



COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL
RELATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

MULTILATERALISM (STILL) MATTERS IN/TO ASIA

RALPH A. COSSA, PACIFIC FORUM

BRAD GLOSSERMAN, TAMA UNIVERSITY CRS/PACIFIC FORUM

The last trimester of the year saw its usual flurry of (albeit virtual) multilateral summitry, with most coming after the US election. While outgoing US President Donald Trump did “attend” the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders Meeting (for the first time since 2017), he was, as usual, a no-show at the ASEAN-chaired gatherings, with the US being represented at the US-ASEAN Summit and at the more important (at least to the other participants) East Asia Summit, for the second straight year, by National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo did attend, in person, the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tokyo in October, with the four navies meeting later in the year for their first four-way exercise in India. Pompeo also attended (virtually) the US-ASEAN Ministerial but left the participation in the broader-based ASEAN Regional Forum to Deputy Secretary of State Steve Biegun.

This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal of Bilateral Relations in the Indo-Pacific*, Vol. 22, No. 3, January 2021. Preferred citation: Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman, “Regional Overview: Multilateralism (Still) Matters in/to Asia,” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp 1-18.

The most significant economic gathering revolved around the signing of the 15-nation (sans the US or India) Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in November, arguably the world's largest economy partnership agreement, and the first multilateral trade arrangement including China. Following President-elect Joe Biden's victory, speculation was rampant in the region regarding the US possibly rejoining the TPP. While Asian states viewed Biden's election as good news as far as US support to multilateralism and a more "traditional" approach to foreign policymaking are concerned, there remained different levels of relief and anticipation, as usual, over the implications of any US regime change. Sound familiar? The key descriptor four years ago was "anxiety."

Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, It's All About Showing Up

Regular consumers of the regional overview can probably skip this section: the message is familiar and readers may have difficulty hearing as we continue to (loudly) beat our drum. In short, in Asia it's all about showing up.

The president's disdain for multilateralism has been a feature of his administration. Some have joked that the only thing worse than Trump not showing up is his potentially disruptive presence when he does; recall his [blasts](#) at Justin Trudeau after the Canadian prime minister hosted the 2018 G7 summit and Trump prevented the group from issuing a joint statement at meeting's end. But his seeming indifference undermined US efforts to show a commitment to a region that officials repeatedly call critical to US national interests. Worse, there is a long [list](#) of initiatives that the US should be trumpeting that were overshadowed by the president's neglect. As outlined below, it is presumed (or at least hoped) that President-elect Biden will be more attentive toward and appreciative of Asian multilateralism.

APEC Gets Down to Business with a Statement and a Vision

Trump did join the APEC summit on Nov. 16, although a week before the meeting his attendance was [uncertain](#). He withdrew from speaking at the CEO summit that took place just before the leaders meeting. The Chinese tabloid *Global Times* [noted](#) that Trump was "the only one of the 21 APEC leaders to appear without a

backdrop logo wall bearing the APEC theme," and continued with the expected applause for Chinese President Xi Jinping's remarks in support of free and open trade and multilateralism. Inexplicably, the White House website only [provides](#) a summary of Trump's remarks and not the speech itself.

The foreign ministers' meeting that preceded the summit produced the first [statement](#) in three years (last year unrest forced Chile, the host, to cancel; the year before, US objections scuttled a declaration). It recognized "the importance of a free, open, fair, nondiscriminatory, transparent and predictable trade and investment environment to drive economic recover at such a challenging time," and promised quick action to bring about a recovery from the economic calamity created by the COVID-19 outbreak.

The leaders [statement](#) hit similar notes. Calling the pandemic "one of the most challenging health and economic crises of our times," the group promised "to work together to use all available policy tools to support an inclusive, effective and sustained response to COVID-19, minimizing its impact on people's livelihoods." Given the uneven national responses to the pandemic—and that includes countries that should be leading regional efforts—that pledge rings hollow. They also proclaimed that they would embrace "the [APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040](#) ... an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040, for the prosperity of all our people and future generations." The leaders tasked senior officials to develop a comprehensive implementation plan by the next meeting, one that rests on three pillars: trade and investment, innovation and digitalization, and strong, balanced, secure, sustainable, and inclusive growth.

ASEAN-led Summits Largely Overshadowed

Usually the ASEAN-led fall summits, bilaterally with each of its dialogue partners, and multilaterally through the East Asia Summit (EAS), steal the headlines; this year, not so much ... other than the [headlines](#) calling attention once again to the absence of President Trump, his vice president, or any member of his Cabinet. After skipping out early from his first EAS meeting (in the Philippines in 2017), Trump sent Vice President Mike Pence to the Singapore Summit in 2018. Last year in Thailand and this

year, held virtually but hosted by Vietnam, the US was represented by National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien. The Nov. 14 meeting itself focused, not surprisingly, on combatting the coronavirus pandemic. More generally, the [Chairman's Statement](#) "reaffirmed that the East Asia Summit is an open, inclusive, transparent and outward-looking forum which strengthen global norms and universally [recognized] values with ASEAN as the driving force working in partnership with the other participating countries of the East Asia Summit."

During the separate ASEAN-US Summit earlier in the day, O'Brien stressed that "(A)t this time of global crisis, the US-ASEAN strategic partnership has become even more important as we work together to combat the coronavirus," further noting that the US "has your back and we know you have ours."

RCEP Ho!



Figure 1 Leaders and trade ministers from the 15 Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership countries pose for a virtual group photo during the signing ceremony hosted by Vietnam on November 15, 2020. Photo: AP

The big headlines came the following day when the other members of the EAS, minus India, Russia, and the US, announced the signing of the RCEP, which offers proof that ambitious plans can produce results. RCEP is the product of eight years of negotiation, and while less than intended—more on that in a minute—it is still the largest trade deal in history: its members account for 2.2 billion people and about 30% of the global economy.

It is often said that China is behind the RCEP—that is wrong. Beijing supported the initiative, but its chief driver has been ASEAN, with help from Japan. Progress was spurred by completion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and its successor the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership

(CPTPP). RCEP was always viewed as a lower standard deal than CPTPP, although in some cases it might be a stepping stone to joining that agreement.

Don't dismiss RCEP. It will profoundly simplify trade within the region by establishing a single set of rules of origin, which will facilitate the movement of goods among members and reduce tariffs in a number of cases. It is the first multilateral trade deal to include China (we're not counting joining the World Trade Organization). It is the first deal that includes Japan, China, and South Korea. With 15 members—the 10 members of ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and Japan, China, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand—it is foundation for economic and political integration, a process that is set to proceed without the United States. The creation of a single Asian market has the potential—over time—to reshape global trade dynamics by promoting production and consumption within Asia as the region gets richer. That would be a big deal.

