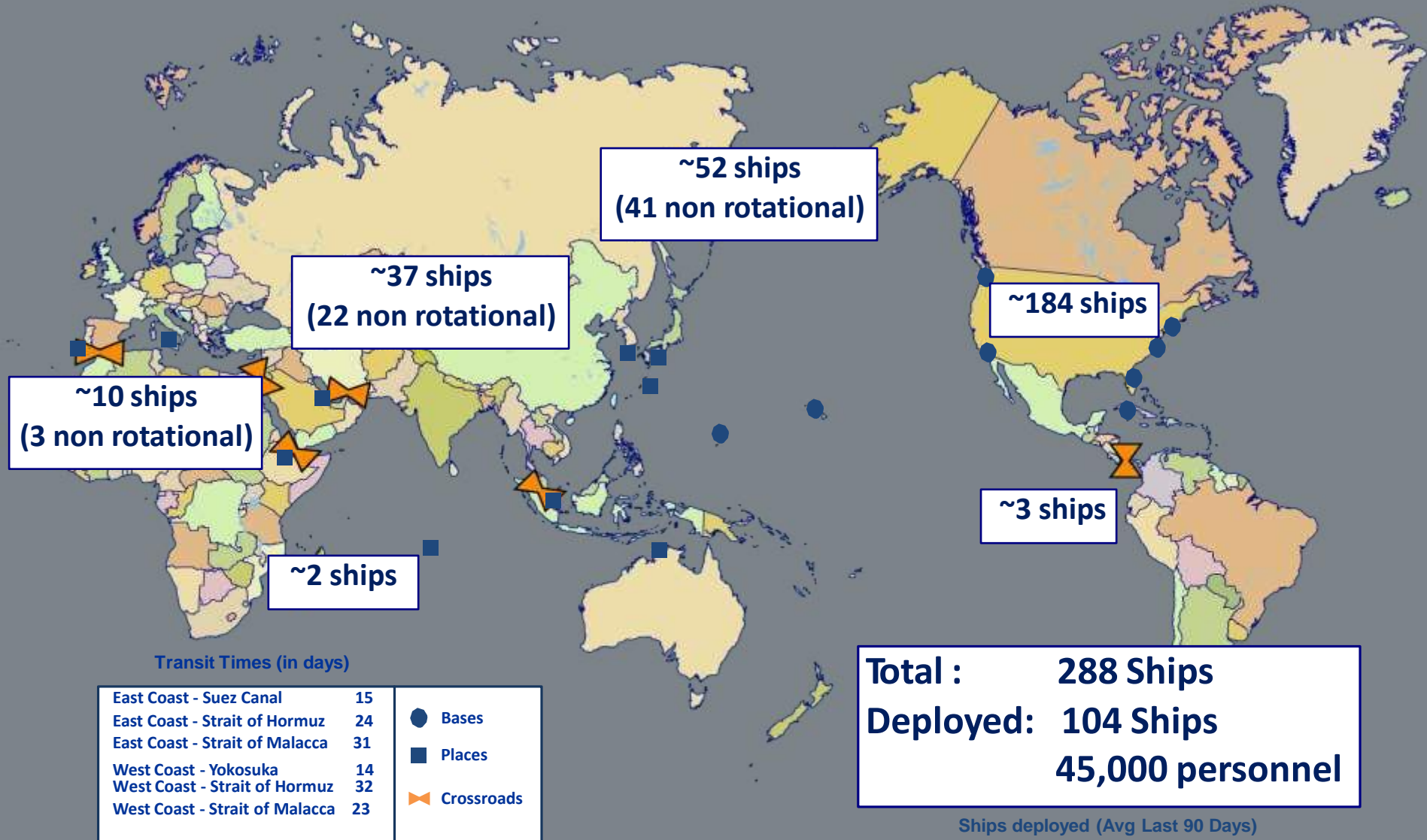
**2nd Fleet**

**4th Fleet**

**6th Fleet**

**5th Fleet**

**7th Fleet**



**OPERATE FORWARD:**  
Strategic Maritime Crossroads

## **B-US naval presence**

The USA uses a « gunboat diplomacy » ( diplomatie de la canonnière):

**This diplomacy aims at the pursuit of foreign policy objectives with the aid of naval power**

The US navy has 288 ships that can be deployed all over the world

104 are currently deployed, which involves 45 000 personnel/staff

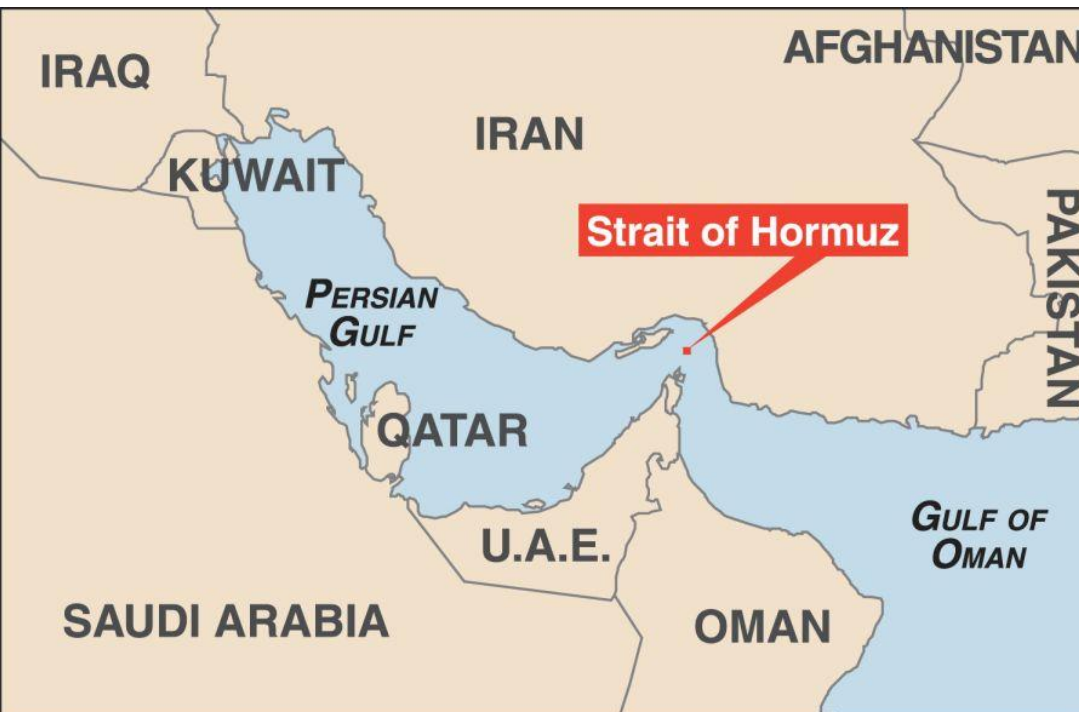
The USA mainly aims to secure « **freedom of navigation** » (FONOP) in all oceans and seas

