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Philippines: A Political Risk and Strategy Assessment post 2022 Presidential Election

In early May, the Philippines held a presidential election that saw the election of the successor to Rodrigo Duterte in what some observers have billed as the “most consequential election since 1969.”¹ Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr., commonly referred to as “Bongbong” Marcos (BBM), was the official winner with a vote count doubling that of his closest rival.² While major campaign issues focused on the economy and climate change, relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) also featured in the campaigns of the contenders. BBM and opposition candidates staked out harder lines on China, reflecting the overall growing anti-China climate in the Philippines.³ However, while BBM is seen as the most pro-China candidate in the field, it is unlikely that there will be significant

changes in the outward orientation of the new president. The presidential election, and the broader context of the Philippines in the regional geopolitical context, present both challenges and opportunities for Taipei.

Strategic Profile of the Philippines

The Philippines is a US treaty ally in the South China Sea and the archipelago is situated in a strategically important geographic location relative to the south and southeast of Taiwan along the First Island Chain. The Bashi Channel in the Luzon Strait and the Philippines Sea are militarily significant for the effective defense of Taiwan. Beijing’s relations with Manila, and the latter with the United States, are thus important factors to take into consideration when assessing the degree to which Manila could be expected to be involved both during peacetime competition and a Taiwan contingency. Due to its strategic location, the importance of the Philippines has grown considerably in recent years, notwithstanding the efforts by the Duterte Administration to lean towards China. This strategic—albeit primarily military—importance is reflected in the efforts by the United States, Japan, and China to court the Philippines.

1 Sam Chittick, Lisa Curtis, and Richard Javed Heydarian, “Winner(s) Take All? What the May 9 Election Means for the Philippines” (online seminar, The Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington, DC, May 5, 2022), <https://www.stimson.org/event/winners-take-all-what-the-may-9-election-means-for-the-philippines/>.

2 Cliff Venzon, “Marcos wins Philippine presidential election in a landslide,” *Nikkei Asia*, May 10, 2022, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Philippine-elections/Marcos-wins-Philippine-presidential-election-in-a-landslide?amp%3Butm_content=article_link&%3Butm_medium=email&%3Butm_source=NA_newsletter.

3 Richard Javad Heydarian, “China looms large on Philippine campaign trail,” *Asia Times*, April 8, 2022, <https://asiatimes.com/2022/04/china-looks-large-on-philippine-campaign-trail/>.



Image: The five “island chains” of the Indo-Pacific region.

Marcos and Cross-Strait Relations⁴

While there seems to be a general consensus among analysts that BBM will be “friendly” with China—with the new president stating that Philippine-China ties are “set to shift to higher gear,”⁵ which should be of some concern to Taipei—he also appears to be more willing to embrace the United States than Duterte, in part due to Marcos’ family connections. The fact that Duterte’s hostility towards the West and embrace of China did not lead to any meaningful investments in the Philippines by China, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have dampened Filipinos’ perceptions of China. For example, 89 percent of Filipinos want the government to be tougher on China in the South China Sea.⁶ Public opinion should serve as a somewhat limited constraint on BBM’s instinct to lean towards Beijing. Some observers believe that Marcos will “follow the Duterte policy but [he] is seen as more fatalistic and defeatist than the outgoing president.”⁷ If correct, this suggests

that the incoming president could be more pliable than his predecessor to pressure from Beijing.

Yet, even though Duterte was seen as politically close to Beijing, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) were wary of the outreach by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA).⁸ The tense standoff over the Whitsun Reef in 2021 is instructive of this tense military situation. Indeed, “[Duterte] adopted a strategy of *limited* hard balancing towards Beijing. The goal has been to develop the Philippines’ external defense capabilities in light of the great-power competition in the Indo-Pacific region.”⁹ Despite these apparent concerns, the Philippines still spends very little on national defense (less than 1 percent of GDP)—with an even smaller proportion for external defense¹⁰—which calls into serious question whether Manila is willing and able to establish “minimum credible deterrence” of force,¹¹ particularly if the new president is friendly towards China.

CCP United Front and Political Warfare in the Philippines

The Philippines is susceptible to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) united front operations due to a combination of factors: the Philippines’ lopsided trade depen-

globalonline.hku.hk/post-duterte-philippine-foreign-policy-matter-change-or-seeking-equilibrium.

8 Raissa Robles, “Why don’t Manila and Beijing have closer military ties, despite Duterte’s ‘pivot to China’?,” *The South China Morning Post*, December 12, 2019, https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3031629/why-dont-manila-and-beijing-have-closer-military-ties-despite?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3031629.

9 Cruz De Castro, “Post-Duterte Philippine Foreign Policy,”

10 Felix K. Chang, “Hot and Cold: The Philippines’ Relations with China (and the United States),” Foreign Policy Research Institute, July 7, 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/07/hot-and-cold-the-philippines-relations-with-china-and-the-united-states/>.

11 Erick Nielson C. Javier, “Rethinking the Philippines’ Deterrence in the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, March 26, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/rethinking-the-philippines-deterrence-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

4 Image source: Wilson Vorndick, 4th and 5th Island Chain, digital map, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, October 22, 2018, <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-reach-grown-island-chains/#-jp-carousel-24716>.

5 Venzon, “Marcos says Philippine-China ties ‘set to shift to higher gear.’”

6 Chittick, Curtis, and Heydarian, “Winner(s) Take All?”

7 Renato Cruz De Castro, “Post-Duterte Philippine Foreign Policy: A Matter of Change – or of Seeking Equilibrium?,” *AsiaGlobal Online*, Asia Global Institute, May 5, 2022, <https://www.asia->

dence on China compared to Taiwan (even though Taiwan invests more FDI in Philippines than China),¹² the country's weak governance system, and the general lack of capacity of law enforcement to counter CCP malign influence operations. While the Philippine military police was once very active in rooting out communist activities following independence in 1946 and during the Cold War, from the 1970s onwards after normalization of relations between Manila and Beijing, the CCP-PRC party-state made significant inroads into Philippines politics—and has developed a prominent presence in diaspora politics. The present-day manifestations of this are manifold. There is ample evidence that the Philippine's China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (菲律賓中國和平統一促進會), which is directly subordinate to the CCP United Front Work Department, is active in Philippine politics and diaspora political life.¹³ As an indicator of the Philippines' place in CCP overseas united front activities, the Global Overseas Chinese China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification held its conference at the Philippine International Convention Center in June 2019.¹⁴

There have also been serious questions raised involving elite capture, as illustrated by allegations that Duterte's 2016 presidential campaign and subsequent administration had been financed by a mysterious rich Chinese businessman. Whether the businessman has ties to the

Chinese government has not been clearly established as of this writing. PRC national Yang Hongming (楊鴻明, aka Michael Yang¹⁵)—who is ostensibly the vice chairman of Fu Deshang (富德勝), a Xiamen-based company with offices in the Philippines—was a senior economic adviser to Duterte until he was ostensibly stripped of this title following the outbreak of a scandal in which he was implicated in the country's illegal drug trade. Yang appears to be a “go-to powerbroker in the Philippines for Chinese politicians and businessmen looking for smooth transactions in the country.”¹⁶ The company in Xiamen has a CCP cell established in 2018.¹⁷ Growing public concerns about the Yang case, which is ongoing, will likely create greater scrutiny about CCP influence in Philippine politics in the Marcos Jr. era. While it remains to be seen whether the allegations regarding Yang's associations and crimes will be bore out in this case, it is reflective of a broader issue of CCP influence operations in Philippine politics. Either way, Marcos Jr. may be inclined to sweep these issues under the rug given his close political relations with Duterte: his vice president is Davao City Mayor

12 Bonny Lin, “U.S. Allied and Partner Support for Taiwan: Responses to a Chinese Attack on Taiwan and Potential U.S. Taiwan Policy Changes,” RAND Corporation, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CTA1194-1.html>.

13 “以僑為橋通聯世界——記菲律賓中國和平統一促進會會長張昭和” [Using overseas Chinese as a bridge to connect the world - Zhang Zhaohe, president of the Philippines-China Peaceful Reunification Promotion Association], China Peaceful Reunification Promotion Association, August 20, 2019, http://www.zhongguotongcuhui.org.cn/tylt/201903/201908/t20190820_12194526.html.

14 康曉青 (Kang Xiao-qing), “菲律賓中國和平統一促進會訊” [Philippine-China Peaceful Reunification Promotion Association Newsletter], Southeast Web: Philippines, May 15, 2019, http://ph.fjsen.com/2019-05/15/content_22289161.htm.

15 Pia Ranada, “Duterte visited Michael Yang in China around time he finalized presidential bid,” *Rappler*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/inside-track/226792-duterte-visited-michael-yang-china-around-time-declared-presidential-bid/>.

16 Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza, “China-funded projects may face scrutiny after Duterte leaves,” *BusinessWorld*, October 18, 2021, <https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2021/10/18/403968/china-funded-projects-may-face-scrutiny-after-duterte-leaves/>; “Ex-cop Acierto speaks out: Duterte, PNP ignored intel on Michael Yang's drug links,” *Rappler*, March 25, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/226600-ex-cop-acierto-says-duterte-pnp-ignored-intel-michael-yang-drug-links/>; Ranada, “Duterte visited Michael Yang in China around time he finalized presidential bid”; Pia Ranada, *Seat of Power: Political Leadership*, podcast audio, September 16, 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/podcasts-videos/seat-of-power-episode-who-is-michael-yang/>.

17 “熱烈祝賀富德勝黨支部正式成立” [Warm congratulations on the official establishment of Fudesheng Party Branch], *Full Win Finance*, March 29, 2018, http://fullwinfinance.com/news_show.aspx?id=20.

Sara Duterte (the daughter of Rodrigo Duterte).¹⁸ Related to CCP's malign influence operations, US analysts have also raised concerns about the effectiveness of Chinese disinformation campaigns in the Philippines. According to Lisa Curtis of the Center for New American Security, a Facebook page promoting a Duterte ticket had originated in Fujian province, a nexus of CCP united front activities. The heavy penetration and use of social media in Philippines also makes the politics in the country more susceptible to influence operations.¹⁹ The prevalent use of Tiktok—a China-owned platform—as a part of the Marcos Jr. campaign is a case in point. Moreover, China Telecom has made significant inroads into the Philippines' market, which will further hamper security cooperation with allies like the United States.

