

An introduction to Nemo in secular legends

The Pacific pole of inaccessibility, known as Point Nemo, is the maritime location on the planet furthest from any landmass. Located in the South Pacific, approximately 2,688 km from the Pitcairn, Easter and Maher islands, it has functioned for centuries as a myth that both fascinates and terrifies mankind. It is a 'non-place', a space without community or history, perhaps a philosophical echo of Plato's *khôra* and the abyss¹.

Beyond geography, it is a symbolic continuation of the ocean as a border between the real world and the unknown, between the living and the dead. Today, images of shipwrecks and space debris sharing the ocean floor for eternity still send shivers down our spines. In short, Point Nemo is the radical negation of any hint of security: a place thousands of miles away from where humanity lives, but, as we shall see, its control is an object of desire.



Illustration 1. Pelagic zone around Point Nemo. Source: HERRERO J. "Point Nemo: the graveyard of spacecraft", *La Razón*. 2/8/2022. <https://www.larazon.es/sociedad/20220802/t2ly3dgme5hxtb5mvpfkjs5ury.html>

With no tradition of its own, Point Nemo has generated digital legends and speculative narratives such as the sea "that does not want ships", a place of silence and a feeling of emptiness, a mockery of a forbidden sanctuary where the Earth does not tolerate human presence, and even a border between the ocean and space, reinforced by its use as a satellite drop zone.

¹ DERRIDA, Jacques. *Khôra*. Amorrortu, 2024. ISBN 978-950-518-392-0.

These legends currently function as internet folklore, but there are allusions to them in the culture of the past, perhaps most notably in Jules Verne and the name 'Nemo' itself, the intrepid captain and anti-hero who flees the world for the ocean, and Howard P. Lovecraft and his cosmic ocean, a Pacific as a space of indifferent horror where human insignificance is highlighted and is the place of residence of *Cthulhu*, an entity symbolising vastness, silence and the abyss. It is no coincidence, therefore, that even today, in an age of hyperconnectivity and information saturation, we are fascinated by a place where nothing happens, or at least where we are not aware of anything happening².

An approach to the geopolitics of the South Pacific

Several of the classic authors on geopolitics highlighted the importance of the Pacific, and specifically the South Pacific, in their writings. Admiral Alfred T. Mahan divided the world into three regions. The first was located north of the 40th parallel, where land power was consolidated. The second, between the 40th and 30th parallels, was a contested and debatable strip, where land and sea powers vied for power. However, the entire region south of this strip was the area where maritime powers could fully exert their influence. If China emerged as a relevant player, the US would need the help of its allies to counter its potential³.

From the admiral's words, it can be inferred that the northern hemisphere is called 'continental' because it contains almost seventy per cent of the planet's landmass, with the major global powers located north of the Tropic of Cancer. For its part, the southern hemisphere is called 'oceanic' because it reverses these figures in favour of the sea⁴. This strip highlights the enormous expanse of the Pacific, where its immensity "makes military efforts very difficult, so they should be avoided as much as possible." For this reason, states should pursue their commercial objectives through non-violent means in an environment of mutual gain⁵.

² CORIA, Javier. "The most isolated place on the planet," *ABC*. 26/12/2012. https://www.abc.es/tecnologia/abci-lugar-alejado-planeta-201212260000_noticia.html

Note: All hyperlinks in this article are active as of 14 January 2026.

³ MAHAN, Alfred Thayer. *The problem of Asia: its effect upon international politics*. Sampson-Low and Martson, 1900, pp. 160, 181-182.

⁴ RIESCO, Ricardo. "Geostrategic assessment of the southern hemisphere," *Journal of Political Science*, vol. 7, no. 1. 1985, p. 177.

⁵ MAHAN, Alfred Thayer. *The problem of Asia: its effect upon international politics*. *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

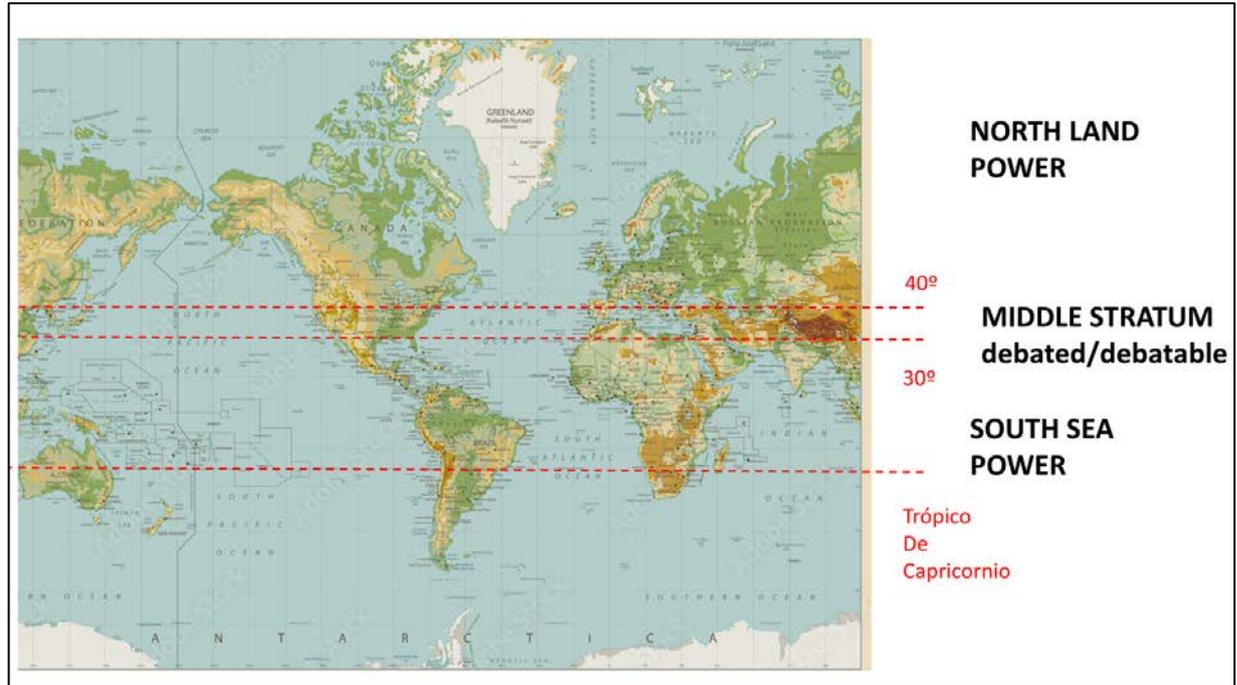


Illustration 2. Division of the world into zones, showing the importance of the southern region for maritime powers.
 Source: own elaboration based on the postulates of A.T. Mahan in *The Problem of Asia*.

