

COMPARATIVE

CONNECTIONS

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ON EAST ASIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

MANAGING A FRAGILE RELATIONSHIP

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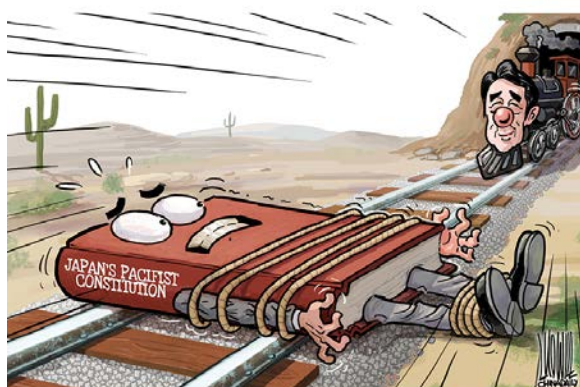
As China's President Xi Jinping entertained national leaders in Beijing, Japan's Prime Minister Abe Shinzō made appearances at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly and the New York Stock Exchange, and authored an op-ed in *The New York Times*. Abe's common theme was denunciation of North Korea's provocative behavior, adding that China must play a greater role in curbing its activities. Abe also indicated Japan would consider supporting companies that participated in the Belt and Road Initiative and partner with China in underwriting aid to African countries, while hinting strongly that he would like an invitation for a state visit. China is holding fast to its conditions for a formal meeting: Japan must agree there is a dispute over Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands ownership and show that it has come to terms with its misconduct during World War II. At yearend, Beijing's *Global Times* asserted that bilateral ties had broken out of their slump while Japanese papers reported a senior LDP official as stating the two sides had pushed their relations to a new state, enabling them to discuss the future.

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Diplomacy

As the leaders of both sides consolidated their positions – Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) achieving a supermajority in Japan’s House of Representatives election while the 19th Congress of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCP) gave power unprecedented since the Mao Zedong era to Xi Jinping – one might speculate that these two strong leaders would pursue hardline policies that would exacerbate frictions, or, that they would have the backing to reach compromises. With Abe’s tentative moves toward selective participation in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the announcement that the two sides had largely agreed on a maritime and aerial communication mechanism for the East China Sea, relations seemed to be warming. Still, Chinese media continued to snipe at Japan, with state-controlled *China Central Television (CCTV)* suggesting that Emperor Akihito’s decision to seek abdication was [prompted](#) by opposition to Abe’s plans to change Article 9 of the constitution. *CCTV* noted that Akihito had never visited the Yasukuni Shrine, which houses the spirits of Class-A war criminals among those honored for their service to the nation.

Xinhua [issued](#) a fairly mild complaint on the Dec. 5 visit of 60 Japanese lawmakers from several political parties to Yasukuni Shrine, noting that Abe had neither visited nor sent an offering, and that no currently serving Cabinet ministers attended. There were no high-level visits at the more traditional time of the Autumn Festival this year because it occurred just before the Japanese general election.



1Luo Jie, *China Daily*, 27 October 2017

A *Global Times* opinion piece by the head of the Heilongjiang Academy of Society Science’s director of Northeast Asian studies on the 45th

anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations [attributed](#) recent tensions to Japan’s “zero-sum mentality.” Tokyo’s nationalization of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, adopting an “ambiguous attitude regarding the status of Taiwan,” lifting the ban on the right to collective self-defense, and initiating discussion on the amendment of the pacifist constitution, have all targeted China, as did strengthening of the US-Japan alliance. The author urged Japanese leaders to grasp opportunities, such as participation in the BRI project, to improve bilateral ties.

On Oct. 1, Abe [attended](#) the Chinese embassy’s reception for the PRC’s National Day, becoming the first Japanese prime minister in 15 years to do so. He expressed his desire to visit China in 2018, and offered to host a Tokyo-Beijing-Seoul summit later this year.

