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AN “ALLIANCE OF DEMOCRACIES”: IS THERE ANY THERE THERE?

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The “cold peace” between Washington and Beijing continued to heat up, with implications throughout and beyond the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. US pronouncements during the last four months should dispel any doubt that the US Asia strategy is aimed first and foremost at China, and more specifically at the Chinese Communist Party. Not only does the “Quad”— the US, Australia, India, and Japan—show signs of coordinated backbone, it seems to be forming the basis for a new “Quad-Plus” that includes other “like-minded states.” Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hammer regional economies and the recovery is likely to be long and uneven. It looks like there may be a new model that describes its impact, and it doesn’t augur well for those countries.

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As the region (and world) focus on the fight against the global COVID-19 pandemic, the “cold peace” between Washington and Beijing continued to heat up, with implications throughout and beyond the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. US pronouncements during the last four months should dispel any doubt that the US Asia strategy is aimed first and foremost at China, and more specifically at the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). While critics of the Trump administration’s unilateralist approach continue to argue that “America First means America Alone,” this does not appear to be the case where China is concerned. Not only does the much-maligned (including by us) “Quad”—the loose grouping of the US, Australia, India, and Japan—show signs of coordinated backbone, it seems to be forming the basis for a new “Quad-Plus” that includes other “like-minded states.” The Quad’s focus on the promotion of the rule of law and freedom of navigation has Beijing’s attention, as does Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s recent comment that “(M)aybe it’s time for a new grouping of like-minded nations ... a new alliance of democracies.”

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hammer regional economies and the recovery, if and when it occurs, is likely to be long and uneven. It looks like there may be a new model that describes its impact, and it doesn’t augur well for those countries. Finally, we offer some framing thoughts for a potential Biden foreign policy as the US presidential campaign enters the homestretch.

The Quad-Plus: An “Alliance of Democracies” in the Making?

The Trump administration took off the gloves in dealing with Beijing during the second third of the year. While President Trump himself focused on the “China virus,” also referred to derisively as the “Kung Flu,” other administration officials focused on China’s ideology rather than just its behavior. Even Attorney General William Barr joined the [chorus](#), encouraging the American people “to reevaluate their relationship with China, so long as it continues to be ruled by the Chinese Communist Party.”

Of significance (at least to us) was the aforementioned Pompeo comment about “a new alliance of democracies.” This puts into perspective the increased efforts by the four Quad members, collectively among themselves

and in concert with others, to tighten the circle (dare we call it a “containment policy?”) around an increasingly assertive China. The bilateral impact is covered expertly, as usual, in the [US-China chapter](#), and we will not dwell on it here. We will look instead at how this relates to present and future multilateral cooperation in the region and beyond.

The Quad had its semi-official birth in late 2017 when the four national leaders met along the sidelines of the annual East Asia Summit “to discuss our shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.” As we [noted](#) at the time, the event reminded us of Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s decade-old dream of a “Concert of Democracies,” even if, at that point and until recently, it remained an informal cooperative effort.

But this may be changing. Simultaneous Quad-related July naval exercises in the Indian Ocean and Philippine Sea on July 21-22 involving a US aircraft carrier—the *USS Nimitz* and *USS Ronald Reagan*, respectively—prompted *The Hindustan Times* to [proclaim](#) in a headline that “Twin naval exercises with US supercarriers signal QUAD has arrived.” Reinforcing this message two days later, Pompeo announced that the “Quad is revived” while speaking at the US-India Business Council’s India Ideas Summit. America, he said “desires a new age of ambition” in its steadily expanding partnership with India. All four navies are expected to meet up again in the Indian Ocean in November for the annual India-hosted Malabar naval exercise, marking Australia’s first participation in this event in over a decade.



Figure 1 The aircraft carriers *USS Ronald Reagan* and *USS Nimitz* participate in naval exercises in the Indian Ocean and Philippine Sea on July 21-22. Photo: Reuters

Speaking at an online forum along the sidelines of the annual US-India Strategic Partnership Forum on Aug. 31, Deputy Secretary of State Steve Biegun took things a step further, [noting](#) that the US aimed to “formalize” its growing four-party strategic ties as part of a US effort “to push back against China in virtually every domain.”

