

# 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

## CONTINUITY (AND ANXIETY) CONTINUE

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In our last issue we argued that there had been more continuity than change in America's Asia policy. The Trump administration's senior national security team has tried to prove us right over the past four months. Defense Secretary James Mattis noted that the Asia Pacific remained "a priority region" for the US. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reaffirmed the US commitment to democracy and human rights while laying out Washington's "peaceful pressure" policy against Pyongyang. Acting Assistant Secretary of State Susan Thornton said that America's "active engagement [in Asia] is frankly continuing and is not going to be changing anytime soon." The major exception was the abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the president's frontal attack on "bad" trade deals. These attacks, against the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) and the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have continued, although the US has not (yet) withdrawn from either accord. The final statements from two major economic gatherings in recent months, the G7 and G20 Summits, endorsed the principles of free trade, although this was despite, rather than because of, the US, which used to champion this cause. The absence of US leadership has compelled others to speak up and carry the ball.

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## **Emerging Trump doctrine: “principled realism”**

We will start our review slightly outside the Asia-Pacific region to show that continuity is not an East Asia phenomenon. In explaining his decision to stay the course in Afghanistan and support a (modest) troop enhancement (dare we call it a “surge”?), President Trump noted that “my original instinct was to pull out – and, historically, I like following my instincts. But all my life I’ve heard that decisions are much different when you sit behind the desk in the Oval Office; in other words, when you’re President of the United States.”

After examining the consequences of a rapid exit from Afghanistan and finding them “predictable and unacceptable,” Trump OK’d a Pentagon request to bring in additional troops as part of US efforts to “work with allies and partners to protect our shared interests.” In contrast with previous administrations, he did note that he would be basing decisions on “conditions on the ground” rather than “arbitrary timetables,” while “integrating American diplomatic, economic, and military power to achieve America’s goals.” While one can argue the wisdom of staying the course in Afghanistan, Trump’s decision was a thoughtful one, driven by US national interests and with consideration for near- and long-term consequences. This tendency to trust his generals rather than his instincts could also pay dividends if followed in regard to North Korea.

## **Mattis reaffirms US commitment to freedom of navigation**

Defense Secretary Mattis’ [speech](#) at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore repeated all the themes stressed by previous administrations. “The United States is a Pacific nation, both in geography and outlook” he asserted; the Asia-Pacific region is “a priority region for us.” The US has an “enduring commitment to the security and prosperity of this region. That enduring commitment is based on strategic interests, and on shared values of free people, free markets and a strong and vibrant economic partnership, a partnership open to all nations, regardless of their size, their populations, or the number of ships in their navies, or any other qualifier.”

“America’s engagement” he continued, “is also based on strong military partnerships, robust

investment and trade relationships, and close ties between the peoples of our countries.” Like his predecessor Defense Secretary Ash Carter, Mattis expressed a strong US commitment to freedom of navigation: “the United States remains committed to protecting the rights, freedoms and lawful uses of the sea, and the ability of countries to exercise those rights in the strategically important East and South China Seas.”

Noting that the 2016 ruling by the UNCLOS Tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the case brought by the Philippines on the South China Sea is “binding,” he called on “all claimants to use this as a starting point to peacefully manage their disputes in the South China Sea.” The US opposes “countries militarizing artificial islands and enforcing excessive maritime claims unsupported by international law. We cannot and will not accept unilateral coercive changes to the status quo.”

In 2015 and 2016, then-Defense Secretary Carter had strongly stated that “the United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows, so that everyone in the region can do the same.” Mattis repeated this pledge: “We will continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows, and demonstrate resolve through operational presence in the South China Sea and beyond.”

## **Tillerson defines “America first”**

In remarks to State Department employees in early May, Secretary Tillerson shared [his perspective](#) on “how you translate ‘America first’ into our foreign policy”: “it’s America first for national security and economic prosperity, and that doesn’t mean it comes at the expense of others. Our partnerships and our alliances are critical to our success in both of those areas.” Arguing that “when we deal with our trading partners – that things have gotten a little out of bounds here, they’ve gotten a little off balance – we’ve got to bring that back into balance because it’s not serving the interests of the American people well.”

