

# COMPARATIVE

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## C O N N E C T I O N S

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL  
ON EAST ASIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

### REGIONAL OVERVIEW

## THE BEST/WORST TRIP EVER!

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President Donald Trump’s inaugural visit to Asia in November was either “the best presidential trip, anywhere, ever” or “an absolute disaster and embarrassment,” depending on whose comments you read. The truth lies somewhere in-between. Objectively speaking, the trip turned out to be much better than many predicted or feared. The president reaffirmed the US commitment to its two key East Asia allies, Japan and South Korea, rallied international support at every stop for his “maximum pressure” campaign against North Korea, stayed on message in China, and reaffirmed support for friends and allies in Southeast Asia. For better or for worse, Trump clearly and unambiguously signaled his administration’s preference for “fair and reciprocal” bilateral trade agreements while dismissing the multilateral approach favored by most of his predecessors, thus opening the door for new trade champions – enter Chinese President Xi Jinping and Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, who will be vying for leadership. The administration’s *National Security Strategy (NSS)* report reinforced the “free and open Indo-Pacific” themes heard during Trump’s trip. The president’s unprecedented personal rollout of the report also underscored the mixed messages coming from Washington when official policy statements and Trump’s personal preferences and viewpoints fail to coincide.

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## Defining the threat

Subsequent chapters will go into greater detail on President Trump's visits to Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam, and the Philippines. We will deal here with the broader themes. Trump's top three priorities during the trip seemed to be North Korea, North Korea, and North Korea. In Tokyo and Seoul, he reassured America's two vital Northeast Asia allies of Washington's commitment to their defense in the face of a growing threat from Pyongyang. His [speech](#) to the Korean National Assembly was particularly well-received. He contrasted the remarkable progress made by the democratic ROK to the human rights abuses and terrible conditions experienced in the North, an approach that no doubt made some progressives squirm, but which drew repeated applause.

Trump also conditionally reached out to the North: "Yet despite every crime you have committed against God and man ... we will offer a path to a much better future. It begins with an end to the aggression of your regime, a stop to your development of ballistic missiles, and complete, verifiable, and total denuclearization.... We seek a future of light, prosperity, and peace. But we are only prepared to discuss this brighter path for North Korea if its leaders cease their threats and dismantle their nuclear program." While this was consistent with earlier pronouncements, those fearful that Trump would repeat his "Rocket Man" insults – he didn't; in fact he largely refrained from tweeting during the trip – saw this as a new opening for US-DPRK dialogue. It wasn't.



1US Navy and Air Force exercise in Western Pacific. Photo: US Navy

In Beijing, Trump pressed the Chinese to do more to persuade (read: compel) Pyongyang to

give up its nuclear ambitions and return to denuclearization talks, even while applauding Xi's increased efforts. In [post-trip remarks](#), Trump asserted that he and Xi "agreed that we would not accept a so-called 'freeze for freeze' agreement like those that have consistently failed in the past." This seems to have come as a surprise to Beijing which continues (with Moscow) to promote this option, although many now call it "suspension for suspension."

In Southeast Asia, Trump sought and generally received individual and multilateral condemnation of North Korea's illegal nuclear and missile programs (both outlawed by UN Security Council Resolutions) and increased adherence to tighter UN sanctions. As Trump himself [explained](#), "throughout the trip, we asked all nations to support our campaign of maximum pressure for North Korean denuclearization. And they are responding by cutting trade with North Korea, restricting financial ties to the regime, and expelling North Korean diplomats and workers."

If one of the "core goals" of the trip was "to unite the world against the nuclear menace posed by the North Korean regime" (which it was; see below), the effort appears to be succeeding. North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un seems to be changing tactics. With his missile and nuclear testing cycles apparently complete (at least for now), he used his New Year's message to wave an olive branch toward Seoul, even while continuing to warn Washington about the nuclear button that is sitting on his desk – a boastful comment that drew an even more undignified boastful reply.

Readers of this journal should not have been surprised by Kim's recent overture. In our last issue we wrote: "Hard as it is to believe right now (and as foolhardy as it is to try to make predictions regarding Pyongyang), we are more likely to be writing about the North's latest smile offensive in four months' time than picking up the pieces after a military strike by one side or the other." While acknowledging that even a broken clock is correct twice a day, it is still nice to be able to say we got one right.

