



# *U.S. Special Operations Command*



**Geopolitics:**  
*Mahan, Mackinder, Spykman,  
Kennan, China, Climate Change  
and Current US Strategies*

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The overall classification of this briefing is:  
**UNCLASSIFIED**



# Principle Theories



- Alfred Mahan: “Sea Power” (1890)
- Halford Mackinder: “Heartland” (1904)
- Nicholas Spykman: “Rimland” (1942)
- George Kennan: “Containment” (1947)
  - Hoover – “Isolationism”
  - FDR – “De’tente”
  - Burnham – “Roll Back”
- China: “Belt and Road” (now)



# Mahan's "Sea Power"



- The two allied land powers, the Russian Empire and France
- The portions of Asia above the 40th parallel under effective influence of Russian land power
- The four allied sea powers, Great Britain, the German Empire, Japan, and the United States
- The portions of Asia below the 30th parallel subject to effective control by sea power
- Key waterways identified by Mahan: the Suez Canal, Panama Canal, Dardanelles, Straits of Gibraltar, and Baltic Straits.



Historic: Control the sea, control commerce, control the world.

The strategic Value of maritime "short cuts"

Constants:

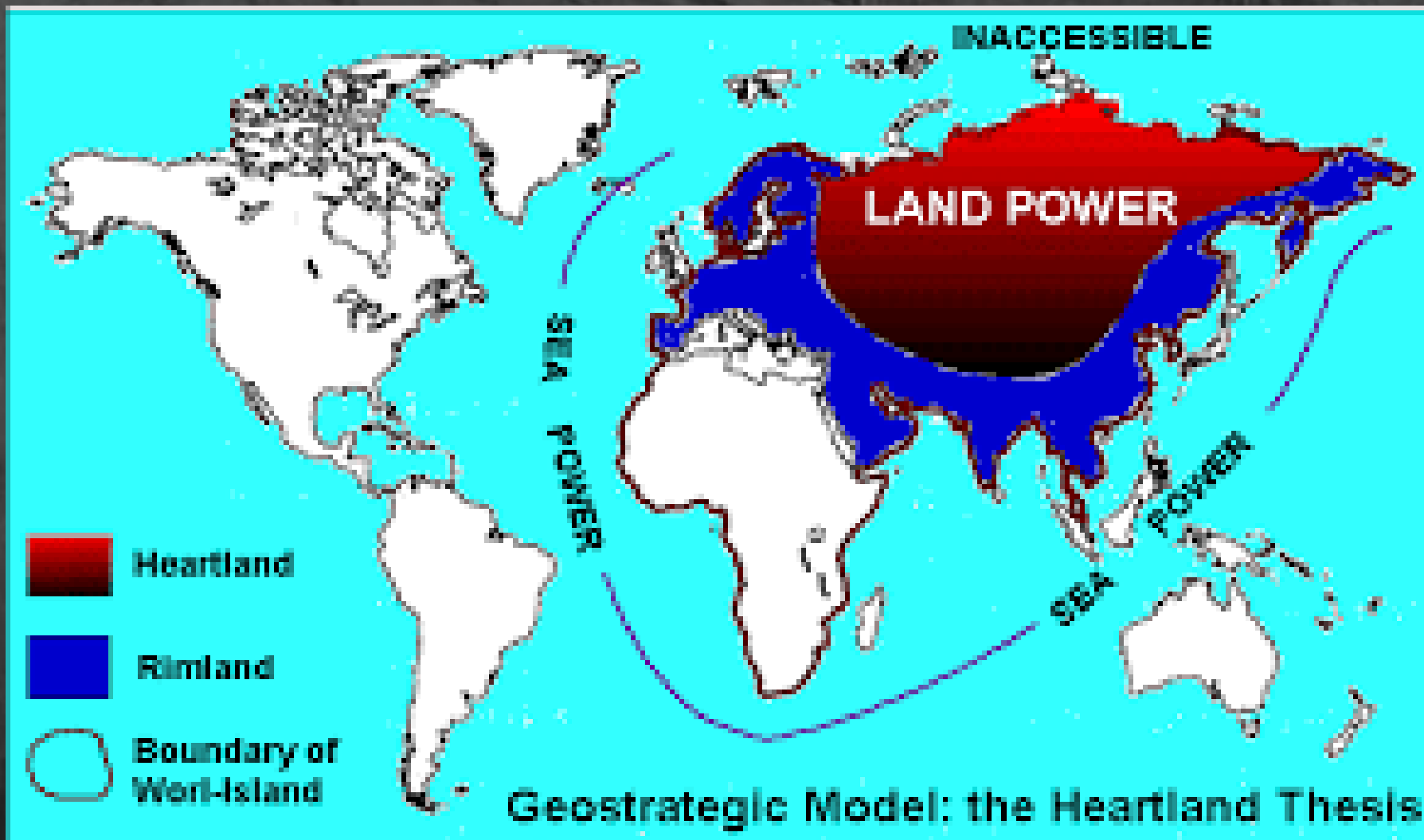
- Physics
- Human nature
- Geography

Variables:

- Who controls
- Climate
- Alliances



# Mackinder's "Heartland"



Projecting power outward from the Heartland.

Interior lines

Required infrastructure to reach out and disrupt, deny defeat efforts to project power inward from the sea and Rimland.

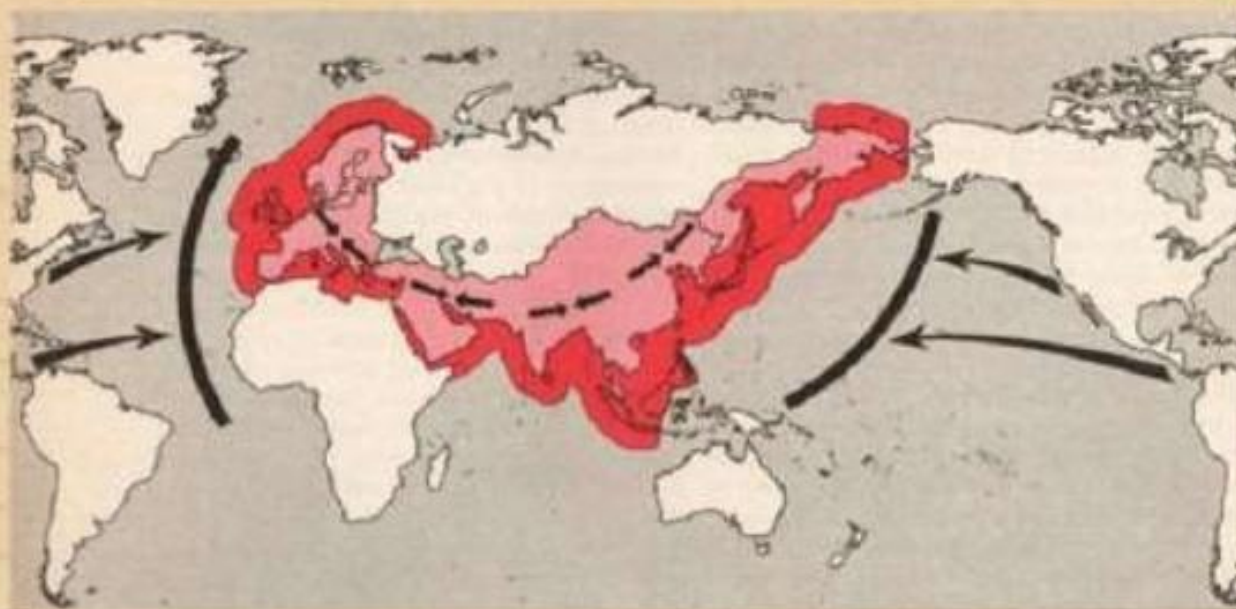
Physics favors Sea Power



# Spykman's Rimland



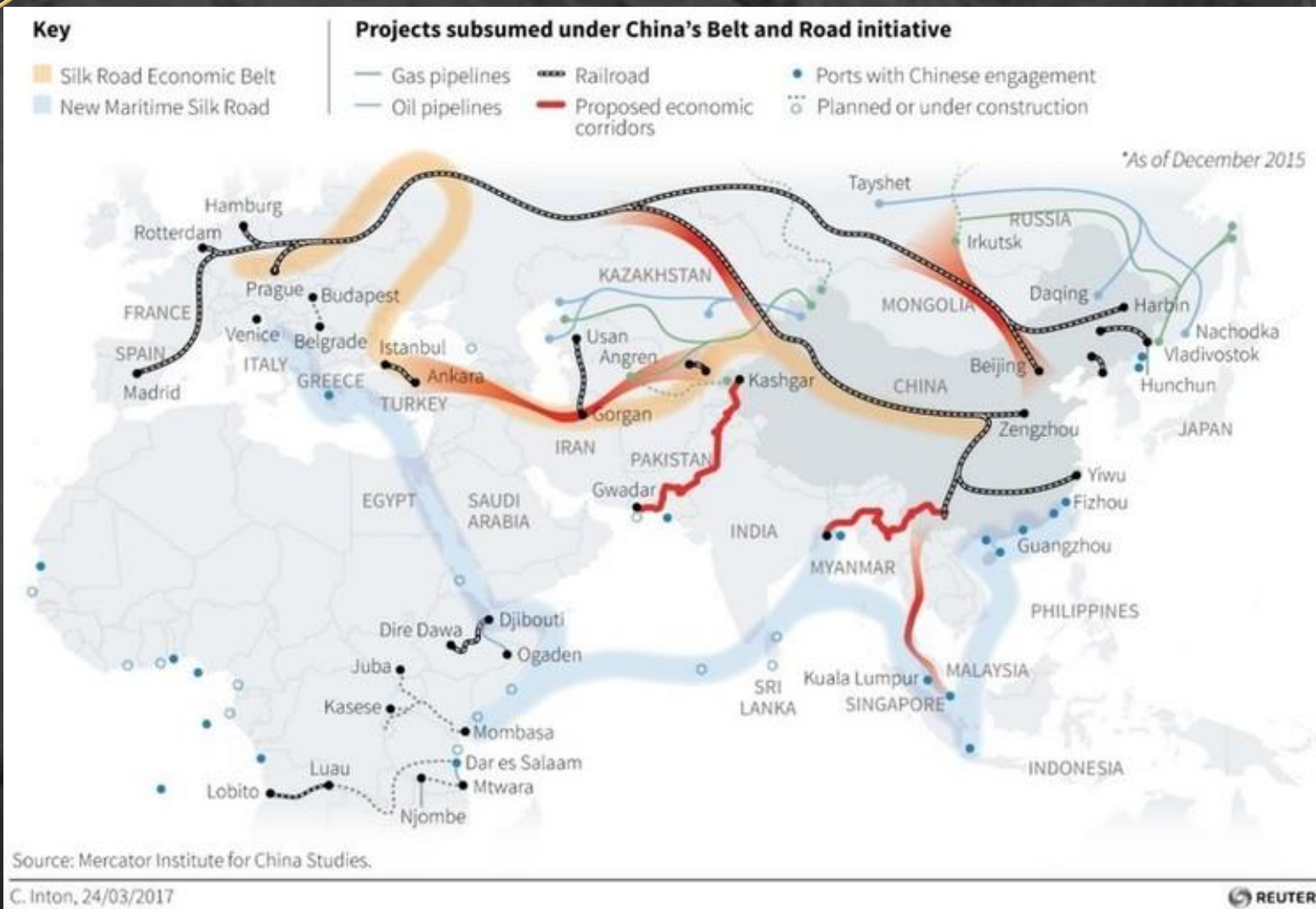
## Spykman Geopolitical Map



*Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia;  
Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.*



# China Has a Clear Vision



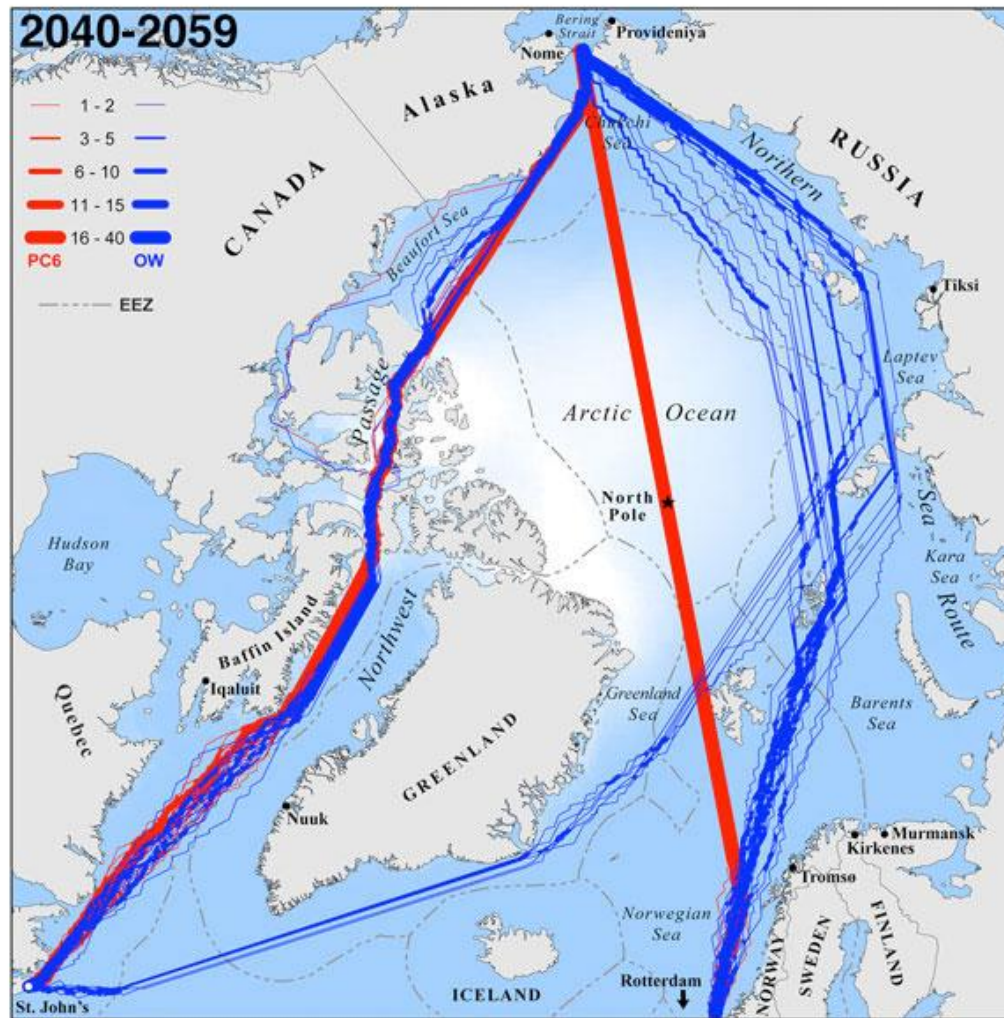
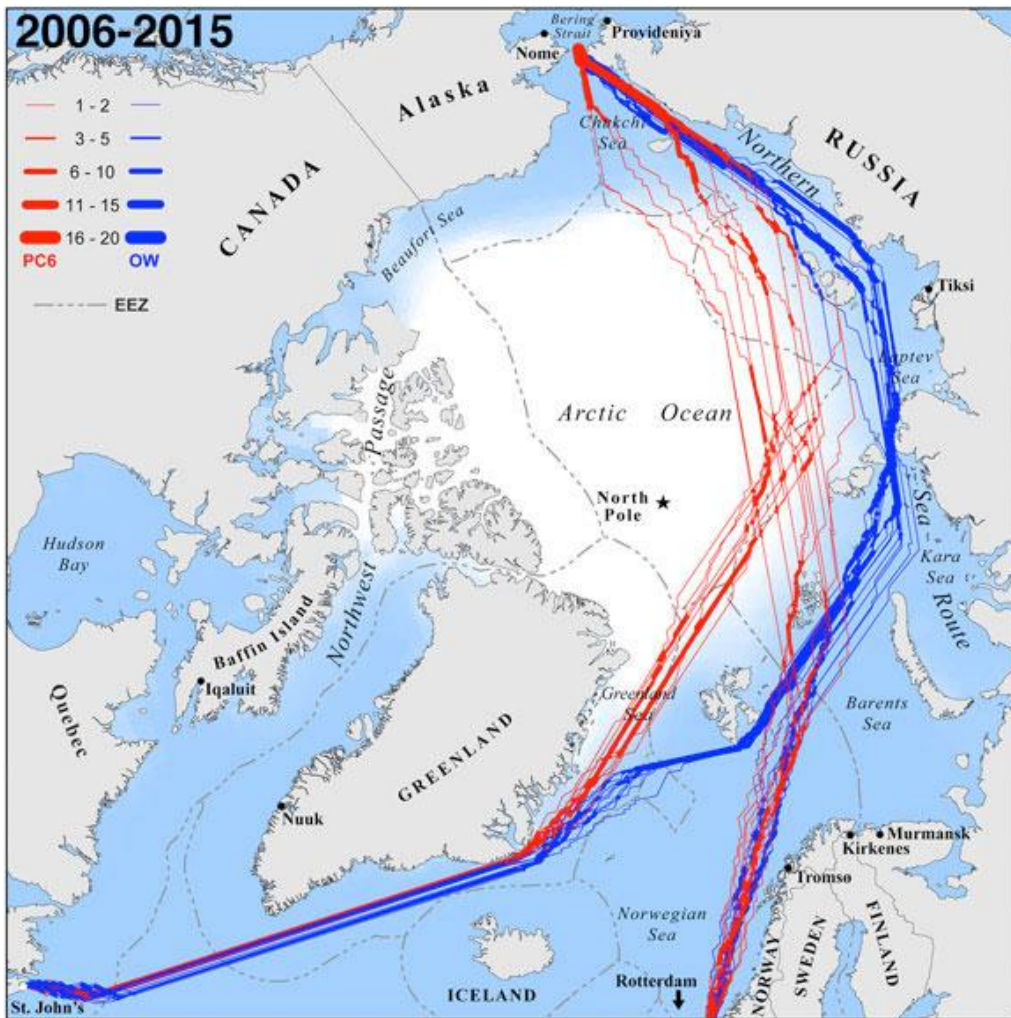
Historically, whomever controls The sea, controls commerce, And thereby becomes the Dominant great power.

Revisionist actors rarely (successfully) challenge the dominant status Quo power directly. Indirect approaches that avoid that clash and that focus on weak or declining powers are the path to success.

China therefore is seeking to dominate commerce and influence on the Eurasian continent from within first, and deal with the US if they still need to after.



# A Northern Front opens up...



NSR: It would reduce a maritime journey between East Asia and Western Europe from 21,000 km using the Suez Canal to 12,800 km, cutting transit time by 10-15 days.

NWP: East Asia and Western Europe would take about 13,600 km using the Northwest Passage, while taking 24,000 km using the Panama Canal.



# Competition



- How does this shape competition?
- Are we focused on the right things?
- Do we have a narrative to compete with “Belt and Road”?
  - “One Ocean, One World”?
- Who will be the winners / losers in the Chinese approach?
  - Are we posturing for both?
- How does Cyber and Space shape this competition?





# Implications for SOF



- SOF is population-based, so Arctic options will be limited, difficult, and platform-centric.
- Recognize the wisdom (and vulnerabilities) of China's combined, phased approach. Can we thwart their ambitions?
  - Interior first to shift momentum / gain influence;
  - Postured to expand into the exterior as opportunity presents.
- Posture in the Rimland, project effects into the Heartland.
- Look for opportunities in "the islands" to do the same.



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZL8TLiOcF6c&spfreload=10>
- MacKinder's Heartland theory (1919) then / now
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4\\_AexxUQfo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4_AexxUQfo)
- Spykman's Rimland theory (student of Mack) then/now
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14650045.2017.1291503>
- China's Belt-Road in the context of MacKinder & Spykman
- <https://consortiumnews.com/2018/08/29/back-in-the-great-game-the-revenge-of-eurasian-land-powers/?print=print>
- More on the Mahan-MacKinder-Spykman basis for China's strategy.