

Geopolitical Competition vs. Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Security



"The essential problem with prevailing geopolitical theories is they view geopolitics almost entirely as a game of winning and losing among the major powers..."



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Overview

1. Understanding Geopolitics
2. Why Indo Pacific?
3. Great Power Rivalry between the US and China
4. Regional Trends and Challenges
5. What's about Thailand? Opportunities and Challenges



1. Understanding Geopolitics

The relationship between “power” and “spaces”

To exert power/influences over spaces

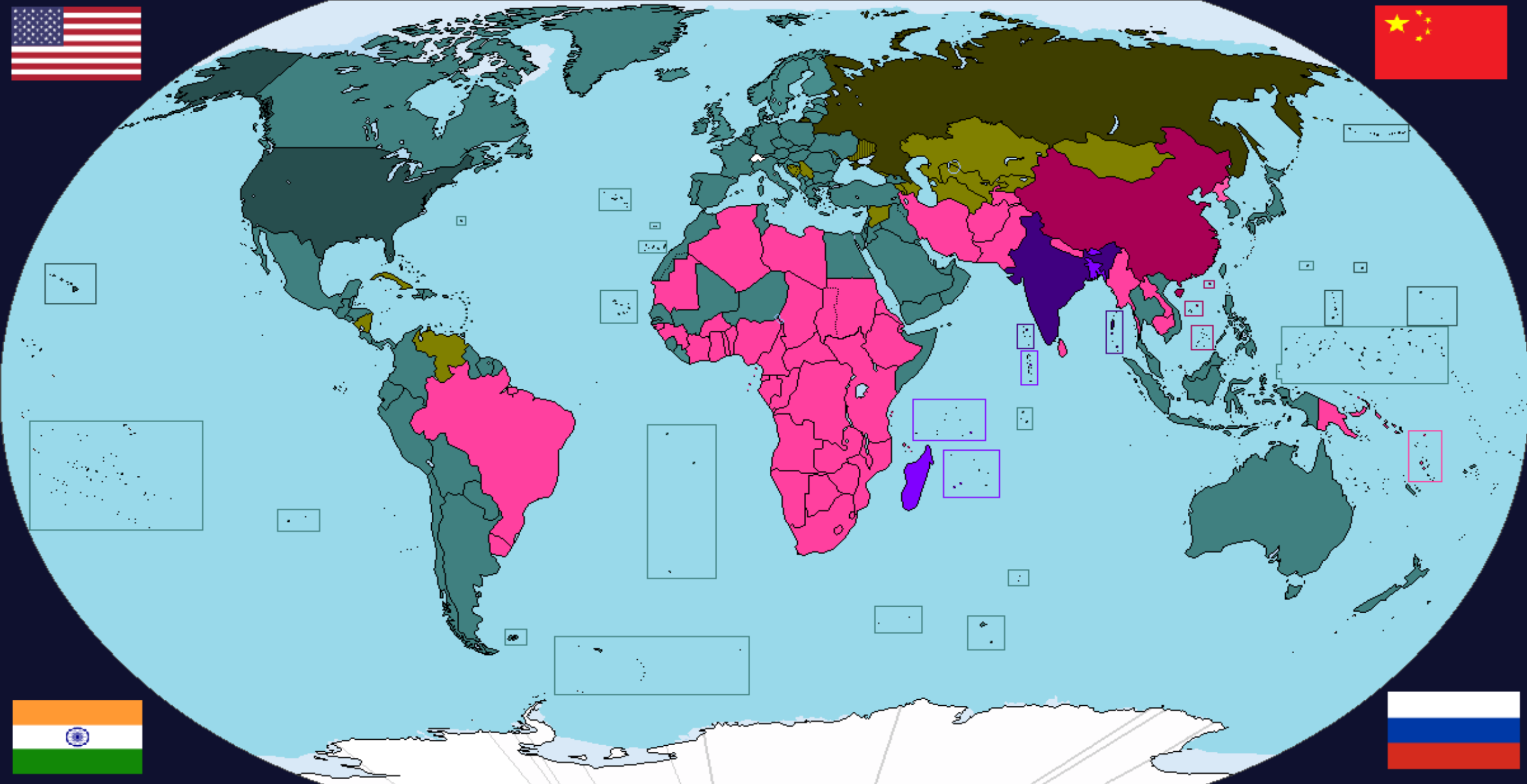
- near and far spaces
- formal control through “colonialism”
- informal control through “sphere of influence” like during the Cold War
- now, not only physical, but also “aerospace” and “cyber space”

→ Attempts to control over “strategic spaces”