It plays a key role in oil trade

So it needs to be secured

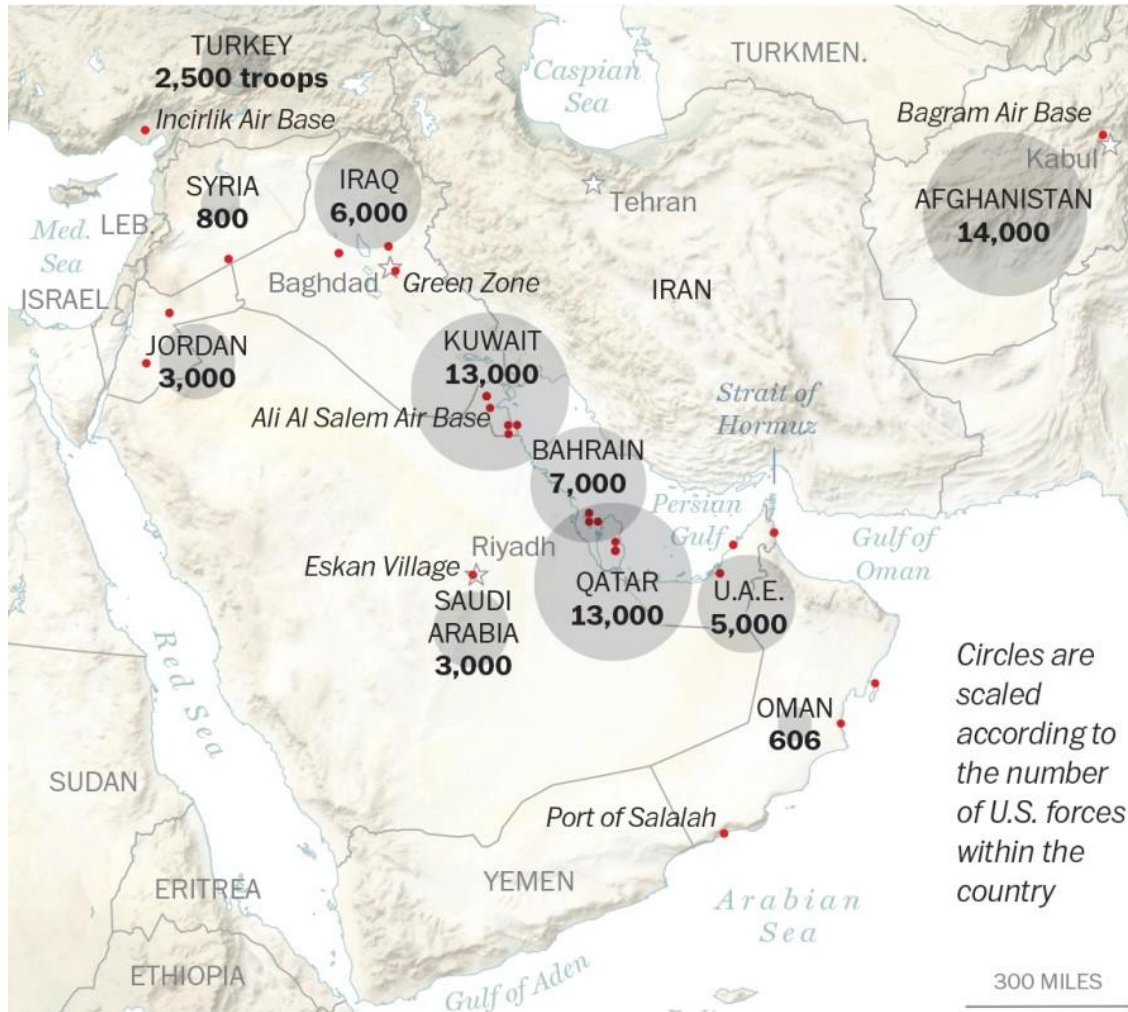
The USA fears Iran the most, as it could blockade the strait

This could trigger an oil crisis



## The U.S. military footprint in the Middle East

- Bases, ports and other installations where U.S. troops are stationed or where U.S. military personnel pass through



Note: Troop numbers are approximate. They do not reflect deployments in recent days and may fluctuate.

Sources: Federation of American Scientists, International Crisis Group

AARON STECKELBERG/THE WASHINGTON POST

The US deploys troops in allied countries : EX Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE...

These troops come on top of the presence of the 5th fleet near the Gulf ( in International waters)

# America's Free-Rider Problem in the Strait of Hormuz [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)

It's a monthly magazine created in 1857. It covers international news.

It's known for its reliable sources and well-grounded arguments.

Its political bias would be center-left

A major part of the reason: to secure the world's oil supplies—about 20 percent of which [flow through](#) the strait. But the U.S. itself doesn't get most of its oil from the Gulf; most [Gulf oil](#) flows to Asia. So why, Trump [asked](#), was the U.S. footing the bill to keep the Chinese supplied? The U.S. has shouldered the burden for protecting the free flow of energy supplies in the region since the Carter administration, when America's chief adversary was the Soviet Union and the U.S. needed guaranteed access to oil so its military could fight a land war in Europe if needed.

But the world has changed. The Soviet Union no longer exists. The United States is producing substantial amounts of its own oil needs. Which does make it worth asking whether the assumption that dictated a U.S. military buildup in the region in the 1980s still holds.

-It doesn't really matter where Middle Eastern oil goes—if supply is disrupted, prices go up for everybody ( ...)

-The U.S. is also providing a global public good as the dominant military force in the region. The United States is the dominant military in the region

-With its mines and missiles, Iran could block part or all of the strait and then shoot at whatever ships try to clear it.

-The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s, which stopped oil exports from both countries, doubled the price of oil at the time and kept them elevated for a year.

“It's arguably still in our economic interests to protect Gulf oil,” Charles Glaser, the director of the Institute for Security and Conflict Studies at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, told me. “It would be better if other countries were militarily able to do that—frankly most of them are not in a situation where they can ... If we don't do it, it's quite unclear that anyone will fill the gap.”

