

By George Friedman

Contemporary China is an island. Although it is not surrounded by water (which borders only its eastern flank), China is bordered by terrain that is difficult to traverse in virtually any direction. There are some areas that can be traversed, but to understand China we must begin by visualizing the mountains, jungles and wastelands that enclose it. This outer shell both contains and protects China.

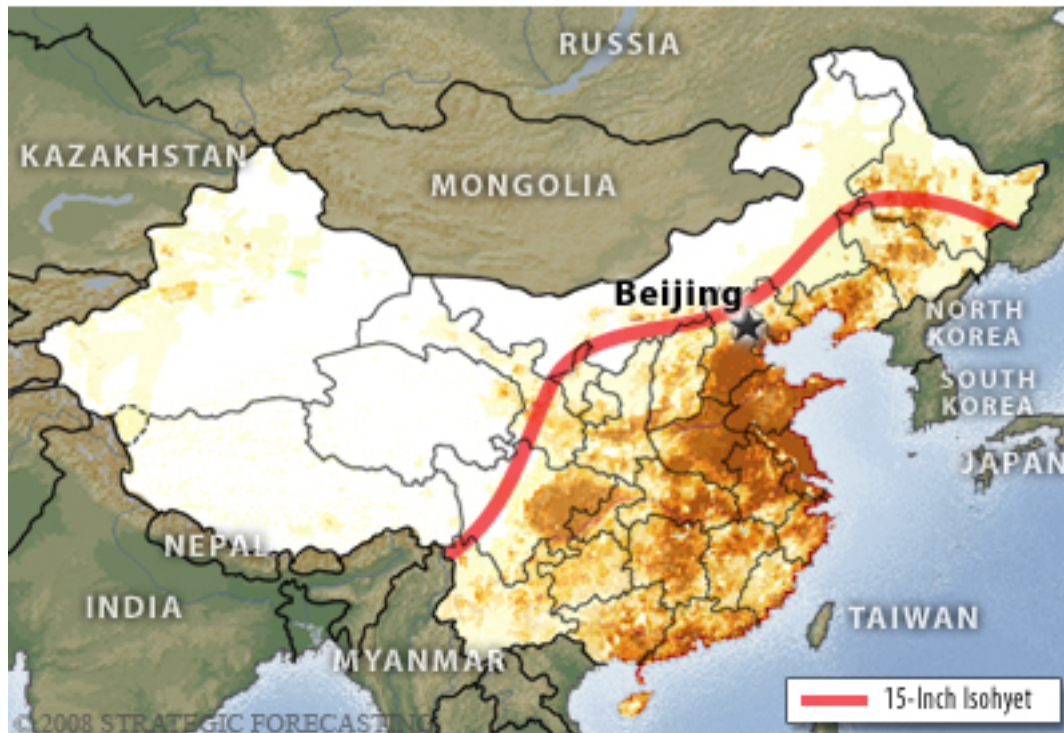
China Island

### CHINA AS AN ISLAND



Internally, China must be divided into two parts: the Chinese heartland and the non-Chinese buffer regions surrounding it. There is a line in China called the 15-inch isohyet, east of which more than 15 inches of rain fall each year and west of which the annual rainfall is less. The vast majority of Chinese live east and south of this line, in the region known as Han China — the Chinese heartland. The region is home to the ethnic Han, whom the world regards as the Chinese. It is important to understand that more than a billion people live in this area, which is about half the size of the United States.

## 15-INCH ISOHYET AND CHINA POPULATION DENSITY



The Chinese heartland is divided into two parts, northern and southern, which in turn is represented by two main dialects, Mandarin in the north and Cantonese in the south. These dialects share a writing system but are almost mutually incomprehensible when spoken. The Chinese heartland is defined by two major rivers — the Yellow River in the north and the Yangtze in the South, along with a third lesser river in the south, the Pearl. The heartland is China's agricultural region. However — and this is the single most important fact about China — it has about one-third the arable land per person as the rest of the world. This pressure has defined modern Chinese history — both in terms of living with it and trying to move beyond it.

### CHINA DIALECTS



### CHINA P



### CHINA TERRAIN

