



Pacific Forum Update

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Issues & Insights is Pacific Forum's publication series that includes special reports (SR), conference reports (CR), and working papers (WP). These in-depth analyses cover a range of topics and are published on an occasional basis. The following have been published in 2023 and are available online [here](#).

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, SR1 — Toward a Unified NATO Response to the People's Republic of China](#)

by Rob York

Following the Cold War's end there were those who questioned NATO's continued relevance. Such views may have found little currency among scholars of foreign policy and security, but among the general public it was not unheard of to wonder why, with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991 its rival organization did not also become defunct, especially given the Russian Federation's friendlier tilt in the decade that followed. On the part of the United States, by the 2010's a fatigue had settled in among much of the populace over US foreign commitments, especially regarding partner countries not perceived as pulling their own weight. By the middle of that decade, that fatigue had begun to manifest itself in US election results.

Vladimir Putin's Russia, and its brazen invasion of Ukraine last year may not have succeeded in bringing Ukraine to heel or establishing Moscow as a great military power again, but it did accomplish two other things. For one, it demonstrated for the world what the countries separated by the Atlantic could achieve—even indirectly—by helping partners (even non-NATO members) acquire the means to defend themselves. For another, and for all Putin's claims to the contrary, it showed that nations near Russia's western border have a very good reason for wanting NATO membership. Putin, more so than any mainstream American or continental European security scholar, has demonstrated the alliance's continued relevance in providing for the security of countries that desire self-determination and alignment with the liberal, rules-based international order.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, SR2 — The World After Taiwan's Fall](#) Edited by David Santoro and Ralph Cossa

Let us start with our bottom line: a failure of the United States to come to Taiwan's aid—politically, economically, and militarily—would devastate the United States' credibility and defense commitments to its allies and partners, not just in Asia, but globally. If the United States tries but fails to prevent a Chinese takeover of Taiwan, the impact could be equally devastating unless there is a concentrated, coordinated U.S. attempt with likeminded allies and partners to halt further

Chinese aggression and eventually roll back Beijing's ill-gotten gains.

This is not a hypothetical assessment. Taiwan has been increasingly under the threat of a military takeover by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and, even today, is under attack politically, economically, psychologically, and through so-called "gray zone" military actions short of actual combat. The U.S. government, U.S. allies, and others have begun to pay attention to this problem, yet to this day, they have not sufficiently appreciated the strategic implications that such a takeover would generate. To address this problem, the Pacific Forum has conducted a multi-authored study to raise awareness in Washington, key allied capitals, and beyond about the consequences of a Chinese victory in a war over Taiwan and, more importantly, to drive them to take appropriate action to prevent it.

The study, which provides six national perspectives on this question (a U.S., Australian, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and European perspective) and fed its findings and recommendations into the second round of the DTRA SI-STT-sponsored (and Pacific Forum-run) Track 2 "U.S.-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue,"^[1] outlines these strategic implications in two alternative scenarios. In the first scenario, China attacks Taiwan and it falls with no outside assistance from the United States or others. In the other scenario, Taiwan falls to China despite outside assistance (i.e., "a too little, too late" scenario).

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, WP1 — Why Gender Balance Matters for Equity and Peace in the Indo-Pacific](#) by Maryruth Belsey Priebe

Who shows up at events and conferences matters. Public and closed-door events are where successes and failures are analyzed; where conceptions about security, what it means, and how we can achieve it bump up against one another; and where problems are solved in novel ways. The greater the diversity of perspectives, the more powerful the outcomes. But within the security sector, predominantly all-male panels—or "manels"—suggest a lack of gender diversity, resulting in the exclusion of women, people of non-binary identities, or both. Manels represent a more serious lack of gender inclusion at leadership levels, making it difficult for women to gain recognition through promotion to senior decision-making positions. The following is a discussion of Pacific Forum's work to study more than nine years of programming with a goal of understanding historical trends in order to implement and measure policies to increase the number of women attending and speaking at Pacific Forum events. The analysis

identified room for improvement, and marks a jumping-off point for Pacific Forum's work on mainstreaming gender within institutional programming.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, WP2 — Digital China: The Strategy and Its Geopolitical Implications](#) by Dr. David Dorman and Dr. John Hemmings

Over the past few years, there has been growing concern inside the United States, Europe, and in the Indo-Pacific on the strategic direction behind China's technology policies. Beginning with the debate over 5G and Huawei, this debate has covered Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum technology, and semi-conductors – a foundational technology. And despite a large number of policies in place – Made in China: 2025, Cyber Super Power, and the New Generation AI Development Plan – few in the West have known China's overall digital grand strategy.

