



# Whispers Among the Stars

Perpetrating (and Preventing) Satellite Eavesdropping Attacks

James Pavur, DPhil Student

Oxford University, Department of Computer Science





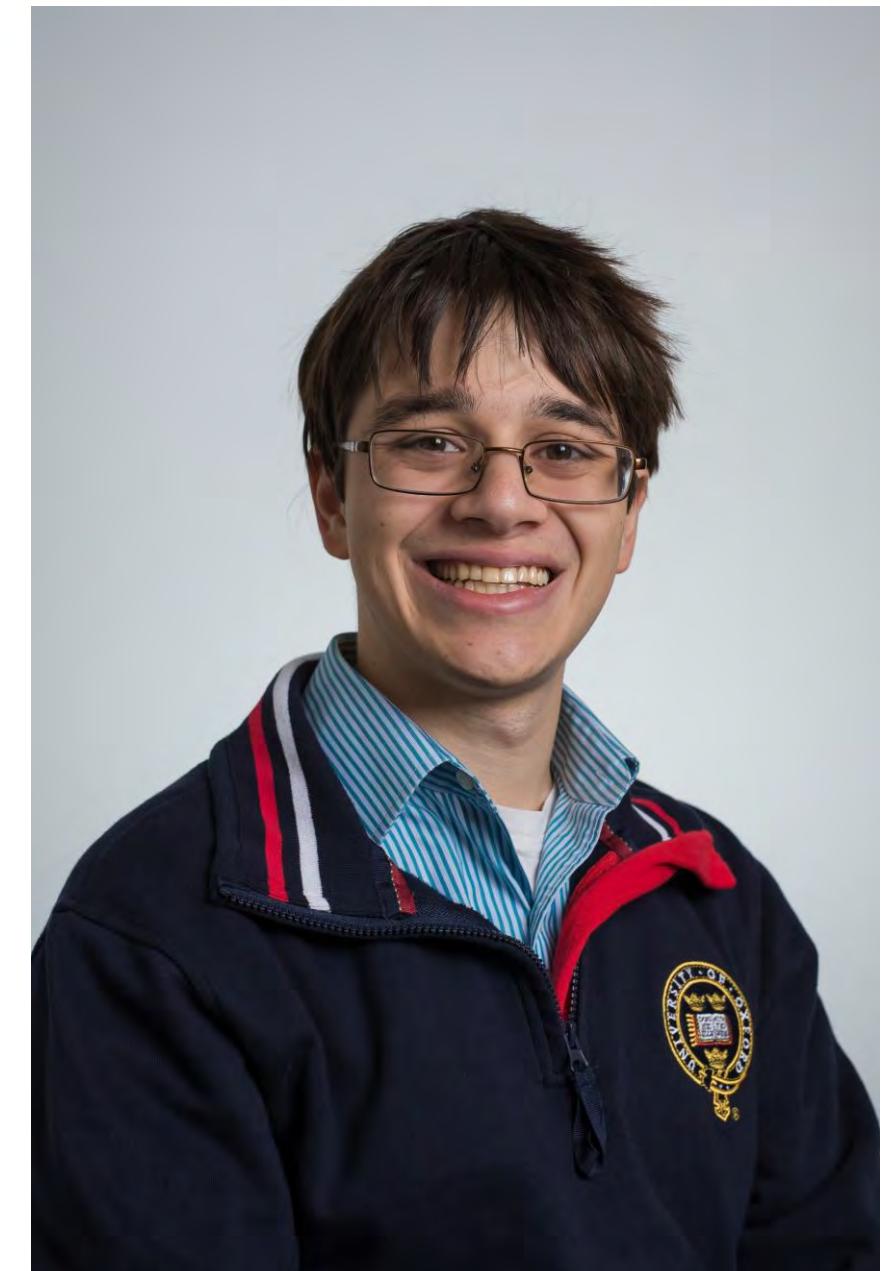
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# Bio / Contributors

- PhD Student @ Oxford University, Systems Security Lab
  - Title of (blank) *thesis\_draft.tex* file: *Securing New Space: On Satellite Cybersecurity*
- Don't Work Alone...
  - Daniel Moser, armasuisse / ETH Zürich
  - Martin Strohmeier, armasuisse / Oxford University
  - Vincent Lenders, armasuisse
  - Ivan Martinovic, Oxford University



# Lessons from the Past

## Satellite Communication without Privacy

– Attacker's Paradise

appeared in *Sicherheit 2005*

Jahrestagung, Fachbereich Sicherheit der Gesellschaft für Informatik, April 5th 2005, Universität Regensburg, LNI Proceedings P-62, pp. 257-268

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**Abstract:** In this paper we highlight the fact that a huge amount of information is sent unsecured via satellite broadcast data channels (here: encapsulated in DVB-s). By applying straightforward data analysis it is possible for any attacker equipped with a digital satellite dish and a DVB card PC to derive extensive confidential information on single users (e.g., legal name, banking details, monthly income facts, mail content etc.) as well as to hijack the user's web identities (e.g., online auction accounts). Many users do not seem to know or to care that broadcasted data can be easily intercepted; moreover even commercial users let high confidential customer related data (e.g. tender calculation details, negotiations with military customers) be sent unsecured via broadcast channels.

## \$atellite Hacking for Fun & Pr0fit!

Adam Laurie  
[adam@algroup.co.uk](mailto:adam@algroup.co.uk)

<http://rfidiot.org>



S21sec

Playing in a Satellite environment 1.2

Leonardo Nve Egea  
[lneve@s21sec.com](mailto:lneve@s21sec.com)

