



China in “West Asia” and U.S. Views on the PRC

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NESA

April 2022

The People's
Republic of
China/ ZhongGuo



The Basics

- One Party State
 - Chinese Communist Party
 - Xin Jinping; President of the PRC, Chairman of the CMC, and General Secretary of the CCP
 - Party/State apparatus with supremacy still retained by Party
- Legitimacy of the CCP was once determined by adherence to Maoist doctrine; now on twin pillars of national cohesion and economic prosperity
- PLA Serves the Party, not the State
- Foreign Policy retains adherence to Maoist-era principles of non-intervention
 - Yet, China's diplomacy emphasizes economic relationships and greater willingness to actively steer, if not lead, international/multilateral institutions
 - Bilateral engagement outside specific topics remains de facto preference
- Economic model remains a mixed socialist market economy (Socialism with Chinese Characteristics)
 - Success at domestic poverty alleviation, consumer market growth, and high-tech achievement
 - Remains burdened by SOEs, opaque banking/lending institutions, economic regional distribution
- Like all Nation-States, the PRC uses historical perception to define national aims:
 - Late Qing era remains relevant politically (19th Century – 1911)
 - Includes the Century of Shame
 - Founding of the Republic (1911)
 - Sun Yat-Sen; Warlord Era
 - Second Sino-Japanese War, or WWII (1937-1945)
 - Division of polity between CCP and ROC
 - Chinese Civil War (1945-1949)
 - Founding of the PRC (1949)
 - Maoist Era (1949 – 1976)
 - Great Leap Forward; Hundred Flowers; Cultural Revolution
 - Reformist Era (1978 – 1991)
 - Also called the Dengist era after Deng Xiaoping; Tiananmen Protests
 - Technocrat Era (1991 – 2012)
 - Jiang Zemin through Hu Jintao
 - Xi Era (2013 -)
 - Nationalism and Growth; Time to be a World Power

Internal Cohesion and Border Concerns

Internal:

- Xinjiang
- Tibet
- HK

External:

- Korean Peninsula
- ECS
- SCS

Mekong Delta

India/China Border Region

Overlapping:

- Taiwan/Taiwan Strait



U.S. Perspective on China

It is Diverse

International Revision

Hegemony over Western Pacific

Wildly Self-Congratulatory / Overreactive to Criticism

Increasingly Adventurous Foreign Policy

Increasingly Meddlesome in Domestic Politics

Peer Competitor

Technological Competitor

Opaque Nature (Especially with BRI)

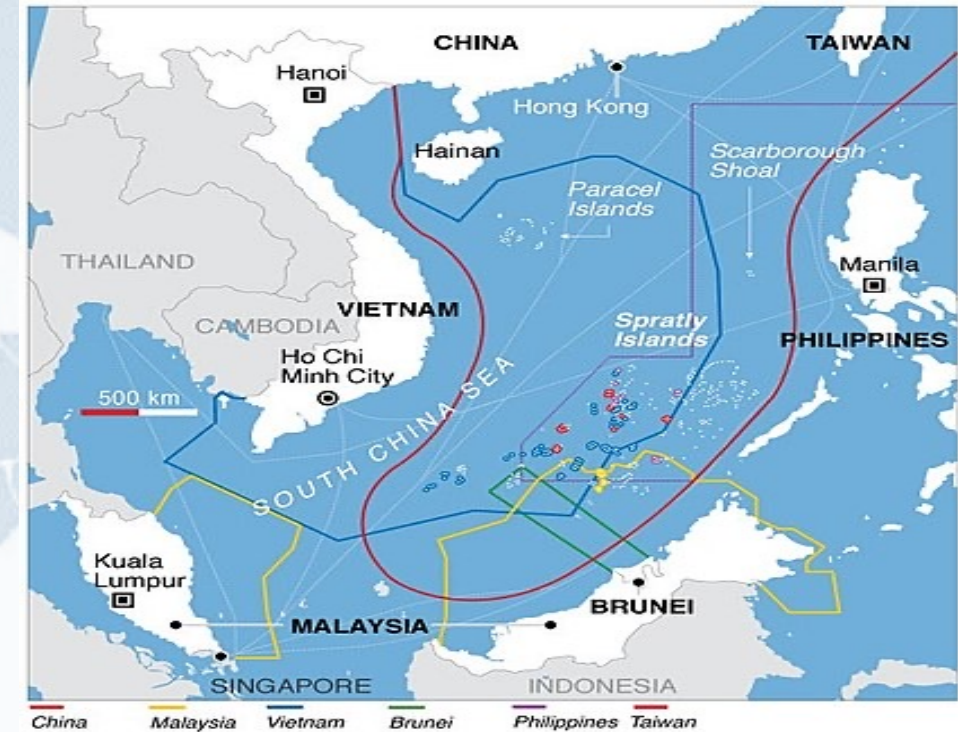
Avoids Burden of Stakeholder Position, While Enjoying the Benefits of Others



