

COMPARATIVE

CONNECTIONS

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JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

WARMER WORDS, CONTINUING DEFENSE PREPARATIONS

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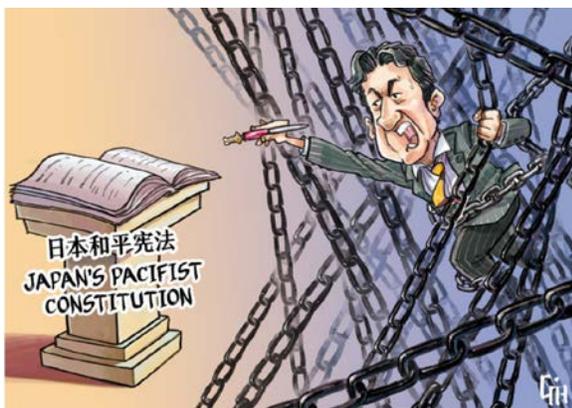
Chinese President Xi Jinping successfully presided over the Boao Forum indicating progress toward establishing China as the fulcrum of the international trading system. Meanwhile, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's political future was clouded by the Moritomo Gakuen scandal. Formal high-level dialogue between Beijing and Tokyo, interrupted since September 2010 was cautiously reinstated in April. In the same month, lower-level military exchanges resumed after a six-year hiatus. Despite talk of resetting relations, there was no resolution of key issues such as the disposition of disputed islands in the East China Sea or of present-day Japanese responsibility for the country's conduct during World War II. As for trade, although both China and Japan are committed in theory to early conclusion of the Regional Economic Cooperation Partnership agreement, Japan favors a deal closer to the Trans-Pacific Partnership while China wants additional concessions to support its economic reform goals. Nonetheless, China hopes to obtain Japanese participation in its Belt and Road Initiative.

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Diplomatic activities

Speaking at a Tokyo hotel, Japan Prime Minister Abe [declared](#) that he would like to make 2018 a year in which both the Japanese and Chinese people agreed that the relationship had improved. Several high-level meetings took place designed to pave the way for a state visit by Abe to Beijing and a reciprocal visit to Tokyo by Chinese President Xi Jinping. In late January, Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō paid a two-day visit to China, his first since taking office and the first by a Japanese foreign minister in 21 months. His counterpart, Wang Yi, [called](#) for Japan's "joint efforts to advance ties," though added the cautionary note that "many disturbances and obstacles" existed.

Frictions continued to bedevil bilateral relations as China continued to interpret political developments in Japan in a sinister light. There were numerous references to Japan's lack of remorse for the latter's conduct in World War II. For example, *Xinhua* announced the [launch](#) of a multi-year effort to compile previously missing historical records from 1931-1945. The study, to include an estimated 1 million characters, is to be ready for publication in 2020. Chinese media also remained highly critical of Abe's efforts to revise the Japanese constitution, characterizing them as a further step toward the return of the quasi-fascist regime of the 1930s and equating what Abe and his supporters view as providing Japan with a normal (*futsu*) military with militarism. In an address to the National People's Congress, China's highest legislative institution, Wang Yi [stated](#) that China was willing to work with Japan to restore relations to healthy, stable growth "as long as Japan does not prevaricate, flip-flop, or backpedal, but accepts and welcomes China's development."



1China Daily February 8, 2018

Not all citizens of either country were in harmony with their government on these issues. Japanese comedian Muramoto Daisuke elicited a firestorm of public anger when he [suggested](#), perhaps facetiously, that if China invaded the contested Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, Japan should immediately surrender, adding that Japan had "stolen" Okinawa from China. In China, there was a series of incidents in which Chinese nationals dressed up in Japanese World War II uniforms, brandishing replica guns and waving rising sun flags inscribed with prayers for military success. At least one of these occurred outside a war memorial, in this case, the edifice commemorating the 1937 Nanjing Massacre. The National People's Congress considered a law prohibiting the wearing of such uniforms, [stating](#) that any actions that glorified the invasion or the invaders would not be tolerated.

Interestingly, the Chinese media did not report the visit of the imperial couple to Yonaguni, Japan's westernmost island. Only 80 nm from the Diaoyu/Senkaku chain, the island is said to be visible from Taiwan on a clear day. Japanese media described the visit as one of the last before the emperor's abdication. Previously known mainly for its tourist attractions – reef diving and unusual stone formations – Japan has installed a coastal monitoring system equipped with radar and other sensors to counter threats from China and placed a Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) garrison of 150 soldiers on the island.

[Responding](#) to the announcement that Japan's Ministry of Education had amended its curriculum guidelines to teach high-school students that the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands are "indisputably" Japanese territory, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson advised Japan to "squarely face history and reality, educate youth with a correct view of history," and "cease stirring up troubles on the relevant issue."

Although both countries have expressed opposition to North Korean proliferation, the Japanese government has expressed doubts that Beijing was enforcing United Nations sanctions against Pyongyang. Most recently, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) [presented](#) photographic evidence of a vessel marked *Min Ning De You 078* (its markings indicating that it came from Ningde City in Fujian (Min) province) transferring oil to a North Korea flagged tanker off Shanghai. Responding to official representations, a Chinese Foreign Ministry

spokesperson [stated](#) that China attached great importance to the information and would carry out an investigation.