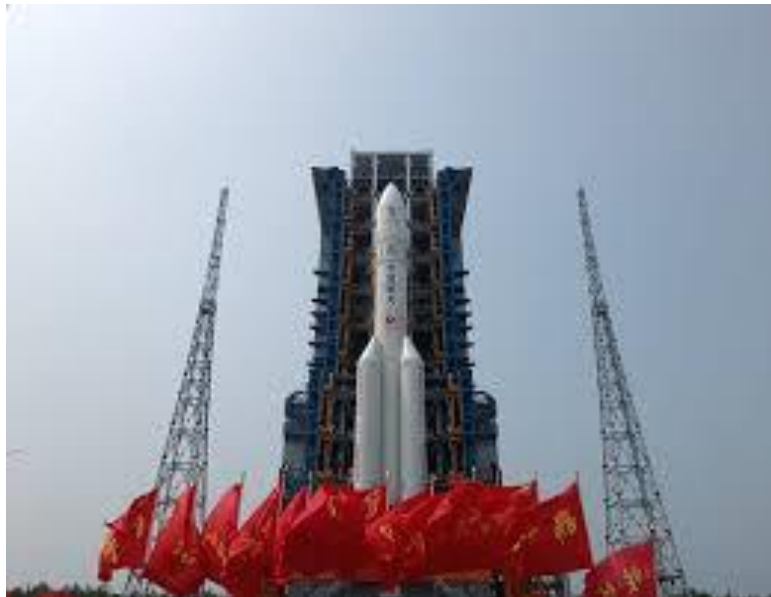


RUDOLF KJELLÉN

Rudolf Kjellén, 1899



Aerospace Competition



Cyber Geopolitics



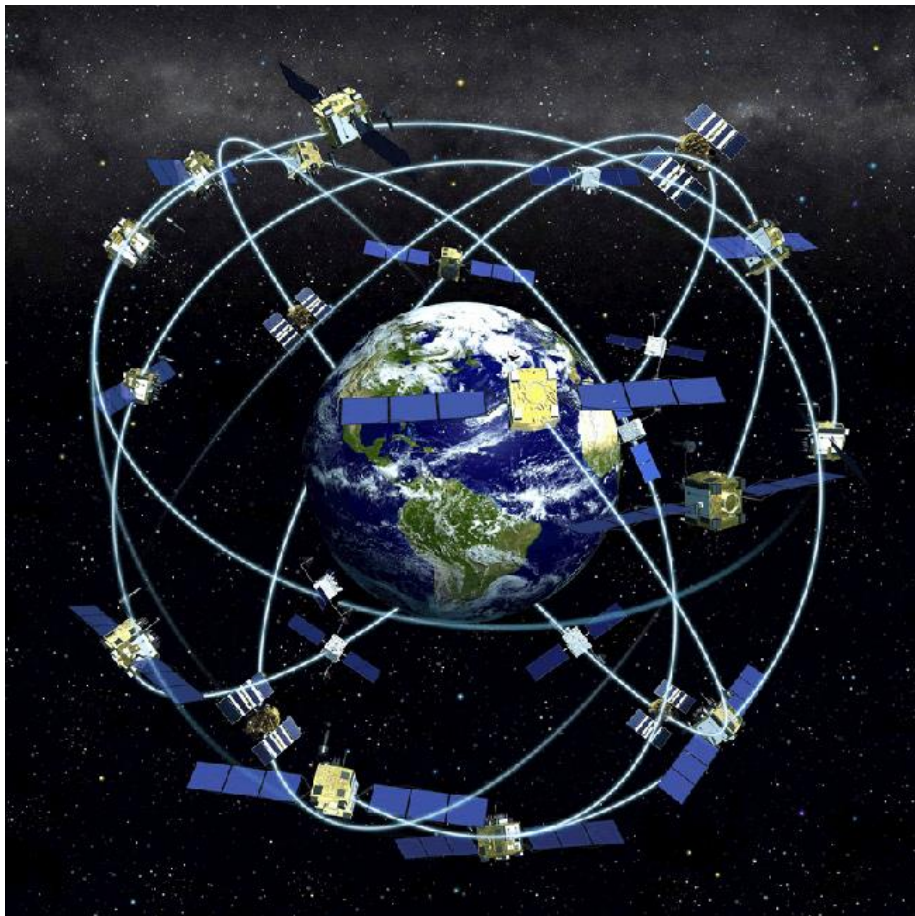


Global positions on allowing Huawei into 5G network

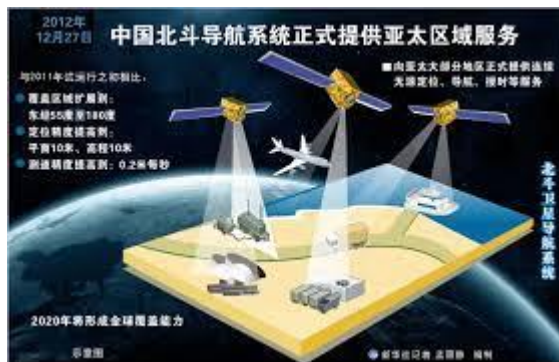
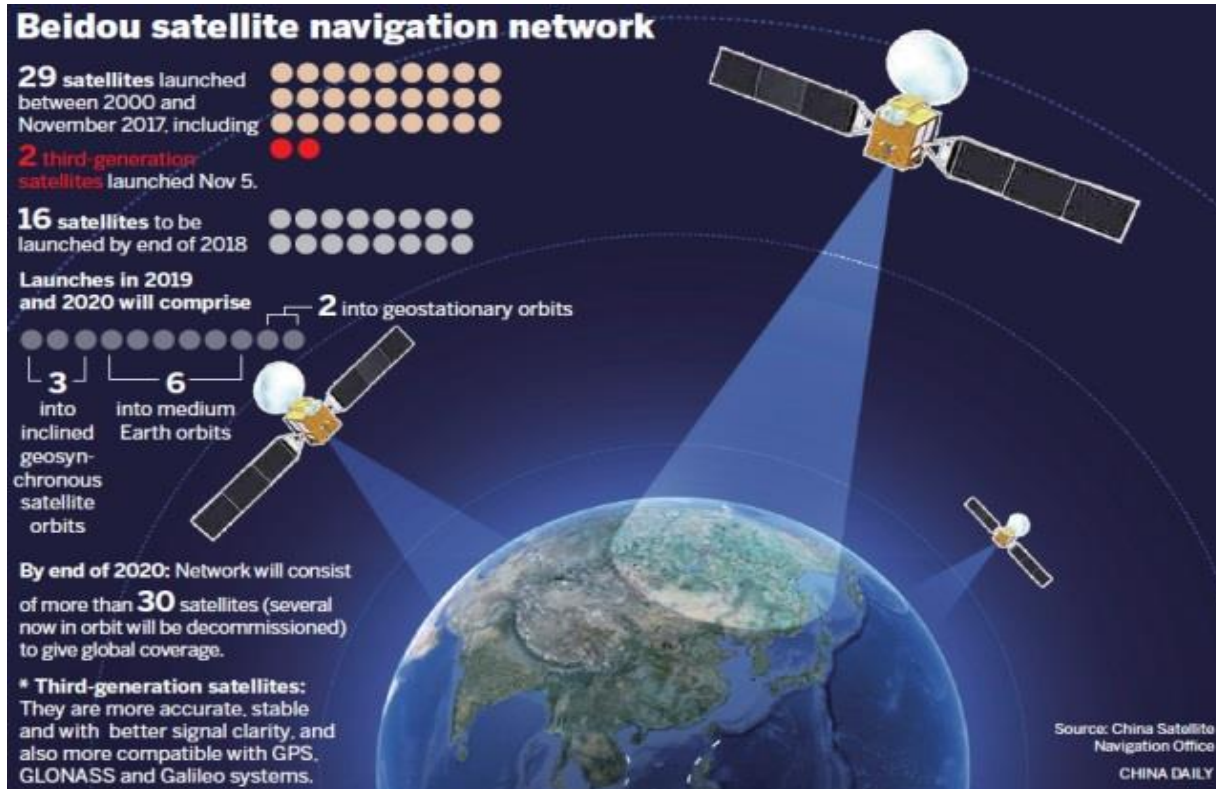