But, he argued, “it doesn’t have to come at the expense of others, but it does have to come at an engagement with others. And so as we’re building our policies around those notions, that’s what we want to support. But at the end of it, it is strengthening our national security and promoting economic prosperity for the

American people, and we do that, again, with a lot of partners.”

Tillerson also tried to explain the difference between US values, which are enduring, and US policies, which may shift during the pursuit of these values: “guiding all of our foreign policy actions are our fundamental values: our values around freedom, human dignity, the way people are treated. Those are our values. Those are not our policies; they’re values. And the reason it’s important, I think, to keep that well understood is policies can change. They do change. They should change. Policies change to adapt to the – our values never change. They’re constant throughout all of this.”

But, he warned, “if you condition our national security efforts on someone adopting our values, we probably can’t achieve our national security goals or our national security interests. If we condition too heavily that others must adopt this value that we’ve come to over a long history of our own, it really creates obstacles to our ability to advance our national security interests, our economic interests. It doesn’t mean that we leave those values on the sidelines. It doesn’t mean that we don’t advocate for and aspire to freedom, human dignity, and the treatment of people the world over. We do. And we will always have that on our shoulder everywhere we go.”

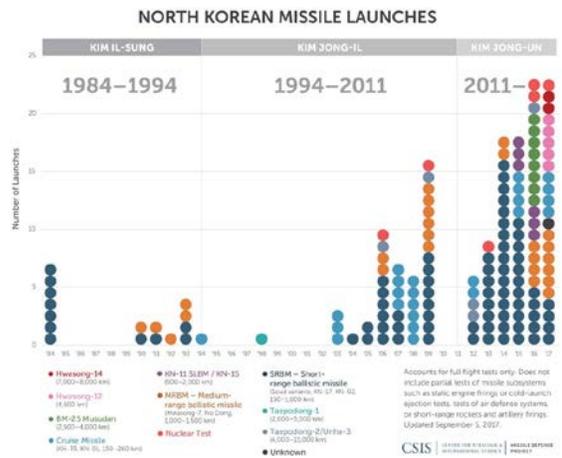
Remember when then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggested that human rights somehow took a back seat to broader geopolitical interests in dealing with China? Tillerson just said essentially the same thing. This approach has resulted in (slightly) improved relations with several Southeast Asian nations (Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia) that had been roundly criticized by the previous administration. It did not, however, prevent the State Department from speaking out in support of the rights of Myanmar’s Rohingya minority.

**North Korea: regime transformation remains the goal**

Secretary Tillerson also argued that the administration was being “very open and transparent about our intentions” when it came to dealing with North Korea. Echoing assurances provided by at least four prior administrations, he noted that US policy “is not about regime change, this is not about regime collapse, this is not about an accelerated reunification of the

peninsula, this is not about us looking for an excuse to come north of the 38th Parallel. So we’re trying to be very, very clear and resolute in our message to them that your future security and economic prosperity can only be achieved through your following your commitments to denuclearize.”

Secretary Tillerson did not rule out eventual dialogue: “We are ready and prepared to engage in talks when conditions are right. But as you’ve heard me say, we are not going to negotiate our way to the negotiating table. That is what Pyongyang has done for the last 20 years, is cause us to have to negotiate to get them to sit down. We’ll sit down when they’re ready to sit down under the right terms.” The goal of the administration’s “peaceful pressure” policy is thus to persuade Pyongyang that the costs of not denuclearizing will exceed the costs of doing so. Regime transformation remains the objective, as it was for Obama and several of his predecessors. “Peaceful pressure,” we would argue, is very much like “Obama’s “strategic patience” approach, only louder.



Regardless of the arguable nuances between the two approaches, one thing unfortunately is unchanged: Pyongyang remains unconvinced. We will leave it to our fellow authors of Korea-related chapters to discuss in more detail Pyongyang’s actions and their implications but must note for the record the Sept. 3 test of an estimated 150 kiloton “city buster” nuclear weapon and earlier intermediate range and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests. Efforts to “bring Kim Jong Un to his senses” are still not working. It remains to be seen if a further tightening of the noose, anticipated (or at least hoped for) in the wake of the sixth nuclear test, will have the desired effect.