It seems that Mahan's words were prophetic and that in the 21st century this situation of dispute is occurring, with China in full expansion and with a naval potential that is approaching that of the United States, but where diplomatic, economic and commercial relations seem to prevail over the use of military power for the time being.

Looking specifically at the South Pacific, it is characterised by its vast expanse of some 65 million square kilometres, where, alongside large empty maritime spaces, there are nearly 10,000 islands with a linguistic diversity of 1,200 languages, home to some 3.6 million people⁶. This area is characterised by great economic and political diversity, with independent states (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, Western Samoa, Vanuatu, Palau and Micronesia); others that are quasi-independent, such as the Cook Islands and Niue, which are freely associated with New Zealand; the territory of Tokelau, which is dependent on New Zealand; the French territories of New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna, which enjoy broad autonomy; the British colony of the Pitcairn Islands; Norfolk Island, which is under Australian sovereignty; the US territories of American Samoa, Guam, and the Mariana Islands, to which must be added

⁶ WORLDMETER. *Countries in Oceania by Population (2025)*. <https://www.worldometers.info/population/countries-in-oceania-by-population/> The populations of Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea have been excluded from this data in order to focus primarily on the islands of Polynesia and Micronesia.

the Marshall Islands due to their dependence on defence matters and Easter Island, which is under Chilean sovereignty^{7,8}.

Another classic figure in Pacific geopolitics is General Karl Haushofer. Apart from considering the Pacific an empty and asymmetrical ocean, he gave its islands transcendental importance. He compared Germany's disillusionment after the First World War to that of the peoples of the Pacific islands, who had lost their independence to the British, French and American empires. Although Japan had also taken possession of islands in this ocean after the Great War, Haushofer saw the Japanese as a country that needed to expand due to its rapid growth in relation to its small territory. The loss of the German colonies at the end of the war placed the Germans in a favourable position with regard to the recovery of their 'self-determination', given that they were in a similar situation⁹.

Extrapolating this situation to the present day, it could be considered that the expanding actor in the Pacific, including its southern region, is China. As was the case more than a century ago, there are certain island territories, such as French Polynesia, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, where there are trends towards independence or a change of orientation and alliances.

Focusing on the island issue, these can be classified as continental islands (New Guinea, New Zealand, Borneo and Sumatra); continentalised islands (Taiwan, Timor and Tasmania); large island territories (New Caledonia, Fiji, Hawaii, Bougainville, Guadalcanal); small island territories (Micronesia, Polynesia, atolls and islands of the Ring of Fire); small islands and volcanic atolls (Tuamotu, Marshall, Ellice, Gilbert). Although the larger islands are close to the continent, the small islands are very important due to their high degree of oceanic isolation. This gives an idea of how archipelagos with very little territory can generate large areas of maritime sovereignty and exclusive economic zones (EEZs), a significant example being the Cook Islands, which with a territory of 120 square kilometres generate almost 1.6 million square kilometres of EEZ¹⁰.

⁷ SCHEIHING, Rubén. "The South Pacific," *Revista General de Marina* 6/81, p. 710.

⁸ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *Pacific Islands Countries*. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/pacific-islands-countries_en

⁹ BASHFORD Alison. "Karl Haushofer's geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean", in: FULLAGAR, Kate (ed.). *The Atlantic World in the Antipodes: Effects and Transformations since the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

¹⁰ COUTAU-BEGARIE, Herve. *Geoestrategia del Pacífico*. Ediciones Ejército, Servicio de Publicaciones del EME, 1990, p. 23.

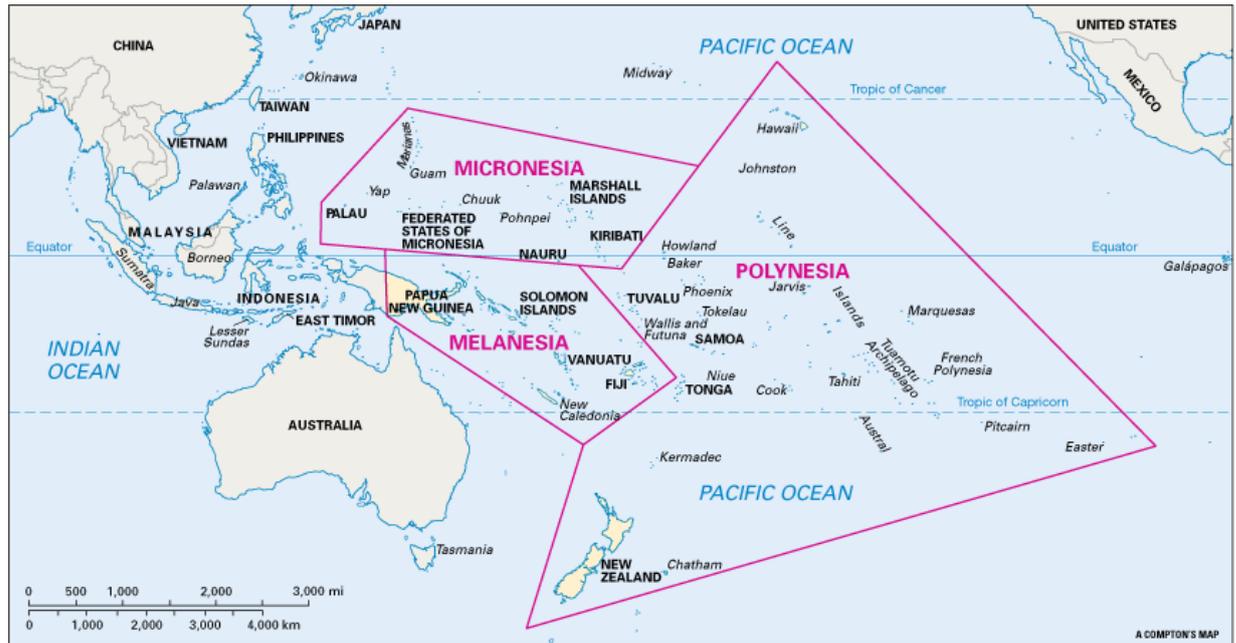


Illustration 3. Classic division of Oceania. Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica. 'Geographical region of Oceania'. 7 January 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pacific-Islands>

The best navigable entrance to the South Pacific is through the Strait of Magellan. This obligatory passageway is, for the moment, of secondary interest because the most important commercial route between the Atlantic and the Pacific is the Panama Canal and because, on the Asian continent, the main traffic skirts its large land mass through the Strait of Malacca. Looking ahead, there has been much discussion about the importance of the Arctic, which is why most academic studies do not focus on the southern region¹¹.