Source: tech.newstatesman.com

US GPS

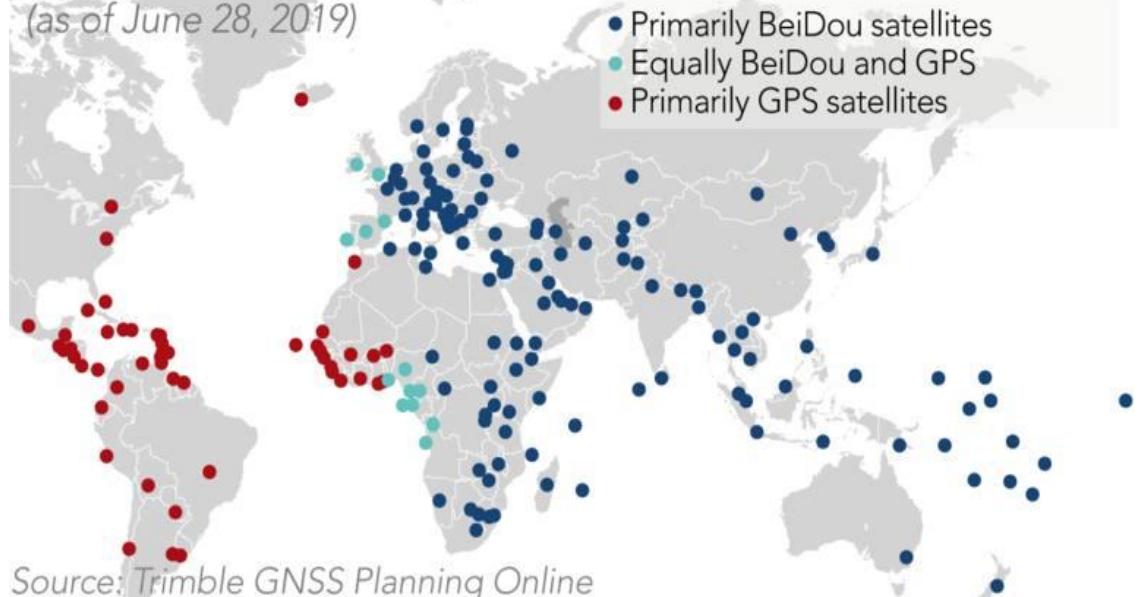


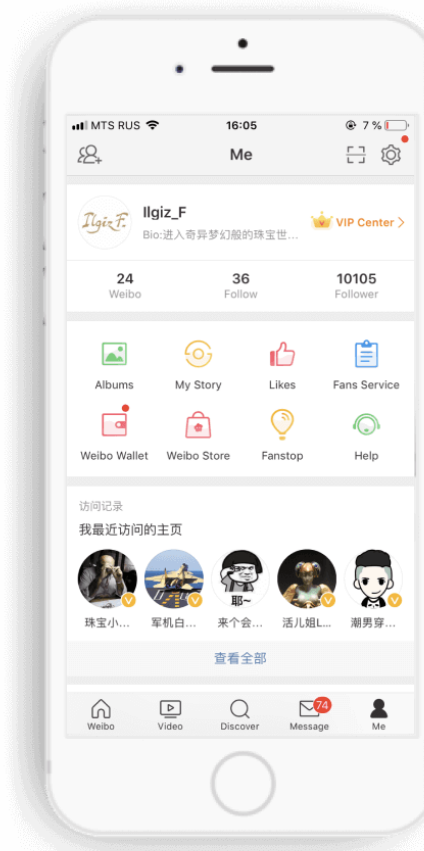
Chinese GPS



Chinese version of U.S. GPS, Beidou expands influence in Asia and Africa

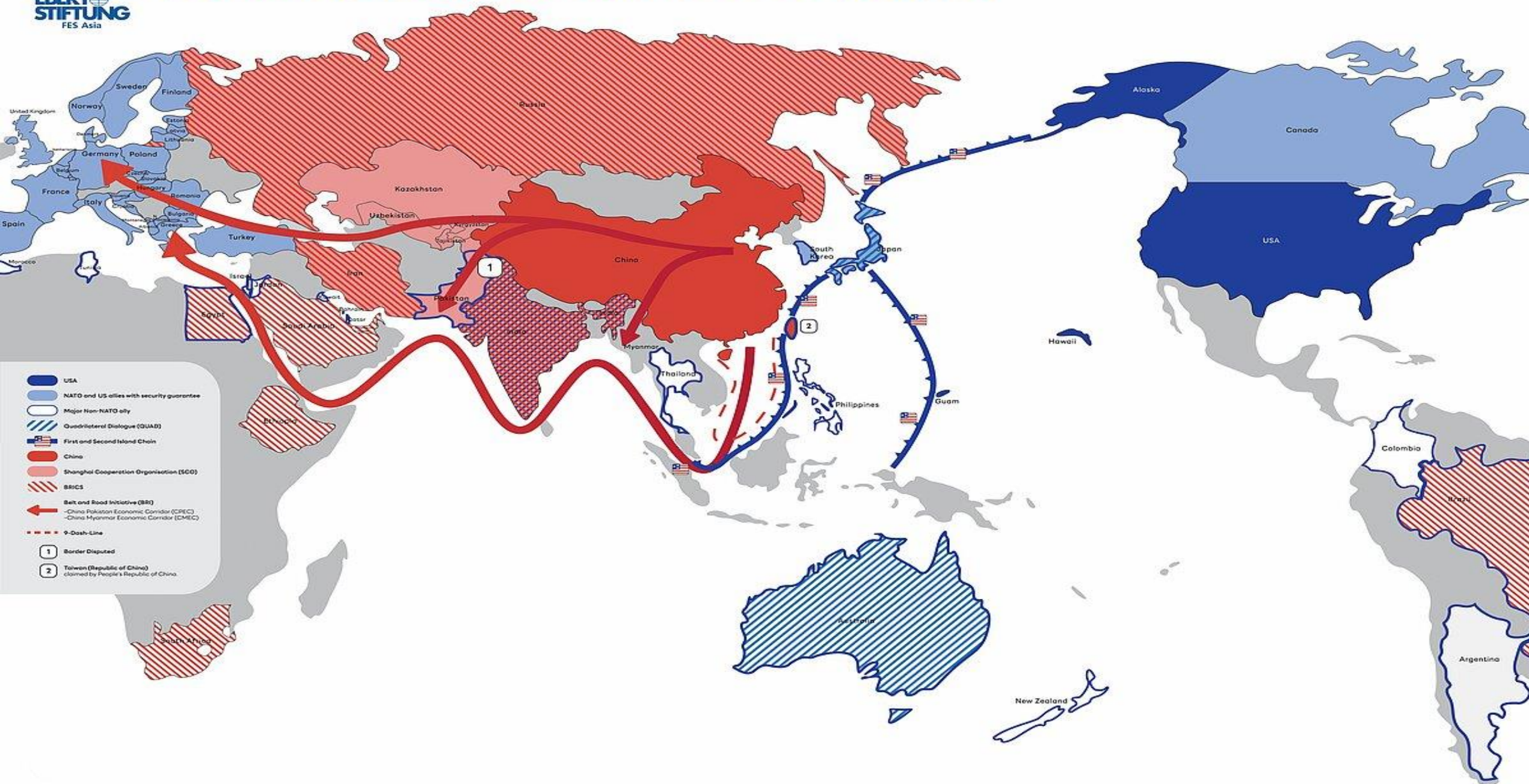
National capitals where positioning satellites can be observed (as of June 28, 2019)





2. Why Indo-Pacific?

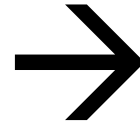
- From “Asia Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific”
- Why is US-China rivalry inevitable?