The vice-ministerial level China-Japan Security Dialogue took place in Tokyo just after the conclusion of the CCP’s 19th Party Congress. China’s Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou “stressed that the lack of mutual trust, especially in the political field, poses a fundamental obstacle to improving and developing bilateral ties.” Discussions addressed North Korean proliferation, the implementation of a maritime hotline aimed at avoiding accidental clashes in the East China Sea, and on creating a maritime and aerial communications mechanism. In a separate meeting with Foreign Minister Kono Tarō, Kong [added](#) that despite a number of positive interactions recently, Sino-Japanese relations still faced “complicated factors.” An editorial in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Japan’s largest circulation daily, [lamented](#) the failure of the series of talks, now in their 15th year, to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to the two countries’ differences.

Abe and Xi met briefly during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in November, held in Da Nang, Vietnam. Xi was [quoted](#) as saying that the key to improved Sino-Japanese relations lies in mutual trust, and admonished the Japanese government to deal with questions of history – code for making further amends for Japan’s conduct during World War II – and Taiwan. Earlier in the year, China’s Foreign Ministry had expressed its displeasure at Japan’s decision to change the name of its mission in the Taiwan capital from the deliberately ambiguous Interchange

Organization to the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Organization, and protested when Vice-Minister for Internal Affairs Asama Jirō attended a cultural exchange meeting in Taiwan. During the APEC forum, Abe met Taiwan's representative, veteran opposition politician James Soong, with Japan's Foreign Ministry referring to Taiwan as "Chinese Taipei" to minimize friction with the PRC.

Despite voicing his desire to visit China "at an appropriate time" and hoping to welcome Xi for a reciprocal visit to Tokyo, Abe made no progress in setting a date. The two leaders agreed only to cooperate in dealing with North Korean nuclear proliferation.

The New York Times, and *Asahi*, which [reprinted](#) the *Times* article, reported that Abe's cordiality toward Xi in Da Nang was a reflection of the unease among allies about the role the US intended to play in the region, heralding a rapprochement that "recognize[d] the shifting dynamics around the Pacific Rim." The *Times* article also opined that given the lavish praise Trump had heaped on Xi, the United States might indicate that the two would draw together and exclude Japan.

Yamaguchi Natsuo, head of Japan's Komeitō party and coalition partner of the ruling LDP, [met](#) Xi Jinping on Dec. 1, carrying a letter from Abe. Separately, Yamaguchi met Vice Premier Wang Yang, newly appointed member of the CCP's Politburo Standing Committee, who is ranked fourth in the PRC's hierarchy. Although the contents of Abe's letter were not disclosed, Yamaguchi reportedly asked Wang for his opinions on future Sino-Japanese exchange programs and the denuclearization of North Korea.

Chinese media largely ignored the meeting, with *Xinhua* [emphasizing](#) that Yamaguchi was in Beijing to attend a meeting of the CCP with other political parties. The article was accompanied by a photo of Yamaguchi sitting stiffly in a chair next to Wang, as opposed to *Yomiuri*'s picture of Yamaguchi shaking hands with Xi. Wang was quoted as saying that the CCP hoped to work with Japan's major political parties to improve bilateral ties, and that the key to bettering relations was mutual trust.

Despite frequent media references to a climate of warming relations, the Chinese government made strenuous efforts to reinforce anti-

Japanese sentiments. Flags flew at half-staff and sirens sounded in major Chinese cities on Sept. 18, the anniversary of the Mukden incident when the Japanese military blew up a train and, blaming it on Chinese forces, used it as a pretext for the invasion of Manchuria.

In the days before the anniversary of the Nanjing massacre in December, Chinese NGOs [wrote](#) to the Japanese Embassy in Beijing requesting an apology from the government to the victims of the massacre and payment of compensation, stating that although Japan had surrendered unconditionally 72 years ago, it had not learned the lessons of history, and wanted to revive militarism by revising the constitution. CCTV began streaming a five-episode documentary on comfort women which, according to *Xinhua*, featured historical records, witness testimonies, and other evidence. The video was also streamed in Japan "to allow more Japanese to know the truth." This was the opener to a well-publicized series of activities. Several modern dramas and Yueju opera performances were held and a documentary recounting the atrocities in graphic detail was screened prior to the Nanjing massacre commemoration day, which was declared a national holiday in 2014. Top leaders attended a ceremony at the Nanjing Memorial Hall while the national flag flew at half-mast, and monks from China, Japan, and South Korea chanted for the victims. *Global Times* [reported](#) on an American who came to Nanjing to photograph the scenes of the massacre at the places originally photographed by his grandfather, who had been an eyewitness. According to *Xinhua*, 200 people attended a testimonial meeting in Shizuoka, Japan, at which the daughter of a survivor shared her mother's stories of the horror. A major commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the massacre was [held](#) on Dec. 13 in Nanjing. Still, Xi did not use his presence at the Nanjing event to make a speech, which is highly unusual.