Another diplomatic spat arose when, in response to a directive from Chinese officials, the Japanese retail chain Ryōhin Keikaku announced that it had [scrapped](#) its furniture catalogue. The catalogue's map maker, in an apparent attempt to avoid the sovereignty issue, had omitted the contested islands entirely. The Chinese government also pointed out that the map had not shown islands in the South China Sea that are claimed by China and others. Hainan Island was also shown in a different color from that used for the rest of China. The Foreign Ministry spokesperson said China's border had been "mistakenly" drawn, although did not say where. The following day, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide [told](#) a press conference that Japan could not accept measures based on China's unilateral assertions. China's Foreign Ministry [countered](#) that, "China welcomes foreign businesses' investment and operation in China, but all of them shall respect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and abide by China's laws. All countries must respect China's territorial integrity."

Trade and Economics

Japan entered the new year with business confidence high: on the first trading day of 2018, the *Nikkei* stock index [closed](#) above 23,000 for the first time in 26 years. Center-left daily *Asahi*, however, presented a far gloomier picture. Although acknowledging that improvements had been made since the bursting of the country's economic bubble nearly three decades ago, it [urged](#) attention to the need for productivity improvement. Japan would have to offer better products and services at lower prices and at faster speed, as well as coping with the challenges of a rapidly aging and shrinking population. Meanwhile, the Chinese leadership faced resistance to implement the structural reforms its economists said were necessary to guide the country onto a stable path to the "new normal" of 6.5-7 percent annual increases in GDP, even as what one observer termed its great wall of debt continued to grow.

Trade rivalries were much in evidence. A Thai professor [portrayed](#) his country as playing China against Japan economically "like a bamboo tree in the wind." Hoping to improve bilateral relations through economic cooperation rather

than rivalry with China, Japan continued tentative steps toward participation in the PRC's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, it expressed concern that Beijing intended to use BRI to further its hegemonic ambitions, and pointed out that Beijing's large loans to countries that were poor credit risks were liable to harm their fiscal health.

On the positive side, Japan and China were [reportedly](#) in the final stages of an agreement aimed at resolving the issue of double payments of pension premiums by employees dispatched to each other's country. In April, the fourth high-level Sino-Japanese economic dialogue, the first in eight years, opened in Tokyo. Previous meetings were held in 2007, 2009, and 2010. [According](#) to member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Wang Pin, the reason for the re-opening was improved Sino-Japanese relations due to Japanese recognition of China's greater influence in the world and of the value of the BRI. He added that in light of current China-US trade friction, it is important for Asian countries to cooperate and support each other. Wang Pin seemed to tie a summit to an official visit by Premier Li Keqiang in conjunction with the China-Japan-South Korea meeting in May, and to the high-level exchanges Japan hoped would follow.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the bilateral relationship [showed](#) "momentum of improvement though there are still some complicated and sensitive factors." He welcomed Japanese participation in BRI, with Foreign Minister Kōno Taro replying cautiously that Japan was willing to promote further development of regional economic cooperation while safeguarding the global free trade system based on World Trade Organization rules.

In a meeting with reporters, Wang Yi portrayed Tokyo as the supplicant, affirming that he [supported](#) "Japan's stance of wanting to improve relations with China." Insofar as is known, major issues between them, such as the disposition of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and Beijing's annoyance at Japan's perceived lack of remorse over the country's conduct during World War II, were not discussed, and their trade rivalry seems likely to continue. Differences of opinion on a trade pact were evident, with Japan favoring an agreement more similar to the Trans-Pacific Partnership while China argued for concessions that would help Xi Jinping's plan.

A *Nikkei* analyst noted that although it was the Chinese who were pressing to hold the talks, presumably because of the intensification of trade friction with the US, they had downgraded the seniority of the delegation: for the first time, no Politburo member attended. Chief economic adviser Liu He, who is a Politburo member, rather than Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is not, should have headed the delegation. There was [speculation](#) that the reason was that the growing gap in economic size between China and Japan did not warrant the presence of a Politburo member. Commenting on the Sino-Japanese economic exchanges, a member of the Development Research Center of China's State Council [advocated](#) that the two should stand together to protect an open global trading environment, and jointly oppose Trump's unilateralism.

This did not seem to be happening. Japan, the United States, and the European Union have been [consulting](#) on jointly filing a case against China in the WTO over Chinese rules that effectively force foreign companies to transfer technologies to domestic firms. Since many Japanese companies are at the forefront of the electric vehicles, robots, and transport systems that are the focus of China's "Made in China 2025" initiative, there is a marked sense of urgency among them.

At a meeting in Sydney, Japan, Australia, the United States, and India [discussed](#) the establishment of a joint regional infrastructure scheme as an alternative to China's OBOR. An unnamed official described the plan as nascent, adding that the preferred terminology was "alternative" rather than "rival" to the Chinese initiative.

For all the talk of Japan's participation in BRI, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* characterized Tokyo as taking the lead in countering China's initiative. Among other evidence, the paper cited Foreign Minister Kōno's visit to Sri Lanka, which had given China rights to the port of Hambantota in exchange for debts, Prime Minister Abe's visits to the Baltic republics, and Sino-Indian cooperation in several Southeast Asian infrastructure projects as well as on the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. Describing closer India-Japan ties as motivated by a tendency to target the PRC, a scholar at Yunnan University [advocated](#) that Beijing approach triangular "relations with composure

and oppose any bilateral cooperation that targets a third party."