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A first part points out the importance of this strait and the future of the US position

A second part justifies the need to stay present in this area

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The importance of the strait and the  
US position in the future ( 1st  
paragraph)

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**20% of oil supplies passes through this strait**

**The strait is used by Asian countries to stay supplied, particularly China**

## **THE ARTICLE RAISES A QUESTION**

**The USA was present in the Gulf during the Cold War to keep the Soviets out the area**

**But the Cold War is over**

**So Is it worth staying because securing the area, now serves the Chinese? ( Trump's administration asked the question)**

## the need to stay present in this area ( second paragraph)

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## the need to stay present in this area

**To secure the strait and avoid an oil crisis**

**To show the US hard power**

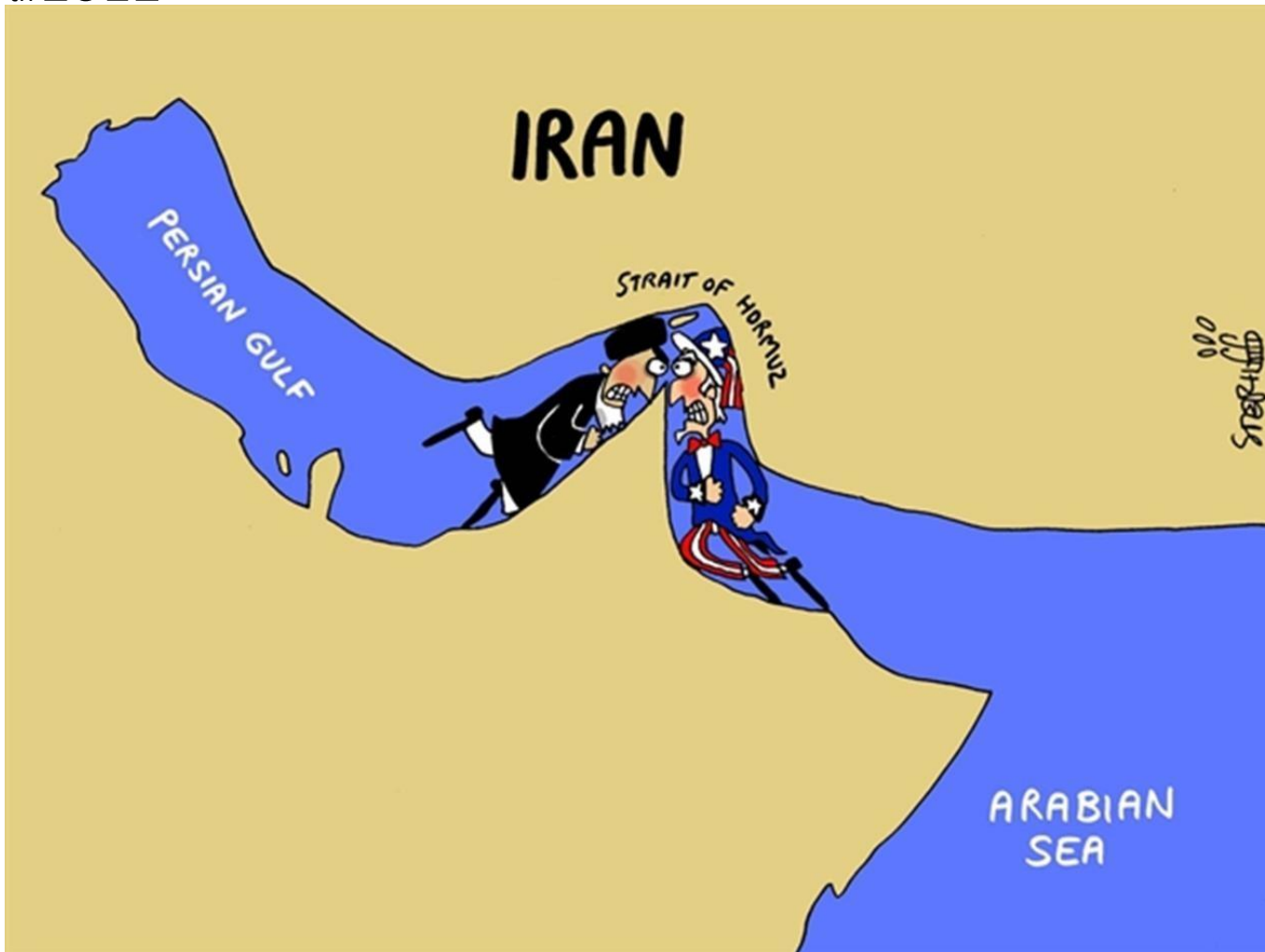
**To deters Iran FROM blockING the strait**

