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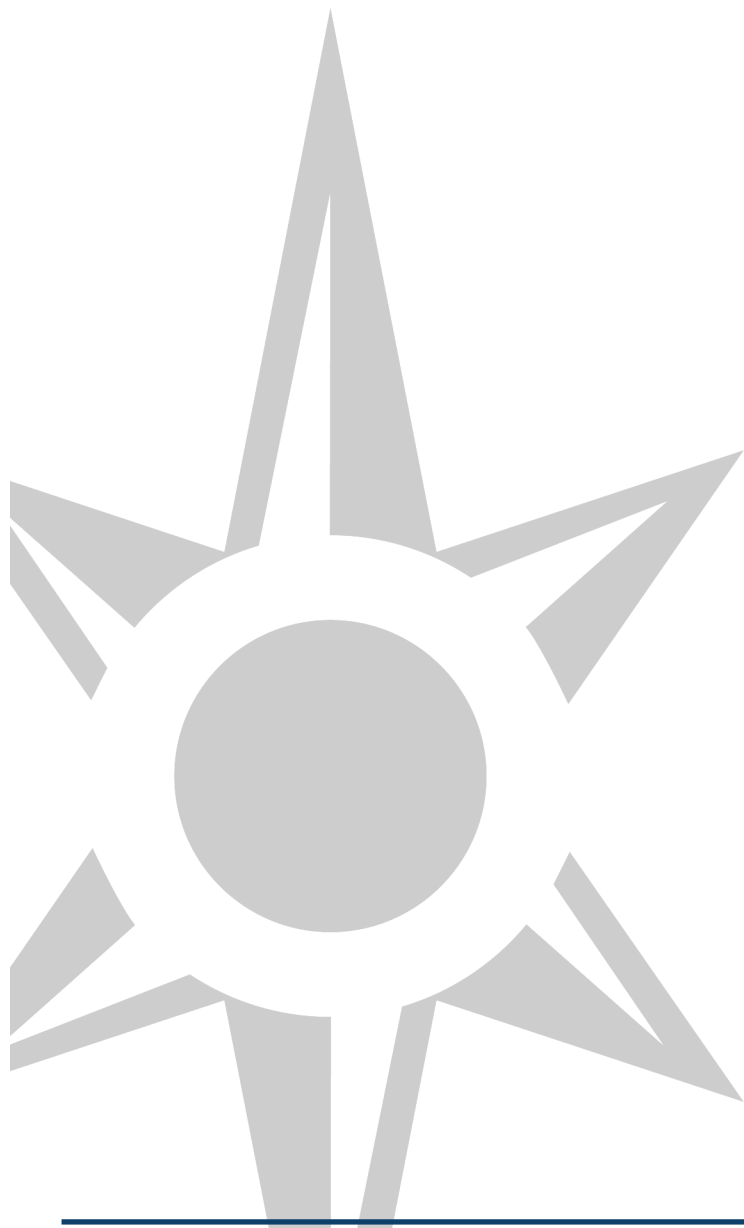
COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

EDITED BY
ROB YORK
BRAD GLOSSERMAN

JANUARY – APRIL 2022
VOL. 24, NO. 1
MAY 2022



PACIFIC FORUM

Founded in 1975, the Pacific Forum is a non-profit, foreign policy research institute based in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic and business issues and works to help stimulate cooperative policies in the Asia Pacific region through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region's leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas.

The Forum collaborates with a network of more than 30 research institutes around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating its projects' findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and publics throughout the region. We regularly cosponsor conferences with institutes throughout Asia to facilitate nongovernmental institution building as well as to foster cross-fertilization of ideas.

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HONOLULU, HAWAII

COMPARATIVE CONNECTIONS

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

Bilateral relationships in East Asia have long been important to regional peace and stability, but in the post-Cold War environment, these relationships have taken on a new strategic rationale as countries pursue multiple ties, beyond those with the US, to realize complex political, economic, and security interests. How one set of bilateral interests affects a country's other key relations is becoming more fluid and complex, and at the same time is becoming more central to the region's overall strategic compass. *Comparative Connections*, Pacific Forum's triannual e-journal of bilateral relations in the Indo-Pacific, edited by Rob York and Brad Glosserman, with Rob York as senior editor, was created in response to this unique environment. *Comparative Connections* provides timely and insightful analyses on key bilateral relationships in the region, including those involving the US.

We regularly cover the key bilateral relationships that are critical for the region. While we recognize the importance of other states in the region, our intention is to keep the core of the e-journal to a manageable and readable length. Because our project cannot give full attention to each of the relationships in Asia, coverage of US-Southeast Asia and China-Southeast Asia countries consists of a summary of individual bilateral relationships, and may shift focus from country to country as events warrant. Other bilateral relationships may be tracked periodically (such as various bilateral relationships with Australia, India, and Russia) as events dictate. Our Occasional Analyses also periodically cover functional areas of interest.

Our aim is to inform and interpret the significant issues driving political, economic, and security affairs of the US and East Asian relations by an ongoing analysis of events in each key bilateral relationship. The reports, written by a variety of experts in Asian affairs, focus on political/security developments, but economic issues are also addressed. Each essay is accompanied by a chronology of significant events occurring between the states in question during the reporting period. A regional overview section places bilateral relationships in a broader context of regional relations. By providing value-added interpretative analyses, as well as factual accounts of key events, the e-journal illuminates patterns in Asian bilateral relations that may appear as isolated events and better defines the impact bilateral relationships have upon one another and on regional security.

The online version of *Comparative Connections* is available at <https://cc.pacforum.org>.

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CRS/PACIFIC FORUM

International attention during the first trimester of 2022 quite naturally focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, amid heavy (and often breathless) speculation regarding its political, security, and economic implications for Asia in general and China-Taiwan in particular. Largely overlooked (except by us) has been the release of the Biden administration's *Indo-Pacific Strategy* and the classified versions of the *National Defense Strategy (NDS)*, *Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)*, and *Missile Defense Review (MDR)*. Still missing in the Indo-Pacific Strategy are specifics regarding the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), first unveiled (sans details) by President Biden at last October's East Asia Summit, which supposedly encompasses the trade and economic dimension of the administration's Asia policy. Also still missing is the all-encompassing *National Security Strategy (NSS)*, which traditionally precedes these documents. It was reportedly sent back to the drawing board following the Russian attack.

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BY SHEILA A. SMITH, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS & CHARLES T. MCCLEAN,
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The US and Japan began the year with a [2+2 meeting](#), continuing their close coordination on alliance preparedness and regional coalition-building. COVID-19 affected the two allies' diplomatic schedule, however, as the omicron variant spread quickly in Washington, DC. Once again, an in-person meeting between the secretaries of state and defense and their counterparts, ministers of foreign affairs and defense, had to be moved online. Moreover, resolving the management of COVID by US Forces Japan with Japan's own protocols was on the agenda. But the US and Japanese governments met another challenge with alacrity: the conclusion of a new Host Nation Support agreement. With an [emphasis on alliance resilience](#), this five-year provision of Japanese support for the US military in Japan handily sidestepped some of the political difficulties that have colored talks in the past.

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BY BONNIE S. GLASER, GERMAN MARSHALL FUND OF THE US

US-China relations sank to new lows in the opening months of 2022. The year began with a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics by the US and nine other countries that objected to PRC policies against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, with another five countries citing the pandemic as the reason for not sending government representatives. A meeting between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin on the eve of the Olympics produced a lengthy joint statement that highlighted the depth and breadth of the China-Russia strategic partnership and raised alarm in Washington as well as in European capitals. US-China ties soured further when the Biden administration shared intelligence with Beijing revealing that Moscow planned to invade Ukraine, but instead of seeking to prevent the war, China gave the information to Russia and refused to act. Once war broke out, US officials warned China repeatedly against providing material support to the Russian economy or military. The Chinese refused to criticize Russia, however, and instead blamed the war on the United States. US and Chinese defense chiefs held their first—and long overdue—phone call. At every opportunity, Chinese officials warned the US to stop supporting Taiwan independence. The US sent several senior delegations to Taiwan, approved the sale of \$100 million in equipment and services to support the Patriot Air Defense System, and sailed three warships through the Taiwan Strait.

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MASON RICHEY, HANKUK UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES & ROB YORK, PACIFIC FORUM

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BY AKHIL RAMESH, PACIFIC FORUM

2022 started with a surging omicron wave, followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a global food, energy, and supply shortage crisis that impacted a wide range of sectors. The United States and India worked collaboratively and individually to put out these fires over the first four months of 2022, becoming more aware of synergies to build on and differences to address. In particular, in the first four months of 2022 bilateral ties witnessed success in their joint efforts. The Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership between the US and India was in action through cooperation on vaccines and COVID-19-related supply chain resiliency initiatives. Over the first four months of 2022, India removed several agricultural trade barriers, the US unveiled its Indo-Pacific Strategy, foreign and defense ministers held the 2+2 meeting, and there were several phone conversations and in-person meetings between the two administrations discussing Ukraine, Afghanistan, and other South Asian and Indo-Pacific issues.

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BY ROBERT SUTTER, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY & CHIN-HAO HUANG, YALE-NUS COLLEGE

Southeast Asia stopped being China's high priority as Beijing viewed US initiatives to compete with China in the region as flagging amid preoccupation with the war in Ukraine. Chinese diplomacy added to the reasons Southeast Asian governments generally eschewed support for US-backed sanctions against Russia and carefully avoided major controversy in UN votes on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. A Chinese-Solomon Islands security deal resulted in more US and allied attention to the Pacific Islands than ever before, surpassing rare past instances of concern over interventions by the Soviet Union, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, and others in an area usually considered of low strategic importance.

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The year 2022 in cross-Strait relations began quite predictably. Both sides repeated their calls for reconciliation, but in completely incompatible terms. Chinese leaders signaled somewhat obscurely that a new tougher Taiwan policy might be announced at the Chinese Communist Party's Twentieth Party Congress scheduled for this fall, which could further increase cross-Strait tensions. This predictability was upended by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. China insisted that this international confrontation had no lessons for the purely domestic matter of reunifying Taiwan. Nonetheless, China, Taiwan, and the US have all begun seeking military lessons from the Ukraine War.

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BY AIDAN FOSTER-CARTER, LEEDS UNIVERSITY, UK

The first months of 2022 were also the last of Moon Jae-in's presidency. Inter-Korean relations have been frozen for the past three years, and 2022 saw no change there. In April Moon exchanged letters with Kim Jong Un, whose warm tenor belied the reality on the ground. The North was already testing more and better missiles faster than ever, and tearing down ROK-built facilities at the shuttered Mount Kumgang resort. Days after his billets-doux with Moon, speaking at a military parade, Kim threatened ominously to widen the contexts in which his ever-improving nuclear arsenal might be used.

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Intermittent declarations of intent to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations notwithstanding, China-Japan tensions continued unabated. No high-level meetings were held between the two, but rather between each and its respective partners: China with Russia, and Japan with members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as well as separately, with Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. All of the latter had apprehension over Chinese expansionism as their focus. Both the Chinese and Japanese economies sputtered in response to COVID lockdowns and the rising cost of energy but trade relations were robust and expected to increase as the number of new COVID cases declines. However, each side continued to develop its military capabilities, with China continuing to voice irritation with Japan for its obvious, though largely tacit, support for Taiwan's autonomy.

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BY JI-YOUNG LEE, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY & ANDY LIM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

What impact will the victory of Yoon Seok-yul in South Korea's presidential elections have on Seoul-Tokyo relations? During his campaign, Yoon repeatedly [emphasized](#) the "strategic importance of normalizing" and improving relations with Japan. It was an open secret that Yoon was Tokyo's preferred candidate. With his May inauguration, opportunities for a diplomatic reset are on the horizon. Unsurprisingly, however, Japan is responding cautiously to overtures. Prime Minister Kishida Fumio sent his foreign minister to Yoon's inauguration on May 10, instead of attending himself, especially as he looks to the Upper House election in July. Seoul and Tokyo will probably schedule a long-awaited summit meeting when they begin to move toward addressing the issue of wartime forced laborers. That issue has strained bilateral ties since the South Korean Supreme Court [ruled](#) in favor of Korean wartime forced laborers in separate decisions in late 2018, leading to drawn-out legal processes against the court orders. Yoon's election win has not changed the Japanese position, which maintains that the reparations issue was fully settled by the 1965 normalization treaty.

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BY YU BIN, WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY

Perhaps more than any month in history, February 2022 will come to symbolize how the states of peace and war can flip-flop in a few days, with dire consequences for the global order. On Feb. 21, just one day after the closing ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics, Russia announced its [official recognition](#) of the independence of the two breakaway regions (Donetsk and Luhansk) of Ukraine. Three days later, Russia launched its “[special military operation](#)” in Ukraine to end the “total dominance” and “reckless expansion” of the United States on the world stage (in the words of Russian Foreign Minister [Sergey Lavrov](#)). As the West imposed sanctions on Russia and rushed arms into Ukraine, China carefully navigated between the warring parties with its independent posture of impartiality.

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KEI KOGA, NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Despite the lingering effects of COVID-19 and another change in leadership in Tokyo, Japan and Southeast Asian states continued to strengthen their functional cooperation. To counter the negative impact of the pandemic, Japan continued to donate vaccines to ASEAN member states. Economically, Japan and ASEAN together with other regional states concluded the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in January 2022. Militarily, Japan conducted the Indo-Pacific Deployment 2021 (IPD21) from August to November 2021, which has become a regularized defense deployment. Further, Japan had the very first bilateral Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting with the Philippines in April 2022. Diplomatically, Japan and ASEAN closely consulted with each other to enhance cooperation for the realization of Japan's “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) vision and ASEAN's “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” (AOIP). However, Japan-Southeast Asia relations now face new normative challenges regarding how their approach to liberal values, such as rule of law and democracy/human rights in the Indo-Pacific region because of the prolonged Myanmar political crisis and the 2022 Russo-Ukraine War.

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW

UKRAINE SEIZES THE HEADLINES AMID MOUNTING CONCERNS ABOUT CHINA

RALPH A. COSSA, PACIFIC FORUM
BRAD GLOSSERMAN, TAMA UNIVERSITY CRS/PACIFIC FORUM

International attention during the first trimester of 2022 quite naturally focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, amid heavy (and often breathless) speculation regarding its political, security, and economic implications for Asia in general and China-Taiwan in particular. Largely overlooked (except by us) has been the release of the Biden administration's *Indo-Pacific Strategy* and the classified versions of the *National Defense Strategy (NDS)*, *Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)*, and *Missile Defense Review (MDR)*. Still missing in the Indo-Pacific Strategy are specifics regarding the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), first unveiled (sans details) by President Biden at last October's East Asia Summit, which supposedly encompasses the trade and economic dimension of the administration's Asia policy. Also still missing is the all-encompassing *National Security Strategy (NSS)*, which traditionally precedes these documents. It was reportedly sent back to the drawing board following the Russian attack.

Events in the opening trimester of the year also raised both hopes and concerns regarding the viability of the Quad, the increasingly more formal collaboration among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. The Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) enhanced security partnership also made progress, to the delight of its members.

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The Long Shadow of Russia's Invasion

Russia's invasion of Ukraine cast a profound shadow over the region, with implications for just about every range of endeavor. As there is so much analysis out there, we merely summarize or outline key issues and concerns.

First, there are the *political* implications. The physical invasion of a sovereign country is an act of naked aggression, a throwback to the industrial (and pre-industrial) era. Moscow dispensed with fictions about “little green men” or “gray zone provocations” and sent in over 100,000 troops. This is a wakeup call for countries that thought such barbarity was a thing of the past. In the Indo-Pacific, the obvious analogue has been to China and its pressure on Taiwan to reunite with the mainland, a parallel that Beijing flatly denies. Nonetheless, both Taipei and Beijing are closely watching developments in Ukraine while examining lessons to be learned by their own defense establishments. For Taiwan, this includes increased emphasis on territorial defense forces and the purchase of “large numbers of small things” [already identified](#) as potential difference-makers were hostilities to break-out across the Strait. For Beijing it's the recognition that 21st century wars will be fought as much in the financial sector as on the battlefield. Like-minded governments have also sounded the alarm, reinvigorating national debates about defense policy (spending in particular) and cooperation to reinforce the rules-based order and the rejection of unilateral efforts to redraw international borders.

To the surprise of some, condemnation of the invasion hasn't been unanimous or full-throated. One of the most surprising holdouts has been India (discussed below), but it is not alone, as Kei Koga explains in his chapter on Japan-Southeast Asia relations. A substantial number of regional governments either abstained or voted against United Nations resolutions to condemn the invasion or the call to remove Russia from the body's Human Rights Council (HRC). They have also refused, almost without exception, to join the sanctions campaign against Russia.

That ambivalence stems from several factors. Most basically, there are longstanding relationships with Russia that typically involve arms sales or access to energy supplies. Abstentions by virtually all the Central Asian

former Soviet Socialist Republics were no doubt aimed at not upsetting their giant neighbor but looked to us like “whistling past the graveyard” since Putin could argue that they, like Ukraine, are not “real” countries but part of the glorious former Russian empire as well. In the UN HRC vote, there was some concern about punishing Russia before investigations of human rights violations were complete. Weighing most heavily is a fear of being forced to take sides between Western democracies and more autocratic governments. In the Indo-Pacific this is framed as choosing between Washington and Beijing but that is an oversimplification. A number of regional governments are uncomfortable with the values component of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy; Russia poses no direct security threat to them, the China threat remains hypothetical, and they enjoy the fruits of economic exchange with Beijing. Pragmatism encourages ambivalence and silence.



Figure 1 Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy examines the site of a recent battle, in Bucha close to Kyiv, Ukraine on April 4, 2022. Photo: Efrem Lukatsky/AP

Failure to condemn Russia or a readiness to tolerate its misdeeds has *practical implications*. All meetings that include Russian representatives now risk walkouts and paralysis, as Indonesia discovered as it hosted G20 meetings in this trimester. At the February meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors, held virtually and in person in Jakarta, Western officials [warned](#) Russia against invading its neighbor; the resulting tensions reportedly yielded a “watered down” statement on geopolitical risks as officials from both Moscow and Beijing objected to any reference to Ukraine.

Disagreements became more pronounced after the invasion. US President Joe Biden called for

Russia to be kicked out of the group; Indonesia, the chair, said it had no power to do so. Instead, at the April meeting of those same senior finance officials, Western representatives walked out as Russian delegates spoke; as Canadian Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, among those who walked out, [tweeted](#), “This week’s meetings in Washington are about supporting the world economy—and Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine is a grave threat to the global economy. Russia should not be participating or included in these meetings.” Russian officials [countered](#) that such meetings should not be politicized.

The G20 walkout is a worrying precedent for ASEAN. The ASEAN-plus meetings with dialogue partners later in the year are the concrete expression of ASEAN centrality, the regional institution’s *raison d’être*. Many of ASEAN’s dialogue partners had already expressed concern about being in the same room with Myanmar’s leader IF (and it’s a big IF) he is invited to the next East Asia Summit. If these leaders will not share the room with Russian officials either, ASEAN will be sorely challenged.

Economic anxieties abound

Finally, there are the *economic* effects. The Ukraine invasion has had several impacts. Ukraine is a critical source of foodstuffs and cutoff of those supplies [threatens](#) humanitarian crises. There has been an increase in commodity prices which fuels inflation. The invasion has slowed growth in Europe, depressing external demand for Asian goods. It also exacerbated global financial conditions, which hit Asian countries, especially those with weak fundamentals and high debt levels.



Figure 2 Grain elevators in the background at the Port of Odessa, Ukraine in October 2021. Photo: iStock image

Economic anxieties have been magnified by the COVID-related shutdowns in China, where the Beijing government’s “zero-tolerance” policy has resulted in the closure of entire cities. The pandemic’s spread to Shanghai, one of the most important nodes in global production networks, rippled around the world. The American Chamber of Commerce in China conducted a flash [survey](#) in the spring in which all companies responding—100%—reported they were negatively impacted by China’s policies concerning the recent outbreak. More than 15% said that operations in Shanghai were fully shut in the wake of the March COVID outbreak, while elsewhere 59% reported slowed or reduced production capabilities due to a lack of employees, an inability to get supplies, or government-ordered lockdowns. That matched a survey of 1,500 companies reported in [Caixin](#), the Chinese business daily (subscription required), in which 90% of small- and medium-size exporters failed to deliver on time during the spring outbreak, and 90% reduced production due to virus restrictions.

Still, assessment of the overall impact on the region was [mixed](#). The World Bank reduced its forecast for 2022, warning that the East Asia and Pacific region will grow 5%, down from the 5.4% projected in October. By contrast, the Asian Development Bank believes that regional growth will “continue to be strong,” with it projecting 5.2% growth this year.

Promoting a “Free and Open” Indo-Pacific

During “normal” times, a new administration is expected to first release its *National Security Strategy*, followed by its *National Defense Strategy*, ultimately followed by regional strategies, in our case an *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*. But these are not normal times. While the administration released an [Interim National Security Strategic Guidance](#) report shortly after taking office in March 2021, it elected to reverse the traditional order of the set of security strategy documents, starting with the release of the [Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States](#) in February, referred to by many as the *Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Report*.

The *FOIP* is not subtle in identifying the primary challenge to US interests in the region: “The PRC is combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might as it pursues a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and seeks to become the world’s most influential power.” It

cites the PRC's "coercion and aggression" which "spans the globe" but is "most acute in the Indo-Pacific" while further warning that "the PRC is also undermining human rights and international law, including freedom of navigation, as well as other principles that have brought stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific."

The FOIP report hastens to add, however, that "our objective is not to change the PRC but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share. We will also seek to manage competition with the PRC responsibly." It further challenges Beijing to cooperate in areas such as climate change and nonproliferation: "We believe it is in the interests of the region and the wider world that no country withhold progress on existential transnational issues because of bilateral differences."

Other challenges include, in the order stated, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and North Korea (which "continues to expand its illicit nuclear weapons and missile programs," plus natural disasters, resource scarcity, internal conflict, and governance challenges which, left unchecked, "threaten to destabilize the region." Russia is referenced nowhere in the document.

The strategy has five primary objectives, each to be accomplished "in concert with our allies and partners, as well as with regional institutions":

- Advance a free and open Indo-Pacific,
- Build connections within and beyond the region,
- Drive regional prosperity,
- Bolster Indo-Pacific security,
- Build regional resilience to transnational threats.

Each objective has its own chapter, which further articulates what is desired and expected. The descriptions coincide nicely with the "five pillars" laid out by Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his visit to Indonesia last December, as we spelled out in our [January report](#).

For those wishing to avoid reading the entire 19-page document, the White House also provided a handy [Fact Sheet](#) summarizing the key points. It

opens by drawing from President [Biden's remarks](#) to his ASEAN counterparts at last fall's East Asia Summit: "We envision an Indo-Pacific that is open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure—and we are ready to work together with each of you to achieve it."

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF): No There There (Thus Far)

Biden informed his ASEAN colleagues last December that "the United States will explore with partners the development of an Indo-Pacific economic framework that will define our shared objectives around trade facilitation, standards for the digital economy and technology, supply chain resiliency, decarbonization and clean energy, infrastructure, worker standards, and other areas of shared interest." The FOIP repeats that promise: "the United States will put forward an Indo-Pacific economic framework—a multilateral partnership for the 21st century" which will "help our economies to harness rapid technological transformation, including in the digital economy, and adapt to the coming energy and climate transition."

Yet as we go to print, details remain...forthcoming. So far, the administration has added that those shared objectives are now four "pillars" of work: (1) fair and resilient trade (encompassing seven subtopics, labor, environmental, and digital standards among them); (2) supply chain resilience; (3) infrastructure, clean energy, and decarbonization; and (4) tax and anti-corruption. The first pillar will be led by the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR), while the other three will be Department of Commerce responsibilities. Discussions with interested governments will commence after Biden reveals the framework—expected during his May visit to Northeast Asia—with the target for conclusion of negotiations (and any resulting agreements) reportedly being the US-hosted Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting in November 2023.

There are rumors that USTR is leaning too far forward on some issues, pushing for standards that satisfy progressives in the US but are unacceptable for many regional governments (and even some US stakeholders). Those demands become even more problematic given [reports](#) that the US is not prepared to increase

access to its own markets for framework members.

After talking to regional representatives, Matt Goodman and Aidan Arasasingham of CSIS [offered](#) five guiding principles to improve the framework's chances of success:

- Offer more meaningful incentives for countries to join and make binding commitments;
- Aim for inclusivity beyond close allies and partners to attract countries from South and Southeast Asia and across the Pacific;
- Break out digital negotiations as a separate pillar of work to secure a high-standard regional digital economy agreement;
- Demonstrate the framework's durability by securing congressional support and offer sustained capacity-building support in the region; and
- Centralize coordination through a single high-level coordinator, either a senior White House official or designated Cabinet officer, and clarify the role of key US agencies.

One particularly thorny issue is Taiwan. Taipei has [expressed](#) interest in joining and 200 members of Congress [signed](#) a letter backing its membership but the Biden administration is wary. Both Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and USTR Katherine Tai have been [noncommittal](#), although [Secretary of State Antony Blinken said](#) that the US is not "closing the door on anyone, including Taiwan." The administration's stance reflects concern that Taiwan's membership would anger Beijing, which would scare off other governments.

The limits of the framework are more troubling as the region continues to integrate. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) went into effect at the beginning of the year and South Korea's membership was activated on Feb. 1. It now accounts for about 31% of global GDP and population and 27% of global merchandise trade. In an especially optimistic analysis for Australia National University's East Asia Forum, Shiro Armstrong and Yose Rizal Damuri [argue](#) that with careful management

RCEP "opens the door for a broad and ambitious conception of economic cooperation and the ASEAN-based secretariat. ... It can become a platform from which Asia-wide [liberalization] and integration is managed." With the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) also contemplating expansion, US failure to make the IPEF substantive risks its marginalization in this vital region.

China: "Our Most Consequential Strategic Competitor"

A month after the White House released its *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, the Pentagon announced, on March 28, that it had transmitted to Congress the classified 2022 *National Defense Strategy*. Until the promised unclassified version is released (or the classified version is leaked), we will have to rely on the Defense Department's [Fact Sheet](#) for details. It states that, "(F)or the first time, the Department conducted its strategic reviews in a fully integrated way—incorporating the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and Missile Defense Review (MDR) in the NDS—ensuring tight linkages between our strategy and our resources." While noting that "Russia poses acute threats, as illustrated by its brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine," it nonetheless identifies China as "our most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge."

According to the Fact Sheet, "the classified NDS sets out how the Department of Defense will contribute to advancing and safeguarding vital US national interests—protecting the American people, expanding America's prosperity, and realizing and defending our democratic values." It lays out the following Defense priorities:

1. Defending the homeland, paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by the PRC
2. Deterring strategic attacks against the United States, Allies, and partners
3. Deterring aggression, while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary, prioritizing the PRC challenge in the Indo-Pacific, then the Russia challenge in Europe
4. Building a resilient Joint Force and defense ecosystem

It further notes that the Department of Defense “will act urgently to sustain and strengthen deterrence, with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as our most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge.” Other threats, again in order listed, include Russia (where the US will “collaborate with our NATO Allies and partners to reinforce robust deterrence in the face of Russian aggression), North Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations. It further notes that “(C)hanges in global climate and other dangerous transboundary threats, including pandemics, are transforming the context in which the Department operates.”

The Pentagon will advance its goal through three primary ways:

- Integrated deterrence, which “entails developing and combining our strengths to maximum effect, by working seamlessly across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, other instruments of US national power, and our unmatched network of Alliances and partnerships.”
- Campaigning, which will “strengthen deterrence and enable us to gain advantages against the full range of competitors’ coercive actions.
- Building enduring advantages for the future Joint Force, which “involves undertaking reforms to accelerate force development, getting the technology we need more quickly, and making investments in the extraordinary people of the Department, who remain our most valuable resource.”

For more on the concept of integrated deterrence, see Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s Dec. 4 [speech](#) at the Reagan National Defense Forum, which we summarized in our [January chapter](#).

Nuclear Posture Review and Missile Defense Review Briefly Defined

Also in our January chapter we discussed the hopes or concerns (depending on where you stand on the issue) that the administration’s

Nuclear Posture Review would proclaim a “no first use” policy, while predicting that, at most, it would “merely stress their ‘defensive purposes’ as a ‘last resort’ weapon. While we await the unclassified version for more details, the combined 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review and Missile Defense Review* [Fact Sheet](#) reaffirms our analysis: “As long as nuclear weapons exist, the fundamental role of US nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States, our allies, and partners. The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners.” To have gone any further at a time when Russia is rattling its nuclear saber would have been very disconcerting to America’s Asian and European allies.

According to the Fact Sheet, the 2022 *NPR* represents “a comprehensive, balanced approach to US nuclear strategy, policy, posture, and forces. Maintaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent and strong and credible extended deterrence commitments, remain a top priority for the Department and the Nation.”

The Fact Sheet also states that the *MDR* “provides a framework for US missile defense that is informed by the evolving missile threat environment. Missiles are a principal means for projecting military power, which makes missile defense a key component of integrated deterrence.” Hopefully the unclassified versions will put a little more meat on the bones of both reports.

Quad Hopes and Concerns

Events in the opening trimester of the year also raised both hopes and concerns regarding the viability of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or “Quad”), the increasingly more formal collaboration among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.

The hopes came in the form of the election of conservative Yoon Suk-yul as South Korea’s new president on March 9; his inauguration occurred May 10. Yoon has promised a more pro-US approach than his progressive predecessor, while also waving olive branches toward Tokyo. He further pledged, during a wide-ranging April 24 [interview](#) with the *Wall Street Journal*, that, if invited, he will “positively review joining” the

Quad; Korea is already associated with the Quad-plus, which has focused primarily on pandemic relief.



Figure 3 South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol dines with US Military officials at Camp Humphreys in South Korea in April 2022. Photo: Wall Street Journal

Some have also [speculated](#) that Seoul might replace New Delhi as the fourth Quad member, given alleged “frustration” with India over its abstentions during UN General Assembly votes related to Ukraine (not to mention its continued purchases of Russia gas, oil, and wheat). These concerns seem misplaced at present, in part because Washington and others have expressed “understanding” over India’s difficult position—Russia remains India’s primary arms supplier—and partly because Delhi’s criticisms seem to have grown louder since reports began emerging about Russian atrocities at Bucha and elsewhere.

At the April 11 “2+2” [meeting](#) in Washington DC, Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh, and Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar joined Secretaries Blinken and Austin in affirming their “common strategic interests” and “abiding commitment to the rules-based international order,” while agreeing “to continue charting an ambitious course in the US-India partnership.” The four senior ministers also “agreed to maintain close consultations on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, including on humanitarian assistance efforts, and echoed support for an independent investigation into the brutal violence deployed against civilians in Bucha.” Prime Minister Modi, in his April 22 “[Joint Statement](#) on the Visit of the Prime Minister of UK to India: Towards shared security and prosperity through national resilience” joined British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in expressing “in strongest terms their concern about the ongoing conflict and humanitarian

situation in Ukraine.” The two leaders “unequivocally condemned civilian deaths, and reiterated the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the conflict,” and the need for “respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.”

All eyes will be on Tokyo as the Quad leaders begin their second in-person summit—the first was held in Washington in October—where Ukraine is sure to again be a topic of discussion.

Earlier in the trimester, Secretary Blinken met with his Australian, Indian, and Japanese Quad counterparts in Canberra on Feb. 11 to reaffirm their “commitment to supporting Indo Pacific countries’ efforts to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific—a region which is inclusive and resilient, and in which states strive to protect the interests of their people, free from coercion.” Their “[Joint Statement](#) on Quad Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific focused on their joint fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and their practical cooperation “to address regional challenges, including humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR), maritime security, counter-terrorism, countering disinformation, and cyber security.” The foundation for Quad cooperation, and that of other regional mechanisms, is, as Blinken [noted](#), “that the issues that are really having an impact...whether it's climate, whether it's COVID, whether it's the impact of emerging technologies—not a single one of these issues can be effectively dealt with by any one of us acting alone.”



Figure 4 Meeting of the Quad foreign ministers in Melbourne, Australia on Feb. 11, 2022. Photo: Kevin Lamarque/AP

There was no reference to the then-impending Russian invasion of Ukraine or the rising challenge posed by Beijing, although their reiteration of “the importance of adherence to

international law, particularly as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to meet challenges to the maritime rules-based order, including in the South and East China Seas” was clearly written with China in mind. So too was their pledge to “champion the free, open, and inclusive rules-based order, rooted in international law, that protects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of regional countries.”

China pushed back, nevertheless, with foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian [complaining](#) that “With its so-called democracy having collapsed long ago, the US is forcing other countries to accept the standards of the American democracy, drawing lines with democratic values and piecing together cliques. That is a complete betrayal of democracy.”

In addition, the Quad Senior Cyber Group met in Sydney in early March to discuss cyber security challenges and Quad senior officials (assistant secretaries) held a virtual meeting later that month.

AUKUS Continues Its Progress

The Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) enhanced security partnership continues to move forward. In April, the leaders of the three countries—President Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson—met to assess the initiative. In a [joint statement](#), they reaffirmed their commitment to AUKUS and to a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” region. “In light of Russia’s unprovoked, unjustified, and unlawful invasion of Ukraine, we reiterated our unwavering commitment to an international system that respects human rights, the rule of law, and the peaceful resolution of disputes free from coercion.” In an accompanying [fact sheet](#), they applauded “important steps toward implementation” of Australia’s conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability.

Initially, AUKUS focused on four areas: underwater capabilities, quantum technologies, artificial intelligence, and advanced cyber. But the leaders charged that the need for cooperation “has only grown” since the deal was first agreed, and they have expanded into four new areas: hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities, electronic warfare, innovation and information sharing.



Figure 5 US President Joe Biden speaks with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Sept. 15, 2021. Photo: Reuters

After their meeting, the leaders said they were “pleased with the progress” they had made and suggested that other countries might be able to join. “As our work progresses on these and other critical defense and security capabilities, we will seek opportunities to engage allies and close partners,” the fact sheet [said](#). That was especially welcome news in Tokyo, where Chief Cabinet Secretary Matsuno Hirokazu [said](#) that Tokyo will “continue to strengthen cooperation in various ways” with the three “important security and defense partners.” He added that “in the wake of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific region is in need of further strengthening security cooperation among allies and like-minded countries, and Japan commends (the AUKUS announcement) as a timely response.” The conservative *Sankei Shinbun* newspaper reported that the members had informally asked Japan about joining, a rumor that was quickly [shot down](#) by both Japanese and US officials. White House spokesperson Jen Psaki flatly dismissed the report as “inaccurate.” She explained that “Our focus has been on finalizing a trilateral program of work on a range of advanced military capabilities that align our priorities, amplify our collective strengths and accelerate the development and acquisition of leading-edge defense capabilities.” “It is not a ‘JAUkus’ plan,” she added.

The Road Ahead

As we enter the second trimester of 2022, the unknowns outweigh the knowns. Is economic recovery around the corner or does another COVID-19 outbreak lurk instead? When will the war in Ukraine end and how? Are we drifting (or rushing) into a new bipolar confrontation with

Russia and China pitted against the West and much of Asia struggling to remain on the sidelines? We'll be watching Biden's trip to Japan and South Korea, actions by and reactions to the new administration in Seoul, and the outcome and subsequent impact of the Australian national election, to name just three triggering events. There are certain to be many more.

REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 1, 2022: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement [enters](#) into force.

Jan. 2, 2022: Vietnam [urges](#) China to urgently reopen border gates as trade stalls.

Jan. 3, 2022: Taiwan announces launch of All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency to boost capabilities of Taiwan's reservists.

Jan. 3, 2022: Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr. S Jaishankar [meets](#) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss bilateral issues, the Indo-Pacific region, and other global matters.

Jan. 3, 2022: Okinawa's governor [criticizes](#) US military over spread of Omicron variant of COVID-19.

Jan. 5, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) suspected ballistic missile into the sea off its east coast, in its first such launch since October.

Jan. 5, 2022: US Navy [joins](#) India, Australia, Canada, Republic of Korea, and Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force to begin multinational exercise Sea Dragon 22.

Jan. 6, 2022: Australia and Japan [sign](#) a treaty to beef up defense and security cooperation at a virtual summit.

Jan. 9-10, 2022: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [visits](#) Sri Lanka as the island nation searches for funds to rebuild foreign exchange reserves and repay debt amid ballooning import bills.

Jan. 9, 2022: US [agrees](#) to impose stricter COVID-19 measures at US military bases in Japan.

Jan. 10, 2022: Aung San Suu Kyi [faces](#) six years in jail after new sentences from a Myanmar court.

Jan. 10, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken [says](#) China's sanctions in December on four US Commission on International Religious Freedom commissioners "constitute yet another PRC affront against universal rights."

Jan. 11, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) a suspected ballistic missile toward the East Sea, less than a week after it launched what it claimed to be a hypersonic missile.

Jan. 11, 2022: Supreme Court of South Korea [dismisses](#) second appeal filed by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries against the forced sale of two of its patents to compensate forced labor victims.

Jan. 11, 2022: Taiwan [suspends](#) F-16 training missions after jet crashes into the sea.

Jan. 12, 2022: China [orders](#) the suspension of six more US flights in the coming weeks after a surge in passengers testing positive for COVID-19.

Jan. 12, 2022: Cambodia [postpones](#) meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers scheduled for next week because some ministers expressed "difficulties" in attending.

Jan. 13, 2022: Japan [donates](#) approximately 2.72 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to Indonesia.

Jan. 13, 2022: Inter-governmental Mekong River Commission (MRC) [urges](#) China and mainland Southeast Asian countries to better coordinate management of Mekong hydropower dams and reservoirs.

Jan. 13, 2022: After nearly two years of border closures to protect North Korea against the pandemic, some humanitarian aid [trickles](#) into the country.

Jan. 14, 2022: Myanmar's ousted former leader Aung San Suu Kyi and deposed President Win Myint [face](#) five additional charges of corruption, each carrying a maximum of 15 years in prison.

Jan. 14, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) two suspected ballistic missiles eastward, South Korea's military said, after Pyongyang publicly warned earlier in the day of a "stronger and certain" response to the United States' imposition of new sanctions.

Jan. 15, 2022: Singapore's prime minister [says](#) ASEAN should continue excluding Myanmar's junta from its meetings until it cooperates on an agreed peace plan.

Jan. 17, 2022: US Special Envoy for North Korea Sung Kim, South Korea's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk, and Director-General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi Takehiro [hold](#) phone talks to discuss North Korea's missile launch.

Jan. 17, 2022: UN envoy [calls](#) on Thailand's support to prevent a deterioration in the crisis in neighboring Myanmar and welcome assurances that refugees fleeing military operations will be protected by the Thai government.

Jan. 18 – 20, 2022: Russia, China, and Iran [hold](#) second joint naval exercises in the Gulf of Oman. They practice sea-lane protection, anti-pirate, and hostage-rescue operations.

Jan. 20, 2022: Vietnam's foreign ministry officials [reject](#) reports from Chinese media that Vietnam has been supporting and arming militia fishing vessels in the maritime dispute.

Jan. 20, 2022: China and Russia [delay](#) a US effort at the United Nations to impose sanctions on five North Koreans in response to recent missile launches by Pyongyang.

Jan. 21, 2022: State Department [imposes](#) sanctions on three Chinese entities for engaging in missile-technology proliferation activities.

Jan. 21, 2022: US Transportation Department [issues](#) order to suspend 44 China-bound flights from the US by four Chinese carriers in response to the Chinese government's decision to suspend some US carrier flights over COVID-19 concerns.

Jan. 23, 2022: Taiwan [reports](#) largest incursion since October by China's air force into its air defense zone.

Jan. 24, 2022: Two US aircraft carrier groups [enter](#) South China Sea for training as Taiwan reported a Chinese air force incursion at the top of the waterway including a new electronic warfare jet.

Jan. 25, 2022: White House [announces](#) the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force, chaired by the Department of Homeland Security, will work to implement the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act and prohibit the importation of goods made by forced labor from China.

Jan. 25, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) two suspected cruise missiles from an inland area, its fifth such test this year.

Jan. 26, 2022: In an anti-dumping dispute that dates back to 2012, the World Trade Organization [rules](#) in China's favor, permitting it to slap duties on \$645 million worth of US imports per year.

Jan. 26, 2022: Secretary Blinken [holds](#) call with China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss the Russia-Ukraine situation, health security and climate change. The MFA [readout](#) says Wang called on the US to "stop interfering with the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, stop playing with fire on the Taiwan issue, and stop creating various anti-China 'small cliques.'"

Jan. 26, 2022: US Navy [makes](#) arrangements to recover F-35C fighter jet that fell into the South China Sea after the pilot attempted a landing on the *USS Carl Vinson* aircraft carrier.

Jan. 27, 2022: North Korea [sets off](#) another volley of suspected short-range ballistic or tactical guided missiles.

Jan. 27, 2022: US announces it will join the UK, the EU, Australia, and Taiwan at the WTO to challenge China's trade curbs on Lithuania.

Jan. 27, 2022: Prime Minister Narendra Modi [hosts](#) first India-Central Asia Summit in a virtual format.

Jan. 28, 2022: China [agreed](#) to allow UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) Michelle Bachelet to visit Xinjiang in the first half of 2022 after the Beijing Winter Olympic Games.

Jan. 28, 2022: China's ambassador to US [warns](#) of conflict over Taiwan.

Jan. 29, 2022: United States customs agency has [banned](#) imports from Malaysian disposable glove maker YTY Industry Holdings (YTY Group) over suspected forced labor practices.

Jan. 30, 2022: Taiwan Vice President William Lai [concludes](#) visit to the United States and Honduras with a virtual meeting with US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Jan. 30, 2022: Chinese Foreign Ministry “[lodges](#) solemn representation” with the US over meetings between Taiwan’s Vice President Lai and several US officials, including Vice President Kamala Harris in Honduras and a virtual meeting with House Speaker Pelosi.

Jan. 30, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) ballistic missile toward the East Sea said South Korea’s military. It conducted four other launches earlier this month, including those of what it claimed to be hypersonic missiles.

Jan. 31, 2022: United States, Britain, and Canada [impose](#) sanctions against additional officials in Myanmar.

Feb. 1, 2022: RCEP [takes](#) effect for South Korea. This 15-member free trade agreement is the first to have both South Korea and Japan as members.

Feb. 1, 2022: Japan’s Parliament [adopts](#) resolution on the “serious human rights situation” in China and calls on Prime Minister Kishida Fumio’s government to take steps to relieve the situation.

Feb. 2, 2022: US House of Representatives [advances](#) a multibillion-dollar bill aimed at increasing US competitiveness with China and boosting US semiconductor manufacturing.

Feb. 4, 2022: Russia [agrees](#) to a 30-year contract to supply gas to China via a new pipeline and will settle the new gas sales in euros.

Feb. 4, 2022: United States [asks](#) Japan if it could divert some LNG to Europe if the Ukraine crisis leads to a disruption of supplies.

Feb. 6, 2022: Singapore President Halimah Yacob [meets](#) China’s President Xi Jinping in Beijing and congratulates him on the successful hosting of the Olympic Winter Games.

Feb. 7, 2022: State Department [approves](#) a possible arms sale to Taiwan of equipment and services to support the Patriot Air Defense System for an estimated cost of \$100 million.

Feb. 8, 2022: Taiwan says that it will [relax](#) a ban on Japanese food imports put in place following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Feb. 8, 2022: CSIS reports that North Korea [harbors](#) an undisclosed missile base built specifically for a unit equipped with intermediate-range and potentially intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

Feb. 8, 2022: Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) [announces](#) that it has conducted a four-day exercise with the US Navy in the East China Sea to boost joint deterrence capabilities.

Feb. 9, 2022: Japan [offers](#) Europe part of its liquefied natural gas imports over fears supplies will be disrupted following a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Feb. 9, 2022: China [suspends](#) imports of beef from Lithuania. No reason is provided, but the move is the latest in a series of retaliatory measures Beijing has taken against the Baltic state since it allowed a de facto Taiwan embassy to open in its capital.

Feb. 10, 2022: Taiwan’s foreign ministry [expresses](#) support for US Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and says it will continue to exchange views with Washington on it.

Feb. 11, 2022: Hong Kong [extends](#) a ban on incoming flights from eight countries, including the United States and Britain, and imposed one on Nepal until March 4.

Feb. 11, 2022: President Joe Biden [nominates](#) Philip Goldberg a senior member of the foreign service, as ambassador to South Korea.

Feb. 11, 2022: White House [releases](#) its Indo-Pacific Strategy, which notes the challenges that China poses for the United States.

Feb. 11, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken and foreign ministers of Japan, Australia, and India [release](#) a joint statement on their fight against COVID-19 and their cooperation “to address regional challenges, including humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR), maritime security, counter-terrorism, countering disinformation, and cyber security” as part of the Quad Foreign Ministers meeting.

Feb. 11, 2022: Indonesia [urges](#) G20 to establish a global body that can dispense emergency funds during a health crisis.

Feb. 12, 2022: South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi [hold](#) bilateral talks in Hawaii to discuss North Korea, shared history, and other bilateral issues.

Feb. 12, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken and foreign ministers of South Korea and Japan, meeting in Honolulu to discuss North Korea and issues between Japan and South Korea, [present](#) a unified front against Pyongyang's recent missile tests.

Feb. 16, 2022: Vietnam [announces](#) that it will lift most restrictions on international tourists arriving in the country beginning March 15.

Feb. 17, 2022: New Zealand [says](#) it will not allow Myanmar into RCEP.

Feb. 18, 2022: Russia and China [alter](#) communique being drafted by the G20 to remove a reference to "current" geopolitical tensions clouding the global economic outlook.

Feb. 19, 2022: Philippines [follows](#) New Zealand's decision to reject inclusion of Myanmar in RCEP.

Feb. 20, 2022: Australia [brands](#) a Chinese navy vessel pointing a laser at one of his nation's surveillance aircraft off the northern coast an "act of intimidation."

Feb. 21, 2022: China's foreign ministry [denies](#) a US report that a spent rocket booster forecast to crash on the far side of the moon next month was debris from a Chinese lunar mission in 2014.

Feb. 21, 2022: China [imposes](#) sanctions on US defense firms Raytheon Technology Corporation and Lockheed Martin Corporation in response to their arms sales to Taiwan.

Feb. 22, 2022: India [asks](#) for restraint and greater diplomatic effort to prevent military escalation in Ukraine as it prepares to evacuate its citizens.

Feb. 23, 2022: South Korea [test-fires](#) a long-range surface-to-air missile.

Feb. 23, 2022: China's foreign ministry [asserts](#) that Taiwan is "not Ukraine" and has always been an inalienable part of China.

Feb. 23, 2022: Vladimir Putin [declares](#) "special military operation," launches invasion of Ukraine.

Feb. 24, 2022: President Biden [speaks](#) with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar about the crisis in Ukraine and the importance of a strong collective response to Russian aggression.

Feb. 24, 2022: Indian Prime Minister Modi [participates](#) in a call with Russian President Putin, and the prime minister urges an end to the violence in Ukraine.

Feb. 24, 2022: Taiwan's air force [scrambles](#) to warn away nine Chinese aircraft that entered its air defense zone on the same day that Russia invaded Ukraine.

Feb. 25, 2022: United Nations Security Council [fails](#) to adopt a draft resolution, submitted by the United States and Albania, intended to end Russia's military offensive against Ukraine

Feb. 25, 2022: Japan [strengthens](#) sanctions against Russia to include financial institutions and military equipment exports.

Feb. 25, 2022: Based on Biden administration leaks, *The New York Times* [reports](#) that the US shared intelligence with China on Russia's troop buildup around Ukraine over a three-month period and urged Beijing to tell Putin not to invade. The Chinese dismissed the intelligence and allegedly shared it with Moscow.

Feb. 26, 2022: Modi [participates](#) in a call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

Feb. 26, 2022: US warship [sails](#) through the strait separating Taiwan and China.

Feb. 27, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) an unidentified projectile, says South Korea's military.

Feb. 27, 2022: Former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo suggests the US renounce “strategic ambiguity” toward a cross-Strait conflict, saying in unusually direct language that a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency.

Feb. 27, 2022: South Korea and Japan [say](#) that North Korea fired a ballistic missile.

Feb. 28, 2022: South Korea and Singapore [unveil](#) sanctions against Russia for invading Ukraine, rare pushback against Moscow in a region that largely avoided taking sides in the conflict.

March 1, 2022: USTR [releases](#) its 2021 Annual Report and its Fiscal Year 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, in which one of its objectives is to “pursue strengthened enforcement to ensure that China lives up to its existing trade obligations.”

March 1, 2022: A delegation of former senior US defense and security officials sent by President Joe Biden [arrive](#) in Taipei.

March 2, 2022: Modi [participates](#) in a call with Putin to review the situation in Ukraine and emphasize India’s need to evacuate its citizens from Kharkiv amid an assault by Russian forces.

March 2, 2022: Cambodia [rejects](#) the use or threats of force and does not side with any of the parties in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

March 3, 2022: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank [announces](#) that it has put all activities relating to Russia and Belarus on hold and under review in the wake of the conflict in Ukraine.

March 3, 2022: Top diplomats of Southeast Asian nations [call](#) for an “immediate cease-fire” or “armistice” between Russia and Ukraine, urging continuation of dialogue between the two warring parties.

March 4, 2022: North Korea appears to continue producing fissile materials for nuclear weapons at its main Yongbyon nuclear facility, [says](#) a US monitoring website, citing recent satellite imagery of Yongbyon.

March 5, 2022: North Korea [says](#) it has conducted “another important” test for reconnaissance satellite systems.

March 6, 2022: Over 100 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar [arrive](#) by boat on the shores of Indonesia's Aceh province.

March 7, 2022: China's foreign minister [announces](#) that it is a “naked double standard” to seek to conflate the issues of Taiwan and Ukraine, claiming the island has always been part of China.

March 7, 2022: Analysts [say](#) recent photos taken from space show new buildings and other signs of work at North Korea’s nuclear testing facility.

March 7, 2022: Three-day 23rd Executive Steering Group Meeting [begins](#) in New Delhi between the Indian and US Navies. The meeting discusses bolstering defense relations

March 8, 2022: Vietnam lodges a complaint and urges China to [respect](#) its exclusive economic zone and sovereignty after China had earlier announced military drills in the vicinity of China’s Hainan Islands in South China Sea from March 4-15.

March 8, 2022: South Korea's military [seizes](#) a North Korean boat that crossed into its waters and fires a warning shot to see off a North Korean patrol vessel that tries to intervene.

March 9, 2022: [Summitry](#) between President Biden and ASEAN leaders to be held later this month is postponed.

March 10, 2022: Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez [says](#) Manila is ready to assist Washington should the war between Russia and Ukraine reach Asia.

March 10, 2022: Conservative candidate Yoon Seok-yul narrowly [wins](#) the South Korean presidential election.

March 10, 2022: Members of US Congressional Hispanic Caucus [urge](#) President Biden to champion vaccine collaboration with India to end the COVID-19 pandemic

March 11, 2022: India [claims](#) that it has accidentally fired a missile into Pakistan because of a “technical malfunction” during routine maintenance.

March 11, 2022: North Korea [appears](#) to be working to restore underground tunnels of its purportedly demolished Punggye-ri nuclear test site.

March 11, 2022: Prime Minister Kishida and President-elect Yoon [speak](#) on the phone for the first time since Yoon's victory. They agreed on the importance of improving ties and resolving pending issues. Kishida is the second leader to speak with Yoon, after President Joe Biden.

March 12, 2022: Vietnam [bans](#) Sony's action movie *Uncharted* from domestic distribution over a scene featuring a map that shows a disputed line declared by China to stake its claim to large parts of the South China Sea.

March 13, 2022: Australia [reports](#) that it has stopped an "incursion" by Beijing into the Pacific islands by talking with leaders there weekly and offering vaccine aid.

March 14, 2022: US [tells](#) allies in NATO and several Asian countries that China has signaled willingness to provide military and economic aid to Russia, at Moscow's request, to support its war in Ukraine.

March 14, 2022: National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [meets](#) Chinese Communist Party Politburo Member and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission Yang Jiechi in Rome and discusses issues in US-China relations, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the "importance of maintaining open lines of communication between the United States and China."

March 15, 2022: USS *Abraham Lincoln* aircraft carrier [leads](#) military exercises in the Yellow Sea, and air defense artillery at Osan air base intensified drills.

March 16, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) an apparent ballistic missile, but the launch ended in failure, says South Korea's military.

March 17, 2022: South Korean automaker Hyundai Motor [opens](#) Indonesia factory, where the company plans to roll out electric vehicles.

March 19, 2022: PLA spokesperson [says](#) the USS Ralph Johnson's sail-through of the Taiwan Strait on March 17 is a "provocative" act by the US and sends the wrong signals to pro-Taiwan independence forces.

March 20, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) four suspected projectiles from its multiple rocket launchers into the Yellow Sea, says South Korean military officials.

March 20, 2022: Japan [pledges](#) to offer Cambodia about \$428 million in aid and 1.3 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX global vaccine-sharing program.

March 21, 2022: Southeast Asian peace envoy [meets](#) Myanmar's military rulers on his first trip to the crisis-hit country.

March 24, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) an apparent ICBM toward the East Sea, says South Korea's military.

March 24, 2022: South Korean and Japanese authorities [say](#) that North Korea has conducted what is likely its largest-ever intercontinental ballistic missile launch.

March 25, 2022: North Korea [says](#) that it successfully test-fired a new ICBM, the *Hwasong-17*, the previous day on the direct order of leader Kim Jong Un. US and South Korean intelligence later [say](#) the ICBM launched by North Korea was actually a *Hwasong-15* missile disguised to look like the newer, larger *Hwasong-17*, according to South Korean military sources.

March 25, 2022: Solomon Islands [confirms](#) it is drafting a security deal with China.

March 26, 2022: Beijing [announces](#) it will host the third regional meeting between foreign ministers of neighboring countries of Afghanistan at the end of the month.

March 27, 2022: India and Maldives [sign](#) a memorandum of understanding to upgrade police infrastructure in archipelago.

March 28, 2022: Classified versions of US *National Defense Strategy*, [Nuclear Posture Review](#), and *Missile Defense Review* are [released](#). The 2022 National Defense Strategy identifies China as the "most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge for the Department."

March 28, 2022: Kim Jong Un [says](#) North Korea will continue to develop “formidable striking capabilities” that cannot be bartered or sold for anything.

March 29, 2022: Biden [meets](#) Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong to discuss Asian relations.

March 30, 2022: US Securities and Exchange Commission [places](#) 11 Chinese entities on its provisional or conclusive list of issuers under the Holding Foreign Companies Accountable Act.

March 30, 2022: Secretary Blinken [meets](#) Indian FM Jaishankar to discuss bilateral cooperation to address the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, shared efforts in the Indo-Pacific, and the global economy.

March 31, 2022: In response to US visa restrictions on Chinese officials who are believed to have violated human rights, China [imposes](#) reciprocal visa restrictions on US officials “who concocted lies about China’s human rights issues, pushed for sanctions against China and undermined China’s interests.”

March 31, 2022: State Department [releases](#) the 2022 Hong Kong Policy Act Report, which documents actions by leaders in Hong Kong and China from March 2021 through March 2022 that have further eroded both democratic institutions and human rights.

April 1, 2022: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [says](#) ties with India are one of the key priorities of Russia and that the country appreciated New Delhi's neutral stand on Ukraine.

April 1, 2022: EU leaders [call](#) on China to help end Russia’s war in Ukraine.

April 1, 2022: Japan [provides](#) emergency grant aid for humanitarian assistance to populations affected by the coup in Myanmar.

April 1, 2022: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [visits](#) India from March 31-April 1, 2022 and meets with FM Jaishankar. Lavrov expresses appreciation for India’s neutral stand on Ukraine.

April 1, 2022: Department of Defense [releases](#) its annual Freedom of Navigation Report for Fiscal Year 2021, which lists excessive maritime claims by 26 claimants, including China.

April 2, 2022: China [proposes](#) revising confidentiality rules involving offshore listings, removing a legal hurdle to China-US cooperation on audit oversight while putting the onus on Chinese companies to protect state secrets.

April 4, 2022: Bucha massacre [is](#) first reported.

April 4, 2022: China [extends](#) lockdown in Shanghai after surge in COVID infections.

April 5, 2022: Department of State notifies Congress that it has agreed to [sell](#) Taiwan equipment, training, and other services totaling \$95 million to support the island’s Patriot Air Defense System.

April 5, 2022: AUKUS leaders [release](#) a statement reaffirming their commitment to the initiative and to a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” region. They also [agree](#) to cooperate on hypersonic weapons and electronic warfare capabilities.

April 5, 2022: China [warns](#) Philippines to avoid “improper measures” for stability in South China Sea.

April 6, 2022: South Korea's president-elect [says](#) he wants nuclear bombers and submarines to return to the Korean Peninsula.

April 6, 2022: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [plans](#) to visit Taiwan on April 10, according to Japanese sources; the trip is [postponed](#) when she tests positive for COVID-19.

April 7, 2022: China [warns](#) that it will take strong measures if Speaker Pelosi visits Taiwan. The trip is called off when Pelosi tests positive for COVID-19.

April 8, 2022: Peng Ming-min, a Taiwanese democracy activist and the DPP candidate for president in Taiwan’s first freely contested popular election in 1996, [dies](#).

April 9, 2022: White House Press Secretary Psaki [says](#) that President Biden believes that the US-India partnership is the most important relationship the US has in the world.

