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Highlights

- With the fast-approaching 20th Chinese Communist Party Congress – at which anything can happen – China’s stringent Covid-19 policies remain firmly in place, as the government’s key priority is maintaining social stability.
- Chinese President Xi Jinping’s latest diplomatic maneuvers in Hong Kong and abroad are but propaganda aimed at domestic audiences, which seeks to further entrench his leadership and “irreplaceability” in Chinese politics before his unprecedented third term in office.
- The report on human rights in Xinjiang, released at the last minute by U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, was an unpleasant blow to China’s leadership, which had considered her last visit a success. However, it remains unclear how much influence China may have had over its final version.
- The visit to Taiwan by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, was met with an aggressive response from China, as well as its efforts to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.
- Southeast Asian countries increasingly struggle to balance their relations with China and the U.S. Their reactions to Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan were elusive, with each at the same time quickly emphasizing its unchanged position regarding the “One China” policy.
- The Sino-Russian relations have not seen any significant changes, but the security cooperation is deepening. Although China’s central government keeps attempting to demonstrate its neutrality, Chinese diplomats have not always succeeded in doing the same.

Domestic Policy

The upcoming 20th CPC National Congress and the importance of social stability

The political cycle in China is drawing to a close. On August 30, the Chinese news agency Xinhua News announced¹ that the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which is drawing a lot of attention from around the world, is to be convened on October 16. The official list of delegates, announced on September 25, consists of 2,296 CPC members from all around China. As per usual, one

aim with this list is to show more attention to gender equality and the role of the country’s ethnic minorities by placing an emphasis on female and ethnic minority attendees: The congress will be attended by 622 women (the 2017 CPC National Congress had 552 female delegates) and 264 delegates from the country’s ethnic minorities (the figure was the same in 2017). Nonetheless, the Chinese political system continues to be characterized by stark gender inequality, as no single woman has ever been elected to the CPC Politburo Standing Committee (the 7-member top leadership of the party) or the Central Military Commission. China’s current vice-premier Sun Chunlan is the only female in the 25-member Politburo, and only 30 members of the 376-strong outgoing 19th Central Committee are women (or 7.9%).