At the same time, however, RCEP is less than anticipated. India's withdrawal last year—Delhi feared a flood of Chinese imports—deprived RCEP of one-third of its potential population and a big political counterweight to Beijing. Moreover, actual economic benefits are limited. One [forecast](#) reckons RCEP will add \$186 billion to the world economy by 2030—not much compared to global GDP that exceeds \$80 trillion—and 0.2% to the GDP of its members.

CPTPP Beckons

The relative value of those competing trade deals was made plain when some RCEP members began to make noise about joining the CPTPP as soon as the former deal was completed. China [announced](#) its interest, as has [Thailand](#), [South Korea](#), and [Taiwan](#). Members of the incoming Biden administration recognize the importance of joining the group on both the economic and strategic levels, but it is too much of the new government.

In 2018, the UK declared its interest in joining the CPTPP and in September 2020 its chief negotiator, International Trade Secretary Liz Truss, [met](#) for the first time with all her counterparts from the group's 11 member states.

Joining the group makes great sense for London as it struggles with the impact of Brexit and tries to make a diplomatic splash that is in keeping with Prime Minister Boris Johnson's swashbuckling image, evidences a bold new approach to diplomacy and heralds the birth of his Global Britain. Johnson will have the support of Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide who [told](#) APEC business leaders that he envisioned expansion of the trade agreements as steps toward an even more far-reaching deal. "Japan will aspire for the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific through the early conclusion of the RCEP agreement and the steady implementation and expansion of the CPTPP as next year's chair," Suga explained.

Ministerial Meetings Focus on China

Secretary Pompeo was also involved (or not) in several ministerial multilateral security-oriented meetings during the trimester. Pride of place went to the second Quadrilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Tokyo on Oct. 6, which Pompeo attended in person despite cancelling the rest of his Asia trip due to COVID-19 concerns after President Trump was infected with the virus. The growing importance of the Quad was highlighted in our September 2020 [chapter](#). While no joint statement was issued, an [analysis](#) of the individual ministers' statements not surprisingly revealed that China was very much on everyone's minds. While others were more indirect, focusing on key buzzwords like "free and open" and "the rule of law," Pompeo was more explicit, raising concerns (as he has at almost every given opportunity) about China in general and the Chinese Communist Party in particular. The ministerial was followed a month later by Australia's first participation in 13 years in the annual (since 1992) *Malabar* naval exercise off the coast of India along with its other three Quad partners sending [a message to China](#) of the Quad's growing multidimensional nature.

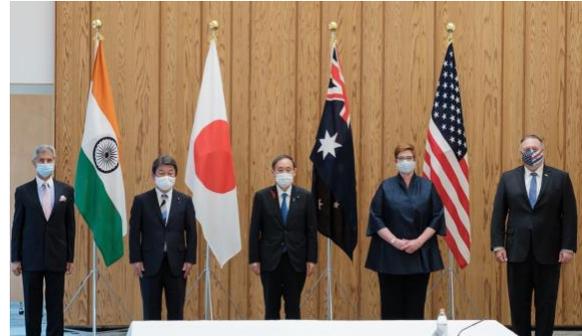


Figure 2 Foreign Ministers from the United States, Australia, Japan, and India meet at the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in Tokyo on October 10, 2020. Photo: AFP/Nicolas Datiche

Pompeo also "attended" the virtual US-ASEAN Ministerial on Sept. 11 hosted by Vietnam. In his prepared [remarks](#) on "The Enduring US Commitment to ASEAN," he "reaffirmed U.S. support for ASEAN's role at the heart of the Indo-Pacific," further noting that the ASEAN Outlook for the Indo-Pacific and the US Indo-Pacific Strategy "share a respect for sovereignty, the rule of law, transparency, openness, and inclusivity." In case this was too subtle, his statement also underscored "our commitment to speak out in the face of the Chinese Communist Party's escalating aggression and threats to sovereign nations' ability to make free choices."

Pompeo passed on the opportunity to attend the next day's broader multilateral ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) ministerial meeting. The US was represented instead by Deputy Secretary of State Steve Biegun, who [underscored](#) "the importance of the international rules-based order in addressing increasing tensions and militarization in the South China Sea, the need for unhindered humanitarian access and the cessation of violence in Rakhine State, concern over the erosion of autonomy and human rights in Hong Kong, and the US support for a path to lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula." He joined all the other ARF participants "in expressing concerns about the coronavirus pandemic's impact and the need for a well-coordinated regional response and an affordable vaccine." The [ARF Chairman's Statement](#) focused on fighting the pandemic, while soft-peddling on the other issues (i.e., expressing "their continued support for Myanmar's commitment to promote safety and security for all communities in Rakhine State as effectively as possible") while avoiding any reference at all to Hong Kong.

Scrambling the COVID Competition

The response to COVID-19 by Indo-Asia-Pacific governments challenged years of theorizing about the merits of political systems in responding to crises. Democracies were supposed to best autocracies when confronting these problems—governments that felt popular pressure would be faster and more efficient in their response because they would be threatened with dismissal.

Reports that the Chinese government covered up the initial outbreak in Wuhan would seem to support the traditional argument. But Beijing recovered and has managed to control the outbreak. With rare exceptions, democracies have not performed as well. However, it looks like governments in this part of the world have done well, regardless of regime type. In the early stages of the outbreak, Hong Kong (a liberal, nondemocratic regime), Singapore (an illiberal dominant-party state), and Taiwan (a liberal democracy) were [assessed](#) as setting the gold standard for a response. Now, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Singapore get applause, as does China.

Three factors contributed to success: learning from the 2003 SARS outbreak; political legitimacy; and state capacity. Democracies were supposed to be especially good at the last two. Reality proved otherwise. Much depends on competence—again, supposedly a feature of democracies—and leadership. A leader's failure to take the virus seriously had to undermine any response. Also important is trust, which inspires a public to follow its government. These days, perhaps counter-intuitively, there is [more trust in China](#)—meaning among Chinese—than elsewhere in the world.

The implications of this are profound (and we aren't talking about the academic careers that might be upended by these developments): Beijing claims that the superiority of its response validates its political system and uses that success as a platform for assertive diplomacy. It argues that human rights can be sacrificed to beat COVID-19. That is wrong, as the record of some of the region's democracies makes plain. Still, former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers has [warned](#) that divergent responses to the crisis—referring to the gross failures in the US and other advanced democracies—“may well be a hinge in history.”

Biden Asia Policy: What to Expect?