Geopolitically, the Strait of Magellan, together with the Beagle Channel and the Sea of Hoces (or Drake Passage), constitute one end of *the outer* crescent defined by Halford Mackinder, complemented by the logic of controlling choke points promulgated by A.T. Mahan.

The special characteristics of this complex allow for interoceanic redundancy, as it is a natural route between two oceans with greater continuity compared to other artificial points such as

¹¹ The natural route is actually Drake Passage (or Sea of Hoces, named after Francisco de Hoces, the Spaniard who discovered it in 1525), which is unobstructed but where weather conditions make navigation difficult. The Strait of Magellan greatly improves on the conditions of the Panama Canal, but it is also easily blockable and has poor conditions for navigation. In the case of Suez, the alternative is to go around Africa, which is longer and more expensive, but it is neither restricted nor particularly dangerous, although at the Cape of Good Hope, navigation approaches the "roaring 40s" of southern latitude. If we compare Malacca and Magellan, the latter could carry significant traffic, but the conditions are openly more hostile. While crossing Malacca is almost routine, crossing Magellan is quite a challenge.

Panama or Suez. Legally, the strait belongs to Chile, while the channel and the passage are internationally regulated waters, which provides great stability from a security standpoint. It is also an area from which Antarctica can be accessed and which provides strategic maritime depth, due to the possibility of controlling various routes, maintaining a naval presence or providing a phased response to threats¹².

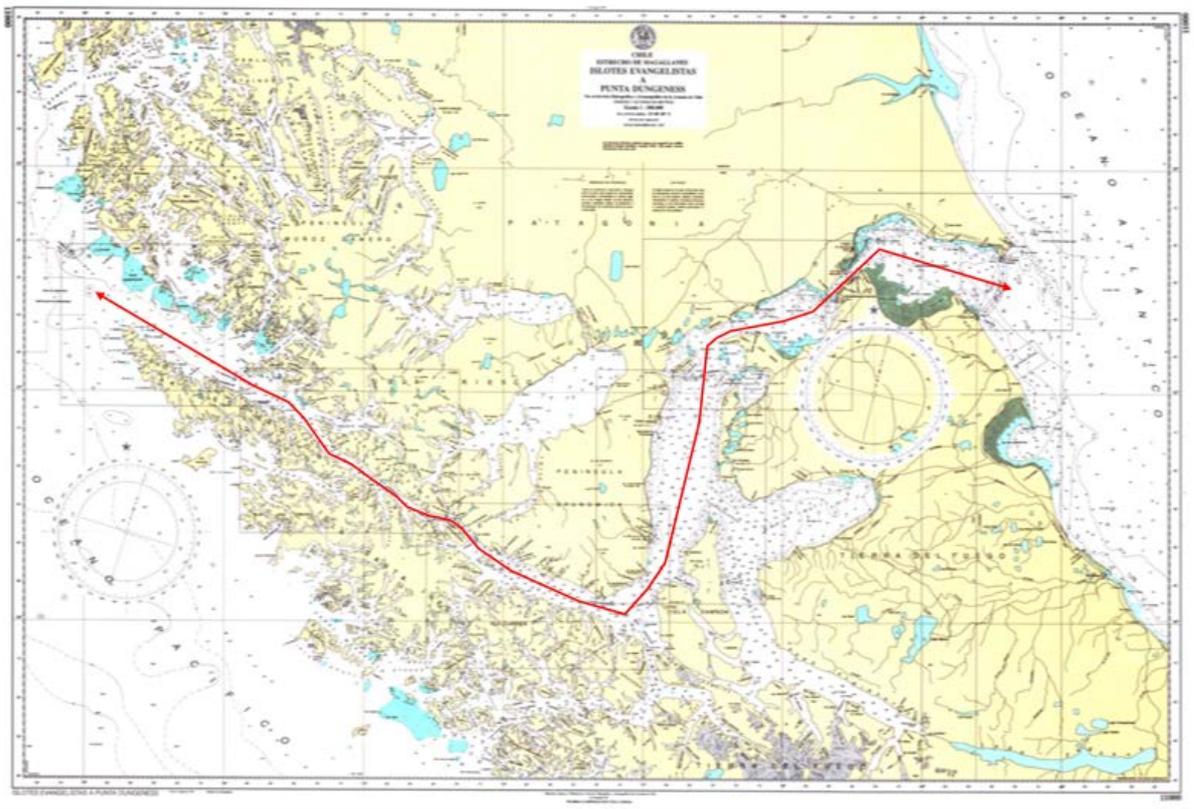


Illustration 4. Navigation chart of the Strait of Magellan. Source: Álvarez Chaigneau, José Ignacio. *Between Mahan and Mackinder: the Strait of Magellan as a southern geopolitical pivot*. IEEE, 2025. <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieee/entre-mahan-y-mackinder-el-estrecho-de-magallanes-como-pivote-geopolitico-austral>

The bioceanic characteristics and alternative possibilities of the Strait of Magellan are significant. More than a century after the Panama Canal was opened, the effects of climate change have highlighted the vulnerabilities of that route, bringing the former role of the Chilean port of Punta Arenas back into consideration. On the downside, it should be noted that a voyage between Europe and China via this route would take 10 days

¹² ÁLVAREZ CHAIGNEAU, José Ignacio. *Between Mahan and Mackinder: The Strait of Magellan as a southern geopolitical pivot*. IEEE, 2025. <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieee/entre-mahan-y-mackinder-el-estrecho-de-magallanes-como-pivote-geopolitico-austral>

longer and cover almost 4,000 nautical miles, and that sailing conditions so far south are complicated¹³.

Be that as it may, the strait has recently experienced a significant upturn in the number of vessels crossing it, with an 85% increase between 2021 and 2024^{14,15}.

Nemo between Magellan and the small islands. The Chinese vision of the South Pacific

Point Nemo is known as the "oceanic pole of inaccessibility" because it is the maritime location furthest from any landmass on the planet, located more than 2,600 kilometres away. Located in the middle of the vast South Pacific, it is characterised by its extreme isolation, depth and scarcity of life, as it lies at the centre of the southern ocean's marine currents. Its most useful function to date has been as a 'spaceship graveyard', as satellite material orbiting the Earth is often directed to this area at the end of its useful life^{16,17}.