This report discusses the rise and current state of "Digital China," a strategy supported by General Secretary Xi Jinping to make China more competitive against the West through digital transformation. It has become the overarching strategy for digital development in the eyes of the Chinese Communist Party leadership, surpassing other initiatives like the Digital Silk Road and 5G. Digital China aims to challenge the existing global system and has profound implications for China's development, great power competition, and international norms. The Party leadership has incorporated "data" into its digital economy, creating a concept called "Digital Marxism." The strategy also seeks to foster innovation through the digital transformation of tools, talent, and learning as a means to facilitate China's rise as a global power and challenge to the West.

The US and its allies have begun to effect strategic counter-effect to the myriad of PRC technology policies, there is almost zero understanding or public discussion of this digital grand strategy. Whether inattention, mistranslation, or obfuscation, Digital China has been mostly missed by the West over the past decade.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, SR3 — Strategic Competition and Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#) by Carl Baker

There is a growing acceptance among countries in the Indo-Pacific region that strategic competition between the United States and China is changing perceptions about security and the adequacy of the existing security architecture. While some have characterized the competition between the two as a new Cold War, it is clear that what is happening in the region is far more complex than the competition that characterized the original Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. First, the economic integration that has taken place since the early 1990s makes it much more difficult to draw bright ideological lines between the two sides. Further, the Asian context of the emerging competition is one where the

two competitors have grown to share power. As the dominant military power, the United States has been the primary security guarantor in Asia and beyond. China, on the other hand, has emerged over the past decades as the primary economic catalyst in Asia and beyond. Currently, each side seems increasingly unwilling to accept that arrangement.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, SR4 – A History of Shared Values, A Future of Shared Strategic Interests: US-Australia Relations in the Indo-Pacific](#) by Rob York

Authors of this volume participated in the inaugural U.S.-Australia Next-Generation Leaders Initiative, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State through the U.S. Embassy in Canberra. With backgrounds from academia, public policy, civil society, and industry, the cohort brings rich insights on the past, present, and future of the U.S.-Australia relations. This program was conducted from February 2021 – September 2021.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, CR1 – South China Sea, East China Sea, and the Emerging US-Japan-Philippines Trilateral](#) by Jeffrey Ordaniel

The U.S.-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Maritime Security Dialogue conducted in December 2022 confirmed that there is very little difference in threat perceptions regarding the East and South China Seas. The three countries view China's increasingly assertive claims to the territories and maritime zones in the two bodies of water as antithetical to their shared vision of a free, open, rules-based Indo-Pacific. China's rapid military expansion, including unprecedented nuclear weapons and missile buildup, reinforces the urgency of the threat. Japanese and Philippine interlocutors worry that as China approaches nuclear parity with the United States, the region's strategic environment will worsen. American participants emphasized greater and tangible demonstration of alliance commitments and agreed that some risk-taking is required to push back against Chinese coercion. There was a consensus about the challenge of addressing Beijing's gray zone activities that have so far succeeded in seizing territories and maritime areas in the South China Sea and establishing regular intrusions into Japanese waters in the East China Sea. Participants struggled to find a strategy to blunt China's salami-slicing tactics while avoiding escalation and armed conflict.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, WP3 – Understanding JI Resilience and Australia's Counterterrorism Efforts in Indonesia](#) by Tom Connolly

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) remains one of Indonesia's longest standing state security threats. It has survived major organizational transformations, state security crackdowns, and international military operations in its pursuit of an Islamic caliphate in Indonesia that could extend to incorporate Malaysia, Singapore, and the southern Philippines. Jemaah

Islamiyah rose to prominence for its role in orchestrating the 2002 Bali Bombings, which prompted the United States and Australia to engage Jakarta with the shared goal of destroying the organization and its links to al-Qaeda. Security pressures from Indonesian security services and international forces led to the dismantling of much of Jemaah Islamiyah's leadership by 2007, which pushed it into a state of hibernation, where members focused on consolidating numbers and religious outreach. The emergence of the Islamic State and its Southeast Asian affiliates in 2014 occupied much of the Indonesian security services' resources, which gave space to Jemaah Islamiyah to regenerate its strength with renewed vigor. The 2017 discovery of a JI military training program in Syria re-alerted Indonesian counterterrorism authorities to the risk posed by the group, and successive waves of arrests and crackdowns ensued. Although the COVID-19 pandemic meant that many terrorist groups ceased offensive operations and maintained a low profile, Jemaah Islamiyah began to infiltrate Jakarta's state apparatus, civil society, and academia to [promote](#) its political objectives. Jemaah Islamiyah's long history in Indonesia has proven it to be adaptable, patient, and persistent in pursuit of its objectives. Although it is not currently engaged in military operations, JI's long history in Indonesia has shown the group is adaptable, patient, and long-term in its thinking. Observers suspect that leaders in Jemaah Islamiyah are biding their time and seeking gaps in state authority that they can exploit to [pursue](#) their organizational goals.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, SR5 – ROK-US Alliance: Linchpin for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific](#) by Rob York

The US-ROK alliance in 2023 celebrates its 70th anniversary, and in both countries remains broadly popular. Previous doubts that both countries have had about the other's commitment have largely given way to a sense of shared opportunities, and shared challenges. Not only is there an ever-more belligerent North Korea, with its growing nuclear and missile arsenals, but the People's Republic of China uses both military and economic means to coerce other countries and Russia has demonstrated a willingness to upend norms, redraw borders, and dare former partners (including Seoul) to risk its ire.