April 10, 2022: China's foreign ministry [expresses](#) "strong dissatisfaction" with the United States after it raised concerns over Beijing's coronavirus control measures

April 11, 2022: US secretaries of state and defense and India's external affairs and defense ministers [take part](#) in 2+2 meeting, affirming their "common strategic interests" and "abiding commitment to the rules-based international order."

April 11, 2022: President Biden [meets](#) virtually with Modi to discuss deepening ties between both governments, economies, and people.

April 11, 2022: State Department [announces](#) that the US and India have "agreed to launch new supply chain-cooperation measures" to "more swiftly support each other's priority defense requirements." It also [announces](#) that the two countries have signed a Space Situational Awareness arrangement.

April 12, 2022: US aircraft carrier [deploys](#) off Korean Peninsula amid tensions following North Korean missile launches.

April 12, 2022: Quad countries [hold](#) handover ceremony for COVID-19 vaccine donation to Cambodia.

April 13, 2022: Australia's international development minister [asks](#) Solomon Islands not to sign China security pact.

April 14, 2022: Russian submarines in the Sea of Japan, also known as East Sea, [fired](#) cruise missiles during exercises.

April 14-15, 2022: Sen. Lindsey Graham [leads](#) congressional delegation to Taiwan during which they discuss US-Taiwan relations, regional security, and other issues of mutual interest with senior Taiwan leaders.

April 15, 2022: South Korean government officially [approves](#) plan to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

April 16, 2022: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [observes](#) the test firing of a new type of tactical guided weapon aimed at boosting the country's nuclear capabilities.

April 18, 2022: US envoy [vows](#) "strongest possible deterrent" over North Korea weapons tests.

April 19, 2022: US [shows](#) concerns after China says it signs security pact with Solomon Islands.

April 20, 2022: US and partner countries [walk out](#) of a G20 plenary session when Russia's delegates speak.

April 21, 2022: Quad representatives [hold](#) handover ceremony for COVID-19 vaccine donation to Thailand.

April 21, 2022: South Korea successfully [test-fires](#) two submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) consecutively earlier this week, in a sign the missile is nearing operational deployment.

April 21, 2022: Chinese President Xi [proposes](#) a "global security initiative" that upholds the principle of "indivisible security," though he gives no details on how it will be implemented.

April 22, 2022: Indian and UK prime ministers [issue](#) a joint statement expressing "in strongest terms their concern about the ongoing conflict and humanitarian situation in Ukraine."

April 22, 2022: Biden administration "Indo-Pacific czar" Kurt Campbell [visits](#) Solomon Islands after it signs a security pact with China.

April 23, 2022: Guided-missile destroyer USS *Momsen* [arrives](#) in Goa, India, for a scheduled port visit. The *Momsen* is deployed to the US 7th Fleet in support of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

April 23, 2022: Japan's foreign minister [promises](#) his country will bolster its military to help the United States maintain regional security.

April 24, 2022: South Korea's President-elect Yoon says he would "positively [review](#)" joining the Quad.

April 24, 2022: Australia's defense minister [accuses](#) China of paying bribes for international deals, but refuses to say whether corruption played a role in Beijing's defense pact with the Solomon Islands.

April 25, 2022: European Union and India [agree](#) to set up a trade and technology council to step up cooperation.

April 26, 2022: US official says Washington [wants](#) to expand security cooperation with Papua New Guinea.

April 27, 2022: USTR [releases](#) the 2022 Special 301 Report on intellectual property protection and enforcement, which places China on its Priority Watch List, indicating that “particular problems exist in that country with respect to IP protection, enforcement, or market access for U.S. persons relying on IP.”

April 27, 2022: Court in military-ruled Myanmar [sentences](#) deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi to five years in jail after finding her guilty in the first of 11 corruption cases.

April 28, 2022: China and Iran [agree](#) to step up military cooperation in a range of areas including exercises.

April 29, 2022: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz [visits](#) Japan, not China, on his first Asian trip.

Regional chronology by Pacific Forum research intern Owen Ou.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

US-JAPAN RELATIONS

RUSSIAN INVASION ACCELERATES ALLIANCE REVIEW

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The US and Japan began the year with a [2+2 meeting](#), continuing their close coordination on alliance preparedness and regional coalition-building. COVID-19 affected the two allies' diplomatic schedule, however, as the omicron variant spread quickly in Washington, DC. Once again, an in-person meeting between the secretaries of state and defense and their counterparts, ministers of foreign affairs and defense, had to be moved online. Moreover, resolving the management of COVID by US Forces Japan with Japan's own protocols was on the agenda. But the US and Japanese governments met another challenge with alacrity: the conclusion of a new Host Nation Support agreement. With an [emphasis on alliance resilience](#), this five-year provision of Japanese support for the US military in Japan handily sidestepped some of the political difficulties that have colored talks in the past.

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Much is ahead for Japan this year in updating its strategic planning. Prime Minister Kishida Fumio began a [strategic review](#) late last year, and the National Security Council as well as the Ministry of Defense got to work on laying out the aims of a new *National Security Strategy*, 10-year defense plan, and an accompanying procurement plan. Shaped by the accelerating shift in the military balance in Japan's vicinity and across the Indo-Pacific, this strategic review is expected to be momentous. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) also [initiated its own study](#) of Japan's strategic needs and [produced a draft](#) that highlights doubling Japan's defense spending to match NATO's target of 2% of GDP.

But President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida have focused on Europe [since Russia invaded Ukraine](#). Both allies have been [in sync](#) as the G7 mobilized to impose sanctions against Russia and aid to Ukraine. Framing this crisis as a violation of the postwar international order, Kishida firmly committed Japan to ongoing and comprehensive engagement with not only the US but also European nations. Moreover, Putin's war against Ukraine has galvanized dialogue between US allies in NATO and in Asia, creating a deepening diplomatic opportunity for Japan to develop European support should a similar crisis erupt in the Indo-Pacific.

US-Japan Alliance Resilience

The year opened with a surge in bilateral diplomacy, albeit via meetings that had to be moved online given the spread of the highly contagious omicron variant of COVID-19. After [reaching an agreement](#) on Host Nation Support in late December 2021, January 2022 featured a virtual Security Consultative Committee ("2+2") meeting followed by a virtual Biden-Kishida summit.

Under the new [Host Nation Support](#) budget, Japan will [contribute](#) ¥1.05 trillion (\$8.1 billion) to hosting US forces over a five-year period that begins with fiscal 2022. Japan's commitment marks an increase of ¥75 billion (\$577 million) compared to the previous five-year agreement, which spanned from fiscal 2016 to 2020. Apart from covering costs related to maintaining the facilities used by US troops in Japan, the upcoming budget also includes funds to [support joint military exercises](#), including ¥20 billion (\$154 million) for the purchase of advanced virtual combat training systems.



Figure 1 Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio talks in a virtual meeting with US President Joe Biden on Jan. 21. Photo: Cabinet Secretariat / Kyodo

In recognition of the new agreement's efforts to strengthen the alliance, Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa announced on Dec. 21 that the Japanese government would no longer use the term "sympathy budget" for Host Nation Support. Instead, Hayashi said it would be referred to as "[the budget to enhance resilience of the alliance](#)." Hayashi and Raymond Greene, chargé d'affaires ad interim at the US embassy, [officially signed](#) the new Special Measures Agreement concerning Host Nation Support in Tokyo on Jan. 7, the same day that the US and Japan held their virtual 2+2 meeting.

The 2+2 meeting—which brought together Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Foreign Minister Hayashi, and Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo—was notable for the breadth of topics that it covered. In addition to emphasizing "the US-Japan Alliance's critical role as the cornerstone of regional peace, security, and prosperity," the meeting's [joint statement](#) also recognized the "urgent challenges presented by geopolitical tensions, the COVID-19 pandemic, arbitrary and coercive economic policies, and the climate crisis." Additionally, the four ministers used their meeting to voice a wide range of concerns regarding China's "efforts...to undermine the rules-based order," including specific mentions of China's activities in the East and South China Seas, human rights issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, and the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

This broader perspective on the alliance's need to cover new domains and threats was echoed in the [virtual summit](#) held between Biden and Kishida on Jan. 21. This video call marked the first substantive meeting for the two leaders since

Kishida became prime minister on Oct. 4, 2021. At the summit, Biden and Kishida highlighted their “[shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region](#),” reiterated concerns raised at the 2+2 meeting regarding China as well as North Korea, and pledged to work together to “deter Russian aggression against Ukraine.”

Two outcomes of the summit were especially notable. The first was that Biden accepted Kishida’s invitation to visit Japan in the first half of 2022 for an in-person summit and Quad Leaders Meeting. The Quad, which also includes India and Australia, [convened their first in-person leaders’ summit](#) in Washington, DC on Sept. 24, 2021, but it was Kishida’s predecessor Suga Yoshihide who attended the meeting as one of his last acts in office. Kishida will get his first chance to [host](#) Biden for a bilateral meeting in Tokyo on May 23, with the Quad Leaders Meeting set to take place the following day.

The second significant outcome of the virtual Biden-Kishida summit was the agreement to create a new, ministerial-level Economic Policy Consultative Committee (i.e., the “Economic 2+2”). While the first committee meeting has yet to take place, [expectations](#) are that the venue will focus less on trade and more on issues such as supply chains, infrastructure, technology investments, and general standard-setting.

Virtual diplomacy thus marked a strong start to 2022 for the two allies, yet these meetings also occurred against a backdrop of [significant tensions regarding pandemic management](#). In Okinawa, the US and Japanese governments [clashed](#) over the high number of COVID cases among US military personnel stationed there. On Jan. 9, two days after the 2+2 meeting and the same day that Kishida placed Okinawa under a [quasi-state of emergency](#), the US and Japan issued a [joint statement](#) restricting the movements of US Forces Japan personnel to only essential activities for the next two weeks. On Jan. 21, the same day as the Biden-Kishida virtual summit, US Forces Japan announced that they would [extend these restrictions for an additional week](#). These restrictions [expired](#) on Jan. 31 as cases in Okinawa started to subside.

Japan’s Strategic Review

The Kishida Cabinet is [reviewing Japan’s National Security Strategy](#), first issued in 2013. Scheduled to be completed by the end of 2022, this new

strategy will need to address the accelerating changes in the military balance in Japan’s vicinity as well as outline the scope and nature of Japan’s military investments over the next decade. It will also be accompanied by a new 10-year defense plan and a procurement plan for implementing it. Late last year, Kishida convened his first National Security Council meeting to initiate the process within the government. Senior civilian and uniformed leaders of the Ministry of Defense also began their own deliberations over how to revise Japan’s strategic goals.

On Dec. 21 last year, the LDP [began its own strategic review](#) under the Joint Research Commission for Security and National Defense. Leading this party effort is former defense minister Onodera [Itsunori](#). On April 26, the [final LDP report](#) was released in Tokyo, and a week later, Representative Onodera along with other Diet members visited Washington, DC. On a panel at CSIS, Onodera and Representative Sato Masahisa, head of the LDP’s Foreign Affairs Division, [presented their report’s conclusions](#). The proposal recommends revising three key documents: the *National Security Strategy*, *National Defense Program Guidelines*, and the *Medium-Term Defense Force Buildup Program*. In a detailed assessment of how Japan should respond to a worsening security environment, primarily driven by Chinese military expansion but also by the North Korean missile threat, the [Recommendations for the Formulation of a New National Security Strategy](#) presented a comprehensive case for strengthening Japanese capabilities.



Figure 2 Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio receives a set of proposals from Itsunori Onodera, who heads the Liberal Democratic Party’s Research Commission on National Security, at the premier’s office in Tokyo on April 27, 2022. Photo: Kyodo

Looking ahead, this LDP report presents three issues that will shape Japan's national policy later this year. The first is what sorts of conventional options will provide Japan with offensive capability. It seems likely that Prime Minister Kishida will decide to introduce "[counterstrike capabilities](#)," the term preferred by the LDP, this year. What kinds of capabilities and how they will be integrated into Japan's defenses remain to be seen.

Second, the LDP has argued that Japan should aim, like NATO, to spend 2% of its GDP on defense. This would [double Japan's current spending](#) of roughly \$52 billion for FY23 to bring it to \$104 billion. The LDP report argued that this should be accomplished within five years, which would then mean that \$10 billion would be added each year from FY24-FY29. Like other advanced industrial nations, Japan today spends about 30% of its national budget on social security and that is likely to increase given the rapidly aging population. Moreover, somewhere between 22-25% of Japan's annual budget goes to servicing the government's debt, and another similar share is dedicated to local government spending. This leaves a small share of the budget from which to find \$10 billion extra each year, and many quietly wonder whether this is a real goal or rather should be seen as a bargaining effort to shape the national policy debate later this fall. If the goal of 2% of GDP remains intact, it is more likely that the time frame will be 10 years rather than five.

Finally, the Kishida Cabinet has [presented new legislation](#) to the Diet on economic security tools to support its National Security Strategy. Experts gathered to advise the government on what measure should be taken, and most of Japan's political parties supported this initiative. The bill passed the [Lower House](#) on April 7 and [Upper House](#) on May 11, with very little opposition. This comprehensive law will allow Japan to develop policy tools for a [range of steps to protect the economy](#). From classifying patents on sensitive technologies to creating incentives for investment in critical inputs for manufacturing (such as semiconductors and rare earth metals) to oversight of Japan's critical energy and other infrastructure, this bill will create a far more integrated effort at ensuring greater resilience for the Japan's economy. Much of the detail on how these various economic security policies will be implemented will rest on ministerial decisions, and the Japanese private sector, while supporting this government effort, has been

quick to assert their desire for close coordination with the Kishida Cabinet.

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Prime Minister Kishida has surprised many with Japan's fulsome response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Prior to the war, Kishida [reached out to Ukraine](#) to help even as he sought a direct conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin to dissuade him from war. When Putin invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, Japan [quickly aligned itself with other G7 nations](#) in developing sanctions against the Russian president, his government, and economic elites. Similar sanctions have been placed on President Alexander Lukashenko and his government in Belarus for supporting Russian aggression. Japan also imposed sanctions on Russian banks, froze sovereign assets in Japanese banks, and withdrew Most Favored Nation status. Close G7 consultations, led by Foreign Minister Hayashi, [kept Japan on pace](#) with the US and Europe.



Figure 3 Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and US President Joe Biden attend a meeting of G7 leaders to discuss Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Photo: NATO

Only in the energy sector did Kishida pause. Japan imports about 11% of its coal, 10% of its LNG supply, and 4% of its crude oil from Russia. Major Japanese trading houses are also deeply invested in two projects on Sakhalin Island as part of international consortia there. Sakhalin-1, led by ExxonMobil, extracts Sokol crude oil, and Sakhalin-2, led by Shell, extracts LNG. When [ExxonMobil](#) and [Shell](#) pulled out of these projects on March 1, this left Japanese firms exposed to questions about their intent. Kishida did not immediately call for an end to oil and gas imports from Russia, however. Only after the revelations about "war crimes" committed by Russian forces after their retreat from Bucha did Kishida announce on April 8 an [end to Japan's imports of coal](#) from Russia. On May 8, Kishida then joined Biden and the other leaders of the G7 in pledging

to [ban or phase out](#) Russian oil, though Kishida later told reporters that Japan would [keep its interests](#) in the Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 projects.

The Kishida Cabinet has been forthright in its offer of aid to Ukraine. Financial aid was provided early on with \$100 million in humanitarian assistance and \$100 million in loans. The Japanese government also announced that Ukrainians fleeing the war would be welcomed in Tokyo, and by late April, over 600 have [arrived](#) in Japan. Perhaps most surprising was the [provision of equipment and material](#) from the SDF on March 8. While Japan determined it could not provide lethal aid, even the provision of nonlethal military supplies to a country at war was a surprising precedent for Tokyo. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy [spoke to the Japanese Diet](#) on March 23 to thank Japan for its support and to encourage more.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has prompted closer ties to Europe. The G7 forum has been a venue for designing sanctions and aid, but Japan has also been invited to participate in NATO deliberations. On April 7, Foreign Minister Hayashi [attended](#) the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting. En route to the NATO meeting, Hayashi also [visited](#) Poland from April 1-5 to discuss how Japan could help Poland's efforts to resettle Ukrainian refugees. Similar aid is being considered for other nations on Ukraine's border that are accepting the millions of Ukrainians leaving their country. In meetings with NATO and other fora, there has also been opportunity for Japan's foreign minister and prime minister to argue that Russian aggression is not just a European problem but one that affects the global order. Certainly, this moment of major power war against a smaller neighboring nation has conjured up questions about what lessons Beijing may be drawing from the current conflict that [could shape its decision-making](#) on Taiwan.

During Golden Week, members of the Kishida Cabinet also consulted with the Biden administration. On May 4, Defense Minister Kishi met with Secretary of Defense Austin to [discuss the war in Ukraine and the alliance's aims in the Indo-Pacific](#). Austin thanked Kishi for his role in the Ukraine Consultative Group, and both noted the worrisome Chinese maritime activities in the East and South China Seas. Taiwan remains a deep concern to alliance defense planners across the Indo-Pacific. The US and Japanese forces along with Australian forces have been

exercising in the South China Sea and [considering just such a contingency](#). More recently, the *Financial Times* reported that the US and UK have [discussed contingency planning](#) in case of the use of force across the Taiwan Strait.

Conclusion

President Biden will head to Japan and South Korea at the end of May, and his agenda will be full. A bilateral US-Japan meeting with Kishida is likely to address the ongoing review of the alliance and its future upgrades to deterrence. In Tokyo, expectations are high that the president will reaffirm the US commitment to Japan's defenses, especially the US extended deterrent. A new economic framework for the Indo-Pacific is also going to be announced, although disappointment remains in Japan that the US is [not prepared to return](#) to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Also, while the US president is in Tokyo, Prime Minister Kishida will host a Quad leaders' meeting bringing Australian and Indian prime ministers together to discuss the progress of their working groups. India's differences with the other Quad leaders over Russian aggression could once more be highlighted.

The inauguration of a new president in South Korea also seems to offer opportunity for improved trilateral ties between the US, Japan, and South Korea. There have been some positive signs that Japan and Korea will be developing a more constructive diplomatic effort to restore confidence and develop their cooperation. This will provide ample opportunity for President Biden, who will be traveling on to Seoul after his Tokyo meetings, to share his ideas for how to further deepen strategic cooperation among the US and its Asian allies. With North Korea seemingly preparing for more missile tests and perhaps even a nuclear test, this seems an opportune moment to solidify the trilateral security agenda, but it is also likely that greater cooperation on economic resilience could also prove helpful to all three nations.

The war in Ukraine will be high on the list of US-Japan priorities until peace is restored. Japan [continues to keep pace](#) with the US and European nations as sanctions grow and as the need for aid to the millions of Ukrainians who have fled their country increases. Prime Minister Kishida has been invited to the NATO Leaders' meeting in June. This coalition of like-minded nations,

many of them treaty allies of the United States, formed to respond to military aggression by Russia, is already discussing how to deter Chinese aggression against Taiwan. During his visit to London during Golden Week, Kishida and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson [announced a new defense cooperation agreement](#) that reveals the deepening of strategic ties with US allies in Europe, as did the [consultations](#) between German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Kishida held during Scholz's visit to Tokyo on April 28-29.

Elections loom later this year, however, and both the Japanese prime minister and US president will have their eyes on domestic politics as they navigate these increasingly complex geopolitics. For Kishida, the Upper House election in July requires deft handling if he is to make progress on the various challenging issues presented in his government's strategic review. For Biden, the stakes may be higher. The midterm elections in the US are widely expected to produce a win for Republicans in Congress. But the recent controversy over the Supreme Court's impending decision on abortion rights deepens the rift in US society will likely prove challenging for the Biden administration as the election approaches.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-JAPAN RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 5, 2022: North Korea [claims](#) second successful test of a hypersonic missile.

Jan. 5, 2022: Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa and Secretary of State Antony Blinken [speak](#) by telephone.

Jan. 7, 2022: FM Hayashi and Raymond Greene, chargé d'affaires ad interim at the US embassy, [sign](#) the new Special Measures Agreement.

Jan. 7, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Foreign Minister Hayashi, and Minister of Defense Kishi Nobuo [hold](#) US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”) virtual meeting. [Joint Statement](#). [Special Measures Agreement](#).

Jan. 9, 2022: Kishida [places](#) Okinawa and parts of Yamaguchi and Hiroshima prefectures under a quasi-state of emergency in response to the surging number of COVID-19 cases.

Jan. 9, 2022: US and Japan [release](#) a joint statement limiting the off-base movements of US Forces Japan personnel to essential activities only for two weeks.

Jan. 11, 2022: North Korea [claims](#) to have tested a missile that is more advanced than the hypersonic test a week earlier.

Jan. 11, 2022: US Special Representative for North Korea Policy Sung Kim holds separate calls with Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi Takehiro and Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk.

Jan. 15, 2022: North Korea [tests](#) railway-borne missiles.

Jan. 17, 2022: US Special Representative for North Korea Policy Sung Kim, Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi, and Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh speak by telephone.

Jan. 20, 2022: Governments of the US and Japan release a joint statement on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Jan. 21, 2022: President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida [hold](#) a US-Japan summit video teleconference. [Readout](#).

Jan. 21, 2022: US Forces Japan [announces](#) that they will extend movement restrictions for an additional week.

Jan. 25, 2022: North Korea [test-fires](#) two long-range cruise missiles.

Jan. 30, 2022: North Korea [test-fires](#) an intermediate range ballistic missile.

Jan. 30, 2022: Special Representative for the DPRK Kim holds separate calls with Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi and Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh.

Jan. 31, 2022: Movement restrictions on US Forces Japan [expire](#).

Feb. 1, 2022: Secretary Blinken and FM Hayashi speak by telephone.

Feb. 1, 2022: Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo, and Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun speak by telephone.

Feb. 2, 2022: Foreign Minister Hayashi and Secretary of State Blinken [speak](#) by telephone.

Feb. 11, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken, FM Hayashi, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne, and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar [hold](#) Fourth US-Japan-Australia-India (Quad) Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Melbourne. [Joint Statement](#).

Feb. 11, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken and FM Hayashi [hold](#) bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Melbourne.

Feb. 12, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken, FM Hayashi, and Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong hold a trilateral meeting in Honolulu.

Feb. 15, 2022: Deputy Secretary of State Sherman and Vice FM Mori speak by telephone.

Feb. 19, 2022: G7 Foreign Ministers release a joint statement on Russia and Ukraine.

Feb. 24, 2022: Russia [launches](#) an invasion of Ukraine.

Feb. 26, 2022: Foreign Minister Hayashi and Secretary of State Blinken [speak](#) by telephone.

Feb. 26, 2022: North Korea [test-fires](#) a ballistic missile.

Feb. 26, 2022: Special Representative for North Korea Policy Kim holds separate calls with Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi and Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh.

Feb. 27, 2022: Japan announces financial sanctions against Russia.

March 1, 2022: Director General of the Economic Affairs Bureau Ono Keiichi, Director General of the Trade Policy Bureau Matsuo Takehiko, and Assistant US Trade Representative Michael Beeman [hold](#) the first meeting of the Japan-US Partnership on Trade.

March 1, 2022: Shell [pulls](#) out of international consortia at Sakhalin-2, which extracts LNG.

March 4, 2022: North Korea [test-fires](#) a ballistic missile.

March 4, 2022: Special Representative for North Korea Policy Kim holds separate calls with Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi and Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh.

March 4, 2022: G7 Foreign Ministers [release](#) a joint statement on Russia and Ukraine.

March 8, 2022: Japan's SDF [delivers](#) nonlethal military supplies to Ukraine.

March 11, 2022: Director-General of the North American Affairs Bureau Ichikawa Keiichi, Director-General of the Defense Policy Bureau Masuda Kazuo, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner [hold](#) the Japan-US Security Subcommittee (SSC) in Tokyo.

March 14, 2022: Special Representative for North Korea Policy Kim, Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi, and Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh speak by telephone.

March 21, 2022: US, Japan, and Australia participate in third OECD-hosted Blue Dot Network Executive Consultation Group meeting.

March 23, 2022: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy [speaks](#) to the Japanese Diet.

March 24, 2022: President Biden and PM Kishida [meet](#) on sidelines of the G7 Summit in Belgium.

March 24, 2022: Secretary Blinken and FM Hayashi [speak](#) by telephone.

March 24, 2022: North Korea [test-fires](#) its first intercontinental ballistic missile since 2017.

March 24, 2022: Special Representative for North Korea Policy Kim holds separate calls with Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi and Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh.

March 24, 2022: Deputy Secretary of State Sherman, Vice FM Mori, and Korean First Vice FM Choi [speak](#) by telephone.

March 24, 2022: Foreign ministers of the US, Japan, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, the UK, and the High Representative of the European Union [release](#) a joint statement on the Taliban's decision to deny Afghan girls the right to an education.

March 25, 2022: Japan's Parliament [approves](#) a new host nation support budget of ¥1.05 trillion (\$8.6 billion) over five years.

March 25, 2022: G7 Foreign Ministers release a joint statement on North Korea's launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile.

March 26, 2022: PM Kishida and US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel [meet](#) in Hiroshima.

April 1, 2022: New Special Measures Agreement [enters](#) into force.

April 1-5, 2022: FM Hayashi [visits](#) Poland to discuss resettling Ukrainian refugees.

April 2, 2022: State Department Counselor Derek Chollet meets Senior Deputy Foreign Minister Yamada Shigeo during his visit to Tokyo.

April 7, 2022: G7 Foreign Ministers release a joint statement on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

April 7, 2022: FM Hayashi [attends](#) the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

April 7, 2022: FM Hayashi and Secretary Blinken [meet](#) on the sidelines of the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting and G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Belgium.

April 8, 2022: Kishida [announces](#) that Japan will end coal imports from Russia.

April 12, 2022: Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Rena Bitter [travels](#) to Tokyo.

April 14, 2022: Vice FM Mori and Deputy Secretary of State Sherman [speak](#) by telephone.

April 16, 2022: North Korea [test-fires](#) two short-range missiles.

April 26, 2022: LDP [releases](#) a report following its strategic review.

May 3, 2022: Former Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori and LDP Foreign Affairs Chief Sato Masahisa [present](#) the conclusions of the LDP's strategic review at CSIS.

May 4, 2022: Defense Minister Kishi and Secretary of Defense Austin [meet](#) in Washington, DC.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

US-CHINA RELATIONS

PUTIN'S WAR FURTHER STRAINS US- CHINA TIES

BONNIE S. GLASER, GERMAN MARSHALL FUND OF THE US

US-China relations sank to new lows in the opening months of 2022. The year began with a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics by the US and nine other countries that objected to PRC policies against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, with another five countries citing the pandemic as the reason for not sending government representatives. A meeting between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin on the eve of the Olympics produced a lengthy joint statement that highlighted the depth and breadth of the China-Russia strategic partnership and raised alarm in Washington as well as in European capitals. US-China ties soured further when the Biden administration shared intelligence with Beijing revealing that Moscow planned to invade Ukraine, but instead of seeking to prevent the war, China gave the information to Russia and refused to act. Once war broke out, US officials warned China repeatedly against providing material support to the Russian economy or military. The Chinese refused to criticize Russia, however, and instead blamed the war on the United States. US and Chinese defense chiefs held their first—and long overdue—phone call. At every opportunity, Chinese officials warned the US to stop supporting Taiwan independence. The US sent several senior delegations to Taiwan, approved the sale of \$100 million in equipment and services to support the Patriot Air Defense System, and sailed three warships through the Taiwan Strait.

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Beijing's Olympics: American Athletes Compete, US Officials Stay Home

One week prior to the opening ceremonies of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a phone call with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Irritated with the US decision to diplomatically boycott the games, which emboldened some US allies to do the same, Wang [demanded](#) that the US end its “interference” in the Olympics. The US [readout](#) of the call didn't even mention the Olympics, noting instead that the two officials discussed how to manage strategic risk, climate change, global health issues, and the Russia-Ukraine situation.

A public opinion [poll](#) conducted by the Pew Research Center Jan. 10-17 found that 46% of Americans supported the US diplomatic boycott of the Games, while 22% opposed and 31% were unsure. Public views of China remained decidedly negative with 54% viewing China as a competitor, 35% seeing it as an enemy, and only 9% considering China a partner of the United States.

Beijing's slogan for the Olympics was “Together for a shared future.” The motto was chosen to [demonstrate](#) the practice of Xi Jinping's vision of building a “community with a shared future for mankind.” In reality, however, the 2022 Winter Olympics were prickly. The US, UK, Canada, India, Australia, Lithuania, Kosovo, Belgium, Denmark, and Estonia sent athletes, but no officials, because of China's human rights abuses against its Muslim population in Xinjiang. Five other countries—New Zealand, Austria, Slovenia, Sweden, and the Netherlands—cited the pandemic as the reason they did not send government representatives.

China's decision to choose a 20-year-old Uyghur athlete, Dinigeer Yilamujiang, as one of two athletes to light the Olympic cauldron prompted criticism from the United States. US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield [said](#) on CNN that “We know that a genocide has been committed there” and accused Beijing of trying to “distract” the world from its human rights atrocities.



Figure 1 Participants cheer as organizers announce the motto for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics at a launch in Beijing. Photo: VCG via Global Times

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Unveils Depth of US-China Mistrust

On the eve of the start of the 2022 Winter Olympics, and just two weeks before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Xi Jinping met with Vladimir Putin. The two leaders signed an unprecedented joint statement that sounded alarm bells in both Washington DC and European capitals. For the first time, China explicitly backed Russian opposition to further enlargement of NATO and supported Putin's earlier demands for “long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe.” The statement also criticized US strategy in the Indo-Pacific, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or “Quad”) and AUKUS. In what appeared to be a push for the establishment of spheres of influence, the joint statement noted that Russia and China oppose “attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions.”

When an anonymous US official later claimed that Putin may have told Xi of his intention to attack Ukraine and that Xi may have asked the Russian leader to wait until the Olympics concluded, China's foreign ministry spokesperson [called](#) the story “sheer fiction.”



Figure 2 Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin pose for a photo prior to their talks in Beijing, China, Friday, Feb. 4, 2022. Putin arrived in Beijing for the opening of the Winter Olympic Games and talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, as the two leaders look to project themselves as a counterweight to the US and its allies. Photo: Alexei Druzhinin/Sputnik/Kremlin Pool Photo via AP

The Russian assault on Ukraine on Feb. 24 began with attacks from three sides using missiles and long-range artillery, almost exactly as the United States had predicted. In an unusual leak of highly classified intelligence, Biden administration [revealed](#) to *The New York Times* that half a dozen meetings had been held with Chinese officials over a three-month period in which the US had shared intelligence of Russia's troop buildup and urged Beijing to tell Russia not to invade. According to US officials, the Chinese shared the information with the Russians and said they would not interfere with Russia's plans, believing that Washington was trying to drive a wedge between Beijing and Moscow.

On March 5 Secretary of State Blinken held a phone call with Chinese counterpart Foreign Minister Wang Yi. In a three sentence [readout](#) of the call, the State Department said that Blinken indicated that "the world is watching to see which nations stand up for the basic principles of freedom, self-determination, and sovereignty." China's much longer [readout](#) included Wang's description of the Ukraine issue as "complicated" and "closely related to the security interests of various parties." Wang maintained that the crisis should be resolved in accordance with the UN Charter, including safeguarding all countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity. He expressed the hope that the war would end as soon as possible and called for dialogue and negotiations between Russia and Ukraine as well as between NATO, the EU, and Russia, insisting that attention be paid to

"the negative impact of NATO's continuous expansion on Russia's security."

In the weeks following Russia's invasion, the US along with its allies and partners in Europe and Asia imposed unprecedented harsh and sweeping sanctions on Russia, including freezing the assets of Russia's central bank, removing some Russian banks from the international financial messaging system SWIFT, and export restrictions aimed at hampering Russia's ability to compete in the 21st century economy. China made clear it would not join in the effort. China's Commerce Ministry [declared](#) on several occasions that China would continue to maintain normal trade and economic cooperation with both Russia and Ukraine "based on equality, mutual benefit and mutual respect."

US officials responded to Beijing's "business as usual" approach to Moscow with clear warnings of the consequences if China violated US sanctions. On March 8, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo [advised](#) that the Biden administration would sever Chinese companies' access to American equipment and software they require to manufacture their products. She singled out China's largest wafer fab and contract chipmaker Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), threatening to "essentially shut" down its operations if the company continues to supply chips and other advanced technology to Russia.

Washington's concerns went beyond whether China would comply with US sanctions on Russia, however. Even if Beijing complied with US sanctions to avoid getting hit with secondary sanctions, including being cut off from the international financial system, China might find ways to aid the Russian economy and the military effort. The latter possibility was especially worrisome and urgent. The Biden administration [reportedly](#) told allies that it had evidence that after the war broke out, Russia had requested military equipment and other support from China, and that Beijing had signaled willingness to help. To avert this outcome, a set of high-level meetings was arranged at the initiative of President Biden to convey to China's top leadership the gravity of the situation and the potential consequences of Chinese efforts to help Russia mitigate the impact of sanctions.

The first high-level meeting took place in Rome, Italy on March 14, where US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met China's top diplomat

and Politburo member Yang Jiechi for seven hours of intense discussions. The day prior to the meeting, Sullivan publicly [telegraphed](#) his message to Yang, telling *CNN* that Beijing would “absolutely” face consequences if it assisted Moscow to evade sanctions over the war in Ukraine. “We will not allow that to go forward and allow there to be a lifeline to Russia from these economic sanctions from any country, anywhere in the world,” Sullivan said. That warning was balanced with an attempt to provide the Chinese with an opportunity to distance themselves from Putin’s war. Prior to the invasion, China may have known that Russian was planning some action against Ukraine, Sullivan stated, but Beijing may not have understood the full extent of Moscow’s military plan.



Figure 3 National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan meets today with Chinese Communist Party Politburo Member and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission Yang Jiechi in Rome, Italy on March 14. Photo: US Mission Italy

Based on the Chinese foreign ministry’s [readout](#) of the talks, Yang did little more than reiterate China’s position on Ukraine. He maintained that Beijing supports respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, backs peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, calls for all parties to exercise maximum restraint, and believes the legitimate concerns of all parties should be addressed.

Four days later, the US reinforced its messages at the highest level in a virtual meeting between President Biden and Xi Jinping. The White House [readout](#) of the call stated that Biden “described the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia as it conducts brutal attacks against Ukrainian cities and civilians.” It also noted that he and Xi agreed on the “importance of maintaining open lines of communication, to manage the competition” between the two countries.

A much lengthier Chinese [readout](#) of the call summarized Xi’s remarks on the war in Ukraine, but included nothing that had not been said in previous statements. Beijing continued to straddle its competing interests in preserving its relationship with Russia, upholding sovereignty and territorial integrity, and preventing a worsening of its ties with the United States and other advanced industrialized countries that could put in jeopardy Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

Following the two high-level meetings, it was clear that Beijing was incensed by the warnings and threats from Washington. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian [told](#) the media at a press conference that “Any attempt to deny China’s efforts and distort China’s intention is irresponsible. We hope relevant sides can help to ease the situation in Ukraine in real earnest, rather than willfully spread disinformation to shift blames, instigate confrontation and reap profit from the situation.”

An [article](#) under the byline “GT Voice” in *Global Times*, a tabloid that often contains nationalistic articles and is not as authoritative as other Chinese media, accused the US of “trying to blackmail China into dancing to its tune,” and insisted that such threats would not work. “Needless to say, if Washington were to be so arrogant and move to hurt Chinese interests, China will respond resolutely and appropriately to protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese entities and individuals,” the article maintained.



Figure 4 A group of women observe a sign put up by the Canadian Embassy in China reading “We Support Ukraine,” where anti-NATO sentiment graffiti had earlier appeared but was quickly covered up in Beijing, China. Photo: Andrea Verdelli/Getty Images

In March and April, PRC state media ramped up efforts to blame the Ukraine war on the United States, in particular on Washington's efforts to expand NATO. A spate of commentaries in *People's Daily*, many of them under the authoritative pseudonym "Zhong Sheng" ("Voice of China") argued that the United States caused the crisis and manipulated NATO to practice its hegemony. The *PLA Daily* also published a six-part series on the "despicable role by the United States and the West in the Ukrainian crisis." Among the accusations made in the series was the charge that the Pentagon was developing biological weapons in Ukraine, echoing disinformation spread by Moscow.

China Warns US Against Supporting Taiwan and Biden Reassures Taipei of US Support

Taiwan remained front and center in the US-China relationship in the first four months of 2021, even as attention focused on Putin's invasion of Ukraine. In an interview with *NPR* in late January, China's Ambassador to the United States Qin Gang [accused](#) the US of encouraging and supporting Taiwan independence, and playing the Taiwan card. Using unusual language, he warned that if current trends continue, the outcome is likely to be a military conflict between the United States and China. Qin also charged that the US was not acting in accordance with President Biden's statements that the US does not support Taiwan independence and adheres to its one-China policy, which he made to China's leader Xi Jinping last November. "So far we haven't seen many actions to honor his words," Qin asserted.

When China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi met with Jake Sullivan, Taiwan was a central part of Yang's talking points. According to the Chinese [readout](#) of the meeting, Yang reiterated that US recent actions on Taiwan "are obviously not consistent its statements." He maintained that China "is gravely concerned and firmly opposes the recent erroneous words and deeds by the US side on Taiwan-related issues." Yang warned the US to "fully recognize the highly sensitive nature of the Taiwan question" and avoid going "further down the road of great danger."

Although President Biden focused almost exclusively on the war in Ukraine in his March 18 phone call with his Chinese counterpart, Xi used the opportunity to touch on other issues, including Taiwan. He reportedly [said](#) it was "very dangerous" that "some people in the US have

sent a wrong signal to 'Taiwan independence' forces" and warned that mishandling of the Taiwan question "will have a disruptive impact on the bilateral ties." In a remarkable statement, Xi suggested that officials in the Biden administration were undermining the "understanding" reached by the two presidents, which likely included Taiwan.

As the war in Ukraine raged, the PRC spread disinformation in Taiwan that the US would abandon Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, just as the US failed to come to the rescue of Ukraine. In an effort to provide reassurance to Taiwan, and thus reduce domestic pressure on the Tsai Ing-wen administration, President Biden dispatched a delegation composed of five former senior US officials and military officers to Taipei in early March. The move was carefully crafted to not provoke Beijing: no sitting officials were included in the delegation and the messages [conveyed](#) by its leader, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen (ret.) were reaffirmations of longstanding US policy to oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo and to support a peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues, consistent with the wishes and best interests of the people of Taiwan. China's foreign ministry spokesperson denounced the visit, [saying](#) that it was "futile for the US to send anyone to demonstrate its so-called support for Taiwan."

As the Mullen-led delegation departed, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in Taiwan on his first visit since leaving office at the end of the Trump administration. He called for the United States to diplomatically recognize the Republic of China as a "free and sovereign country." He insisted that the move would simply accept the "unmistakable, already existing reality."

A planned visit to Taiwan by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi was leaked to the press on April 7 but was scrapped when Pelosi was diagnosed with COVID-19. The PRC reacted unusually harshly to the possibility of the visit, even though it would not have set a precedent. The last visit by a US Speaker of the House took place in 1997, 25 years ago, when Newt Gingrich traveled to Taiwan after visiting Japan. Before the media reported that Pelosi's trip had been postponed, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi used the opportunity of a phone call with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic counselor to French President Emmanuel Macron, to [register](#)

his objections. “If Pelosi, a political leader of the United States, knowingly visits Taiwan, it would be a malicious provocation against China’s sovereignty and gross interference in China’s internal affairs, and would send an extremely dangerous political signal to the outside world,” Wang said. Chinese MFA spokesman Zhao Lijian demanded that the visit be cancelled and [warned](#) that if it proceeded as planned, China would take “firm and strong measures to firmly safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity,” adding that “All possible consequences that arise from this will completely be borne by the US side.”



Figure 5 US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi departs the White House in Washington DC following a signing event for a postal service reform act on April 6, 2022. Pelosi tested positive for COVID-19 on April 7 and postponed her Asia trip and reported visit to Taiwan. Photo: VCG via Global Times

In mid-April, a bipartisan delegation of lawmakers led by Sen. Lindsey Graham, who serves as Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on the Budget, and Sen. Bob Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Taiwan.

On Jan. 22, China flew 39 military aircraft in Taiwan’s air defense identification zone. The sortie took place as the US sailed two carrier strike groups in the South China Sea led by USS *Carl Vinson* and USS *Abraham Lincoln*.

US Navy transits of the Taiwan Strait took place in February and March. The destroyer USS *Ralph Johnson* (DDG 114) of the 7th Fleet sailed through the Strait transit on Feb. 28. On March 17, China sailed its aircraft carrier *Shandong* through the Taiwan Strait just 12 hours before the phone call between President Biden and Xi Jinping. A source revealed that the USS *Ralph Johnson* shadowed the carrier. A third Taiwan Strait transit was conducted on April 26 by the *Arleigh Burke*-class guided-missile destroyer USS *Sampson* (DDG 102).

On Feb. 7, the US State Department [approved](#) the potential sale to Taiwan of equipment and services to support the Patriot Air Defense System at an estimated cost of \$100 million. Later that month, China [imposed](#) sanctions on US defense firms Raytheon Technology Corporation and Lockheed Martin Corporation in retaliation for their arms sales to Taiwan.

Defense Chiefs Hold Their First Phone Call

For the first 15 months of the Biden administration, contacts between the US and Chinese militaries took place only at low levels. Disagreement over protocol hampered the scheduling of a phone call between the two sides’ defense chiefs. Last year, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin repeatedly requested to talk by phone with Gen. Xu Qiliang, vice chairman of China’s Central Military Commission, but Beijing rejected those requests, insisting that Austin first speak with Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe. The US refusal to accept that the calls be sequenced according to China’s preference led to a stalemate. Even after Biden’s talks with Xi in November 2021 and again in March 2022, no progress was made toward creating crisis communications or establishing risk reduction measures in part due to the wrangle over protocol.

On April 20, the US relented, and Secretary Austin spoke with Gen. Wei for 45 minutes. The Pentagon provided a two-sentence [readout](#) of the phone conversation, noting that the call was “a follow-up” to the video call between Presidents Biden and Xi a month earlier. It listed three topics that were discussed: US-PRC defense relations, regional security issues, and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. According to US sources, Austin reiterated warnings that China should not provide material support to Russia’s military or economy.

China’s [readout](#) of the call was much lengthier, and focused in part on his messages regarding Taiwan. Gen. Wei stressed that “If the Taiwan question is not handled properly, it will have a subversive effect on the China-US relations.” In the bilateral defense issues bucket, Wei called for the two sides to “enhance military mutual trust, strengthen dialogue and exchanges, manage risks and crises, and carry out practical cooperation.”

The limited amount of time available for the call meant that the conversation was only an exchange of opening talking points with no additional time for responses or discussion. It remains to be seen whether the call will open the door to additional dialogues or defense exchanges aimed at advancing the objectives set out by Biden and Xi.

A Chinese air force video that aired on CCTV on April 25 underscored the pressing need for the US and China to take measures to avoid conflict and control risks. The video [featured](#) a PLA pilot of a JH-7 fighter bomber saying that he had recently intercepted a foreign vessel operating in Chinese territorial waters in the South China Sea, and was “ready to pull the trigger” if the ship had not left. The pilot, a captain of a PLA air force unit, said that he was willing to sacrifice himself defending the nation.

US Government Reports Highlight China Threat

On Feb. 11, the White House released the long-awaited Indo-Pacific Strategy. Although several reasons were cited for the US increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific, the [report](#) noted that a driver is mounting challenges that the region faces from China. “The PRC’s coercion and aggression spans the globe, but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific,” the report noted, citing Chinese economic coercion against Australia, growing pressure on Taiwan, bullying of neighbors in the East and South China Seas, and use of force against India along their disputed border, along with China’s violations of human rights and international law.

In the clearest statement so far of the Biden administration’s objectives toward China, the strategy stated that “Our objective is not to change the PRC but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share.” Among the main themes of the report is that the US will cooperate with like-minded countries and will seek to manage intensifying competition with China so it doesn’t escalate to conflict.

On March 8, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines released the 2022 Annual Threat Assessment of the US intelligence community. The [report](#) stated that China “increasingly is a

near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas—especially economically, militarily, and technologically—and is pushing to change global norms and potentially threatening its neighbors.” It predicted that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would “continue efforts to achieve President’s Xi Jinping’s vision of making China the preeminent power in East Asia and a major power on the world stage,” work to press Taiwan on unification, undercut US influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system.” At the same time, the report judged that China’s leaders probably would “seek opportunities to reduce tensions with Washington when it suits their interests.”

On March 28, the Department of Defense [transmitted](#) the classified 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) to Congress. Among the defense priorities, China was identified as the main challenge in the Indo-Pacific, while Russia was named the main challenge in Europe. Moreover, China was labeled “our most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge for the Department.” Later this year, the DoD will release an unclassified version of the NDS along with the unclassified National Security Strategy.

Trade Debate

In April, two top Biden officials hinted that the administration was weighing lifting tariffs on some Chinese imports to combat inflation. Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh commented that most of the tariffs on Chinese imports “serve no strategic purpose,” especially those on consumer goods. A day later, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that easing tariffs on some goods is “worth considering.”

The spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington chimed in with words of encouragement: “The early termination of these sanctions will help stop the loss to China-US relations and help enterprises from both countries to seek opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation,” Liu Pengyu [told](#) reporters.

Testifying before the Senate Finance Committee on March 31, US Trade Representative Ambassador Katherine Tai said that “the realignment of the US-China trade relationship” is “the next major component of our trade

agenda.” Tai pledged to vigorously defend American values and economic interests from the negative impacts of the PRC’s unfair economic policies and practices, but no details emerged about Biden’s trade policy toward China from the hearing or at other time during the four-month period.

A New Low but Possibly not the Nadir

The US-China relationship sunk to a new low in the first four months of 2022. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine provided yet another reason for fresh exchanges of recriminations. Under the threat of secondary sanctions from the US if it violates international sanctions on Russia, Chinese banks and enterprises had no recourse but to abide by the restrictions. To avoid appearing weak to its domestic population, and to fan the flames of nationalism, Chinese state media released a torrent of articles blaming the United States for the war.

In early May, Secretary of State Antony Blinken is scheduled to deliver a speech on the Biden administration’s China strategy. Although the speech is unlikely to contain any surprises, as the first comprehensive speech on China outlining US objectives and approach, it will lay down an important marker. A lengthier China strategy document is expected to remain classified, but provide important guidance for US government agencies.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-CHINA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 3, 2022: United States and China, along with France, Russia, and the United Kingdom, [issue](#) a joint statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races.

Jan. 5, 2022: Secretary of State Antony Blinken [expresses](#) concern about China's attempts to bully Lithuania by pushing US and European companies to stop building products with components made in Lithuania or risk losing access to the Chinese market.

Jan. 10, 2022: Blinken [says](#) China's sanctions in December on four US Commission on International Religious Freedom commissioners "constitute yet another PRC affront against universal rights."

Jan. 12, 2022: State Department [releases](#) a study rejecting the legality of the Chinese government's expansive sovereignty claims in the South China Sea.

Jan. 13, 2022: China's consul-general in New York Huang Ping [calls](#) on US business leaders to help improve US-China relations in a video speech to the China-US Business Alliance.

Jan. 13, 2022: China [condemns](#) the US for imposing sanctions on six North Korean nationals connected with North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, and calls for reconvening the six-party talks.

Jan. 14, 2022: State Department issues a [statement](#) on the passing of Zhang Qing, wife of human rights defender Guo Feixiong, who is being held incommunicado in China. It calls for the PRC to release Guo and allow him to travel to the US to be reunited with his children and grieve the death of his wife.

Jan. 19, 2022: Biden [says](#) at a press conference that he is not ready to lift the Trump-era taxes because Beijing failed to deliver on the promises it made under the phase-one trade deal that expired at the end of last year.

Jan. 20, 2022: USS *Benfold* (DDG 65) of the 7th Fleet [conducts](#) freedom of navigation operation in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands.

Jan. 21, 2022: State Department [imposes](#) sanctions on three Chinese entities for engaging in missile-technology proliferation activities.

Jan. 21, 2022: Transportation Department [issues](#) an order to suspend 44 China-bound flights from the United States by four Chinese carriers in response to the Chinese government's decision to suspend some US carrier flights over COVID-19 concerns.

Jan. 25, 2022: White House [announces](#) the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force, chaired by the Department of Homeland Security, will work to implement the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act and prohibit the importation of goods made by forced labor from China.

Jan. 26, 2022: In an anti-dumping dispute that dates back to 2012, the World Trade Organization [rules](#) in China's favor, permitting it to slap duties on \$645 million worth of US imports per year.

Jan. 26, 2022: Secretary Blinken [holds](#) a call with China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss the Russia-Ukraine situation, health security and climate change. The MFA [readout](#) says Wang Yi called on the US to "stop interfering with the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, stop playing with fire on the Taiwan issue, and stop creating various anti-China 'small cliques.'"

Jan. 27, 2022: US-China Economic and Security Review Commission [holds](#) a hearing titled "CCP Decision-Making and the 20th Party Congress."

Jan. 27, 2022: USTR spokesperson Hodge [expresses](#) concern about China's "discriminatory trade practices against Lithuanian goods and EU products with Lithuanian content."

Jan. 27, 2022: Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [revokes](#) China Unicom America's telecom services authority in the United States, citing national security concerns.

Jan. 28, 2022: In an interview with NPR, China's ambassador to the US Qin Gang [says](#) the Taiwan issue "most likely will involve China and the United States...in the military conflict" if "the Taiwanese authorities, emboldened by the United States...keep going down the road for independence."

Jan. 30, 2022: Chinese Foreign Ministry "[lodges](#) solemn representation" with the United States over meetings between Taiwan's Vice President Lai Ching-te and several US officials, including with Vice President Kamala Harris in Honduras and a virtual meeting with Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi.

Jan. 31, 2022: FBI Director Christopher Wray [delivers](#) speech on countering threats posed by the Chinese government inside the United States, saying they are "more brazen, more damaging than ever before."

Feb. 3, 2022: Speaker Pelosi [delivers](#) testimony at the Congressional-Executive Commission on China's hearing on "the Beijing Olympics and the Faces of Repression," in which she criticizes China for "perpetrating a campaign of gross human rights violations, including genocide."

Feb. 7, 2022: State Department [approves](#) a possible arms sale to Taiwan of equipment and services to support the Patriot Air Defense System for an estimated cost of \$100 million.

Feb. 8, 2022: United States and other member countries of the Media Freedom Coalition [issue](#) a statement expressing "their deep concern at the Hong Kong and mainland Chinese authorities' attacks on freedom of the press and their suppression of independent local media in Hong Kong."

Feb. 8, 2022: Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security [adds](#) 33 Chinese entities to its Unverified List.

Feb. 10, 2022: State Department [issues](#) statement welcoming an International Labor Organization report calling on the Chinese government to review, repeal, and revise its laws and practices of employment discrimination against racial and religious minorities in Xinjiang.

Feb. 11, 2022: White House [releases](#) its Indo-Pacific Strategy, which notes the challenges that China poses on the United States.

Feb. 14, 2022: Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security [adds](#) a Chinese entity, Jiangsu Tianyuan Metal Powder Co. Ltd., to its Entity List "based on determination that it engaged in activities that warranted the imposition of measures pursuant to the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act."

Feb. 16, 2022: USTR [releases](#) its annual report on China's WTO compliance, which concludes that China "has a long history of violating, disregarding and evading WTO rules to achieve its industrial policy objectives."

Feb. 16, 2022: Treasury Department [issues](#) the Chinese Military-Industrial Complex Sanctions Regulations, which prohibits all transactions pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13959 as amended by E.O. 14032.

Feb. 17, 2022: US-China Economic and Security Review Commission [holds](#) a hearing titled "China's Cyber Capabilities: Warfare, Espionage, and Implications for the United States."

Feb. 21, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken [holds](#) a call with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss developments in North Korea and Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Feb. 21, 2022: China [imposes](#) sanctions on US defense firms Raytheon Technology Corporation and Lockheed Martin Corporation in response to their arms sales to Taiwan.

Feb. 22, 2022: White House [announces](#) major investments to expand the domestic critical minerals supply chain to break dependence on China and boost sustainable practices.

Feb. 23, 2022: At George Mason University's National Security Institute, Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen [announces](#) that the department will end the "China Initiative."

Feb. 24, 2022: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying [criticizes](#) the US for Russia's aggression against Ukraine, saying the United States "started the fire and fanned the flames."

Feb. 24, 2022: China's ambassador to the United States Qin Gang [delivers](#) the keynote address at a Nixon Foundation event commemorating the 50th anniversary of Nixon's visit to China.

Feb. 25, 2022: United Nations Security Council [fails](#) to adopt a draft resolution, submitted by the United States and Albania, intended to end Russia's military offensive against Ukraine. The United States and 10 member countries vote in favor of the draft resolution, and China and two member countries abstain from voting; Russia vetoes the draft resolution.

Feb. 25, 2022: Based on Biden administration leaks, *The New York Times* [reports](#) that the US shared intelligence with China on Russia's troop buildup around Ukraine over a three-month period and urged Beijing to tell Putin not to invade. The Chinese dismissed the intelligence and allegedly shared it with Moscow.

Feb. 26, 2022: USS *Ralph Johnson* (DDG 114) of the 7th Fleet [conducts](#) a Taiwan Strait transit.

Feb. 28, 2022: China's State Council Information Office [releases](#) "The Report on Human Rights Violations in the United States in 2021."

March 1, 2022: USTR [releases](#) its Fiscal Year 2022–2026 Strategic Plan, in which one of its objectives is to "pursue strengthened enforcement to ensure that China lives up to its existing trade obligations."

March 1, 2022: USTR [releases](#) its 2022 President's Trade Policy Agenda and 2021 Annual Report, which includes details on "how USTR and the Biden Administration have re-aligned the United States–China bilateral trade relationship in order to defend the rights of American workers, farmers, producers, and businesses and ensure they can fairly compete on a level playing field."

March 1, 2022: Delegation of former US security and defense officials sent by President Biden and led by Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, [travels](#) to Taiwan.

March 1, 2022: In response to the US delegation's visit to Taiwan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin [says](#) that "the attempt by the US to show support to Taiwan will be in vain, no matter who the US sends."

March 5, 2022: Secretary of State Blinken [holds](#) a call with China's Foreign Minister Wang and discusses Russia's war against Ukraine.

March 5, 2022: New US ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns, [arrives](#) in China.

March 8, 2022: Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines [delivers](#) the Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Committee to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, in which she describes China as "an unparalleled priority for the Intelligence Community."

March 8, 2022: In an interview with *The New York Times*, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo [warns](#) that Chinese companies that defy US restrictions against exporting to Russia will be denied access to US equipment and software they need to manufacture their products.

March 13, 2022: Special Representative for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Sung Kim [holds](#) a call with China's Special Representative on Korean Peninsula Affairs Liu Xiaoming and discusses North Korea's February 26 and March 4 ballistic missile launches.

March 14, 2022: National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [meets](#) Chinese Communist Party Politburo Member and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission Yang Jiechi in Rome and discusses issues in US–China relations, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the "importance of maintaining open lines of communication between the United States and China."

March 15, 2022: US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) [announces](#) that it is detaining merchandise produced or manufactured by Li-Ning Sporting Goods at all US ports of entry as a result of a CBP investigation indicating the company uses North Korean labor in its supply chain.

March 17, 2022: US-China Economic and Security Review Commission [holds](#) a hearing titled “China’s Energy Plans and Practices.”

March 18, 2022: Approximately 12 hours before a call between President Biden and Chinese President Xi, Chinese aircraft carrier *Shandong* [conducts](#) a Taiwan Strait transit. The destroyer *USS Ralph Johnson* (DDG 114) of the 7th Fleet [shadows](#) the carrier.

March 18, 2022: President Biden [holds](#) a call with President Xi and discusses Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Biden also “reiterate[s] that US policy on Taiwan has not changed and emphasize[s] that the United States continues to oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo.”

March 21, 2022: The State Department [imposes](#) visa restrictions on Chinese officials “who are believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, policies or actions aimed at repressing religious and spiritual practitioners, members of ethnic minority groups, dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists, labor organizers, civil society organizers, and peaceful protestors in China and beyond.”

March 23, 2022: USTR [announces](#) its determination to reinstate certain previously granted and extended product exclusions in the China Section 301 Investigation.

March 24, 2022: US [imposes](#) sanctions on Chinese entity Zhengzhou Nanbei Instrument Equipment Co. Ltd for supplying Syria with equipment controlled by the Australia Group chemical and biological weapons nonproliferation regime.

March 25, 2022: FCC [adds](#) equipment and services from two Chinese entities—China Telecom (Americas) Corp and China Mobile International USA Inc. —as well as a Russian entity—AO Kaspersky Lab—to its list of communications equipment and services that have been deemed a threat to national security.

March 28, 2022: Department of Defense [transmits](#) to Congress the classified 2022 National Defense Strategy, which identifies China as the “most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge for the Department.”

March 30, 2022: USTR Ambassador Katherine Tai [delivers](#) testimony to the House Ways and Means Committee, in which she says “our strategy must expand beyond only pressing China for change and include vigorously defending our values and economic interests.”

March 30, 2022: US Securities and Exchange Commission [places](#) 11 Chinese entities on its provisional or conclusive list of issuers under the Holding Foreign Companies Accountable Act, which requires the securities issuers to “establish that they are not owned or controlled by a foreign government.”