Biegun observed that “the Indo-Pacific region is actually lacking in strong multilateral structures. They don’t have anything of the fortitude of NATO, or the European Union,” further noting “(T)here is certainly an invitation there at some point to formalize a structure like this.” He hastened to add that the Quad was not just about China: “I’d just be very careful to not define it solely as an initiative to contain or to defend against China, I don’t think that’s enough.” Biegun also cautioned against being “too ambitious.” In what could be interpreted (tongue-in-cheek) as self-criticism, he quickly downplayed his own NATO comparison: “I’ve heard loose talk about an Indo-Pacific NATO and so on. But remember, even NATO started with relatively modest expectations and a number of countries chose neutrality over NATO membership in post-World War II Europe.”

Nonetheless, he also stressed that the Quad “isn’t exclusive,” pointing to recent efforts by a Quad-plus “natural grouping” involving the four plus South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam, focused on the pandemic: “Seven of us on a weekly basis at my level, so just below the ministerial level, and each of those governments met weekly, and it was incredibly productive discussion among very, very cooperative partners.”

US National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien, [speaking](#) at the Atlantic Council on Aug. 28, also mentioned the growing importance of the Quad: “I think the Quad, which is really coming into its own ... is one of the most exciting diplomatic initiatives and one of the ... areas most likely to succeed and pay huge dividends in the future.” O’Brien announced that he and his Quad counterparts would be meeting in Hawaii in October, and that Pompeo would likewise meet his fellow Quad ministers in September and October.

Biegun explained why: “The purpose here can be to create a critical mass around the shared values and interests of those parties in a manner that attracts more countries in the Indo-Pacific,

and even from around the world, to be working in a common cause or even ultimately to align in a more structured manner with them.”

It’s still not clear who, even among the four, much less “around the world,” will sign up for a more formal structured grouping, although Australia may be a prime candidate, based on Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s early August [comment](#) to the Aspen Security Forum that “building a durable strategic balance” in the Indo-Pacific was a “critical priority.” It was necessary, he said, for “like-minded nations to act more cohesively, more consistently, more often. To align.”

Whatever is created will likely obtain bipartisan Congressional support. Writing in *War on the Rocks* in late May, Republican Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) and Democratic Sen. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island), [warned](#) that the “foundation of deterrence is crumbling as an increasingly aggressive China continues its comprehensive military modernization,” and announced their intention to establish a Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021. The Pacific Deterrence Initiative will “focus resources on key military capabilities to deter China. The initiative will also reassure US allies and partners, and send a strong signal to the Chinese Communist Party that the American people are committed to defending US interests in the Indo-Pacific.”

Other Multilateral Developments

Is a G10 possible? President Trump has yet to express any support for a new multilateral alliance mechanism—and given his lack of enthusiasm for alliances in general it is not expected he will do so anytime soon—but he did invite the two outlying Quad members, Australia and India, to attend this year’s US-hosted G7 meeting, along with South Korea and (sigh) Russia. The meeting, originally slated for Camp David in June, has been postponed until September. This has spurred [discussion](#) of a possible G10 (sans Russia) to “promote strategic cooperation on global political and security issues and advance the norms and values of a liberal international order.”

RIMPAC. Meanwhile, this year’s RIMPAC maneuvers off Hawaii, dubbed the world’s largest international maritime exercise, was a shadow of its former self, with only 10 of the

usual two dozen national navies making the trek to Honolulu. Three of the four Quad members (not India) made the trip. China, which joined the exercise in 2016, was “[disinvited](#)” in 2018 and was not invited to this year’s event. Due to COVID concerns participants were not able to come ashore and assist the struggling Hawaii economy. As a US Navy spokesperson explained: “The at-sea-only construct for RIMPAC 2020 was developed to ensure the safety of all military forces participating by minimizing shore-based contingents. This modified plan will allow us to conduct a meaningful exercise with maximum training value and minimum risk to the force, allies and partners, and the people of Hawaii.” All told, at least 20 ships and some 5,300 personnel took part in the biennial maneuvers.

Working toward a “networked region.” Defense Secretary Mark Esper reinforced the need for broader multilateral cooperation in dealing with the China challenge during his trip to the region in late August, even while acknowledging that the Pentagon was reexamining its current force posture in Northeast Asia. As acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs David Helvey [explained](#): “When we talk about promoting a networked region, we’re talking about building the relationships we have not only with our allies and partners, we’re promoting the contacts, coordination, integration [among] our allies and partners themselves.” Noting that the US was “heavily concentrated in Northeast Asia,” Helvey said the Pentagon would “like to be able to make our presence more geographically distributed, more operationally resilient. “Maybe the future is going to be less about bases and more about places,” he continued, “being able to operate across a multiplicity of locations, which give us the flexibility and the agility to respond to a variety of different threats and challenges.” Some of us are old enough to remember when then-Pacific Command Commander Chuck Larson introduced his “places not bases” strategy in the early 1990s. Seems like the more things change the more they remain the same.