¹³ CHAPA VEGA, Fernando. "Strait of Magellan: A new boom as a global geopolitical space?" *Revista Ensayos Militares*, vol. 11, no. 1. 2025, pp. 74-93.

¹⁴ ÁLVAREZ CHAIGNEAU, José Ignacio. *Between Mahan and Mackinder: The Strait of Magellan as a southern geopolitical pivot*. *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ If reference was made earlier to the "roaring 40s" degrees of southern latitude, the Sea of Coves or Drake Passage falls within the "howling 60s" zone. If the former are complicated, the latter are even more so, due to their strong winds and rough seas.

¹⁶ NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION (NOAA). National Ocean Service. 'Where is Point Nemo?'. <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/nemo.html>

¹⁷ DAVIES, Ella. "What is Punto Nemo, the 'most inaccessible place' on Earth, and where is it located?" *BBC Earth*. 26 October 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/vert-earth-37629178>

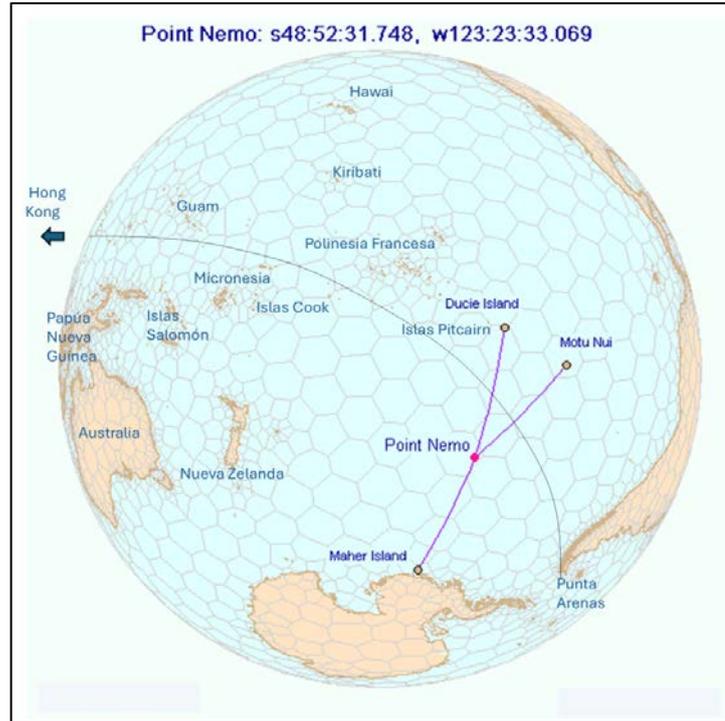


Illustration 5. Location of Point Nemo in the South Pacific. Source: own elaboration based on GONZÁLEZ, Diego. "En mitad de la nada" (In the middle of nowhere), *Fronteras*, 19 March 2009. <https://fronterasblog.com/2009/03/17/en-mitad-de-la-nada-i/>

It should be noted that China has a particular view of the region, very different from the passive zone that other powers see it as. For the Chinese, what we might call the "Nemo Region" could be very useful, as it would constitute a viable alternative to a situation where the flow of products and goods it receives and supplies to other parts of the planet is cut off.

In short, the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) strategy has serious problems in terms of China's control of its communication routes. From an essentially geographical perspective, the reality is that China's maritime façade, its coasts, are surrounded by a double chain of islands, the first centred on Taiwan and the second on Guam¹⁸.

¹⁸ SAMBHI, Natalie. "The Strategist," *ASPI suggests*. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 14 February 2014. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/aspi-suggests-14-feb/>

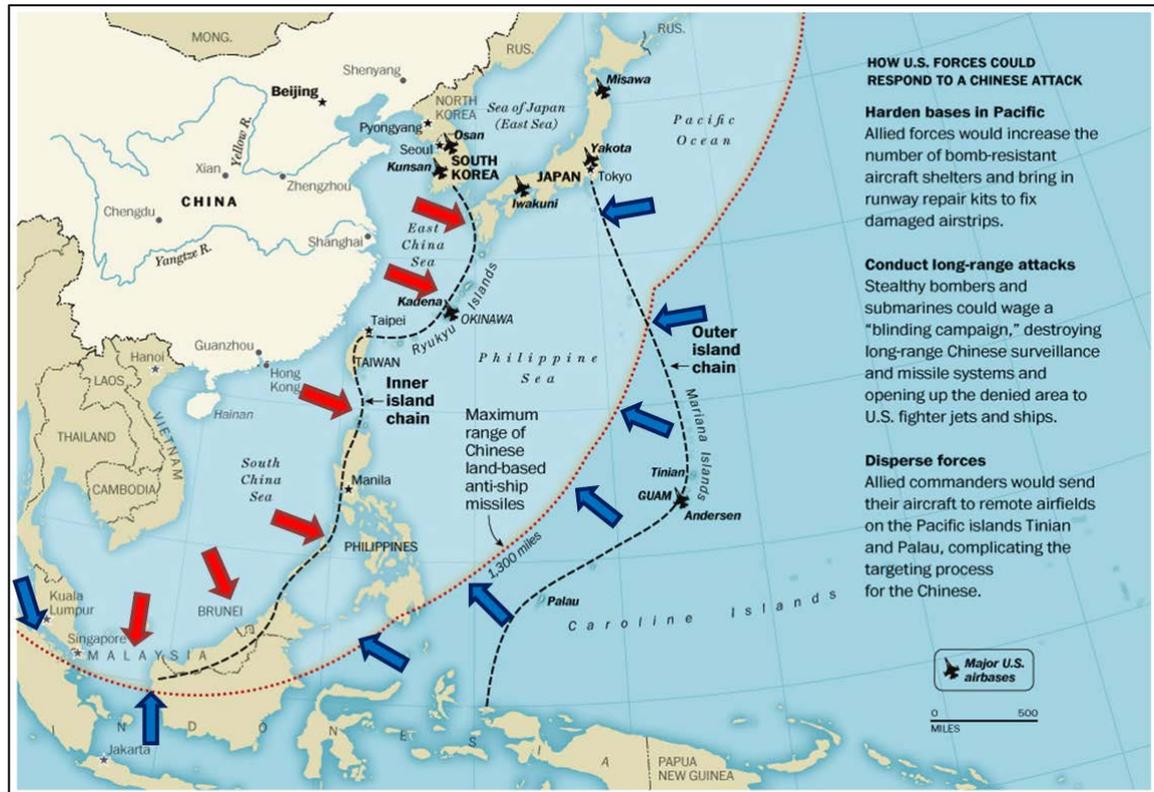


Illustration 6. Double chain of islands surrounding the Chinese coast. Source: SAMBHI, Natalie. *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*. 14 February 2014. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/aspi-suggests-14-feb/>

Bordering the large mass of the Eurasian continent are vital *choke points* such as the Straits of Malacca, Hormuz and the Suez Canal. As if this were not enough, the passages from the Eastern to the Western Mediterranean and the exit from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic through the Strait of Gibraltar are controlled by the US or its allies. In addition, China's strategy to consolidate its commercial presence in the Panama Canal has been questioned several times by the Americans, who have put pressure on the Panamanian government to prevent this from happening¹⁹.

