

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

CHANGE IN STYLE, CONTINUITY IN ASIA POLICY

RALPH A. COSSA, PACIFIC FORUM

BRAD GLOSSERMAN, TAMA UNIVERSITY CRS/PACIFIC FORUM

Quadrennially, we write to assure readers that there will be more continuity than change as a new foreign policy team takes office. Globally, this would not be the case this year. In its first few months, the Biden administration made 180-degree turns on issues such as climate change, World Health Organization membership, the role of science in the battle against COVID-19, immigration, and the Iran nuclear agreement. In our region, however, there has been more continuity. The Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy focused on the Quad—the informal but increasingly structured grouping of Australia, India, Japan, and the US—and the Biden administration has doubled down on this effort, conducting the first (virtual) Quad summit. It has largely continued the “cooperate when we can but confront when we must” approach toward China. And while Trump appeared to have disdain for US alliances, every national security document from his administration underscored the central role US alliances played in its Asia strategy.

This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal of Bilateral Relations in the Indo-Pacific*, Vol. 23, No. 1, May 2021. Preferred citation: Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman, “Regional Overview: Change in Style, Continuity in Asia Policy,” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp 1-20.

For all that continuity, there is no mistaking the change in style, however. “America is back; diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy,” Biden [trumpeted](#) in his first visit to Foggy Bottom, and the flurry of 2+2 meetings and high-level encounters, including with the Chinese in Alaska, attest to this. As does a marked increase in international favorability ratings, a testament to Biden’s quieter, more predictable, less confrontational style.

Finally, in regional multilateral developments, we would be remiss if we did not mention the (very) small step forward by ASEAN in attempting to deal with the coup in Myanmar.

Personnel is Policy

Anyone who has ever worked in government—any government—knows that [personnel is policy](#): top officials set the tone for and shape the institutions that they head. President Biden’s picks for top foreign and security policy positions—Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, CIA Director William Burns—are longtime friends and associates of the president. They know each other, are comfortable with each other, and should work well together. They’re professionals with considerable experience at the top levels of their departments and organizations. That should reduce, if not eliminate the frictions and infighting that many administrations endure as they get down to business. The absence of behind the scenes drama, typically revealed by leaks, thus far suggests that, at least for now, Team Biden is pulling together.



Figure 1 Vice President Joe Biden and Deputy National Security Advisor Antony Blinken in November 2013. Photo: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

None of those senior officials are Indo-Asia-Pacific specialists. With one major exception, key Indo-Pacific posts are only being filled as this reporting period comes to a close. Some of that delay is the result of the [refusal](#) of the General Services Administration head to “ascertain” that Biden had won the 2020 election until Nov. 23, a decision that slowed the transition. The one exception is the selection of Kurt Campbell, former assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) in the first Obama term, as “[Indo-Pacific coordinator](#)” at the National Security Council, a newly created position that is intended to be the point person for Indo-Pacific policy and a sign of the priority the region assumes for the Biden administration. Campbell is widely credited with being the prime mover behind Obama’s “rebalance,” helping then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton turn the president’s vision into reality. With experience at both the departments of state and defense (in the Bill Clinton administration), Campbell has the knowledge and skill for the whole-of-government wrangling that is the essence of the NSC job. (In the interest of full disclosure, both authors have known Campbell for years and he might even be able to pick us out in a crowd.)

Other key administration posts have been slower to fill. Only at the end of March did Biden [announce](#) the nomination of Ambassador to Vietnam Dan Kritenbrink as assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific. Kritenbrink is a career foreign service officer (FSO), who has served in Beijing and Tokyo, and did stints at the NSC (as senior director for Asia policy) and in the Office of Chinese and Mongolian affairs in Foggy Bottom. In April, Biden [nominated](#) Ely Ratner to serve as assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs. Ratner is another longtime member of Biden’s inner circle, serving as his deputy national security advisor when he was vice president, a staff member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when Biden was chair, and as a member of Biden’s Senate staff. Prior to his nomination, Ratner directed the Pentagon’s China Task Force, an attempt to figure out where the Department of Defense was on China policy. In short, it is an experienced team that understands the nature of the challenges that the US faces at a time of enhanced strategic competition with China.

While these have traditionally been the most important positions for Indo-Asia-Pacific policy, the scale of “the China challenge,” which crosses multiple domains and includes economic, diplomatic, and technological dimensions, requires a whole-of-government approach. Other government offices will play vital roles in this effort. Two stand out. The first is the head of the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), which historically has focused on strategic trade controls, particularly those that address access to parts, components, and knowhow related to weapons of mass destruction. Today it is key to policy regarding access to technology more broadly, especially the critical and emerging technologies that are central to the digital economy, putting it on the front line of the tech competition with China. No nominee for BIS has been named. The second position is the head of the Department of Justice’s National Security Division. This career slot has assumed new significance given the full court legal press against China’s illegal acquisition of intellectual property and the cyberattacks that its hackers have allegedly launched. The Trump administration in November 2018 launched the “China initiative” within the DOJ to spearhead those law enforcement efforts. The head of the NSD and the China Initiative is John Demers, a career assistant attorney general and he is likely to stay in that post.

The one glaring hole is the failure to name any ambassadors. With the exception of Marc Knapper, another career FSO currently serving as principal deputy assistant secretary of State, who has been nominated to be ambassador to Vietnam—a move reportedly in the works at the end of the Trump administration—all other ambassadorial positions in the region (and the world) normally filled by political appointees are empty; in most cases very capable FSOs are serving as charge d'affaires (temporary ambassadors) until nominees are identified. Media reports suggest that names are likely just after we go to press in mid-May. Biden has [said](#) that he wants to reduce the number of political appointees, a percentage that has skyrocketed in recent administrations, although key positions—such as ambassadors to Japan, South Korea, Australia, and China—are likely to continue to be political.

Consistent Rhetoric—and Policy that Matches Up

The Biden administration has been impressively consistent: not only has its campaign rhetoric continued into the administration, but its behavior has matched its language. Candidate Biden praised cooperation and consultation, multilateralism, and alliances. At every opportunity, his administration echoes that line, elevating and prioritizing US alliances and partnerships. Speaking to the Munich Security Conference in February, Biden [told](#) the audience that the US was back and would be working closely with allies and partners “to meet the range of shared challenges we face.” In his “America is back” Foggy Bottom speech he [asserted](#) “American alliances are our greatest asset, and leading with diplomacy means standing shoulder to shoulder with our allies and key partners, once again.” [Testifying](#) to Congress, Secretary of State Blinken reiterated the US commitment to its core alliances and called Japan and South Korea “two of our most important allies.” Defense Secretary Austin is similarly oriented, [noting](#) that the US’ “great alliances, great partnerships” are an asymmetrical advantage that it has over other rivals. Secretary Blinken also [told](#) America’s NATO allies in Brussels in March that “Americans disagree about a few things, but the value of alliances and partnerships is not one of them.” Citing a recent poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, he pointed out that “nine in 10 Americans believe that maintaining our alliances is the most effective way to achieve our foreign policy goals.” It’s hard to find many other things that nine in 10 Americans would agree upon nowadays.