A *Japan Times* editorial applauded Xi Jinping's promise to loosen trade restrictions, but [cautioned](#) that, given past experience, follow-through was not automatic and should be carefully monitored. Prime Minister Abe should work with Chinese reformers to press for liberalization, consistent with the important role Japan is playing through its stewardship of regional trade initiatives like the Trans-Pacific Partnership and ensuing domestic reforms, to promote and sustain a liberal and open global trading system.

Military and Defense

On the positive side, a delegation of lower-ranking PLA officers visited Japan after a six-year suspension of defense exchanges. Ministry of National Defense spokesperson Wu Qian, replying to a question from the press, [stated](#) that China was willing to work with the Japanese side to enhance mutual trust, accumulate consensus, and manage and control disputes. He noted that the delegation was received by Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori and SDF Chief of Staff Adm. Kawano Katsutoshi.

According to *Yomiuri*, Japan and China are making [arrangements](#) to resume military exchanges begun in 2003 but suspended since the Japanese government bought three of the five disputed Senkaku Islands from their Japanese owners in 2012. Chinese trainees will be dispatched to a 10-month program at the National Institute of Defense Studies (NIDS), the think tank of Japan's Defense Ministry. The article did not mention whether Japanese would be sent to China for a similar program.

Confrontation near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands

Most of the other defense-related news was less positive. *Yomiuri* [reported](#) the first Japanese government admission that a submarine, in this case accompanied by a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) frigate, had entered the contiguous zone near the Senkaku chain, implying that it may not have been the first time the time a submarine had actually entered the area. Although the Defense Ministry did not initially [mention](#) the nationality of the submarine and did not call for a maritime security operation by the Self-Defense Forces, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga explicitly told a press conference that,

“we’ll demand that the Chinese side not impede the current momentum for improving Japan-China relations.” China’s Foreign Ministry immediately defended the action, saying the waters are part of China’s inherent territory, leaving no doubt as to the submarine’s nationality. After crews of two Japanese destroyers approached the submarine, it raised the Chinese national flag. They photographed the vessel and stopped pursuit when it headed toward China. With positive identification in hand, Vice Foreign Minister Sugiyama Shinsuke telephoned Chinese Ambassador Cheng Yonghua to lodge a fresh protest, [saying](#) that the entry by a submarine into a contiguous zone constituted “a unilateral change of status quo and a serious escalation” of the already tense situation in the area. *Global Times* [editorialized](#) that, although the incident could have been addressed through diplomatic means, Japan “hyped it up instantly, derailing its recent efforts to improve ties with China.” It urged the Tokyo government to cease blustering and show more composure. *Jiefang Junbao*, official newspaper of the People’s Liberation Army, added that, “the Chinese military will continue to firmly defend China’s territorial sovereignty and security [interests](#) by all means necessary.”



2Chinese submarine in Japanese contiguous zone; January 11, 2018 (Japan Defense Ministry)

Conservative newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* [asked](#) how, in the face of this fresh provocation, the Abe government could continue to say that improved relations with China were possible. Prime Minister Abe had left for a six-country European trip without even mentioning the Chinese actions, and although Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga had criticized China, he had added, “Our position of completely improving relations remains unchanged, and we would urge China not to hamper this trend.” A former political adviser to the US Marine Corps in Japan [opined](#) that the point of the Chinese incursion was to challenge the US as well as Japan. The

island near which the ships passed, Taisho, also known as Shikibi-sho, is technically under control of the US, which used it as an air-to-ground target area until 1978, just before the Carter administration agreed to normalize relations with the PRC.

A spokesperson for China’s Foreign Ministry [urged](#) Japan to stop making trouble over the Diaoyu Islands issue, protesting the entry of two Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) ships entering the contiguous zone of Chiwei Islet, which, he stated, belongs to China’s Diaoyu Islands. He added that Japan must take concrete measures to improve bilateral ties and meet China halfway, in line with the four-point principled consensus reached in 2014.

Japan bolsters defense in the Southwest region

Yomiuri, in a four-part series on the defense of Japan, [summarized](#) efforts to reinforce remote islands against China. Citing a senior defense official, it argued that China, having reinforced its control over the South China Sea, is likely to increase pressure on the East China Sea. In December 2016, the aircraft carrier *Liaoning* first advanced into the Pacific by sailing between Okinawa and Miyako Jima; bombers and fighter jets now fly over the area frequently. In January, a *Shang*-class nuclear powered attack submarine entered the contiguous zone, but not the territorial waters, near Taisho, one of the contested Diaoyu/Senkaku islands that are under Japanese control. A GSDF unit was deployed on Yonagumi Jima in March 2016; two years later, an Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade of the GSDF was formed in Sasebo, and a security unit is scheduled for deployment on Miyakojima in March 2019. Gray-zone contingencies, such as the occupation of islands by Chinese fishermen, will be handled by the Coast Guard.

A draft of Japan’s third five-year ocean plan will explicitly address security threats [including](#) China’s maritime advances. Among the risk factors cited are foreign government vessels entering Japan’s territorial waters, and foreign fishing boats operating illegally, washing ashore, or drifting off the coast. Regarding the Senkakus, the plan calls for the Coast Guard to “urgently prepare a system to guard territorial waters.” Units will be deployed to the Nansei Islands, which stretch southwest from Kyushu to Taiwan, and efforts will be made to integrate all relevant maritime data among agencies,

including detecting suspicious ships, surveillance vessels, aircraft, and artificial satellites.