In addition to these geographical factors, climate change could bring about a series of restrictions on the Panama Canal, as was the case during the drought that ravaged the region in 2023, due to the canal's dependence on the Chagres River²⁰. It also remains to be seen whether the possible melting of the Arctic ice will lead to the opening of a new

¹⁹ ARMUS, Teo. "The U.S., China, the Panama Canal and the community caught in the middle," *The Washington Post*. 9 August 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/08/09/panama-canal-china-trump-united-states-hegseth/>

²⁰ PANAMA CANAL AUTHORITY. "Debunking myths about drought and Panama Canal operations." 9 April 2024. <https://pancanal.com/desmontando-mitos-sobre-la-sequia-y-las-operaciones-del-canal-de-panama/>

maritime traffic route (), which would also depend on the passages that provide access to this glacial ocean.

In view of the global maritime outlook for the Chinese, the South Pacific route, which crosses the Nemo Region, appears to be a good alternative. China will inevitably face the problem of the double chain of islands, but it would not have the constraints that the other routes currently have. In addition, large tonnage vessels that do not fall within the 'Panamax' category will necessarily have to use this route if they want to pass from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Therefore, in the event of a possible disruption to conventional energy and trade routes, the possibility of using what could be called the 'Nemo Route', as it runs through this area, becomes even more compelling.

The points of support for the Nemo Route. China's strategy

One of Mahan's postulates is the need to establish bases to protect trade routes. The logical sequence advocated by the admiral included the establishment of industry and trade, followed by the creation of a merchant navy and, finally, control of the sea. This control of the sea would be exercised through the creation of a powerful navy and, subsequently, the establishment of bases from which to exercise power²¹. Although China seems to be repeating this sequence in the first two points, it is not following the third to the same extent, as it is first creating bases that are primarily commercial in nature, followed by the impressive growth of its navy.

Looking at the possible points of support for the establishment of the Nemo Route, one could consider those located near the southern tip of South America, as well as the island territories that could support maritime traffic before entering the region of the double chain of islands. Between one end and the other, the route would circle through the immensity of the South Pacific, but could be protected by a projection of power from both ends.

At present, it appears to be pursuing a policy of rapprochement with the approaches to the Strait of Magellan and Drake Passage through the establishment of certain facilities. Near the Atlantic entrance, China has built the controversial Deep Space Station in the province of Neuquén in Argentine Patagonia, belonging to the China National Space

²¹ MAHAN, Alfred Thayer. *Lessons of the war with Spain: And other articles*. London, S. Low, Marston. 1899, pp. 29-30. Mahan asserted that Napoleon was not wrong in taking Malta, but rather in not having ships to protect it.

Administration (CNSA), in which the Chinese state-owned company China Launch and Tracking Control Corporation (CLTC) is involved. It should be noted that this company has been associated with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), prompting a reaction from the United States because the station could be used to receive satellite information, considering it the 'Trojan horse' of the southern hemisphere^{22,23}.

As for Chile, the country that controls the strait, it is important to remember its relationship with China, which considers the port of Valparaíso to be the twin of Shanghai²⁴. However, it is the port city of Punta Arenas, located on the strait itself, that is considering expanding its facilities in response to increased maritime traffic. As in other scenarios, the US is aware of the need to control the Strait of Magellan^{25,26}.

In relation to Chinese policy towards the Pacific Island Countries (PIC), China has attempted to establish its presence in the southern route by promoting bilateral agreements on economic cooperation, but also on security matters, despite the opposition of the United States, Australia and New Zealand. At the same time, they have managed to get almost all the island countries in the region to abandon diplomatic relations with Taipei, strengthening them with Beijing²⁷.

Of particular note is the 2022 agreement with the Solomon Islands, one of China's biggest supporters in the region, which still harbours resentment that Australia intervened to stabilise the country with an assistance force between 2003 and 2017. Although not all the details of the agreement are known, it is known that the Chinese will be able to "conduct maritime visits, logistical relief operations, and stopovers and transits in Solomon Islands ports," as well as transfer Chinese forces to the islands to "protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects"²⁸. However, the islands are simultaneously maintaining the

²² GARCÍA MORITÁN, Roberto. "The Chinese base in Patagonia: covert operations?" *Clarín*. 30/10/2025.

https://www.clarin.com/opinion/base-china-patagonia-funciones-encubiertas_0_F9fke249U1.html

²³ LONDONO, Ernesto. "From a space station in Argentina, China expands its presence in Latin America," *The New York Times*. 28 July 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2018/07/28/espanol/america-latina/china-america-latina-argentina.html>

²⁴ PUERTO VALPARAÍSO. "Puerto Valparaíso explores innovation alternatives and new technologies in Chinese ports." Wednesday, 29 October 2025. <https://www.puertovalparaiso.cl/puerto-valparaiso-explora-alternativas-de-innovacion-y-nuevas>

²⁵ LAUTARO, Luis Andrés. "United States alerts Chile to Chinese influence in the Strait of Magellan during the 2025 South American Defence Conference," *Defensa.com*. 25 August 2025. <https://www.defensa.com/chile/estados-unidos-alerta-chile-sobre-influencia-china-estrecho-2025>

²⁶ XIAO, Tianyi. "China-Chile Economic Ties: Trade, Investment, and Future Prospects," *China Briefing*. 13 January 2025. <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-chile-economic-ties-trade-investment-and-future-prospects/>

²⁷ Only the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

²⁸ ZOE LIU, Zongyuan. "What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the U.S. and South Pacific," *Council on Foreign Relations*. 4 May 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/china-solomon-islands-security-pact-us-south-pacific>

security agreements they already had with New Zealand, giving the impression that they are seeking a balance that benefits them^{29,30}.