More broadly, PRC propaganda has a relatively

high-degree of access and enjoys general appeal in Filipinos mainstream popular culture. The Chinese government has programs that

run on the Philippine state-run broadcasting network People's Television Network (PTV)-4, as well as entertainment shows on ABS-CBN and Global Media Arts (GMA), which are the two largest private broadcasting networks in the country. Official programs jointly

Related to CCP's malign influence operations, US analysts have also raised concerns about the effectiveness of Chinese disinformation campaigns in the Philippines.

produced with the Philippine government by China Radio International (CRI)—which is controlled by the PRC's propaganda agency—have aired pro-China radio shows on Philippine radio broadcasting channels since mid-2018. Chinese movies are also reportedly becoming more popular in the Philippines.²⁰

Structural Variables in PRC-Philippines Relations

Despite BBM's proclivity to lean towards Beijing, as one political analyst observed: "Philippine presidents are not free of internal and external constraints to pursue his or her personal foreign-policy agenda. The real issue is whether the new leader can find an appropriate balance in dealing with the two major powers in the Indo-Pacific region – China and the United States."²¹

US-Philippines

Recent years have seen steady advances in the security relationship between the United States and the Philippines, despite occasional high-profile political standoffs between Washington and Manila—due in large part to the Duterte administration's haphazard approach to balancing relations between China and the United States. Yet, relations between Washington and Manila appear to have

stabilized since 2021, and appear back on track with the full restoration of the Visiting Forces Agreement in July of that year.²² "Facilities for US forces at five bases²³ were authorized by the Philippines govern-

18 Richard Javad Heydarian, "What is behind the resurgence of the Marcos dynasty?," *Al Jazeera*, December 14, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/12/14/what-is-behind-the-resurgence-of-the-marcos-dynasty>.

19 Vernise Tantuco, "YouTube networks spread propaganda on Marcoses, Martial Law – study," *Rappler*, December 7, 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/technology/social-media/study-says-youtube-networks-spread-propaganda-marcos-martial-law/>.

20 Jason Hung, "China's Soft Power Grows in the Philippines," *The Diplomat*, February 26, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/chinas-soft-power-grows-in-the-philippines/>.

21 Cruz De Castro, "Post-Duterte Philippine Foreign Policy."

22 Jim Garamone, "Philippine President Restores Visiting Forces Agreement With US," *DOD News*, July 30, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2713638/philippine-president-restores-visiting-forces-agreement-with-us/>.

23 Cesar Basa Air Base; Palawan Island; Fort Magsaysay Military

ment under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement.”²⁴ (The agreement hands US forces operational control of the shared facilities and allows them to stockpile defense equipment and supplies). It is instructive of how some US strategists view the significant military role of the Philippines that, in a recent US wargame, the US militarily responded to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan by first deploying aircraft from the Philippines.²⁵

Moreover, “[i]n December 2018, Philippine National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana asked Washington to clarify the scope of American commitments under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). In March 2019, then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo assured Manila that any armed attack against any Philippine public vessel in the South China Sea would trigger the mutual-defense obligation.”²⁶ In November 2021, the United States and the Philippines announced the “Joint Vision for a 21st Century United States-Philippines Partnership”²⁷ that underscored the mutual defense treaty’s application to new and emerging threats. In March 2022, Filipino and US troops held an amphibious exercise off Cagayan.²⁸ In April 2022, the US and the Philippines

It is not clear whether Manila’s political leadership will have the willingness and fortitude to resist PRC direct military coercion in the event of a Taiwan contingency.

also held the inaugural Maritime Dialogue.²⁹

Japan-Philippines

As a further sign of Manila’s increasing strategic profile, Tokyo—the United States’ most important treaty ally in the Indo-Pacific—has also been deepening its engagements and security cooperation with the Phil-

ippines. In April 2022, the two countries held their first ever “2+2” meeting between their defense and foreign ministers.³⁰ Notably, the readout of the meetings affirmed the two sides’ shared

views on the Taiwan Strait: “Both sides also shared the same view that freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, as well as respect for international law should always be upheld in the said areas. The same view was also held by the two Ministers regarding the situation in the Taiwan Strait.”³¹

The Potential Role of Philippines in a Taiwan Contingency

According to Elbridge Colby, the former US deputy

Reservation; Lumbia Airfield; and Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base.

24 Seth Robson, “We plan to move fairly quickly’: US, Philippines to restart work on shared military facilities,” *Stars and Stripes*, September 23, 2021, https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2021-09-23/us-philippines-mutual-defense-treaty-duterte-2989695.html.

25 “War Games: The Battle For Taiwan,” YouTube video, 26:55, posted by NBC News, May 12, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYfvm-JLhPQ>.

26 Cruz De Castro, “Post-Duterte Philippine Foreign Policy.”

27 US Department of State, “Joint Vision for a 21st Century United States-Philippines Partnership” (press release), November 16, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/joint-vision-for-a-21st-century-united-states-philippines-partnership/>.

28 Priam Nepomuceno, “PH, US troops hold amphibious exercise off Cagayan,” *Philippine News Agency*, March 31, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1171131>.

www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1171131.

29 US Embassy Manila, “The Philippines And The United States Launch Inaugural Maritime Dialogue” (press release), April 22, 2022, <https://ph.usembassy.gov/the-philippines-and-the-united-states-launch-inaugural-maritime-dialogue/>.

30 “Japan, Philippines Eye Further Defense Cooperation at First 2+2 Meeting,” *Voice of America*, April 9, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/japan-philippines-eye-further-defense-cooperation-at-first-2-2-meeting-/6522008.html#:~:text=Japan%20and%20the%20Philippines%20signed,held%20joint%20air%20force%20exercises.>

31 Nepomuceno, “PH, US troops hold amphibious exercise.”

assistant secretary of defense for strategy and force development, the Philippines is one of the most susceptible countries to China's "focused and sequential strategy"—and China's "second natural target" after Taiwan.³² Manila is also arguably one of the most vulnerable members of a hypothetical anti-hegemonic coalition. It is not clear whether Manila's political leadership will have the willingness and fortitude to resist PRC direct military coercion in the event of a Taiwan contingency.

While the political leadership in Manila may not be

alert, some Filipino defense analysts are much more clear-eyed about China. According one such analyst, the Philippines is a "prisoner of geography...it is so close to Taiwan." The analyst also observed that the "[b]est place for US forces

to operate [in a Taiwan contingency is] in Northern Luzon." However, the biggest challenge for Filipinos is that many of them think that a Taiwan contingency is "none of our business." Yet, the Philippines defense establishment understands that Manila would be involved in the conflict one way or another, whether they like it or not, due to Chinese military designs on the first island chain.³³

The Philippines and its surrounding waters are militarily significant for a Taiwan contingency, and thus Manila's relations with the PRC should be of particular concern to Taipei and Washington. Yet, despite the Philippines' strategic military significance—which

is unlikely lost to PLA planners—the framing over the record uptick in Chinese intrusions into Taiwan's southwest air defense identification zone (ADIZ) has focused on its significance to Taiwan and the United States. US analysts such as Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Zach Cooper of the American Enterprise Institute think that even though Manila may allow US basing access in a Taiwan contingency, it is unlikely that they would contribute military forces to a military contingency over Taiwan, noting that "political support for basing access is far from guaranteed, even from some US treaty allies in peacetime."³⁴ More engagement ef-

forts by allies and partners should be made to ensure that the Philippines' political leadership will have the willingness and fortitude to resist PRC direct military coercion in the event of a Taiwan contingency. The impact of gray zone coercion on political attitudes

and morale should not be understated in preparing the ground—and as such, should be addressed in any overall effort to engage Manila.

On balance, any Philippines response to a Taiwan conflict would be contingent on the US-Philippines treaty alliance, as is also true in the case of Japan. Yet while Tokyo has taken a far more assertive stance on Taiwan, with some former senior leaders even calling upon Washington to make its commitment to defend Taiwan explicit in a move towards "strategic clarity,"³⁵ Manila is more disinterested given its lack of capacity to defend

Taiwan should work in tandem with the United States and Japan to shore up Philippines' capacity and enhance its resiliency.

32 Elbridge Colby, "Strategy of Denial: A Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific Region" (online seminar, US-Philippines Society, Washington DC, March 10, 2022), <https://www.usphsociety.org/2022/03/11/strategy-of-denial-a-strategic-framework-for-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

33 Colby, "Strategy of Denial: A Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific Region" (online seminar).

34 Henry D. Sokolski, "Occasional Paper 2101: New Frontiers for Security Cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo," Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, February 2021, https://npolicy.org/article_file/2101_New_Frontiers_Occasional_Paper.pdf.

35 Shinzo Abe, "Op-Ed: The US must make clear to the world it will defend Taiwan against Chinese invasion," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-04-12/china-taiwan-invasion-united-states-policy-ambiguity>.

itself and perceptions of the threat, and would be less likely than Japan to play a role in a Taiwan contingency. Increased engagement by Japan and United States could affect its considerations, so more engagement with the Philippines' strategic community is necessary. However, it will be very difficult to seriously change the Philippines' orientation given how vulnerable it is to China's focused and sequential strategy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the election of a new leader in Manila, there is the potential to reinvigorate ties between the United States and Japan with the Philippines, and by extension Taiwan. However, Taipei must be mindful of the complex political constraints and measure its expectations for progress with Manila.

While it is unlikely that Manila will defect to Beijing's side, the military's overall lack of capacity, the volatility of Filipino politics, and Manila's weak governance make it highly susceptible to PRC influence and hence relations potentially unstable without persistent engagement. Taipei should pursue sustained political, economic, and security engagements with the Philippines, but the goals and expectations should be measured. Manila is unlikely to reciprocate at any senior political level, given its vulnerability to Beijing's coercion. Taiwan should enhance its soft power outreach to Manila through measures such as COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The Philippines is the weakest link the First Island Chain, but it is also an important member of the US-led anti-hegemonic coalition. Taipei and allied efforts at outreach should convey the message that Manila has a direct security interest that Taiwan does not become subjugated by the PRC, given what such an outcome would mean for China's command of the Philippine Sea. Taipei can and should take initiative to pursue more engagement with the Philippines' strategic community in a collective binding strategy with United States, Japan, and Australia—and to a lesser

extent, India. While actively engaging Manila, Taipei should be also cognizant of the regime's poor legacy reputation on human rights and publicly mindful of its implications.

While it will be very difficult to fundamentally change the Philippines' geopolitical orientation, steady advances in the security relationship between the United States and Japan with the Philippines are expected to continue under BBM. Taiwan should work in tandem with the United States and Japan to shore up Philippines' capacity and enhance its resiliency. With growing concerns about CCP influence operations, Taiwan should seek to reconstitute its role in the diaspora community in the Philippines and broader region.

Taiwan and the Philippines should prepare for a spectrum of conflicts ranging from high-end scenarios to gray zone warfare. In the latter category, they should consider Chinese tactics like the use of maritime militia and other hybrid warfare activities in the South China Sea. Coast guard cooperation should be a priority. Other areas where Taipei and Manila could cooperate are disinformation and political warfare, such as efforts at elite capture. The two sides could regularly hold track 1.5 and 2.0 dialogues with policy and security experts on these matters in a trilateral or quadrilateral format³⁶ with American and Japanese counterparts. Taiwanese lawmakers should also consider initiating a "2+2" dialogue with the Philippines, just as it has with Japan.

36 Charmaine C. Deogracias, Yuki Tatsumi, and Renato Cruz De Castro, "Philippines-U.S.-Japan Trilateral Defense Cooperation and their Converging Interests in the South China Sea," (seminar, East-West Center, Washington DC, September 15, 2016), <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/events/philippines-us-japan-trilateral-defense-cooperation-and-their-converging-interests-in-the>.