Meanwhile, former Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo sent mixed signals when he [stated](#) that now was a good time for the two countries to improve relations by acting together on global challenges, but that the Japanese government was considering [expanding](#) its ballistic and cruise missile capabilities (see section on defense below). Fukuda made his remarks in Beijing at a forum jointly organized by the China International Publishing Group and Japan's Genron NPO.

At the 11th China–Japan Comprehensive Forum on Energy Saving and Environmental Protection in late December, 23 agreements on cooperation projects were signed. According to [Xinhua](#), since the forum began meeting in 2006, agreement had been reached on 337 projects, with topics ranging from intelligent vehicle development, coal-fired power generation, and people-to-people exchanges.

In a brief yearend roundup of the PRC’s diplomatic achievements, China’s *Global Times* [stated](#) without giving details that Sino–Japanese ties had finally broken out of their “slump.” At the same time, LDP Secretary General Nikai Toshihiro [stated](#) that Japan and China had pushed their relations to a new stage that allowed them to discuss the future together. Listing possible areas of cooperation that included environmental preservation, energy-saving, better protection of intellectual property rights, and the improvement of hygiene including the use of Japanese high-quality toilets in China, Nikai urged early reciprocal visits by Xi and Abe as well as a trilateral summit with South Korean leaders. China’s negative reaction to the news that the Japan’s Defense Ministry was mulling a proposal to modify the country’s helicopter-carrying destroyers to accommodate F-35 stealth jets may, however, had a dampening effect on the rapprochement. Speaking at the same meeting, Xi Jinping [advocated](#) enhanced party-to-party exchanges and cooperation, implying that an early summit meeting was unlikely.

Cultural exchanges

The head of Japan’s famed Urasenke Tea School made his 100th visit to China. State Counselor Yang Jiechi said that he hoped that Urasenke would make efforts to get Sino–Japanese relations back on the right track. The tea master replied non-committedly.

In a *Global Times* yearend summary, an ethnically Chinese professor returned to a familiar, but not recently heard, [lament](#): leaders like those of the 1950s “who did their utmost to promote bilateral ties had not been replaced. The agreements signed since normalization of diplomatic ties in 1972 had “failed to lift deteriorating ties.” Japan’s younger generation, the author opined, was “generally indifferent to China” while “academic circles reinterpret China with a new cognitive paradigm.” There was no mention of the attitudes on the Chinese

side. His suggested solution was more cultural exchanges.

General news coverage

In early September, *Xinhua* [reported](#) the death of the last of the 24 former comfort women to sue the Japanese government for being pressed into providing sex services to the Japanese military during World War II. Fourteen other comfort women, non-litigants, remain alive.

In response to Prime Minister Abe’s sending a *masakaki* offering during the Autumn Festival of the Yasukuni Shrine, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson delivered a fairly mild rebuke, [demanding](#) that Japan properly handle the issue and reflect on its past aggression. Abe’s ritual offering, which has become standard procedure for him following a controversial in-person visit several years ago, received little coverage in Japanese newspapers.

Media from both sides reacted to political gains by the respective leaders. Chinese media interpreted Abe’s LDP gaining a supermajority of delegates in the Oct. 18 election for the House of Councillors as portending further moves toward amending the Japanese constitution. Japanese sources reacted with apprehension to Xi Jinping’s marathon speech at the CCP’s 19th Party Congress, highlighting such phrases as China moving to center stage in international affairs and achieving a world-class military.