We caution our readers not to be too optimistic about the impending North-South talks. While we will hopefully experience a peaceful Olympics (perhaps even with the North and South marching together in the opening ceremony), a breakthrough remains unlikely.

While President Moon Jae-in would love to talk denuclearization with the North, Pyongyang has made it very clear that it will only talk about nuclear issues with the US (and then only in terms of strategic arms talks like the US once had with the Soviets). Meanwhile, the North at some point will insist that Moon deliver on all the outlandish promises made by his progressive predecessors, which Moon couldn't do, even if he wanted to. At the end of the day, Pyongyang really wants sanctions relief and President Moon can't give them that.

### Asia trip core goals

In his post-trip news conference President Trump summed up the trip's [three core goals](#):

First: to unite the world against the nuclear menace posed by the North Korean regime, a threat that has increased steadily through many administrations and now requires urgent action.

Second: to strengthen America's alliances and economic partnerships in a free and open Indo-Pacific, made up of thriving, independent nations, respectful of other countries and their own citizens, and safe from foreign domination and economic servitude.

And third: to finally – after many years – insist on fair and reciprocal trade. Fair and reciprocal trade – so important. These two words – fairness and reciprocity – are an open invitation to every country that seeks to do business with the United States, and they are a firm warning to every country that cheats, breaks the rules, and engages in economic aggression – like they've been doing in the past, especially in the recent past.

While rejecting a multilateral approach to trade (more on this shortly), Trump embraced multilateral security cooperation during his summit with ASEAN leaders and at the East Asia Summit (which he sort of attended; he went to the leaders' lunch but sent Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to the meeting once he learned that it was running an hour or so behind schedule).

During the US-ASEAN Summit, Trump said, "we made it clear that no one owns the

ocean. Freedom of navigation and overflight are critical to the security and prosperity of all nations." At the East Asia Summit (EAS), the United States "negotiated and signed four important leaders' statements on the use of chemical weapons, money laundering, poverty alleviation, and countering terrorist propaganda and financing."



2Japan's Prime Minister Abe Shinzo meets Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in Manila on the sidelines of the 31st ASEAN Summit in Manila. Photo: Philippine President's office

With 18 heads of state assembled for the EAS, there were the usual bilateral and mini-lateral summits, the most interesting of which (at least to us) involved President Trump and the prime ministers of Australia, India, and Japan, "to discuss our shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific." This so-called "Quad" meeting reminded some of Prime Minister Abe's decade-old dream of a "Concert of Democracies" (now sometimes described as "a democratic security diamond"), but at this point it remains a more informal cooperative effort. This did not stop the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson from warning that "regional cooperation should neither be politicized nor exclusionary."

All in all, it was a successful trip, even if it did not quite live up to the president's own description: "Over the last two weeks, we have made historic strides in reasserting American leadership, restoring American security, and reawakening American confidence."

### (Re-)defining the threat

If the president's trip focused on North Korea, the administration's first [National Security Strategy](#) put this challenge in broader

perspective. The NSS identified three main threat categories:

- regional dictators that spread terror, threaten their neighbors, and pursue weapons of mass destruction (North Korea shares pride of place in this category with Iran, among others);
- jihadist terrorists that foment hatred to incite violence against innocents in the name of a wicked ideology, and transnational criminal organizations that spill drugs and violence into our communities; and
- revisionist powers, such as China and Russia, that use technology, propaganda, and coercion to shape a world antithetical to our interests and values.

The last category clearly reflects the thinking of the US strategic and intelligence communities, but flies in the face of many of the president's own pronouncement, before, after, and even during the release of the NSS. For example, during his rollout of the document, President Trump described China and Russia as "rival powers ... that seek to challenge American influence, values, and wealth." In the very next sentence, however, he went on to express his desire "to build a great partnership" with both, albeit "in a manner that always protects our national interest." He then talked fondly of a phone call he had received from President Putin.