Another island supporter of China could be Tonga, which is a prime example of the Chinese debt trap, whereby debt is refinanced at maturity with a progressive increase. The Tongan vision is unifying for the entire group of islands, which it sees as a community with interconnected origins that does not need to build new identities, hence its significant influence on Fiji and Samoa. At the same time, the Tongans are trying to distance themselves from Australia, which they consider an interventionist country, wary of a scenario similar to that experienced by the Solomon Islands³¹.

In 2025, China signed a comprehensive five-year agreement with the Cook Islands (loosely associated with New Zealand) on infrastructure, maritime transport and seabed exploration, among other areas. The decision came as a surprise to New Zealanders, who did not expect the islands to opt for their "long-term interests", although the islands gave assurances that their relations with New Zealand would remain as they were. However, the islands' attempts to create their own passports indicate that actions do not match words, in an environment of perceived progressive increase in Chinese presence and decline in Western presence, understanding that the US is more busy in other parts of the world and cannot cover all the fronts it needs to attend to³².

With varying degrees of involvement, it can be said that virtually all PICs maintain cordial relations with China. Proof of this is the establishment of the meeting of foreign ministers of China and the Pacific island countries in May 2025, where Minister Wang Yi steered the meeting towards opposition to Taiwan's independence and presented China as a positive alternative to the US.³³

²⁹ JOHNSON, Blake and YOUNG, Astrid. "Friends to all: Solomon Islands juggles security partners in search of maximum support," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*. 5 Aug 2025. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/friends-to-all-solomon-islands-juggles-security-partners-in-search-of-maximum-support/>

³⁰ BROWN, Terry M. "The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI): Did It Help or Harm a Friend?," *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 3. 2024, pp. 613-620.

³¹ MOTULALO, Tevita. "Paradise in Isolation: Tonga and the Fight for Influence in the Pacific," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*. 15 May 2025. <https://gija.georgetown.edu/2025/05/15/paradise-in-isolation-tonga-and-the-fight-for-influence-in-the-pacific/>

³² WATSON, Katy. "Cook Islands China deal riles allies as West's grip loosens," *BBC*. 28 February 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvq559y0803o>

³³ PAIK, Kathryn and AUGÉ, John. "China Courts the Pacific: Key Takeaways from the 2025 China–Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting," *Centre for Strategic & International Studies*. 3 June 2025. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-courts-pacific-key-takeaways-2025-china-pacific-island-countries-foreign-ministers>



Illustration 7. Photograph of the May 2025 meeting between China and the Pacific island countries.
Source: PAIK, Kathryn; AUGÉ, John. "China Courts the Pacific: Key Takeaways from the 2025 China–Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting," *Centre for Strategic & International Studies*. 3 June 2025.
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-courts-pacific-key-takeaways-2025-china-pacific-island-countries-foreign-ministers>

The meeting resulted in the signing, in early November 2025, of a framework agreement on trade cooperation with the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Vanuatu and the Republic of Fiji. This step has been interpreted as a shift in China's orientation in the Pacific from a more fragmented policy to one based on an institutionalised permanent partnership³⁴.

In French Polynesia, which enjoys a high degree of autonomy and has an EEZ of almost 4.8 million square kilometres, its inhabitants are divided between those who favour independence, who are closer to China, and those who favour autonomy, who support continuing their ties with the metropolis³⁵. At the end of September 2025, a delegation from the islands visited Taiwan, causing unease in Chinese diplomatic circles. In response, the Polynesian delegation declared that it was "not a province of China"³⁶.

³⁴ YIYI, Zhang. "China, 5 Pacific Island nations ink deal to deepen partnership; 'move boosts cooperation in marine economy and green development,'" *Global Times*. 5 November 2025.
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202511/1347444.shtml>

³⁵ ROBERT LANSING INSTITUTE. "The pro-independence forces are likely to push the French authorities to negotiate a referendum on French Polynesia status." 4 May 2023. <https://lansinginstitute.org/2023/05/04/the-pro-independence-forces-are-likely-to-push-the-french-authorities-to-negotiate-a-referendum-on-french-polynesia-status/>

³⁶ DECLOITRE, Patrick. "French Polynesian politicians' visit to Taiwan irks Beijing envoy," *RNZ*. 24 September 2025.
<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/573930/french-polynesian-politicians-visit-to-taiwan-irks-beijing-envoy>

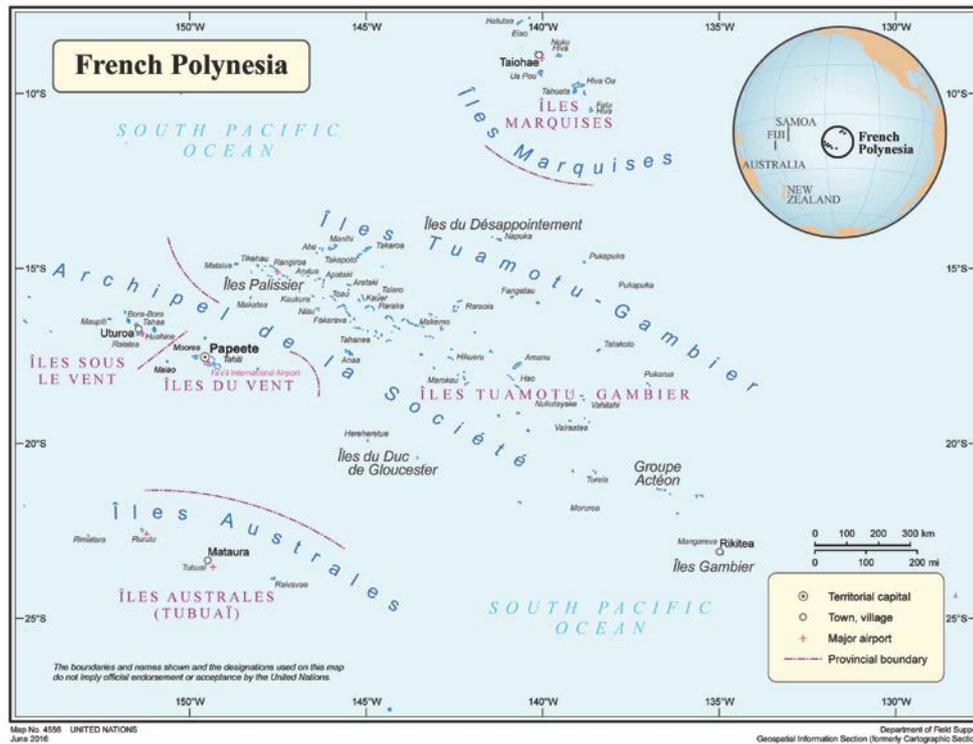


Illustration 8. Map of French Polynesia. Source: United Nations. "The United Nations and decolonisation. French Polynesia." 20 September 2024. <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/es/nsqt/french-polynesia>

Meanwhile, France is taking an ambivalent stance, maintaining military coordination with US forces in the Pacific while also doing so with China in a global environment in which the situation in Ukraine could be a bargaining chip on the other side of the world³⁷. The different positions can be exploited by Chinese pragmatism, whose interest seems to be focused on the Hao atoll in French Polynesia, where there is an old military base with a runway over 3 kilometres long and a deep-water dock. At best, this facility could be used as a logistics base for the fishing fleet³⁸.