Ruhr-University Bochum, 2005

Black Hat DC, 2009

Black Hat DC, 2010



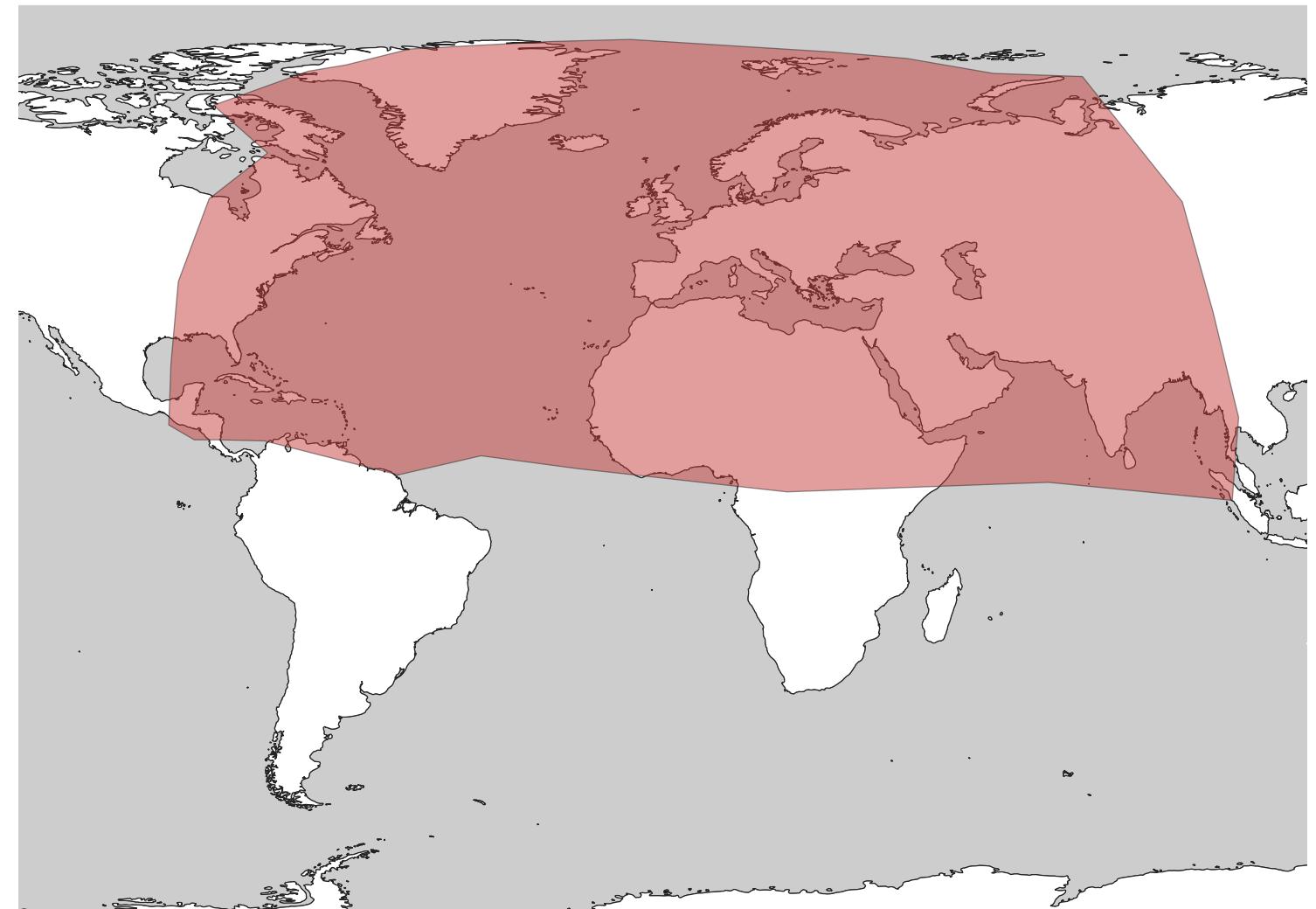
3 Domain-Focused  
Experiments



18 GEO Satellites



Coverage Area ~100 million km<sup>2</sup>



# Whose Data?



9 FORTUNE GLOBAL  
500 MEMBERS



6 OF 10 LARGEST  
AIRLINES



~40% MARITIME  
CARGO MARKET

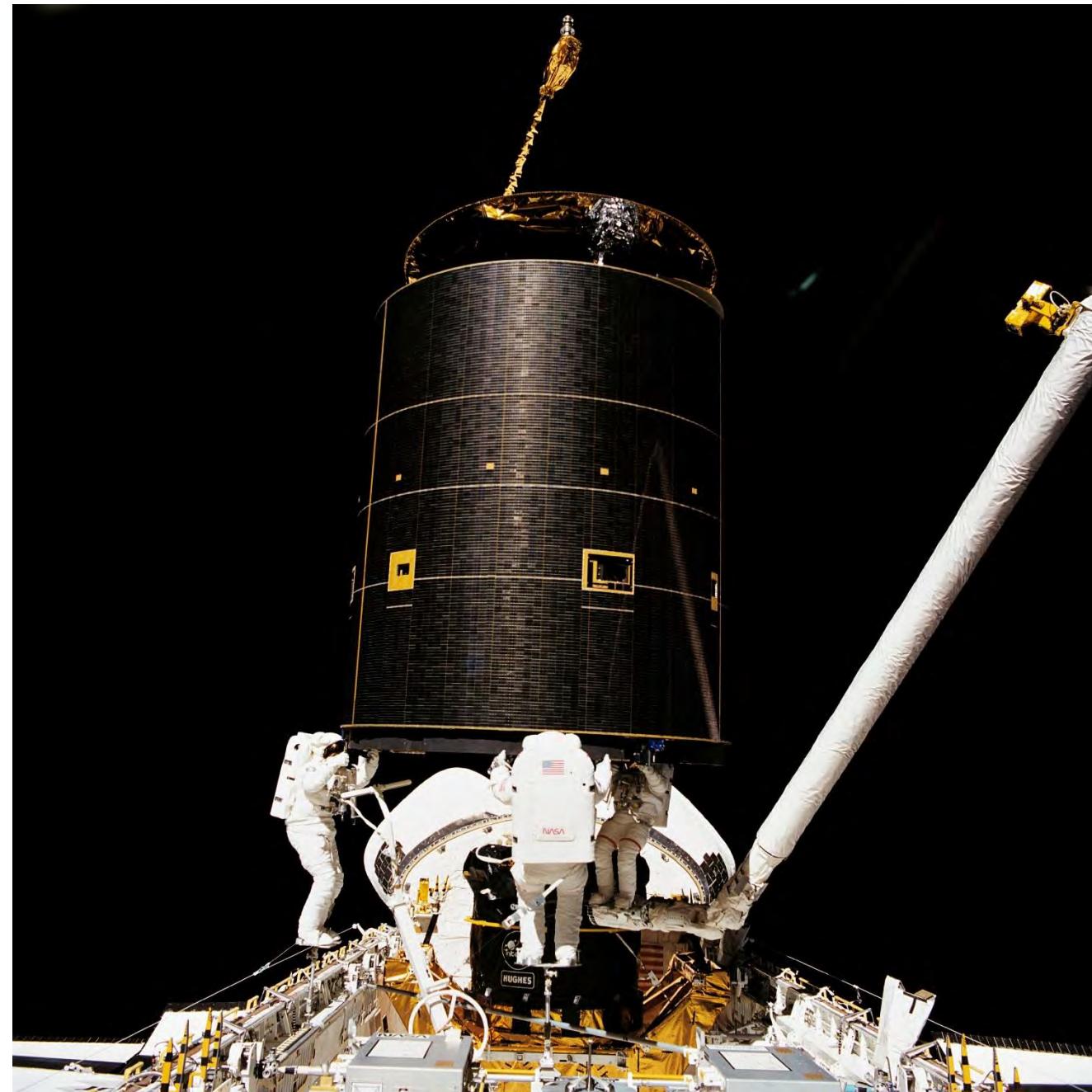


GOVERNMENTAL  
AGENCIES

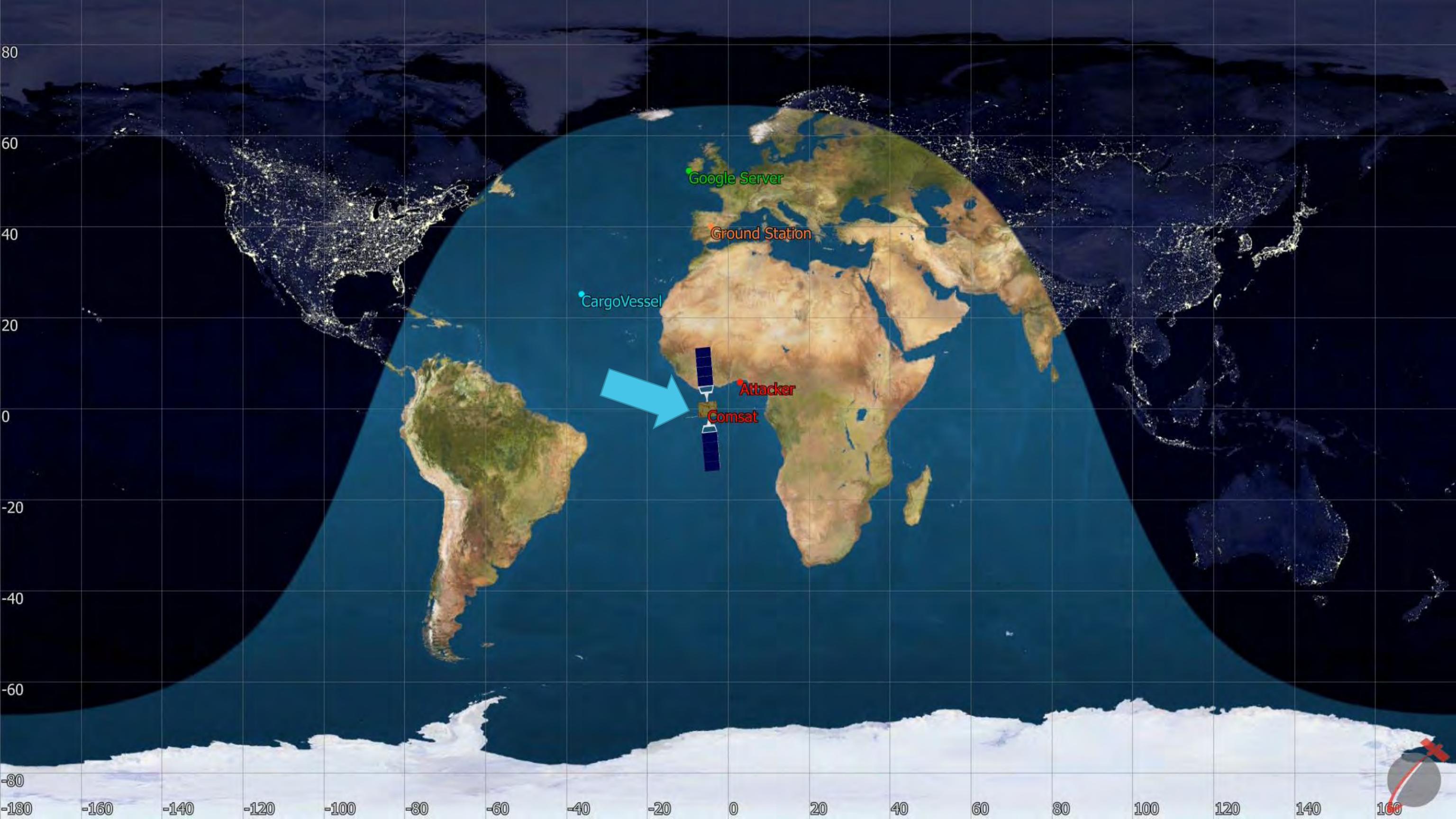


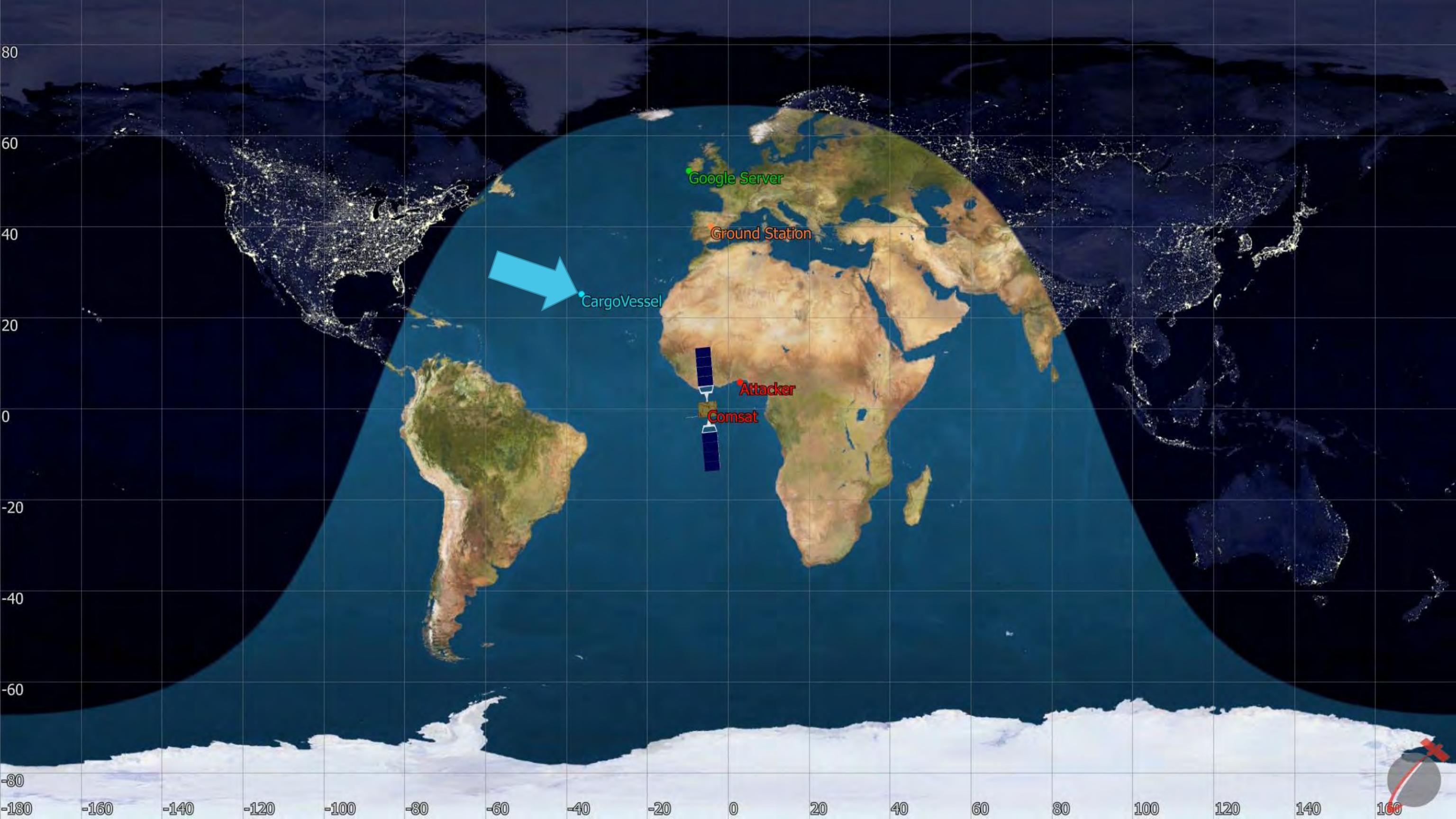
YOU?

