

## How China rules the forklifts

**Comments about the article published in the Financial Times on January 12, 2017: "How China rules the waves".**

China rules the forklifts, rather than rules the waves.

Managing ports and ruling the high seas are two very different propositions. If China owns companies that operate ports, she does not own the ports themselves, which belong to the countries in which these are located. It is the country's government that can regulate, allow, or restrict access to a port based on the flag, not a port operator.

Money does not buy national sovereignty. The Financial Times, being financial, may be inclined to believe, alongside the U.S. president-elect, that who commands a large bank account also controls national sovereign rights, but such is not yet formally the case.

China knows she is landlocked, a sad fact for her, which she is acutely aware will hinder severely her future ambitions. So is Russia, although to a lesser degree.

The irony of the statement in the article that: " *Analysts say that China's naval strategy is aimed primarily at denying US aircraft carrier battle groups access to a string of archipelagos from Russia's peninsula of Kamchatka to the Malay Peninsula in the south, a natural maritime barrier called the "first island chain" within which China identifies its strategic sphere of influence* " is that the reality is just the exact opposite: it is China that is denied access to the high seas, and within a line drawn quite inside the "first island chain" (see map below).

To be able to deny access to the U.S. inside her immediate perimeter, China would need to control not only the countries of Southeast Asia, but also Russia, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. China cannot boast a single ally in the region, except perhaps the Democratic Republic of Korea and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (where it is probable the obsolete euphemism is bound to be dropped after the current ruler's exit). China could build a navy base in East Timor and stay there after the current Timorese strongman fades away, but only because the country is tiny, and no match for China, provided of course that the United Nations do not oppose her through the imposition of damaging sanctions. Outside that limited possibility her choices are quite restricted.

As history teaches us, to rule the oceans a nation needs a very large navy and the sovereign control of bases such as Gibraltar, Diego Garcia, the Hawaii Islands, the Pacific Islands, the Aleutian Islands, the Kuril Islands, Okinawa, the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, the Caribbean, the Panama Canal, the Suez Canal, Japan, South Korea, etc.

The tiny reefs of the South China Sea currently developed by China are disproportionate in every aspect, when compared with the U.S. and allied oceanic presence, be it by size, location, distance from main maritime lanes, capacity to harbor large fleets and projected force, exposure to hurricanes, etc. How does Scarborough Reef compare to Pearl Harbor, Midway, the Marianna's, Okinawa, South Korea? And the contested reefs are inside the prison walls.

China could of course use the ports her companies operate as navy bases, but for that treaties are to be signed to that effect, and then navy ships stationed there. So far, China doesn't have enough navy ships, and such treaties were not signed, although the article seems to hint to one.

The strength of the U.S. Navy is in its ability to project force. The U.S. has 10 nuclear aircraft carriers. China has 1 diesel powered aircraft carrier (see comparative table of naval and air forces below). China's navy and air force are disproportionately smaller than the U.S.'s. China spends \$200 billion a year to improve a military that is a fraction of the U.S.'s, who spends \$600 billion a year. The Chinese projectable force is probably not even one tenth of the U.S.'s, and her military budget is a third. At this pace, when will China surpass the U.S. and her allies militarily? Granted, the capability of China, with her population of 1.5 billion, to defend her soil from any foreign seaborne invasion is absolute, without doubt, but offensive power is of a different nature.

All China's business is based on foreign trade. Any military conflict would immediately see her revenue dwindle and petroleum supplies dry up. Chinese freighters would be seized. China would lose all access to the seas, encircled as she is by tight and shallow straits and channels. She would also lose her commercial port assets overseas, which would be used by her opponents.

The last sentence in the Financial Times article, about "*our port at Piraeus*" is particularly deceptive: would any non-Chinese operator bar a humanitarian evacuation ship from entering port? On the other hand, would the Greek government feel obligated to welcome a warship, just because she flies the flag of the port operator? Isn't Greece a member of the European Union and of NATO?

And anyway, how long will it be until social revolution and ethnic outburst develop, once China reaches a per capita GDP of \$10,000, or perhaps \$15,000? Who in China will care then about territorial expansion, in a country singularly devoid historically of any such ambition? Rather, the current shallow nationalistic clamors, in spite of the fear they engender, should be regarded as the Communist regime's swan song.

Propaganda devised by an expansionist dictatorship is understandable. Public gullibility should not fall prey to it.

## COMPARISON OF U.S. AND CHINESE NAVIES AND AIR FORCES (2015)

	U.S.			China		
Type	Units	Total displacement (MT)	Notes	Units	Total displacement (MT)	Notes
<b><u>NAVY</u></b>						
<b>Aircraft carriers</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1,060,000</b>	<i>(all nuclear) (900 aircraft)</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>67,500</b>	<i>(diesel - range: 4,000 NM) (36 aircraft)</i>
<b>Submarines</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>729,867</b>	<i>(all 73 nuclear)</i>	<b>71</b>	<b>279,220</b>	<i>(13 nuclear)</i>
<b>Amphibious ships</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>640,947</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>100,000</b>	
Amphibious assault ship	9	374,893				
Amphibious command ship	2	38,354				
<b>Battleships above destroyer size</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>823,200</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>378,260</b>	
Cruisers	22	215,600				
Destroyers	62	607,600		29	183,520	
<b>Littoral combat ship</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13,200</b>				
<b>Total:</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>3,267,214</b>		<b>105</b>	<b>630,240</b>	
<b><u>NAVY AND AIR FORCE</u></b>						
<b>Aircraft</b>	<b>13,444</b>			<b>2,942</b>		