## Looking ahead in Korea

Given the increase in both missile tests and rhetoric, many are predicting some type of Armageddon – “fire and fury like the world has never seen” – in the coming months. Not hardly! Trump and his generals know that nothing short of an attack against the US or its allies would justify or merit a major military operation against the DPRK and Kim Jong Un is not crazy; his quest for nuclear weapons is aimed at regime survival, not annihilation.



1) banner: “nothing can stop our march”; tank tracks: “economic building” and “nuclear force building”; tank face: “byungjin”; ground under the tank: “isolation” “strangulation” “sanctions” and “preventive war” (KCNA)

Once Kim is convinced that we are convinced that his deterrence capabilities are credible and in place – and he could very well be close to this point after the latest nuclear and ICBM tests – he will likely agree to sit down and discuss a freeze in *testing* (but not on his missile or nuclear programs *per se*; the centrifuges will keep spinning and static testing will continue unabated). In return, he will seek not only a reduction or elimination of military exercises but primarily a lifting of sanctions and a resumption of economic and humanitarian assistance so that he can deliver on his *Byungjin* policy’s dual promise of both economic development and nuclear weapons. The world will have to live with North Korea as a *de facto* nuclear weapon state with the prospects of nuclear blackmail, which are almost certain to follow. 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.

## And then there’s US trade policy!!!

Apparently, politics and physics share at least two immutable laws: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction and nature abhors a vacuum. Thus, President Trump’s apparent abdication of the US role in protecting the international economic order has prompted other leaders to fill that void. At international gatherings throughout the quadrimester, the US has been alarmingly consistent in its retreat from language supporting a free and open trading system, compelling other governments to stand up more forcefully against protectionism. Some of those new defenders are opportunists, whose rhetoric does not align with their government’s policies. Still, if Trump’s retreat from decades of US trade orthodoxy obliges other governments to pick up the slack, some good may yet come from America’s new trade nationalism.

For decades, gatherings of world economic and political leaders invariably mouthed paeans to free trade and promised to avoid protectionism. The single most important statement that came from the G20 meeting in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis in 2007–8 was the pledge to disavow protectionism and ensure that borders remained open. Over time, that commitment eroded but it has been the hymnal of global economic policy and the chorus was led by the US president. Trump and his team sing from a different song sheet.

At the G7 finance ministers meeting in Bari, Italy in early May, US objections obliged the group to water down its [statement](#) in which they were “working to strengthen the contribution of trade to our economies” rather than overtly fight protectionism. At the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) trade ministers meeting in Hanoi shortly thereafter, the [final declaration](#) made no mention of protectionism, a marked retreat from language in the minister’s meeting in November 2016. Again, US objections were [identified](#) as the obstacle. At the G7 Leaders’ Summit in Taormina also held in May, [the final declarations](#) reiterated the leaders’ commitment “to fight protectionism,” but hedged at Trump’s reported insistence by including that “we commit to adopting appropriate policies so that all firms and citizens can make the most of opportunities offered by the global economy.” The G20 Hamburg Summit that followed in July ultimately agreed on [similar language](#), offering support for

protectionism but promising to fight unfair trade practices. This formula was [characterized](#) by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, host of the meeting, as “a compromise” that followed hard bargaining with the US.

Eagle-eyed observers will note that the leaders’ declarations don’t drastically depart from established policy, but all reporting has indicated intense US opposition to the traditional language. More revealing are statements from US officials about existing trade deals, in particular the president’s inclination to rip them up and start again to get something better for the US. NAFTA? [End it](#). The Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (KORUS)? “[A horrible deal](#).” (Although Trump isn’t as inclined to tear it up in the wake of North Korea’s sixth nuclear test.) He even appears ready [to pick a fight](#) with China over intellectual property rights and advanced technology.

These may be negotiating ploys to maximize US leverage – and all such deals include clauses calling for periodic assessment and modernization and the US has not elected (yet) to walk away from these deals, tweets notwithstanding – but even so, Trump’s apparent readiness to undo decades of trade deals is evidence of new thinking about trade policy in the pursuit of his “America First” agenda. (One of the great ironies of this approach is that [reportedly](#) some of the changes that his administration is pushing in the NAFTA renegotiation are modeled after provisions in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that Trump withdrew from on day one of his administration.)