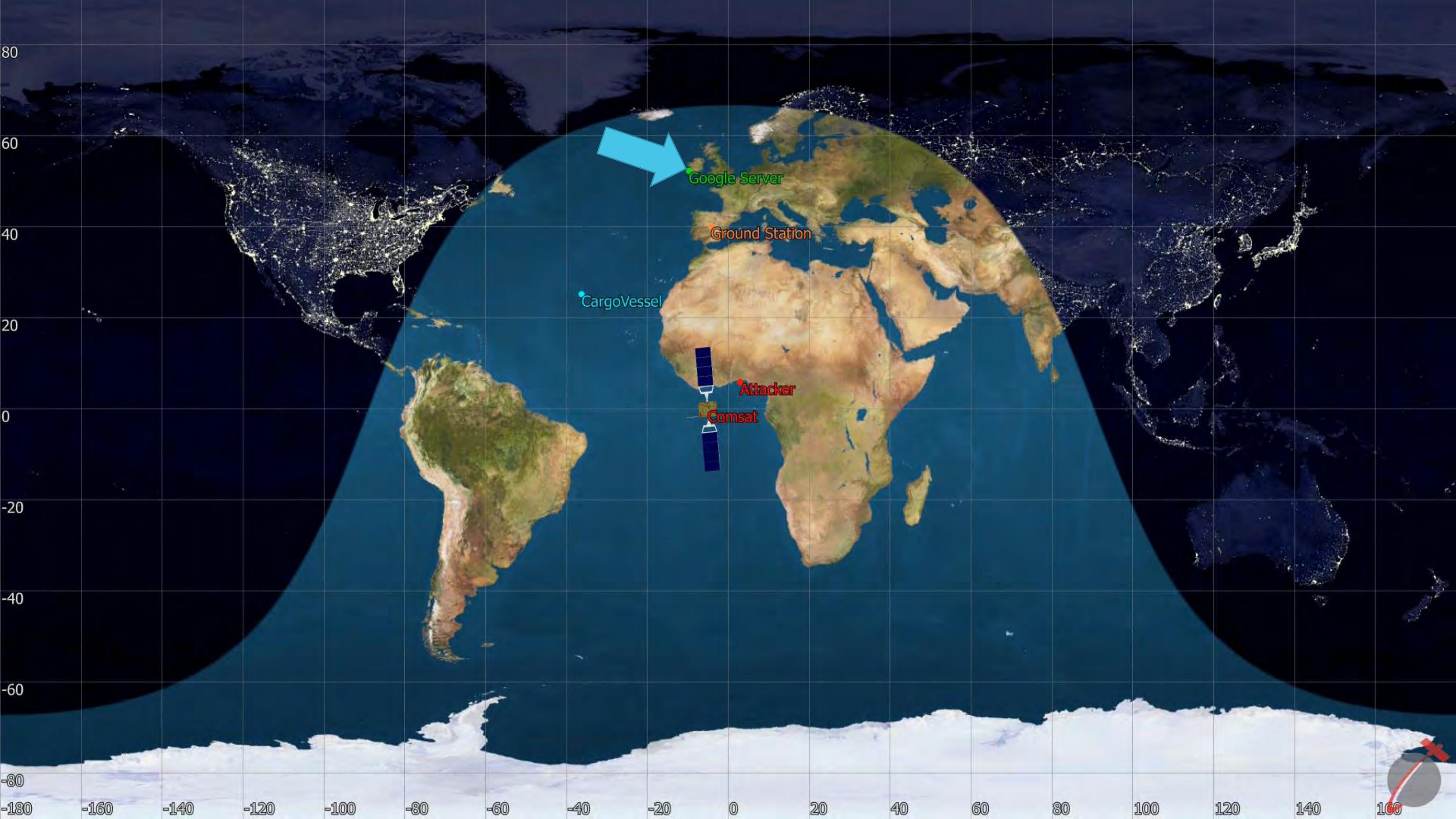
# 3-Minute SATCOM Crash Course

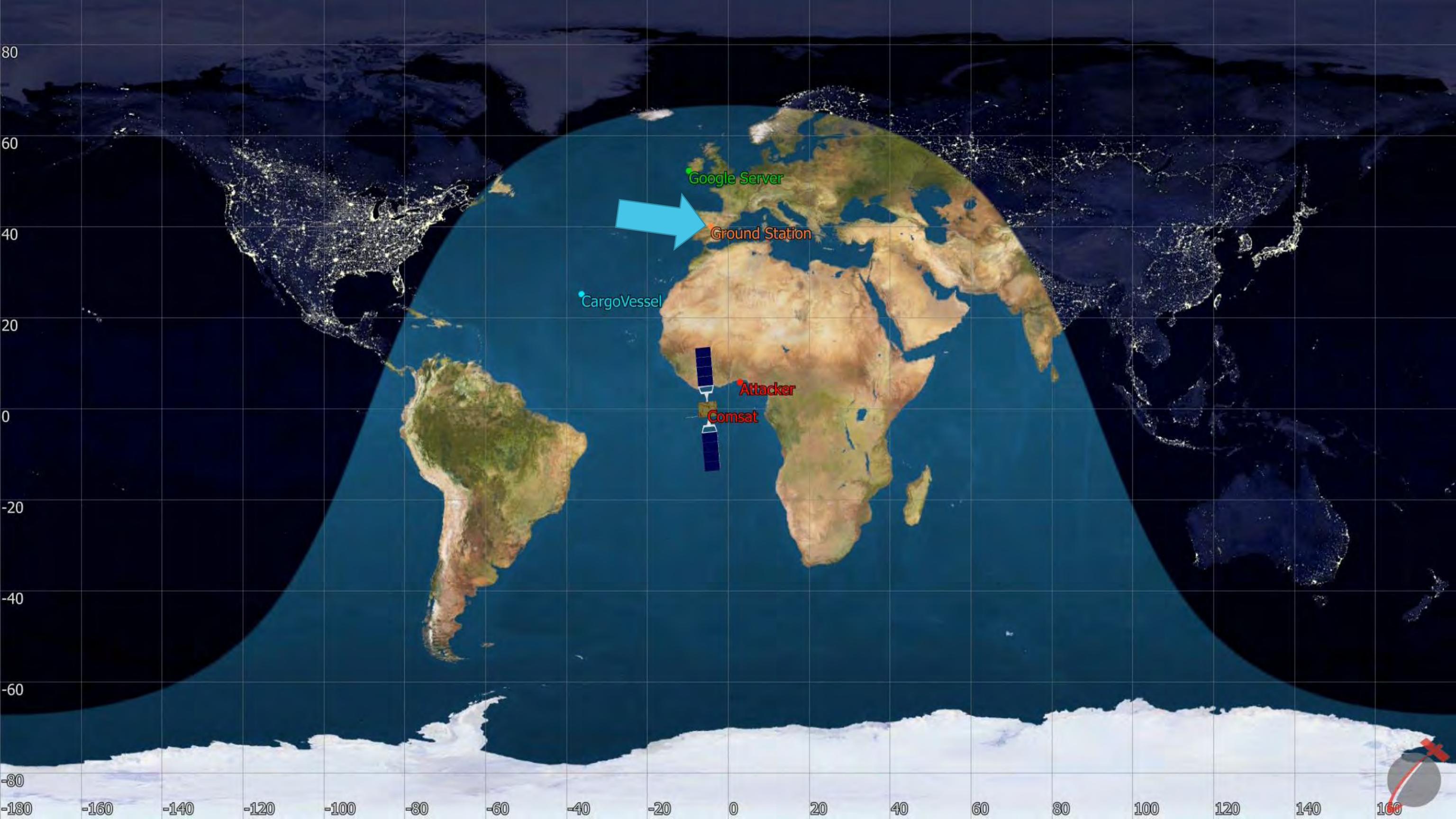


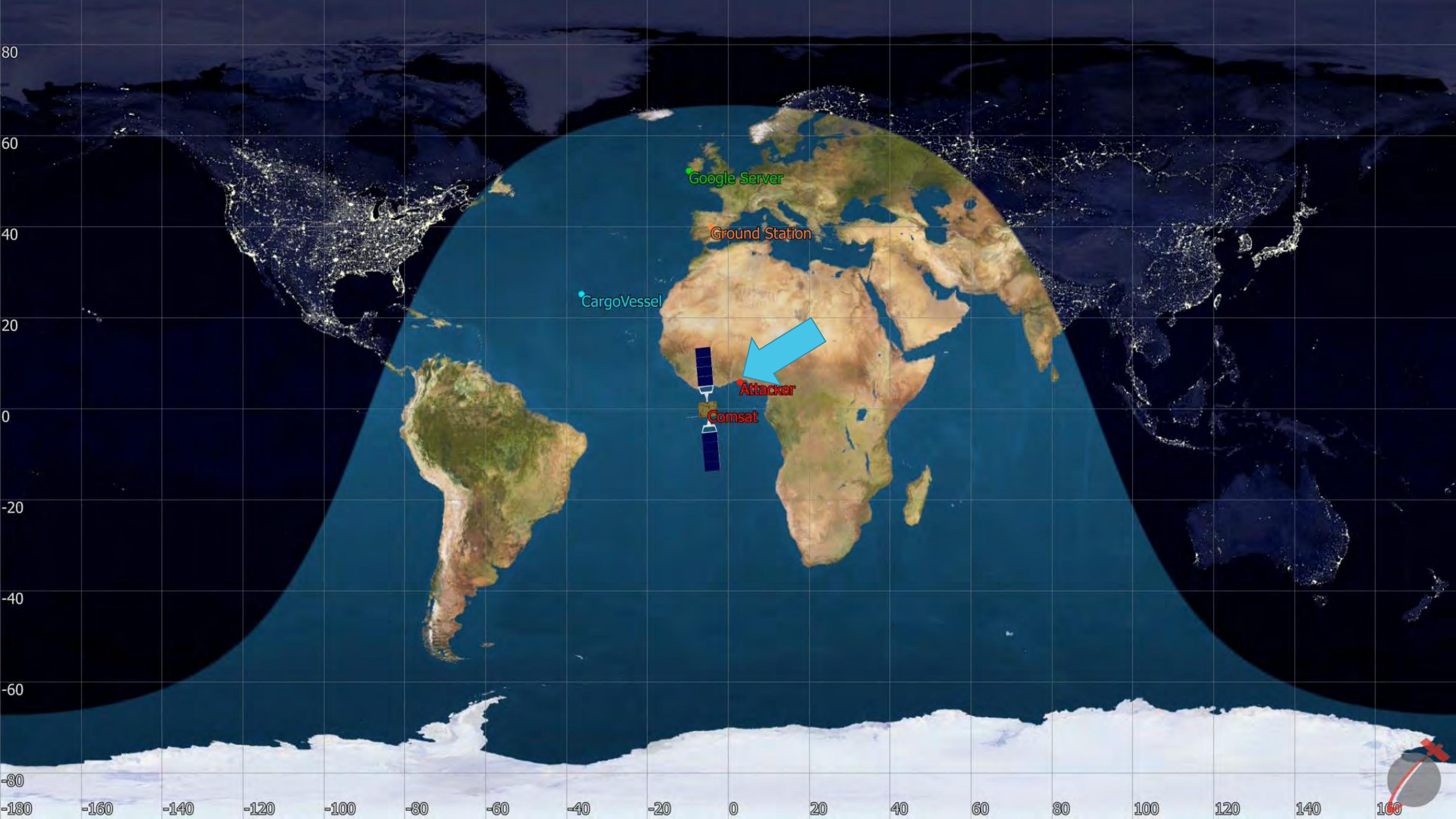
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Comsat







Ground Station

Comsat





Google Server

Ground Station





# Threat Model

# Nation-State Actor Tech

## MDM9000 Satellite Modem For Intelligence Gathering, WGS and Milsatcom Networks

### Description



The WGS certified MDM9000 Satellite Modem is the versatile modem that allows service providers and government operations to increase the amount of services or the customer base within the same bandwidth. At the same time it introduces ways to reduce OPEX costs and increase the profitability of your operations at maximum efficiency and optimum availability.

The MDM9000 is optimized for a wide range of fixed and mobile government and defense applications over satellite. The MDM9000 modem is typically installed at both ends of a point-to-point satellite link or at the remote sites of a star network. The unit can act as a modulator, demodulator or modem depending on the network configuration and integrates seamlessly with terrestrial networks and equipment. The modem is in full compliance with the DVB-S2 and the DVB-S2X standard while being backward compatible with our S2 Extensions mode, all in order to achieve barrier-breaking efficiency at maximum service availability. In receiver mode, the MDM9000 serves as demodulator with dedicated intelligence gathering features.



In receiver mode, the MDM9000 serves as demodulator with dedicated intelligence gathering features.

# Nation-State Actor Tech

## MDM9000 Satellite Modem

For Intelligence Gathering, WGS  
and Milsatcom Networks

### Description

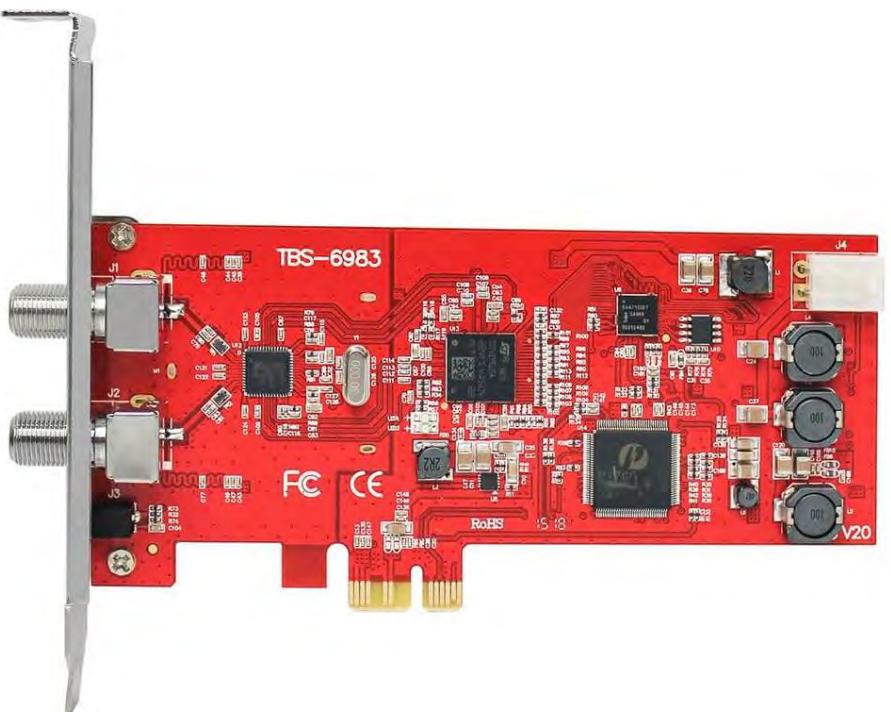
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# \$300 of TV Equipment



Selfsat H30D ~\$90 (or any old satellite dish + LNB off Craigslist)

TBS-6983/6903 ~\$200-\$300 (or comparable PCIE DVB-S tuner, ideally with APSK support)



Recycle Bin



Firefox



TBS-BlindS...



TBS-IP-1



TBS-IP-2



EBSpro



VLC media player



OLD Desktop

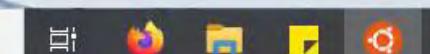


TBS-TSRec...

```
lab@DESKTOP-TRFPEV2: /mnt/c/Users/lab/Desktop
lab@DESKTOP-TRFPEV2:/mnt/c/Users/lab/Desktop$
```



Type here to search

15:04  
ENG  
04/06/2020

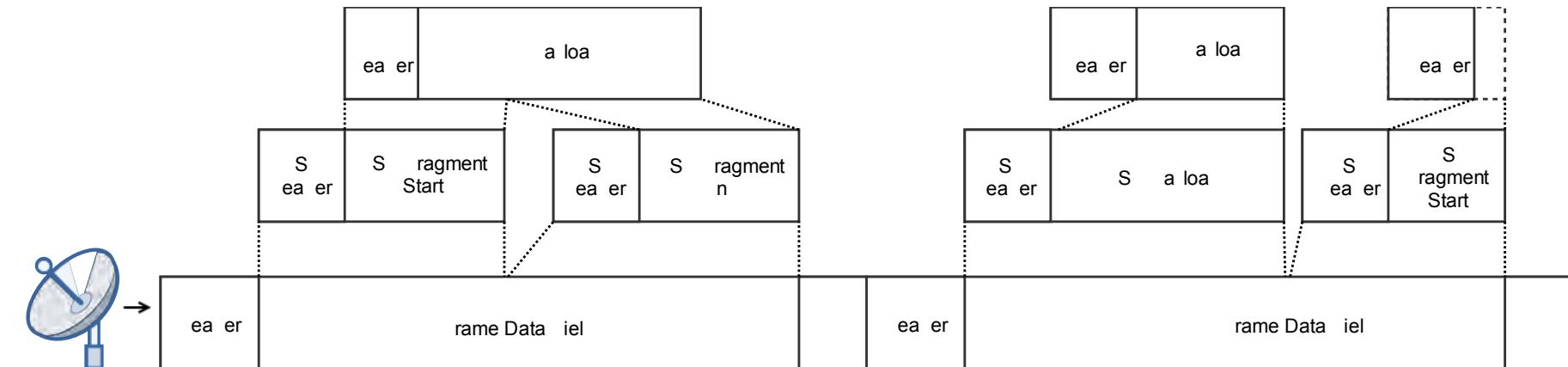
## MPEG-TS + MPE/ULE

- Legacy (but still popular) standard
  - Sort of a hacked together combination of protocols built for other purposes
- Tools exist for parsing
  - dvbsnoop, tsduck, TSReader
- Primary focus of related work from 2000-2010



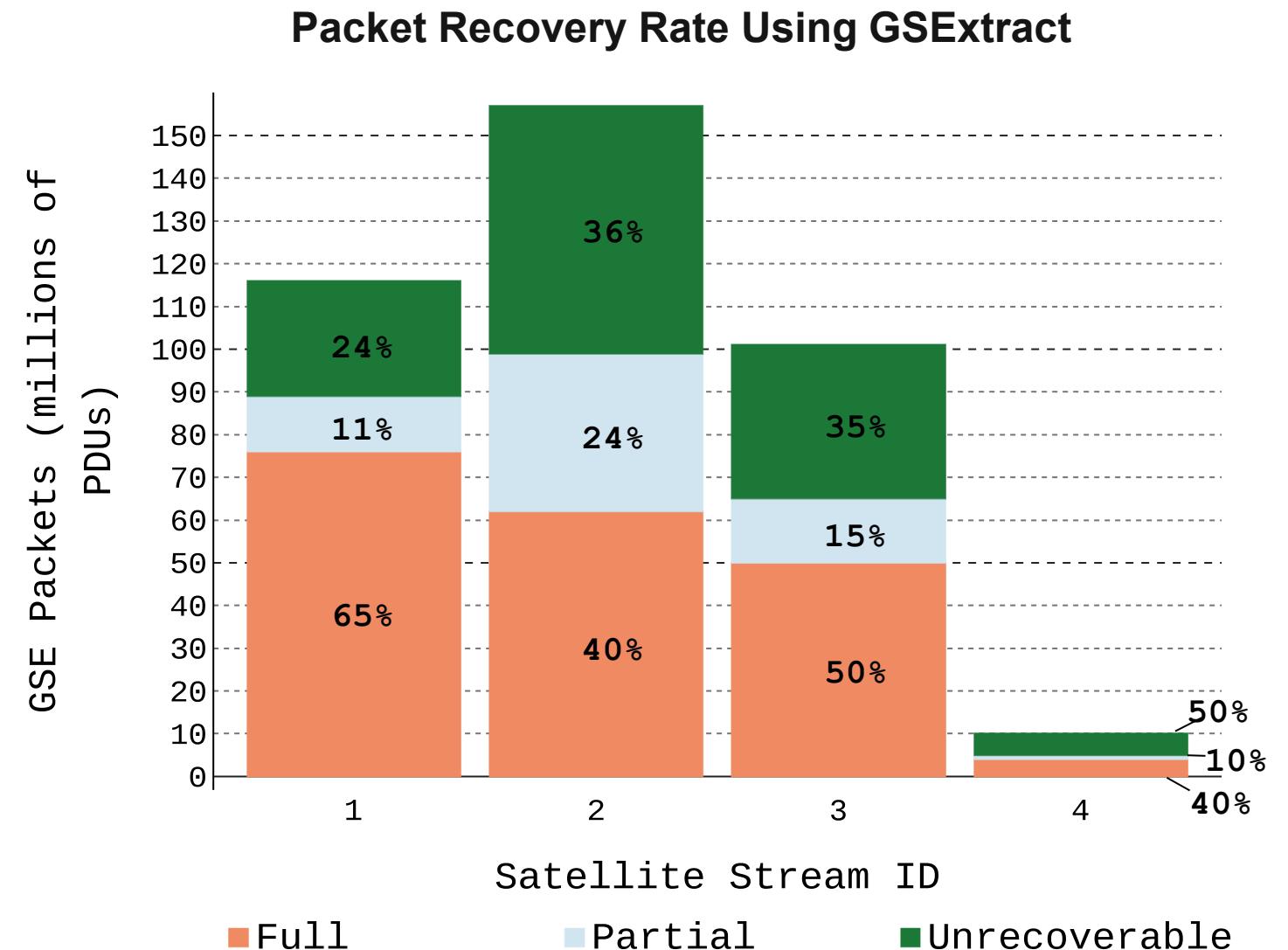
# GSE (Generic Stream Encapsulation)