There were indications that overall perceptions of bilateral relations were improving. Kyodo [reported](#) polls indicating a marked improvement in Chinese and Japanese views of relations. A survey jointly conducted by the Japanese nonprofit think tank Genron NPO and the China International Publishing Group found that 44.9 percent of respondents believed that bilateral ties were bad or relatively bad, down from 71.9 percent a year earlier, the first time in seven years that the number had fallen below 50 percent. 64.2 percent of Chinese respondents believed ties were bad or relatively bad, down from 78.2 percent. On the prospects for future bilateral relations, Chinese were somewhat more optimistic than Japanese, with 29.7 percent expecting them to worsen, down from 50.4 percent, and 28.7 percent anticipating they would improve, up from 19.6 percent. However, 23.6 percent of Japanese believed they would improve vs. 34.3 percent last year, with the number expecting them to rising to 13.1 percent

from 8.8 percent. Reasons given for the generally more optimistic results were an increase in high-level contacts, no major incidents, and greater media coverage of North Korean proliferation.

Nevertheless, there was also some news to remind us that history issues remain a sensitive topic. Survivors of the Japanese bombing of Chongqing during World War II [protested](#) against a ruling of the Tokyo High Court affirming the judgment of a 2015 decision of a lower court that they were not entitled to compensatory damages. A lawyer for the plaintiffs announced that the group would appeal to the Japanese Supreme Court.

Economy

According to figures released in November, Japan's GDP expanded by an annualized 1.4 percent during the third quarter of 2017. This [marked](#) seven consecutive quarters of growth, the longest continuous rise since the eight straight quarter expansion from April–June 1999 to January–March 2001. Unemployment was just under 3 percent. Meanwhile, Chinese economic growth continued at over 6 percent, though Chinese economists warned that the economy was being artificially stimulated and a day of reckoning might be at hand. In the midst of the Xi's triumphal 19th Party Congress, Governor of the People's Bank of China Zhou Xiaohuan [warned](#) of a "Minsky Moment," or sudden collapse of asset prices that follows a long period of growth, sparked by debt or currency pressures.

At a Sino-Japanese entrepreneurial dialogue held in Beijing in late November, Jiang Zengwei, head of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, [advised](#) Japanese companies to use their strengths in high-end manufacturing, smart manufacturing, and biotechnology to help China upgrade its industrial structure and integrate the two countries' industrial chains. According to Chinese Customs data, said Jiang, bilateral trade had risen 14.2 percent year-on-year through October to about \$252 billion, accounting for 7.4 percent of the PRC's total foreign trade.

In a move said to have been prompted by a desire to improve bilateral relations and obtain Beijing's assistance in dealing with North Korean nuclear proliferation, the Japanese government [announced](#) that it was considering

support to companies that conduct joint projects with Chinese companies in countries along China's Belt and Road economic zone. Abe was said to have first discussed the outline of Japan's assistance with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang when the two met in Germany in July and again with Abe met Xi in Vietnam in November. A detailed plan was then drawn up from consultations among the Cabinet Secretariat, the foreign and defense ministries, and the Ministry for Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI). Emphasis was to be on:

- energy saving and environmental cooperation
- industrial advances
- improving the usability of the rail network

In addition to hopes that cooperation would help warm relations and obtain Chinese cooperation in dealing with North Korean missile proliferation, the Japanese government hoped that the plan would ease the way to holding a bilateral summit with South Korea, which had been scheduled to take place in Japan and, separately, arranging a state visit by Li Keqiang. This would be a prelude to Abe visiting the PRC in 2018 and a reciprocal visit by Xi to Japan. However, the Japanese government remained wary of Chinese projects involving harbor development at strategically important points along the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, since there is speculation that they may be used for military purposes. Hence, for the time being, the government will not participate in joint harbor projects.

In response, an op-ed in China's *Global Times* [opined](#) that Japan's decision reflected its realization that better ties with China were hard to resist due to growing pressure from sluggish domestic growth and rising protectionism in the US: new markets were essential to maintain steady economic growth. Taking note of Japan's work with India and other countries to counter the influence of the BRI, the writer evaluated the influence of competing programs like Japan's Asia-Africa Growth Corridor as far lower than that of China's program. This view would seem to have been overtaken by events, given Japan's expressed [willingness](#) to cooperate on some BRI projects, and also to partner with the PRC on development assistance to African states.