Trump’s position has created opportunities for other world leaders to assume the mantle of “protector of an open trading order.” In this, as in so many other endeavors, German Chancellor Merkel is among them. But no one has been as assiduous as Chinese President Xi Jinping in staking out that role. Xi has positioned himself (and China) as the defender of globalization. Speaking at the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in May, he [declared](#) “We need to seek results through greater openness and cooperation, avoid fragmentation, refrain from setting inhibitive thresholds for cooperation or pursuing exclusive arrangements, and reject protectionism.” Three months later, at the BRICS Summit he hosted in Xiamen, he [contrasted](#) China’s policies with “Some countries [who] have become more inward-

looking, and [whose] desire to participate in global development cooperation has decreased.” He went on to note at the BRICS conclave that “Beggar-thy-neighbor policy and a zero-sum game mind set don’t benefit global economic growth.”

Xi smells opportunity more generally: US retreat from global leadership not only creates space for his global leadership but it allows for a more aggressive attempt to rewrite global rules in a way that benefits China and like-minded “revisionist” powers. No assembly is more eager to exploit that opportunity than the BRICS, the group that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and seeks a more distributed and decentralized global order. Their annual summit, held this year in Xiamen, was especially timely and fueled more than the usual speculations about the group’s role, influence, and future. That interest was ironic given deepening divisions among members: the growing gap between the economies that have grown with globalization (China and India) and those “disadvantaged” by it (Brazil, South Africa, and to a lesser degree Russia) and the military face-off between China and India over disputed territory in Dokla that ended just before – and likely because of – the summit.

Another champion in the fight for trade has been Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Abe has been the most stalwart defender of the TPP and, after recognizing the depth of Trump’s antipathy to it, has pushed for a residual deal that keeps the agreement alive. In May, the 11 remaining members [agreed](#) to try to move ahead without the US, in the hope of concluding a deal by November. Two months later, representatives of those 11 governments met in Japan to see what common ground they could find. Japan’s chief negotiator [summarized](#) the progress, noting the 11 “achieved mutual understanding on a path forward” without the US. “We need a new international agreement,” he said. “I think we have reached a rough picture of what it will be like.” Deadlines invariably slip, so a November agreement would be a nothing less than a diplomatic tour de force; still, the commitment to preserving TPP is notable.

Not just in good ways, though, concluded some Chinese. In analysis published in *China Daily*, a senior writer [editorialized](#) that preserving TPP is a “desperate” move by Japan “to widen its influence in the region ... [and] to contain China’s economic influence in the region.”

Instead, Japan should “wake up from its TPP dream” and embrace “more inclusive regional economic arrangements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)” which is backed by China.

If Tokyo and Beijing are truly committed to free and open trade, they will push for any and all opportunities to reduce barriers and obstacles, recognizing more stringent deals (like TPP, touted as a “gold standard”) as goals and less onerous ones (like RCEP) as intermediate steps toward a more liberal order. Otherwise, it all looks like posturing and political theater, and we don’t need more of that.

### **Whither the pivot?**

In summary, while terms like pivot and rebalance not surprisingly departed with the Obama administration, Asia remains a “high priority” area for this administration, especially when it comes to regional security. Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific (and the choice of many for the position permanently) Susan Thornton [addressed](#) the “rebalance” head on, when asked during an August 2 teleconference if this strategy had been abandoned by the Trump administration:

“I think that slogans are sometimes overrated or overused, but certainly, what the rebalance was trying to denote was that the U.S. is an Asia Pacific power, we're going to be engaged in the Asia Pacific region, we're a provider of security in the region, it's key to our prosperity and our economic future, and we are going to pay a lot of attention to Asia and we're going to put a lot of resources into our policy focus and our engagement and our interaction with Asia.

And so I think you've seen the engagement by all - so many high-level officials, with leaders coming here, with our high-level cabinet officials going there, with the President's trip upcoming later this fall, so I think it's really just a matter of naming it. And I think I would say our active engagement is frankly continuing and is not going to be changing anytime soon.”