1990s



Cold War



globalization

2010s



Globalization



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Geopolitics

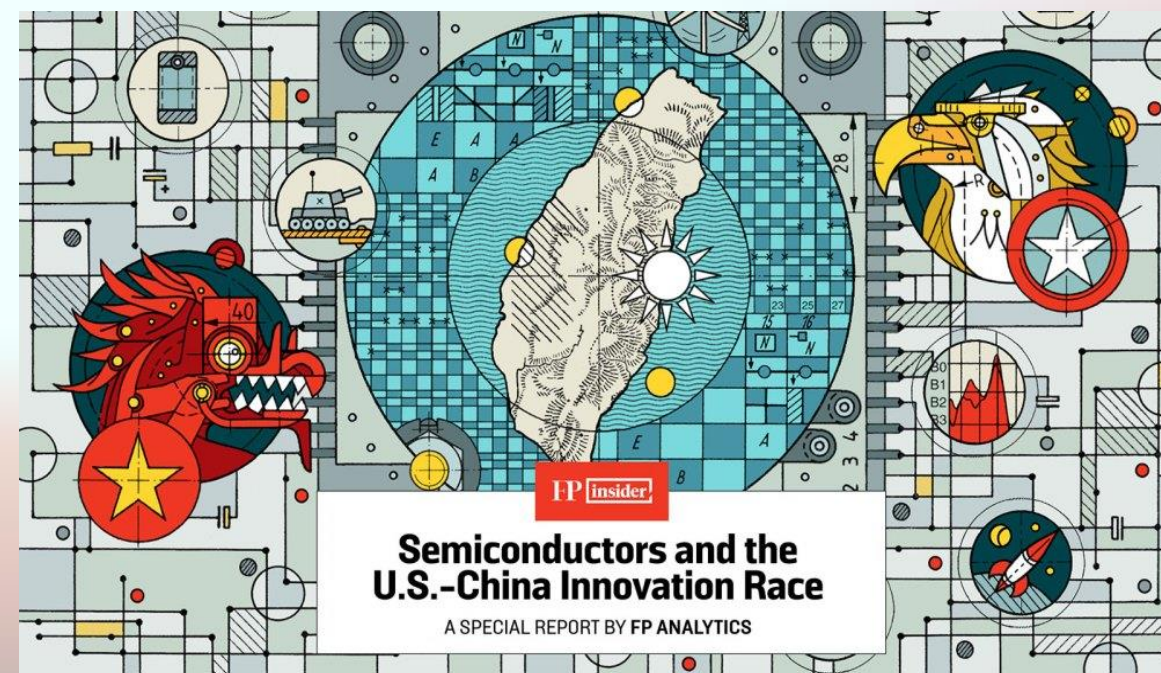
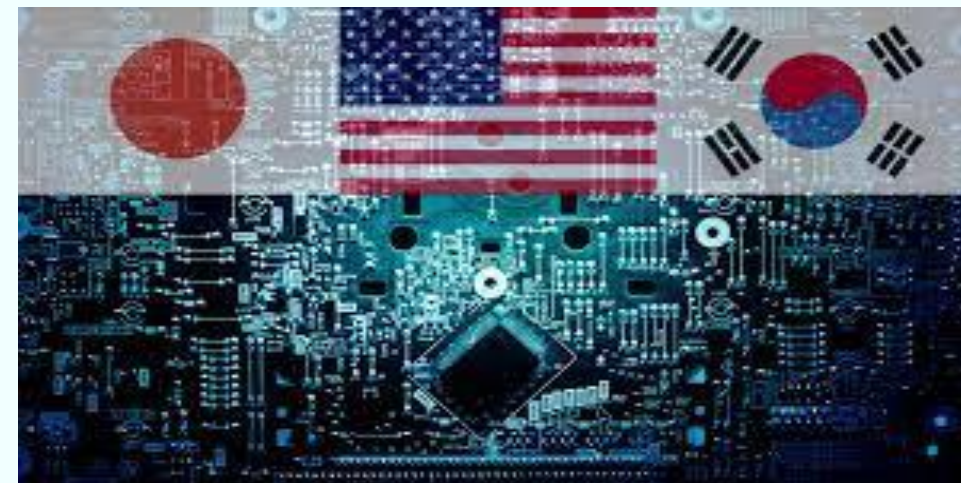
- deglobalization
- decoupling and derisking: friend-shoring