Japan's GSDF [announced](#) the creation of a Ground Component Command (GCC), to take effect from March 27. The GCC will control overall operations of GSDF brigades and divisions nationwide. An Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB) was also created. The reorganization, the largest since the GSDF was founded in 1954, aims to enhance the force's ability to respond to contingencies as well as natural disasters. The ARDB is responsible for retaking remote islands occupied by foreign forces. Its 2,100 personnel are equipped with amphibious vehicles and will be the central GSDF unit in operations to "retake remote islands seized by foreign forces." *Yomiuri* [editorialized](#) that the GSDF reorganization was crucial in dealing with China, whose incursions into Japan's territorial waters had become a normal occurrence. The new GCC, with its centralized control of the five regional armies, is horizontal to the MSDF and ASDF's commands, with the aim of developing integrated operation of the three services.

Sankei Shimbun [reported](#) that Japan is to deploy an ASDF mobile radar unit in the Ogasawara Islands to monitor airspace violations and approaching foreign aircraft, to compensate for the lack of fixed radars on surrounding islands. The ASDF's Second Mobile Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron from Iruma Base will be in charge of deploying the mobile radar unit.

Japan activated its first marine unit since World War II, [described](#) as having been trained to counter occupation by China. Col. Grant Newsham, a retired US Marine Corps liaison officer who helped train the group, commented that Japan still needs a joint Navy-Army amphibious headquarters to coordinate operations as well as more amphibious ships to carry troops and equipment. According to Newsham, Japan could have a reasonable capability by late 2019.

The Japanese government [announced](#) that, in response to China's rapid military expansion in the area, it is considering the introduction of F-35 B, which needs a much shorter airstrip. It has [commissioned](#) a study on the feasibility of converting the helicopter destroyer *Izumo* into an aircraft carrier, with the defense of Japan's remote islands in mind. According to former

MSDF executives, and despite the Defense Ministry's denials, the *Izumo* was [designed](#) to take the possibility of future changes into an aircraft carrier. This was done with China's increasing maritime advances around Japan's southwestern islands in mind.

Japan looks for friends

Joint training exercises between the Indian and Japanese coast guards were for the first time joined by counterparts from Sri Lanka and the Maldives, both of which face the strategically crucial Indian Ocean. *Asahi* [observed](#) that China had contributed to the construction on harbors in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and that Chinese ships and submarines had anchored at ports in both, adding that the Abe administration was seeking to deepen cooperation with nations under its "free and open Indo-Pacific region" strategy as a way to counter the PRC's maritime advances. Three days later, The Japanese government [announced](#) plans to strengthen naval capacities to nations in the Indian Ocean. Aid will first be given to Sri Lanka and Djibouti, with *Yomiuri* noting that "the rush to provide aid to Sri Lanka and Djibouti was prompted by both nations' requests for cooperation on fighting piracy and other issues, as well as by progress China has made in building ports and other 'important footholds' in these nations."

Japan and France agreed to conduct a joint maritime exercise in February that was [described](#) as "a show of strength against China's ambition to make the South China Sea its stronghold." The two sides affirmed the importance of freedom of navigation. They are also discussing an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and joint research on mine detection technology. By virtue of its control of New Caledonia and French Polynesia, France has status as a Pacific state.

Britain's Royal Navy and the MSDF participated in their first joint exercises in the waters off the Kanto region, designed to enhance cooperation. They [conducted](#) anti-submarine drills and procedures for refueling at sea. The Japanese contingent included the destroyer *Suzunami*, the resupply vessel *Tikwa*, P-1 patrol aircraft, and submarines; the Royal Navy was represented by the frigate *Sutherland*.

Japan continued to donate equipment to countries feeling pressure from Chinese activities. In accordance with a law allowing the

donation of excess defense and military equipment to partner states, Tokyo transferred three Beechcraft TC-90 planes to the Philippines. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana [accepted](#) noting that, although the relationship between the Philippines and China was very strong, the maritime row with China was “still a security worry.”

Japan's increases its defense capabilities

The first of an anticipated 10 F-35A stealth fighter jets was deployed at the ASDF's Misawa Airbase in Aomori. According to the [Defense Ministry](#), the planes will be used for surveillance of North Korean ballistic missile launches and to deter intrusions into Japanese airspace. The deployments will also strengthen interoperability with the US. Anticipating criticism that the deployment of the aircraft was a step away from Japan's defense-only posture, Defense Minister Onodera stated that, since there is a division of roles between the two countries, no change in Japan's reliance on US attack capabilities is expected. *Xinhua* immediately [responded](#), calling the deployments “constitutionally unsound and unsettling for regional stability.” It also placed the action in the context of rising defense budgets and plans to convert the Izumo helicopter carrier into a de facto aircraft carrier.

Reuters [revealed](#) that the Japanese government had issued requests for information (RFIs) to the US and Britain for a new fighter plane. Designated the F-3, it will be designed for air superiority and will supplement the ASDF's F-35 stealth fighters. Existing airframes that could be used include Lockheed Martin's F-35, Boeing's F/A-18E/F, and the Eurofighter Typhoon, only the first of which is designed to be stealthy. Japan has struggled to develop an indigenous design.