Actions Matter ... and are Duly Noted

After several years of steady decline, US popularity ratings have also begun rising internationally with the advent of the new administration. In a recent Morning Consult [poll](#), favorability ratings were up in 13 of 14 countries surveyed. The one outlier, to no one’s surprise, was China. One suspects US ratings there would have declined regardless of who won last November.

The Biden administration has also reassured foreign governments— allies and partners in Asia and elsewhere—that the US retains its capacity to act. The COVID-19 vaccination program—with more than 150 million people

inoculated—and the passage of a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package are proof that Washington is not paralyzed and can be mobilized.

The political symbolism is important: Paralysis is not the norm. But perhaps more important is the boost that the stimulus will provide to the US and global economy. The OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the club of advanced economies) [forecasts](#) that the bill will increase global growth to 5.6% in 2021, a jump of 1.4 percentage points from its December prediction (4.2%). Much of that expansion reflects a substantial rise in US growth estimates, from 3.2% in December to 6.5% in March. If correct, this will be the first time in 45 years that the US economy grows at a rate equal to or faster than that of China. A revving economy helps rehabilitate the US image and the US model, and provides the country with resources for more forward-leaning diplomacy and greater economic engagement.

The Indo-Pacific: America's "Priority Region"

The Indo-Pacific remains a priority. Also in the Munich speech, Biden [reminded](#) a *European audience* that efforts "to secure the peace and defend our shared values and advance our prosperity across the Pacific will be among the most consequential efforts we undertake." His decision to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan, long a goal of his, was also motivated by a [desire](#) to be able to more precisely focus resources on critical security challenges, such as the rise of China. Biden rightly viewed the continuing US military presence as a distraction. That the first overseas trip by Secretaries Blinken and Austin was to Asia, and that Biden's first guest at the White House was Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide hammers home this point. [Speaking](#) at the April 30 Indo-Pacific Command Change of Command, Secretary of Defense Austin, chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mark Milley and both the incoming (Adm. John Aquilino) and outgoing (Adm. Philip Davidson) commanders [cited](#) the Indo-Pacific as "the priority region" for US national security interests. Davidson stressed that "the strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific is not between two nations, it is a contest between liberty—the fundamental idea behind a Free and Open Indo-Pacific—and authoritarianism, and the absence of liberty."



Figure 2 US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga walk to the White House Rose Garden. Photo: AFP-JJJI

Their speeches, and numerous foreign policy pronouncements by Biden and the rest of his team leave little doubt as to what authoritarian power is of primary concern. As should be clear by now, concern that the Biden administration would reverse Trump administration policies that viewed China as a strategic competitor should have dissipated. Biden sees the US engaged in a real race with China for leadership in the Indo-Pacific and eventually globally. While the rhetoric is less sharp and inflammatory, the readiness to stand up to Beijing's revisionism has not diminished. This administration has recognized the need to do so collectively, however, and has made rebuilding and consolidating alliances a first step. Don't underestimate the sequencing of the new team's meetings in Northeast Asia. Blinken and Austin went to Tokyo and Seoul before Blinken and Sullivan sat down with Chinese officials Yang Jiechi and Wang Yi in Anchorage: the messaging is unmistakable.

And then there is the administration's "[interim strategic guidance](#)," a way station as Biden's team prepares its National Security Strategy. It warns of an "increasingly assertive" China, which it labeled "the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system." Secretary of Defense Austin already launched a global posture review of US forces to ensure that they are ready to support foreign policy priorities – the Indo-Pacific, as Biden noted in his Munich remarks, where he also reminded European allies that the China challenge was a global one: "we must prepare together for a long-term strategic competition with China. How the

United States, Europe, and Asia work together to secure the peace and defend our shared values and advance our prosperity across the Pacific will be among the most consequential efforts we undertake.”

(And anyone still worried about the US going soft on China should also remember this: Kurt Campbell was the assistant secretary of state who negotiated the 2012 deal between China and the Philippines that called for the withdrawal of all forces from Scarborough Shoal, reefs in the South China Sea claimed by both governments. Manila’s forces withdrew; those of China did not. Campbell knows well how suspicious of China to be.)

For the US, Asian Multilateralism Now Centers on the Quad

While the Trump administration was largely dismissive of ASEAN-led multilateralism—Trump attended only one East Asia Summit (and left that meeting early) and his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo skipped the last ASEAN Regional Forum meeting—it did embrace multilateral cooperation among the US, Australia, India, and Japan. As outlined in our last [report](#), Pompeo’s last major meeting as secretary was an in-person visit to Japan for the second Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting last October.

President Biden has been quick to signal his own firm support for the Quad, hosting the first-ever (virtual) Quad Summit in early March. In the [Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement](#): “*The Spirit of the Quad*,” the four leaders reaffirmed their shared vision for “a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.” In outlining the “defining challenges of our time,” they referenced “the global devastation wrought by COVID-19, the threat of climate change, and security challenges facing the region.” They further defined their “shared challenges, including in cyber space, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, and humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief as well as maritime domains.” The word China was not mentioned anywhere in the Joint Statement or in the subsequent [Washington Post op-ed](#) they all signed that focused on the history of Quad cooperation, beginning with disaster relief cooperation following the 2004 Boxing Day

tsunami. The four leaders stated that, “in this new age of interconnection and opportunity throughout the Indo-Pacific, we are again summoned to act together in support of a region in need,” noting in particular that “climate change has grown more perilous, new technologies have revolutionized our daily lives, geopolitics have become ever more complex, and a pandemic has devastated the world.”



Figure 3 US President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken attend a virtual Quad meeting with leaders of Japan, India, and Australia. Photo: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA/Bloomberg

While careful not to cast an anti-China shadow, the Joint Statement did have a familiar ring: “Together, we commit to promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity.” For those in Beijing who saw these words as aimed at them, the proper response should be “if the shoe fits, wear it.”

The Quad is not a formal alliance. It is, as the op-ed in *The Post* maintained, “a flexible group of like-minded partners dedicated to advancing a common vision and to ensuring peace and prosperity.” As such, “(W)e welcome and will seek opportunities to work with all of those who share in those goals. In this, it is important to again note the continuity with US foreign policy. The Quad in important ways is like President George W. Bush’s “coalition of the willing,” that brought together like-minded nations to address shared concerns.