In many respects, the NSS is consistent with those produced by Trump's predecessors. It stresses four pillars or vital interests: protect the American homeland, promote American prosperity, preserve peace through strength, and advance American influence. It underscores the importance of alliances and security cooperation and notes the importance of the rule of law. It's a strategy "based on a principled realism, guided by our vital national interests, and rooted in our timeless values." It also "recognizes [it claims for the first time] that economic security is national security."

Both proponents and critics would agree, however, that it is more inward looking than previous strategies. Themes like democracy promotion, climate change, and other environmental issues are downplayed, if not avoided completely. (On a more positive note,

the word "preemption" which caused a stir when used by George W. Bush in his NSS, was not to be found, although it does note that "fear of escalation will not prevent the United States from defending our vital interests and those of our allies and partners.") All told, it is, and is touted as being an "America first" document aimed at "making America great again."

### **'America First' takes concrete form**

If the Trump administration's security policies have largely hewed to established lines, its trade and economic policies have honored the president's campaign promise to shake things up. President Trump gave full throat to his "America First" approach in speeches and comments throughout this reporting period.

His outlook rests on four themes articulated in his Sept. 19 [speech](#) to the United Nations General Assembly. First, the raw expression of national interest comes first. As Trump explained, "As president of the United States, I will always put America first. Just like you, as the leaders of your countries, will always and should always put your countries first." Second, multilateralism has been bad for the US: "the American people were told that mammoth, multinational trade deals, unaccountable international tribunals, and powerful global bureaucracies were the best way to promote their success. But as those promises flowed, millions of jobs vanished and thousands of factories disappeared. Others gamed the system and broke the rules..." Third, the era of exploitation is over: "We can no longer be taken advantage of or enter into a one-sided deal where the United States gets nothing in return." Finally, the guiding principle is reciprocity. "We seek stronger ties of business and trade with all nations of goodwill, but this trade must be fair and it must be reciprocal."

Trump reiterated that message at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders Meeting, held in Da Nang, Vietnam in November. At the [CEO summit](#) that preceded the leaders meeting, the president hit all four themes. There was America First: "I am always going to put America first the same way I expect all of you in this room to put your countries first." There was hostility to multilateralism. "The US will no longer enter into large agreements that tie our hands, surrender our sovereignty and make meaningful enforcement practically impossible." Third, there was the

warning that the era of exploitation was over. “We are not going to let the United States be taken advantage of anymore,” and the US “will no longer turn a blind eye to violations, cheating, or economic aggression. Those days are over.” Finally, fairness and reciprocity are central to US engagement: “we seek robust trade relationships rooted in the principles of fairness and reciprocity. ... we will, from now on, expect that our partners will faithfully follow the rules just like we do. We expect that markets will be open to an equal degree on both sides....”

The new *National Security Strategy* institutionalized those themes. As Trump explained in [remarks](#) announcing the NSS, “It calls for trade based on the principles of fairness and reciprocity. It calls for firm action against unfair trade practices and intellectual property theft. And it calls for new steps to protect our national security industrial and innovation base.” Kevin Nealer, a senior nonresident fellow on economic issues at CSIS, [noted](#) that the NSS mentioned the word “trade” 45 times and “competition /competitors” 58 times, “making both themes among the top five issues raised in this declaration of U.S. foreign policy intentions.”

In theory, the cornerstone of the Trump economic strategy – that all nations must genuinely embrace free and fair trade and not use multilateral deals to gain unfair advantage over partners – is hard to challenge. Implementation is problematic, however. The US position appears to be one in which Washington measures all relationships in terms of the trade balance and who is exporting more to whom. No reputable economist considers that an accurate assessment of bilateral economic relations.

Equally disturbing is the transactional nature of the US approach. While candidate Trump bashed China’s economic and trade policies on the campaign trail, President Trump has held his fire to win Beijing’s support for a tougher line against North Korea. Failure to deliver will [change](#) Trump’s calculus. More ominously, the president seems to believe that a trade war is the answer, as he [explained](#) in an eyebrow-raising yearend interview in *The New York Times*: “China on trade has ripped off this country more than any other element of the world in history has ripped off anything. ... If they don’t help us with North Korea, then I do what I’ve always said I want to do.”