The current reality is that China has begun to show a less friendly face in the region, occasionally flaunting its military power. In February 2025, it conducted a series of live-fire military exercises in the Tasman Sea, forcing Australians and New Zealanders to divert their air and sea traffic. This exercise was interpreted as a political gesture

³⁷ WOŹNIAK, Mikołaj and FALKOWSKI, Konrad. "French aperitif for Xi Jinping," *EU-China Affairs Review*. April 2024. The Institute of New Europe Foundation. 8 May 2024. <https://ine.org.pl/en/eu-china-affairs-review-april-2024/>

³⁸ ROBERT LANSING INSTITUTE. "The pro-independence forces are likely to push the French authorities to negotiate a referendum on French Polynesia status." *Op. cit.*

demonstrating China's growing power and that the US is too involved in so many scenarios that it is difficult for it to prepare a response³⁹.

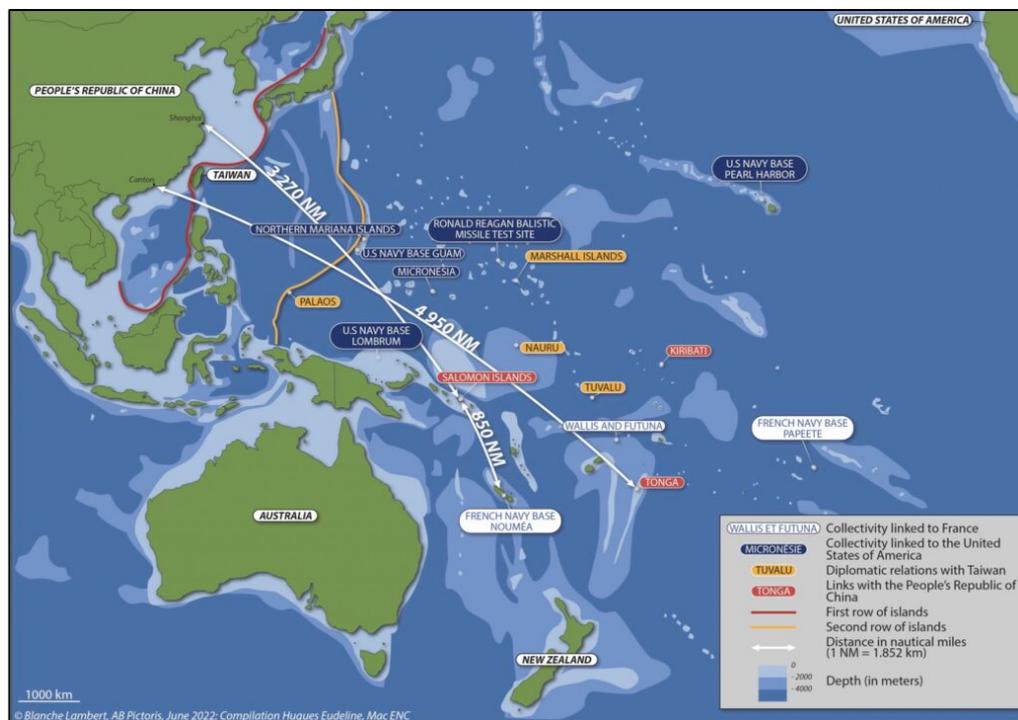


Illustration 9. Location of the main island territories in relation to Chinese interests in the South Pacific. Source: Robert Lansing Institute. "The pro-independence forces are likely to push the French authorities to negotiate a referendum on French Polynesia status." 4 May 2023. <https://lansinginstitute.org/2023/05/04/the-pro-independence-forces-are-likely-to-push-the-french-authorities-to-negotiate-a-referendum-on-french-polynesia-status/>

From a pole of inaccessibility to a strategic spatial node

In addition to the maritime importance that Point Nemo and the so-called Nemo Route could have for China in particular, as can be seen from the preceding paragraphs, their marked importance from a geospatial perspective should also be highlighted, making the leap from geopolitics to astropolitics. Emulating the postulates of Mahan and Mackinder, Everett C. Dolman stipulated that "whoever dominates the near-Earth orbit dominates its space, whoever dominates its space dominates the Earth, and whoever dominates the Earth dominates the destiny of humanity"⁴⁰.

Point Nemo is directly related to the principle of "orbital sustainability," because as satellite material accumulates in space, the risk of "Kessler syndrome" increases. An increase in orbital debris would increase the probability of collisions in space, potentially

³⁹ YU LIN, Ying and HE, Thomas. "The PLAN's Tasman Sea Drill: A Military Response to AUKUS," *Jamestown*. 3/11/2025. <https://jamestown.org/the-plans-tasman-sea-drill-a-military-response-to-aukus/>

⁴⁰ CASTRO TORRES, José Ignacio. *Astropolitics in a post-pandemic world*. IEEE Analysis Document 07/2021, p. 10. https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2021/DIEEEA07_2021_JOSCAS_Astropolitica.pdf

creating a domino effect, generating more debris to the point of saturating low Earth orbit (LEO) and rendering it unusable⁴¹. To avoid this obstruction, space agencies should have plans in place to deorbit material that has reached the end of its useful life. One example is the Spanish military satellite Spainsat NG-II, whose safety was compromised in early 2026 when it was hit by space debris⁴².

Due to its remoteness from any land mass, Point Nemo has paradoxically become a strategic node for the governance of outer space, not because of what is on the surface, but because of what falls from above. As a maritime space with no effective sovereignty and located on the high seas without human presence, political and environmental risks are minimised, making it the largest space cemetery on the planet today. Thus, the South Pacific near Nemo functions as a controlled re-entry zone for debris from space stations and satellites, the most paradigmatic example being the MIR space station, along with more than 200 objects between 1971 and 2018⁴³. It is true that at Point Nemo the potential risk to populated areas is reduced, but it is also true that waste is increasingly concentrated in an uncontrolled area.