One of the Quad’s most specific initiatives was the decision to “combine our nations’ medical, scientific, financing, manufacturing and

delivery, and development capabilities and establish a vaccine expert working group” focused on “safe and effective vaccine distribution.” They also established a critical- and emerging-technology working group and a climate working group. The Joint Statement also reaffirmed “our commitment to the complete denuclearization of North Korea” and the “necessity of immediate resolution of the issue of Japanese abductees.”

One (Very) Small Step for ASEAN, One (Slightly) Larger Step for Indonesia

ASEAN was specifically mentioned in both the Joint Statement (cited here) and op-ed: “We reaffirm our strong support for ASEAN’s unity and centrality as well as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Full of potential, the Quad looks forward to the future; it seeks to uphold peace and prosperity and strengthen democratic resilience, based on universal values.” If and when the Quad begins to work with those countries will be a key indicator of the grouping’s success and long-term viability.

ASEAN also surfaced in the Quad discussions when the agenda turned to the appalling situation in Myanmar. The Joint Statement emphasized “the urgent need to restore democracy and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience” in Myanmar (aka Burma). International pressure has been growing on ASEAN to get its house in order since the Feb. 1 coup in Myanmar and the slaughter of (mostly) unarmed protestors that has followed.



Figure 4 Indonesian President Joko Widodo attends the ASEAN leaders' summit in Jakarta. Photo: Reuters/Nikkei Asia

ASEAN’s response “[exceeded expectations](#),” or at least those very low expectations of ASEAN members themselves, who anticipated that the consensus-based organization would once

again hide behind the “noninterference in the internal affairs of one another” principle inscribed in ASEAN’s [Charter](#). Enter Indonesia! At President Joko Widodo’s urging, a special ASEAN Summit was held in Jakarta on April 24. To the dismay of many, Myanmar was represented by the coup leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, although he was listed not as head of the State Administration Council (SAC), as Myanmar’s military junta now calls itself, but merely as chief of Myanmar’s armed Forces (his pre-coup title). Neither Aung San Suu Kyi nor any representative from the new self-declared National Unity Government (NUG) was invited to attend.

The assembled leaders—Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam were represented by heads of state while Laos, the Philippines, and Thailand sent their foreign ministers—[expressed](#) their “deep concern on the situation in the country, including reports of fatalities and escalation of violence” and “acknowledged ASEAN’s positive and constructive role in facilitating a peaceful solution.” Jokowi (as President Widodo is more commonly known) was less subtle, reportedly [telling](#) the senior general during the Summit that “the situation in Myanmar is unacceptable and should not continue” and that the “violence must be stopped, democracy, stability and peace in Myanmar must be returned immediately.”

To this end, the [Chairman’s Statement](#), issued by current ASEAN Chair Brunei Darussalam, contained a “Five-Point Consensus” as follows:

First, there shall be immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint.

Second, constructive dialogue among all parties concerned shall commence to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people.

Third, a special envoy of the ASEAN Chair shall facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, with the assistance of the Secretary-General of ASEAN.

Fourth, ASEAN shall provide humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre.

Fifth, the special envoy and delegation shall visit Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned.

Reportedly a proposed sixth point, “the immediate release of all political prisoners” failed to make the final cut. The Chairman’s Statement merely mentioned that “(W)e also heard calls for the release of all political prisoners including foreigners.”

At a [press conference](#) after the summit, Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said that Min Aung Hlaing told ASEAN leaders that he will find a way to solve the problem and agreed that violence must stop. “Our proposals would be accepted, the general in his response did not reject (them),” Muhyiddin said, “This is very encouraging progress.” In discussion of the organization’s noninterference principle, he reportedly said that policy should not lead to inaction if a domestic situation “jeopardizes the peace, security, and stability of ASEAN and the wider region.” He also acknowledged that “(T)here is a tremendous expectation on the part of the international community on how ASEAN is addressing the Myanmar issue. The pressure is increasing.”

the killing won’t stop until the protests stop; this is clearly not what ASEAN had in mind.

After several years of slights, it was anticipated that the US would once again be full and enthusiastic participants in ASEAN-led multilateralism under the Biden administration, which continues to play lip service to the importance of ASEAN [centrality](#). However, it is hard to imagine President Biden going to this fall’s ASEAN-organized East Asia Summit if Senior General Min Aung Hlaing is among the participants; in fact, we would strongly urge him not to attend if this is the case.



Figure 5 People hold signs as they protest against Myanmar’s military in Launglon, Myanmar. Photo: Dawei Watch via Reuters

All well and good, but by the time *Comparative Connections* went to print, no special envoy had yet been named and no delegation had set foot in Myanmar and, most importantly, there had been no cessation of violence.” While Min Aung Hlaing has not disputed the Chairman’s Statement per se, two days after the summit the junta issued a [press release](#) noting ASEAN’s “suggestions,” which it would consider only “after stabilizing the country.” In other words,

REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY

JANUARY – APRIL 2021

Jan. 1, 2021: In a New Year's Day speech, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen [expresses](#) the need for cross-strait stability and offers talks with Beijing to end confrontation.

Jan. 1, 2021: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong and Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin [issue](#) a joint announcement that the agreement between the two countries to construct a high-speed rail between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore is officially terminated.

Jan. 2, 2021: Bipartisan Congressional provision condemning China's aggression towards India [becomes](#) law, as the US Congress overrides Donald Trump's veto on the \$740 billion defense policy bill.

Jan. 2, 2021: Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* [describes](#) China's strategy to wear down Japanese resistance to its claim over the Senkaku Islands through repeated air and sea incursions.

Jan. 3, 2021: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [extends](#) an olive branch to the incoming Biden administration, stating that a "new window of hope" is opening.

Jan. 3, 2021: Commenting on Japanese [interest](#) in becoming the sixth eye of the Five Eyes alliance, a research associate at Fudan University's Center for Japanese Studies opines that Japan is "strong in will but weak in capability," but will continue to move closer to the alliance.

Jan. 4, 2021: China Securities Regulatory Commission [describes](#) the US government's order to delist three Chinese telcos from the New York Stock Exchange as politically motivated and in breach of market rules.

Jan. 5, 2021: New York Stock Exchange reverses plans to delist three Chinese state-run telecoms groups to comply with a Trump administration executive order that bars US investors from holding stakes in companies with alleged ties to the Chinese military.

Jan. 5, 2021: Eighth Congress of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party opens in Pyongyang, unannounced; this is not reported until Jan. 6.

Jan. 5, 2021: US Ambassador to India Kenneth I Juster [describes](#) the Indo-Pacific as "significant" for US-India relations in a press conference in New Delhi.

Jan. 6, 2021: Members of the US Congress [certify](#) the November election results, while a violent mob of Trump supporters [storms](#) the US Capitol building.