## Xi to the rescue?

In pointed contrast to Trump’s nationalist rhetoric was Chinese President Xi Jinping’s defense of globalization. Speaking after Trump in Da Nang, Xi called globalization an “[irreversible historical trend](#)” while conceding that trade should be “more open, more balanced, more equitable.” He [told](#) APEC leaders that, “We should support the multilateral trading regime and practice open regionalism to allow developing members to benefit more from international trade and investment.” He called for “determined steps toward” an inclusive Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP).

The battle of “[multilateralism versus bilateralism](#)” (as China Global TV characterized it) was evident in the final statement issued at the APEC meeting. Media [reports](#) highlighted tough negotiations over a declaration that pitted the Trump administration against the 20 other APEC governments. The [final document](#) repeated the usual calls for free trade and fighting protectionism, reaffirmed the commitment to FTAAP, and sought a successful World Trade Organization ministerial. (The final item proved too much a few weeks later when the 11<sup>th</sup> ministerial closed without progress.) Reflecting the Trump administration’s priorities, the declaration also stated that members “will work together to make trade more inclusive, support improved market access opportunities, and address unfair trade practices” and they “urgently call for the removal of market-distorting subsidies and other types of support by governments and related entities.”

## Abe Shinzo, guardian of the international order!

The faceoff between Trump and Xi has dominated analysis of the future of the international order; that is unfair to Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo who has done invaluable work shoring up the timbers of regional architecture. Abe has been instrumental in saving the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal after Trump pulled the US out on day one of his administration. In the last quarter of 2017 Japan did yeoman’s work to push forward a revised TPP, now christened the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). At the end of the APEC meeting, the remaining 11 members [agreed](#) on “core elements” of the deal,

overcoming last-minute resistance from Canada. Nearly two dozen provisions of the original agreement have been dropped: among them were provisions that protected labor rights and the environment, intellectual property, express delivery, biologics, investment, telecommunications and medical devices. As the quarter closed, there were [reports](#) that the UK was considering joining the CPTPP in a bid to boost trade relations after the country leaves the European Union. (The [significance](#) of the Tokyo-London relationship was evident in a December “2+2” meeting of Japanese and British defense and foreign affairs officials which confirmed that the UK and Japan are each other’s closest security partners in Europe and Asia, respectively.)

In another important [development](#), Japan and the European Union concluded the legal text for a trade deal between two economies that provide about 30 percent of global output. The outline of the agreement was reached last summer and the negotiators had been writing language ever since. Abe called the agreement “a free, fair and rule-based economic zone, which will be a model of an economic order in the international community in the 21st century.” EU Trade Minister Cecilia Malmstrom applauded the deal, saying, “It sends a powerful message in defense of open trade based on global rules.” Intended or not, the deal sure looks like a rebuke to the US.

Abe has also been pushing the concept of “the Indo-Pacific,” adopted by the Trump administration as the framework for its regional engagement, as well as “the Quad” initiative, discussed above, that looks to be the preferred grouping to address regional security concerns.

Abe is walking a fine line, having built a strong relationship with Trump while, at the same time, working to fortify key elements of the regional order that Trump seeks to tear down. He deserves credit for managing both, but that task will get harder in the year ahead if Trump, as anticipated, gets serious about redressing US trade balances and takes a harder line with countries that enjoy persistent trade surpluses with the US. It is not year clear how the US will address the tensions in its security and economic policies.

### **More words to the wise: “they are what they are!”**

In our January 2017 issue, we warned that President Trump’s tweets “should be taken serious, but not literally.” In May, we wondered about the serious part. We may have been on to something. When White House Chief of Staff John Kelly was asked if tweets drove US policy, he said they did not. “Believe it or not, I do not follow the tweets,” he stated: “Someone, I read the other day, said we all just react to the tweets. We don’t. I don’t. I don’t allow the staff to. We know what we’re doing.” The tweets “are what they are,” Kelly asserted, “We develop policy in the normal traditional staff way. . . . The tweets don’t run my life – good staff work runs it.” Now if only the rest of the world could as easily ignore them.

# REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY

## SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2017

**Sept. 1, 2017:** US President Donald Trump and ROK counterpart Moon Jae-in talk by phone and agree to enhance Seoul's deterrence against North Korea by increasing its missile capabilities, but also reaffirm the need to resume talks with the DPRK.