The Japanese government [announced](#) arrangements to introduce a new missile intercept system on two of its *Aegis*-equipped destroyers that will be deployed in FY 2019 and 2020. The new system will enable an *Aegis* vessel stationed in the Sea of Japan that had exhausted its supply of intercept missiles to share radar information with another *Aegis* vessel stationed elsewhere, so that the second vessel could use the information for targeting enemy missiles.

China complains about Japan's “normalization of the military”

An article in China's *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* [predicted](#) that, despite obstacles such as institutional hurdles to constitutional revision, pacifist sentiment, and the inexperience of its military, Japan's capacity for self-defense is likely to increase in the coming years. While this will allow the United States to concentrate more on other areas of the world, Tokyo will be able to drive harder bargains with Washington.

China Military Online [commented](#) that Japan's announced intention to unify its capabilities in space, cyberspace, and electronic warfare under one command “is yet another step toward Japan's ‘normalization of the military’ as well as an attempt to break the ‘purely defensive defense’ and the ‘peace constitution.’” The paper added that another motive for this action is to deepen cooperation between Japan and the United States. It did not mention that in September 2015 the PRC established a strategic support force to combine the PLA's own capabilities on these matters.

Chinese analyst Zhu Haiyan [argued](#) that Abe has used UN peacekeeping operations to demonstrate Japan's capabilities and its will to use them, promote a positive image, and accustom the world to Japan's use of force. Zhu predicted that although Japan cannot block China's rise, it could harm China's image and undermine its soft power by alleging that there is a China threat. Its increasing military capabilities will cause a regional arms race that will complicate China's regional security environment and obstruct its peaceful development.

Japan complains about China's growing defense budget

Japanese newspapers, even center-left dailies that are normally sympathetic to China, were critical of the Chinese government's announcement that the country's defense budget would increase by 8.1 percent in 2018. *Asahi* [reacted](#) with dismay, noting that the PRC's defense budget is already the world's second largest even though it does not include many military outlays. It added that no new version of the PRC's defense white paper has been published since 2015, and that the spending plan contains only the total amount of the budget, equivalent to \$169.17 billion, and some policy

slogans such as “providing powerful support to help realize the dream of a strong military” are causing concerns to the PRC’s neighbors.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Navy has started operating a base in Djibouti, acquired port-use rights in South Asia, and is building military bases on reclaimed land on reefs in disputed areas. *Mainichi* [described](#) the country as moving toward a “digital dictatorship,” observing that the defense budget is 3.5 times the size of Japan’s, and that the 8.1 percent increase exceeds the projected 6.5 percent of GDP.

Yomiuri [editorialized](#) that “resolute measures” were needed against China’s assertive maritime advances that could “pour cold water on efforts to improve Japan–China ties.” The government must repeatedly convey Japan’s position at summit meetings and other occasions, and to press China to exercise self-restraint so the situation does not accelerate. It is vital that both sides agree on a maritime and aerial communication mechanism between the SDF and the Chinese military, but at the same time, Japan should boost its warning and surveillance capabilities.

However, China also pushed back against Japanese assessments. It [reacted](#) angrily to the latest [iteration](#) of the Japanese National Institute of Defense Studies’ (NIDS) *China Security Report 2018*. The cautiously worded NIDS study, entitled *The China-US Relationship at a Crossroad*, concluded that Chinese policy is simultaneously attempting to stabilize its relationship with the United States while becoming more assertive in East Asia. While stabilization of the US–China relationship is desirable, if stability is achieved through bilateral compromises that entail changes in the regional status quo, the result would likely be regional instability. China’s Ministry of National Defense spokesperson termed the study “irresponsible and untenable.” Since the 40th anniversary of the signing of the China–Japan Peace and Friendship Treaty was imminent, Wu expressed hope that Japan could view China’s domestic and foreign policies objectively and rationally. At the same time, a *Nikkei* analyst, citing a number of efforts China had made to improve its weapons, expand its basing rights, and produce aircraft carriers, accused China as “[acting](#) in a way that recalls European imperialism.”

Culture

While certain areas touching on the history of Sino–Japanese relations remain off-limits, efforts to create friendlier relations are more easily achievable in the soft power/cultural sphere. A Sino–Japanese jointly [produced](#) film, “Legend of the Dragon Cat,” directed by acclaimed Chinese director Chen Kaige, began showing in Tokyo. Based on a period fantasy novel by Yumemakura Baku, it is based on a Japanese monk who meets a Chinese poet in Tang dynasty Chang’an.

Japan and China are scheduled to sign an agreement on joint film productions, the first of its kind for Japan, when Premier Li Keqiang visits Tokyo in May. The agreement aims at circumventing current problems such as permission to film in certain locations, visa issuances, and the import and export of film equipment. Since the Chinese government will regard films based on this accord to be domestic, they will not count against the PRC’s limit on the number of foreign films that can be screened in the country. However, a note of caution was [sounded](#) by Kawaguchi Yukihiro, president of Access Bright Japan, which specializes in Chinese content and has deep knowledge of the PRC’s entertainment industry. According to Kawaguchi, the accord may not be effective “when the political situation (with China) worsens.” The signing will occur as part of the festivities to mark the 40th anniversary of the Japan–China Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

Other tensions existed as well. Chinese netizens were reportedly refuting the contention of an article in Japan’s *Daiyamondo* that assessed Japanese children’s fitness as superior to those of Chinese children although, [according](#) to the reporter, it is true that grandparents, who often are the main caregivers for working parents, tend to cosset and spoil the youngsters.