**It’s an economic interest**

**To avoid having another power taking the control**

# Why is the strait of Hormuz such a source of tension between the USA and Iran?

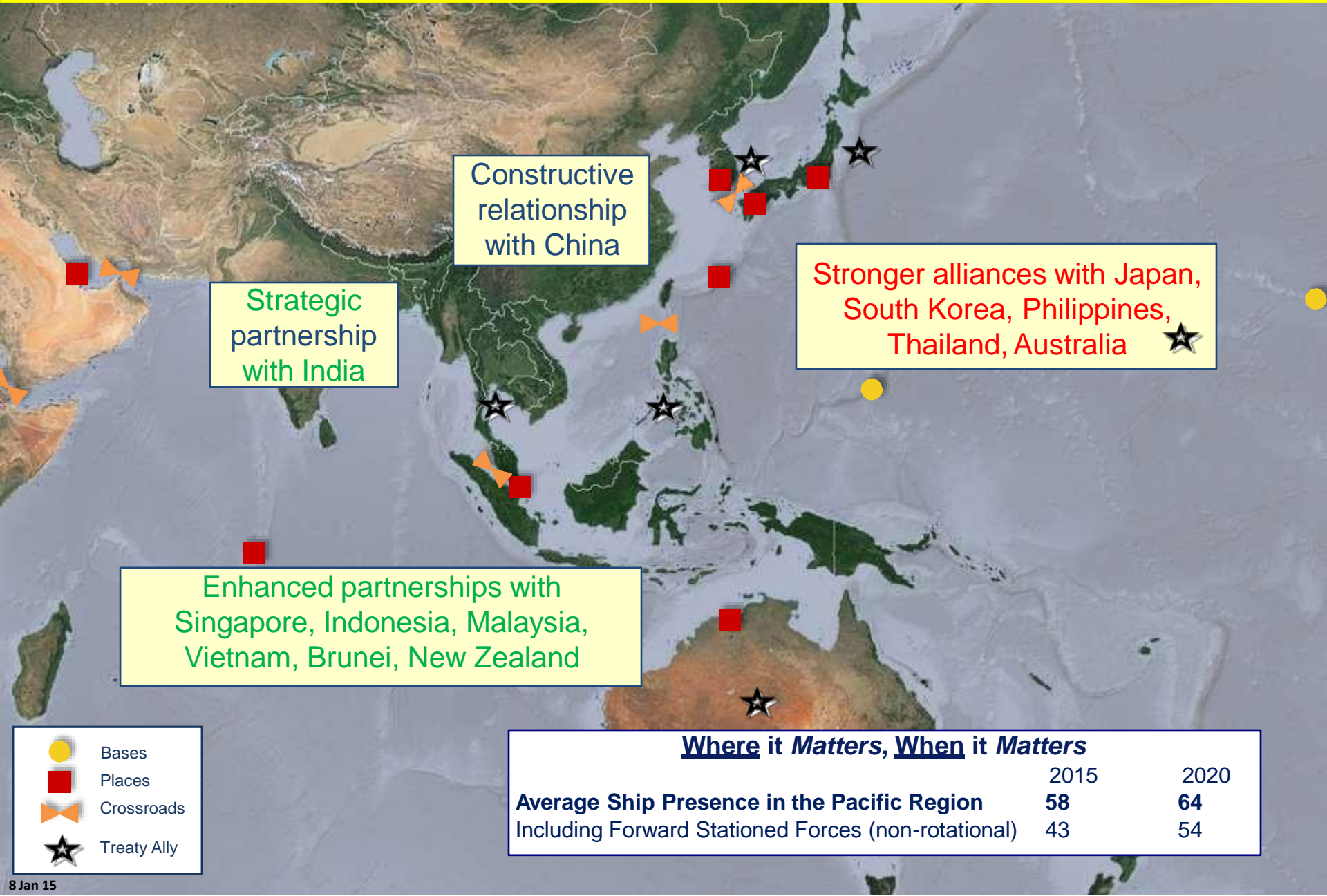
From : dailystar.com . British newspaper Cartoon published in January 5<sup>th</sup> 2012



# III/ US PRESENCE IN ASIA

## A/The key role of the Malacca strait









Strategic partnership with India

Constructive relationship with China

Stronger alliances with Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Australia

Enhanced partnerships with Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, New Zealand

-  Bases
-  Places
-  Crossroads
-  Treaty Ally

<u>Where it Matters, When it Matters</u>		
	2015	2020
<b>Average Ship Presence in the Pacific Region</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>64</b>
Including Forward Stationed Forces (non-rotational)	43	54

## The US presence in Malacca has been increased

	2015	2020
<b>Average Ship Presence in the Pacific Region</b>	<b>58</b>	
It's a key strait when it comes to export oil to Asia		<b>64</b>

For example: 90 % of the Japanese oil transits through this strait

It's also a key strait for trade from Asia to Europe

**The 7th fleet** is deployed there to maintain freedom of navigation

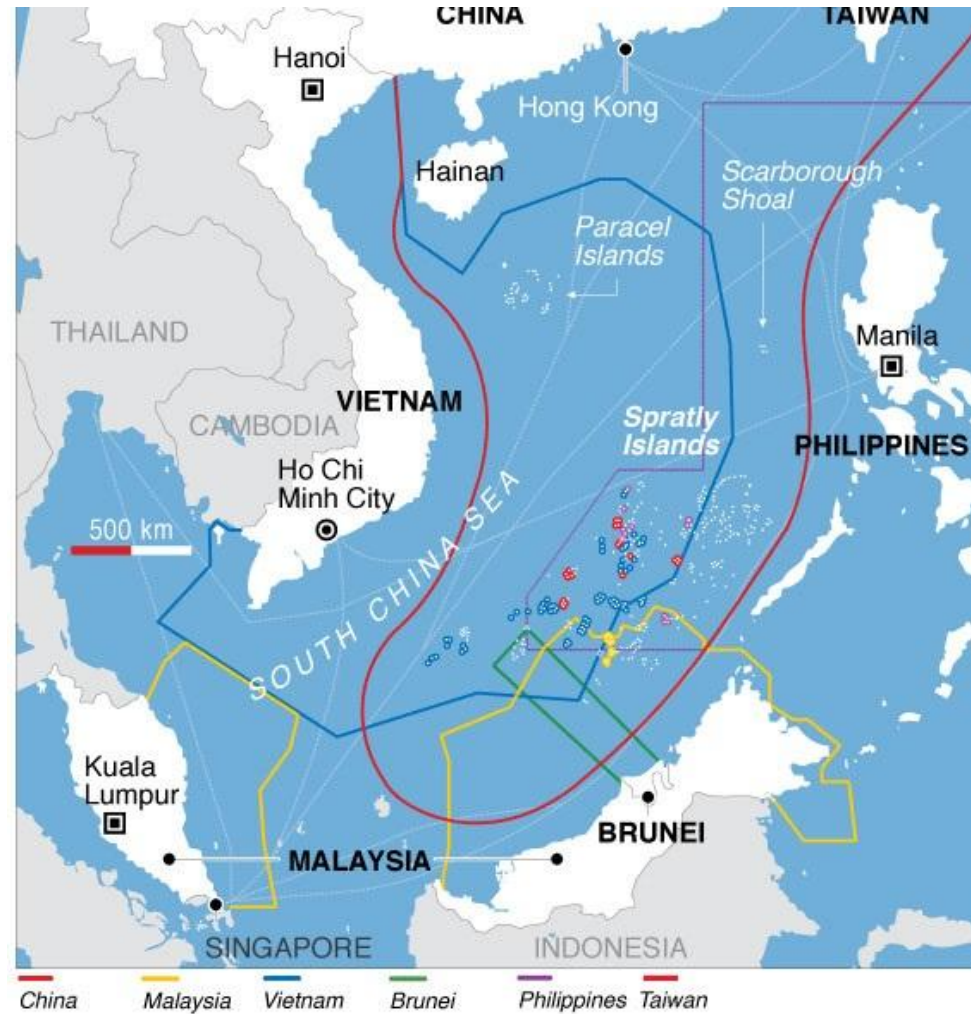
The US also has bases in allied countries ( Philippines, Japan, South Korea) and partners ( Vietnam, Singapore or india)