As we argued in our May Regional Overview, Asia remains a high priority region;

administrations may change but national interests do not. But if this is true, then why does everyone in Asia still seem so nervous? Part of it is the concern that comes with any regime change in Washington. National security strategy documents outlining the overall direction of US policy are still to be written and many fear the worst, even though continuity has traditionally been the order of the day.

But a big part is the uncertainty and unpredictability, sometimes by accident but often by design, in President Trump’s personal approach to foreign policy (and politics in general). US leaders in our lifetime have been aware of one simple fact: presidents don’t have personal opinions. Whatever a president says is seen as a declaration of US policy. But this is not always the case when it comes to this president, especially during his early morning visits to the Twittersphere.

President Trump’s recent reassurance that a military option vis-a-vis North Korea is “not a first choice” suggests he is becoming more aware of and concerned about how his words are affecting friends and allies as well as potential adversaries. It’s been a steep learning curve, more often characterized by curves than by straight-line progress. But there are encouraging signs. New White House Chief of Staff Gen. John Kelly seems to be bringing discipline and thoughtfulness to the White House and the departure of bomb-throwers like Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka has caused a few loud sighs of relief. Now if the tweets would only stop, perhaps a more stable “new normal” can be achieved.

# REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY

## MAY – AUGUST 2017

**April 29–May 2, 2017:** CIA Director Mike Pompeo makes unannounced visit to South Korea and meets counterpart in South Korea's National Intelligence Service and other senior South Korean and US officials.

**May 1, 2017:** US Forces Korea announces that the recently deployed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system has achieved initial operational capability.

**May 2, 2017:** China calls for immediate dismantlement of the THAAD missile defense system in South Korea.

**May 4, 2017:** Secretary of State Rex Tillerson meets foreign minister of 10 ASEAN countries in Washington and urges them to do more to help cut funding streams for North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and to minimize diplomatic relations with Pyongyang.

**May 5, 2017:** North Korea accuses the US CIA and South Korea's intelligence service of a plot to attack its “supreme leadership” with a biochemical weapon.

**May 8–19, 2017:** US and Philippines conduct 33<sup>rd</sup> iteration of *Balikatan* military exercises, with special focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and counter-terrorism operations, in multiple locations in the Philippines.

**May 9, 2017:** Jakarta Gov. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama is found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in prison following a trial seen as a test of Indonesia's religious tolerance.

**May 11, 2017:** In Beijing for the Belt and Road Forum, Vietnam's President Tran Dai Quang meets President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People. They have “positive” talks, “without any criticism of each other” on the South China Sea.

**May 14, 2017:** North Korea conducts a test of what KCNA identifies as a *Hwasong-12* missile and describes as a “medium long-range missile that “can carry a heavy nuclear warhead.”

**May 14–15, 2017:** China hosts delegates from 138 countries for Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, including: Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte, Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo, Vietnam's President Tran Dai Quang, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Laotian President Bounnhang Vorachith, and Myanmar's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi.

**May 18, 2017:** The 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of senior officials from China and ASEAN on implementation of a code of conduct (COC) in the South China Sea is held in Guiyan, China. Participants agree on a draft COC, which will be submitted to the foreign ministers for consideration.

**May 21, 2017:** North Korea launches an intermediate-range missile (*Pukguksong-2*, also known as *KN-15*) 500 km into the East Sea (Sea of Japan). KCNA claims the test demonstrates accuracy of the missile's guidance system and confirms the capacity of the rocket's propulsion system.

**May 21, 2017:** US, ROK, and Japan call for an emergency session of the UN Security Council to discuss the latest missile launch by North Korea.

**May 21, 2017:** On the sidelines of APEC meetings in Hanoi, the remaining 11 countries of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agree to pursue the trade agreement without the US. The APEC forum fails to issue a consensus statement when the US refuses wording agreed by the other 20 APEC countries that supported free trade and opposed protectionism.

**May 22, 2017:** UNSC condemns North Korea's latest missile test and directs its sanctions committee to redouble its efforts to implement existing sanctions.

**May 23–24, 2017:** Philippine President Duterte visits Russia and meets President Vladimir Putin. Duterte cuts his trip short after declaring martial law in Mindanao following a skirmish between the military and members of the Maute Group, a terrorist group affiliated with the Islamic State.