Speculation regarding incoming US President Joe Biden's Asia/Indo-Pacific policy and team has already filled volumes. As this issue was going on line, *The Financial Times* [reported](#) that former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Kurt Campbell would be named to a new position of Indo-Pacific coordinator overseeing the various Asia-oriented desks at the National Security Council and that Ely Ratner, a former deputy national security advisor to Biden, would be nominated to serve as assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, the Pentagon's top Asia position.] Given that Biden in all probability will revert to a more traditional staff-supported approach to foreign policy (rather than policy by tweets), who he picks for the key Asia portfolios at State, Defense, and the NSC will help shed more light as the transition takes hold; the only quasi-Asia hand nominated thus far is Wendy Sherman for deputy secretary of state, whose prior diplomatic portfolio included negotiating with the DPRK (along with Iran and others).

The choices of Jake Sullivan (head of policy planning and deputy chief of staff to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and later national security adviser to Biden during Obama's second term), Antony Blinken (who served as both a deputy national security adviser and as deputy secretary of State with long and close personal ties to Biden), and retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin (who last served as head of US Central Command in 2016) to fill the three top foreign policy positions (national security advisor, secretary of state, and secretary of defense, respectively) sends a clear signal of a renewed emphasis on multilateralism and alliance-based diplomacy as previously practiced by the Obama-Biden administration. This does not necessarily portend a less firm approach toward China, however, as many are speculating. As Sullivan has already clearly [signaled](#), we are dealing today with “a much more assertive China abroad and a much more repressive China [at home]” than the one Obama faced. As a result, “(W)e expect to be taking a stronger position on China than has been the case in past Democratic administrations.” The change in approach toward Asia policy in general and toward China in particular is more likely to be a change in style rather than in substance. Recall that *National Security Strategy* statements from both the Obama and Trump administrations

stressed the alliance-based nature of Asia security policy and the need to both cooperate with China when possible and confront/constrain (not contain) when necessary. What's changed over time has been the difference in emphasis between cooperation and confront/constrain, but this has been driven more by Chinese actions than US desires. Not surprisingly, Sullivan also signaled renewed emphasis on climate, global health, cyber, and human rights by the incoming administration.

Reaction to Biden's win in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region has largely been positive, but there has been some concern. There is no regret at the prospect of an end to Trump's seemingly unilateral, mercurial, ad hoc, and transactional approach to foreign policy. Allies, partners, and likely even adversaries are looking forward to a more predictable and process-driven foreign policy. One of the authors produced [six articles](#) outlining expectations of the new administration by US allies in the region. A constant theme was a desire for more consistency and consultation. Equally important, they all stressed continued vigilance toward China's revisionism and blocking Beijing's efforts to extend its influence in the region. Many in the region would welcome a US return to the TPP or even its joining RCEP but it's unlikely that Biden would expend the political capital required to make such a move at least in the near term given other priorities, such as fighting an out-of-control pandemic and rescuing a rapidly deteriorating economy.

At the same time, however, regional governments do not want Biden to force them to take sides in the competition between the two powers, nor to foreclose the economic opportunities that they enjoy from close relations with China. They are wary of a values-based foreign policy that could antagonize other governments in the region that are not as committed to human rights and democracy, and could undermine the broader alliance against a revisionist power. And of course each regional government has its particular concern. The South Korean government does not want the new US administration to adopt a hard line against Pyongyang that would imperil inter-Korean relations. The government in Tokyo continues to harbor instinctive concern about a Democratic administration in Washington, no matter how [unfounded](#) those beliefs are. Individual chapters in this issue of *Comparative Connections* offer more details and we're sure

that the issue will demand attention in issues to come.

REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2020

Sept. 1, 2020: US Department of Defense [releases](#) its annual report on China's military power, assessing that the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s military modernization has eroded Taiwan's potential advantages should a cross-Taiwan Strait conflict occur.

Sept. 1, 2020: Japan, Australia, and India [agree](#) to diversify supply chains away from China, a major trading partner for all three.

Sept. 2, 2020: Chinese and Lao firms [sign](#) a shareholders pact to establish the Electricite du Laos Transmission Company Limited in Vientiane.

Sept. 2, 2020: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [announces](#) that the State Department will require senior PRC diplomats in the US to receive approval to visit university campuses and meet local government officials.

Sept. 3, 2020: Department of State [publishes](#) the website entitled "The Chinese Communist Party's Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang," detailing aspects of alleged violations of human rights in Xinjiang.

Sept. 6, 2020: KMT national convention [reiterates](#) party's cross-Strait narrative: "1992 Consensus based on the ROC Constitution," and says it opposes Taiwan independence and China's "one country, two systems."

Sept. 7, 2020: Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe [meets](#) Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin in Kuala Lumpur and discuss bilateral cooperation.

Sept. 8, 2020: Philippine Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez [meets](#) Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian via video conference to discuss cooperation between Manila and Beijing, including timely completion of projects under the "Build, Build, Build" program.

Sept. 8, 2020: Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi [cautions](#) the United States and China not to entangle Jakarta in their regional struggle for influence.

Sept. 8, 2020: Department of State [revokes](#) more than 1,000 visas of PRC nationals following a May 29 [proclamation](#) by President Trump in response to China's curbs on democracy in Hong Kong.

Sept. 8, 2020: Chinese Defense Minister Wei [meets](#) Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto in Jakarta and they agree to resolve South China Sea issues through dialogue.

Sept. 9, 2020: Brunei Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah [meets](#) Wei in Bandar Seri Begawan.

Sept. 9-12, 2020: Video meetings of foreign ministers on East Asia Cooperation [take place](#).

Sept. 10, 2020: Pompeo [attends](#) a virtual US-ASEAN ministerial meeting and urges counterparts to stand up to Chinese maritime bullying.

Sept. 10, 2020: Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He [participates](#) in the China-EU high-level dialogue in the digital area and stresses digital cooperation with the EU.

Sept. 11, 2020: Wei [meets](#) Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and pledges to donate \$20 million in noncombat equipment to the Philippines.

Sept. 11, 2020: China's foreign ministry [accuses](#) Australian consular officials of "wanton obstruction" and disruption of law enforcement activities of Chinese authorities by sheltering journalists Bill Birthles and Mike Smith in the embassy in Beijing and in the Shanghai consulate.

Sept. 11, 2020: US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun [meets](#) foreign ministers from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to discuss ways to deepen cooperation.

Sept. 11, 2020: China State Construction Engineering Company [publishes](#) its first sustainable development report for Sri Lanka.

Sept. 11, 2020: China [announces](#) new restrictions on US diplomats working in mainland China and Hong Kong in response to similar measures imposed on Chinese diplomats.

Sept. 12, 2020: US lawmakers [question](#) Disney CEO Bob Chapek on connections with security and propaganda authorities of China's Xinjiang region during production of the film *Mulan*.

Sept. 12, 2020: Online meeting of the 27th ASEAN Regional Forum [takes place](#).

Sept. 13, 2020: China [bans](#) imports of horses and other equines from Malaysia following an outbreak of African Horse Sickness.

Sept. 14, 2020: International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi [tells](#) board members that North Korea appears to have continued operating nuclear facilities.

Sept. 14, 2020: Suga Yoshihide [wins](#) the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election, effectively becoming prime minister of Japan.

Sept. 15, 2020: World Trade Organization (WTO) panel [says](#) the US broke global regulations in imposing tariffs on Chinese goods in 2018.

Sept. 15, 2020: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [meets](#) Mongolian Foreign Minister Nyamtseren Enkhtaivan and pledges to advance cooperation.

Sept. 15, 2020: US [blacklists](#) Chinese real-estate development company Union Development Group over its Cambodia development project amid "credible reports" the project could be used to host Chinese military assets.

Sept. 16, 2020: Ma Xiaoguang, spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, [calls](#) Chinese military drills of Taiwan's southwest coast a "necessary action" to protect Chinese sovereignty.

Sept. 17, 2020: US-based venture capital firm Lightspeed Venture Partners [announces](#) establishment of regional headquarters in Singapore, signifying expansion into Southeast Asia.

Sept. 17, 2020: Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh [briefs](#) Rajya Sabha regarding the standoff between the Indian Army and PLA at the Eastern Ladakh border.

Sept. 17, 2020: US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Stilwell [describes](#) China's recent actions as that of a "lawless bully" in prepared testimony for a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing.

Sept. 19, 2020: Japan's former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [visits](#) Yasukuni Shrine a few days after his resignation.

Sept. 19, 2020: US Undersecretary for Economic Affairs Keith Krach [concludes](#) visit to Taiwan after attending a memorial service for late former President Lee Teng-hui.

Sept. 19, 2020: China's Commerce Ministry [announces](#) details about its "unreliable entities list" in response to US WeChat and TikTok bans.

Sept. 20, 2020: New Delhi police [arrest](#) veteran Indian journalist Rajeev Sharma on suspicion of spying for China.

Sept. 21, 2020: California Judge Laurel Beeler temporarily [blocks](#) the Department of Commerce ban of Chinese social media app WeChat.

Sept. 21, 2020: Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen [accuses](#) Beijing of inflaming tensions in East Asia following Chinese warplanes' crossing of the sensitive median line between the cross-strait rivals.

Sept. 22, 2020: South Korean President Moon Jae-In [calls](#) for declaring an end to the Korean War at 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Sept. 22, 2020: Baimadajie Angwang, a New York City police officer, [is charged](#) as an intelligence asset for the Chinese government.

Sept. 22, 2020: Ren Zhiqiang, Chinese property tycoon and outspoken critic of Xi Jinping, [is sentenced](#) to 18 years for alleged corruption.

Sept. 22, 2020: President Trump [lashes](#) out at China for “unleashing” the COVID-19 pandemic in a pre-recorded address to the 75th session of the UN General Assembly. Chinese President Xi [responds](#) with calls for multilateralism and warnings against the “stigmatization” of states.

Sept. 23, 2020: Pompeo [warns](#) state and local US politicians of the dangers posed by Chinese diplomats seeking to manipulate them as part of Beijing’s propaganda and espionage campaign.

Sept. 24, 2020: South Korean officials [condemn](#) North Korea’s [killing](#) of a South Korean Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry official who may have tried to defect to North Korea.

Sept. 25, 2020: Australian Strategic Policy Institute [releases](#) a research report documenting over 380 suspected detention facilities in Xinjiang, China.

Sept. 25, 2020: US State Department [publishes](#) a fact sheet on China’s environmental abuses.

Sept. 25, 2020: Suga has his first [call](#) with Chinese President Xi, agreeing to pursue high-level contacts in the pursuit of regional and international stability.

Sept. 26, 2020: Malaysian Ambassador to China Raja Nushirwan Zainal Abidin [says](#) that Malaysia will not follow the US in imposing sanctions on 24 Chinese companies that the US accuses of advancing Chinese militarization in the South China Sea.

Sept. 27, 2020: US government [imposes](#) sanctions on China’s largest chipmaker, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation, dealing additional damage to the country’s semiconductor industry.

Sept. 27, 2020: US Federal Judge Carl Nichols [blocks](#) the Trump administration’s order to Apple and Google to remove TikTok from their US app stores.

Sept. 28, 2020: China [holds](#) five simultaneous military exercises on different parts of its coast for the second time in two months. Locations [include](#) the Bohai Sea, the East China Sea, the Yellow Sea, and the disputed South China Sea, close to the Paracel Islands.

Sept. 29, 2020: China [describes](#) India’s designation of the fast-militarizing Ladakh region as a union territory “illegal” and objects to Indian infrastructure construction in the area.

Sept. 29, 2020: Thailand’s new army chief Gen. Narongpan Jittkaewtae, [pledges](#) support to the Thai monarchy.

Sept. 30, 2020: H.R.6270 – Uyghur Forced Labor Disclosure Act of 2020 [passes](#) in the US House of Representatives.

Sept. 30, 2020: Bangladesh officials [accuse](#) the Myanmar government of conducting a “disinformation campaign” to hamper Rohingya repatriation in a speech before the UN General Assembly.

Sept. 30, 2020: Vietnamese President Nguyen Phu Trong [suggests](#) to his Chinese counterpart Xi that the two countries “work together” to address concerns, particularly maritime issues.

Oct. 1, 2020: Lawmakers in the US House of Representatives [approve](#) legislation requiring publicly listed companies in the US to disclose commercial links to China’s Xinjiang Autonomous Uygur Region.

Oct. 2, 2020: Trump [announces](#) that he and first lady Melania Trump have tested positive for COVID-19.

Oct. 3, 2020: Cambodia reportedly [destroys](#) a US-built facility at one of its largest naval facilities amid concerns of a secret Phnom Penh-Beijing deal to host PLA soldiers at Ream Naval Base.

Oct. 4, 2020: Interpol [issues](#) a “red notice” for Vorayuth Yoovidhya, Thai heir to Red Bull co-founder Chaleo Yoovidhya’s fortune estimated at \$20.2 billion, for his role in an alleged hit-and-run.

Oct. 4, 2020: President of Singapore Halimah Yacob and Xi [exchange](#) congratulatory messages to mark the 30th anniversary of bilateral relations.

Oct. 5, 2020: Chinese People’s Liberation Army propagandists [are ordered](#) to steer clear of US election coverage and avoid remarks that might cause more disturbance to US-China relations.

Oct. 5, 2020: Indonesia [passes](#) the so-called omnibus law, overhauling several dozen tax and labor market laws as Jakarta looks to boost foreign investment and mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19.