COVID Rattles Regional Economies

The COVID pandemic continues to wreak havoc around the world. The IMF [anticipates](#) that the Asia-Pacific economy will shrink by 4.7% this year before recovering and marking 5.4% growth in 2021. Unemployment is expected to rise from 3.9% to 5.5% of the region’s labor force. In a summer survey by the Pacific

Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), [respondents](#) said they don’t expect an economic recovery to pre-crisis levels within the next five years.

Individual countries are suffering not just because of their own experiences with the virus and with measures to contain it but because of the ripple effects of COVID-prompted actions elsewhere. When the European and North American economies shut down, imports from Asia are reduced. In addition, shutdowns and lockdowns throttle the tourism that is the pillar of several Asian economies; as Cathrine Dalpino notes in [her chapter](#), Thailand is the second worst-hit country in the world (after Jamaica), with its tourism revenues falling \$47.7 billion (about 9% of its economy).



Figure 2 COVID shutdowns and lockdowns have throttled the tourism industry in several Asian economies. Immigration officers stand in an empty arrivals hall at Suvarnabhumi airport. Photo: Bangkok Post

Whatever the cause, the impact is severe. The US economy shrank by a third, although parts of it are rebounding (see below). Australia is experiencing its first recession in nearly 30 years, with GDP falling 7% in the June quarter, following a 0.3% drop in the first quarter. The head of National Accounts at the Australian Bureau of Statistics [called](#) the June report “by a wide margin, the largest fall in quarterly GDP since records began in 1959.” Initial reports that Japan’s economy had contracted 7.8% in the April-June quarter proved wrong. The [revised](#) figures were worse: the decline was actually 7.9% (compared to the preceding quarter), and the annual rate of decline was 28.1%. South Korea [recorded](#) a 3.2% decline in the second quarter, a worsening from the 1.3% contraction of the previous quarter. If there was a bright spot—and professionals always counsel skepticism about its numbers—it was [China](#),

where the economy posted 3.2% growth in the second quarter.

Southeast Asian economies had a [grim](#) March-June quarter. Malaysia's economy contracted by 17.1%, the Philippines by 16.5%, and Singapore's economy shrank 13.2 percent, the sharpest contraction since 1976. Thailand registered a 12.2% decline, the worst since 1998 when it was hit by the Asian financial crisis. Indonesia's economy—the region's largest—shrank by 5.3%, its first contraction in over two decades.

In several of those countries, economic difficulties are compounded by political problems. The Thai government is struggling with its COVID response, with a new economic team resigning just weeks into the job. Malaysia is encountering political uncertainty as that government tries to gain its footing in the face of determined opposition from Mahathir Mohammad, recently ousted as prime minister by backroom shenanigans. While continuity is promised for Japan whoever takes over for Abe Shinzo, there will be questions about the new prime minister's longevity and ability to fill his predecessor's shoes.

What's in a Letter?

Normally obsessed with numbers, the COVID-19 outbreak has economists now focused on the alphabet. When the bottom dropped out of the global economy, speculation raged about the shape of the future economic trajectory. Would the rebound look like a “U”—a sharp decline followed by a continued lull which would in turn be followed by an equally sharp return to normal—a “V”—the same decline with a much shorter time before recovery—an “L”—an enduring and seemingly endless decline—or a “W” (which this font doesn't capture properly)—in which decline is followed by a series of seeming recoveries and subsequent collapses as waves of the virus return?

More than a half year into the pandemic, a letter for the recovery is emerging—and it is none of the above. Instead, the most accurate representation is a “K”: a sharp decline followed by *two* separate recoveries, a strong one for some and a weak one for the rest. This is most apparent in the US, where in mid-August, the stock market had recovered from pandemic-triggered losses and the S&P 500 reached an all-time high. Unemployment in August was “only” 8.4% (we know, we know) but jobs have been

returning to the economy at a speed that outpaces [expectations](#). Still, all jobs are not created equal. One [analysis](#) concluded that in the US jobs are fully back for the highest wage earners, but fewer than half the jobs lost this spring have returned for those making less than \$20 an hour.

Work conditions—top earners can work from home—contribute to the K-shaped recovery, but they don't explain it all; there is another factor at play. Market returns flow to a small group of citizens. “It's one recovery for financial market investors and another recovery for everybody else,” [explained](#) one economist. Even Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin [conceded](#) the problem, acknowledging that “It's a two-tiered economy right now.” While some larger firms are benefiting, “there's plenty of small businesses that are on the ropes.”