This is also an era of the minilateral, as the US seeks to move past its previous hub-and-spokes alliance system in Asia and draw its partners into closer cooperation. South Korea, especially under its current administration, demonstrates increased interest in becoming a regional player, with its recent gestures toward old frenemy Japan representing a key test: historical differences between the US' two closest partners have prevented a "normal" relationship from emerging despite many similarities in political systems, values, and interests, and Korean public opinion remains skeptical of the Seoul-Tokyo rapprochement. Furthermore, there is always a chance that issues complicating US-ROK relations in the past—conduct by US military personnel in

Korea, trade disputes, environmental concerns related to US bases—could resurface.

All of these issues present challenges for the alliance that will require addressing. In that light, the Pacific Forum, with the generous support of the Korea Foundation, has launched the "ROK-US Next Generation Leaders Initiative" program, bringing together young burgeoning scholars and analysts from both countries to discuss pressing issues in the alliance the way forward. This edited volume contains edited papers on pressing topics—extended deterrence, North Korea, China, Russia, Japan, and much more—by rising scholars we expect to see addressing these issues in the years to come. Their active engagement, we believe, will help the alliance endure another 70 years, will providing for the security and prosperity of both countries.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, SR6 – Pressing Security Concerns in Southeast Asia: Next-Generation Perspectives](#) by John Hemmings

Southeast Asia is a pivotal sub-region of the Indo-Pacific. Spanning 1,700,000 square miles, its total population is 676 million – around 8.5% of the world's population – and has a collective GDP of US\$3.67 trillion (as of 2022). Over the years, it has been associated with both economic dynamism and significant security challenges. As authors in this volume note, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, disagreements over water rights in the Mekong Delta, and the current conflict in Myanmar highlight fault lines not only between Southeast Asian states themselves, but also between great powers such as China and the United States. There are many more – the EU, India, Japan, Australia, and South Korea – that pay close attention to developments in the sub-region. Maintaining peace and stability in a region that plays host to one-third of global sea-borne trade, hosts major undersea internet cables, and is a major thoroughfare for energy supplies from the Middle East to the advanced manufacturing hubs in China, Japan, and South Korea is both challenging and complicated.

The primary mechanism for engagement with Southeast Asian countries is through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its associated bodies. ASEAN promotes the principle of "ASEAN centrality" to prevent major power interference in the region and retain influence over security cooperation. However, the evolution of institutions and processes associated with ASEAN is lagging behind the pressing nature of regional challenges.

The "ASEAN Way" of informal consultation, non-interference, and consensus has fostered internal cohesion but hindered collective responses to conflicts. ASEAN's influence is also vulnerable to great powers that can use their leverage to break consensus. While some believe ASEAN will adapt over time, others are skeptical about its ability to maintain its role in regional security.

The essays in the collection cover a broad range of security issues, including traditional and non-traditional ones.

Traditional security topics include the South China Sea dispute, the political crisis in Myanmar, and dealing with rising Chinese influence. Non-traditional security issues encompass climate change's impact on the Philippines and Timor-Leste, human trafficking in Vietnam, and Thailand's brain drain challenge.

The essays reflect the diverse perspectives and challenges in Southeast Asia. They cover issues that range from well-covered topics to unique perspectives on local variations of international issues. The collection aims to spark regional conversations and discussions on these pressing security issues.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 23, SR7 — Southeast Asia's Clean Energy Transition: A Role for Nuclear Power?](#) by David Santoro and Carl Baker

To bring clarity on these developments and their implications in Southeast Asia, the Pacific Forum commissioned several Southeast Asian scholars to write analytical papers on the energy transition that is underway in the region, which are compiled in this volume. Each chapter looks at the current and possible future energy landscape of a specific Southeast Asian country and focuses especially on the place and role of nuclear power in it. This “nuclear focus” is important because, for decades, most Southeast Asian countries have expressed on-and-off interest in nuclear power but never brought it online. Interest is now picking up again, especially for SMRs, so if this time one or several Southeast Asian countries successfully went nuclear, it would be a first.

It is good timing, therefore, to devote attention to how Southeast Asian countries are thinking about nuclear power in today's context, for multiple reasons, including those related to safety, security, and safeguards.