March 30, 2022: US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield [meets](#) China’s Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs Liu Xiaoming and discusses opportunities to encourage North Korea to denuclearize and engage in meaningful negotiations.

March 30, 2022: Special envoys for Afghanistan from China, the United States and Russia, a group known as the “Extended Troika,” [meet](#) in Tunxi in Anhui province.

March 31, 2022: In response to US visa restrictions on Chinese officials who are believed to have violated human rights, China [imposes](#) reciprocal visa restrictions on US officials “who concocted lies about China’s human rights issues, pushed for sanctions against China and undermined China’s interests.”

March 31, 2022: State Department [releases](#) the 2022 Hong Kong Policy Act Report, which documents actions by leaders in Hong Kong and China from March 2021 through March 2022 that have further eroded both democratic institutions and human rights.

March 31, 2022: Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women’s Issues [holds](#) a hearing titled “China’s Role in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

April 1, 2022: Department of Defense [releases](#) its annual Freedom of Navigation Report for Fiscal Year 2021, which lists excessive maritime claims by 26 claimants, including China.

April 5, 2022: Department of State notifies Congress that it has agreed to [sell](#) Taiwan equipment, training, and other services totaling \$95 million to support the island's Patriot Air Defense System.

April 5-6, 2022: Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Korean Peninsula Affairs Liu Xiaoming visits Washington, DC for consultations with US counterparts.

April 6, 2022: Ambassador Nick Burns [meets](#) China's Vice Foreign Minister Xie Feng and exchanges views on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of mutual concern.

April 9, 2022: China [lodges](#) "solemn representations" with the United States for its "groundless accusations against China's epidemic response policies."

April 12, 2022: State Department [releases](#) the 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, which highlights human rights issues in China such as "arbitrary or unlawful killings" and "forced disappearances by the government."

April 12, 2022: Defense Intelligence Agency [releases](#) "2022 Challenges to Security in Space" report, which examines "space and counterspace strategies and systems pursued primarily by China and Russia."

April 13, 2022: Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen [delivers](#) address at the Atlantic Council on the future of the global economy and US economic leadership and says, "China cannot expect the global community to respect its appeals to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity in the future if it does not respect these principles now when it counts."

April 14, 2022: US-China Economic and Security Review Commission [holds](#) a hearing titled "Challenging China's Trade Practices: Promoting Interests of US Workers, Farmers, Producers, and Innovators."

April 14-15, 2022: Sen. Lindsey Graham [leads](#) a congressional delegation to Taiwan during which they discuss US-Taiwan relations, regional security, and other significant issues of mutual interest with senior Taiwan leaders.

April 20, 2022: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [holds](#) his first phone call with China's Minister of National Defense Gen. Wei Fenghe since the beginning of the Biden administration. They discuss US-China defense relations, regional security issues, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

April 24, 2022: In a CBS 60 Minutes interview, FBI Director Wray [says](#) the Chinese Communist Party is "targeting our innovation, our trade secrets, our intellectual property on a scale that's unprecedented in history."

April 25, 2022: State Department spokesperson Ned Price [issues](#) a statement on the Panchen Lama's 33rd birthday, urging Chinese authorities to "account for Gedhun Choekyi Nyima's whereabouts and well-being immediately."

April 26, 2022: USS Sampson (DDG 102) of the 7th Fleet [conducts](#) a Taiwan Strait transit.

April 26, 2022: During a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing [on](#) the FY 2023 State Department budget request, Secretary of State Blinken [says](#) the administration is "determined to make sure that [Taiwan] has all necessary means to defend itself against any potential aggression, including unilateral action by China to disrupt the status quo that's been in place now for many decades."

April 27, 2022: USTR [releases](#) the 2022 Special 301 Report on intellectual property protection and enforcement, which places China on its Priority Watch List, indicating that "particular problems exist in that country with respect to IP protection, enforcement, or market access for U.S. persons relying on IP."

April 27, 2022: Senate Foreign Relations Committee [holds](#) a closed hearing titled "Recent Developments in China's Nuclear Capabilities."

Chronology by GMF Research Intern Ki Suh Jung

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

US-KOREA RELATIONS

WHEN IT RAINS, IT POURS

MASON RICHEY, HANKUK UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES
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Winter/Spring 2022 was a dynamic, clarifying time in US-Korea relations, following [repetitious](#), [turbid](#) reporting periods in 2021. South Korea geared up for and held a presidential election, [won with a razor-thin margin](#) by conservative Yoon Suk-yeol. His new administration, replacing the progressive government of term-limited Moon Jae-in, promises to place very different accents on the US-South Korea alliance and inter-Korean relations. Washington is [relieved to see](#) Yoon assume office, as US senior leadership, policymakers, and alliance managers are [comfortable](#) with his foreign and security/defense policy team. Moon and his progressives did plenty to advance the US-South Korea alliance, but their parochial, Peninsula-focused diplomacy was occasionally a source of friction and often seemingly quixotic vis-à-vis North Korea. The Yoon administration is [poised to attempt](#) to make the US-South Korea alliance more comprehensive geographically and functionally, although conservative administrations also pose their own idiosyncratic risks to the US-ROK alliance.

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For its part, North Korea embarked on an [unprecedented](#) missile launch spree during the January-April 2022 reporting period, with [13 separate tests](#) or demonstrations (with three more to follow so far in May) of a variety of known and new systems ranging from short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) to hypersonic weapons to (supposedly) the previously untested *Hwasong-17* inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM). Three more [missile tests](#) followed in May. North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong Un [subtly clarified](#) that Pyongyang's nuclear posture is not totally [deterrence-focused](#), but includes warfighting use, underscoring the [likelihood the regime develops](#) tactical nuclear weapons. This would [also likely mean](#) a seventh nuclear test. Pyongyang's provocations and fiery rhetoric were leavened with celebration, as April parades in North Korea marked the 110th Day of the Sun (the birthday of Kim Il Sung) and the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Army (KPA). These events have a primarily domestic focus, but they also serve as international propaganda, announcing outwardly that North Korea is strong and united. This attempt at perception management will be tested by reality, as an [outbreak](#) of omicron variant COVID-19 in early May represents a serious risk for North Korea.

Looming in the background of these events was the Russia-Ukraine war, which has current and future implications for US relations with the Koreans. South Korea [slowly but surely supported](#) US-led sanctions on Russia, while North Korea predictably blamed the US for the conflict. Going forward, Washington's likely increasing pressure on Moscow will be a litmus test for Seoul's willingness to work comprehensively with its alliance partner on maintaining the international rules-based order; that same pressure campaign will also [open up possibilities](#) for greater [Pyongyang-Moscow](#) cooperation, notably in sanctions evasion.

US-South Korea: Just Do It

The most significant development in US-South Korea relations during the Winter/Spring 2022 reporting period was the South Korean presidential election in March. In the first place, pre-election uncertainty about the winner led to a slowdown in decisive action between Washington and Seoul. The Moon administration was fully a lame duck by January, dramatically reducing its ability to advance policy preferences, even in foreign and inter-Korean affairs.

Meanwhile the Biden administration was clearly willing to run out the clock on Moon, either expecting to get a conservative Yoon Suk-yeol administration more aligned with US priorities, or girding itself for another tricky progressive presidency under progressive candidate Lee Jae-myung.



Figure 1 South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol of the main opposition People Power Party celebrates with supporters at the party's headquarters on March 10, 2022 in Seoul, South Korea. Photo: Chung Sung-Jun/Getty Images

Yoon won the election, but his extremely close victory margin (<1%) presents challenges all its own, as the new president entered office on May 10 with [little political capital](#) and a deeply divided electorate. Moreover, Yoon's People Power Party does not hold a majority in the National Assembly—the progressive Democratic Party in fact holds a super-majority, with the next National Assembly election scheduled for 2024. On the one hand, Yoon's difficulties in realizing his domestic agenda given socio-political polarization and a hostile National Assembly may sap energy and momentum from Yoon's executive team. This could constrain Yoon's willingness to enact bold, domestically risky foreign policy, such as transforming the US-South Korea alliance into a deeper and more expansive partnership, taking a harder line on China and accelerating Sino-Korean economic de-coupling, and resuscitating poor Seoul-Tokyo relations with an eye toward greater US-South Korea-Japan trilateral cooperation. On the other hand, deadlocked domestic legislation may lead Yoon to focus on action where his administration has the most prerogatives: foreign, security, and defense policy.

In a vacuum, Yoon's foreign, security, and defense policy team has personnel inclined to think ambitiously about South Korea's external

relations. The nominee for foreign minister (Rep. Park Jin) is well-appreciated in Washington, and the defense minister-nominee (Gen. (ret.) Lee Jong-sup) and National Security Advisor-appointee Kim Sung-han are solid backers of the US-South Korea alliance. They not only share Washington's [preferred perspective on North Korean denuclearization](#), but will enjoy a reservoir of trust with Biden administration personnel. Thus there is potential for important advancements in several areas of the US-South Korea alliance: geographic broadening, more vocal values-based diplomacy, enhanced South Korean cooperation with the Quad in a Quad-plus arrangement, bolstering extended nuclear deterrence, pushing back on problematic international behavior by China, and [greater](#) US-South Korea-Japan trilateral cooperation.

But policy is never made in a vacuum—the urgent always intrudes on the important. In April Yoon [dispatched](#) Rep. Park to Washington along with a team of diplomatic, regional (China and Japan), defense/security, and trade/economics experts. The new president's Policy Coordination Delegation [met senior officials](#) (including US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman) to discuss alliance-related issues ranging from North Korea to extended nuclear deterrence to trade to COVID vaccines, but sources say the delegation was strongly marked by how insistent the US was on three items: the war in Ukraine, dealing with China, and greater US-South Korea-Japan cooperation. All three items will test the president-elect's appetite and ability to take domestic political risks to raise the US-South Korea alliance to a new level and cash in his campaign promise to make South Korea a "global pivotal state."

Yoon's weak domestic political position means that ameliorating relations with Japan could be fraught and possibly socio-politically inflammatory, while pushing back on Chinese malfeasance in the region would risk economic blowback from Beijing that could have serious economic/employment repercussions as Yoon's People Power Party lays the groundwork for a tight 2024 election for control of the National Assembly. Washington's desire to have South Korea onside for increasing pressure on Moscow is the easiest for Seoul to satisfy, as South Korea has limited trade with Russia, but even that might be difficult: how far Yoon is willing to go in ramping up diplomatic and economic pressure on Moscow might depend on global/local

inflation and inter-Korean relations (where Russia can theoretically play a spoiler role).

As Yoon enters office, North Korea is, for the Biden administration, a [lower priority](#) than the Russia-Ukraine war and countering China. Even for a conservative South Korean administration eager to look beyond the Korean Peninsula in rejuvenating the US-South Korea alliance, the disparity of interest between Seoul and Washington vis-à-vis Pyongyang is a potential fault line. This will be even more the case if North Korea continues regular demonstrations and tests of components of its nuclear program and arsenal, including missiles and a potential [seventh nuclear test](#) that could lead to better production of tactical nuclear warheads that add to the threat toward South Korea (see next section). If the Biden administration has its hands full with Russia-Ukraine and/or China, the Yoon administration may feel compelled to adopt a more assertive stance to restore deterrence vis-à-vis the Kim regime, which may [feed into an escalatory cycle](#).

The Yoon and Biden administrations will have a chance to address North Korea—and other urgent and important issues—at a [leader-level summit](#) in Seoul scheduled for May 21, just before Biden travels to Tokyo for a Quad leaders meeting. Yoon's April delegation to Washington, led by Foreign Minister-nominee Park Jin, advocated for a Yoon-Biden summit "at an early date" and the White House obliged—although there is [some concern](#) the meeting may be coming too soon, beginning only 11 days after Yoon's inauguration, with his team barely in place and not fully in control of their respective personnel and bureaucracies. Moreover there is [some question](#) about a [suitable venue](#) for the summit, as President Yoon has insisted on a quixotic quest to immediately mothball the traditional presidential executive office and residence (the Blue House) in favor of a rushed relocation to the Yongsan grounds of the Ministry of National Defense.

Nevertheless, a full agenda awaits Biden and Yoon. Some of this agenda is inherited from the [successful May 2021 Biden-Moon summit](#), while other items will be novel, including the deteriorated international order consequent to the Russia-Ukraine war. [Evergreens and holdovers from 2021](#) will include supply-chain structures and resilience; technology security, standards, and investment (notably in the semiconductors sector); more or less subtle

pressure on China on everything from human rights to economic coercion to Beijing's relations with Moscow and Taipei; global public health and COVID vaccine production cooperation; climate change cooperation; South Korean and [US](#) shared interests and strategic outlook on the Indo-Pacific (read: South Korean support for the US Indo-Pacific Strategy); war-time operational control reversion to South Korea (OPCON transfer); and North Korea (with the 2022 summit likely featuring a harder South Korean line on North Korean [deterrence and denuclearization](#), given the new conservative administration's policy proclivities).

New business at the Biden-Yoon summit will include [US-South Korea-Japan cooperation](#) (a priority for Washington, in turn requiring improved Seoul-Tokyo ties, which Yoon has emphasized); the [possibility](#) of greater South Korea collaboration with the Quad in several capacities (presumably as a Quad Plus associate) to give greater heft to South Korea's dovetailing of its Southeast Asia policy with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy; re-starting full-scale, regular field training during US-South Korea joint military exercises, which have suffered from COVID disruptions and politico-diplomatic decisions favoring reduced exercises (which has led to US-South Korea combined force combat readiness [atrophy](#)); and discussion about the nature of the Biden administration's promised yet heretofore absent economic policy (the [Indo-Pacific Economic Framework](#)) for East Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region, hints of which may be given at the US-ASEAN summit a week prior to the Biden-Yoon meeting. South Korea will be expecting ([or at least hoping for](#)) something tangible and beneficial, which is [all the more important](#) considering South Korea's [pending application](#) to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP, which emerged in the vacuum of US withdrawal from the original TPP).

The summit will also unfold against the backdrop of a global geopolitical shift away from liberal internationalism, in which cooperation among like-minded partners such as the US and South Korea is increasingly more important and endangered. Both presidents and their senior officials are aware of this, and doubtless much summit discussion will concern the primary drivers of the global lurch away from the international rules-based order: China and Russia. Washington will want to divine how serious the Yoon administration is in its apparent

tack toward more robustly pushing back against problematic Chinese behavior, as well as intention to continue keeping economic and diplomatic pressure on Russia. The new Yoon administration will want to get its bearings (both in general and vis-à-vis the Biden administration) and an idea of how sound US strategy is with respect to both the East Asia region and the rebuilding of degraded international order.

Aside from the South Korean presidential election, its consequences, and preparation for the Yoon-Biden summit, two other major developments impacted the US-South Korea relationship during the reporting period: the Russia-Ukraine war and North Korea's accelerated pace of missile testing. Concerning the former, the Moon administration had a mixed-record from a US perspective. Ultimately, in terms of [diplomatic and sanctions choices](#), Seoul [took the high road](#), recognizing that Russia's invasion is more than just an attack against another sovereign state, but [against sovereignty](#) as such and against the rules-based order generally. That said, initially the Blue House gave rhetorical support to Kyiv, but was slow to condemn the Kremlin by name. South Korea was also a follower—not a leader—in imposing sanctions on Russia. The South Korean National Assembly embarrassed the country with its reception of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy—[less than 20%](#) of Assembly members attended his video address.

The Yoon administration has taken over the challenges of Russia policy as of May 10. Yoon will need to maintain current sanctions on Russia, and may hear calls to support Ukraine with lethal weapons. Beyond that, the United States and European Union may strengthen sanctions, which South Korea would be expected to support. Washington and/or European capitals might also increase pressure on China to dissuade it from cooperating with Russia on sanctions evasion. Seoul may feel obliged to endorse such measures, which would complicate economic relations with its largest trading partner.

The military situation on the peninsula ratcheted up several notches during the January-April reporting period, which naturally impacts the US-South Korea alliance. Especially worrisome was North Korea's increased missile testing, notably of the [Hwasong-17](#) and a hypersonic missile with a [possibly maneuverable re-entry](#)

vehicle, as well as general advancement of its nuclear weapons program (see following section). The [response](#) from the US and South Korea ramped up accordingly, first with the [standard government condemnations](#) and obligatory shuttle- and [phone-diplomacy](#) by US and South Korean Special Envoys for North Korea (Sung Kim and Noh Kyu-duk, often with Japanese and Chinese counterparts), and then with increased military deterrence signaling from Washington and Seoul (including a [trilateral meeting](#) of US-South Korean-Japanese senior defense officials). The Yoon team [broached](#) re-deployment of US strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula. South Korea demonstrated its increasingly impressive conventional strike capabilities, including [submarine-launched ballistic missiles](#) (SLBMs). Seoul also announced the procurement of a US-made [SM-6 missile defense system](#) to be deployed on an Aegis-equipped *KDX-III* destroyer, as well as [intentions to purchase](#) close-in weapons systems (CIWS) for protecting surface ships from enemy missiles and aircraft. At various points, Washington responded to Pyongyang's missile testing by [carrying out extended and expanded ISR](#) near North Korea, as well as sending an [aircraft carrier strike group](#) (headed by the USS *Abraham Lincoln*) and a [guided-missile destroyer](#) into waters near the Korean Peninsula. The US and South Korea also [carried out](#) regularly scheduled joint command-post exercises.



Figure 2 US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim shakes hands with South Korea's Special Representative for the Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk as they pose for a photo during a meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul, South Korea on April 18, 2022. Photo: Ahn Young-joon/AP

US-North Korea: Have It Your Way

North Korea did not have a cheerful New Year's greeting for either the Biden administration or counterparts in the South. Ballistic missile

testing, which began to accelerate in Fall 2021—with hints at alarming new capabilities (or at least intent to develop them) in hypersonics with maneuverable re-entry vehicles, tactical nuclear weapons, and improved ICBMs—continued on Jan. 5 with a short-range ballistic [missile test](#). Pyongyang claimed the SRBM was hypersonic (a *Hwasong-8*), a technology that would greatly improve the North's capacity to render existing US and South Korean missile defense systems less effective, though Washington and Seoul have [cast doubt](#) on the claim. When the North test-fired [another missile](#) less than a week later (Jan. 10) and made the same hypersonic claims, a Pentagon spokesperson [insisted](#) that the test of ballistic missile technology constituted a violation of US sanctions, regardless of hypersonic capability.

The news worsened. North Korea conducted seven missile test launches in total in January, following the initial launches with [tests](#) of two train-launched ballistic missiles—useful for firing back should an initial attack take out its regular missile launchers—on Jan. 14, tactical-guided missiles (*KN-24*) on Jan. 17, two [long-range cruise missiles](#) on Jan. 25, and two *KN-23* SRBMs on the 27th. On Jan. 30 Pyongyang took things a step further, [launching](#) an apparent intermediate-range ballistic missile (*Hwasong-12*), which at the time was the longest-range missile tested since the North's self-imposed moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear testing in late 2017.

February, by comparison, was quiet, with just one test [recorded](#) on Feb. 27, although it was an important one. North Korea was cagey about the nature of the launch of a supposed MRBM, [hinting](#) that it was part of tests for placing [military reconnaissance satellites](#) in orbit. However, the data on range, apogee, trajectory, flight time, and other parameters were intriguing (possibly a bad fit for the narrative from Pyongyang), and it was later determined that the launch was likely a test of ICBM components, notably a “post-boost vehicle” or “bus,” which is critical for deploying multiple warheads on ICBMs.

The timing of the launch was also troubling, taking place just days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At a time when much of the world—US partners in North America, Europe, East Asia, and Oceania—had united in opposition to Moscow's aggression and imposed penalties, North Korea signaled that it took the opposite

side: one day before the test, Pyongyang's foreign minister [released](#) a statement, attributed to a political "researcher," placing all the blame for the crisis on the United States and echoing Russia's rhetoric on the conflict. "The root cause of the Ukrainian crisis also lies in the high-handedness and arbitrariness of the US which has held on solely to the unilateral sanction and pressure while pursuing only global hegemony and military supremacy in disregard of the legitimate demand of Russia for its security," read the statement, supposedly made by Ri Ji Song of the Society for International Politics Study.

Who Ri is, or whether the ostensible society actually exists, was probably unimportant—North Korea's official channels are fond of citing a variety of sources, including those of questionable origin, inside and out of the country, who back its official line. What was more concerning was that Pyongyang's capabilities, and official rhetorical line, appeared to be escalating and the US involvement in Ukraine—even limited to a supporting role—was perhaps serving as a pretext for an increasingly more alarming, and more provocative, round of tests. And indeed another [launch](#) followed on March 5, with a senior US defense official [stating](#) that the North appeared (based on similar parameters as the Feb. 27 launch) to be preparing a new ICBM sub-system in advance of an actual ICBM test-launch.

March 16 marked a watershed, as Pyongyang apparently made an [initial test](#) of its *Hwasong-17* "Monster" ICBM, which was [unveiled](#) in Fall 2020 at the 75th founding anniversary of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party. This brought to an end, as [anticipated](#), North Korea's [self-imposed moratorium](#) on long-range ballistic missile [testing](#). The test failed, however, with the missile exploding spectacularly at an altitude of less than 20 km. The Kim regime was, unsurprisingly, mute on the test, leaving North Korea watchers unsure of what system was tested and thus if the failed March 16 launch was in reality a *Hwasong-17*. Ten days later analysts began to connect the failed March 16 test with a successful ICBM launch on March 24 (which followed an *amuse bouche* volley [fired](#) from multiple rocket launchers on March 20). The March 24 ICBM, launched on a highly lofted trajectory, was reported by Pyongyang to be the long-awaited *Hwasong-17*. But open-source intelligence analysts cast serious doubt on the claim, noting irregularities in the imagery provided to

substantiate the launch. Official US and South Korean government sources [later seconded](#) this judgment. Currently the relatively sure working hypothesis is that the March 16 failed launch was a *Hwasong-17*, while the March 24 successful ICBM launch was the already-proven *Hwasong-15*, which North Korea launched to make up for the March 16 failure. Pyongyang then ostensibly switched imagery of the two firings to give the impression that the successful March 24 launch was of a *Hwasong-17*.



Figure 3 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un meets troops who took part in a military parade to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army, in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency on April 29. Photo: KCNA via Reuters

This baroque story has numerous [implications](#). The first concerns North Korea's capability to strike the continental United States with a larger payload (such as multiple warheads or high-quality penetration aids) than allowed by Pyongyang's previous ICBMs. If the *Hwasong-17* in fact failed, then perhaps the regime is still a significant distance from placing multiple warheads on ICBMs, thus increasing the value of US strategic missile defense assets deployed to intercept a North Korean strike. Second, the standard explanation for potential North Korean deception about this ICBM test is that the Kim regime needed a successful test (following the failure on March 16) for domestic propaganda purposes, notably in the leadup to the April 15 110th Day of the Sun celebration and 90th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army (which also featured display of an apparently [new solid-fuel SLBM](#)). Yet the cost of this deception is non-negligible, as it dings the credibility/reliability of North Korea's ICBM nuclear arsenal, and thus potentially of its deterrent value. If North Korea was willing to be deceptive about its ICBM tests in so obvious a manner, what else—especially regarding less verifiable components such as re-entry vehicle

survivability or guidance systems—about its ICBMs has it misrepresented?

In any event, regardless if Pyongyang's official channels are being forthright about the tests they have conducted, they continue to signal that they are not content with their current capabilities and will seek to increase them. On April 17, state media said Kim Jong Un had [overseen](#) the successful test-firing of a new tactical guided weapon "of great significance in drastically improving the firepower of the frontline long-range artillery units and enhancing the efficiency in the operation of tactical nukes of the DPRK and diversification of their firepower missions." In the background, there are [signs](#) that the North [continues](#) work [producing](#) fissile materials for nuclear weapons, and is likely preparing for a seventh nuclear test, as evidenced by construction and tunneling at the [Punggye-ri test site](#). On April 26, Kim Jong Un said that his regime's nuclear arsenal may not necessarily be confined to deterrent purposes—perhaps hinting at tactical nuclear weapons use in warfighting scenarios. Earlier that month, his younger sister Kim Yo Jong fueled peninsular tension with [conditional threats](#) of nuclear weapons use. This, however, may have been a calculated measure to increase pressure on the US-South Korea defense and security relationship during a time of political transition in Seoul, US intelligence analysts argue.

Fueling distrust is something the North is apparently happy to do. Having given the conciliatory Moon Jae-in administration the cold shoulder since the 2019 Hanoi summit, when Moon's promises of better North Korean ties with Washington fizzled, Kim [sent](#) personal letters to the departing progressive president in late April thanking him for his work on behalf of "the great cause of the nation." [Moon responded in kind](#). The existence of the missives was made public during a visit in Seoul by US North Korea Special Envoy Sung Kim, which again highlighted how during Moon's presidency Washington and Seoul were not sufficiently on the same page vis-à-vis Pyongyang.

The letters presumably did not include Kim taking responsibility for the stalemate in relations with the US or South Korea, and a few kind words for Moon cannot make up for the lost opportunities Moon likely sees in the past three years of his term (not to mention the [barbs](#) he has endured from Kim's little sister). They do, however, suggest that Kim is a savvy analyst of

politics in his rival countries. In both South Korea and the US, there are those who see the summitry of the 2018-19 period as a lost opportunity for peace on the Peninsula, something Moon could have achieved if the US had not stood in the way. This reservoir of distrust among South Korean progressives may cause a headache for the Yoon administration's desire to work with the Biden administration to be tougher on the Kim regime. With Moon departing in favor of a South Korean administration that has had more to say about improved ties with Japan than with the North (and which has [talked about](#) pre-emptively striking North Korea under certain unclear scenarios), North Korea may seek to change the narrative of post-Hanoi events, even as Kim signals that resumed nuclear testing lies on the horizon.

The good news is that all this suggests Pyongyang wants resolution and is not after armed conflict with the US-South Korea alliance, even as the Kim regime discusses new possible uses for its nuclear arsenal. However, a resolution that both North Korea and the US can accept has proven exceedingly difficult and it seems that Pyongyang's provocations will continue to escalate in the coming reporting period, possibly including nuclear (including tactical nuclear warhead) testing. There are also no clear off-ramps (although North Korea's new COVID-19 outbreak [might offer an opportunity](#) for humanitarian engagement). Biden's administration is preoccupied with Ukraine, including both its security dimensions and its attendant economic fallout. Multilateral action is also murky: the US has been [unable to push through](#) additional United Nations Security Council resolutions, with both China and Russia refusing to entertain the notion, *géopolitique oblige*. Consequently during the recent spasm of North Korean missile testing, the US resorted to designating [additional entities and individuals—including Russians](#)—through US domestic law.

This is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future as well. North Korea's initial *Hwasong-15* test in 2017 prompted tightened UN sanctions upon which the entire Security Council—including China and Russia—was able to agree. However, in the aftermath of the US-China trade war, a global pandemic that started in Wuhan, and Russia's Ukraine invasion, 2017 feels a lot further away than five years. Recently the most the US has been able to muster in terms of international condemnation of continued North Korean nuclear proliferation is [rhetorical](#)

[support](#) from states that do not have much leverage to shape Pyongyang's choices.

Conclusion: Do What You Can't

Looking forward to the Spring/Summer 2022 reporting period, a set of new impetuses will join the US-Korea dynamic already in progress as a clash between the rejuvenated US-South Korea alliance and North Korea's growing nuclear program. Those new impulses include a lot of known unknowns. Will North Korea [finally implement](#) a COVID vaccine program and import antiviral drugs in order to try to beat back an apparent COVID-19 outbreak? If it does not, how can the country begin to [sustainably open up](#) its borders for essential trade, notably with China and potentially Russia? If it does not manage to open up, nuclear negotiations will also likely be pushed back further even as Pyongyang continues its nuclear proliferation under the shadow of COVID-19. Relatedly, with the UNSC deadlocked regarding increased international sanctions against North Korea, will the US and selected states of the international community [step up](#) unorthodox methods of making Pyongyang's sanctions evasion harder, especially by cracking down on financing via [cryptocurrency theft](#)? It is fitting that the new US ambassador to South Korea is Philip Goldberg, a [known supporter](#) of aggressive sanctions enforcement against North Korea and other rogue regimes.

Strategic alterations are also afoot, even if in a nugatory stage. South Korea, for example, is experiencing a steady, and [now significant](#), increase in the percentage of its population in favor of developing indigenous nuclear weapons. The fact that this number is growing as a function of North Korean nuclear weapons development is worrisome, as the latter seemingly has no intention of halting (much less rolling back) its nuclear proliferation. Finally, what could a potentially developing strategic triangle among China, Russia, and North Korea look like? Would it be durable and would it be able to bring additional pressure on the US-South Korea alliance?

CHRONOLOGY OF US-KOREA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 5, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) what appears to be a ballistic missile toward the East Sea.

Jan. 5, 2022: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [condemns](#) North Korea's latest missile test in his telephone conversation with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa.

Jan. 7, 2022: Senior diplomats of South Korea and Iran [discuss](#) Iranian assets frozen here under US sanctions, with the thorny bilateral issue on the table for talks in Vienna aimed at restoring the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal. During the meeting, South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun expressed hope for an early agreement on the nuclear deal, while the two sides shared the understanding that Tehran's frozen assets should be released soon.

Jan. 10, 2022: United States and five other countries (Albania, Britain, France, Ireland and Japan) [call](#) on North Korea to cease missile tests and engage in denuclearization negotiations. They argue the tests will advance the North's capabilities and add to its illicit arms exports.

Jan. 10, 2022: Pentagon press secretary John Kirby says North Korea's latest missile test is in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, regardless of whether it involved a hypersonic missile as claimed by the North, said.

Jan. 11, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) a suspected ballistic missile toward the East Sea, less than a week after it launched what it claimed to be a hypersonic missile. US Indo-Pacific Command characterized the North's projectile as a “ballistic missile,” which highlights the “destabilizing impact” of the North's illicit weapons program.

Jan. 11, 2022: Top nuclear envoys of South Korea and the US [hold](#) phone talks over North Korea's latest launch of a ballistic missile and stressed the importance of maintaining the allies' combined defense posture.

Jan. 12, 2022: US Department of Treasury [designates](#) five North Korean individuals, one based in Russia and four in China, for illegally procuring materials for the North's WMD and ballistic missile programs.

Jan. 13, 2022: Senior defense officials from South Korea, the US, and Japan [hold](#) phone talks to discuss North Korea's missile launches and reaffirm the importance of trilateral security cooperation.

Jan. 14, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) two suspected ballistic missiles eastward, South Korea's military said, after Pyongyang publicly warned earlier in the day of a “stronger and certain” response to the United States' imposition of new sanctions.

Jan. 15, 2022: Secretary Blinken [condemns](#) North Korea's recent missile tests as a violation of multiple UNSC resolutions and reaffirmed the “ironclad” security commitment to South Korea.

Jan. 16, 2022: United States [blasts](#) North Korea for its tactical guided missile test, which the North's official state news agency revealed was conducted by its railway-based missile regiment.

Jan. 17, 2022: Top nuclear envoys of South Korea, the US, and Japan [hold](#) discussion about North Korea's latest missile test and agreed to maintain close trilateral cooperation in the region.

Jan 19, 2022: Top trade officials of South Korea and the US [agree](#) to strengthen their strategic partnership to actively respond to supply chain issues, new technologies, and other major trade issues.

Jan. 20, 2022: State Department spokesperson [says](#) the US strongly [supports](#) humanitarian assistance for the people of North Korea but UNSC sanctions must be fully implemented at the same time.

Jan. 20, 2022: North Korea [holds](#) policymaking politburo meeting of the ruling Workers' Party presides over by Kim Jong Un and decides to consider restarting all temporally-suspended activities.

Jan. 20, 2022: South Korea's top nuclear envoy [holds](#) back-to-back phone talks with US and Chinese counterparts amid rising tension over North Korea's apparent threat of nuclear and long-range weapons tests.

Jan. 20, 2022: United States and seven other members of the UNSC [call](#) on all UN members to fully implement UNSC sanctions on North Korea.

Jan. 24, 2022: Department of Defense Press Secretary John Kirby says the US [continues](#) to call on North Korea to stop its provocations and instead return to dialogue to find ways to de-escalate tension.

Jan. 25, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) two suspected cruise missiles from an inland area, its fifth such test this year.

Jan. 27, 2022: North Korea [sets off](#) another volley of suspected short-range ballistic or tactical guided missiles. South Korean military authorities say the missiles landed in eastern waters off the Korean Peninsula.

Jan. 27, 2022: Department of Defense Press Secretary Kirby says the US is equally [focused](#) on dealing with the threat posed by North Korea just as it is with all other major security issues.

Jan. 28, 2022: South Korea's top trade official [calls](#) on the United States to swiftly begin talks to revise Section 232 tariffs on Seoul's steel exports. South Korean Trade Minister Yeo Han-koo made the request to US Trade Representative Katherine Tai during a meeting in Washington.

Jan. 30, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) ballistic missile toward the East Sea said South Korea's military. It conducted four other launches earlier this month, including those of what it claimed to be hypersonic missiles.

Feb. 3, 2022: Top diplomats of South Korea and the US [express](#) strong concern about recent advances in North Korea's missile program and stress the significance of diplomatic efforts to resume talks with Pyongyang.

Feb. 3, 2022: According to US congressional records, South Korea [seeks](#) to purchase six close-in weapon systems (CIWS) for its naval ships from the United States.

Feb. 4, 2022: Senior defense officials of South Korea, Japan and the US [hold](#) three-way talks to discuss ways to mitigate threats posed by North Korea, says the US Department of Defense.

Feb. 8, 2022: North Korea [harbors](#) an undisclosed missile operation base built specifically for a unit equipped with intermediate-range and potentially intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), according to a CSIS report.

Feb. 10, 2022: Top nuclear negotiators of South Korea, Japan and the US discuss ways to engage with North Korea.

Feb. 11, 2022: President Joe Biden [nominates](#) a senior member of the US foreign service, Philip Goldberg, as ambassador to South Korea.

Feb. 12, 2022: South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong, Secretary of State Blinken, and Japanese FM Hayashi [urge](#) North Korea to halt its destabilizing actions and return to dialogue.

Feb. 15, 2022: Biden administration's new Indo-Pacific strategy [looks](#) to cement trilateral cooperation with Asian allies, South Korea and Japan, as a core lever to counter China's assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear ambitions under its newly unveiled.

Feb. 22, 2022: More than half of South Koreans [support](#) the acquisition of nuclear weapons either through indigenous development or the deployment of US assets, according to a survey by Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Feb. 24, 2022: South Korea [vows](#) to join the international community to impose export controls against Russia in case of a full-fledged invasion of Ukraine but stopped short of drawing up its own punitive measures against Moscow.

Feb. 24, 2022: President Moon Jae-in [says](#) South Korea will join international sanctions against Russia as he expressed regret over Russia's attack on Ukraine, saying any use of armed force causing human casualties cannot be justified.

Feb. 24, 2022: In an apparent warning to North Korea and China, the United States [deploys](#) an unspecified number of F-35A stealth fighter jets to Okinawa.

Feb. 25, 2022: Department of Defense spokesperson Kirby [says](#) the US [welcomes](#) South Korea's decision to impose sanctions on Russia for what the US calls an unlawful and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

Feb. 26, 2022: North Korea [ascribes](#) the armed conflict in Ukraine to US “high-handedness and arbitrariness,” accusing Washington of having pursued “military supremacy” in disregard of Russia's security concerns.

Feb. 26, 2022: Top diplomats of South Korea and the United States strongly [condemn](#) Russia's invasion of Ukraine and reaffirm their support for Ukraine.

Feb. 27, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) an unidentified projectile, says South Korea's military.

Feb. 28, 2022: South Korea [decides](#) to ban exports of strategic materials to Russia as part of efforts to join global sanctions against Moscow following its invasion of Ukraine.

March 1, 2022: South Korea [backs](#) a statement issued by 10 other members of the UN condemning North Korea's latest missile launch in the strongest terms.

March 4, 2022: South Korea wins an exemption from the United States' expanded export restrictions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, [says](#) Seoul's industry ministry.

March 4, 2022: North Korea appears to continue producing fissile materials for nuclear weapons at its main Yongbyon nuclear facility, [says](#) a US monitoring website, citing recent satellite imagery of Yongbyon.

March 5, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) a ballistic missile toward the East Sea.

March 7, 2022: Analysts [say](#) recent photos taken from space show new buildings and other signs of work at North Korea's nuclear testing facility.

March 7, 2022: The chief of the UN nuclear watchdog [says](#) that signs of activity have been detected at North Korea's main Yongbyon nuclear complex and other facilities and called the reclusive regime's nuclear program deeply regrettable.

March 8, 2022: North Korea may resume nuclear and ICBM testing before the year's end, [says](#) a US government report.

March 9, 2022: US [intensifies](#) its intelligence collection activities around the Korean Peninsula.

March 9, 2022: UNSC [holds](#) a closed-door meeting to discuss North Korea's recent missile test, but fails to produce a text condemning the regime of its sanctions violations.

March 10, 2022: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [visits](#) the country's space agency, saying the recent development of a reconnaissance satellite is aimed at collecting information on the US military in the region and its “vassal forces.”

March 10, 2022: Opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol [is elected](#) South Korea's next president.

March 11, 2022: North Korea [appears](#) to be working to restore underground tunnels of its purportedly demolished Punggye-ri nuclear test site.

March 11, 2022: North Korea's two most recent missile launches [aim](#) to test a new ICBM system ahead of a possible full-fledged ICBM test, says a senior US official.

March 13, 2022: US [imposes](#) fresh sanctions on two Russian individuals and three entities for enabling North Korea's weapons program, says the US Treasury Department.

March 13, 2022: Getting US-Korea ties back on track will be a top priority, [says](#) President-elect Yoon at his first press conference after the election results were released.

March 16, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) an apparent ballistic missile, but the launch ended in failure, says South Korea's military.

March 16, 2022: USTR Tai [says](#) the South Korea-US free trade agreement (KORUS FTA) has greatly increased bilateral trade and investment but more can and should be done to advance the countries' economic ties.

March 20, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) four suspected shots from its multiple rocket launchers into the Yellow Sea says South Korean military officials.

March 22, 2022: President-elect Yoon [says](#) that North Korea's recent artillery firing was a violation of an inter-Korean military tension reduction agreement.

March 24, 2022: North Korea [fires](#) an apparent long-range ballistic missile toward the East Sea says South Korea's military. The North's move came four days after it fired four artillery shots into the Yellow Sea, apparently using multiple rocket launchers.

March 24, 2022: South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and Secretary of State Blinken [discuss](#) North Korea's missile tests over the phone, condemning them as violating UNSC resolutions.

March 24, 2022: US [condemns](#) North Korea's launch of an ICBM, vowing to take all necessary measures to ensure the security of the country and its allies.

March 25, 2022: North Korea [says](#) that it successfully test-fired a new ICBM, called the *Hwasong-17*, the previous day on the direct order of leader Kim Jong Un.

March 27, 2022: US and South Korean intelligence [believe](#) the ICBM launched by North Korea was actually a *Hwasong-15* missile disguised to look like the newer, larger *Hwasong-17*, according to South Korean military sources.

March 28, 2022: President-elect Yoon [calls](#) for closer trilateral cooperation with the US and Japan to deter North Korea from pursuing its nuclear weapons program in a meeting with Japan's ambassador.

March 28, 2022: Biden administration [seeks](#) a 4.1% increase in defense spending, citing the US' growing competition with China and threats from North Korea.

March 30, 2022: South Korea [conducts](#) its first successful launch of a solid-fuel space rocket as part of a project to deploy civilian and military surveillance satellites, says the Defense Ministry.

April 1, 2022: US [imposes](#) fresh sanctions on five North Korean entities involved in the North's recent missile tests that included its first ICBM launch in over four years.

April 3, 2022: Kim Yo Jong, sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, [blasts](#) South Korea's defense minister for highlighting Seoul's "preemptive strike" capabilities and threatens the South for making such "reckless" remarks, according to Pyongyang's state media.

April 4, 2022: Top nuclear envoys of South Korea and the US [agree](#) to jointly push for a new UNSC resolution against North Korea over its recent series of ballistic missile launches.

April 5, 2022: South Korean delegates representing President-elect Yoon [discuss](#) the possible deployment of US strategic assets to South Korea in a meeting with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

April 5, 2022: US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim and China's Liu Xiaoming [meet](#) in Washington for talks on ways to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

April 6, 2022: US and its allies are prepared to deal with any further provocations by North Korea, [says](#) US special envoy for North Korea, noting the recalcitrant state may conduct a nuclear test in the future.

April 6, 2022: US [seeks](#) to ensure peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region partly by reinvigorating its trilateral cooperation with South Korea and Japan, says US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

April 9, 2022: North Korea [condemns](#) the US for making the crisis surrounding Ukraine a human rights issue and imposing sanctions against Russia, denouncing US President Biden as "an old man in his senility" and a man of a "repeated slip of tongue."

April 12, 2022: US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier [enters](#) the international waters of the east of the Korean Peninsula, in an apparent show of America's military might.

April 12, 2022: Head of the UN civil aviation agency [urges](#) North Korea to make prior notifications on its missile launches, saying Pyongyang's unannounced missile tests pose a risk to international civil aviation.

April 15, 2022: North Korea [holds](#) celebrations for the 110th birth anniversary of late founder Kim Il Sung with fireworks and a mass dance performance in its capital, footage from state media showed.

April 17, 2022: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [oversees](#) the successful test-firing of a new tactical guided weapon meaningful in improving the efficiency of tactical nuclear operations.

April 18, 2022: US special representative for North Korea Sung Kim [says](#) that Seoul and Washington will respond “responsibly and decisively” to Pyongyang's provocative acts while voicing concerns over its “escalatory actions.”

April 20, 2022: South Korea [will](#) set up a task force to deal with its potential participation in a US-led economic framework, as the United States accelerates preparations to launch the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

April 21, 2022: South Korea successfully [test-fires](#) two submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) consecutively earlier this week, in a sign the missile is nearing operational deployment.

April 25, 2022: North Korea [holds](#) a military parade in Pyongyang to mark a key national anniversary, in what was seen as a highly choreographed event to cement internal unity and highlight its military heft. During the parade, North Korea rolls out what appears to be a new type of solid fuel missile alongside the country's largest-known ICBM.

April 26, 2022: President-elect Yoon [says](#) he will “positively review” South Korea's joining of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an anti-China security partnership, if invited, according to a report.

April 26, 2022: South Korea and the US [sign](#) their first bilateral document on joint space policy research, in their latest push to reinforce cooperation in the increasingly crucial security domain.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

US-INDIA RELATIONS

COLD-WAR ERA DIFFERENCES & INDO-PACIFIC SYNERGIES

AKHIL RAMESH, PACIFIC FORUM

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2022 started with a surging omicron wave, followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a global food, energy, and supply shortage crisis that impacted a wide range of sectors. The United States and India worked collaboratively and individually to put out these fires over the first four months of 2022, becoming more aware of synergies to build on and differences to address. In the first four months of 2022 bilateral ties witnessed successes in their joint efforts. The Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership between the US and India was in action through cooperation on vaccines and COVID-19-related supply chain resiliency initiatives. During the reporting period, India removed several agricultural trade barriers, the US unveiled its Indo-Pacific Strategy, foreign and defense ministers held their 2+2 meeting, and there were several phone conversations and in-person meetings between the two administrations discussing Ukraine, Afghanistan, and other Indo-Pacific issues. Historically, foreign affairs has not played a significant role in Indian state-level elections. However, domestic politics in India has a significant impact on foreign relations. On topics of trade, economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and even human rights, developments in state elections can profoundly impact US-India relations.

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Modi: Better than Teflon

Amid a pandemic, Ukraine conflict, and global economic crises, five Indian states went to the polls in February and March. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) once again got a clear mandate from the public, winning in [four](#) of the polls.

There were multiple issues at play in those elections. In the northern states, the Modi administration's notorious [farm bills](#)—which sought to liberalize the farming sector and prompted protests by members of farmers unions last year—plus its success with religious and cultural initiatives such as the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, its relative success with channeling the flow of infrastructure and manufacturing investments into those states and—as with any Indian state election—the caste calculus all played significant roles.



Figure 1 A supporter of India's BJP displays cutouts of PM Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh state's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath as he celebrates poll results in Lucknow Photo: Pawan Kumar/Reuters

Those local electoral successes might receive little attention internationally but they portend policy consistency in Delhi. This will aid the continuation of reforms for increased investment and in creating a business-friendly environment. While the farmers' protests impacted the election results in Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP won by a smaller margin than in the previous election, this is not expected reverse the administration's reform drive.

As the Modi government consolidates power electorally, its macroeconomic reform agenda coupled with the *Atmanirbhar* ("self-reliant India") initiative will accelerate, profoundly impacting states such as Uttar Pradesh, an agrarian state that has historically been shunned

by investors for a host of reasons—lack of basic infrastructure, poor law and order, and stringent labor laws. The state has been given new life by its leader, the saffron-clad monk, Yogi Adityanath. On crime, he has taken a Rudy Giuliani approach to crime—[zero tolerance](#)—bringing law and order to a former "Wild West" state. With the support of Modi, the state has successfully executed several infrastructure projects such as highways, bridges, airports, and metros, and reformed and consolidated its archaic labor laws.

The state is crucial for the US-India relationship for two reasons. First, it receives the Modi administration's undivided attention since it is politically important for his government, providing 78 seats of 521 in Parliament. Second, it is at the heart of the administration's flagship *Atmanirbhar* and Make in India initiatives. The government thus has incentive to channel international investments into the state, and has predictably done so with [French](#), Japanese, and Korean investments. As US investments follow those, the success and failure of those manufacturing and investment decisions will chart the course of the US-India economic relationship.

Foreign affairs also matter to the relationship. A case in point was Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, which ignited a discussion in both Washington and New Delhi on Cold War relationships and their impact on 21st-century partnerships. It proved to be a stress test of the US-India relationship.

March Madness

If "the ultimate test of a relationship is to disagree but to hold hands," the US-India relationship was stress-tested by the Ukraine crisis, but it held. The Cold War-era alliance between Delhi and Moscow was a recurring issue from the onset of the invasion. But as the Quad meetings and the 2+2 ministerial meetings highlighted, the US-India relationship has grown in many directions, addressing energy challenges, vaccines for the Global South, climate change, and supply chain resiliency. Even in its prime, the Soviet-India relationship was not as comprehensive as the US-India one that exists today—and it is just getting started.

For a nation that has historically championed non-alignment and, more recently, multi-

alignment for its foreign policy strategy, India had a challenging time de-hyphenating relations or at least convincing the Western world that such a de-hyphenation was possible under the circumstances. While there was no shortage of drama at press briefings, both the US and Indian administrations chose pragmatism to protect their strategic partnership.

The way the conflict in Ukraine tested the limits of India's strategy of multi-alignment and US tolerance of India's Cold War-era loyalties may have been best illustrated at the start of the conflict on Feb. 25, when US forces participated in the Indian Navy-led *Exercise Milan* for the first time. The US Navy *Arleigh Burke*-class guided-missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), *P-8A Poseidon* maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft (MPRA), from Patrol Squadron (VP) 47, joined with ships, aircraft, and personnel from India and numerous other navies to begin *Exercise Milan 2022*, in the Bay of Bengal.

Just as the exercise was kicking off, however, the entire Western world was uniting in condemning Russia's aggression in Ukraine. However, outside of the West, the rest of the world was cautious in its approach to the conflict. For India, taking sides against its Cold War-era partner Russia, in favor of its 21st-century partner, the United States, meant choosing between the country that [sent its warship](#) to the Bay of Bengal 50 years earlier to warn the US 7th Fleet against intervening in the Indo-Pakistani War, vs siding with the government with which it was conducting joint naval exercises.



Figure 2 Sailors aboard *USS Fitzgerald* wave to the Indian Navy destroyer *INS Ranvir* (D54) during *Exercise Milan 2022* in the Indian Ocean. Photo: US Navy Photo/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Catie Coyle

America Plays “Good Cop/Bad Cop”

In the first two weeks of March, the priorities of the India government were to bring home its students from Ukraine, who were pursuing medicine and engineering at universities across the country. The external affairs ministry faced domestic pressure from states that were run by opposition parties such as Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to bring back those students. In this situation, the last thing the ministry wanted was a hasty change in foreign policy that could work against the national interest.



Figure 3 A gas station in Kolkata. Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner, purchased 3 million barrels of Russian oil following the invasion of Ukraine. Photo: Indranil Aditya/Zuma Press

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Modi in his calls with both Putin and Zelenskyy, while prioritizing the safe repatriation of Indian students, called for peace and resolution through talks and diplomacy. India's national interest meant limiting its economy's exposure to global commodity price shocks, and thereby inflation, potentially impacting the poorest in India. The conflict had the unintended consequence of a rise in commodity prices, with crude oil [crossing \\$130 per barrel](#) and wheat shooting up to unprecedented prices. India's balancing act between Russia and the US paid off with the availability of Russian oil at discounted rates. As a consequence, it was not in India's interests to join Western sanctions or condemn Russia at multilateral forums such as the UN Security Council or UN Human Rights Council. As expected, this prompted a backlash on the global stage.

Criticism of India for seeking alternate mechanisms to secure oil from Russia, circumventing economic sanctions imposed by the West, came from sectors and countries in the

West, from commodities traders to analysts at prestigious think tanks to government officials.

Responding to a question to about whether the UK was disappointed by India buying Russian oil, India's External Affairs Minister Subramanyam Jaishankar [remarked](#) that "it looked like there was a campaign on this issue" and pointed out that in March, Europe bought 15% more oil and gas from Russia than the month before, that most buyers of Russian oil are in Europe, and that India buys the bulk of its oil from the Middle East—with about 8% coming from US and less than 1% coming from Russia. Shortly after, *The Economist* magazine published a cartoon that picturized/caricatured Xi and Modi as heartless leaders who supported Putin. Interestingly, while the Western world was supplying Ukraine with weapons, artillery, and expedited financial aid, India shipped both Ukraine and Russia vital medicines to prevent ailing civilian populations from bearing the brunt of the conflict.

While criticisms from the media may have a negligible impact on US-India relations, that of US government officials is a different story. US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, in her visit to India in late March, told an Indian television channel of her advice to her Indian counterparts to rethink their Russian energy policy. Furthermore, she organized private meetings with activists and social leaders who were [ardent](#) critics of the Modi administration—a move equivalent to a senior Indian foreign ministry official meeting with Black Lives Matter under a Republican administration or a gun rights advocacy group under a Democratic administration. Fueling the fire, Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh, in his visit to New Delhi in the same month, [warned](#) India of consequences if India were to continue its energy trade with Russia.

The pressure on India, from various fronts, to condemn Russia's aggression in Ukraine was short-lived, and India emerged without much damage to its partnerships with the Western world. The White House ultimately [put an end](#) to the pressure, along with speculation as to whether there were fissures in the US-India relationship due to Delhi's relationship with Russia, in April by calling India ties the most important in the world for the US.

Nevertheless, while the White House seems to understand India's predicament and its significance for the Indo-Pacific strategy, US

government officials and government-funded think tanks engaging in veiled threats, signal that the US is playing "good cop, bad cop" with India. This duality, coupled with the Indian administration's [multi-alignment strategy](#), will not serve the US-India relationship well, and has the potential to stagger the rapidly growing ties.

Destination India

The end of March and April do not typically attract many visitors to India, due to the scorching heat and the humidity. Yet, in 2022, that's when India received the most foreign dignitaries, from heads of state to vice presidents to various secretaries (not including the [Raisina Dialogue](#)). Over a span of three weeks, around 10 different nations sent representatives to India. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was in New Delhi to discuss energy, trade and security while the UK Secretary of State Liz Truss was in New Delhi to discuss trade and prepare for her prime minister's scheduled meeting with his Indian counterpart.



Figure 4 A US Congressional delegation led by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand poses with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during their visit to New Delhi on April 21, 2022. Photo: Twitter/@DrSJaishankar

A US Congressional delegation led by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand visited New Delhi to exchange views on Ukraine, Afghanistan, South Asia and bilateral cooperation with Jaishankar. Interestingly, around the same time, Congresswoman Ilhan Omar visited Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, as part of her four-day visit to Pakistan from April 20–24. The Biden administration distanced itself from the trip by characterizing it as a personal trip by the congresswoman. Nevertheless, the Indian external affairs ministry condemned the trip, perceiving the visit as an attempt at bringing international attention to its internal affairs.

Unexpectedly, Vice Premier and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi made a short trip to New Delhi to invite India to attend the upcoming BRICS summit. Not surprisingly, the Indian government gave the vice premier the [cold shoulder](#), neglecting the usual diplomatic honors given to a state-level visit such as meeting the delegate at the airport. This is not shocking given that the two states have been unable able to revert to normal relations since the Galwan valley clash in 2020.

Ministers Get Candid

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin welcomed Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh and Minister of External Affairs Jaishankar to Washington on April 11 for the fourth US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. The dialogue was preceded by a virtual meeting between the leaders of the two countries. In their statement, the ministers reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific in which the territorial integrity of all states are respected, and countries are free from military, economic and political coercion. The ministers welcomed the progress made on several initiatives and highlighted the fact that the bilateral US-India relationship has expanded in scope thanks to the formation of the Quad grouping. They applauded the growth of the bilateral relationship. Of significance are these [developments](#):

Climate Change & Renewable Energy. The ministers talked about creating an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to develop new approaches to trade that met high environmental standards and about making shared investments in decarbonization and energy resiliency to meet 2030 and 2050 targets. Both the US and India have actively pursued these goals for some time. For example, the US signed the Framework Agreement of the International Solar Alliance, an initiative of France and India to address climate change through adoption of solar energy. The US, through DFC, supported solar panel manufacturer First Solar's facility to produce panels in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. At the 2+2 ministerial meeting, the ministers present praised the efforts of their counterparts in identifying low-carbon pathways to undertake joint research and development, including commercialization and scaling up of green hydrogen, battery storage and rooftop solar in India. Cooperation on climate change is one area where it is appropriate

to say that the US-India relationship has grown from the ocean floor (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's collaboration with India's Ministry of Earth Science) to outer space (development of the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite to monitor climate change).

Trade and Economic Cooperation. The ministers applauded the rebound of trade in goods to over \$113 billion since COVID-19 and the progress of several working group discussions to reduce market access barriers and improve ease of business, which have been perennial challenges for US businesses investing and operating in India. USAID and India's Development Partnership Administration (DPA) decided to expand triangular development activity with third countries.

Defense and Security. Defense and security cooperation between US-India has historically been limited. However, the Indo-Pacific Strategy indicates that the US seeks to advance integrated deterrence and develop interoperability with India. At the ministerial dialogue, the ministers welcomed the progress of the US-India Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) on the agreement to co-develop air-launched unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Notably, the ministers agreed to explore possibilities of utilizing India shipyards for maintenance of US Maritime Sealift Command (MSC) to support repair of US Naval ships. The ministers underscored the importance of cooperation in space and suggested an inaugural Defense Space Dialogue.

People-to-People. Educational linkages have been the strongest element of the US-India people to people ties. The ministers welcomed the launch of the ICMR-NIH Clinical Research Fellowship Program, the Quad Fellowship program, and the US-India Education and Skills Development Working Group.

Multilateral Cooperation. In addition to initiatives launched as part of the Quad, in what could be dubbed a significant development for the emerging partnership between US and India, the US reaffirmed its support for India's permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council

and for India's entry to the Nuclear Supplier's Group.

Vaccines & Global Health. The ministers committed to expediting the delivery of the first batch of vaccines that are manufactured at the Biological E facility in India, support by the US DFC to countries of the Indo-Pacific and beyond, and to diversify the basket of vaccines in the larger context of global changes in demand and supply. Both parties applauded the recent collaboration in vaccine R&D and the manufacturing of Corbevax, Janssen, and Novovax vaccines at Indian facilities.

A relationship once limited to mostly trade in information technology, tourism, and the diaspora has widely expanded and now runs the gamut, from addressing climate change to enhanced defense cooperation.



Figure 5 Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin meet with Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh and Minister of External Affairs Jaishankar in Washington on April 11, 2022 for the fourth US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. Photo: Twitter/@rajnathsingh

The Jaishankar Way

Despite the progress that the dialogue revealed, the Indian external affairs minister injected a dose of realism after the proceedings. In the press briefing after the 2+2 meeting, when the Indian ministers were asked about their Russian oil purchases and whether they should reconsider them, Jaishankar's [riposte](#)—"thank you for suggesting how we conduct our foreign affairs, but we are well aware of our interests..." and his note that Europe buys more Russian oil in an afternoon than India buys "in an entire month" was another sign of the changing times. Moreover, unexpectedly, Blinken talked about

the human rights issues related to policing in parts of India. In the press briefing that followed, Jaishankar, when asked about Blinken's comments, [remarked](#) that India has issues with the US human rights record as well and India would be open to discussing that.

Those remarks reveal what could be a perennial challenge to cooperation between these two democracies, and the minister's ripostes show that the Modi administration remains determined to assert itself. Nonetheless, there are those in the Biden administration who understand India's dilemma, such as State Department Counselor Derek Chollet, who [added](#) that the "Russo-Ukrainian war doesn't impact US-India ties, our connection is deep, it's strong. US understands India's long standing defense relationship with Moscow, it started at a time when America wasn't available as a partner to India." Similarly, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman [said](#), "Indian democracy is messy but so is ours."