According to *Yomiuri*, Tokyo [hoped](#) that enhanced cooperation would persuade China to make greater efforts to stop North Korean

proliferation and ease the way to a Sino-Japanese summit to mark the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty. *Yomiuri* also noted that “some in the government” were cautious about changing the policy, given China’s more strongly hegemonic stance, even in regions west of the Indian Ocean. One of the factors behind Japan’s agreement with Kenya for assistance in developing the port of Mombasa is to prevent China from putting the port under its influence. The commitment to cooperation notwithstanding, China’s involvement will be limited to the construction of related roads, to avoid having PRC ships enter the port.

A third round of meetings between Chinese and Japanese economic leaders and former high-ranking officials held in Tokyo in early December was characterized by the standard clichés. Former Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan [declared](#) that stable, healthy bilateral relations conformed to the shared interests of the two countries; *China Daily* quoted Abe as saying that the two should join hands to deal with the huge investment demand for Asia’s infrastructure facilities.

A *Xinhua* year-ender painted a [bleak](#) picture of Japan’s “debt-mired economy [which is being] further debilitated by deflation, degraded image, and demographics.” The article noted that Japan’s public debt was more than double its \$5 trillion economy, as wages have stagnated, the population continues to decrease, and scandals have hurt the country’s once-stellar reputation for producing high-quality precision-made goods.

Nikkei [described](#) a sea change in Pacific fishing waters, with Japan losing out to China in the competition. Due to over-fishing, even the price of even less expensive species had become less plentiful. Chinese and Taiwanese fishing catches are up while Japan’s are down; there are some areas where Japanese fishermen do not go because they fear for their safety.

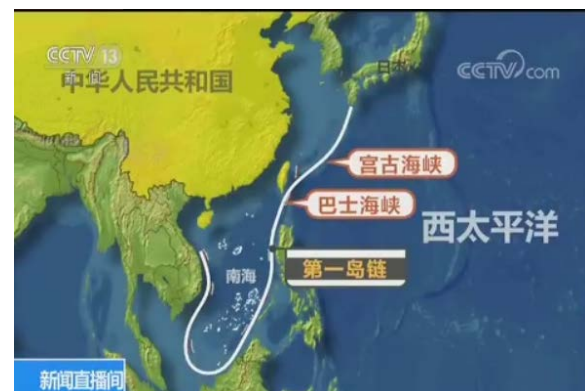
Participants at an economics forum [opined](#) that Japan could reassert its financial leadership through, among other actions, renegotiating trade pacts: the Nikkei index was more than twice the level it was when Abe began his second term as prime minister, and unemployment, at 2.8 percent, is lowest in two decades. Meanwhile, Beijing [said](#) that Standard & Poor’s downgrade of China from A+ to AA- was based

on a misreading; Chinese economy is in fact resilient. In June, Moody’s issued a comparable downgrade.

Xinhua reported that Kobe Steel’s admission that it falsified product data, along with other recent revelations involving Nissan Motors and the Takata Corporation, is indicative of a cheating culture that is damaging the competitiveness of Japan’s manufacturing industry as well as [Japan’s reputation](#) as a country. A commentary added that Japan’s traditional “shame culture” was being replaced by a “falsification culture.” Kobe Steel apologized, answering that the defective products were [sourced](#) from units in Malaysia, Thailand, and China.

Defense

Japan’s Defense Ministry’s 2017 [White Paper](#) contained a 34-page section on China that praised the PRC’s contributions to counterpiracy and United Nations peacekeeping activities while criticizing dangerous acts as attempts to change the status quo by coercion based on its own assertions that are incompatible with the existing international order.



2PLAAF planes fly around Miyako and Bashi straits. CCTV, 24 November 2017

On Nov. 21, the same day that the Japanese Ministry of Defense [reported](#) a decrease in the number of air force scrambles for the first half of 2017 (51 percent of them against Chinese aircraft), *CCTV-4*, the international channel of state-run *Chinese Central Television*, accused the Abe administration of playing up increased passage of Chinese Air Force planes through the Miyako Strait and circling Taiwan air space. It opined that Japan was trying to divert attention from the country’s poor economy and domestic scandals while encouraging support for changes in the constitution and higher defense budgets.

The CCTV report warned that the “new normalized training” would include an increase in the frequency of training, a change in the area of training to beyond the first island chain, and more intense training and methods. Neighboring countries “should be prepared” for such changes.

In mid-December, the Chinese Air Force conducted what it described as routine air patrols, passing through the Strait of Tsushima for what *Xinhua* said was the first time, and also conducting “encirclement” patrols close to Taiwan. Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* cited Beijing-based naval expert Li Jie as noting “growing signals that the U.S. and Japan [were] supporting Taiwan’s independence leaning Democratic Progressive Party’s attempts at secession,” indicating that the flights were a warning to all three countries. In a move sure to corroborate Beijing’s suspicions, two days later Japan and Taiwan announced the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding to enhance search and rescue at sea, though failing to reach agreement on contested fishing rights around Okinotori Atoll.

Among measures to address Japan’s growing concerns regarding China’s increased activity in adjoining maritime spaces, the Japanese Coast Guard announced plans to further enhance its capabilities, the better to defend encroachments on the disputed islands of the East China Sea.

In early December, Japanese government sources revealed that the introduction of air-to-air and air-to-ship long-range cruise missiles was being considered. The system being considered was the US AGM-158 Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile-Extended Range (JASSM-ER), which has a range of more than 900 km. The missile could not, however, be loaded onto some Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) planes without modification of the airframes and systems. Under the government’s interpretation of the constitution, Japan is prohibited from possessing the capability to strike enemy bases but is allowed to have the capability to do so.

A few days later, *Asahi* quoted an unnamed senior JSDF official as saying that the Japanese government’s plans to intercept not only ballistic missiles but cruise missiles under the national’s new defense program guidelines was “partly intended to bolster Japan’s defense against North Korea’s ballistic missiles, but the

real aim of introducing the Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) system is to counter China, which has been upgrading a number of its missiles.” The revised National Defense Program Guidelines are expected to be announced at the end of 2018, Abe having called for a sweeping overhaul of the existing guidelines.

As the year closed, Japanese government sources revealed that the Defense Ministry is mulling a plan to buy F-35 stealth fighter jets for use on the Maritime Self-Defense Force’s helicopter carriers. Modifications would have to be made to the bow, deck, and other areas before this would be possible. This is controversial since Japan has maintained that it cannot possess attack aircraft carriers, as these could be deemed offensive weapons in violation of the country’s defense-only policy.



3Japan fears China-Russia maritime exercises. Shen Lan, *Global Times*, 17 September 2017

Following the announcement in late December that the Japanese government plans to seek a 1.3 percent increase in the country’s defense budget, an editorial in the center-left *Asahi* expressed concern and called for rigorous debate on the expenditures when the Diet reconvenes in January. Respected Japanese diplomat and former university president Kitaoka Shinichi argued that Japan should possess not only a missile defense system but a counterstrike capability.

There was some progress in reducing tensions over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Japanese and Chinese negotiators reached a tentative agreement designed to avert clashes in the Japanese-administered islands area in early December. Arrived at after behind-the-scenes negotiations during the autumn were refined at a two-day meeting of senior defense and foreign ministry officials in Shanghai, the agreement

would establish a mechanism to deal with crises over the territorial waters and airspace. Japan is concerned that China might interpret the new framework as giving it a legitimate right to approach the islands. The mechanism, described as a kind of hotline, was described as not undermining the legal position of either country.

According to surveys conducted in Japan during the summer of 2017 but [released](#) in late October, 62.2 percent of respondents showed interest in the Senkaku Islands, down 12.3 percent from a previous poll in 2014. However, *Xinhua* [called](#) the Ishigaki City mayor's plan to change the name of islands to include the word Senkaku a "petty move, part of its endless number of little tricks" that will not prevent Japan from declining, although "provocations increase the likelihood of confrontation between China and Japan."