Supply chains and markets is moving from China to
Vietnam, Indonesia and India

Quad Summit, 2022



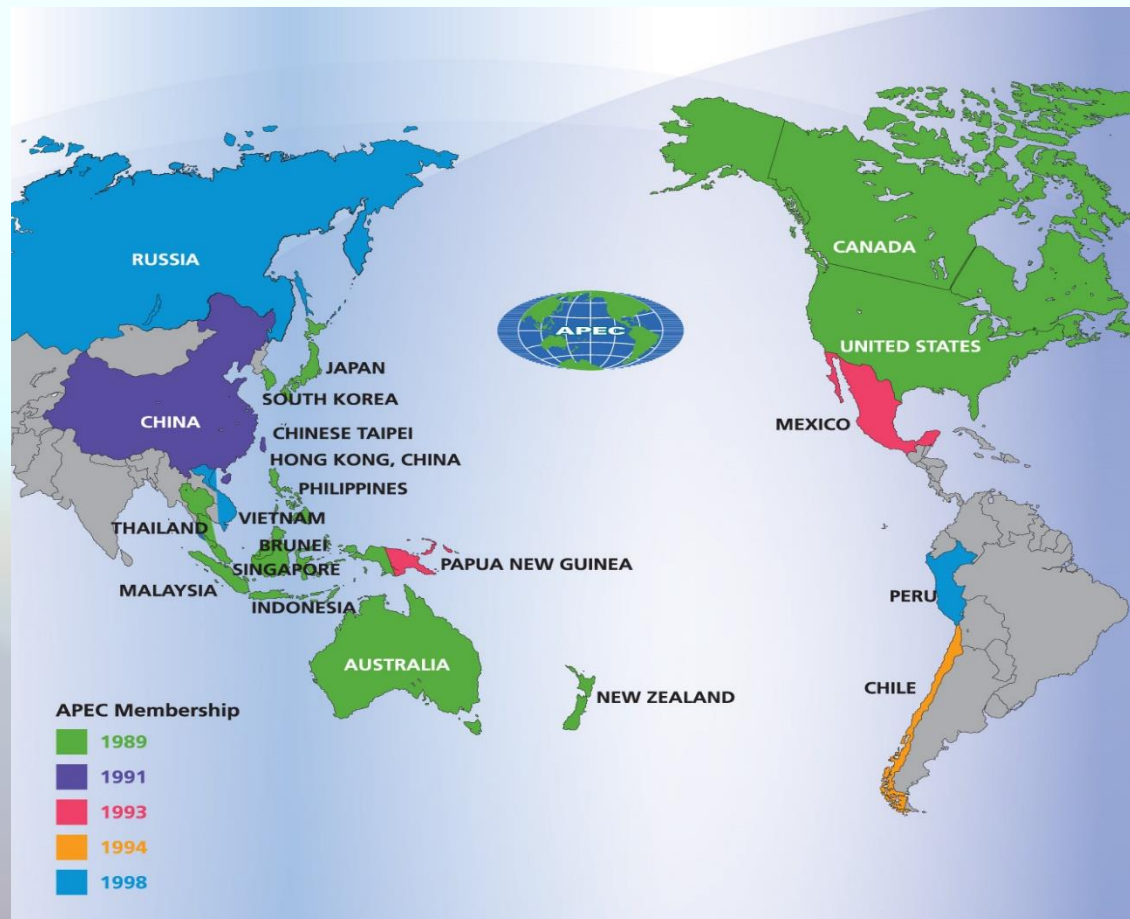
Semi-Conductor Alliance



2010s Asia-Pacific



Indo-Pacific



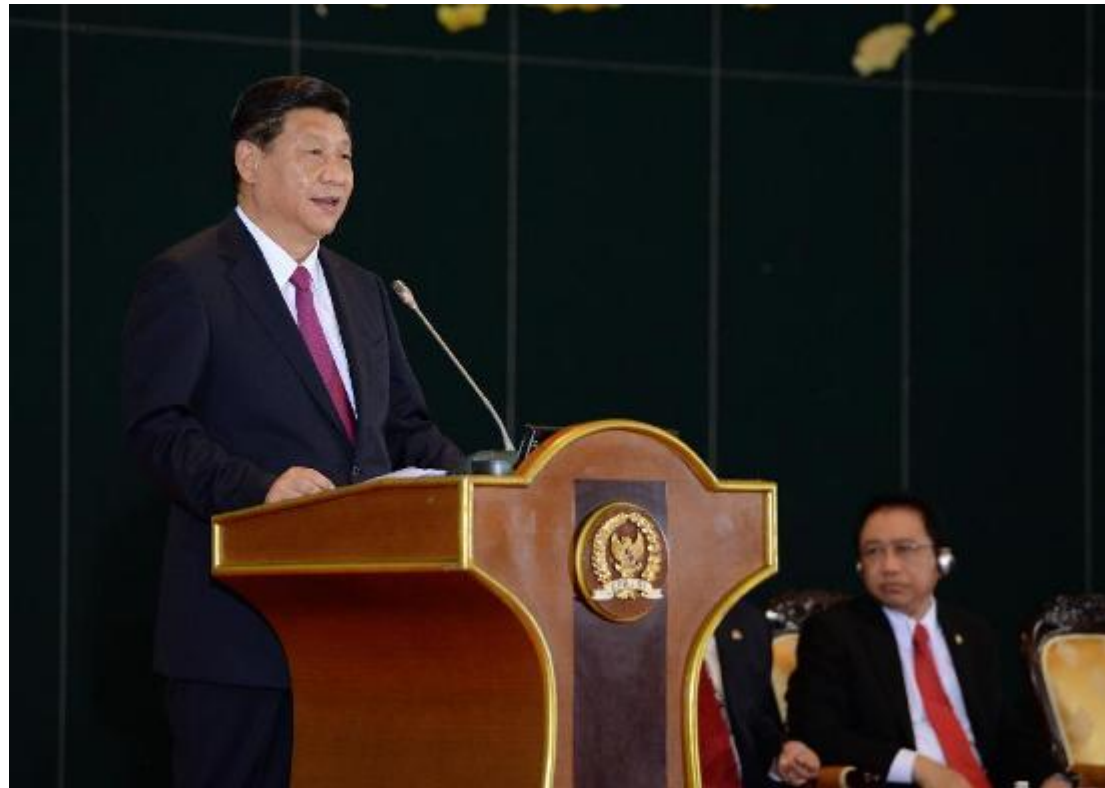
The US' Indo-Pacific Strategy



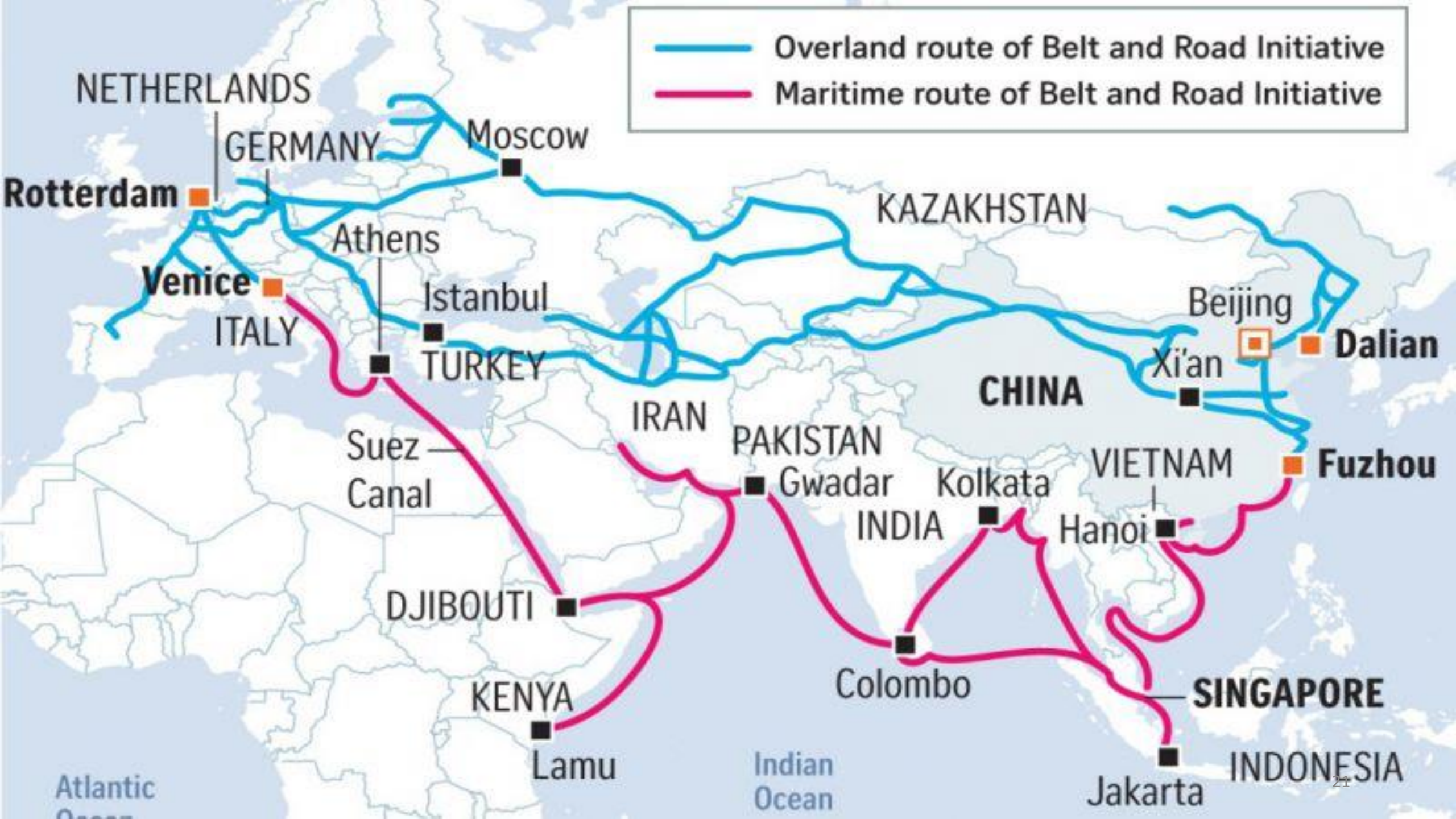
Belt and Road Initiative – BRI (since 2013)



Astana



Jakarta



China's String of Pearls Strategy





Thailand's Land Bridge Project



Sea Power Theory

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914)



The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783 (1890)

Heartland Theory (1919)

- Halford Mackinder, Jr. (1861-1947)
- Land is more important than the sea.
- Especially Eurasia



Rimland Theory (1942)

Nicholas Spykman (1893 - 1943)



The Evolution of American Thinking on China

- 1998 Bill Clinton visited China and declared “partnership.”
- 2001 China entered the WTO
- **Niall Ferguson** & Moritz Schularick
 - “Chimerica,” 2006: symbiotic relationship b/w the US and China
 - economic interdependence
 - US treasury bills, China purchases the bills, US has money to purchase goods from China
- “The End of Chimerica,” 2009
 - Global Economic Crisis 2008
 - China resisted to Yuan revaluation and continues to impose tight control on monetary sector.



Why is US-China rivalry inevitable?



John Mearsheimer: Tragedy of Great Power Politics (2001)

- Why China can't rise peacefully?
 - Offensive realism, regardless of democracy or not
 - Great powers will always want to be a hegemon, that is no. 1.
 - US mistake in fostering China's wealth.
 - China wants to dominate the Asia-Pacific
 - India, Japan, Vietnam, and some Southeast Asian countries will join the US to balance China.

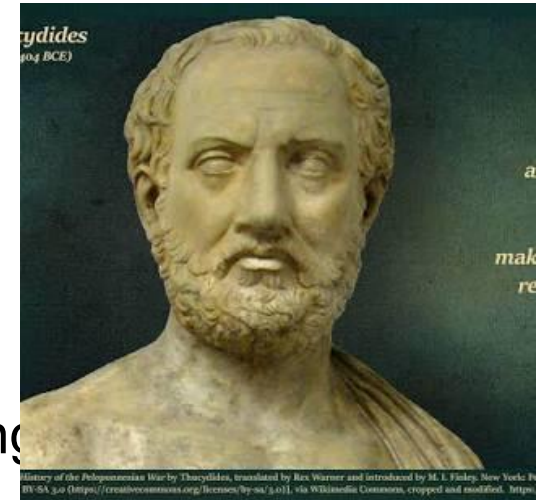
John Ikenberry



- The liberal system will survive (2008).
 - useful for China, India, and even Russia
 - multi-layered and multi-facet rules/institutions
 - war is unlikely.
- U.S. must work with developing democracies to preserve and adjust the liberal order, not only with old allies like Western Europe and Japan (2018)
 - The liberal order needs to be less American.

Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, 2017

- The History of the Peloponnesian War
- Athens (rising power) vs. Sparta (ruling power)
- Sparta viewed Athens as a threat, while Athens perceived Sparta as a threat to its rise and keep it down.
- Security dilemma



Allison

- Rising power syndrome, ruling power syndrome, transition friction
- Objective conditions (materialist capabilities) and subjective conditions (perceptions)
- China's grand strategy: 4 goals
 - 1) returning China to the predominance in Asia
 - 2) reestablishing control over the territories of 'Greater China', including not just Xinjiang and Tibet on the mainland, but also Hong Kong and Taiwan
 - 3) recovering its historic sphere of influence along its borders and in the adjacent seas
 - 4) commanding the respect of other great powers in the councils of the world

Allison on China

- reviving Chinese nationalism and patriotism to instill pride
- deep cultural differences increase stress b/w the US and China (Huntington's clash of civilization)
- Chinese Dream = not only rich, but powerful
- Possible accidents
 - 1) South China Sea
 - 2) Taiwan independence
 - 3) North Korea
 - 4) Economic conflicts

3. Great Power Rivalry between the US and China



George W. Bush (2001-2008): From “strategic partner” to “strategic competitor”



Obama's Pivot to Asia since 2010



Biden: Alliance to contain China



QUAD



QUAD Summit, 2021



Quad Summit, 2022



QUAD Summit 2023 @ Hiroshima



G7 and NATO



4. Regional Trends and Challenges

New leadership



2. The Myanmar Dilemma



The Economist





Five-Point Consensus

ASEAN Leaders' Meeting, 24 April 2021

1 Cessation of Violence

there shall be an immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint.

4 Humanitarian Assistance

ASEAN shall provide humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre

2 Constructive Dialogue

constructive dialogue among all parties concerned shall commence to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people

3 A Special Envoy

a special envoy of the ASEAN Chair shall facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, with the assistance of the Secretary-General of ASEAN

5 Visit Myanmar

the special envoy and delegation shall visit Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned



Since last year



Philippine Military Exercises



April 2024, another tri-lateralism



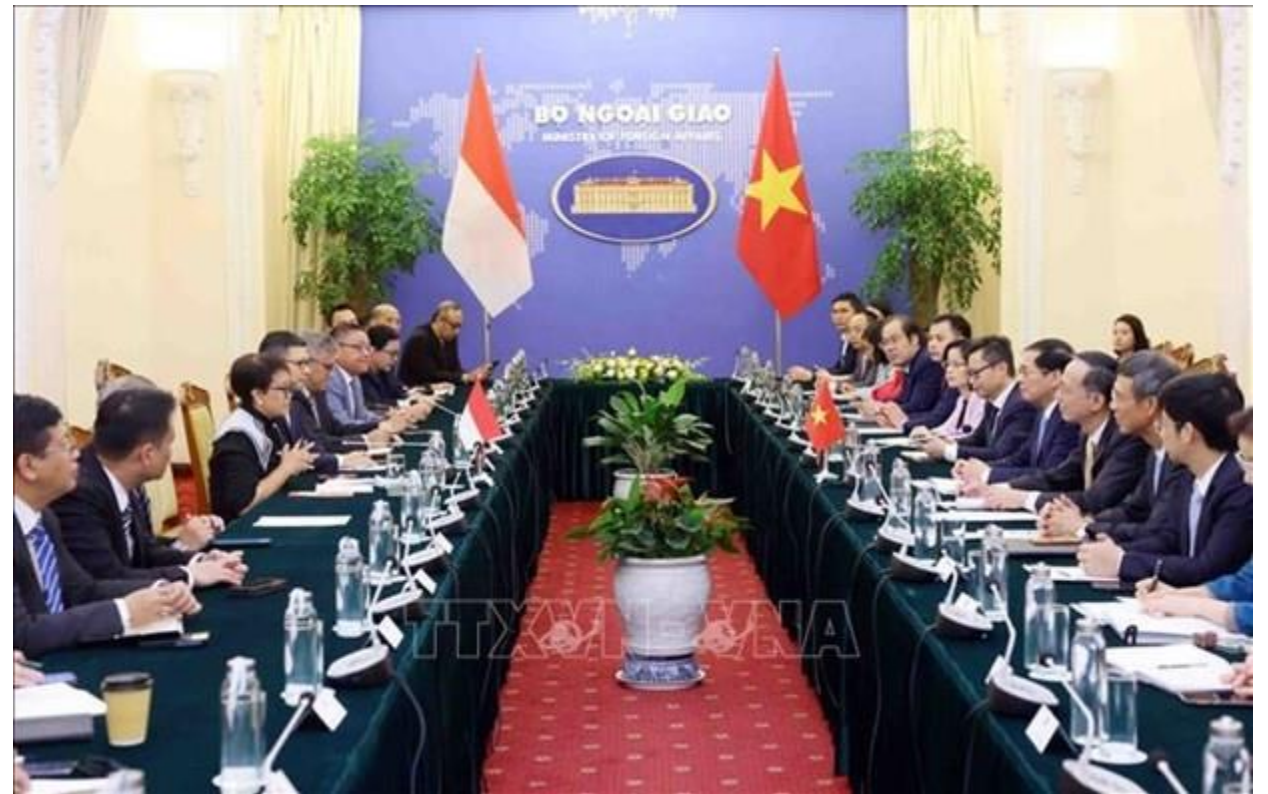
Increasing deterrence capability in the Indo-Pacific