Conclusion: The Time Has Come

The change in tone indicated by Sherman and Chollet's remarks reflects the current needs of the US-India relationship, and demonstrates a realization that the US and India have many internal challenges and flaws, as is inherent in any democracy. The legacy of the US and India's Cold War-era relations also presents challenges, with Pakistan, the US' non-NATO strategic ally, having a historical dispute with India. However, President Biden has [not](#) had a single phone call with the Pakistani leadership since taking office and with recently ousted Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan [suggesting](#) that the US was behind his ousting, that relationship may be dying a slow death. India's relations with Russia could suffer the same fate; empirical evidence would suggest so. India's reliance on Russian defense exports has been [declining](#) over the past five years. While 85% of Indian defense is made up of Russian hardware—which is hard to replace overnight—the diversification process has begun.

France is a strong contender. Its exports have grown [10-fold](#) over five years to become India's second-largest source of arms and equipment. Moreover, US energy can replace that of Russia and contribute to India's growth. As Jaishankar pointed out, energy trade with the US did not exist a decade ago and now India imports more crude from the US (8%) than it does from Russia

(2%). As highlighted in the 2+2 meeting, several sectors are ripe for collaboration. Energy (both renewable and nonrenewable), electric vehicles, cyber security, AI, defense, and people to people connections are areas where synergies can be fostered, keeping not just the Indo-Pacific but the entire world clean, safe, and secure.

The US is expected to capitalize on this trend and find ways to increase its defense exports to India. India is the world's largest importer of arms and ammunition and the US Congress, along with the US arms industry, are expected to explore ways to participate in India's *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative.

Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, speaking on the sidelines of the IMF meetings in Washington, [summed](#) it all up: "India wants to be friends with the European Union and the Western, free, liberal world, but not as a weak friend that needs desperate help here and there." While that could be music to the ears of Americans who have become increasingly skeptical of sending aid and troops around the world—often underwriting the defense expenses of partner nations—the minister's comments signal a willingness to consider alternatives to Cold War arrangements. In the coming months, US businesses will explore opportunities with a renewed/revitalized interest. Whether they find room in India's self-reliance drive, only time will tell.

It is a good time for the US to center trade and economic engagement with India to develop the relationship, as the two countries are celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2022. As neither India nor the United States are part of RCEP or CPTPP, much hope rests on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. India has concluded bilateral trade deals with unprecedented urgency with nations such as the United Arab Emirates and Australia and is in the process with the [UK](#). While there are outstanding issues to address, it seems likely that the US and India will look to accelerate the negotiation process to finalize a bilateral trade agreement.

Despite Biden categorizing the relationship with India as the most crucial for the United States, his administration has not [yet](#) appointed an ambassador to India. Biden must appoint an ambassador to accelerate the expansion and the scope of the relationship. The two democracies are finally coming to terms with their Cold War-era differences, and based on the prioritization of

cooperation for the Quad Summit in Tokyo later this year, it is evident that the time has come for the US-India relationship to accelerate.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-INDIA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 3, 2022: Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar [meets](#) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss bilateral issues, the Indo-Pacific region, and other global matters.

Jan. 5, 2022: US Navy [joins](#) India, Australia, Canada, Republic of Korea, and Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force to begin multinational exercise *Sea Dragon 22*.

Jan. 8, 2022: US Department of Agriculture and Indian Department of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare [sign](#) a framework agreement for implementing the "2 Vs 2" Agricultural Market Access Issues. This grants market access for pomegranate arils from India and cherries and alfalfa hay from the US, among other goods.

Jan. 10, 2022: US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack [announce](#) that India has agreed to allow imports of US pork and pork products into India, removing longstanding agricultural trade barriers.

Jan. 10, 2022: White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki [says](#) that the US and India are expected to move forward on initiatives in 2022 including the fight against the pandemic, climate change, the Quad, and emerging technologies.

Jan. 12, 2022: Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans at the Department of Homeland Security Rob Silvers [meets](#) Indian Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the US-India Homeland Security Dialogue Senior Officials Meeting. They discuss the global supply chain, aviation and maritime security, law enforcement and information-sharing, counter-terrorism, cyber-security, critical infrastructure, customs enforcement and trade security.

Jan. 19, 2022: Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman [speaks](#) with Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to discuss bilateral and regional priorities, including Russia's military build-up on Ukraine's borders, regional issues, and the fight against COVID-19, including the supply of vaccines. They also exchange views on the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East, the United Nations Security Council, and more.

Jan. 21, 2022: Indian Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu [meets](#) Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya. They discuss matters of mutual interest, including leveraging bilateral health and knowledge partnerships.

Jan. 27, 2022: Indian Union Cabinet Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav [meets](#) US Climate Envoy John Kerry and other leaders at the Major Economies Forum to reflect on COP26 outcomes and the ways to accelerate climate action.

Feb. 7, 2022: Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. [speaks](#) to Indian Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhari to congratulate him on his appointment as chief of the Air Staff. They discuss increasing cooperation and further operationalizing India's unique status as a Major Defense Partner of the US.

Feb. 8, 2022: Secretary Blinken [departs](#) for a visit to the Indo-Pacific region.

Feb. 10, 2022: Sandhu [meets](#) with Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment at the State Department Jose W. Fernandez to discuss the India-US bilateral partnership.

Feb. 11, 2022: At the fourth Quad Foreign Minister's meeting, Australian Foreign Minister and Minister for Women Marise Payne [meets](#) the foreign ministers of India and Japan, plus Secretary of State Blinken, in Melbourne to discuss issues that shape collective prosperity and security.

Feb. 11, 2022: Secretary Blinken [meets](#) with Minister Jaishankar to discuss cooperation on climate, COVID-19, and strengthening Indo-Pacific cooperation bilaterally and through the Quad.

Feb. 11, 2022: US [launches](#) its new Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Feb. 23, 2022: Ambassador Sandhu [participates](#) in the Roundtable on Vaccines to discuss leveraging India-US synergies in producing affordable COVID-19 vaccines for the world, including the African region.

Feb. 24, 2022: President Biden [speaks](#) with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar about the crisis in Ukraine and the importance of a strong collective response to Russian aggression.

Feb. 24, 2022: Prime Minister Modi [participates](#) in a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, where the prime minister urges an end to the violence in Ukraine.

Feb. 25, 2022: Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla [welcomes](#) Commander of the US Pacific Fleet Adm. John Paparo to India for Navy-led *Exercise Milan 2022*. They discuss bilateral maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Feb. 26, 2022: Modi [participates](#) in a call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

Feb. 26, 2022: US Forces [participate](#) in Indian Navy-led Exercise Milan for the first time.

Feb. 28, 2022: Sandhu [meets](#) Gov. Gavin Newsom to discuss connections between India-US bilateral relations and California, including the state's strengths in healthcare, IT and emerging tech, renewables, education, defense and aerospace, and the vibrant Indian-American diaspora in California.

March 2, 2022: Modi [participates](#) in a call with Putin to review the situation in Ukraine and emphasize India's need to evacuate its citizens from Kharkiv amid an assault by Russian forces.

March 2, 2022: India and the US [hold](#) the 19th Military Cooperation meeting at the Air Force Station in Agra to strengthen defense cooperation, fortify defense arrangements, and consider new initiatives under the ambit of existing cooperation mechanisms.

March 3, 2022: President Biden [meets](#) with Quad leaders, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Russia's attack on Ukraine and the Quad's commitment to sovereignty and territorial integrity, including security, safety, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

March 4, 2022: US Food and Drug Administration [rejects](#) emergency authorization for India-made COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 2 to 18.

March 4, 2022: Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland [meets](#) Sandhu at the US State Department to discuss Indo-Pacific priorities and challenges, deepening bilateral partnerships, and peace and security in the region.

March 5, 2022: Manipur Legislative Assembly election [concludes](#). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wins the election, which began on Feb. 28, 2022.

March 7, 2022: Modi [participates](#) in a call with Zelenskyy to discuss the situation in Ukraine. Modi seeks Ukraine's assistance in India's evacuation from Sumy.

March 7, 2022: Modi [participates](#) in a call with Putin, where he conveys the importance of the safe evacuation of Indian citizens from Sumy city in Ukraine.

March 7, 2022: Three-day 23rd Executive Steering Group Meeting [begins](#) in New Delhi between the Indian and US Navies. The meeting discusses bolstering defense relations.

March 7, 2022: Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly election [concludes](#). BJP wins the election, which began on Feb. 10, 2022.

March 10, 2022: Members of US Congressional Hispanic Caucus [urge](#) President Biden to champion vaccine collaboration with India to end the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter suggests the use of two vaccines resulting from India-US collaborations on vaccine equity through Corbevax and Covovax.

March 10, 2022: Punjab Legislative Assembly election [concludes](#). The centrist Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) wins, and claims 92 seats.

March 10, 2022: Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly election [concludes](#). BJP wins and claims 47 seats.

March 10, 2022: Goa Legislative Assembly election [concludes](#). BJP wins.

March 15, 2022: India, the US, the European Union, and South Africa [reach](#) a consensus on the key elements of an intellectual property waiver for COVID-19 vaccines at the WTO.

March 15, 2022: Food and Drug Administration and India's Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) [sign](#) arrangement that facilitates their cooperation to ensure safer seafood products for Indian and US consumers.

March 15, 2022: White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki [says](#) that India would not be violating US' sanctions if India imported oil from Russia.

March 16, 2022: Applications for the Quad Fellowship [open](#).

March 17, 2022: Congressman Ami Bera, chair of the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Asia, Pacific, Central Asia, and Non-Proliferation, [says](#) he has been deeply disappointed with India's abstention at United Nations votes condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine.

March 21, 2022: Undersecretary of State Nuland [meets](#) Secretary Shringla for bilateral consultations in preparation for 2+2 ministerial meetings in Washington and an in-person Quad summit in Tokyo later this year. They review progress in the bilateral Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and discuss issues in South Asia, the Indo-Pacific, West Asia, and Ukraine.

March 22, 2022: Undersecretary of State Nuland [meets](#) Minister Jaishankar to discuss expanding bilateral cooperation in South Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and the Ukraine situation.

March 23, 2022: USAID [announces](#) that Administrator Samantha Power will co-chair the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure Governing Council with Indian Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr. Pramod Kumar Mishra for a two-year term.

March 25, 2022: Quad Senior Cyber Group [meets](#) in Sydney to strengthen cybersecurity cooperation and bolster the resilience of critical infrastructure.

March 25, 2022: Undersecretary of State Nuland [travels](#) to India and meets senior officials, entrepreneurs, and thought leaders.

March 25, 2022: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi [visits](#) India and meets Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

March 30, 2022: Senior Officials' Meeting of the Quad [discusses](#) cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, including maritime security, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief.

March 30, 2022: Secretary Blinken [meets](#) with Minister Jaishankar to discuss bilateral cooperation pertaining to the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, shared efforts in the Indo-Pacific, and the global economy.

March 30, 2022: Indian Minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs & Food & Public Distribution and Textiles Piyush Goyal [meets](#) US Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics and G20 Sherpa Daleep Singh. They discussed bilateral economic and strategic ties.

March 30, 2022: Shringla [meets](#) Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh to discuss economic cooperation and strategic partnership in global issues of mutual interest, including the G20.

April 1, 2022: Russian Foreign Minister Serge Lavrov [visits](#) India from March 31-April 1, 2022 and meets with Jaishankar. Lavrov expresses appreciation for India's neutral stand on Ukraine.

April 5, 2022: Blinken [meets](#) Jaishankar ahead of 2+2 consultations to discuss developments in Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific.

April 7, 2022: Secretary Blinken [marks](#) 75 years of US-India diplomatic relations.

April 7, 2022: Sandhu [meets](#) Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf to discuss bilateral cooperation in affordable healthcare, food standards, and sharing best practices.

April 8, 2022: First batch of Indian Navy pilots and sensor operators [graduates](#) from US Navy Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 41 in San Diego.

April 8, 2022: Deputy Economic Minister Counselor of the US Embassy in India John Speaks and Economic Officer of the US Consulate-General in Chennai Dustin Bickel [meet](#) Scientific Secretary of the Indian Space Research Organisation Shantanu Bhatawdekar to discuss US-India ties in space.

April 9, 2022: White House Press Secretary Psaki [says](#) that President Biden believes that the US-India partnership is the most important relationship the US has in the world.

April 10, 2022: Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh [meets](#) aerospace and defense majors Boeing and Raytheon in Washington, DC

April 11, 2022: Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [meet](#) Jaishankar and Singh for the fourth US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in Washington DC to discuss the bilateral strategic partnership. On the same day, Austin [hosts](#) Singh at the Pentagon to discuss the developing defense partnership. Blinken and Jaishankar [meet](#) to exchange views on the global situation, regional hotspots, and bilateral cooperation.

April 11, 2022: President Biden [meets](#) virtually with Modi to discuss deepening ties between both governments, economies, and people. They [commit](#) to strengthening the bilateral “defense, economic, and people-to-people relationship to together seek a peaceful and prosperous world.”

April 11, 2022: State Department [releases](#) a statement reaffirming continued cooperation “with India and Quad partners to advance coordination on development assistance, post-pandemic economic recovery, and combating climate change while promoting prosperity, security, and rule of law throughout the Indo-Pacific.”

April 11, 2022: State Department [announces](#) that the US and India have “agreed to launch new supply chain-cooperation measures” to “more swiftly support each other's priority defense requirements.” It also [announces](#) that the two countries have signed a Space Situational Awareness arrangement.

April 12, 2022: Jaishankar [meets](#) Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo to discuss accelerating the economic partnership, enhancing resilience and reliability of supply chains, and enhancing trust and transparency in business.

April 12, 2022: US Trade Representative Ambassador Katherine Tai [meets](#) India's Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar. They notes the re-launch of the US-India Trade Policy Forum last fall, and efforts to strengthen bilateral trade and economic cooperation.

April 12, 2022: Blinken, Assistant Secretary of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the Dept. of State Lee Satterfield, and Jaishankar [speak](#) at Howard University on the importance of US-India cooperation in research and education, an important driver of people-to-people ties. They [announce](#) a Working Group on Education and Skill Training for US and Indian academic institutions to develop joint research programs.

April 13, 2022: Minister Singh [meets](#) Commander of US Army Pacific (USARPAC) Gen. Charles A. Flynn. They visit training sites located around Oahu.

April 14, 2022: Commander Adm. John C. Aquilino [welcomes](#) Minister Singh to Honolulu, where he visits the Headquarters of United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and advances bilateral defense collaboration.

April 14, 2022: Shringla [meets](#) a US Congressional delegation led by Rep. Adam Smith, chairman of the Armed Forces Committee, and Rep. Chrissy Houlahan and Reps Austin Scott. The meeting covers bilateral cooperation, including opportunities for enhanced trade and investments, defense and security, as well as regional and global issues of interest.

April 18, 2022: Indian Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman [visits](#) Washington for the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the G20 Finance Ministers, and Central Bank Governor meeting, and other investment meetings.

April 20, 2022: Sitharaman and Sandhu [host](#) heads and senior officials from the White House, National Security Council, US Treasury, USAID, World Bank, IMF, US Trade and Development Agency, US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, US-India Business Council, National Science Foundation, the US International Development Finance Corporation, and the State Department. The conversation takes place at the India House in Washington, DC.

April 20, 2022: Sitharaman [meets](#) Secretary of Commerce Raimondo in Washington DC to discuss strengthening economic cooperation in bilateral and global contexts.

April 21, 2022: Jaishankar [hosts](#) a US Congressional delegation led by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand to exchange views on Ukraine, Afghanistan, South Asia, and bilateral cooperation.

April 21, 2022: Spokesperson of India's Foreign Ministry [condemns](#) Congresswoman Ilhan Omar's visit to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on her visit to Pakistan from April 20-24, 2022.

April 22, 2022: Commander of US Army Pacific (USARPAC) Gen. Charles A. Flynn and India's Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Strategy) Lt. Gen. Sanjeev Kumar Sharma [sign](#) the US-India Executive Steering Group minutes. The Executive Steering Group occurs annually and focuses on strategic discussions among senior leaders.

April 23, 2022: Guided-missile destroyer USS *Momsen* [arrives](#) in Goa, India, for a scheduled port visit. The *Momsen* is deployed to the US 7th Fleet area of operations in support of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

April 25, 2022: Adm. Aquilino, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense Lindsey W. Ford, and Deputy National Security Advisor Anne Neuberger [visit](#) New Delhi for the Raisina Dialogue 2022.

April 25, 2022: Jaishankar [expresses](#) a Vote of Thanks at the inaugural session of the Sixth Raisina Dialogue.

April 27, 2022: Aquilino [joins](#) a panel discussion at the Raisina Dialogue entitled "Sabres of Silicon: (Re)assessing a 21st-Century Global Risk Landscape."

April 27, 2022: US Deputy National Security Advisor of Cyber and Emerging Technology Anne Neuberger [participates](#) in a panel discussion at the Raisina Dialogue entitled "Diminished Democracies: Big Tech, Red Tech, and Deep Tech."

April 27, 2022: Aquilino [calls](#) on Indian Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari to discuss issues of mutual interest, including joint training and exercises.

April 27, 2022: Aquilino [calls](#) on Minister of Finance Manmohan Singh in New Delhi.

April 27, 2022: Chief of the Naval Staff Adm. R. Hari Kumar and Aquilino [discuss](#) defense cooperation for ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue. They discuss avenues to further augment existing cooperation between the two navies through capacity enhancement and cooperative engagements.

April 28, 2022: Aquilino [calls](#) on Indian Army Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane to discuss ways to enhance existing bilateral defense cooperation.

April 29, 2022: Aquilino and Australian Department of Defence Chief Gen. Angus Campbell [participate](#) in the Raisina Dialogue to discuss collaborative approaches to security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

Chronology prepared by Pacific Forum research intern Angela Min Yi Hou.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

REGIONAL POWERS CAST LONG SHADOWS: ASEAN GRAPPLES WITH NEW DYNAMICS

CATHARIN DALPINO, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

In the early months of 2022 the Russian invasion of Ukraine had a major, if indirect, impact on Southeast Asia and its relations with the major powers. Rising commodity prices and added disruptions in global supply chains caused by the invasion threatened to erase economic gains following the damage of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. ASEAN splintered in its response to the invasion, putting further strain on an institution already buckling under the worsening conflict in Myanmar. A year past the coup in Naypyidaw, the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan has barely moved forward.

Beijing's apparent, if cautious, support for Moscow following the invasion added new tensions in a region already on edge with growing Chinese assertiveness and a reinvigoration of US alliances. Chairing the G20 for the first time this year, Indonesia faces demands from the West to expel Russia from the group, a proposal that China vigorously opposes. The Ukraine conflict exacerbates ASEAN's fear of being caught between the West and China, but adds a new concern that the Asia-Pacific region might further nuclearize with the threat of a nuclear standoff between Russia and NATO.

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US relations with Southeast Asia began the year on a positive note following the stream of visits from high-level officials from the Biden administration in the second half of 2021. By late March, however, the US-ASEAN Special Summit had been postponed, in part because of ASEAN uneasiness over Washington's intense focus on Ukraine. The campaign for Philippine elections was launched officially in February, and Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos, son of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, maintained a steady lead and realized a substantial win in the presidential race on May 9, with Sara Duterte as his vice president. Politics in both Malaysia and Thailand were less straightforward, but by the end of April both countries appeared to be heading for early elections. A political transition of a different sort took place in Singapore, when President Lee Hsien-Loong named Finance Minister Edward Wong as the new leader of the People's Action Party, effectively making Wong his political heir and the next prime minister.

Ukraine Through A Regional Lens

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 quickly became the singular focus of many Western governments, even surpassing the COVID pandemic. ASEAN reacted with a [statement](#) on Feb. 26, drafted by Phnom Penh in its capacity as the 2022 chair, whose blandness hinted at divisions within the group. Modeled after Beijing's own statement, it called upon both parties to demonstrate "restraint" with no mention of a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. However, three ASEAN states—[Singapore](#), [Indonesia](#), and [Brunei](#)—issued more forceful statements with reference to sovereignty, and on Feb. 28 Singapore announced that it would impose unilateral export controls on Russia on items that were potentially dual use, and that it would also block some Russian banks and financial transactions. With Washington's urging, the Philippines [criticized the invasion](#), while it also endeavored to remove Filipino workers in Ukraine from harm's way. The Malaysian foreign ministry's [initial response](#) was to comment that it was "saddened" by the invasion. Bangkok too adopted a [low-key position](#) on the crisis.

Myanmar's State Administrative Council in Myanmar carved out a unique position in the region by siding with Moscow in a [statement](#) that maintained the invasion was justified to preserve Russian sovereignty. Since the 2021 coup,

Moscow has [extended](#) *de facto* recognition to the junta and remains its primary source of weapons.

The mixed—and sometimes [muted](#)—[response](#) in Southeast Asia is rooted in three concerns. The most widespread of these is the economic impact of the invasion on the region, which derives from disruptions in trade with both Russia and Ukraine.

Southeast Asia's role in Russia's global trade is insignificant, at roughly 1%, but Russia is the region's top arms vendor and, for a few countries (such as Vietnam and the Philippines) an energy supplier. Russian companies have been aggressively [marketing](#) both arms and energy in Southeast Asia since the invasion. Both Russia and Ukraine have supplied nickel and other critical minerals for Southeast Asian production of semiconductors. Southeast Asia's agricultural trade with Russia and Ukraine are also significant. Indonesia is the world's fourth-largest importer of wheat from Russia and Ukraine, and the Philippines the 10th-largest. Ukrainian grains account for nearly 10% of the cereals consumed in Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asian relations with China also figure heavily in the region's response to the invasion. Although Beijing's [apparent support](#) for Moscow is more complicated than a simple return to a Cold War alliance, the region's governments are wary of antagonizing China by allying too closely with the West on Ukraine.

Indonesia's dilemma, chairing the G20 for the first time this year, is illustrative. Washington [proposed](#) that Moscow be expelled from the group, as it did in 2014 after the Russian annexation of Crimea. Although the West did [expel](#) Russia from the G8 in 2014, Australia was unable to find a consensus for doing so when it chaired the G20 that year. Jakarta has remained resolutely in the middle and, with China [refusing](#) to consider Russia's expulsion, Moscow is likely to remain in the G20.

Apart from economic and geostrategic considerations, two Southeast Asian countries—[Vietnam](#) and [Myanmar](#)—will attempt to preserve core relations with Russia. Myanmar's motives are immediate and apparent, but Vietnam's are most deeply rooted in its wartime alliances and its inclination to balance relations with China with those of other powers. Moscow and Hanoi have been in talks on the possibility of

[granting access](#) to Cam Rahn Bay to a Russian naval detachment, and the two countries cooperate on energy exploration in the South China Sea, which tends to draw Chinese interference. Vietnam is not unsympathetic to the plight of Ukraine, and the two countries have a shared past in the Eastern bloc as well as a growing trade relationship. However, as with other Southeast Asian governments, Hanoi must consider China in any geostrategic calculation.

The Pandemic Wanes and Washington Steps Up

Anxiety over great power competition rose in the early months of 2022 in Southeast Asia. When Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong visited Washington in late March he [warned](#) that the Asia-Pacific region was going in “a dangerous direction.” The Russian invasion of Ukraine—and Vladimir Putin’s threat to use tactical nuclear weapons there—stoked worry within ASEAN that the threat of nuclear competition between Moscow and the West would encourage US allies in the region (Japan, South Korea, and Australia) to seek limited nuclear capacity as a backstop to the US nuclear umbrella.

The invasion of Ukraine also [raised fears](#) that Beijing would follow suit in Taiwan, with collateral damage throughout the region. Moreover, the finalization of [China’s agreement](#) with the Solomon Islands, which opens the door to Chinese basing rights there, could provide China with a strategic outpost in the South Pacific. This brings fresh scrutiny to the Chinese refurbishment of Ream Naval Base in Cambodia, in a year when Phnom Penh is chairing ASEAN.

This heightened security environment was the backdrop for the Biden administration’s efforts to return its presence in Southeast Asia to pre-pandemic levels. In early 2022 the multilateral [Cobra Gold](#) exercises, co-chaired by Thailand and the United States, marked its 41st year, and the US-Philippine [Balikatan](#) (“shoulder-to-shoulder”) exercises brought the two militaries together in the 37th iteration, with several smaller bilateral and trilateral exercises as well.

Washington’s [donation](#) of COVID-19 vaccine and other support to fight the pandemic continued at regular intervals. Three Southeast Asian countries—Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines—were [among the top](#) five recipients of US COVID assistance. Moreover, the

administration’s long-awaited [Indo-Pacific Strategy](#), released in February, called out several Southeast Asian partners for attention, and vowed to contribute to “an empowered and unified ASEAN.”

However, the administration’s [initial attempt](#) to convene a Special US-ASEAN Summit in late March stumbled and was [rescheduled](#) for mid-May. Apart from scheduling differences, the United States and ASEAN likely had opposing agendas for the summit. Washington [made clear](#) that the war in Ukraine and China’s rise would be key topics of discussion, both of which ASEAN would prefer to avoid.

For its part, ASEAN is hoping for major “deliverables” that would open trade—and market access—[further](#). The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) came into effect on Jan. 1. With China at the center, RCEP promises to [increase Beijing’s economic leverage](#) in the region, and Southeast Asian governments look to both the United States and the European Union for balance. Washington will likely [disappoint](#) on that score in the near-term. The administration is [preparing to release](#) its Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and has foreshadowed several areas, including [digital trade](#). Some Southeast Asian countries may be early entrants to the Framework, but the IPEF is [unlikely](#) to be the base for a US-ASEAN trade agreement.



Figure 1 President Joe Biden and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong take questions from the press at the White House on March 29. Although the US-ASEAN Summit was postponed, the urgency of the Ukraine war prompted Lee to keep his travel plans for Washington. Photo: Patrick Semansky/AP

Myanmar: A Reality Check on the ASEAN Plan

As the 2022 ASEAN chair, Cambodia was determined to kickstart the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan on Myanmar, which had [languished](#) since April 2021, primarily because State Administrative Council Prime Minister and coup leader Min Aung Hlaing had [refused permission](#) to ASEAN Special Envoy, then Brunei Second Foreign Minister Erywan Yusof, to visit with opposition leaders in his visits to Myanmar. Under those conditions, Erywan did not visit the country in his tenure as the envoy.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen was blunt in articulating his belief that any strategy to mitigate the conflict in Myanmar should begin with the junta and build out from there. On Jan. 7-8, he visited Naypyidaw and met with Min Aung Hlaing, [declaring](#) that he intended to “plant trees, not cut them down.” It is not clear if Hun Sen had requested a meeting with former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and other National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders in detention, or with the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), but he made no public mention of them. His trip further [exacerbated divisions](#) within ASEAN on Myanmar, which ultimately led to the [cancellation](#) of the first ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting of the year, which had been scheduled for late January.



Figure 2 Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen (L) and Myanmar military chief Min Aung Hlaing meet in Naypyidaw on Jan. 7, 2022. Hun Sen is the first Southeast Asian leader to visit Myanmar since the February 2021 coup. Photo: AFP

Since Hun Sen had advertised the visit as only an “ice-breaker,” no concrete deliverables were expected, but he did meet with international aid officials on the issue of humanitarian assistance, one of the five points of the ASEAN plan. He also [discussed prospects](#) for a ceasefire, but between the government and armed ethnic groups, rather than with the NUG's People's Defense Force (PDF). This was no doubt to Min Aung Hlaing's

liking, since resuming peace talks with the ethnic groups, but without the opposition, would be to the junta's advantage.

The trip was [followed on](#) March 20-23 by the first visit of the ASEAN Special Envoy for Myanmar, currently Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn. He met with Min Aung Hlaing and requested that he speak with NUG officials; he was denied but was allowed to [meet](#) with Ko Ko Gyi, a longstanding, if sidelined, democracy activist. Following his visit, Prak was candid in his [assessment](#) that neither peace negotiations nor a ceasefire were a near-term possibility. He also pointed out that the conflict made distribution of humanitarian assistance impossible at present; moving the assistance out of the warehouses will be his focus for the time being.

Although there is general agreement across ASEAN that the situation in Myanmar is unlikely to improve in the near-term, the members continue to [disagree](#) over representation. Following the failure of Cambodia's first attempt to convey a foreign ministers' meeting, Hun Sen was successful in organizing a foreign ministers “[retreat](#)” on Feb. 16-17, to which Naypyidaw was not invited. This was a turnabout from Phnom Penh's *de facto* recognition of the junta. In late April Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah announced that Kuala Lumpur had established contact with the National Unity Government and [proposed](#) that ASEAN set up informal talks with the NUG, not with the intention of recognizing the opposition as the legal government of Myanmar but to advance the ASEAN Plan's point on encouraging dialogue to end the conflict.

Throughout the new year, conflict has continued across the country, with the PDF targeting military installations and other key points. Much of the fighting is based in key ethnic areas, particularly bordering [China](#) and [Thailand](#). On April 25 the PDF [detonated](#) a car bomb at the foot of the Myanmar-Thailand Friendship Bridge in Mae Sot. The intention was in part to deprive the Tatmadaw of its share of illicit cross-border trade, but the attack also risked drawing the Thai Army into the conflict.

In the meantime, the regime [continues the trials](#) of NLD leaders arrested in the coup. On April 27 Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to five years in detention on one of the charges of corruption, adding to the six years she had previously

received. With several more corruption trials ahead and facing more serious charges of violating the Official Secrets Act, the total of the 76-year-old Suu Kyi's sentences could exceed 100 years. Shortly after the coup, the junta promised new elections in 2022; those have now been [postponed](#) for at least another year. The regime will likely move the goalposts repeatedly until it is confident that the opposition has been weakened; they are likely to find that decapitating the pre-2021 democracy movement will not quell the NUG and its insurgency.

External Responses

In January, two Western energy companies, Total and Chevron, [announced](#) that they would withdraw from the Yadana pipeline they had built and maintained that ships natural gas from Myanmar into western Thailand. International pressure and an operating environment that was increasingly untenable forced a reversal of the companies' position following the coup that they would keep the pipeline open, to provide energy to Thailand and revenue to Myanmar. Believed to have been built partly with forced labor provided by the Tatmadaw, the pipeline was hugely controversial when it was constructed in the late 1990s.

In early 2022 an unexpected move by foreign energy companies put Myanmar's oil and gas on the block for sanctions. Total, the major partner in a consortium that included Chevron; Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE); and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT), followed the announcement with the recommendation that sanctions be imposed on the sale of oil and gas to Myanmar, a key demand of overseas Burmese and human rights groups. On Feb. 22 the European Union [expanded](#) its sanctions on Myanmar to include MOGE and the 10 companies affiliated with it. In late April Thailand's oil and gas conglomerate PTTEP and Malaysia's Petronas announced they would [withdraw](#) from the Yetagun gas project. Russia will likely [make up](#) for immediate shortfalls in Myanmar's natural gas, but maintenance of the country's pumping facilities is another matter.

Although the United States has yet to sanction MOGE, this year Washington has expanded its sanctions regime in Myanmar in two stages. To mark the first anniversary of the coup, on Jan. 31 the US joined with the UK and Canada to [add new individuals](#) and entities connected to the regime to the sanctions list. The next tranche,

[announced](#) on March 25, expanded the scope of sanctions to arms dealers supplying weapons to the junta.

The March sanctions were groundbreaking in that they were paired with the Biden administration's declaration that the Tatmadaw had committed genocide, only the eighth such designation ever by the United States. Embedded in the Treasury Department's announcement of sanctions, the designation refers both to the military's crackdown on Muslim Rohingya in 2017 and the massacre of ethnic Karen in December 2021. The designation lends support to the case against the Tatmadaw for genocide in the 2017 crackdown currently before the International Court of Justice. That process has been complicated by the coup: [public hearings](#) in The Hague in February were overshadowed by disagreement over recognition of a government in Naypyidaw.

Political Transitions: Return of Old Orders?

The [landslide victory](#) of Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos, Jr., in the Philippines' May presidential race, and the equally strong victory of Sara Duterte-Caprio as vice president were hardly electoral upsets. Marcos and Duterte had held onto sizable margins in approval polls throughout the campaign, despite a number of [petitions](#) before the Election Commission (COMELEC) to disqualify Marcos because of a prior conviction for tax evasion.

Marcos [flooded social media](#) with campaigns to promise the return of a "golden era" in the Philippines, which he linked to his father's era, when the senior Marcos moved from an elected president to a dictator under prolonged martial law. His election as president completes a concerted campaign over three decades to rehabilitate the image of the Marcos family following their exile in the mid-1980s.

Another political ghost in the campaign, who has yet to depart, is current President Rodrigo Duterte, who appeared ambivalent over Marcos' candidacy, although his political faction, PDP-Laban, [officially endorsed](#) him. Duterte had contributed to burnishing the reputation of the late senior Marcos, by [granting permission](#) for him to be buried in Manila's National Heroes Cemetery in 2016. Duterte's support of Marcos will depend in large part on the degree to which the new president embraces his predecessor's

brand of populist authoritarianism and is willing to protect the Duterte family. Although the 2022 election is historic in that it brings together two political dynasties, each will guard its own position and power.

Marcos' main rival, current Vice President Leni Robredo, was the target of frequent [disinformation campaigns](#). She narrowly defeated Marcos for vice president in 2016; Marcos contested her win in the courts but the case was dismissed. Robredo's support includes Philippine human rights groups and an *ad hoc* coalition of Catholic priests, acting in their individual capacities, who urged voters to vote for her. Despite Marcos' resounding victory, he is aware that another "people's power" movement could imperil his administration. His father was deposed by a popular uprising in 1986, as was President Joseph Estrada in 2001. If Marcos cannot hold onto a critical mass of public support in his six-year tenure as president, which will commence in late June, Robredo would be an obvious choice to lead a new "people's power" movement.

When he takes office, Marcos will face multiple challenges. Foremost among these is continuing the Philippines' economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the "black swan" impact of the Ukraine crisis on the global economy. After five consecutive quarters of contraction, economic growth was 7.7% for the last quarter of 2021; the Asian Development Bank estimates that growth for 2022 could total 6%. Any slippage from that expectation, whether because of poor policy or circumstances beyond Manila's control will affect Marcos' public support negatively.

Foreign policy is another question mark. During his campaign he made vague promises that he would seek a midpoint between Washington and Beijing in his foreign policy, but signaled that he would [follow](#) Duterte's policy of [disregarding](#) the 2016 UNCLOS [arbitration ruling](#) in Manila's favor on the South China Sea. Although Duterte's approval ratings were the highest of any recent Filipino president, [public disapproval](#) of his policy on the South China Sea grew significantly in the last years of his term. Moreover, the Philippine defense sector is not likely to back a leader who disregards Chinese incursions into Philippine Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) or harassment of Filipino fishing vessels.

Another issue will be Marcos' response to two accountability exercises still in train. The case against Duterte in the International Criminal Court (ICC) for extrajudicial killings in his campaign against drug dealers was [suspended temporarily](#), to give Manila an opportunity to curb such excesses, but it will not go away. Marcos has said that he will keep the drug campaign but focus instead on root causes of addiction rather than apprehension of dealers. It is not clear whether this will satisfy the ICC. Another issue is the ongoing Presidential Commission on Good Governance, [launched](#) by the late President Cory Aquino, to investigate and recover government funds that may have been embezzled by the Marcos family. To date the Commission has found over \$3 billion and believes there is an even larger amount to be recovered. Abolishing the Commission outright would be difficult for Marcos without handing the political opposition a potent weapon.

In early 2022 [Malaysia](#) and [Thailand](#) approached elections that are less definitive than the Philippine polls but also with echoes of political dynasties. On April 14 the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) announced that it had selected current Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob as its candidate for the upcoming general elections. The party also [terminated](#) its Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan, in which they had agreed to defer elections until the fall. The MOU had been set to expire on July 31. The announcement was a sign of UMNO's increasing confidence, as the lead party in the Barisan Nasional coalition, of reclaiming some of its historic strength. In three state elections, most recently on March 12 in Johor, UMNO won against a flagging and dispirited opposition.

However, this resurgence of Malaysia's once-dominant party includes the public reappearance of former Prime Minister Najib Razak. Still a member of Parliament, despite his [resignation](#) in 2018 during the 1MDB scandal, Najib campaigned for UMNO in Johor. Himself the son of a former prime minister, it is not clear whether he is seeking a return to power and the strengthening of his family dynasty, or a strong UMNO victory in general elections that would enable him to persuade the judiciary to drop corruption charges against him.



Figure 3 Barisan Nasional's top leaders at a press conference after the coalition won the Johor state election on March 12, 2022. The BN's victory in Johor, and in other state elections, signals renewed political strength in UMNO, the lead party in the coalition. Photo: Amir Yusof/ CNA

Although elections in Thailand are not formally required until March 2023, earlier polls are likely as Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's popularity wanes: a recent poll conducted by the National Institute for Development Administration showed that only slightly more than 12% of those surveyed would vote for him. In reality there is no clear favorite, but the poll showed that the two most significant opposition parties, Move Forward and Pheu Thai, would draw slightly more than 25%.

More interesting was the appearance of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's youngest daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, as the Pheu Thai candidate. Although both Thaksin and his daughter are coy about her possible run for election, her [appearance signals](#) the emergence of a new generation in the Shinawatra political dynasty. However, the candidacy of a family member—with Thaksin and his sister, former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, still in exile—would raise the temperature of the election and put the military on edge.

In contrast to the tumultuous politics of its neighbors, Singapore quietly signaled the approach of a critical political transition when Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong [announced](#) in a Facebook post on April 14 that Finance Minister Lawrence Wong had been chosen as the new leader of the People's Action Party's "fourth-generation team." This is widely interpreted as a signal that Wong will become the country's next prime minister, succeeding Lee. The next elections are due in 2025, but with this announcement Lee will likely move them up when he feels that Wong is sufficiently prepared

to assume his new role and political conditions are favorable for PAP.

Looking Ahead

The US-ASEAN Summit, scheduled for May 12-13, will have modest "deliverables," but it will provide a timely boost to US relations with Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, if the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework does not offer a significant role for Southeast Asia, the administration will come under increasing pressure to define and advance a US-Southeast trade agenda. This will be all the more important if new COVID variants emerge to hinder economic recovery from the pandemic in ASEAN.

Relations will be equally, if not more, challenged by the changing security environment. Growing concern from the United States and its allies over China's assertiveness—in the South China Sea; Taiwan Straits and Eastern Seas, and the South Pacific—will exert new pressure on Washington's security partners in Southeast Asia and has the potential to widen the gap between US relations with the maritime states and those on the mainland. As the conflict in Ukraine perseveres, the Biden administration will need to tailor its efforts to enlist support from Southeast Asia for its positions to the region's economic needs and relations with China.

There are no signs that the internal conflict in Myanmar will ease, much less approach reconciliation. Washington will continue to add to its sanctions list of junta and military leaders but will retain a targeted approach. ASEAN will likely reconsider the Five-Point Consensus Plan with an eye to formulating a more informal and short-term approach. Through the remainder of 2022, political transitions in Southeast Asia will loom large in the Philippines and possibly in Thailand and Malaysia, and relations with external powers could take a back seat.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 1, 2022: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) [goes](#) into effect. The world's largest trade agreement, it includes Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. India [dropped out](#) of negotiations in 2021.

Jan. 7–8, 2022: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen [visits Myanmar](#), the first ASEAN head of state to do so since the February 2021 coup. He meets with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and international relief officials in the hope of jumpstarting the ASEAN Five Point Consensus Plan.

Jan. 21, 2022: Biden administration [announces](#) new sanctions on Myanmar, in concert with Canada and the UK, adding seven individuals and two entities connected to the junta to the list.

Feb. 16–17, 2022: Cambodia [hosts](#) ASEAN Foreign Ministers “retreat.” Since ASEAN member states cannot agree on representation from Naypyidaw, Myanmar is not represented.

Feb. 20 – March 5, 2022: US and Thailand [host](#) a scaled-down version of the *Cobra Gold* Exercises, with a focus on humanitarian training drills instead of traditional war games. 1,200 US and 2000 Thai troops were joined by military personnel from India, Indonesia, South Korea, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Australia, and China. Launched in 1982, *Cobra Gold* is the longest-running multinational military exercise.

Feb. 26, 2022: ASEAN [releases](#) a joint statement on the Ukraine crisis, urging all parties to show “restraint” but not mentioning the Russian invasion of the country.

Feb. 28, 2022: Singapore [announces](#) that it will impose unilateral export controls on Russia in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

March 14 – 15, 2022: US, Singaporean and Thai militaries [participate](#) in the 26th iteration of *Exercise Cope Tiger* at Korat Royal Air Force Base in Thailand.

March 20–23: Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhoon makes his first [visit](#) to Naypyidaw in his capacity as the ASEAN Special Envoy for Myanmar.

March 22, 2022 – April 8, 2022: US and Philippine Armed Forces [conduct](#) the 37th iteration of the *Balikatan* (“Shoulder-to-Shoulder”) Exercises. This year’s exercises focus on maritime security, amphibious operations, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance.

March 25, 2022: US Treasury Department [announces](#) a new tranche of sanctions against Myanmar, which include entities providing arms to the military regime. The announcement also serves as a designation that the Tatmadaw committed genocide against the Muslim Rohingya in 2017 and Karen villagers in December 2021.

March 28 – April 2, 2022: State Department Counselor Derek Chollet [visits](#) the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan to discuss regional issues, Myanmar and the crisis in Ukraine.

March 29, 2022: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong [visits](#) Washington and meets President Biden to discuss the invasion of Ukraine, China, Myanmar, and other issues of concern.

March 30, 2022: Indonesian Chief of Navy Adm. Yudo Margono makes his inaugural [visit](#) to the Pentagon and meets US Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday. Indonesia currently has two midshipmen at the US Naval Academy for the first time.

April 12–14, 2022: US and Indonesian navies [conduct](#) three days of at-sea operations in the South China Sea.

April 14, 2022: United Malays National Organization (UMNO) [announces](#) that it will put forward Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob as its candidate in general elections. The announcement all but ensures that elections will be held before the end of the year.

April 14, 2022: In a Facebook posting, Singapore Prime Minister Lee [appoints](#) Finance Minister Lawrence Wong as head of the People's Action Party (PAP), effectively anointing Wong as the next prime minister.

April 18, 2022: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Philippine Secretary of Defense Delfin Lorenzana [meet](#) at the Pentagon to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation under the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty.

April 20, 2022: Philippines and the United States [launch](#) an inaugural maritime dialogue in Manila, covering topics such as the need to strengthen a rules-based order in the South China Sea.

April 27, 2022: Former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and leader of the National League for Democracy is [sentenced](#) to five years in detention on corruption charges, adding to a previous sentence of six years. She faces other corruption charges as well as trials for violation of the Official Secrets Act.

April 30, 2022: Malaysia [recommends](#) that ASEAN open informal talks with the National Unity Government in Myanmar, to promote dialogue between the two sides of the ongoing conflict. Regime head and coup leader Min Aung Hlaing objects strenuously to the proposal.

May 9, 2022: Philippines [conducts](#) general elections and Ferdinand “Bong Bong” Marcos, Jr., is elected president with a resounding margin. Sara Duterte-Carpio, daughter of current president Rodrigo Duterte, is elected vice president.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

CHINA - SOUTHEAST ASIA

DIMINISHED PRIORITY AS UKRAINE DISTRACTS AMERICA

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CHIN-HAO HUANG, YALE-NUS COLLEGE

Southeast Asia stopped being China's high priority as Beijing viewed US initiatives to compete with China in the region as flagging amid preoccupation with the war in Ukraine. Chinese diplomacy added to the reasons Southeast Asian governments generally eschewed support for US-backed sanctions against Russia and carefully avoided major controversy in UN votes on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. A Chinese-Solomon Islands security deal resulted in more US and allied attention to the Pacific Islands than ever before, surpassing rare past instances of concern over interventions by the Soviet Union, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, and others in an area usually considered of low strategic importance.

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Lower Priority

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's annual [review](#) of Chinese international priorities in late December signaled an end to Beijing's extraordinary high-level attention to Southeast Asia, evident since late 2020. The highpoint of that effort was President Xi Jinping presiding over a special ASEAN-China summit in November. Wang's speech returned Southeast Asia to the region's important but not prominent position in Chinese priorities before late 2020: it ranked fifth after salient international trends and China's relations with Russia, the United States, and Europe. The higher priority attached to Southeast Asia [coincided](#) with and seemed related to keen Chinese attention to the Biden administration's stepped-up efforts to reverse recent decline and compete more effectively with China in the region. In the past three months, Beijing media and commentary have [depicted](#) the US initiatives in Southeast Asia as complicated and weakened by the conflict in Ukraine and by the initial failure of the United States to gain regional agreement on a proposed US-ASEAN summit.

Beijing's diminished attention to Southeast Asia was evident when Premier Li Keqiang avoiding the topic in his press [conference](#) following the annual meeting of the National People's Congress in March. Wang Yi, [meeting](#) with the media after the Congress, as usual devoted more attention to foreign affairs. Southeast Asian issues were duly discussed after long explanations of China's reaction to the war in Ukraine, relations with Russia, and relations with the United States.

When speaking on Southeast Asian issues, Wang was consistent with recent practice. He condemned the Indo-Pacific Strategy announced in February as the latest US effort to build alignments in the Australia-India-Japan-US Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the "Quad") and other arrangements to create an Asian NATO that he judged leads to confrontation contrary to ASEAN-centered regional cooperation favored in the region. He hailed the China-ASEAN comprehensive strategic partnership, the proposed upgrading of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement, the positive prospect of even closer trade relations under the ASEAN-centered Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, and China's leading role in providing vaccines and other COVID relief for Southeast Asia. Wang devoted special attention to the stalled China-ASEAN negotiation on a

Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, urging ASEAN members to work constructively with China to resolve differences and to counter efforts by "some non-regional powers" to disrupt the negotiations.

Elsewhere, there were few notable Chinese initiatives focused on Southeast Asia, though Wang did [host](#) the foreign ministers of Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand for in-person consultations in China in late March and early April. By contrast, Wang in January [hosted](#) his counterparts from four Persian Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain), along with the Gulf Cooperation Council secretary general, and held separate meetings with top diplomats from Turkey and Iran in what seemed to be an effort to raise China's profile in that region as the US was seen in withdrawal. South Asia received new attention in Wang's trips to the Maldives and Sri Lanka following his annual visits to African countries in January, and his visits to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and India in March.

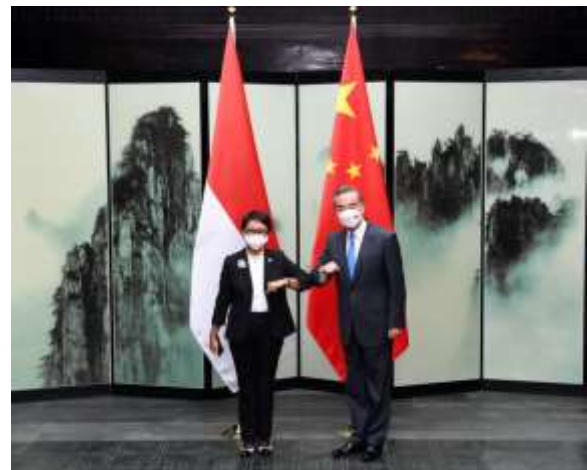


Figure 1 Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets with visiting Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi on March 31, 2022. Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China



Figure 2 Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets with Myanmar's Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin on April 1, 2022. Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China

By that time, Chinese [motives](#) focused on winning support among developing states for China's strong opposition to US-led sanctions against Russia for its war against Ukraine and Beijing's opposition to US and Western efforts to support the Ukrainian military and weaken the Putin regime. Indeed, Chinese media interpreted Xi Jinping's keynote speech to the annual Boao Forum for Asia in April, which emphasized the president's Global Security Initiative upholding "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security," as an opposing vision to the "Cold War mentality" of US-led efforts to sanction Russia and provide weapons assistance to Ukraine.

Meanwhile, China's systematic and well focused use of economic blandishments and other positive incentives as well as levers of coercive influence, control and intimidation to steadily advance its influence and power in Southeast Asia and other world areas achieved notable [success](#) in the Solomon Islands on Southeast Asia's southeastern flank. Discussed below is a secret security agreement, leaked to the media in draft form in March, which was signed by the Solomon Islands and Chinese governments in April. These developments prompted widely publicized alarm in Australia, the United States, and other regional stakeholders over the potential for China to gain a military foothold in an area of growing strategic importance to Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific.

Specific Regional Issues

Beijing continued to highlight its status as the leading source of vaccines and other COVID relief in Southeast Asia. The annual Institute of Southeast Asian Studies poll of regional elites [published](#) in January said that 58% of respondents saw China as "the strongest provider of COVID-19 vaccine support" with the United States ranked a distant second with 23%.

Chinese commentary in March remained [optimistic](#) about growing trade as Chinese trade with ASEAN rose by over 10% in the first two months of 2022, after an increase of almost 20% in 2021. The growth figure declined to 8.4% for the first quarter of 2022. CCP [leaders](#) in April were sensitive to China's strict COVID Zero measures' likely negative impact on Chinese economic growth and disruption of supply chains and trade with Southeast Asia and other trading partners.

High-profile shows of force in the South China Sea by US and allied naval warships and repeated Chinese warnings and complaints continued without letup. Chinese [commentary](#) highlighted a report by the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative, a Beijing-based think tank, documenting the ever-increasing tempo and scope of US and allied exercises in the South China Sea. There were 95 US military exercises in the South China Sea in 2021, 10 more than in the previous year. US amphibious landing and aircraft carrier strike groups carried out exercises on 12 occasions in 2021, nearly double the number in 2020. Japan was cited as the most active ally, participating in dozens of joint exercises with the US last year. The report also noted a record number of 1,200 sorties by US maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft conducting close-in intelligence gathering targeting China. Against this background, the US Aircraft Carrier *Carl Vinson* and US landing helicopter dock ship *Essex* and their support warships [exercised](#) in the South China Sea in mid-January. On Jan. 24, the *Vinson Strike Group* joined the US Aircraft Carrier *Abraham Lincoln* Strike Group to conduct dual carrier operations in the South China Sea.

A week earlier the two carrier strike groups and the *Essex* Amphibious Ready Group exercised with a Japanese helicopter carrier and accompanying destroyer in the nearby Philippines Sea. In conjunction with this year's US-Philippines *Balikatan* military exercises, the

largest in seven years, in late March the *Abraham Lincoln* Strike Group carried out operations in the South China Sea and made a port [visit](#) to Manila. At that time, US, Japanese and Australian warships conducted South China Sea exercises. And on March 20, US Indo-Pacific Commander Adm. John Aquilino told reporters accompanying him on a US reconnaissance aircraft operating over the disputed South China Sea of the dangers posed by China's "fully militarized" islands in the Sea. The reporters [noted](#) the plane was repeatedly warned by Chinese outposts to leave Chinese territory. China did not have comparable displays of force during this reporting period, but Beijing did [announce](#) on March 4 10 days of military drills in a no-entry zone that appeared to infringe on South China Sea areas also claimed by Vietnam.



Figure 3 A helicopter takes off from the USS Wasp during a recent exercise in the South China Sea with the Philippines Navy. Photo: AFP

Beijing' ability to make headway on resolving differences in Code of Conduct negotiations faced major obstacles. On the one hand, Chinese ally Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, this year's ASEAN Chairperson, said he would give priority to concluding the negotiations in 2022. Nevertheless in December 2021, prominent international affairs expert PLA Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Yao Yunzhu [saw](#) completion of negotiations this year as unlikely because she judged that as the talks advance, differences will become more pronounced and difficult to address and foreign interference with intensify. Leading Southeast Asian specialist Carlyle Thayer in a Jan. 14 Thayer Consultancy Background Brief agreed. He noted that the current negotiating text does not yet define the geographic scope to be covered by the code; does not clarify the code's legal status as a binding agreement or a nonbinding declaration; does not contain a binding dispute settlement mechanism or provisions on how the code will be

enforced, and makes no mention of third parties who may wish to accede to the code. Adding to the complications are two proposals by Beijing requiring advance notification of military exercises involving countries outside the region and limiting exploitation of South China Sea oil and gas resources to companies from China and littoral states, excluding oil companies from outside the region. The former could block US and allied exercises and the latter would compel littoral states to engage Chinese companies in oil and gas exploitation as their capacities are limited and they now rely on collaboration with foreign firms.

Opposition to US Initiatives

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson and official media commentary [reacted](#) negatively to the announced US Indo-Pacific Strategy and Secretary of State Antony Blinken's concurrent visits in February with US forces leaders in Hawaii, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad") counterparts in Australia, and Pacific Island leaders in Fiji to register US resolve in defending against Chinese advances in the Indo-Pacific including the Pacific Islands. There was notably less Chinese official commentary regarding the initially unsuccessful efforts by the United States to reach agreement with Southeast Asian leaders on a US-proposed in-person US-ASEAN summit in March. The unofficial *Global Times*, affiliated with *People's Daily*, made clear Chinese satisfaction with what it [portrayed](#) as Southeast Asian resistance to an "arrogant, bossy" America seeking to set times convenient to US leaders regardless of inconveniences to Southeast Asian counterparts. Official Chinese commentary depicted US leaders as preoccupied with Russia and the war in Ukraine, but Beijing remained [unclear](#) on whether and how the Ukraine war would complicate US policy countering Chinese challenges in Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific. The White House announcement in April that the US-ASEAN summit would be held in May prompted critical Chinese commentary warning the ASEAN states not to be turned into "chess pieces" manipulated by the United States against China.

Chinese officials and commentary gave top priority in foreign affairs to [encouraging](#) opposition to US and Western-aligned countries imposing sanctions and pressures on Russia for its war in Ukraine. They judged approvingly that much of the developing world, including Southeast Asia, was not supportive of the US-led

efforts. Only Singapore among ASEAN governments imposed sanctions on Russia. The voting record of Southeast Asian states on various UN resolutions reflected cautious postures in order not to raise tension or incur punitive sanctions from the US and European Union on the one hand and China and Russia on the other. On the UN General Assembly resolution calling on Russia to stop the offensive, eight ASEAN members voted in favor and two (Laos and Vietnam) abstained. On the UN General Assembly resolution to grant access to Ukraine to deliver aid, seven ASEAN members voted in favor and three abstained (Brunei, Laos, and Vietnam). On the UN General Assembly resolution to expel Russia from the Human Rights Council, four ASEAN members voted in favor (Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand), two voted against (Laos and Vietnam), and four abstained (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malaysia). One notable exception was pro-China Cambodian leader Hun Sen who repeatedly [spoke out](#) against the Russian “invasion” for what were seen as a range of reasons based on Cambodian experience with foreign invasion and mercurial personal calculations.

Perceptions of US-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia

The authoritative annual [survey](#) of opinion in Southeast Asia conducted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and published in 2022 reinforced recent studies charting China’s continued remarkable advancing political and strategic influence along with growing economic power in Southeast Asia. At the same time, the survey, as it did [last year](#), showed a high level of anxiety and distrust held by those polled about Beijing’s powerful regional position. As seen in the survey published in 2021, this year’s poll showed that the United States under the Biden administration was viewed as more influential and trustworthy than in polling during in the Donald Trump administration published in the Institute’s annual surveys ending in 2020. Forecasting growing US-China rivalry, the 2022 survey underlined a trend seen last year marking strong regional support for and trust in US strategic influence. If forced to choose, a substantial majority, 57% (versus 61% in the previous poll published in 2021) would choose the United States, whereas those choosing China were 43% (versus 38% in the previous poll). Regional anxiety over China’s rise showed in almost 60% of respondents in the 2022 survey having little or no confidence that China would

“do the right thing” to contribute to global peace, security, prosperity and governance,” while over 40% of respondents viewed China as a “revisionist power” that “intends to turn Southeast Asia into its sphere of influence.”

Center for Strategic and International Studies Southeast Asia Director Gregory Poling took a similarly hard look at Chinese motives and practices in an important [book](#) published in early 2022 assessing the checkered US historical record and recent failings in dealing with China over South China Sea disputes. Beijing is seen following a determined effort begun under Deng Xiaoping’s leadership to have its way at others’ expense in a drive to control the South China Sea, reinforced by ever-growing Chinese economic and political influence and leverage backed by the impressive buildup of military and para-military coercive capacities. The situation has deteriorated badly for the United States and its interests in the past decade because of failures of the Barack Obama government to counter egregious Chinese advances and the Trump government to implement and sustain effective strategy. The present stakes for the United States and its interests are seen as very high, with no likelihood of an easy solution.

Solomon Islands: Domestic Tensions, Chinese Advances, High Security Stakes

The Chinese security agreement with the Solomon Islands government [came](#) amid strong and violent domestic opposition to the government of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, resulting in riots targeting the ethnic Chinese businesses in the capital city and endangering the prime minister’s home in November 2021. The disturbances were quelled with the help of regional peacekeepers from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and New Guinea brought in at the government’s request. The underlining domestic tensions have a long history, and exploded in armed conflict that was dealt with by an Australian-led regional security force that helped to maintain the peace in the Solomon Islands from 2003 until its withdrawal in 2017. In 2019, the Sogavare government alienated the opposition by breaking longstanding ties with Taiwan that had benefited the opposition and establishing official relations with Beijing. After the November 2021 riots, the prime minister faced a vote of no-confidence in Parliament in December when parliamentarians who voted in support of the government were

rewarded with sizable cash payments from the China-funded National Development Fund.

The leaked draft China-Solomons security framework had vague terms that would allow Chinese military and intelligence operations, and involvement in maintaining order and protecting Chinese businesses. [Critics](#) saw Prime Minister Sogavare opening the country to a substantial Chinese military presence without consultations in a secret deal with potential loss of sovereignty. They depicted his motives as corrupt and partisan. The reactions of governments in Australia and New Zealand were sharply negative while US concern was registered in the dispatch to the region of a senior US delegation led by National Security Council Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific Kurt Campbell.

