



COMPARATIVE CONNECTIONS SUMMARY: **JANUARY 2023 ISSUE**

REGIONAL OVERVIEW Indo-Pacific as the “Epicenter”

BY RALPH COSSA, PACIFIC FORUM & BRAD GLOSSERMAN, TAMA UNIVERSITY CRS/PACIFIC FORUM

The Biden administration released its long-awaited *National Security Strategy (NSS)* this trimester, along with unclassified versions of its *National Defense Strategy and Missile Defense and Nuclear Posture Reviews*. There were no big surprises. The NSS identified the Indo-Pacific as “the epicenter of 21st century geopolitics” and reaffirmed China as the “pacing challenge,” even while branding Russia as “an immediate threat to the free and open international system” as a result of its invasion of Ukraine. Underscoring the priority attached to the region, President Biden attended the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh and the G-20 Summit in Bali, with Vice President Kamala Harris representing the United States at the annual Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders’ Meeting in Bangkok.

US-JAPAN RELATIONS

Ramping up Diplomacy and Defense Cooperation

BY SHEILA A. SMITH, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS & CHARLES MCCLEAN, YALE MACMILLAN CENTER

In the wake of the death of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, the fall brought unexpectedly turbulent politics for Prime Minister Kishida Fumio. In the United States, however, President Joe Biden welcomed the relatively positive outcome of the midterm elections, with Democrats retaining control over the Senate and losing less than the expected number of seats in the House. Diplomacy continued to be centered on various impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but both Biden and Kishida focused their attention on a series of Asian diplomatic gatherings to improve ties. Chinese President Xi Jinping’s attendance at the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, G20 Meeting in Bali, and APEC gathering in Bangkok proffered the

opportunity finally for in-person bilateral meetings for both leaders. Finally, Japan’s long awaited strategic documents were unveiled in December. A new *National Security Strategy (NSS)* took a far more sober look at China’s growing influence and included ongoing concerns over North Korea as well as a growing awareness of Japan’s increasingly difficult relationship with Russia.

US-CHINA RELATIONS

The Bali Summit: US and PRC Leaders Attempt to Arrest the Slide

BY BONNIE GLASER, GERMAN MARSHALL FUND OF THE US

Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in person for the first time as national leaders at the G20 summit in Bali and agreed to manage competition in their relationship responsibly and restore regular dialogue between senior officials and cooperation between their countries. Bilateral meetings between senior officials in charge of climate, finance, trade, and defense followed. After the US announced another weapons sale to Taiwan, however, Beijing halted the resumption of military-to-military exchanges again. The US issued new export controls aimed at freezing China’s advanced chip production and supercomputing capabilities. President Biden maintained that he would send US forces to defend Taiwan if attacked and repeated that whether the island is independent is up to Taiwan to decide. The Biden administration issued its National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review, and Missile Defense Review. The US imposed sanctions on Chinese officials for serious human rights abuses in Tibet and arbitrary detention of Falun Gong practitioners. China retaliated by sanctioning two former Trump administration officials.

US-KOREA RELATIONS

Everything Everywhere All at Once, Extremely Close and Incredibly Loud

BY MASON RICHEY, HANKUK UNIVERSITY & ROB YORK, PACIFIC FORUM

Continuing a trend from the May-August [reporting period](#), the final reporting period of 2022 in US-Korea relations was marked by an accelerated ratcheting up of tension. In short, numerous problems reared up on the Korean Peninsula from September-December, and good solutions have been few. And not only does this describe relations between the US and North Korea, but in their own, friendly way also the situation between Washington and Seoul, whose frequent invocations of rock-solid alliance cooperation belie unease about crucial areas of partnership. Two critical issues have been increasingly affecting the US-South Korea alliance in 2022, with the September-December period no exception. First, South Korea desires ever more alliance-partner defense and security reassurance from the US in the face of a growing North Korean nuclear threat and Chinese revisionism. Yet the US has downward-trending limits on credible reassurance as North Korea masters nuclear weapons technology that threatens US extended nuclear deterrence for South Korea. The US also faces less geopolitical pressure to effusively reassure its Indo-Pacific allies—including South Korea—as China grows to menace the regional order and the US consequently faces lower risk of ally hedging or realignment.