Jan. 6, 2021: Outgoing US President Donald Trump [signs](#) an executive order arguing that "aggressive action" must be taken against eight notable Chinese applications, including Alipay and WeChat Pay.

Jan. 6, 2021: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [issues](#) a statement condemning China's arrest of more than 50 pro-democracy politicians and activists in Hong Kong.

Jan. 7, 2021: South Korean court [orders](#) Japan to compensate 12 women who were forced to work as so-called "comfort women" in wartime brothels, drawing ire from Tokyo.

Jan. 7, 2021: Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide [declares](#) a second state of emergency due to COVID-19 in four prefectures (Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba) through Feb. 7. He [declares](#) a state of emergency for seven more prefectures on Jan. 13.

Jan. 8, 2021: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [examines](#) ties with Seoul, determining to expand foreign relations on the third day of his second Party Congress since ascending to power in 2012.

Jan. 8, 2021: Secretary Pompeo [approves](#) the creation of a new cyber-security and emerging technologies bureau to fight against cyber-security threats, citing threats from North Korea.

Jan. 9, 2021: Social media images of the People's Liberation Army [reveal](#) the first public display of its upgraded PCL-191 long-range multiple launch rocket system (MLRS), capable of firing 370mm rockets 217 miles, or 750mm ballistic missiles 311 miles.

Jan. 11, 2021: US State Department [says](#) that Mike Pompeo has no plans to travel to Taiwan amid Chinese commentary that a visit to Taiwan from the US secretary of state would provoke an “overwhelming” response from Beijing.

Jan. 12, 2021: India [returns](#) a People's Liberation Army soldier who strayed across the disputed Himalayas region.

Jan. 13, 2021: China's new armed reconnaissance drone, the WJ-700, [completes](#) its maiden flight at an undisclosed location.

Jan. 13, 2021: US [bans](#) all imports of cotton and tomato products from China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, citing growing concerns over widespread use of forced labor.

Jan. 13, 2021: Biden [selects](#) Kurt Campbell to serve as National Security Council Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific.

Jan. 14, 2021: US Department of Defense [releases](#) names of additional companies added to the list of “Communist Chinese military companies” operating in the US.

Jan. 15, 2021: North Korea [holds](#) a military parade in Pyongyang, displaying its new Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM).

Jan. 15, 2021: Pompeo [announces](#) that the US is sanctioning six PRC and Hong Kong officials after pro-democracy arrests in Hong Kong.

Jan. 15, 2021: Trump administration [announces](#) sanctions on officials of Chinese state-owned enterprises and military and adds Chinese oil giant CNOOC to an economic blacklist, accusing them of using coercion against states with rival claims in the South China Sea.

Jan. 16, 2021: United States [imposes](#) sanctions on six pro-Beijing Hong Kong officials over mass arrests of pro-democracy activists.

Jan. 16, 2021: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi concludes his Southeast Asian tour in the Philippines, [promising](#) its “closest neighbour” half a million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, \$1.34 billion in loan pledges for infrastructure projects, and \$77 million in grants.

Jan. 18, 2021: South Korean President Moon Jae-in [urges](#) President-elect Joe Biden to hold talks with North Korea to build on the progress that President Trump made with leader Kim Jong Un.

Jan. 19, 2021: Beijing [pledges](#) to use its political and economic strengths to contain pro-independence forces in Taiwan, identifying it as a key talk for the Communist Party's centenary year.

Jan. 19, 2021: Secretary Pompeo [declares](#) that China's treatment of Uygurs in Xinjiang constitutes genocide.

Jan. 20, 2021: President Biden is [inaugurated](#) in Washington.

Jan. 21, 2021: 13th National Party Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam [opens](#) to select the top leadership of the party as well as choosing members of the Politburo, and to set policy goals for the next five years.

Jan. 21, 2021: Japan [characterizes](#) China's “drawing of territorial sea baselines” as incongruent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Jan. 22, 2021: Lloyd Austin is [confirmed](#) by the Senate to be secretary of Defense.

Jan. 22, 2021: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying [calls](#) for the “better angels in US-China relations” to emerge following the inauguration of President Biden.

Jan. 23, 2021: China's top legislative body [passes](#) a law permitting its coastguards to fire on foreign vessels and demolish structures built in disputed waters.

Jan. 23, 2021: State Department [urges](#) Beijing to cease military, diplomatic, and economic pressure against Taiwan in a press release.

Jan. 24, 2021: Washington [urges](#) Beijing to end its military pressure against Taiwan, hours after Taipei reported a large incursion into its airspace by the mainland Chinese air force.

Jan. 24, 2021: In the first US-Japanese ministerial-level talk since President Biden took office, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin [affirms](#) to Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo that the Senkaku Islands fall within the scope of the Japan-US Mutual Security Treaty.

Jan. 25, 2021: Secretary Austin [calls](#) on key Asian allies to work with the US in the Indo-Pacific, signaling his intention to boost defense ties in the region amid US regional competition with China.

Jan. 26, 2021: China and New Zealand complete a review and expansion of their free trade agreement, [eliminating](#) almost all trade tariffs.

Jan. 26, 2021: South Korea's Bank of Korea [announces](#) that South Korea's real gross domestic product fell by 1% in 2020, marking the lowest growth rate in 22 years.

Jan. 26, 2021: US Senate [confirms](#) Antony Blinken as secretary of state.

Jan. 27, 2021: US Special Climate Envoy John Kerry [says](#) at a press conference that the US must deal with China on climate change as a "critical standalone issue," adding that the Biden administration will not trade concessions on human rights and trade for climate cooperation.

Jan. 27, 2021: Head of the Philippine fishers' association [describes](#) China's new law permitting China's coastguard to fire on foreign vessels in disputed waters as a "virtual declaration of war."

Jan. 28, 2021: President Biden [assures](#) Japanese Prime Minister Suga that the US-Japan mutual treaty applies to the disputed Senkaku Islands.

Jan. 28, 2021: Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian [warns](#) the Biden administration and Taiwan, stating that the pursuit of independence for the self-ruled island "means war."

Jan. 29, 2021: A Pentagon spokesperson [calls](#) Chinese remarks equating Taiwanese independence as "war" as "unfortunate," and reaffirms Washington's commitment to improving the self-ruled island's defense capacity.

Jan. 30, 2021: US [states](#) that Chinese military flights in the past week in the South China Sea fit a pattern of destabilization and aggressive behavior by Beijing, but pose no threat to a US Navy carrier strike group in the region.

Jan. 31, 2021: A World Health Organization team investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic [visits](#) a Wuhan seafood market linked to the earliest COVID-19 cases.

Feb. 1, 2021: Taiwan's Defense Ministry [states](#) that Seven People's Liberation Army warplanes and a US reconnaissance aircraft entered Taiwan's air defense identification zone, as tensions across the strait continue to escalate.