Regional competition

At a two-plus-two meeting of the British and Japanese defense and foreign ministers held in London in mid-December, the two sides agreed to strengthen security operations. Britain, exiting the European Union, hopes to increase its presence in the Asia-Pacific region through closer ties with Japan, while Japan views a stronger British presence as a deterrent to Chinese expansionism. Specific details of the action plan for security operations in what has been [described](#) as a quasi-security alliance have not been released, but the plan is known to include joint exercises and cooperation in defense equipment and technologies as well as peacekeeping operations. This follows an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement signed in January 2017 which provided for the exchange of ammunition and other goods. The two have also been researching the joint development of a new air-to-air missile. Japan has formulated such plans, separately, with India and Australia, but the agreement with Britain is its first with a European power.

In what was widely considered to be an effort to counter growing Chinese influence over the Philippines, Abe [pledged](#) ¥1 trillion in economic assistance over the next five years. However, this was less than half the ¥2.5 trillion (about \$24 billion) that Beijing offered a year before. According to the joint statement, the Japanese loan will support sustainable economic development in the Philippines, using Japanese technology to build quality infrastructure. One

area of focus is Manila's serious traffic congestion. Japanese sources opined that the Philippines was seeking a balanced diplomacy among the Japan, the US, and China.

The Japanese government announced that it would postpone until the next fiscal cycle construction on additional land it had leased to expand the Japan Self-Defense Force base in Djibouti. According to media [reports](#), the expansion is intended to serve as a counterweight to China's expanding strategic footprint in Africa and the Middle East. The existing base, opened on July 5, 2011, was designed to support counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. On the same day, Xi Jinping and Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh, the first head of state to visit China after the conclusion of the 19th CCP Congress, [announced](#) the establishment of a strategic partnership. The two signed agreements on economic, technological, and agricultural cooperation, with Xi suggesting that they support each other on issues concerning their core interests and major concerns. Presumably this would include Djibouti's support for China's position on territories disputed between China and Japan.

Prime Minister Abe's visit to India in mid-September resulted in pledges with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to deepen defense ties and agreement that the two must cooperate to balance against China. Abe also laid a foundation stone for a \$17 billion bullet train project – India's first – that was made possible by a loan that [Asahi](#) described as huge.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2017

Sept. 15, 2017: Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [visits India](#) and meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They agree to deepen defense ties and to cooperate to balance against China.

Sept. 21, 2017: The head of Japan's Urasenke Tea School visits China and meets with, among others, State Counselor Yang Jiechi.

Sept. 21, 2017: Mayor of Ishigaki City asks that islands under its administrative jurisdiction be renamed to include "Senkaku Islands" in their formal names.

Sept. 22, 2017: China says changing the name of islands will not [prevent](#) Japan from declining.

Sept. 23, 2017: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi [advises](#) counterpart Kono Tarō that Japan should talk and act cautiously to play a constructive role on the Korean nuclear issue rather than abandoning dialogue.

Sept. 25, 2017: Four Chinese ships patrol area near the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.

Sept. 25, 2017: China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, reacting to Abe's calling a snap election of the Diet, [warns](#) him against changing the constitution.

Oct. 1, 2017: PM Abe [attends](#) Chinese Embassy reception for the PRC's National Day.

Oct. 14, 2017: *Xinhua* [reports](#) the death of the last of the 24 former comfort women to sue the Japanese government for being pressed into providing sex services to the Japanese military during World War II.

Oct. 18–24, 2017: The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China is held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Oct. 28, 2017: The 15th China–Japan Security Dialogue is held in Tokyo.

Nov. 1, 2017: Japan's Defense Ministry publishes its 2017 [White Paper](#).

Nov. 12, 2017: PM Abe and President Xi Jinping [meet](#) briefly during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Da Nang, Vietnam.

Nov. 21, 2017: Japanese Ministry of Defense [reports](#) a decrease in the number of air defense scrambles, 51 percent of them against Chinese aircraft, for the first half of 2017.

Nov. 23, 2017: Japan announces that it would postpone until the next fiscal cycle construction on additional land it had leased to expand the JSDF base in Djibouti.

Nov. 23, 2017: President Xi and Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guellah [announce](#) the establishment of a strategic partnership.