US-INDIA RELATIONS

[Friends with Benefits](#)

BY AKHIL RAMESH, PACIFIC FORUM

2022 was a challenging year, not just for US-India relations, but for every India analyst trying to explain the Indian government's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Explaining to a non-IR audience India's history of nonalignment during the Cold-War era and its current policy of multi-alignment was not a gratifying endeavor. While the last four months of 2022 did not have the friction and stress-tests as the first four of 2022 or the slow and steady expansion of relations that followed between May and September, they certainly had multiple surprising events that could make them the halcyon months of 2022. In mid-November, the US and Indian armies engaged in a military exercise at Auli, not far from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) separating Indian-held and Chinese-held territory. While the US and Indian armies have engaged in exercises prior to 2022, this proximity to the Indo-China border is a first. A month later, in another first, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen traveled to India to meet Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to expand the US-India "Indo-Pacific partnership." Yellen [characterized](#) India as a "friendly shore" for supply chain diversification and as the indispensable partner for the US.

US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

[External Order, Inner Turmoil](#)

BY CATHARIN DALPINO, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

In November three ASEAN states—Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand—drew favorable marks for their chairmanship of high-profile regional and global meetings: the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Leaders Meeting; the G20 Summit; and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting, respectively. Helming these meetings was particularly challenging for Southeast Asian leaders—who are naturally inclined to avoid strong alignments with external powers—in the current global environment of heightened tensions between the United States and China in the Taiwan Strait and the war in Ukraine. However, the year was a difficult period for ASEAN internally, with uneven economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the intractable conflict in Myanmar. The last quarter of 2022 saw two political shifts in the region: in general elections in Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim achieved a longstanding ambition to become prime minister but will have to manage a difficult coalition to retain power. At the year's end, Laos changed prime ministers, but it is not clear if the transition will solve the country's debt problems, which were revealed to be more dire than estimated.

CHINA-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

[Xi Moderates to US and Others Amid Continued Competition](#)

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

Southeast Asia was the center of international attention in November as regional and global leaders gathered at the G20 conference in Indonesia, which took place between the annual ASEAN-hosted summit meetings in Cambodia and the yearly APEC leaders meeting in Thailand. Acute China-US rivalry loomed large in media and other forecasts, warning of a [clash](#) of US-Chinese leaders with negative implications feared in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. The positive outcome of the Biden-Xi summit at the G20 conference and related actions [eased](#) tensions, which was welcomed, particularly in Southeast Asia, but the implications for the US and allies' competition with China remain to be seen. Tensions over disputes in the South China Sea continued unabated. President Xi Jinping made his first trip to a major international

gathering at the G20 conference followed by the APEC meeting after more than two years of self-imposed isolation in line with his government's strict COVID-19 restrictions.

CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Tensions Intensify as Taiwan-US IT Cooperation Blossoms

BY DAVID KEEGAN, JOHNS HOPKINS SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES & KYLE CHURCHMAN, JOHNS HOPKINS SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

In the wake of then US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August, China's extensive military exercises continued to impose a more threatening "new normal" in the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan continued to be the focus of heated public exchanges between the US and China. US President Biden said, for a fourth time, that the US would defend Taiwan and added an inflammatory codicil that independence was for Taiwan to decide. At the 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, General Secretary Xi Jinping promised China would strive for peaceful reunification with Taiwan but would not renounce use of force. On Dec. 23, Biden signed the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act and a State Department appropriation providing \$2 billion in loans for Taiwan to purchase US equipment. Two days later, China sent 71 military aircraft and seven ships to intimidate Taiwan, its largest-ever one-day exercise near the island. Two days later, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen announced that Taiwan would extend its military conscription to 12 months. TSMC formally broke ground for the first of two factories in the US, a \$40 billion investment.

NORTH KOREA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS

Drones in a Darkening Sky, Tactical Nuke Talk: Pyongyang's Provocations Escalate

BY AIDAN FOSTER-CARTER, LEEDS UNIVERSITY, UK

The main feature of inter-Korean relations in the last four months of 2022 was varied and ever-increasing provocations by Pyongyang. Besides multiple missiles, there were artillery volleys and an incursion by five drones. Kim Jong Un also ramped up his nuclear threats, in theory and practice. A revised law widened the scope of nuclear use, while a new stress on tactical weapons was matched by parading 30 new multiple launch rocket systems (MLRs) which could deliver

these anywhere on the peninsula. The government of South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol for his part reinstated officially calling North Korea an enemy, and revived concern with DPRK human rights. As the year turned, his government was mulling retaliation for the drone incursions; that could include scrapping a 2018 inter-Korean military accord, a dead letter now due to Pyongyang's breaches. With tensions rising, the new year ahead may be an anxious one on the peninsula.