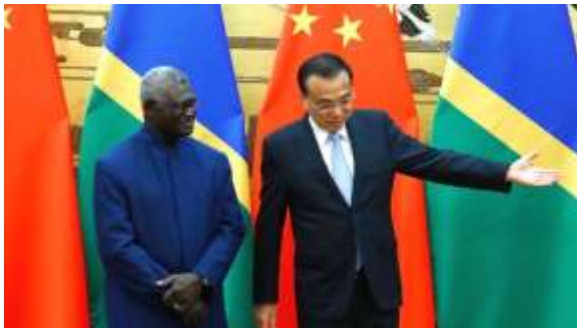


Figure 4 Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang attend a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China Oct. 9, 2019. Photo: Thomas Peter/Reuters

Chinese commentary rebuked US and Australian “bullying” of the Solomon Islands government. The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson and Chinese commentary criticized the US visit to the Solomon Islands as designed to pressure the Sogavare government in pursuit of a type of Monroe Doctrine in the Pacific Islands. Western media were critical of Chinese exploitation of weak Pacific Island governments. The [Financial Times](#) went beyond standard critiques of Chinese economic measures including use of payoffs and other corrupt practices to gain the support of political leaders of small poorly governed countries. It gave prominence to heretofore poorly understood Chinese efforts in the Solomon Islands and other developing countries to rely on ostensibly private Chinese firms to purchase or arrange long-term leases of islands or large tracts of coastal territory in countries with strategic locations to construct military installations for use by Chinese forces. One such

purchase in the Solomons took place three years ago and was later voided. Others were attempted.

Philippines Power Transition and Future China Policy

The shift over the past year in President Rodrigo Duterte’s government toward a more forceful defense of Philippines claims against China in the disputed South China Sea and stronger alignment and closer cooperation with the US military has worried specialists in China about a potential shift against Beijing’s interests following the May 2022 presidential elections. During a meeting in China with Philippines Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Foreign Minister Wang Yi [urged](#) Manila to steer clear of external disturbances and prevent tensions from arising in the South China Sea. The meeting came amid the largest US-Philippines annual *Balikatan* military exercises in seven years. Philippines-based expert Richard Javad Heydarian [found](#) that only front-running presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos favors a policy of avoiding confrontation with China over territorial issues while seeking beneficial economic cooperation. Overall, other candidates and Philippines public opinion favor calibrated assertiveness on territorial difference and realist pragmatism in other areas of interaction with China. Regardless of who wins the upcoming election, China’s continued presence in the maritime dispute means that the United States remains an important ally and partner of choice for Manila.

ASEAN-Myanmar-China relations

More than a year after the coup in Myanmar, there remains a lack of tangible progress in implementing ASEAN’s five-point consensus adopted by regional leaders, including the junta leader, in April 2021. In a regional foreign ministers’ meeting in February 2022, ASEAN agreed to adopt a more coordinated stance toward Myanmar. Cambodia’s chairmanship of the regional grouping this year has seen Phnom Penh taking on a different tack earlier this year when Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen made a surprise visit to Myanmar and met junta leaders in January 2021. The visit was met with regional disapproval, with Malaysia publicly denouncing the event. Regional leaders appear to have persuaded Cambodia to return to ASEAN’s earlier position of maintaining and applying the five-point consensus and maintaining additional diplomatic pressure on the junta. ASEAN continued its outreach to China for support on

the implementation of the five-point consensus. In a regional foreign ministerial meeting with China in March and April 2022, top ASEAN diplomats engaged with Chinese officials on Myanmar and sought Beijing's support for ASEAN's coordinated effort and diplomatic approach to address the looming border security risks, humanitarian, and refugee problems with the Myanmar crisis.

Regional Outlook

The outcomes from the upcoming US-ASEAN summit will feature prominently in regional development as US strategic competition with China deepens in Southeast Asia. Regional views on how to respond to continued US-China tension will test ASEAN's ability to maintain its leverage and unity. The South China Sea dispute, Myanmar crisis, and economic headwinds with rising inflation across the region will add to increasing challenges and uncertainties in the next reporting period of China-Southeast Asia relations.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 1, 2022: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) [kicks](#) into effect as the world's largest trade pact. RCEP covers nearly a third of global gross domestic product. In addition to tariff reductions and eliminations, RCEP will enhance regional trade with preferential market access, allowing for greater flexibility to draw on regional supply chains.

Jan. 20, 2022: Vietnam's Foreign Ministry officials [reject](#) reports from Chinese media that Vietnam has been supporting and arming militia fishing vessels in the maritime dispute.

Jan. 20, 2022: Following the opening of the China-Laos high speed railway line in December 2021, China's plans for extending the pan-Asia railway through Indochina are stalled. Thailand announces that it will review the initial terms of agreement with China on the railway construction, especially the requirement that only Chinese materials and workers be employed for construction and that China be granted rights to develop areas along the railway line.

Jan. 21, 2022: Philippines [welcomes](#) the US State Department's latest report on the South China Sea, which affirms the validity of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague's ruling and the finding that China's expansive maritime claims are "unlawful."

Jan. 25, 2022: Senior Chinese and Laotian officials meet during a videoconference to celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations and agree to deepen bilateral economic and security ties. China also agrees to provide additional medical equipment and COVID-19 vaccinations to support Lao's efforts to combat the pandemic.

Feb. 16–17, 2022: ASEAN foreign ministers [meet](#) in Phnom Penh to discuss the latest developments in regional security. They agree to apply continued pressure on the junta in Myanmar, including the decision that Myanmar could only send nonpolitical representatives to ASEAN meetings and to expedite implementation of the five-point consensus adopted in April 2021. Regional foreign ministers also agree to an early conclusion of a robust code of conduct with China over the South China Sea and aim to finalize the agreement by the end of this year.

Feb. 26, 2022: According to *The Irrawaddy*, a Thailand-based English news website on Myanmar, the junta [convened](#) an emergency meeting to discuss the implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for Myanmar. The report notes that the junta assumes there is a risk that Myanmar would face invasion by neighbors like China, just as Ukraine has been invaded by its larger and more powerful neighbor. While the junta acknowledges that such an invasion would not occur in normal times, it asserts that China may "take matters into its own hand if and when Myanmar's military is incapable of protecting Chinese interests in the country."

March 8, 2022: Vietnam lodges a complaint and urges China to [respect](#) its exclusive economic zone and sovereignty after China had earlier announced military drills in the vicinity of China's Hainan Islands in South China Sea from March 4–15.

March 14, 2022: Philippines [summons](#) China's ambassador in Manila to explain the "illegal intrusion and lingering presence" of a Chinese navy reconnaissance ship that had entered Philippine waters without permission the previous month. The Philippine Foreign Ministry statement indicates that the Chinese vessel lingered in its waters from Jan. 29 to Feb. 1 and ignored repeated demands from the Philippine forces to leave the area.

March 26–April 2, 2022: Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore’s prime minister, [visits](#) the United States and meets with President Joseph Biden and other senior US officials. The two leaders discuss the state of bilateral ties and regional security issues, including North Korea and Myanmar. In the midst of growing uncertainty in US–China relations, Singapore emphasizes that it would continue to deepen security ties with the US, while urging the two external powers to provide continued leadership in the form of public goods and concrete trade and economic investments in the region.

March 28–April 8, 2022: Philippines and the US [carry](#) out a 12-day *Balikatan* military exercise focusing on maritime security, amphibious, urban, and aviation operations, counter-terrorism, and humanitarian assistance. The military drill comes at a time of heightened tensions between the Philippines and China over the South China Sea.

March 31–April 3, 2022: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi [meets](#) with regional counterparts from Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Myanmar. In each of the bilateral meetings, the regional diplomats exchange views on the Russia–Ukraine crisis, as well as on regional security and economic issues, including affirming the significance of ASEAN’s five-point consensus on Myanmar and its implementation, as well enhancing trade and infrastructure development under the Belt and Road Initiative.

April 5, 2022: Thailand’s Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha [announces](#) that a submarine deal with China could be annulled if a specific term of agreement in the earlier deal is not implemented. Under the terms of the deal, submarine engines were to be provided by Germany and to be fitted on the Chinese *S26T Yuan*-class submarine that is being built for the Royal Thai Navy. The German company supplying the engines, however, was barred from making the sale to China due to an embargo as they are designated a military item. China had indicated that it would find a suitable replacement with Chinese-made submarine engines.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

CHINA- TAIWAN RELATIONS

TAIWAN AND CHINA SEEK LESSONS FROM UKRAINE AS TAIWAN'S INTERNATIONAL POSITION STRENGTHENS

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The year 2022 in cross-Strait relations began quite predictably. Both sides repeated their calls for reconciliation, but in completely incompatible terms. Chinese leaders signaled somewhat obscurely that a new tougher Taiwan policy might be announced at the Chinese Communist Party's Twentieth Party Congress scheduled for this fall, which could further increase cross-Strait tensions. This predictability was upended by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. China insisted that this international confrontation had no lessons for the purely domestic matter of reunifying Taiwan. Nonetheless, China, Taiwan, and the US have all begun seeking military lessons from the Ukraine War.

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Taiwan and the US have intensified their discussion as to whether and how aggressively Taiwan should adopt an asymmetric defense relying on the small portable weapons—Javelins, Stingers, and others—that have thus far proven so successful in Ukraine. Diplomatically, the Biden administration has struggled to reassure China that it continues to honor the One-China Policy introduced in the Shanghai Communique 50 years ago even as it signals renewed support for Taiwan's security. China's support for Russia has antagonized Europe, Taiwan's continues to enjoy success in international diplomacy, and Pacific allies Japan and Australia have become more explicit in their support for cross-Strait stability.

In Taiwan domestic politics, President Tsai Ing-wen is in the strongest position of any Taiwan president midway through a second term after leading her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to victories in a local by-election and a local recall effort, both called by the opposition Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT). If the DPP does well in regularly scheduled local elections this fall, that success may set the stage for a confrontation with Xi Jinping as he begins his history-making third term as general secretary of the modern Communist Party.

Verbal Volleys Across the Strait



Figure 1 President Tsai Ing-wen delivers her 2022 New Year's Address in the Reception Hall of the Presidential Office. Photo: Office of the President, ROC

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen [delivered a new year's address](#) as she has done every year of her presidency. She relegated cross-Strait relations to the end of her speech, first introducing "Resilient Taiwan, One with the World" as her theme for the new year, stressing that Taiwan is committed to raising its profile in the region and supporting democratic forces, including in Hong Kong. Only then did Tsai return to her familiar

themes on cross-Strait relations: that Taiwan will neither bow to pressure nor act rashly and that military action is not an option to resolve cross-Strait differences.

China's cross-Strait new year's proclamation was [issued by Liu Jieyi](#), director of the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO). Like Tsai's, it sounded very familiar. Liu called on all Chinese sons and daughters to seek a better future for both sides of the Strait. He proclaimed that the historical imperative of complete reunification of the motherland is moving forward based on the One-China Principle and the 1992 Consensus. No one or any force can stop it. The only obstacle is the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan and its efforts to collude with external forces, primarily the United States.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's [comments on Taiwan](#) in his Work Report to the annual National People's Congress on March 5 sounded equally familiar: "We remain committed to the major principles and policies on work related to Taiwan, to the Party's overall policy for resolving the Taiwan question in the new era, and to the One-China Principle and the 1992 Consensus." This statement appeared in its familiar place near the end of the Work Report, a reassuring sign that cross-Strait unification is not becoming a more urgent issue for the People's Republic of China (PRC) government.

The only troubling note were suggestions that the Communist Party's Twentieth Party Congress this fall would offer a new approach to Taiwan as Xi Jinping begins his precedent-breaking third term as Party General Secretary. Central Standing Committee member Wang Yi attracted attention when he [referred to](#) "the Party's overall strategy for solving the Taiwan issue in the new era," although there is no document articulating such a strategy, perhaps suggesting there would soon be such a document. Sun Yafu, TAO deputy director, [suggested](#) there would be a new approach presented at the Congress "which will have a positive impact on promoting work on Taiwan and on the situation across the Taiwan Strait."

Ukraine Cements Strong US-Taiwan Ties

Two days after the initial Russian assault on Ukraine on Feb. 24, a US Navy destroyer transited the Taiwan Strait. On March 1, the White House dispatched a small group of former high-ranking

military and national security officials to Taipei. The bipartisan delegation, led by retired Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. Michael Mullen, signaled US support and sought to reassure a rattled Taiwan public in the wake of Russia's invasion. In Congressional testimony in early April, Treasury Secretary Janet [Yellen all but declared](#) that China would face massive US sanctions, like those imposed on Russia, if it attacked Taiwan.

The task of bolstering Taiwan's defenses and strengthening deterrence has become even more urgent for US defense planners after Ukraine. Assistant Secretary of Defense Ely Ratner [remarked](#) in early March that "with China as the pacing challenge, Taiwan is the pacing scenario" for US security policy planning. In [February](#) and [April](#), the Biden administration authorized two arms sales with a combined value of \$195 million to supply equipment and technical support for US-built Patriot missile defense systems in Taiwan. Even as Washington seeks to persuade Taiwan of its need to prioritize "asymmetric" capabilities, the Biden administration reportedly is considering ways to expedite the delivery of the 66 F-16 C/D fighters approved by the Trump administration in 2019.

In early April, Japanese media reported that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi would lead a Congressional delegation to Taipei to meet President Tsai the week of April 10 after visiting Japan. However, Pelosi abruptly postponed her travel to Asia after testing positive for COVID-19. If Pelosi had visited Taiwan, it would have been the first trip by a sitting House speaker in 25 years. PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi [said](#) any trip to Taiwan by Pelosi would amount to a "malicious provocation." Meanwhile, South Carolina Sen. Lindsay Graham in mid-April led a bipartisan CODEL of six senators to Taiwan for meetings with Tsai and senior officials.

By the end of March, both chambers of the US Congress passed bills to enhance US competitiveness vis-à-vis China with several Taiwan-friendly provisions included. Both bills express support for Taiwan as a close partner of the United States in addition to funding a fellowship program to embed Americans in Taiwan government agencies to enhance people-to-people ties. The Senate's "United States Innovation and Competition Act" ([USICA](#)) requires US government agencies to abandon use of "Taiwan authorities" when referring to the Taiwan government in internal and external communications (sec. 3215). The House's

"America Creating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength Act" ([COMPETES](#)) calls on the State Department to commence negotiations to rename Taiwan's de facto embassy in the United States from the current "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office" (TECRO) to "Taiwan Representative Office" (TRO) (sec. 30209). It is possible that all Taiwan provisions in both bills could be merged into the final text before it reaches President Biden's desk for signature, targeted for this summer. Both versions include subsidies (up to \$52 billion in the Senate version) to encourage semiconductor chip fabrication companies to expand production in the US, and the final version is widely expected to have subsidies in that range. The former chairman of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) Morris Chang bluntly called this re-shoring effort "a very expensive exercise in futility" for both the US government and TSMC given higher production costs in the US, even as Chang's successor at TSMC is lobbying for the promised subsidies.



Figure 2 Demonstrators in front of Russia's de facto embassy in Taipei in February. Photo: Lam Yik Fei/Getty Images

The Biden administration began rolling out details of its Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in March, with indications that Taiwan is likely to be excluded from the initiative. IPEF envisages a set of agreements to be negotiated over 18 months with different groupings of Indo-Pacific countries under four separate "pillars." The US Trade Representative (USTR) will manage the trade pillar, whereas the Commerce Department will oversee pillars on supply chains, infrastructure and clean energy, and anti-corruption. In March, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo reportedly [told](#) members of Congress that her agency is not contemplating Taiwan's

inclusion at this time. USTR Katherine Tai also declined to comment to Congress whether Taiwan would be invited to join her agency's trade pillar. This non-committal stance motivated 200 members of Congress to write a [letter](#) to the two Cabinet secretaries urging Taiwan's inclusion. Taiwan's de facto trade minister John Deng also [said](#) publicly that Taiwan wishes to be a "full member" of IPEF and reiterated this request in an April 18 call with USTR Tai. [Secretary of State Antony Blinken said](#), however, when challenged on this at a House hearing on April 28, that the US is not "closing the door on anyone, including Taiwan." The Biden administration's hesitancy to invite Taiwan likely reflects a concern that many ASEAN nations might [worry](#) Beijing could perceive IPEF as an "anti-China" initiative if Taiwan is involved and therefore skip joining. IPEF is expected to be formally unveiled during President Biden's travel to Japan and South Korea on May 20-24.



Figure 3 US Trade Representative Katherine Tai testifies before a Senate Finance Committee hearing on President Biden's trade policy agenda on Capitol Hill in Washington on March 31, 2022. Tai declined to comment to Congress whether Taiwan would be invited to join her agency's trade pillar. Photo: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Throughout this reporting period, senior Biden administration officials were on the receiving end of PRC venting about US violations of the One-China Principle. In January, the Biden administration released its Indo-Pacific Strategy with several mentions of Taiwan, indicating Washington views the island on its own merits instead of merely as a feature of its China policy. Beijing remains upset by this and other indications of ongoing and deepening US support for Taipei, especially as the Biden has sought to reassure the self-governing island following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Blinken held monthly calls with his counterpart Wang Yi

through March, mainly to discuss Ukraine tensions, but Wang also used the calls to criticize US actions over Taiwan. In a March meeting in Rome with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Politburo member [Yang Jiechi stated](#) according to China's Foreign Ministry: "the Chinese side is gravely concerned about and firmly opposes the recent erroneous words and deeds by the US side on Taiwan-related issues." Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin held a phone conversation with his nominal counterpart, PRC Defense Minister Wei Fenghe, in April, and Wei [warned](#) that improper handling of the Taiwan issue "will have a subversive effect on the China-US relations."

The 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Communiqué came amid these heated exchanges. There were many analytic commentaries on both sides but none of the bilateral celebrations that might ordinarily mark such a milestone. Neither the US State Department nor the Chinese foreign ministry issued a celebratory statement. The foreign ministry spokesman [issued China's only commentary](#) in response to a question and noted that the Shanghai Communiqué "affirmed the One-China Principle" (an assertion that the US rejects), and the spokesman urged the US not to make China into an "imaginary enemy." Foreign Minister [Wang Yi noted](#) that the US says it does not support Taiwan independence but called these statements "just verbal assurances."

Taiwan Joins Sanctions Campaign Against Russia

Taipei [imposed](#) sanctions against Russia the day after its invasion. Several Taiwan firms with operations in Russia also joined the self-sanctioning efforts by multinational companies. ASUS, a leading Taiwan laptop producer, initially resisted joining the exodus and, as a result, a senior Ukrainian official on March 10 appealed to the computer maker's chairman in a public [letter](#). ASUS, which has a large share of Russia's laptop market, soon after announced it was stopping export shipments. In early April, Taipei [tightened](#) sanctions against Russia by identifying 57 categories of high-tech products that are off-limits for Russian end-users. This announcement occurred immediately after Washington's imposition of [increased sanctions](#) and underscored the degree to which Taipei is coordinating its actions with the United States and its allies.

Lithuania Remains Defiant as the EU and Taiwan Lend Support

In early January, Lithuania's president said that his government had made a mistake when it approved the use of the term "Taiwanese" for the name of Taiwan's new diplomatic office in Vilnius. Despite this admission, the Baltic nation gave no indication it was seriously seeking a name change, fearing a U-turn would not lead to de-escalation by Beijing and might invite further demands. Lithuania received a boost of support in late January when the European Union filed a [complaint](#) at the WTO that China's trade sanctions against Lithuania constituted discriminatory trade actions against the EU member state. Brussels made clear that it views Beijing's economic coercion against Lithuania and European companies with links to Lithuania as an attack on the integrity of the single European market. Taipei also lent support by setting up a \$200 million investment fund for Lithuania and by increasing imports of Lithuanian chocolate and rum.

Lithuania's resolve has been fortified by hardening European views toward Beijing and its "no limits" partnership with Moscow. EU leaders Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel were not shy in telling Xi during the frosty EU-China summit on April 1 that PRC coercion against Lithuania is unacceptable and must stop. At a press conference afterward, Michel said he and von der Leyen also [stressed](#) to President Xi and Premier Li "the importance of preserving stability and the status quo in the Taiwan Strait." Perhaps in response to the WTO case and EU pushback, [reports](#) emerged in the spring that China had begun to relax some of its trade sanctions. But the Lithuania-China dispute is likely to fester for the foreseeable future, with Taiwan watching carefully what happens next.

Lessons for a China-Taiwan Conflict from the Ukraine War

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Ukraine's thus-far surprisingly successful resistance backed by a reunited Western opposition has quickly drawn government officials and analysts to consider what lessons the war might offer for the kinds of military coercion China has threatened against Taiwan. Repeated Chinese sorties of combat aircraft into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), reportedly [totaled approximately 1,000](#) in 2021 and [continued into 2022](#). At the same time the People's Liberation Army [Navy](#)

[expanded its presence](#) along Taiwan's east coast. All these moves have underscored China's determination to intimidate Taiwan while expanding its military capacity to move toward coercion if it judges it necessary.

China, Taiwan, and the US have all suggested that Russia's invasion has compelled them to take the possibility of a cross-Strait military confrontation with renewed seriousness. Chinese foreign ministry [spokesperson Hua Chunying made clear](#) China's position, that the Taiwan situation is totally different from Ukraine. Taiwan, in China's view, has never been independent; it has always been part of China and its current situation is the result of an internal civil war. As a result, there is no place for foreign interference. Taiwan's foreign ministry condemned Russia's unilateral invasion, and [a senior Taiwan national security official warned](#) that a crisis over Taiwan would be even more destabilizing than the war in Ukraine for three reasons: Taiwan is a key strategic part of the "first island chain" controlling maritime access to China; the US is committed to security in the Taiwan Strait; and Taiwan is a critical supplier of semiconductors. The American Institute in Taiwan [spelled out the US position](#): consistent with its one-China policy, the US supports Taiwan's self-defense, opposes any unilateral changes in the status quo, and calls on Beijing to cease threats and pressure against Taiwan.

Beyond official positioning, analysts have been looking for lessons that might be applied as both Taiwan and China build militaries to deter, intimidate, or fight a cross-Strait war. While no lessons can be final until it is clear whether Ukraine's asymmetric defense or Russia's overwhelming conventional offense will prevail, initial assessments are already being offered. The first and most broadly accepted is that no Russian setback or defeat [will reduce China's commitment](#) to use force if necessary to prevent Taiwan independence in the short term and effect reunification in the longer term. For China the challenge, at least according to US analysts, is [how to dominate](#) the cross-Strait battle space before the US and its allies can bring their military forces to bear or exact unbearable economic costs. While China is almost certainly focusing intently on the military travails of its military partner, Russia, it has thus far said nothing critical of its performance publicly.

For Taiwan, the first lesson is that war is no longer unimaginable. As Ryan Hass at Brookings

[concluded](#), Taiwan needs “a greater sense of urgency...to coalesce[e] around a defense strategy that is appropriate.” When stated that generally, almost everyone agrees. Public opinion surveys in Taiwan confirm a general support for greater military capability, including an expanded draft and training for reserves to provide homeland defense. Yet there is little agreement on what that greater military capability should be. Many US and Taiwanese analysts outside Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense have contended that Taiwan’s far smaller military force can only prevail if it prepares to fight an asymmetric defense using large numbers of small mobile weapons and sensors, as the Ukrainians did in defense of Kyiv. Others, primarily inside Taiwan’s MND and the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) Party, [have argued](#) that there is a continuing need for large platforms—combat aircraft, tanks, submarines, and large surface ships—to counter Chinese intimidation and defend Taiwan’s sea lines of communication (SLOCs).

At the beginning of 2022, Taiwan launched a new All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency to develop and implement more comprehensive training for military reservists, and US National Guard units will [initiate exchanges](#) with Taiwan to strengthen this training effort. On April 12, Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense [published a “National Defense Handbook”](#) for Taiwan citizens to prepare for war. A Taiwan NGO promptly criticized the handbook as unrealistic, suggesting for example that its reliance on downloading material onto cellphones would be untenable during an attack, and [issued](#) its own “Citizens’ Guide to Action When War Comes.” Perhaps an even more telling sign of renewed popular interest in preparing for war was a series of independent [citizen training exercises](#) to prepare for coping with a war on the island.

For Taiwan, beyond the need to prepare is the question of whether the US will intervene militarily. China certainly expects the US would, and they have built the People’s Liberation Army to keep the US out of a Taiwan fight. But recent [surveys suggest](#) that many Taiwanese do not expect “rock solid” US support to translate into military intervention, risking the question whether the Taiwan military alone can do more than delay the inevitable.

After stating that “the PRC [is] the department’s pacing challenge, [and] Taiwan is the pacing scenario,” Assistant Secretary of Defense Ratner

promised that the US would work with Taiwan and like-minded democracies to deter and defeat Chinese aggression. However, Ratner suggested that [his number-one lesson for Taiwan](#) remained “the importance of Taiwan developing its own [self-defense] capabilities.”

For the US, the challenge remains to persuade Taiwan to adopt a defensive posture that emphasizes the asymmetric and a territorial defense strategy, which US experts believe would make subjugation of Taiwan more than just a matter of defeating Taiwan’s armed forces. Taiwan analysis of US military sales to Taiwan have concluded that 16 of 18 recent US sales approvals were for asymmetric weapons, and that the [US denied a Taiwan request](#) for Black Hawk helicopters, after concluding it was not sufficiently asymmetric. In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on April 7, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that he was focused on expediting arms sales to Taiwan, and Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley suggested that Taiwan should pay close attention to Ukraine’s response to the Russian invasion and learn tactics from Kyiv, including the need to give weapons and training to enlistment-age men and women. [Milley added](#) that Taiwan is a defensible island.

For the US, a second challenge will be to supply sufficient asymmetric weapons to Taiwan quickly enough to ensure deterrence despite the massive quantities being rushed to Ukraine to bolster its defense. Can the US produce enough defense equipment to help two small democracies while still ensuring US forces remain adequately stocked? If the US can do that, will Taiwan’s leaders be prepared to spend enough to amass the stockpiles to deter and, if necessary, overcome a combined assault and blockade?

One additional question is whether Japan, Australia, and others, which have recently expressed concern for stability in the Taiwan Strait, would be prepared to impose sanctions or act militarily if China were to shift from its current gray-zone tactics to outright military coercion.

President Tsai & DPP Win Twice Again

Local elections on Jan. 9 gave President Tsai and her Democratic Progressive Party two more victories to follow on their sweep in defeating all

four referendum issues initiated by the KMT on Dec. 18, 2021 (as documented in the previous [China-Taiwan chapter](#) of *Comparative Connections*). In Taichung, the DPP won a by-election over long-time local KMT power broker Yuan Kang-heng. (The election was required because the KMT had won a recall vote to remove Chen Po-wei of the DPP-allied Taiwan Statebuilding Party from his seat in the Legislative Yuan.) In Taipei, independent LY member Freddy Lim, also allied with the DPP, survived a KMT effort to recall him. Taiwan media widely viewed these elections as a test of strength between President Tsai and KMT Chairman Eric Chu. Clearly the DPP was more successful in marshalling its forces, but two more fundamental forces were at play. Recent [surveys show](#), first, that a slim majority of Taiwan voters continue to support Tsai's performance as president and, second, that support for the KMT has [slipped to its lowest level](#) since Tsai was first elected in 2016, especially among younger voters.



Figure 5 President Tsai Ing-wen speaks at the opening ceremony of the Ching-kuo Chi-hai Cultural Park and Chiang Ching-kuo Presidential Library in Taipei. Photo: Taipei Department of Cultural Affairs

On Jan. 22, Tsai made an effort to expand her base of support when she delivered the keynote address at the opening of the Chiang Ching-kuo memorial library, [surprising some supporters](#) who remember this son of President Chiang Kai-shek as the KMT architect of the White Terror. Tsai used the occasion to present herself as an heir to those parts of the KMT legacy most broadly accepted in Taiwan. She lauded Chiang for his fierce opposition to Communist China and his defense of Taiwan, while implicitly criticizing today's KMT for departing from Chiang's legacy and being too willing to open dialogue with the mainland while it threatens Taiwan.

Both parties have begun caucusing to select candidates for the island-wide "nine-in-one" local elections [scheduled for Nov. 26](#). These elections for magistrates, mayors, councilors, town chiefs, and town representatives across Taiwan are held every four years at the mid-point of the president's term. The KMT triumphed in the last round of these elections in 2018, midway through President Tsai's first term, even winning in pro-DPP Kaohsiung City and causing Tsai to resign as DPP chair. If Tsai's popularity holds, the DPP may do better this year, giving Tsai considerable authority to influence the selection of the DPP candidate to succeed her as president.

Looking Ahead

The incompatible positions of China, Taiwan, and the US on cross-Strait issues are likely to remain frozen and perhaps harden over the coming months. The first step down this road may come as early as May when Secretary of State Blinken is expected to give an address on the Biden administration's long-awaited China strategy. Beijing will examine the speech closely for any changes in how Taiwan is discussed. Over succeeding months, both Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing-wen will seek to strengthen their positions leading up to the Communist Party Congress and Taiwan's island-wide local elections this fall. If the Communist Party Congress issues a new policy statement on Taiwan, that may fuel more and harsher rhetoric from both sides. It may even aid Tsai and the DPP in the nine-in-one elections, just as hardline pronouncements from Beijing on the eve of Taiwan elections have often done in the past. Taiwan and the US will continue to expand Taiwan's bilateral and multilateral activities, while the US insists it continues to honor its one China policy of peaceful resolution. However, the most important variable may well

be the fate of Ukraine. If Ukraine succeeds in resisting the Russian invasion, and if the US-led Western alliance remains firm in support of Ukraine, that may strengthen Taiwanese advocates of military self-strengthening and the US commitment to support that effort. If it falters, China may intensify efforts to intimidate or even coerce Taiwan militarily to re-unify.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 3, 2022: Taiwan announces the launch of its All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency to boost capabilities of Taiwan's reservists.

Jan. 3, 2022: US suggests that Taiwan be included in State Partnership program so that Taiwan military and reservists can participate in training with National Guard.

Jan. 5, 2022: Taiwan begins repatriating 21 illegal Chinese migrants back to China.

Jan. 5, 2022: Secretary of State Antony Blinken and German Foreign Minister Annalen Baerbock [express concern](#) over "China's attempts to bully Lithuania...all because Lithuania chose to expand their cooperation with Taiwan."

Jan. 6, 2022: China is reported to have [started to quarantine live fish](#) imports from Taiwan.

Jan. 6, 2022: Beijing fines 7-Eleven for labeling Taiwan a country on its website.

Jan. 11, 2022: Taiwan's Legislative Yuan approved a NT\$236.95 billion (\$8.55 billion) special budget, which will be used to buy anti-ship missiles, air defense systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, air-to-ground and surface-to-surface cruise missile systems, submarines, and weapons systems for Taiwan's Coast Guard.

Jan. 13, 2022: US [Navy bans officers](#) from attending events of the Washington Naval Attaché Association after the NAA invites three Taiwan officers to attend an event and China complains. The NAA subsequently bans participation by Taiwan officers.

Jan. 20, 2022: Taiwan Vice President William Lai Ching-te transits Los Angeles and San Francisco en route to attending the inauguration of Honduras's president.

Jan. 22, 2022: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen gives keynote speech at the opening of the Chiang Ching-kuo Presidential Library and praises Chiang for his defense of Taiwan.

Jan. 23, 2022: 39 Chinese combat aircraft [enter](#) Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), the largest number since Oct. 4, 2021.

Jan. 27, 2022: US announces it will join the UK, the EU, Australia, and Taiwan at the World Trade Organization to challenge China's trade curbs on Lithuania.

Feb. 9, 2022: Taiwan [purchases](#) a military communication system from the US for \$246.39 million that will update a system in use in Taiwan for nearly two decades.

Feb. 11, 2022: Taiwan [is ranked](#) as one of three "full democracies" in Asia, together with South Korea and Japan.

Feb. 12, 2022: Chinese state-run newspaper *People's Political Consultative Daily* [names](#) Taiwan Nationalist Party (Kuomintang/KMT) Legislators Lin Wei-chou and Charles Chen as members of a "secret" faction of independence advocates.

Feb. 21, 2022: Taiwan announces it has lifted the ban on food imports from Japan's five prefectures affected by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Feb. 21, 2022: China announces sanctions against Raytheon and Lockheed Martin because equipment they produce was included in the US sale of Patriot missile related arms and services to Taiwan.

Feb. 21, 2022: For the first time a Chinese KA-28 anti-submarine helicopter is spotted entering Taiwan's ADIZ.

Feb. 25, 2022: Taiwan announces it will join international sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

Feb. 26, 2022: US Seventh Fleet [announces](#) a Taiwan Strait transit by an *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer, the *USS Ralph Johnson*. In apparently new wording, it says that is conducting a transit in the Taiwan Strait “through international waters in accordance with international law. The ship is transiting through a corridor in the Strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal State.”

Feb. 27, 2022: Former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo suggests the US renounce “strategic ambiguity” toward a cross-Strait conflict, saying also in unusually direct language that a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency.

March 1, 2022: At the direction of President Biden, former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Michael Mullen arrives with a delegation of four other former senior US security officials

March 4, 2022: Three Chinese naval vessels are spotted off Taiwan’s southeast coast, near Taiwan’s Orchid Island.

March 5, 2022: Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense launches a more intensive reservist training regimen to improve combat readiness.

March 5, 2022: Premier Li Keqiang’s Government Work Report [assures](#) China’s National People’s Congress that China will oppose any Taiwan separatist activities or any foreign interference in cross-Strait issues in line with “the Party’s overall policy for resolving the Taiwan question in the new era, the one China principle, and the 1992 Consensus.”

March 9, 2022: Taiwan’s Minister-without-Portfolio John Deng [reiterates](#) that Taiwan wants to participate in the United States’ forthcoming Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), stressing that Taipei is a reliable partner and crucial part of the global supply chain.

March 24, 2022: Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council Minister Chiu Tai-shan [calls](#) for “safeguarding the sovereignty of the Republic of China” and for “mutual recognition of sovereignty between both sides of the Strait.” [China’s Taiwan Affairs Office rejects this](#) as another form of the pro-independence “two state theory.”

March 25, 2022: Taiwan’s Legislative Yuan [approves](#) a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age in Taiwan from 20 to 18. Next, the amendment must be affirmed by at least half of all eligible votes in a national referendum.

March 31, 2022: US State Department’s Hong Kong Policy Act Report [cites](#) reports that Hong Kong acted on behalf of China to prevent Taiwan from participating meaningfully in the WTO, in which it is a member, and from assuming leadership positions.

April 6, 2022: US approves \$95 million sale of equipment and services to support Taiwan’s Patriot anti-air missile batteries.

April 7, 2022: Nationalist (KMT) Party Chairman Eric Chu announces that Alexander Huang will head the party’s representative office in Washington. Eric Huang will be the deputy representative and will be resident in Washington.

April 8, 2022: Peng Ming-min [dies](#). Peng was a Taiwanese democracy activist and the DPP candidate for president in Taiwan’s first freely contested popular election in 1996.

April 12, 2022: Taiwan MND [issues](#) civil defense handbook. The handbook details how to find bomb shelters, water, and food supplies via smartphone apps, as well as tips for preparing emergency first aid kits. Critics have wondered whether smartphone apps will work if the power grid and Internet are knocked out.

April 12, 2022: State Department’s Human Rights Report [expresses](#) concern that the PRC influences Taiwan media companies with business ties to China and puts pressure on other companies with business in China not to advertise in media outlets critical of China.

April 14, 2022: Taiwanese democracy activist Lee Ming-che is released from prison in China after serving a five-year sentence for “subversion of state power.”

April 14, 2022: Bipartisan delegation of US senators arrives in Taiwan. The visit comes shortly after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi cancels a planned visit after contracting COVID-19.

April 20, 2022: Taiwan MND [informs](#) the Legislative Yuan that it expects to take delivery of five new *Tuo Chiang*-class stealth multi-mission corvettes by the end of 2023.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

NORTH KOREA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS

FROM MOON TO YOON: END OF AN ERA

AIDAN FOSTER-CARTER, LEEDS UNIVERSITY, UK

The first months of 2022 were also the last of Moon Jae-in's presidency. Inter-Korean relations have been frozen for the past three years, and 2022 saw no change there. In April Moon exchanged letters with Kim Jong Un, whose warm tenor belied the reality on the ground. The North was already testing more and better missiles faster than ever, and tearing down ROK-built facilities at the shuttered Mount Kumgang resort. Days after his billets-doux with Moon, speaking at a military parade, Kim threatened ominously to widen the contexts in which his ever-improving nuclear arsenal might be used.

All these challenges confront a new leader in Seoul. Unlike Moon, the conservative Yoon Suk-yeol is new to politics, but not minded to indulge Kim. His ministerial and other appointees, who have now taken over, are already striking a firmer note—while also stressing their pragmatism and openness to dialogue. Very recently a fresh threat—or perhaps an opportunity—has arisen, with the North finally admitting an outbreak of COVID-19. Yoon promptly offered vaccine aid. It remains to be seen if Kim will accept this, how he will handle the omicron outbreak, whether he will proceed with a widely expected nuclear test, and how Yoon and Biden will handle an ever more complex crisis.

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A Watershed Moment

This article, indeed this issue, is being published on the cusp of change in South Korean politics. When I began to write, the liberal Moon Jae-in was eking out his final days in the Blue House: the secluded compound in northern Seoul that was hitherto the president's office and residence (analogous to the more centrally located White House in Washington, DC).

By the time you read this, the conservative Yoon Suk-yeol—a former chief prosecutor with no prior political experience until last year, who won the March 9 election by the slimmest of margins for the conservative opposition People Power Party (PPP)—will be serving his first week as president of the Republic of Korea (ROK). Only not in the Blue House, which he spurned as remote from the people—Moon had originally said the [same](#), until the logistics of moving defeated him—but in [new premises](#) in the Ministry of National Defense (MND) compound in Seoul's Yongsan district. Carving out this new presidential office—a work still in progress—required part of MND to be evicted. Meanwhile the Blue House (Cheongwadae) has now become a park, [open](#) to the public.

But I digress, already.

All being well, Yoon will serve five years until May 2027, when someone will succeed him—unless the Constitution is amended to permit a second term. (This has been regularly discussed, but has yet to gain enough traction to become a serious proposal.)

At this key turning-point for South Korea and the peninsula, besides covering events during the first four months of 2022, it seems to right to look forward and back. This article will try to sum up the Moon era in inter-Korean relations overall (we began this in the [previous](#) issue), while also considering what Yoon may do and how he will be different. Not only is this task timely, but we have the space, since once again there was almost no direct contact between the two Koreas during this period—as has been the case for three years. Which is not to say the peninsula was uneventful (is it ever?), especially on the missile front.

Many More Missiles

Writing these articles can feel like trying to pen a rough first draft of history. Being so close to the

events—in *medias res*, literally in the midst of things—an author may wonder if the immediate take will stand the test of time; or whether matters that loom large now will turn out to be ephemeral, forgotten in the longer run.

Sometimes, though, one can be confident. 2022 is not yet half over, but we already know that—as so often—Pyongyang is making the running: setting familiar, yet heightened, challenges to its interlocutors and foes. As most readers will know, Kim Jong Un began the year with a bang: January was the DPRK's most intensive month [ever](#) for missile launches. After a brief lull during the Beijing Winter Olympics, this barrage resumed in late February and has continued ever since. As of May 12, there had been 16 separate launch events in 2022 so far, featuring a variety of weapons, including in March the first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) since late 2017—after Pyongyang warned on Jan. 20 that it was reconsidering “restarting all temporarily-suspended activities.” Satellite images appear to confirm what that warning implies: a nuclear test may be imminent too, perhaps as early as this month (May). That again would be the first time since 2017. Still another likely prospect is a fresh [satellite launch](#), using dual-use technology that also [advances](#) WMD rocketry.

These disconcerting developments are widely covered [elsewhere](#), and transcend this chapter's bilateral remit. They are, however, the most important thing to happen on the peninsula so far in 2022, together with regime change in Seoul. As such, they must be borne in mind as the essential backdrop and context to everything discussed here. Similarly, though far from Korea, the most ominous new factor bearing on the future of North-South relations is Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. The potential impact of this is considered below.

Yoon Backs Preemption—Or Does He?

Kim Jong Un's missile flurry had multiple motives. One was to test not just his own weapons, but the enemy's reactions. President Moon's National Security Council (NSC) responded with characteristic mildness, usually expressing “[strong regret](#)” or “[grave regret](#).” By contrast, Yoon Suk-yeol—at that stage a candidate, in a close race—caused a stir by appearing to endorse a preemptive strike on the North's missiles in some circumstances. Soon after, he said it again (for full details and links,

see the chronology). In other remarks he offered olive branches.

A political neophyte, Yoon sometimes seemed to be learning on the job in a gaffe-prone campaign. He will have to learn fast. On March 9 voters narrowly elected him president, defeating the continuity candidate, Lee Jae-myung of Moon's ruling Democratic Party (DP). Had Lee won, he would have continued Moon's engagement approach to North Korea. What Yoon will actually do remains to be seen, but his preemption talk has been toned down since.



Figure 1 South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol gestures to supporters on March 10, 2022 outside of party headquarters in Seoul. Photo: Time via Getty Images

Yoon moved swiftly to set up a transition committee, and then to nominate ministers. His transition team, announced on March 18, included [no](#) portfolio specifically on inter-Korean relations. Past presidents-elect, including conservatives, had appointed advisers to what was called a foreign, security and unification sub-committee, but Yoon ditched the U-word. His three picks in the foreign/defense space—long-time adviser Kim Sung-han, plus Kim Tae-hyo and ex-general Lee Jong-sup—are all seen as hawkish on North Korea. There was speculation that Yoon, already controversially committed to abolishing the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MGEF) as supposedly redundant, might emulate another rightwing president, Lee Myung-bak (2008-13), and seek to get rid of the Ministry of Unification (MOU). Lee failed in that bid, because he lacked a majority in the National Assembly. Yoon too faces a DP-controlled legislature at least until elections in April 2024, so existing ministries look safe for now.

Yet transition teams are short-lived and can only advise. Ministers last longer and have power—if not much on either front in South Korea, with its strong presidency and frequent Cabinet reshuffles. Yoon's ministerial nominations in foreign affairs, defense, and indeed unification appeared to soften the tone, compared to his transition team (though there is one overlap). Foreign Minister [Park Jin](#) is a mild and urbane figure (this author knew him long ago as a young lecturer in England; he has an Oxford D Phil). [Lee Jong-sup](#), in transition from the transition team to become Minister of National Defense (MND), [assured](#) lawmakers that he had no plan to scrap 2018's inter-Korean military accord, as some conservatives demand.

Especially interesting is the “Yoonification” minister. Kwon Young-se, a long-time lawmaker, ex-ambassador to China and sometime law-school classmate of Yoon, [opposed](#) the idea of scrapping MOU when it was resurrected last year by the PPP's combative young chairman Lee Jun-seok. Both [at](#) and [ahead of](#) his confirmation hearings, despite disagreeing with specific Moon-era policies—he rightly [opposes](#) the fantasy of restoring tourism to Mount Kumgang, and has [hinted](#) at reconsidering the ban on sending leaflets into the North—Kwon was careful to suggest continuity rather than change. He explicitly [rejected](#) the ABM—Anything But Moon—approach to handling North Korea, saying this was not the “right way.”

Threats, Demolition—and Billets-Doux

The final weeks of Moon Jae-in's presidency brought, not for the first time, contradictory developments. First, the good news: He and Kim exchanged [letters](#), as they have done from time to time. (The means is unrevealed, but in 2018 they agreed to install a direct hotline. No more was heard of this, but conceivably it exists and could be used to send faxes, still a thing in the DPRK; but I speculate.) On April 20 Moon wrote to Kim to say goodbye. Pyongyang [revealed](#) this on April 22, and Seoul [confirmed](#) it the same day. Neither side published the actual texts, but by both accounts the tone was respectful, if tinged with melancholy that they had not achieved more. According to KCNA, Kim “appreciated the pains and effort taken by Moon Jae In for the great cause of the nation until the last days of his term of office...The exchange of the personal letters between the top leaders of the north and the south is an expression of their deep trust.”

Really? Actions speak louder than words. This year's missile volleys aside, these pleasantries came just weeks after the North reportedly began carrying out its threat, first made in 2019 but postponed due to the pandemic, to [demolish](#) Southern-built and owned (though long since confiscated) facilities at the former Mount Kumgang resort, which has seen no ROK tourists since one was shot dead there in 2008. Seoul [demanded](#) an explanation, but has had no reply.

Also, some words speak louder than others. Simultaneously with the destruction at Mount Kumgang, after a six-month silence Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, issued two back to back statements (just as she had in Sept; those were appended to our last article) on April [2](#) and [4](#). Both tore into ROK Defense Minister Suh Wook – a “senseless and scum-like guy” – for talking about preemptive strikes. Her second rant was quite strange, as her remarks often are: threatening South Korea's army with nuclear annihilation, while insisting there was “no ground” for the South to feel menaced. If her works are ever collected, as is the DPRK way, that slim volume will at least be a racier read than her father's and grandfather's turgid tomes: less formal, more haphazard, ditzier even, but ultimately no less weird and menacing.

Above all, just days after his honeyed words to Moon, Kim Jong Un struck a very different note when he addressed a large military parade – nocturnal, as has become the habit recently – in Pyongyang on April 25. One section in particular on nuclear use drew wide attention. It is hard to parse – see Appendix B for the passage in full – but perhaps that was the point: vague but pointedly enhanced menace, to discomfit the enemy. Here is what he said:

“[O]ur nukes can never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent even at a time when a situation we are not desirous of at all is created on this land. If any forces try to violate the fundamental interests of our state, our nuclear forces will have to decisively accomplish its unexpected second mission.”

What might that mean? It is hard not to see this as a leaf from Vladimir Putin's new playbook.

Ukraine Casts a Long Shadow

Ukraine is far from Korea, and the Moon government has tried to keep its [distance](#). The ROK was [not](#) among 31 countries which President Zelenskyy thanked by name for their support on April 27 (nor was Japan). The DPRK, meanwhile, wholeheartedly [backs](#) Russia.

Distant or not, the war in Ukraine has concentrated minds in Korea: publicly in Seoul, but no doubt also in [Pyongyang](#). Seen from North Korea, Ukraine's vulnerability to invasion can only confirm the Kim regime's belief that possessing nuclear weapons is a crucial guarantee against such a fate. South Korea's take is rather different. Russia's aggression crosses and annuls many red lines, ominously rendering the unthinkable a necessary object of [thought](#).



Figure 2 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin meet in Vladivostok, April 25, 2019. Photo: NKNews.org via Kremlin

Put simply: If Putin can do it, might Kim Jong Un? Not that KPA tanks would or could now roll across the heavily defended DMZ, as they crossed the 38th parallel in June 1950. But might a nuclear-armed DPRK now be emboldened to threaten a nonnuclear ROK, in ways that would be hard to counter without risking conflagration? Questions like this, hitherto seen as abstract (or confined to contrarians like [BR Myers](#), too glibly dismissed by a centrist consensus as extreme), now look alarmingly real. Complacency is ill-advised, especially after Kim Jong Un's gnomic remarks in April on when nuclear weapons might be used. The new Yoon government will be thinking hard about all this, amid a predictable [clamor](#) for the ROK to have its own nuclear arsenal, a view long espoused by a majority of South Koreans.

Yoon's Inauguration Speech: Mild Towards Pyongyang

Yoon Suk-yeol was duly inaugurated on May 10. Though technically falling into the period covered by *Comparative Connections*' next issue, since this journal's publishing schedule permits (just!) it would be a perverse disservice to readers not to address right now the issue on everyone's minds: How will inter-Korean relations fare after regime change in Seoul?

On his 'Nordpolitik', as noted above Yoon has given contradictory signals. His inauguration speech, excerpted as an Appendix below, was strikingly mild. North Korea's WMD threat, which he has sometimes said may require a preemptive strike, did not even get a whole sentence, just a subordinate clause: "While North Korea's nuclear weapon programs are a threat not only to our security and that of Northeast Asia..." But the main thrust was positive, for the sentence continues: "...the door to dialogue will remain open so that we can peacefully resolve this threat." Money was dangled too, with talk of "an audacious plan that will vastly strengthen North Korea's economy and improve the quality of life for its people."

We have been here [before](#), many a time. In one form or another, every ROK president since Chun Doo-hwan (even) has tried to bribe—sorry, incentivize—the DPRK to give up its nukes. Two of them, Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003–08), implemented such a policy—aka "Sunshine," fully catalogued and analyzed in this journal at the time. Actually this was on a loss-leader basis: Seoul gave the money (both over and [under](#) the table), in the vague and unfulfilled hope that this would create an atmosphere for denuclearization in due course. More recently, a decade ago during his first bid for the presidency (when Park Geun-hye defeated him), Roh's mentee Moon Jae-in was [advocating](#) an "inter-Korean economic union," no less. None of these initiatives had lasting success; most never got off the ground.

Will Yoon fare any better? I wish him well, but there are at least two grounds for skepticism.

One is both obvious and well known. The other is more implicit, and of his own making.

First, Kim Jong Un, like his father and grandfather before him, shows no sign of

wanting to surrender his WMD, at any price. Some may retort that maybe the price has never been right [yet](#), adducing a counterfactual what-if regarding February 2019's US–DPRK summit in Hanoi. Suppose Trump had not walked away? But that was then. Kim Jong Un's latest menacing nuclear threats, discussed above, scarcely inspire optimism.

Second, it is important to read Yoon's remarks in their context: as in the Appendix below, or better yet within his full inauguration [speech](#). An [avowed](#) disciple of Milton Friedman, Yoon believes that freedom is the supreme value. (The word appears 30 times, in a speech of fewer than 1,600 words in total.)

Does he mean it? Apparently so. And, freedom for whom? Everyone, it seems. Later in his speech—the antepenultimate paragraph, in fact, building toward a peroration—Yoon is clear that freedom is something to spread abroad, and Seoul should be doing this more. He says that not in the context of North Korea as such, but globally. This is a known theme of his, notably in an earlier [article](#) in February for *Foreign Affairs* titled: "South Korea Needs to Step Up."

Returning to the theme now, he says: "We must take on an even greater role in expanding freedom and human rights *not just for ourselves but also for others*" (emphasis added). If he is serious, that has far-reaching implications. This could change ROK policy on at least three fronts: refusing thus far to send arms to [Ukraine](#); not joining other democracies in [statements](#) admonishing China over the Uyghurs and similar issues; and doing business worldwide even with the nastiest regimes (Myanmar post-coup is a rare [partial exception](#)).

Will he also press North Korea on human rights? This is a very familiar crux. Serious would-be engagers, from Kim Dae-jung to Moon Jae-in (the latter originally a human rights lawyer in South Korea, ironically) have kept silent on the DPRK's appalling abuses. While all policy planning has to prioritize, the putative sequencing which posits "aid now, rights later" has proved no less dubious than its security twin: "aid now, peace later." ROK NGOs working on human rights in the North are frankly [glad](#) to see Moon gone—some were [harassed](#) by his administration—and have hopes of Yoon. Yet if Yoon plays the human rights card with North Korea, he had better forget any "audacious" plan to bribe Kim Jong Un into denuclearization.

Pyongyang Admits COVID-19: Inter-Korean Opportunity?

As this journal went to press, a long-expected shoe finally dropped. Despite over two years of draconian border controls, which have seriously hurt the economy, the coronavirus has at last reached North Korea. Or, skeptics may say, the regime has finally admitted it. Two days after first [reports](#) of a lockdown in Pyongyang, on May 12 the Politburo convened and [admitted](#) that “a most serious emergency case of the state occurred: A break was made on our emergency epidemic prevention front.” Prevention work was upgraded to [emergency](#) mode, amid predictable scapegoating: “The Political Bureau censured the epidemic prevention sectors for their carelessness, relaxation, irresponsibility and inefficiency.” Kim Jong Un was pictured in a [mask](#) for what seems to be the first time.



Figure 3 Kim Jong Un pictured wearing a mask in state media during a meeting to discuss a COVID-19 outbreak in Pyongyang. Source: NKNews.org via KCTV

If anyone deserves censure, it is not hard-pressed working-level cadres, but the leaders who for two years have perversely refused any assistance, crucially including vaccine supplies. With no North Koreans yet vaccinated, and many vulnerable due to undernourishment, this may prove devastating. Yet it is also an opportunity. MOU swiftly said that the new ROK government, like its predecessor, wants to help. A press statement affirmed that “support for North Koreans and the inter-Korean cooperation on quarantine and health care can be promoted at any time on a humanitarian level.”

Hitherto the North has [rebuffed](#) all such offers from Seoul, the WHO, and everyone else. Might an emergency make Kim Jong Un reconsider, as his father momentarily did in 1995, when famine forced the DPRK to bite the bullet and asked for outside aid? Internal [debates](#) about pros and cons back then are surely being

replicated in Pyongyang now. An upcoming [meeting](#) of the WPK Central Committee of the ruling, slated for early June “to discuss and decide some important issues,” may offer clues. Watch this space, and pray that North Korea’s long-suffering people are not about to suffer even more.

Appendix A: Sections covering North Korea (directly or implicitly) in President Yoon Suk-yeol's inauguration speech on May 10

My fellow citizens, here in Korea and those abroad,

Liberal democracy creates lasting peace and peace is what safeguards our freedom. Peace is guaranteed when the international community that respects freedom and human rights come together as one.

Peace is not simply avoiding war—real peace is about allowing freedom and prosperity to flourish. Real peace is a lasting peace. Real peace is a sustainable peace.

Peace on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia is the same—our region cannot be exempt from threats that endanger the peace of other regions.

We, as global citizens, must make a stand against any attempt that aims to take our freedom away, abuse human rights or destroy peace.

While North Korea's nuclear weapon programs are a threat not only to our security and that of Northeast Asia, the door to dialogue will remain open so that we can peacefully resolve this threat.

If North Korea genuinely embarks on a process to complete denuclearization, we are prepared to work with the international community to present an audacious plan that will vastly strengthen North Korea's economy and improve the quality of life for its people.

North Korea's denuclearization will greatly contribute to bringing lasting peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

....

Korea is the tenth largest economy in the world. It is incumbent upon us to take on a greater role befitting our stature as a global leader. We must actively protect and promote universal values and international norms that are based on freedom and respect for human rights. **We must take on an even greater role in expanding freedom and human rights not just for ourselves but also for others.** The international community expects us to do so. We must answer that call. *[emphasis added]*

[ends]

Appendix B: Remarks about nuclear forces in Kim Jong Un's speech at April 25's military parade in Pyongyang

In particular, the nuclear forces, the symbol of our national strength and the core of our military power, should be strengthened in terms of both quality and scale, so that they can perform nuclear combat capabilities in any situations of warfare, according to purposes and missions of different operations and by various means.

The prevailing situation demands that more proactive measures be taken to provide a firm and sustained guarantee for the modern character and military technological supremacy of our Republic's armed forces.

To cope with the rapidly changing political and military situations and all the possible crises of the future, we will advance faster and more dynamically along the road of building up the self-defensive and modern armed forces, which we have followed unwaveringly, and, especially, will continue to take measures for further developing the nuclear forces of our state at the fastest possible speed.

The fundamental mission of our nuclear forces is to deter a war, but our nukes can never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent even at a time when a situation we are not desirous of at all is created on this land.

If any forces try to violate the fundamental interests of our state, our nuclear forces will have to decisively accomplish its unexpected second mission.

The nuclear forces of our Republic should be fully prepared to fulfil their responsible mission and put their unique deterrent in motion at any time.

CHRONOLOGY OF NORTH KOREA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 2, 2022: First reports [come in](#) that a man has entered North Korea from the South—yes, that way round—by crossing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

Jan. 3, 2022: In his final New Year’s speech as South Korea’s president, Moon Jae-in [says](#) he will pursue an “irreversible path to peace” on the peninsula until his term ends in May: “I will not stop efforts to institutionalize sustainable peace...If we [the two Koreas] resume dialogue and cooperation, the international community will respond...I hope efforts for dialogue will continue in the next administration too.”

Jan. 3, 2022: South Korea’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) [says](#) it has had no response from North Korea to a message it sent on Jan. 2 via the western military communication line, urging the North to protect the border-crosser. Another report [clarifies](#) that while Pyongyang did acknowledge receipt of the message, sent twice, it made no comment on the protection request. MND also confirms that this is the same person who [arrived](#) by a similar route across the DMZ in November 2020.

Jan. 4, 2022: Amid reports that last week’s presumed returnee defector was suffering financial problems in South Korea, the Ministry of Unification (MOU) [insists](#) that the man—who worked as a cleaner—had received due resettlement support from the ROK government.

Jan. 5, 2022: After investigating Jan. 1’s redefector border crossing, the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) [report](#) that the man crossed into North Korea despite being caught five times on military surveillance cameras. Gen. Won In-choul, JCS chairman, admits: “We failed to carry out given duties properly...I apologize for causing concerns to the people.”

Jan. 5, 2022: President Moon [urges](#) the ROK military to “have a special sense of alert and responsibility.” Calling the “failure of security operations ...a grave problem that should not have happened,” he demands a special inspection of front-line units to ensure no repetition.

Jan. 5, 2022: ROK JCS [reports](#) that North Korea fired an apparent ballistic missile over the East Sea (Sea of Japan). South Korea’s presidential National Security Council convenes, is briefed, and expresses concern. This is Pyongyang’s first such launch in 2022; its last was an SLBM in October. (Further missile tests [follow](#), making January the most intensive month ever for DPRK missile launches.)