Taiwan

Aware of extreme Chinese sensitivity over its claims to sovereignty over Taiwan, Japan and Taiwan continued to gently press the limits of China’s toleration of their interactions. *Kyodo*, for example, [reported](#) that an urban renewal project in Taipei had retained Japanese colonial era features, citing several Taiwanese experts on the benefits of Japanese rule of Taiwan.

In February, the *Taipei Times* [revealed](#) that the head of Taiwan's Veterans Affairs Council (VAC) had visited Japan in the previous month. According to the report, the VAC was responding to an invitation from Japan's veterans' association, Taiyukai, and "[paving] the way toward regular interactions between the two agencies." Although Taiyukai has no formal government affiliation, its headquarters are at the Japanese Ministry of Defense, its chair and director, retired generals, had separately served as heads of the SDF Joint Chief of Staff. The visit, the first since VAC was founded in 1974, was kept low-key to avoid Beijing's attention.

national flag placed in parallel with that of Japan.

Eric Chuo, head of Taiwanese machinery manufacturer Hiwin Technologies [announced](#) that his company planned to make Japan its top priority in 2018. The company, with branches in nine countries, is considering building plants in Aichi, and plans to acquire a Japanese machinery maker.

A letter to the editor of the *Taipei Times* noted that the letter Prime Minister Abe had originally written to Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen after the devastating Hualien earthquake was [deleted](#) from the Japanese government's website after the Chinese government complained. Abe had addressed Tsai as "Her Excellency" and urged Taiwan to "*ganbare*" (hang in there). The author of the letter added that a poll of Taiwanese showed that 75.8 percent of respondents believed that Japan was likely to help Taiwan in an emergency, as compared to 1.8 percent for China.

In an editorial headlined "China Must Not Heighten Regional Tensions with Intimidation of Taiwan," *Yomiuri* [stated](#) that tension between China and Taiwan is directly linked to Japan's national security, and that the Japanese government should take unspecified steps to counter China's intimidation tactics.

At a ceremony in Suao, Taiwan, a Sophia University student's camera, lost at sea two years ago, was returned to her. It had washed ashore there, and was found by school children; their teacher's post on Facebook led to establishing contact with the owner. Japan's *Jiji Press* [quoted](#) the grateful student as expressing her wish "to serve as a bridge for friendship between Japan and Taiwan." The accompanying photograph included placards celebrating Taiwan-Japanese friendship, with Taiwan's

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

JANUARY – APRIL 2018

Jan. 3, 2018: *Sankei Shimbun* reports the Japanese government had [begun](#) arrangements for an agreement with like-minded countries to create international rules on electronic commerce.

Jan. 4, 2018: An [opinion piece](#) in *Global Times* argues that bilateral security cooperation between Australia and Japan is part of a plan to preserve the hegemony of the two plus India and the United States, “reframed as ‘rules-based international order’ on the pretext of supporting a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific.”

Jan. 4, 2018: *Xinhua* announces the [launch](#) of a multi-year effort to compile previously missing historical records from 1931-1945, including “invading, looting, and other crimes of Japanese troops” to help fill in missing gaps. The study is to include an estimated 1 million characters and to be ready for publication in 2020.

Jan. 4, 2018: At a press conference, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [announces](#) that his new year’s resolution is to take the net big step toward revising the constitution.

Jan. 4, 2018: Speaking at a meeting at a Tokyo hotel, Prime Minister Abe [declares](#) that he would like to make 2018 a year in which both the “Japanese and the Chinese people perceive that bilateral relations have greatly improved.”

Jan. 5, 2018: *Global Times*, [reprinting](#) *Xinhua*, has a relatively low-key response to Abe’s plans to revise the constitution, adding only that there was “staunch criticism” from opposition parties and the public. *China Daily* [runs](#) a cartoon showing a slyly smiling Abe cutting the lock on the cage of a large, vicious lizard, as a frightened dove tried to fly away.

Jan. 7, 2018: Japanese comedian Muramoto Daisuke says if China invaded the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands Japan should immediately surrender, adding that Japan had stolen Okinawa from China. *Global Times* responds with an opinion piece by a Chinese student in Japan, who said that criticism of the comment [revealed](#) “erosion of the concept of free speech in Japanese society.”

Jan. 11-13, 2018: *Yomiuri* [reports](#) the first government admission that a submarine, in this case accompanied by a PLAN frigate, had entered the contiguous zone near the Senkaku chain.

Jan. 11, 2018: *Global Times* [editorialized](#) that, although the submarine intrusion incident could have been addressed through diplomatic means, Japan had “hyped it up instantly, derailing its recent efforts to improve ties with China.” *Jiefang Junbao*, official newspaper of the PLA, added that “the Chinese military will continue to firmly defend China’s territorial sovereignty and security [interests](#) by all means necessary.”

Jan. 11, 2018: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [urges](#) Japan to stop making trouble over the Diaoyu Islands issue, protesting the entry of two MSDF ships entering the contiguous zone of Chiwei Islet.

Jan. 11, 2018: Japanese government [announces](#) arrangements to introduce a new missile intercept system on two of its *Aegis*-equipped destroyers that will be deployed in FY 2019 and 2020.

Jan. 13, 2018: Conservative Japanese daily *Sankei Shimbun* [asks](#) how, in the face of this fresh provocation, the Abe government could say that improved relations with China were possible.