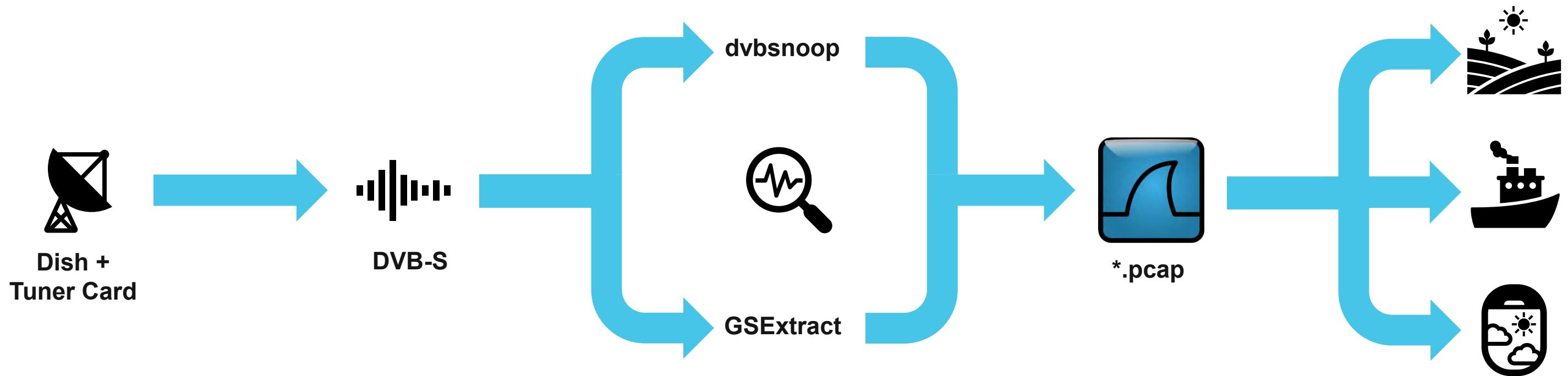
- More modern, popular among enterprise “VSAT” customers
- In practice, networks assume equipment in the \$25k-\$100k range



# GSEExtract

- Custom tool to forensically reconstruct bad recordings
  - Applies simple rules to find IP headers / place fragments
  - <https://doi.ieeecomputersociety.org/10.1109/SP40000.2020.00056>
- Public Release?
  - <https://github.com/ssloxford>





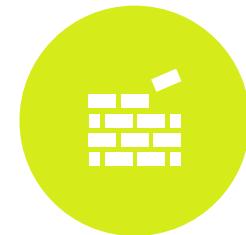
# General Findings



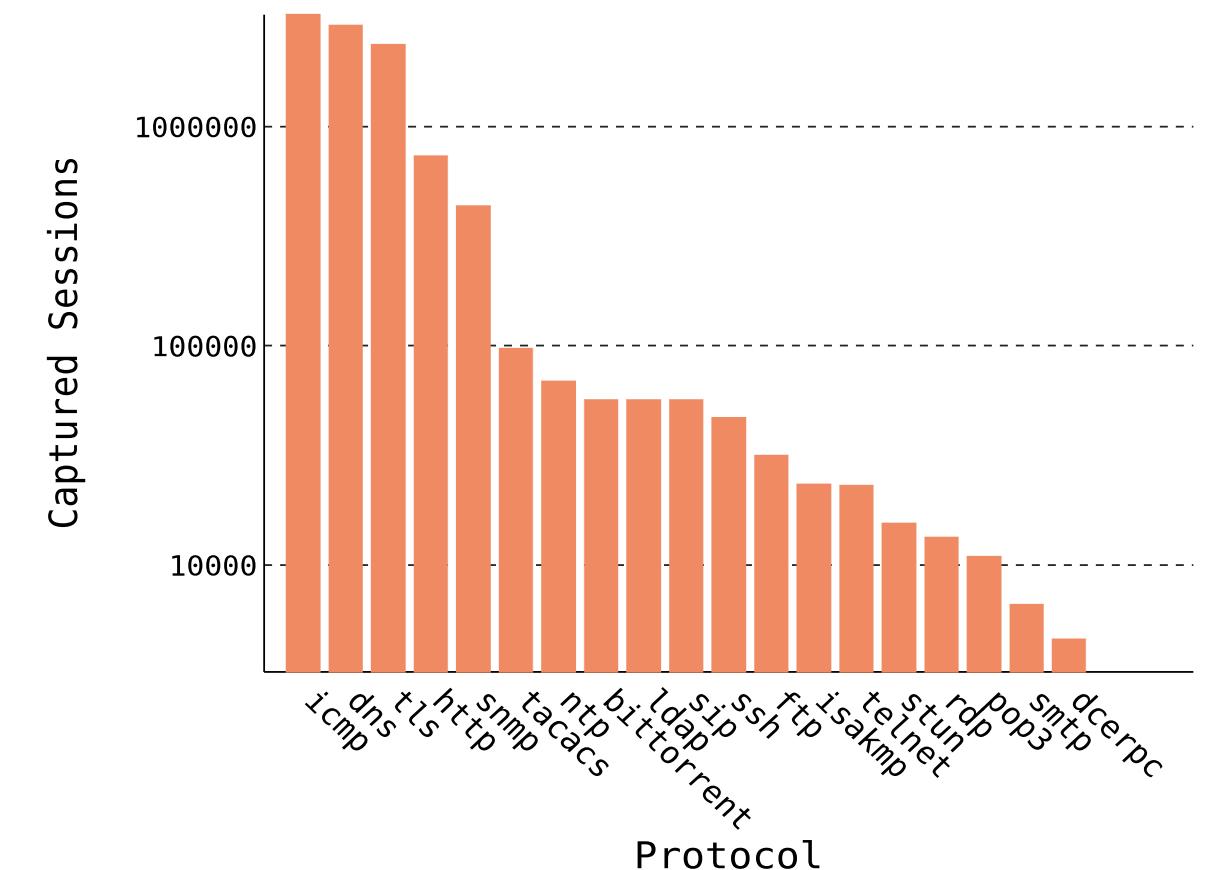
NO DEFAULT  
ENCRYPTION



ISP-ESQUE  
VANTAGE POINT



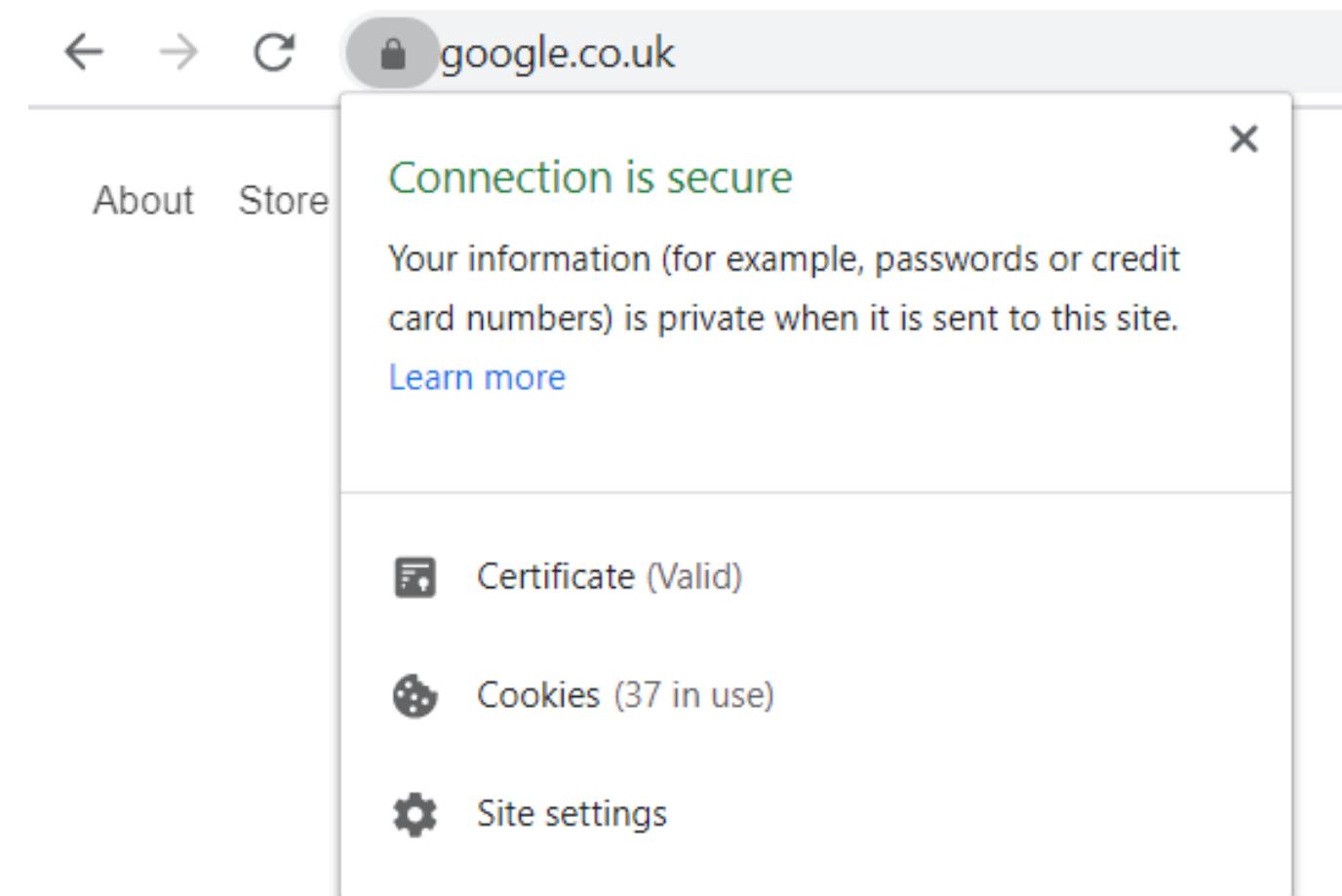
BREACH THE  
PERIMETER



# Terrestrial



# TLS == Privacy?



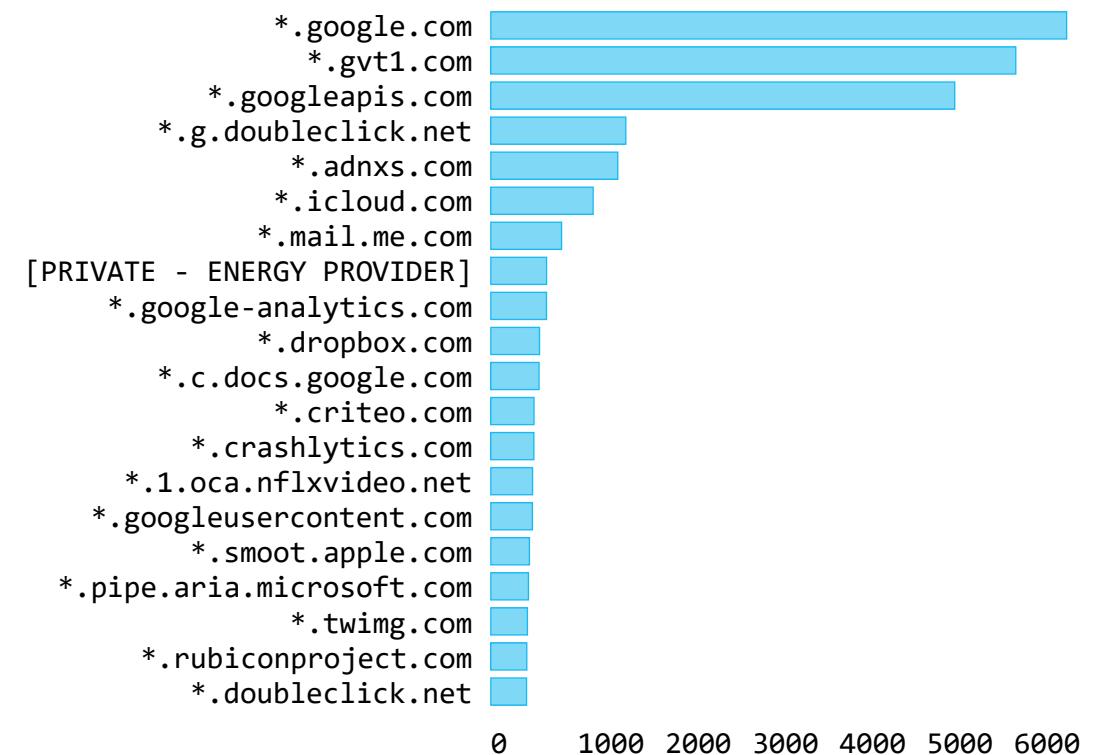
# TLS != Privacy

```

> DVB-DATA MultiProtocol Encapsulation
> Internet Protocol Version 4, Src: dns.google (8.8.4.4), Dst: [REDACTED]
> User Datagram Protocol, Src Port: 53, Dst Port: 43667
▼ Domain Name System (response)
  Transaction ID: 0x13c2
  > Flags: 0x8180 Standard query response, No error
  Questions: 1
  Answer RRs: 2
  Authority RRs: 0
  Additional RRs: 0
  ▼ Queries
    > bolt.dropbox.com: type A, class IN
  ▼ Answers
    > bolt.dropbox.com: type CNAME, class IN, cname bolt.v.dropbox.com
    > bolt.v.dropbox.com: type A, class IN, addr 162.125.18.133
      [Unsolicited: True]
  > Stuffing

```

Top SSL Certificate Names (MPEG-TS Case Study)



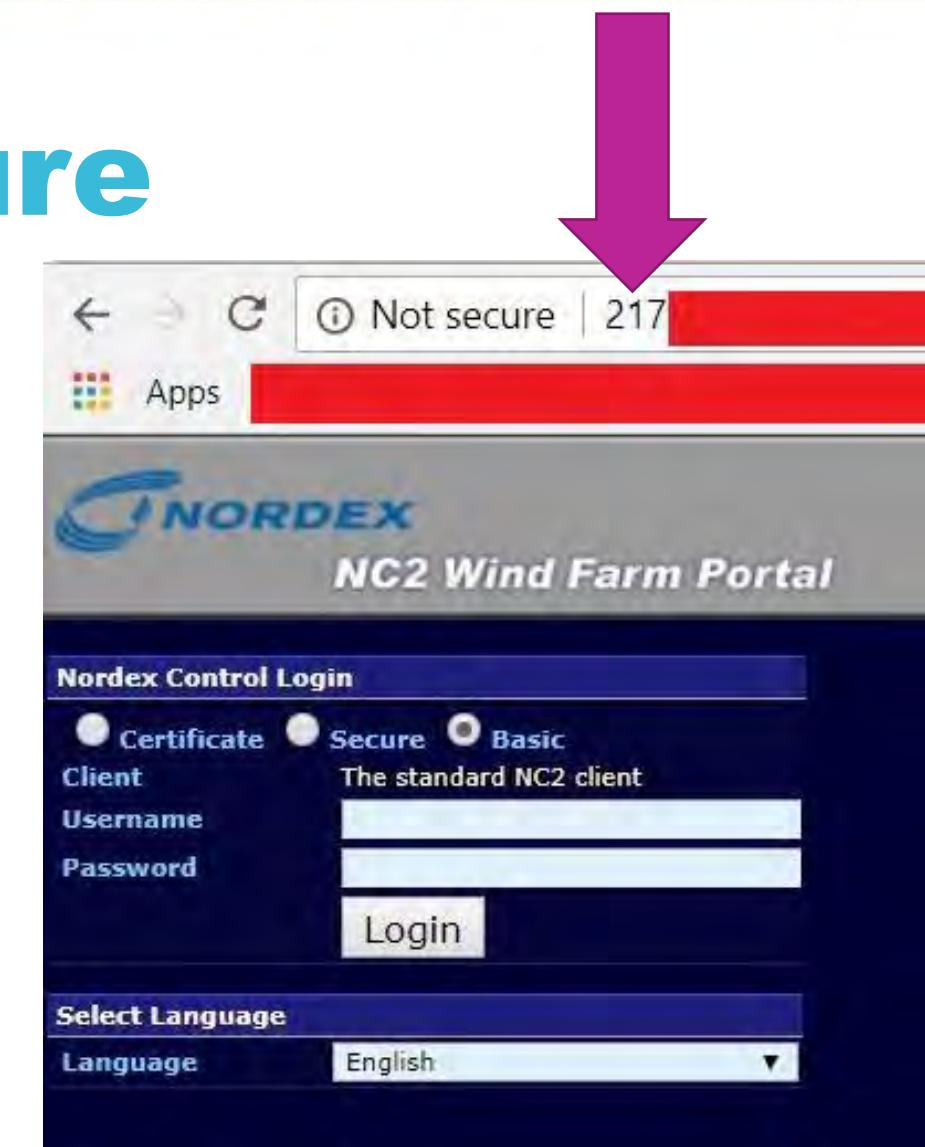
# !TLS != Privacy

```
...=3D"cs80D9435B"><span  
class=3D"cs19=..C3E152">E-mail: <a  
href=3D"mailto:[REDACTED]"><span  
class=3D"cs2=..50A6940">[REDACTED]</span></a>  
</span></p><p class=3D"csGB..%80D9435B"=..><span  
class=3D"cs19C3E152">&nbsp;</span></p><p  
class=3D"cs95E872D0"><span  
c=..lass=3D"cs19C3E152">&nbsp;</span></p><p  
cl.vœx>µ»‡7Á...¬..E..®<$....Ã,¬."¬.7‡7‡....%....°  
..G....>.*ass=3D"cs80D9435B"><span  
class=3D"=..cs675EBAl">AVISO LEGAL</span></p><p  
class=3D"cs80D9435B"><span class=3D"cs19=..C3E152">Este  
mensaje va dirigido, de manera exclusiva, a su  
destinatario y contiene informaci=C3=B3n  
confidencial y sujet a al secreto profesional; cuya  
d=..ivulgaci=C3=B3n no est=C3=A1 permitida por ley.  
</span></p><p class=3D"cs80D=..9435B"><spG...an  
class=3D"cs19C3E152">En caso de haber recibido&nbsp;  
este mensaje por error, le rogamos que, de forma  
inmediata, nos lo comunique mediante este medio o a  
trav=C3=A9s del tel=CG...3=A9fono (+34) 942 [REDACTED] y  
proceda a su eliminaci=C3=B3n. Asimismo, le  
comunicamos que la distribuci=C3=B3n, copia=.. o
```

# IOT & Critical Infrastructure

```
GET /level/15/exec/-/sh/run/CR HTTP/1.1
Host: 64. [REDACTED]
Authorization: Basic YWRtaW4tZWx1Y3Ryb[REDACTED]
Accept: text/html,application/xhtml+xml,application/xml;q=0.9,*/*;q=0.8
Accept-Encoding: deflate,gzip,identity
Accept-Language: en-US;q=0.6,en;q=0.4
Referer: http://64. [REDACTED]
User-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (Windows NT 5.1; rv:9.0.1) Gecko/20100101 Firefox/9.0.1
```

## **“admin-electro....**



# Maritime



# Case Study: 100 Random Ships



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# ~10% of Vessels Identifiable

Vessel ID*	Vessel Type	Gross Tonnage	Operator Industry	Operator Fleet Size	Example of Identified Client Software Information	Notable Traffic Observations
1	Subsea	22,000t	Oil & Gas	70 Vessels	Specialized Maritime Software	Unencrypted Netlogon Traffic
2	Container	150,000t	Shipping	250 Vessels	PLC Firmware Binaries	“Cargo Hazard A, Major” In Cargo
3	Icebreaker	9,000t	Research	Government	IT Support Software	Unencrypted SMB Fileshares
4	Firefighter	8,000t	Oil & Gas	70 Vessels	Specialized Maritime Software	Unencrypted SQL Database Replication
5	Seismic	8,000t	Seismic	10 Vessels	Antivirus Software & Version	Unencrypted Email Conversations
6	Chemical	5,000t	Shipping	1 Vessel	PLC Firmware Binaries	Unencrypted PLC Firmware Update
7	Outpost (Island)		Research	N/a	OS Minor Version Numbers	Polar Island Research Station
8	Container	33,000t	Shipping	600 Vessels	Messaging Software	Unencrypted REST API Credentials
9	Fishing	1,300t	Fishing	1 Vessel	OS Major Version Numbers	Unencrypted Email Conversations
10	Chemical	17,000t	Shipping	10 Vessels	Specialized Maritime Software	Unencrypted Fileshare Credentials
11	Container	110,000t	Shipping	500 Vessels	Maritime Navigation Software	Unencrypted Email Conversations
12	Subsea	22,000t	Oil & Gas	70 Vessels	Firewall Software & Version	Vulnerable Windows Server 2003

\*Note: Vessel names have been withheld and fleet sizes and tonnage are approximate due to privacy concerns.

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# ECDIS

- Electronic Chart Display and Information System
- Standard Formats Support Cryptographic Verification
  - But we observed more than 15,000 unsigned charts files in transit
- Many also use proprietary formats



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# Listening Can Be Enough....

## Publicly Routable FTP Fileshares

- Transmission Control Protocol, Src Port: 21, Dst Port: 41573, S
- File Transfer Protocol (FTP)
  - 257 "/Inbox/chartdelivery" is current directory.\r\n\r\n
    - Response code: PATHNAME created (257)
    - Response arg: "/Inbox/chartdelivery" is current directory.

## Chart Update Via Email

```
-----_Part_64846_1152542406.1556874033574  
Content-Type: text/plain;  
charset="us-ascii"  
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit
```

Please save the attached file  
(0 [REDACTED].csv) to the following  
directory on the ChartCo PC:  
'C:\ChartCo\Inbox'

(Networked users should browse to their  
relevant ChartCo Network path e.g.  
'G:\ChartCo\Inbox')

Once all attachments have been saved,  
open PassageManager and click on the  
'Check for New Updates' button at the  
foot of the home page in order to import  
any new data.

```
=====  
=====  
-----_Part_64846_1152542406.1556874033574  
Content-Type: application/octet-stream;  
name="0 [REDACTED].csv"  
Content-Transfer-Encoding: base64  
Content-Disposition: attachment;  
filename="0 [REDACTED].csv"
```

# General Privacy

## Captain of Billionaire's Yacht – MSFT Acct.

Subject: Microsoft account password reset  
To: captain@[REDACTED].com  
X-Priority: 3  
X-MSAPipeline: MessageDispatcherEOP  
Message-ID: [REDACTED]  
X-MSAMetaData:  
=?us-ascii?q?[REDACTED]  
=?us-ascii?q?[REDACTED]  
=?us-ascii?q?[REDACTED]  
MIME-Version: 1.0  
Content-Type: multipart/alternative; boundary=" [REDACTED]"  
Return-Path: account-security-noreply@accountprotection.microsoft.com  
X-EOPAttributedMessage: 0  
X-Forefront-Antispam-Report:

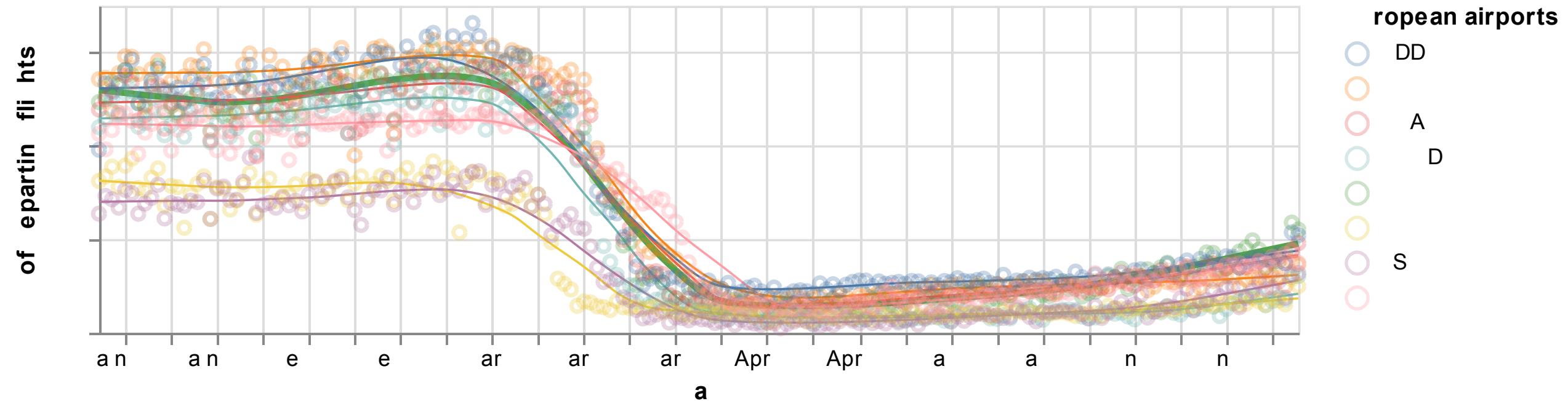
## Crew Passport Data Transmitted to Port Authorities

CID Number [REDACTED] Rank: COFF Name: S [REDACTED] N <br>  
Passport: Z [REDACTED] Issued: 05 [REDACTED] Expiry: 04 [REDACTED] <br>  
Seaman book: [REDACTED] Issued: 04 [REDACTED] Expiry: 03 [REDACTED] <br>  
Nationality: [REDACTED] Date of birth: [REDACTED] Place of birth: [REDACTED] <br>  
<br>  
<br>  
CID Number [REDACTED] Rank: 2OFF Name: [REDACTED] UL <br>  
Passport: R [REDACTED] Issued: 14 [REDACTED] Expiry: 13 [REDACTED] <br>  
Seaman book: [REDACTED] Issued: 24 [REDACTED] Expiry: 23 [REDACTED] <br>  
Nationality: [REDACTED] Date of birth: [REDACTED] Place of birth: [REDACTED] <br>