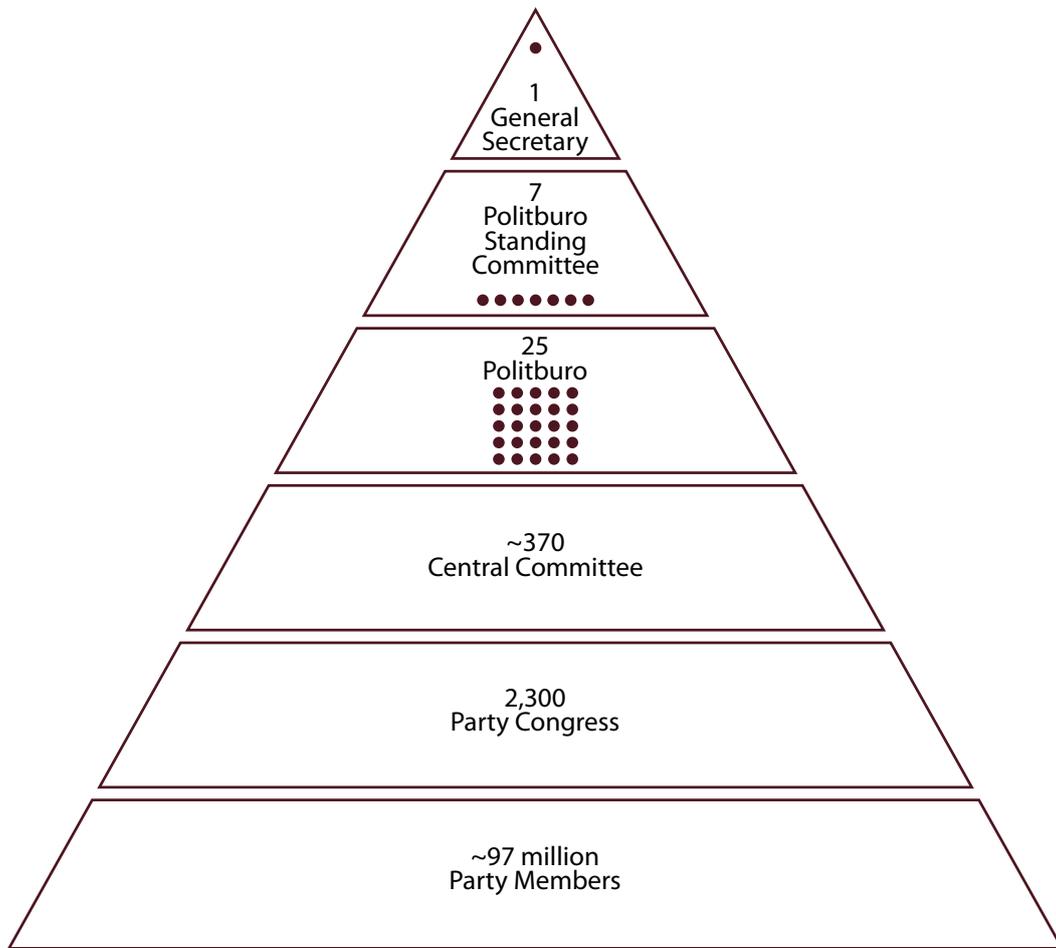


Figure 1. The current structure of CPC. This figure may change after the 20th CPC National Congress. Source: TBI²

In Q3 of 2022, the Covid-19 situation remained tense in China, with some cities reimposing restrictions of varying severity – but things have been stabilizing recently. A total of 17,699 confirmed cases were recorded in July (571 daily cases on average), with the peak, of 52,103 confirmed cases, reached in August (1,681 daily cases on average). The dynamic of infections changed in September, with 36,203 confirmed cases reported (1,206 daily cases on average). The geographic spread of the virus was also increasing: after nearly 900 days of zero cases in Tibet, the confirmed new cases reported from August 9 onward led to new restrictions and mass testing in the region.

Strict Covid-19 restrictions have caused social discontent on multiple occasions. On September 1, due to a significant spike of new cases, the city of Chengdu (with a population of 21 million) imposed

a stringent lockdown (second only to Shanghai in terms of strictness) with especially severe restrictions on movement and social contact. On September 5, a magnitude 6.8 earthquake struck China's Sichuan province, with the epicenter was some 200 km from Chengdu, the province capital.³ As a result of stringent Covid-19 policies, some residents were not allowed to leave their homes even after experiencing the onset of the earthquake, this situation resulted in criticism and public discontent. Sichuan residents still remember the 2008 earthquake (magnitude 8), which took almost 90,000 lives in the region – hence the outrage against the restrictions on movement on social media.

Public outrage and voices of doubt regarding the justifiability of the stringent Covid-19 policies have been growing louder. Notably, the former editor-in-chief of

the Global Times Hu Xijin, who has a large base of followers in China, has also rather openly declared that “Experts must speak out” and demanded that China “organize comprehensive studies and make them transparent to the public.”⁴ However, there have been no signs to date indicating any easing of these policies. In the July 28 meeting, the 25-member CPC Politburo emphasized that China will be continuing its zero-Covid policy – even if it negatively impacts the country’s economy in the short term.⁵

25th anniversary of Hong Kong’s return to China and Xi Jinping’s visit

On June 30, China’s Head of State Xi Jinping arrived in Hong Kong for an official two-day visit. This was his first visit outside mainland China in 2 years, and the first trip to Hong Kong in 5 years. The main goal of this visit was to celebrate 25 years since Hong Kong’s return to Chinese rule.

During the ceremony, Xi delivered a speech⁶ praising the achievements of the Chinese government and its efforts to support Hong Kong’s prosperity and stability. The speech mainly focused on the “one country, two systems” policy, emphasizing its effectiveness and importance. This policy was mentioned as many as 17 times. President Xi reaffirmed that PRC is determined to adhere to this cause, which, as reflected in his speech, has demonstrated its effectiveness in and contribution to promoting the prosperity and stability in Hong Kong, and urged the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to “meet residents’ expectations”. Also as part of the ceremony, oath of office was administered to the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region John Lee (John Lee Ka-chiu). As per China’s tradition, after Xi’s visit, the authorities in Hong Kong have organized more than 60 sessions to study the speech he delivered, according to Hong Kong Free Press.⁷



Picture 1. President Xi and the Chief Executive of Hong Kong Lee swear in other officials. Source: Selim Chtayti/Reuters

Xi’s visit is laden with symbolic meaning given the major changes in Hong Kong over the last five years: China has significantly extended its influence on Hong Kong’s domestic policy, brutally suppressed

the protests and opposition movements, and severely restricted the freedom of speech with the view to “nurturing genuine patriots of the country”.

Recently, China appears to have revived the idea to adopt this system in its relationship with Taiwan.⁸ Historically, Taiwan has never been positively inclined toward this proposal of China's, and China's crack-down on the protests in Hong Kong only served to strengthen Taiwanese people's negative views on the country's possible future relationship to China. In the 2021 poll by Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, 85.6% of respondents said they oppose China's "one country, two systems" formula and only 5.4% agreed with it.⁹ By comparison, in a poll from two decades ago, 70% of Taiwanese respondents opposed the formula and about 15% said they were in support of it.¹⁰

U.N. Human Rights Office report on Xinjiang and China's response

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet's visit on May 23–28 was followed by a wave of criticism for her being too soft on China – especially after her press conference in Guangzhou, where she expressed a relatively positive view on Beijing's policy in Xinjiang and used Beijing's official narrative when referring to Chinese government's "counter-terrorism measures" that necessitate its separate "review".¹¹ Bachelet's visit, which had been carefully planned by China, her multiple meetings with Chinese officials, and the use of her statements for the purposes of domestic propaganda, were of high importance to China. The delay in releasing the official report on Xinjiang drew a lot of criticism from human rights organizations (such as Amnesty International and International Service for Human Rights). According to an exclusive article by the Reuters¹², Bachelet's office was under a lot of pressure from Beijing not to release the report. Ultimately, the story reached its climax on August 31, when the OHCHR report on human rights in Xinjiang was released on the last day of Bachelet's term as U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The report openly expresses serious concern about the situation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang—the document emphasizes¹³ that "arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups [...], may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity." However, its strict tone notwithstanding, the document remains controversial due to the delay and last-minute release. It remains unclear how much influence China may have had over its final version.

China lashed out at the U.N. in response. Immediately after the report was released, China's ambassador to the United Nations Office in Geneva Chen Xu told reporters that by releasing the report the Human Rights Office "closed the door of cooperation", describing the report as "illegal and invalid".¹⁴ Reacting to the report, Wang Wenbin, the spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized that this assessment "has been fabricated by the United States and some Western forces [and] is completely illegal and invalid". He also criticized the OHCHR for violating "principles of universality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicization".¹⁵ Also questioning the legitimacy of the OHCHR was China's Global Times, which issued a report of its own, allegedly demonstrating that "the US and some Western forces have firmly seized many important positions in the OHCHR and planted many individuals full of ideological bias to take these positions."¹⁶

Foreign Policy

Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and the security situation in the Taiwan Strait

The most important event in this quarter was the visit to Taiwan by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. Held secret until the very last minute, the visit took place on August 2. This was the first high-profile visit by a U.S. Official to Taiwan in 25 years.

A growing tension regarding Pelosi's potential visit was also palpable before it took place. During the July 29 phone conversation¹⁷ between Xi and Biden, the Chinese president spent a lot of time on the issue of Taiwan, trying to pressure his American counterpart to encourage Pelosi to abandon her plans to visit it. In a very frank tone, Xi emphasized that "China firmly opposes separatist moves toward 'Taiwan independence' and interference by external forces [...] in whatever form," also warning President Biden that "Those who play with fire will perish by it."

China reacted to Pelosi's visit with a show of force – on multiple fronts: China launched large-scale cyber-attacks with targets including Taiwan's Presidential Office¹⁸ and imposed bans on exports from

Taiwan prior to¹⁹ and after²⁰ the visit, focusing mainly on foodstuffs but, at the same time, avoiding directly impacting Taiwan's semi-conductor sector. Nonetheless, the largest shift occurred in the military sphere.

Although this visit is not going to result in China's major moves against Taiwan in the short term due to the importance of bilateral trade, from the military perspective, this visit does change the military status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Immediately after Pelosi's visit, China conducted 4-day large-scale military drills around and over Taiwan, followed by the People's Liberation Army's military exercises in the eastern part of the Taiwan Strait. Despite 3 previous crises in the Taiwan Strait not spiraling out into a large-scale conflict, this time, the Chinese military under Xi's command may become even more aggres-

sive and harder to deter. According to the Economist, "in 1995 [during the last crisis in the Taiwan Strait], China's defense budget was only twice the size of Taiwan's [...]. Today China spends more than 20 times as much as Taiwan on defense."²¹ There are signs that China's behavior is changing: According to Adrian Ang U-Jin and Olli Pekka Suorsa²², after Pelosi's visit, China's military has made record incursions past the median line in the Taiwan Strait. Even though the median line in the Taiwan Strait is not formally set as border in any documents, the two militaries used to avoid any significant incursions past it. Currently, however, the frequency of these incursions is on the rise, with a large portion of them being short crossings of the median line by Chinese military aircrafts. On September 10, for example, 17 Chinese planes crossed the Taiwan Strait median line.²³

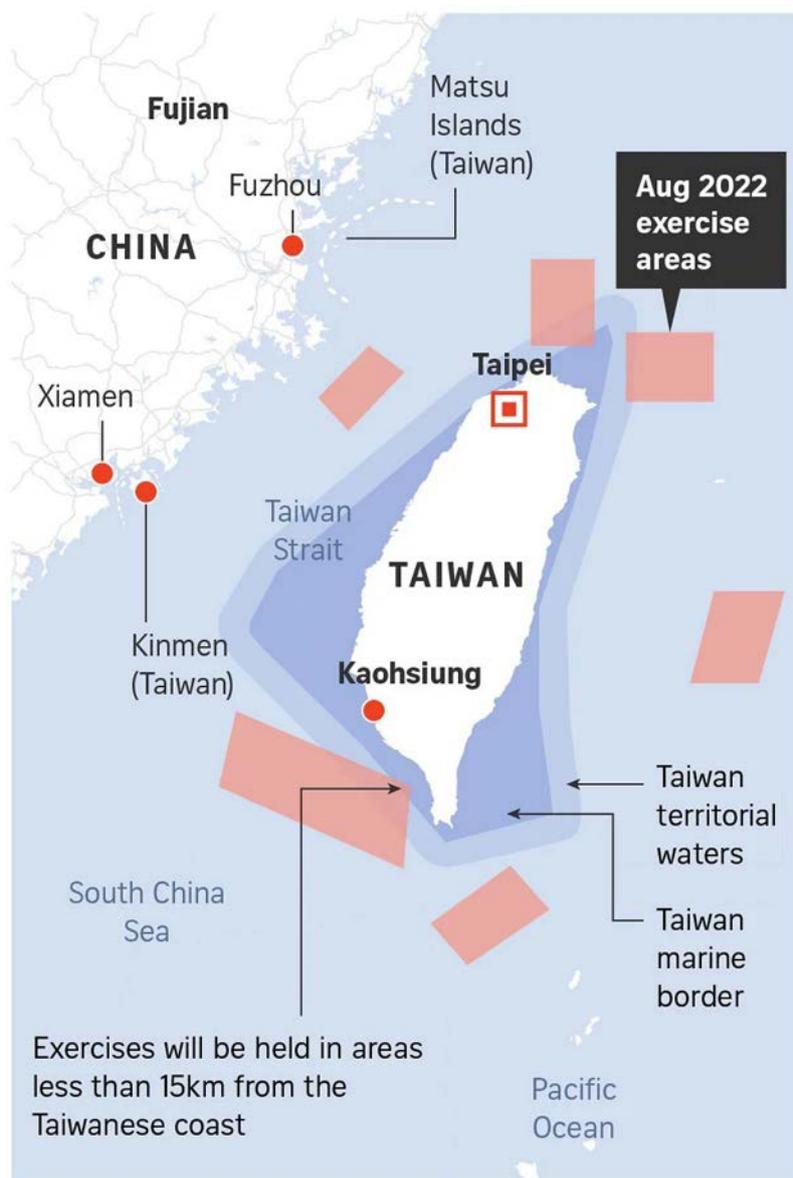


Figure 2. China's military drills around Taiwan as a response to Pelosi's visit. Source: Xinhua, Straits Times Graphics

Pelosi's visit became an impetus for more frequent foreign delegations to Taiwan, with the phenomenon dubbed "The Pelosi Effect" in foreign media. After Pelosi, Taiwan was visited by delegations from the U.S., Japan, and Lithuania.²⁴ The frequency of visits especially increased on the part of EU delegations. According to Veronika Blablová and Filip Šebok²⁵, EU countries sent to Taiwan a total of 102 official delegations between 2016 and 2022. Despite the Covid-19 traveling restrictions, there have already been 12 such visits this year (with Lithuania in the lead with a total of 4 visits). By comparison, the total number of visits in 2018 was 26.

The dynamic of the Sino-Russian relationship

There have been no significant changes in the Sino-Russian relationship since the start of the war in Ukraine. Although China's political leadership keeps attempting to demonstrate their neutrality, Chinese diplomats have not always succeeded in doing the same. In an interview with Russian news agency TASS on September 10²⁶, Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Hanhui openly supported the Russian narrative on the war in Ukraine. Zhang openly criticized the U.S. as "the real destroyer of international rules and world order, a source of increasing instability and uncertainty in today's world".

In September, Xi and Putin had their first in-person meeting in Uzbekistan since the war in Ukraine broke out. However, China's political support to Russia notwithstanding, the statements after the meeting were cautious. Both heads of state underscored their personal friendship (addressing each other with "my dear friend"), but there were no significant signals to suggest a change in the relationship. The focal point of attention was Putin's speech, where he said that "We [Russia] understand your questions and your concerns [regarding the crisis in Ukraine]".²⁷ Since becoming the president in 2013, Xi has met with Putin as many as 39 times.

As is by now a tradition, the official report by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the meeting between Xi and Putin differs from the Kremlin's in terms of the points of emphasis and the attempt, on the part of China, to demonstrate neutrality, while also avoiding mentioning the topic of Ukraine (there is no single mention of Ukraine in China's official statement on the meeting²⁸).

On September 5-8, Eastern Economic Forum was held in Vladivostok, also attended by a high-ranking Chinese politician, the chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee (in other words, the speaker of the Chinese parliament) Li Zhanshu. This Russia-run forum has drawn a lot of attention from Chinese media, which strongly underscored Putin's statement that "the West is failing, the future is in Asia".²⁹ The Sino-Russian trade relations are becoming closer, with both sides expressing their willingness to strengthen and expand bilateral trade, especially in the agricultural sector. According to the spokeswoman for the Ministry of Commerce Shu Jueting, Beijing wants to increase bilateral trade in terms of both the scope and the quality, and the areas with high potential include agriculture, digital economy, biomedicine, and green development. The main point of focus at the 6th China Soybean Industry International Summit Forum was on strengthening the trade ties between China and Russia. Compared with the same period of last year, China bought 157% more Russian soybeans this July, but the overall value of these imports remains insignificant (by comparison, China's soybean imports from the U.S. are as many as 8 times the amount they were last year).

China Customs data show that in the first eight months, Russia's exports to China grew 50%, reaching a total of \$72.9 billion, with imports from China growing 8.5% and reaching \$44.2 billion.

Xi's first foreign visit since the start of the Covid pandemic

On September 14, Xi arrived in Astana, the capital city of Kazakhstan. This was his first state visit since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic (during this period, Xi had spent more time without foreign trips than any other G20 head of state, namely 970 days). Xi was accompanied by a very high-level delegation, comprising CCP General Secretary Ding Xuexiang, Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Minister in charge of the National Development and Reform Commission He Lifeng.

During the meeting with Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, both parties signed a bilateral memorandum of cooperation in areas includ-

ing economy, trade, infrastructure, finance, and the media, as well as announcing they will be opening new consulates general in the two countries. The official statement on the meeting issued by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs³⁰ emphasized the importance of the meeting and China's great attention to the region.

Xi's visit to Kazakhstan was brief: on the evening of the same day, Xi made a state visit to Uzbekistan³¹, where he attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit. During his September 15 meeting with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Xi signed memorandum of cooperation in areas including agriculture, digital economy, green development, culture, and the media. At the same meeting, the leaders of China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan signed a trilateral memorandum of cooperation on the development of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Uzbekistan

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established on China's initiative in 2001. Currently, the SCO has 8 members (China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, as well as India and Pakistan, which joined in 2017). Its supreme decision-making body is the Heads of State Council. It has a Beijing-based Secretariat and an Uzbekistan-headquartered Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. Currently, the SCO has 4 Observer States (Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia) and 6 Dialog Partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Turkey).

This was a special year for the SCO, as it marked the 20th anniversary of the SCO Charter and the 15th anniversary of the Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation. The approaching SCO summit received extensive coverage from the Chinese media, which listed its achievements, compared it with NATO, underscored its recently significantly growing importance and vitality³², and provided various kinds of statistic to support its growing strength.³³

What attracted arguably the most attention were foreign media reports on bilateral meetings on the

margins of the summit between Xi and Putin and Xi and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, only one of these took place, as Xi and Modi did not sit down for a bilateral meeting.³⁴ Recently, there has been a bit of progress in terms of conflict resolution, but the bilateral relations remain tense.

This year's SCO summit in Samarkand was significant in several respects:

- a) Iran's application for membership was approved: Iran is planning to formally join the organization next year (the SCO's last expansion took place in 2017).
- a) After the summit, the president of Turkey, which is a NATO member, declared the country's goal to join the SCO.³⁵ However, this was not the first time that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan mentioned Turkey's potential membership in the SCO. Erdoğan also spoke about this back in 2013³⁶, when he served as prime minister, but Turkey has yet to take concrete steps in this direction. Turkey has an SCO Dialog Partner since 2012.
- a) Also approved was Belarus's accession procedure into the SCO.³⁷ But the procedure might take time, as Belarus has yet to adopt several dozen international agreements and commitments outlines in the SCO accession framework of 2010.
- a) The summit's content and newly initiated dialogs on cooperation in areas ranging from science to infrastructure show that the SCO may be undergoing an identity shift, transforming itself from an organization exclusively focused on security matters in the region to a bloc focused on addressing specific issues.
- a) The Dialog Partner status was granted to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. The summit also agreed that Bahrain, Maldives, U.A.E., Kuwait, and Myanmar are to become new Dialog Partners.

Security cooperation and the Vostok-2022 military drills

Although the growing intensity of the Sino-Russian military cooperation had been noticeable prior to the war in Ukraine, recently, their coordinated activities have become even more frequent. On September 19, the 17th round of China-Russia strategic security consultation took place in Fujian, where Director

of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi met Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation Nikolai Patrushev. The ever-closer cooperation between the two powers is a justifiable cause of concern for other countries in the region and Japan in particular. Japan's 2022 security report (Annual White Paper) pays particular attention to the deepening military cooperation between Russia and China against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. It voices concern about their increasingly more frequent joint military drills and military coordination, adding that "from the standpoint of the security of Japan, this is not something that can be overlooked".³⁸

On September 1-7, Russia conducted its Vostok-2022 military drills in its Far East, which were also attended by President Putin. According to the media, the countries participating in the drills included Azerbaijan, Algeria, Armenia, Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Syria, and Tajikistan.³⁹

Key aspects of the Vostok-2022 military drills:

- a) Although India's participation in Russia-led military drills is not anything new (India participated in the Zapad-2021 military drills), India's decision, in view of the significantly different geopolitical situation, to attend this year's exercises also sends a political message about the continuing Russian-Indian relations despite the war in Ukraine.
- a) This was the first that China's People's Liberation Army's Ground Force, Navy, and Air Force jointly participated (i.e., not just individual divisions) in Russia's military drills. This demonstrates their deepening cooperation and coordination in matters of security.

On September 15, immediately after the Vostok-2022 military drills ended, Moscow announced that China and Russia held joint naval patrols in the Pacific, carrying out exercises involving artillery and helicopters.⁴⁰ The first joint naval patrols of this kind were held in 2021.

Review of Southeast Asia

The region's reaction to Pelosi's visit to Taiwan

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) find it increasingly challenging to balance the U.S. and China. Given the member states' significant differences in the interests in certain areas, ASEAN generally tends to react to international developments with caution, including the war in Ukraine. However, ASEAN's reaction to Pelosi's visit to Taiwan showed that it is increasingly struggling to balance the U.S. and China. Pelosi's visit was a subject of concern to Southeast Asia countries, which find themselves at the epicenter of the intensifying rivalry between the U.S. and China. Although ASEAN's reaction to Pelosi's visit was neutral (the visit was not even mentioned in its statement), the countries immediately emphasized their support to the "One China" policy, thus showing the importance they attach to their economic ties to China.

Her visit coincided with the 55th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Cambodia (taking place between July 30 to August 6), which was also attended by the U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Despite earlier expectations for the meeting to be centered on the crisis in Myanmar, Pelosi's unexpected visit fundamentally revised its points of focus. China's foreign minister used the event to harshly criticize the visit, condemning the U.S.'s actions as a "blatant provocation" and calling the country "the biggest destroyer of peace across the Taiwan Strait and the biggest troublemaker for regional stability".⁴¹ He described the visit itself as "hysterical, irresponsible, and irrational". Secretary Blinken used a somewhat softer tone, reassuring that the U.S. continues to support the "One China" policy and emphasizing that Washington is attempting to contact Beijing via all available channels to defuse tensions.⁴² However, the tension between the U.S. and China did not dissipate: Their top diplomats did not have a bilateral meeting, and, as Reuters reports⁴³, Wang unexpectedly left the ASEAN Summit dinner, which was attended by the region's diplomats, Secretary Blinken, and Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi.

On August 3, ASEAN foreign ministers released a joint statement on the situation in the Taiwan Strait, voicing their concern about the destabilization in the region. Despite not mentioning the U.S. or China, the statement clearly was a response to Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. To steer clear from the issue of Taiwan, the statement explicitly states the ASEAN countries' continuing unconditional support for the "One China" policy.

The region's countries have each issued official statements of their own. While differing in tone and the points of emphasis, none of them had anything positive to say about Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. Indonesia⁴⁴, for example, called on all parties to refrain from provocative action, adding that it continues to adhere to the "One China" policy. Vietnam⁴⁵, Malaysia⁴⁶, and Thailand⁴⁷ issued similar statements, which were all cautious in tone and emphasizing their support for the "One China" policy. One country that stands out in the context of the region is the Philippines, which, due to some unresolved historical disputes with China, prefers to deepen its ties with the U.S.⁴⁸ Chinese media⁴⁹ took the opportunity to portray the cautious reaction of the ASEAN countries as evidence of their support for China. However, the region's experts went further than that: According to Dewi Fortuna Anwar, an analyst at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, the more aggressive than usual exercises immediately after the visit should not have come as a surprise, because to China, Pelosi's visit equals "spitting in their face", as well as being "dangerously provocative" and having come "at a time when tensions were already high in the region".⁵⁰ Other experts also worry that China's increased aggressiveness may push other neighboring countries to speed up their armament and increase their military power.

Russia's decreasing influence in Southeast Asia

With China and the U.S. competing for influence in the region, Russia was often regarded as a third player seeking to increase its political and economic influence. But the war in Ukraine and harsh sanctions from the U.S. and other Western countries have compelled the region to view any kind of ties with Russia with extra caution. Although ASEAN did not openly condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine, the responses and actions by individual members of the bloc have been more resolute. Singapore was the only one to denounce Russia and join Western sanctions against it, with the other countries acting in their own different ways. Worried about the potential consequences (especially regarding the automatic application of U.S. sanctions under CAATSA), some of them opted to significantly reduce the extent of their trade with Russia – especially with respect to military trade, which, in the context of the region's relations with Russia, had always been of prime importance. For example, Indonesia⁵¹ and the Philippines⁵², the two largest ASEAN member states, canceled their orders of Russian arms. As a country with traditionally close ties to Russia, Vietnam is trying to keep the existing trade and investment flows in the areas outside the scope of the sanctions.⁵³

The Russia-ASEAN Business Dialog held under the umbrella of the Eastern Economic Forum (which took place on September 5-8) signals that Russia is beginning to focus even more on the policy of turning to the East. President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sergey Katyrin underscored the two-digit growth of the ASEAN-Russia trade in the last few years (the trade turnover grew 27.5% in 2021, reaching \$20 billion) and the existing trade potential.⁵⁴ However, given that most Southeast Asian countries do not want their relations with the U.S. to deteriorate – the value of the ASEAN-U.S. Trade was at \$441 billion in 2021⁵⁵ – the ASEAN member states are highly unlikely to offer a helping hand to Russia's economy.

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