Jan. 15, 2018: Thai professor [portrays](#) his country as playing China against Japan “like a bamboo tree in the wind.”

Jan. 18, 2018: Joint training exercises between the Indian and Japanese coast guards were for the first time joined by their counterparts from Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Jan. 18, 2018: *China Military Online* [comments](#) that Japan's announced intention to unify its capabilities in space, cyberspace, and electronic warfare under one command "is yet another step toward Japan's 'normalization of the military' as well as an attempt to break the 'purely defensive defense' and the 'peace constitution.'"

Jan. 21, 2018: Japanese government [announces](#) plans to strengthen naval security capacities to nations in the Indian Ocean.

Jan. 23-24, 2018: Senior legislators from China and Japan meet in Tokyo and [agree](#) to work to improve ties.

Jan. 25, 2018: Japan and France agree to conduct a joint maritime exercise in February that is [described](#) as "a show of strength against China's ambition to make the South China Sea its stronghold."

Jan. 26, 2018: The first of an anticipated 10 F-35A stealth fighter jets is deployed at the Japanese ASDF base at Misawa Airbase in Aomori Province.

Jan. 26, 2018: A spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry [expresses](#) strong dissatisfaction with the opening of an exhibition in Tokyo to showcase Japan's claim for the Senkaku Islands. China's resolve to safeguard sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands, she added was steadfast.

Jan. 27-28 2018: Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō visits China, his first since taking office in office and the first by a Japanese foreign minister in 21 months. His counterpart Wang Yi [calls](#) for "Japan's joint efforts to advance ties, [adding](#) that there were "many disturbances and obstacles."

Jan. 29, 2018: *Yomiuri* reports that Japan and China are making [arrangements](#) to resume military exchanges begun in 2003 but suspended since the Japanese government bought three of the five disputed Senkaku Islands from their Japanese owners in 2012.

Jan. 29, 2018: Chinese Vice Foreign Minister and Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs Kong Xuanyou [meets](#) Japan's Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs and chief representative for Six-Party Talks Kanasugi Kenji in Beijing.

Feb. 5, 2018: Eric Chuo, head of Taiwanese machinery manufacturer Hiwin Technologies [announces](#) that his company planned to make Japan its top priority in 2018. The company, with branches in nine countries, is considering building plants in Aichi, and plans to acquire a Japanese machinery maker.

Feb. 10, 2018: An [article](#) in Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* credits Japan with taking the lead in countering China's Belt and Road initiative, citing Foreign Minister Kōno's visit to Sri Lanka, which had given China rights to the port of Hambantota in exchange for debts.

Feb. 12, 2018: Japanese government [announces](#) that, in response to Chinese rapid military expansion it is considering introduction of the F-35B, which needs a much shorter airstrip. It has [commissioned](#) a study on the feasibility of converting the helicopter destroyer *Izumo* into an aircraft carrier, with the defense of Japan's remote islands in mind.

Feb. 14, 2018: Japanese economic growth in the last quarter of 2017 was 0.05 percent, the eighth straight quarter of growth and longest since the financial bubble of the 1980s.

Feb 19, 2018: At a meeting in Sydney, Japan, Australia, the US, and India [discuss](#) establishment of a joint regional infrastructure scheme as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Feb. 20 2018: Chinese analyst Zhu Haiyan [argues](#) that PM Abe has used UN peacekeeping operations to demonstrate both Japan's capabilities and its will to use them, promote a positive image, and accustom the world to Japan's resuming the use of force.

Feb. 20, 2018: An article in China's *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* [predicts](#) that, despite obstacles such as institutional hurdles to constitutional revision, pacifist sentiment, and the inexperience of its military, Japan's capacity for self-defense is likely to increase in the coming years.

Feb. 21, 2018: Japan's MSDF [reports](#) a vessel marked *Min Ning De You 078* (with *Min* meaning Fujian, and *Ningde* a city in North Korea) transferring oil to a North Korean flagged tanker near Shanghai, in violation of UN sanctions. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [states](#) that the Chinese government attaches great importance to the information and is carrying out an investigation.

Feb. 23, 2018: According to former MSDF executives, and despite the Defense Ministry's denials, the helicopter destroyer *Izumo* was [designed](#) to be adapted as an aircraft carrier.

Feb. 23, 2018: Two men who [posed](#) in Japanese military uniforms at an anti-Japanese war monument in Nanjing are arrested after they upload photographs on themselves on social media. According to *South China Morning Post*, there have been similar instances in the past several months.

Feb. 24, 2018: *China Daily* article advocates passage of a law [prohibiting](#) the wearing of Japanese imperial army uniforms.

Feb. 27, 2018: Japan [launches](#) its seventh reconnaissance satellite, an optical satellite that can detect missile launches "and other things at military and other facilities" in North Korea and perhaps elsewhere in Asia.

March 3, 2018: Japan's leading business daily [describes](#) Abe as making efforts to charm allies to counter Beijing's growing influence, citing Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's tour of the GSDF training ground and Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori becoming the first foreign dignitary to inspect *HMS Queen Elizabeth*.

March 6, 2018: Chinese government announces that the country's defense budget would increase by 8.1 percent in 2018. *Asahi* [reacts](#) with dismay, noting that the PRC's defense budget is already the world's second largest even though it does not include many military outlays.