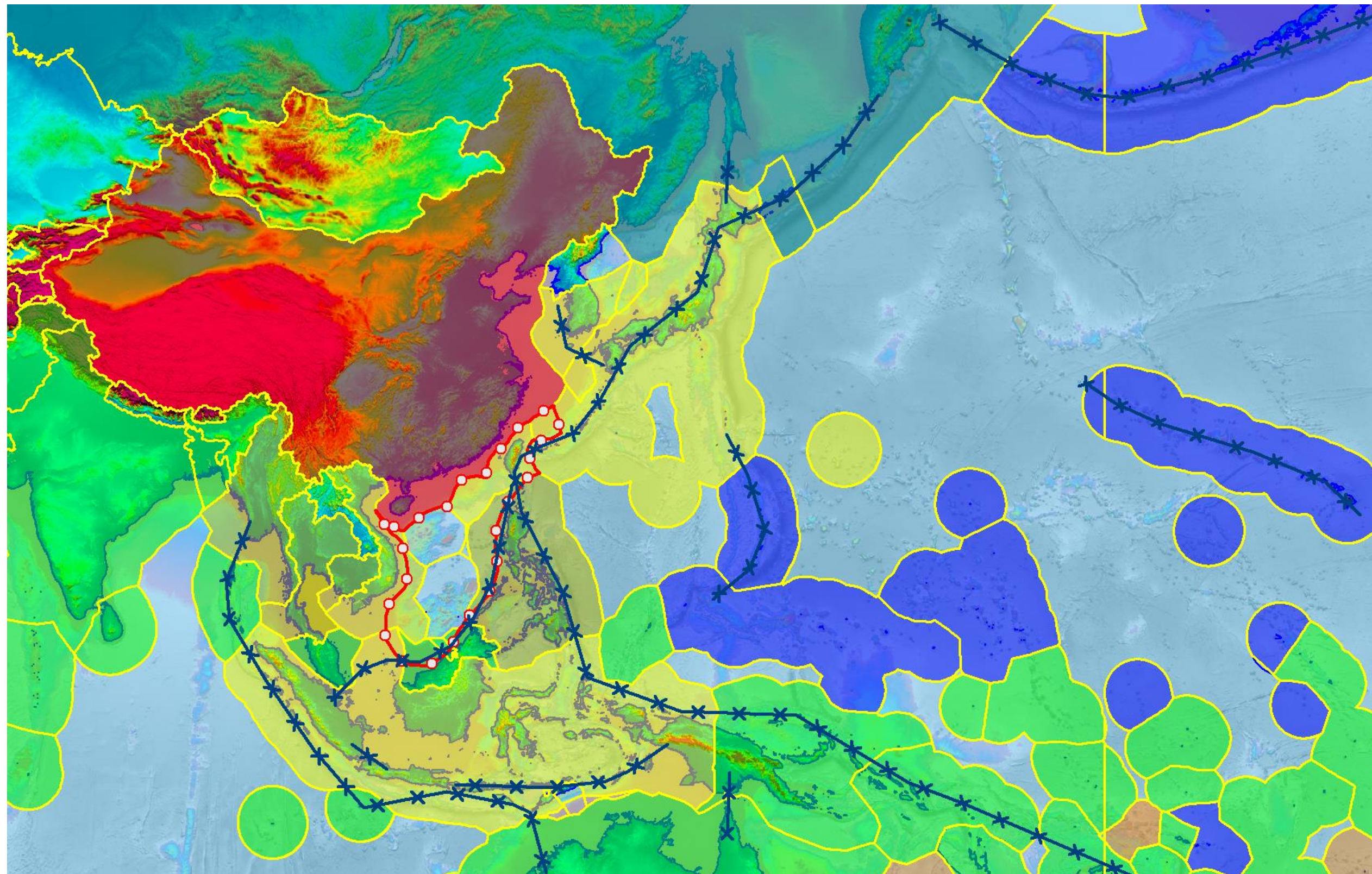


Chart of the region, showing coastlines and maritime areas controlled by different powers (for ease of mapping the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's) are shown, which are at most 200 nautical miles from shore). Green represents the Commonwealth of Nations, blue the U.S. and its Pacific Islands satellites, yellow Asian countries other than China, blue-grey Russia, orange France and red China.

The red line with white circles just offshore China represents the "9-dash" area of Chinese territorial ambitions, and the crossed blue lines are drawn along archipelagos, along which China could be easily blockaded at will by her neighbors (Russia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Australia, with solid support of the U.S.). The U.S. is not China's only foe. The barriers are multiple and probably impassable, and it is worthwhile noting that China's territorial ambitions so far are limited to small atolls and fringing islands inside the barriers, thus not presenting a real threat to the external world, although it is understandable that a strong reaction needs to be displayed as a matter of principle and of security for the countries bordering the South China Sea.