## B/ Tensions in the South China sea

It's between  
Indonesia and Malaysia

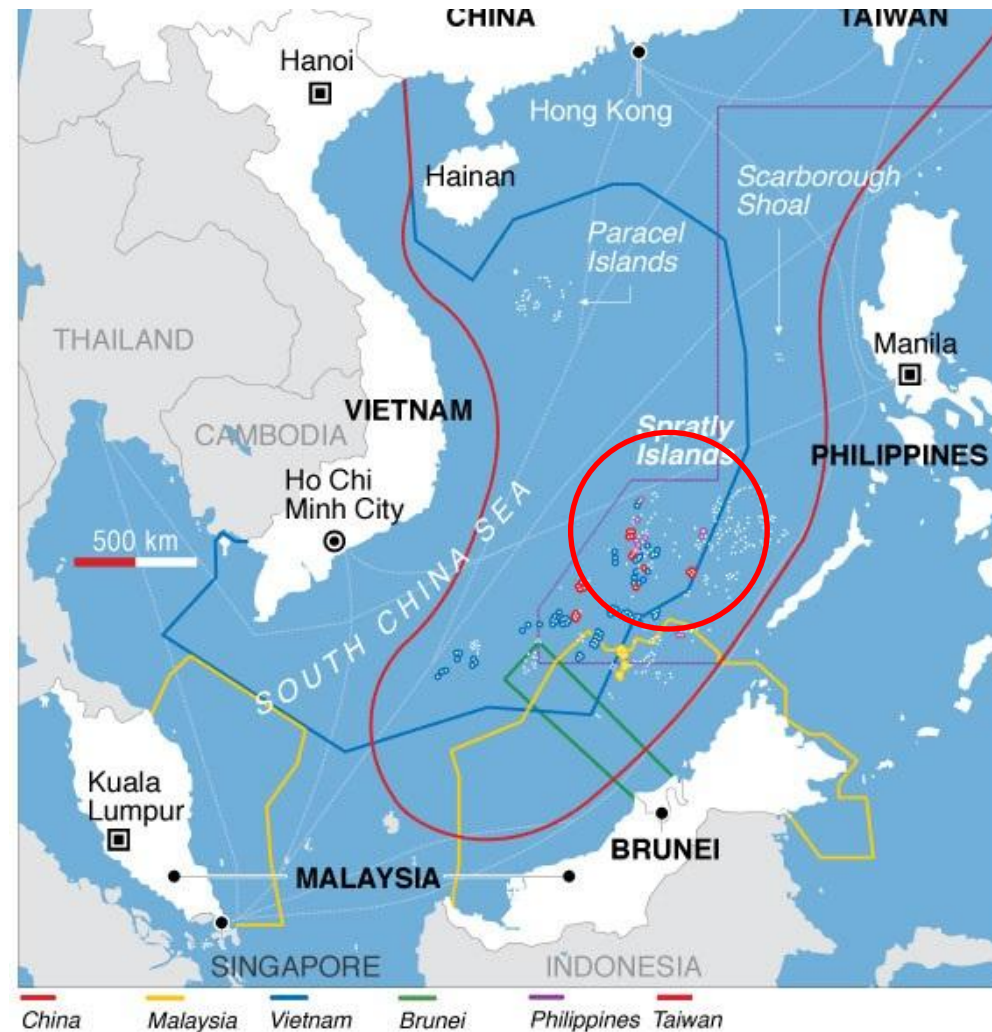
it extends to China  
Eastwards

it touches the Philippines



# 1) The Spratley Islands dispute

It's an ongoing territorial dispute between China, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam, concerning "ownership" of the Spratley/ Spratly Islands located in the South China Sea ( It's in their EEZ)



The Spratly Islands are important for economic and strategic reasons:

- The Spratly area holds reserves of [oil](#) and natural gas
- It is a productive area for world fishing (halieutical resources- fish-based resources)
- It is located in one of the busiest areas of shipping traffic

Since 2015, China has been building artificial islands with military purpose in the area.



## 2) The OBOR Chinese program or BRI

China Belt and Road Initiative:

One Belt One Road

Or Belt and Road Initiative

It's a global development strategy adopted by China in 2013

It is considered a centerpiece **of Xi Jinping's ( since 2013)** foreign policy

China built port infrastructure development and invested in nearly 70 countries and international organizations.

It aims to secure China's supply

Some observers see it as a plan for Chinese world domination for a China-centered global trading network

It is built on the old “Silk Routes” on the continent but has a maritime side as well

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI or OBOR) illustrates the transformative geopolitical implications of China's rise. This series of major infrastructure and development projects designed to connect Eurasian regions together is a coherent enterprise of unprecedented scale: \$4 trillion of promised investments in 65 countries representing 70 percent of the world's population, 55 percent of its GNP, and 75 percent of its energy reserves .

Of course, the BRI's prospects of success are subject to many unknowns, including the possibility of foreign resistance, China's domestic economic travails ( travaux) , political turbulence, aging population, and environmental issues . On the other hand, the U.S. still possesses [enormous assets](#) to maintain its [predominance](#), including military primacy, multiple alliances, powerful Western-led international organizations, and an unmatched soft power.

The United States' response to a rising China has largely focused on bolstering military capabilities, doctrines, and partnerships in Asia. This approach misconstrues the problem: it overstates the security threat and understates (or ignores) the economic challenge. To maintain its dominant position globally in the long-term, the United States must reckon with the ambitious geo-economic endeavor Beijing has launched to project strategic influence across the Eurasian continent, which hosts most of the world's economic centers and natural resources.

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Yet over time the BRI could threaten the very foundations of Washington's post-WWII hegemony.

Beijing seeks to offset the United States' military primacy. Its buildup in maritime East Asia and the South China sea is worthy of attention but it is also designed in response to the U.S. naval presence and to the alliances that American leaders have nurtured along China's southern flank since the early years of the Cold War..

To advance its interests, China exploits the cracks in U.S. post-Cold War hegemony. Washington's interferences in Russia and Iran's respective spheres of influence, and its military interventionism in the Middle East, triggered a nationalist and Islamist backlash that significantly diminished its resources and credibility.

China has nurtured bilateral relations with Tehran for decades, leveraging a common resentment toward Western [dominance](#). This partnership has great geostrategic importance to both nations. Thanks to its oil and gas reserves, Iran could help Beijing withstand a U.S. attack on its SLOCs (Sea Lines of Communication).