**Sept. 3, 2017:** North Korea conducts its sixth nuclear weapon test at its Punggye-ri test site. US Geological Survey reports a 6.3 magnitude earthquake in conjunction with the test. North Korea describes the event as a successful test of a hydrogen bomb.

**Sept. 4-5, 2017:** Leaders of the BRICS nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – meet in Xiamen, China. As host, President Xi Jinping calls on them to stand together against a growing tide of protectionism across the world.

**Sept. 11, 2017:** UN Security Council adopts [Resolution 2375](#) in response to North Korea's nuclear test on Sept. 3.

**Sept. 12, 2017:** US Ambassador to Cambodia William Heidt [denies](#) allegations by Prime Minister Hun Sen that Washington is seeking to oust his government.

**Sept. 12, 2017:** Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak visits Washington and meets President Trump at the White House.

**Sept. 13, 2017:** North Korea vows to accelerate its weapons program in response to UN Security Council Resolution 2375.

**Sept. 13-15, 2017:** Japanese Prime Minister Abe visits India and meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

**Sept. 18, 2017:** Presidents Xi and Trump talk by telephone. The White House [statement](#) says, "The two leaders committed to maximizing pressure on North Korea through vigorous enforcement of United Nations Security Council resolutions." The [Chinese version](#) says, "The two leaders also exchanged views on the current situation on the Korean Peninsula."

**Sept. 18-24, 2017:** US and Malaysia conduct a "Maritime Training Activity" (MTA) which appears to be a replacement for the annual *Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT)* exercise series, which has been held for past 22 years.

**Sept. 18-26, 2017:** Chinese People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) and Russian Navy conduct *Joint Sea 2017* military exercises in the Sea of Japan and, for the first time, the Okhotsk Sea. The exercises focus primarily on joint submarine rescue and anti-submarine warfare.

**Sept. 20, 2017:** In a speech at the UN General Assembly President Trump refers to Kim Jong Un as "rocket man" and as being "on a suicide mission." He also says that, "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea."

**Sept. 21, 2017:** President Trump, South Korea's President Moon and Japan's Prime Minister Abe Shinzo meet on the sidelines of UN General Assembly in New York.

**Sept. 22, 2017:** Kim Jong Un responds to Trump's remarks at the UN, saying he "will surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged U.S. dotard with fire."

**Sept. 23, 2017:** US Air Force *B-1B Lancer* bombers along with *F-15C Eagle* fighter escorts fly in international airspace over waters east of North Korea.

**Sept. 25, 2017:** North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho accuses Trump of declaring war against his country, saying Pyongyang is ready to defend itself by shooting down US bombers.

**Sept. 26, 2017:** Japan provides \$4 million to various organizations to assist people in the northern part of Rakhine State, Myanmar.

**Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 2017:** Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visits China and meets President Xi and other senior leaders.

**Oct. 2, 2017:** Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha [visits](#) Washington and meets President Trump at the White House.

**Oct. 2, 2017:** Myanmar authorities take foreign diplomats and UN representatives on a [tour](#) of northern Rakhine State.

**Oct. 5, 2017:** President Trump and Prime Minister Abe [agree](#) in a telephone conversation that pressure should be maintained on North Korea.

**Oct. 8, 2017:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [pledges](#) to continue the country's policy of simultaneously developing the economy and nuclear weapons.

**Oct. 9, 2017:** UN North Korea Sanctions Committee [bans](#) four ships with ties to North Korea from entering all ports outside North Korea.

**Oct. 10, 2017:** US [flies](#) two *B-1B Lancer* bombers escorted by fighters from Japan and South Korea, while in the airspace of the two countries, over the Korean Peninsula.

**Oct. 10, 2017:** Eighth China-Russia consultation on Northeast Asia security is [held](#) in Moscow.

**Oct. 10, 2017:** European Union strengthens sanctions against North Korea by applying sectoral sanctions [imposed](#) by UNSC Resolution 2375.

**Oct. 11, 2017:** North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri [threatens](#) to "shower fire" on the United States with "unprecedented strategic force."

**Oct. 12, 2017:** Malaysia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Anifah Aman [announces](#) that Malaysia has no plans to appoint an ambassador to North Korea.