Demographic Change and South Korea's Shift in Attitude Towards China: Implications for Taiwan during the Yoon Seok-youl Administration

A new president of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Yoon Seok-youl, was inaugurated on May 10. Defeating his liberal opponent (aligned with the previous administration) by only a thin margin in the presidential race, Yoon has vowed to shake up Korean politics by returning to a conservative stance—most notably in foreign policy, which traditionally has meant aligning closely with the United States and taking a more hawkish approach to North Korea (DPRK). Observers generally agree that the Yoon Administration is determined to align South Korea's security and defense policies with the United States—and by extension with Japan—although Seoul will need to balance that tilt with its strong economic ties with China. Against the backdrop of great power competition between the United States and China, buttressed by a significant change in political attitudes within South Korea, the impending shift will likely align the posture of the ROK's foreign and security policy in ways that are favorable for Taiwan's security.

The dramatic change in the political attitudes of South Koreans is striking; and while this factor alone cannot reasonably be credited for Yoon's narrow victory, the clear victory of multiple conservative candidates in a wave during the subsequent local elections could be seen as further evidence of this political shift.¹ Wheth-

er this wave will carry over into the 2024 legislative elections remains to be seen, but underlying demographic trends and shift in the political attitudes suggest that it could. This shift is driven by demographic changes in the ROK's electorate,² which will likely give Yoon greater political support for his foreign policy agenda. While he still faces a National Assembly controlled by the liberal Democratic Party (which controls 167 seats, or 57.39 percent), the National Assembly is slated to have its next election in 2024. This means that President Yoon, with his single five-year term, could face some political headwinds for his policy agenda in the first two years; however, this resistance will likely be surmountable given the underlying changes in the political attitudes of the electorate. According to one Korean political scientist, Seong-Hyon Lee, "Yoon is likely to approach the Taiwan issue from a stance more aligned with the US, a signature political predisposition of his party, the PPP [People Power Party]. He will also likely display more clarity in siding with the United States over China in their rivalry when it comes

rean Local Elections," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/01/world/asia/korea-election-conservatives.html>.

2 Gi-Wook Shin, Haley Gordon, and Hannah June Kim, "South Koreans Are Rethinking What China Means to Their Nation," Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, February 8, 2022, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/south-koreans-are-rethinking-what-china-means-their-nation>.

1 Choe Sang-hun, "Conservative Party Wins Big in South Ko-

to overall ROK foreign policy postures, including democratic values and human rights.”³

As Christian Davies, the Seoul correspondent for the *Financial Times*, observed: “China has lost South Korea’s neutrality.” This observer specifically noted that the younger generations attitude toward China have been shaped by what has happened in Hong Kong, and also with Taiwan.⁴ While this observation reflects an ongoing shift in South Korea, these matters will have to be balanced with Seoul’s continuing concerns about potential Chinese economic retaliation, and Beijing’s role in assisting eventual Korean unification. On the latter issue, however, such concerns may not carry as much weight as in a liberal administration more vested in taking a conciliatory approach towards the north.

US-ROK Alliance: Strategic Flexibility and Taiwan

An alliance concept that has been debated considerably in the context of the US-ROK alliance, with implications for Taiwan, is the notion of “strategic flexibility.”⁵ The concept was first introduced in the George W. Bush Administration in the early 2000s to justify the ability for Washington to rapidly move US military assets out of the Korean Peninsula to wherever these forces may be needed—with the implicit pressing scenario being a Taiwan contingency. The proposal faced vociferous opposition from South Korean policymak-

ers at the time,⁶ who were especially worried that such an arrangement could threaten to entrap South Korea in a war between the United States and China over Taiwan. Even still, the South Korean government agreed in 2006 to acknowledge the “strategic flexibility” of US Forces Korea under the condition of consultation.⁷

During a summit in May 2021—15 years after the uneasy acknowledgement of “strategic flexibility” as a shared alliance understanding, and with regional military conditions severely disrupted by China’s military rise—Presidents Biden and Moon Jae-in publicly stressed the importance of “preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits.” This was the first time that the Taiwan issue was ever included in a joint statement between South Korea and the United States.⁸ At the 53rd Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communique in December 2021 between the two countries’ defense ministers, the two sides again acknowledged “the importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.”⁹

A year later in May 2022, in the summit between Presidents Biden and newly-elected Yoon, the joint statement went further in stating: “The two Presidents reiterate the importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait *as an essential element* in security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region” [emphasis added].¹⁰ In explaining his rationale for the statement, President Yoon stated in a media interview: “Because

3 Seong-Hyon Lee, “South Korean Angle on the Taiwan Strait: Familiar Issue, Unfamiliar Option,” The Stimson Center, February 23, 2022, <https://www.stimson.org/2022/south-korean-angle-on-the-taiwan/>.

4 Victor Cha and Andrew Schwartz, interview with Christian Davies, “Takeaways from the First Biden-Yoon Summit,” CSIS’ The Impossible State, podcast audio, May 26, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/node/65531>.

5 Josh Chang, et al., “Aligning South Korea’s Defense Strategy and Capabilities” (seminar, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Washington, DC, April, 2021), https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Aligning_ROK_Defense_Strategy_and_Capabilities_v3_Final.pdf.

6 President Roh Moo-hyun publicly expressed his strong opposition against such a scenario.

7 Sungmin Cho, “South Korea’s Taiwan Conundrum,” *War on the Rocks*, December 31, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/12/south-koreas-taiwan-conundrum/>.

8 Ibid.

9 US Department of Defense, “53rd Security Consultative Meeting,” Joint Communique, December 2, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2858814/53rd-security-consultative-meeting-joint-communique/>.

10 The White House, “United States-Republic of Korea Leaders’ Joint Statement” (press release), May 21, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/21/united-states-republic-of-korea-leaders-joint-statement/>.

during the previous administration, the Taiwan issue didn't come to the fore, so maybe it wasn't necessary to make that *clear* [emphasis added]. But Taiwan is under a lot of focus right now as an international issue.

And, in this sense, I think declaring the universal principle of international law is something that contributes to the peace and

prosperity of the region.”¹¹ While the statement from the summit between Biden and Yoon was a positive sign, observers agree that the follow through will be key.¹² Taiwan should figure out ways to constructively insert itself in these broader discussions about regional security, through sustained track 1.5 and 2.0 dialogues with counterparts in Seoul and Washington.

With the new US ambassador to the ROK, Philip Goldberg, sworn in,¹³ Taiwan needs to ensure that the appropriate representatives are dispatched to Seoul to bolster relations with both the ROK and the United States—like Japan and the Philippines, there are limited measures these countries could independently do strategically with Taiwan without the United States, so effective bilateral relations with these countries requires diplomats who are knowledgeable and capable of conducting multilateral diplomacy.

While the statement from the summit between Biden and Yoon was a positive sign, observers agree that the follow through will be key.

THAAD Deployment and China

President Yoon has observed that the Taiwan issue has not caught Korean attention until fairly recently; and

Seoul has generally lagged behind Tokyo with regards to Taiwan. However, China's increasing aggression against Taiwan and other countries could no longer be ignored by Seoul, and this is reflected in recent public opinion polls. Beyond the Taiwan issue, there have been significant events in bilateral ROK-PRC relations that have contributed to the deterioration in

relations, and perhaps contributed to a greater willingness by Seoul to push back against Beijing—both at the political/policy level, and at the people-to-people level, that led the president to call during the campaign for a “reset” in relations with China.¹⁴ These events include Beijing's unhelpful response to the DPRK's sinking of *Cheonan* (2010) and the shelling of Yeongpyeong island (2010). Moreover, Beijing's heavy-handed measures in response to South Korea's decision to deploy Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles was a striking display of Chinese coercion—and one that demonstrated to the South Korean people the vulnerabilities and the threats posed by its economic dependence on China. Despite the general deterioration in ties, China remains by far South Korea's largest trading partner. Consequently, Seoul will need to balance its economic relations with China and its security ties with the United States.

During the campaign, Yoon said that he would consider an additional THAAD battery (which will be Korea-owned).¹⁵ Given Beijing's intense opposition to the

11 “New South Korean President on Balancing Relations with the US, China and North Korea,” *CNN*, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2022/05/27/talk-asia-yoon-suk-yeol-hnk-intl.cnn>.

12 Cha and Schwartz, interview with Christian Davies, “Takeaways from the First Biden-Yoon Summit.”

13 Robert King, “Senate Confirmation Advances for Ambassador Philip Goldberg, Nominee for US Envoy to South Korea,” Korea Economic Institute's *The Peninsula*, April 8, 2022, <https://keia.org/the-peninsula/senate-confirmation-advances-for-ambassador-philip-goldberg-nominee-for-u-s-envoy-to-south-korea/>.

14 Hyonhee Shin, “S.Korea presidential frontrunner seeks to ‘reset’ China ties with extra THAAD missile system,” *Reuters*, February 23, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-presidential-frontrunner-seeks-reset-china-ties-with-extra-thaad-missile-2022-02-23/>.

15 Cha and Schwartz, interview with Christian Davies, “Takeaways from the First Biden-Yoon Summit.”

initial deployment, there is no doubt that Beijing will exert a great deal of pressure on Seoul if Yoon proceeds with the purchase of an additional THAAD.¹⁶ This will surely militate against considerations of direct and visible efforts by Seoul to engage Taipei. According to one defense analyst affiliated with the Department of Defense: “With China’s economic retaliation over the US deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system in 2017 still in fresh memory, it is not surprising that Seoul needs to take into account China’s likely retaliation when formulating its position on Taiwan.”¹⁷ In 2017, the United States and the ROK were not prepared for Beijing’s response, and Washington left Seoul unsupported in the face of Beijing’s THAAD pressure. The United States must do better the next time around—and if there is assistance that Taiwan can render when those economic coercive pressures come again, it should be prepared to assist.

CCP United Front Activities in South Korea

Chinese overseas diasporas were instrumental for Beijing in forming relations with other countries in the 1950s through the 1990s. CCP united front organizations are active in South Korea, although the extent to which their activities have had a measurable effect on South Korea politics post-normalization is difficult to say (although their role in the pre-normalization period appears to be quite significant). The negative turn in public attitudes in recent years suggests that their effects have been limited—however, they could also be less visible but more effective at the elite level, particularly against older generations of liberal poli-

ticians. It should be expected that these united front organizations will be mobilized again during the Yoon Administration.

There are six known South Korean chapters of the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR), which is directly subordinate to the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD). The late founder of the national chapter is a very well-known public figure in South Korea: Han Shenghao (韓晟昊), who was even conferred a national award by the Korean government in 1993 for his contributions to South Korea

The US must do better the next time around—and if there is assistance that Taiwan can render when those economic coercive pressures come again, it should be prepared to assist.

and PRC-ROK relations.