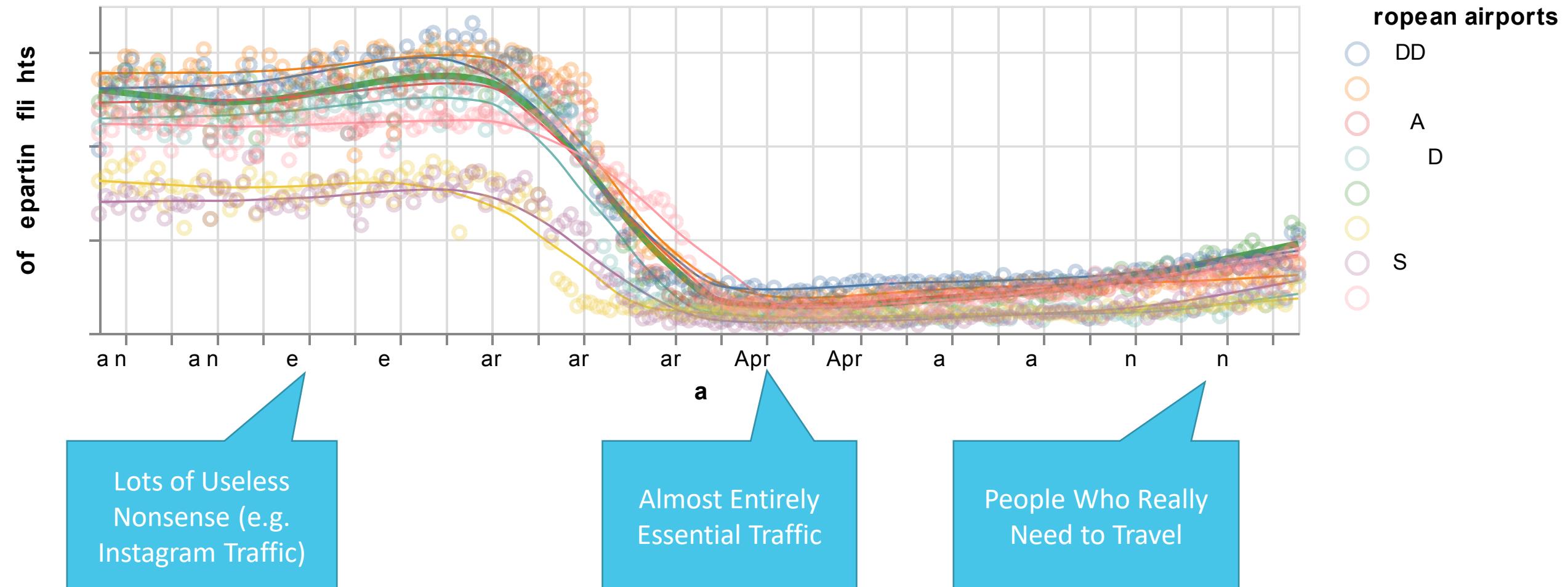
# Aviation



# Where Did the Planes Go????



# Where Did the Planes Go????



# Crossing the “Red Line”



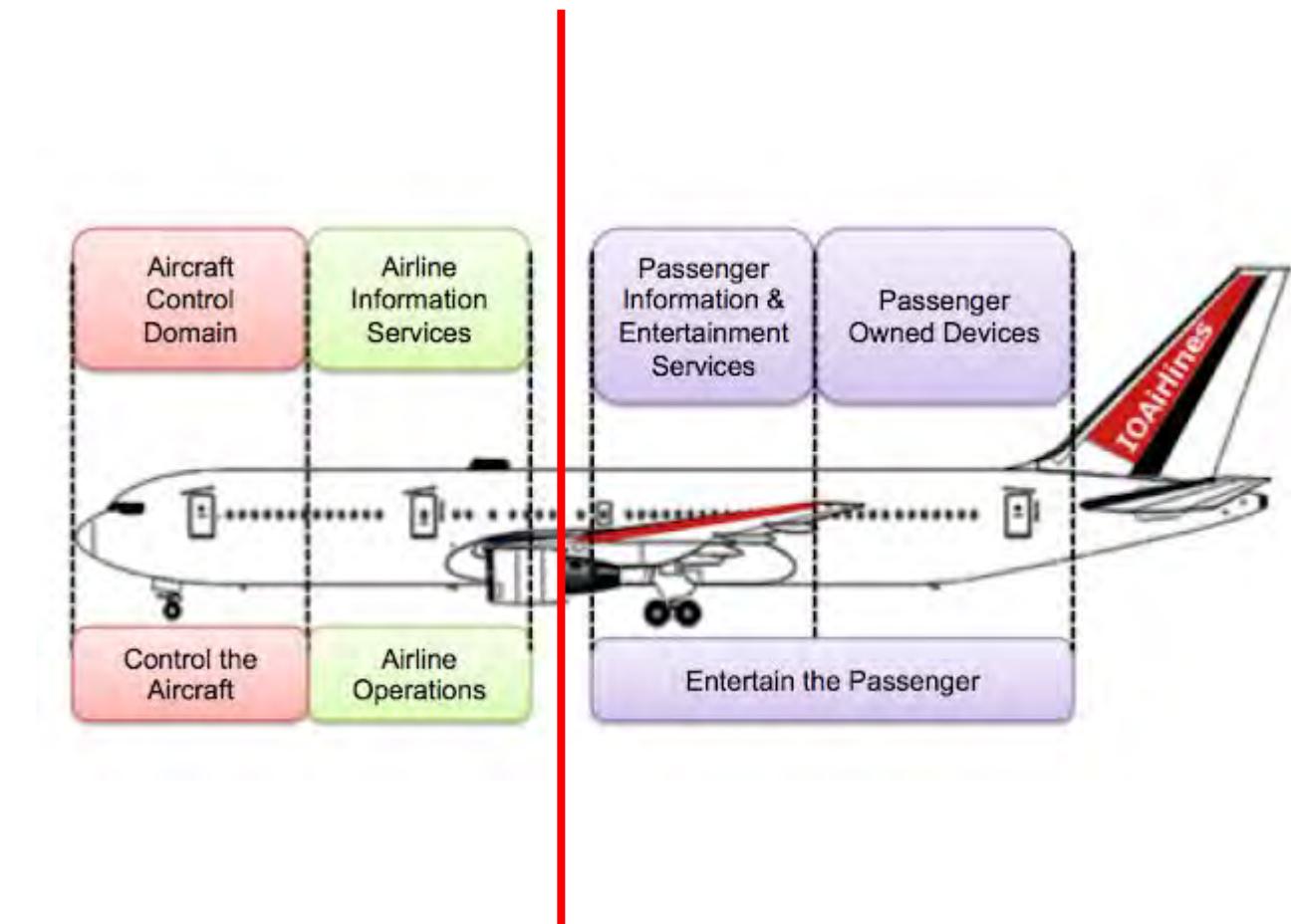
BLOGS | CONTACT US | [in](#) [t](#) [f](#)  
[SERVICES](#) [INDUSTRIES](#) [RESOURCES](#) [CAREERS](#) [WHO WE ARE](#)

RESEARCH | DECEMBER 20, 2016

## In Flight Hacking System

By [Ruben Santamarta](#)

*“A primary concern is the sharing of these SATCOM devices between different data domains, which could allow an attacker [...] to pivot from a compromised IFE to certain avionics”*



# The Loneliest EFB

```
T [REDACTED] -> 10.48.[REDACTED]:50684 [AFP] #127
HTTP/1.0 302 Moved Temporarily..Content-Type: text/html..Location:
http://172.[REDACTED]:80?[REDACTED] &userurl=http://efb.[REDACTED]/efb/api/v1/taskSheet/getUnsavedTsCaptains.do?soflSeqNrs=[REDACTED]
&fltNrs=[REDACTED]&schDepDts=[REDACTED]
&depCds=[REDACTED]&PVG&arrvCds=PVG,[REDACTED]

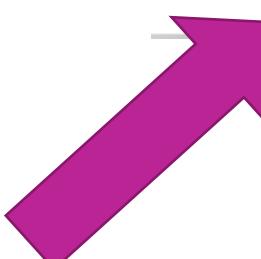
T [REDACTED]:80 -> 10.48.[REDACTED]:61044 [AFP] #913
HTTP/1.0 302 Moved Temporarily..Content-Type: text/html..Location:
http://172.[REDACTED]:80?[REDACTED] &userurl=http://efb.[REDACTED]/efb/api/v1/flightPlan/getWayPoint.do?fltNr=[REDACTED]
&tailNr=[REDACTED]
&alnCd=[REDACTED]&depCd=[REDACTED]&arrvCd=PEK&rescheduledFltDt=[REDACTED]&soflSeqNr=[REDACTED]

T [REDACTED] -> [REDACTED]:55070 [AFP] #820
HTTP/1.0 302 Moved Temporarily..Content-Type: text/html..Location:
http://172.[REDACTED]:80?[REDACTED] &userurl=http://efb.[REDACTED]/efb/api/v1/weather/sweatherquery.do?latitude=56.[REDACTED]&longitude=[REDACTED]
```



# GSM @ 30,000ft

```
> UTRAN Iuh interface RUA signalling
> Radio Access Network Application Part
> GSM A-I/F DTAP - CP-DATA
> GSM A-I/F RP - RP-DATA (Network to MS)
▼ GSM SMS TPDU (GSM 03.40) SMS-DELIVER
    0... .... = TP-RP: TP Reply Path parameter is not set in this SMS SUBMIT/DELIVER
    .1... .... = TP-UDHI: The beginning of the TP UD field contains a Header in addition to the short message
    ..0. .... = TP-SRI: A status report shall not be returned to the SME
    .... 0... = TP-LP: The message has not been forwarded and is not a spawned message
    .... .0.. = TP-MMS: More messages are waiting for the MS in this SC
    .... ...0 = TP-MTI: SMS-DELIVER (0)
    > TP-Originating-Address - [REDACTED]
    > TP-PID: 0
    > TP-DCS: 8
    > TP-Service-Centre-Time-Stamp
    TP-User-Data-Length: (140) depends on Data-Coding-Scheme
    ▼ TP-User-Data
        > User-Data Header
        SMS text: Name: [REDACTED]0\nTest Result: Negative - \nResult Date: [REDACTED]
```

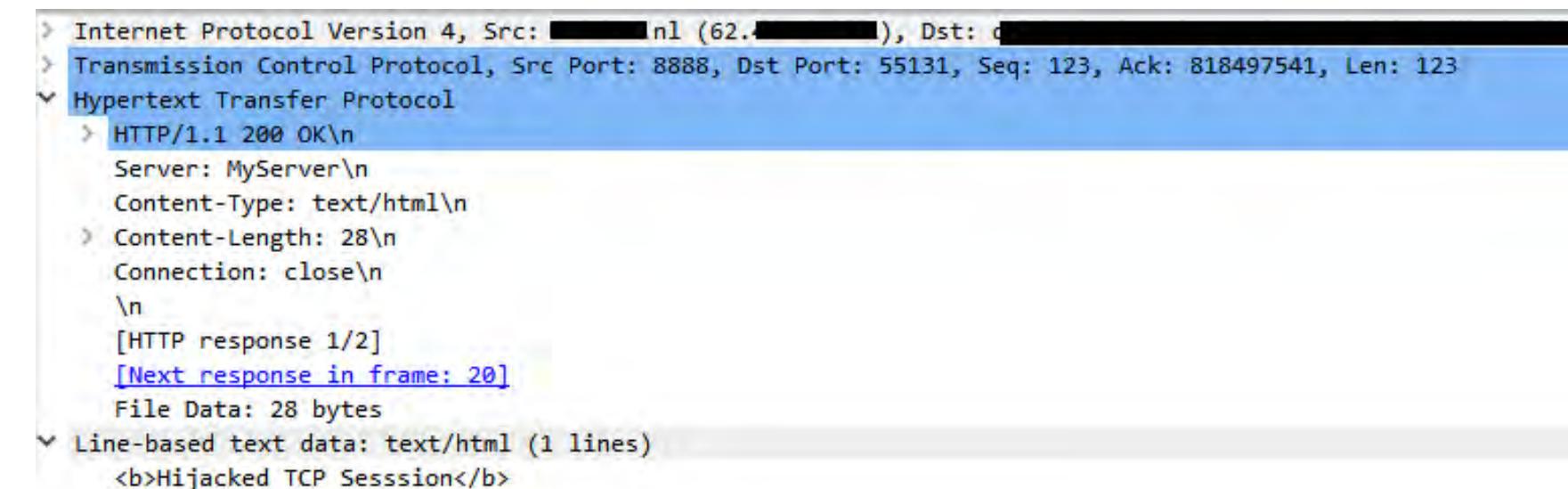




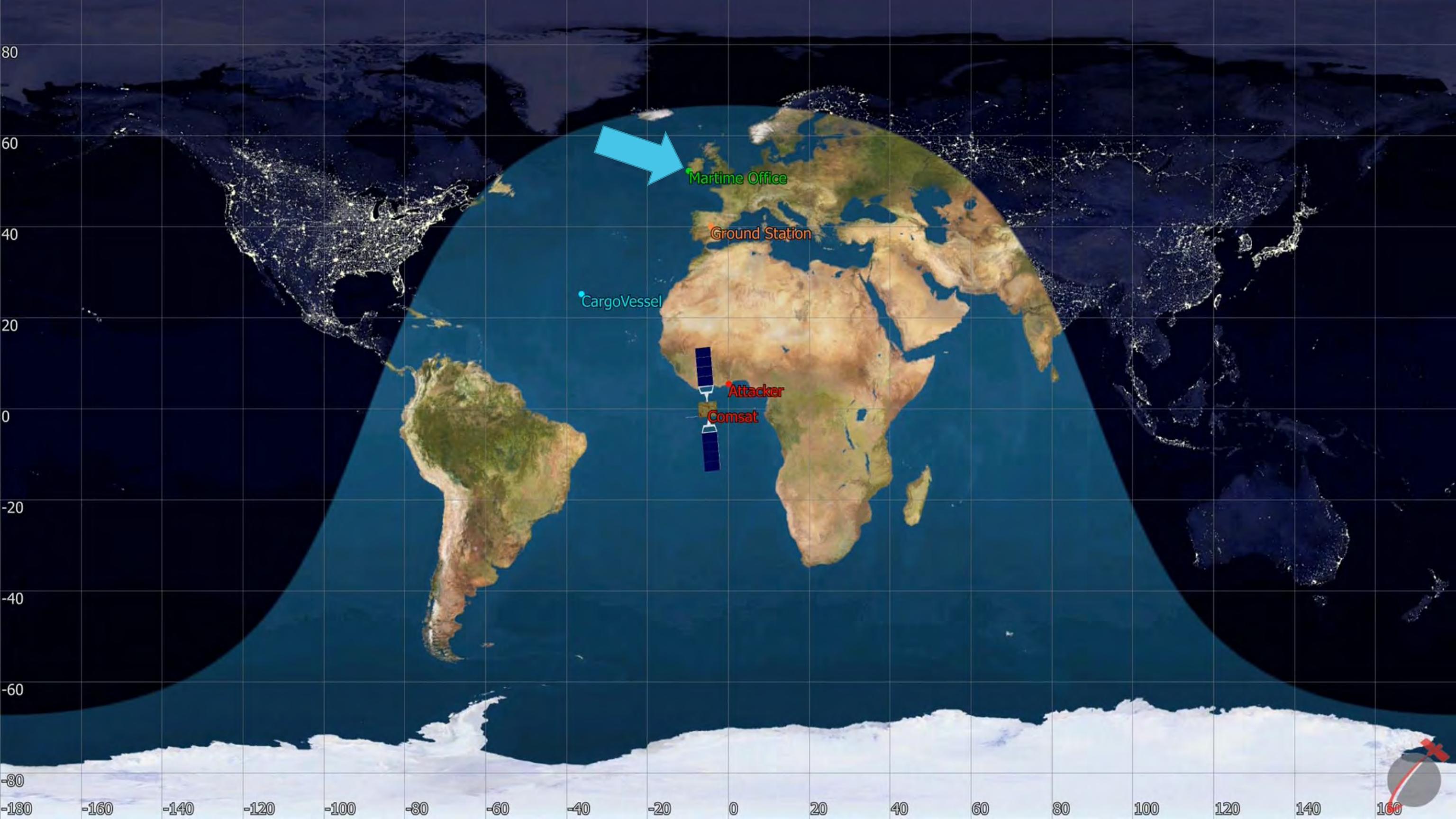
# Active Attacks?