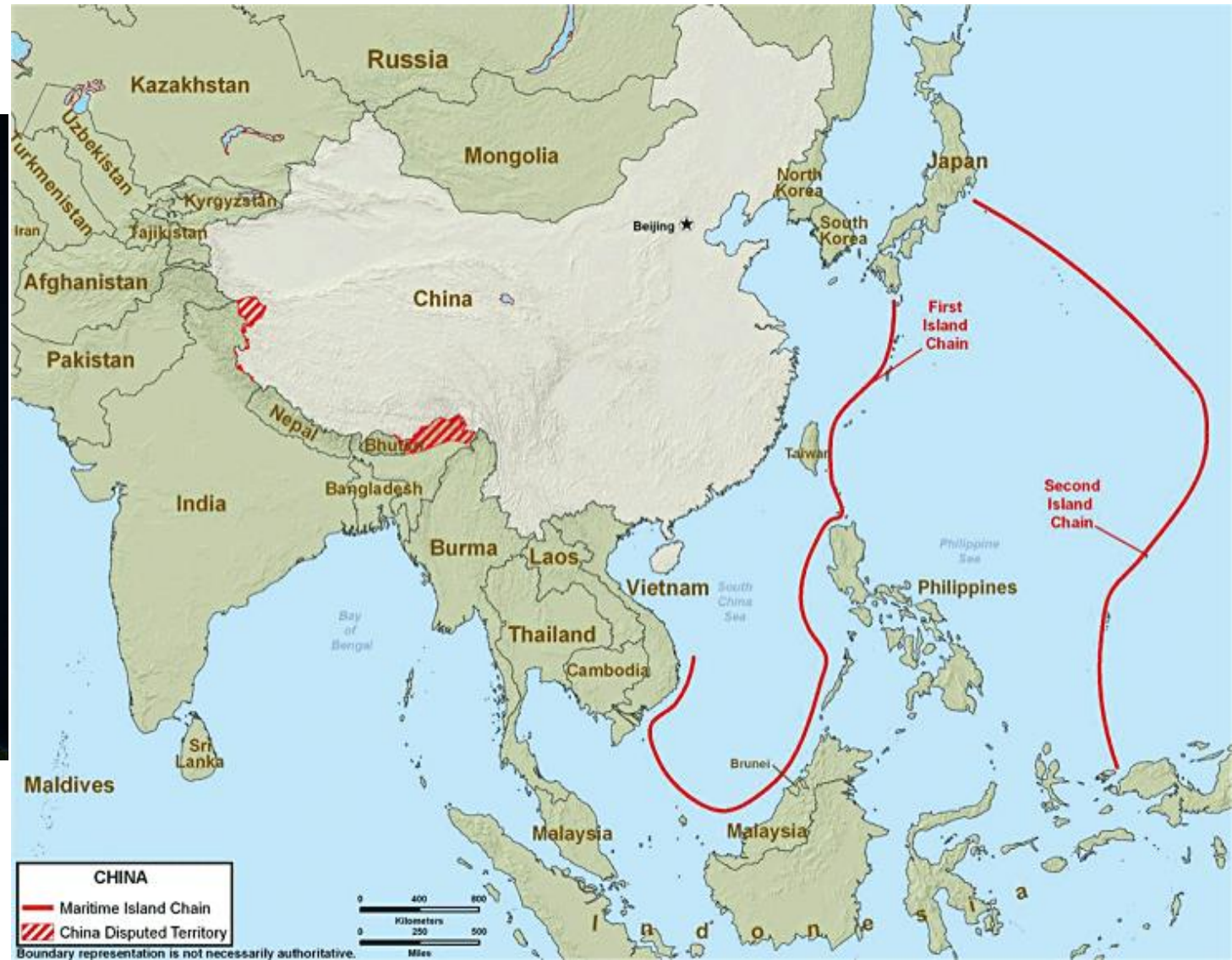
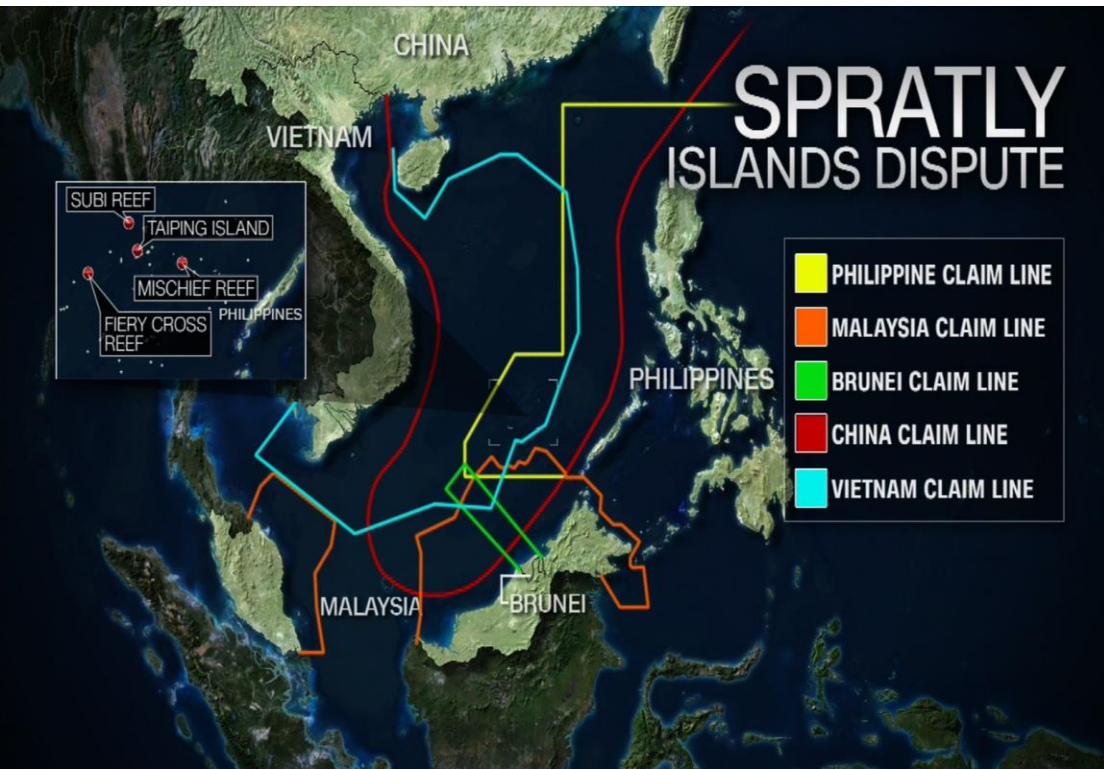
April 2024