Jan. 5, 2022: Reacting to Pyongyang’s missile launch, President Moon [voices](#) “concerns that tensions could rise and a stalemate of inter-Korean relations could further deepen.” Yet South Korea should not give up on dialogue, and “North Korea also should make efforts in a more earnest manner.”

Jan. 6, 2022: ROK government [says](#) that next month it will launch a new inter-agency team, including MOU and the police, to support vulnerable defectors from the North. Last year MOU’s biannual survey found that 1,582 defectors needed help additional to the basic support package that all ex-DPRK arrivals receive. Almost half (47%) spoke of having psychological problems. The new team is duly inaugurated on Feb. 7; see below.

Jan. 6, 2022: *Korea Times* [profiles](#) Tim Peters, a Seoul-based US activist whose NGO, Helping Hands Korea, has since 1996 helped over 1,000 North Koreans in China to safety in third countries. Despite the pandemic, in 2020 HHK enabled more such evacuations than ever before as hitherto hidden sub-groups, such as the elderly or disabled, came to light.

Jan. 10, 2022: MOU [says](#) it is monitoring potential changes in how North Korea handles COVID-19, such as easing current strict border controls, after *Rodong Sinmun*—the main DPRK daily, organ of the ruling Workers' Party (WPK)—averts that “we need to move to a better advanced, people-oriented epidemic work from one that focused on control measures.”

Jan. 10, 2022: Refuting recently [publicized](#) research claiming that as many as 771 of the 33,800 North Korean defectors in the South have moved on to third countries as of 2019, MOU [insists](#) the true figure for the five years 2016–20 is only 20 (which seems implausibly low.) It [confirms](#), however, that as many as 31 have redefected to the North.

Jan. 11, 2022: After North Korea's second missile launch in under a week, Yoon Suk-yeol, presidential candidate for the conservative opposition People Power Party (PPP), causes a stir by [endorsing](#) a preemptive strike if the North fires a nuclear-armed missile toward Seoul. He accuses Moon of enabling the North to further advance its missile program, by accepting its peace overtures and calling for sanctions to be lifted. Moon's NSC [expresses](#) “strong regret” at the DPRK's Jan. 11 launch—and several which follow.

Jan. 14, 2022: Shortly after the US sanctions six North Koreans and others involved in the DPRK's WMD programs, MOU [vows](#) to continue to try to provide humanitarian aid to the North “regardless of the political or military situation.” (In the real world, since 2019 Pyongyang has spurned all such efforts by Seoul.)

Jan. 17, 2022: After a further brace of DPRK missile tests, Yoon Suk-yeol [doubles down](#) on preemptive strike talk. Posting on Facebook, he writes: “I will secure a preemptive strike capability known as Kill-Chain and build the surveillance and reconnaissance capability needed to monitor all parts of North Korea...Only strong deterrence against the North can guarantee the Republic of Korea's peace.”

Jan. 20, 2022: Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) [reports](#) that on Jan. 19 a Politburo meeting of the DPRK's ruling WPK, after decrying US “hostility,” decided “to promptly examine the issue of restarting all temporarily-suspended activities.” This refers to the North's moratorium since Nov. 2017 on nuclear and ICBM tests.

Jan. 20, 2022: Reacting to Pyongyang's statement, South Korea's NSC [says](#) it will “prepare for the possibility of further deterioration of the situation, while continuing efforts to stabilize the situation on the Korean Peninsula and resume dialogue with North Korea.”

Jan. 20, 2022: MOU [reports](#) a further sharp drop last year in defector arrivals. Just 63 North Koreans—40 men and 23 women—reached the South in 2021, down from 229 in 2020 and 1,047 in 2019. The ministry attributes this to tightened DPRK-China border controls due to the coronavirus.

Jan. 24, 2022: Yoon Suk-yeol [promises](#), if elected, to normalize joint military exercises with the US. He adds: “North Korea has been upgrading its nuclear capabilities and is making blatant provocations...The [Moon] administration's Korean Peninsula peace process has completely failed.”

Jan. 25, 2022: Seoul Central District Court [sentences](#) a businessman, named only as Kim, to four years in jail for violating the National Security Act (NSA). Formerly a member of a pro-North student group, Kim was indicted in 2018 for buying a DPRK-made facial recognition software program in 2007, which he sold in the ROK as his own company's work. In return he sent Pyongyang \$860,000, plus unspecified military secrets. Kim denied the charges, claiming he had Seoul's permission for his contacts with the North.

Jan. 25, 2022: Briefing “dozens of foreign diplomats,” including from the US, China, Japan and Russia, Unification Minister Lee In-young [emphasizes](#) that, notwithstanding Pyongyang's missile launches, “dialogue and cooperation are the only solution for peace on the Korean Peninsula,” and Moon will pursue peace “to the last.” Lee adds that time is on no one's side.

Jan. 25, 2022: ROK prosecutors [indict](#) defector-activist Park Sang-hak, head of Fighters for a Free North Korea (FFNK), for two launches of balloons carrying leaflets into North Korea last April. The charge is attempted violation of the revised Development of Inter-Korean Relations Act, as it is unconfirmed whether the balloons reached the DPRK. He also faces a separate indictment on charges of receiving illicit donations during 2015–19. (See also Feb. 15.)

Jan. 27, 2022: Dismissing a suit brought by former operators of factories in the now defunct Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), the ROK Constitutional Court [rules](#) that then-President Park Geun-hye's suspension (in effect closure) of the KIC in February 2016, as a riposte to North Korean nuclear and missile tests, was constitutional. This did not violate the claimants' property rights, even though "fair compensation has not been paid."

Feb. 1, 2022: MOU [says](#) it has delivered Lunar New Year gifts of "daily necessities and other items" to young (aged 24 or under) North Korean defectors who are without families.

Feb. 3, 2022: After Pyongyang's Jan. 20 warning that its ICBM test moratorium may end, and its launch on Jan. 31 of a Hwasong-12 intermediate range missile (IRBM), an unnamed military official [tells](#) *Yonhap*, South Korea's quasi-official news agency, that "at this point there isn't any notable change or activity" in the North suggesting an imminent ICBM test.

Feb. 3, 2022: *Yonhap* [reports](#) that on Jan. 26 the UN Security Council (UNSC)'s committee on DPRK sanctions gave the Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Research Center, a South Korean NGO, a year-long waiver to send 20 thermal imaging cameras to North Korea. These will be used to help stave off COVID-29. This is the first such exemption granted this year.

Feb. 7, 2022: ROK government [launches](#) a nine-member inter-agency team to help North Korean defectors "suffering from economic and psychological difficulties." (See also Jan. 6.)

Feb. 8, 2022: A survey of 2,465 North Korean defectors (rather a small sample) by MOU's Korea Hana Foundation [finds](#) that in 2021 their average monthly wage was 2.27 million won (\$1,920). This was 457,000 won below the national average, but the gap is narrowing: it was 599,000 won in 2019 and 520,000 won in 2020.

Feb. 9, 2022: Ahead of a meeting in Honolulu with his US and Japanese counterparts, Noh Kyu-duk, ROK special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs, [says](#) he hopes this "will be another opportunity for us to work toward engagement (with Pyongyang)."

Feb. 10, 2022: In a "joint written interview" with *Yonhap* and seven other international news agencies, President Moon [says](#) he is ready for to meet Kim Jong Un again, in any format and without preconditions: "Whether...face-to-face or virtual (sic) does not matter. Whatever method North Korea wants will be acceptable." But he admits that the imminent Presidential election may make a fresh summit "inappropriate." Warning that if Pyongyang ends its ICBM testing moratorium the peninsula could return to a "touch-and-go-crisis" as in 2017, Moon mourns the failure of the 2019 Trump-Kim summit in Hanoi: a "small deal" would have been better than no deal. He says a Kim-Biden summit is "just a matter of time," and reiterates his support for a "peace declaration" despite Pyongyang's unresponsiveness.

Feb. 10, 2022: MOU [says](#) the ROK government will provide financial support totaling 57.4 billion won (\$48 million) to companies hit by the suspension of North-South exchanges. A mixture of subsidies and loans, this applies to firms which invested in the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) and the Mount Kumgang tourist zone. Their actual losses are much larger.

Feb. 15, 2022: FFK's Park Sang-hak [seeks](#) leave to file suit with the Constitutional Court to determine whether the anti-leafleting law under which he is charged is unconstitutional. Park claims it infringes the ROK's identity, independence and national dignity. (See also Jan. 25.)

Feb. 17, 2022: MND [announces](#) new plans for its Air Defense Missile Command (ADMC). Given North Korea's escalating missile threat, from April ADCM will get more mid-range surface-to-air missiles (M-SAMs) and BM early-warning radars, and be renamed in English (name to be decided). April will also see the Army Missile Command relaunched (so to say) and expanded as the Army Missile Strategic Command.

Feb. 17, 2022: Incheon District Court [hands](#) double defector Yoo Tae-joon an 18-month jail sentence for trying to return to North Korea. Having first defected to South Korea in 1998, in 2000 Yoo returned to the North. He then redefected to the South (date not given), but in 2019 attempted to go North again, approaching the DPRK embassy in Hanoi. Rebuffed as a spy, he entered China where he was arrested—and presumably extradited to the ROK.

Feb. 18, 2022: An online survey of 75,524 elementary, middle and high school students, jointly conducted in November-December by MOU and the Ministry of Education (MOE), [finds](#) that 25%—up from 19.4% in 2019 and 24.2% in 2020—consider that Korean unification is unnecessary. Reasons cited include the economic burden (29.8%), potential social problems after unification (25%) and political differences (17%).

Feb. 21, 2022: Seoul Metropolitan Government ([SMG](#)) [says](#) it will increase its support for defectors, including free health checkups, online tutoring and more. 3.4 billion won (\$2.85 million) has been budgeted, more than double last year's 1.5 billion won. The avowed aim is to help defectors "gain complete independence and social integration, not only resettlement."

Feb. 22, 2022: South Korea's official [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) says that the (North) Korean People's Army (KPA) killed "1,026 Christians and 119 Catholics" in a bid to "eliminate reactionary forces" during its retreat from the South after the allied Incheon landing in Sept. 1950 during the Korean War. ("Christians" here means Protestants; this usage is common in the ROK, which is the most Protestant country in Asia.)

Feb. 22, 2022: Song Young-gil, head of South Korea's ruling Democratic Party (DP) tells visiting UN special rapporteur on DPRK human rights, Tomas Ojea Quintana, that the KIC could reopen if there were conditional sanctions relief and wages were paid in kind. Quintana reportedly says he supports reopening. There is in fact no such prospect, and Pyongyang may have other plans. (Song is [running](#) as DP candidate for mayor of Seoul in elections on June 1.)

Feb. 23, 2022: "Informed sources" tell [Yonhap](#) that the Agency for Defense Development (ADD) today oversaw a successful test at Taean, 100 miles southwest of Seoul, of a long-range surface-to-air missile (L-SAM), being developed to counter DPRK missile threats.

Feb. 28, 2022: President Moon tells the Korea Army Academy that (in [Yonhap's summary](#)): "Based on strong defense capabilities, South Korea has pushed for peace efforts on the Korean Peninsula and turned North Korea's nuclear crisis into a mode of dialogue." He adds that the ROK has the "biggest security burden" in the world: "For now, the top priority is to deter war between the South and North, but from a broader and long-term point of view, the geopolitical situation of the Korean Peninsula itself represents a grave security environment."

March 8, 2022: Amid [reports](#) of fresh activity at the DPRK's Punggye-ri nuclear test site, supposedly [blown up](#) in 2018, MOU [urges](#) Pyongyang to abide by international agreements.

March 8, 2022: DPRK patrol boat [breaches](#) the Northern Limit Line (NLL, the de facto maritime border in the Yellow/West Sea), seemingly chasing a stray Northern vessel which has also crossed the line. It retreats after an Southern warship fires three warning shots. The ROK Navy apprehends the other DPRK vessel (story continues on March 9).

March 9, 2022: Yoon Suk-yeol [wins](#) South Korea's presidential election for the PPP, defeating the DP's Lee Jae-myung by just 0.73% (they poll 16,394,815 and 16,147,738 votes, respectively). Despite the tight margin, Lee swiftly concedes.

March 9, 2022: says it has sent back a DPRK vessel and its crew of seven, seized yesterday after breaching the NLL. The intruders explained that they accidentally crossed the line due to fog while transporting materials between two islands, and refused to eat until they were repatriated. Alert for provocations around election time, Seoul accepts that this was just a "navigational error and mechanical glitch."

March 11, 2022: In an item headlined "20th 'presidential' election held in south Korea," the DPRK's Voice of Korea [says](#) (this is the full report): "Yun Sok Yol, candidate of the 'People's Strength' (sic), a conservative opposition party, was elected 'President' by a small majority at the 20th 'presidential' election held in south Korea on March 9." (Scare quotes and capitalization in original). VOK is for external consumption, so North Koreans are not privy to this news.

March 13, 2022: North Korea's *Uriminzok-kiri* [website](#), aimed at outside audiences, [attacks](#) as "paranoiac convulsion" South Korea's (and the US') claim that recent DPRK satellite-related test launches on Feb. 27 and March 5 actually involved [ICBM](#) development.

March 14, 2022: Amid signs that North Korea has begun dismantling South Korean-built and owned facilities at long-shuttered Mount Kumgang resort, as Kim Jong Un first threatened to do in 2019, MOU [says](#) it has received no new word from Pyongyang. Its spokesperson adds: "There shouldn't be unilateral measures by the North that infringe upon our companies' property rights, and all...issues should be resolved through consultations between the South and the North."

March 15, 2022: Belatedly reporting a poll last August by the Korea National Defense University (KNDU), PPP Rep. Kang Dae-sik [says](#) that 70.6% of South Koreans believe North Korea will never denuclearize completely. 61.3% regard the DPRK as hostile, while 22.1% consider it a partner for cooperation. Over 80% reckon China would take the North's side in any crisis on the peninsula. A slightly earlier survey, by the state-run Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU), [found](#) 90.7% skeptical about Pyongyang's will to denuclearize.

March 16, 2022: ROK JCS says that a seeming DPRK missile launch from Sunan, near Pyongyang's airport, appears to have failed. Eye-witnesses [report](#) a loud bang and seeing burning debris. North Korean media say [nothing](#), now and subsequently.

March 22, 2022: Two days after the KPA fires four rounds from multiple rocket launchers (MRLs) into the West Sea, Yoon Suk-yeol [calls](#) this "a clear violation" of Sept. 2018's inter-Korean military agreement. However ROK MND Suh Wook [denies](#) any breach, saying this took place "far north" of the border area covered by the accord. Yoon's team shoot back that it violated the spirit of the agreement; they accuse Suh of "protecting" the North.

March 23, 2022: President-elect Yoon's transition committee TC spokesperson [says](#): "There will be no abolition of the unification ministry." Rather, MOU will be restored to its "proper function" instead of just taking orders from the Blue House. The TC also denies that Yoon's *Nordpolitik* will be hard-line.

March 23, 2022: "Informed source" [tells](#) *Yonhap* that MOU has formed a 10-member panel to review secret documents on the first two decades of inter-Korean talks (1971-91), with a view to publishing them. (See also April 15, below.)

March 24, 2022: Ending (as presaged on Jan. 20) its four-year moratorium on ICBM tests, North Korea stages what it [celebrates](#) as a successful first launch of the Hwasongpho-17: its largest missile, paraded but not yet known to have flown. Korean Central Television (KCTV) issues a highly untypical movie-style [video](#) of the launch.

March 24, 2022: In tougher terms than usual, Moon "strongly [condemns](#)" the North's ICBM test as "a serious threat to the Korean Peninsula and beyond," and "a scrapping on its own (sic) of a moratorium on ICBM tests that...Kim Jong Un promised to the international community." This is also "a clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions." Moon calls on Pyongyang to immediately stop actions that raise tensions and return to the dialogue table.

March 24, 2022: South Korea [responds](#) to North's ICBM launch with a live-fire missile exercise in the East Sea (Sea of Japan). The JCS warns that "(we) have the ability and posture to precisely strike the origin of the missile launch and command and support facilities at any time."

March 27, 2022: "Informed sources" [claim](#) that both the ROK and US military reckon the DPRK's recent ICBM launch was not in fact a Hwasong-17, as officially touted, but rather the slightly smaller Hwasong-15, previously tested in 2017. They speculate that March 16's failed test really was a Hwasong-17, and Pyongyang could not risk a second failure. On close inspection, KCTV's video spliced footage from two launches, with different locations, time of day and weather. (That said, two earlier tests on Feb. 27 and March 5, announced as being satellite-related, are [thought](#) to have involved elements of the Hwasong-17 system.)

March 29, 2022: Briefing the ROK National Assembly, MND [claims](#) publicly that March 24's ICBM test was indeed a Hwasong -15, not -17. (See March 27, above.)

April 1, 2022: ROK Defense Minister Suh Wook [stresses](#) that South Korean missiles can “accurately and swiftly strike any targets in North Korea.” Earlier the same day, he vows to develop an “advanced, multilayered missile defense system that the North does not possess.”

April 2, 2022: In her first public comment since Sept., published a day later, Kim Jong Un’s sister Kim Yo Jong [castigates](#) South Korea’s defense minister—a “confrontation maniac” and “senseless and scum-like guy”—for “reckless and intemperate rhetoric” about a “preemptive strike” on the DPRK. She concludes: “I will give a serious warning upon authorization. We will reconsider a lot of things concerning south Korea. South Korea should discipline itself if it wants to stave off disaster. I hope I don’t hear him blustering again.” (It is not clear that Suh actually used the word preemptive, though he certainly said strike; see April 1.)

April 4, 2022: Kim Yo Jong [repeats](#) her earlier message, only at greater length and naming “So Uk” (Suh Wook), whom she accuses of “abrupt bluffing” and “an irretrievable very big mistake.” She warns: “In case south Korea opts for military confrontation with us, our nuclear combat force will have to inevitably carry out its duty.” Yet she also avers: “We will not fire even a single bullet or shell toward south Korea. It is because we do not regard it as match for our armed forces.” Also, “the north and the south of Korea are of the same nation who should not fight against each other.” She concludes: “I pray that such morbid symptom as feeling threat for no ground would be cured as early as possible.”

April 4, 2022: After Kim Yo Jong’s verbal volleys, MOU “clearly [points out](#) that North Korea should not cause additional tension on the Korean Peninsula in any case.” It adds that routine daily inter-Korean phone calls are still taking place as normal.

April 6, 2022: In his last regular press conference as unification minister, Lee In-young [urges](#) the incoming administration to adopt a “forward-looking” approach to North Korea. A propos the DPRK’s breaking of its ICBM moratorium, and amid signs of preparations for a fresh nuclear test, Lee says: “We must put an end to this right here.”

April 7, 2022: In an unprecedented move for a president-elect, Yoon Suk-yeol flies by helicopter to Camp Humphreys, the huge USFK headquarters near Pyeongtaek south of Seoul. Sharing a canteen meal with US and ROK troops, he [vows](#) to strengthen deterrence against North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats.

April 7, 2022: Unification Minister Lee In-young [warns](#) that “April is a time laden with many factors that could lead to the escalation of inter-Korean military tensions.” In strong terms by his standards, he adds: “It is very unfortunate not only for the North but for the future of our nation if (sic) it has chosen nuke (sic) and missiles, disregarding dialogue.”

April 13, 2022: Lee Do-hoon, who served Moon Jae-in as special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs but switched allegiance to Yoon Suk-yeol, [warns](#) the incoming government to be cautious about pursuing sanctions relief: a key goal for Moon, though unachieved. He argues: “Once cash flows into the North, denuclearization will be off the table.” On May 9 Yoon appoints Lee as vice foreign minister.

April 13, 2022: Yoon Suk-yeol [nominates](#) Kwon Young-se, a four-term lawmaker and former Ambassador to China, as his first unification minister. Having been confirmed by the National Assembly, Kwon is sworn in and begins work exactly a month later on May 13.

April 14, 2022: Asserting a linkage largely eschewed by Moon Jae-in, MOU nominee Kwon [says](#) inter-Korean normalization will be “difficult” as long as Pyongyang continues to build up its nuclear arsenal. He adds: “For sure, (we) will make a request for dialogue.” However, Seoul cannot incessantly dangle “carrots” while continually rebuffed.

April 15, 2022: On Kim Il Sung’s 110th birthday, the ROK government [publishes](#) a dossier on the two Koreas’ behind-the-scenes diplomacy prior to their becoming full UN members in 1991. 405,000 pages of diplomatic documents now 30 years old have been declassified.

April 18, 2022: Park Jin, four-term PPP lawmaker nominated to be Yoon's foreign minister, [declares](#) that the new Yoon Suk-yeol administration "will pursue a balanced policy, based on common sense, toward North Korea." He adds: "[We] can't prevent North Korea's continued provocations only with conciliatory policy...[A] substantial policy change is needed."

April 19, 2022: MOU [says](#) North Korea remains unresponsive to the South's enquiries about demolition at Mount Kumgang. Citing satellite imagery, Voice of America (VOA) reported that the seven-story floating Haegumgang Hotel has lost half its height, while a golf resort has eight buildings now minus their roofs and outer walls.

April 20, 2022: Lee Sang-min, a researcher at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA), [says](#) North Korea might use tactical nuclear arms in a contingency to offset its conventional inferiority. However, US and ROK forces are overwhelmingly stronger.

April 20, 2022: In written answers to lawmakers' questions ahead of his parliamentary confirmation hearing, Yoon's MND nominee Lee Jong-sup [clarifies](#): "I am not of the position that the Sept. 19 South-North military agreement should be scrapped." Rather, he plans to verify if the 2018 accord is being faithfully implemented. As to whether ROK defense white papers should characterize North Korea as a 'main enemy': "I will decide carefully."

April 21, 2022: New MOU nominee Kwon Young-se [says](#) resuming Kumgangsan tours is not "a desirable idea in the current situation," and "won't be easy as it is subject to sanctions." He adds that Seoul must "clearly" challenge Pyongyang's dismantlement of some facilities there. But he also supports humanitarian aid, and opposes any blanket rejection of Moon's policies.

April 21, 2022: MOU [reports](#) a fire at a factory in the former Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), shut since 2016. Spotted around 1400 local time, the blaze is extinguished by 1450.

April 22, 2022: MOU [says](#) it has asked North Korea, via the inter-Korean liaison line, for further information on the previous day's fire at the KIC.

April 22, 2022: KCNA reveals that Moon Jae-in wrote Kim Jong Un a personal letter on April 20. Kim sent a reply on April 21, "appreciat[ing] the pains and effort taken by Moon Jae In for the great cause of the nation until the last days of his term of office." After further pleasantries, KCNA concludes: "The exchange of the personal letters between the top leaders of the north and the south is an expression of their deep trust." The Blue House [confirms](#) the exchange of letters and their warm tenor. Neither side published the letters in full.

April 25, 2022: North Korea stages a nocturnal military parade in Pyongyang. Kim Jong Un's speech [emphasizes](#) the need "for further developing the nuclear forces of our state at the fastest possible speed," including for a possible "unexpected second mission...at a time when a situation we are not desirous of at all is created on this land." He does not elaborate.

April 26, 2022: Moon [urges](#) his successor to work with the US to bring Kim Jong Un's regime back to talks. Admitting that the North's ICBM launch in March "crossed a red line" and "may be a sign that [Pyongyang] would end dialogue," he adds: "I hope North Korea will make a rational choice."

April 26, 2022: Responding to North Korea's parade, President-elect Yoon's transition team [says](#) his administration will bolster deterrence and strengthen the US-ROK alliance "while simultaneously developing far-superior military technologies and weapons systems."

April 28, 2022: Defector activist group FFNK [claims](#) that on April 25-26 it sent 20 large balloons, carrying around 1 million leaflets, across the DMZ into North Korea. Information therein included about Yoon Suk-yeol's election. Such actions are now illegal; FFNK's leader Park Sang-hak is on trial for two earlier launches (see Jan. 25 above). MOU says it is investigating, including whether this claimed flight actually happened.

April 28, 2022: MOU [responds](#) to Kim Jong Un's parade speech: "North Korea should stop all acts that heighten tensions, including the advancement of its nuclear capabilities, and...return to the negotiating table."

April 29, 2022: Family of [Lee Dae-jun](#), the South Korean fisheries official [shot](#) and incinerated in Northern waters in September 2020, [file](#) suit in Seoul Central District Court against the DPRK government. They seek 200 million won (\$159,000) in compensation for mental suffering caused to the deceased's young son and daughter. MND and the Blue House are [appealing](#) a separate court [order](#) to disclose all information they possess to the family.

May 4, 2022: Both the outgoing and soon-to-be ROK governments condemn the DPRK's [missile launch](#) today, its 14th this year. The NSC [calls](#) on Pyongyang "to stop its actions that pose serious threats." Yoon's transition team [promises](#) "more fundamental deterrence measures."

May 4, 2022: Lee Jong-sup, former three-star general who is Yoon's nominee to be the next Minister of National Defense, [tells](#) his parliamentary confirmation hearing that South Korea could be a nuclear target for North Korea.

May 7, 2022: In North Korea's 15th missile launch this year, the ROK JCS [report](#) an apparent submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) test in waters near the east coast city of Sinpo. The projectile flew 600 km, reaching 60 km in altitude. The DPRK's last SLBM test was in October. The JCS adds that it is "maintaining a full readiness posture." Incoming National Security Adviser (NSA) Kim Sung-han [says](#) the Yoon administration will reassess the DPRK's WMD threat, to "come up with fundamental measures against North Korea's provocations and actual deterrence capabilities against its nuclear missile threats."

May 10, 2022: Yoon Suk-yeol is duly [inaugurated](#) as president of the Republic of Korea.

May 11, 2022: Yoon [picks](#) Kim Kyou-hyun, a career diplomat and onetime deputy national security adviser, as head of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), succeeding Park Jie-won. Kwon Chun-taek, a former NIS official and diplomat, will be first deputy director: a job largely focused on North Korea. (Some had [tipped](#) Kwon for the top job.) Like ministers, Kyou must undergo a parliamentary confirmation hearing, but approval is not mandatory.

May 12, 2022: Sources [tell](#) *Yonhap* that, by order of new Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup to the JCS, the ROK military will revert to calling DPRK missile tests "provocations": a term eschewed under Moon. Seoul will also refer to "unidentified ballistic missiles" rather than "unidentified projectiles." In a similar hardening of tone, the presidential National Security Office (NSO) "strongly [condemns](#)" Pyongyang's latest missile launch today, and "deplore[s] North Korea's two-faced actions" of continuing ballistic missile provocations while neglecting its people's lives and safety amid a coronavirus outbreak.

May 13, 2022: A day after the DPRK [admits](#) an outbreak of COVID-19, President Yoon [offers](#) to send COVID-19 vaccines. His spokesperson says: "We will hold discussions with the North Korean side about details." The North today [reports](#) six deaths, and that a total of 350,000 people "got fever in a short span of time," with 18,000 new cases on May 12 alone; 187,800 "are being isolated and treated." However one of Yoon's officials tells reporters, on background: "We know more than what was announced. It's more serious than thought." It cannot be [assumed](#) that Pyongyang will accept this and other offers of vaccine aid.

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C O N N E C T I O N S

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

CHINA- KOREA RELATIONS

BEIJING OLYMPIC TENSIONS, NORTH KOREA'S TESTING SPREE, AND SOUTH KOREA'S NEW CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP

SCOTT SNYDER, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
SEE-WON BYUN, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

The first four months of 2022 marked a turn toward difficult terrain in the China-South Korea relationship, including the challenge of managing conflicting expressions of patriotism during the Beijing Olympics. The Olympics opening ceremonies were attended by National Assembly Speaker Park Byung-seug, South Korea's second highest ranking official by protocol, despite the US imposition of a "diplomatic boycott."

North Korea's dozen missile tests since January 2022 included a "new" ICBM launch in March ahead of the 110th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth and Yoon Suk-yeol's presidential inauguration. The latest tests drove China-South Korea dialogue, new US sanctions, and reassertions from Beijing that US actions remain the decisive factor in resolving the peninsula problem. Beijing's hosting of the Olympics and Pyongyang's commemorations of Kim anniversaries presented opportunities for jointly reaffirming China-North Korea friendship. Despite signs of rebounding economic activity after the resumption of cross-border freight train operations in January, China's COVID-19 lockdowns remain a source of uncertainty.

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South Korea's election of pro-US opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol generated a mixture of anxiety and veiled warnings from Chinese commentators. Chinese President Xi Jinping's call to Yoon two weeks following the election was hailed as an unprecedented gesture of respect from a Chinese leader to an incoming South Korean president. But Yoon's first congratulatory calls after his electoral victory were from Quad members as well as the United Kingdom, reflecting a distinct South Korean tilt toward the United States amid the China-US strategic rivalry. Yoon's campaign platform posited a positive-sum relationship between his pledges to restore a "comprehensive strategic alliance" with the United States and to establish relations with China built on "mutual respect." But it remains to be seen how Beijing will respond to the Yoon administration's shift toward an unambiguous alignment with the US.

The Beijing Olympic Flame and the South Korean Political Tinderbox

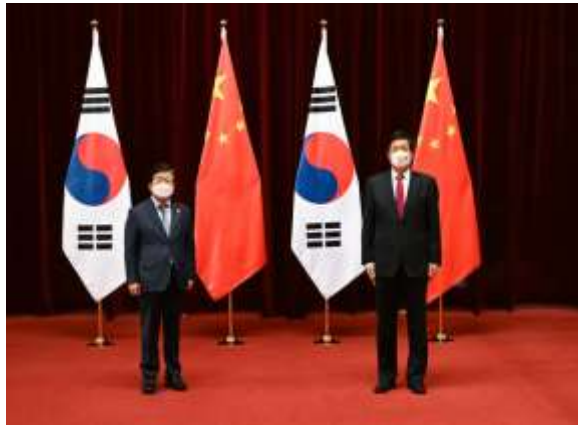


Figure 1 Li Zhanshu, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, holds talks with the Republic of Korea (ROK) National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong-seug at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Feb. 5, 2022. Photo: Rao Aimin/Xinhua

South Korean public sentiment toward China experienced a serious and sustained downturn well in advance of the Beijing Olympics, setting up the Olympics as a potential tinderbox for expressions of anti-Chinese sentiment in Seoul. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs had documented this downturn in an [April 2021 survey](#) that showed South Korean favorability of China at 3.1 compared to a 4.8 rating in 2019. In a Korea Institute of National Unification [survey](#), 72% of South Koreans viewed China as South Korea's "biggest threat." A [January 2022 JoongAng Ilbo project](#) involving data scraping of

South Korean netizen comments underscored negative sentiments over Chinese encroachment on national symbols such as kimchi, hanbok, and taekwondo. These actions led netizens to ask sarcastically whether China might next claim Samsung or soccer phenom Son Heung-min as Chinese. Moreover, criticism of China among South Korean conservatives drew public rebuke from former Chinese Ambassador to South Korea Chu Guohong, signaling sensitivity to the growth and politicization of negative views toward China. Chinese netizens have responded in kind by referring to South Korea by a derogatory nickname roughly meaning "[thief country](#)."

The Moon administration walked the tightrope between China's desire for strong international representation in support of the Beijing Olympics and the US-led "diplomatic boycott" of the games due to China's human rights violations. As South Korea's official delegation head, Minister of Sports, Culture, and Tourism Hwang Hee played an essential protocol role in passing on the hosting of the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics to Beijing in 2022. But the unofficial attendance of National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong-seug distinguished South Korea from other US allies and earned China's [public praise](#).

It was unsurprising in such a charged environment that South Korean netizens might respond negatively to China's representation of the ethnic Korean minority dressed in hanbok as evidence of Chinese harmony and multiculturalism in the Olympic opening ceremonies. But that negative South Korean public response was only a precursor to an even more emotional controversy during the 1,000-meter men's short-track skating event, in which two South Korean skaters received judging disqualifications along with the first-place Hungarian skater, paving the way for China to sweep medals at the event. This development drew sharp criticisms across South Korean society, including public denunciations from all major candidates in the March 9 presidential election. Democratic Party presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung expressed disappointment and anger at the "[biased decision](#)" of short-track Olympic judges, while [Yoon Suk-yeol worried](#) that Korean children, who learn sportsmanship by observing the rules of the game and participating in fair play, might conclude that the world is not fair.

The Chinese Embassy in South Korea responded to the Olympics controversies with three

successive statements clarifying China's position on the hanbok and short-track skating controversies and congratulating skater Hwang Dae-heon on his subsequent gold-medal win in the men's 1,500 km event. The [first statement](#) emphasized the common ethnic heritage of Koreans and Korean Chinese citizens, both of whom had a right to claim the Korean national dress, and the need for mutual respect. The [second statement](#) defended the professionalism of International Skating Union judges and condemned the "irresponsible attitude" of South Korean media and politicians who leveled criticisms against China. The [third statement](#) offered congratulations from Ambassador Xing Haiming and expressed his hopes for the further development of friendly China-South Korea relations. The controversy led to assessments of the failure of both governments in managing national emotions, and recommendations such as that by [Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences Da Zhigang](#) of the need to enhance dialogue, cooperation, and exchange.



Figure 2 Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong meet virtually on Feb. 28, 2022. Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China

Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Chung Eui-young [held a virtual dialogue](#) on Feb. 28 where Wang expressed appreciation for Seoul's "friendly policy toward China, which is not only in line with the fundamental and long-term interests of the ROK, but also conducive to maintaining peace and stability." Wang called for progress in China-South Korea FTA negotiations and for efforts to strengthen public support during the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Chung supported efforts to further develop the relationship, noting that regardless of South Korea's presidential election

outcome, both sides will strive to develop "future-oriented" bilateral relations.

Xi-Kim Olympic Exchanges Celebrate China-DPRK Partnership

The Winter Olympics presented an opportunity for Kim Jong Un to exchange messages with Xi, and also to pause weapons-testing after seven rounds in January. To mark the Games' closing in late February, Kim [projected](#) unity and "strategic" ties with China under the "military threat of the US and its satellite forces." He praised Beijing's resolve against not just COVID-19, but also "hostile" actions, in an apparent reference to US-led diplomatic boycotts. North Korea's participation in the 2022 Winter Olympics was suspended based on its refusal to participate in last year's Tokyo Games out of health concerns.

February also marked the 80th anniversary of the birth of Kim Jong Il, driving joint commemorations in Pyongyang and Beijing. At the DPRK Embassy, Vice Chairman of China's National People Congress Ji Bingxuan conveyed President Xi's greetings to Kim Jong Un, met Ambassador Ri Ryong-nam, and [expressed](#) appreciation of Pyongyang's "recent support for China in the global stage." To commemorate Kim Il Sung's 110th birth anniversary a month later, North Korea's Foreign Languages Publishing House [released](#) photo books celebrating the founding leader's diplomatic exchanges with China and Russia.

China-South Korea Relations Under Yoon Suk-yeol's Pro-US Administration

Given the downturn in public sentiment toward China, it is notable that China did not emerge as a major issue for South Korea's presidential candidates. But the respective campaign platforms charted differences over the degree of South Korea's foreign policy orientation toward the United States that had implications for South Korea's China policy. In contrast to Moon's strategy of avoiding overt US alignment, the Yoon campaign made the "comprehensive strategic alliance" with the United States a foreign policy centerpiece while pledging to pursue relations with China based on "mutual respect." This approach acknowledges the need for constructive and close communication with Beijing, but embraces a strategic alignment with the United States. Moreover, the Yoon campaign

publicly stepped on a number of Chinese red lines, including the possibility of a closer Korean relationship with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”), and pledge to purchase from the United States a new [Terminal High-Altitude Air Defense \(THAAD\) battery](#) in direct contradiction with the Moon administration’s October 2017 statement that South Korea would not do so.

Initial Chinese media reaction to Yoon’s election suggested a mixture of anxiety and veiled warnings arguing that South Korea’s national interests and rejection of “external influence” (from the United States) would lay the foundations for a positive relationship. [Global Times](#) noted on the eve of the election that extensive trade and educational exchanges and China’s support for peninsula peace and stability serve as favorable foundations. But it cited the politically contested consensus with the Moon administration over THAAD as “a classic case of the two countries overcoming external influence,” arguing that stable relations with China are a prerequisite for South Korea’s national security.

Two days after the election, [Global Times](#) addressed the Yoon campaign’s pursuit of “mutual respect”-based relations, arguing that mutual respect is a basic Chinese diplomatic principle and rebutting South Korean views that China has not respected South Korea. The editorial then argues that the Moon administration’s 2017 “three noes” statement with China pledging not to join the US missile defense network, join a US-Japan-South Korea military alliance, or deploy additional THAAD batteries was not only a product of mutual respect, but a prerequisite for maintaining normal China-South Korea relations. While asserting that “the THAAD system has exceeded the defense needs of South Korea,” it also argues that “real security must be common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable” and that “China’s strategic security interests must also be respected by Seoul.” On the same day, Ambassador Xing Haiming [met President-elect Yoon](#) to convey Xi Jinping’s formal letter of congratulations and to exchange views on the development of bilateral relations.

On March 25, Yoon received a congratulatory call from Xi, marking the first time that a Chinese leader had called a South Korean president-elect. The call emphasized the 30th anniversary of diplomatic normalization, timely

communication to “maintain continuity and stability” in bilateral relations, and regional stability. Following the call, the [Global Times](#) asserted that the United States is the primary source of disturbance in China-South Korea relations, stating that “China has always respected South Korea’s independent foreign policy, but China-South Korea relations shouldn’t be an appendix to China-US ties.”



Figure 3 Ambassador Xing Haiming meets President-elect Yoon to convey Xi Jinping’s formal letter of congratulations and to exchange views on the development of bilateral relations. Photo: Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Korea

Ambassador Xing followed up Xi’s call with an April 6 [visit](#) to Yoon transition committee chairman Ahn Cheol-soo, discussing China-South Korea relations and conveying North Korea’s concerns about US-North Korea relations. The following day, Xing gave a [public presentation](#) expressing his desire that “THAAD” not become a “sensitive word” between the two countries, and arguing that China-South Korea relations should be mutually beneficial.

Renmin University scholar Cheng Xiaohe [wrote](#) on the Moon administration’s Quad policy and its evolution, arguing that “China respects South Korea’s cooperation with other countries and organizations, but such cooperation should not be achieved at the expense of China’s national interest.” Tsinghua University’s Liu Jiangyong [asserted](#) that although Yoon seeks to strengthen cooperation with the US and Japan and to take a tougher response to North Korea, Yoon would not want to sacrifice the China-South Korea relationship for an alliance with them.

DPRK Tests Trigger Sanctions and Dialogue

North Korea signaled its frustration over planned annual US-ROK military drills by [firing](#) two short-range missiles on April 16, its 12th missile test of 2022. Timed around Kim Il Sung's 110th birth anniversary, the latest launch mitigated fears that Pyongyang would mark the major national holiday with bigger shows of force. The test appeared less powerful than other recent ones, most notably the March 24 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test claiming capabilities of targeting the United States. Although the ICBM launch raised [debate](#) on whether it was indeed the "new" missile Pyongyang [showcased](#) in the October 2020 military parade, it [amplified](#) inter-Korean security concerns as President-elect Yoon promised to expand military drills with the United States to deter DPRK aggression.

Pyongyang's ICBM test was its first such test since 2017, leading Washington to [impose](#) new sanctions on Russia and North Korea-based entities on March 24, along with sanctions against a Chinese company for supporting Syria's weapons program. It also prompted China-ROK communication on DPRK denuclearization, including telephone talks between Xi and Yoon on March 25, and nuclear envoys Liu Xiaoming and Noh Kyu-duk on March 26.

DPRK military threats challenged regional diplomacy, including US Special Representative Sung Kim's separate talks with ROK and PRC counterparts in early April, and his visit to Seoul later that month to meet Yoon and key foreign policy and unification officials. At China's National People's Congress press conference on March 7, Foreign Minister Wang Yi [insisted](#) that resolving Pyongyang's "legitimate security concerns ... will still largely depend on what the US will do: whether it will take the actions needed to settle the issues on the Peninsula or continue to use them as a geostrategic leverage." Affirming solidarity with Beijing, the DPRK foreign ministry reacted to the White House's February [report](#) on US Indo-Pacific strategy by [calling](#) it a "long-term plan to isolate China in the Asia-Pacific."



Figure 4 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un walks away from what state media call a "new type" of intercontinental ballistic missile in an undated photo released March 24 by the official Korean Central News Agency. Photo: KCNA via Nikkei Asia

China's Stepped-Up Diplomatic Consultations on Korean Affairs

China's Special Representative for the Korean Peninsula Liu Xiaoming has undertaken a more active travel schedule from the beginning of 2022, signaling more visible Chinese diplomacy to monitor the international response to North Korea's stepped-up missile testing. Following telephone consultations with his South Korean counterpart Noh Kyu-duk on [Jan. 20](#), [February 18](#), and March 26, and in-person [consultations in Moscow](#) with Russian Vice Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov, Liu made his first visit to [Washington](#) in April for discussions with US senior officials. Liu held consultations at the [United Nations in New York](#) and visited [France](#) and [Germany](#) for consultations with European counterparts. He [reiterated](#) China's policy of supporting Korean Peninsula denuclearization and peace through dialogue, expressed concerns about the escalation of tensions, and [argued](#) that "the legitimate and reasonable concerns of the DPRK should be taken seriously and addressed." US Ambassador Sung Kim reassured to Liu that the United States has no hostile intent toward North Korea and is open to resumption of talks with Pyongyang on all concerns, including sanctions relief.

China's Multilateral Economic Cooperation with South Korea and Resumption of "Normal Bilateral Trade" with North Korea

China-South Korea economic cooperation took a step forward with the coming into force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in South Korea in February. China

Institute of International Studies Research Fellow Xiang Haoyu [observed](#) that South Korea's RCEP membership would improve China-ROK trade relations, which experienced record growth in 2021. RCEP is projected to enhance bilateral trade in the electronics, machinery, food, marine products, cosmetics, and e-commerce sectors.

On the other hand, the Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry and South Korean businesses [held a meeting on April 29](#) to review the impact of the Shanghai lockdown, with special reference to the potential negative impact on South Korea's supply chain. The meeting reflected South Korean recognition of the close macroeconomic linkages between the two economies and risks of a Chinese economic slowdown for South Korean growth prospects.

China-DPRK trade remains at about half the pre-pandemic level, dropping by almost 90% (2019-2021) after North Korea's border closure in January 2020. Dandong-Sinuiju freight train operations resumed this January, [supporting](#) "normal bilateral trade" according to the PRC Foreign Ministry. Based on Chinese customs data, bilateral trade in January-February [grew](#) more than 40-fold compared to the same period last year, driven by DPRK imports of key necessities like food, pharmaceuticals, and construction materials. At the end of April, China and North Korea resumed a joint trade fair that was suspended from 2016 after Beijing supported UN sanctions against Pyongyang. Held in Dandong since 2012, the latest online fair was North Korea's first international trade engagement since COVID-19.

The Ukraine crisis draws attention to the implications of global energy price shifts for China-DPRK coal trade. In April, the price of smuggled North Korean coal into China reportedly [reached](#) more than twice the pre-pandemic value of DPRK coal exports, but still half of Chinese prices and less than a quarter of global prices. But North Korea's hopes for a sustained recovery are muted by the current COVID-19 outbreak across its border, where Jilin [fights](#) China's worst regional pandemic crisis since Wuhan in 2020. Provincial Party Secretary Jing Junhai pointed to a "[critical stage](#)" in March, when Jilin's reported figures peaked to 75% of China's new locally transmitted cases. As China's foreign ministry [confirmed](#) on April 29, Dandong-Sinuiju freight train operations were again suspended due to renewed COVID-19 concerns.

Yoon's Dual Pursuit of a "Comprehensive Security Alliance" with the United States and a China-South Korea Relationship Based on "Mutual Respect": Zero-Sum or Win-Win?

President-elect Yoon is scheduled to meet President Biden only 11 days after the launch of his administration, in a summit that symbolizes US-South Korean security linkage and the extent to which Yoon has placed Washington at the center of his global strategy. The closeness of this alignment has led China to reiterate its markers for managing the Seoul-Beijing relationship around THAAD while observing closely the depth of the Yoon administration's alignment with Washington and Tokyo. Yoon has asserted the desire for a positive relationship with Beijing based on "mutual respect," an early sign of which may revolve around Xi's willingness to make a long-anticipated visit to Seoul. Xi's visit has been delayed in part by the pandemic and in part by the need to manage political risks around the growth of negative public sentiment on both sides.

In response to DPRK missile tests, Seoul's conservative turn, and perhaps the perceived risk of US-DPRK crisis escalation, China has reactivated its North Korea-focused diplomacy through active outreach to Washington and Europe, and continued calls for the United States to make concessions necessary to bring Pyongyang to the negotiating table. But given the likelihood that such concessions will go unreciprocated, and that North Korea may continue testing essential to military development goals, all parties are more likely to come together in the aftermath of crisis rather than in a joint effort to prevent a crisis. Moreover, the strengthening of Seoul's strategic alignment with Washington runs the risk of exposing fissures in the China-ROK relationship that Beijing has signaled might have negative implications for peninsula security. Rising tensions in Northeast Asia also threaten to hold back Yoon's aspiration for South Korea to be a "pivotal global state." Much will depend on how Yoon handles his transition to power, and whether he can actually forge a positive-sum relationship with Beijing and manage potential provocations by Pyongyang despite the intensifying Sino-US rivalry.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-KOREA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 1, 2022: China and North Korea [resume](#) Dandong–Sinuiju freight train operations.

Jan. 6, 2022: China announces tightened quarantine guidelines for travelers entering from South Korea.

Jan. 13, 2022: PRC State Council announces that from Feb. 1 China will implement RCEP tariffs on selected ROK imports.

Feb. 3, 2022: Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Hwang Hee [departs](#) for Beijing leading South Korea's government delegation to the Winter Olympics.

Feb. 4, 2022: China's National People's Congress Chairman Li Zhanshu [meets](#) ROK National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong-seug, who attends the Winter Olympics opening ceremony.

Feb. 11, 2022: Protestors near the PRC Embassy in Seoul [protest](#) Beijing Winter Olympics officiating.

Feb. 12, 2022: PRC and Russian ambassadors to North Korea [meet](#) at the PRC Embassy in Pyongyang.

Feb. 16, 2022: NPC Vice Chairman Ji Bingxuan [addresses](#) a DPRK Embassy event commemorating Kim Jong Il's 80th birth anniversary.

Feb. 18, 2022: PRC and ROK nuclear envoys [hold](#) telephone talks.

Feb. 20, 2022: Korean Sport and Olympic Committee [confirms](#) South Korea's decision not to appeal the Beijing Winter Olympics refereeing of short-track speed skating.

Feb. 21, 2022: Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un [exchange](#) messages on the Beijing Winter Olympics closing.

Feb. 25, 2022: PRC and ROK foreign ministers hold video talks.

March 10, 2022: China's foreign ministry in a regular press briefing [congratulates](#) ROK President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol on his election victory.

March 11, 2022: President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol and PRC Ambassador Xing Haiming [meet](#) in Seoul.

March 22, 2022: Kim Jong Un [sends](#) a condolence message to Xi Jinping over a China Eastern airline crash.

March 23–24, 2022: Chinese (March 23) and Russian (March 24) military planes enter South Korea's air defense identification zone (KADIZ) without notice.

March 24, 2022: President Moon Jae-in [sends](#) a condolence message to Xi Jinping over China Eastern airlines' crash.

March 24, 2022: US State Department [announces](#) new sanctions on entities and individuals in Russia, North Korea, and China for proliferation activities.

March 25, 2022: Pyongyang test-fires an ICBM into the East Sea.

March 25, 2022: Xi Jinping and Yoon Suk-yeol [hold](#) telephone talks.

March 26, 2022: PRC and ROK nuclear envoys [hold](#) telephone talks.

April 6, 2022: Seoul's transition team leader Ahn Cheol-soo [meets](#) PRC Ambassador Xing Haiming.

April 29, 2022: China and North Korea [resume](#) an international trade fair online after a seven-year hiatus. They suspend Dandong–Sinuiju freight train operations over renewed COVID-19 concerns.

April 29, 2022: ROK Trade Minister Yeo Han-koo [meets](#) PRC Ambassador Xing Haiming in Seoul.

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

THE COLD PEACE CONTINUES

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Intermittent declarations of intent to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations notwithstanding, China-Japan tensions continued unabated. No high-level meetings were held between the two, but rather between each and its respective partners: China with Russia, and Japan with members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as well as separately, with Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. All of the latter had apprehension over Chinese expansionism as their focus. Both the Chinese and Japanese economies sputtered in response to COVID lockdowns and the rising cost of energy but trade relations were robust and expected to increase as the number of new COVID cases declines. However, each side continued to develop its military capabilities, with China continuing to voice irritation with Japan for its obvious, though largely tacit, support for Taiwan's autonomy.

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Politics

Rather than interacting with one another to state their grievances and work toward resolutions, Japanese and Chinese diplomats and statesmen spent much of the reporting period speaking about the other country's threatening actions and statements. Chinese diplomats, in particular, tended to place blame on a small group of Japanese right-wingers and their US allies. In January, Yang Yu, China's charge d'affaires to Japan, [described](#) China-Japan ties like "a boat sailing against the current...we must forge ahead or it will be driven back." An April [seminar](#) hosted by the Japan-China Investment Promotion Organization to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of bilateral relations, saw Chinese Ambassador to Tokyo Kong Xuanyou describing relations as being at a crossroads, listing three main areas where Japan needed to improve, and implying that economic relations might suffer if improvements were not made. He pointed out that China-Japan trade volume is about the same as that with the US and EU combined. Leaving little doubt about which country is the driver of relations, *Kyodo* reported that China was [considering](#) a face-to-face ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations with Japan and would invite "political and business leaders who have contributed to the development of relations" between the two countries, implying that those not considered friendly to China would be omitted from the guest list.

As relations continue to deteriorate Hayashi Yoshimasa—who resigned as head of the Japan-China Friendship Association to become foreign minister—has proved a disappointment, from China's point of view, in his new role. In a January speech to the Diet, Hayashi [emphasized](#) that China's efforts to change the status quo in the East China Sea could not be tolerated, that peace and security in the Taiwan Strait are important, and expressed concern over the human rights situations in Xinjiang and Tibet. However, he said Japan would handle the issues "in a level-headed and resolute way" while helping build a constructive and stable relationship ahead of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China-Japan diplomatic normalization.

Other Japanese statements that alarmed China, included Kishida telling Biden that he "intends to [consider](#)" the possession of capabilities to attack enemy bases. The two leaders agreed to create an

economic version of the "2+2" foreign and defense ministers meeting in response to China's efforts at economic coercion through controlling supply networks and confirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, as well as to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, both of which are anathema to China. After the meeting, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kihara Seiji added that the prime minister would [consider](#) "all options including acquiring preemptive strike capability." Soon after this, the Chinese foreign ministry [accused](#) Japan and the United States of "baselessly smear[ing] and attack[ing] China and wantonly interfer[ing] in China's domestic affairs at their recent meeting as well as "holding to Cold War mentalities and inciting ideological antagonism."

The two sides continued to snipe at each other. [Responding](#) to Japan's House of Representatives adopting a resolution of concern on China's policies in Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Hong Kong, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson stated that, given the innumerable wartime crimes Japan had committed (presumably referring to the period during and leading up to World War II), it had no authority whatsoever to speak on the topic. And two articles that appeared on the same day in *Asahi*, a paper normally accommodative to the PRC, criticized China's policy of [disappearing](#) people, provided biosketches of the more prominent names of the missing, and editorialized that China's Olympic diplomacy risked creating rifts by not urging Russian President Vladimir Putin to refrain from reckless military action and by [expressing](#) support for the Kazakh government's suppression of rioting without condemning the brutality of the suppression.

Japanese citizens in China faced increased media, with media reporting that a Japanese man in his 50s had been [detained](#) in Shanghai since December despite no charges known to have been made against him. In a separate incident a few days later, after an investigation into the Japanese embassy's [complaint](#) that one of its diplomats had been detained in violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Chinese authorities announced that the Japanese claim was "not acceptable." Chinese media also [objected](#) to the Japanese ambassador to Canberra's statement that his country is fully behind Australia on the latter's allegation that a Chinese naval ship pointed a laser at its patrol aircraft. The hostile exchanges were reflected in

public opinion polls: according to an annual six-country [survey](#) by the Japanese Press Research Institute, the proportion of Chinese who have a favorable view of Japan has plunged 13.4 percentage points to an all-time low of 26.3%. By comparison, the figure for the US was 79%.

March brought no improvements. Ignoring Japan's security concerns about China absorbing Taiwan, the Chinese foreign ministry [accused](#) Tokyo of "exploit[ing] the situation in the neighborhood for a military breakthrough." *Yomiuri* [editorialized](#) that China could not achieve stability while complicit with Russian aggression and since its economic outlook was cloudy. *Japan Times* [faulted](#) China's more than three-decades-long military expansion for bilateral tensions rising even as China and Japan were becoming more economically interdependent. Japan's largest and second-largest circulation newspapers, the center-right *Yomiuri* and the center-left *Asahi*, editorialized against the PRC's declaring respect for territorial integrity while not opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with *Asahi* adding that such a stance will not win China the trust of the international community. For its part, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian [accused](#) Japan of using the Russia-Ukraine conflict to further its militarist motives.

Japanese diplomats continued to seek support from other countries, including those with whom it has key differences of opinion on current affairs, or those considered to be in China's orbit. [Concerned](#) for the cohesion of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad") among Australia, India, Japan, and the US, Kishida urged Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to take a clearer stance on the crisis in Ukraine. India would later refuse to allow Japan to transport aid to Ukraine through India. Kishida also visited Cambodia, a close ally of China, for talks with long-term Prime Minister Hun Sen. The resulting [joint statement indirectly](#) criticized some of China's actions in the South China Sea, since it reaffirmed the importance of sustaining peace, security, safety, freedom of navigation in and overflight about the South China Sea as well as non-militarization of the area. The director of Japanese studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences accused Japan of [using](#) the Ukraine crisis to push further against the constraints of its pacifist constitution. And, [responding](#) to the Japanese foreign minister's statement that Japan would help African countries escape China's debt trap, *Global Times*

described it as an absurd, futile attempt to slander Chinese-Africa cooperation. At the end of March, after more than 40 years and a \$29 billion expenditure, Japan [ended](#) its official development assistance (ODA) to China, with *Yomiuri* observing that Japan's generosity was not well-known in the PRC, nor had it supported democratization.



Figure 1 Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen at the welcome ceremony in Phnom Penh on March 20, 2022. Photo: Kyodo

Surprisingly, China had an unusually low-key [reaction](#) to Kishida's offering to the Yasukuni Shrine, with a foreign ministry spokesperson at a regular press briefing merely urging Japan to "completely cut itself off from militarism and win the trust of its Asian neighbors and the international community with practical actions." Although Kishida did not attend in person, former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and current LDP policy chief Takaichi Sanae did visit, as did a multiparty group of 103 Diet members that included ministers, for its spring festival, resuming a practice that had been interrupted by the pandemic.

Economics

Although its effects will not be known for some time, the Chinese-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership ([RCEP](#)) agreement formally entered into force. Comprising the PRC, the 10 ASEAN members, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, it will eventually allow the trade among the 15 to be conducted with zero tariffs.

But even as trade between them, and the rest of the region, looks to deepen, Japanese concerns about Chinese inroads into its traditional markets continues to mount. The controversial

Chinese company Huawei would follow Tesla by [selling](#) large-scale battery systems for renewable energy storage in Japan, with both Chinese and US companies able to sell at prices far lower than Japanese producers; China [became](#) the world's largest importer of liquefied natural gas in 2021, surpassing Japan, and the Chinese-based computer-generated anime is [challenging](#) Japanese animation studios, who have virtually dominated the global market in recent years. With China seen as catching up to, and in some areas surpassing, the US in quantum computing, Japan [aimed](#) to become self-sufficient in the area. The focus is to shift from basic research by institutions such as universities to measures such as support for start-ups. Although Japanese companies excel at quantum computing for secure data transmission, costly specialized equipment has been a hurdle to greater adoption. According to news released in April, Chinese companies have [displaced](#) their Japanese counterparts in producing automotive battery materials, which account for about a third of the price of EVs and a major factor in whether an EV can compete on the market.

China's role in import markets also continued to cause concern for Japan. In February, Japan's Cabinet Office [warned](#) that the country's import structure was "risky," with 23% of the country's imports in 2019 coming from China and that it would be more difficult for Japan than for the US or Germany to find substitutes if supplies from the PRC ran short. Trade data revealed that China had [become](#) the largest importer of Japanese goods for the first time in 2021, surpassing previous leader Hong Kong, with the US in third place. *China Daily*, citing *Asahi*, emphasized the supply chain [difficulties](#) for Japanese firms if the government's economic security bill became law. However, China's economic clout also resulted in Japan making some surprising choices on the energy front: in March, the Japanese government announced that it would [maintain](#) its interests in energy projects in Sakhalin despite sanctions on Russia since, if Japan were to give up its interests, China would likely take them. Japanese energy group JERA, one of the world's largest importers of liquefied natural gas, is [exploring](#) expanding its LNG business to China, with one scenario being that LNG stocks in China could be diverted to Japan to meet a shortfall.

Defense

Throughout the reporting period Japanese sources expressed alarm at China's military capabilities and Japan's perceived inability to counter them. Proposed steps for addressing these imbalances, however, generated debate, and not just between China and Japan.