Theoretically, the law of the sea regulates the planet's maritime surface, but it is the confusing space law that regulates the orbits around it, while the re-entry of various space devices remains in a grey area, with no clarity as to who is responsible for possible damage on the high seas. To abuse the redundancy, at Point Nemo we are facing a "deadlock" because sovereignty over objects from the surface to orbit and vice versa is fragmented, so this pole of inaccessibility reveals that legal fracture⁴⁴. States with an interest and capacity for guided re-entry must demonstrate precision, orbital control and command, and the immensity of Nemo facilitates these three characteristics, while also acting as a global sink for strategic competition that occurs in orbit and dies at the bottom of the sea. An integrated ocean-atmosphere-ultraterrestrial orbit regulatory architecture may be needed.

⁴¹ KESSLER, Donald J., *et al.* "The Kessler syndrome: implications for future space operations," *Advances in the Astronautical Sciences*, vol. 137, no. 8. 2010, p. 2010.

⁴² SUAREZ, Alejandro. "Spanish military satellite Spainsat NG-II at serious risk," *La Moncloa*. 6 January 2026. <https://www.moncloa.com/2026/01/06/en-grave-riesgo-el-satelite-espanol-militar-spainsat-ng-ii-3353242/>

⁴³ GORVETT, Zaria. "The Soviet spacecraft cemetery in the Pacific," *BBC*. 9/10/2023. Available at: [The ocean grave for 264 spacecraft](#) (accessed 7/1/2026).

⁴⁴ CASTILLO, Luis Fernando. "Space activities and international responsibility," *Perspectivas Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, year 4, no. 8. July-December 2019, pp. 301-313. ISSN 2525-1112. [Dialnet-LasActividadesEspacialesYLaResponsabilidadInternac-9175519.pdf](#)

On the other hand, questions remain about the impact on the seabed and the pollution that this space cemetery entails. This environmental debate goes hand in hand with the same premises for outer space and space debris, as space and oceans cannot be separated here. Added to this is a third factor, namely ocean pollution⁴⁵, because, although it is the furthest point from any consistent human presence, its footprint transcends through a problem whose scope is little known.

Conclusions: a maritime chain in the emptiness of the Pacific

The changes taking place globally are affecting all regions of the planet. The world is watching events unfold on the grand stage that is the vast Eurasian continent, even extending this scenario to the island world that also encompasses the African continent. It also seems that the scenarios in the Atlantic, Arctic and even the Central Pacific are more important than the South Pacific.

This may be due to the immensity and emptiness of this region of the Pacific, which until now has not been the scene of any significant events. However, this situation seems likely to be reversed, as climate change has repeatedly called into question the capacity of the Panama Canal. As a result, the route through the Southern Cone of the American subcontinent is once again taking on a position of importance, bringing it back to the early 20th century.

Another key factor to consider is that the transit routes in the South Pacific may increase their current lack of prominence compared to those considered classic. This is due to the emergence of China as a growing oceanic power, which is increasingly seeking to extend its reach beyond the seas that bathe its coasts.

The South Pacific is playing a new role in a globalised world, in which the maritime communication routes in the great Eurasian landmass are not under Chinese control and are therefore not entirely secure, both because of the various rivals that can deny China free use of them and because of the number of *choke points* they must pass through. For this reason, finding an alternative route, whether or not it is more profitable, is very

⁴⁵ MUSSO, Marta. "More than a million potentially dangerous pieces of space debris float around the Earth," *Wired*. 2/4/2025. [More than a million potentially dangerous pieces of space debris float around the Earth | WIRED](#)

interesting for China, as it would not be subject to blackmail in the form of a stranglehold on its supplies and foreign markets.

It is a reality that China is following Mahan's postulates to the letter, and despite not being blessed by geography from a maritime perspective (a single façade on the Pacific, enclosed by two chains of islands), it is the great power that produces goods globally, controls the maritime industry and shipbuilding, plays a significant and growing role in the shipping companies that manage maritime trade, and has an increasingly powerful navy, but one that is limited because it does not yet have the capacity to 'control the sea' and therefore to control the maritime routes through which more than 80% of global trade passes.

In this constrained scenario for a China that is heavily dependent on maritime trade, the South Pacific may constitute an indirect approach strategy, as its great American rival must attend to multiple global scenarios if it wants to maintain a global hegemony that is slipping through its fingers. It remains to be seen what priority the Americans will give to this emerging scenario and whether they will be able to manage all the challenges they face in a context of recession as a hegemonic power. It is possible that the American global retreat will once again adopt the principles of the Monroe Doctrine (as stated in its recently approved *National Security Strategy 2025*), so control of the passages from the Atlantic to the Pacific can be considered a potentially highly relevant scenario⁴⁶.

In any case, the option is not without difficulties. In addition to the aforementioned obstacle of overcoming the double chain of islands surrounding China's coastline, there is the question of ensuring the viability of a maritime communications route across an empty ocean, which requires establishing a presence at certain points of support. The first would be the southern tip of South America, mainly the Strait of Magellan. The second is in the myriad of island territories, known as PICs, which would give China the possibility of securing transit through these islands which, although small, generate very large areas of sovereignty.

The two southern areas described above may contain footholds for projecting forces that can guarantee the safe passage of a commercial fleet, which will have to cross an empty

⁴⁶ THE WHITE HOUSE. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. November 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf?utm_cmp_rs=Nota%20Enlace%20Editorial

space that could be called the Nemo Route, not only because it runs more or less far from Point Nemo, but also because it crosses ocean waters for a large part of its journey, far from any landmass.

It is possible that this reason will add to the other factors that are driving the extraordinary growth of the Chinese navy's oceanic capacity in the coming years and that events such as the occupation of bases far from the mainland or acts of naval power demonstration are indicators that the evolution of the PLA's capabilities is moving in this direction. China remains faithful to Mahan's doctrines, and the South Pacific may be the new arena where it applies them, strengthening and consolidating what we might call the 'Nemo Route'.

Finally, Nemo transcends its status as a remote enclave to become a relevant element of contemporary astropolitics. Its location has consolidated it as a safe space for the controlled re-entry of satellites and orbital devices, directly linking the oceanic domain with the extraterrestrial. In a context of increasing militarisation of space, proliferation of satellite constellations and competition between major powers, Nemo symbolises the interdependence between global commons — oceans, airspace and outer space — and the need for international governance, which today, at a time of absolute instability, seems far from being realised.

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