The 2015 nuclear deal and Iran's partial reintegration into the international community benefited all parties by dramatically reducing the risk of regional war.

By contrast, Beijing took advantage of the nuclear deal to drastically increase its imports of oil and gas and to welcome Tehran in the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), a rival to the U.S.-led financial order. Most important, it now seeks to use Iran's potential as trade crossroads and as the cheapest route to export Caucasian and Central Asian natural . Instead of remaining overwhelmingly fixated on the military balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, Washington should find effective ways to counter Beijing's geoeconomic offensive across the Eurasian continent and its growing leverage among some of the United States' partners and allies themselves.

Furthermore, instead of perpetuating self-defeating interferences in Russia's and Iran's respective spheres of influence, which only push these countries into China's arms, the United States should leverage their fears of Beijing's growing power to constrain its geopolitical progression.

In parallel, U.S. leaders should engage Beijing to try to shape the BRI's contours to their advantage, minimize the risk of war, and encourage cooperation in domains such as counter-terrorism and global environmental reforms.(...)

**IS OBOR OR BRI ONLY A THREAT TO US POWER IN  
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NO, because the Chinese invest a lot of money in many countries that could never afford such expenses.  
It helps connecting Europe and Asia

**WHY IS OBOR ALSO A MEANS TO COUNTER US  
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The Chinese aim to rival US presence in this area as well as the fact the US has many alliances there

# WHY IS OBOR ALSO A MEANS TO COUNTER US HEGEMONY?

**“could threaten the very foundations of Washington’s post-WWII hegemony”.**

**“designed in response to the U.S. naval presence and to the alliances that American leaders have nurtured along China’s southern flank since the early years of the Cold War.”**

The USA has set the 7th fleet in the Pacific to watch over any threat on freedom of navigation

During the Cold war US presence targetted the Soviets but when China turned to communism it also targetted China

Today the USA fears China could threaten US control by building trade infrastructure in allied countries

To advance its interests, China exploits the cracks in U.S. post-Cold War hegemony. **Washington's interferences in Russia and Iran's respective spheres of influence, and its military interventionism in the Middle East, triggered a nationalist and Islamist backlash that significantly diminished its resources and credibility.**

China **has nurtured bilateral relations with Tehran** for decades, leveraging a common resentment toward Western dominance. This partnership has great geostrategic **importance to both nations.** **Thanks to its oil and gas reserves, Iran could help Beijing withstand a U.S. attack on its SLOCs (Sea Lines of Communication).**

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So China uses this to get closer to US enemies like IRAN

**“China has nurtured bilateral relations with Tehran for decades, leveraging a common resentment toward Western dominance. “**

Beijing seeks to offset the United States' military primacy. Its buildup in maritime East Asia and the South China sea is worthy of attention but it is also designed in response to the U.S. naval presence and to the alliances that American leaders have nurtured along China's southern flank since the early years of the Cold War..

To advance its interests, China exploits the cracks in U.S. post-Cold War hegemony. Washington's interferences in Russia and Iran's respective spheres of influence, and its military interventionism in the Middle East, triggered a nationalist and Islamist backlash that significantly diminished its resources and credibility.

China has nurtured bilateral relations with Tehran for decades, leveraging a common resentment toward Western [dominance](#). This partnership has great geostrategic importance to both nations. Thanks to its oil and gas reserves, Iran could help Beijing withstand a U.S. attack on its SLOCs (Sea Lines of Communication).

The 2015 nuclear deal and Iran's partial reintegration into the international community benefited all parties by dramatically reducing the risk of regional war.

**By contrast, Beijing took advantage of the nuclear deal to drastically increase its imports of oil and gas and to welcome Tehran in the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), a rival to the U.S.-led financial order. Most important, it now seeks to use Iran's potential as trade crossroads and as the cheapest route to export Caucasian and Central Asian natural .**

Instead of remaining overwhelmingly fixated on the military balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, Washington should find effective ways to counter Beijing's geoeconomic offensive across the Eurasian continent and its growing leverage among some of the United States' partners and allies themselves.

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Iran has accepted a deal which let UN inspectors check if It does have nuclear military equipment.

But Trump doubted Iran's honesty and boycotted Iran's oil

So the Chinese got closer to Iran to counter the US and even set trade routes through Iran in the OBOR program to reach markets in central Asia

# According to this article, how should the US handle the growing Chinese presence in the region?

By contrast, Beijing took advantage of the nuclear deal to drastically increase its imports of oil and gas and to welcome Tehran in the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), a rival to the U.S.-led financial order. Most important, it now seeks to use Iran's potential as trade crossroads and as the cheapest route to export Caucasian and Central Asian natural gas. Instead of remaining overwhelmingly fixated on the military balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, Washington should find effective ways to counter Beijing's geoeconomic offensive across the Eurasian continent and its growing leverage among some of the United States' partners and allies themselves.

Furthermore, instead of perpetuating self-defeating interferences in Russia's and Iran's respective spheres of influence, which only push these countries into China's arms, the United States should leverage their fears of Beijing's growing power to constrain its geopolitical progression.

In parallel, U.S. leaders should engage Beijing to try to shape the BRI's contours to their advantage, minimize the risk of war, and encourage cooperation in domains such as counter-terrorism and global environmental reforms.(...)

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**Today Chinese threat concerns economy as well, so the USA should focus on this first and not only on geopolitical issues which are real**

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Beijing to try to shape the BRI's contours to their advantage, minimize the risk of war, and encourage cooperation in domains such as counter-terrorism and global environmental reforms.(...)

**China has an attractive strategy by encouraging co-operation on hot issues between countries in Asia.**

**Acting aggressively might push some countries away from the USA and instead attract them to China**

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## IV/ OTHER KEY PLACES FOR US PRESENCE

### A/ IN AFRICA



The United States 's AFRICOM PROGRAM is a unified combatant commands of the United States headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany and started in 2006.

It is responsible for military operations with 53 African nations.