**May 25, 2017:** US Navy destroyer, *USS Dewey*, sails within 12 nm of Mischief Reef in the Spratley Islands, the first US freedom of navigation operation in the region since October 2016.

**May 29-31, 2017:** Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc visits the US and meets President Trump, first Southeast Asian leader to visit Washington during Trump administration.

**June 1-3, 2017:** *USS Carl Vinson* and *USS Ronald Reagan* strike groups and Japanese destroyers *Hyuga* and *Ashigara* conduct a joint exercise in the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

**June 2-4, 2017:** Shangri-La Dialogue (16<sup>th</sup> Asia Security Summit) is held in Singapore.

**June 2, 2017:** UNSC expands North Korea sanctions, barring 14 officials from traveling to UN member states and four companies, including Koryo Bank and Kangbong Trading, from doing business with UN member state entities.

**June 4-8, 2017:** Vietnam's PM Nguyen visits Japan and meets Prime Minister Abe Shinzo.

**June 5-6, 2017:** Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis visit Sydney for the 2017 Australia-US Ministerial Consultations hosted by Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Defense Minister Marise Payne.

**June 8, 2017:** Two US Air Force *B-1B Lancer* bombers fly a training mission from Guam over the South China Sea in conjunction with the Navy's *USS Sterett* guided-missile destroyer.

**June 9, 2017:** The 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council of Heads of States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is held in Astana.

**June 13, 2017:** Otto Warmbier, a US citizen who had been detained in North Korea since January 2016, is released to US Special Representative for North Korean Policy Joseph Yun and returns to the US. He reportedly has been in a comatose state for the past 17 months.

**June 16, 2017:** Indian Army intercepts and stalls road-laying efforts by Chinese in Doka La area of the Doklam Plateau, leading to a standoff between the Indian Army and China's PLA.

**June 19, 2017:** Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines launch trilateral maritime patrols of borders, which will allow hot pursuit operations to cross borders until authorities of the other country take over.

**June 20-23, 2017:** China stages military exercises in the Paracel Islands.

**June 21, 2017:** Inaugural US-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue co-chaired by Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Mattis for the US, and State Councilor Yang Jiechi and Gen. Fang Fenghui, chief of staff of the PLA for China, is held in Washington.

**June 25-26, 2017:** Indian Prime Minister Naendra Modi visits the US and meets President Trump. They agree to promote strategic cooperation.

**June 27, 2017:** US releases annual *Trafficking in Persons Report*. It downgrades China's status as among the world's worst offenders, citing Beijing's complicity in North Korea's export of forced labor.

**June 28, 2017:** KCNA says North Korea will impose a "death penalty" on former South Korean President Park Geun-hye and former head of the National Intelligence Service Lee Byoung-ho for their alleged plot to assassinate Kim Jong Un.

**June 28-July 1, 2017:** Recently-appointed Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano visits China. He meets Chinese counterparts Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi in Beijing.

**June 29, 2017:** Chinese President Xi travels to Hong Kong for celebrations to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city's return to Chinese sovereignty and to oversee the July 1 swearing-in of Hong Kong's first female chief executive Carrie Lam.

**June 29-30, 2017:** South Korean President Moon Jae-in visits the US and meets President Trump. Discussion between the two focuses on North Korea and US-ROK trade.

**June 30, 2017:** China files formal protest against Washington's decision to sell arms to Taiwan.

**July 2, 2017:** US destroyer *USS Stethem* [conducts](#) FON operation within 12 nm of Triton Island in the Paracel Island chain while shadowed by a Chinese warship.

**July 4, 2017:** North Korea tests what it claims to be its first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of carrying a large nuclear warhead.

**July 5, 2017:** US and South Korea conduct military exercise that is described as a response to the North Korean missile launch on July 4.

**July 6, 2017:** Two US bombers fly over parts of the South China Sea amid territorial disputes, asserting the right to treat the region as international territory.

**July 3-4, 2017:** China's President Xi visits Russia and meets President Putin. They sign several agreements related to trade and investment, agriculture, infrastructure, energy, and culture. The joint statement reaffirms their support for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, maintenance of regional stability, and solving the North Korean nuclear issue through dialogue.

**July 7-8, 2017:** G20 Summit is held in Hamburg, Germany. Leaders from Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and US attend.

**July 10-17, 2017:** Naval ships, aircraft, and personnel from India, Japan, and the US participate in exercise *Malabar*, which features ashore training in Chennai and at-sea training in the Bay of Bengal.

**July 12-13, 2017:** Eleven TPP countries meet in Hakone, Japan and agree to draft a new version of the TPP text that makes minimal changes to reflect the US withdrawal from the group.

**July 14, 2017:** Indonesia unveils a new official map of the national archipelago that includes renaming of the southwest part of South China Sea to North Natuna Sea.

**July 19, 2017:** US-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue is held in Washington DC.

**July 23, 2017:** Two Chinese fighter jets intercept a US Navy surveillance plane over the East China Sea.

**July 24, 2017:** Vietnam orders a private oil company to stop drilling in contested territory one week after China allegedly threatens to attack its bases in the Spratly Islands.

**July 28, 2017:** North Korea launches a ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan (East Sea). The missile reportedly travels for 45 minutes and lands in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone.

**Aug. 2-8, 2017:** ASEAN-related meetings are held in Manila including the 50<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and Post-Ministerial Conferences, 18<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Plus 3 Foreign Ministers Meeting, 7<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers Meeting, and 24<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum.

**Aug. 3, 2017:** National security advisers from the US, South Korea, and Japan hold a video conference to coordinate their response to North Korea's missile and nuclear threats.

**Aug. 5, 2017:** UNSC passes Resolution 2371 in response to North Korean long-range missile tests. It bans North Korean exports of coal, iron, iron ore, lead, lead ore, and seafood. It also prohibits countries from increasing the current number of North Korean laborers working abroad, and bans new joint ventures with North Korea and new investment in current joint ventures.

**Aug. 6, 2017:** Foreign ministers from ASEAN endorse a framework for the South China Sea code of conduct. It is adopted on Aug. 6 during the ASEAN-China Post-Ministerial Conference.

**Aug. 7, 2017:** North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho, speaking at the ASEAN Regional Forum, blames the US for the situation on the Korean Peninsula and says Pyongyang would "teach the US a severe lesson" if it used military force against North Korea.

**Aug. 8, 2017:** President Trump warns that "North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with the fire and the fury like the world has never seen."

**Aug. 9, 2017:** KCNA reports that the KPA Strategic Force is "carefully examining" plans to launch four missiles toward Guam and surround the US territory in an "enveloping fire."

**Aug. 12, 2017:** China's President Xi calls for a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue in a telephone call with President Trump.

**Aug. 15, 2017:** KCNA reports Kim Jong Un delayed a decision on firing missiles toward Guam.

**Aug. 15, 2017:** Indian and Chinese soldiers are involved in an altercation in the western Himalayas, raising tensions between two countries that are already locked in a two-month standoff in another part of the disputed border.

**Aug. 17, 2017:** Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Mattis host Japanese Foreign Minister Kono Taro and Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori for a Security Consultative Committee ("2+2") meeting in Washington.

**Aug. 21-30, 2017:** ROK and US Combined Forces Command conduct the annual *Ulchi Freedom Guardian* military exercise. In addition, UN Command forces from seven countries, including Australia, Canada, Columbia, Denmark, New Zealand, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, participate.

**Aug. 24, 2017:** The Rakhine Advisory Commission, led by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, releases report that says the Muslim community in Myanmar's Rakhine State has become particularly vulnerable to human rights violations due to protracted statelessness and profound discrimination.

**Aug. 25, 2017:** Chinese Foreign Ministry sends official note to the Indonesian Embassy in Beijing expressing opposition to Jakarta's renaming of the southwest part of South China Sea to North Natuna Sea.

**Aug. 28, 2017:** India and China agree on an "expeditious disengagement" of troops at a disputed border area at the Doklam Plateau in the Himalayas.

**Aug. 29, 2017:** North Korea launches a missile over Japan that lands in waters off the northern region of Hokkaido.

**Sept. 3, 2017:** North Korea conducts its sixth nuclear test, a powerful nuclear device that it claims is a hydrogen bomb.