Feb. 1, 2021: Myanmar's military [launches](#) a coup, detaining leader Aung San Suu Kyi and a number of other high profile elected officials.

Feb. 2, 2021: Suga [extends](#) the state of emergency to March 7 for 10 prefectures.

Feb. 2, 2021: President Biden [calls](#) on Myanmar's military to relinquish power immediately.

Feb. 3, 2021: Aircraft carrier group USS Nimitz [departs](#) its extended period in the Middle East for the Indo-Pacific region.

Feb. 3, 2021: Tokyo [conveys](#) "strong concerns" to Beijing over China's new coast guard legislation. Tokyo and London's foreign and defense ministers also [express](#) concern about the law.

Feb. 4, 2021: Biden declares "America is back" during first visit to State Department as president: "American leadership must meet this new moment of advancing authoritarianism, including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy."

Feb. 4, 2021: US [announces](#) an extension of the New Strategic Arms Treaty, the last remaining treaty with Russia capping their nuclear arsenals, until 2026, vowing to pursue similar arms agreements with Beijing.

Feb. 5, 2021: Vice-Admiral Aan Kurnia, head of Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency, [warns](#) that China's new coastguard law heightens risk of "spillover conflict" into Indonesia's territorial waters around the Natuna Islands, where two countries have had skirmishes before.

Feb. 6, 2021: China [protests](#) US Navy destroyer USS *John S. McCain*'s freedom of navigation exercise in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, the first such operation under the Biden administration.

Feb. 8, 2021: Tens of thousands of people in Myanmar [march](#) in protest against the military coup for the second straight day, as a partial restoration of Internet connection flooded Myanmar social media with images and videos of the demonstrations.

Feb. 8, 2021: In a CBS interview [broadcast](#), President Biden describes the US-China rivalry as "extreme competition" rather than conflict, and acknowledges that he is yet to speak to his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

Feb. 9, 2021: French nuclear attack submarine *Émeraude* and its naval support ship *Seine* [carry out](#) freedom of navigation in the disputed South China Sea as part of Paris' efforts to challenge Beijing's sweeping claims in the region.

Feb. 9, 2021: Chinese President Xi Jinping [says](#) that China and Vietnam must manage their own maritime disputes and resist outside instigation during a phone call with his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Phu Trong.

Feb. 10, 2021: A confidential UN report [states](#) that North Korea maintained and developed its nuclear and ballistic missile programs throughout 2021 in violation of international sanctions. According to the report, these were partially funded with some \$300 million stolen through cyber hacks.

Feb. 10, 2021: Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian [states](#) that PLA and Indian troops have "simultaneously" begun disengagement in the disputed border of Pangong Lake in a "planned, orderly manner."

Feb. 10, 2021: Presidents Biden and Xi [engage](#) in their first phone call since Biden's inauguration. Issues pertaining to trade, human rights, the Indo-Pacific region, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang feature throughout the dialogue.

Feb. 11, 2021: *Kyodo* [reports](#) that the Japanese government is hesitant to impose sanctions on Myanmar following the military coup there, fearing that doing so would drive the military closer to China.

Feb. 11, 2021: President Biden [signs](#) Executive Order 14014, which authorizes an initial round of sanctions on top military leaders in Myanmar who were involved in the Feb. 1 coup, among other possible actions.

Feb. 11, 2021: Official negotiations [open](#) on renewal of the US-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), triggering a 180-day countdown in which the agreement must be renewed or terminated.

Feb. 12, 2021: South Korea's new Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [stress](#) close cooperation for the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula during their first phone talks.

Feb. 12, 2021: China [bans](#) the *BBC*'s World News in retaliation to the UK banning the Chinese state-backed broadcaster *CGTN*'s license the previous week.

Feb. 13, 2021: *CGTN* [loses](#) permission to air in Germany, just days after its broadcasting license was revoked in Britain.

Feb. 13, 2021: US military [begins](#) its delayed two-week-long annual Yudh Abhuas exercise with India, which has been reported to be the Biden administration's first move to use its Quad partners to exert pressure on Beijing.

Feb. 14, 2021: TikTok's Chinese owner, ByteDance, [walks](#) away from a deal to sell the video-sharing application's US operations to a group led by Oracle following Donald Trump's departure from the White House.

Feb. 15, 2021: Japan [announces](#) that it will build three transport ships for the Ground Self-Defense Forces designed to supply ammunition, fuel, and provisions to troops stationed on its outlying islands, as part of its efforts to deal with China's military buildup in the region.

Feb. 16, 2021: Jose Santiago Sta. Romana, the Philippines Ambassador to China, [states](#) that China has sought to ease tensions with Manila over its controversial new coastguard law.

Feb. 17, 2021: In a *CNN* town hall meeting, Biden [says](#) that he told Xi that there would be "repercussions" for China's human rights abuses.

Feb. 17, 2021: Satellite images provided by the Indian Army [show](#) China dismantling dozens of structures and moving vehicles from camps along parts of the disputed Himalayan border.

Feb. 18, 2021: South Korean Minister of Unification Lee In-young [says](#) that North Korea faces a food shortage of over 1.2 million to 1.3 million tons this year due to damage from heavy downpours that happened last year.

Feb. 19, 2021: Biden [addresses](#) the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference, says the US would be working closely with allies and partners "to meet the range of shared challenges we face."

Feb. 19, 2021: South Korean Nuclear Envoy Noh Kyu-duk, acting US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs Sung Kim, and Japanese Director-General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Takehiro Funakoshi [meet](#) virtually to discuss North Korean-related issues.

Feb. 20, 2021: Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and nine ministers [survive](#) a no-confidence motion in parliament following a four-day censure debate. Protests calling for his resignation resume.

Feb. 23, 2021: G7 foreign ministers [issue](#) a statement condemning the violence committed in Myanmar against protestors and calling upon the security forces to exercise "utmost restraint and respect human rights and international law."

Feb. 26, 2021: Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Koichi Aiboshi [meets](#) South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun and they agree to maintain close communication.

Feb. 27, 2021: South Korea's National Assembly [passes](#) a parliamentary resolution denouncing the military coup in Myanmar.

Feb. 27, 2021: US Defense Department spokesman [says](#) North Korea's continued development of weapons poses a threat to the United States and its allies.

March 1, 2021: President Moon Jae-in [says](#) South Korea is ready to talk with Japan anytime, stating that it would also be helpful to the trilateral partnership with the United States.

March 1, 2021: Suga [lifts](#) the state of emergency in six prefectures (Aichi, Gifu, Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo, and Fukuoka).

March 2, 2021: ASEAN foreign ministers [urge](#) the Myanmar military to desist from violence during an informal online meeting.

March 2, 2021: Following China's import ban on Taiwanese pineapples, the de facto US and Canadian embassies in Taiwan [praise](#) Taiwan's pineapples on social media.