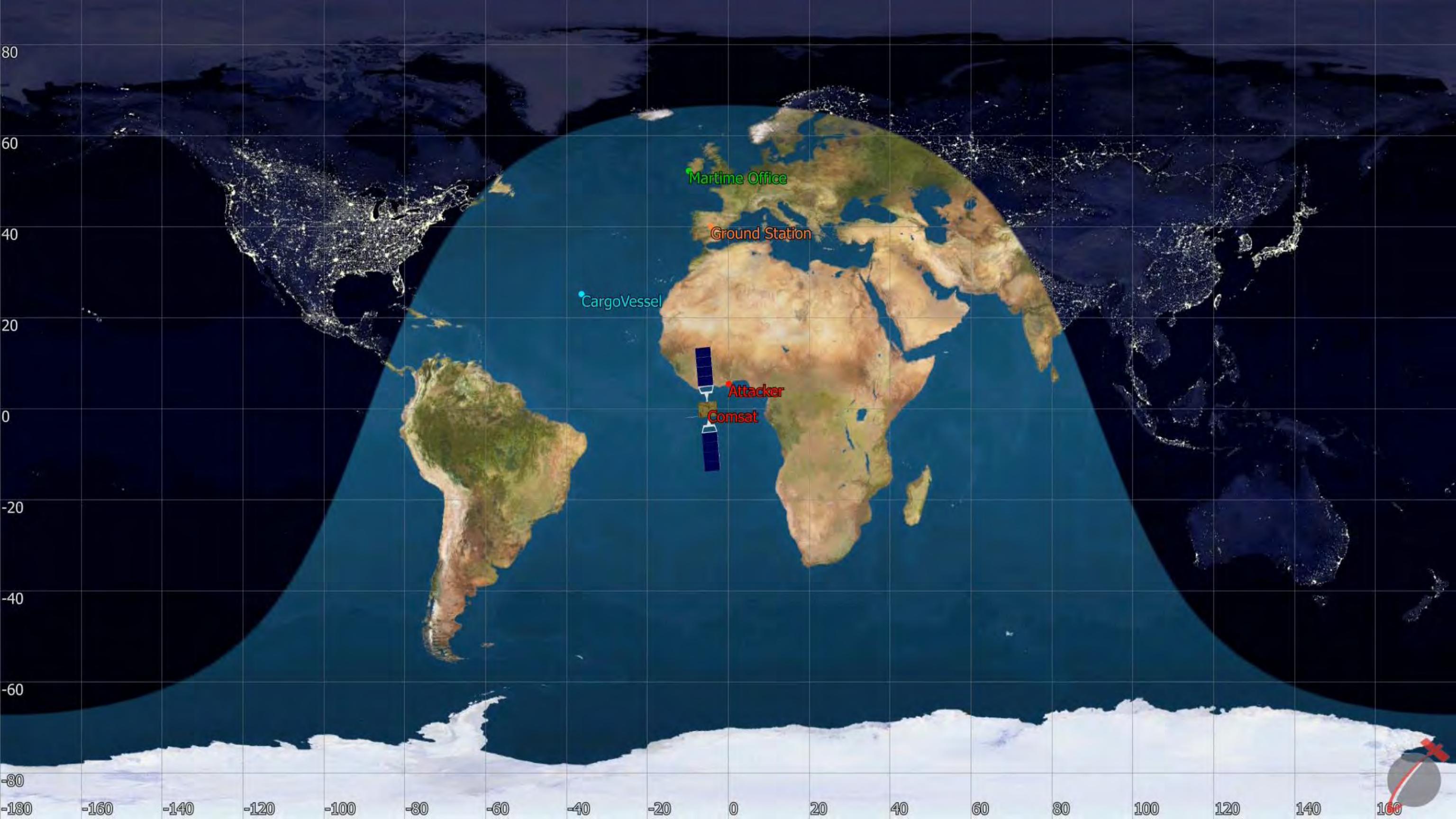
# TCP Session Hijacking

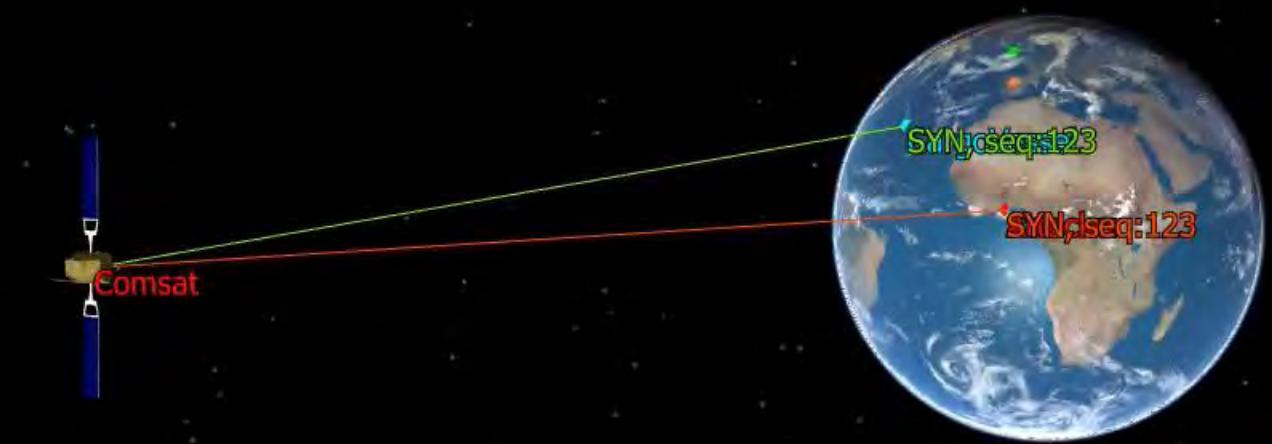
- Snoop TCP sequence numbers
- Impersonate satellite-terminal conversation endpoint
  - Possibly bi-directional, but more complex
- Network Requirements
  - IPs must be routable to attacker
  - No TCP sequence number altering proxies

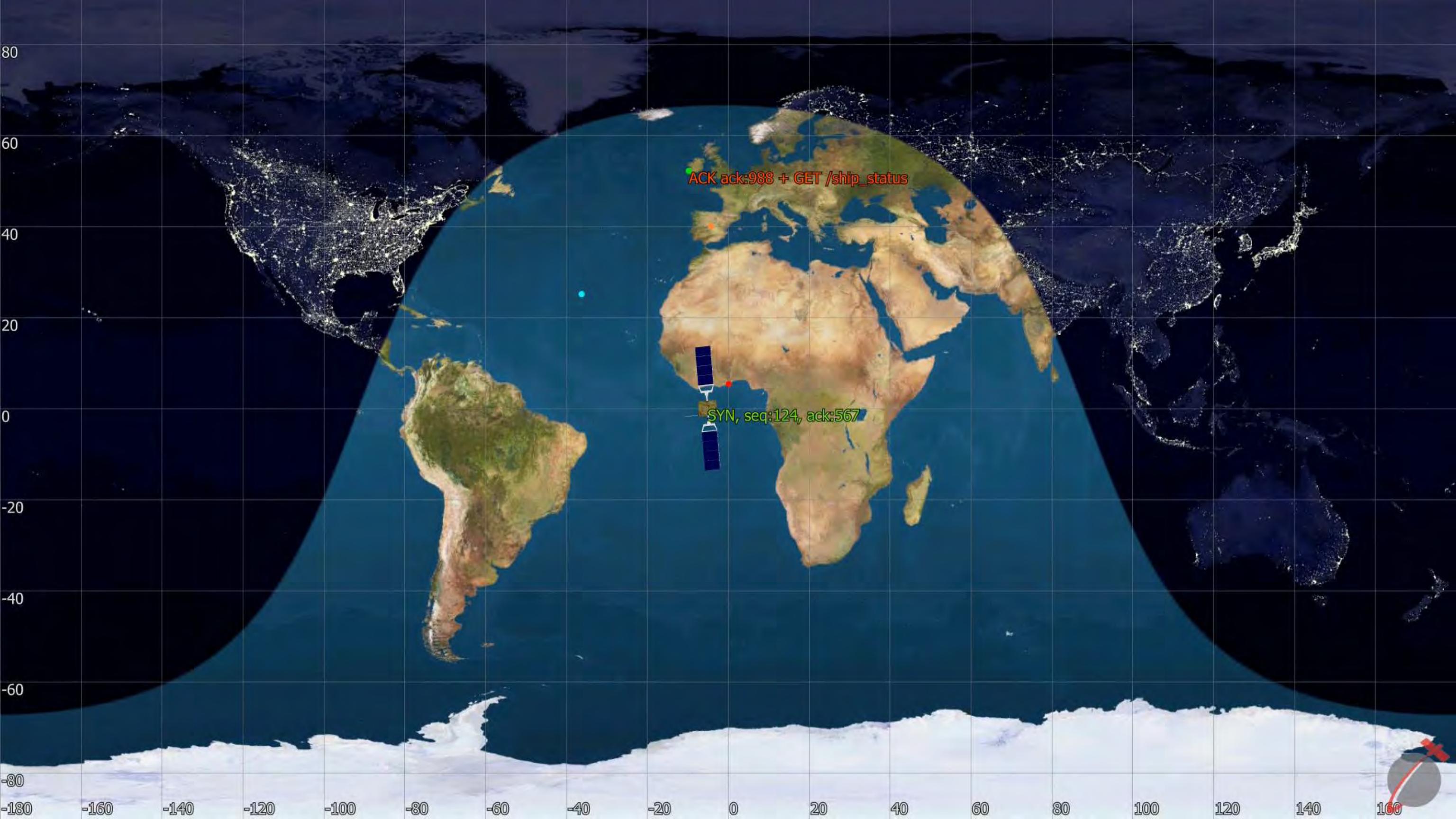


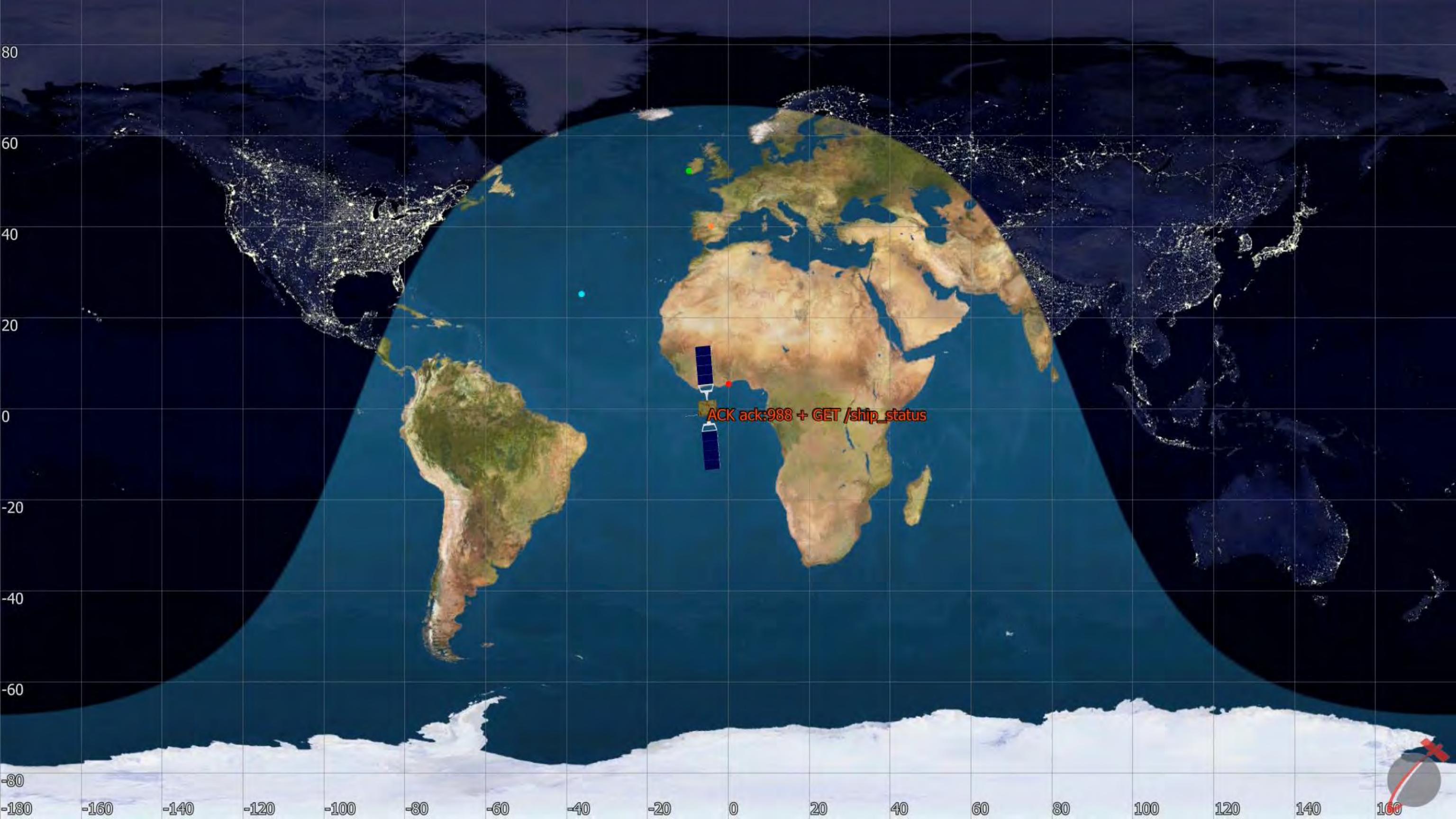
```
> Internet Protocol Version 4, Src: [REDACTED] n1 (62.4.1.1), Dst: [REDACTED]
> Transmission Control Protocol, Src Port: 8888, Dst Port: 55131, Seq: 123, Ack: 818497541, Len: 123
< Hypertext Transfer Protocol
  > HTTP/1.1 200 OK\r\n
    Server: MyServer\r\n
    Content-Type: text/html\r\n
  > Content-Length: 28\r\n
    Connection: close\r\n
    \r\n
    [HTTP response 1/2]
    [Next response in frame: 20]
    File Data: 28 bytes
< Line-based text data: text/html (1 lines)
  <b>Hijacked TCP Session</b>
```













# Ethics and Disclosure

Adhered to legal obligations in jurisdiction of data collection

- Data stored securely and only while needed
- Data was never shared with 3<sup>rd</sup> parties
- Encryption untouched
- Won't "name and shame"

Followed responsible disclosure process

- Contacted satellite operators in 2019
- Reached out to some of the largest impacted customers

Vast majority of companies were receptive

- Shared findings directly to CISOs of several large orgs
- Unclear if any changes have been made...
- Only one organization threatened legal action if we published!