The CCPPNR chapters in South Korea are more active than those in many other countries, notably engaging in public protests on policy matters that align with CCP interests. For instance, in 2016, the CCPPNR in South Korea, along with other Chinese associations, mobilized to oppose the THAAD deployments.¹⁸ More recently, it has mobilized to support the Beijing Winter Olympics.¹⁹ It is not clear whether these groups are acting at the direction of the PRC Embassy in the ROK, but the *modus operandi* of united front organiza-

16 Shin, “S.Korea presidential frontrunner seeks to ‘reset’ China ties with extra THAAD missile system.”

17 Cho, “South Korea’s Taiwan Conundrum.”

18 Kori Schake and Allison Schwartz, “Defending Taiwan,” American Enterprise Institute, June 3, 2022, <https://www.defendingtaiwan.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BK-Defending-Taiwan-online-final.pdf>.

19 Liu Lan-liang (劉覽量), “追夢北京 共享冬奧 —韓國僑界迎接北京冬奧會線上座談會暨北京冬奧會倒計時100天活動在韓國首爾隆重召開” [Chasing Dreams of Beijing and Sharing the Winter Olympics - Korean Overseas Chinese Community Joins the Beijing Winter Olympics Online Symposium and Beijing Winter Olympics 100-Day Countdown Event Held in Seoul, South Korea], *Global ECCOM*, October 27, 2021, <http://huaqiao0082.com/content.php?id=206>.

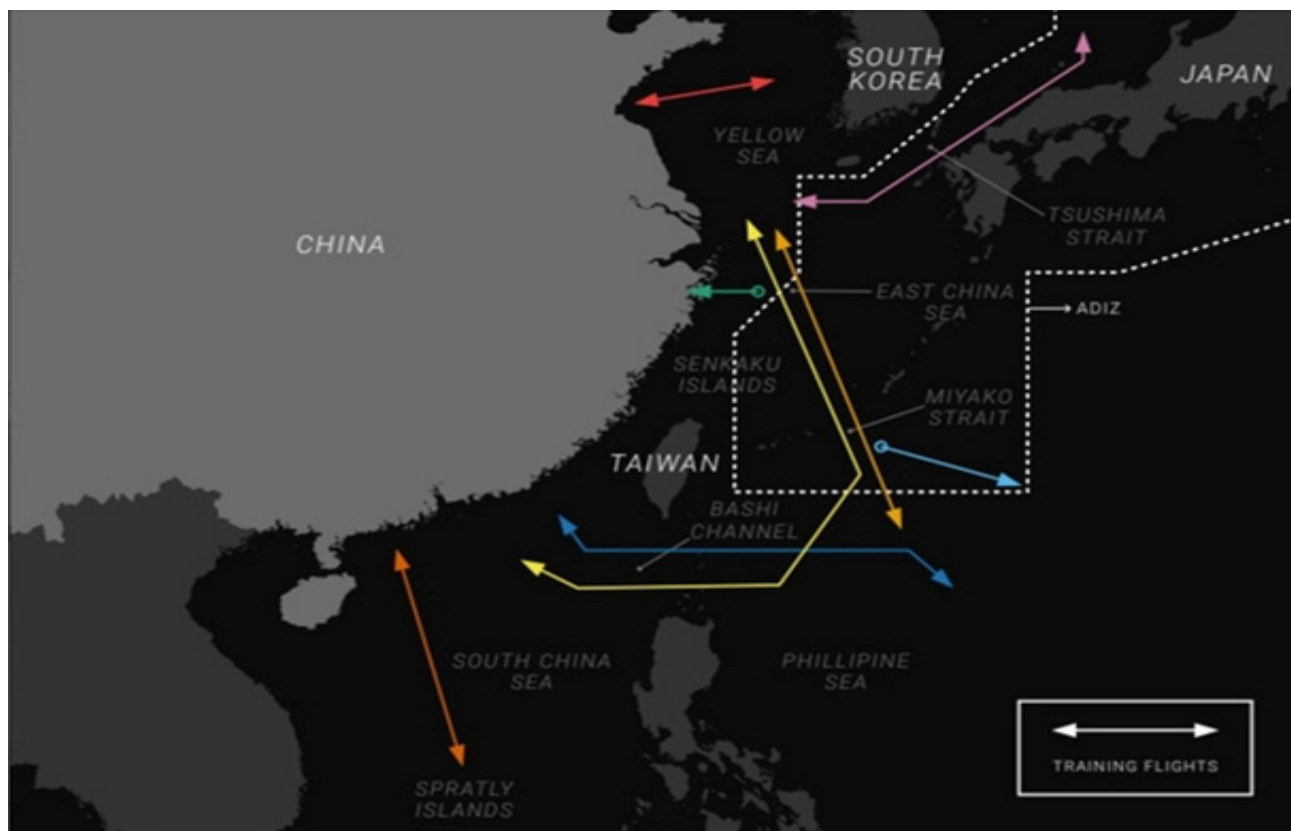


Image: Japan's ADIZ and common PRC regional military flight routes.

tions in other countries suggests that this is likely happening.

Growing Military and Security Concerns

On top of broader geopolitical changes that impact Seoul's decision as a regional middle power, South Korea has become increasingly concerned by the increased number of Chinese incursions into the ROK's air defense identification zone (ADIZ). In late May, following the joint summit between Biden and Yoon—while the former was in Tokyo, and against the backdrop of ROK's condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine—Seoul had to scramble fighter jets after at least four Chinese and four Russian warplanes entered its ADIZ.²⁰ The last time there was a joint Russian

and Chinese patrol in Korea's ADIZ was in 2019, and in that tense encounter South Korean warplanes fired hundreds of warning shots toward Russian military aircraft when they entered South Korean ADIZ during a joint air patrol with China.²¹

These incursions²² began in earnest starting in 2016 and the flight paths were mostly extending out to overlapping areas of Japan's ADIZ (suggesting they were targeted at Japan) and steadily increase through 2018. Starting in 2018, however, these flight paths became increasingly more “provocative,” by starting

²¹ Ibid.

²² Image source: Mercedes Trent, “Over the Line The Implications of China's ADIZ Intrusions in Northeast Asia,” Federation of American Scientists, August 17, 2020, <https://uploads.fas.org/2020/08/ADIZ-Report.pdf>.

²⁰ Shin, “S.Korea presidential frontrunner seeks to ‘reset’ China ties with extra THAAD missile system.”

to focus on ROK's ADIZ (KADIZ), and flying closer to Korean airspace. According to American analyst Mercedes Trent: "China likely initiated flights into the KADIZ, which began on January 31, 2016, as part of its broader coercion campaign to intimidate Seoul into backing out of THAAD deployment. South Korean analysts immediately speculated that the incursion was a show of force to dissuade South Korea from agreeing to THAAD deployment. China also employed other coercive means to dissuade South Korea, including attacking South Korea's economy through imposing import controls, restricting tourism to South Korea, encouraging boycotts of South Korean products, and closing South Korean businesses in China through arbitrary regulations."²³

additional THAAD deployment, no participation in the US's missile defense network, and no establishment of a trilateral military alliance with the United States and Japan) that the THAAD dispute effectively ended. As astutely observed by Trent, there was a noticeable decrease in tension, which "coincided with the PLA shifting from flying heavy flight groups with H-6K bombers to primarily sending single reconnaissance aircraft for KADIZ overflights from 2018 onward."²⁵ These drills from 2018 onward were probing exercises, rather than coercive activities like the bomber flights—a pattern broken by the recent May incursion by Chinese and Russian warplanes. There will likely be an escalation of increased tensions, and a return to flying larger military flight groups by China into Korea's ADIZ, as the Yoon Administration aligns more

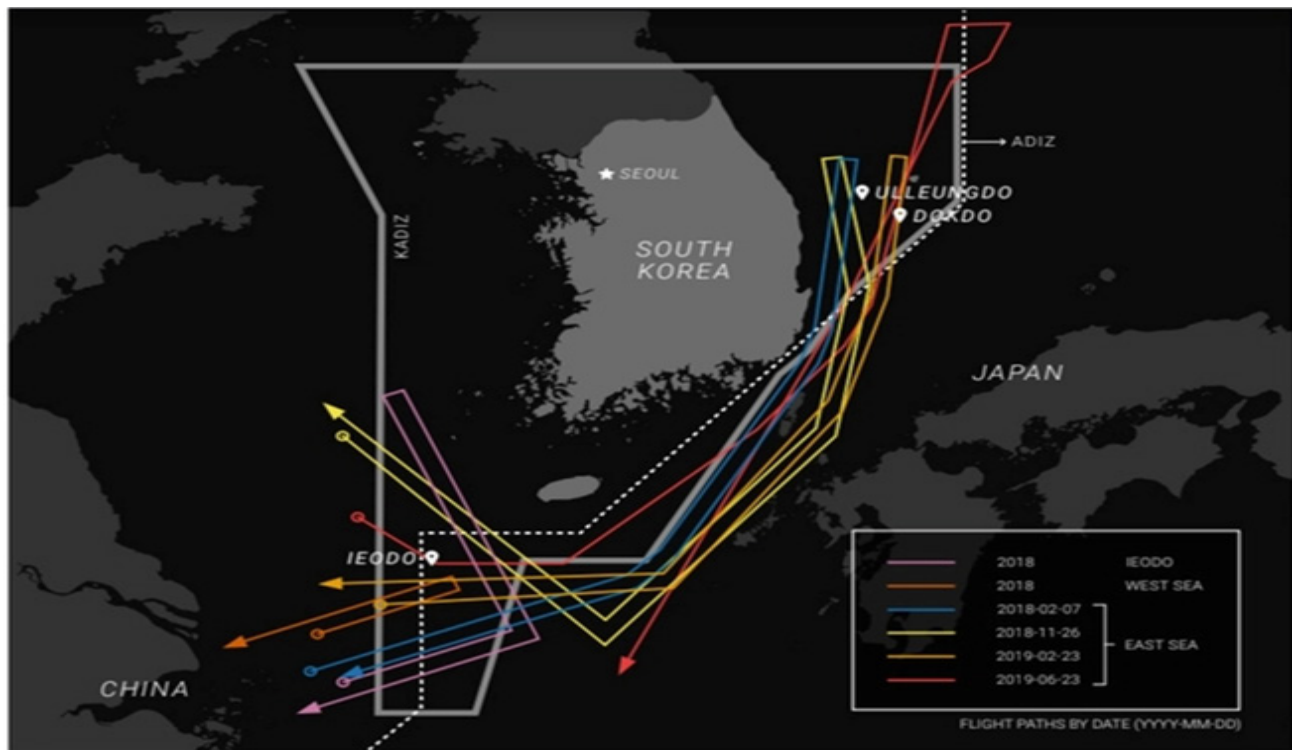


Image: South Korea's ADIZ and common PRC regional military flight routes.

It was only after October 2017,²⁴ when South Korean President Moon Jae-in issued the "three nos" (e.g., no

closely with the United States. These aerial incursions have been compounded by the increasingly aggressive actions taken by Chinese fishing vessels and coast

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Image source: Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

guards:²⁶ in 2021, “South Korea seized a total of 108 Chinese fishing boats in violation of due regulations.”²⁷

Due to the growing threat perceptions from Seoul and Tokyo in their bilateral relations with China, it is instructive that following a 2020 tabletop exercise hosted by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (with participants from the United States, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea), the findings recommended: “Expand[ing] Japan’s and South Korea’s mechanisms to consult and coordinate with Taiwan so they resemble the robust connection between the United States and Taiwan [...] [e]stablish[ing] a secure VTC link between the United States and Taiwan that can be used for consultations at all levels and among all national security departments [and] [e]nsur[ing] that this secure VTC can be expanded to other US strategic partners or allies in the event of crisis or conflict.”²⁸

US-ROK-Japan Relations

A critically important enabler for Northeast Asia security is the prospect for trilateral cooperation between the United States, ROK and Japan. This relationship has long been hampered by longstanding distrust between Seoul and Tokyo over issues of history and territorial disputes. However, enhanced cooperation and coordination between Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo are expected under the Yoon Administration. The press statement from the recent United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting (TMM),

held on June 11 between the defense ministers of the three countries, stated that all participants “expressed strong opposition to any unilateral actions that seek to alter the status quo and increase tensions in the region. They emphasized the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. They shared concerns on activities that are inconsistent with the international rules-based order and stressed the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight. They also reaffirmed that all disputes should be resolved in a peaceful manner in accordance with the principles of international law.”²⁹

Korean Public Opinion

The deteriorating conditions in the broader geopolitical landscape are reflected in the changes in the political attitudes of South Koreans towards China. For instance, a 2021 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that unfavorable views of China had reached near historic highs in 17 advanced economies, including Korea (77 percent). A Stanford survey also found that 84 percent of Koreans viewed China unfavorably, demonstrating an increasing prevalence of anti-Chinese sentiments in Korea.³⁰ Indeed, “Younger Koreans who grew up with liberal, democratic values may be more critical of authoritarian, communist China than the older activists of ‘Generation 586,’ who instead grew up amid anti-American sentiments that fostered greater sympathy towards China.”³¹ These changes bode well for creating political openings in engaging in people-to-people dialogue between Taipei and Seoul, as well as between Seoul and Tokyo. Specifically with regards to Taiwan, in a poll conducted in late May, 59 percent of South Korean respondents believe that their country may be attacked by other

26 Hyonhee Shin, “South Korea ‘fired 249 warning shots’ to fend off Chinese fishing boats,” *Reuters*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-china-fishingboats/south-korea-fired-249-warning-shots-to-fend-off-chinese-fishing-boats-idUSKBN1EE0ZH>.

27 “Coast Guard seizes Chinese boat for fishing in S. Korean waters without permit,” *Yonhap News Agency*, January 22, 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220122002400315>.

28 Michael McDevitt, “Testing U.S. Alliance Capacity to Handle Simultaneous Provocations in East Asia,” Sasakawa Peace Foundation, February 4, 2020, https://spfusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TTXRpt_PacificTrident3-Final-27Apr2020.pdf.

29 US Department of Defense, “United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting (TMM)” (press release), June 11, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3059875/united-states-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-meeting-tmm-joint/>.

30 Shin, Gordon, Kim, “South Koreans Are Rethinking What China Means to Their Nation.”

31 Ibid.

countries in the near future; and the respondents who believed that China might invade Taiwan by force were both as high as 73 percent. In order to confront China and Russia, 77 percent of South Korean respondents believed that they “should cooperate with the United States.”³²

Conclusion

The political and strategic environments in Northeast Asia have changed rapidly in recent years. This change has been accelerated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which is drawing the populations of smaller democracies and countries to become increasingly alarmed by their larger and increasingly aggressive authoritarian neighbors. These dynamics provide an opportunity to advance Taipei’s strategic relations with both Seoul and Tokyo. In the case of the ROK, this is to a large degree a function of the broader geostrategic environment, reinforced by changes in the political attitudes of the population (particularly among the younger generations). These dynamics provide good opportunities to enhance people-to-people ties between the two countries.

While the American alliance network is much more aligned now than in recent history, Taipei must be cognizant of the fact that Seoul remains susceptible to China’s influence. As Korea expert Dr. Jung Pak observed: “Beijing perceives Seoul as the weakest link in the US alliance network, given its perception of South Korea’s deference and history of accommodating China’s rise relative to other regional players, such as Japan, which considers China a long-term security threat.”³³ Beijing will continue to try to focus on South

Korea and pry it from the alliance network—so active and deft engagements by Taipei with Seoul are necessary.

With growing concerns about Chinese military activities, the ROK should be encouraged to publicize these incursions so that its population and analytical community, alongside those in other countries, are fully aware of the scale and scope of Chinese activities in the East China Sea.

If a mechanism does not already exist, think tanks in the three countries should form a consortium to regularly exchange information and perspectives on Chinese activities, and to advise their governments of counter-measures. As the last Asian diplomatic partner to switch ties from the ROC to the PRC in 1992, the ROK has had intimate defense exchanges with Taiwan for many decades. These ties should be reconstituted, particularly in areas of political warfare.

While the CCP is very active and entrenched in South Korea, which will likely make such efforts difficult, there are many avenues for potential engagement between Taiwan and the ROK. Taiwan’s Oversea Community Affairs Commission should be encouraged to strategically engage with the diaspora community in the ROK. Initiatives like the Mandarin Learning Center should be expanded in the ROK to engage the mainstream of Korean society. Taiwan’s representative office in Japan should also commission more polling data in South Korea to get a better sense of the general population’s attitudes toward Taiwan, and to better inform policy and political debates. Lastly, enhancing exchanges between the legislatures of the two countries would serve to deepen political and strategic discussions in the absence of senior official communication channels.

32 “日韓媒體民調：73%受訪者認中國恐犯台” [Japanese and South Korean media poll: 73% of respondents believe that China is a terrorist], *The Liberty Times*, June 10, 2022, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/1522203>.

33 Jung H. Pak, “Trying to loosen the linchpin: China’s approach to South Korea,” Brookings Institution, July, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/trying-to-loosen-the-linchpin-chinas-approach-to-south-korea/>.

NATO's 2022 "Strategic Concept" and Implications for Taiwan

In the Madrid Summit Declaration issued on June 29 by NATO heads of state and governments participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC, hereafter “The Council”)—the principal political decision-making body within NATO and the ultimate authority at the head of a network of committees—the 30-member security bloc¹ issued an extraordinary statement calling out China: “We face systemic competition from those, including the People’s Republic of China, who challenge our interests, security, and values and seek to undermine the rules-based international order.”² This Declaration is remarkable not only for its directness about how NATO perceives the challenges emanating from China and for the fact that NATO has been a Europe-centered and Russia-focused security bloc from its founding in 1949, but also for how it aligns with increasing international concerns about China’s military ambitions and the resulting security implications beyond the Indo-Pacific. This expansion of NATO’s strategic outlook, which is codified in its Strategic Concept (last updated in 2010),³ reflects the acute global concerns with regards

to China’s rise.⁴ NATO’s pivot to the Indo-Pacific—coupled by the advances in the Quad between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, and other regional groupings—reflects conditions that have led to bolstered deterrence against China,⁵ and which could have the positive effect of enhancing Taiwan’s security environment.

The Madrid Summit was also the first time that the heads of state from Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand (all NATO “Contact Countries”) all attended the meeting. News report from Japan described the NATO Summit as the “latest indication [that] democracies and like-minded nations are coalescing in opposition to Beijing’s growing military and economic

Organization, July 29, 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>.

4 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Madrid Summit Declaration” (official text), July 29, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm.

5 This move is consistent with the Biden Administration’s approach of shaping the strategic environment around China as outlined by Secretary Blinken’s China policy speech: “But we cannot rely on Beijing to change its trajectory. So we will shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision for an open, inclusive international system.” Anthony J. Blinken, “The Administration’s Approach to the People’s Republic of China,” (The George Washington University, Washington, DC, May 26, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>.

1 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Finland and Sweden complete NATO accession talks” (press release), July 5, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_197737.htm.

2 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Madrid Summit Declaration” (official text), July 29, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm.

3 “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” North Atlantic Treaty

assertiveness.”⁶ Indeed, the appearance of the leaders from the Indo-Pacific huddled with the Euro-Atlantic security bloc projected a powerful image of increasing solidarity between these two previously strategically estranged regions. Such steps forward in NATO and Asia relations have been a long time coming (as this assessment will review in the coming paragraphs). The Madrid Summit is best understood in the context of the concerted push by the United States for NATO to focus on the China challenge, and the crystallization of this challenge by the Ukraine War.

(then serving as foreign secretary), said the UK rejects “the false choice between Euro-Atlantic security and Indo-Pacific security” in favor of “a global NATO.” “I mean that NATO must have a global outlook, ready to tackle global threats,” Truss said. “We need to pre-empt threats in the Indo-Pacific, working with allies like Japan and Australia to ensure that the Pacific is protected. We must ensure that democracies like Taiwan are able to defend themselves,” she emphasized.⁷ This vision for NATO was reinforced by the US Secretary of Defense as well: “[T]he members of the Alliance are supportive of what’s in the strategic concept, and they



Image: The leaders of the governments of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea, along with the Secretary General of NATO, at the Madrid Summit in June 2022.

The reasons why NATO needed to extend its outlook to the Indo-Pacific was reinforced at the senior level in European capitals. For instance, in a speech on the UK’s foreign policy in April, Prime Minister Liz Truss

recognize the importance of making sure that we pay attention to what’s going on in the Indo-Pacific, and we all have a common interest in making sure that the Indo-Pacific remains free and open and accessible.”⁸

6 Miya Tanaka, “FOCUS: NATO’s reference to China challenge a symbolic turning point,” *Kyodo News*, June 30, 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/06/d14eba766b0f-focus-natos-reference-to-china-challenge-a-symbolic-turning-point.html?phrase=museum&words=>.

7 Cristina Gallardo, “UK’s Liz Truss: NATO should protect Taiwan too,” *Politico*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/liz-truss-nato-taiwan-protect/>.

8 US Department of Defense, “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Holds a Press Conference at the NATO Defense Ministerial in Brussels, Belgium” (transcript), June 16, 2022, <https://>

Although the Madrid Summit and NATO's Strategic Concept are both meaningful for their political signaling, it is important for Taipei to have measured expectations for what NATO could actually do operationally—and much less for what it could do *directly* with Taiwan. As the Japanese news report added, “the move may still be largely symbolic ... due to the likelihood the guidelines will not lead to any specific security commitments in the Indo-Pacific region.”⁹ And even as NATO pivots to the Indo-Pacific, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has stated that its evolving ties with the Asia-Pacific countries do not make the bloc a global alliance: “NATO will remain an alliance of North America and Europe.”¹⁰ According to a US defense analyst referenced in the Japanese news report, “As the new Strategic Concept vows to strengthen cooperation between NATO and its Indo-Pacific partners...the change will center on more defense exchanges, including high-level talks, and more chances of collaboration in exercises. Engagement in out-of-area operations is unlikely.”¹¹ Despite the valid skepticism about the likelihood that there could be an overt security commitment like that of Article V extended to countries in the Indo-Pacific, and the enduring focus of the NATO alliance on the

Taipei should figure out ways to better align itself with NATO's regional initiatives.

European theater, the political signal should not be understated and should be seen in the context of the concept of “integrated deterrence.”¹² The gathering of the heads of state of these Indo-Pacific countries at

NATO, and the joint declaration, do signal top-down support and an important phase in the development of NATO's approach to the region. Taipei should figure out ways to better align itself with NATO's regional initiatives.

NATO's relations with Asia

The transformation in NATO's strategic outlook towards the Indo-Pacific is profound, and it is worth considering the significance of this pivot, and its potential future potential trajectory, for the organization's security cooperation with the region. To be sure, former US officials have noted that “[f]or most of its existence, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has viewed Asia at best as an afterthought in its policies or action.”¹³ As early as the late 1970s, Japanese defense ministers made formal visits to Brussels to explore potential cooperation with the organization but were largely ignored.¹⁴ In the 1990s, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, there began a new phase in NATO's engagement, particularly with Japan.¹⁵

www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3065525/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-holds-a-press-conference-at-the-nato-de/source/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-holds-a-press-conference-at-the-nato-de/.

9 Tanaka, “FOCUS: NATO's reference to China challenge a symbolic turning point.”

10 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government with Partners (2022 NATO Summit)” (transcript), June 30, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_197292.htm.

11 Tanaka, “FOCUS: NATO's reference to China challenge a symbolic turning point.”

12 Jim Garamone, “Concept of Integrated Deterrence Will Be Key to National Defense Strategy, DOD Official Says,” *DOD News*, December 8, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2866963/concept-of-integrated-deterrence-will-be-key-to-national-defense-strategy-dod-o/>.

13 Randall Schriver and Tiffany Ma, “The Next Steps in Japan-NATO Cooperation,” Project 2049 Institute, November 23, 2010, https://project2049.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/next_steps_in_japan_nato_cooperation_schriver_ma.pdf.

14 Ibid.

15 The inaugural Japan – NATO Security Conference was

As noted earlier, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand had all been Contact Countries of NATO since as early as 2004.¹⁶ The term was first introduced in 2004 to provide avenues for joint protection of shipping lanes and assistance with peacekeeping and counter-terrorism missions without formal membership into NATO.¹⁷ Then “[i]n 2007, NATO stepped up its security network in Asia by establishing individual “Tailored Cooperation Packages” (TCP) with the Contact Countries. Under the TCP framework, NATO offers capacity and skills building opportunities to promote interoperability and help integrate partner nations into NATO-led operations.”¹⁸ As a sign of the high-level attention, that same year then-Prime Minister Abe Shinzo stated that “Japan and NATO are partners” to the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Abe was the first ever Japanese Prime Minister to address the NAC.¹⁹

The convergence in strategic thinking between Tokyo and NATO is illustrative of the current convergence between NATO and Asia. Over a decade ago, analysts accurately noted that “Japan and NATO have different perspectives on China and Russia, but both must in some way prudently account for each in security planning. The goal of cooperation should not be to contain China or Russia, but rather there should be a strong emphasis on sharing information and building coordinated approaches.”²⁰ This incongruence in perspectives has been reduced by growing concerns in many

capitals throughout Europe and Asia about the threats posed by both Russia and China, particularly in light of the former’s invasion of Ukraine and the latter’s tacit support of Moscow’s invasion.

While NATO’s engagement with Asia began in the 2000s, it started to take a higher-profile in 2019. In December 2020, NATO Foreign Ministers held the first ever meeting with their Asia-Pacific partners, where the global balance of power and the rise of China featured prominently in discussions.²¹ Less than two years later, NATO Foreign Ministers held another meeting in April 2022—again with the foreign ministers of the four Asia-Pacific partner countries, together with Finland, Georgia, Sweden and Ukraine, as well as the European Union High Representative/ Vice-President of the European Commission—to focus on the global implications of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.²² In May 2022, a meeting of the NATO Military Committee in Chiefs of Defense session with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand was held at NATO Headquarters.²³

The 2022 Madrid Declaration released in late June is not the first time that NATO called attention to China. In fact, that came in the London Declaration of 2019, in which the bloc very diplomatically noted that: “We recognize that China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance.”²⁴ Moreover, as noted by a British think tank, the “soft position” was taken to “avoid taking joint stances, reflecting the diverging economic interests members have with Beijing, and their differing assessments of the degree to which the alliance should remain fo-

convened in Belgium in July 1990 and in 1991, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner visited Tokyo, marking the first visit of a NATO Secretary General to Japan. See: Ibid.

16 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO’s Relations with Contact Countries,” updated April 9, 2009, accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.nato.int/summit2009/topics_en/12-contact_countries.html.

17 Schriver and Ma, “The Next Steps in Japan-NATO Cooperation.”

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Relations with Asia-Pacific Partners,” updated July 12, 2022, accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_183254.htm.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “London Declaration” (press release), December 4, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm.

cused on threats from Russia.”²⁵ Developments in the past three years leading up to 2022 led to the clear difference in tone and message reflected in the Madrid Declaration.

Are We Headed towards SEATO 2.0?

The shift in the strategic outlook of NATO towards the Indo-Pacific with a focus on China, has led to some US defense planners and policymakers to reconsider the value of a multilateral alliance structure in the Indo-Pacific. Admiral John Aquilino, commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), stirred controversy when he commented in April 2022:

*If nations want to come together to provide security and prosperity, then I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. We have seen the benefit of when like-minded nations come together in the increased strength in NATO based on the Russian actions. That's a pretty good model for Indo-Pacific nations who value freedom.*²⁶

The suggestion by the INDOPACOM commander that NATO offers a good model for Asia sparked renewed interest in a multilateral defense architecture in the region. Previous attempts to create a multilateral defense treaty alliance in Asia failed with the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which was formed in 1954 and barely got off its feet before dissolving a little over two decades later in 1977.²⁷ Of course, the geopolitical environment now is not what it was when SEATO was attempted. Some US strategic thinkers are now recommending the establishment of a trans-regional

security organization. In calling for a “North Atlantic Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization” (NAIPTO)—which geographically combines the Euro-Atlantic theatre with the Indo-Pacific—Miles Yu, a senior advisor to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, argued:

*NAIPTO would eliminate the most significant limitation to the US-led alliance in the Indo-Pacific: the inadequacy of America's bilateral alliances in the region. NATO is a multilateral alliance, but America's alliance system in the Indo-Pacific is bilateral. The US has strong defense agreements with key allies in Asia, including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. But those nations do not have mutual defense arrangements for multilateral defense.*²⁸

Clearly recognizing the limitations of the current US hub-and-spokes system of alliances in Asia, the objective of NAIPTO would be to counter “the China-led, Beijing-Moscow axis of tyranny and aggression.”²⁹ According to Yu: “Russia’s war on Ukraine crystallizes the common sources of aggression by the world’s two remaining civilization states: China and Russia.”³⁰

Although a multilateral defense treaty would be desirable to some countries in the Indo-Pacific, this is not a widely shared view among most states in the region, particularly those susceptible to China’s influence and coercion. In general, most countries in the region—and in particular, within Southeast Asia—do not want to have to pick a side. They want to benefit from their economic relationships with China while at the same balancing risks with their security relationships with the United States.

NATO defined the organization’s objectives for global

25 Tanaka, “FOCUS: NATO’s reference to China challenge a symbolic turning point.”

26 Emma Connors, “NATO a good model for Indo-Pacific: US military commander,” *Financial Review*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.afr.com/world/asia/nato-a-good-model-for-indo-pacific-us-military-commander-20220427-p5agm4>.

27 John J. Tierney Jr., “Reviving SEATO,” *The Institute of World Politics*, August 25, 2020, <https://www.iwp.edu/articles/2020/08/25/reviving-seato/>.

28 Miles Yu, “Miles Yu on Taiwan: NAIPTO—Toward a Eurasian, transoceanic multilateral collective defense alliance,” *Taipei Times*, July 11, 2022, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2022/07/11/2003781525>.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

partners under the “2008 Bucharest Summit,” which emphasized support operations, security cooperation, and enhanced common understanding to advance shared security interests and democratic values with the Contact Countries.³¹ It is most feasible and probable than a NATO-like organization in Asia, at least in the near term, would follow this model and work in the region through regional mechanisms like Quad and AUKUS.

While the “Quad” (the informal grouping of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India) is not a defense alliance, it has become more institutionalized in recent years. It started as an ad hoc coordination mechanism for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. In November 2020, members of the four-power Asian “Quad” held joint naval exercises for the first time.³² A year later in September 2021, President Biden hosted Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga at the White House for the first-ever in-person Quad Leaders’ Summit.

In the context of Taiwan, it is instructive that President Biden responded unequivocally in the affirmative when asked in May of this year whether he would intervene militarily to defend Taiwan.³³ Far from an unintentional gaffe, the location and timing of the statement seemed carefully orchestrated by the Biden

Administration: next to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo and as the leaders of the Quad nations prepared to meet for the fourth time.³⁴

In recent years, Tokyo has grown increasingly vocal about its concerns regarding China’s military aggressions. Against the backdrop of the Ukraine war, former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo penned an April 2022 op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* calling on the United States to explicitly commit to Taiwan’s defense. The underlying motivation for the op-ed likely

Although a multilateral defense treaty would be desirable to some countries in the Indo-Pacific, this is not a widely shared view among most states in the region, particularly those susceptible to China’s influence and coercion.

stemmed from a recognition of the role that Japan would likely have to play in the event of a military contingency over Taiwan. These debates are surely happening behind closed doors in other capitals as well, and amid rising concerns about China’s aggression Tokyo—and

other allies—must have their own internal debates to ensure that the political conditions and the legal means are in place to effectively respond. It is instructive that in November 2021 Australian Defense Minister Peter Dutton stated that, “It would be inconceivable that we wouldn’t support the US in an action if the US chose to take that action [to defend Taiwan].”³⁵

The announcement in September 2021 of the trilateral AUKUS security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States serves as another

31 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO’s Relations with Contact Countries.”

32 Tierney, “Reviving SEATO.”

33 Joseph Biden, “Biden Says US will Defend Taiwan Militarily If China Invades,” YouTube video, 1:15, posted by NBC News, May 23, 2022, <https://youtu.be/g0p4f1BSzts>.

34 The White House, “FACT SHEET: Quad Leaders’ Tokyo Summit 2022” (press release), May 23, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-tokyo-summit-2022/>.