March 2, 2021: Philippine Defense Undersecretary Raymund Elefante and Indian Ambassador Shambu Kumaran [sign](#) an implementing agreement involving the procurement of defense material and equipment by the Philippines from India including BrahMos cruise missiles.

March 2, 2021: Biden administration [releases](#) the “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,” which warns of an “increasingly assertive” China, “the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.”

March 3, 2021: China and South Korea [establish](#) two additional military hotlines as an effort to avoid any military miscalculation.

March 5, 2021: Secretary Austin [includes](#) North Korea on the list of threats to the United States and its allies.

March 5, 2021: US [unveils](#) new measures to punish Myanmar’s army for its coup, blocking the ministries of defense and home affairs and top military conglomerates from certain types of trade.

March 6, 2021: US Senate unanimously [approves](#) bill to tighten controls on Chinese-funded Confucius Institutes accused by lawmakers of being propaganda tools.

March 7, 2021: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [delineates](#) Hong Kong and Taiwan “red lines” in its relations with the United States, but says there is room for cooperation in the areas of pandemic control, economic recovery, and climate change.

March 8, 2021: Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne [announces](#) Australia’s suspension of its defense cooperation program with Myanmar amid an intensified crackdown on protesters and media by the country’s military.

March 9, 2021: Official news outlet of the Communist Party of China’s Xinjiang region [says](#) unidentified companies have filed a domestic civil lawsuit seeking compensation from Adrian Zenz, a US-based human rights researcher, whose reports have alleged the region’s cotton industry utilizes forced labor.

March 9, 2021: OECD [says](#) a global economic recovery is “in sight” thanks partly to fiscal stimulus in the US and increasing vaccine deployment, despite “uneven” vaccine distribution.

March 10, 2021: Secretary Blinken [refers](#) to South Korea and Japan as “two of our most important allies” during testimony before Congress ahead of his Indo-Pacific tour.

March 10, 2021: Prime Minister Suga and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi [hold](#) a phone call ahead of the upcoming Quad meeting with the US and Australia, pledging to realize a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.”

March 11, 2021: Washington [says](#) it will not ease its sanctions on Iran, including Iranian funds in South Korea, until Iran returns to compliance with the JCPOA.

March 11, 2021: US Navy [sends](#) warship USS John Finn on voyage through the Taiwan Strait, drawing the ire of Beijing. This is the third such voyage under the Biden administration.

March 11, 2021: China’s national legislature [approves](#) resolution drastically altering Hong Kong’s electoral system, expanding the Electoral Committee with 300 Beijing loyalists who will comprise the fifth sector of the 1,500 member body.

March 11, 2021: State Department [condemns](#) the Beijing legislature’s tightening the central government’s control over Hong Kong’s electoral system, deeming the move to be a “direct attack” on the city’s autonomy. A day later, Secretary Blinken also [joins](#) other G7 foreign ministers and the High Representative of the European Union in a joint-statement condemning the changes made to Hong Kong’s electoral laws by China’s National People’s Congress.

March 12, 2021: At a virtual summit of the Quad, the United States, Japan, Australia and India [announce](#) they will provide 1 billion doses of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, to be produced in India, to countries of the Indo-Pacific by the end of 2022. The *Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement* [is also released](#), reaffirming a shared vision for “a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.”

March 12, 2021: Quad leaders’ *Washington Post* op-ed [is published](#), highlighting the history of the four nations’ cooperation and new challenges for the region that require coordination. China is not mentioned.

March 13, 2021: Ahead of Indo-Pacific tour, Secretary of Defense Austin [calls](#) China “our pacing threat” and vows to strengthen alliances which, he says, give the US “a lot more capability.”

March 13, 2021: A Biden administration official [says](#) North Korea has not responded to the behind-the-scenes Biden administration’s diplomatic outreach since mid-February.

March 14, 2021: Chinese Ambassador to US Cui Tiankai [argues](#) that fears regarding an erosion of democracy in Hong Kong are “unnecessary.”

March 15, 2021: Myanmar’s military [extends](#) “full martial law” to all parts of Yangon following violent protests over the weekend that left 50 people dead.

March 16, 2021: Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi and Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo meet Secretaries Blinken and Austin, [hold](#) a Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”) meeting in Tokyo.

March 16, 2021: US Treasury Department [sanctions](#) 24 Chinese and Hong Kong officials over Beijing’s changes to Hong Kong’s electoral system that took place on March 11.

March 16, 2021: Kim Jong Un’s sister Kim Yo Jong [condemns](#) South Korea for military exercises with the United States.

March 16, 2021: NSC Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell [says](#) that the Biden administration will not offer any improvements in the relationship with China until its economic coercion of Australia ceases.

March 17, 2021: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijan [criticizes](#) Washington and Tokyo for attempting “anti-China encirclement” after officials raised concerns about its “destabilizing behavior” in the region.

March 17, 2021: Asked by a reporter while traveling in Tokyo if the US is considering boycotting the 2022 Beijing Olympics, Secretary Blinken [says](#) President Biden is “listening to the concerns” of many countries and will decide what to do at the appropriate time.

March 17-18, 2021: Blinken and Austin [attend](#) a US-ROK Foreign and Defense Ministerial (2+2) in Seoul. The meeting is hosted by the ROK’s Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and Minister of Defense Suh Wook.

March 18, 2021: North Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui [says](#) North Korea will continue to ignore any contact from the United States unless the US withdraws its hostile policies toward North Korea.

March 18, 2021: President Moon [says](#) South Korea will improve strained ties with Japan to bolster trilateral security cooperation involving the United States during talks with Blinken and Austin.

March 18, 2021: During a trip to Seoul, Secretary Blinken [calls](#) on China to use its influence in Pyongyang to help pressure it into abandoning its nuclear program.

March 18-19, 2021: Chinese Politburo member Yang Jiechi and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [hold](#) meetings with Secretary Blinken and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in Anchorage, Alaska. In a fiery round of opening statements, Blinken says China is contributing to a “far more violent world” and Chinese officials call the US hypocritical for complaining about human rights abuses given its history of racism.

March 19, 2021: North Korea [says](#) that it will sever diplomatic relations with Malaysia for extraditing its businessman living in Malaysia to the United States.

March 20, 2021: Australian Foreign Minister Payne [states](#) that Australia will not trade away important principles and values simply to restart diplomatic talks with China.

March 21, 2021: Philippine troops [kill](#) a leader of the Abu Sayyaf kidnap-for-ransom group, Majan Sahidjuan, and rescue four Indonesian hostages.

March 22, 2021: 55-year-old businessman Mun Chol Myong, who faces money laundering charges, [becomes](#) the first North Korean citizen ever extradited to the United States.

March 22, 2021: State Department [issues](#) a joint statement with Canada and the United Kingdom opposing China's human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

March 22, 2021: South Korea's Defense Minister Suh Wook [signals](#) closer military cooperation with Tokyo in a TV interview.

March 22, 2021: Suga lifts the state of emergency in the four remaining prefectures (Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba).

March 23, 2021: Philippine Defense Minister Delfin Lorenzana [calls](#) upon the 220 Chinese vessels surrounding Whitsun Reef to withdraw, claiming they are violating the Philippines' rights under international maritime law.

March 23, 2021: North Korea [fires](#) off multiple short-range missiles after denouncing Washington for the joint military exercises with South Korea.

March 23, 2021: Myanmar's ruling military council spokesperson, Zaw Min Tun, [says](#) that the junta is cooperating with five neighboring countries and vows to stamp out "anarchy."

March 23, 2021: US Climate Envoy John Kerry [attends](#) the Ministerial on Climate Action, and meets with China's Special Envoy for Climate Affairs Xie Zhenhua.

March 24, 2021: Addressing NATO headquarters in Brussels, Blinken says "nine in 10 Americans believe that maintaining our alliances is the most effective way to achieve our foreign policy goals."

March 24, 2021: President Biden's nominee to lead USINDOPACOM, Admiral John Aquilino, [says](#) that Beijing's ability to invade Taiwan is "much closer than most think."

March 25, 2021: North Korea [fires](#) at least one unidentified projectile into the East Sea, according to the Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff.

March 25, 2021: South Korea [convenes](#) an emergency National Security Council (NSC) meeting on North Korea's latest projectile launch.

March 26, 2021: Biden nominates Daniel J. Kritenbrink as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

March 26, 2021: World Bank [announces](#) that the economy of Myanmar has contracted by 10% since the Feb. 1 coup. Food prices have doubled, and the cost of fuel has risen by 15%.

March 26, 2021: United States and Taiwan [further strengthen](#) maritime security ties, signing a coastguard agreement suggested to counter growing "gray zone" threats from mainland China.

March 26, 2021: United States [condemns](#) North Korea's ballistic missile launches as "destabilizing" actions violating UN Security Council resolutions.

March 26, 2021: Two suicide bombers believed to be members of an Islamist militant group [detonate](#) an explosive device outside a Catholic church, killing themselves and wounding 19 others.

March 27, 2021: China [announces](#) sanctions on US and Canadian individuals and entities in retaliation for imposing sanctions on Chinese persons and entities in Xinjiang.

March 27, 2021: Iran and China [sign](#) a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement addressing a wide variety of economic issues, including oil and mining, the promotion of industrial activity in Iran, as well as transportation and agricultural collaborations.

March 28, 2021: Blinken [says](#) China's retaliatory sanctions in the growing dispute of Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs are "baseless" and would only draw further attention to the "genocide" in Xinjiang.

March 29, 2021: In her first week in office, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai [says](#) that a trade meeting between China and the United States will take place "when the time is right."

March 29, 2021: United States [suspends](#) its trade pact with Myanmar in response to the military junta's killing of over 100 democracy protesters over the weekend.

March 30, 2021: sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un [criticizes](#) South Korean President Moon Jae-in for his speech, mocking him as a "parrot" that repeats the United States' "gangster-like logic."

March 30, 2021: Xi [urges](#) Sri Lanka to continue work with Beijing to develop the controversial Hambantota port, which sits along the main waterways of Asia and Europe.

March 31, 2021: US Department of State [releases](#) 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights, within which China's humanitarian practices in Xinjiang are classified as "[g]enocide and crimes against humanity."

March 31, 2021: US Acting Assistant Secretary of State Lisa Peterson [says](#) the US will hold North Korea accountable for its "egregious" human rights violations.

March 31, 2021: Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu [announces](#) that Tokyo will halt any new aid in Myanmar in response to the coup orchestrated by the military junta.

April 1, 2021: Philippine military [says](#) that it has documented illegal man-made structures on Union Banks in the South China Sea's Spratly Islands, near areas where hundreds of Chinese vessels massed last month.

April 2, 2021: Myanmar anti-coup protests [hold](#) candle-lit protests and urge "guerilla strike" tactics, as internet blackout widens.

April 3, 2021: In a joint statement after a day of talks, representatives from the United States, South Korea, and Japan [agree](#) to work together to maintain pressure on North Korea to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

April 3, 2021: Ten of Myanmar's major rebel groups [express](#) their support for the country's anti-coup activists.

April 4, 2021: Australia's newly appointed Defense Minister Peter Dutton [expresses](#) his intention to work closely with the US and other allies in maintaining peace in the region.

April 5, 2021: A report on North Korean Sports Ministry website DPRK Korea [states](#) that the North Korean Olympic Committee "decided not to participate in the 32nd Olympic Games in order to protect players from the world public health crisis caused by COVID-19," dealing a blow to both South Korean and Japanese hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough with the North at the Games.

April 5, 2021: South Korea's Defense Ministry [rejects](#) Japan's renewed territorial claims over the country's easternmost islets of Dokdo, saying Seoul does not even have to repeat explanations on the matter.

April 5, 2021: Japan [sends](#) its naval destroyer JS *Suzutsuki* to "gather information and monitor the movements" of China's carrier group, which was spotted passing the waterway between Okinawa and Miyako Island.

April 6, 2021: China's Foreign Ministry [requests](#) Manila to "stop hyping up" the fleet of Chinese vessels moored in Whitsun Reef in the disputed South China Sea.

April 7, 2021: State Department spokesman Ned Price [acknowledges](#) that the Biden administration is considering a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

April 8, 2021: US [sends](#) the USS Makin Island amphibious-ready group (ARG) to the disputed water of the South China Sea, bolstering Washington's presence amid heightened tensions between Manila and Beijing regarding the presence of Chinese fishing vessels in Whitsun Reef.

April 9, 2021: Indo-Pacific Command [moves](#) the US carrier strike group USS Theodore Roosevelt and the amphibious ready group USS Makin Island into the South China Sea, partly in response to the presence of Chinese vessels off Whitsun Reef, a perceived threat against the maritime security of the Philippines.

April 9, 2021: Iran [releases](#) a South Korean-flagged tanker that it seized amid a dispute over billions in frozen oil funds.

April 9, 2021: US issues [new](#) contact guidance for US government interactions with Taiwan counterparts, though the details remain classified.

April 10, 2021: Myanmar's ruling military junta [announce](#) that 19 people have been sentenced to death for killing an associate of an army captain and that anti-coup protests are dwindling.

April 11, 2021: Local media reports in Myanmar [state](#) that at least 82 people were killed in one day in a crackdown by Myanmar security forces on pro-democracy protesters.