In January it was reported that Japan and the United States are [deepening](#) their military integration, with one of the most important objectives being to stop Chinese forces before they cross the first island chain. Left-of-center Japanese publications, while not discounting the threat, tended to oppose these because of the cost. An *Asahi* editorial expressed [skepticism](#) about the government's plan to increase defense spending in the face of worsening fiscal problems due to higher social security payments and anti-pandemic measures. Measures intended to counter Chinese assertiveness were also implicit in Australia and Japan signing a defense [agreement](#) that would allow greater interoperability of their military forces. They [discussed](#) a forthcoming Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, pledged their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, and [clarified](#) such points as the status of personnel of each country in the other.



Figure 2 Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison sign a bilateral defense cooperation pact during their online meeting on Jan. 6, 2022. Photo: Kyodo

Then, at the virtual 2+2 meeting of foreign affairs and defense ministers, the US and Japan [agreed](#) to bring together their scientists and engineers to collaborate on emerging defense technologies, including ways to counter hypersonic missiles, increase the shared use of facilities, and affirmed their commitment to the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues. China countered, with a foreign ministry spokesperson [expressing](#) "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to

the 2+2 agreement, which a Chinese academic described as motivated by rightwing politicians to justify changing Japan's war-renouncing constitution by cooperating with the US to hype imaginary threats from China, Russia, and North Korea.

Observing the [mismatch](#) between Japanese and Chinese military strength, a *Nikkei* correspondent advocated giving the SDF the ability to strike back, stating that Japan must break with the tradition of restricting the SDF to defense while leaving reprisal to the United States. Center-left *Asahi*, [editorialized](#) that while Japan "may need enough defense to discourage China from taking actions that threaten the regional peace and security," excessive reliance on a military approach could heighten tensions: Japan should be seeking peaceful coexistence with China. Center-right *Yomiuri*, responded that since Spring 2021, MSDF destroyers had repeatedly [sailed](#) through waters outside the territorial waters of areas which China claims as its territorial waters but were inside its contiguous zone, citing a defense ministry spokesperson saying the operations were meant to warn China and protect freedom of navigation and the law and order of the sea.

Japanese sources noted with alarm that the country's defense industry is [contracting](#) even as the threat from China and North Korea grows: while weapons technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated, the amount of equipment ordered by the defense ministry has dropped by half over the past two decades, affecting Japanese companies' decision to withdraw from defense production. Meanwhile, in what a Japanese defense ministry official [described](#) as a race against time in national security, the island of Mageshima was chosen as a new training site for US carrier-based aircraft that are currently using Iwoto, for landing practice. In the first of a two part [interview](#) with *Yomiuri*, Abe described Taiwan as the biggest issue of 2022 and advocated that the international community continue sending support to Taiwan. He linked the issue directly to Japan's control over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, adding that there was room for Japan to get involved with the development of Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) defense equipment, that he supports deepening interaction with the Quad, and urged Japan to acquire striking power against enemy ballistic missiles and bases. Chinese Coast Guard vessels [patrolled](#) within the territorial waters of the

disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands on Jan. 15, for the first time in 2022. Chinese analysts stated that Japan must accept that the islands belong to the PRC and that such patrols are nothing out of the ordinary.

In a statement that must have further disconcerted Beijing, former SDF Chief of Staff Oriki Ryochi, chair of a study group on policy proposals for the upcoming revision of the National Security Strategy, advocated [enhancing](#) Japan's ability to act independently. While the alliance with the US was becoming ever more important, Oriki continued, the US must pay attention not only to China but to other regions and hence the SDF must become more active in the East China Sea and waters near the Japan Sea. Having the ability to counterattack, including enemy bases, would reinforce deterrence. Japan's defense ministry announced that it [scrambled](#) fighter jets against possible airspace intrusions 785 times from April to December 2021, the highest for the same period over the last five years, with 571, or over 70%, of the scrambles being against Chinese aircraft. As January closed, and following the "2+2" meeting and an increase in Chinese military activity in the East China Sea, Japan was [considering](#) the deployment of US military drones at the MSDF's Kanoya base in Kagoshima.



Figure 3 Ships of the America and Essex Amphibious Ready Groups and Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 3 transit the Philippine Sea with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force during exercise Noble Fusion. Photo: US Navy photo/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Matthew Cavenaile

With China and Russia making progress on the development of [high-power microwave \(HPM\) weapons](#), Japan's defense ministry announced in February that as of the new fiscal year in April it will begin full-scale research and development on HPMs. Following the intensification of

Chinese pressure in areas near Japan, US and Japanese forces conducted [exercise](#) *Noble Fusion* involving the Aegis-equipped *Kongo* destroyer, and a US aircraft carrier and amphibious assault ship. The GSDF's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, which is tasked with protecting remote islands, also took part. In response to [concerns](#) about leakage of classified information from defense suppliers who are exiting the industry, such as the May 2021 discovery that a Chinese company had obtained the designs of components of SDF machine guns and, in a separate incident, that China had acquired shares of a Japanese company that makes submarine antennae, the Japanese government is seeking 100 billion yen (\$8.7 million) for the FY 2022 budget to buy technical documents from such companies. Chinese media interpreted Abe's statement on a *Fuji Television* talk show that Japan should consider a nuclear-weapons sharing agreement with the US in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine as [unlocking](#) the country's militarism.

Following a statement by Abe about opening debate on nuclear sharing with the United States, in March some members of both the LDP and opposition parties called for a [discussion](#) on such an arrangement, to allow nuclear weapons, operated jointly with the US, to be stationed in Japan. Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party) leader Matsui Ichiro called for discussions on leasing US nuclear submarines, while Tamaki Yuichiro, head of the Democratic Party for the People, said at a press conference that the three non-nuclear principles "should be thoroughly discussed." Continuing this theme, while [speaking](#) to a gathering of the Diet's largest faction, Abe repeated his call to discuss the possibility of nuclear sharing, opining that if Ukraine had entered NATO it would have been protected through nuclear sharing. On the same day, Nippon Ishin no Kai submitted a policy proposal on nuclear sharing to Foreign Minister Hayashi.

Also in March, a Japanese amphibious rapid deployment brigade and Okinawa-based US marines held their first airborne landing and combat training exercise in [response](#) to growing maritime activity by China and Russia. Japanese analysts [interpreted](#) Tokyo's tougher response to the Ukraine invasion as likely to portend a stronger response to China so as to avoid encouraging Beijing to be incentivized to follow Putin's lead. Adding to Beijing's annoyance, Japan commissioned its first new *Mogami*-class

multirole frigate, [designed](#) to help defend the southwestern Nansei islands against Chinese expansionism. Additionally, responding to concern about Chinese military activities in the waters of the East China Sea, the Diet passed an expanded defense budget [aimed](#) at strengthening the alliance with the US. Included is a funding category of up to \$164 million for advanced virtual combat training systems for joint exercises between the two countries' forces. Chinese activities in the South China Sea were also noted, with *Yomiuri* complaining that the Chinese fishing vessels that [continued](#) to appear in the area off the Philippines were apparently not conducting actual fishing activities. In a clear mismatch of forces, the Japan Coast Guard had 69 patrol [vessels](#) of 1,000 tons or larger as of the end of fiscal 2020, while China had 131 of comparable size at the end of calendar 2020, and according to the Japanese defense ministry, the disparity is likely to widen.

With regard to a different area of defense, artificial intelligence, the investigation division of the Japanese defense ministry [established](#) the position of global strategy intelligence officer in response to the Chinese military's introduction of such advanced technologies as artificial intelligence.

April began with the Air Self-Defense Force announcing its intent to [upgrade](#) its irregular mobile radar unit on Yonaguni to permanent in response to increasing Chinese activities in the area. A GSDF coastal surveillance unit established in 2016 is to be joined by an electronic warfare unit as early as 2023. And Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo announced that discussions would proceed on acquiring the [capability](#) to attack enemy bases. Though not explicitly naming China as the reason, the "2+2" meeting between Japan and the Philippines agreed to begin formal [discussions](#) on a defense pact that would allow reciprocal visits by their troops for training and to increase interoperability in equipment. A US naval expert opined that because of public opposition to the cost, Japan could not [outpace](#) Chinese naval construction, although it can harness the latest technologies to increase the capabilities of its existing platforms. Other experts lamented that the MSDF's vision was still defense-centered and emphasized the need for supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles.

The draft of the National Defense Program Guidelines being prepared by an LDP commission [called](#) for changing the description

of China from “serious security concern” to “a threat to Japan’s security and increasing defense spending to 2% or more of GDP, from its current 0.957%. At the same time, the MSDF announced that one of its patrol aircraft had monitored the [passage](#) of a Chinese *Dongdiao*-class reconnaissance ship through the Tsushima Strait, though noting that it had not entered Japanese territorial waters.

Yomiuri continued a favorite theme, [editorializing](#) on the need for Japan and the US to work together to help coastal states improve their capabilities against China’s aggressive expansion into the South China Sea. A collaborative training exercise to the Philippine Coast Guard began, followed immediately by four Chinese Coast Guard vessels entering the territorial waters off the Senkakus.

Japan also expressed concern about [interdiction](#) of its seabed cables, most of which are concentrated in two landing stations, in time of conflict with China. Australian sources revealed that China had built a new long-range early warning [radar](#) that can be used to detect ballistic missiles from thousands of miles away, likely giving it coverage of all of Japan. Beijing, wary about the formation of an “Asian NATO” for some time reacted with derision to Abe’s address to the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, [warning](#) that Japan would become a laughing stock if it did not raise its defense budget in line with NATO countries’ 2% of GDP.

In what *The New York Times* [interpreted](#) as a move toward including Japan in the Five Eyes intelligence sharing partnership among English-speaking powers, prime ministers Jacinda Ardern and Kishida began talks on a “seamless” sharing of classified information. Realization of the degree to which New Zealand has been penetrated by Chinese influence activities and the recently concluded pact between Beijing and the Solomon Islands are thought to have shifted Wellington away from its past China-friendly policies. Stating that the [development](#) of new missiles, especially by China, had raised fears that Japan can no longer defend itself by only intercepting incoming missiles, the LDP’s Research Commission on Security recommended the use of the term “counterattack capability” to allow the SDF to strike an enemy base that is believed to be preparing for a missile attack against Japan. Komeito, the LDP’s coalition partner, had objected to the previously proposed term, “pre-emptive strike “on grounds that it

might violate Japan’s exclusively defense posture. Nonetheless, *Asahi* editorialized against the [proposal](#) to allow a counterattack capability on grounds that it could endanger Japan’s security should a mistake be made in judging an enemy’s intentions.

A perceived [linkage](#) between China’s avowed neutrality on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its expansive behavior in the Pacific region added an additional element to Sino-Japanese tensions. Foreign Minister Hayashi, without naming any country, described the security situation in the area as increasingly severe and affirmed that Japan and the US were fully prepared to take on any contingencies at any time. The Japanese Foreign Ministry’s 2021 Diplomatic Bluebook reiterated Tokyo’s perception of the linkage, adding to the previous edition’s concerns with China’s unilateral attempts to change the status quo.. However, in [response](#) Da Zhigang of the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences opined that the reason Japan had not reacted as strongly against China as against Russia was not only because of the upcoming 50th anniversary of normalization but because there “would be no diplomatic wiggle room for Japan if it defines both of its nuclear-armed neighbors as enemies at the same time.” [Concerned](#) that the recent agreement between China and the Solomon Islands could affect the security of the entire Indo-Pacific region, Japan dispatched its vice foreign minister to the area. And, as the report period closed, Japan [protested](#) the presence of a Chinese ship in its territorial waters.

Taiwan

Beijing continued to react against several examples of closer Japan-Taiwan ties. At a Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association meeting in January Chairperson Ohashi Mitsuo [called](#) for more chip tie-ups between the two with Taiwanese ambassador-equivalent Chiou I-jen thanking Japan for his country’s bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and stating that since Taiwan is of crucial importance to the world’s supply chain, economy, and trade, joining the CPTPP would greatly increase the importance and visibility of the pact in the global economy. In February, [removing](#) a major irritant to Taiwan-Japan relations, Taipei ended the overall ban on products from the Fukushima area, though some items will continue to be excluded. A few days later, in a step forward to

Japan's [diversifying](#) its semiconductor supply chain, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), along with Sony and auto parts maker Denso, announced that it would increase its investment in TSMC's first plant in Japan. The plant, to be built in southern Japan's Kumamoto, will be a joint venture called Japan Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing, JASM, with TSMC the majority partner.



Figure 4 President Tsai Ing-wen holds a videoconference with former Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo at the Presidential Office in Taipei. Photo: Office of the President, ROC

In March, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and Abe held a half-hour [videoconference](#) as part of an annual meeting of the 270-member Japan–Republic of China Diet Members’ Consultative Council. Among other statements objectionable to Beijing, Abe called for overcoming diplomatic and professional barriers between the two nations and reiterated support for Taiwan joining the CPTPP provided that it could meet the pact’s high standards. [Speaking](#) on a morning television talk show in April, Abe argued that it was time for the US to abandon strategic ambiguity about Taiwan and make clear that it would defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion, saying explicitly that a Taiwan contingency is also a Japanese contingency. In April he reiterated this call in an op-ed, [stating](#) that Xi Jinping must not doubt Japan’s resolve concerning Taiwan nor its intention to defend the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands, and urging the United States to make clear that it will defend Taiwan against any attempted Chinese invasion. In late April it was announced that a waiver had been [granted](#) from Taiwan’s inbound visa quarantine requirement so that an 11-person delegation from the LDP’s youth division could visit Taiwan from May 3–7 to pay their respects at pro-Japanese former President Lee Teng-hui’s grave and meet high-ranking Taiwan officials. The exchange, an annual event that is

unabashedly aimed at reinforcing friendly relations between Taiwan and Japan, is much resented by Beijing.

China did not meet these actions with silence. In late January, following US–Japan joint naval exercises off Okinawa, and Biden and Kishida vowing to ensure peace in the Taiwan Strait, the Chinese air force [sent](#) 39 warplanes toward Taiwan, the largest such intrusion since the record-setting 56 planes of Oct. 4, 2021. [Responding](#) to Abe’s urging of the US to drop its ambiguity, a spokesperson for China’s Taiwan Affairs Office criticized “certain people” for making malicious remarks and urged adherence to Beijing’s interpretation of the one-China policy.

The Future

While the most likely scenario is a continuation of the current controlled tensions between China and Japan in which Beijing moves toward its objectives of territorial and economic dominance, this could be changed by unlikely though implausible circumstances such as a “Minsky moment” implosion of the PRC’s property market that spreads to the rest of the economy, internally generated resistance to Xi Jinping’s effort to attain a third term as China’s president, or an invasion of Taiwan. Despite strong statements by conservative politicians, the Japanese public appears to be reluctant for the country to play a strong role on the international scene. For now, the impetus seems to be with China.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 1, 2022: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement [enters](#) into force.

Jan. 2, 2022: Komeito leader Yamaguchi Natsuo [advocates](#) Japan create a permanent framework which would include the US, China, and the other countries of the Indo-Pacific region.

Jan. 3, 2022: While not referencing threats, an *Asahi* editorial [expresses](#) skepticism about the government's plan to increase defense spending given worsening fiscal problems due to higher social security payments and anti-pandemic measures.

Jan. 5, 2022: Taiwan's foreign ministry [declines](#) to comment on reports that when, in February 2019, it proposed to the Japanese government that the two sides regularly exchange intelligence about the locations and activities of Chinese warplanes, it was turned down on grounds that the two have no formal diplomatic ties.

Jan. 6, 2022: Australia and Japan [sign](#) a defense agreement to allow greater interoperability of military forces.

Jan. 6, 2022: Beijing municipal government fines Japanese-owned 7-11 stores \$23,500 for describing Taiwan as an independent country on its website.

Jan. 7, 2022: At the virtual 2+2 meeting of foreign affairs and defense ministers, the US and Japan [agree](#) to bring together their scientists and engineers to collaborate on emerging defense technologies, including ways to counter hypersonic missiles, increase shared use of facilities, and affirm their commitment to the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.

Jan. 7, 2022: Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson [expresses](#) strong dissatisfaction with the 2+2 agreement, with an academic describing it as motivated by rightwing politicians to justify changing Japan's war-renouncing constitution.

Jan. 8, 2022: Chinese professor at Yokohama University [interprets](#) the Australia-Japan agreement and the US-Japan 2+2 meeting as Tokyo seeking to discard the shackles of its constitution by joining with the US to contain the PRC.

Jan. 9, 2022: Observing the [mismatch](#) between Japanese and Chinese military strength, a *Nikkei* correspondent advocates giving the Self-Defense Forces the ability to strike back.

Jan. 10, 2022: Center-left *Asahi* [editorializes](#) that while Japan "may need enough defense to discourage China from taking actions that threaten the regional peace and security."

Jan. 11, 2022: At a Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association meeting, Chairperson Ohashi Mitsuo [calls](#) for more chip tie-ups between the two; Taiwanese ambassador-equivalent Chiou I-jen thanks Japan for his country's bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Jan. 11, 2022: *Yomiuri* [reports](#) that since spring 2021, Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyers have repeatedly sailed through waters outside the territorial waters of areas that China claims as its territorial waters.

Jan. 12, 2022: Japanese defense industry reportedly [contracts](#) even as the threat from China and North Korea grows.

Jan. 13, 2022: Mageshima Island [is chosen](#) as new training site for US carrier-based aircraft currently using Iwoto for landing practice.

Jan. 14, 2022: Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [describes](#) Taiwan as the biggest issue of 2022 and calls on the international community continue sending support to Taiwan.

Jan. 14, 2022: Yang Yu, China's charge d'affaires to Japan, [describes](#) Sino-Japanese ties like "a boat sailing against the current...we must forge ahead or it will be driven back."

Jan. 14, 2022: Chinese company Huawei announces it will follow Tesla by [selling](#) large-scale battery systems for renewable energy storage in Japan, with both Chinese and US companies able to sell at prices far lower than Japanese producers.

Jan. 16, 2022: Chinese Coast Guard vessels [patrol](#) within the territorial waters of the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands on Jan. 15 for the first time in 2022.

Jan. 18, 2022: Kyodo [reports](#) that China is considering a face-to-face ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations with Japan and would invite "political and business leaders who have contributed to the development of relations."

Jan. 20, 2022: Former SDF Chief of Staff Oriki Ryoichi, chair of a study group on policy proposals for the upcoming revision of the National Security Strategy, [advocates](#) enhancing Japan's ability to act independently.

Jan. 20, 2022: China [becomes](#) the world's largest importer of liquefied natural gas in 2021, surpassing Japan.

Jan. 22, 2022: Chinese analysts interpret Biden's virtual [meeting](#) with Kishida as a probe to test Tokyo's loyalty to Washington rather than aimed at producing concrete results.

Jan. 23, 2022: Kishida [tells](#) Biden that he "intends to consider" possession of capabilities to attack enemy bases.

Jan. 23, 2022: China's air force [sends](#) 39 warplanes toward Taiwan, the largest such intrusion since the record-setting 56 planes of Oct. 4, 2021.

Jan. 24, 2022: Japan's ambassador to Poland [describes](#) Poles as finding promised China's economic benefits less than they had expected and advocates that Japan strengthen relations with Poland.

Jan. 24, 2022: China's foreign ministry [accuses](#) Japan and the United States of "baselessly smear[ing] and attack[ing] China and wantonly interfer[ing] in China's domestic affairs" at their recent meeting as well as.

Jan. 25, 2022: *Nikkei* reports that Japan [aims](#) to become self-sufficient in quantum computing, with China seen as catching up, and in some areas surpassing the US.

Jan. 25, 2022: Japan's defense ministry announces that it [scrambled](#) fighter jets against possible airspace intrusions 785 times from April to December 2021, the highest for the same period over the last five years, with 571 or over 70%, being against Chinese aircraft.

Jan. 26, 2022: In what *Yomiuri* says was aimed at [countering](#) China's growing influence in Tonga, Japan dispatches relief supplies to the island kingdom where China accounts for about 60% of external debt.

Jan. 28, 2022: Honda executive [predicts](#) that EV sales in China will make or break the company in the next five years.

Jan. 29, 2022: Japan reportedly [considers](#) deployment of US military drones at MSDF Kanoya base in Kagoshima.

Jan. 31, 2022: *Tokyo Review* [speculates](#) that Beijing's recent fairly restrained attitude toward Japan reflects its assessment that Washington is the real instigator of heightened tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

Feb. 1, 2022: Japan expert at Shanghai's Fudan University [expresses](#) concern that rightwing forces are slowly taking the initiative in Japan to provoke Sino-Japanese conflict.

Feb. 1, 2022: [Responding](#) to Japan's House of Representatives adopting a resolution of concern on China's policies in Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Hong Kong, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson states that Japan has no authority whatsoever to speak on the topic.

Feb. 3, 2022: Japan's Cabinet Office [warns](#) that the country's import structure was "risky," with 23% of the country's imports in 2019 coming from China.

Feb. 6, 2022: China [becomes](#) the largest importer of Japanese goods for the first time in 2021.

Feb. 6, 2022: With China and Russia [making progress](#) on the development of high-power microwave (HPM) weapons, Japan's defense ministry will begin full-scale research and development on HPMs in the fiscal year that begins in April 2022.

Feb. 8, 2022: *Asahi* [criticizes](#) the PRC policy of disappearing people and [editorializes](#) that China's Olympic diplomacy risks creating rifts by not urging Vladimir Putin to refrain from reckless military action.

Feb. 8, 2022: Taipei [removes](#) overall ban on products from the Fukushima area, though some items will remain excluded.

Feb. 9, 2022: US and Japanese forces [conduct](#) exercise *Noble Fusion* involving the Aegis-equipped *Kongo* destroyer and a US aircraft carrier and amphibious assault ship.

Feb. 11, 2022: Quad foreign ministers [meet](#) in Melbourne a week after China and Russia declared a "no limits strategic partnership," their most detailed and assertive statement to work together.

Feb. 15, 2022: In a step toward [diversifying](#) Japan's semiconductor supply chain, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, along with Sony and auto parts maker Denso, will increase its investment in TSMC's first plant in Japan.

Feb. 17, 2022: Media [reports](#) that a Japanese man in his 50s has been [detained](#) in Shanghai since December, though no charges are known to have been made against him.

Feb. 18, 2022: *China Daily* [emphasizes](#) the supply chain difficulties Japanese firms will have if the government's economic security bill becomes law.

Feb. 21, 2022: In response to concerns over leakage of classified information, the Japanese government [seeks](#) 100 billion yen (\$8.7 million) for the fiscal year 2022 budget to buy technical documents from such companies.

Feb. 22, 2022: Chinese media [object](#) to the Japanese ambassador to Canberra's statement that his country is fully behind Australia on its allegation that a Chinese naval ship pointed a laser at its patrol aircraft.

Feb. 23, 2022: After an investigation into the Japanese embassy's complaint that one of its diplomats had been detained in violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Chinese authorities [announce](#) that the Japanese claim is not acceptable.

Feb. 26, 2022: Japanese officials [warn](#) that the international community's failure to hold Russia in check would send the wrong message to China.

Feb. 27, 2022: Japanese Press Research Institute survey shows that the proportion of Chinese who [have](#) a favorable view of Japan has plunged 13.4 percentage points to an all-time low of 26.3%.

Feb. 27, 2022: Speaking on a morning television talk show, Abe [says](#) that it is time for the US to abandon strategic ambiguity about Taiwan and make clear that it would defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion.

Feb. 28, 2022: *Nikkei* poll [shows](#) that 77% percent of Japanese are concerned that Russia's invasion of Ukraine will spill over into China using force against Taiwan.

Feb. 28, 2022: Chinese media [interpret](#) an Abe statement that Japan should consider a nuclear-weapons sharing agreement with the US in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine as unlocking the country's militarism.

Feb. 28, 2022: *Xinhua* [reports](#) that, after a call by Abe to discuss nuclear sharing, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio informs the Diet that "it is unacceptable given our country's stance of maintaining the three non-nuclear principles."

March 1, 2022: Concern with China's increasing aggression is [believed](#) to be a decisive factor in the re-election of a pro-base and pro-Self Defense Forces mayor in Ishigaki, Okinawa.

March 2, 2022: Members of both the LDP and opposition parties [call](#) for a discussion on a nuclear-sharing arrangement with the US, with weapons to be stationed in Japan.

March 6, 2022: *Yomiuri* [editorializes](#) that China cannot achieve stability while complicit with Russian aggression and its economic outlook is cloudy.

March 7, 2022: *Japan Times* [faults](#) China's long military expansion for rising bilateral tensions.

March 8-9, 2022: Japan's largest and second-largest circulation newspapers, the center-right *Yomiuri* and the center-left *Asahi*, [editorialize against](#) the PRC's declaring respect for territorial integrity while not opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

March 11, 2022: *Kyodo* [predicts](#) China may take a softer approach to Japan to curb possible economic downturn as Xi Jinping is eager to secure a third term as leader, but that Tokyo is unlikely to reciprocate.

March 14, 2022: Sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine reportedly [give](#) Japanese banks huge leverage over the Chinese economy.

March 15, 2022: Japanese amphibious rapid deployment brigade and Okinawa-based US marines [hold](#) first airborne landing and combat training exercise.

March 17, 2022: Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian [accuses](#) Japan of using the Russia-Ukraine conflict to further its militarist motives.

March 20, 2022: National security expert Takamizawa Nobushige [advocates](#) total security, including economic power, should be assembled in preparation for a deterrence by denial capability "against outrageous acts."

March 20, 2022: Japan's Coast Guard's Mobile Cooperation Team, now in its fifth year of guidance, has been [dispatched](#) to 14 countries to advise on tensions in the South China Sea and piracy.

March 20, 2022: Kishida [pushes](#) Indian counterpart Narendra Modi for a clearer response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

March 21, 2022: Japan analysts [interpret](#) Tokyo's tougher response to the Ukraine invasion as likely to portend a stronger response to China should it follow Putin's lead.

March 22, 2022: Japan commissions its first new *Mogami*-class multirole frigate, [designed](#) to help defend the southwestern Nansei islands against Chinese expansionism.

March 22, 2022: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and Abe [hold](#) a half-hour videoconference as part of an annual meeting of the 270-member Japan-Republic of China Diet Members' Consultative Council. Abe reiterates support for Taiwan joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership.

March 23, 2022: [Responding](#) to Abe's video call to Tsai, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office [criticizes](#) "certain people" for making malicious remarks.

March 23, 2022: Director of Japanese studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences [accuses](#) Japan of using the Ukraine crisis to push further against the constraints of its pacifist constitution.

March 25, 2022: Japan's Diet [passes](#) an expanded defense budget aimed at strengthening the alliance with the US, including up to \$164 million for advanced virtual combat training systems for joint exercises.

March 26, 2022: *Yomiuri* [complains](#) that Chinese fishing vessels continue to appear in the South China Sea off the Philippines.

March 28, 2022: *Global Times* [responds](#) to Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa's statement that Japan would help African countries escape China's debt trap, calling it an absurd, futile attempt to slander Chinese-Africa cooperation.

March 28, 2022: *Xinhua* reports the opening of an [exhibition](#) on China's terra cotta warriors at a museum in Kyoto, in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations.

March 29, 2022: Japan's defense ministry [says](#) the disparity—in which Japan's Coast Guard had 69 patrol vessels of 1,000 tons or larger as of the end of fiscal 2020, compared to China's 131 of comparable size at the end of calendar 2020—is likely to widen.

March 30, 2022: Investigation division of the Japanese defense ministry [establishes](#) global strategy intelligence officer position in response to the Chinese military's introduction of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence.

March 31, 2022: Chinese Ministry of Defense spokesperson [reiterates](#) that Taiwan is China's internal affair that Japan must stay out of.

April 1, 2022: Air Self-Defense Force [says](#) it will upgrade its irregular mobile radar unit on Yonaguni to permanent in response to increasing Chinese activities in the area.

April 1, 2022: Japan [ends](#) official development assistance to China after 40 years.

April 2, 2022: Japan's ambassador to Australia warns Canberra against overreliance on Chinese trade.

April 4, 2022: Chinese companies have [displaced](#) their Japanese counterparts in producing automotive battery materials, which account for about a third of the price of EVs and are a major factor in whether an EV can compete on the world market.

April 5, 2022: Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo [announces](#) that discussions will proceed on acquiring the capability to attack enemy bases.

April 9, 2022: 2+2 meeting between Japan and the Philippines [agrees](#) to formal discussions on a defense pact that will allow reciprocal visits by their troops for training and to increase interoperability in equipment.

April 12, 2022: Abe [states](#) that Xi must not doubt Japan's resolve concerning Taiwan, nor its intention to defend the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands and urges the United States to abandon its policy of strategic ambiguity and make clear that it will defend Taiwan against any attempted Chinese invasion.

April 11, 2022: US naval expert opines that Japan cannot [outpace](#) Chinese naval construction, recommending that it harness the latest technologies to increase the capabilities of its existing platforms.

April 12, 2022: MSDF patrol aircraft [monitors](#) the passage of a Chinese *Dongdiao*-class reconnaissance ship that passed through the Tsushima Strait though without entering Japanese territorial waters.

April 12, 2022: Draft of the National Defense Program Guidelines under preparation by an LDP commission [calls](#) for changing the description of China from "serious security concern" to "a threat to Japan's security" and increasing defense spending to 2% or more of GDP from its current 0.957%.

April 12, 2022: Two Chinese academics [urge](#) the International Court of Justice to issue an advisory opinion on the illegality of Japan's planned dumping of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the sea.

April 16, 2022: *Yomiuri* [editorializes](#) on the need for Japan and the US to work together to help coastal states improve their capabilities against China's aggressive expansion into the South China Sea.

April 18, 2022: Japanese energy group JERA is [exploring](#) expanding business operations to include China, with one scenario being that LNG stocks in the PRC be diverted to Japan to meet a shortfall. JERIA is also engaged in building facilities in Vietnam.

April 18, 2022: Japan [expresses](#) concern about interdiction of its seabed cables, most of which are concentrated in two landing stations, in time of conflict with China.

April 18, 2022: Australian sources [reveal](#) that China has built a new long-range early warning radar that can be used to detect ballistic missiles from thousands of miles away, likely giving it coverage of all of Japan.

April 19, 2022: Reacting to a sharp slowdown in exports to China, rising energy prices, and the conflict in Ukraine, Japan's March trade deficit [amounts to](#) more than four times that of market forecasts, though the economy is predicted to grow to an annualized 4.9% in the current quarter.

April 20, 2022: *Global Times* [reports](#) that a well-known Japanese lawyer has organized a grassroots "emergency rally" to persuade his government to return Chinese relics stolen during World War II.

April 20, 2022: China [has](#) an unusually low-key reaction to Kishida's offering to the Yasukuni Shrine.

April 22, 2022: In an address to the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, Abe [warns](#) that Japan will become a laughing stock if it doesn't raise its defense budget in line with NATO countries' 2% of GDP.

April 22, 2022: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand and Kishida [begin](#) talks on a "seamless" sharing of classified information; *The New York Times* [interprets](#) this as a move toward including Japan in the Five Eyes intelligence sharing partnership.

April 22, 2022: LDP Research Commission on Security [recommends](#) use of the term "counterattack capability" to allow the SDF to strike an enemy base should it be believed to be preparing for a missile attack against Japan.

April 23, 2022: *Asahi* [editorializes](#) against the proposal to allow a counterattack capability on grounds that it could endanger Japan's security should a mistake be made in judging an enemy's intentions.

April 23, 2022: Commander of the US 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, speaking to US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel and Foreign Minister Hayashi aboard the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln*, [links](#) Russian aggression in Ukraine with Chinese expansion in the Pacific region.

April 23, 2022: A multiparty group of 103 Diet members including ministers visit the Yasukuni Shrine on its spring festival, resuming a practice interrupted by the pandemic.

April 23, 2022: In response to the publication of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Blue Book, Da Zhigang of the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences [opines](#) that the reason Japan had not reacted as strongly against China as against Russia was not only because of the upcoming 50th anniversary of normalization but because there "would be no diplomatic wiggle room for Japan if it defines both of its nuclear-armed neighbors as enemies at the same time."

April 23, 2022: [Granted](#) a waiver from Taiwan's inbound visa quarantine requirement, an 11-person delegation from the LDP's youth division is to visit Taiwan May 3-7 to pay respects at former President Lee Teng-hui's grave and meet high-ranking Taiwan officials.

April 27, 2022: At a seminar hosted by the Japan-China Investment Promotion Organization to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations, the Chinese ambassador to Tokyo [describes](#) relations as at a crossroads, listing three main areas where Japan needed to improve, and points out that Sino-Japanese trade volume is about the same as that with the US and EU combined.

April 27, 2022: Professor at Japan's Chuo University [warns](#) that Japan's support for the US position on Ukraine could backfire against its economy.

April 30, 2022: Japan [protests](#) the presence of a Chinese ship in its territorial waters.

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COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

SOUTH KOREA'S NEW PRESIDENT AND A SEOUL-TOKYO RESET?

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What impact will the victory of Yoon Seok-yul in South Korea's presidential elections have on Seoul-Tokyo relations? During his campaign, Yoon repeatedly [emphasized](#) the "strategic importance of normalizing" and improving relations with Japan. It was an open secret that Yoon was Tokyo's preferred candidate. With his May inauguration, opportunities for a diplomatic reset are on the horizon. Unsurprisingly, however, Japan is responding cautiously to overtures. Prime Minister Kishida Fumio sent his foreign minister to Yoon's inauguration on May 10, instead of attending himself, especially as he looks to the Upper House election in July. Seoul and Tokyo will probably schedule a long-awaited summit meeting when they begin to move toward addressing the issue of wartime forced laborers. That issue has strained bilateral ties since the South Korean Supreme Court [ruled](#) in favor of Korean wartime forced laborers in separate decisions in late 2018, leading to drawn-out legal processes against the court orders. Yoon's election win has not changed the Japanese position, which maintains that the reparations issue was fully settled by the 1965 normalization treaty.

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South Korea's Foreign Policy Changes and Japan

At stake in South Korea's March 9 presidential election was Seoul's role in the shaping of international order, an impact more far-reaching than any other election. The two rival candidates—Lee Jae-myung of the incumbent progressive Democratic Party and Yoon Seok-yul of the main opposition conservative People Power Party—presented competing visions of South Korea's foreign policy, with promises to take the country in a different direction in terms of its place in regional and global affairs. President-elect Yoon [speaks of](#) the need for South Korea to take a more proactive role in global diplomacy and “to firmly demonstrate [its] attitude of respect for the international rules-based order.” The outcome of this election will likely bring the foreign policies of South Korea and Japan into closer alignment than during the Moon Jae-in presidency.

South Korea's policy toward North Korea will go through significant changes under Yoon. Compared to Lee, who shares the assumption with Moon that dialogue and other positive incentives can lead Pyongyang to denuclearize, Yoon believes Pyongyang should first take steps toward denuclearization before any positive incentives, such as the lifting of sanctions, are offered. Japan's North Korea policy, under Kishida and his predecessors Suga Yoshihide and Abe Shinzo, has primarily rested on pressure and sanctions over dialogue, even while Tokyo was open to a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for resolution of the abduction issue.

The alliance with the United States is another area where we might see more coordination and alignment of views between Seoul and Tokyo. During the campaign, the foreign policy platforms of the two candidates in large part represented conservative and progressive camps, with Yoon pledging to restore and strengthen the alliance with the US. Yoon's victory means that governments in both Japan and South Korea will place a strong alliance with the US at the center of their foreign policies.

This also promises stronger trilateral US-Korea-Japan security cooperation over North Korea, which will in turn work favorably for Seoul-Tokyo relations. Trilateral coordination on North Korea has been robust under the Biden administration. Following a record number of missile tests by North Korea, top nuclear envoys of the US, South Korea, and Japan [met](#) in Hawaii

on Feb. 10 to discuss ways to restart dialogue with North Korea. Coordination continued when the top diplomats of each country [met](#) in Hawaii two days later to discuss North Korean provocations, how to hold them accountable, and ways to restart negotiations. South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong also had his first face-to-face meeting with Japanese counterpart Hayashi Yoshimasa, who took office in October 2021.



Figure 1 South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui Yong, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa meet in Honolulu on Feb. 12, 2022. Photo: Japanese Foreign Ministry

US and Japanese policymakers will pay a great deal of attention to how South Korea's new government will navigate its relationship with China. South Korea's China policy under Yoon may move away from the Moon government's position of avoiding decisions on regional issues that appear to take sides between Washington and Beijing. It is still unclear whether the change in South Korea's approach to Beijing will be nuanced or bold, and what such a change might mean for South Korea's relations with Japan. Still, Yoon's desire to play a more proactive role in shaping the contours of international order is likely to facilitate tighter cooperation among the three countries in nontraditional security areas such as energy, technology, and communication. US President Joe Biden's scheduled visit to South Korea and Japan in late May will further strengthen the effort.

Yoon's Search for Breakthrough and Japan's Response

President-elect Yoon has called for a mutually beneficial, "future-oriented" relations in the mold of a Kim-Obuchi 2.0 era in [writing](#), in [interviews](#), and in [meetings](#) with the Japanese. The signal has been unequivocal. He even

[promised](#) in his first interview as president-elect that bilateral relations “will go well.” Yoon believes the previous administration exploited bilateral relations for domestic political gain, causing relations to hit rock bottom. He has vowed to separate diplomatic and economic issues from domestic politics, and to seek comprehensive solutions to disputes over history, trade, and security.

This optimism is buoyed by Yoon's desire to look to the future, and by Kishida's promise of a “realist diplomacy for a new era.” The day after Yoon's victory, the two leaders spoke on the phone and agreed that they should meet to mend ties. After the call, Kishida [told](#) reporters that “Japan and South Korea are important neighbors and healthy bilateral ties are essential in protecting the rules-based international order and in ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and the world.” Kishida was the second leader to speak with Yoon, after President Biden.

In late April, Yoon sent a delegation to Japan for policy consultations. The delegation, led by five-term lawmaker and National Assembly Vice Speaker Chung Jin-suk, is the second special delegation sent by Yoon, following a group that visited Washington the first week of April. Prior to the trip, Chung [told](#) Korean media that the new administration wants “future-oriented” relations with Japan and emphasized that “Yoon's thought is that restoring ties between South Korea and Japan, which have been left unattended at one of their worst points, serves our national interests.”

During the first day of meetings on April 25, the delegation [met](#) Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi and Trade Minister Hagiuda Koichi, where they discussed bilateral issues and export controls. On April 26, the delegation met and delivered a letter from Yoon to Kishida. During their 25-minute meeting, Prime Minister Kishida [said](#) “there is no time to waste in improving Japan-South Korea relations,” and that “strategic cooperation between Japan and South Korea, and among Japan, the US, and South Korea, is more necessary than ever.” In a press conference after the meeting, Kishida [said](#) “fulfilling promises made to each other is a basic rule between nations,” referencing recent disputes over wartime forced labor and women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military (“comfort women”). Chung, head of the Korean delegation, [told](#) reporters after the

meeting that they agreed to work together for “shared interests,” and that Kishida shared Yoon's desire for a forward-looking relationship while facing up to shared history, in the [spirit](#) of the Japan-South Korea Joint Declaration of 1998 between Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo and President Kim Dae-jung.

Prior to the South Korean delegation's visit, it was unclear whether a meeting with Kishida would take place. According to a [Japanese media outlet](#), Kishida made the decision to meet the delegation only after hearing the report of Foreign Minister Hayashi's exchanges with the delegation the day before. Some within his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) questioned whether it would be helpful for Kishida to meet with the delegation without a tangible sign that Seoul is taking steps to resolve the forced labor issue. Kishida recently [singled](#) out this issue as a “major sticking point” in the relationship. Ultimately, he met the delegation and reiterated Japan's position on the issue.



Figure 2 A delegation of foreign policy aides to South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol meets Prime Minister Kishida Fumio in Tokyo on April 26, 2022. Photo: Kyodo

Both Kishida and Yoon agree that bilateral relations cannot remain as is and need repairing as soon as possible. However, challenges ahead are not small for both men. Within the LDP, there is a skeptical view that [predicts](#) that South Korea will change its position again and that Japan may lose face if it agrees to take steps to improve relations with Seoul now. Japanese public opinion is also pessimistic. According to a [Kyodo News survey](#) in late March, 72.2% of Japanese respondents remain skeptical about major changes in Japan's relations with South Korea, answering that Seoul-Tokyo relations will not change under Yoon despite his willingness to improve relations. Only 18.9% said that bilateral relations will improve. The same survey showed

that 42.1% said that they would cast proportional representation votes for the ruling LDP this summer.

Kishida will likely wait until after the July Upper House election to meet Yoon, instead sending his foreign minister to his inauguration. A hypothetical scenario where Kishida's in-person attendance at Yoon's inauguration is followed by South Korea's scheduled liquidation of Japanese companies' assets would pose a political risk for him in the Upper House ballot. However, it is worth noting that within Japan, there are those who argue that Kishida should use the inauguration ceremony as an opportunity to reset relations with South Korea. In an editorial, Japan's the left-leaning *Asahi* pressed Kishida to attend the inauguration to break a deadlock.

Despite Yoon's willingness to push for future-oriented relations with Japan, his government will have to work with political leaders in the soon-to-be opposition Democratic Party who do not share Yoon's views of Japan. The issue of wartime forced labor compensation will remain thorny in South Korea. According to the progressive South Korean daily *Hankyoreh*, Yoon's advisors are reviewing several options, including former National Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang's proposal that companies from both Japan and South Korea donate funds to compensate the plaintiffs. But any proposal that deals with this issue will require the Yoon government to work with the Democratic Party, which retains a majority in the National Assembly. In early January, news came out that the South Korean Supreme Court had on Dec. 27 [dismissed](#) a second appeal by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries against a court order to sell two patents to compensate a victim of forced labor. The first appeal was dismissed by the Supreme Court in September 2021. There is another pending case in a lower court in Daejeon.

North Korea

For now, it is perhaps on policy coordination over North Korea that Japan and South Korea's willingness to cooperate will be most visible. North Korea began 2022 with a bang, ringing in the new year with seven different missile tests in January, the most ever in a month. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February created a favorable environment for North Korea to

continue its testing campaign, as Russia and China are unlikely to support additional sanctions at the UN Security Council. As of April 30, it has [conducted](#) 13 different tests and demonstrated troubling technological advances. It broke a four-year self-imposed moratorium on ICBM tests on March 24, and said it tested new types of hypersonic missiles, long-range cruise missile, tactical guided weapon, and an ICBM, all part of Kim Jong Un's plan to [modernize](#) his military capabilities.

In early April, Japan responded to the North's ICBM test by [expanding](#) and [extending](#) unilateral sanctions. While the outgoing Moon government has [condemned](#) the North's provocations, it has not expanded sanctions in hopes of salvaging inter-Korean talks. The Yoon administration is expected to take a tougher stance toward the North, and to align more closely with the US and Japan.

North Korea held a military parade on April 26 to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Korean People's Army (KPA), and displayed new military capabilities, [including](#) a possible new solid fuel submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM). [Speaking](#) at the parade, Kim Jong Un vowed to speed up development of nuclear forces at the "fastest possible speed." Furthermore, his [ambiguous message](#) of an "unexpected secondary mission" for his nuclear forces if "any forces try to violate the fundamental interest of our state" has led many to conclude that he has updated North Korea's nuclear doctrine to be more aggressive—but there is no official North Korean nuclear doctrine.



Figure 3 An apparent new type of solid fuel missile rolls through Kim Il Sung Square on Monday, April 25, during a military parade in Pyongyang, North Korea on April 26, 2022. Photo: KCTV via NK News

The Yoon transition team [responded](#) to the parade by stressing the urgent task for South Korea to build the capability needed to deter the

North's nuclear and missile threats, including the [completion](#) of the three-axis system, which includes: 1) Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR), targeting North Korean leadership in case of a conflict, 2) the Kill Chain pre-emptive strike platform—which would target the North's nuclear and missile facilities—and 3) the Korea Air and Missile Defense system (KAMD).

Japan's proposed revision on April 26 to its security and diplomatic policies, including the National Security Strategy, is a reminder of the growing regional threats to Japan's security. The proposal specifically [mentioned](#) new hypersonic weapons being deployed by China and North Korea as impetus for Japan to acquire new counterattack capabilities for stronger deterrence.

As North Korea continues to systematically improve its military capabilities, expect both South Korea and Japan to continue bolstering their own capabilities. While the Yoon transition team [drew](#) the line at holding combined US-Korea-Japan military exercises for now, there are incentives for stronger security cooperation.

Korea-Japan Trade

Expectations are high in both capitals for economic relations to improve under the two new leaders. A late-April 2022 survey of 327 Korean companies by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) [showed](#) optimism for improved bilateral relations, with 45.3% of respondents believing in improved relations, while 44% expect no change. This is in stark contrast to a similar survey taken just six months ago by KCCI, in which only 12.9% of companies expected improved relations, while 80% expected the status quo to remain. There are many opportunities for the two governments to work together bilaterally and multilaterally, including but not limited to multilateral agreements such as the CPTPP and the Quad, digital trade, supply chain resiliency, economic security, among others.

The first quarter of 2022 saw positive developments in two major multilateral free trade agreements in the Indo-Pacific. The first was the 15-member Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest FTA (accounting for 30% of the world's GDP) which officially [took](#) effect for South Korea

in February 2022, making this the first FTA with both South Korea and Japan as members.

The second was South Korea's official decision on April 15 to [join](#) the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). South Korea will soon submit an official application, and the Yoon administration will work on the negotiations, which is expected to take at least one year. So far, seven of the 11 CPTPP members have [expressed](#) support for South Korea's membership, while Chile, Japan, Peru, and Singapore have yet to publicly express a position. South Korea [convened](#) a meeting of ambassadors from 10 CPTPP members on April 28, all except for Japan, and they expressed support. South Korea needs unanimous support from all 11 members for accession. According to government estimates, accession will [increase](#) Korea's real GDP by 0.33 to 0.35%, and boost trade and investment. If South Korea joins the CPTPP, it will be the second FTA involving both Korea and Japan.

South Korea's ban on seafood imports from eight Japanese prefectures near Fukushima, in force since 2013 over radiation level concerns, is likely to remain. The South Korean trade ministry has made clear that this is a health and safety issue, and said that lifting the ban is not a precondition for CPTPP membership, a position [reinforced](#) by the Oceans and Fisheries Ministry.

This brings us to the overall health of the bilateral economic relationship. The 2019 trade dispute between Korea and Japan over export controls brought about a series of tit-for-tat actions that led to a highly publicized deterioration of relations. In reality, the economic impact has been minimal. A recent study (a co-author is from the Bank of Korea) [quantifying](#) the overall economic impact found only a small “welfare loss of 0.144% (\$1.0 billion) for Korea and 0.013% (\$346 million) for Japan,” with minimal sectoral impacts, including a 0.25% decrease in the production of chemical goods in Japan. For [reference](#), South Korea's and Japan's GDP in 2020 were \$1.64 trillion and \$5.05 trillion, respectively. Furthermore, the graph below shows minimal change in the overall bilateral trade under the Moon administration, with 2021 numbers even surpassing 2017, the year Moon took office.

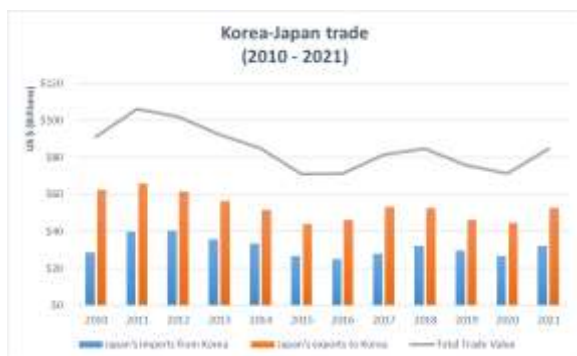


Figure 4 Korea-Japan trade between 2010-2021.
Source: UN Comtrade database

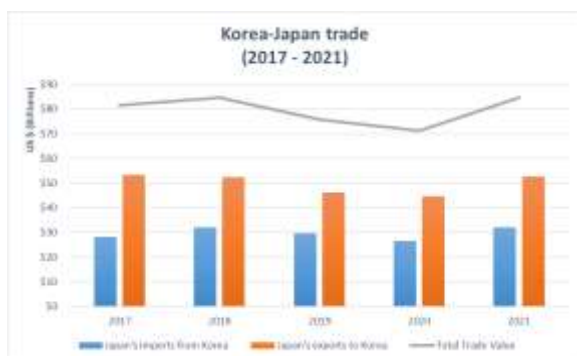


Figure 5 Korea-Japan trade between 2017-2021.
Source: UN Comtrade database

Lingering bilateral issues

While there is optimism in both capitals for better "future-oriented" relations under Yoon and Kishida, especially over North Korea and economic relations, many lingering historical and territorial disputes remain.

A new historical dispute emerged in late January 2022, when Japan [decided](#) to nominate the mine on Sado Island for the 2023 UNESCO World Heritage list. This was controversial because the mine is associated with Korean wartime forced labor, with as many as 2,000 Koreans forced to work there during World War II. The Korean foreign ministry and the Blue House strongly [protested](#) the decision and immediately [launched](#) a task force to thwart the bid. The issue will resurface during the Yoon administration as UNESCO is expected to visit the Sado mine this fall before deciding next May—a two-thirds majority of the 21 World Heritage Committee members is needed—whether to add the Sado mine to the list.

Conflict over different representations of history and claims of territory simmered again in late March when the Japanese government

[completed](#) its screening of high school textbooks to be used next year, which included removal of terms such as "wartime," "forced arrest," and "forced conscription" when describing forced labor victims and comfort women. The textbooks will also again write that Dokdo/Takeshima is an "inherent part" of Japanese territory. The South Korean foreign ministry protested by saying this distorts historical facts because the removal of terms dilutes the "coercive nature" of those acts and criticized Japan's "preposterous claims" over the disputed islet. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Matsuno Hirokazu [responded](#) by saying the Korean protest was "unacceptable" because those revisions are in line with the government's consistent stance on the issues.

Once Yoon comes to office, the thorny issue of comfort women is another reality that his government will have to address. President Moon has [questioned](#) the legitimacy of the 2015 agreement, believing it to be a flawed deal that excluded the victims and the public. His government dissolved the foundation created by the agreement. In the past year, South Korean courts have ruled for and against "comfort women" in separate rulings in [January](#) and [April 2021](#). There have also been mixed rulings by South Korean courts on whether Japanese government assets can be seized to pay legal costs, including two rulings in June 2021 with opposite conclusions, one [for](#) and one [against](#). It remains to be seen how President-elect Yoon will handle this delicate but important issue. One early indication came from Foreign Minister-nominee Park Jin, who has publicly [acknowledged](#) that the 2015 comfort women deal is an official one and that Korea and Japan will work together to "recover the honor and dignity of the victims."

On the issue of the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima, barring a deliberate action like the December 2021 [police chief's visit](#), or a diplomatic faux pas like the [Lunar New Year gift](#) in January 2022, the issue should not surface again this year. A Japanese day commemorating the islet—Takeshima Day—occurred in February, and Japan's annual diplomatic bluebook [protesting](#) Korea's "illegal occupation" was published in late April.



Figure 6 The image on the box of South Korean President Moon Jae-in's gift sent to foreign ambassadors in the country to mark the Lunar New Year. The gift was refused by the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, which claimed that the box bore an image of the contested Dokdo/Takeshima islets. Photo: Yonhap

There also remain concerns in Korea and other neighboring countries over Japan's [plan](#) to release more than 1 million tons of contaminated wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi power plant into the Pacific Ocean. Prime Minister Kishida has [stated](#) the planned disposal of wastewater—to start in Spring 2023 over the next four decades—should not be delayed when he visited the plant last October. A UN taskforce visited the plant in February 2022 to collect water samples and they are expected to release their findings at the end of April.

Looking to the Future

The timing of a Kishida-Yoon summit meeting will depend in large part on domestic politics in Japan and South Korea, which leads us to believe that it will be after the Upper House election in July. The key highlights of this summer will include President Biden's visit to Seoul and Tokyo in May, his first Asia trip, as well as the NATO summit in June, where the two leaders might attend. Barring a major eruption of disputes over history that changes the public mood, South Korea will likely reach out to Japan to begin a reset of relations. As cautious as the Kishida government is, the Biden administration's desire to see strained Seoul-Tokyo relations mended will be no small factor in Tokyo's deliberation to recalibrate its policy on South Korea. Kishida now has a willing partner in Yoon to work with, and many issues to cooperate on, including the one neighbor that routinely threatens both with missiles.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 11, 2022: Supreme Court of South Korea [dismisses](#) second appeal filed by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries against the forced sale of two of its patents to compensate forced labor victims.

Jan. 13, 2022: South Korea's Deputy Defense Minister Kim Man-ki, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner, and Japan's Director General for Defense Policy Masuda Kazuo [hold](#) phone talks to discuss North Korea's recent missile tests and reaffirm trilateral cooperation.

Jan. 17, 2022: South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [protests](#) Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa's remarks reiterating Japan's claim to the disputed islet of Dokdo/Takeshima during a parliamentary speech.

Jan. 17, 2022: US Special Envoy for North Korea Sung Kim, South Korea's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk, and Director-General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi Takehiro [hold](#) phone talks to discuss North Korea's missile launch.

Jan. 22, 2022: Japanese embassy in Seoul [sends](#) back the Lunar New Year gift box from South Korea's presidential office Cheong Wa Dae, claiming the box contains an illustration that resembles the disputed islet of Dokdo/Takeshima.

Jan. 28, 2022: Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [announces](#) plans to nominate the mine on Sado Island for the 2023 UNESCO World Heritage designation. South Korea protests because of the mine's ties to Korean forced labor during World War II, which may have included as many as 2,000 laborers.

Jan. 30, 2022: South Korea's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk and Director-General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi Takehiro [hold](#) bilateral phone talk to discuss North Korea's launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile the same day.

Feb. 1, 2022: RCEP (the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) [takes](#) effect for South Korea. This 15-member free trade agreement is the first to have both South Korea and Japan as members.

Feb. 1, 2022: Japan's Cabinet [approves](#) plan to submit the nomination of the mine on Sado Island to the UNESCO World Heritage list. Japan submits a letter of recommendation to the UNESCO World Heritage Center the same day.

Feb. 2, 2022: US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun, and Japan's Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo [hold](#) trilateral phone call to discuss North Korea's missile launches and denuclearization efforts.

Feb. 3, 2022: South Korea's presidential office Cheong Wa Dae [vows](#) to respond to Japan's nomination of the Sado mine in a "systematic and omnidirectional manner." South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong [lodges](#) a protest during a phone call with Japanese foreign minister Hayashi, voicing his "deep disappointment" over Japan's nomination.

Feb. 4, 2022: South Korea [launches](#) a government-private task force to respond to Japan's nomination of the Sado mine to the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Feb. 4, 2022: South Korea's Deputy Defense Minister Kim Man-ki, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ratner, and Japan's Director General for Defense Policy Masuda Kazuo [hold](#) phone talks to discuss North Korea's missile threat, reaffirm trilateral cooperation and reiterates plans to hold a trilateral defense ministerial in the future.

Feb. 10, 2022: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, South Korean Defense Minister Suh Wook, and Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi [hold](#) trilateral phone talk to discuss the North Korean missile threat and trilateral cooperation.

Feb. 10, 2022: US Special Envoy for North Korea Sung Kim, South Korea's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk, and Director-General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi Takehiro [meet](#) in Hawaii to discuss ways to restart dialogue with North Korea.

Feb. 12, 2022: South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi [hold](#) bilateral talks in Hawaii to discuss North Korea, shared history, and other bilateral issues. This is Hayashi's first in-person bilateral meeting with Chung since he took office in October 2021. Chung, Hayashi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [meet](#) for a trilateral meeting the same day, and call for North Korea to stop provocations and return to dialogue.

Feb. 22, 2022: Director-general for Asia and Pacific affairs at the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lee Sang-ryeol [calls](#) in the deputy chief of mission of the Japanese embassy in Seoul Naoki Kumagai to protest "Takeshima Day," an annual event about the dispute islet that is attended by Japanese officials.

Feb. 23, 2022: Seoul Central District Court [dismisses](#) damage lawsuits filed by two former Korean wartime force laborers against Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and Kumagai Gumi Co. Each sought 100 million won (\$83,800) in compensation. The court did not explain its ruling, but many believe it to be over the expiration of the statute of limitations, like previous rulings.

Feb. 23, 2022: South Korean FM Chung [meets](#) UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay in Paris and expresses concerns over Japan's nomination of the Sado mine to the UNESCO World Heritage list.

March 1, 2022: South Korean President Moon Jae-in [calls](#) on Japan to "squarely face history" and "take leadership as an advanced nation" during a speech commemorating the March 1st Independence Movement.

March 1, 2022: South Korea [opens](#) the National Memorial of the Korean Provisional Government, a new museum in Seoul dedicated to the history of the Korean Provisional Government.

March 10, 2022: Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [congratulates](#) South Korean president-elect Yoon Seok-yul for his victory in the presidential election, saying that "healthy bilateral relations are indispensable."

March 11, 2022: Prime Minister Kishida and President-elect Yoon [speak](#) on the phone for the first time since Yoon's victory. They agreed on the importance of improving ties and resolving pending issues. Kishida is the second leader to speak with Yoon, after President Joe Biden.

March 14, 2022: US Special Envoy for North Korea Sung Kim, South Korea's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk and Director-General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi Takehiro [hold](#) trilateral phone talk to discuss recent North Korean provocations, including tests of an ICBM system.

March 15, 2022: Busan City Government [releases](#) a plan to prepare for Japan's scheduled release of wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in 2023.