It helps to bring peace and promote common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa

## IV/ OTHER KEY PLACES FOR US PRESENCE



## A/ Routes to the Arctic

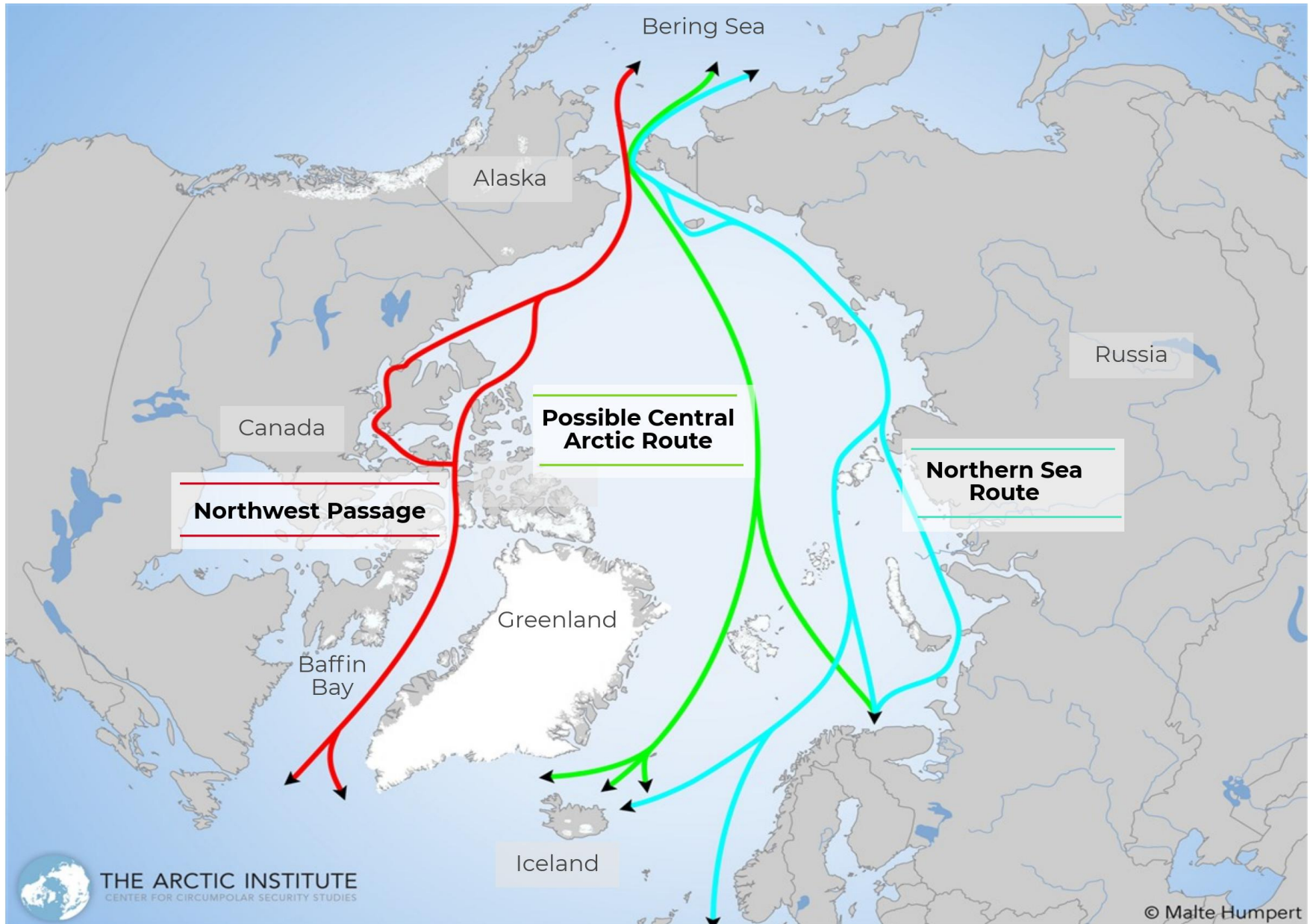
The melting of the Arctic leads to the creation of new sea routes as well as opportunities of exploitation

- for oil

- for fishing

The USA plans to grab the opportunity to tighten its grip on this region but it faces long-lasting Russian presence.

Riparians ( The USA, Canada, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Russia) plan to extend their EEZ as well



Note: The author of this article added labels to Mr. Humpert's original map.

## **NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR A FONOP IN THE ARCTIC**

**[DAVID AUERSWALD](http://www.waronrocks.com) FOR [WWW.WARONROCKS.COM](http://www.waronrocks.com)**

**(ONLINE MAGAZINE FOR THE STUDY OF US DEFENSE)**

**OCTOBER 11, 2019**

Russia and the United States have started a game of chicken ( a dangerous competition game where no side wants to compromise) in the Arctic that could lead to an unnecessary military conflict. The Russians have asserted unilateral control over the Northern Sea Route, an international waterway running along Russia's northern coast, and are deploying military assets at chokepoints along the route.

U.S. officials dispute Russia's claim to the Northern Sea Route and have threatened to send U.S. naval vessels in a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP). FONOP would be aimed at Russia. In May, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned. ( Biden's secretary of State)

The Arctic's climate has not been this hot in 10,000 years and is warming at an alarming pace, raising the possibility of viable Arctic shipping routes. The Northern Sea Route, one of three main passages through Arctic waters, runs along Russia's northern coast from Murmansk in the west to the Bering Strait in the east. It makes travel between Europe and Asia roughly 11 days quicker than a southern transit via the Strait of Malacca and Suez Canal.

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There are five choke points ( passages stratégiques) along the Northern Sea Route where Russia could conceivably delay or stop shipping traffic

The United States has a big problem if it wants to conduct an Arctic FONOP — it doesn't have the right ships to do it. The Navy has no ice-capable warships in its inventory,

The Russians say they are well within their rights to regulate the Northern Sea Route given Articles 21 and 234 of the UN Convention on the [Law of the Sea](#) (UNCLOS). Article 21 gives states the ability to regulate their territorial waters. Russia claims that parts of the route are within their territorial waters. Instead of threatening to conduct Arctic FONOPs that are unlikely to advance U.S. interests, the United States should play the long game. First, the United States should publicly reject Russia's assertions of unilateral control. The United States should continue with FONOPs where it has more robust capabilities, such as in the South China Sea or Persian Gulf, to maintain U.S. leverage on the larger point of innocent passage in international waterways.

Finally, the United States needs to rethink Arctic maritime operations: It should build icebreakers and ice-capable surface ships, not for Arctic FONOPs but to support search and rescue operations in and maritime control of Alaskan waters.