# Thanks FBI!



**14 February 2020**

PIN Number

**20200214-001**

Please contact the FBI with any questions related to this Private Industry Notification at either your local **Cyber Task Force** or **FBI CyWatch**.

Local Field Offices:

[www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field](http://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field)

E-mail:

[cywatch@fbi.gov](mailto:cywatch@fbi.gov)

Phone:

**1-855-292-3937**

The following information is being provided by the FBI, with no guarantees or warranties, for potential use at the sole discretion of recipients to protect against cyber threats. This data is provided to help cyber security professionals and system administrators guard against the persistent malicious actions of cyber criminals.

This PIN has been released **TLP:WHITE**: The information in this product may be distributed without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

## **VSAT Signals Vulnerable to Low-Cost Device Exploitation**

### **Summary**

The FBI has identified a potential increased risk to data transmitted by Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSAT). Previously, the cost of the satellite equipment needed to intercept the data from these terminals served as a barrier for threat actors. However, recently conducted research discovered man-in-the-middle attacks against maritime VSAT signals can be conducted with less than \$400 of widely available television equipment,<sup>a</sup> presenting opportunities to a wider range of

# Thanks FBI!



James Pavur  
@JamesPavur

Excited to share that our paper on Maritime VSAT security will be presented S&P 2020 @IEEESSP. Check out the paper here:

[doi.ieeecomputersociety.org/10.1109/SP4000...](https://doi.ieeecomputersociety.org/10.1109/SP4000...)  
#spacecybersecurity #sp20

3:28 PM · Mar 9, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)



The image shows a screenshot of a 'Private Industry Notification' from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The document has a blue header with the FBI seal and the text 'TLP:WHITE'. Below the header, it says 'Private Industry Notification' and 'FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, CYBER DIVISION'. The main body of the document contains the following information:

- Date:** 14 February 2020 (circled in red)
- PIN Number:** 20200214-001
- Text:** Please contact the FBI with any questions related to this Private Industry Notification at either your local Cyber Task Force or FBI CyWatch.
- Local Field Offices:** [www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field](http://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field)
- E-mail:** [cwatch@fbi.gov](mailto:cwatch@fbi.gov)
- Phone:** 1-855-292-3937

To the right of the document, there is a sidebar with the following text:

The following information is being provided by the FBI, with no guarantees or warranties, for potential use at the sole discretion of recipients to protect against cyber threats. This data is provided to help cyber security professionals and system administrators guard against the persistent malicious actions of cyber criminals.

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  - E-mail: [cwatch@fbi.gov](mailto:cwatch@fbi.gov)
  - Phone: 1-855-292-3937

A large red arrow points from the circled date in the tweet to the circled date in the document. A smaller red arrow points from the circled date in the tweet to the circled date in the document.

**Text below the document:**

The following information is being provided by the FBI, with no guarantees or warranties, for potential use at the sole discretion of recipients to protect against cyber threats. This data is provided to help cyber security professionals and system administrators guard against the persistent malicious actions of cyber criminals.

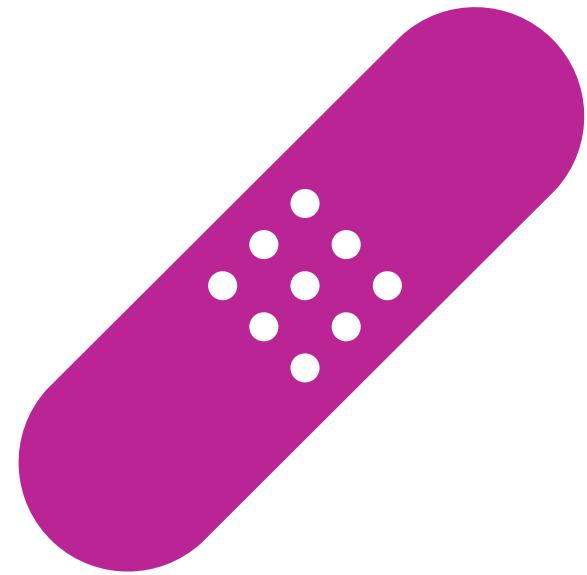
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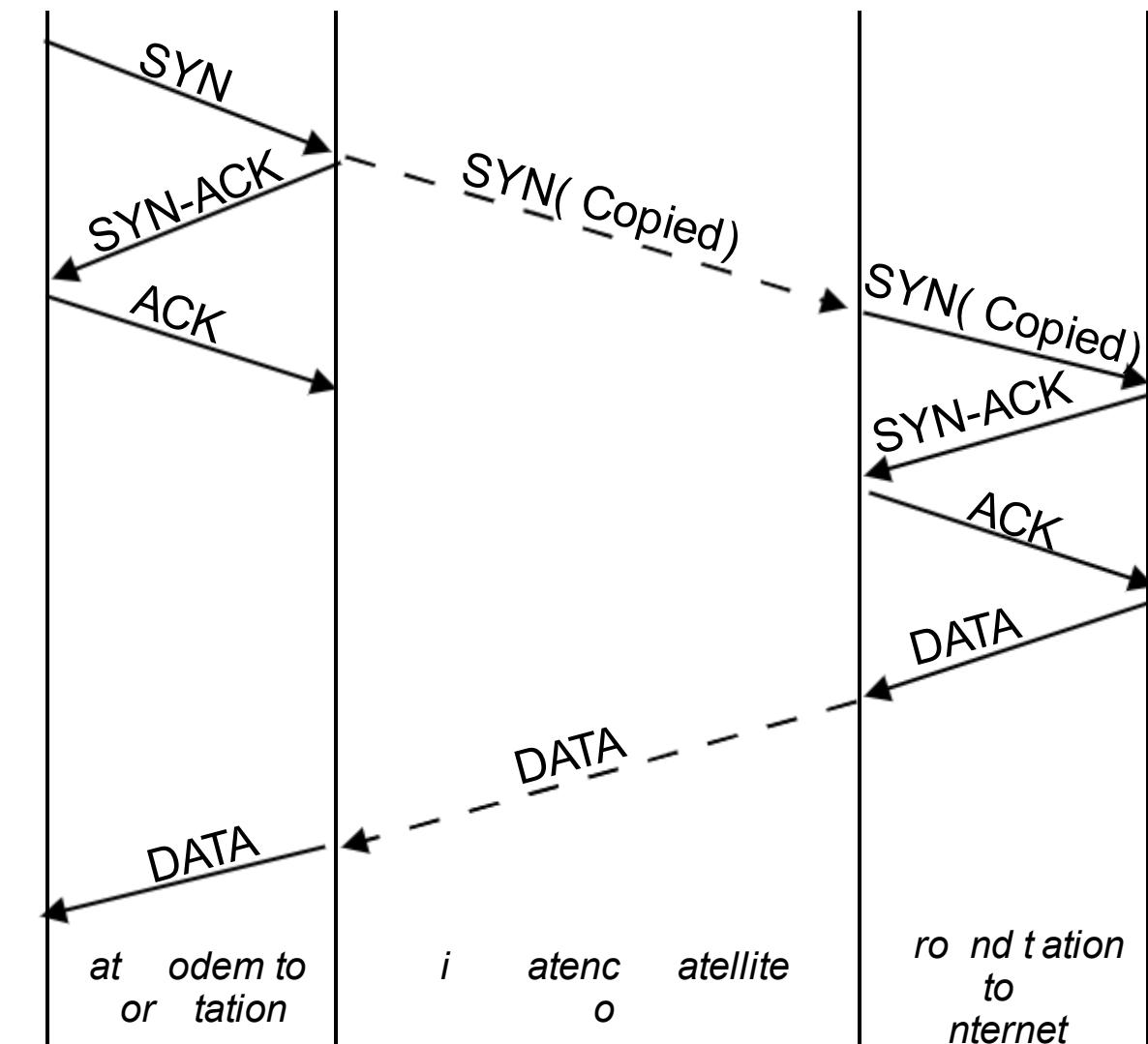
<sup>a</sup> The materials used in the researchers experiment included a TBS-6903 DVB-S2X PCI card, Selfsat H30D satellite dish, and 3 meter coaxial cable.



# Mitigations and Defenses

# Why Does This Happen?

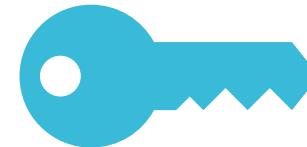
- Not 100% Incompetence / Ignorance
- Latency -> Miserable TCP Experience
- Ss fix wit “ e rforman e n an ing rox ies” s
  - Basically a benevolent Man-In-The-Middle attack
- an ’t se tra itional en -to-end VPN and PEP



# Short-Term Fixes



Accept VPN performance hit

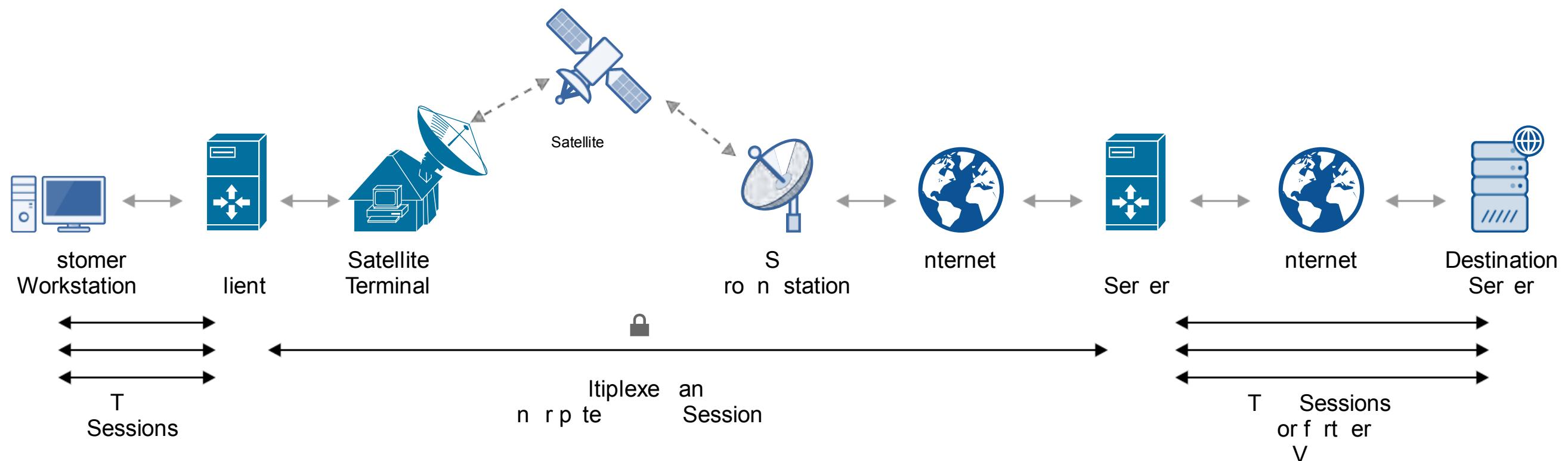


Use TLS / DNSSEC / etc.

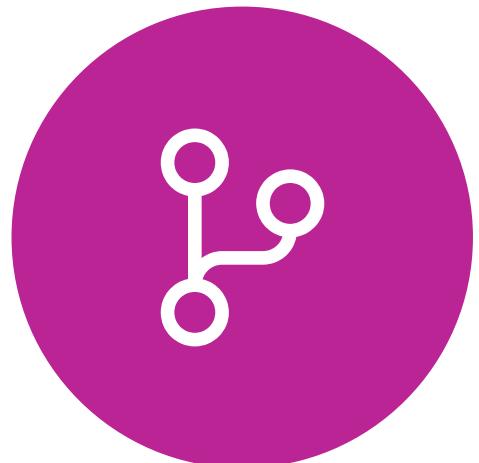


ISP: Alter sequence numbers in PEP

# Longer-Term – “QPEP”



# QPEP Design Principles



OPEN SOURCE



ACCESSIBLE & SIMPLE



TARGET INDIVIDUALS (NOT  
ISPS)

Contribute Here: <https://github.com/ssloxford/qpep>

## Traditional VPN Encryption (OpenVPN)



 ~25 seconds

## Encrypted PEP (QPEP)



 ~14 seconds

# Key Takeaways



Satellite Broadband Traffic is Vulnerable to Long-Range Eavesdropping Attacks



Satellite Customers Across Domains Leak Sensitive Data Over Satellite Links



Performance and Privacy Don't Need to Trade Off in SATCOMs Design

*T e “Next o ” i n now n. Encr t ever t in .*