April 12, 2021: Philippines armed forces [begin](#) two week joint exercises with hundreds of US soldiers amid growing tensions with Beijing in the South China Sea.

April 12, 2021: Blinken [blames](#) China's failure to provide access to global health experts for making the COVID-19 pandemic worse than it had to be.

April 12, 2021: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian [expresses](#) Beijing's "deep concerns" with Japan over its planned disposal of treated radioactive water from the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean. South Korea's Foreign Ministry likewise [expresses](#) "grave concerns" over Japan's decision.

April 13, 2021: According to Taiwan's Defence Ministry, China's People's Liberation Army [flew](#) 25 warplanes into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ), its largest incursion yet as tension in the Taiwan Strait continues to escalate.

April 13, 2021: Chinese Premier Li Keqiang [holds](#) virtual dialogue with board chairmen and CEOs from the US-China Business Council and over 20 US multinational companies.

April 14, 2021: Former US Senator Chris Dodd and Deputy Secretaries of State Richard Armitage and James Steinberg [travel](#) to Taiwan at Joe Biden's request, in a "personal signal" of the president's commitment to the Chinese-claimed island.

April 14, 2021: An annual report by the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence [lists](#) China at the top of its national security threats, warning of Beijing's efforts to realize "an epochal geopolitical shift."

April 15, 2021: General Bipin Rawat, the Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Army [says](#) that China tried to wage an "undeclared war" against India through cyberattacks.

April 16, 2021: Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister, Wu Jianghao, [summons](#) Japanese ambassador Hideo Tarumi over Tokyo's controversial decision to release more than 1 million tons of treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean.

April 17, 2021: In a joint statement after a meeting, President Biden and Prime Minister Suga [call](#) for "peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and reaffirm their commitment to countering China's "intimidation" in the East and South China seas.

April 17, 2021: US Climate Envoy John Kerry and China Special Envoy for Climate Change Xie Zhenhua [issue](#) a joint statement addressing the Climate Crisis.

April 17, 2021: US Treasury Department [determines](#) that Vietnam has tripped the threshold for currency manipulation but does not formally declare Hanoi a currency manipulator.

April 18, 2021: In a joint statement following Special Envoy Kerry's visit to Shanghai, Washington and Beijing [express](#) their commitment to working together to uphold the Paris Agreement on climate change.

April 19, 2021: China's People's Liberation Army [reportedly](#) deploys an advanced long-range rocket launcher to the Himalayas, in a move to reinforce China's border defense and act as a deterrent to India.

April 20, 2021: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte [says](#) that he is prepared to send military ships in the South China Sea to stake a claim over oil and mineral resources in the disputed section of the strategic waterway.

April 21, 2021: Biden [nominates](#) Ely Ratner for Assistant Secretary of Defense, Indo-Pacific Security Affairs.

April 21, 2021: US Senate Foreign Relations Committee [passes](#) the *Strategic Competition Act*.

April 21, 2021: President Moon [urges](#) the United States to restart dialogue with North Korea at an early date during an interview with *The New York Times*.

April 21, 2021: Chinese Foreign Ministry [confirms](#) that President Xi will attend the US-hosted Earth Day climate change summit.

April 21, 2021: Seoul Central District Court [rejects](#) a compensation claim against the Japanese government by 20 individuals including survivors of wartime sex slavery, citing sovereign immunity.

April 22, 2021: Xi Jinping [delivers](#) remarks at the US-led Leaders Summit on Climate.

April 22, 2021: Beijing [says](#) that it will “respond firmly and forcefully” if Canberra refuses to reverse its decision to cancel two deals agreed between China and the Australian state of Victoria.

April 23, 2021: Suga [declares](#) a third state of emergency in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Hyogo due to a surge in COVID-19 cases.

April 23, 2021: Chinese embassy in London [condemns](#) the British parliament for passing a motion declaring that Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in China’s Xinjiang region “are suffering crimes against humanity and genocide.”

April 23, 2021: A North Korean defector group [plans](#) to send thousands of leaflets to North Korea, despite a recently enacted ban on leafletting.

April 24, 2021: ASEAN leaders [gather](#) in Jakarta in the first physical summit to try to bring an end to the violence and instability in Myanmar following the Feb. 1 military coup. The [Chairman’s Statement](#) include a “Five-Point Consensus” to resolve the conflict, including “immediate cessation” of violence.

April 24, 2021: Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin [says](#) that Min Aung Hlaing, commander of Myanmar’s armed forces, told ASEAN leaders that he agreed that violence in his country must stop.

April 25, 2021: At a defense and security consultation, Chinese and Vietnamese officials [agree](#) to work together to improve trust amid regional tensions regarding their territorial claims in the South China Sea.

April 26, 2021: Myanmar’s junta [releases](#) a statement that it will consider ASEAN’s “suggestions” in Jakarta after “stabilizing the country.”

April 26, 2021: Following Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton’s remark that conflict with China over Taiwan could not be “discounted,” Beijing [releases](#) a statement imploring Australia to recognize the “one-China principle.”

April 27, 2021: A Morning Consult poll [shows](#) the US’ favorability ratings to be up in 13 out of 14 countries since Biden’s inauguration, with China the lone exception.

April 27, 2021: Japan’s 2021 edition of its annual Diplomatic Bluebook [highlights](#) ‘strong concerns’ regarding China’s military expansion.

April 28, 2021: In a speech to a joint session of Congress, Biden [states](#) that the US is in competition with China “to win the 21st century.”

April 28, 2021: Britain’s Royal Navy [announces](#) it will send a strike group, led by HMS Queen Elizabeth, to the Indo-Pacific next week, as it seeks to expand its presence in the region.

April 29, 2021: Taiwan [commissions](#) the first of a fleet of coast guard ships that can be converted into warships to bolster the defense of Taipei-controlled islands in the South China Sea.

April 30, 2021: State Department [calls](#) for Taiwan to be allowed to participate in the upcoming World Health Assembly.

April 30, 2021: United Nations Development Program [issues](#) a report warning that turmoil and violence in Myanmar has doubled the number of people in poverty, and could force half the population into poverty by early 2022, if the situation continues unchecked. Since the coup, 11% of the population has been pushed into poverty.

April 30, 2021: Reports of the Biden administration's completed policy review on North Korea [circulate](#), indicating a new path on addressing North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Few details are revealed, however.

April 30, 2021: At the Indo-Pacific Command Change of Command, Secretary of Defense Austin, chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mark Milley and both the incoming and outgoing commanders [cite](#) the Indo-Pacific as "the priority region" for US national security interests.

May 11, 2021: Biden reportedly [picks](#) Rahm Emanuel, the former Chicago mayor and chief of staff to President Obama, as ambassador to Japan.

Regional chronology by Pacific Forum Research Intern Tom Connolly.