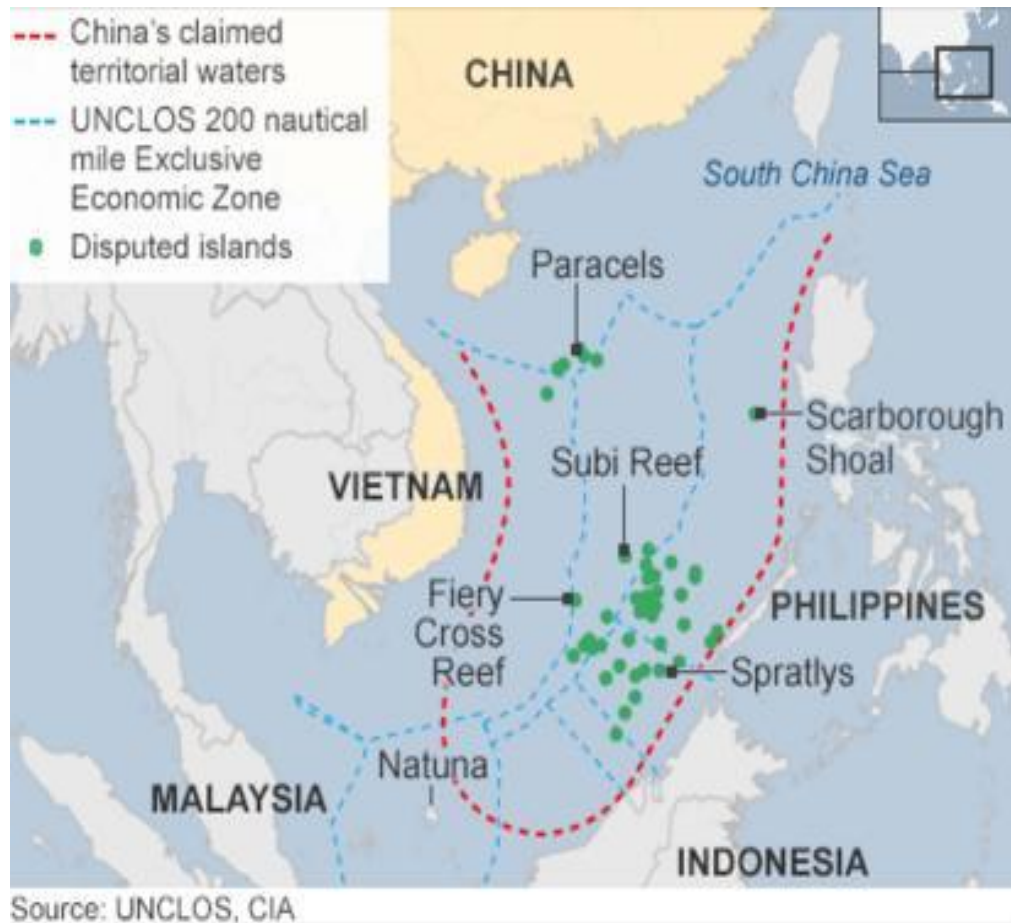
April 2024



The South China Sea







Ream Naval Base, Cambodia



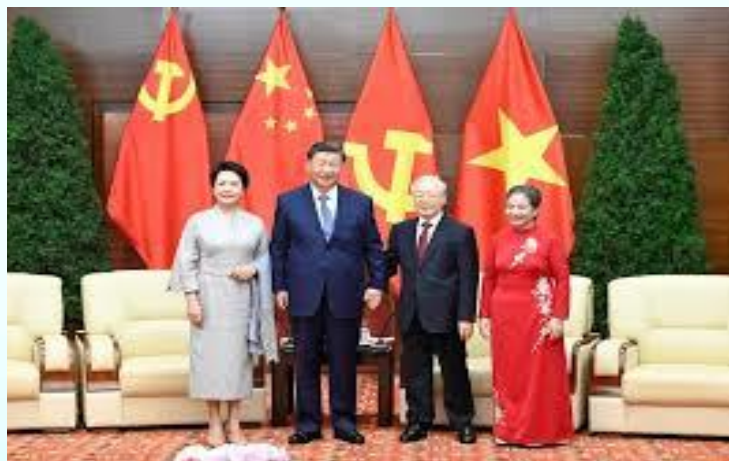
The Taiwan Issue



The 9-dash line vs. The 10-dash line



December 2023



Malabar Naval Exercise



China-Russia Exercises

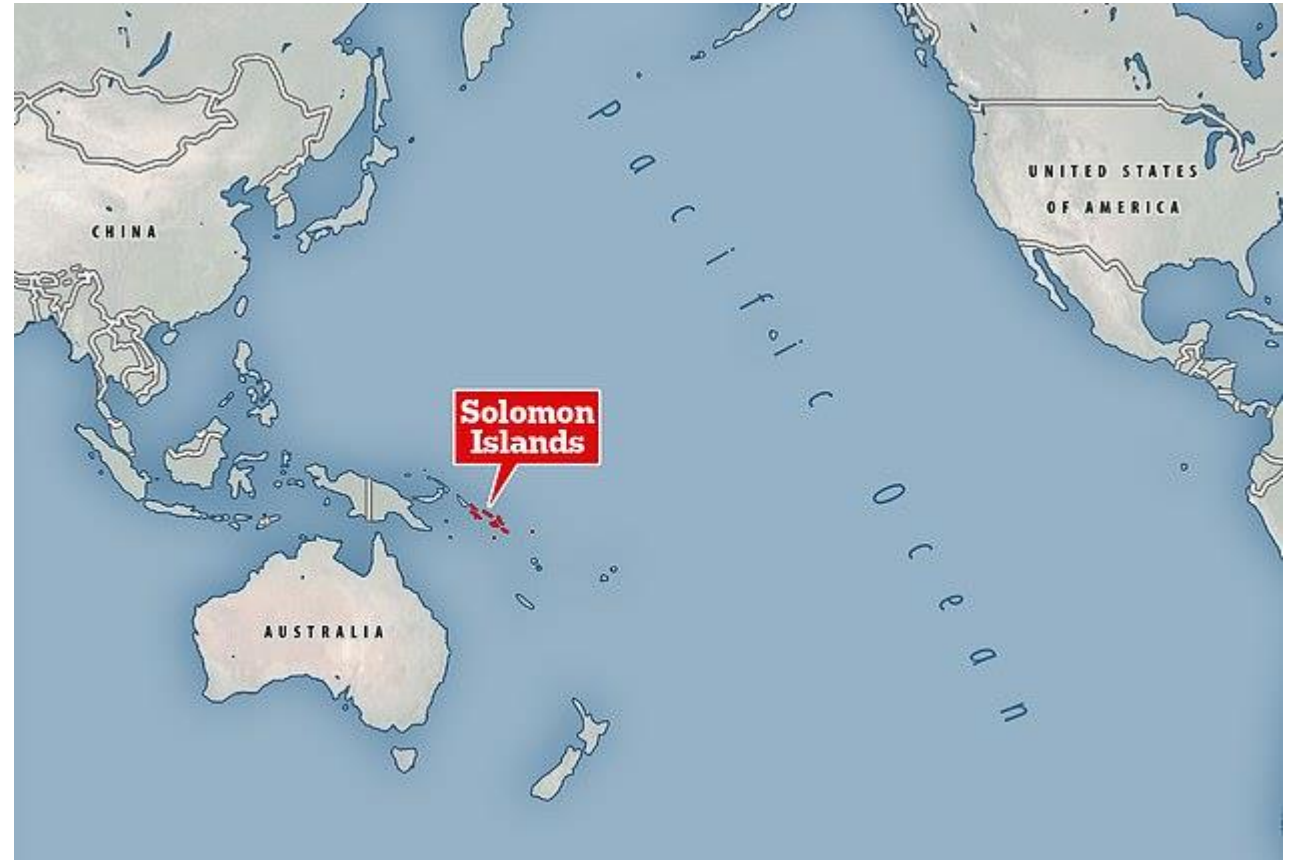
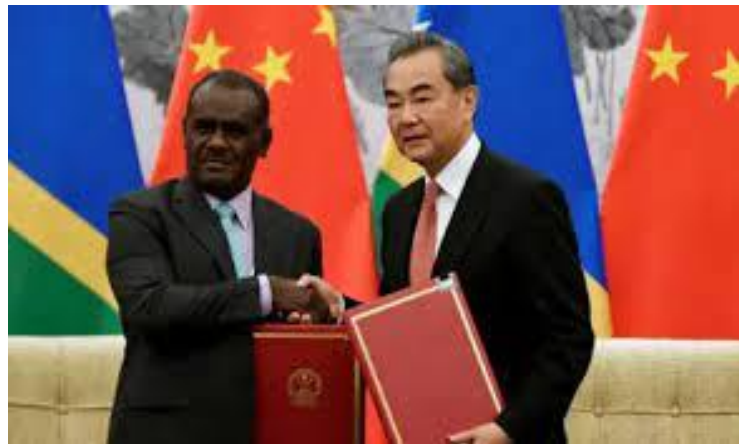


Geopolitics spills over into domestic politics.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJITfKFt3CE>

Solomon Islands



The Philippines



Arroyo
2001 – 2010 Pro-China



Noynoy Aquino
2010 – 2016 Pro-US



Duterte
2016 – 2022 Pro-China



Fernando Marcos, Jr.
2022 – present Pro-US

Brief Discussion

- 1) Will China supersede the US soon (on military, economy, technology, and soft power)?
- 2) Is the world becoming “multipolar” or “bipolar”?
- 3) Is Thailand a small or middle power?
- 4) Pro and Con on Thailand’s application for BRICS full membership?

5. What's about Thailand? Opportunities and Challenges

- Missing some supply chains, esp. semiconductors and other hi-tech industries; “get something, lose something”
- Can Thailand bare the costs of “one country, two (multiple) tech systems”?
- Diminishing regional role

Take-Away Points

- Increasing US-China rivalry → Thailand needs to cooperate more with somewhat third-pole countries (EU, Japan, India) “partnership of the middle”
 - + cooperate with the US and China based on Thai interests and mutual interests respectively.

- South China Sea is hot but won't turn into flame yet, as there are two burning spots (Ukraine, Mideast) already.
- Geopolitics is increasingly influencing domestic politics → Thailand needs bipartisanship on foreign affairs.
- Thailand should play more roles in ASEAN. How?

Dancing with ASEAN: Which Model?



4 - 7