CHINA-KOREA RELATIONS

Kim Jong Un Tests Xi-Yoon Diplomacy

BY SCOTT SNYDER, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS & SEE-WON BYUN, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

Regional and global summits presented high-level platforms for China-South Korea engagement in November. The summitry showed that the relationship had returned with solidity with the resumption of international meetings and in-person exchanges. Although the Xi Jinping and Yoon Suk Yeol leaderships advanced diplomatic exchange, concerns emerged over enduring political and security constraints and growing linkages with the economic relationship. Kim Jong Un's escalation of military threats, through an unprecedented number of missile tests this year, challenged Xi-Yoon bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. China-North Korea bilateral interactions, while brisk, primarily relied on Xi and Kim's exchange of congratulatory letters around significant founding anniversaries, China's 20th Party Congress, and expressions of condolences after the death of former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin. The UN Security Council's failure to take unified action on DPRK threats prompted South Korea to voice frustration with China and expand cooperation with US and Japanese partners. Such responses only reinforced concerns raised in recent leadership exchanges, and Korean domestic division over Yoon's diplomatic strategies.

JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

A Period of Cold Peace?

BY JUNE TEUFEL DREYER, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

In the sole high-level meeting in the report period, on the sidelines of the APEC meeting in Bangkok in November, General Secretary/President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio essentially talked past each other. At an earlier ASEAN+3 meeting in Phnom Penh, Premier Li Keqiang and Kishida not only talked

past each other but pointedly walked past each other. There was no resolution of major issues: the Chinese position is and remains that Taiwan is a core interest of the PRC in which Japan must not interfere. Japan counters that a Chinese invasion would be an emergency for Japan. On the islands known to the Chinese as the Diaoyu and to the Japanese as the Senkaku, Tokyo considers them an integral part of Japan on the basis of history and international law while China says the islands are part of China. On jurisdiction in the East China Sea, Japan says that demarcation should be based on the median line and that China's efforts at unilateral development of oil and gas resources on its side of the median are illegal. Beijing does not recognize the validity of the median line.

JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

[Japan and South Korea as Like-Minded Partners in the Indo-Pacific](#)

**BY JI-YOUNG LEE, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
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The last four months of 2022 saw a flurry of bilateral diplomatic activities between Japan and South Korea in both nations' capitals and around the world. They focused on 1) North Korea, 2) the issue of wartime forced labor, and 3) the future of Seoul-Tokyo cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite mutual mistrust and the low approval ratings of Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and President Yoon Suk Yeol, both leaders had the political will to see a breakthrough in bilateral relations. Another signal came in the form of new strategy documents in which Seoul and Tokyo explained their foreign and security policy directions and goals. On Dec. 16, the Kishida government [published](#) three national security-related documents—the *National Security Strategy (NSS)*, the *National Defense Strategy (NDS)*, and the Defense Buildup program. On Dec. 28, the Yoon government [unveiled](#) South Korea's *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region*, its first ever Indo-Pacific strategy. Although each document serves a somewhat different purpose, it is now possible to gauge how similarly or differently Japan and South Korea assess challenges in the international security environment, and how they plan to respond to them.

CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

[Ending the War? Or the World?](#)

BY YU BIN, WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY

Unlike in 1914, the “guns of the August” in 2022

played out at the two ends of the Eurasian continent. In Europe, the war was grinding largely to a stagnant line of active skirmishes in eastern and southern Ukraine. In the east, rising tension in US-China relations regarding Taiwan led to an unprecedented use of force around Taiwan. Alongside Moscow's quick and strong support of China, Beijing carefully calibrated its strategic partnership with Russia with signals of symbolism and substance. Xi and Putin directly conversed only once (June 15). Bilateral trade and military ties, however, bounced back quickly thanks to, at least partially, the “Ukraine factor” and their respective delinking from the West. At the end of August, Mikhail Gorbachev's death meant both much and yet so little for a world moving rapidly toward a “[war with both Russia and China](#),” in the words of Henry Kissinger.

INDIA-EAST ASIA RELATIONS

[India's Ongoing 'Strategic Correction to the East' During 2022](#)

**BY SATU LIMAYE, EAST-WEST CENTER IN
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India's East Asia relations in 2022 followed the arc articulated by External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar's [address](#) at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand in August 2022. He began by recalling three decades ago India made a “strategic correction to the East” which was “[o]riginally...contemplated as an economic measure, with trade and investment at its core” and mostly focused on ASEAN. He went on to say the geography, concepts, and assessments of India's Indo-Pacific vision have expanded “to cover Japan, Korea and China, and in due course, Australia as also other areas of Pacific Islands...[and] facets of cooperation also increased...now cover[ing] connectivity in various forms, people-to-people ties and more recently, defense and security.” And while dutifully referencing India's Indo-Pacific policies including Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), he gave the most attention to the revitalized Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”).

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors