



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 2024 and are available online [here](#).

[Issues & Insights Vol. 24, SR. 1 – US-India Dosti: Insights from the Next Gen](#) by Aadrina Deori, Moirangthem Sayaluxmi Devi, Lake Dodson, Grrison Moratto, Nicholas Shafer, and Shalini Singh.

The relationship between India and the United States may be the most important bilateral in the 21st century. It's not just that the two countries are democracies that face a common obstacle in the People's Republic of China, but that both countries offer the other an enormous amount of resources, be it in technology, natural resources, and (most importantly) people. This volume includes six such people, all of them young minds capable of offering suggestions on how to nurture that relationship for years, even decades to come. Their ideas—on critical and emerging tech, nuclear energy, security, and even social problems like inequality—present the first round of such advice, which Pacific Forum looks forward to offering to the publics in both countries for many years. We are grateful for the support of the Hindu American Foundation in this effort. Together, we look forward to nurturing the dosti (friendship) across the social, economic, technological, and political spheres.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 24, WP. 1 – Will China be a Facilitator or a Bystander in North Korea's Denuclearization: Revisiting the DPRK-China Blood Alliance](#) by Jahee Kim.

While the DPRK-China relationship is a formal security alliance established by the DPRK-China Friendship Treaty signed in 1961, it differs from the usual asymmetric security alliance. Most of all, China's diplomatic strategy, dating back to Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) of avoiding direct confrontation with the United States and allowing itself time to build up its national strength (韬光养晦) to become a regional superpower has kept the North Korean nuclear issue from becoming a priority in Chinese foreign policy. In this vein, during the Cold War, China sought to stabilize the regional security environment more broadly through détente with the United States and improved diplomatic relations with South Korea to create a stable security environment in the region.

In addition, China, which joined the NPT after the successful nuclear test, rejected North Korea's demand for the transfer of

nuclear technology, claiming to defend the non-proliferation regime as a "responsible member" of the international community. As such, the Sino-North Korean asymmetric alliance is less likely than others to compel a response to each other's demands because the usual security-autonomy exchange formula has not been established. China's failure to provide security guarantees and North Korea's declining dependence on China have contributed to the diminishing value of each other.

[Issues and Insights Vol. 24, SR. 2 – Making Collective Deterrence and Defense Work in the Indo-Pacific](#) by David Santoro and Brad Glosserman.

The Indo-Pacific security architecture is undergoing fundamental transformation to address rising challenges, most notably those posed by an increasingly confident, assertive, and capable China.

Pacific Forum has started a multi-year unofficial dialogue with experts and officials from the United States and key allies and partners to share views of this evolving regional security environment and identify common interests and concerns as well as areas of divergence. The inaugural Pacific Forum Defense and Deterrence Dialogue, which included participants from the United States, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom, took place in Tokyo on February 2-3, 2023. It was run at the Track 2 level, although diplomatic officials and military officers from each country also attended as observers.

Pacific Forum's goal is to identify ways to shape this evolution to ensure that it meets U.S. national security needs, particularly integrated deterrence of, and defense against, regional adversaries—with China as the foremost concern. Responses to these changes have taken several forms. Bilateral alliances are being modernized. Other security relationships are being strengthened, such as those between Japan and Australia and Japan and the United Kingdom. There is also talk of new coordination among Five Eyes and other partners. In other cases, new initiatives have been launched, such as the Australia-United Kingdom-United States "enhanced trilateral security partnership" (AUKUS) or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Recent developments, such as the election of conservative Yoon Suk-yeol as president in South Korea, are hopeful signs of the revitalization of currently moribund defense and security arrangements, notably U.S.-Japan-South Korea cooperation. There is also reportedly talk of renewed interest in the Trilateral Security Dialogue that includes the United States, Australia, and Japan.

Issues and Insights Volume 24, WP 2 – New Caledonia and French Polynesia: New Opportunities Amid Great Power Competition by Raihaamana Tevahitua.

New Caledonia and French Polynesia, like to other Oceanian nations, are gaining heightened significance within the Indo-Pacific framework. Consequently, both non-sovereign territories have improved leverage to assert their priorities in relation to the central French state. Simultaneously, they are increasingly engaging with foreign partners under the guidance of France. This paper offers recommendations for how these territories can expand their influence in this era of Great Power competition.

Issues and Insights Volume 24, WP 3 – Enhancing the Cooperation between the US and Its Allies in the Mekong Subregion by Sach Nguyen

The Mekong subregion is experiencing heightened geopolitical competition between the US and China, representing a clash between the international rules-based order and a China-led order. While the US and its allies advocate for the rules-based order, China's intentions for its own order in the region are debated. China's increased presence and influence in the Mekong subregion, particularly through upstream control of the Mekong water, reflect its pursuit of this order. In response, the US and its allies, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia, have strengthened cooperation with one another to promote a rules-based system. Despite existing coordination, there is potential for further collaboration to enhance their role in mainland Southeast Asia.

Stability and prosperity in the Mekong subregion are being challenged. Weakening international norms in governing transboundary waters threaten downstream countries' security and livelihoods, exacerbated by climate change-induced droughts. China's growing engagement in the region aims to establish its sphere of influence, primarily through economic development projects like dams and railways, raising concerns over environmental impacts and expanding Chinese influence. Additionally, non-traditional security threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic, cyber security, and human trafficking further complicate the region's situation.

The engagement of the US and its allies in the Mekong subregion is multifaceted, driven by various interests but united in countering China's growing influence. The US, through initiatives like the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) and later the Mekong-US Partnership, seeks to maintain its relevance and preeminence in the region. Japan, South Korea, and Australia also engage with the subregion, for economic interests and to counterbalance China. Japan, for instance, aims to establish production bases and balance China's influence through high-standard infrastructure projects. South Korea focuses on economic development and diversification of trade amid US-China tensions, while Australia prioritizes

promoting a rules-based order and addressing non-traditional security threats. Despite differences in approach, the US and its allies collaborate through platforms like the Friends of the Mekong and initiatives such as the Trilateral Partnership for Infrastructure Investment in the Indo-Pacific, aimed at countering China's Belt and Road Initiative. However, challenges remain in realizing these initiatives, particularly in engaging the private sector and ensuring concrete outcomes amidst competing interests and complex negotiations.

Recommendations for enhancing cooperation between the US and its allies in the Mekong subregion include strengthening international norms and rules, expanding economic infrastructure projects, focusing on non-traditional security issues, and fostering track 1.5 and track 2 diplomacy to promote mutual understanding and collaboration among all stakeholders, including governments, academia, businesses, and civil society organizations. These efforts, facilitated by the US and its allies, can contribute to a more stable and prosperous Mekong subregion.

Issues and Insights Volume 24, WP 4 – North Korea is Winning the Information War by Jonathan Corrado, Chelsie Alexandre, and Alexander Tufto.

The outside world has been presented with two contradictory images of North Korea's younger generation. In the outside media, youth are portrayed as rebellious and radical, ignoring the Kim regime's increasingly harsh crackdowns on foreign media and trends, and instead toting the latest South Korean fashion trends and adopting South Korean lingo. Meanwhile, state propaganda pushes the narrative that North Korean youth are extremely devoted to Kim Jong Un and the regime. Both conceptions of North Korea's younger generation fail to acknowledge a more complex reality.

Kim Jong Un understands the importance of winning over the younger generation to ensure his regime's survival. Since coming into power, Kim has increased the severity of punishments for importing, distributing, and consuming foreign media. This strangled information environment amplifies the efficacy of a youth loyalty campaign designed to bear hug the younger generation. As a consequence, when compared with older cohorts, North Korean youth have a more favorable view of the regime, *juche* ideology, and Kim Jong Un himself. In short, the campaign is working.

A reinvigorated foreign media distribution strategy is needed to break the impasse and win the battle over hearts and minds. Despite the dangers, North Koreans remain highly interested in foreign media. Research shows that those who consume tend to feel more fondly about South Korea and view the North Korean regime critically. Foreign media provides a powerful basis to cross check regime propaganda and can even lay the foundation for a shared understanding of concepts like human rights and civil society. A reinvigorated strategy should focus on content curation and innovative dissemination methods to maximize utility and minimize blowback for end users in North Korea.

[Issues and Insights Volume 24, WP 5 – Gender in Strategic Competition: A Non-Traditional Strategy for Building Resilience in the Indo-Pacific](#) by Charity Borg.

Today’s era is defined by strategic competition with “autocrats [who] are working overtime to undermine democracy and export a model of governance marked by repression at home and coercion abroad.”¹¹ The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is the leading autocratic force, operating with both the intent to reshape the democratic rules-based international order and the resources to advance those aims. States interested in upholding the international rules-based order must enhance their ability to withstand PRC coercion and invest in cultivating a values-based security alliance against the spread of authoritarianism. International collaboration on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda offers a low-cost, high-return opportunity to bolster national and regional resistance to authoritarian coercion while building a coalition of like-minded allies and partners. Increasing national resilience and building alliances that center on enhancing the security of women is a data-backed approach that ensures elevated state stability, democracy, and economic prosperity while increasing the likelihood of a coalition’s willingness to defend the current international rules-based order from those who seek to dismantle it.

An overwhelming body of empirical analysis demonstrates a significant correlation between the security of women and the democratic or authoritarian tendencies of a state. That same analysis also finds that women’s security is a precondition for a state’s level of democracy. Otherwise stated, countries with higher levels of gender equality are more democratic, less corrupt, and more stable. Whereas “states with higher levels of violence against women are less peaceful [internally and] internationally, less compliant with international norms, and less likely to have good relations with neighboring states,” they are also more likely to align with autocratic governance structures.¹² Authoritarian states such as the PRC understand the benefits of empowered societies, which is why their actions on domestic and international fronts actively seek to suppress women. They fear that like-minded allies and partners will successfully improve security for fifty percent of the population and, as a result, will ultimately tip the scales of power and influence to preserve the values-based international order they desire to uproot.

[Issues and Insights Volume 24, WP 6 – Taiwan Strait’s Echo in Korean Peninsula Security and the US-ROK Alliance](#) by Yerin Yoon.

In recent years, the geopolitical landscape of East Asia has undergone significant shifts, with the Taiwan Strait emerging as a pivotal point of great power competition and regional instability. This paper delves into the intricate dynamics in this evolving scenario, examining the multifaceted implications of Taiwan contingencies and their ripple effects

on the security of the Korean Peninsula and the longstanding US-ROK alliance. This study highlights the need for Korea to build strategic plans for a Taiwan contingency by examining the correlation between plausible scenarios and the security challenges of the Korean Peninsula.

This paper explores the broader implications of a Taiwan contingency within the context of great power rivalry and international relations. Moreover, it analyzes specific scenarios related to the Korean Peninsula that could unfold around Taiwan, such as maritime blockades and potential Chinese armed attacks on Taiwanese territory. It then emphasizes the influence of these scenarios on the Korean Peninsula, revealing a complex web of economic security, diplomatic, and military challenges. The article thereafter turns its attention to the US-ROK alliance essential to regional security in East Asia. This analysis examines the strategic ramifications of the relocation of US Forces Korea (USFK) and the possible engagement of the ROK military to assess the potential responses by the US-ROK alliance to the Taiwan crisis. It also highlights how crucial it is to comprehend each of the points of view held by the US and the ROK, underscoring the complex intricacies of the alliance.

Finally, the paper proposes strategic policy recommendations to enhance Korea’s role in regional security. This includes strategies for maritime security, military readiness against conventional threats, and the strengthening of trilateral relationships with the US and Japan, providing a proactive roadmap for Korea’s foreign and defense policy.

[Issues and Insights Volume 24, WP 7 – China’s Responsibility, and Ours: The Persecution and Neglect of Stateless North Korean Children](#) by Rob York, Hannah Cole, and Kaylin Kim.

What happens to the children of North Korean women who are born in China? What happens when they remain in China, or when they escape to other countries? It is believed that as many as 300,000 North Koreans have fled the country—most of them since the famine of the 1990s, and most of them women. To address China’s “bare branches”—its much larger population of young men than young women—North Korean women are often sold to young Chinese men as brides. The children of these brides will be born stateless, lack legal rights, and face the ever-present danger of their mothers’ deportation back to North Korea because they are considered illegal immigrants in China. These unique challenges persist, despite China being a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, among other international treaties. Even those children that eventually escape to third-party countries are haunted by their status, as their statelessness caused legal hindrances to their ability to settle and, specifically in South Korea, deprives them of government assistance. This study documents the treatment of “stateless” children born to North Korean and Chinese parents. It delineates the factors that contribute to their mistreatment—China’s unwillingness to anger the North Korean government, South Korea’s growing disinterest in

North Korean defectors, and a lack of formal networks for North Korean defectors elsewhere. It further finds that, with China openly hostile toward “meddling” in its internal affairs, the most likely source of relief for these children will be a change in attitudes among South Koreans, the United States, and their allies and partners, resulting in conscious effort by their governments and civil societies to help them, both financially and in assisting with their assimilation.