35 “‘Inconceivable’ Australia would not join US to defend Taiwan—Australian defense [sic.] minister,” *Reuters*, November 12, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/inconceivable-australia-would-not-join-us-defend-taiwan-australian-defence-2021-11-12/>.

important link between Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security. Further underscoring this important linkage, the Pentagon has recently appointed a senior official to perform the coordinating mechanism within the Pentagon to work with AUKUS.³⁶

Conclusion: NATO and Taiwan

The NATO 2022 “Strategic Concept” calls to “work together responsibly, as Allies, to address the systemic challenges posed by the [People’s Republic of China] to Euro-Atlantic security.”³⁷ As the Ukraine war has shown, by Beijing’s tacit support for Moscow and increasing joint patrols by Russian and Chinese fighters in the East China Sea,³⁸ Indo-Pacific security cannot be separated from Euro-Atlantic security as revisionist authoritarian powers seek to recreate their spheres of influence—and at times, seem further intent to jointly dominate both theaters.

As President Biden has made clear: “the idea that, that it [Taiwan] can be taken by force, just taken by force, is just not, is just not appropriate. It will dislocate the entire region and be another action similar to what happened in Ukraine and so it’s a burden that is even stronger.”³⁹

In an era of strategic competition in which the core principles of international security are being contested, NATO must work even more closely with like-minded countries.

NATO and each of the four Asia-Pacific Contact Countries have developed Individual Partnership Cooperation Programs, with cooperative activities focusing on topics of mutual interest including: cyber defense, non-proliferation, civil preparedness and women, and peace and security. Taipei should work with the Contact Countries to see how Taiwan can participate in these activities and better align with the initiatives. These partners should include Taiwan in their respective programs and invite Taiwan as an observer to any relevant committee meetings.⁴⁰ Indeed, the issue areas underscored in the Madrid Declaration and in the Strategic Concept are areas in which Taiwan has important technical knowledge and expertise.

In an era of strategic competition in which the core principles of international security are being contested, NATO must work even more closely with like-minded countries. As clearly noted by NATO in July after the Madrid Summit: “This is why strengthening relations with the Asia-Pacific partners forms an important aspect of the NATO 2030 agenda.”⁴¹ Cooperation in several areas have been emphasized, including cyberspace, new technology countering disinformation, maritime security, climate change, and resilience.⁴² Over the next decade, Tailored Cooperation Packages, especially with the four Contact Countries, could be methods for improving coordination both directly and indirectly between NATO and Taiwan to promote peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the broader Western Pacific.

36 US Department of Defense, “Statement on AUKUS Senior Adviser” (press release), July 29, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3109966/statement-on-aukus-senior-adviser/>.

37 Biden, “Biden Says US will Defend Taiwan Militarily If China Invades.”

38 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.”

39 Nobuhiro Kubo, Hyonhee Shin, and Michael Martina, “Russian and Chinese jets deliver pointed send-off on last day of Biden

Asia trip,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/russian-chinese-jets-conducted-joint-patrol-moscow-says-2022-05-24/>.

40 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Relations with Asia-Pacific Partners.”

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

A Preliminary Assessment of Southeast Asian Views of the Taiwan Strait after Speaker Pelosi's Visit

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's high-profile visit to Taiwan in early August—the first speaker in 25 years, and the very first from the Democrat Party to visit—generated attention across the world. To be sure, the Taiwan Strait has been a focus of growing international concern in recent years, but Beijing's determined opposition and military provocations in response to Speaker Pelosi's long-planned visit to Taiwan were especially pronounced, and attracted even greater global attention.

The Speaker's visit was originally planned for April 2022,¹ but was postponed because the Speaker tested positive for COVID-19. The possibility of the visit was raised between senior US and Chinese officials in early July, so Beijing knew well in advance that the visit could occur.² Despite the advance warning, the lead up to the Speaker's visit unfolded in an unusually dramatic fashion. Some Chinese state mouthpieces claimed that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) could prevent the Speaker's plane from landing or otherwise obstruct the flight, with others making even more provocative threats that the Chinese military would shoot down

her plane.³ The barrage of Chinese propaganda against the Speaker's visit was amplified by many commentators in the United States and elsewhere, claiming of dire consequences if the Speaker went ahead with her planned visit. These assessments contributed to a prevailing narrative that framed the Speaker's visit as an act provoking Beijing, in contrast to the stated purpose of Speaker Pelosi's trip: a visit necessary to demonstrate democratic solidarity in the face of People's Republic of China (PRC) military coercion, and the ever-increasing pressure squeezing Taiwan's international space.⁴

The reasons why certain governments responded to Speaker Pelosi's visit the way they did are important to understand. While the positive effects of the visit are not emphasized enough in public debates, the negative reactions are still worth assessing if efforts to internationalize the Taiwan Strait are to proceed. There could be genuine criticisms of Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan: for example, on grounds of a lack of clarity in US policy, or perceived inconsistency with longstanding US policy on Taiwan (even though the Biden Admin-

1 Martin Quin Pollard, "China warns US against House Speaker Pelosi visiting Taiwan," *Reuters*, April 7, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-warns-strong-measures-if-us-speaker-pelosi-visits-taiwan-2022-04-07/>.

2 Ibid.

3 Wang Yunfei, "Five possible ways the PLA could thwart Pelosi's Taiwan visit," *Global Times*, July 31, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202207/1271825.shtml>.

4 Nancy Pelosi, "Nancy Pelosi: Why I'm leading a congressional delegation to Taiwan," *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/08/02/nancy-pelosi-taiwan-visit-op-ed/>.

istration asserts that it hasn't changed as a result of the visit).

However, other visits in the past have not elicited the same kind of international reaction, and Beijing's propaganda has played a role in drumming up the opposition to Speaker Pelosi's visit. The precise means by which Beijing engaged in this campaign is outside the scope of this review, but it warrants further study. The most striking element of this particular propaganda campaign has been Beijing's success in hijacking the narrative over its increasingly dangerous behaviors at sea and in air,⁵ and redirecting this attention to the visit by a member of the US Congress, as if this visit compelled its behaviors. As Ely Ratner, assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, stated in July: "In recent months, we've witnessed a sharp increase in unsafe & unprofessional behaviors by PLA ships & aircraft."⁶

The focus on this analysis is to review and assess the responses of Southeast Asia countries in particular, and their implications for Taipei and Washington going forward. The episode was a telling incident because it further illuminated the risk perception of countries in the region with regards to the Taiwan Strait. This in turn raises implications for potential future acts of support for Taiwan. Given the region's proximity to the Taiwan Strait, as well as its role in Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, Southeast Asia is naturally an interested party in the peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

While the positive effects of the visit are not emphasized enough in public debates, the negative reactions are still worth assessing if efforts to internationalize the Taiwan Strait are to proceed.

While the positions of Southeast Asian countries on the matter of Taiwan have largely hewed to rigid neutrality and general deference to Beijing, several important treaty allies and security partners of the United States are in Southeast Asia—and some may be called upon to support the United States in a Taiwan contingency. Up until now, discussions with these allies and partners about a Taiwan crisis have been virtually

non-existent, but there are signs that things could be starting to change as tensions ramp up.⁷

Reactions to Speaker Pelosi's visit in Southeast Asia were largely expressions of concern over Speaker Pelosi's visit—to the effect that the visit provoked Beijing's retaliatory responses and escalated tensions in

the region. In the immediate aftermath of the exercises, most if not all countries in region expressed staid support for the PRC's "One-China Principle," or some form of its "One-China Policy." A more nuanced assessment of how countries in the region responded to Speaker Pelosi's visit will help provide a better sense of their risk perceptions and views towards the situation in the Taiwan Strait.

Regional Responses to Speaker Pelosi's Visit

In a clear nod to Beijing, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers released a statement that "reiterate[ed] ASEAN Member States' support for their respective One-China Policy," while calling for "maximum restraint, refrain[ing] from provocative action and [...] upholding

5 Thomas Kika, "US Has Faced 'Dozens' of Dangerous Events With China in 2022: DoD," *Newsweek*, July 26, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-us-south-china-sea-2022-incidents-department-defense-1728159>.

6 Ibid.

7 Ryo NakaMura and Yuichi Shiga, "Philippines may allow U.S. military access during Taiwan crisis," *Nikkei Asia*, September 5, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Philippines-may-allow-U.S.-military-access-during-Taiwan-crisis>.

the principles enshrined in United Nations Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC).⁸⁹

In addition to the joint statement, some countries in the region also issued their own statements. As summarized by Derek Grossman, a senior defense analyst at the Rand Corporation:

Indonesia called on all parties “to refrain from provocative actions,” adding that it continued to “respect the One China policy.” Singapore hoped “the U.S. and China can work out a modus vivendi, exercise self-restraint and refrain from actions that will further escalate tensions.” Vietnam, a fast-emerging key regional partner of the United States, hewed closely to its past statements, noting, “Vietnam persists in implementing the ‘One China’ principle and hopes relevant parties exercise restraint, refrain from escalating the situation in the Taiwan Strait, and actively contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability.” Malaysia and Thailand made similar statements that refrained from supporting Taiwan.¹⁰

It is noteworthy that these countries—some of whom

are closely aligned with Beijing, and all of whom have economic interests tied to China—did not take positions in direct support of the PRC’s actions. One reason for this may be, according to analysts at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, that “[t]he consensus among elites and much of the public across Southeast Asia is that while the trip may have been ill-timed or unnecessary, Beijing’s reaction has



Image: The 12th East Asia Summit foreign ministers’ meeting was held in Cambodia in early August

been beyond the pale and it was imperative that the United States stand firm.”¹¹ This view, however, is not uniformly shared among the US analytical community. As Rand’s Grossman highlighted: “Heightened tensions in the Taiwan Strait also elicited responses from other nations in the Indo-Pacific that predictably and overwhelmingly upheld Beijing’s ‘One China’ principle—that Taiwan is part of mainland China.”¹²

8 Derek Grossman, “After Pelosi’s Visit, Most of the Indo-Pacific Sides with Beijing,” *Foreign Policy*, August 22, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/22/china-taiwan-pelosi-crisis-missiles-indo-pacific-allies-support/>.

9 Image source: Ibid.

10 June Blanchette et. al., “Speaker Pelosi’s Taiwan Visit: Implications for the Indo-Pacific,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 15, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/speaker-pelosis-taiwan-visit-implications-indo-pacific>.

11 Grossman, “After Pelosi’s Visit, Most of the Indo-Pacific Sides with Beijing.”

12 “Thailand affirms neutral stance,” *Bangkok Post*, March 11, 2022, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2277283/>

What accounts for the discrepancy between public views and the official positions of the regional governments? The aforementioned assessments of regional perceptions and approaches may appear contradictory at first glance, but they are in fact reconcilable. There is broad support among regional countries to maintain both the current political status quo and their diplomatic and economic relations with Beijing. Even if Speaker Pelosi's visit does not change fundamental elements of US policy towards Taiwan, Beijing's strong response forced countries to reaffirm their position on the issue or suffer Chinese economic punishments (as seen in the case of Australia). On the other hand, countries in the region are increasingly wary of China's military aggression, and many still look to the United States as the critical security balancer in the region. So while expression of support for a "One-China Policy" may be interpreted as deference for Beijing's position, it should not be automatically assumed to indicate their support for Beijing's claims over Taiwan.