SCS, IOR Straits, and Island Chains – Geography



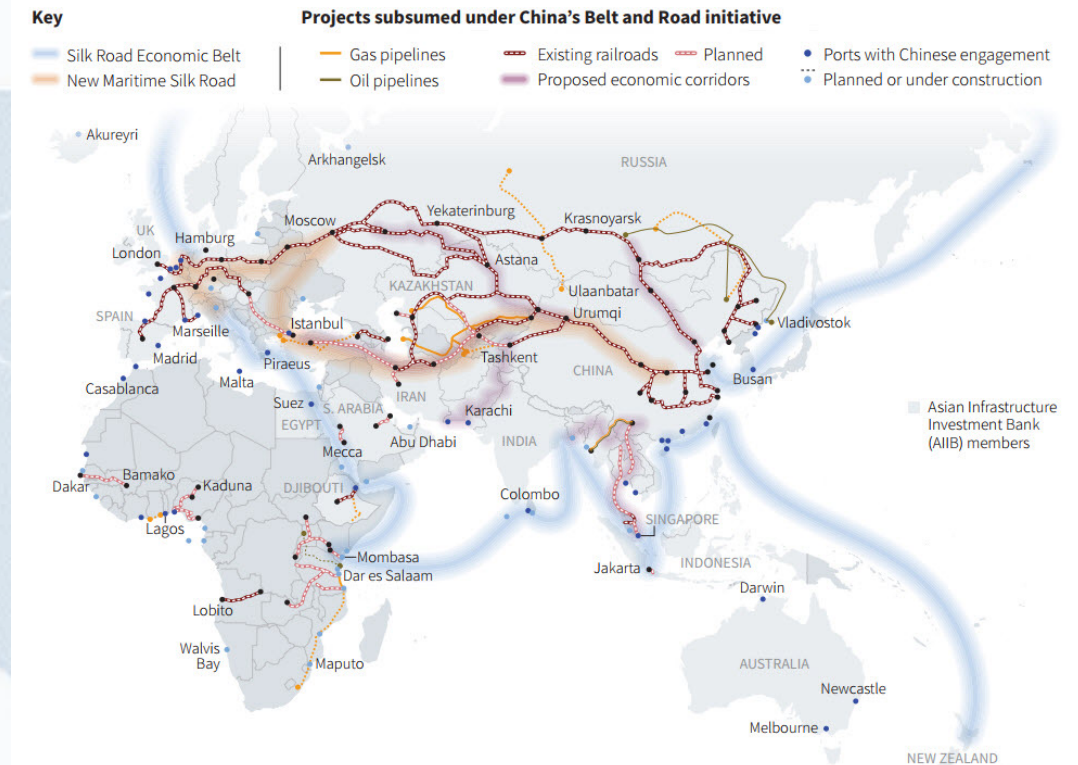
Figure 4: The First and Second Island Chains. PRC military theorists refer to two "island chains" along China's maritime perimeter. The First Island Chain includes Taiwan and the Ryukyu Islands, the Second Island Chain extends from Japan to Guam.



China's Adventurous Foreign Policy

- The BRI (Yidai Yilu)
 - Built upon existing efforts
 - SREB and MSRI
 - Energy Needs/Export Necessity
- Island Building, Salami Slicing, Gray Zone Efforts
 - SCS – Spratly and Parcel
 - Scarborough Shoal
 - Chinese Maritime Militia
- Overseas Logistics and Basing
 - Development of Dual-Use Facilities
 - Logistical Advancement for Overseas Deployments
 - Djibouti Base
- Bang the Drum
 - China's effective communication strategy
 - Speed of action
 - Figure out the limits (Covid-era, Wolf Warriors)
- Gain Familiarity beyond East Asia
 - Build relationships in regions where a relatively new player
 - Gain SME expertise on non-East Asia regions

FIGURE 1. REVIVING THE SILK ROAD

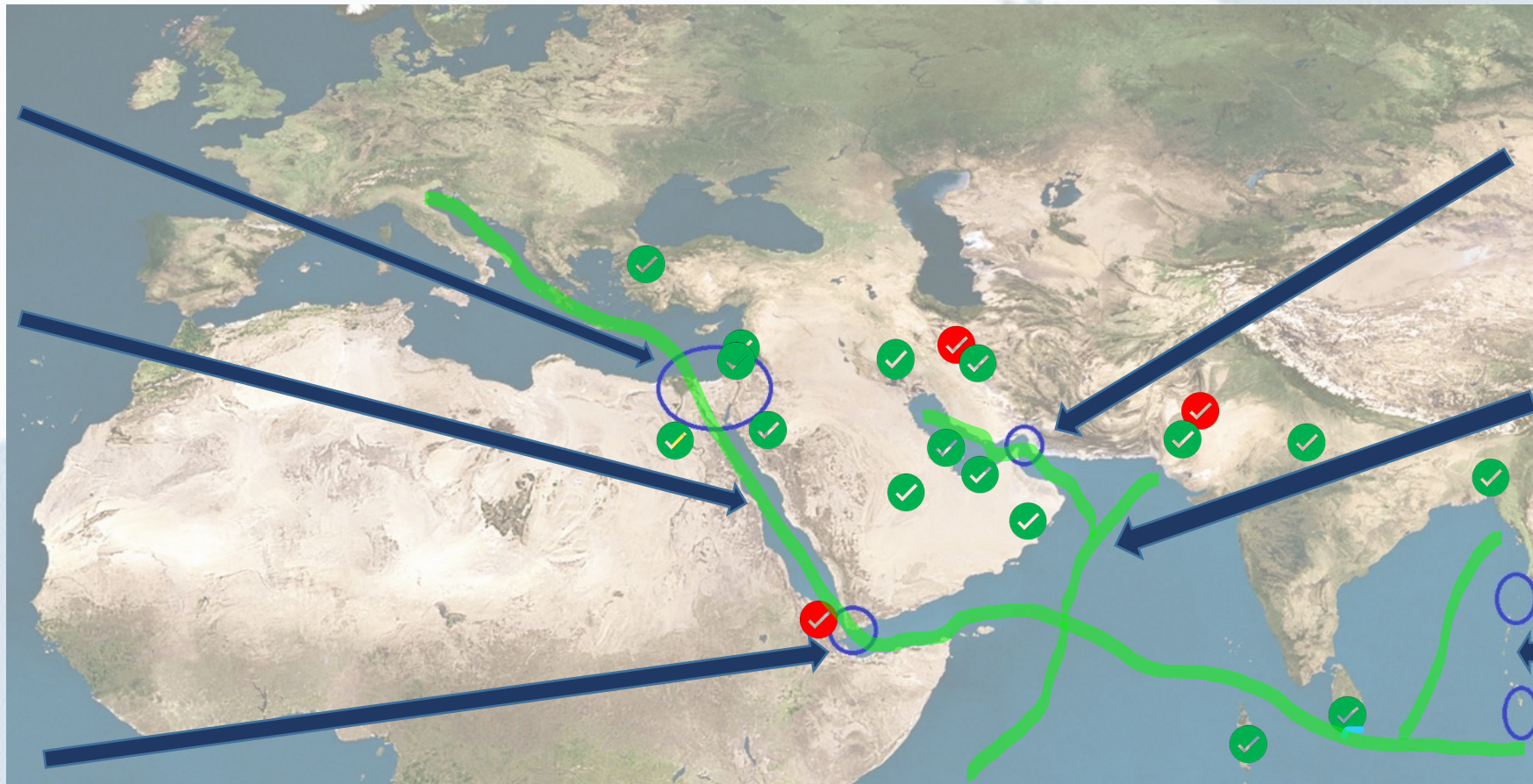


Source: Mercator Institute for China Studies.

C. Inton, 23/04/2018

REUTERS

The PRC in the NESAs Region



SUEZ REGION / EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

RED SEA

BAB EL MANDEB / HORN OF AFRICA

STRAIT OF HORMUZ

ARABIAN SEA

ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

MSRI

✓ Economic Presence
✓ POL/SEC Presence

WHY DOES THE REGION MATTER FOR CHINA?

- MENA Region is more than a resource cache for China
- MSRI over SREB (IOR becoming more central than Eurasia overland)
- Bab al-Mandab and Arabian Sea remains key region for PLA/security efforts
- Political reality starting to take shape vis-à-vis PRC in the region

China Security Presence in the Wider Middle East

Djibouti Base:

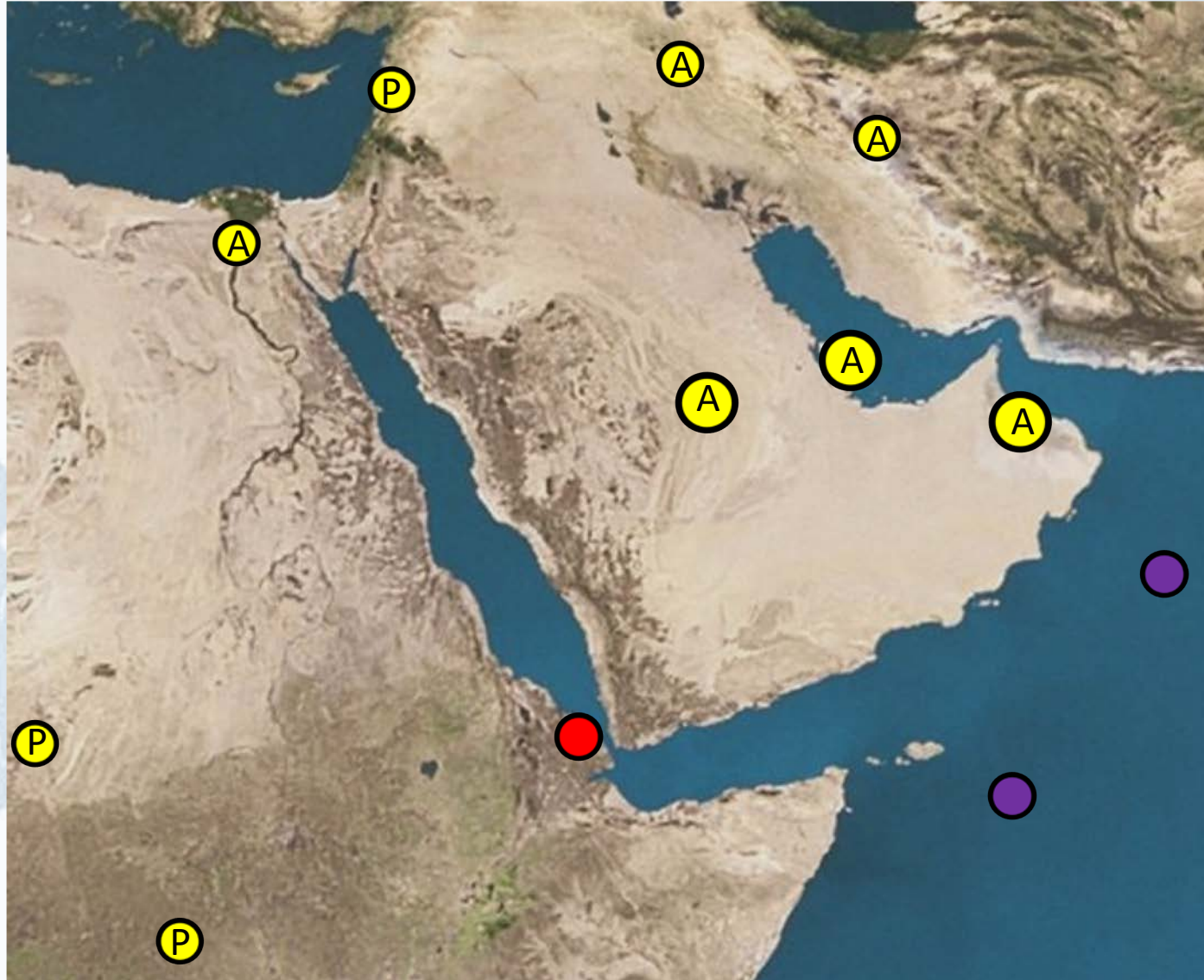
- Dual Use Facility
- PLAN resupply
- PKO deploy point
- Intelligence
- Supports Djibouti Port investment
- Political message of China overseas capability

Increasing Comfort Navigating Gulf Tensions:

- Retains ability to balance close ties with Tehran and Riyadh

Focus on Red Sea/Gulf of Aden:

- The Main SLOC for trade with Europe, its priority market



Base = ● Ops/Exercises = ● Add' Security Presence = ●

Political Dance Ongoing

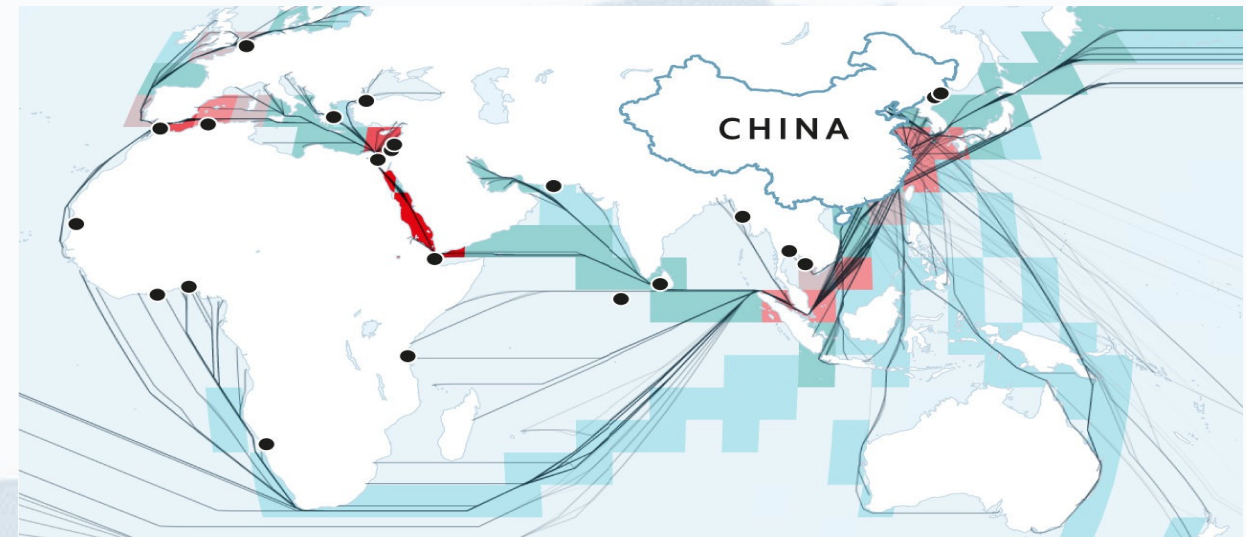
- Continues to avoid entanglement in regional conflicts (Yemen, Syria, Counter VEO, etc.)
- Still leans on its history as a leader of the Global South from time to time
- Economic Largesse as Communicative Device
- Emphasize a Retreating West
- Avoid active leadership in regional institutions

CASE: the Internal Debate

- Increasingly common for analysts in China to recognize end date for "regional balance"
- Debate over sides/choices
- Future security sector action will be tied to littoral spaces, not overland

What China is and is not doing in the NESAs Region?

- China maintains Balancing Act; Recognizes termination date of that approach; Preparing for Next Stage
- China's Maritime Interests don't Raise too many Alarms; Make Logistical Sense; SREB can't work
- Economic Diplomacy still drives relationships, but overt political pressure and messaging becoming increasingly common
- Exploits Pricing and State-Driven Economic Model to advantage
- What does the U.S. Expect?
 - Intensified competition in Western Pacific; Institutions and Relationships overtly Tested
 - Deepen strategic reach to IOR
 - Technological Competition between Major Powers
 - In NESAs Region, deepen political ties to offset slowdown of BRI
 - Refine information approach, while still being on the offensive in crafting narratives
 - Keep Weaknesses Off Radar
 - And right now, a reflection on strength of U.S. in Pacific, as well as a reflection of long-term impact of adventurous foreign policy





Many Thanks and Look Forward to Questions

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