March 24, 2022: South Korea's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Noh Kyu-duk and Director-General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Funakoshi [speak](#) on the phone and call out North Korea's firing of a ICBM for breaking its self-imposed moratorium on ICBM testing.

March 28, 2022: President-elect Yoon [meets](#) Japanese ambassador to South Korea Koichi Aiboshi and calls for Korea-Japan relations to improve in a “future-oriented way” and for it to be “urgently restored to a good relationship as before.”

March 31, 2022: Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [announces](#) completion of textbook screenings for next year, with removal of words such as “wartime” and “forced” from some history textbooks. The South Korean foreign ministry protests the decision by summoning the deputy chief of mission of the Japanese embassy in Seoul Kumagai Naoki, calling it a distortion of history, a claim [rejected](#) by the Japanese.

March 31, 2022: Kim Eun-hye, spokeswoman for President-elect Yoon [reiterates](#) that Yoon’s stance against Japan’s distortion of history remains unchanged, after some criticisms that he did not directly condemn the recent Japanese action to change some of their history textbooks.

March 31, 2022: President-elect Yoon’s spokeswoman Kim [clarifies](#) that while the Yoon administration will seek stronger security cooperation with the US and Japan, it will not seek to hold trilateral combined military exercises.

April 1, 2022: Japan [announces](#) additional sanctions against North Korea in response to its ICBM launch last week. The new sanctions target six North Koreans, three Russians and four Russian entities for their involvement in North Korea’s nuclear and missile program, subjecting them to an asset freeze.

April 2, 2022: Four-day “Non-Freedom of Expression Exhibition 2022” [opens](#) in Tokyo, featuring the Statue of Peace, which is a statue [symbolizing](#) comfort women.

April 15, 2022: South Korean government officially [approves](#) plan to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). This would become the second FTA with both Korea and Japan as members, after the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

April 17, 2022: President-elect Yoon [announces](#) plans to send a special delegation to Japan from April 24-28 for policy consultations. The delegation will be led by five-term lawmaker and vice National Assembly Speaker Chung Jin-suk. This will be Yoon’s second special delegation, after the one that visited the US in early April.

April 25, 2022: South Korean special delegation [meets](#) Hayashi and Trade Minister Hagiuda Koichi and discusses bilateral issues and export controls.

April 26, 2022: South Korea’s special delegation [meets](#) Prime Minister Kishida. He says “there is no time to waste in improving Japan-South Korea relations” and reiterates that “strategic cooperation between Japan and South Korea, and among Japan, the US and South Korea, is more necessary than ever.”

PACIFIC FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

CHINA- RUSSIA RELATIONS

UKRAINE CONFLICT DÉJÀ VU AND CHINA'S PRINCIPLED NEUTRALITY

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Perhaps more than any month in history, February 2022 will come to symbolize how the states of peace and war can flip-flop in a few days, with dire consequences for the global order. On Feb. 21, just one day after the closing ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics, Russia announced its [official recognition](#) of the independence of the two breakaway regions (Donetsk and Luhansk) of Ukraine. Three days later, Russia launched its “[special military operation](#)” in Ukraine to end the “total dominance” and “reckless expansion” of the United States on the world stage (in the words of Russian Foreign Minister [Sergey Lavrov](#)). As the West imposed sanctions on Russia and rushed arms into Ukraine, China carefully navigated between the warring parties with its independent posture of impartiality.

This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal of Bilateral Relations in the Indo-Pacific*, Vol. 24, No. 1, May 2022. Preferred citation: Yu Bin, “China-Russia Relations: Ukraine Conflict Déjà Vu and China’s Principled Neutrality,” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp 147-156.

Russia's Fog of War

Russia's "special military operation" was a surprise to China. "Had China known about the imminent crisis, we would have tried our best to prevent it," said [Qin Gang](#), China's Ambassador to Washington. Qin's expressed intention to influence Russia's Ukraine policy would have been unlikely to be effective given the highly centralized foreign policymaking mechanism in Vladimir Putin's Russia and NATO's consistent move eastward. In the fog of war of words immediately before the Russian invasion, both [Russia](#) and [Ukraine](#) repeatedly dismissed the possibility of war despite the [US' insistence](#) that conflict was imminent. In retrospect, Beijing seemed inclined to trust "insiders" ([Ukraine and Russia](#)) while dismissing US "warnings" as premature and even disinformation. As a result, China did not begin to evacuate its citizens (about 6,000 of them) from Ukraine until after Russia's invasion started.

Moscow moved quickly to fill the information gap with Beijing. Within the first few hours of the invasion, Russian Foreign Minister [Lavrov](#) called his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and said Russia's military actions were the consequence of the "broken" commitment by the US' and NATO's expansion. Russia, therefore, was "forced" to take necessary measures to safeguard its own rights and interests, Lavrov added.

[Wang's](#) brief response conveyed three points: 1) China has always respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries; 2) China recognized the complex and special historical context of the Ukraine issue and that Russia's security concerns were legitimate; and 3) a balanced, effective, and sustainable European security mechanism should be established through dialogue and negotiation. While the first two points appealed to the warring parties, the third spelled out the China-preferred approaches to conflict resolution and final goals.

Putin and Xi conversed over the phone the following day. It was unclear which side initiated the call. Putin gave Xi "[a detailed account](#) of the reasons" behind Russian actions. Putin also told Xi that Russia was ready to send a delegation to Minsk for talks with Ukraine. [Xi](#) responded by saying that China supported efforts to resolve the Ukraine crisis via dialogue. The Chinese side believed that it received [a positive response](#).

In his teleconferences with top European diplomats on Feb. 26, [Wang Yi](#) reiterated his three principles on the Ukraine conflict while adding two additional points: the Ukraine conflict was "something China did not want to see," and the UN Security Council should play a constructive role in resolving the Ukraine issue. These five points constituted the core of China's policies in the conflict.

Beijing's quick moves in the first three days of the Ukraine conflict meant to define the parameters of its policy toward the warring sides. It was a sensitive and difficult endeavor given the cumulative pressure raised by all sides prior to Russia's invasion. In this regard, Wang Yi's note (the Ukraine conflict was "something China did not want to see") was genuine for at least two purposes: it said to the West/US that Beijing had no role in making the conflict, and it told Russia that its use of force was not a preferred option for China.

This was particularly needed because Putin's nine-hour working visit to Beijing on Feb. 4, before the opening of the Beijing Olympics, gave the impression of China's endorsement of the invasion. In the "Russia-China [joint statement](#) on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development" signed by Putin and Xi, China expressed its opposition to NATO enlargement and "is sympathetic to and supports" Russia's proposal "to create long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe." The joint statement also reaffirmed that "friendship between the two states has no limits" and "there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation" (for a full assessment of Putin's Feb. visit, see [PacNet #8](#) published on Feb. 16).

In retrospect, China's concordance with Russia before the Beijing Winter Olympics was largely a response to Biden's hardball approach to alliance-building and sanctions against both Russia and China. Regardless, closer alignment between Moscow and Beijing paralleled the further deterioration of US-China relations immediately after the start of the Ukraine conflict. On March 13, senior US officials leaked "intel" that Russia asked China for military assistance, a story rejected by both [China](#) and Russia. A few days later, Biden warned Xi of "[consequences](#)" if China provides "material support" to Russia. The US did not specify what constitutes "material support," thus allowing unilateral interpretation by the US with grave

implications for normal economic intercourse between China and Russia.

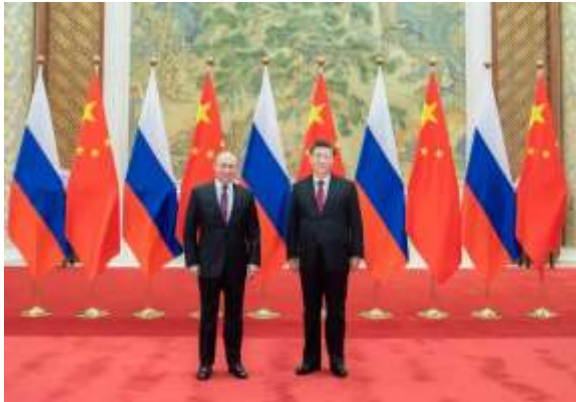


Figure 1 Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin pose for a photo prior to their talks in Beijing, China on Feb. 4, 2022. Photo: Alexei Druzhinin/Sputnik/Kremlin Pool Photo via AP

In addition, there has been heightened US diplomatic and military activities in China's vicinity, including Taiwan (e.g., House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's [planned](#), but ultimately aborted, visit to Taiwan on April 17). In addition, NATO's preoccupation with the Ukraine conflict in Europe seemed to accelerate its extension into the Indo-Pacific. On April 27, UK Foreign Secretary [Liz Truss](#) made the forceful declaration that the UK rejected "the false choice between Euro-Atlantic security and Indo-Pacific security" in favor of "a global NATO," and that NATO "must ensure that democracies like Taiwan are able to defend themselves."

The Ukraine crisis, therefore, defies the [conventional \(but inaccurate\) Western paraphrasing](#) of the Chinese notion of "crisis" as two separate characters of "danger" (危) and "opportunity" (机). It is—by all means, and in its authentic connotation—a dangerous time and should be handled carefully.

A Conflict of Asymmetries and Attrition

In many ways, the current Ukraine War is the continuation and expansion of its first phase eight years before, including its timing, after a different Winter Olympics. The only difference was that after months of violent demonstrations, the Ukrainian opposition parties [ousted](#) pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich before the end of the Sochi Winter Olympics. The ensuing Russian takeover of Crimea and eight years of low-level conflict in eastern Ukraine were typical "[gray-zone operations](#)" with restraint on both

sides. This time, Moscow unleashed its battalion tactical groups (BTGs) three days after the Beijing Winter Olympics with World War II-style blitzkrieg operations, only to be forced back to World War I-like trench warfare in eastern and southern Ukraine.

Russia's predicament was not unpredictable given the highly asymmetric nature of the conflict. Although Ukraine is much smaller and militarily weaker than Russia, it enjoys enormous support from the most powerful economic and military entities (EU and NATO), including access to round-the-clock intelligence, which was instrumental in [the sinking of the *Moscova*](#), an icon of the powerful Soviet Navy. As the conflict continues and escalates, it is becoming increasingly clear that neither side can afford to lose. As a result, China's balancing between the warring sides is becoming more delicate and difficult.

The Chinese government never used the singular term "neutrality" in its policy pronouncement on the Ukraine conflict. Instead, [it](#) described its policy as "aboveboard, objective, and impartial." On March 15, China's Ambassador to Washington [Qin Gang](#) reiterated these points in his article in *The Washington Post* as the principles of neutrality and impartiality. For conceptual clarity and brevity, the phrase "principled neutrality" is used here.

At the onset of the conflict, much of China's effort was to sort things out with the Russian side. As the conflict dragged on, however, more attention was directed to the Ukrainian side. In his [March 1](#) and [April 5](#) phone calls with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Foreign Minister Wang reiterated China's "fundamental position" on the Ukraine issue as objective, transparent, and consistent, while emphasizing China's deep concern about the damage done to civilians. On March 7, China put to the UN Security Council its [six-point proposal](#) for Ukraine's humanitarian relief, including a point that humanitarian action must be neutral and avoid the politicization of humanitarian issues, and that effective measures should be taken to protect civilians and prevent secondary humanitarian disasters in Ukraine.

Between March 9 and 14, the [Chinese Red Cross Society](#) provided Ukraine with three batches of emergency humanitarian assistance (5 million yuan). Another 10 million yuan (\$1.57 million) was added a week later. The two governments

also worked together to evacuate 6,000 Chinese citizens in Ukraine, which was largely completed in [early March](#). In a uniquely humanitarian effort to keep extended families together in a crisis, China is allowing Chinese citizens in Ukraine to bring with them the [parents](#) of their Ukrainian spouses.

To drive home China's balanced policy on the Ukraine crisis, China's Ambassador to Ukraine [Fan Xianrong](#) paid a visit on March 14 to Lviv Governor Maksym Kozytskyi and remarked: "I, as an ambassador, can say with responsibility that China is always an important partner of Ukraine in both economic and political terms ... We will respect the path chosen by Ukrainians because this is the sovereign right of every nation." Fan added that "China will never attack Ukraine...We are ready to help your development...We will take responsible actions. We have seen how the Ukrainian people demonstrated their strength and unity."



Figure 2 Chinese Ambassador to Ukraine Fan Xianrong meets with Lviv Governor Maksym Kozytskyi on March 14, 2022. Photo: Ukrinform.net

Fan's remarks were reported in [Ukrainian media](#) and endorsed later by the [Chinese foreign ministry](#). Chinese media, however, only cited Ukraine sources for Fan's remarks.

China's carefully calibrated Ukraine policy is driven by at least three factors: 1) Ukraine, too, is China's strategic partner. Despite the steady deterioration of relations between Moscow and Kiev, China-Ukraine relations have largely been normal, and Ukraine had been more generous in military-technological transfers to China. 2) Ukraine has been a key component of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2019, China surpassed Russia to become Ukraine's biggest trade partner. Two-way trade increased in 2021 by 35% to [\\$18.98 billion](#) and Chinese

firms signed \$6.7 billion in contracts in Ukraine in the same year. 3) China gains nothing from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As in the case of China's relations with Russia, the continuation and escalation of the Ukraine conflict will only increase China's already difficult relations with the West in general and with the US in particular.

By the end of March, the 5th round of Russia-Ukraine talks in Turkey ended with [signs of progress](#). Ukraine went as far as to propose adopting a neutral status while [Russia](#) started to scale down its military operations around Kyiv. When Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov arrived in China for the Third Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Afghan Issue Among the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan on March 30, he had something positive to share with Chinese host Wang Yi: Russia was committed to de-escalating tensions and would continue peace talks with Ukraine and maintain communication with the international community.

Lavrov's mission in China was to build relations with China "in a stable and consistent manner," said [Lavrov](#) at the meeting with Wang Yi. He urged that "concrete steps" be taken to ensure that all agreements signed by the two heads of state a month ago be "consistently implemented," according to Russian official media TASS.

In response to Lavrov's subtle concern about China's wavering support of Russia, [Wang replied](#) that China-Russia relations "withstood the new test of evolving international landscape, remained on the right course and shown resilient development momentum." Regarding the Ukraine conflict, Wang reiterated that China supported Russia-Ukraine peace talks. China also looked for the de-escalation of tensions on the ground, and efforts by Russia and other parties to prevent a large-scale humanitarian crisis. In the long run, lessons should be learned from the Ukraine crisis, said Wang.

The preliminary outcome of the 5th round of Russia-Ukraine peace talks was nonetheless [questioned by the West](#). The alleged [Bucha killing](#) of civilians by Russian forces in early April closed the door for a negotiated ceasefire, at least for the time being.

Limits of Sino-Russian “No-Limit” Strategic Partnership

The apparently unlimited potential of the Ukraine War to expand and escalate tested the limits of Russia-China bilateral relations.

The “unlimited” degree of the China-Russia strategic partnership was first articulated by Chinese Foreign Minister [Wang Yi](#) on Jan. 2, 2021. “In developing China-Russia strategic cooperation, we see no limit, no forbidden zone, and no ceiling to how far this cooperation can go (没有止境, 没有禁区, 没有上限),” he told *Xinhua*. He reiterated this to Lavrov in their [Feb. 4 2021](#) phone call.

In retrospect, Wang’s “no-limit” formula was driven by at least two factors. One was the search for a new conceptual framework to replace and transcend the traditional military alliance, which was dismissed repeatedly by both sides. Another driver of China’s search for new space to elevate relations with Russia was the Trump administration, when China-US relations hit a new low (over the trade war, the “Wuhan/China virus,” [Taiwan](#), etc.). For Russia, closer ties with China were desirable at a time when the marked [escalation](#) of the low-level Ukraine conflict went hand-in-hand with the Biden administration’s anti-Russian actions in 2021 ([\\$125 million in military aid](#) to Ukraine on March 1, 2021, the first round of [sanctions](#) on March 2 for Russia’s handling of the Navalny case, and Biden calling Putin “[a killer](#)” on March 17).

When the “no-limit” phrase was written into the joint statement signed by the two heads of state on Feb. 4, 2022, both sides seemed to gain something. For Putin, who may have already made up his mind about the Ukraine invasion, the “no-limit” cooperation with China meant additional assurance of China’s neutrality, which was the case in the 2014 Crimea crisis. For Beijing, Putin’s presence at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics was indicative of Russia’s strong support when the West launched a diplomatic boycott. By no means was it considered a blank cheque by China for whatever Russia did.

Regardless, the Ukraine war radically shaped Western perceptions, or misperceptions, of China’s “no-limit” cooperation with Russia. To alleviate this “[strategic conundrum](#),” China’s Ambassador to Washington [Qin Gang](#) clarified on

March 25 that “although Sino-Russian cooperation has no limits, it does, however, have its bottom line, which is the principle of the UN Charter.” The end of the Ukraine conflict through negotiations at the earliest possible time, therefore, serves China’s interests as well as the interests of all sides. “A worse Russia-US relationship does not mean a better China-US relationship,” added Qin.

Qin’s clarification of China’s “no-limit” Russia policy was necessary, particularly for a newly appointed ambassador (who arrived at his post in July 2021). Other senior [diplomats](#) in China, however, continued to use the concept for at least one reason: the Feb. 4 China-Russia joint statement is already conditioned by the usual anti-alliance component: “The new inter-state relations between Russia and China are superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era.”

Beyond the Ukraine conflict, the China-Russia strategic partnership has its own built-in “bottom lines” that set both upper and lower boundaries. As large and genuinely independent civilizational entities, Russia and China value their independence and sovereignty above all else. A military alliance with automatic interlocking mechanisms for security would inevitably deprive them of their freedom of action.

Perhaps more than anything else, the current strategic ties between China and Russia is a pragmatic relationship without the interface of political ideology. In contrast, the same communist ideology exaggerated the friendship during the Sino-Soviet alliance of the 1950s and amplified disagreements during their 30 years as adversaries (1960-89). Both sides paid enormous political, economic, and strategic costs for the wild swing from friends to foes. Since the normalization of their relations in 1989, the two sides have turned that asymmetrical and highly ideological relationship into one of pragmatic coexistence with close and flexible coordination. And they have every reason to preserve that relationship regardless of external distractions.

Beijing’s Ukraine Discourse

Lavrov had every reason in his late March meeting with Wang to seek a more affirmative assurance for [Russia’s war](#) “to end US

dominance.” For all the “unlimited” rhetoric, China’s support may not be automatic. First, there is the risk-averting behavior of [Chinese companies](#) that have already slowed down or avoided Russia-related activities, lest they be hit by secondary sanctions by the West. That is also why large [Chinese banks](#) are reportedly trying to circumvent direct operations with Russian clients. Although risk aversion is normal for any business, as was the case in the [post-Crimea years](#), Russia is keenly aware of the constraints of the Chinese side and the limits of bilateral economic ties even in normal times.

It is the seemingly ever-divisive public and intellectual space in China regarding the Ukraine conflict that may have caused additional concerns for Russia. From his close monitoring of the Ukraine discourse in China, [Alexander Lukin](#), one of the most prominent Sinologists of Moscow’s Higher School of Economics, noticed in his March 28 *National Interest* piece that China “has not yet formed its final position, which may be subject to change throughout the conflict.” China “won’t break with Russia over Ukraine but would persuade Russia to resolve the situation as quickly as possible.”

Lukin’s concerns about a polarizing Ukraine debate within China were echoed by [Yan Xuetong](#) of Tsinghua University in Beijing. In his *Foreign Affairs* piece on May 3, Yan described a “deepened political polarization within China by dividing people into pro- and anti-Russia camps.”

Both Lukin and Yan cited public opinion for their arguments. There is, however, a huge difference between the two. Whereas Lukin carefully documented some leading opinion leaders’ views, Yan cited only “anti-Russian sentiments” as evidence of China’s highly polarized public space.

Both, however, ignored the “not-so-silent” majority in China’s rapidly expanding Internet. Any casual peek at the vast Chinese chatrooms would reveal an active and diverse pool of opinions regarding the war. Official media may have contributed to this by being impartial with coverage of both Russian and Ukrainian official views. As a frequent commentator for CCTV’s popular experts’ panel *Focus Today* (今日关注), Professor Wu Dahui (吴大辉), a prominent expert on Russian and Ukrainian affairs, went as far as to cite directly from his own “deep throat” inside Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s inner circle. In late April,

China’s official *Xinhua* news service published the [full texts](#) of its interview with the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers. It was not a surprise that a recent [survey](#) indicates that 30% of respondents support Russia’s “special military operations,” 20% side with Ukraine, and 40% remain neutral.



Figure 3 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.
Photo: CGTN



Figure 4 Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba
Photo: Lev Radin/Getty Images

Beyond Ukraine, an increasing number of Chinese people with globalized interests and experiences, as well as foreign language capabilities, naturally prefer stability and predictability for their professional and personal activities. Their inclination toward a more balanced approach to the Ukraine conflict, or any conflict, has to be taken seriously by the government. In this regard, Beijing’s principled neutrality is not just a “[strategic predicament](#),” but also a reflection of the interests of the Chinese, no matter how difficult it is to operationalize.

A more important issue is how to interpret diverse views of the Ukraine conflict among China’s intellectual elite. Both Lukin and Yan gave disproportional attention to a few leading

critics of China's "pro-Russia" stance. Lukin nonetheless put them in the category of "private opinions not directly related to the official line." Yan, however, equated these rather minority views, albeit more vocal now, with a broad "anti-Russian sentiment among some Chinese citizens."

Those few "anti-Russian" academics, however, have been anti-Russia long before the current Ukraine conflict and have devoted much of their professional life to reminding their audiences about China's lost territories to both Czarist and Communist Russia. For better or for worse, they have been part of a diverse academic community, albeit with a trivial impact on policymaking. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, however, provided an opportunity to amplify their obsession with the past. And this time, they are joined by a sizeable Western-oriented intellectual elite, who were embarrassed, dismayed, and largely silenced by Trump's assaults on US political institutions, as well as his extremely hostile and racialized China policy (e.g., [Kiron Skinner](#)'s "civilization conflict" against a "non-Caucasian" China).

Yet even for the intellectual elite, Yan's *Foreign Affairs* piece missed a much larger group of political realists working on both Russian studies and broadly international relations. They are not necessarily pro-Russia or anti-US but are pragmatic and professional. The Ukraine discourse in China, therefore, should be understood as an interactive dynamic between at least three groups: policymakers, the general public, and the intellectual elite.

Finally, China's neutrality regarding the Ukraine conflict was the natural extension of China's "independent foreign policy," officially adopted in 1982 after China's huge swings between its "one-adversary" (anti-US in the 1950s and anti-Soviet Union in 1972-1981) and "dual-adversary" strategies (1960-71). These one-sided foreign policies were products of both the Cold War and a highly politicized and ideological domestic setting.

Conclusion: A Tale of Two Neutralities

The last time China declared [neutrality](#) in Russia's war was 118 years ago, when Japan's ascending Empire of the Sun was battling the vast and decaying Czarist Russia, ironically, in northeastern China. The Qing's neutrality in a

war on its own territory did not save the dying dynasty. It was the "neutral" US from the other side of the Pacific that brokered a deal for the warring sides. For this [grand deal](#) (at the expense of the sovereignty of both Korea and the Philippines), US President Theodore Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize. The end of the brutal Russo-Japanese War in China, however, was only the beginning of more wars, disunity, and social revolutions in Asia in the first three quarters of the 20th century.

In contrast to these formative decades of endless civil and foreign wars when China was weak and divided, its steady rise since the 1979 historic economic reforms has been accompanied by a largely stable and increasingly prosperous East and Southeast Asia. A *de facto* US-China *rapprochement* has also been instrumental for this state of affairs in the not-so-orderly post-Cold War Pax Americana (e.g., in the greater Mideast and now Europe). Many in China, therefore, prefer to stay away from the current Ukraine war, which can be defined as Huntingtonian "Western civil war" 2.0 (in his 1993 treatise "[Clash of Civilizations](#)," Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that the end of the Cold War meant the end of "Western civil wars" since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia), for both China's own interests and global stability.

China's current balancing moves can also be understood as an effort to return to its Confucian past for wisdom in a world of chaos. A key component of Confucianism is being moderate (中庸) or staying in the middle while avoiding extremes. In his 2011 [On China](#), Henry Kissinger defined traditional China's policy toward its neighbors as one of impartiality and pragmatism, which is very similar to Ambassador Qin Gang's depiction of China's principled neutrality in the current Ukraine crisis.

It remains to be seen how China's principled neutrality would affect the increasingly dangerous Western civil war 2.0.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 7, 2022: President Xi Jinping [sends](#) a message to Kazakh President Askar Katayev that China strongly opposes any effort to sabotage and threaten Kazakhstan's stability, security, and Sino-Kazakh friendship and cooperation.

Jan. 10, 2022: State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi and Russian FM Sergey Lavrov [talk](#) over the phone, with Wang telling Lavrov that China and Russia should not allow chaos in central Asia.

Jan. 17, 2022: Lavrov tells a news conference that Russia-China friendship is not against anyone.

Jan. 18–20, 2022: Russia, China, and Iran [hold](#) their second joint naval exercises in the Gulf of Oman. They practice sea-lane protection, anti-pirates, and hostage-rescue operations.

Jan. 25, 2022: Xi [holds](#) a virtual summit commemorating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

Feb. 3, 2022: Lavrov [travels](#) to Beijing ahead of Putin's official visit. He meets his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. On the same day, the Russian President publishes his article in China's *Xinhua* news agency: "[Russia and China: A Future-Oriented Strategic Partnership](#)."

Feb. 4, 2022: Putin [visits](#) China. Before joining the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics, he holds a lunch talk with President Xi, and 15 documents are signed. The two heads of state also issue a joint statement on international affairs.

Feb. 22, 2022: Russian Parliament [grants Putin's request](#) to use the military to back Ukrainian separatists.

Feb. 24, 2022: Lavrov [talks](#) over the phone with Wang Yi. They discuss the situation in eastern Ukraine.

Feb. 25, 2022: Xi [speaks](#) with Putin on the phone. Putin briefs Xi on Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Feb. 26, 2022: Wang [puts](#) forward a "five-point" stance on the Ukraine conflict.

Feb. 27, 2022: Putin [puts](#) the Russian nuclear force on high alert.

March 1, 2022: Wang [talks](#) to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba at the latter's request.

March 2, 2022: Lavrov [says](#) that "World War III would be a devastating nuclear war."

March 14, 2022: Chinese Ambassador to Ukraine Fan Xianrong [pays](#) a visit to Lviv Governor Maksym Kozytskyi. He expresses support for Ukraine.

March 17, 2022: Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesman Zhao Lijian [says](#) that the Foreign Ministry supports Fan's statement on March 14, 2022.

March 18, 2022: Xi and Biden [talk](#) over the phone about the Ukraine War.

March 21, 2022: Wang [pays](#) an official visit to Pakistan.

March 22, 2022: Wang [is invited](#) to address the opening ceremony of the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Islamabad, the first time a Chinese Foreign Minister is invited to such a meeting.

March 24, 2022: Wang [visits](#) Afghanistan.

March 25, 2022: Wang [visits](#) India.

March 29, 2022: 5th round of peace talks for Ukraine [end](#) with a written document for a ceasefire. Ukraine reportedly proposes adopting neutral status and a 15-year consultation period on the future of Russian-occupied Crimea as long as a complete ceasefire with Russian forces is agreed.

March 30-31, 2022: Wang [chairs](#) the 3rd Foreign Ministers' meeting among neighboring countries of Afghanistan in Tunxi of China's Anhui Province. He held talks with Lavrov on the sidelines of the conference. FMs or representatives of Pakistan, Iran, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan attended the meeting.

April 1, 2022: Xi [meets](#) via video with President Charles Michel of the European Council and President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission. They exchange views on the Ukraine conflict.

April 4, 2022: Wang [talks](#) to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba at the latter's request.

April 4, 2022: Bucha's massacre [is](#) first reported.

April 6, 2022: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [plans](#) to visit Taiwan on April 10, according to Japanese sources, though the trip is [postponed](#) when she tests positive for COVID-19.

April 14, 2022: Wang [talks](#) to his Vietnamese counterpart. Wang reportedly said that the Ukraine tragedy should not be allowed to be repeated around China.

April 15, 2022: Li Zhanshu, Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, [holds](#) virtual talks with Russian Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko.

April 18, 2022: Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng [meets](#) in Beijing with Russian Ambassador to China Andrey Denisov.

April 25, 2022: Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe [visits](#) Kazakhstan.

April 26, 2022: Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe [visits](#) Turkmenistan.

PACIFIC  FORUM

COMPARATIVE

C O N N E C T I O N S

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

JAPAN - SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

NORMATIVE CHALLENGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

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Despite the lingering effects of COVID-19 and another change in leadership in Tokyo, Japan and Southeast Asian states continued to strengthen their functional cooperation. To counter the negative impact of the pandemic, Japan continued to donate vaccines to ASEAN member states. Economically, Japan and ASEAN together with other regional states concluded the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in January 2022. Militarily, Japan conducted the Indo-Pacific Deployment 2021 (IPD21) from August to November 2021, which has become a regularized defense deployment. Further, Japan had the very first bilateral Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting with the Philippines in April 2022. Diplomatically, Japan and ASEAN closely consulted with each other to enhance cooperation for the realization of Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) vision and ASEAN's "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" (AOIP). However, Japan-Southeast Asia relations now face new normative challenges regarding how their approach to liberal values, such as rule of law and democracy/human rights in the Indo-Pacific region because of the prolonged Myanmar political crisis and the 2022 Russo-Ukraine War.

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A(nother) New Japanese Administration and Southeast Asia

The leadership change in Japan did not directly affect Japan–Southeast Asia relations, but it might have a long-term effect because of Kishida's inclination to emphasize the importance of human rights. In September 2021 Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide stepped down, one year after taking over from Abe Shinzo, deciding not to seek re-election for the LDP leadership. While Suga carried out [the Tokyo Olympics/Paralympics](#), which had been postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and he spent too much political capital executing unpopular [counter-COVID-19 measures](#) and engaging in the [political battle](#) over leadership of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). [NHK public polling](#) after the Olympics/Paralympics showed that the approval rate for the Suga administration dropped from 40% in January 2021 to 29% in August 2021 while disapproval rates rose from 41% to 52%. With a Lower House election scheduled for late 2021, Suga chose to resign in September 2021, and Kishida took over the LDP in the same month.

This leadership change initially created some concern in Southeast Asia, given that Japanese prime ministers changed annually prior to the second Abe administration, destabilizing Japanese domestic politics and Japan's diplomacy toward the region Asia. This concern remained even after the Kishida administration conducted a snap Lower House election in October and secured an [absolute majority](#) for the LDP and a near two-thirds majority with the *Komei* party. According to the [2022 Southeast Asian survey](#) conducted by the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Japan remained “the most trusted major power among Southeast Asians” for three consecutive years, yet its percentage dropped from 67.1% in 2021 to 54.2% in 2022. While there were several reasons, such as perceived domestic mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the main reasons was a possibility of [domestic political instability](#).

Japan's diplomacy toward Southeast Asia remained consistent, however. Under the Suga administration, Japan continuously emphasized the importance of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) vision. While Suga actively supported the US initiative to institutionalize the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or “Quad”) between Australia, India, Japan, and the US, he continuously [emphasized](#) the importance of

ASEAN unity and centrality. Kishida also assured, in his [2021](#) and [2022](#) policy speeches, that Japan would make efforts to promote the FOIP through its allies and partners, including ASEAN. [ASEAN unity and centrality](#) also remain important components of Japan's FOIP vision, and its diplomatic rhetoric looks unlikely to change in the near future. Japan's fundamental diplomatic posture toward Southeast Asian states and ASEAN thus remains the same—while its bilateral engagements aim at deepening understanding of each regional state's needs and requests, its multilateral diplomacy attempts to ensure ASEAN's diplomatic importance in East Asia while cultivating common strategic ground with ASEAN.



Figure 1 Former Defense Minister Gen Nakatani speaks to reporters at the Prime Minister's Office after being named special adviser on human rights issues by Fumio Kishida. Photo: Kyodo

The differences between Suga and Kishida in terms of pursuing the FOIP derive from Kishida's emphasis on freedom, democratic values, and human rights, as shown in his appointment of Nakatani Gen, a former defense minister, as a [special adviser on human rights issue](#). As discussed below, Japan's value-oriented diplomacy has gradually taken a more significant role in its FOIP vision. This corresponds to the Biden administration's [Indo-Pacific strategy](#), which considers democratic values an important component of the rules-based international order. The United States and Japan have become more concerned about China's domestic and international behavior, including its development practices that do not consider liberal values like human rights, and political suppression in the Xinjiang region and Hong Kong. However, this diplomatic posture also has a strategic implication for Southeast Asian

states, particularly Myanmar, where human rights violations are evident.

As of April 2022, Kishida has yet to reveal his own strategic initiative in shaping the FOIP vision. However, since the beginning of 2022, Japan and Southeast Asian states have begun to resume in-person diplomacy, and more active diplomacy and new initiatives may emerge in the near future.

Supporting ASEAN Multilateralism

Japan-ASEAN relations remained strong, yet faced two continuous and emerging challenges in ASEAN-led multilateral diplomacy. First, diplomatic interactions in 2021 were still largely conducted online, which limited in-depth discussions and negotiations for furthering ASEAN-Japan cooperation. At high-level exchanges between Japan and Southeast Asian states from April 2021 to January 2022, including ministerial and summit-level meetings, there were only four in-person meetings out of 24 (see chronology). It was only after February 2022 that in-person meetings resumes. Second, there emerged a new challenge in Japan-Mekong cooperation as a result of the 2021 Myanmar coup. Japan has not launched new [development programs toward Myanmar](#) through its Official Development Assistance (ODA) and postponed the Japan-Mekong summit in 2021, which had been annually convened since 2009. The Japan-Mekong [Foreign Ministers meeting](#) and [Economic Ministers meeting](#) were held in August and September 2021, respectively, yet Japan's emphasis was on the importance of ASEAN's [Five-Point Consensus](#) toward the Tatmadaw. Given Japan's diplomatic concerns over the Myanmar situation, the summit is unlikely to be held unless the Tatmadaw resumes the democratic process.

On the other hand, Japan-ASEAN cooperation has been largely conceptualized on the basis of the 2020 [ASEAN-Japan Joint State on Cooperation on the AOIP](#) which defines bilateral cooperation through the realization of the AOIP and its synergy with Japan's FOIP. Japan repeatedly identified ASEAN as a strategic partner to realize its FOIP vision and its respect for ASEAN unity and centrality as well as the principles of the AOIP, particularly inclusivity, openness, transparency, and rules-based order. The four cooperative areas of the AOIP—(1) maritime cooperation, (2) connectivity, (3) UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and (4)

economic and other possible area of cooperation—were the main fields in which Japan and ASEAN facilitated functional cooperation. In 2020, Japan's foreign ministry mapped out 49 cooperative activities, and in 2021, it discussed the development of 24 additional activities, which include the "[Promotion](#) of action against marine plastic litter in Asia and the Pacific (Counter Measure II)," "[Asia Kakehashi program](#) in Japan," and "[the Quang Tri Province onshore wind power project](#) in Vietnam."

Furthering Functional Cooperation

The principles and functional cooperation stipulated in the AOIP and the FOIP are highly compatible. Four main areas of cooperation that the AOIP stipulated resonated with the [three pillars](#) of the FOIP, (1) "Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc.," (2) "Pursuit of economic prosperity," and (3) "Commitment for peace and stability." With these cooperative fields in the context of the prolonged effect of COVID-19, Japan and Southeast Asian states showed progress, particularly in the areas of counter-COVID-19, socio-economic cooperation, and defense diplomacy.

Counter-COVID-19 Measures and Public Health Institutionalization

Socio-economic struggles caused by the pandemic loomed large in Southeast Asia even as the negative impact of COVID-19 has gradually mitigated because of the increased availability of vaccines. In this context, Japan continuously contributed to the betterment of the Southeast Asian health circumstance through two main means.

First, Japan has provided vaccines, medical equipment, and financial assistance to ASEAN member states. In October 2021, Japan announced at the [24th ASEAN-Japan Summit](#) that it had [donated](#) vaccines and provided financial aid bilaterally and through the COVAX facility to all ASEAN member states (except Singapore), amounting to over 16 million vaccines and approximately \$296.3 million of grant aid, including "[Last One Mile Support](#)" to promptly deliver vaccines to the Philippines. In January 2022, Japan decided to provide [approximately 272 million additional doses](#) of COVID-19 vaccines to Indonesia, and in April, the Quad

cooperated to donate the [approximately 4.65 million India-manufactured vaccines to Cambodia](#), of which Japan contributed 1.3 million in addition to its “Last One Mile Support.”



Figure 2 Participants attend the 24th ASEAN-Japan Summit, held via videoconference on Oct. 27, 2021. Photo: ASEAN

Second, Japan supported human development and the establishment of health institutions in Southeast Asia. Although Vietnam, the 2020 ASEAN Chair, [announced](#) the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) in November 2020, the center had [yet to be established](#). Despite the delay, Japan has assisted the establishment of ACPHEED since 2020 by providing financial assistance of ¥49.8 million (\$385,000) through the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund. Furthermore, from October 2021, Japan provides [human development assistance of health officers](#) in cooperation with other regional states in the Indo-Pacific, such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and the EU.

Socio-Economic Cooperation

One of the largest economic achievements by Japan and ASEAN member states was signing the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership \(RCEP\)](#), which entered into force on Jan. 1, 2022. This ASEAN-led initiative emerged in the context of the existing bilateral free trade agreement between ASEAN and its dialogue partners, including Japan, and the original 16 members of the East Asia Summit began to negotiate in 2012. Although RCEP's trade standard is not as advanced as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), it is the region-wide trade agreement that establishes the largest free trade area in the Indo-Pacific. The integration of trade rules, such as rule of origin, will potentially facilitate diversification of supply chains, which reduces trade risks among member states. Also, in the

negotiation process Japan, along with other member states, [supported ASEAN centrality](#), which enabled Indonesia to become the chairperson in the chief negotiators' meetings and the ASEAN secretariat be the secretariat for the negotiation.

Japan-ASEAN economic cooperation becomes an imperative component of the FOIP and the AOIP, particularly in ensuring the mitigation of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic economic recovery. To this end, Japan and ASEAN created the [“ASEAN-Japan Economic Resilience Action Plan”](#) in 2020, which included over 50 projects, such as the conclusion of the RCEP. To further promote this initiative, in September 2021, Japan proposed the [“ASEAN-Japan Priority for Innovative and Sustainable Growth”](#), whose four priorities are (1) “Steadily implement the ASEAN-Japan Economic Resilience Action Plan,” (2) “Identify priority fields for focusing on innovation and sustainability in three areas: industry, urban areas, and rural areas,” (3) “Review and upgrade the ASEAN-Japan Economic Resilience Action Plan based on these three areas,” and (4) “Further promote public-private partnerships between ASEAN and Japan based on the Dialogue for Innovative Sustainable Growth (DISG) launched [in 2020].” The proposal was welcomed by ASEAN, and the more details will follow.

For the enhancement of connectivity in the Indo-Pacific, there have been a number of initiatives by Japan and ASEAN in the past few years to seek synergy between Japan's “Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure” and the “Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025,” through the [Joint Statement of the 22nd ASEAN-Japan Summit on Connectivity](#) in November 2019, the [Japan-ASEAN Connectivity Initiative](#) in November 2020, the [ASEAN-Japan Transport Partnership](#) (AJTP) in March 2021. As such, Japan and ASEAN cooperate in both hard and soft infrastructure development.

Defense Diplomacy: Constant Engagement

Japan has been active in providing defense capacity-building programs to Southeast Asian states. Previously, Japan created the [“Vientiane Vision”](#) in 2016 and the [“Vientiane Vision 2.0”](#) in 2019, through which Japan conducted joint training and exercises, including the Japan-ASEAN Ship Rider Cooperation Program. The COVID-19 pandemic limited in-person cooperative activities, including capacity-

building programs. Nevertheless, Japan and ASEAN member states conducted online training and seminars, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) programs with ASEAN in 2020 and underwater UXO (unexploded ordnance) clearance with Vietnam in 2022. Furthermore, as the COVID-19 vaccination became available, several programs began through in-person meetings, including the third Japan-ASEAN Invitation program on HA/DR in 2020, the Air Rescue seminar with Vietnam in 2020, and Japan-Philippines HA/DR Cooperation Project in 2021.

The Indo-Pacific Deployment (IPD) by Japan's Maritime SDF (MSDF) was also conducted in 2021 marking three consecutive years. Prior to the IPD, Japan conducted similar training by deploying DDH183 (*Izumo*) and DD113 (*Sazanami*) in 2017 and through the "Indo-Southeast Asia Deployment 2018," the so-called [ISEAD18](#), to increase its defense visibility in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2021, MSDF conducted [IPD21](#) from August to November by sending DDH184 (*Kaga*), DD101 (*Murasame*), and DD120 (*Shiranui*). During this deployment, the MSDF held joint training and exercises with regional states, such as the Japan-Vietnam friendly exercise, Japan-Philippines joint exercise, and Japan-US-UK-Netherlands-Canada-Singapore joint exercise. This deployment underpins Japanese defense engagement in the Indo-Pacific, particularly Southeast Asia, which is in the central geographical location that connects the Pacific and the Indian Oceans.

One of the most important forms of defense cooperation in 2021-22 was the first Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (2+2) in April 2022. Deepening their "strategic partnership," Japan and the Philippines aimed to elevate defense cooperation to the next level. Two visions stand out. First, both states now consider the possibility of creating a [framework](#) that facilitates "reciprocal visits as well as reciprocal provision of supplies and services." This envisions the future conclusion of not only an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA) but also the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) that Japan signed in January 2022 with Australia, which substantially increases the [effectiveness and efficiency](#) of defense cooperation. Second, both states emphasized the importance of cooperation in the Sulu-Celebes Seas, where the borders of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia meet. This area has been

underdeveloped and has become a hotbed for international terrorism and transnational crime and has an important sealine connecting Southeast Asia to the Pacific Ocean. Given China's increasing development aid to the Philippines and the Pacific Islands through the Belt and Road Initiative, [China's military presence](#) around the Sulu-Celebes Seas would likely be stronger, and along with its influence in the region. In this connection, Japan and the Philippines emphasized its strategic importance. This point was also discussed in [Japan-Indonesia](#) dialogues although discussion with Malaysia was not as frequent.



Figure 3 Senior official from Japan and the Philippines gather for the first Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting ("2+2") meeting on April 9, 2022. Photo: AFP

The Russo-Ukraine War: Normative Implications in the Indo-Pacific

The most significant challenge for the FOIP and the AOIP in 2021-22 is the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On Feb. 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a "[special military operation](#)" against Ukraine. Against initial [expectations](#), Russia's invasion was not smoothly conducted, resulting in a prolonged war with Ukraine. While the UN Security Council has been deadlocked by Russia's veto, the UN General Assembly conducted two important votes through April 2022: [one resolution](#) in March called for ending the Russian offensive and the [other](#) in April suspended Russia from the Human Rights Council. Given that Russian behavior was a clear violation of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty, the general reaction of the international community was strong condemnation against Russia. Nevertheless, while Japan took an explicit stance and voted for both resolutions, ASEAN member states' did not. On the March resolution, Laos and Vietnam abstained while other members

voted for the resolution. On the April resolution, only Philippines and Myanmar voted in favor (represented by Kyaw Moe Tun, the UN ambassador appointed before the military coup in February 2021 who remains loyal to Myanmar's civilian government). Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand abstained while Laos and Vietnam opposed.

On both occasions, ASEAN also issued foreign ministers' statements. In March 3, ASEAN foreign ministers called for an "immediate ceasefire or armistice and continuation of political dialogue" in the [statement](#), although they avoided condemning Russia directly. In April 8, the ministers [responded](#) to atrocities committed in Bucha, Ukraine, by supporting an independent investigation of the incident. Most Western states, including Japan, concluded that those atrocities were committed by Russia, but other states were wary about reaching that conclusion without an independent investigation. As ASEAN operates under consensus decision-making procedures and Vietnam and Laos clearly wanted to avoid naming-and-shaming Russia, ASEAN's approach toward the Russo-Ukraine war remains soft compared to Japan's. Also, this posture reflected ASEAN's preference to open channels of communication while not taking strong measures against aggressors.

Japan has been wary about ASEAN's strategic posture. The one major reason is the potential erosion of international rules and norms, as well as its strategic implications for the Indo-Pacific region. For Japan, Russian aggression is a clear violation of international law and should be punished collectively. Peaceful dialogue to settle the dispute is important, but Japan does not consider it the only means to respond to the Russo-Ukraine War, because if Russia were successful in Ukraine, rules and norms will substantially weaken and certain states in the Indo-Pacific region would be eager to emulate such actions. These include China and North Korea, albeit to different degrees. Therefore, Prime Minister Kishida made [official trips](#) to Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand in April and May 2022 to reiterate the importance of international rules and norms and coordinate policies vis-à-vis Ukraine where possible.



Figure 4 Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and Indonesian President Joko Widodo wave to reporters ahead of their talks on April 29, 2022, at the presidential palace in Bogor, south of Jakarta. Photo: Kyodo

This challenge to the rules-based international order is not all that Japan's FOIP and ASEAN's AOIP face. There is the ongoing Myanmar issue, as the military junta has disrespected Myanmar's democratic process and overthrown the democratically elected leadership by negating election results. After the coup, ASEAN quickly reached a Five-Point Consensus in April 2021, but its goals, including immediate cessation of violence, constructive dialogue among all parties, and ASEAN mediation, have yet to be achieved. In December 2021, the Tatmadaw stated that it would hold a [general election](#) in August 2023, but there was a condition that "state stability and peace" be ensured. This did not give clear future prospects for Myanmar's domestic politics because that assessment would be conducted by the Tatmadaw. As the political legitimacy of the Tatmadaw has not been accepted internationally, ASEAN did not invite the junta to its summit in 2021, and Japan has not held a bilateral meeting with the Tatmadaw since February 2021.

These two international issues created visible policy divergences between Japan and Southeast Asian states/ASEAN. On the one hand, Japan moved to emphasize the importance of international and domestic rule of law. As the intensification of violence in both Ukraine and Myanmar would likely erode the principles of its FOIP vision without any actions, Japan needs to match words and deeds. On the other hand, ASEAN faces a dilemma. For Myanmar, ASEAN's resistance to invite the Tatmadaw is regarded as a [short-term appropriate measure](#), and the absence of Myanmar would create disunity within ASEAN. As such, Southeast Asian states' response is confined to diplomatic dialogues that

do not guarantee any immediate success. For Russia, as Vietnam and Laos have strong political and military relationships with Moscow, ASEAN has difficulty in reaching consensus to openly condemn Russia's aggression. Since ASEAN under Cambodia's chairpersonship does not plan to uninvite Russia to the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus, several external members, such as the United States and Australia, might boycott the meetings, and thus weaken ASEAN's convening power.

As such, Japan's inclination to take stronger measures on the rule of law does not necessarily correspond to ASEAN's responses to these two international and regional events. This could make it difficult to synthesize the principles of the FOIP and the AOIP.

Prospects for Japan-ASEAN relations in 2022-23

While functional cooperation between Japan and Southeast Asian states steadily progresses, their strategic postures toward the existing international order have begun to diverge. This divergence has long existed because their national interests differ. However, the Myanmar coup and the Russo-Ukraine war have made it much clearer. This has significant implications for the Indo-Pacific regional order as intensification of the US-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region is caused by not only the shifting balance of military and economic power but also their contestation over what basic rules and norms to nurture. This implicitly puts diplomatic pressure on regional states to reveal their preferences. Japan has already taken a firm stance in promoting existing liberal rules and norms, although its approach is not exactly that of the US and the EU. ASEAN member states, however, have divergent views on this, which could weaken ASEAN unity.

In this context, there are important diplomatic events in 2022-23 for both Japan and ASEAN. By the end of 2022, Japan plans to issue three strategic documents—the National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), and the Medium-Term Defense Program (MTDP). In 2023, Japan will host the Japan-ASEAN commemorative summit for the 50th anniversary of Japan-ASEAN relations. These occasions will be a great opportunity for both Japan and the ASEAN members to coordinate what regional norms and

rules both can facilitate in the Indo-Pacific region and what policies they can pursue.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

MAY 2021—APRIL 2022

May 11, 2021: Japan-Vietnam telephone summit [takes place](#) between Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

May 19, 2021: Japan-Philippines telephone summit [takes place](#) between Suga and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

May 20, 2021: Japan-Brunei Defense Ministers' video teleconference [takes place](#) between Japanese Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo and Bruneian Second Defense Minister Halbi Yussof.

May 25, 2021: Japan-Singapore telephone summit [takes place](#) between Suga and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

May 25, 2021: Japan-Thailand Defense Ministers' video teleconference [takes place](#) between Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo and Prime Minister/Defense Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

May 26, 2021: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu and Bruneian Foreign Minister II Erywan Yusof.

June 2, 2021: Japan-Philippines Defense Ministers' video teleconference [takes place](#) between Kishi and Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

June 3, 2021: Japan-Vietnam Defense Ministers' video teleconference [takes place](#) between Kishi and Vietnamese Defense Minister Phan Van Giang.

June 9, 2021: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Motegi and Foreign Minister Erywan.

June 10, 2021: Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Motegi and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi.

June 18, 2021: Japan's Ministry of Defense [hosts](#) seminar on Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) for Lao People's Army.

June 23, 2021: Japan-Laos Defense Ministers' video teleconference [takes place](#) between Kishi and Laotian Deputy Prime Minister/Defense Minister Chansamone Chanyalath.

June 25, 2021: Japan-Cambodia Defense Ministers' video teleconference [takes place](#) between Kishi and Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister/Defense Minister Tea Banh.

June 28, 2021: Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' meeting [takes place](#) between Motegi and Foreign Minister Marsudi.

June 29, 2021: Japan and Thailand exchange memorandum regarding COVID-19 vaccine donation to Thailand.

June 29, 2021: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' Meeting [takes place](#) between Motegi and FM Erywan.

July 28, 2021: 11th Meeting of the Japan-Philippines High Level Joint Committee on Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation [takes place](#).

Aug. 3, 2021: Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (online) [takes place](#).

Aug. 11, 2021: 5th Japan-Thailand High Level Joint Commission [takes place](#).

Aug. 12, 2021: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Motegi and FM Erywan.

Aug. 20 – Nov. 25, 2021: Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force [conducts](#) Indo-Pacific Deployment 2021 (IPD21) by dispatching JS *Kaga* (DDH 184), JS *Murasame* (DD 101), and JS *Shiranui* (DD 120).

Sept. 3, 2021: 11th Japan-Cambodia Human Rights Dialogue [takes place](#).

Sept. 8, 2021: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Motegi and Foreign Minister Erywan.

Sept. 10, 2021: Meeting between Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Uto Takashi and Indonesian Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi.

Sept. 15, 2021: Japan-Vietnam Summit phone call [takes place](#) between Suga and President Phuc.

Sept. 28, 2021: Japan [sends](#) donations of approximately 100,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses to Brunei.

Sept. 30, 2021: Japan's Ministry of Defense, SDF, and Philippine Air Force [hold](#) first online "Subject Matter Expert Exchange on Aviation Medicine and Aeromedical Evacuation."

Oct. 12, 2021: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Motegi and Foreign Minister Erywan.

October 27, 2021: 24th ASEAN-Japan Summit Meeting [takes place](#) (online).

Nov. 2, 2021: Japan-Vietnam Summit takes place between Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh.

Nov. 15-19, 2021: Japan's Ministry of Defense, SDF, and Philippine Army [conduct](#) HA/DR training through the Japan-Philippine HA/DR Cooperation Project.

Nov. 17, 2021: Japan-Philippines telephone summit [takes place](#) between Kishida and President Duterte.

Nov. 17, 2021: Japan-Thailand Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Foreign Minister Hayashi Masayoshi and Thai Deputy Minister/Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai.

Nov. 17, 2021: Japan-Brunei Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Hayashi and FM Erywan.

Nov. 18, 2021: Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between FM Hayashi and Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn.

Nov. 18, 2021: Japan-Indonesia summit phone call [takes place](#) between Kishida and Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

Nov. 22, 2021: Japan-Thailand summit phone call [takes place](#) between Kishida and Thai Prime Minister/ Defense Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

Nov. 22, 2021: Japan-Singapore summit phone call [takes place](#) between Kishida and Prime Minister Lee.

Nov. 24, 2021: Japan-Vietnam Summit Meeting [takes place](#) between Kishida and Prime Minister Pham.

Nov. 24, 2021: Japan-Vietnam Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters is [signed](#).

Nov. 25, 2021: Japan-Vietnam Foreign Ministers Meeting [takes place](#) between FM Hayashi and Vietnamese Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son.

Nov. 30, 2021: Japan Ministry of Defense/SDF [hold](#) online meeting for knowledge/experience sharing about PKO missions with Vietnam.

Dec. 1, 2021: Japan-Singapore Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between FM Hayashi and Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

Dec. 1, 2021: Japan-Cambodia Leaders' video conference [takes place](#) between Kishida and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Dec. 2, 2021: Japan-Malaysia summit phone call [takes place](#) between Kishida and Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

Dec. 2, 2021: Japan-Malaysia Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Hayashi Yoshimasa and Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah

Dec. 8, 2021: Japan-Philippines Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Hayashi and Philippine Foreign Secretary Theodoro Locsin, Jr.

Dec. 22, 2021: 6th Japan-Cambodia Politico-Military (PM) Dialogue [takes place](#).

Dec. 25, 2021-Jan. 12, 2022: Japan Ministry of Defense/SDF provides training to Vietnam for peacekeeping operations.

Dec. 28, 2021: Japan-Brunei Defense Ministers' video teleconference [takes place](#) between Kishi and Defense Minister Halbi.

Jan. 11, 2022: Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Hayashi and Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Sokhonn.

Jan. 11, 2022: Japan-Laos Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Hayashi and Laotian Foreign Minister Saluexay Kommasith.

Jan.12, 2022: Japan Ministry of Defense, SDF, and Vietnam People's Navy [hold](#) online seminar on Underwater Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) clearance.

Jan. 13, 2022: Japan [donates](#) approximately 2.72 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to Indonesia.

Jan. 19, 2022: Japan's Ministry of Defense, SDF, and Vietnam Peoples' Navy [hold](#) online seminar on underwater medicine.

Feb. 3-4, 2022: Japan Ministry of Defense [conducts](#) cyber security online seminar for ASEAN member states and the ASEAN Secretariat.

Feb. 14-17, 2022: Japan Ministry of Defense/ASDF [conduct](#) capacity-building activities on air rescue for Vietnam Air Defense-Air Force.

Feb. 14, 2022: Courtesy call on Hayashi by Cambodian Lt. Gen. Hun Manet, commander of the Royal Cambodian Army, [takes place](#).

Feb. 16, 2022: 12th Meeting of the Japan-Philippines High Level Joint Committee on Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation [takes place](#).

March 1, 2022: Japan-Laos Summit phone call [takes place](#) between Kishida and Laotian Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh.

March 3, 2022: Japan-Indonesia Foreign Ministers' phone call [takes place](#) between Japanese FM Hayashi and Indonesian FM Marsudi.

March 8, 2022: Japan-Indonesia summit phone call [takes place](#) between Kishida and President Jokowi.

March 12, 2022: Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [meets](#) Malaysian Prime Minister Yaakob.

March 15, 2022: Japan [dispatches](#) personnel to Independent Decommissioning Body in relation to the Mindanao Peace Process in the Philippines.

March 20, 2022: Japan-Cambodia summit meeting [takes place](#) between Kishida and Prime Minister Hun Sen.

April 1, 2022: Japan [provides](#) emergency grant aid for humanitarian assistance to populations affected by the coup in Myanmar.

April 7, 2022: Japan-Philippines Defense Ministers' Meeting [takes place](#) between Kishi and Defense Secretary Lorenzana.

April 9, 2022: 1st Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (2+2) [takes place](#) between Hayashi and Kishi and Foreign Secretary Locsin and Defense Secretary Lorenzana.

April 9, 2022: Japan-Philippines Foreign Ministers' Meeting [takes place](#) between Hayashi and Foreign Secretary Locsin.

April 12, 2022: Quad countries (Japan-Australia-India-US) [hold](#) handover ceremony for COVID-19 vaccine donation to Cambodia.

April 19, 2022: 17th Japan-Singapore Military Medicine Dialogue [takes place](#).

April 20, 2022: Japan-Malaysia Summit phone call [takes place](#) between Kishida and Prime Minister Yaakob.

April 21, 2022: Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Matsuno Hirokazu [meets](#) Thai Deputy Minister/Energy Minister Supattanapong Pumeechaow.

April 21, 2022: Quad representatives [hold](#) handover ceremony for COVID-19 vaccine donation to Thailand.

April 22, 2022: Japan-Singapore Partnership Programme for the 21st Century, JSPP21, [takes place](#) online.

April 23, 2022: Japan-Cambodia Summit [takes place](#) between Kishida and Prime Minister Hun Sen.

April 23, 2022: Japan-Laos Summit [takes place](#) between Kishida and Prime Minister Viphavanh.

April 25, 2022: Hayashi [meets](#) Philippine Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez.

April 29, 2022: Japan-Indonesia Summit [takes place](#) between Kishida and President Jokowi.

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Strategy for the Obama Administration (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security, 2009); "US-Japan Relations: What Should Washington Do?" in *America's Role in Asia: Recommendations for US Policy from Both Sides of the Pacific* (San Francisco: Asia Foundation, 2008); and *An East Asian Community and the United States*, Ralph A. Cossa and Akihiko Tanaka, eds., (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 2007).

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