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## B/ - Seaborn/ maritime cables

The USA was accused in the news of spying on citizens through a program called PRISM

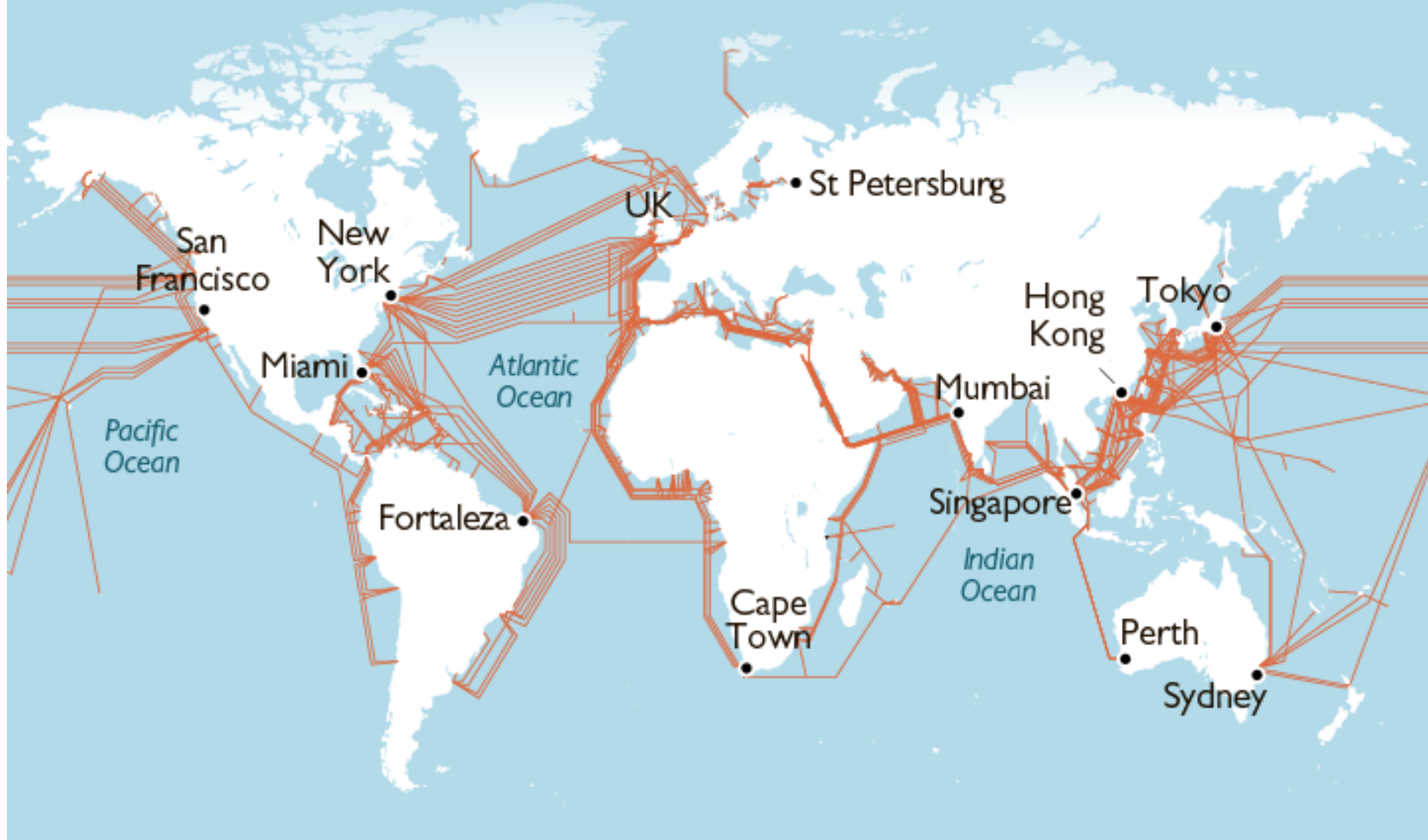
It was revealed by **Edward Snowden** in the Washington Post and the Guardian ( exiled in Russia- Russian nationality in 2022)

PRISM is a [code name](#) for a program under which the [United States National Security Agency](#) (NSA) collects [internet](#) communications from various U.S. internet companies

This system uses also maritime cables through the Atlantic and the Pacific ( underwater cables)

It's good for spying but It creates a risk on being spied too

# Main underwater cables



Under Trump, the US government vetoed the **PACIFIC LIGHT CABLE NETWORK PROJECT** between LA and Hong Kong **PRIVATELY FINANCED BY** a consortium consisting of Facebook, Google, Apple, Microsoft and Pacific Light Data Communication Co. Ltd. ( **GAFAM**)

The US government feared spying by China

## US Government To Reject Pacific Undersea Cable

Tom Jowitt, June 18, 2020 for [www.silicon.co.uk](http://www.silicon.co.uk)

The United States looks set to block an undersea cable that connects Los Angeles to Hong Kong, despite the fact that it has already been built.

The Pacific Light Cable Network (PLCN) cable was funded by Google and Facebook, as well as a Chinese broadband provider called Dr. Peng Telecom & Media Group Co. But trouble began in August 2019, when it was reported that the cable was being opposed by the US Justice Department\_ because of national security concerns over its Chinese investor and the direct link to Hong Kong.

The PLCN cable was **first announced back in 2016** as a partnership between Google, Facebook, and other companies. It aimed to be the highest capacity transpacific connection to date.

Google said in 2016 that it had invested in the 12,800 km long (8,000 miles) cable to enhance its public cloud infrastructure, which comprises data centres, terrestrial networks and subsea connections.

But the PLCN cable had been facing a real threat of not being granted a licence by US State Team Telecom, which it needs in order to operate.

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**But the PLCN cable had been facing a real threat of not being granted a licence by US State Team Telecom, which it needs in order to operate.**

And now Team Telecom reportedly rejected the license application, which is said to be the first time the US has rejected an undersea cable license because of national security concerns:

China's "sustained efforts to acquire the sensitive personal data of millions of US persons"

China's "access to other countries' data through both digital infrastructure investments"

China's "recent actions to remove Hong Kong's autonomy and allow for the possibility that Chinese intelligence and security services will operate openly in Hong Kong"

The final decision will be taken by the US Federal Communications Commission. The Team Telecom decision comes at the same time as when former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, launched an extraordinary and blunt ( direct) assessment of Huawei Technologies.

Schmidt said that the Chinese firm poses challenges to national security and has engaged in unacceptable acts in the past. He also alleged that information from Huawei routers ended up in Chinese government hands.

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Upon recommendations by Team Telecom, the FCC has finally approved Submarine Cable Landing License for the Pacific Light Cable Network (PLCN) system in 2020 and It opened in 2022 providing leading companies accept annual assessments on risks.

The system has a length of 12 800 Kilometers