March 7, 2018: *Yomiuri*, Japan's largest circulation paper, [opines](#) that Xi's consolidation of power "bodes ill for China and the world." Coupled with the PRC's sustained military buildup, it is essential for neighboring countries to be vigilant.

March 7, 2018: National Institute of Defense Studies' (NIDS), a think tank attached to Japan's Defense Ministry, publishes the 2018 version of its China security report, *The China-US Relationship at a Crossroad*.

March 7, 2018: China [reacts](#) angrily to the NIDS report, with Ministry of National Defense spokesperson terming it "irresponsible and untenable."

March 7, 2018: A *Nikkei* analyst, citing a number of efforts China has made to improve its weapons, expand its basing rights, and produce aircraft carriers, accuses China as "[acting](#) in a way that recalls European imperialism."

March 9, 2018: *Reuters* [reveals](#) that the Japanese government has issued requests for information (RFIs) to the US and Britain for a new fighter plane.

March 10, 2018: Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in an address to the National People's Congress, says China is willing to work with Japan to restore relations to healthy, stable growth "as long as Japan does not prevaricate, flip-flop or backpedal but accepts and welcomes China's development."

March 20, 2018: Japanese government [announces](#) that \$940 million in investments and loans will be made available to fund space start-ups, to better compete with China and other countries.

March 21, 2018: China transfers control of its Coast Guard to the People's Armed Police (PAP), which was placed under the command of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in January.

March 21, 2018: The LDP's Research Commission on National Security [recommends](#) that Japan introduce a multi-mission "defensive" aircraft carrier.

March 23, 2018: The GSDF [announces](#) creation of a Ground Component Command, to take effect from March 27. An Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade has been created as well. The reorganization aims to enhance the force's ability to respond to contingencies on remote islands as well as natural disasters.

March 24, 2018: A draft of Japan's third five-year ocean plan will explicitly address security threats [including](#) China's maritime advances.

March 25, 2018: Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana [accepts](#) three Beechcraft TC-90 planes from Japan, noting that, although the relationship between his country and China is very strong, the maritime row with China is “still a security worry.”

March 31, 2018: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, [responding](#) to a statement that Japan’s Ministry of Education had amended its curriculum guidelines to teach high school students that the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are indisputably Japanese territory, urged Japan to face squarely history and reality, educate youth with a correct view of history, and “cease stirring up troubles on the relevant issue.”

April 1, 2018: *Yomiuri* [editorializes](#) that the recent GSDF reorganization was crucial in dealing with China, whose incursions into Japan’s territorial waters had become a normal occurrence.

April 2, 2018: *Sankei Shimbun* [reports](#) that Japan is to deploy an ASDF mobile radar unit in the Ogasawara Islands to monitor airspace violations and approaching foreign aircraft, to compensate for the lack of fixed radars on surrounding islands.

April 4, 2018: *Yomiuri*, in a four-part series on the defense of Japan, [summarizes](#) efforts to reinforce remote islands against China.

April 6, 2018: According to *Asia Times*, Taiwan has been [sharing](#) with Japan information on its investigations into attacks, cyber espionage, and major data breaches. Taiwan is believed to be a testing ground for Chinese techniques before they are deployed against other countries.

April 7, 2018: Japan activates its first marine unit since World War II. It is [described](#) as having been trained to counter occupation by China.

April 12, 2018: *Japan Times* editorial applauds Xi Jinping’s promise to loosen trade restrictions, but [cautions](#) that follow-through was not automatic and should be carefully monitored.

April 13, 2018: *Yomiuri* [editorializes](#) that “resolute measures” are needed against China’s maritime advances, which could “pour cold water on efforts to improve Japan-China ties.”

April 16, 2018: Fourth high-level Sino-Japanese economic dialogue, and the first in eight years, opens in Tokyo.

April 17, 2018: British journal *Scientific Reports* publishes findings [confirming](#) massive deposits of rare earth minerals in Japan’s exclusive economic zone near Minami-Torishima Island.

April 21, 2018: Japanese Defense Ministry reveals that it has completed the design concept of fighter jets to replace the ASDF’s currently deployed F-2s.

April 23, 2018: *Yomiuri* editorial [states](#) that tension between China and Taiwan is directly linked to Japan’s national security, and that the Japanese government should take unspecified steps to counter China’s intimidation tactics.

April 25, 2018: Draft law prohibiting people in Japanese military uniforms taking selfies outside memorials and other locations associated with the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression is submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Conference for second review, with supporters [stating](#) that “the new clause mainly targets acts that glorify the Japanese invasion and invaders. It clearly states that such behavior won’t be tolerated”

April 26, 2018: [Replying](#) to a question on a delegation of lower-ranking PLA officers visiting Japan after a six-year suspension of defense exchanges, Ministry of National Defense spokesperson Wu Qian states that China was willing to jointly work with the Japanese side to enhance mutual trust, accumulate consensus, and manage and control disputes.

April 27-28 2018: Britain’s Royal Navy and the MSDF participate in their first joint exercises in the waters off the Kanto region, designed to enhance their cooperation.

April 28, 2018: Japanese Defense Ministry [releases](#) study into the conversion of the MSDF’s helicopter destroyer into a full-fledged carrier “in case Japan were required to provide rear-line support for a U.S.-led war.”

April 28, 2018: Commenting on recent Sino-Japanese economic exchanges, a member of the Development Research Center of China's State Council [advocates](#) that the two stand together to protect an open global trading environment, and jointly oppose Trump's unilateralism.