US Treaty Allies

Regional countries' relations with the United States are also a factor to consider in evaluating their responses to Speaker Pelosi's Taiwan visit, and these responses reflect how the countries in the region balance their relations between China and the United States. The United States has treaty commitments with two countries in Southeast Asia: Philippines and Thailand. Since the end of the Cold War, both treaty allies have drifted to align more closely with Beijing. Geopolitically speaking, Thailand is more aligned with Beijing than the Philippines: for instance, Thailand has maintained its neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.¹³ Despite Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, which saw the Philip-

thailand-affirms-neutral-stance.

13 Anna Felicia Bajo, "Palace: Philippines 'closely monitoring' China's actions amid Pelosi's Taiwan visit," *GMA News*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/840341/palace-philippines-closely-monitoring-china-s-actions-amid-pelosi-s-taiwan-visit/story/>.

ippines lean closer to Beijing, Manila has begun to show signs that it may move closer to the United States.

Manila's response to Speaker Pelosi's visit was particularly instructive. The Philippines took a cautious and measured approach: the Philippines' press secretary, Cruz-Angeles, reportedly declined to comment on the appeal of PRC Ambassador Huang Xilian (黃溪連) for the Philippines to "strictly abide" by the One-China policy. Cruz-Angeles reportedly said "There is no reaction. Usually, when it's a matter of international relations, we take time to study the matter and do not react immediately. Loose words might affect relationships and [they're] very difficult to rebuild."¹⁴

Beijing's irredentist claims play a role in Manila's shifting position. As Rand's Grossman noted: "One clear exception to Southeast Asian hedging was the response of the Philippines, a US treaty ally in open conflict with China over the latter's maritime claims."¹⁵ Furthermore, as CSIS analysts noted:

[I]n the Philippines [...] government and thought leaders increasingly recognize that they will likely be party to any conflict over Taiwan, whether they seek to be or not. The Philippines' northernmost islands are within sight of Taiwan and some of the military exercise areas declared by China crossed into the Philippine exclusive economic zone. Nearly 200,000 Philippine citizens live and work in Taiwan. And for the first time, the U.S. and Philippine governments are beginning to have honest conversations about their expectations of each other in a Taiwan contingency. That is part of a process of alliance modernization kicked off at last year's Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, which includes ongoing negotiations on new defense guidelines, a General Security of Military Information Agreement, a new maritime security

14 Grossman, "After Pelosi's Visit, Most of the Indo-Pacific Sides with Beijing."

15 Blanchette et. al., "Speaker Pelosi's Taiwan Visit: Implications for the Indo-Pacific."

dialogue, and the long-delayed start of U.S.-funded upgrades of and access to Philippine bases under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. Newly installed president Ferdinand Marcos Jr. met with Blinken in Manila over the weekend and was asked by the press about the tensions around Taiwan. His response underscored the shift seemingly underway in the alliance: “This just points to the fact of the importance of the relationship between the United States and the Philippines.”¹⁶

Thailand, on the other hand, expectedly provided a coy response: “Thailand is closely following developments regarding the situation in the Taiwan Strait with much concern. Thailand stands by the One-China Policy. We do not wish to see any actions that would aggravate tensions and undermine peace and stability in the region. We hope that all parties concerned exercise utmost restraint, abide by international law and principles of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and resolve their differences through peaceful means.”¹⁷ Thailand’s political volatility in recent years, and its broader geopolitical alignment with Beijing, have diminished the alliance with the United States. As noted by Richard Bush of the Brookings Institute: “The pact with Thailand is almost a dead-letter: joint exercises continue but periodic military coups and Bangkok’s tilt to Beijing have diluted relations of strategic value.”¹⁸

The US government needs to invest more resources and efforts in explaining its Taiwan policy in Southeast Asia, and to invest more resources in public diplomacy to engage the public within the region.

US Security Partners and Regional Players

In addition to treaty allies, Washington has enhanced security partnerships with countries in the region such as Singapore and Vietnam.¹⁹ Singapore is an important security partner of the United States, and the city-state also maintains close security relations with Taiwan.²⁰ In private conversations with US think tank experts, analysts there have stated that they would like the United States to have “strategic clarity about strategic ambiguity.”²¹ Reflective on the more general view in the region, countries do not want to have to choose

between their economic relations with China and security partnership with the United States, and some Asian countries seem to be worried about the perceived inconsistency of US policy and the impact that it

could have on regional security. Meanwhile, Vietnam, another growing strategic partner of the United States, stated in response: “Vietnam persists in implementing the ‘One China’ principle and hopes relevant parties exercise restraint, refrain from escalating the situation in the Taiwan Strait, and actively contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability, promoting cooperation and development of the region and the world.”²²

16 Kingdom of Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Situation in the Taiwan Strait” (press release), August 3, 2022, <https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/taiwan030865-2?cate=5d5bc-b4e15e39c306000683e>.

17 Richard Bush, “America’s Alliances and Security Partnerships in East Asia: Introduction,” The Brookings Institution, July 5, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/fp_20160713_alliances_introduction.pdf.

18 Ibid.

19 Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “55th ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting” (press release), August 3, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2022/08/20220803-55th-ASEAN-Foreign-Ministers-Meeting>.

20 Ibid.

21 “Vietnam calls for restraint from all parties in Taiwan situation,” *The Star*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2022/08/03/vietnam-calls-for-restraint-from-all-parties-in-taiwan-situation>.

22 Ibid.

Viewing the matter of Speaker Pelosi's visit as an issue between United States and China, Jakarta has stated: "Indonesia is deeply concerned with the increasing rivalry among major powers. If not managed well, it may lead to open conflict and disrupt peace and stability, including in the Taiwan [S]trait."²³ Similarly and perhaps reflective of the prevailing mood in the region, Malaysia, while committing to its "One-China Policy," added: "We put a lot of value to both the US and China when it comes to trade and technology in the region. So we want to be friends with both China and the US."²⁴

The positions taken by governments in region are generally consistent with the prevailing attitudes of the population in those countries, as indicated by the "State of Southeast Asia 2022 Survey Report," published by Singapore-based ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS).²⁵ Summarizing the report's findings, the *Asia Times* noted that "Today, more than two-thirds of Cambodians and [Laotians] think ASEAN should side with China. Most Bruneian respondents also agreed with this. But more than two-thirds of Burmese, Filipinos and Singaporeans now say America. And it appears that the typical hedgers, like Singapore and Malaysia, are gravitating further toward the US."²⁶

23 "At ASEAN meet, Malaysia urges all concerned parties to address tension in Taiwan Strait very carefully," *Malaymail*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/world/2022/08/03/indonesia-calls-for-de-escalation-after-pelosis-taiwan-visit.html>.

24 Sharon Seah et. al., "The State of Southeast Asia 2022: Survey Report," ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, February 23, 2022, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/The-State-of-SEA-2022_FA_Digital_FINAL.pdf.

25 David Hutt, "Shifting SE Asia sentiment amid US-China rivalry," *Asia Times*, February 22, 2022, <https://asiatimes.com/2022/02/shifting-se-asia-sentiment-amid-us-china-rivalry/>.

26 Frederick Deveau, "Democracy Perception Index 2022," Lantana, Alliance of Democracies, May 26, 2022, [https://7049607.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7049607/Democracy%20Perception%20Index%202022.pdf?utm_campaign=DPI%202022&utm_medium=email&_hsmt=214709308&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--r4xd93k1u_XGNZEieOGT2j28KEljXGspcrvh6OtyYfaU-JWd15-mfAn_31EtvkLuxKtYVWqQpZDTstx17WE52TM0tc-](https://7049607.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7049607/Democracy%20Perception%20Index%202022.pdf?utm_campaign=DPI%202022&utm_medium=email&_hsmt=214709308&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--r4xd93k1u_XGNZEieOGT2j28KEljXGspcrvh6OtyYfaU-JWd15-mfAn_31EtvkLuxKtYVWqQpZDTstx17WE52TM0tc-jg&utm_content=214709308&utm_source=hs_automation)

Public opinion captured by survey also reflects the unwillingness of people in the region to sever their economic relations with China in the event of a conflict over Taiwan. The "Democracy Perception Index 2022" survey asked: "If China started a military invasion of Taiwan, do you think your country should cut economic ties with China?" Three key observations drawn from the report are:

- Indonesians ranked among the top three national groups that wanted to maintain ties with China.
- A net majority of respondents from all six Southeast Asian states surveyed also said their own governments should maintain economic relations in this eventuality, including Vietnamese and Singaporeans. Filipinos were almost divided equally on the question.
- Almost all Western democracies and their main Asian partners, like Japan and South Korea, supported cutting economic ties with China if it invades Taiwan.

Conclusions

The reactions to Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan from Southeast Asian countries underscore the sense of greater uncertainty among Southeast Asian countries over how to respond to the increasingly tense US-China competition, and their concerns about how ASEAN as a bloc can deal with these problems.²⁷ As US Asia expert Mike Green has observed: "ASEAN is wary that great power competition has undermined ASEAN's capacity to exercise considerable agency to shape the regional dynamics."²⁸ Fundamentally, South-

[jg&utm_content=214709308&utm_source=hs_automation](https://7049607.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7049607/Democracy%20Perception%20Index%202022.pdf?utm_campaign=DPI%202022&utm_medium=email&_hsmt=214709308&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--r4xd93k1u_XGNZEieOGT2j28KEljXGspcrvh6OtyYfaU-JWd15-mfAn_31EtvkLuxKtYVWqQpZDTstx17WE52TM0tc-jg&utm_content=214709308&utm_source=hs_automation).

27 Hutt, "Shifting SE Asia sentiment amid US-China rivalry."

28 Michael Green, "US Indo-Pacific Strategy and Southeast Asia" (online seminar, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore,

east Asian countries are attempting balance between pursuing their economic interests with the PRC, while maintaining their security relationships with the United States—and their approach to the Taiwan Strait is also affected in part by their relations to the United States.

The US government needs to invest more resources and efforts in explaining its Taiwan policy in Southeast Asia, and to invest more resources in public diplomacy to engage the public within the region. As suggested by comments cited earlier concerning regional perspectives, it is important for Washington to be strategically clear about what US policy is, and greater public outreach is necessary. Washington should use important international functions like the US-ASEAN Summit and other regional fora to clarify its position on Taiwan. At the same time, Taipei should be aware of the underlying issues contributing to these frictions, and utilize opportunities where they exist to further relations with countries in the region. At the same time, both Washington and Taipei should pay attention to how China has been effective in using its propaganda in Southeast Asia to shape the narratives surrounding Speaker Pelosi's visit.

July 8, 2022), <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/event-highlights/webinar-on-us-indo-pacific-strategy-and-southeast-asia/>.