This isn't just a US concern. Similar divergences are evident within Asian nations too. [India](#) is looking at a K-shaped recovery, as is [Australia](#). One [analysis](#) shows that the rich-poor divide is most severe among developing nations in Asia. When Bloomberg looked at 17 emerging markets, it found a 42% correlation between gross domestic product per capita and stock performance since the pandemic hit in January. The correlation between GDP per capita and currency returns was 31%. Specifically, stock returns from four economies with per capita GDP above \$10,000 in 2019—China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Malaysia—has been 20% higher than that of nations below that level (a list that includes India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand). In other words, wealthier nations are recovering at a quicker pace than less wealthy ones; and even that good news should be leavened by the fact that within recovering economies, internal gaps could be widening.

Countries that are wealthier are better able to spend money and provide some cushion for the economic damage done by the pandemic. Singapore has [funded](#) four fiscal stimulus packages worth close to S\$100 billion (\$72 billion), around 20% of GDP. South Korea has spent 270 trillion won (\$226 billion), about 14% of its GDP. Poorer governments like the Philippines are struggling to find funds—Manila can't [fund](#) the 1.3 trillion pesos (\$30 billion) stimulus package approved in June.

Biden's Asia Team

As the presidential campaign draws to an end, there are the usual speculations about foreign policy in a Biden administration should “regime change” take place in Washington. For a take on the candidate’s foreign policy, check out his [web page](#) and the by-now ritual article in [Foreign Affairs](#). The campaign has been tightlipped about its advisors, although a handful of top officials have been publicly identified with Team Biden and can be expected to take positions in his administration. There isn’t much point in guessing who will get what post yet (he [reportedly](#) has over 1,000 members on his foreign policy team), but we can offer broad thoughts about Biden foreign policy should his campaign prove successful. Our next issue will dive more deeply into anticipated foreign policy changes or adjustments regardless of who prevails in November.

First, foreign policy will matter to the president and his administration. Biden has immersed himself in the subject throughout his political career, serving for many years on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, becoming ranking member in 1997, and chair from 2001 to 2003 and then again from 2007 until he became vice president. In 2012, he was [called](#) the most powerful vice president on foreign policy, with the exception of his predecessor Dick Cheney. Biden knows the issues, takes an interest in them, and knows many key actors.

Second, foreign policy in a potential Biden presidency will revert to many of the more traditional US positions. Expect renewed support for multilateralism, US alliances, international institutions, and the rule of law. While the president will be engaged in foreign policy, he is likely to avoid the radical, seeming solitary gestures that Trump seems to revel in. Don’t expect “bolt from the blue” summits with adversaries or tearing up of painstakingly negotiated treaties. Instead, he will rely on traditional foreign policy processes and institutions. That means that his foreign policy team will do the heavy lifting—as in most administrations. The senior-most advisors and likely top officials are known quantities: Tony Blinken (his long-time foreign policy advisor who also served two years of deputy secretary of State, Susan Rice (former UN ambassador and President Obama’s National Security Advisor), Jake Sullivan (Biden’s national security advisor when Blinken left), Michelle Flournoy (former

undersecretary of defense for policy), Ely Ratner (former deputy national security advisor to Biden and China expert), among [others](#).

Third, and critically for Asia, a Biden administration will continue the hard line against China—the center of gravity in US thinking about China has shifted, likely permanently, in that direction as Xi’s “China dream” increasingly looks like America’s nightmare—but it will likely be more strategic, more measured, more multilateral, and more acknowledging of the need to find areas to cooperate with China amid intensified “great power” competition with Beijing. Among other things, this means that Asia will remain a priority for a Biden administration and the ongoing effort at coalition-building, outlined above, is likely to continue.

Finally, for all that continuity, should he win, Biden will be obliged to address domestic challenges that have grown during the last two decades. Deficits have mounted—blame overseas adventurism, ill-advised tax cuts, the COVID crisis—and inequality has exploded. National divisions exposed by the Black Lives Matter movement have widened during the campaign. There is a widespread belief throughout the US body politic that its leaders have devoted more attention to foreign than domestic affairs. A competent and capable US administration should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time, but priorities will change and this will have implications for US relations with the rest of the world. Under Biden, the US will not be retreating to isolationism, but even an administration that understands and appreciates the value of cooperative relations with allies and partners will have to engage differently.

REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY

MAY – AUGUST 2020

May 1, 2020: North Korean state media announces North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's [public reappearance](#) at a ribbon cutting for the Suncheon Phosphatic Fertilizer Factory. US President Donald Trump [tweets](#) the following day that he is glad to see Kim “back, and well!”

May 3, 2020: North Korean troops [fire](#) on a South Korean guardpost along the DMZ near Cheorwon.

May 4, 2020: Deputy National Security Advisor Matt Pottinger [delivers](#) a speech at the University of Virginia entitled “Reflections on China’s May Fourth Movement: an American Perspective.”

May 5, 2020: [Scuffle](#) between Chinese and Indian troops at border on Pangong Tso. Incident is downplayed and resolved.

May 6, 2020: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo publicly [calls](#) for Taiwan’s participation in the upcoming World Health Assembly as an observer.

May 8, 2020: Two of four China Coast Guard vessels in waters around the contested Senkaku Islands [approached](#) and chased a Japanese fishing boat, resulting in an immediate protest to the Chinese embassy in Tokyo.

May 10, 2020: Indian and Chinese security forces [scuffle](#) along the disputed border at the Naku La pass.

May 12, 2020: A Chinese survey ship and two coast guard vessels in the SCS leave the disputed waters after an oil exploration vessel contracted by Malaysian state energy company Petronas left the disputed waters earlier the same day.

May 14, 2020: A Chinese state-owned company [raised concerns](#) by looking to buy the largest mobile phone carrier in the Pacific islands Digicel, opening a new front in the fight for influence in the Pacific between China and democratic states.

May 10, 2020: Myanmar military [declares](#) a three-month nationwide ceasefire, excluding areas where terrorist groups take positions.

May 15, 2020: The Chinese embassy in Kiribati [re-opens](#).

May 18, 2020: Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu announces Taiwan will not pursue its effort to participate in the World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization.

May 18, 2020: President Trump [threatens](#) to permanently cut off WHO funding and revoke US membership if the group does not curb its purported pro-China bias.

May 15–20, 2020: The 30th round of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership negotiations [are held](#) as a virtual conference.

May 20, 2020: President Tsai Ing-wen is inaugurated for second term as president of the Republic of China.

May 22, 2020: China [proposes](#) new national security legislation for Hong Kong that many fear will essentially end the “one country two systems” arrangement

May 24, 2020: Policy makers and politicians from 23 countries [condemn](#) China for proposing new set of security laws for Hong Kong

May 24, 2020: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [calls](#) for more cooperation with the US to manage the global impact of the coronavirus and limit the global economic fallout.

May 24–25, 2020: US littoral combat ship *USS Gabrielle Giffords* and Singaporean frigate *RSS Steadfast* conduct [bilateral exercises](#) on the South China Sea to enhance interoperability between the two navies.

May 27, 2020: Nepal [shelves](#) plans to redraw its national map to include areas claimed by India.

May 27, 2020: Trump [offers](#) to mediate China-India border dispute as tensions rise.

May 28, 2020: Senators Jim Inhofe and Jack Reed, in a joint *War on the Rocks* commentary, [propose](#) the establishment of a Pacific Deterrence Initiative.

May 28, 2020: China's National People's Conference [officially passes](#) security bill which critics fear will undermine civil liberties in Hong Kong

May 29, 2020: Trump [announces](#) at a press conference that his administration "will take action to revoke Hong Kong's preferential treatment as a separate customs and travel territory from the rest of China."

May 29, 2020: China [sends](#) 5,000 troops to its Indian border in show of strength amidst growing tensions. Both sides claim the other transgressed their boundaries.

May 30, 2020: Following China's imposition of new national security laws on Hong Kong, the US [announces](#) it will eliminate policy exemptions on the enclave because it is "no longer sufficiently autonomous."

June 1, 2020: Philippines advises the US that it has [frozen the process](#) to cancel the bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement for a period of six months. Unless action is taken otherwise, the Philippines intends to abrogate the agreement at the end of the year.

June 3, 2020: Boris Johnson [pledges](#) to give nearly 3 million Hong Kong citizens the right to live and work in the UK if China enacts new security legislation for the territory.

June 4, 2020: Korea and US [reach](#) a new cost-sharing agreement for funding local employees at US bases in the country

June 4, 2020: India and Australia [sign](#) maritime peace operation agreement.

June 6, 2020: China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism [issues](#) travel warning urging Chinese citizens not to travel to Australia due to a rise in racial discrimination and violence against Chinese and Asian people there.

June 9, 2020: North Korea [announced](#) it will cut off all means of communication with South Korea in response to the South failing to stop activists floating anti Pyongyang leaflets across the border into the North.

July 10, 2020: Singapore holds 13th [general elections](#), which are won by the People's Action Party, albeit by a narrower margin than usual.

June 12, 2020: China [annexes](#) 60 square km of land claimed by India in Ladakh.

July 13, 2020: US State Department issues a [lengthy statement](#) on the US position on maritime claims in the South China Sea, sharply calling out Beijing for its claims and "bullying" there.

June 14, 2020: China [closes](#) areas of Beijing in response to fears of COVID 19 resurgence.

June 15, 2020: Rappler founder Maria Ressa [is convicted](#) of cyber libel in the Philippines. The verdict is seen as a blow to press freedom.

June 15-16, 2020: 20 Indian soldiers [are killed](#) in border clash with Chinese troops in the Galwan valley.

June 16, 2020: North Korea [detonates](#) the inter Korean Liaison office. Sources inside the regime say it is part of an effort by Leader Kim Jong Un's sister to boost her revolutionary credentials

June 16, 2020: Beijing experiences a [second mutated strain](#) of COVID-19.

June 18, 2020: Secretary of State Pompeo [meets](#) senior Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi in Honolulu.

June 18, 2020 Taiwan [announces](#) it will set up office to help those thinking of leaving Hong Kong.

June 19, 2020: Pompeo [delivers](#) a speech at the Virtual Copenhagen Democracy Summit entitled "Europe and the China Challenge."

June 19, 2020: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison [calls attention to](#) ongoing series of hacking cases by a sophisticated foreign state actor. Australian government agencies believe China is behind the attacks.

June 22, 2020: Chinese Air Force jets [briefly enter](#) Taiwan's air defense identification zone and are warned to leave via radio and patrolling Taiwanese fighters.

June 22, 2020: Department of State [designates](#) Chinese media entities, including China Central Television, China News Service, *People's Daily*, and *Global Times*, as foreign missions.

June 22, 2020: Kiribati [re-elects](#) its pro-China president, who defeats a challenger who pledged to recognize Taiwan.

June 23, 2020: China [occupies](#) Rui village in Nepal.

June 23, 2020: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong [announces](#) election for July 10th.

June 24, 2020: National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien [delivers](#) a speech on China in Phoenix, Arizona entitled "The Chinese Communist Party's Ideology and Global Ambitions."

June 25, 2020: US Senate unanimously [passes](#) Hong Kong Autonomy Act to punish China for impositions on democracy in Hong Kong. The act will [sanction](#) businesses and individuals that impose on Hong Kong's democratic freedoms.

June 25, 2020: Australian intelligence services [raid](#) home of an elected Labor Party member Shaoquett Moselmane following allegations of foreign interference from China.

June 26, 2020: Department of State [imposes](#) visa restrictions on Chinese Communist Party officials for undermining Hong Kong's autonomy and restricting human rights.

June 30, 2020: India [bans](#) dozens of Chinese apps, including TikTok and WeChat, citing cybersecurity concerns.

June 30, 2020: Chinese government [asks](#) US media outlets to submit information about their Chinese operations. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian named the Associated Press, National Public Radio, CBS and United Press International news agency as companies asked to submit information within seven days.

July 2, 2020: Vietnam and the Philippines [criticize](#) Chinese military drills in disputed area of the South China Sea, near the Paracel Islands.

July 2, 2020: Hanoi sends a diplomatic note to Beijing [protesting](#) Chinese naval drills off the Paracel Islands, which China has held since 1974 but which Vietnam also claims.

July 3: Japan's passes revised state secrets law that [allows](#) exchanges with partners such as India, Australia, and the UK as well as existing exchange with the US, making it easier to share data on Chinese movements. It also allows Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defense and supply fuel and ammunition to other militaries in situations that pose a threat to Japan.

July 3, 2020: Beijing [appoints](#) Zhen Yanxiong as director of new national security office in Hong Kong.

July 5, 2020: Koike Yuriko [wins](#) second term as governor of Tokyo.

July 7, 2020: FBI Director Christopher Wray [delivers](#) speech at the Hudson Institute entitled "The Threat Posed by the Chinese Government and the Chinese Communist Party to the Economic and National Security of the United States."

July 7, 2020: Australia [upgrades](#) travel warning for China. Canberra claims its citizens entering China may be at risk of arbitrary detention.

July 7, 2020: Seoul Central District Court [rules](#) that Kim Jong Un must pay more than \$35,000 in damages to two former prisoners of war detained in North Korea.

July 9, 2020: Australia [suspends](#) extradition arrangement with Hong Kong following China's passage of new national security law.