**Oct. 15-20, 2017:** US Navy Strike Group 5, led by *USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76)*, participates in a combined [exercise](#) with South Korea's Navy near the Korean Peninsula.

**Oct. 16, 2017:** Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro and Vice President Mike Pence co-chair second round of the Japan-US Economic Dialogue in Washington DC.

**Oct. 18, 2017:** Secretary Tillerson delivers [remarks](#) on US-India relations at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC and outlines a strategy for US engagement in Asia characterized as the "free and open Indo-Pacific framework."

**Oct. 18, 2017:** North Korea [sends](#) a congratulatory message to China on the opening of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

**Oct. 18, 2017:** South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Lim Sung-nam and US Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan meet in Seoul. Lim also meets Sullivan and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama to coordinate policies on North Korea.

**Oct. 18-25, 2017:** Nineteenth Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress is held in Beijing.

**Oct. 19, 2017:** Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman says the US should take an objective view of China, after Secretary Tillerson said Washington wanted to "dramatically deepen" ties with New Delhi to counter China's influence in Asia.

**Oct. 23, 2017:** Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visits Washington and meets President Trump at the White House.

**Oct. 23-31, 2017:** US and ROK conduct a joint naval exercise near South Korea.

**Oct. 23, 2017:** Philippine government declares the end to the five-month [siege](#) of Marawi.

**Oct. 23-24, 2017:** The 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus is held in the Philippines.

**Oct. 25, 2017:** Defense Secretary James Mattis reaffirms Pentagon's support for local counterterrorism operations with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana in [Manila](#).

**Oct. 25, 2017:** Secretary Tillerson visits India and meets Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj to discuss India's role in Afghanistan.

**Oct. 27, 2017:** North Korea [repatriates](#) a South Korean boat and its crew as a “humanitarian” gesture after the vessel had entered the North’s waters.

**Oct. 31, 2017:** Philippine President Duterte visits Japan and meets senior government leaders and Emperor Akihito in Tokyo.

**Oct. 31, 2017:** China and South Korea [agree](#) to move beyond a yearlong standoff over the deployment of a US anti-missile system in South Korea.

**Nov. 2-3, 2017:** China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi visits Vietnam and meets counterpart Pham Binh Minh.

**Nov. 3-14, 2017:** President Trump visits Asia with stops in Hawaii, Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

**Nov. 3, 2017:** ROK President Moon Jae-in says military [cooperation](#) with the US and Japan is needed to rein in the rising threat from North Korea but is skeptical about a trilateral defense alliance.

**Nov. 3, 2017:** Myanmar’s State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi visits Rakhine State for the first time since hundreds of thousands of [Rohingya](#) Muslims began fleeing the region.

**Nov. 10-11, 2017:** The 25<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders Meeting is held in Da Nang, Vietnam.

**Nov. 10-11, 2017:** South Korea’s President Moon meets Chinese President Xi on the sidelines of the APEC meeting in Da Nang.

**Nov. 10-14, 2017:** The 31<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Summit and related meetings including the ASEAN+1 summits and the East Asia Summit are held in the Philippines.

**Nov. 11, 2017:** The 11 remaining members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agree to its “core elements” and to move ahead despite US withdrawal from the group. The proposed agreement is renamed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

**Nov. 11-14, 2017:** Three US Navy carrier strike groups including *USS Ronald Reagan*, *USS Nimitz*, and *USS Theodore Roosevelt* conduct a joint exercise in the Sea of Japan (East Sea) near the Korean coast.

**Nov. 12, 2017:** ASEAN and China agree to start negotiations on “a substantive and effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea after concluding the Framework Agreement on Code of Conduct.”

**Nov. 12, 2017:** Senior officials from US Department of State, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, India’s Ministry of External Affairs, and Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs meet in Manila to discuss a shared vision for increased prosperity and security in a “free and open Indo-Pacific region.”

**Nov. 12-14, 2017:** President Xi Jinping makes a state visit to Vietnam and Laos.

**Nov. 14, 2017:** President Trump [skips](#) East Asia Summit plenary meeting in the Philippines after being told the meeting would be delayed by about two hours.

**Nov. 15, 2017:** Secretary Tillerson [travels](#) to Nay Pyi Daw to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State and US support for Myanmar’s (Burma’s) democratic transition.

**Nov. 15, 2017:** Cambodia’s Supreme Court [orders](#) the country’s main opposition party to be dissolved.

**Nov. 15, 2017:** Cambodian opposition politician Sam Rainsy [says](#) the international community should cut ties with Prime Minister Hun Sen’s government after the court-ordered dissolution of the only challenging party.

**Nov. 15, 2017:** Lim Jock Hoi of Brunei Darussalam is named the new ASEAN Secretary General. He will assume the position on Jan. 1.

**Nov. 20, 2017:** President Trump announces that the US has re-designated North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism.

**Nov. 21, 2017:** US unveils new sanctions targeting North Korean shipping and Chinese traders doing business with Pyongyang.

**Nov. 22, 2017:** Secretary Tillerson says Myanmar's Rohingya population was subjected to "ethnic cleansing," accusing the security forces of perpetrating "horrendous atrocities" against the Muslim minority.

**Nov. 22, 2017:** Air China announces that it suspended flights between Beijing and Pyongyang because "business was not good."

**Nov. 29, 2017:** North Korea tests an intercontinental ballistic missile that flies for 54 minutes giving it an estimated range at normal trajectory of over 8,000 nm. The US, Japan, and South Korea call for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council.

**Dec. 1, 2017:** Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi visits China and meets President Xi. They hail close ties between the two countries and avoid any mention of the Rohingya.

**Dec. 1, 2017:** President Xi addresses the annual party-to-party talks in Beijing and says China's Communist Party wants to boost its international image but "will not import other countries' models, and will not export the China model."

**Dec. 4-8, 2017:** US and South Korea conduct [Vigilant Ace](#) joint military exercise involving about 230 aircraft, characterized as the largest-ever such exercise. North Korea calls the exercise an "all-out provocation."

**Dec. 5-6, 2017:** Senior officials from China and Japan meet in Shanghai and [reach a tentative agreement](#) on implementation of a crisis management hotline to avoid sea and air clashes in disputed areas of the East China Sea.

**Dec. 5-8, 2017:** UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman visits North Korea and meets Vice Foreign Minister Pak Myong Guk.

**Dec. 11, 2017:** The 15th Foreign Ministers Meeting of China, Russia, and India [held](#) in New Delhi.

**Dec. 13-16, 2017:** ROK President Moon visits China and meets President Xi in Beijing.

**Dec. 14, 2017:** Myanmar's President Htin Kyaw visits Japan and meets Prime Minister Abe.

**Dec. 15, 2017:** US and Singapore [hold](#) 10<sup>th</sup> annual Counter-proliferation Dialogue in Singapore.

**Dec. 18, 2017:** US releases [National Security Strategy](#).

**Dec. 18-19, 2017:** The inaugural US-India Counterterrorism Designations Dialogue [convenes](#) in New Delhi, India to discuss increasing bilateral cooperation on terrorism-related designations.

**Dec. 19, 2017:** South Korean Coast Guard patrol vessel [fires 249 warning shots](#) at 44 Chinese fishing boats suspected of illegally fishing in South Korean waters.

**Dec. 22, 2017:** UN Security Council unanimously adopts [Resolution 2397](#), which imposes new sanctions against North Korea.

**Dec. 24, 2017:** DPRK condemns the new UNSC sanctions resolution as an act of war.

**Dec. 27, 2017:** US Treasury announces sanctions against two DPRK officials behind ballistic missile program. China is reported to have broken sanctions on the sale of petroleum products to the DPRK with ship transfers.

**Dec. 28, 2017:** Trump tweets that China was "caught RED HANDED" allowing oil into the DPRK and preventing "a friendly solution" to the conflict with the DPRK. China blocks US effort to blacklist six foreign-flagged ships believed involved in illicit trade. ROK claims ship seizure over illicit petroleum trade with the DPRK.

**Dec. 30, 2017:** *Reuters* reports that Russian tankers have illicitly supplied fuel to the DPRK via transfers at sea.

**Dec. 31, 2017:** South Korea reports the seizure of a second ship suspected of oil transfers.