Oct. 6, 2020: Pew poll [shows](#) a rise in unfavorable views of China in 14 countries, including Australia, South Korea, and Japan.

Oct. 6, 2020: Taiwan's deputy defense minister, Chang Guan-chung, [appeals](#) to the United States to help boost the island's defenses at the annual US-Taiwan Defense Industry Conference.

Oct. 6, 2020: Foreign ministers from the Quad—the US, Japan, India, and Australia—[gather](#) in Tokyo to discuss the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” initiative. **Oct. 7, 2020:** Pompeo [criticizes](#) Chinese military maneuvers in the Pacific, reiterating US assurances to help Taiwan defend itself.

Oct. 7, 2020: US [lifts](#) the 20-year ban on Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto, a move analysts claim is aimed at balancing China's power in Southeast Asia.

Oct. 7, 2020: Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu and his Australian counterpart Marise Payne [meet](#) to discuss the Australian-Japanese strategic partnership and cooperation.

Oct. 8, 2020: Police in Indonesia [arrest](#) hundreds of protesters across the country as thousands rally against the omnibus labor law.

Oct. 8, 2020: Japanese fishing industry representatives [urge](#) the government not to allow the release of tons of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea.

Oct. 9, 2020: China [joins](#) 156 countries in WHO-led Covax initiative for fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Oct. 9, 2020: US government [appeals](#) court ruling that suspended government ban of video-sharing app TikTok.

Oct. 10, 2020: India's Foreign Secretary Harsh V Shringla and the country's army chief [make](#) a joint visit to Naypyidaw, fueling talk that Myanmar is stepping up efforts to balance Chinese influence.

Oct. 10, 2020: Kim Jong Un [unveils](#) North Korea's largest ICBM at military parade. Kim [tears](#) up as he delivers an apology to North Korean citizens for his failure to raise living standards

Oct. 11, 2020: Japan's Coast Guard [claims](#) that two Chinese vessels entered what Japan considers its territorial waters near disputed islands in the East China Sea.

Oct. 12, 2020: China's PLA [holds](#) a large-scale island invasion drill during Taiwan's “Double Ten” holiday.

Oct. 12, 2020: China [signs](#) a free-trade deal with Cambodia and pledges \$140 million for national “top priority projects.”

Oct. 13, 2020: Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein [meets](#) with his Chinese counterpart Wang during the second leg of Wang's five-nation regional tour. During their meetings Wang [slams](#) the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

Oct. 14, 2020: US State Department Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs [releases](#) its list of Hong Kong, Macau, and PRC officials it says have contributed to undermining of autonomy in Hong Kong.

Oct. 14, 2020: As part of China's regional charm offensive, Wang [visits](#) Thailand, casting Beijing as Bangkok's “big friend.”

Oct. 15, 2020: UN [condemns](#) North Korea's unlawful killing of ROK official in waters.

Oct. 15, 2020: Thailand's government [declares](#) a state of emergency in Bangkok following anti-government protests by around 10,00 people in Bangkok.

Oct. 15, 2020: China [calls](#) on Taiwanese spies to switch sides after claiming to have uncovered hundreds of cases of spying by Taipei on the Chinese mainland.

Oct. 16, 2020: Cotton Australia and the Australian Cotton Shippers Association [confirm](#) reports of a verbal directive for Chinese mills to stop using Australian cotton. This adds cotton to a growing list of targeted Australian exports, including coal, barley, wine, and beef.

Oct. 16, 2020: China's ambassador to Canada [blasts](#) Ottawa for granting refugee status to Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters, calling it "interference" encouraging "violent criminals."

Oct. 17, 2020: Wang [tells](#) ASEAN that the "Quad" aims to "stir up confrontation among different groups ... to maintain the dominance and hegemonic system of the US."

Oct. 17, 2020: Philippines [announces](#) that oil and gas exploration will resume in the South China Sea, signaling an end to a six-year moratorium on resource exploration in the disputed waters.

Oct. 17, 2020: Chinese government [warns](#) Washington that it may detain Americans in China in response to the prosecution of Chinese military-affiliated scholars.

Oct. 19, 2020: Chinese Ambassador to Japan Kong Xuanyou [urges](#) Tokyo to use its unique position as US ally and major Chinese neighbor to help stabilize Washington-Beijing relations.

Oct. 19, 2020: Suga and Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc [meet](#) in Hanoi and agree to cooperate on regional issues, including the disputed South China.

Oct. 20, 2020: Australia [agrees](#) to take part in large-scale *Malabar* naval exercise with other members of the Quad in the Bay of Bengal.

Oct. 20, 2020: Indonesian DM Prabowo and US Defense Secretary Mark Esper [agree](#) to boost defense and security cooperation.

Oct. 21, 2020: Thai royalists and anti-government protesters [confront](#) each other over demands for reform to the monarch and departure of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

Oct. 21, 2020: Indian authorities [hand back](#) a Chinese soldier who was apprehended in the Demchok area of Ladakh after crossing a contested border in the Himalayan region.

Oct. 22, 2020: Protesters in Bangkok [reject](#) PM Prayut Chan-o-cha's olive branch and submit a letter calling on him to resign within three days.

Oct. 22, 2020: China [issues](#) a draft version of its national defense law, detailing enhanced security in cyberspace and improved communication between the government and military.

Oct. 22, 2020: Beijing's [describes](#) US labelling of six Chinese media outlets as "substantially or effectively controlled" by Beijing as "political oppression" and threatened to retaliate.

Oct 23, 2020: Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden [says](#) he could meet Kim Jong Un if North Korea reduces the country's nuclear capabilities.

Oct. 23, 2020: Justice Department official John Demers [accuses](#) China of helping North Korea launder money from massive cyber thefts carried out to raise capital in the face of international sanctions.

Oct. 23, 2020: In a speech marking the anniversary of the Korean War, Xi [warns](#) that China is not afraid of war and will not allow its sovereignty, security, and development interests to be undermined.

Oct. 25, 2020: Beijing cautiously [welcomes](#) Vladimir Putin's suggestion that a military alliance between China and Russia is possible.

Oct. 25, 2020: Suga [pledges](#) Japan will become carbon neutral by 2050 in his first policy speech to a new session of the Diet.

Oct. 26, 2020: State Department [approves](#) sale of 100 Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems (HCDS) to Taiwan in a package worth \$2.37 billion.

Oct. 26, 2020: Media reports [claim](#) the United States and India are preparing to sign an agreement to share satellite intelligence, as the two sides seek to increase security cooperation.

Oct. 26, 2020: US lodges an [appeal](#) against the WTO ruling that some of its tariffs on China are unlawful.

Oct. 27, 2020: In a trip to New Delhi with Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Pompeo [vows](#) to work closely with India to counter an increasingly aggressive China.

Oct. 27, 2020: Spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry [announces](#) Beijing's intention to impose sanctions on US firms Boeing Defense, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon Technologies, as well as "anyone who played a bad role" in Washington's \$1.8 billion Taiwan arms deal.

Oct. 27, 2020: Three prodemocracy activists [are arrested](#) by the Hong Kong Police Force after briefly entering the US consulate in the city in an apparent bid to seek asylum.

Oct. 28, 2020: Pompeo [calls](#) China's communist government a "predator" during a meeting with Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in Colombo.

Oct. 28, 2020: US Department of Defense [hosts](#) a crisis communications working group with the PLA to discuss concepts of crisis communications, crisis prevention, and crisis management.

Oct. 28, 2020: South Korean President Moon Jae-in [pledges](#) to make his country carbon-neutral by 2050 during a budget speech.

Oct. 29, 2020: US authorities [charge](#) eight people with conducting an illegal operation intended to target, intimidate, and kidnap individuals perceived by Beijing to be dissident threats.

Oct. 29, 2020: Pompeo [issues](#) a statement condemning the arrest and detention of three student activists in Hong Kong under the National Security Law.

Oct. 29, 2020: Pompeo [adds](#) a two-day visit to Hanoi to his Asian tour designed to promote US foreign policy. Earlier destinations included India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Indonesia.

Oct. 30, 2020: Australia [criticizes](#) China's anti-dumping duties on its barley exports in a statement at the WTO.

Oct. 30, 2020: Chinese and US defense officials [comprising](#) the Crisis Communications Working Group meet to discuss crisis prevention amid rumors that the Trump administration plans to attack Chinese-claimed islands in the South China Sea.

Oct. 31, 2020: Pompeo [concludes](#) a visit to Asia in Vietnam, a tour marked by repeated calls for assistance to the US in confronting security threats posed by China.

Nov. 1, 2020: Telecoms giant Huawei [works](#) on plans for a dedicated chip plant in Shanghai, which would enable it to secure essential supplies for its telecom infrastructure business despite US sanctions.

Nov. 2, 2020: Former Chinese Commerce Minister Chen Deming [says](#) China should "carefully consider" whether Beijing should join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Nov. 2, 2020: Pompeo [condemns](#) Hong Kong authorities for "clear abuse of law enforcement" in arresting eight opposition ministers.

Nov. 3, 2020: State Department [approves](#) a \$600 million sale of four Weapons-Ready MQ-9B Remotely Piloted Aircraft to Taiwan.

Nov. 3, 2020: Indonesian President Joko Widodo [endorses](#) controversial omnibus law, which has sparked protests from those who say it erodes labor rights and weakens environmental protections.

Nov. 3, 2020: Indian, Japanese, Australia, and the US [begin](#) joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean as part of the Malabar exercise.

Nov. 3, 2020: US [approves](#) sale of four sophisticated drones to Taiwan, in the final component of a weapons package to Taipei worth almost \$4.8 billion.

Nov. 4, 2020: China [suspends](#) the \$37 billion listing of Ant Group, which was set to become the world's largest IPO, two days before trading was due to start.

Nov. 5, 2020: Duong Di Sanh, deputy chairman of the Museum of Chinese Australian History, [becomes](#) the first person charged under a new foreign interference law by Australian Federal Police.

Nov. 5, 2020: US [removes](#) the designation of the Uyghur-founded group the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as a terrorist organization.

Nov. 6, 2020: German defense chief Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer [labels](#) China a “systemic challenge” and calls for greater military cooperation with “like-minded” countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Nov. 6, 2020: China drafts a coast guard law [authorizing](#) maritime law enforcers to demolish foreign constructions on Chinese-claimed reefs and use weapons against foreign ships.

Nov. 7, 2020: BHP Group [signs](#) a memorandum of understanding focused on decarbonizing steelmaking with Baowu, China’s biggest steelmaker.

Nov. 7, 2020: Indian Chief of Defense Staff Bipin Rawat [warns](#) that tense border standoff with Chinese forces in the western Himalayas could spark a larger conflict.

Nov. 8, 2020: Moon [congratulates](#) Joe Biden on his election victory, as does [Suga](#).

Nov. 8, 2020: China’s PLA [releases](#) a video on Weibo showing armed personnel carriers driving through the streets of Hong Kong before conducting a live-fire exercise.

Nov. 9, 2020: US [imposes](#) sanctions on four additional PRC and Hong Kong officials over the Hong Kong national security law.

Nov. 9, 2020: Japan [welcomes](#) the visit of ROK intelligence chief Park Jie-won as an opportunity to thaw frosty relations between Tokyo and Seoul.

Nov. 10, 2020: Center for Strategic and International Studies [publishes](#) pictures allegedly showing the destruction of a US-built facility at Cambodia’s Ream Naval Base.

Nov. 10, 2020: Hong Kong pro-democracy legislators [resign](#) en masse amid reports of Beijing planning to disqualify four opposition lawmakers accused of potential unlawful filibustering in the legislature.

Nov. 11, 2020: Pompeo [announces](#) that Undersecretary of State Keith Krach will lead economic talks with Taiwan this month.

Nov. 12, 2020: Trump [signs](#) an executive order prohibiting Americans from investing in Chinese firms the administration says are owned or controlled by the Chinese military.

Nov. 12, 2020: Biden [declares](#) that Article 5 of US-Japan security treaty applies to Japan’s administration of the disputed Senkaku Islands.

Nov. 12, 2020: North Korea [labels](#) the IAEA a “marionette dancing to the tune of the tune of hostile forces.”

Nov. 13, 2020: Taiwan representative to the US Bi-Khim Hsiao [speaks](#) with Biden foreign policy advisor Tony Blinken by phone to congratulate Biden on his election victory.

Nov. 13, 2020: China’s MFA spokesman [congratulates](#) Biden on his election as president after staying silent for 10 days following the election on Nov. 3.

Nov. 13, 2020: Christopher Langman, Australian deputy foreign affairs and trade secretary, [expresses](#) confidence that “technical” issues disrupting trade between Beijing and Canberra will be resolved as soon as possible.

Nov. 13, 2020: China’s Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong [describes](#) the ousting of four pro-democracy lawmakers from Hong Kong’s legislature as the “right medicine” and tells foreign governments that the issue is none of their business.

Nov. 13, 2020: Trump administration [extends](#) deadline for ByteDance to restructure ownership of its video app TikTok in the US, giving the Chinese company time to resolve national security concerns raised by Washington.

Nov. 14, 2020: Defense chiefs of Japan and the US [confirm](#) that the Senkaku Islands fall under the scope of a security treaty between Tokyo and Washington.

Nov. 15, 2020: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the [world’s](#) biggest free trade pact, is signed by 15 Asia-Pacific nations.

Nov. 15, 2020: Research paper in the *Chinese Journal of Aeronautics* [reveals](#) US software is being used in Chinese military research, despite US ban and efforts to restrict Beijing’s access to these tools.

Nov. 16, 2020: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison [arrives](#) in Tokyo to meet counterpart Suga.

Nov. 17, 2020: China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian [states](#) that China bears "no responsibility" for the collapse of bilateral trade with Canberra as a result of a rising number of restrictions on Australian exports to China.

Nov. 18, 2020: US [sends](#) two long-range bombers into China's air defense identification zone.

Nov. 18, 2020: Governments of the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK [release](#) a joint statement expressing "serious concern regarding China's imposition of new rules to disqualify elected legislators in Hong Kong."

Nov. 18, 2020: At least 10,000 Thai democracy activists [surround](#) police headquarters in Bangkok during one of the largest demonstrations since protests began almost five months ago.

Nov. 18, 2020: Australia and Japan [agree](#) "in principle" to a Reciprocal Access Agreement, which provides the legal framework for Australian forces in Japan, and vice versa.

Nov. 18, 2020: China's foreign ministry [expresses](#) unease at the joint defense pact signed by Japan and Australia, noting that their military cooperation should not threaten third-party interests.

Nov. 19, 2020: China [criticizes](#) a statement by the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance urging Beijing to reverse the disqualification of pro-democracy lawmakers from Hong Kong's Legislative Council.

Nov. 19, 2020: Morrison [responds](#) to Beijing's list of 14 grievances, accusing Canberra of "poisoning bilateral relations," by stating he would not compromise Australia's national security and sovereignty.

Nov. 20, 2020: Suga [states](#) Tokyo's intention to expand the CPTPP to include China and Britain.

Nov. 21, 2020: Xi [tells](#) an online APEC summit that China will consider joining the CPTPP.

Nov. 21, 2020: US and Taiwan [sign](#) a memorandum of understanding during inaugural US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue, laying a foundation for stronger economic ties.

Nov. 21, 2020: USS *Barry* [transits](#) Taiwan Strait in a Freedom of Navigation Operation.

Nov. 22, 2020: Controversial 43 billion renminbi (about \$6.6 billion) port project to be built off the coast of Melaka, Malaysia, slated to be the largest in the region, [is scrapped](#) by the state government.

Nov. 23, 2020: In letter read at the opening ceremony of the 7th World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, Xi [says](#) China ready to work with other countries to build a shared cyberspace community and "create an even better future for mankind."

Nov. 23, 2020: Wang [tells](#) French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian that Beijing supports Europe's push for "strategic autonomy" amid calls for the EU to work with the new Biden administration to counter China.

Nov. 24, 2020: China [launches](#) Chang'e 5 space mission, an unmanned expedition aiming to probe, drill, and retrieve minerals from an unexplored volcanic mound on the moon.

Nov. 24, 2020: Taiwan [commences](#) construction of first domestically developed submarine, armed with a US combat system.

Nov. 25, 2020: Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam [vows](#) to deepen ties with Beijing at an annual policy address, pledging to rescue the city from "chaos."

Nov. 25, 2020: Xi [congratulates](#) Biden on his election as president of the United States 12 days after China's initial congratulations.

Nov. 25, 2020: India's Electronics and Information Technology ministry [announces](#) a ban on an additional 43 Chinese apps, including AliExpress, bringing the total of blacklisted apps to over 200.

Nov. 26, 2020: Wang [meets](#) senior government officials in South Korea, stressing the importance of bilateral relations amid growing concern that Seoul is being squeezed between China and the United States.

Nov. 27, 2020: Beijing [announces](#) anti-dumping duties on Australian wine imports in the latest wave of sanctions that have already targeted barley, beef, seafood, and coal.

Nov. 27, 2020: Taiwan Finance Minister Su Jain-rong [promotes](#) informal alliance with the US to finance infrastructure and energy projects in Asia and Latin America with capital from the private sector.

Nov. 28, 2020: In TV interview, Hong Kong's chief executive [says](#) she has no bank account after the US imposed sanctions on her, along with 14 other senior security officials, in response to Hong Kong's national security law.

Nov. 29, 2020: China [powers](#) up its first domestically developed nuclear reactor, the Hualong One, which is expected to go into commercial use by the end of the year.

Nov. 29, 2020: Taiwan [commences](#) construction of first indigenous submarine its fleet, when complete, will consist of eight vessels.

Nov. 30, 2020: Canberra [accuses](#) Beijing of sharing a "deeply offensive" fake image on Twitter of an Australian soldier murdering an Afghan child amid escalating diplomatic tensions.

Nov. 30, 2020: Chinese Defense Minister Wei [pledges](#) military support for Nepal during talks in Kathmandu amid Chinese defense disputes with India in the contested Himalayas region.

Nov. 30, 2020: China [announces](#) sanctions against National Democratic Institute (NDI) and National Endowment for Democracy (NED) personnel in a tit-for-tat measure against US sanctions on Chinese and Hong Kong officials.

Dec. 1, 2020: Australian Defense Minister Linda Reynolds [announces](#) that Australia will jointly develop hypersonic cruise missiles with the US to counter Chinese and Russian efforts to develop similar weapons.

Dec. 2, 2020: Department of Homeland Security [announces](#) a ban on cotton products made in whole or in part by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, alleging that its products are made using slave labor.

Dec. 2, 2020: China's Chang'e 5 spacecraft moon lander and ascender vehicle [land](#) on the moon to drill for lunar samples.

Dec. 2, 2020: Deputy Assistant Secretary for North Korea Alex Wong [accuses](#) China of a "flagrant violation" of its obligation to enforce international sanctions on North Korea, offering rewards of up to \$5 million for information regarding sanctions evasions.

Dec. 3, 2020: Chinese social media app WeChat [censors](#) a post by Morrison containing a conciliatory message to Australia's Chinese community.

Dec. 4, 2020: State Department [terminates](#) five cultural exchange programs with China after calling them "soft power propaganda tools."

Dec. 4, 2020: US customs authorities [begin](#) to detain shipments of products connected to Xinjiang Production & Construction Corps' cotton over their use of forced labor.

Dec. 4, 2020: State Department [announces](#) new visa restrictions on Chinese government officials belonging to, or affiliated with, the United Front Work Department, a CCP organ operating with a broad mandate to strengthen adherence to the party within and outside China.

Dec. 5, 2020: North Korea [announces](#) that its Supreme People's Assembly will hold its next session in January, after Biden takes office.

Dec. 5, 2020: State Department [scraps](#) five China-funded exchange programs, with Pompeo dismissing them as "propaganda tools" disguised as cultural exchanges.

Dec. 6, 2020: Beijing [reorganizes](#) ministerial and provincial rankings, promoting a new generation of Chinese officials from various backgrounds to fill an array of positions, including top roles at the commerce and agriculture ministries.

Dec. 6, 2020: Japan, France, and the United States [hold](#) joint military drills on one of Japan's uninhabited outlying islands in the East China Sea for the first time in May next year.

Dec. 7, 2020: Wang [calls](#) for Beijing and Washington to resume dialogue to reset ties after months of increasing hostility during an address to the board of the US-China Business Council (USCBC).

Dec. 7, 2020: Treasury Department [imposes](#) financial sanctions and a travel ban on 14 members of China's National People's Congress over their role in Beijing's disqualification of pro-democracy legislators in Hong Kong.

Dec. 7, 2020: Indian officials [accuse](#) China of assisting rebel groups in Myanmar that have stepped up their attacks on the India-Myanmar border.

Dec. 8, 2020: Suga [launches](#) Japan's third fiscal stimulus of the year, ¥30.6 trillion (\$294 billion) package, aimed to boost Japan's coronavirus recovery.

Dec. 8, 2020: Hua Chunying, spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry, [warns](#) the US that Beijing will retaliate with "the necessary countermeasures" if Washington imposes sanctions on Hong Kong officials responsible for the disqualification of opposition legislators.

Dec. 9, 2020: Indian FM S. Jaishankar [describes](#) China-India relationship as at its worst in decades, and says relations can't improve unless the ongoing border dispute is settled peacefully.

Dec. 9, 2020: Treasury Department [announces](#) new sanctions on six entities and four vessels related to North Korea.

Dec. 10, 2020: In telephone call, Xi [tells](#) French counterpart Emmanuel Macron that he hopes Europe approaches China with a positive attitude; they agree to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and pursue joint space exploration.

Dec. 10, 2020: Beijing [revokes](#) visa-free visits to Hong Kong and Macau for holders of US diplomatic passports in retaliation for US restrictions on the movement of 14 members of China's National People's Congress.

Dec. 10, 2020: Indian FM S Jaishankar [announces](#) that Australia and India are in discussions for a bilateral free trade agreement.

Dec. 11, 2020: *Bloomberg News* employee Haze Fan is [detained](#) in Beijing on suspicion of "participating in activities endangering national security."

Dec. 11, 2020: Taiwan [commissions](#) first vessel in a new fleet of coast guard ships, an advanced catamaran armed with missile capacity, as the island faces a growing threat from Beijing.

Dec. 12, 2020: Xi [announces](#) that political security will be a top priority in the next five years, and the Communist Party must proactively maintain the safety of the Chinese political system.

Dec. 12, 2020: President-elect Biden [states](#) that his nominee for trade chief, Katherine Tai, will target abusive trade practices by China, a sign that the Trump administration's trade war with Beijing will continue.

Dec. 14, 2020: Wei and Japanese counterpart Kishi Nobuo [discuss](#) tensions in the disputed East China Sea over a phone call.

Dec. 14, 2020: South Korea's National Assembly [passes](#) a revision to the Development of Inter-Korean Relations Act to ban sending leaflets into North Korea.

Dec. 15, 2020: Canberra [reaches](#) out to Beijing to clarify whether it has formally banned Australian coal, warning that such an action would contravene WTO rules and be harmful to both countries.

Dec. 16, 2020: Canberra [refers](#) China to the WTO over Beijing's imposition of punitive tariffs on Australian barley imports, in the newest escalation in a bitter diplomatic and trade dispute.

Dec. 18, 2020: Document outlining objectives for the US Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard for 2021 [warns](#) the US will be "more assertive" against Beijing and US naval forces are expected to be more visible in the Pacific.

Dec. 18, 2020: *USS Mustin* [transits](#) Taiwan Strait, conducting Freedom-of-Navigation operation.

Dec. 18, 2020: China's Chang'e-5 lunar probe carrying rocks and soil from the moon [returns](#) safely to earth.

Dec. 18, 2020: Quad Senior Officials Consultations [take place](#) via video conference.

Dec. 18, 2020: US [imposes](#) sanctions on members of the Chinese Communist Party engaged in “malign activities,” including actions related to mass surveillance, military modernization, human rights abuses, and coercion in the South China Sea.

Dec. 19, 2020: Washington [adds](#) Chinese companies Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation and DJI, the drone maker, to the US export blacklist.

Dec. 19, 2020: Wang [urges](#) Biden to have the “right perception” of China and cooperate with Beijing to “restart dialogue, return bilateral relations to the right track, and rebuild mutual trust.”

Dec. 20, 2020: China’s People’s Liberation Army [accuses](#) Washington of “jeopardizing stability” in the region by sending the guided missile destroyer *USS Mustin* through Taiwan Strait.

Dec. 21, 2020: US Department of Commerce [publishes](#) list of Chinese and Russian firms with alleged military ties that restrict them from buying a wide range of US goods and technology. Elsewhere, Pompeo [announces](#) additional restrictions for issuing visas to Chinese officials believed to be complicit in human rights abuses.

Dec. 22, 2020: South Korea [scrambles](#) fighter jets in response to intrusion in its air defense zone by Russian and Chinese military aircraft.

Dec. 22, 2020: Tibet Policy and Support Act of 2020 [is passed](#) by Congress as an amendment to the \$1.4 trillion government spending bill.

Dec. 22, 2020: US guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* [conducts](#) a FONOP near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Two days later, the vessel [asserts](#) navigational rights and freedoms near Vietnam in the vicinity of the Con Dao Islands in the South China Sea.

Dec. 23, 2020: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually [meets](#) with Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc. They call for a peaceful, “open and rules-based” Indo Pacific, agree to increase military-to-military exchanges, and to intensify defense industry collaboration.

Dec. 27, 2020: Trump [signs](#) into law a \$2.3 trillion government spending [package](#) that includes the Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020 and the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020.

Dec. 27, 2020: In response to signing of the Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020 and Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said China was “resolutely opposed” to both acts.

Dec. 27, 2020: Chinese delegation led by Vice Minister of the International Department of the CCP Guo Yezhou [meets](#) Nepali President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Prime Minister Kharga Prasad Oli, and other NCP leaders.

Dec. 31, 2020: Pompeo [denounces](#) Chinese court’s jailing of Hong Kong activists trying to flee to Taiwan. In a statement, Pompeo said, “A regime that prevents its own people from leaving can lay no claim to greatness or global leadership. It is simply a fragile dictatorship, afraid of its own people.”

Regional chronology by Pacific Forum Research Intern Tom Connolly.