July 9, 2020: Trump administration [imposes](#) visa and asset sanctions on several Chinese officials for their role in human rights violations of Uighurs in Xinjiang.

July 9, 2020: State Department [authorizes](#) the repair and recertification of Patriot missiles (PAC-3) to Taiwan for an estimated cost of \$620 million.

July 10, 2020: People's Action Party [retain power](#) in Singapore election.

July 10, 2020: WHO [sends](#) advance team to China to organize investigation into origins of COVID 19.

July 11, 2020: State Department [warns](#) Americans of heightened detention risks in China, including detention and a ban from exiting the country.

July 13, 2020: Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin [wins](#) a motion to remove the speaker of Parliament and replace the Speaker with his own candidate.

July 13, 2020: Pompeo [announces](#) formal rejection of “most” of China’s maritime claims in the South China Sea.

July 13, 2020: China’s Foreign Ministry [announces](#) retaliatory sanctions against US officials, including Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), over Xinjiang sanctions.

July 14, 2020: China [books](#) biggest single-day US corn purchase as it tries to meet trade deal commitments.

July 14, 2020: Trump [signs](#) into law the “Hong Kong Autonomy Act” and an [Executive Order](#) on “Hong Kong Normalization,” eliminating Hong Kong’s special status.

July 15, 2020: Russia [tests](#) anti-satellite weapon, launching a projectile from an orbiting satellite.

July 15, 2020: Department of State [imposes](#) visa restrictions on certain employees of Chinese technology companies that provide material support to regimes engaging in human rights abuses globally.

July 20, 2020: China [launches](#) Shiyan-6 marine research vessel to boost exploration activities, including in the South China Sea.

July 21, 2020: Britain [suspends](#) extradition treaty with Hong Kong. The UK also [places](#) an arms embargo on the territory, banning exports on riot gear which could be used to suppress protests.

July 21, 2020: US Justice Department [announces](#) charges against two suspected Chinese hackers. The 11-count indictment accuses Li Xiaoyu and Dong Jiazhi of a hacking campaign that targeted companies and NGOs and stole intellectual property and trade secrets.

July 21-22, 2020: US [conducts](#) simultaneous Quad-related naval exercises in the Indian Ocean and Philippine Sea.

July 22, 2020: US [orders](#) China to shut down its Houston consulate.

July 23, 2020: Australia [declares](#) that China’s claims in the South China Sea have no legal basis under international law.

July 23, 2020: Pompeo [delivers](#) a speech at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum entitled “Communist China and the Free Worlds’ Future.”

July 24, 2020: China [orders](#) US to shut down its Chengdu consulate in response to the closure of its Houston consulate.

July 24, 2020: Pompeo [tells](#) US-India Business Council’s India Ideas Summit that the “Quad is revived.”

July 27, 2020: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte [asks](#) Chinese Chairman Xi Jinping for help getting access to a coronavirus vaccine and credit to purchase the vaccine.

July 28, 2020: European Union [imposes](#) sanctions on China over its treatment of Hong Kong.

July 30, 2020: Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation [holds](#) subcommittee hearing on “[The China Challenge: Realignment of US Economic Policies to Build Resiliency and Competitiveness.](#)”

July 30, 2020: Former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui dies. He is mourned as a hero of Taiwan’s democracy.

July 31, 2020: President Trump [announces](#) he will ban Chinese App TikTok in the US.

July 31, 2020: China [rejects](#) charges that hackers linked to its government targeted biotech firm Moderna Inc.

July 31, 2020: Treasury Department [blacklists](#) Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), along with former XPCC party secretary Sun Jinlong, and XPCC deputy party secretary and commander Peng Jiarui over accusations they are connected to human rights abuses against Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Aug. 2, 2020: Thailand army [suspends](#) plans for joint training abroad with the US military after nine Thai soldiers test positive for coronavirus after returning from *Lightning Forge 2020* training in Hawaii.

Aug. 4, 2020: Australian PM Morrison [attends](#) Aspen Security Forum and says that building an Indo-Pacific alliance is a critical priority for his government.

Aug. 5, 2020: Pompeo [announces](#) the expansion of the Clean Network program aimed at removing Chinese technology companies from US telecommunications networks and app stores.

Aug. 6, 2020: Vietnam lodges protests against China's recent military drills near the Parcel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

Aug. 6, 2020: Secretary of Defense Mark Esper [calls](#) Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and expresses concerns about Beijing's destabilizing activity near Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Aug. 7, 2020: US [imposes](#) sanctions on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, the current and former police chiefs, and eight top officials for curtailing political freedoms in the territory.

Aug. 10, 2020: China [imposes](#) sanctions on 11 US citizens, including six Republican lawmakers and other individuals at nonprofit and rights groups who Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian says "behaved egregiously on Hong Kong-related issues."

Aug. 10, 2020: Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai [is arrested](#) under new national security law.

Aug. 10, 2020: US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar [meets](#) Taiwan President Tsai in Taipei.

Aug. 10, 2020: Russian President Vladimir Putin [announces](#) that Russia is the first country to grant regulatory approval to a COVID-19 vaccine.

Aug. 12, 2020: Pompeo [calls](#) on European countries to rally against the Chinese Communist Party. Pompeo gives speech at the Czech Senate and says, "What's happening now isn't Cold War 2.0," adding "The challenge of resisting the CCP threat is in some ways much more difficult."

Aug. 12, 2020: Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu [says](#) that arrests of Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Agnes Chow and media tycoon Jimmy Lai raise questions about freedom of speech and the press in Hong Kong.

Aug. 13, 2020: India [announces](#) a \$500 million package to fund a project in the Maldives. Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar says the plan will link Male to the islands of Villingili, Gulhifahu, and Thilagushi in the largest civilian infrastructure project in the Maldives.

Aug. 13, 2020: Japanese FM Motegi [meets](#) Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan in Singapore and they agree to ease travel restrictions implemented in response to COVID 19.

Aug. 15, 2020: Photo of Chinese ambassador to Kiribati [walking](#) across the backs of local children goes viral, setting off controversy. Many i-Kiribati [defend](#) the practice as a local custom rather than a symbol of Chinese dominance, though other diplomats, including from Australia, say they have never participated in such a custom.

Aug. 15: Four Cabinet ministers [visit](#) the Yasukuni Shrine on the anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II, the first such Cabinet-level visit since 2016 when two ministers attended.

Aug. 16, 2020: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [speaks](#) with Pompeo about Russia's proposed video summit at the United Nations to discuss Iran.

Aug. 16, 2020: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern [postpones](#) general elections to October 17 as Auckland remains in lockdown due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Aug. 17-30, 2020: 27th iteration of the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) [exercises is held](#), with 10 of 25 invited nations participating. The Philippines and Singapore are the only Southeast Asian participants, which are at-sea-only because of the pandemic. The US Navy and partner nations wrap up RIMPAC 2020 with the sinking of a decommissioned amphibious cargo vessel.

Aug. 19, 2020: State Department [notifies](#) Hong Kong that Washington has suspended or terminated three bilateral agreements following China's imposition of a national security law.

Aug. 21, 2020: Philippines [lodges](#) a diplomatic protest over China's illegal confiscation of fish aggregating devices from Filipino fisherman at the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea.

Aug. 24, 2020: Japanese FM Motegi [meets](#) Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw and they agree to reopen borders for long-term residents.

Aug. 25, 2020: US and Chinese trade negotiators [have](#) phone talks and affirm progress in implementation of their trade deal.

Aug. 24, 2020: China-based video sharing app TikTok [sues](#) US government for banning its service in the US, and demands annulment of the president's executive orders.

Aug. 25, 2020: State Department issues a [statement](#) marking third anniversary of the Tatmadaw's attack on a large group of Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine State, noting that 860,000 Rohingya who fled remain in camps in Bangladesh.

Aug. 26, 2020: US Commerce Department [blacklists](#) 24 Chinese companies and targeted individuals over their "role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarize the internationally condemned artificial islands in the South China Sea."

Aug. 27, 2020: Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [announces](#) he will resign because of chronic health problems.

August 27, 2020: Esper [delivers](#) speech at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies on countering China's "malign strategy."

Aug. 28, 2020: Esper [visits](#) Palau and meets President Tommy Remengesau.

Aug. 28, 2020: Taiwan President Tsai [announces](#) that she would ease restrictions on imports of beef and pork from the US.

Aug. 29, 2020 Esper [meets](#) Japanese Defense Minister Kono Taro in Guam. They [agree](#) to keep China's maritime assertiveness in check in the South China Seas.

Aug. 31, 2020: Thailand announces it will negotiate with China to [delay](#) its \$724 million purchase of two submarines.

Aug 31, 2020: Deputy Secretary of State Steve Beigun, speaking at an online forum along the sidelines of the annual US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, [says](#) the US plans to "formalize" its growing strategic ties with its Quad partners.

Chronology prepared by Pacific Forum Program Manager Taryn Ino and Research Intern Conrad Maclean.