Nov. 28, 2017: Japan [announces](#) it is considering support to companies that conduct joint projects with Chinese companies in countries along China's Belt and Road economic zone.

Dec. 1, 2017: *China Central Television (CCTV)* suggests that Emperor Akihito's decision to seek abdication was [prompted](#) by opposition to Abe's plans to change Article 9 of the constitution.

Dec. 1, 2017: Yamaguchi Natsuo, head of Japan's Komeitō party and coalition partner of the ruling LDP, [meets](#) Xi Jinping, carrying a letter from Abe.

Dec. 4, 2017: A third round of meetings between Chinese and Japanese economic leaders and former high-ranking officials held in Tokyo. Former Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan [declares](#) that stable, healthy Sino–Japanese relations conformed to shared interests.

Dec. 5, 2017: Japanese government sources [reveal](#) that Japan is considering the introduction of air-to-air and air-to-ship long-range cruise missiles.

Dec. 6, 2017: Japanese and Chinese negotiators [reach](#) a tentative agreement designed to avert clashes in the Japanese-administered Diaoyu/Senkaku islands area.

Dec. 11, 2017: Chinese NGOs [write](#) to the Japanese Embassy in Beijing requesting an apology from the government to the victims of the Nanjing massacre and payment of compensation.

Dec. 13, 2017: Nanjing massacre is commemorated in Nanjing and other places. President Xi does not use his presence at the Nanjing event to make a speech.

Dec. 14, 2017: Kyodo [reports](#) polls conducted by Japanese nonprofit think tank Genron NPO and the China International Publishing Group show a marked improvement in Chinese and Japanese views of relations between the two countries.

Dec. 14, 2017: A two-plus-two meeting of the British and Japanese defense and foreign ministers is held in London. The two sides agree to strengthen security operations.

Dec. 14, 2017: Survivors of the Japanese bombing of Chongqing during World War II [protest](#) a ruling of the Tokyo High Court affirming the judgment of a 2015 decision of a lower court that they were not entitled to compensatory damages. A lawyer for the plaintiffs announces that the group would appeal to the Japanese Supreme Court.

Dec. 18, 2017: Chinese Air Force conducts what it describes as routine air patrols, passing through the Strait of Tsushima and also conducting “encirclement” patrols close to Taiwan.

Dec. 20, 2017: Japan and Taiwan [announce](#) the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding to enhance search and rescue at sea.

Dec. 22, 2017: Japan’s Defense Ministry [reveals](#) that the delivery of most of the 52 AAV-7 amphibious vehicles contracted for by the marine corps has been delayed.

Dec. 23, 2017: Following the announcement that the Japanese government plans to seek a 1.3 percent increase in the country’s defense budget, an editorial in the center-left *Asahi* expresses [concern](#) and calls for rigorous debate on the expenditures when the Diet reconvenes in January.

Dec. 24, 2017: The 11th China-Japan Comprehensive Forum on Energy Saving and Environmental Protection [is held](#) in Tokyo and 23 agreements on cooperation projects are signed.

Dec. 25, 2017: Japanese government [sources](#) reveal that the Defense Ministry is mulling a plan to buy F-35 stealth fighter jets for use on the MSDF’s helicopter carriers.

Dec. 25, 2017: *Global Times* [states](#), without giving details, that Sino-Japanese ties had finally broken out of their “slump.”

Dec. 28, 2017: Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Nikai Toshihiro [states](#) that Japan and China have pushed their relations to a new stage that allowed them to discuss the future together.

Dec. 30, 2017: Japan’s *Nikkei*, citing examples from Australia, New Zealand, and Antarctica, [opines](#) that China’s behavior was “sending chills through South Pacific politics.”

Dec. 30, 2017: Japanese Coast Guard [reports](#) that three Chinese Coast Guard ships entered Japan’s territorial waters near Kuboshima in the Senkaku chain, leaving after an hour and 45 minutes. This is the 29th such incursion since the beginning of 2017.

Dec. 31, 2017: *Yomiuri* [reports](#) the Japanese government would cooperate with China in providing aid to African states, hoping that China would make greater efforts to stop North Korean proliferation and easing the way to a Sino-Japanese summit to mark the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty.