

A S A N

INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY OUTLOOK

2 0 2 4

Coalition Building

THE ASAN INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES

December 2023

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Translations were provided by Ms. Lim Jeonghee, Mr. Kang Chungku, and the Ewha Research Institute for Translation Studies. Editing and proofreading were done by Mr. Ben Forney, Mr. Ha Chaekyoun, and Ms. Song Ji-Eun. Dr. Peter K. Lee and Dr. Go Myong-hyun reviewed the full report.

All views expressed herein belong solely to the author of each chapter to which they are named. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of all contributors nor the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

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Foreword

The reshaping of the international order in recent times is a phenomenon that has taken on myriad forms and characteristics, which has rendered it a difficult task to condense into a single theme the multitudinous contexts involved in the ongoing great power competition. Whereas some define the world today in the context of a “New Cold War,” others regard the present condition of global affairs as chaos itself in a state of anarchy. Meanwhile, neologisms such as “decoupling” and “de-risking” have been coined to describe the trends that have arisen surrounding the matter of security in global supply chains.

In this regard, the international order has taken on a diverse array of dimensions since the 2000s, adding to the exceptional intricacy of predicting future events in practice. Regardless of one’s perspective on contemporary international relations, however, it seems evident that some of the common denominators include the rise of nationalism and unilateralism among dominant powers and the undermining of substance within international organizations. As such, the systematic analysis and description of these trends are critical in assessing the global landscape of today and predicting the future.

To understand current trends in the international order despite the complexity of discerning their direction and characteristics, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies has endeavored since 2015 to select an annual overarching theme for each volume of its publication, “Asan International Strategic Outlook.” Past themes include “Strategic Distrust” (2015), “New Normal?” (2016), “Reset” (2017), “Illiberal International Order” (2018), “Korea’s Choice” (2019), “Neo Geopolitics” (2020), “Era of Chaos” (2021), “Rebuilding” (2022), and “Complex Competition” (2023). Although these themes reflect a number of topical keywords, they nonetheless reflect our painstaking efforts in adopting a multidimensional and comprehensive perspective to examine the nature of the changing international order, its subsequent implications, and the response of each country and region to address such changes.

In line with such considerations, the theme for 2024 has been finalized as “Coalition Building.” All dominant powers, whether it be the United States, China, or Russia, strive to maintain or establish an international order under their sole leadership, and in doing so, seek to gain an advantage over competitors by forming “coalitions” with allies and partners. These coalitions take on many forms.

The United States, for instance, is making simultaneous efforts to bring together allies and partners across regions such as cooperation between NATO and Indo-Pacific allies, establish “minilateral” partnerships such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the ROK-U.S.-Japan security cooperation, and also lead platform-specific economic partnerships that emphasize economic norms and criteria such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). By contrast, China is capitalizing on its economic power to pursue its own coalitions based on a distinctly Chinese style of rules and standards, hoping to fill the vacuum left in the international order by the “America First” policy of the United States. Russia is also striving to establish a multipolar world order in which it has a stake based on the concept of “Eurasianism” and pursuing its own version of coalition-building, while maintaining its control over the former member states of the Soviet Union. Outwardly at least, the competition between great power-centered coalitions appeared to reach a brief lull in 2023, although it actually became even more pronounced inwardly.

This trend is expected to persist in 2024 as well, as major countries including the United States, China, and Russia compete to deepen and expand their respective coalitions with themselves at the helm, while endeavoring to avoid the escalation of the war of values between democracy and authoritarianism that has been sparked by the war in Ukraine. In the process, the confrontation between the South Korea-U.S.-Japan coalition and the North Korea-China-Russia coalition in Northeast Asia may become more prominent, with dominant powers scrambling to court the “Global South.” However, these great powers will grapple with the dilemma of their weakening leadership within their coalitions, and perhaps even face crises of democracy, in the case of U.S.-centered coalitions.

The outlook is yet bleaker for cooperation in emerging security areas such as cyberspace and climate change, which had once served to unite the global consensus despite the intensity of the existing hegemonic struggle. In particular, it must also be noted that the possibility of further escalation of geopolitical tensions by North Korea based on its close ties with Russia cannot be ruled out as a threat to the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, as well as the international order.

The strategic landscape in 2024 raises various questions and concerns. South Korea’s immediate vicinity of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia is a web of strategic calculations that are either intertwined or in conflict with each other, which may play out in a plethora of different outcomes. Our security landscape could be further complicated by North Korea, which seeks to leverage the bloc confrontation between the ROK-U.S.-Japan and North Korea-China-Russia coalitions to heighten its

nuclear threat; China, which intends to take advantage of South Korea-China economic ties to counter South Korea's participation in U.S.-led coalitions; and the United States, which hopes that South Korea will expand its regional and global roles.

This report is the culmination of the efforts of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies to forecast the strategic situation in 2024, identify those insights South Korea should consider, and offer recommendations for how to best respond. We hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for further analysis of the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the international order in 2024. Finally, I would like to once again express my gratitude to the Asan Institute's researchers and external authors for their unsparing efforts in contributing to the publication of this report.

Dr. YOON Young-kwan
Chairman, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

1. Introduction: Competing Great Power Coalitions

Dr. CHOI Kang | President

The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

■ 2023 in Review: Easing International Confrontation, Persisting Domestic Balancing

In 2023, dominant powers shifted away from intense rivalry, opting to avoid excessive frictions in their pursuit of leadership in the international order. Despite the persistence of the confrontational structure between democratic powers led by the United States and authoritarian powers centered on China, they nevertheless sought to prevent the escalation of their rivalry into direct conflict. This was exemplified by the summit between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping, held on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco in November 2023. In a press conference following the summit, President Biden remarked, “We should pick up the phone and call one another and we’ll take the call. That’s important progress.” President Xi also underscored the principle of coexistence, stating, “Planet Earth is big enough for the two countries to succeed.”

The series of visits to China by U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in July 2023 also appeared to signify the willingness of both countries to manage the relations. Meanwhile, Russia and the United States did not enter into a direct conflict over the war in Ukraine. While maintaining its supportive stance toward Ukraine, the United States remained passive in its approach toward providing the large-scale military support needed for a Ukrainian counteroffensive, due to the opposition of the Republican Party. Simultaneously, Russia refrained from escalating its so-called “special military operation” into all-out war, avoiding large-scale ground warfare.

Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to expect the fundamental resolution of these conflicts, given that rivalries among dominant powers, such as the U.S.-China strategic competition, have evolved into a matter of values and systems. In reality, despite avoiding direct conflict, major powers opted to keep their counterparts in check by asserting control over their spheres of influence. Accordingly, major countries are making visible moves to pressure their rivals by establishing coalitions centered around themselves. This trend already began several years ago and cannot be considered unique to 2023, but it has become more prominent as the world returns to normalcy after the COVID-19

pandemic and the aforementioned coalitions are once again being reinforced through meetings between national leaders.

While strengthening its network of traditional allies and partners, the United States has concurrently pursued a policy of reinforcing ties with crucial allies in the Indo-Pacific region, where there is a lack of multilateral security cooperation organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), by engaging in minilateral security arrangements including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and AUKUS—the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. To date, the United States has made persistent efforts to maintain this strategic direction.

For example, a diverse range of topics were discussed during the Group of Seven (G7) summit held in Hiroshima, Japan, from May 19 to 21, including discussions on the war in Ukraine, diplomatic and security matters, economic security affairs such as the reinforcement of supply chains and infrastructure, the establishment of artificial intelligence (AI) governance, emerging security issues such as climate change, energy initiatives, and the environment. Notably, many of these topics were directly or indirectly connected to U.S.-China strategic competition. In the subsequent G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué, the leaders of the G7 member states expressed their stance by stating, "We strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion." They further called for a peaceful solution to tensions across the Taiwan Strait involving China and Taiwan and also stressed the need to address human rights concerns within China.

In essence, these statements were tinged with criticisms against China's current policies, as was the statement of the G7 leaders that they will enhance their strategic consensus against malicious activities, such as unlawful exercise of influence to undermine supply chains, espionage, and illegal information leaks, which can be interpreted to target China in practice. Although this communique acknowledged that China's economic growth has contributed to the global economy, and emphasized a willingness to coexist with China, it can be seen to reflect the current state of strategic competition between the U.S. and China.¹

This atmosphere continued at the NATO summit held in July 2023. Having condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and indicated their intention to counterbalance China's foreign policy during the 2022 summit, NATO members declared that "China's stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values," and

1. "G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué," *The White House*, May 20, 2023.

further stated that the strategic partnership between China and Russia undermines “the rules-based international order” in the communique issued during the 2023 summit, which was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, in July 2023.²

The United States sought to mitigate the risk of military conflict with China while simultaneously engaging in more sophisticated deterrence in non-military domains. This strategy became notably apparent during the U.S.-China summit in San Francisco in November 2023. During the summit, the United States urged China to restore some military communication channels but made it clear that it had no intentions to make concessions on issues such as the economy and the environment. At the same time, the United States continued its efforts to bolster regional multilateral security cooperation. On March 13, 2023, the first face-to-face meeting of the AUKUS partnership between the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom was held in San Diego, and the Quad Leaders’ Summit was held in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 20, 2023.

However, the most significant event in regional multilateral cooperation in 2023 was the trilateral leaders’ summit involving South Korea, the U.S., and Japan, held at Camp David in the U.S. in August. Based on the improvement of relations between South Korea and Japan in early 2023, the United States successfully finalized its long-awaited framework for trilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. Through the “Spirit of Camp David” agreement, trilateral security cooperation evolved beyond mere summit meetings between leaders, establishing the groundwork for regular dialogues across diverse areas, including traditional security, economic security, and emerging security.

Meanwhile, U.S. efforts to foster collaboration among allies in the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic regions also continued. For example, the leaders of the four Asia-Pacific partners (AP4) of NATO—the non-NATO member states of South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—were invited to the 2023 NATO summit held in Vilnius. All of these leaders represented countries in the Indo-Pacific region and had also participated in the 2022 NATO summit.³

However, such coalition-building efforts did not always proceed without challenges. The outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023 was an event with the potential to significantly impact the U.S. strategic direction in the Middle and Near East region. Towards the end of the Donald J. Trump administration, the United States promoted reconciliation and cooperation between Israel and Islamic states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as exemplified by the Abraham Accords. Through these

2. “Vilnius Summit Communiqué,” *NATO*, July 11, 2023.

3. In 2022, Georgia was also invited.

efforts, the United States sought to reduce its involvement in the region, deter anti-American countries like Iran and Syria, and concurrently endorse cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Figure 1.1. G7 Hiroshima Summit



Source: Yonhap News.

When the Israel-Hamas war broke out, Qatar actively endorsed Palestine's position, the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—while not explicitly supporting Hamas—contributed \$20 million in aid to the Palestinians, and Saudi Arabia also expressed support for the Palestinians in response to the conflict. Although the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia did not overtly oppose Israel, the Israel-Hamas war may have significantly undermined the momentum of the Abraham Accords. This is in contrast to the solidarity demonstrated by Iran and Syria from the onset of the conflict by actively supporting anti-Israel and anti-American forces such as Hamas and Hezbollah, casting uncertainty on the future of coalition-building based on the U.S.-Israeli cooperation in the Middle and Near East region.

U.S. efforts to secure the participation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries in a U.S.-centered coalition likewise achieved only partial success. While the United States faced limitations in assuring all Southeast Asian countries

about the potential future benefits of a U.S.-centered coalition, it was successful in elevating the U.S.-Vietnam relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) during President Biden's visit to Vietnam in September 2023. As such, the United States has worked to incorporate ASEAN members into its coalition by focusing on bilateral relations with individual countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia, rather than pursuing a more comprehensive engagement with ASEAN as a collective entity.

China also criticized the U.S.-centered coalition-building efforts and actively cultivated its own coalition networks. In 2023, China emphasized the stabilization of U.S.-China relations under the one-man rule of Xi Jinping, aiming to disrupt the U.S.-led anti-China coalition. At the same time, China broadened its collaborative relationships with the "Global South" by raising concerns about U.S. leadership and advocating for enhanced economic cooperation.⁴ China also devoted itself to expanding its influence by leveraging its economic influence in response to the strengthening of the U.S. network of allies and partners.

A major outcome of this strategy was the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), launched at the end of 2020. Although RCEP is an initiative led by ASEAN, China effectively assumed a leadership role in it through its active support. This can be attributed to the fact that, while RCEP is a multilateral cooperation organization involving the largest number of countries in the Indo-Pacific region, constituting 29 percent of global GDP, China represented 44 percent of the total GDP within RCEP as of 2019, not to mention that major U.S. allies, including South Korea, Japan, and Australia, are also signatories.

In addition, China announced its intention to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the successor to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), in 2021 and engaged actively in regional multilateral economic cooperation, aiming to proactively fill the void created by the absence of the U.S.⁵ China is also seeking to reap the benefits of coalition-building through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an economic development cooperation initiative it has promoted since 2014. In October 2023, China hosted the third Belt and Road Forum for

4. The "Global South" refers to countries located at lower latitudes in the Southern and Northern Hemispheres. However, in some instances, the term collectively refers to all countries in the region based on their geographic location, while in other cases, it specifically indicates countries with the potential for substantial growth in the future among those located at low latitudes, such as India, Indonesia, and Brazil.

International Cooperation in Beijing, following the previous forums in 2017 and 2019. Over 4,000 delegates from 140 countries took part in the third forum, with more than 90 countries sending heads of state and other high-level officials.⁶

Figure 1.2. 2023 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation



Source: Yonhap News.

China has also been leading collaborative organizations that advocate multilateral cooperation on the surface, but which are in fact aimed at countering the United States,

5. The TPP was a multilateral trade agreement signed in 2015 by countries including the U.S., Japan, Australia, Canada, Peru, Vietnam, Malaysia, New Zealand, Brunei, Singapore, Mexico, and Chile. Although initially launched with the aim of promoting economic cooperation and integration in the Indo-Pacific region, this partnership also contained strategic intentions to contain China. However, the U.S. withdrew from the TPP in 2017 after the election of President Trump, following which the remaining TPP members initiated the CPTPP with the goal of cooperation, mirroring the objectives of the previous partnership. Even after the inauguration of the Biden administration, the U.S. has remained reluctant to join the CPTPP.

6. "One Day Before the China's Belt and Road Forum, Delegations from Different Countries Arrive in Beijing One After Another," *Yonhap News*, October 16, 2023; "Over 90 countries confirm participation in One Belt One Road summit: Chinese MFA," *TASS*, September 7, 2023.

most notably the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO is a cooperative organization that defines terrorism, separatism, and extremism as the “three evils.” While it is ostensibly open to all countries that sympathize with its goals—it includes India, Pakistan, and other countries which take a neutral stance in U.S.-China strategic competition—in reality it tends to operate as a coalition of states against the U.S. In addition, it also serves as a means to strengthen the legitimacy of China’s internal policies, as the so-called “three evils” that it advocates encompassing independence movements of ethnic minorities and other resistance movements. One significant development at the 23rd SCO Summit, conducted virtually in July 2023, was the full SCO membership granted to Iran. Though the decision to admit Iran as a full member had already been made at the 2022 summit, this development held high symbolic importance given the ongoing confrontation between the U.S. and Iran.

Russia also established its own strategic coalition to bolster its international standing. Since the deterioration of relations with the West, Russia has been strongly criticizing the dominance of the U.S. governance structure and envisioning a multipolar world order founded on the coexistence between civilizations. To this end, Russia aims to expand the membership and enhance the roles and functions of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the SCO, and the BRICS—an intergovernmental organization comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. While aspiring for a prominent position in security matters as part of its leap as one of the pillars of the multipolar world order, in the finance and information sectors, Russia also seeks to establish a media system to counter Western influence and introduce an international monetary system designed to promote de-dollarization. To this end, Russia has been operating the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) since 2002, with the aim of maintaining control over the former member states of the Soviet Union.

In particular, Russia has exploited the war in Ukraine as an opportunity to further enhance its strategic and military solidarity with Belarus, including the redeployment of its tactical nuclear weapons there. However, Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, which had experienced conflict with Russia or were discontented with Russia’s interference, withdrew from the CSTO. In addition, Russia failed to adequately support Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that commenced between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020, leading to a decline in Russia’s influence within the CSTO. In a bid to reverse this situation, Russian President Vladimir Putin personally attended the CSTO summit in Belarus in November 2023.

In addition, Russia deepened its ties with North Korea following the North Korea-Russia summit by dispatching Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on a visit North Korea

in October, while President Putin simultaneously visited Beijing with an agenda to strengthen Russia's strategic coalition with China. The relationship between Russia and China is noteworthy in this regard. While Russia maintains positive relations with China, it cannot entirely embrace its increasing dependence on China. Although diminishing this dependence on China is a challenging task, Russia attempted to restore relations with North Korea as a means to secure supply chains for ammunition and artillery, on one hand, and safeguard Russia's interests in the Asia-Pacific region, on the other.

Concurrently, some countries are growing in prominence as they take a step back and adopt a neutral stance in the face of the competing coalition building by the United States, China, and Russia. The aforementioned "Global South" is a representative example, as these countries aimed to maximize their interests by refraining from taking sides and adopting an ambiguous stance on significant issues that could lead to tensions between the United States and China or between the United States and Russia. Even in 2023, countries in the "Global South" generally adhered to a neutral position regarding the war in Ukraine and U.S.-China strategic competition. Through this approach, they reinforced selective cooperation with major countries and assumed a passive stance towards participating in coalition-building efforts.

Throughout the "Global South," there are regions in which both the United States and China hold a stake, but have failed to dedicate significant efforts, with ASEAN being a notable example. In the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, ASEAN or Southeast Asia appeared to gradually lose its priority, as the Biden administration's strategy for the region caused anxiety among ASEAN member states based on the impression that it preferred to deal with specific countries bilaterally rather than with the entire ASEAN bloc. China also failed to effectively leverage this vacuum. However, this appears to be a matter of priorities rather than an actual lack of interest toward ASEAN, which has nonetheless resulted in ASEAN appearing to be somewhat detached from U.S.-China strategic competition and coalition-building efforts.

■ Characteristics of the Coalition-Building Competition

Recent coalition-building efforts by dominant powers are distinguishable from "alliances" in that their purpose is not limited to the military dimension, and they also differ from general partnerships in that member states in a coalition either expect exclusive advantages from their participation or are concerned about the disadvantages of non-participation. Most notable in this regard are the coalition-building efforts of the United States, which can be characterized by the following three characteristics.

First, the United States aims to maintain and strengthen its existing comprehensive multilateral cooperation networks while seeking and facilitating new avenues of minilateral cooperation. As highlighted above, the United States is seeking to reinforce its relations with the member states of the European Union (EU) and NATO in Europe, with a heightened focus on enhancing its cooperation with the latter following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Beyond Europe, the United States is consolidating coalitions among its allies and partners through minilateral cooperation involving three or four parties. Such efforts have already come to fruition with the formations of the Quad and AUKUS, with the Camp David Trilateral Summit in 2023 serving as the final piece of the puzzle for the Northeast Asian region. In addition, the U.S. is also strengthening the ties between its major allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region and NATO. This suggests a concerted effort by the U.S. to link the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions to establish a network of its allies worldwide.

Second, the U.S.-centered coalition-building strategy highlights a confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism. Compared to the past, the United States is placing greater emphasis on shared values and systems in building coalitions and this stance has led to an intensified clash between democracy and authoritarianism, prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is not unique to the Biden administration, given that the Trump administration had already raised the issue of governance systems in the U.S. strategic competition with China, labeling China and Russia as "revisionist" powers. The emphasis on coalitions based on shared values has persisted in 2023, mirrored in joint statements issued by the United States with its allies and partners. In this context, both China and Russia advocate against U.S. hegemony, presenting their own definitions and justifications for the concepts of democracy, human rights, and international order to defend their authoritarian regimes, thus deepening the clash of values among major powers.

Third, in the economic domain, "club-like" coalitions are being created that require certain qualifications for membership, rather than being inclusive and open. The United States seeks to move beyond security cooperation to comprehensive cooperation, emphasizing to its allies the importance of cooperation for "economic security," but it is reluctant to engage in multilateral partnerships that could bring reciprocal benefits, such as Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). This stance is exemplified by the fact that it led the platform-like Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) but did not participate in the RCEP and CPTPP. The United States is also consolidating coalitions with its allies and partners through initiatives like the "Chip 4" alliance, aimed at reshaping supply chains in specific sectors. This strategic move is intended to prevent China and Russia

from surpassing the United States in critical areas that will drive future growth, and to maintain U.S. leadership based on its qualitative military advantages. However, the United States is susceptible to the criticism that it is based on a selective variation of the “America First” policy, which is a potential impediment to U.S. coalition-building efforts, as is its reluctance to engage in inclusive multilateral coalitions.

In this context, China is also seeking to build coalitions centered on itself, based on the following characteristics. First, these coalitions hinge on comprehensive multilateral economic cooperation, leveraging China’s vast market and financial power. China is maintaining and expanding its influence over U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region through economic multilateral cooperation, such as by signaling its willingness to join the CPTPP, while dissuading their participation in the U.S.-led “Chip 4” alliance or the IPEF. China also aims to strengthen its influence over countries in the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe by establishing a network for development cooperation in alignment with its economic initiatives, notably through the Belt and Road Forum.

Second, China’s coalition-building efforts are intended to consolidate solidarity among authoritarian states. China capitalizes on the SCO to enhance its ties with countries outside the circle of U.S. allies and partners. Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, China has sought cooperation with Russia, signaling its preparedness to play a mediating role. However, China has not officially denied the possibility of forming a North Korea-China-Russia trilateral coalition, based on strengthened ties between North Korea and Russia. Third, China is enhancing security cooperation with other countries without officially defining such cooperation as “alliances.” For instance, China has continued to expand its security cooperation with countries in the Middle East and Africa to counteract U.S. influence in those regions.

In response to these competitive coalition-building efforts among dominant powers, the “Global South” is striving to make its voice heard in a different way from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of the past. While the member countries of the NAM did not possess significant economic influence, the “Global South” has become a meaningful player in the global economy, albeit not quite at the level of China and the West, including the United States. For example, in 2002, the total gross domestic product (GDP) of the BRICS countries, most of which are members of the “Global South,” amounted to only a quarter of the U.S. GDP, but the bloc has since grown to the extent that it now rivals the G7 in total economic size and some analysts project it could overtake the G7 within the next 20 years.⁷ This implies that, unlike the NAM, which had little impact on the Cold War balance of power, the choices made by the

“Global South” will be a non-negligible factor in the current race to establish coalitions.

While the NAM had somewhat anti-Western, non-socialist leanings, the “Global South” has no clear political affiliation. It cooperates with both the United States and the authoritarian bloc including China, and its political stance is not unconditionally neutral, but rather flexible on major international issues, depending on the situation and countries involved. In other words, the “Global South” tends not to act as a monolith. The actions of “Global South” countries are not collectively determined by any particular cooperative unit, which is another crucial difference from the NAM. The loose solidarity of the “Global South” was demonstrated at the BRICS Summit in August 2023 as well.

Although the BRICS countries are not all members of the “Global South,” its three members except Russia and China—namely Brazil, India, and South Africa—are all leading countries of the “Global South.” At the 2023 BRICS Summit, China and Russia advocated for a significant expansion of BRICS membership as a way to develop it into a coalition to counter the U.S. However, the attempt was met with opposition from India and South Africa, which were reluctant to see the BRICS transformed into more than economic cooperation with China and Russia’s influence expanding. In the end, only six new countries—Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—were accepted as members at the 2023 BRICS Summit, among which only Iran is currently at odds with the U.S.

At the regional level, smaller coalitions are being established reflecting the concerns faced by each region. In the Middle East, U.S. influence is declining, while the former enemies of Israel and Arab states are now working together through the Abraham Accords. They are also cooperating with China by sharing COVID-19 prevention practices, promoting joint economic cooperation projects, and strengthening diplomatic ties, which does not necessarily indicate their desire to deviate from the U.S. sphere of influence. ASEAN is endeavoring to assert its voice by promoting the idea of “ASEAN Centrality,” but it retains concerns about the credibility of China and the U.S. Meanwhile, EU member states are consolidating their ties with the United States following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, though without turning their backs on China’s potential.

Competitive coalition-building efforts among dominant powers are taking place in various domains, as opposed to the political and military dimensions alone. This is exemplified by the race to form coalitions surrounding the reorganization of supply

7. BRICS is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and has become a cooperative group of countries since South Africa joined its predecessor known as BRICs in 2010.

chains in the economic domain and the race to establish exclusive blocs for cooperation in science and technology. As demonstrated at the Camp David Trilateral Summit, these coalition-building efforts can even be extended to outer space.

The race to build coalitions presents a dilemma for many countries, and South Korea is no exception. It would be too costly to choose a coalition with any single country, and the situation surrounding the competitive coalition-building efforts can change depending on compromises among dominant powers. It is also possible that conflict between coalitions affects the security landscape across the region. For example, the enhanced military ties between North Korea and Russia would prompt the consolidation of the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation and subsequent provocations by North Korea, which would escalate tensions in turn, or the strengthening of North Korea-China-Russia trilateral cooperation, which could lead to a crisis in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea.

2024 Outlook: Intensifying and Expanding Coalition Building

During the APEC Summit in San Francisco from November 15 to 17, 2023, U.S. President Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping met each other and expressed their commitment to preventing the U.S.-China rivalry from escalating into outright conflict and continuing to work together on issues such as climate change, combating the proliferation of narcotics, and artificial intelligence.⁸ This lends credence to the expectation that the coalition-building competition between the United States and China may be somewhat alleviated on the surface, but the two countries continued to espouse divergent views on issues related to traditional security, cutting-edge technology, and supply chains. This suggests that their coalition-building race is likely to accelerate in 2024. More than ever, the United States will seek to leverage coalitions centered on itself, since it is difficult for the country to respond unilaterally to formidable challenges, such as defending Ukraine, maintaining security commitments in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula, and preventing the escalation of conflicts in the Middle East as the fallout of the Israel-Hamas war.

First, the United States will seek to expand the role and function of existing minilateral cooperation. In Northeast Asia, for example, the United States will place greater emphasis on stability in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific region, in addition

8. "Biden, China's Xi will discuss communication, competition at APEC summit," *Reuters*, November 18, 2023.

to addressing the North Korean threat through its trilateral security cooperation with South Korea and Japan. It will also consolidate the said trilateral cooperation in the domain of economic security, including supply chains. The United States will also endeavor to expand the role of the Quad from cooperation in emerging security areas to traditional security cooperation, despite the possible limitations imposed by India's opposition. Furthermore, the United States will accelerate its efforts to expand membership in existing coalitions. Following Finland's accession to NATO, the United States is expected to seek a path for Sweden to become a full member, while encouraging potential members to join AUKUS and other alliances.

In addition, the United States will establish coalitions in specific areas as needed, focusing on functional solidarity beyond geographic scope. The potential areas for such functional coalitions include intelligence, military logistics, defense, emerging technologies, and aerospace. Intelligence sharing is a representative function of these newly-emerging coalitions, as evidenced by the various intelligence-sharing partnerships centered on the United States, including cooperation with the existing "Five Eyes" member countries of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, alongside the Quad and the ROK-U.S.-Japan and the U.S.-Japan-Philippines trilateral cooperation partnerships. Through these partnerships, the United States will be able to establish new intelligence coalitions.

In response, China is expected to continue undermining U.S. leadership in the international order and establish its own authoritarian coalitions in each region by expanding partnerships with developing and authoritarian states based on its technological and economic strength. First of all, China will seek to expand its influence by supporting the Arab states' position in the Israel-Hamas war, and in the process, consolidate its political ties with these countries. As developing countries face greater needs for economic growth amid multifaceted global crises and economic downturns, China will endeavor to differentiate itself from the U.S. and establish coalitions with developing countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South America.

In the science and technology field, China has sought to develop its own innovative technologies in the face of intensifying U.S. pressure. Against this backdrop, in 2024, China is expected to utilize its innovative technologies to satisfy the high demand among developing countries to bridge the digital divide, thereby disseminating its own system as well as related policies and standards in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the South Pacific, and South America, elevating its status and influence in its cooperative partnerships with developing countries.

Russia will also join this race for coalition building, sometimes in cooperation with

China and sometimes on its own. As the war in Ukraine drags on, Russia is likely to take time to prepare for the rise of a new, post-war world order, rather than seeking a swift end to the war. Based on the hope that the protracted war will exacerbate war fatigue and thus weaken solidarity among Western countries that are supporting Ukraine—as well as the results of the upcoming U.S. presidential election and various other elections in EU countries that could lead to reduced Western support for Ukraine—Russia will actively engage in the race to build coalitions in pursuit of a multipolar international order that guarantees Russia's sphere of activity with a focus on Eurasia, as well as enhanced cooperation with the “Global South.” It may also become more willing to engage in military trade deals based on coalitions. In order to gain the upper hand in ceasefire or end-of-war negotiations with Ukraine, Russia could launch large-scale missile strikes or airstrikes, if not a ground warfare campaign, on major Ukrainian cities. This strategy is also likely intended to maximize its political impact in Russia ahead of elections scheduled for March 2024. This could help increase military proximity and solidarity between Russia and North Korea in early 2024, albeit for the short term.

With the declining approval rating of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration, Japan is expected to maintain its existing policies based on cooperation and coalitions with the U.S., rather than pursuing major diplomatic shifts. In the domain of diplomacy and security, the main areas of focus will be military security, economic security, and cybersecurity, and particularly in terms of military security, Japan will seek to enhance its solidarity with partner countries to strengthen the liberal international order and achieve the goal of increasing its defense capabilities.

Throughout the Middle East in 2024, a new pattern of coalition building will emerge in response to reduced U.S. involvement in the region. The United States is likely to continue the “Abraham Accords” framework of managing regional affairs through improved relations between Israel and Arab states, rather than through direct engagement or intervention. However, as shown in the Israel-Hamas war, reduced U.S. involvement will amplify the discontent and anxiety of its traditional allies, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan, which would thus lead them to overcome their historic conflicts and eagerly seek opportunities to form new coalitions with Israel, Turkey, Egypt, and Iran. Once the military tensions provoked by the Israel-Hamas war subside, U.S. mediation toward détente in the Middle East will resurface and major countries in the region will begin to act accordingly since they recognize that strengthened ties with China do not mean that they can neglect relations with the U.S. Even in the case of Iran, although it claims to be the ringleader of an anti-American coalition in the region, it will nonetheless refrain from directly supporting countries engaging in anti-American

movements. As a result, the Middle East will remain devoid of a clear winner in terms of coalition building, not even the U.S., China, or Russia, and thus see the complex and continuous reshuffling of local coalitions.

ASEAN will focus more on identifying opportunities for cooperation based on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). While ASEAN will continue to base all cooperative efforts on the four areas of maritime cooperation, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic and other possible areas of cooperation as specified in the AOIP, it faces a problem in the lack of momentum for internal cohesion within the region and external motivation for cooperation. This will increase the need for ASEAN to capitalize on the “Global South” as another network for its interests. If ASEAN enhances its identity either as part of the “Global South” or its partner and strengthens coalitions with the “Global South” countries, this may create a synergic effect with ASEAN’s hedging strategies against the established powers.

Likewise, EU member states will continue to grapple with entrenched issues. While their alliance with the United States has been largely restored following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, EU members recognize the need to reduce their dependence on the U.S., given the uncertainty of its domestic politics such as the upcoming presidential election and the possibility of Trump’s re-election, has become an obstacle in the way of further enhancing relations between EU members and the U.S. Although its relations with China have remained strained, the EU has not abandoned its partnership with China as it considers the Chinese threat to be less severe than that posed by Russia. As a result, EU countries have been shifting their strategy against China from “decoupling” to “de-risking,” and will seek to alleviate some tension in their relations. While EU members remain vigilant against Russia, they have yet to develop a unified set of principles on how they will define their relations with Russia following the end of the war in Ukraine. In this regard, EU members are expected to pursue “open strategic autonomy” in 2024, redefining their relations with dominant powers such as the U.S., China, and Russia. In other words, based on their cooperation with the U.S., EU countries will seek a certain degree of assertiveness rather than unconditionally acquiescing to U.S.-centered coalitions. To this end, the EU will continue to form cooperative coalitions with countries in the “Global South” and the Indo-Pacific and make efforts to strengthen its voice on the global stage by expanding its membership and enhancing its internal solidarity.

Based on the outlook for each country’s strategies and policies related to coalition building, 2024 will be characterized by the following phenomena.

1. Coalition-Building Competition in Northeast Asia: A Microcosm of Global Trends

Northeast Asia is predicted to be a region where the coalition-building competition will be most pronounced in 2024. While the outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential election remains a variable, the Biden administration is expected to continue the trilateral cooperation framework initiated during the Camp David ROK-U.S.-Japan Trilateral Summit and make the most of shared values and systems among the three countries. Consequently, a more conspicuous confrontation is anticipated between the ROK-U.S.-Japan coalition and the DPRK-China-Russia coalition, which will be most keenly welcomed by North Korea. Having defined the current situation as a “new Cold War” already at the 6th Plenum Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea in 2022, Kim Jong Un is poised to reap the benefits of the clash of coalitions by bringing China into its existing cooperation framework with Russia under the aim to advance its nuclear capabilities, thereby achieving the status of a “nuclear power,” while also resuming negotiations with the United States following the 2024 U.S. presidential election.

Despite the ostensibly confrontational stance, the true solidarity of this coalition remains uncertain, primarily owing to potential constraints within the DPRK-China-Russia cooperation framework. While North Korea has sought another patron by turning to Russia rather than engaging in negotiations with the United States, the nuclear technology transfers that North Korea wants are a significant burden for Russia. It also remains unclear whether Russia can provide substantial economic support for North Korea. As noted earlier, the military deal between the two countries could accelerate in early 2024. However, if Putin returns to power in the presidential election scheduled for March 2024 with a guaranteed term of office that will last until 2030, it is unclear whether he will commit to closer relations with North Korea. China, too, may exhibit caution in elevating DPRK-China-Russia cooperation from a symbolic gesture to a substantive military partnership. In addition, China will employ its relationships with South Korea and Japan to deter the advancement of the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral cooperation, a factor that will limit the progress of DPRK-China-Russia cooperation beyond a certain level.

In this regard, the response to North Korea’s nuclear development will be the area in which the clash between the ROK-U.S.-Japan and DPRK-China-Russia coalitions will be at its most evident. Even if China and Russia do not directly support North Korea’s nuclear development, they are unlikely to actively impede or alter North Korea’s policies, which will inevitably result in conflicts with the ROK-U.S.-Japan coalition over the

imposition of stronger sanctions on North Korea's nuclear tests or missile launches. The confrontation between the ROK-U.S.-Japan and DPRK-China-Russia coalitions will also resurface in relation to economic security concerns including the restructuring of global supply chains.

2. Continuation of Regional Disputes

The rivalry for coalition building among the U.S., China, and even Russia is expected to erode trust among major powers, further diminishing the possibility of mediation and compromise in regional conflicts. Consequently, even if there is an atmosphere of ceasefire or peace process in Ukraine or the Middle East, the risk of renewed conflict will nonetheless persist, while the temporary cessation of the conflicts will likely only come at a time when the ability of major powers to intervene in the conflicts is exhausted. In this regard, a fundamental resolution of the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war may not be guaranteed, even in the event of their simultaneous end. For instance, the Ukraine war could be rekindled at any time over issues concerning Russia's recognition of the "annexed" regions, Ukraine's NATO and EU membership, and its internal political dynamics. Similarly, the Israel-Hamas conflict remains susceptible to resumption over the Palestinian Authority's control of the Gaza Strip.

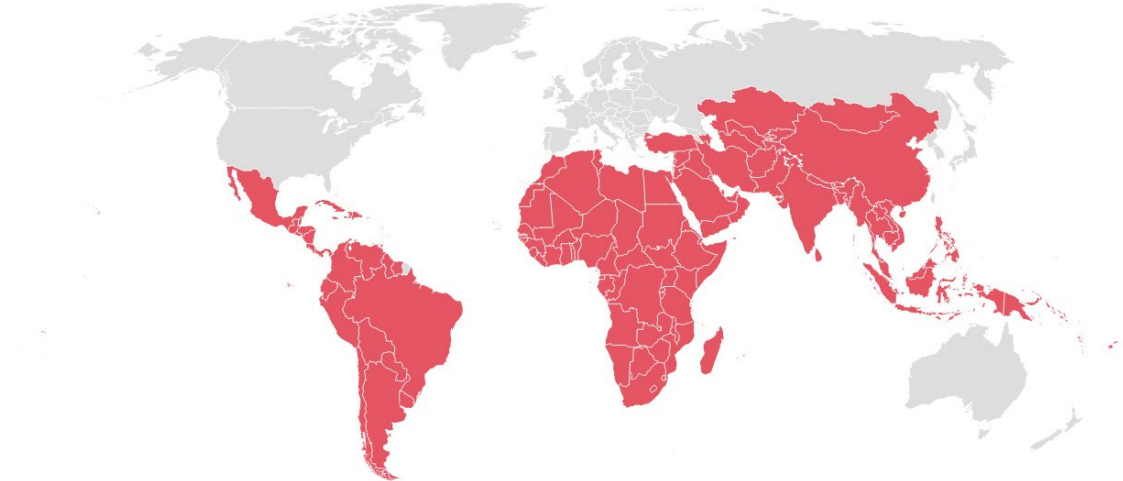
Meanwhile, Taiwan and the South China Sea will demand heightened attention in 2024. Tensions in the Taiwan Strait, which have already been recognized as a potential conflict zone in the 2020s, are likely to resurface around Taiwan's presidential election in 2024. Despite Beijing's denial of any intent to directly invade Taiwan, it may opt to escalate tensions in the Taiwan Strait if it perceives a violation of its "One China" principle. In this case, the region may witness tensions as high as those caused by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022, especially around Taiwan's presidential election in January 2024.

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait also carry significant implications for security cooperation among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan. The "Spirit of Camp David" statement, announced in August 2023, opposes any unilateral attempts to change the status quo through force or coercion in the Taiwan Strait. The degree to which South Korea, the United States, and Japan embody this principle will influence the likelihood of actual military conflict with China. While direct conflict between the ROK-U.S.-Japan coalition and China and its allies is improbable, diplomatic frictions will be inevitable. In the event that North Korea exploits the Taiwan Strait conflict to stage provocations, subtle disagreements may emerge between South Korea and the U.S. over the prioritization of security commitments.

3. Competitive Courtship of the “Global South”

As previously mentioned, 2024 will witness competitive coalition-building efforts targeting the “Global South,” not only by the United States and China but also by Russia, ASEAN, and the EU. Various countries will engage with the “Global South” under the aim of (1) fortifying the strength of their respective coalitions (the United States, China, Russia), (2) enhancing their influence or representation within dominant power alliances (EU), or (3) securing autonomy as an independent coalition (ASEAN). This trend will accelerate collaborative efforts by dominant powers directed toward nations in the “Global South.”

Figure 1.3. The “Global South”



Source: World Economic Forum.

However, the “Global South” refers to a specific group of states that are unlikely to coalesce under a unified direction or collective course of action. While there are some shared characteristics in terms of geopolitical location and economic potential, not all countries of the “Global South” maintain close relations with one another and each nation has its own foreign policy orientation, as seen in the aforementioned expansion of the BRICS. Consequently, in 2024, the “Global South” is expected to maintain a certain distance from the competitive efforts of dominant powers for coalition building, rather than supporting a specific coalition. Therefore, endeavors by major powers to construct coalitions are likely to focus on the major influential countries within the “Global South,” rather than seeking its collective cooperation. India, in particular, is expected to emerge as a competitive target due to the following factors: its neutral stance on the Ukraine conflict, its membership in the Quad, its traditionally cooperative relationship with Russia, and its avoidance of all-out conflict with China despite ongoing border disputes.

4. Leadership Challenges within Each Coalition

While dominant powers such as the U.S., China, and Russia will actively seek to establish coalitions centered on themselves, questions about their leadership within each coalition will be amplified in 2024. Firstly, the United States will face persistent controversy over its perceived lack of leadership, attributed to its passive stance on comprehensive multilateral security cooperation, economic unilateralism as demonstrated by the CHIPS and Science Act, along with the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), in addition to questions about its fulfilment of foreign security commitments. For example, if the conflict in Ukraine concludes with Russia's annexation of occupied territory, the United States may become entangled in a renewed debate over its leadership, despite providing extensive support to Ukraine.

The forthcoming U.S. presidential election in 2024 also has the potential to spark intense discussions on U.S. leadership. In a nation currently marked by a lack of bipartisan consensus on crucial matters including in the security domain, the potential Republican presidential candidacy and return to power of former President Donald Trump could raise concerns about the coherence of U.S. foreign policy. In 2023, the United States was exposed in terms of its vulnerabilities in influencing allies when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky clashed with the Biden administration over the scale and pace of military aid and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu disregarded U.S. requests to delay the Israeli military campaign in Gaza. Consequently, the United States' restoration of its leadership will be a crucial factor in determining the strength of solidarity within the coalitions it leads.

Neither China nor Russia is exempt from leadership controversies, however. China's domestic economic slowdown in 2023 poses a challenge to its efforts to construct a coalition based on economic strength. Moreover, its undermining of the UN Security Council's authority on issues such as North Korea's nuclear program despite being a permanent member could be a stumbling block for its reputation. Likewise, the economic crises suffered by partner countries of China-led economic cooperation initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative in the process of their implementation may give rise to amplifying concerns toward economic dependence on China as a result of cooperation with China. This will pose questions for the Chinese leadership about what safeguards they can provide.

Another critical variable for China will be its management of strategic competition with the United States. As evidenced by the policies of EU countries towards China, the EU is likely to seek economic benefits from cooperating with China. However, if China remains strategically opposed to the United States, the EU's inclination to cooperate

with China will diminish. Therefore, the effectiveness of China's coalition depends on its ability to maintain strategic competition with the U.S. while avoiding excessive conflict.

Despite making territorial gains through its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has increased its perception as a threat to EU and NATO countries, exacerbating security concerns among the countries of the former Soviet Union. Additionally, depending on how the war in Ukraine is resolved, Russia's domestic political situation will become increasingly unstable, even if Putin returns to power. As for Russia's initiative to establish its own economic cooperation zone, its success will depend on the extent to which the country recovers from the various economic sanctions that it is under.

In the midst of leadership crises affecting all dominant powers involved in the coalition-building competition, tensions will rise between coalition leaders seeking to deepen and expand their coalitions, and coalition partners who are eager to safeguard their policy autonomy within these alliances. Consequently, dominant powers will actively take measures to reinforce the loyalty of the countries within their coalitions. For instance, the United States will prioritize cooperation with allies and partners based on their contributions to its coalitions, differentiating the implementation of its security commitments and science and technology cooperation accordingly. Similarly, China will employ a dual strategy of economic investment and economic retaliation to retain key potential coalition partners within its sphere of influence.

5. Escalation of the Crisis of Democracy

While the competition for coalition building among dominant powers is characterized by the clash of values and systems—specifically, democracy versus authoritarianism—it is ironic that the likelihood of a crisis of democracy has increased within democratic coalitions. Despite the Biden administration's call for solidarity and unity among democratic systems, this approach to promoting values such as freedom and human rights has added to the reluctance of countries that are still transitioning to full democracy to align themselves with the U.S. For example, key players in the "Global South," such as India and ASEAN member states, appear uncomfortable with the prospect of the U.S.-China strategic competition evolving into a debate over governance systems. This sentiment is mirrored in Latin America, a region that the United States has traditionally seen as under its influence.

In seeking to overcome the issue of promoting democratic values posing an obstacle to expanding their coalitions, major powers face the dilemma of having to either overlook the erosion of democratic principles in potential cooperation partners or engage with quasi-authoritarian states. Israel is a case in point. Although Netanyahu implemented

anti-democratic policies such as attempts to weaken the judiciary after forming a radical right-wing coalition, the Biden administration has consistently supported the Israeli government during the Israel-Hamas war. When the strategic competition between the United States and China evolved into a contest of values and systems, the United States criticized “revisionist” forces for undermining the international order and attributed their problematic behavior to their political systems. However, this rationale fails to justify the United States’ support for the Netanyahu administration, which continues to act in violation of democratic principles. The challenge for the United States to bolster solidarity among democracies while accommodating anti-democratic allies and partners is anticipated to continue into 2024.

The crisis of democracy can be further compounded by the fact that the United States is not an exemplar of democracy itself in its domestic politics. The ideological divide and extremism within the U.S., which began to manifest during the 2020 U.S. presidential election, are likely to resurface or even intensify during the 2024 presidential election, which will leave lasting scars regardless of the outcome.

6. Catalysts of a Nuclear and Space Arms Race

The competition among major powers to build coalitions is poised to inevitably trigger an arms race. Securing an advantage in strategic competition requires not only military superiority over rivals but also the ability to serve as an arsenal for allies and partners. Indeed, with the onset of strategic competition between the U.S. and China, both nations have entered into a competitive arms race, striving for military superiority in both quantity and quality. Russia has also become more discerning and focused on developing military and technological capabilities comparable to those of the United States. A notable aspect is that this arms race may extend into the nuclear realm. The United States has explicitly expressed its intent to gain nuclear superiority over Russia and China by withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 2019 during the Trump administration. Likewise, Russia withdrew its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in November 2023⁹—a move that could

9. The CTBT is an international treaty that prohibits nuclear testing across all domains, encompassing the atmosphere, underground, and space. The prohibition on nuclear testing is regarded as a commitment to refrain from upgrading existing nuclear weapons or developing new ones. Although the United States became a signatory to the CTBT in 1996 when it was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the U.S. Senate declined to ratify it in 1999. Russia, on the other hand, remained a party to the treaty until 2023.

be interpreted as a declaration of its readiness to engage in a nuclear arms race with the U.S.

Given Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war, its entry into a nuclear arms race with the United States—its primary nuclear power rival—signals a shift to more perilous times. China is also becoming a participant in the nuclear arms race, with the United States projecting an increase in China's nuclear warheads from the current level of 400 to 700 by 2027 and to 1,500 by 2035.¹⁰ At present, there is no new agreement on nuclear arms control to replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START) signed between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Prospects for a new START agreement, previously discussed between the United States and Russia in the 2000s, seem unlikely in the near term due to China's entry into the nuclear arms race and Russia's refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In 2024, the trajectory of the nuclear arms race may overshadow voices advocating for arms control.

In addition to the nuclear arms race, a discernible competition is unfolding in space. The United States, Russia, and China have already initiated efforts to leverage the space domain for military purposes, and in 2023, India made significant strides in space development by successfully landing *Chandrayaan-3* lunar mission on the Moon. While space development currently revolves around individual initiatives rather than collaborative efforts among coalitions or alliances, there is ample possibility of a future space development coalition among allies and partners. As the military rivalry among major powers extends into the space domain, the logic behind alliances and military coalitions will also apply to this domain as well. While the formation of such a coalition may not be immediately evident in 2024, there is a plausible possibility of personnel or information exchanges between allies in preparation for a potential space coalition.

7. Bleak Prospects for International Cooperation in Emerging Security Areas

The ongoing competition for coalition building has cast a somber outlook on cooperation in emerging security areas, which had traditionally served as a nexus among major powers. This trend is expected to persist into 2024. Despite the United States and China's commitment to cooperate on climate change and other issues at the San Francisco Summit in November 2023, there is limited motivation for major powers to forge a consensus on emerging security issues such as narcotics, new forms of terrorism,

10. "Pentagon sharply raises its estimate of Chinese nuclear warheads," *Reuters*, November 4, 2021.

climate change, low-carbon green growth, and emerging infectious diseases, as these concerns are increasingly reduced to instruments for mutual deterrence rather than shared challenges.

Instead, yet another coalition-building competition is likely to emerge, particularly in the cyber domain. Although cyberspace has conventionally been regarded as immune to traditional geopolitics, this is only the case for the private sector, whereas at the government level, it is inevitably influenced by traditional geopolitics as information management and dissemination in the cyber domain reflect the nature of a given system of governance, be it democratic or authoritarian. As a result, cooperation on cybersecurity and information sharing will be strengthened among coalitions of states with similar values and systems, especially cyber cooperation among open democracies that are vulnerable to cyberattacks. In the area of economic security, the competition for coalition building is also expected to accelerate in 2024. In particular, U.S. efforts to build bilateral and multilateral coalitions on key technologies will gain momentum and become a driving force behind the formation of economic blocs.

In 2024, South Korea will face a complex set of choices in the ongoing coalition-building competition. North Korea will strengthen its role within the authoritarian coalition, envisioning that the confrontation between “democracy and authoritarianism” and that between the ROK-U.S.-Japan and DPRK-China-Russia coalitions will work in its favor to sustain its regime and system. Russia and China, in turn, will seek to use North Korea’s active participation in authoritarian coalitions to enhance their own diplomatic and military influence. It is concerning, however, that the United States, which leads the democratic coalition, may struggle to provide satisfactory leadership amid domestic divisions and electoral uncertainties. What is more, the United States is likely to demand greater sacrifices from its allies and partners within its coalitions in order to revive the U.S. economy—a critical issue in the upcoming presidential election. The apparent reluctance of the U.S. to expand its security and military commitments within coalitions while demanding greater contribution and even shirking the economic burdens of coalitions to its major allies will prompt its key allies, including NATO members, to reevaluate their positions within the coalitions, to which South Korea will be no exception.

2. Northeast Asia: A New Arena for Coalition Building

Dr. CHA Du Hyeogn | Principal Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

■ 2023 in Review: The Scramble for Coalition Building

The Northeast Asian region has traditionally been characterized by the clash between the “northern trilateral relationship” among North Korea, China, and Russia, and the “southern trilateral relationship” involving South Korea, the United States, and Japan. This perception stems from the persistence of certain aspects of the Cold War in Northeast Asia, unlike in other regions. Amid the continued division of the Korean Peninsula, the northern coalition of North Korea, China, and Russia has maintained its historic partnerships to some extent, albeit with occasional variations. Meanwhile, based on the ROK-U.S. alliance, South Korea has aimed to periodically enhance its cooperative relationship with Japan. However, despite being referred to as trilateral relationships, both groups of nations were essentially coalitions in name only, failing to forge true tripartite coalitions to make concerted efforts in lockstep with each other.

Even during the Cold War, the northern trilateral relationship behaved more like two bilateral relationships in which North Korea dealt separately with China and Russia (then the Soviet Union) respectively due to the intra-bloc rivalry between the latter two, as opposed to forming a unified front on specific issues. Although Russia and China came together to balance against the United States through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and North Korea’s relations with China and Russia rapidly improved around the time of the 2018 U.S.-DPRK summit, there are limitations in interpreting such developments as the formation of a genuine DPRK-China-Russia coalition. Similarly, security cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan was tied through the ROK-U.S. and U.S.-Japan alliances and constrained by the weak link of the ROK-Japan relationship, which posed a hindrance to trilateral cooperation.

In the 2020s, the intensification of U.S.-China strategic competition and the advancement of North Korea’s nuclear capabilities provided grounds for genuine coalition-building among North Korea, China, and Russia, as well as among South Korea, the United States, and Japan. However, China and Russia continued to engage in subtle one-upmanship regarding their own respective influence over North Korea, while unresolved issues such as historical grievances between South Korea and Japan hindered their trilateral cooperation involving the United States. The first breakthrough

past these limitations came from South Korea, the United States, and Japan, particularly after the Yoon Suk Yeol administration announced a resolution to the historical issue of forced labor on March 6, 2023.¹ Subsequently, President Yoon's visit to Japan on March 16-17 for the ROK-Japan summit and then-Japanese Prime Minister Kishida's visit to South Korea on May 7 for another summit swiftly improved relations between the two nations. During President Yoon's state visit to the United States on April 26 for the ROK-U.S. summit, President Biden expressed his support for the "bold steps"² taken by President Yoon. The leaders of the three nations had a brief meeting during the G7 summit held in Hiroshima, Japan from May 19 to 21, and at President Biden's proposal, the United States hosted Japan and Korea at the Camp David Trilateral Summit in August, where three nations discussed partnership initiatives in earnest.

Subsequently, South Korea, the United States, and Japan made a joint statement titled "The Spirit of Camp David" at the trilateral summit. The three leaders thereby committed to partnering on various issues including the pursuit of cooperation in the wider the Indo-Pacific region, supporting the rules-based international order, strengthening safeguards for democracy and human rights, as well as enhancing economic security and supply chain resilience. The paramount implication of "The Spirit of Camp David" is that it clearly articulated the notion of extending the trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan to the security domain. The three leaders pledged to elevate the trilateral security cooperation to a new level, ensuring prompt discussions in case of regional challenges and threats, while emphasizing cooperation in response to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, including the sharing of missile alerts. Furthermore, South Korea, the United States, and Japan also laid the groundwork for institutionalizing trilateral cooperation by agreeing to maintain discussions among the three countries at various levels, including summit meetings.³

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1. This can be seen as the culmination of a series of continued efforts to improve relations between South Korea and Japan since the inauguration of the Yoon Suk Yeol administration in May 2022. However, a decisive moment emerged with the announcement by the South Korean government on March 6, proposing the "third-party compensation" plan administered by the Foundation for Victims of Forced Mobilization by Imperial Japan under the Ministry of Interior and Safety to compensate victims and their families affected by forced labor under Japanese colonial rule. The decision was highly praised by Japan, despite being made against internal political pressure in South Korea, to the extent that Prime Minister Kishida Fumio cited it as an effort "to return Korea-Japan relations to a healthy state." "Yoon makes 'decision for the future,' Kishida praises 'return to healthy relations'," *The Chosun Ilbo*, March 7, 2023.
 2. "Leaders' Joint Statement in Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Alliance between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea," *The White House*, April 26, 2023.

Figure 2.1. ROK-U.S.-Japan Summit Meeting at Camp David



Source: Yonhap News.

The concerted efforts for trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan prompted strong opposition from North Korea, China, and Russia. Following the declaration of the reinforced ROK-U.S. alliance and the United States' strengthened commitment to extended deterrence against North Korea during the April 26 summit, the opposing three nations immediately criticized the “Spirit of Camp David” declaration. China took a hardline stance by using its state media to publish a critique that denounced the trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan as a “hypocritical anti-China pantomime” and a “mini-NATO.” Russia likewise warned that the trilateral cooperation was aimed at restraining it and that it would no longer stay silent in the face of any further U.S.-led support for Ukraine.⁴

North Korea issued a statement by Defense Minister Kang Sun-nam, characterizing the Camp David summit as “a despicable U.S. ploy to build an anti-Russia, anti-China encirclement” and vowed to “amplify our camaraderie in arms and solidarity with Russia

3. For the entire statement, see “The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States,” *The White House*, August 18, 2023.

4. “The Camp David summit serves as hypocritical anti-China pantomime with a ‘mini-NATO’ in the making: analysts,” *Global Times*, August 19, 2023; “Russia on ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral summit: ‘escalation of tensions in Asia-Pacific under pretense of North Korea threat’,” *Yonhap News*, August 24, 2023.

a hundredfold.”⁵ In a speech during the Sixth Plenary Meeting of the Eighth Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea in late December 2022, Kim Jong Un, the Chairman of the State Affairs Commission and the General Secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea (hereinafter referred to by name), defined the current international situation as a “new Cold War” and expressed his vision to break through this crisis by strengthening cooperation with socialist countries.

To this end, as part of the July 27 “Victory Day” commemoration, Kim Jong Un sought to enhance military cooperation with Russia through a meeting with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. North Korea’s strategy to utilize the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation as a pretext to strengthen its ties with both China and Russia coincided with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s plan to tackle internal and external challenges triggered by the war in Ukraine, leading to the September summit between North Korea and Russia at the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Amur, Russia. Although specific measures for cooperation were not publicly disclosed at the summit, many experts believed that Russia and North Korea may reinforce mutual cooperation beyond the diplomatic dimension, potentially to encompass the economic and military sectors. Moreover, on October 13, the White House confirmed the presence of an actual arms trade between Russia and North Korea.⁶

However, it is premature to conclude that the DPRK-Russia summit will result in a trilateral cooperation between North Korea, China, and Russia, particularly in military cooperation. While China sent a high-level delegation to North Korea for the Victory Day military parade in July 2023, it exhibited a reserved response to any potential expansion of military cooperation with North Korea. China has not yet taken a public stance on trilateral cooperation involving Russia and North Korea. Nevertheless, China continued its cooperation with Russia in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula, conducting “Northern/Interaction-2023” military exercises with Russia in the East Sea in July. Furthermore, China carried out a series of Taiwan encirclement exercises from April 9 to 11 in the East and South China Seas to maintain its influence in the region,

5. “Statement of Kang Sun-nam, the Defense Minister of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” *Korean Central News Agency*, August 24, 2023.

6. At the October 13 press briefing, the White House also disclosed that over 1,000 containers of military equipment had been transported from North Korea to Russia from September 7 to October 1. In addition, a much more diverse array of vehicles had been identified on the North Korean side of the Russia-North Korea railway line. For more information, see “US says North Korea delivered 1,000 containers of equipment and munitions to Russia for Ukraine war,” *Associated Press*, October 14, 2023.

which escalated existing tensions with the United States. Considering these factors, the intensifying severity and pace of the U.S.-China strategic competition may present an ample possibility that China may adopt a more proactive stance toward the trilateral cooperation among North Korea, China, and Russia.

Figure 2.2. The DPRK-Russia Summit in September 2023



Source: Yonhap News.

2024 Outlook: Entrenchment of the Rivalry Between Coalitions

The most prominent aspect of the competition for coalition-building in Northeast Asia throughout 2023 was the growing contrast between the trilateral security cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan versus that among North Korea, China, and Russia. It is forecasted that this contrast will become more evident in 2024. Even before the confrontations between the southern trilateral relationship and the northern trilateral relationship, there already existed various sources of tension in East Asia. These included the advancement of North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities, the crisis in the Taiwan Strait, the indirect involvement of Northeast Asian countries in tensions between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states and China regarding the East China Sea and the South China Sea, the various territorial disputes among Northeast Asian countries, and the dualistic presence of mutual

economic cooperation and pressure. The framework of contrast between the ROK-U.S.-Japan coalition against the DPRK-China-Russia coalition, combined with these existing issues of contention, poses diverse risks. In particular, should North Korea choose to exploit this confrontational structure, Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula might emerge as new conflict areas, following the precedents set by Ukraine and the Middle East. The competition for coalition-building among major powers in 2024 is anticipated to manifest in Northeast Asia as outlined below.

1. Continuation of the DPRK-China-Russia vs. ROK-U.S.-Japan Framework

Considering the atmosphere at the 2023 San Francisco summit between the United States and China, the likelihood of the rivalry between the two countries leading to a military conflict in 2024 has, if anything, diminished. While a crisis in the Taiwan Strait could potentially emerge around the time of the Taiwanese presidential election, even if the tensions between the U.S. and China were to escalate again, it is expected to be at a level similar to the time when Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, visited Taiwan in 2022. The possibility of a sudden escalation in conflicts in the East China Sea and the South China Sea is relatively low compared to previous years. On the other hand, the contrast between the DPRK-China-Russia coalition and ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation is anticipated to become more pronounced in 2024. This is due to the distinct value systems pursued by each side and clear motivations to compete with each other's coalition. South Korea, the United States, and Japan, pursuing the values of freedom, openness, a rules-based international order, will seek cooperation in various aspects to counter regimes in North Korea, China, and Russia, whose systems are based on authoritarianism and control.

Meanwhile, North Korea, China, and Russia will fortify their alliances in response and establish a balance of power that is favorable to them. This dynamic will manifest itself through political meetings. The "Spirit of Camp David" statement has already established the groundwork for the institutionalization of trilateral discussions. Therefore, it is anticipated that the trilateral summit will reconvene in 2024. Additionally, there are expectations for similar-level meetings in the diplomatic, defense, and national security domains. The technical interpretation of the "Spirit of Camp David" statement directly implies that high-level meetings between South Korea, the U.S. and Japan should continue throughout the year. However, there is potential to integrate various high-level meetings such as bilateral meetings among the three nations through their rescheduling or to prioritize symbolically significant meetings such as security control tower meetings.

North Korea, China, and Russia are also likely to continue their meetings as a display of their coalition. During the September 2023 DPRK-Russia summit, Kim Jong Un requested Putin to make a state visit to Pyongyang in return, which Putin is reported to have “gratefully accepted.”⁷ Consequently, unlike in 2019, there is a possibility that Putin may visit Pyongyang in early 2024,⁸ while the likelihood of a DPRK-China-Russia summit similar to the ROK-U.S.-Japan summit cannot be ruled out either. In an attempt to emphasize the cooperation among North Korea, China, and Russia, Pyongyang may also request a visit from Xi Jinping, the President of the People’s Republic of China, to take place during Putin’s visit to Pyongyang, thereby establishing a summit of the three leaders. Alternatively, if requested by Putin or Xi, respectively, a trilateral summit could take place in Beijing or Moscow.⁹

Another demonstration of the strengthened ties among both the southern and northern trilateral relationships will take place in the form of joint military exercises. In September 2023, South Korea, the United States, and Japan staged trilateral maritime interdiction drills and anti-piracy exercises in waters southeast of Jeju Island. Subsequently, a trilateral aerial exercise was organized in October, involving U.S. strategic assets such as B-52 bombers. While the maritime interdiction drill resumed after a seven-year hiatus that began in 2016, the trilateral air exercise involving all three countries’ air forces marked its inaugural year. This development symbolized strengthened security ties following the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral leaders’ summit at Camp David. The summit’s decision to evolve the trilateral exercises into a medium-term framework indicates an increase in the frequency and scale of these exercises for 2024. In response, North Korea, China, and Russia are also highly likely to conduct joint military exercises with the aim of counteracting these actions. Since China and Russia have already held annual joint military exercises in the East China Sea, there is significant potential for a trilateral maneuver exercise including North Korea.

However, in 2024, both the ROK-U.S.-Japan and DPRK-China-Russia coalitions will likely encounter obstacles in developing their cooperative relationships into close military partnerships that can be regarded as a “trilateral alliance.” For the ROK-U.S.-Japan coalition, though the relationship between South Korea and Japan has improved

7. “Putin ‘gratefully’ accepts Kim invite to visit North Korea, Kremlin says,” *Reuters*, September 15, 2023.

8. During the first summit with Putin in Vladivostok in April 2019, Kim Jong Un requested Putin’s return visit to Pyongyang, to which Putin responded positively. However, this potential visit did not materialize.

9. In practice, the possibility of a Pyongyang meeting is slim, as China and Russia would be unlikely to favor a trilateral cooperation framework centered around North Korea.

in 2023, the launch of a trilateral military alliance is not a popular political agenda in either Seoul or Tokyo. In South Korea, particularly, some may argue that the three-party cooperation could provoke China and pose greater military risks.

This is also true for the DPRK-China-Russia coalition. Beijing will be concerned about the rapid escalation of the U.S.-China military confrontation and South Korea's tilt toward the U.S.-ROK alliance as possible outcomes of direct military alignment between North Korea, China, and Russia. Therefore, it may be rather passive in its provision of military supplies to North Korea. While North Korea and Russia are expected to display a stronger commitment to each other across politics, economy, and military aspects beyond 2023, it remains unclear whether Russia will choose to engage in risky transactions that would impose substantial risks in terms of cost and ramifications, such as the exchange of its nuclear weapons technology for large quantities of North Korean conventional weapons. This is because Moscow regards its nuclear weapons technologies as a disproportionately costly price to pay for North Korean arms and ammunition, and it may need quite some time before it gains confidence in its ability to control Pyongyang after such a technology transfer.

Figure 2.3. 2023 ROK-U.S.-Japan Joint Aerial Exercise



Source: United States Air Force.

Depending on the circumstances, however, it is impossible to completely disregard the potential for a military conflict to materialize. If the tensions between China and Taiwan escalate beyond a certain degree after the 2024 Taiwanese presidential election, North Korea may exploit the dispersal of U.S. military forces to provoke South Korea, whereby China could also opt to escalate military tensions in the Taiwan Strait amid the heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

2. Targeting the Other Coalition's Weak Link

In the process of coalition-building, there will be more pronounced efforts in 2024 for the nations involved to demonstrate their own influence as well as undermine the cohesion of their rival coalition. In this regard, China's next moves will be most noteworthy. In 2024, Beijing is expected to accelerate its efforts to deter the trilateral security cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan from evolving into military cooperation and expanding their scope of activity into the areas contested by the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region, including the Taiwan Strait. In the course of the U.S.-China strategic competition, China has responded to the U.S.-centered mini- and multilateral security partnerships such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the U.S.-U.K.-Australia trilateral alliance (AUKUS) by establishing multilateral agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and its own economic cooperation network called "One Belt, One Road (一帶一路)."

China will seek to leverage its economic power to the maximum extent, as it did when it took economic retaliation against South Korea over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). China is likely to target the ROK-Japan relationship, which it has historically perceived as the "weak link" in the southern trilateral relationship and therefore more fluid than the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK relationships. Moreover, it will exert its influence on the ROK-Japan bilateral relationship not through direct interference, but by targeting South Korea, which heavily depends on China for trade.

China announced in August 2023 that it would allow its citizens to take group tours to South Korea again, underscoring its economic influence over the country. China's decision to open the gate for "yóukè," or "tourists" in Chinese, to resume international travel to South Korea can be interpreted as a conciliatory gesture to Seoul as well as a way of stacking the cards for future retaliation. Similarly, China is likely to seek to exert pressure through its economic power at critical junctures, aiming to curtail the development of the ROK-U.S.-Japan security cooperation beyond a certain threshold. On the other hand, for North Korea and Russia, their attempts to target the weak link

may be limited in their effect, given that they hold a very limited number of cards.

Conversely, there is also a weak link that South Korea, the United States, and Japan can exploit. Given that China has yet to clearly express its stance on military cooperation with North Korea and Russia, it remains an open target for the United States, its strategic competitor, as well as South Korea and Japan. However, in China's case, it can only be influenced through a message of cooperation rather than pressure. A prime example is the ROK-China-Japan trilateral summit, which had been suspended since 2019. The possibility of its resumption was discussed several times throughout 2023, and if the summit resumes in 2024, the three countries could emphasize their spirit of cooperation while seeking ways to avoid excessive discord. In this respect, the trilateral summit can serve as a conduit for China to court South Korea and Japan, and vice versa.

3. Risk of a Standstill in North Korea's Denuclearization

At first glance, Pyongyang may stand to benefit the most from the rivalry between the ROK-U.S.-Japan and DPRK-China-Russia coalitions. This is because the clash between the two coalitions will raise North Korea's value in the eyes of China and Russia, allowing North Korea to secure cooperation from its two competitive partners. This is particularly the case for the North Korean nuclear issue. Both China and Russia have ostensibly endorsed the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and have not dissented from the necessity to dismantle North Korea's nuclear program. Their actions enabling North Korea to circumvent or evade various sanctions can be seen less as direct support for North Korea's nuclear development and more as an attempt to prevent crises within the North Korean regime or system from happening in the course of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.

It should be noted that the possibility of a closer DPRK-Russia relationship and a strengthened DPRK-China-Russia trilateral coalition in 2024 could lead to China and Russia taking entirely divergent approaches to the North Korean nuclear issue. If Beijing and Moscow each perceive North Korea's nuclear program as a strategic asset rather than a risk that could undermine stability in Northeast Asia and trigger military confrontations with the United States, they may either turn a blind eye to it at best or even facilitate it at worst. While some speculate that China and Russia may hesitate to choose this option because neither country can fully trust North Korea, it can be readily hypothesized that, under the ROK-U.S.-Japan versus DPRK-China-Russia rivalry structure, both countries may tolerate or support North Korea's nuclear capacity to a certain extent in return for guaranteed control over it.

The compromise that can be reached in this regard is the recognition of North Korea's

tactical nuclear capabilities. The possession of tactical nuclear weapons alone enables North Korea to regularly wield the threat of nuclear attacks against South Korea and secure its superiority in inter-Korean military capabilities. Through this comprise, North Korea would gain the status of a “nuclear-weapon state.” Depending on the outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, North Korea could present this bargaining chip to the United States, which would serve the strategic interests of China and Russia in that it could lead to a rapid weakening or collapse of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

The policy shift in Moscow and Beijing regarding the North Korean nuclear issue would signify the eventual breakdown of the already-fragile united front for North Korea’s denuclearization, allowing North Korea impunity to pursue technology transfers related to its tactical nuclear weapons and to upgrade its nuclear capabilities through military cooperation with Russia. North Korea’s failure to carry out its seventh nuclear test in 2023 despite sending out several signals may be attributed to the strategic calculation that crossing the red line of an additional nuclear test could pose the risk of losing support from Russia or China. However, within the framework of the DPRK-China-Russia coalition, North Korea would be able to pursue alternatives such as additional nuclear tests or test launches of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with much less mental strain.

While the technical maturity of the North’s nuclear program remains a variable, formalizing the DPRK-Russia alignment into a trilateral coalition involving China could allow North Korea to finally stage its seventh nuclear test or even a series of consecutive tests in 2024 or attempt to demonstrate reentry or multi-warhead capabilities through repeated ICBM launches.¹⁰ Moreover, if its military dealings with Russia enter into a more practical dimension, North Korea may take further steps such as launching additional military reconnaissance satellites or announcing plans to build a new class of nuclear submarines in cooperation with Russia in 2024.

It should be also noted that, as the issue of North Korean denuclearization loses its momentum, North Korea’s conventional provocations against the South may resume or increase. For China and Russia, ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation in response to North Korean provocations will be interpreted as a measure to counterbalance their influence, thereby disincentivizing the two countries from urging North Korea to exercise self-restraint. Subsequently, North Korea will also be more aggressive in its conventional provocations, along with the demonstration of its advanced nuclear capabilities.

10. However, ICBM launches are likely to be limited to one or two rounds of tests due to the controlling influence of Russia and China.

4. South Korea's Increasing Security Dilemma

If North Korea accelerates its demonstrations of nuclear capabilities including additional nuclear tests in 2024, it will once again amplify the controversy in South Korea over the credibility of extended deterrence provided by the United States. Some will argue that the ongoing operation of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) or the regular deployment of strategic U.S. military assets based on the Washington Declaration is inadequate to mitigate nuclear risk. Some will call for more advanced measures such as the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons, which may present challenges for ROK-U.S. cooperation in terms of extended deterrence. There are yet even more limitations in reinforcing extended deterrence within the context of ROK-U.S.-Japan security cooperation, given the differences between South Korea's approach to extended deterrence, which focuses on the U.S. nuclear retaliation capabilities, and Japan's approach, which emphasizes U.S.-Japan joint actions against North Korea. Therefore, inducing Japan's cooperation on South Korea's redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons in the short term poses a challenging task.

The most compelling rationale for addressing the challenges arising from the security dilemma of extended deterrence is the potential ripple effect of weakened assurance by the United States, which may stifle the momentum of ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation. The three countries have different perspectives on the meaning of the 2023 Camp David summit. While the primary focus of trilateral security cooperation for South Korea is responding to the North Korean nuclear threat, the United States and Japan may prioritize other issues beyond the Korean Peninsula, such as the security of the Taiwan Strait. This could lead to subtle disagreements among the three nations.

5. Domestic Political Variables and Opacity

The rivalry between the ROK-U.S.-Japan and DPRK-China-Russia coalitions can also be subject to influence from domestic political variables in each country. These variables may exert a more potent influence over the southern trilateral relationship than the northern trilateral relationship, which shares a common feature as authoritarian regimes led by a single dictator. In the case of the DPRK-China-Russia coalition, North Korea shows signs of internal unrest including economic hardships such as food shortages and uncertainties surrounding the potential introduction of an early leadership succession system in 2023. Still, there are no particular factors that could weaken the momentum of the DPRK-China-Russia trilateral relationship unless these symptoms materialize into tangible issues. However, there remains a possibility that Putin, who is likely to

retain power in the March 2024 elections in Russia, could adjust Moscow's proximity to Pyongyang owing to the alleviation of the burden of its war with Ukraine in the wake of recent upheavals in the Middle East and doubts regarding Russia's control over North Korea.

On the other hand, ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation depends on variables such as Kishida's fragile approval ratings and his uncertain political future in Japan, as well as the 2024 U.S. presidential election. There is no guarantee that the existing momentum in ROK-Japan relations could be maintained if Kishida steps down early before the end of his full tenure. This is because his successors may prioritize Japan's interests more stringently than Kishida did in dealing with the issues of historical grievances and bilateral cooperation with South Korea. In the United States, the return of former President Donald J. Trump to office or the election of a Republican candidate advocating Trumpism in the 2024 presidential election would result in a substantial weakening of the momentum of existing policies immediately following the announcement of election results. In the run-up to the election, the Republican-led House of Representatives may strengthen its checks against the Biden administration in response to its large-scale support for Ukraine or its Middle East policy, pushing the Biden administration to shift its priorities away from the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's presidential election in January 2024 presents another issue for consideration. The issue of Taiwanese independence will once again emerge as a focal point in the election, and the outcome could quickly revive tensions in cross-strait relations, especially if the new Taiwanese government reaffirms stronger security cooperation with the United States and distances itself from China. A Chinese invasion of Taiwan is unlikely to come to reality, as some fear. However, military tensions in the Taiwan Strait, coupled with the actions of the U.S.-ROK-Japan security cooperation, will require South Korea to expand its diplomatic contribution at the very least. South Korea's response in such a case could lead to friction in its relations with the United States, Japan, and China, leading to the challenging task of identifying optimal alternatives that maintain the spirit of trilateral cooperation without incentivizing the DPRK-China-Russia trilateral coalition to reinforce its own solidarity.

If tensions rise in the Taiwan Strait in 2024, another concern faced by South Korea is that it would be more likely than ever for North Korea to view the situation as an opportunity. Friction in cross-strait relations is most likely to occur early in the term of the new Taiwanese government as it clarifies its policy direction in the immediate aftermath of the election, namely the first half of 2024. It is entirely possible that North Korea could conduct additional nuclear tests and ICBM launches while the United

States and Japan are preoccupied with the Taiwan Strait. In addition, North Korea may seek to leverage conventional provocations taking advantage of rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait, leaving South Korea essentially alone in responding to such provocations. Consequently, there is a risk that North Korea may be bolder than usual in terms of its unmanned aerial vehicle infiltrations, guard post shootings across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), or hostile acts against South Korean fishing vessels or civilians in the West Sea, combined with its nuclear demonstrations.

3. North Korea: Betting on Nuclear and Authoritarian Coalitions

Dr. GO Myong-Hyun | Senior Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

■ 2023 in Review: Strengthening DPRK-China-Russia Trilateral Cooperation in Lieu of Dialogue

North Korea was most active in exploiting the competition for coalition building in 2023. North Korea's provocative tactics are aimed at pressuring the ROK-U.S. alliance and the U.S. government by strengthening its nuclear capabilities and the strategic advantages they provide. Within such a strategic framework, the chance of inter-Korean dialogue is low. Instead of engaging in diplomatic talks with South Korea and the United States, North Korea has pursued a strategy of "strength for strength," consisting of confrontation and taking advantage of the emerging North Korea-China-Russia coalition triggered by the U.S.-China conflict and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Mired in the Ukraine war, Russia aimed to improve relations with North Korea for the pragmatic reason of obtaining weapons assistance and to demonstrate it is not diplomatically isolated. Russia's aim matched North Korea's desire to regain the diplomatic initiative that it had lost during the three years of self-imposed COVID-19 restrictive measures, with Pyongyang looking to score its first diplomatic achievement since the breakdown of the talks with the United States in Hanoi in 2019. This became a reality on September 13 when Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un held a summit at the Vostochny space base. For Kim Jong Un, who insists that possessing nuclear weapons is the mark of a great power, standing on an equal footing with Russia, which although declining is still considered by many as a great power, can be seen as a diplomatic achievement that cements North Korea's status as a nuclear state.

In terms of provocations, the frequency was significantly lower in 2023 compared to 2022, which was a "turning year" (a five- to ten-year cycle) for the North Korean regime, but higher compared to other years. North Korea continued its provocative behavior as usual until September. By September 13, North Korea had conducted a total of 23 cruise missile and ballistic missile tests and unveiled a new ICBM equipped with a solid fuel engine, the Hwasong-18 type. Although North Korea's first and second launches of Cheollima-1, a new space vehicle, in May and August failed, it finally succeeded in putting into orbit for the first time a military reconnaissance satellite, Manlikyong-1, on

November 21.

In 2023, as in 2022, North Korea faithfully followed the steps to complete the weapons development roadmap pledged at the 8th Party Congress in 2021. At the time, North Korea announced that it would deploy new ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), “nuclear submarines,” hypersonic missiles, new tactical guided weapons, new cruise missiles, and military reconnaissance satellites at an early date. In 2023, North Korea launched a new medium-sized submarine, the “Kim Gun-ok Heroic Ship,” in September and unveiled a variety of cruise missiles, including the Submarine-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM) and surface-to-surface (Hwasal-2) kinds. The other strategic weapons are a new ICBM with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) capability, a medium-sized SLBM that can be deployed on submarines, and a super-large nuclear warhead.¹

Figure 3.1. Launch of North Korea's Manlikyong-1 Military Reconnaissance Satellite



Source: Yonhap News.

The limitations of sanctions against North Korea due to the coalition between North Korea, China, and Russia remained in 2023. As predicted in the 2022 Asan International Security Outlook, U.S.-China-Russia cooperation on North Korea through multilateral

1. “It’s not working normally’... When will North Korea launch SLBMs from new submarines,” *Yonhap News*, September 10, 2023.

systems such as the United Nations (UN) was far from possible. Despite North Korea's repeated provocations, China and Russia have remained unperturbed. China and Russia failed to issue a statement to condemn North Korea's ICBM test in the name of the UN Security Council's Chairman in February and actively defended North Korea for its military satellite test in May.² China's and Russia's support for North Korea peaked when their delegations attended North Korea's Victory Day celebrations in July. At the same time, North Korea began to refer to South Korea as the "Republic of Korea," showing that it no longer recognizes the special relationship between the North and South, and that it intended to sever ties completely. This attitude spread to private exchanges as well, as when the regime refused entry in July to Hyun Jeong-eun, the chairperson of Hyundai Group that is behind South Korean investments.³

North Korea's actions of cutting off dialogue with South Korea while at the same time strengthening ties with China and Russia hints at a changed strategic approach. It has broken away from the old scheme of compelling the United States to engage in dialogue by fomenting tension with a series of provocations. It is instead utilizing the "new Cold War" structure of extreme bloc-to-bloc confrontation to be accepted as a nuclear state. It also proves that North Korea's ballistic missile tests, which have not been carried out since September, have always been about pressuring the United States into negotiations as well as developing their technology. North Korea appears to have given up on its long-held strategy of being acknowledged as a nuclear state through negotiations with the United States and instead has in place a strategy of aligning with China and Russia and being accepted by these two countries as a peer nuclear power. The public appearance of Kim Jong Un's daughter, Kim Ju-ae, should also be seen as efforts to symbolize nuclear possession and the inevitability of four generations of Kim family rule, regardless of whether she is indeed the anointed successor or not.

North Korea's international status, the consolidation of Kim's hereditary rule, and the increasing cult of personality around Kim Jong Un are all based on nuclear possession. There are those who evaluate Kim's abandonment of the "Byungjin" line, the simultaneous pursuit of nuclear and economic development, and his going "all-in" on the nuclear only strategy as a success, at least outwardly.⁴ But food shortages and

2. "South Korea, the United States, and Japan 'Condemn North Korea's Satellite Launch,' China and Russia 'Criticize U.S. Military Activities in the Region,'" *Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation News*, June 5, 2023.

3. "North Korea denies 'Hyun Jeong-eun visit'...Foreign Ministry says ties 'severed,'" *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 2, 2023.

4. "Kim Jong Un's comeback," *Financial Times*, November 9, 2023.

hunger that have been reported throughout 2023 and the defection of entire families by sea at the end of the year strongly suggest that the situation of ordinary North Koreans is desperate.⁵ The foundation of North Korea's "all-in" strategy for possessing nuclear weapons is the establishment of a "new Cold War" structure. The war in Ukraine and the conflict between the United States and China have succeeded in relieving North Korea's sanctions pressure and mitigating diplomatic isolation to a certain extent, but the ultimate success of this strategy will depend on whether this "new Cold War" can continue in its present form.

■ Outlook for 2024: The Limits of North Korea's "All-in" Strategy on a DPRK-China-Russia Coalition and a Possible Return to the Provocation-Dialogue Cycle

1. The Limits of a North Korea-China-Russia Coalition

North Korea's "all-in" nuclear strategy shined brighter as U.S.-China relations became strained. However, U.S.-China relations, which had been verging on conflict, have turned towards stability, with U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken and U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visiting China this summer and President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping holding a summit meeting at the APEC summit in November. First, the two leaders agreed to restore the U.S.-China military dialogue channel, which was unilaterally suspended by China due to the visit of then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022. This gesture may seem insignificant, but it can be regarded as a joint will to avoid further worsening of disputes over Taiwan.⁶ As a result, the concern in the United States of the possibility of a "three front war," namely the opening of the Taiwan front in addition to the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, has been reduced to some extent. At the same time, concerns over the linkage between Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula in the event of a conflict between the United States and China have also been allayed.

The reason why the United States and China have begun to stabilize their relations is primarily due to the difficult domestic situation that the two countries are respectively facing. President Biden, who is seeking re-election in 2024, needs to stabilize the

5. "4 North Koreans crossed NLL on a wooden boat...'Steps to determine willingness to return'" *BBC News Korea*, October 24, 2023. "Family defects to South by sea after 6 years...North Korean regime felt inflamed," *Seoul Shinmun*, May 19, 2023.

6. "U.S.-China leaders agree to restore military dialogue channel...Taiwan issue most sensitive for Xi Jinping," *Yonhap News*, November 16, 2023.

external environment. If he is keen on improving relations with China, he may face criticism from his rival and political opponent, former President Donald Trump, but the political burden of continuing tensions with China is too great for the U.S. public amid considerable fatigue from the protracted war in Ukraine. Compared to the United States, China's domestic situation is even worse. At present, China's economy is in the midst of a slump caused by a collapse in real estate prices and associated debt crisis. Its economy has been ridiculed as a "ticking time bomb,"⁷ and if China's economy has a hard landing, it could be a serious blow to Xi Jinping's grip on power. Externally, China is also feeling the pressure of the United States' strategy in the region. In particular, China is concerned about trilateral security cooperation between South Korea, the United States, and Japan, which will become even stronger if it fully sides with North Korea over Korean Peninsula issues.

In contrast to North Korea, China is already showing signs that it is less than eager to strengthen North Korea-China-Russia coalition. The Russian delegation to North Korea's Victory Day celebrations was headed by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who is considered Putin's right-hand man, while the Chinese delegation was led by Li Hongzhong, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party Central Committee and vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. Compared to the Victory Day celebrations ten years ago, when Vice President Li Yuanchao visited as the head of the delegation, this clearly represents a downgrade. In addition, shortly before Kim Jong Un's visit to Russia, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman seemingly distanced themselves from the North Korea-Russia alignment by saying that it was an "issue between North Korea and Russia."

Taken together, China's view of North Korea's pursuit of trilateral alignment is clear. In other words, China has always wanted stability on the Korean peninsula, and it wants it even more so now that the situations at home and abroad have deteriorated. North Korea can serve as a deterrent for China in preventing U.S. military forces from concentrating in the Taiwan Strait, but only if the Taiwan issue deteriorates. Now that the United States and China have signaled that they will work together to manage the situation surrounding Taiwan, North Korea's short- and medium-term strategic utility will decline.

7. "Is the Chinese economy a 'ticking time bomb'?" *BBC News Korea*, September 1, 2023.

Figure 3.2. U.S.-China Summit Held During the 2023 APEC Leaders' Meeting



Source: Yonhap News.

In fact, China is likely more concerned about North Korea's closeness to Russia provoking further defense cooperation among South Korea, Japan, and the United States. One of the outcomes of the Camp David agreement was joint exercises between South Korea and Japan for missile defense. If North Korea were to launch threatening missile provocations or conduct a seventh nuclear test, the security cooperation between South Korea and Japan, which has taken its first step, could expand at a rapid clip, resulting in a stronger encirclement of China in Northeast Asia. In addition, if North Korea's provocations intensified, the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), which was agreed to by South Korea and the United States and the Washington Declaration, may develop further, strengthening the ROK-U.S. alliance to one that includes nuclear sharing.

Russia's calculations are also more complex than they may seem. It is still unclear whether the current deepening of relations between North Korea and Russia is transactional or signals a long-term strategic partnership. Russia has maintained its support for North Korea for longer than is publicly known,⁸ but like China, it has also maintained some distance. Although it has now asked North Korea for help because of the enormous number of weapons and ammunition consumed by the war in Ukraine,

if in return North Korea was given technologies that South Korea and Japan regard as sensitive, in particular those related to space and missiles, South Korea will certainly consider providing direct military assistance to Ukraine. Given that the war in Ukraine is currently at a stalemate, where neither side has gained the upper hand, South Korea's full-blown support for Ukraine may well make the difference between the two sides in the war. This would prevent Russia from expanding its relationship with North Korea beyond diplomatic rhetoric, high-level diplomacy, and conventional weapons support.

There is no guarantee that North Korea-Russia relations will continue flourishing after the war in Ukraine ends. If North Korea-Russia relations grow closer and are elevated to a military partnership, the Russian Far East could become a target of the ROK-U.S.-Japan military power. This could be vexing for Russia, which faces the prospect of a greatly strengthened NATO on its western flank in the future. It can thus be said the North Korea-China-Russia coalition is built on a rather shaky foundation. The "new Cold War" that North Korea advocates will only become certain if China or Russia can stand up to the United States as equals or if the three authoritarian states can form a robust alliance, which is doubtful. For now, North Korea, China, and Russia are likely to prioritize their respective interests above anything else.

2. The Confounder: The U.S. Presidential Election and a Return to the Provocation-Dialogue Cycle

The confounder that could make the greatest impact in the international situation in 2024 is, above all, the U.S. presidential election in November. With just over a year to go before the election, polls in key swing states are reported to show incumbent President Biden lagging behind former President Trump by one to five points.⁹ If Trump is elected, U.S. relations with Russia and North Korea could change dramatically. Trump has already vowed that if elected he will end the war in Ukraine within 24 hours of taking office. This seems to mean that he will press Ukraine to accept a ceasefire with Russia,¹⁰ which could mean the war will end with Russia gaining the upper hand and allowing Putin to declare victory.

Trump's return to power is likely to be beneficial for North Korea, whose classic

8. The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, "The Rise of Phantom Traders: Russian Oil Exports to North Korea," *Asan Report*, July 2023.

9. "Trump Leads in 5 Critical States as Voters Blast Biden, Times/Siena Poll Finds," *The New York Times*, November 13, 2023.

10. "Trump's plan to end the war in Ukraine is ... something," *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2023.

strategy toward the United States starts with provocations and ends with negotiations. Such a strategy is more likely to succeed under Trump than Biden, who is largely indifferent to U.S.-North Korea dialogue. North Korea is therefore more likely to demonstrate its full nuclear capabilities to gain advantage in negotiations in the event of a power change in the United States in 2024. Considering that North Korea refrained from provocative actions during the 2020 presidential election when Trump was the incumbent but was more disruptive during the 2016 presidential election when Trump was the challenger, it is possible North Korea could return to the cycle of provocation and dialogue in 2024.

If North Korea's coalition with China and Russia falters, Biden's chances of reelection in 2024 diminish, and Trump's victory becomes likely, North Korea is more likely to consider a major provocation. If China pursues stabilized relations between South Korea, the United States, and Japan, and is less committed to supporting Russia, North Korea is likely to conduct a nuclear test or provocative missile test (e.g., a normal angle launch that shows full trajectory or lands near U.S. territory) that affects all countries in the region, with the intention to stoke conflict between China and neighboring countries. It could also induce China to join forces with North Korea in confronting South Korea, the United States, and Japan. If North Korea was to carry out such a provocation, South Korea, the United States, and Japan would likely react strongly by pressuring China to implement tougher sanctions and additional measures to strengthen deterrence.

If North Korea feels its coalition with China and Russia does not help but limits its strategy, it will seek to change the dynamics through major provocations, in which case North Korea will return to its old strategy of negotiating with the United States. The cycle of provocation leading to dialogue is similar to North Korea's strategy during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. On the other hand, if China-Russia ties remain robust and Biden's chances of re-election increase, North Korea may spend 2024 with neither dialogue nor major provocations, concentrating on providing military aid to Russia and perfecting its nuclear capabilities.

3. Economic Austerity, Humanitarian Crisis, and System Instability

In 2023, trade between North Korea and China improved. North Korea's public imports, which are an inference of North Korea's internal economy, surged by about 150 percent compared to the previous year. But the composition of trade changed compared to the pre-pandemic period when machinery was the main import item, as North Korea's largest import item was rice in 2023.¹¹ This is in line with expectations, as a decrease in imports and a shortage of food production due to the replanning of the economy

were already predicted. The recovery of exports, as seen in official statistics, is still slow, but this may be due to the fact that most of North Korea's exports to China are subject to sanctions and so they are carried out through illegal ship-to-ship transfers at sea. North Korea's exports (e.g., iron ore, coal, fishery, etc.) will be concealed as belonging not to North Korea but to a third country. It is certain that the actual volume of North Korea's exports is higher than the official statistics. North Korea's illegal export and import activities would be impossible without China's and Russia's active collusion. In particular, North Korea is expected to resume the dispatch of overseas workers, which had been suspended due to sanctions and COVID-19 lockdowns, as its relations with Russia have become closer. Regardless of the differences in strategic interests between North Korea, China, and Russia, at least in terms of the external economy, North Korea is expected to benefit from a North Korea-China-Russia coalition.

Nevertheless, the fallout from the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 lockdowns and anti-market economic policies seems to linger. This can be inferred from the fact that the most dangerous way to escape, by sea, occurred twice in 2023. Recent defections include family members, which is different in nature from fishermen drifting or defecting alone. Cases of family defections show that the internal situation in North Korea is desperate. With food shortages endemic across the country, it is certain that localized famines are taking place. This situation will continue into 2024 and will not be overcome while North Korea is "all-in" with nuclear weapons.

The bleak internal situation explains why the current cult of personality campaign is focused on the nuclear program and the Kim dynasty as a whole, rather than Kim Jong Un. The regime has made Kim Ju-ae the centerpiece of propaganda message. She is the nexus between the nukes, the Kim dynasty, and the idea of the current generation sacrificing for future generations. In this sense, Kim Ju-ae should be seen as a telegenic symbol that improves the image of her father rather than being his de facto successor. The regime will continue to emphasize the message of sacrifice for future generations to induce internal solidarity and loyalty to Kim Jong Un. However, with rising public discontent caused by anti-market policies, the regime's heavy-handed cult of personality and campaign of terror against external influence will continue as usual in 2024.

North Korea's nuclear "all-in" strategy is the same as the "all-in" strategy of a North Korea-China-Russia coalition. On the back of North Korea-China-Russia coalition, North Korea severed dialogue with South Korea and the United States and has focused on

11. "North Korea's trade with China in Q1 up 146.8% year-on-year," *Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation News*, July 11, 2023.

completing its nuclear force rather than negotiating with the United States or provoking the South. Such a tendency has become more pronounced since the second half of 2023. In other words, it appears that North Korea has diverged from the strategy of negotiating with South Korea and the United States from the position of strength by alternating dialogue and provocation, and instead has chosen a strategy of completing its nuclear force development in a short period of time and becoming a peer nuclear power to China and Russia, even if not recognized as such by the United States.

This presents North Korea with the dilemma of having to change its current strategic trajectory and may compel it to reconsider the strategy of alternating provocation and dialogue. Moreover, as Trump's chances of winning the 2024 U.S. presidential election increase significantly, North Korea will be faced with a choice: whether to stick to its strategy of refusing dialogue with the United States and further advancing its nuclear capabilities or return to the strategy of "provocation for negotiations" to negotiate with the United States from a position of strength. It may also find appealing that provocation can prevent China from getting too close to South Korea, the United States, and Japan. Thus, the possibility of a major North Korean provocation such as a nuclear test will increase in 2024.

Given this, the Yoon and Biden administrations' launch of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) to strengthen extended deterrence in 2023 has been a good preemptive measure. South Korea and the United States will be able to formulate a substantive joint nuclear response based on the NCG in 2024. The two allies should maintain a strong nuclear posture and assure South Korea through enhanced extended deterrence while avoiding being embroiled in North Korea's strategy of exploiting U.S. domestic politics in the run-up to the U.S. presidential election.

4. The United States: Coalitions of the Willing 2.0

Dr. Peter K. LEE | Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

■ 2023 in Review: Managing Complex Competition

The Biden administration made important progress in managing what last year's Asan International Security Outlook predicted would be a year of "complex competition." Globally, the United States was focused on "two-front competition" against Russia as the "acute threat" and China as the "pacing challenge," while also dealing with the "persistent threats" posed by North Korea and Iran.¹ Each of these authoritarian regimes actively sought to change the balance of power in their respective regions, either through direct military intervention in the case of Russia, threats and coercion in the cases of China and North Korea, or via proxy forces in the case of Iran. The Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas war, North Korea's advancing nuclear capabilities, and escalating maritime and aerial pressure by China around Taiwan and the South China Sea were all flashpoints demanding U.S. leadership.

In the Indo-Pacific, the Biden administration announced a number of new initiatives to strengthen collective deterrence, including the Washington Declaration with South Korea to improve extended nuclear deterrence, the AUKUS optimal pathway for nuclear-powered submarines with Australia and the United Kingdom, four new sites for defense activities in the Philippines, new defense agreements with Pacific Islands countries such as Papua New Guinea, and additional military sales to Taiwan. This represented significant progress across most of the core lines of effort set out in the White House's 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy Action Plan.²

The rebuilding of ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral cooperation was especially noteworthy. Building on intense South Korea-Japan diplomacy, the three allies held the August 18 Camp David summit as the first ever standalone trilateral leaders' summit. The meeting

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1. "2023 Department of Defense Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction," *U.S. Department of Defense*, September 28, 2023.
 2. The ten lines of effort include new resources, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, reinforcing deterrence, empowering ASEAN, supporting India, Quad, ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation, Pacific Islands resilience, good governance and accountability, and secure technologies. "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States," *The White House*, February 2022, pp. 15-16.

showed that with the right leadership and political effort, South Korea and Japan can rise above their historical enmities and work together. The “Commitment to Consult” released at the summit pledging to “coordinate our responses to regional challenges, provocations, and threats affecting our collective interests and security” is the closest the three countries have ever come to a collective security agreement.³

Figure 4.1. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, U.S. President Joe Biden, and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak at the AUKUS Summit Held in March 2023



Source: Yonhap News.

The United States also strengthened its involvement in the Quad and AUKUS partnerships as its two other main Indo-Pacific minilateral groupings. The Quad reflects U.S. efforts at regional assurance by providing public goods while AUKUS reflects U.S. efforts at regional deterrence by upholding the balance of military power. The Quad working groups continued to expand their cooperation across infrastructure, financing, emerging technologies, maritime domain awareness, education, climate and clean energy, health, technology standards, cyber, and space.⁴ Meanwhile, the United States set out an ambitious “optimal pathway” for the construction of the AUKUS nuclear-

3. “Commitment to Consult,” *The White House*, August 18, 2023.

4. “Quad Leaders’ Summit Fact Sheet,” *The White House*, May 20, 2023.

powered conventionally armed submarines with Australia and the United Kingdom.⁵

The Biden administration also continued to strengthen its global network of allies and partners throughout 2023. In keeping with its pledge to build connections “within and beyond the region” in its 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy, the White House tried to bridge its Asian and European allies. The U.S.-led response to Russia’s illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine alongside the 50-members of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group has proven highly effective. Cross-regional forums such as the NATO Asia-Pacific Four (AP4) meetings involving South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand also met for the second time at the leaders’ level in July during the NATO Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Some of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy’s other objectives, however, had mixed success. U.S. engagement with Southeast Asia did not see improvements on par with the previous year. President Biden notably skipped the U.S.-ASEAN Summit and the East Asia Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, in September but then visited Vietnam that same month to upgrade the relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This reinforced perceptions that the United States is prioritizing like-minded partners willing to balance China over the harder job of working through ASEAN mechanisms.⁶

2024 Outlook: Mobilizing “Coalitions of the Willing 2.0”

The idea of “coalitions” in U.S. policy discourse is infamously tied to the U.S. invasion of Iraq twenty years ago when the George W. Bush administration assembled a “coalition of the willing” as part of the War on Terror. The “coalition” included almost 50 countries, including some allies but mostly small, developing countries. The Iraq war set off almost two decades of conflict and instability across the Middle East and distracted the United States from the return of great power competition in Asia. The U.S.-led “coalition of the willing” became a symbol of American hubris and hegemony in the unipolar moment. The United States is once again seeking to build like-minded coalitions across a range

5. “FACT SHEET: Trilateral Australia-UK-US Partnership on Nuclear-Powered Submarines,” *The White House*, March 13, 2023. The three-phase plan will see a rotational presence of up to four U.S. nuclear-powered submarines to Australia starting in 2027 to be known as Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West), the sale of between three to five U.S. Virginia-class attack submarines to Australia in the early 2030s, and finally the construction of “SSN-AUKUS” submarines in Australia and the United Kingdom in the late 2030s and 2040s with U.S. technical support.

6. “Biden Skips Jakarta: When (Not) Showing Up Speaks Volumes,” *Fulcrum*, August 25, 2023.

of issues to compete with China, including in supply chains, semiconductors, critical minerals, emerging technologies, and more.

The major challenge for the United States in 2024 will be dealing with four-front strategic competition. The U.S. military will find itself severely overstretched in 2024 simultaneously resourcing Ukraine's defense, upholding deterrence over the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula, and averting a wider Middle East conflict in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war. Each of these challenges is formidable in their own right. But the tacit understandings and possible military coordination among the regimes, as already demonstrated by North Korea's alleged provision of munitions for Russia's war effort in Ukraine, poses further difficulties. As a result, the United States will once again call upon coalitions for this multi-theatre competition. In 2024, it is likely to focus on strengthening existing coalitions, expanding coalitions to include more members, creating new coalitions in strategically critical sectors, and coalition-building at home. With the United States holding a presidential election in November 2024, most of the White House's energy will be focused on strengthening existing coalitions to showcase tangible achievements rather than expanding membership or creating new groupings.

1. Strengthening Coalitions with New Roles

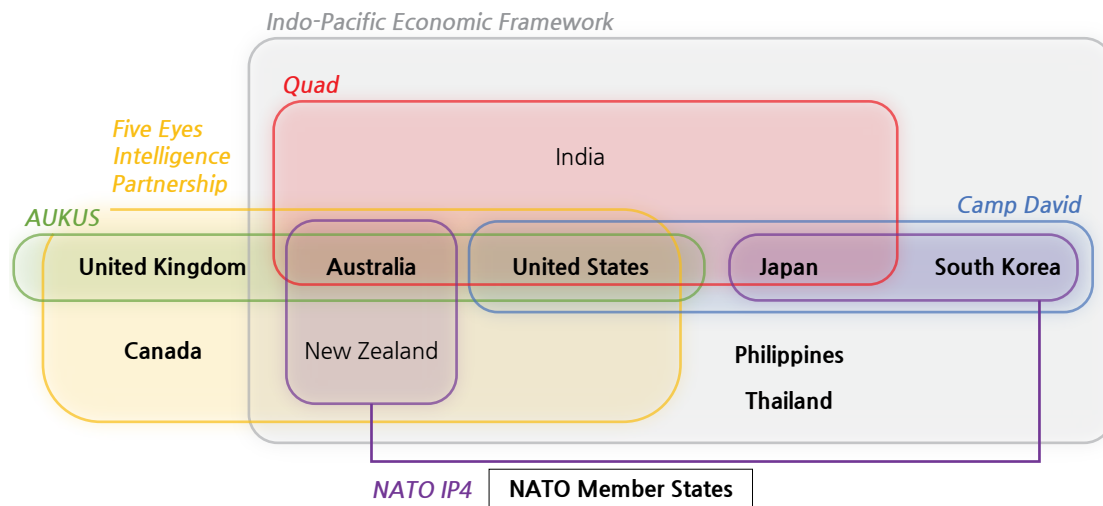
The United States already has a diverse range of coalitions and minilateral groupings to help it uphold a favorable balance of power in critical regions and domains against adversaries. A priority for the Biden administration in 2024 will be to strengthen existing coalitions to improve their collective impact. Some informal groupings could start to take on more formal roles. ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation as envisaged under the Camp David Summit outcomes is already being institutionalized for regular meetings. For example, the three countries are finalizing a data-sharing mechanism for real-time missile warning data from North Korea's launches and are also implementing a series of annual military exercises.⁷

In 2024, the Ukraine Defense Contact Group's focus will shift towards air defense and ammunition, two areas where allied defense industrial supply chains are struggling to keep up with demand. U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin outlined what he called the need for "capability coalitions" that will coordinate the delivery of specific platforms such as Leopard tanks and F-16 fighter jet training programs, as well as broader defense

7. "United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting Unilateral Press Statement," *U.S. Department of Defense*, November 12, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3586406/united-states-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-meeting-unilateral/>.

capability areas.⁸ Munitions will be another area where capability coalitions could be strengthened. Since Ukraine's June 2023 counter-offensive, it used 110,000 155mm-calibre artillery shells each month, far more than the United States and European allies can replenish.⁹

Figure 4.2. U.S.-centered Allied Coalitions in the Indo-Pacific



Source: Author. Note: India and New Zealand are not formal treaty allies.

In the case of the Quad, this will mean cautiously adding elements of a security agenda to the Quad's main focus on regional public goods, such as vaccine delivery and humanitarian assistance. In the maritime domain, the Quad's Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) will soon move beyond the pilot phase and potentially support Southeast Asian and Pacific Islands countries respond to Chinese illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in their waters, as well as instances of maritime coercion by providing real-time tracking data.¹⁰ These collective efforts will be pursued in conjunction with the United States' own step-up in the region, such as the deploying of U.S. Coast Guard vessels to improve partner capacity.¹¹

8. "Opening Remarks by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III at the 16th Ukraine Defense Contact Group (As Delivered)," *U.S. Department of Defense*, October 11, 2023.

9. Natasha Bertrand, Oren Liebermann and Jennifer Hansler, "US and NATO grapple with critical ammo shortage for Ukraine," *CNN*, July 18, 2023.

10. Peter K. Lee (ed.), Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto, Renato Cruz De Castro, Collin Koh and Lan-Anh Nguyen, "Many hands: Australia-US contributions to Southeast Asian maritime security resilience," United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney (November 2022), <https://www.usssc.edu.au/australia-us-contributions-to-southeast-asian-maritime-security-resilience>.

2. Expanding Membership of Coalitions

The second option for the United States will be to expand the membership of its coalitions. This would update groupings to match the changed strategic circumstances from when they were first created. This has already been put into practice with U.S. support for Finland joining NATO in 2023 and backing Sweden's application. By contrast, the Quad was revived in 2017 at a time when South Korea was uninterested in membership, but the Yoon administration is keen to cooperate with Quad working groups such as on health and climate responses. New opportunities are emerging for potential Quad-Plus partners like South Korea to cooperate with the Quad countries.¹² It has also expressed interest in closer coordination with U.S. intelligence partnerships and signed up to semiconductor alliances.

The United States welcomes these changes precisely because they show that minilateral groupings are inclusive and open to states. In 2024 it is likely that existing minilateral coalitions will start to become the center of gravity, attracting like-minded partners. On trade, for example, the Minerals Security Partnership to coordinate critical minerals supply has added new members, including India. In 2024, potential candidates to join U.S.-led security and economic groupings in the Indo-Pacific include South Korea, but also New Zealand and Canada, which have both announced plans to increase their Indo-Pacific engagement. Adding Pacific Islands countries to coalitions, both individually and collectively under the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) framework, is also a possibility.

3. Building New Coalitions

In addition to strengthening and expanding coalitions, the United States is likely to also create new coalitions where needed. This could include a number of areas, including intelligence, munitions supply chains, defense space cooperation, and emerging technology sectors. On intelligence-sharing, the United States is currently weaving together intelligence cooperation between the traditional core group of the Five Eyes intelligence sharing partnership with newer partnerships such as the Quad, ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral cooperation, U.S.-Japan-Philippines cooperation, and bilateral sharing

11. Kirsty Needham, Exclusive: US Coast Guard seeks bigger role to search, board vessels in Pacific, *Reuters*, July 26, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-coast-guard-seeks-bigger-role-search-board-vessels-pacific-2023-07-26/>.

12. Peter K. Lee and Chungku Kang, "South Korea's Quad Opportunity: Aligning Foreign Policy and Public Opinion," *Asan Issue Brief*, November 15, 2023.

of information with Japan, India, and Vietnam.¹³

On defense industrial supply chains, new capability coalitions may be formed. The production difficulties confronting the U.S. defense industrial base have been well-documented. This is especially severe in artillery shell production, guided munitions, shipbuilding and maintenance, and supply chains for critical components.¹⁴ The pressure is growing for the United States to take a new, and collective, approach to these problems that leverages the industrial strengths of its key allies and partners around the world. Unfortunately, the U.S. Congress is currently moving in the opposite direction, with the House and Senate both proposing “Buy American” amendments that would require 75% of content for major defense programs be domestic by 2029.¹⁵

In space, U.S. cooperation with allies and partners will go beyond civilian research collaboration, such as the Artemis Accords for lunar exploration. The United States will focus on creating new coalitions for defense space cooperation that deal with military activities including anti-satellite missiles, space-based surveillance, and directed-energy weapons. This is in line with the newly established “defense space” commands among U.S. allies. Finally, on technologies, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan’s widely reported speech calling for a “small yard, high fence” to protect foundational military use technologies will see new coalitions built to deny access to China and other adversaries. This will be especially complicated in areas where there are dual-use purposes, such as semiconductors as well as biomanufacturing, which is used for healthcare but also producing military fuels, chemicals, and construction materials.¹⁶

The tension between the need to forge stronger coalitions with allies and partners, and the domestic protectionist pressures that prioritize U.S. unilateralism and self-interest, will not be easy to reconcile. For example, the U.S. debate over the AUKUS partnership and whether the sale of Virginia-class submarines would detract from the United States’ own shipbuilding requirements is only going to intensify, even as support for the deal continues. The U.S. attitude towards its allies and partners is similarly uncertain. As former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently observed, “Both

13. “US Weaves Web of Intelligence Links in Asia to Counter China,” *Bloomberg*, October 5, 2023.

14. Seth Jones, “Empty Bins in a Wartime Environment: The Challenge to the U.S. Defense Industrial Base,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, January 23, 2023.

15. Joe Gould, Paul Mcleary, and Connor O’Brien, “Defense manufacturers fear fallout from ‘Buy American’ politics,” *Politico*, November 13, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/11/13/defense-industry-buy-american-00126846>.

16. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, “U.S. Department of Defense Biomanufacturing Strategy,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, March 21, 2023.

friends and adversaries wonder whether Biden’s engagement and alliance-building is a return to normal or whether Trump’s ‘America First’ disdain for allies will be the dominant thread in American policy in the future.”¹⁷

4. No Coalitions at Home

The most important coalition will be the one that is hardest to create: a “united” United States of America. The November 2024 U.S. presidential election will dominate U.S. attention for much of the year. President Biden and former President Donald Trump are widely expected to face off against each other once again, barring any unexpected criminal or health developments. The indictment of former President Trump on 37 federal charges, the removal of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, and the downgrading of the U.S. credit rating in August to AA+ were all events unprecedented in U.S. history. It is likely that 2024 will see even more unprecedented events. The United States is currently stuck in a dysfunctional political gridlock of impeachments, criminal investigations against senior politicians, indictments, and political nominations held ransom.

Figure 4.3. Representative Matt Gaetz (R-Fla) Points at Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy During a Heated Conversation in January 2023



Source: Yonhap News.

There are several trends already in motion that are likely to have a major impact on the United States in 2024. Three of these so-called “black elephants” are well understood but are not being addressed. First, political paralysis in Congress over government spending and personnel appointments could lead to a prolonged government shutdown or a debt default. Stopgap bills to prevent further U.S. government shutdowns are likely to continue and any political compromises will incur the fierce criticism of hard-right Republican members. Second, there could be a tipping point in the U.S. border migration crisis that was one of the drivers for the election of President Trump in 2016. More than 200,000 people were unlawfully detained each month entering the United States in 2023, and a breakdown in the border system could cause a major crisis between border states, the federal government, and Republican party hardliners.¹⁸ Finally, and perhaps most concerning for U.S. allies and partners, the re-election of President Trump as the 47th President of the United States would mark a return to alliance instability and unpredictability in U.S. international leadership.

The combination of political dysfunction and domestic crises will present challenges for not only sustaining domestic coalitions, but also mobilizing international coalitions. For example, Republican Senator Tommy Tuberville’s almost year-long hold on confirming over 300 military nominations left many senior leadership positions vacant at a time when U.S. defense diplomacy in minilateral groupings was needed.¹⁹ Meanwhile, political polarization in Congress is also hampering the passage of bills to sustain the coalition supporting Ukraine, as representatives tie funding to domestic issues such as border security, spending limits, and bureaucratic fundings. Political populism can also have important consequences for U.S. leadership of coalitions, as was best illustrated by the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership on free trade. The Biden administration’s first term foreign policy record heavily emphasizes successful coalitions with allies and partners. A second Trump administration has instead promised to continue its “America First” approach to transactional relationships, but there will be few allies or partners willing to sign up to U.S.-led coalitions should that come to pass.

South Korea should be prepared to manage both a returned Democratic Biden-

17. Robert M. Gates, “The Dysfunctional Superpower,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 29, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/robert-gates-america-china-russia-dysfunctional-superpower>.

18. Camilo Montoya-Galvez, “Unlawful crossings along southern border reach yearly high as U.S. struggles to contain mass migration,” *CBS News*, October 1, 2023.

19. Carlos Del Toro, Frank Kendall and Christine Wormuth, “Three service secretaries to Tuberville: Stop this dangerous hold on senior officers,” *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2023.

Harris administration as well as a Trump presidency that once again puts “America First.” There is much to learn from the playbooks of other U.S. allies who successfully managed the Trump administration between 2017 and 2020, including Japan, Australia, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. These countries were able to secure exemptions from U.S. unilateral tariffs, extract new deals and diplomatic wins, and defend their national interests by navigating the U.S. political system and building the right coalitions. The Yoon administration’s alliance restoration efforts with the Biden administration enjoy bipartisan U.S. support, but it will need to respond to harder burden-sharing demands from a second Trump administration on issues such as cost-sharing for the U.S. military presence in South Korea, extra-regional commitments over Taiwan or the South China Sea, and economic decoupling from China. It should also be noted that the future of U.S. coalitions will be not just “U.S.-led” but “U.S.-included.” That is, the United States will not be the leader of every coalition it is trying to strengthen, expand, or create. In many of these coalitions, allies and partners will have leverage and capacity to influence U.S. thinking and the direction of the groupings. These will need to be new coalitions of the willing to meet the challenges of a more complex and chaotic world.

5. China: Building Sinocentric Coalitions

Dr. LEE Dong Gyu | Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

2023 in Review: Seeking Cracks in the Anti-China Coalition and the Expansion of Cooperation with the “Global South”

On March 10, 2023, Xi Jinping’s third term as the President of the People’s Republic of China officially began as Xi was unanimously re-elected and key high-ranking officials were confirmed at the National People’s Congress. In 2023, China explored cracks in the U.S.-led anti-China coalition by highlighting the stabilization of U.S.-China relations, while expanding cooperation with the “Global South” by questioning U.S. leadership and raising the necessity for economic cooperation.

Figure 5.1. Xi Jinping Taking the Oath of Office at the National People’s Congress on March 10, 2023



Source: Yonhap News.

1. Increasing Pressure and Conciliation on U.S. Allies while Emphasizing the Stabilization of U.S.-China Relations

The confrontation between the United States and China which had escalated with the “Chinese spy balloon” incident in February 2023 gradually eased through a number

of high-ranking U.S. officials' visits to China, including Secretary of State Tony Blinken (June 18-19), Secretary of Treasury Janet Yellen (July 6-9), Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry (July 16-19), and the U.S.-China leaders' summit on November 15. During the summit, the U.S. and China agreed to manage the competition to prevent it from veering into confrontation or conflict. However, no meaningful progress was achieved due to the two sides' different positions on diplomatic and security issues such as the Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Taiwan issue, and the North Korean nuclear issue. Nevertheless, China capitalized on the occasion as an opportunity to strengthen President Xi Jinping's leadership and stabilize domestic politics. Externally, China tried to create cracks in the U.S.-led anti-China coalition by stressing the necessity of cooperation with China to the U.S. allies and partners as the U.S.-China relations seemed to be on the course of stabilization.

In particular, given the improving South Korea-Japan relations and ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation, China intensified pressure and conciliation on South Korea and Japan by criticizing trilateral cooperation as a trilateral alliance and a threat to peace and stability of the region. When President Yoon Suk Yeol described the Taiwan issue as a global issue in an interview with Reuters in April, China strongly opposed the view, stating China would not allow others to comment on its internal affairs. China also employed diplomatic pressure on the South Korean government and induced division within Korean society as the Chinese Ambassador to South Korea Xing Haiming (邢海明) asserted that South Korea was making "wrong bets." In addition, China abruptly banned the import of Japanese seafood on August 24 in response to Japan's discharge of the contaminated waters from the Fukushima nuclear plants.

Nonetheless, as ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation was strengthened after the Camp David Trilateral Summit in August, China appeared to use economic development and regional stability as a pretext to strengthen communication with South Korea and Japan by adding both to the list of countries permitted for Chinese overseas group tours on August 10 and seeking high-level exchanges such as the November ROK-PRC-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting. It seems that China has changed its tactics after seeing the backlashes from the countries in the region against its economic coercion and diplomatic pressure.

2. Keeping Its Distance from North Korea-Russia Military Cooperation While Maintaining Favorable Bilateral Relations with North Korea and Russia

On February 24, the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced "China's Position on the Political Settlement of

the Ukraine Crisis” (關於政治解決烏克蘭危機的中國立場) to present China as a peace mediator. Xi Jinping, however, travelled to Russia as his first overseas visit of his third term and signed “the Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era” (中華人民共和國和俄羅斯聯邦關於深化新時代全面戰略協作夥伴關係的聯合聲明) with Vladimir Putin. This demonstrated China’s intention to develop favorable relations with Russia in the long term to promote a multipolar global order. China also showcased its close ties with Russia by hosting the China-Russia summit during the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October 2023.

When North Korea officially re-opened its borders in August 2023, economic exchanges between North Korea and China began to recover. In addition, China continued to advocate for Pyongyang’s position on the North Korean nuclear and human rights issues at the UN Security Council. For example, Zhang Jun (張軍), Chinese Ambassador to the UN, claimed that North Korea’s “legitimate security concerns” should be addressed at the UN Security Council in response to North Korea’s launch of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) on July 12, 2023.¹ Geng Shuang (耿爽), Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, opposed the discussion on North Korean human rights at the UN Security Council, insisting that North Korean human rights issues “do not pose a threat to international peace and security.”² By supporting North Korea and Russia’s positions in the international society and maintaining favorable bilateral relations with the two countries, China has attempted to secure leverage against ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation.

However, regarding the North Korea-Russia military cooperation in the latter half of 2023, China was rather cautious about the framing of a China-Russia-North Korea cooperation structure, noting that the military cooperation is a bilateral matter between North Korea and Russia. Although China needs to maintain relations with Russia and North Korea to respond to the increasing U.S. influence in the region, a China-Russia-North Korea triangle can be seen as a collective of rogue states which may face the risk of international sanctions or diplomatic pressure. At the same time, China seems to be showcasing its influence over North Korea and Russia, thereby increasing its reputation in the international community.

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1. “Remarks by China’s Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Zhang Jun at the UN Security Council Briefing on the Korean Nuclear Issue,” *Chinese Foreign Ministry*, July 14, 2023.
 2. Zhao Ziwen, “China calls UN Security Council talks on North Korea an ‘abuse of power’,” *China Morning Post*, August 18, 2023.

3. Strengthening Cooperation with the “Global South”

In 2023, China expanded cooperation with the “Global South” through various events such as the BRICS Summit, the China-Africa Summit, the 8th Senior Officials’ Meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the China-Central Asia Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, and the China-Central Asia Summit.

China also further developed its bilateral ties with the international community. In 2023, China established “strategic partnerships” with Kyrgyzstan (May 18), Palestine (June 14), Solomon Islands (July 10), Georgia (July 31), Benin (September 1), Venezuela (September 13), Zambia (September 15), Syria (September 22), Timor-Leste (September 23), Ethiopia (October 17), Colombia (October 25), and Uruguay (November 22). Responding to the U.S.-led values-based democratic coalition, China expanded its multilateral cooperation with developing countries focusing on non-traditional security cooperation and economic cooperation.

2024 Outlook: Seeking to Build Sinocentric Coalitions against the United States

With the upcoming U.S. presidential election in 2024, the U.S. is likely to focus on domestic politics and reduce its international engagement. Amid the ongoing turmoil in the global geopolitical landscape including the Russo-Ukrainian War, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Sudanese Civil War, and the volatile situation in Afghanistan, China is likely to actively engage in international affairs to elevate its status as a “responsible great power.” In addition, China is likely to construct China-centric coalitions in each region by expanding cooperation with developing and authoritarian countries based on its technological and economic power while continuing to question U.S. leadership and taking advantage of Russia’s preoccupation with the war in Ukraine.

1. Enhancing Coalitions with Countries in the Middle East by Mediating the Israel-Hamas Conflict

After the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict, China actively supported the Two-State Solution (兩國方案). On November 20, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) noted that “China is a good friend and brother of Arab and Islamic countries. China has always firmly upheld the legitimate rights and interests of Arab and Islamic countries and firmly supported the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and interests.”³ Considering that China recognizes the War in Ukraine as a proxy war and has criticized the U.S. for providing weapons to Ukraine, China seems to expand

political consensus with Arab and Islamic countries by supporting Palestinian positions in the Israel-Hamas conflict, while questioning the U.S. leadership and responsibility regarding Israel's Gaza strikes.

Figure 5.2. Talks with a Delegation of Arab and Islamic States Foreign Ministers on November 20



Source: Yonhap News.

In the past, China has expanded its influence in the region by seeking partnerships based on economic cooperation rather than security cooperation to avoid the complicated political dynamics of the Middle East. The Xi regime, however, has enhanced partnerships with authoritarian countries in the Middle East by showing respect to the political system of each country based on the principle of non-interference to counter against the U.S. pressure on China. China's mediation in the diplomatic normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023 also reflects its intention to expand its political influence in the Middle East.

In February, China made a mediation proposal for the war in Ukraine. China is

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3. "Wang Yi Talks with Joint Delegation of Foreign Ministers of Arab and Islamic Countries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, November 20, 2023 ["王毅同阿拉伯、伊斯兰国家外长联合代表团会谈, 中华人民共和国外交部," 中华人民共和国外交部, 2023.11.20].

likely to propose another peace talk based on the Two-State Solution and the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine to proclaim itself as a peace mediator. Given the long-term animosity between Israel and Palestine and the influence of the U.S. in the Middle East, China's attempt is not expected to make tangible progress. In the process, however, China is likely to strengthen political cooperation with Arab and Islamic countries by supporting their positions. Based on this, China is likely to extend not only economic cooperation but also military cooperation such as joint military exercises and arms sales to build an authoritarian coalition with countries in the Middle East.

2. Seeking to Build Coalitions with Developing Countries Based on Global Initiatives

From January 1, 2024, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates will officially become members of the BRICS. Following Saudi Arabia's decision to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a dialogue partner in March 2023, Iran formally joined the SCO in July. In light of this development, China is expected to further expand its cooperation with the "Global South" based on its proposed global initiatives in international organizations such as BRICS and SCO.

At the 13th Meeting of BRICS National Security Advisers and High Representatives on National Security on July 25, 2023, Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized China's cooperation with the "Global South" based on its 'Global Security Initiative (GSI),' 'Global Development Initiative (GDI),' and 'Global Civilization Initiative (GCI).' Through these initiatives, China declared that it aims to construct a sustainable global security architecture based on mutual respect for each country's diversity, opposing hegemonism and fostering mutual development. China has advertised its global initiatives by publishing the 'GSI concept paper' and the 'Progress Report on the GDI 2023' in 2023 and expanded its partnerships on these bases. Particularly, unlike the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which focuses on building infrastructure, the GDI aims to cooperate with developing countries through humanitarian support, food aid, and knowledge sharing to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Since China's proposed global initiatives emphasize respect for sovereignty, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, and each country's diversity, they are free of human rights issues or authoritarian political systems which makes participation by "Global South" countries relatively easier. As the developing countries' demand for economic growth increases amid complex global crises and economic recession, China will likely expand its cooperation with developing and authoritarian countries based on these global initiatives.

While the intensifying complex competition between the U.S. and China has structured a confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism, the cohesion of an authoritarian coalition tends to be relatively weaker. Not only does each country have different values, economic development levels, and security environments, but China, Russia, and India have repeated cooperation and conflict with each other in comparison to the U.S.-led democratic coalition with shared values. In the situation where dominant powers such as the U.S. and Russia have difficulty focusing on China due to the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict, China can highlight its distinctiveness from the U.S. by making use of the various global initiatives to establish cooperation frameworks with developing and authoritarian countries in regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

3. Disseminating Chinese Systems through China's Technologies and Policies

With the intensifying U.S. containment in the field of science and technology, China has independently sought advanced technological development. As the U.S. has strengthened its controls on semiconductor exports to China since October 2022, Chinese semiconductor companies have been accelerating their technological independence. Huawei, which abandoned the use of 5G chips due to U.S. sanctions in early 2023, released the 'Mate 60' in October using the 'Kirin 9000S,' a 7-nanometer semiconductor produced by Chinese semiconductor company SMIC despite the continuing U.S. sanctions. Based on this achievement, the Chinese government is expected to increase its support and investment in advanced technologies, including semiconductors, and seek independent technological innovations.

Considering that essential intellectual properties are possessed by developed countries including the U.S., it remains uncertain how far China will achieve meaningful results through its indigenous technological innovation. However, since developing countries have high demands to resolve the global digital divide, China is likely to expand cooperation with developing countries in regions such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America by using its own advanced technologies. China will provide its technologies and related policies in various fields such as constructing Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure, e-commerce, cyber education, cyber policy, and next-generation network standards. Through this process, China will try to disseminate Chinese systems and increase its influence within cooperation frameworks with developing countries.

4. Increasing Pressure on Taiwan Ahead of Taiwan's Presidential Election

Taiwan's presidential election scheduled for January 13, 2024, can be a significant variable in Cross-Strait relations and U.S.-China relations. The likelihood of Lai Ching-te (賴清德) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) winning the election seems high due to the recent failure by the opposition to create a coalition. Nonetheless, if candidates from opposition parties can dramatically agree on a single candidate before the day of the election, there still remains a possibility of electoral change considering the small gap in the candidates' approval ratings.

Before the Taiwanese presidential election, China is expected to make various moves such as military provocations in the Taiwan Strait, economic coercion, and diplomatic pressure in the international community to stimulate Taiwanese concern and anxiety on conflicts in Cross-Strait relations. Their impacts on the economy and national security will cultivate a favorable public opinion for the Kuomintang (KMT) and if the Kuomintang comes to power, tensions between the two sides can be eased, allowing China to build a foundation to expand its influence over Taiwan. This can weaken the U.S. policy of containing China by enhancing Cross-Strait relations and this can create a crack in the U.S.-led democratic coalition. In this respect, it is unlikely that China will invade Taiwan, as some argue.

Figure 5.3. Candidates for the 2024 Taiwanese Presidential Election



Source: Yonhap News.

If the DPP maintains power and strengthens its existing foreign policy seeking 'de-Sinicization,' China will exert even more pressure on Taiwan in 2024. The Xi Jinping regime needs to suppress Taiwan's de-Sinicization to demonstrate the inevitability of

reunification with Taiwan to secure its ruling legitimacy and domestic cohesion given the economic recession and increasing instability within the Chinese society.

Since China's such behaviors can be a serious challenge to regional peace and stability, the scope of ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation is likely to be expanded to cover the Taiwan Strait. South Korea would have challenges in providing substantial military support in a contingency in the Taiwan Strait given its primary concerns over North Korea's potential military provocations. Nevertheless, South Korea needs to expand communications with countries in the region, including the U.S., Japan, and Australia, since there is a possibility of being entangled in the Taiwan issue by being requested to participate in joint statements related to the Taiwan Strait or to support the U.S. military operations.

5. Seeking Expansion of Overseas Naval Bases and Regional Joint Maritime Exercises

China is expected to complete the construction of the Ream Naval Base in Cambodia and facilitate the deployment of its third aircraft carrier *Fujian* (福建) in 2024. China has been expanding its naval capabilities by adding destroyers, frigates, and escort ships, and as a result, it needs to further expand its naval bases to manage its vessels and ensure their smooth operational activities. To extend its naval power beyond the South China Sea and East China Sea, China is likely to explore constructing more overseas naval bases in 2024, in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Equatorial Guinea, reaching out to the Indian Ocean and Africa.

China has expanded its Maritime Defense Layer to counter the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, as evidenced by its security agreement with the Solomon Islands in 2022. In 2023, China conducted various joint maritime exercises with countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, including the China-Russia-South Africa joint maritime exercises (February), the China-Russia-Iranian joint exercises in the Gulf of Oman (March), the China-Cambodia joint exercises in waters near Sihanoukville (March), the China-Laos 'Friendship Shield' military exercises (May), the China-Thailand 'Blue Strike' joint exercises in waters near the Gulf of Thailand and Sattahip (September), the China-Saudi Arabia 'Blue Sword' joint exercises in Guangdong Province, China (October) and the China-ASEAN five countries (Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam) 'Peace and Friendship' joint maritime exercises (November).

Following the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the AUKUS trilateral alliance between the U.S., U.K., and Australia in February 2023, the U.S. announced plans to establish four new military bases in the Philippines (Naval Base Camilo Osias

in Santa Ana, Cagayan; Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela; Balabac Island in Palawan; and Lal-lo Airport in Cagayan) to enhance its siege strategy against China. China, which seeks military dominance in the region by 2027, the 100th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), is likely to increase its efforts to expand its overseas naval bases and regional maritime joint exercises in 2024. This can lead to increased maritime conflicts between the United States and China.

6. Japan: Strengthening Values-Based Coalitions

Dr. CHOI Eunmi | Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

2023 in Review: Japan Expands Partner Countries for a Liberal Coalition

1. Liberal Coalition on Display at the G7 Hiroshima Summit

The most notable event in Japanese diplomacy in 2023 was the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, held on May 19-21. Amid ongoing international instability, including the Ukraine war, the G7 leaders gathered in Hiroshima, the site of the world's first atomic bombing and the constituency of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, whose political mantra is “a world free of nuclear weapons.” Under the themes of “upholding an international order based on the rule of law” and “strengthening engagement with the “Global South,” the G7 leaders discussed regional affairs, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, climate and energy, food, health, development, gender and human rights, digital, and science and technology. They issued a joint statement and four separate documents on Ukraine, nuclear disarmament, economic security, green energy, and food.

Figure 6.1. G7 Hiroshima Summit 2023



Source: G7 Hiroshima 2023.

The G7 leaders specifically condemned Russia's aggression in Ukraine and pledged to work closely on issues regarding China. They expressed their commitment to a constructive and stable relationship with China, while at the same time criticizing Beijing's economic coercion.¹ This was not only an affirmation of the strong relationship between liberal countries, but also a statement to the world about the joint response of liberal countries to solve international problems. In addition, the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Japan on May 20 during the G7 Summit, sent an even stronger message of liberal cooperation and support for Ukraine. Two months before the Hiroshima G7 summit, on March 21, Prime Minister Kishida made a surprise visit to Ukraine, the last of the G7 leaders to do so. The visit came on the same day that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a summit in Moscow, which served as a confirmation of Sino-Russian ties. Throughout this time, Japan's actions raised the banner for a coalition among liberal nations.

2. Japan's New Plan for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and the "Global South"

In March 2023, during a visit to India, Prime Minister Kishida announced "The Future of the Indo-Pacific," Japan's new plan for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" with India as an indispensable partner.² This is a more specific action plan than the previous version of the FOIP and aims to gain broad support and consensus from the international community, especially Western Europe and emerging and developing countries, on the core ideas of FOIP: freedom, openness, diversity, inclusiveness, and the rule of law. Specifically, it seeks to build solidarity with the United States, Australia, India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Pacific Islands, the Republic of Korea, Canada, and Europe, and to create shared values by expanding the FOIP's vision to include the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

Underlying this objective is the recognition that the international community has entered a period of historical transition, with the rise of emerging and developing countries and various complex crises. In the process of realizing the goals of the FOIP, Japan intends to present the FOIP's values as a vision of the international order that can be accepted by everyone. Japan emphasizes that it "does not exclude anyone," "does not create camps," and "does not impose its values," messaging that can be seen as targeting the "Global South," a group of emerging and developing countries that are hesitant to move closer to Japan for fear of damaging ties with China.

1. "G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué," *G7 Hiroshima 2023*.

Figure 6.2. Prime Minister Kishida Announcing the New Plan for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”



Source: Prime Minister's Office of Japan.

To expand FOIP cooperation, Japan proposed four pillars, including (1) creating an international environment for peaceful principles and rules of prosperity, (2) responding to challenges in the Indo-Pacific area, (3) overcoming countries' vulnerabilities through enhancing connectivity, and (4) expanding security at sea and in the air. It also announced that it would achieve its goals through strategic utilization of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Specifically, it announced more than \$75 billion in private and public financing to be brought to the Indo-Pacific region by 2030 to foster growth and strengthen partnerships and cooperation with emerging economies.

Based on these plans, Prime Minister Kishida visited four African countries (Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique) and Singapore (April 29-May 5), three Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar) (July 16-19), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit and the Japan-European Union (EU) Summit (July 11-13), and the ASEAN and G20 Summits (September 5-11) to promote FOIP's values. Among these visits, Kishida became the first Japanese prime minister to attend the

2. "A New Plan for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, March 20, 2023 ["自由で開かれたインド太平洋 (FOIP) のための新たなプラン," 外務省. 2023.3.20].

NATO summit two years in a row, in 2022 and 2023. Japan and NATO upgraded their existing cooperation document, the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program (IPCP), to the Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITPP). The agreement states that Japan and NATO will strengthen cooperation in 16 areas over the four-year period from 2023 to 2026, including cyber defense and space security, countering disinformation, addressing emerging and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum, and arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation.³ The Japan-EU summit also agreed to share perceptions of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, establish a ministerial strategic dialogue on security, promote security partnerships on cyber and hybrid threats, disarmament and nonproliferation, and conduct joint exercises to combat piracy.⁴ This is significant, in that it illustrates the shared threats and joint responses to China, as well as demonstrating Japan's strategy to expand diplomatic and security partners, centered on FOIP values.

3. South Korea-Japan Relations Back on Track

After the Supreme Court ruling on the forced labor issue in 2018, relations between South Korea and Japan have deteriorated for years. However, a number of recent events have caused them to improve, including the Korean government's announced solution, President Yoon Suk Yeol's visit to Japan (March 16-17), Prime Minister Kishida's visit to Korea (May 7-8), the two leaders paying their respects at the Korean memorial to the atomic bomb victims during the Hiroshima G7 Summit (May 21), and the ROK-U.S.-Japan summit at Camp David (August 18). Shuttle diplomacy between the two leaders resumed after a 12-year hiatus, and high-level strategic dialogues and consultations on foreign affairs, security, defense, finance, economy, industry, culture, and education were restored. Specifically, these measures included the normalization of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), the lifting of Japan's export restrictions on South Korea, and the restoration of the trade whitelist. In addition, the Korea-Japan Economic and Security Dialogue was newly launched in May, and the Federation of Korean Industries and the Japan Business Federation each contributed 1 billion won to establish the Korea-Japan Future Partnership Foundation (June 22). Furthermore, efforts were made to strengthen economic cooperation, including the

3. "ITPP: Individually Tailored Partnership Programme," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, July 12, 2023 [“国別適合パートナーシップ計画(ITPP)”, 外務省. 2023.07.12].

4. "Joint Statement of the 29th Japan-EU Summit Meeting," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, July 12, 2023 [第29回日EU定期首脳協議 共同声明, 外務省. 2023.07.12].

June 29 resumption of the Korea-Japan currency swap after an eight-year hiatus. The two countries also agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fields of next-generation energy, such as hydrogen and ammonia, and advanced science and technology (November 17).

People-to-people exchanges have increased significantly as well. From January to October 2023, South Koreans accounted for around 27.8% (5.52 million) of the total number of foreign visitors to Japan (19.89 million), topping the list. Japanese visiting Korea accounted for around 20.7% (1.84 million) of the total number of foreign visitors to Korea (8.88 million), also more than any other country.⁵ Prior to the deterioration of bilateral relations and the outbreak of COVID-19, South Korea and Japan, which celebrated 10 million people-to-people exchanges, have continued to actively engage with each other.

Figure 6.3. Yoon and Kishida Jointly Pay Respects at the Monument in Memory of the Korean Victims of the A-bomb



Source: Yonhap News.

However, when it comes to the South Korean government's resolution of the forced

5. "Tourist Arrivals to Korea by Country," *Korea Tourism Organization* (<https://datalab.visitkorea.or.kr/datalab/portal/nat/getForTourDashForm.do>); "Changes in Visitor Numbers to Japan," *Japan National Tourism Organization* (<https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/graph/#graph--breakdown--by--country>).

labor issue related to the Supreme Court ruling, there is a mostly negative perception in Korea (36% favorable, 59% unfavorable), while Japan has a mostly positive perception (57% favorable, 31% unfavorable).⁶ Also, 21.7% of South Koreans and 34.8% of Japanese positively view the South Korean government's attempts to improve bilateral relations, while 15% of South Koreans and 34.5% of Japanese are positive about the Japanese government's stance.⁷ Considering that cooperation at the government level is back on track, it seems a wide gap in perceptions between the two countries on issues such as history and conflict.

2024 Outlook: Strengthening Coalitions Amid Instability at Home and Abroad

1. The Unpopular Kishida Cabinet: The House of Representatives Election and the Liberal Democratic Party Presidential Election at a Critical Juncture

For Kishida, whose term as LDP leader ends in September 2024, the coming year could be a reaffirmation as both LDP leader and Japanese prime minister. As shown in Figure 6.4, Kishida's approval ratings have struggled since reaching a high during the G7 Summit in May. Under the circumstances, Prime Minister Kishida tried to recover his approval rating by appointing 11 new cabinet ministers out of 19 total and increasing the number of female cabinet ministers from 2 to 5. He also requested the dissolution of the Unification Church on October 12—which was related to the shooting of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2022—and announced new economic measures such as income and resident tax cuts in November. However, his approval rating is still on the decline.

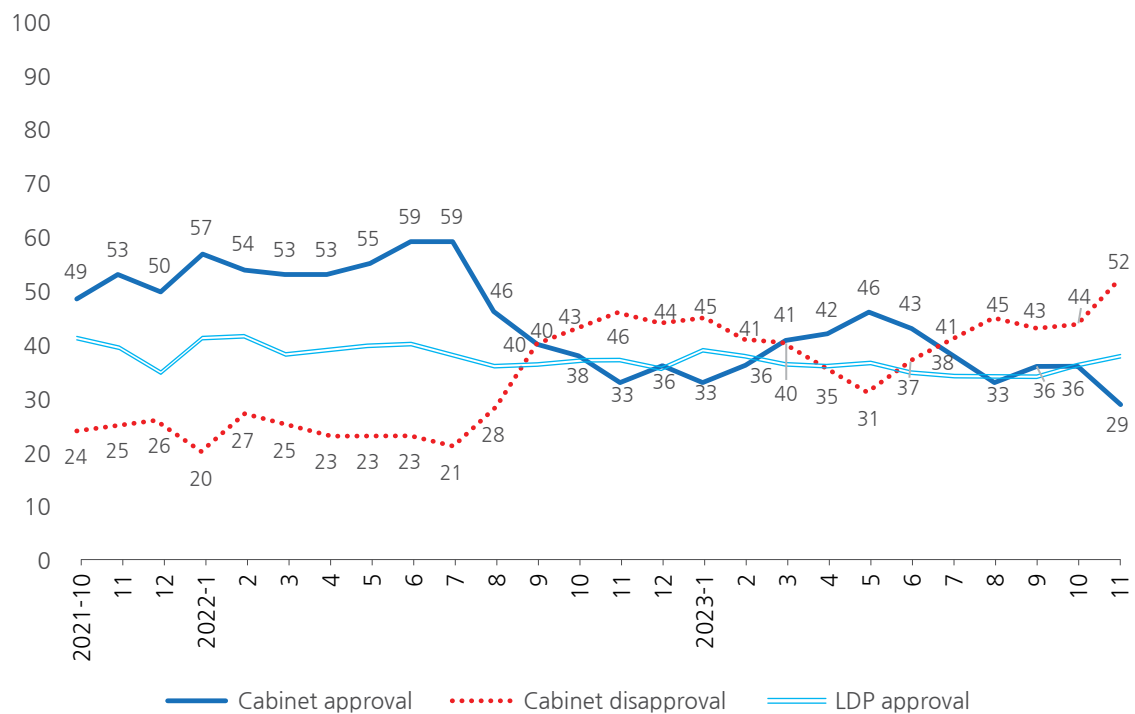
The reasons for the low approval rating of the Kishida cabinet are threefold. First, using policies such as income tax and resident tax cuts to address high prices has not gained public support. Second, Prime Minister Kishida is seen as lacking communication skills and determination. Third, as a prime minister and politician, Kishida has failed to articulate a national vision. It is worth noting, however, that the disapproval rating is higher than in the period after the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe, when it had fallen due to inadequate responses to the issues of the state funeral and the Unification Church. Unlike previous negative ratings, which stemmed from external

6. "Japan-South Korea Joint Poll in May 2023," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, June 15, 2023 ["2023年 5月 日韓共同世論調査 質問と回答," *読売新聞*. 2023.6.15].

7. "2023 EAI-Genron NPO Korea-Japan Public Opinion Survey," *East Asia Institute*, October 2023.

factors, current dissatisfaction is with the policies proposed by the Kishida cabinet to solve domestic problems, such as its policies to reduce high prices and create a virtuous cycle in the economy. In other words, it is a serious situation that can be seen as a threat to the existence of the cabinet because it is not caused by a *force majeure* or unpredictable external factors but by solutions proposed to solve internal problems not being accepted by the public.

Figure 6.4. Approval Rating of Kishida's Cabinet (October 2021–November 2023)



Source: NHK, created by author.

Amid this decline in approval ratings, Prime Minister Kishida's term as LDP leader ends in September 2024. Prime Minister Kishida, who has the right to dissolve the House of Representatives, will seek a second term, keeping in mind an appropriate time to dissolve the House of Representatives before the end of his term. There is a possibility of dissolution in 2024, but if the current decline in approval rating continues, it is highly likely that the term will end without dissolution. In this case, it is unclear whether he will be able to run for re-election as LDP leader, or if he will be able to win the LDP presidential election and become Japan's prime minister again. There is also no clear candidate who is being considered for the prime minister after Kishida. As a result, Kishida is likely to remain in office for the time being. However, the unstable political situation is expected to continue amid the low approval rating.

On the other hand, even if the Kishida cabinet steps down and a new cabinet is established, there will be no significant change in the direction or strategy of Japanese diplomacy. Considering the approval ratings of other Japanese political parties, it is unlikely that a party other than the LDP will become the ruling party.⁸ This means that even if a new person emerges, he or she is likely to be a member of the LDP and the direction of diplomacy pursued by the LDP is likely to remain the same. Furthermore, the FOIP, which is the current direction of Japanese diplomacy, is a concept that has evolved since the 1990s and more recently since the second Abe cabinet was formed in December 2012.⁹ This strategy is likely to continue. However, considering the sensitivity of Korea-Japan relations to historical issues, a new Japanese leader with a regressive historical perception or who makes far right-wing statements could negatively affect Korea-Japan relations.

2. Pursuing and Substantiating Achievements for Re-election Amidst Political Instability at Home and Abroad

In the absence of major diplomatic events, the Kishida cabinet in 2024 will strive to achieve results in a variety of domestic and international policies. First and foremost, domestic politics, such as the House of Representatives election and the LDP presidential election, will be in the spotlight, but Japan is also closely watching elections in major countries, including the U.S. presidential election, Taiwanese presidential election, Russian presidential election, and South Korean legislative elections. Therefore, in the face of expected political changes at home and abroad, efforts will be made to strengthen the substance of existing policies rather than pursue major diplomatic changes.

Among them, military, economic, and cyber security are expected to be prioritized. In the field of military security, Japan will seek to strengthen coalitions with its partners and increase its own defense capabilities to maintain a liberal international order. In late December 2022, Japan released three security strategy documents—the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Capability

8. According to a November NHK poll, the approval rate for the Liberal Democratic Party (ruling party) was 37.7%. On the other hand, only 4.7% supported the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, the first opposition party. (“November 2023 Party Approval Rating,” *NHK*, November 2023; 2023年11月 政党支持率).

9. Choi, Eunmi. “Is Japan Still a ‘Reactive State’? Change and Continuity in Japanese Foreign Policy under the Abe Cabinet,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, No. 49 (2019), pp.110-141.

Enhancement Plan—which include fundamental strengthening of defense capabilities and an increase in defense spending. However, in a situation where high domestic spending is not well received by the public, tax increases to raise defense spending or budget cuts in other areas are likely to face significant domestic opposition, making it difficult for Kishida’s cabinet to win a second term.

Meanwhile, in the field of economic security, the cabinet is expected to submit an amendment to the Economic Security Promotion Act to the National Assembly, and cooperation efforts in cybersecurity will be strengthened. As such, Japan is likely to strengthen coalitions and cooperation with like-minded countries in various fields and emphasize its leading role in establishing regional order. In addition, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) foreign ministers’ meeting between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India is expected to advance discussions on cooperation among these countries.¹⁰

3. South Korea-Japan Relations: Accelerating Efforts to Establish a Stable South Korea-Japan and ROK-U.S.-Japan Relationship

Having reached a turning point in March 2023 when the South Korean government proposed a solution to the Supreme Court’s ruling on the issue of forced labor, Korea and Japan will seek to stabilize relations on the current friendly tide. The “Camp David Principles,” “Spirit of Camp David,” and “Commitment to Consult” announced at the ROK-U.S.-Japan summit in Camp David in August 2023, as well as the South Korea-Japan Summit Discussion at Stanford University (November 19) on the sidelines of the APEC summit, can be seen as part of this effort. Also at the summit, the two leaders attended the Korea-Japan Startup Summit and agreed to cooperate in high-tech fields such as hydrogen and ammonia, demonstrating their willingness to work together on science and technology and economic security.

Meanwhile, the need for a second South Korea-Japan Joint Declaration (tentatively titled the “Yoon-Kishida Joint Declaration”) to succeed the Kim Dae-jung and Keizo Obuchi Joint Declaration continues to be raised. The two countries are likely to prepare a new joint declaration on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations in 2025. However, in the process, it is expected that it will be difficult to reduce the gap between the two countries’ opinions on historical issues.

10. “Foreign ministers of Japan, US, Australia, India to meet in Japan in 2024 support restarting grain agreement,” *Nikkei*, September 23, 2023 [“日米豪印外相、日本で24年会合へ 穀物合意再開を支持,” *日本経済新聞*. 2023.9.23].

Figure 6.5. South Korea-Japan Leaders' Discussion at Stanford University During APEC 2023 in San Francisco



Source: Yonhap News.

In this process, Japan is unlikely to take the initiative to stabilize relations with South Korea, rather it will follow South Korea's lead. This is because, while Japan welcomes the current situation of improving bilateral relations, it is still concerned about the future direction of South Korea's policy toward Japan and questions its continuity. However, as the current bilateral cooperation agenda is expanding to include diplomacy, security, economy, science, technology, society, and culture, we can expect to see tangible results. In this process, President Yoon's and Prime Minister Kishida's visits to each other's countries as part of their shuttle diplomacy are expected to reaffirm their commitment to cooperation and concrete achievements that go beyond the exchanges of 2023. In addition, the Korea-Japan summit meeting held during Prime Minister Kishida's visit in May 2023 confirmed the will to cooperate on science and technology fields such as AI, bio, and quantum, suggesting that the results of cooperation in these fields may be more prominent. Furthermore, as North Korea's missile and nuclear test threats escalate, efforts to advance security cooperation between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea will increase, as well as cooperation throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

In terms of trilateral relations, a second ROK-U.S.-Japan summit is expected to be held in South Korea, following the Camp David summit in August 2023. Also, a trilateral

summit between China, Japan, and South Korea, which has been on hold since 2019, is also likely to be held. With people-to-people exchanges, the two countries will likely be able to re-enter the 2018 era of 10 million exchanges. However, historical issues like ‘forced labor’ and ‘comfort women’ remain unresolved, and issues of Japanese historical awareness like the UNESCO listing of the Sado Mine, the annual recurrence of Japanese history textbooks controversies, Yasukuni Shrine visits, and the Dokdo dispute come to the fore, conflict between Japan and Korea and negative perceptions of both countries may rise again.

The South Korean government’s decisions in 2023 marked the beginning of an improvement in relations between the two countries, with government-level cooperation resuming, and this trend is likely to continue in 2024. However, given the low level of understanding between Japanese and South Korean people, and the fact that the perception gap is not closing anytime soon, the two countries face major challenges in the long term. Therefore, South Korea and Japan will need to maintain the current trend of improving relations while simultaneously working to narrow the gap in perceptions and broaden understanding.

7. Russia: Seeking a New World Order and “Global South” Coalition

Dr. LEE Sang-Joon | Professor
Kookmin University

2023 in Review: Russia’s Coalition Building

1. Establishing the Concept of a Post-War Multipolar Order and Seeking a Coalition with the “Global South”

Russia blocked the 2023 Ukraine counteroffensive through the active defense and gained confidence that it would not lose the war.¹ Russia warned that if the conflict with the West becomes more serious, it will become a war rather than a special military operation, and Russia also restrained the West from direct intervention.² Russia attempted to weaken Western coalition by encouraging European Union (EU) member states, heavily dependent on Russian energy and facing economic difficulties due to rising energy prices, to withdraw from EU support for Ukraine.

Furthermore, Russia is actively seeking to form a new world order while strongly criticizing the rules-based international order of the West. Assessing the difficulty of improving relations with the West in the short term, Russia places importance on developing relationships with countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Russia is establishing a new Eurasian partnership with near abroad Eurasian countries, expanding the role and functions of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and enhancing cooperation within ‘Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa’ (BRICS), and actively fostering solidarity with the “Global South.”

The SCO, the partnership of Russia, China, and four Central Asian countries, continues to expand its geographical scope, including India and Pakistan in 2017, reaching the Indian Ocean, and Iran in 2023, expanding towards the Middle East. Strengthening cooperation with Saudi Arabia, they continue to broaden their geopolitical and strategic reach into the southern Eurasian region. At the virtual SCO summit on July 4th,

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1. “Putin: The Ukraine counteroffensive has completely failed,” *RIA Novosti*, October 15, 2023 [“Украинское контрнаступление полностью провалилось, заявил Путин,” *РИА Новости*, октября 15, 2023].
 2. “Putin: In the event of a Western conflict with Russia, there will be ‘an entirely different war’,” *TASS*, October 15, 2023 [“Путин: в случае конфликта Запада с Россией будет не СВО, а “совсем другая война,” *ТАСС*, октября 15, 2023].

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his desire to expand cooperation among SCO member countries from security to various aspects of the socio-economic sphere, including investment, banking, finance, industry, energy, transportation, agriculture, communication, digitization, and advanced technologies.

In August, BRICS welcomed six new member countries—Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—for the first time in 13 years. The BRICS summit declared its commitment for “a new chapter in its effort to build a world that is fair, a world that is just, a world that is also inclusive and prosperous.” Russia sought to secure support from the “Global South” by announcing that it would provide grain support to six African countries.³ In addition, by accepting countries rich in energy resources as member countries, it sought to form coalitions among member countries through oil production, and further strengthen the role of BRICS as an axis of the multipolar system.

Russia has advocated for the development of an independent international payment system led by BRICS member countries. It proposes to reduce economic dependence on the West by expanding the use of national currencies in payments between member countries and other trading partners.⁴ Russia criticizes the West for unilateral sanctions, misuse of international payment mechanisms as tools for geopolitical rivalry, and neglecting global food security and health during the pandemic. Russia aims to consolidate countries dissatisfied with the West’s attitude into a “BRICS Plus” framework, seeking to play a role in the restructuring of the world order.

2. The Fall of Liberalism and the Consolidation of an Authoritarian Coalition in Russia

On June 24, Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the Wagner Group, staged a revolt, which ended on the 25th with the mediation of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.⁵ Putin has maintained his power by using surveillance and restraint among elite groups, showcasing himself as the ruler when a particular elite group grew stronger. When these incidents occurred, Putin consolidated his power by focusing his efforts

3. “Putin to BRICS: Russia is ‘reliable partner’ for Africa on food, fuel supplies,” *Reuters*, August 24, 2023.

4. “‘We see opportunities’: BRICS countries discuss creating a single currency as an alternative to the dollar,” *RT*, August 23, 2023 [“«Мы видим возможности»: страны БРИКС обсуждают создание единой валюты в качестве альтернативы доллару,” *RT*, августа 23, 2023].

5. “Rebellion Halted Under Moscow’s Nose... Prigozhin Leaves Russia to Avoid Punishment,” *Yonhap News*, June 25, 2023.

on hunting down traitors within his power. After the outbreak of war, liberal forces pursuing international cooperation in Russia collapsed, and nationalist forces took complete control of Russian political power. Putin enjoys the absolute support of the people, represents the nationalist force, and has a deep mistrust of the West, thus improving relations with the West will be difficult for the time being. In 2023, the political landscape in Russia is inclined more towards actively pursuing authoritarian coalitions.

3. Securing a Share in the Northeast Asian Order: The Paradox of Deepening Dependence on China and the Restoration of North Korea-Russia Relations

Russia continues to be interested in its role in the Asia-Pacific region. Russia hosted the Eastern Economic Forum from September 10 to 13, under the theme of “Path to Partnership, Peace, and Prosperity,” and believes that international cooperation in a changing world should be based on a multipolar system, and the direction of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region should also be explored on this basis.

For Russia to have a presence in Northeast Asia, it is crucial to enhance geopolitical and geographical connectivity between Russia and Northeast Asia through logistics. However, the underdeveloped infrastructure in the Far East limits cooperation with the Asia-Pacific region, and Russia’s dependence on China is growing. Russia actively uses the Chinese yuan and Russian ruble in its oil transactions with China. As of March 2023, the monthly trade volume in yuan for Russian export companies increased by 1,280%, reaching \$6.9 billion, and for import companies, it increased by 450%, reaching \$7.7 billion compared to 2022. In April 2023, the Russian Central Bank reported that the share of yuan in foreign exchange transactions reached a record high of 42.7%, the highest since statistics were compiled.⁶

Russia is making efforts to strengthen its cooperation with North Korea in order to enhance its engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. In July, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Pyongyang, and in September, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was invited to a summit in the Russian Far East. Russia has been able to strengthen its role in Northeast Asia and secure import sources for ammunition and artillery shells, if necessary.⁷ The summit held at the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Amur Oblast, Russian Far East, implicitly suggested the potential resumption of military technology cooperation between Russia

6. Korea Capital Market Institute, “Recent Trends in the Internationalization of the Renminbi,” *Capital Market Focus*, August 2023.

7. The Russian government has denied allegations of receiving ammunition and shells from North Korea.

and North Korea. This cooperation is pursued not only to counterbalance South Korea, the United States, and Japan but also because North Korea holds strategic value in limiting China's influence in the region.

Figure 7.1. 2023 North Korea-Russia Summit



Source: Yonhap News.

2024 Outlook: Continued Efforts at Strengthening Coalitions

1. Seeking Multipolar Order

Russia supports President Joe Biden's statement that a new world order is needed but dismisses the argument that Washington should be the driving force of the new world order as outdated. In a speech at the Valdai Forum in October, Putin argued that the world is becoming increasingly diverse and that complex processes can no longer be handled through simple methods of governance. He emphasized that a civilization-based approach driven by the long-term interests of states and peoples, rather than a "rules-based order," could be the solution to many problems of humanity.⁸ Russia argues that a new order should be formed based on the principles of compliance with international law, mutual respect, pursuit of mutual interests, and non-interference in domestic affairs.

8. "Valdai International Discussion Club meeting," *President of Russia*, October 5, 2023.

Russia is poised to pursue extensive cooperation with the “Global South.” In the Eurasian near abroad, Russia will leverage organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Simultaneously, it will broaden the geographical scope of coalitions through SCO, involving India and China. On a global scale, Russia will utilize a series of international cooperation mechanisms, extending to South America, the Middle East, and Africa, including the expanded “BRICS Plus.”

Russia aims to redefine security, finance, and information to establish a new world order. Security dominance is deemed crucial for Russia to play a pivotal role in the multipolar system. While prioritizing the victory in the Ukraine conflict, Russia will intensify the development of advanced weaponry. The nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed long-range cruise missile Burevestnik, initially announced in 2018, is expected to see an almost limitless increase in range. Russia asserts that Burevestnik’s flight path is unpredictable, making interception practically impossible. Although Burevestnik faced several failures during testing in the Arctic, confirming complete success will take time. Russia plans to deploy advanced weapons such as the RS-26 Avangard missile with a speed exceeding Mach 20, Kinzhal missiles, the next-generation ICBM RS-28 “Sarmat,” and nuclear-powered intercontinental underwater drones after their development is completed. Through weapons development, Russia aims to maintain a threatening position in the international community and, furthermore, strives to emerge as an axis of the multipolar system.

Russia believes that changes to the international monetary system are essential to realizing a multipolar system. It will actively pursue de-dollarization to weaken the dollar-based financial system, a core element of U.S. global dominance. Russia and China settle the majority of their trade in their own currencies and aim to expand this practice to other nations. However, within BRICS nations, the yuan is emerging as the primary settlement currency, overshadowing the ruble, rupee, and real. Other BRICS member states, having relatively stable relations with the West, use the dollar or other reserve currencies for foreign exchange diversification and hedging. While Russia continues efforts to garner support from BRICS members, achieving rapid results appears challenging.

Regarding information, Russia criticizes Western media for using fake news as a weapon to denigrate Russia and the “Global South.” Russia emphasizes the need to create an alternative global media consortium, in English and other languages, along with BRICS member countries, to advocate for the interests of the “Global South.” Russia highlights the role of media outlets such as RT (Russia), Al Jazeera (Qatar), Press TV

(Iran), CGTN (China), etc., in reporting the perspectives of many countries worldwide on the future of the global order. Using this logic, Russia aims to garner support for the “Global South” and position itself as a key axis in a multipolar world. Russia asserts leadership in security matters while aligning itself with the “Global South” in finance and information, challenging the dominant position of the United States.

In the context of energy, Russia seeks to accumulate economic wealth by adjusting oil production levels with oil-producing countries. Simultaneously, it aims to foster substantial cooperation with non-oil-producing nations, setting climate change as a new area of collaboration. Russia’s ability for concrete collaboration in climate-related areas is somewhat limited and primarily involves sectors such as nuclear power. While operating nuclear power plants, Russia completed the construction of a nuclear power plant in Bangladesh under the condition that Russia handles the post-use nuclear materials extracted. Russia’s state-owned nuclear company, Rosatom, is constructing a total of 15 nuclear power plants in countries including Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Hungary, India, and Türkiye.⁹

2. Continued Coalition with the “Global South”

Russia’s pursuit of BRICS Plus is a loosely structured and non-institutionalized international cooperation mechanism with limited functionality. As Russia chairs BRICS in 2024, it will seek cooperation for a new future through institutions like the New Development Bank (NDB) despite the heterogeneous nature of the member countries. Russia plans to emphasize cooperation related to the use of local currencies and payment systems through discussions between finance ministers and central bank governors of member countries. Additionally, having accepted key global oil production and export countries that control vital petroleum transit points such as the Suez Canal, Hormuz Strait, and Bab el-Mandeb Strait as member countries, Russia anticipates an increased role in the energy market and aims to assert its presence through various means, such as oil production cuts that neutralize oil price ceilings.

As the number of member states in SCO and BRICS Plus increases, new complexities will arise including the difficulties in reaching consensus. Unlike Russia, other member countries do not directly experience conflicts with the West. For instance, while Russia sought to use the SCO as an anti-American alliance, China attempted to mitigate the perception of SCO conflicting with NATO by aligning it with their global vision. Criticisms

9. “The West hasn’t gone after Russia’s nuclear energy. Here’s why,” *CNN Business*, March 7, 2023.

of the West were not explicitly included in the key statements of SCO summits. While SCO leaders condemned the unilateral application of economic sanctions against Russia without the approval of the UN Security Council, they framed it indirectly. Russia aims to curb the growing influence of China in organizations like SCO and BRICS Plus. Rather than accepting China's proposal for an "SCO Free Trade Area," Russia is interested in expanding the number of member countries to strengthen the SCO's global status.

Oil prices have risen since April due to cuts in crude oil production between Russia and Saudi Arabia, neutralizing Western oil price caps and causing inflation. However, as each country raised its base interest rate, an era of high interest rates began, and as the financial market fell into chaos due to the aftermath of the interest rate rise, concerns about an economic recession were growing. This situation is making it more difficult for economically vulnerable "Global South" countries. However, Russia is not in a position to continue providing support to countries in the "Global South" indefinitely.

3. Overcoming Geopolitical Challenges in the Eurasian Near Abroad

In a speech at the Valdai Forum in October 2023, Putin explained that the war in Ukraine is not a territorial issue but about protecting Russia's traditions, culture, and people. However, given the large difference in perceptions between Russia and Ukraine, it is not easy to prepare a space for war-end negotiations.¹⁰ Additionally, as the Russian economy adapts to the new normal, the motivation to end the war quickly has decreased. Russia believes that if the war prolongs, Ukraine's troop losses and the West's fatigue with support for Ukraine will increase, which will work to its advantage.

However, from a different perspective, Russia is also hoping to begin negotiations to end the war. Despite claims that the economy has entered a new normal despite international sanctions, Russia's economic burden continues to grow. Russia's economic growth in 2023 was due to expansion of fiscal spending. While Russia could sustain its production system with abundant resources, aligning itself with China and the "Global South" is not sufficient to reach a higher level of socioeconomic development. Therefore, if Trump wins the U.S. presidential election, it is expected that he would have a certain pretext to initiate peace negotiations. However, given that U.S.-Russia relations did not significantly improve when Trump was first elected, there may be limited expectations for a transformative improvement in relations.

Russia has a significant interest in ensuring stability in the Eurasian near abroad to

10. "Valdai International Discussion Club meeting," *President of Russia*, October 5, 2023.

prevent its vast territory from becoming a vulnerability. The SCO is expected to play a more crucial role in competition, confrontation, and status-related issues with the West. Russia aims to actively leverage the SCO to expand the concept of a post-Western and multipolar global order, emphasizing fairness. It envisions initiating cooperation among Eurasian nations, including the SCO, as a starting point for the new multipolar world order.

Other than war in Ukraine, the Caucasus is expected to be the most difficult region in Russia's foreign policy for the foreseeable future. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia gained control over Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan through war, a situation that has persisted for the past 30 years. Russia has supported Armenia and, to ensure the safety of the Lachin Corridor between Armenia and Karabakh and the Armenians living in the Karabakh region, deployed Russian peacekeeping forces. This move served as a countermeasure against the pro-Western orientation of Georgia and Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan, with its oil-based development, has grown in relative strength, surpassing ten million in population. In 2020, Azerbaijan launched a preemptive attack, reducing Armenia's control over Nagorno-Karabakh, and in 2023, by closing the Lachin Corridor, sought recognition of its sovereignty over Karabakh. Russia tried to convince Azerbaijan to guarantee the safety and rights of Armenians, but Azerbaijan refused. Many Armenians are leaving Karabakh, and Armenia has turned from a pro-Russian to an anti-Russian state as Russia's mediation efforts hit a limit. With all three countries in the Caucasus region becoming anti-Russian, Russia will closely monitor the geopolitical instability in the Caucasus.

With the existence of organizations like the SCO, the potential for damage to relations with Central Asian countries is relatively low. However, difficulties may arise in bilateral cooperation. Kazakhstan participates in the CIS, CSTO, and SCO, being an important ally of Russia. However, since the start of the war, Kazakhstan has sought to keep a distance from Russia. Kazakhstan is making efforts to find oil export routes that do not involve Russia. As a country heavily reliant on oil exports, Kazakhstan is not welcoming the increasing use of the ruble. This is because Russian products do not meet the increased expectations of the Kazakh population since the country's integration into the global economy. Russia exports gas through Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan, being a gas-rich and producing country, views Russia's decision to supply gas as an effort to influence its near-abroad nations.

4. Extension of Putin's Power and Consolidated Authoritarian Coalition through the Presidential Election

In March 2024, there will be a presidential election in Russia. The Ukraine war has triggered external challenges to Putin's leadership. Putin is likely to run in the election to demonstrate leadership in overcoming this crisis and to secure popular support. High voter turnout and approval ratings in the election would serve as indicators of the long-term stability of Putin's regime. The Russian presidential office aims for a voter turnout of over 70% and a vote share of over 75% for the "key candidate" in the upcoming election. Efforts are expected to be made to manage the visibility of war scars in Russian society to ensure an overwhelming victory in the election. The government is likely to strengthen its role in reducing casualties in the war and alleviating economic difficulties.

Currently in Russia, patriotism, once scorned in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, has overwhelmed all other values. Putin and the elite have shaped themselves as guardians of patriotism. Russia hopes that the Western coalition in support of Ukraine weakens, and it will strive to influence Western elections in a way that benefits its interests. Specifically, there are expectations that Russia will adjust its propaganda efforts to potentially reduce Western support for Ukraine based on the results of Western elections, particularly in the United States. This suggests an intention to continue the war while strategically managing the level of aggression to align with perceived changes in Western positions.

The Russian government is expected to increase government spending before the election to prevent the negative impact of the war from affecting the daily lives of Russians. A fiscal deficit of approximately 2% of Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) is anticipated in 2023, with the government allocating a significant budget to industries such as defense to ensure that the economic situation does not deteriorate. Despite economic growth in Russia in 2023, concerns arise due to the war and increased military spending, while the global economy faces uncertainties that may limit the rise in oil prices. Consequently, Russia's fiscal capacity for expenditures outside the defense industry is not substantial. The quality of Russian consumer goods remains relatively low, and a significant portion of intermediate goods is imported, potentially leading to an increase in circumvented imports through countries like Kazakhstan, resulting in a reduction in the trade surplus.

The prolonged war is expected to cause a shortage of younger workers, reducing labor productivity as educational periods in industrial settings decrease. With war-related investments concentrated in defense industries, improvements in productivity in this sector may not necessarily support an improvement in living standards. The shortage

of labor and the growth of the defense industry is likely to contribute to an overall economic slowdown. Furthermore, due to the nature of the defense industry, high dependence on the state is inevitable, leading to an expansion of the government's role in the economy. This could result in an economic structure reminiscent of the Soviet Union, making it challenging to guarantee sustained long-term economic growth in Russia.

The Russian government may view prolonged warfare as strategically beneficial but cannot overlook potential negative impacts on its socio-economic landscape. To manage these consequences and seek an exit strategy, Russia is likely to explore active cooperation with nations serving as weak links in Western alliances.

5. Strengthening Efforts to Secure Influence in Northeast Asia

Russia, geopolitically, is largely separated from most countries in the Asia-Pacific region. In an effort to enhance cooperation with the Asia-Pacific region, Russia has pursued the development of the Russian Far East and Siberia. However, these attempts face challenges due to the economic burden of the Ukraine war and Western sanctions. From the Russian perspective, a hopeful aspect is the potential for cooperation on energy security issues with South Korea, China, and Japan. While Russia cannot avoid growing dependence on China at the moment, it may seek to prevent excessive reliance to avoid hindering the formation of the multipolar system it desires. Considering the geopolitical landscape in the Asia-Pacific region, which includes the dominant position of the United States, the growing importance of China, the economic interests shared between the United States and its allies South Korea and Japan, and the presence of Taiwan in cross-strait relations, Russia is likely to pursue a policy in the region that involves confrontation with the United States and containment of China.

Russia's relationship with South Korea and Japan is strained due to the war, and this is likely to persist for the foreseeable future. While Russia is in support of China in the U.S.-China strategic competition, not all interests align, and Russia is considering alternative options. One of these options is improving relations with North Korea. Putin accepted an invitation to visit North Korea during the 2023 summit, and it is anticipated that he might visit North Korea around the time of the 2024 Eastern Economic Forum. Although the benefits for Russia in improving relations with North Korea may not be substantial, it can demonstrate that Russia has security and economic interests in the region beyond its relationships with South Korea, the U.S., and Japan and further establish its regional presence with China.

Additionally, Russia is expected to show interest in developing relations with the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a group of countries that did not participate in the sanctions against Russia. Despite the ongoing war, the volume of trade with Russia and Asian countries increased, with China increasing by \$190.2 billion in 2022 (+29% compared to the previous year) and \$114.5 billion in the first half of 2023 (+40.6% compared to the previous year). Trade between Russia and India recorded \$44.4 billion from April 2022 to March 2023, making Russia India's fifth-largest trading partner. Trade with Russia and ASEAN also increased by 20%, reaching \$20 billion, the highest level since 2014. Russia is expanding its trade by settling transactions with its currency using the ruble-yuan with China and the ruble-rupee with India.

Russia is not without challenges. Although energy payments exported to India are kept in Indian rupees, it is not possible to import all the production and consumer goods needed from India. Also, compared to Europe, Asia is still a difficult and unfamiliar partner for Russia. Nevertheless, due to the current geopolitical conditions and the necessity to enhance cooperation with Asia, Russia is likely to leverage its geographical and logistical capabilities to strengthen connectivity with the Asia-Pacific region.

8. The Middle East: New Coalitions and a Different “Global South”

Dr. JANG Ji-Hyang | Senior Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

■ 2023 in Review: Attempts at Diplomatic Diversification in the Middle East

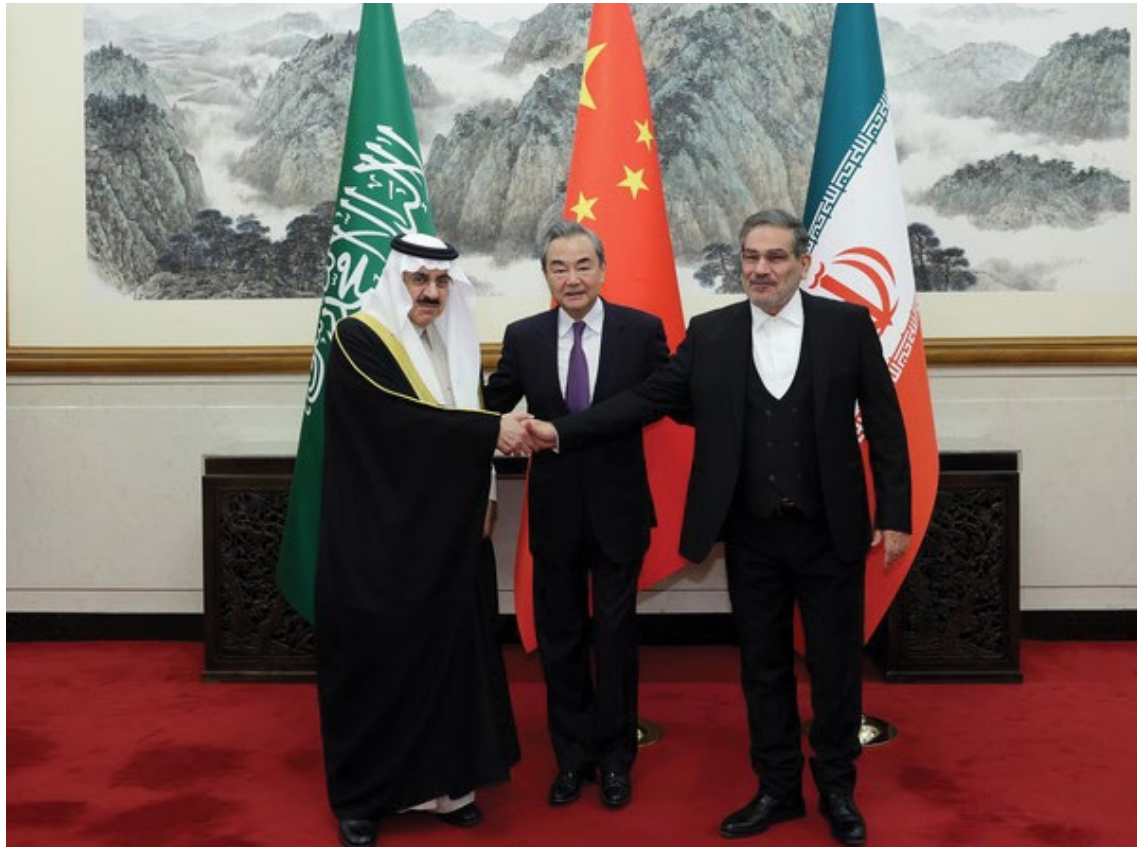
In 2023, major countries in the Middle East made numerous efforts to diversify diplomatic relations and cooperation. Since the United States declared its policy of “leaving the Middle East,” major countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Israel, Türkiye, Iran, and Egypt set aside their history of competing for regional hegemony and sought détente. In particular, these countries saw China as a new cooperation partner in preparation for the withdrawal of the United States from the region. China also quickly sought to fill the gap as the U.S. withdrawal from the region became visible.

In March 2023, China successfully mediated the Sunni-Shiite conflict. Saudi Arabia and Iran, which had severed diplomatic ties for seven years, agreed to normalize their relationship in Beijing, elevating China’s status as a competent mediator. In 2016, Saudi Arabia executed a leading anti-government Shiite figure on terrorism charges, and Iranian protesters attacked the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran. These events led to the two countries severing diplomatic relations. Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic ties through China’s mediation and promised to resume reciprocal embassy operations. China demonstrated its diplomatic capacity by accomplishing the reconciliation of the two countries in Beijing just in time for the National People’s Congress, where President Xi Jinping was reelected for a third consecutive term.

At the 15th BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) summit in August, approval for the membership of six countries, namely Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE was announced. In particular, the accession of Saudi Arabia, which is competing with the United States for the position of the largest oil producer, has increased the possibility that BRICS will be able to respond to the economic order led by the United States and the G7 in the future. Currently, Algeria, Bahrain, Syria, and Türkiye are reported to be seeking membership in the group. It appears that the recently developed cooperative relationship with China has contributed to the diversification efforts of major countries in the Middle East. Earlier in February, Iran’s

Constitutional Defense Committee completed the legal procedures for joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is led by China and Russia.

Figure 8.1. China Mediates the Re-establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran



Source: Yonhap News.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, a leading Sunni country, proceeded with behind-the-scenes negotiations to establish diplomatic relations with Israel through the mediation of the United States. In 2020, Bahrain and the UAE signed the Abraham Accords with Israel, achieving a monumental détente, and Morocco followed suit. On October 7, Hamas, which denies the very existence of Israel, launched a surprise attack against Israel. The Islamic militant organization that controls the Gaza Strip carried out an unprecedented large-scale attack, killing over 1,400 Israelis and taking more than 240 hostages. If Saudi Arabia, the guardian of Islam's holiest sites, joins the Arab-Israeli détente, Hamas's position will suffer a major blow and the very basis for its existence may be shaken. Furthermore, its biggest rival and the largest political faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Fatah, which is dominating the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, can solidify its legitimacy and even reap economic benefits. To Saudi Arabia and Israel, the organization representing Palestine per se is the Palestinian

Authority, not Hamas. Given the circumstances, Hamas needed to shake up the status quo.

On October 27, Israel declared a “second war of independence” and deployed ground forces with the goal of eliminating Hamas while minimizing civilian casualties and saving as many Israeli hostages as possible. Negotiations for the release of hostages between Israel, the United States, and Hamas, which were mediated by Qatar, failed to find a breakthrough and the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip worsened as the death toll of Palestinian residents reached over 10,000. Finally, on November 15, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution calling for an end to hostilities between Israel and Hamas, with the approval of 12 of the 15 members and three abstentions by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia. From a humanitarian perspective, the resolution includes a call for an immediate cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, a call for the unconditional release of hostages captured by Hamas and other militant groups, and an emphasis on compliance with international law and the protection of civilians, including children. On November 22, negotiations mediated by Qatar for the release of hostages and a temporary ceasefire were reached. Hamas agreed to release 50 of the captured hostages, including children and women, and Israel agreed to exchange 150 Palestinian prisoners. Additionally, Israel allowed 300 trucks loaded with food, medicine, and fuel into the Gaza Strip.

2024 Outlook: Intensifying Efforts at Détente and Building New Coalitions

1. Continued Détente and Resuming Saudi-Israel Negotiations on Diplomatic Relations

Despite the Israel-Hamas war, various aspects of new coalition building in preparation for the U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East will continue in 2024. The United States will not reverse its policy of reducing its role in the Middle East, and in turn Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel, Türkiye, Egypt, and Iran, which regard the U.S. vacuum as a *fait accompli*, will engage in a fierce search to build new coalitions beyond the existing conflictual relationship.

Once the military tensions subside, efforts at détente in the Middle East by the regional stakeholders with the United States as mediator will reemerge. This is because major countries in the Middle East are well aware that China cannot fill the security vacuum of the United States and therefore cannot simply neglect their relationship with the United States. Immediately after the outbreak of armed conflict between Israel

and Hamas, U.S. President Joe Biden paid a visit to the site and made active efforts to ease tensions. However, Israel pressed on with its offensive in the Gaza Strip and the casualties of Palestinian civilians further increased. As protests in support of Palestine took place across the Middle East and the world, Saudi Arabia also expressed support for Palestine which was interpreted by some to mean that the Middle East détente had been broken. However, it was the Palestinian people that the major Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia had expressed support for, not Hamas.

Figure 8.2. The 2023 Israel-Hamas War



Source: Yonhap News.

As the leading Sunni country, Saudi Arabia is hesitant to build a coalition with Israel. It will demand a firmer defense treaty with the United States and an immediate policy of conciliation towards Palestine from Israel as conditions for establishing diplomatic relations. Saudi Arabia has recently been pursuing unprecedented reforms as a strategy to protect the royal regime, and it needs a stable regional order as well as cooperation with Israel's cutting-edge technology capacity to achieve its goals. Saudi Arabia not only has to protect its own security from Iran's nuclear development and missile attacks by pro-Iranian Houthis in Yemen, but above all as the leading Sunni country, it has to secure the cause of Palestine. Saudi Arabia normalized diplomatic relations with Iran in 2023 with the aim of diversifying its diplomatic ties and reducing regional instability,

but it is unlikely that Iran's hardline ruling coalition will give up its strategy of exporting the Islamic Revolution and supporting proxy organizations in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria. Iran is not only Saudi Arabia's biggest rival but is also Israel's main enemy.

Nevertheless, major countries in the Middle East will carefully observe the regional order that is being readjusted in line with the U.S. withdrawal from the region, and attempt cooperation in multiple ways, albeit superficial, to maintain the atmosphere of reconciliation. Saudi Arabia, which has compared its relationship with the United States to a "Muslim marriage," will continue to emphasize its diplomatic diversification stance that it can legally develop friendly relations with other countries without divorcing the United States. Amid deepening conflict between Israel and Hamas, Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi spoke by phone for the first time since the restoration of relations in March and discussed the humanitarian crisis in Palestine, how to bring an end to the conflict, and the unity of the Islamic world. Saudi Arabia then convened an extraordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the largest international organization in the Islamic world, and invited major countries including Iran, Turkmenistan, Egypt, and Jordan. At an emergency meeting, Saudi Arabia and Iran once again agreed on humanitarian principles and called for a ceasefire. Through convening the summit, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who chaired the meeting, once again solidified his pragmatic foreign policy stance.

Ultimately, Saudi Arabia has already strongly condemned Hamas's killing of Israeli civilians and its horrific violence as un-Islamic and it will soon resume diplomatic talks with Israel. The United States and Israel will also engage in the negotiations again, standing firm against the terrorist group Hamas and Iran's ambition to pursue regional hegemony. The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, a direct beneficiary of the Saudi Arabia-Israel normalization, did not place blame solely on Israel, but urged both Israel and Hamas to exercise restraint.

The UAE, which took the lead in establishing diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020, has withheld outright criticism against Israel as much as possible since the conflict began. Immediately after the surprise attack by Hamas, the UAE issued a statement expressing sympathy for Israel and continued to express condolences several times. After an explosion occurred at Al-Ahli Hospital in the Gaza Strip on the 10th day of the conflict, Hamas released a statement to the media saying that Israel's bombing was a humanitarian tragedy, and the UAE, along with most Arab countries, joined in condemning Israel. However, when experts concluded that the hospital explosion

was caused by a rocket misfired from the Gaza Strip, the UAE again showed a friendly attitude toward Israel unlike other Arab countries.

The Biden administration has considered the establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel a notable accomplishment, particularly given that there have been no major achievements across the three priorities of its Middle East policy, including restoration of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, consolidation of regional democracy and alliance values, or strengthening of Arab-Israeli détente. Even if U.S. voter preferences in next year's presidential election are not greatly influenced by the performance in foreign affairs, the Biden administration will try to achieve at least some success in its Middle East policy through negotiations to normalize relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia to spread regional détente.

Figure 8.3. Special Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Hosted by Saudi Arabia to Discuss the Israel-Hamas War



Source: Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

2. Iran's Risk-Averse Strategy and International Efforts to Maintain the Status Quo

In a similar context, there is a low likelihood that the current armed conflict will soon escalate into a Middle East war involving other countries. In particular, Iranian hardliners will stick to a risk-averse strategy to stabilize the regime, and other countries will also try to avoid risks that break the status quo. In other words, most neighboring countries

are concerned about possible internal instability and are busy protecting their respective regimes. However, pro-Iranian proxy groups in the region may attack Israel and support Hamas, and some militant groups in the West Bank may attempt provocations to expand the anti-Israel front. As a matter of fact, it is likely that Lebanon's Hezbollah will continue fighting on Israel's northern front while Yemen's Houthi rebels will launch drones and cruise missiles toward Israel, and Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces will also gather in the Israeli border area of Syria.

However, Iran's hardline ruling coalition, which financially and militarily supports these proxy groups, the so-called Axis of Resistance, has suffered from economic collapse caused by tough sanctions from the United States. They also face worsening domestic public opinion due to protests against forced hijab-wearing and therefore intervention in the war is quite burdensome for them. Indeed, even local constituencies including rural conservatives and low-income population have been actively participating in the ongoing protests against people's livelihood in Iran, shaking the support base of the hardliners. Therefore, Hamas, Hezbollah, and various other pro-Iranian proxy groups will be forced to limit their armed provocations to the extent of not putting their sponsor in trouble, and it will be difficult for these provocations to lead to an escalation of war.

Moreover, if Iran engages Hezbollah in an unprecedented joint operation to support Hamas, it will turn into an all-out war where intervention by the United States cannot be ruled out, which would eventually lead to a decision that poses a greater threat to the stability of the regime for Iran's hardliners. Therefore, although the destruction of Hamas will be extremely unfortunate for Iran, Iran will have no choice but to focus its efforts on internal crackdowns in the face of widespread dissatisfaction with the regime. In fact, the Iranian authorities, who sent a congratulatory message immediately after Hamas's attack on Israel, later emphasized several times that Iran was not behind Hamas as the level of conflict deepened and insisted that the escalation of the war must be prevented. This is an attempt to manage Tehran's reputation in the international community, but it also appears to be a message to pro-Iranian proxy groups in the region.¹

Egypt, which is the only country that borders the Gaza Strip other than Israel, will also keep its distance as much as possible to avoid becoming entangled in the Israel-Hamas war for the sake of regime stability. During this conflict, Egypt rejected the international community's proposal to open the Rafah border with the Gaza Strip

1. "Iran's UN mission says Tehran not involved in Hamas attacks," *Reuters*, October 9, 2023; "Iran told US it did not want Israel-Hamas war to escalate," *Financial Times*, November 17, 2023.

and evacuate Palestinian residents on humanitarian grounds, and even destroyed the Rafah crossing with military aircraft which could be used as an evacuation route. The authoritarian regime is already unpopular, and an influx of Palestinians could lead to domestic instability. In particular, ahead of the presidential election in December 2023, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was more sensitive to domestic public opinion. Egypt is an electoral authoritarian system, allowing electoral competition only when the ruling elite determines that the regime can survive, but the election is not completely fair under this circumstance. However, even for politicians in countries where the level of democracy is relatively low and there is less domestic political pressure, a war can be a significant political burden. After successfully winning a third consecutive term in the 2023 presidential election, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is also likely to refrain from past expansionist moves and explore new aspects of building coalitions in the region as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Meanwhile, due to the war in Ukraine, Russia will not be able to carry out its role as an effective conflict mediator, which it had appealed to in the past during the Syrian civil war. After the outbreak of the Ukraine war, Israel did not participate in the U.S.-led sanctions against Russia and only provided radar equipment, not offensive weapons, to Ukraine. However, Russia has been closely working with Iran, which supplies a variety of weapons, including drones. China, which has emerged as a new competent mediator in the Middle East, has dispatched a Middle East envoy to Jordan to seek mediation efforts. However, it will not be able to exert influence as it does not have any crucial leverage against Israel and Hamas, as well as neighboring countries.

3. The Palestinian Authority's Control over Gaza Under the "Two-State Solution"

The scenario that receives the most support from the U.S. and the international community is the plan to transfer control of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority, with Fatah governing the West Bank after Israel eliminates Hamas. Then, neighboring Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan may dispatch peacekeeping forces to ensure that Fatah can successfully take over control. The Biden administration has been emphasizing the principle that the future of the Gaza Strip depends entirely on the Palestinian people.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right coalition government are planning to reoccupy the Gaza Strip, or at least initially station Israeli security forces to manage peace and order in the area. However, after the current ground war is over, Israeli citizens will be the first to hold Netanyahu's coalition government responsible for the intelligence disaster, and those who failed to prevent the attack

by Hamas will completely lose their political base at home and abroad, facing the risk of being permanently ejected. As the casualties of Palestinian civilians have increased exponentially due to the Israeli military's indiscriminate airstrikes to eliminate Hamas, international criticism toward Israel has also increased and Israel is under pressure to end the ground war. The Netanyahu government, which allowed Hamas's unprecedented attack to occur, will not be able to enforce a post-war scenario that stems from its own political interests. The responsibility for Israel's security failure lies with the far-right coalition government which took the lead in dividing the people by inciting populism and exclusionary nationalism, as well as pursuing ultra-hardline policies toward Palestine.

The coalition government launched in November 2022 enacted legislation that neutralized the judiciary to protect Prime Minister Netanyahu who was on trial for corruption, leading to strong opposition from the civil society. In particular, more than 10,000 reservists from the military, special forces, and intelligence agencies declared their refusal to serve, and even incumbent high-ranking officials supported the collective action, resulting in the divided public opinion and a power vacuum caused by the desertion of duty by the key figures in the military. The Biden administration criticized the Israeli hardline government's expansion of illegal Jewish settlements and the bloody suppression of Palestinian protesters. As a matter of fact, anti-Netanyahu public opinion surged in the American Jewish community.

Even if the Palestinian Authority takes control of the Gaza Strip, the key question is whether it can successfully govern the region that has been under Hamas's rule for 16 years. According to a survey of 1,270 adult men and women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip conducted by the Palestine Policy Research Institute before the outbreak of this conflict in 2021, the challenges facing Palestinians are corruption (26%), poverty and unemployment (22%), blockade of the Gaza Strip (20%), Israel's occupation (16%), and division of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (12%). Also, 84% of respondents said that Fatah was corrupt while 72% said that Hamas was corrupt. Moreover, 58% were afraid of Hamas, and 53% were afraid of Fatah to a point where they felt insecure to criticize the regime. In addition, more than half of respondents (53%) viewed their leadership as responsible for the Abraham Accords which allowed the establishment of diplomatic ties between Israel and four Arab countries in 2020, including Bahrain and the UAE, leaving the Palestinian issue behind.

In other words, the Palestinian Authority led by Fatah also does not have the trust of the Palestinians. This calls for the elections that have been indefinitely postponed due to the bloody conflict between Fatah and Hamas that broke out in 2006. The election that will take place after the war must provide a groundbreaking turning point for the

Israel-Palestine and the Fatah-Hamas conflicts in the long term. This could break the vicious cycle of Gaza's next generation supporting Hamas and the radicalism as well as Israel's continued blockade of Gaza in the name of managing its remaining forces. Furthermore, the "De-Hamasification" policy of indiscriminately purging personnel from the time of Hamas control should be avoided in the process of the Gaza Strip's post-war stabilization and reconstruction. Amongst the estimated 20,000 members of Hamas, there would be many who were forced to join under Hamas' iron-fisted rule of terror. Therefore, a reconstruction policy based on social integration that distinguishes between such members from those who are core Hamas followers is necessary to bring stability to the region.

9. ASEAN: Coalition Shopping Continues

Dr. LEE Jaehyon | Senior Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

| 2023 in Review: Weakening U.S.-China Competition in Southeast Asia and ASEAN in Disarray

At the end of 2022, the outlook for Southeast Asia or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2023 could be summarized in three points. First, the U.S.-China rivalry in Southeast Asia would intensify. The United States had some tasks in Southeast Asia, with 2023 being an ideal time to focus on diplomacy before the presidential election campaign begins in 2024. In particular, Washington needed to finalize the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), launched in 2022, and get Southeast Asian countries on board with the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. China, of course, was expected to prevent the United States from carrying out these tasks in the region.

Turning to Southeast Asia, ASEAN member states had to address their own significant internal challenges. Not only the ongoing Myanmar issue, but also the long-weakening “ASEAN Centrality,” great power competition, U.S. protectionism, and the food and energy crises caused by the war in Ukraine were anticipated to act as incentives to strengthen ASEAN-led regional multilateral cooperation. The ASEAN Chair in 2023 was Indonesia, a leading ASEAN country with a critical view of the great power strategic competition in the region. Jakarta was anticipated to restore ASEAN’s autonomy and seek ASEAN’s interests in the midst of great power strategic competition.

1. U.S.-China Competition Weakened in the ASEAN Region

Looking back at 2023, the predictions were largely off the mark. The outcome of the ASEAN+3 and East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2023 showed that unlike in the previous years, there was not much visible tension between the United States and China at the regional summits. Moreover, the United States was represented at the summit by Vice President Kamala Harris rather than President Joe Biden which increased the frustration of ASEAN countries. Instead of attending the regional summit, President Biden attended the G20 Summit in India, visited Vietnam for a bilateral summit, and then flew back to Washington. While the U.S.-Vietnam relationship may have been strengthened, Biden’s absence from the ASEAN meetings was not viewed favorably by the ten ASEAN member states including Vietnam.

Figure 9.1. Vice President Harris and Premier Li Qiang at the East Asia Summit



Source: Yonhap News.

In the past, China effectively capitalized on the absence of U.S. leaders. However, Beijing did not dominate the meetings this year. The remarks by the Chinese Premier Li Qiang, a new face to the ASEAN-related summits, and China's renewed commitment to Southeast Asia went largely unnoticed. Rather, the Chinese National Standard Map released by the Chinese government ahead of the meetings reiterated China's existing claims in the South China Sea, much to the displeasure of the regional states. It also drew complaints from India as it labelled disputed border areas as Chinese territory.

In retrospect, the ASEAN or Southeast Asian region seems to be gradually losing importance in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. ASEAN countries were concerned about the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy from the beginning since the strategy seemed to target only a few ASEAN countries that were or could be strategically close to the United States, such as Singapore and Vietnam. These concerns were subsequently allayed when U.S. regional allies in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines and Thailand, as well as Malaysia and Indonesia, were mentioned in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy.

However, with 2024 just around the corner, the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy has gone in a different direction from ASEAN's expectations. The United States has devoted more resources to strengthening strategic relationships with traditional allies in the Indo-Pacific, including Australia, Japan, and South Korea. The strengthening of "alliances," as well as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the U.S.-U.K.-Australia trilateral alliance (AUKUS), and the strengthening of the trilateral security cooperation between South Korea, the United States, and Japan affirmed at the 2023 Camp David summit has consistently failed to meet the ASEAN expectations. 2023 was the only opportunity to make a full commitment to the Indo-Pacific strategy and to transform the ASEAN region from a zone of Chinese influence to a neutral zone ahead of the 2024 presidential election. However, the United States appears to have lost this opportunity.

2. ASEAN in Disarray

The year 2023 was a year of many challenges with little solutions drawn for ASEAN. First and foremost, the Myanmar issue remains unresolved. Indonesia has been relatively critical and vocal about the situations in Myanmar but ultimately was unable to play a decisive role in dealing with the situation, despite holding ASEAN chairmanship. Indonesia was only able to reaffirm the ASEAN member states' commitment to the existing Five-Point Consensus (5PC) on Myanmar. The good news for ASEAN was that it managed to address the issue of Myanmar's ASEAN chairmanship scheduled for 2026, following Laos' in 2024 and Malaysia's in 2025. ASEAN announced that it would skip Myanmar's 2026 chairmanship, and the Philippines would assume the position in 2026.

In 2023, ASEAN was anticipated to strengthen the ASEAN Centrality, find a breakthrough in the great power competition, and improve its economic and security situation, including energy and food security, under Indonesia's active leadership. To achieve these goals, the revitalization of regional multilateral cooperation such as ASEAN+3 and EAS was expected. Reflecting on the past year, the prospect for the reinvigoration of regional multilateralism does not look promising. However, ASEAN's continued efforts in mainstreaming the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) that began in 2022, have made some progress to extend it beyond ASEAN members to its key dialogue partners. During the series of ASEAN-led summits in 2023, ASEAN succeeded in securing additional declarations on cooperation with South Korea, the United States, and China, with the AOIP at its core. While the content of the documents may be little more than a repackaging of existing cooperation initiatives, ASEAN showed its diplomatic prowess in persuading great powers such as the United States and China to agree to anchor their bilateral cooperation in the AOIP.

| 2024 Outlook: ASEAN's Coalition Shopping Continues

ASEAN's search for its own pragmatic interests through coalition shopping will continue in 2024 amidst an accelerating trend of coalition building driven by the great powers. Some variables including the weak Laos leadership in ASEAN, the rise of the "Global South," and the growing charm offensive to ASEAN by regional middle powers, will play their roles as well. On the other hand, the initiatives toward ASEAN by the U.S. and China are likely to weaken. In addition, wars and military conflicts in different parts of the world could sow the seeds of new divisions within ASEAN. These variables will determine the strategic trajectory of ASEAN in 2024.

1. Weaker Engagement by the Great Powers

The tug-of-war between the United States and China over ASEAN and ASEAN member states is likely to continue. The ASEAN region and individual ASEAN countries are among the most heavily contested battlegrounds in the great power competition between Washington and Beijing. ASEAN occupies an important geopolitical and geoeconomic position between the two powers as it is closely connected to the respective supply chains of the United States and China. Southeast Asia is where the two competing supply chains are interconnected. Such geopolitical and geoeconomic importance contributes to the ever-growing ASEAN's geostrategic weight. In addition, Russia has been trying to engage with some of these competitions in Southeast Asia since the war in Ukraine began, making the great power rivalry even more heated in the ASEAN region.¹

Since the late 2000s or early 2010s when the U.S.-China rivalry has intensified, ASEAN's foreign policy has largely been shaped by the rivalry between the two countries. ASEAN's strategy has always been responsive to the United States or Chinese initiatives to maximize its own interests without leaning towards either side. The year 2023 was somewhat of an exception in this U.S.-China rivalry over ASEAN. As discussed earlier, the strategic rivalry between the United States and China did not feature much in the series of ASEAN-led summits in 2023. The United States has been less active in the ASEAN region throughout the Biden administration and President Biden's absence in the EAS in 2023 is an example of such shortfall. China's efforts to expand its presence in the region that could have capitalized the absence of the United States were also unexpectedly low-key.

In 2024, the U.S.-China rivalry over ASEAN is likely to continue, but with less intensity. The United States does not have many resources nor much political will to bolster its ASEAN strategy. With the presidential election coming up, the support for the incumbent President Biden is dwindling as he faces a political crisis due to issues concerning his age and his son. Beset by domestic woes, Biden administration cannot focus on foreign policy fronts. Therefore, it is difficult for the Biden administration to take a decisive initiative in the ASEAN region against China. To make matters worse, the Israel-Hamas war is likely to push the ASEAN region to the back burner of U.S. foreign policy.

This could present an opportunity for China. However, China has not been very active on the ASEAN front since Beijing secured ASEAN's support in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic through its vaccine diplomacy. China could have exploited the

1. "Russia's Asia-Pacific Interests," *The Diplomat*, May 30, 2023.

window of opportunity in Southeast Asia given the Biden administration's ineffective Southeast Asia policy, but there had been no significant ASEAN strategy from China. The United States has been prioritizing its alliance network and therefore Southeast Asia sitting on neutral grounds could have been an effective target for China. However, China's ASEAN assertiveness was not noticeable even in the 2023 EAS where Biden was not present. China's current ASEAN strategy does not appear to go much beyond maintaining the status quo.

Meanwhile, ASEAN is likely to seek more opportunities to utilize the AOIP to engage with the United States and China, as well as other ASEAN dialogue partners in the region. First announced in 2019, the AOIP has been criticized for its lack of implementation. In 2022, ASEAN leaders issued the ASEAN Declaration on Mainstreaming the AOIP to overcome such critique.² The declaration places the four areas of cooperation mentioned in the AOIP at the core of all ASEAN cooperation: maritime cooperation; connectivity; sustainable development goals; and economic and other development. At the ASEAN+3 Summit and the EAS in 2023, the efforts to mainstream the AOIP were extended to ASEAN dialogue partners, namely the Republic of Korea, the United States, and China.³ In 2024, ASEAN countries will continue to mainstream the AOIP in their cooperation with major dialogue partners, namely Australia, the European Union (EU), India, and Japan, in order to strengthen the implementation and effectiveness of the AOIP and gain more concessions and support from the partner countries.

2. Riding on the “Global South”

The “Global South” has been emerging as a new trend in global politics besides the U.S.-China rivalry. The “Global South” discourse can be interpreted in two different ways. One is the attempt by anti-Western forces such as China and Russia to mobilize BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to bring together developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The other stream is the politicization of the countries in the “Global South”

2. The full name of the ASEAN document is the “ASEAN Leaders’ Declaration on Mainstreaming Four Priority Areas of The ASEAN Outlook on The Indo-Pacific within ASEAN-Led Mechanisms.”

3. Three separate documents were announced between ASEAN on the one hand and Korea, the US, and China on the other. The full names of the documents are “Joint Statement of the 24th ASEAN-Republic of Korea Summit on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” “ASEAN-U.S. Leaders’ Statement on Cooperation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” and “ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Mutually Beneficial Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.”

that is not driven by alternative Western powers such as China or Russia, but rather by the aspiration to reject great power politics, like the non-alignment movement or the Group of 77 during the Cold War which rejected U.S.-Soviet rivalry or alignment with major powers such as the United States, China, or Russia.

Regardless of the nature, the rise of the “Global South” and the strategic interests invested by the existing great power-led coalitions in the “Global South” makes it even more necessary for ASEAN to utilize the “Global South” as another strategic network for ASEAN’s interests. Countries with an anti-Western stance, such as China and Russia, have already begun to target the “Global South.” In the Western camp, Japan has been prominent on this front by introducing policies to engage the “Global South.”⁴

If ASEAN strengthens its identity as the “Global South” and enhances its solidarity with the countries of this group, this will consolidate ASEAN’s existing hedging strategy against superpowers. As a grouping of small states, it is in ASEAN’s interest to create as many strategic networks as possible to gain extra leverage against the great powers. There have already been voices within the ASEAN bloc about ASEAN countries playing a leading role in the “Global South” and making strategic use of the emerging group. As early as 2022, the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) called on Indonesia, then G20 Chair, to play an active role in garnering international support to address the challenges facing countries in the “Global South,” including human rights, climate change, and digital transformation.⁵

Furthermore, ASEAN believes that developing countries in the “Global South” have begun to use the same hedging strategies that ASEAN has been employing against the United States and China and by extension, the U.S.-centered Western bloc and the countering Sino-Russian bloc. In this respect, ASEAN member states recognize ASEAN’s potential leadership in the “Global South.” Furthermore, ASEAN attempts to serve as a spokesperson for the “Global South,” conveying their voices to the great powers.⁶ By riding on the “Global South,” ASEAN is able to increase its leverage over the great powers. In 2024, ASEAN will strive to strengthen its strategic leverage between the United States and China, as well as through the “Global South.”

4. “Japan to expand support for ‘Global South’ to tackle China and Russia,” *The Japan Times*, June 1, 2023.

5. “Position Paper on Indonesia G20 Presidency,” *ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights*, June 2023.

6. “Asia’s Third Way: How ASEAN Survives -and Thrives -Amid Great-Power Competition,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2023.

3. ASEAN's Alignment with Regional Middle Powers

A new trend that is likely to emerge in 2024 is ASEAN's alignment with regional middle powers. The regional middle powers and ASEAN have been steadily expanding their engagement with each other over the past two to three years. One of the most visible moves is to elevate formal relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). In 2021, Australia and China established CSPs with ASEAN, followed by India and the United States in 2022, and Japan in 2023. A CSP relationship is likely to be realized in 2024. While it is common for major powers such as the United States and China to take the lead in upgrading the diplomatic ties, followed by regional middle powers, the series of CSPs with ASEAN has seen middle powers such as Australia, India, and Japan actively pursue the upgrading of relationship before or at the same time as great powers.

ASEAN was initially lukewarm about the simultaneous push to upgrade relations due to concerns that establishing CSPs with certain countries may offset ASEAN's hedging strategy. This could have sent a wrong signal that ASEAN was collectively taking certain sides in the U.S.-China competition. Therefore, in establishing CSPs with Australia and China, ASEAN particularly emphasized that a CSP is not a step up from a "strategic partnership." Furthermore, ASEAN made it clear that CSPs should not be merely diplomatic rhetoric, and that ASEAN will only respond to CSP proposals if the enhanced level of partnership can deliver concrete benefits to ASEAN. ASEAN declared that the bloc would only consider CSP proposals that are 'meaningful, substantive, and mutually beneficial,' which effectively means that it is ultimately ASEAN that makes the final decision.⁷

Middle powers in the region, such as Australia, India, and Japan, pursued CSPs with ASEAN for strategic reasons. These middle powers seek to deepen their cooperation with ASEAN to enhance their influence in the region and strengthen economic ties with ASEAN countries. Beyond these immediate interests, the regional middle powers, particularly Australia and Japan, also seek to supplement the weak U.S. engagement with ASEAN and counter Chinese economic influence in the region. In short, the intention is to act as a regional anchor for the sake of the U.S. commitment to ASEAN. The effort by the middle powers may invite ASEAN to promote a rules-based order in the region and to build coalitions among the region's small and medium-sized states, even if it does not extend to the level of creating a U.S.-led coalition. The coalitions for

7. "Is ASEAN's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Becoming a Farce?" *ASEAN Fulcrum*, February 22, 2023.

a rules-based order led by regional middle powers will be instrumental, especially if Donald Trump returns to power in the United States.

ASEAN, on the other hand, will emerge with a strategy in 2024 that may fully capitalize on these regional middle powers' active charm offensive towards ASEAN. As mentioned earlier, ASEAN has already finalized a declaration to put the AOIP at the center of its bilateral cooperation with regional powers. Based on this, ASEAN will use the cause of the AOIP as an opportunity to strengthen its centrality by making all bilateral cooperation more ASEAN-centric. The establishment of a CSP between ASEAN and South Korea is in the pipeline. Once ASEAN and South Korea finalize the CSP, ASEAN will have established CSPs with all of its major dialogue partners, including the United States, China, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and India. For ASEAN, the question now becomes, what will these CSPs, especially those with medium-sized countries, do for ASEAN. With this question, ASEAN may set those middle powers to compete for the best interests of ASEAN.

4. Laos' Weak Leadership Imposes Limits on ASEAN Coalition Shopping

While the external environment provides a solid basis for ASEAN to do some collective coalition shopping, Laos' chairmanship can be a challenging factor. "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience" is the slogan for the 2024 ASEAN chairmanship under Laos. Among ASEAN member states, Laos is the most inexperienced and economically under-resourced, as well as lacking human resources meaning that it lacks the capacity to lead the organization. Therefore arguably, ASEAN's internal leadership would be most fragile when chairmanship is held by Laos, excluding Myanmar under military regime. As we anticipate 2024 to be a turbulent period of great power-led coalitions and alliance building around ASEAN, it will be no easy task for Laos to demonstrate stable leadership, strengthen ASEAN Centrality, and promote ASEAN's interests amid intensifying great power competition. Moreover, Laos is one of the most pro-China countries in ASEAN along with Cambodia and Myanmar.

However, when Cambodia held the ASEAN chairmanship two years ago, ASEAN did not deviate much from its pragmatic and neutral path despite Phnom Penh's relatively pro-Beijing stance. Given such a backdrop, ASEAN under Laos is not likely to digress from the traditional ASEAN path. Furthermore, ASEAN's strategic decisions are not solely in the hands of the ASEAN chair. ASEAN is fundamentally a consensus-based organization. Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and other traditionally vocal member states will also do their parts. Or reversely, ASEAN's long-standing strategic tradition or the existing strategic policy vis-à-vis great powers can guide Laos' ASEAN chairmanship.

Figure 9.2. Indonesia Hands over ASEAN Leadership to Laos



Source: Yonhap News.

5. ASEAN Unity Shaken by Military Conflicts in Other Regions

On the other hand, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the Israel-Hamas war that newly broke out in 2023, could sow the seeds of division within ASEAN. The Ukraine war, which has already been going on for two years, is less likely to divide ASEAN further. Nevertheless, the war has drawn clear lines of division on where different member states stand. Those closer to China, namely Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, lean more toward Russia. Vietnam, while maintaining a close strategic relationship with the United States, is not overtly supportive of Ukraine. In contrast, countries like Singapore and the Philippines are aligned with the United States and support Ukraine against Russia. Of course, this does not mean that these countries are giving Ukraine much material and military support. Indonesia, on the other hand, has taken a neutral stance, with President Joko Widodo even attempting to mediate between Ukraine and Russia.

Figure 9.3. Pro-Palestine Rally in Malaysia



Source: Yonhap News.

The 2023 Israel-Hamas war adds a new twist to the potential line of division over the Ukraine war in ASEAN. First and foremost, Malaysia and Indonesia, which share the Muslim identity, have long supported the Palestinian causes. Immediately after the military conflict broke out, these two countries did not directly comment on the Hamas' attack and hostage-taking or Israel's retaliation. Instead, they made it clear that the root of the problem was Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. Thailand, on the other hand, remained neutral and called for a peaceful resolution of the situation. The strongest stance was taken by Singapore in support of Israel. Singapore, a country with close ties to Israel, strongly condemned actions by Hamas from the beginning.⁸ Individual countries are all taking positions on the war in Ukraine and the Israeli-Hamas conflict based on their own interests and identities. If these conflicts continue and further escalate in 2024, it can be anticipated that the disagreements and dissonance within ASEAN may also intensify and become a new variable that could further weaken ASEAN unity in 2024.

8. "How Southeast Asian States are Responding to the Growing Middle East Conflict," *Asia Unbound*, October 9, 2023.

10. Europe: Open Strategic Autonomy and Coalition Building

Dr. CHOI Jinwoo | Professor
Hanyang University

■ 2023 in Review: Striving for “Open Strategic Autonomy” Amidst U.S. Alignment

For the European Union (EU), establishing its status as a geopolitical actor has been the central theme of its recent foreign policy. This would involve a resolute response to Russia’s act of aggression and China’s aggressive diplomacy, securing relative autonomy from the United States, and the pursuit of expanded international partnerships. The focus is on developing cooperative relationships, such as close coalitions, with nations that are autonomous from the influence of major powers like the United States and China yet share common goals, with the aim of enhancing European values and interests, such as peace and prosperity.

In 2023, the primary challenge in the diplomatic and security domain for Europe was supporting Ukraine in the ongoing conflict, while in the economic domain, the focus was on ensuring supply chain stability and securing its competitiveness. The EU’s commitment to supporting Ukraine remained unwavering. By the end of September 2023, the assistance provided by the EU and its member states amounted to approximately 82 billion euros. This support included the provision of military equipment, refugee assistance, agricultural purchases, support for reconstruction projects, and humanitarian aid.¹ Furthermore, the quick progress in the procedure for Ukraine’s accession to the EU reflects the EU’s strong and firm commitment to supporting Ukraine.²

Europe is pursuing “Open Strategic Autonomy” to ensure the stability of supply chains and enhance international competitiveness. Originally, “Strategic Autonomy” was a policy direction aimed at overcoming excessive dependence on the United States and vulnerability to Russian threats in the domain of diplomacy and security and advocating for strengthened Europe-wide independent security capabilities. However, in response to the supply chain issues and accelerated technological competition triggered by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, China’s coercive economic diplomacy, and

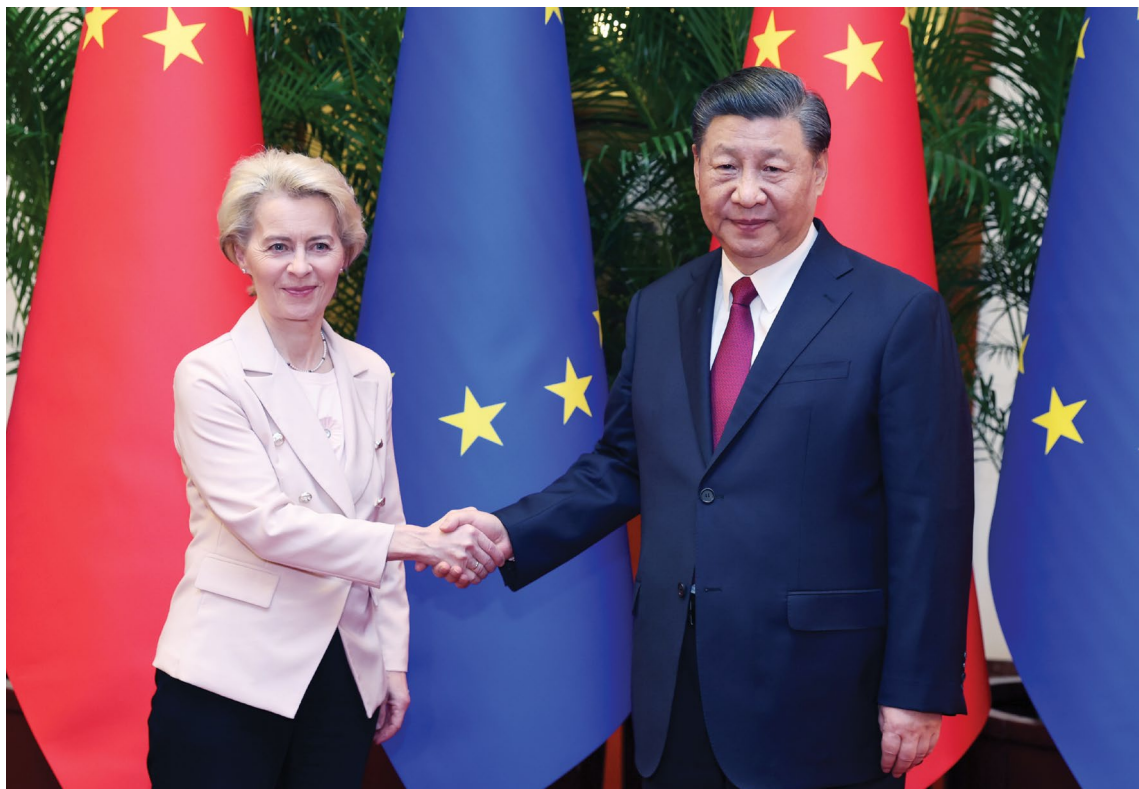
1. “Infographic: EU solidarity with Ukraine,” *Council of the European Union*, September 29, 2023.

2. “European Union makes Ukraine a candidate for EU membership,” *Associated Press*, June 23, 2022.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe has articulated a commitment to "Open Strategic Autonomy."

While "Open Strategic Autonomy" respects open and free trade and investment, it also takes into account the changes in international economic environment, namely return of the geopolitical era, hence demanding reciprocity from counterparts and prioritizing the protection of domestic businesses and strategic interests, exercising autonomy and leadership. The view is that while openness needs to be maximized, it should be preserved within limits that do not compromise autonomy or within the range that enhances autonomy. If openness undermines autonomy, it can be actively restricted.³ This encompasses critical raw materials, technology, food, health, infrastructure, security, and other strategic sectors.

Figure 10.1. Meeting between European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and President Xi Jinping in April 2023



Source: Yonhap News.

3. "Open Strategic Autonomy" simply means the capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible, in all strategic areas. Schmitz, Luuk and Time Seidl, "As Open as Possible, as Autonomous as Necessary: Understanding the Rise of Open Strategic Autonomy in EU Trade Policy," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 61:3, September 2022, pp. 834-852.

The most notable action in European foreign policy in 2023 is the declaration of “de-risking” with respect to China. In March 2023, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared de-risking towards China, clearly differentiated from the U.S.-advocated path of “decoupling” from China. Unlike “decoupling,” which implies a complete break-off in relations, “de-risking” involves maintaining economic cooperation while emphasizing policy directions towards diversifying supply chains and enhancing domestic production capabilities in key industries, considering the potential weaponization of interdependence. Given that China is a threat but has an attractive market and considering the effects of inexpensive imports from China on countering inflation, Europe has shifted its stance to a de-risking strategy, deeming a sudden severance or drastic reduction in relations with China unrealistic. It is worth noting that after the EU’s shift in position, the United States is also gradually acknowledging the impracticality of complete decoupling with China, converging toward a stance similar to that of the EU.

Meanwhile, the EU considers not only China but also the United States as a competitor and is strengthening regulations on big tech companies, successively pursuing policies equivalent to the U.S. CHIPS Act and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Notable examples include the European Chips Act, Critical Raw Materials Act, and Net-Zero Industry Act, along with the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act, which aim for an edge in the regulatory hegemony in the digital sector. Overall, Europe aims to maintain a strategic distance from China while strengthening coalitions with the United States. However, a comprehensive competition landscape is emerging in the economic and industrial sectors.

2024 Outlook: The Acceleration of a Geopolitical Pivot

1. Enhancing Strategic Autonomy and Coalitions

The EU’s policy stance to emerge as a geopolitical actor will not change much in 2024. The hardline stance against Russia and the de-risking policy towards China will continue, and the pursuit of “open strategic autonomy” to secure and improve international competitiveness will be further strengthened. Amid growing uncertainty due to the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, Europe appears poised to continue promoting internal cohesion, enhancing domestic capabilities, and increasing external autonomy and solidarity.

Figure 10.2. Geopolitical Europe



Source: GLOBSEC.

The EU's aspiration to be a geopolitical actor is not new. Key leaders in the EU have openly acknowledged the EU's status as a geopolitical actor. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared in her inaugural speech in 2019 that the upcoming Commission would be a "geopolitical Commission," and Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, emphasized that securing strategic autonomy is the EU's top priority.⁴ Recently, almost every document related to the EU's future strategic planning mentions its role and status as a geopolitical actor and its practical task, i.e. strategic autonomy. The idea of becoming a geopolitical actor and achieving strategic autonomy had been presented as strategic concept but is now entering the concrete implementation phase.⁵

Figure 10.3. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at an EU Summit



Source: Yonhap News.

It is worth noting that as Europe positions itself as a geopolitical actor, its perceived competitors are not only China and Russia but also the United States. This certainly does not mean that Europe will maintain an equal distance between the United States and China. Undoubtedly, the most critical partner for Europe is the United States, regardless of what anyone says. Europe views China as a systemic rival and aligns with the United States in keeping China's rise in check. However, European interests do not align completely with U.S. interests. At times, independent actions are necessary, and sometimes, Europe finds itself in competition with the United States. The European perspective is that, while maintaining infrastructure for cooperation and alliance with the United States, it should have the ability to pursue an independent course when U.S. actions do not align with European interests. Having already experienced the Trump administration and with the possibility of Trump's reelection not ruled out, Europe's discussion of strategic autonomy only seems natural. Europe seeks close alliance and cooperation with the United States but is determined not to be in a subordinate position to the United States.

Figure 10.4. U.S.-EU Summit Held in Washington, D.C. in October 2023



Source: Yonhap News.

Along with the United States, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand are important partners for Europe. These “like-minded countries” can collaborate with Europe on various frameworks, pooling their strength in areas such as supply chain stability, maintaining and advancing a rules-based international order, and restraining China’s hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. Europe is also engaging with developing countries as partners. Particularly, the EU is focusing on efforts to enhance trade, transportation, and digital connectivity through the Global Gateway project. These efforts to expand and strengthen external coalitions by Europe can be seen to secure open strategic autonomy amid the instability in relations with major powers such as the United States, China, and Russia while safeguarding European values and interests.

2. Strengthening Internal Cohesion

An important political event for Europe in 2024 is the European Parliament elections, which is held every five years. In June 2024, 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will be newly elected. In addition, the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will also be appointed. This means a complete change in the leadership of the EU. However, there is a strong possibility of Ursula von der Leyen, the current President of the European Commission, being reappointed.

Even if the European Parliament begins a new term and there is a significant overhaul in the EU leadership, the current policy stance will not shift significantly. The political group currently securing the largest number of seats in the European Parliament is the center-right coalition, which is expected to remain in place in the 2024 elections. While there is a possibility of an expansion in the far-right political group, the expected increase in seats is not substantial, suggesting that there may not be significant changes in the distribution of seats among political groups. Therefore, the influence of far-right political groups is likely to be limited across the legislative activities of the European Parliament, including the appointment of the President of the European Commission, which requires the approval of the European Parliament. As a result, there is a high

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4. Schmitz, Luuk and Tíme Seidl, “As Open as Possible, as Autonomous as Necessary: Understanding the Rise of Open Strategic Autonomy in EU Trade Policy,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 61:3, September 2022, pp. 834-852.
 5. “State of the Union address by President von der Leyen,” *European Commission*, September 13, 2023. “Taking forward the Strategic Agenda: 18-month Programme of the Council,” *Council of the European Union*, June 20, 2023.

probability that a figure who continues the current policy direction will be appointed. Additionally, given that the current policy direction is established and pursued based on broad agreements between various EU institutions and member states, significant changes are not expected.

Nevertheless, a key point to watch in the 2024 European Parliament elections is the growth of the far right. While the prominence of the far right varies by each country, there is a significant surge in several key countries. The National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN) in France is gaining momentum, the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) is making gains in major regional elections in Germany. In Italy, a party already classified as far-right is in power, and in the Netherlands, a far-right party took the lead in the 2023 general elections. Furthermore, in the 2023 Slovakian elections, a far-right populist party advocating a pro-Russian stance won, posing a potential obstacle to EU unity in supporting Ukraine during the ongoing war. However, the failure of the far-right populist regime to return to power in the October 2023 Polish elections, leading to the formation of a centrist coalition government, is a positive development.

The unexpected victory of the centrist coalition in the Polish elections in October 2023 is expected to have a significantly positive impact on internal cohesion in Europe. For the past eight years, Poland has been governed by the far-right populist party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS). The Law and Justice, along with Hungary's Fidesz, represented a leading political force of illiberal democracy in Europe, undermining the judiciary and media, pursuing populist policies, and sparked controversy within the EU with conservative and nationalist stances on gender and immigration policies. Consequently, while the Law and Justice Party was in power, relations with EU institutions and other EU member states were strained, and in particular, the Berlin-Paris-Warsaw axis, which had formed the main axis of European foreign and security policy after Britain's withdrawal from the EU, was not functioning effectively. Poland was involved in a historical dispute with Germany and strained ties with France.

Once the centrist coalition led by Donald Tusk takes power, European foreign and security policy is expected to be normalized. This is crucial primarily because of the potential dispersion of U.S. attention and resources from Ukraine to the Middle East following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023. While the Biden administration has pledged unwavering support for Ukraine, the possibility of a policy shift in the United States, especially with Trump's potential re-election, the Republican Party is taking a reserved stance on full support for Ukraine, so it is difficult to rule out the possibility of a change in the U.S. policy. If U.S. attention and capabilities

shift to the Middle East, leaving a void in support for Ukraine, Europe's strengthened security posture is essential to fill this void. At this point in time, the emergence of a pro-European government in Poland can contribute to enhancing Europe's security posture.

3. Expansion of the EU Geopolitical Space: Negotiations for Ukraine's Accession

Ukraine submitted its application for membership to the EU on February 24, 2022, four days after Russia's invasion. Amid skepticism and caution, the European Commission went through an unusually expedited review process. On November 8, 2023, the European Commission recommended the European Council approve the commencement of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. Upon the EU Council's approval, the formal accession process for both countries will begin.

The expansion of the EU is expected to contribute to the stabilization of the European geopolitical landscape. Countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia had been leaning towards the West away from Russia, but because they were within the former Soviet Union's sphere of influence, they became the epicenter of geopolitical instability between the West and Russia, thereby becoming a source of security instability in Europe. The EU's expansion into this region could alleviate security concerns by removing uncertainties. However, it is unlikely that these countries will become full EU members in the near term, given that the level of political, economic, and governance do not yet meet the EU accession criteria. Nevertheless, considering the geopolitical significance of these countries, the EU is expected to strategically expedite the accession process.

There have always been concerns that EU expansion would lead to increased internal heterogeneity and disrupt the European integration process. However, the EU has prevented disruptions in the decision-making process by reorganizing the EU decision-making mechanism in advance before pursuing expansion. Therefore, in the ongoing process of expanding its membership, it is expected that the EU will once again go through the institutional adjustments.⁶ This ultimately means that the scope of authority of the EU's supranational organization will be expanded, and the efficiency of the decision-making process will be increased, leading to a deepening process of

6. It is in this context that Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, raised this issue of revising the decision-making system, at the meeting that adopted the Granada Declaration in October 2023. "President Michel's Strategic Agenda Consultations," *Council of the European Union*, November 8, 2023.

European integration. This will result in internal cohesion and strengthened institutions within the EU. Through the “enlargement” of its member states, the EU aims to “deepen” integration, thereby strengthening internal cohesion and transforming into a more powerful actor.

4. EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029

In 2024, the EU will establish the 2024-2029 strategic agenda, defining domestic and international policy priorities for the next five years.⁷ As the first step, the European Council, convened in Granada, Spain on October 6, 2023, initiated discussions for formulating the 2024-2029 strategic agenda and adopted the ‘Granada Declaration.’ In this declaration, EU leaders pledged to uphold values and principles such as the protection of fundamental rights, democracy, and the rule of law to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity. To achieve this, European leaders expressed their commitment to setting policy priorities aimed at building a strong, dynamic, and competitive cohesive Europe.

In this declaration, the primary focus is on strengthening the autonomy of the EU. Even the expression “sovereignty” of the EU appears in the declaration. Strictly speaking, it is difficult to assert sovereignty for the EU as it is a supranational organization composed of sovereign states as its members. However, through the Lisbon Treaty enacted in 2009, the EU acquired legal personality and possesses a unique jurisdictional area, free from the intervention and interference of its member states, indicating its quasi-sovereign existence. Particularly concerning the functioning of the single market, which can be considered the core of European integration, it is not incorrect to say that the European Commission exercises policy sovereignty with exclusive jurisdiction.

Emphasizing autonomy with the invocation of the term “sovereignty,” this declaration underscores specific policy agendas, including the enhancement of defense capabilities through technological and industrial reinforcement, improvement of military mobility and response capabilities in space and cyberspace, securing resilience and long-term competitiveness, pursuing sustainable and inclusive growth, exercising global leadership, striving for green and digital transitions, and increasing energy and resource efficiency. Above all, in order to achieve this goal, the declaration expresses the commitment to enhance the EU’s own capabilities and strengthen relations with partner countries worldwide, aiming to promote and protect the rule-based international order

7. Over the past five years, activities of the EU have unfolded in accordance with the 2019-2024 Strategic Agenda. “A new strategic agenda for the EU,” *Council of the European Union*, June 20, 2019.

centered around the UN. Additionally, it underscores the intention to improve the fairness of multilateral institutions and calls for efforts to prevent division, emphasizing the need to pursue international regime reforms without exacerbating factionalization in the international system.

It is unclear when and to what extent these goals pursued by Europe will be achieved. Factors such as internal and external criticism, resistance, resource and capability limitations, internal divisions, and external pressures may lead to significant delays, setbacks, or distortions in the plans and aspirations. Nevertheless, the efforts of Europe as a geopolitical actor to protect and promote its values and interests will continue. We need to examine closely what Europe means to us as a geopolitical actor in pursuit of coalitions and autonomy.

11. Cyberspace: Possible Coalitions on International Norm-Setting

Dr. SHIN Sohyun | Associate Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

■ 2023 in Review: Slow Progress Towards International Norm-Setting and the Risk of Bifurcation

The behaviors of states in cyberspace may be similar or different from those traditionally conducted in kinetic space. This is due to the characteristics of cyberspace as a new space given to humanity with the development of information and communications technology (ICT). Even though the digital divides between states' ICT infrastructure and cyber capabilities are large and diverse, the hyper-connectedness of networks makes national borders of kinetic space meaningless and anonymizes users and attackers alike. This anonymity makes it difficult to reveal the identities of both state and non-state actors. These characteristics of cyberspace make coalitions between states more complex and difficult than in kinetic space. In cyberspace, the digital gap between states can be an obstacle to practical cooperation, and especially in the cyber intelligence field, competition exists, even among allies.

The UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) worked to identify responsible state behaviors in cyberspace since 2004 and reached an agreement in the 2021 report.¹ However, it concluded that further progress in the GGE discussion was nearly impossible, due to the limited number of participant countries and the continuous confrontation between the Western-backed group centered on the United States and the European Union (EU) and the group centered on China and Russia. It transferred discussion to the UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) in which various stakeholders, such as

1. "Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security," *UNGA*, July 14, 2021. "Official compendium of voluntary national contributions on the subject of how international law applies to the use of information and communications technologies by States submitted by participating governmental experts in the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behavior in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/266," *UNGA*, July 13, 2021.

global Big Tech companies, think tanks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and more states participated.² The OEWG is scheduled to hold 11 “substantive sessions” from 2021 to 2025 and has been working every year to define responsible state behaviors in cyberspace. On the other hand, in November 2022, the First Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution on the ‘Program of Action on Cybersecurity’ as a permanent, comprehensive, and action-oriented mechanism after the end of the 2021-2025 OEWG.³

In March, Russia argued that the OEWG should be able to produce a comprehensive and legally binding international document in its working paper.⁴ Before the 5th substantive session from 24-28 July 2023, Russia submitted the working paper including the ‘Updated Concept of the Convention of the United Nations on Ensuring International Information Security’ co-sponsored by Belarus, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Nicaragua, Syria, and Venezuela.⁵ Russia insisted that the second Annual Progress Report (APR) in 2023 should include preparations for concluding such a comprehensive international cyber agreement. The OEWG might have deadlocked and failed to adopt the APR because it takes the consensus-based approach to reach an agreement, but it was finally adopted after last minute negotiations between the U.S. and Russia. The series of processes showed that the efforts to develop international norms applicable to cyberspace at the UN level, which have made slow but continuous progress, are likely to be jeopardized by future changes in the international security situation.

International cybersecurity cooperation is impossible without confidence-building between states and strengthened cyber capabilities of individual countries. The second

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2. “Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security,” *UNGA*, January 4, 2021 (The first OEWG was 2019-2020).
 3. “Programme of Action to Advance Responsible State Behaviour in the Use of Information and Communications Technologies in the Context of International Security,” *UNGA*, December 12, 2022.
 4. “Concept paper of the Russian Federation on establishing under the auspices of the United Nations a regular institutional dialogue for all the UN Member States on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies,” *The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs* ([https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-__\(2021\)/ENG_Regular_institutional_dialogue_Proposal_of_the_Russian_Federation.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-__(2021)/ENG_Regular_institutional_dialogue_Proposal_of_the_Russian_Federation.pdf)).
 5. “Updated concept of the convention of the United Nations on Ensuring International Information Security,” *The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs* ([https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-__\(2021\)/ENG_Concept_of_UN_Convention__on_International_Information_Security_Proposal_of_the_Russian_Federation.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-__(2021)/ENG_Concept_of_UN_Convention__on_International_Information_Security_Proposal_of_the_Russian_Federation.pdf)).

APR includes Annex A, which establishes intergovernmental and global ‘Points of Contact (PoC),’ which was proposed in the first APR as a concrete, action-oriented confidence-building measure. In addition, the capacity-building principles were agreed to and included as Annex C.⁶ The sixth substantive session was scheduled for the 11-15th December 2023.

Unlike discussions at the UN level, the EU is accelerating the development of cyber-related regulation. Starting with the ‘General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR),’ the EU has broadly dealt with regulatory issues related to digital technologies and cyberspace from the angle of the EU’s common diplomacy and security. The EU regulations affect like-minded countries, including the U.S. and the United Kingdom, and entice other countries willing to engage in international cooperation with the EU in diplomacy, defense, and trade, into following it. As a result, the EU plays a role in promoting international norm-setting in cyberspace. The EU’s digital and cyber-related regulations are as follows.

Table 11.1. The EU’s Digital and Cyber-related Regulation⁷

	Regulations	Status	Note
1	The NIS 2 Directive	entered into force	2023. 1
2	The European Cyber Resilience Act	adoption	2023. 7
3	The Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA)	adoption	2022.12
4	The Critical Entities Resilience Directive (CER)	entered into force	2023. 1
5	The Digital Services Act (DSA)	came into effect	2023. 8
6	The Digital Markets Act (DMA)	came into effect	2023. 5
7	The European Chips Act	entered into force	2023. 9
8	The European Data Act	adoption	2023.11
9	The European Data Governance Act (DGA)	came into effect	2023. 9
10	The EU Cyber Solidarity Act	adoption	2023. 4
11	The Artificial Intelligence Act	provisional agreement	2023. 11
12	The European ePrivacy Regulation	amendment	2021. 2

Source: Author; made by referring to Cyber Risk GmbH & EU official sites.

6. “Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security,” *UNGA*, August 1, 2023.

2024 Outlook: Solidifying the Division Surrounding International Cyber Norms

Russia has repeatedly proposed a comprehensive international cybersecurity treaty.⁸ Setting aside the problematic contents of the Russian proposal, this may delay cyber-related discussions, including ongoing negotiations for the ‘UN Convention on Cybercrime’ in the Third Committee of the UNGA, as well as OEWG processes. Since states can only invest limited resources into international platforms for cybersecurity, duplicated proposals could lead to delays or deadlock in forming international norms for cybersecurity. This strategy is consistent with Russia and China’s repeated argument that existing international law cannot properly regulate cyberspace and so, a novel, binding international treaty is required to address this so-called legal vacuum.⁹ This argument has been mostly overturned by the contention that there is no such legal vacuum and that most existing international laws are applicable to cyberspace with some modifications or applicable interpretations. Although international digital norms have been developed in various forms, it was expected that a comprehensive international treaty, commonly referred to as international law, would take a considerable amount of time. As the U.S.-China competition, Russia-Ukraine war, heightened tensions in the South China Sea, and readjustment of supply chains surrounding cutting-edge technologies signal an intensification in geopolitical confrontations, the existing bifurcated stance in international norm-setting is highly likely to increase.

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7. In general, ordinary legislative procedure of EU consists of the joint adoption of legislative acts by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, in general, following a proposal from the European Commission. The procedure comprises one or two readings and, if needed, a conciliation procedure and a third reading. The European Parliament votes by simple majority of the votes cast at the first and third readings and by majority of its members at the second reading. A regulation is applicable in all Member States from the date of its entry into force (a date that it sets or, failing that, 20 days after its publication in the EU’s Official Journal). On the other hand, the national authorities of each EU country to which the directive is addressed determine the form and the methods they use to incorporate the directive into their national law.
 8. “Letter dated 12 September 2011 from the Permanent Representatives of China, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General,” *UNGA*, September 14, 2011. “Letter dated 9 January 2015 from the Permanent Representatives of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General,” *UNGA*, January 13, 2015.
 9. “The Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the Promotion of International Law,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, June 25, 2016.

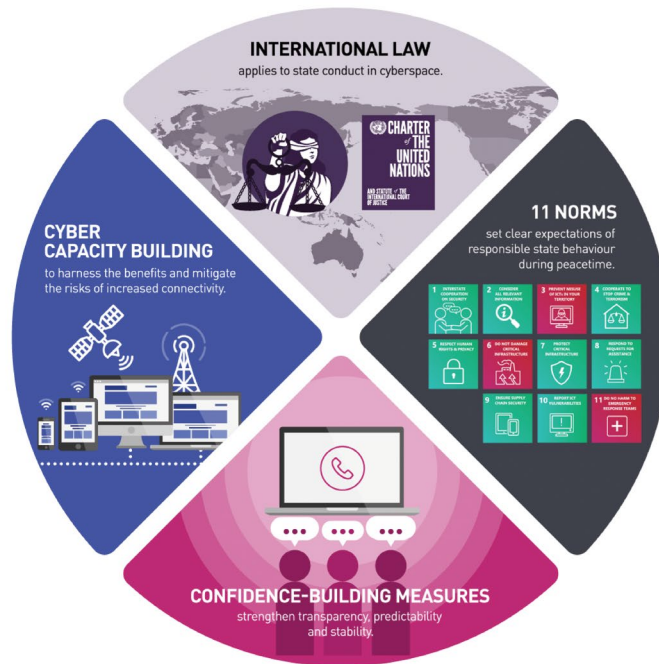
Coalitions and cooperation in the cybersecurity field are pursued in different ways depending on the sector. However, coalitions for international norm-setting cannot be considered separately from other factors. In other words, it is nearly impossible that the development of norms for responsible state behavior in cyberspace, which has progressed throughout 2023, will advance rapidly and reach an agreement in 2024. As seen with the formation of other international treaties, a comprehensive international cyber agreement can only be drawn up through a long, arduous process of discussion and consultation among countries. There is also no guarantee that international norms can be set in a completed treaty form. Like the ‘Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA)’ from the UN International Law Commission (ILC), it may become a *de facto* law by acquiring normativity through states’ practice in the international community, even if it is not established as a treaty. Treaties at a regional level, such as the EU, or at a thematic level, such as the International Cybercrime Convention, may gradually expand their normativity to a global level and then become international custom and international law. There are several possible paths, but what is certain is that the process will take quite a long time.

Like-minded countries such as the U.S., EU members, and South Korea take the fundamental position that existing international laws are applicable to cyberspace. This position seeks to implement international norms by modifying or interpreting regulations to fit in cyberspace. It aims to induce states to conduct themselves responsibly in cyberspace in order to sustain international peace and security. On the other hand, the position of Russia and China is likely to be used strategically to justify their indiscriminate cyber activities. Such countries with superior cyber capabilities may seek to delay the international norm-setting process because they believe that an uncertain and ambiguous situation that lacks a complete disciplinary system will provide greater freedom to implement their strategies and tactics. In this grey zone, where existing international norms and practices do not accurately conform, it is easier for a state to claim the legitimacy of its actions and free itself from criticism of illegality. However, one should not err in thinking that international norms governing cyberspace do not exist. No matter how narrowly it is interpreted, the 11 principles already agreed upon at the UN GGE must be considered as recognized.¹⁰ In fact, it is reasonable to assume that most existing international legal norms also apply to cyberspace. Respect for existing international law has been confirmed consistently in many countries’ cyber

10. “Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behavior in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security,” *UNGA*, July 14, 2021.

strategies, cyber security strategies, and cyber military manuals, including the Tallinn Manual, which has been published since 2013.

Figure 11.1. UN Framework for States' Responsible Behaviors in Cyberspace



Source: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The confrontation between digital democracy and digital authoritarianism has been intensified in cyberspace as part of the U.S.-China competition. In the process of rearranging the international security order, cybersecurity cooperation is also likely to become more divided and bifurcated. There has been much analysis of cyber operations in the Ukraine War, but this should not be hastily generalized as cyber operations are conducted in all armed conflict situations. Strengthening cybersecurity capabilities is closely related to peacetime cyber operations. Disinformation and the concept of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), which is promoted by the EU, are all cyberspace problems occurring in peacetime that require more cooperation within the democratic bloc. If the Ukraine war that began in 2022 continues in 2024, and the 2023 Israel-Hamas war continues, confrontation and conflict in cyberspace will also intensify. Apart from armed conflict in kinetic space, fierce cyber operations targeting public opinion or psychological influence are expected to be waged not only by the states engaged in the conflicts, but also by sympathizers. This will become a routine confrontation involving state actors and state-sponsored non-state actors, as

well as unaffiliated non-state actors, such as individuals, hacker organizations, and terrorist groups.

While the global cyber security coalition and cooperation at the UN level may probably stagnate, the possibility of a coalition at the regional or bloc level is relatively high. Cybersecurity-related cooperation among countries in traditional military or intelligence alliances will expand and become closer, and regional coalitions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will also be strengthened. For example, on 18 July 2023, ASEAN member states opened the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Cybersecurity and Information Center of Excellence (ACICE) at Changi Naval Base in Singapore to focus on cybersecurity, disinformation, and misinformation in the defense sector.¹¹ The group seeks to strengthen mutual cyber capabilities through information-sharing and policy consultation. Despite regional cybersecurity coalitions in various fields like the 'ASEAN Regional Cyber Emergency Response Team (CERT)' and the 'Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA),' these movements would have few substantive effects without confidence-building and capacity-building. As geopolitical tensions and regional cyber threats are increasing in Southeast Asia, smooth regional cybersecurity coalitions or cooperation will be difficult to achieve. Efforts to reduce the various divides in cyber capabilities between member states should be undertaken to bring about information-sharing. In addition, it is important to coordinate confidence-building and capacity-building measures to suit each state's situation and interests. Bilateral cyber collaboration is also possible, such as the 'ROK-U.S. Strategic Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework' announced on 26 April, 2023. In order for cyber coalitions and cooperation to be effective from the UN level to regional, multilateral, and bilateral levels, it is important to build appropriate and mutual confidence through the implementation of concrete measures.

11. The ADMM Cybersecurity and Information Centre of Excellence (<https://www.acice-asean.org>).

12. Space: Infrastructure Coalitions and the Second Space Race

Dr. YANG Uk | Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

■ 2023 in Review: Confirming the Importance of the Private Sector in Space Solidarity

The Space Race during the Cold War was an outgrowth of the nuclear arms race. To win the nuclear arms race, the United States and the USSR sought to utilize outer space, an unexplored frontier for humanity. When the Soviet Union succeeded in developing a de facto inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) with the launch of Sputnik, the United States responded by establishing the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and pursuing various space programs. By the Reagan administration, a massive space defense project called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) had emerged, and the first Space Race ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the dominance of the United States.

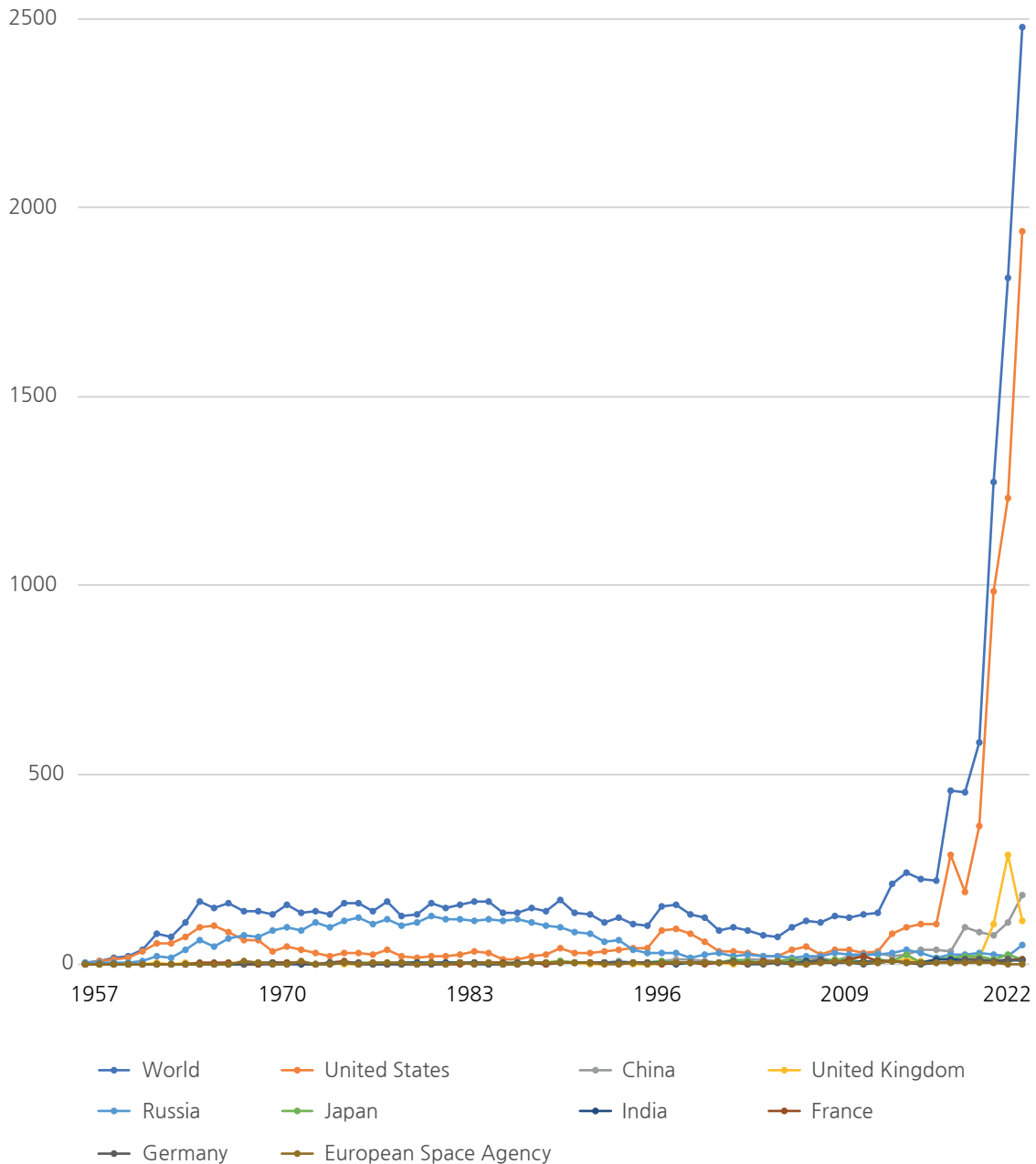
With the end of the Cold War, space development was gradually transferred from the state to the private sector. As the nuclear arms race had concluded, governments were no longer able to pursue space missions that involved large-scale budgets. However, information and communication industries developed to become a core area of private industry, and the space industry naturally grew in areas such as satellite communications and navigations, opening a new chapter of space race. Existing space powers such as the United States, China, and Russia have been leading the civilian space race, but more than 80 medium-sized countries are also entering the space sector.¹ While the first Space Race was led by states and giant companies, the center of gravity has shifted to the private sector and small and medium-sized enterprises, ushering in the “New Space” era with a transformed ecosystem of the space industry.

In this second era of the Space Race, it is all about governance—who can expand space infrastructure faster and at scale. Innovative private space companies such as Space-X, Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic have risen to prominence as creativity and momentum became the measure. Thus far, the United States is leading the second

1. Tim Marshall, *The Future of Geography: How Power and Politics in Space Will Change Our World*, Elliott & Thompson, Ltd (2023).

Space Race with 1,939 launches in 2022, which comprises 78% of global space launches totaling 2,478.

Figure 12.1. International Space Launches Per Year



Source: United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.

2023 was a year that confirmed how the private sector is driving the public sector in the New Space Race. The war in Ukraine proved that the private space industry can be a real game-changer. With the support of the U.S. government and private space

company systems such as SpaceX's Starlink, Ukraine was able to build a space-based C4I (command, control, communications, computer and intelligence) system. It also utilized high-resolution satellite imagery from private companies such as Digital Globe, Maxar Technologies, Planet Labs, and ICEYE instead of traditional military reconnaissance satellites.

In particular, Starlink established the basis for drone operations by providing positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) information. Ukraine was able to offset its power disadvantage against Russia by utilizing about 10,000 drones per month in 2023.² Meanwhile, Ukraine's attacks on Russia's Black Sea Fleet were limited when Starlink refused to provide telecommunications services on Crimea.³ This proved that while private companies can contribute to warfare and foster coalitions between nations, they can also disrupt it.

The New Space era has also seen challenges from major countries and various companies. India successfully landed on the Moon in August 2023, following the United States, Russia, China, and Israel.⁴ In addition, space startups have become more active to establish their own business models. In particular, the era of space monopolization by major powers is coming to an end as the number of satellites has soared due to a significant reduction in satellite launch costs.

The space race between North and South Korea has also accelerated on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea succeeded in commercializing its own space launch with the third launch of the Nuri,⁵ and also launched the "425" reconnaissance satellite. North Korea, on the other hand, succeeded in launching the Malligyong-1 reconnaissance satellite with the Chollima-1 rocket after two previous failures.⁶ North Korea is on the verge of completing its tactical nuclear capability and its acquisition of a space-based reconnaissance capability enables it to select its own targets, jeopardizing the Korean Peninsula. North Korea also formalized space cooperation at the North Korea-Russia

2. David Hambling, "New Report: Ukraine Drone Losses Are '10,000 Per Month'," *Forbes*, May 22, 2023.

3. Musk was known to have refused the Ukrainian request for the Starlink support due to concerns that Russia would launch a nuclear attack in response; Tara Copp, "Elon Musk's refusal to have Starlink support Ukraine attack in Crimea raises questions for Pentagon," *Associated Press*, September 12, 2023.

4. Christian Davenport, "As Russia and India attempt lunar landings, the moon rush gets crowded," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2023.

5. "Nuri-3 Launch 'Successful'...Space Transportation Capability Secured," *Yonhap News*, May 26, 2023.

6. "DPRK's General Administration of Aerospace Technology reports successful launch of reconnaissance satellite," *Rodong Sinmun*, November 22, 2023.

summit,⁷ laying the groundwork for utilizing Russia's advanced space technology and equipment, increasing the threat to space security. In response, South Korea, the United States, and Japan agreed to share information on missile launches from early warning satellites at the Camp David summit,⁸ and materialized their space cooperation.

2024 Outlook: The Beginning of Space Coalitions Based on Civilian Space Capabilities

The space race is expected to accelerate in 2024. In New Space, the focus is on how many satellite systems can be launched into space to fulfill missions such as communication, positioning, navigation, and weather observation. Of course, unlike the "Old Space"⁹ system, it is not state-led but led by the private sector, hence commercial success is key. Nevertheless, geopolitical competition will arise as countries form New Space Coalitions.

1. New Space Coalition-Building and Multilateral and Pluralistic Competition

While the first Space Race in Old Space was a bilateral competition between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the second Space Race in New Space is becoming a multilateral competition between the United States, China, and Russia, along with the EU, India, Japan, and South Korea. In addition, unlike Old Space, which focused on security through government-led space development, New Space is becoming a venue for coalition-building as private sector-led activities for commercial space utilization take center stage. In New Space, the distinction between commercial and military use is less distinct, and even commercial satellites can be easily diverted to military use.

The militarization of civilian space development is a new focus of space security, particularly after the war in Ukraine where the civilian space industry was used for military purposes. In the past, the number of military satellites was a measure of a great power's security capabilities, but it is the number of space-based systems in the hands of its private space companies which has become a measure of its security capabilities.

7. "Putin 'Will Help Develop North Korean Satellite' ... Kim Jong Un 'Thanks for Invitation to Busy Schedule,'" *Yonhap*, September 13, 2023.

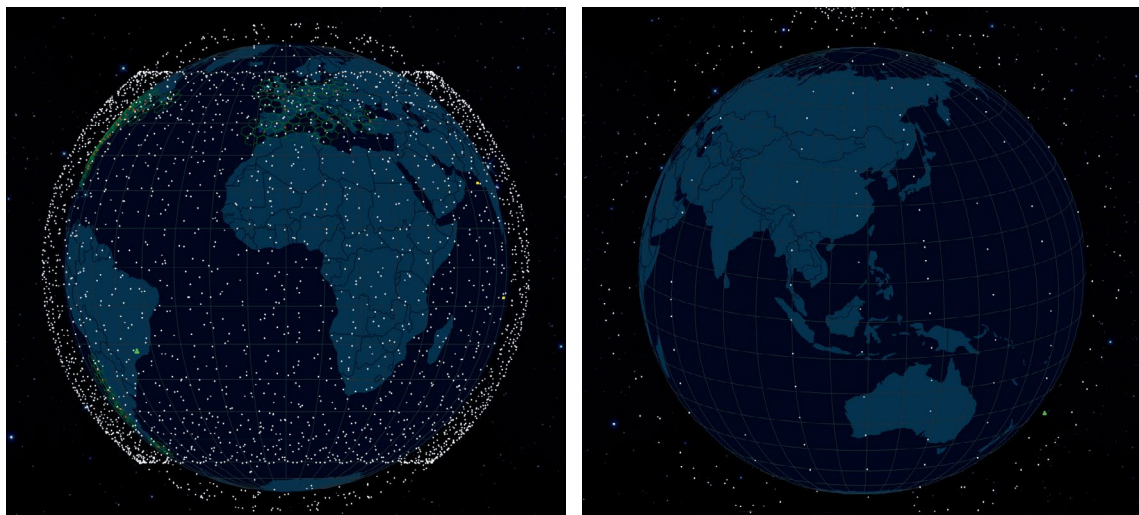
8. "Rapid response by South Korea, Japan to North Korean satellite launch... First information sharing after 'Camp David' declaration," *Hankook Ilbo*, August 24, 2023.

9. Old Space is the opposite of New Space and refers to an earlier stage of space development when the government took the lead in space exploration. Space systems were developed by national research organizations and large corporations such as NASA.

However, private space companies are ultimately driven by corporate interests rather than national interests, hence they serve customers who are willing to pay for their services. This means they can provide space capabilities to foreign companies and governments if their own governments are unable to provide sufficient demand. In the end, private space companies can be both facilitators and hindrances of New Space coalition-building, making the policy guidance by the states more important.

Moreover, space has been recognized as a new domain of military operations along with cyber and electromagnetic domain, making it a central domain for conducting multi-domain operations. Pre-emption of the space domain enables the use of electromagnetic waves without a shadow zone, and without space and electromagnetic assets, the utilization of cyberspace will also be limited. Therefore, the military power differential will be determined by how many space-based platforms private space companies acquire and which countries they provide these services to. The exosphere, particularly low Earth orbit, where these space platforms are active, will function as a choke point in space geopolitics, like a strait in maritime geopolitics, and will become a battleground for New Space Coalitions.

Figure 12.2. Internet Communication Satellite Operation Status of Starlink (left) and OneWeb (right)



Source: Starlink.

Countries that lack indigenous space capabilities will need to utilize space services from foreign private companies and countries will naturally choose private space-based systems that belong to friendly or like-minded countries, which will gradually develop into New Space Coalition. Starlink (U.S.) and OneWeb (U.K.) will increasingly function as the vehicles for New Space Coalitions, providing space internet communication services connecting the world. In response, China is initiating the Guo Wang (國網,

National Network) project to launch more than 13,000 satellites into low Earth orbit.¹⁰ The competition for New Space Coalitions will heat up.

2. The Race to the Moon

The Race to the Moon will accelerate in the New Space Race in 2024. The Moon is again the center of attention in the New Space Race. The first reason is its potential as a resource base. Water and ice are present in the lunar south pole, making it possible to build lunar bases and harvest lunar resources such as rare earths. The second reason is to use the Moon as a base for more serious space exploration.

The United States is moving forward with its Artemis program with the goal of manned landings on the Moon. In 2024, it seeks to execute a “swing-by”¹¹ flight to the Moon on Artemis 2 and a landing on the Moon on Artemis 3 in 2025. The Artemis plan aims to establish a base on the Moon by enabling sustained lunar visits, rather than simply exploring the Moon. The U.S. plans to conduct about 150 missions over the next decade.¹² The goal of the Artemis program is to use this lunar base as a springboard for future manned exploration of Mars and other exoplanets.

The Artemis program is not exclusively a U.S. space program but is part of the International Space Alliance. Twenty-nine countries around the world, including the United States, are participating, with South Korea signing on in 2021. But it is the companies, not countries, that should be given attention. Unlike the government-led Apollo program, private space companies are now developing major components such as rockets, lunar landers, lunar vehicles, and return spacecraft. Moreover, the participating countries are likely to allow their companies to own the space resources acquired in the program. While some have argued that the ownership of space resources by certain companies violates the Outer Space Treaty (1967),¹³ it ultimately provides a significant incentive for private companies to participate.

Of course, Artemis is not the only lunar endeavor being pursued by countries around the world. Russia launched its first lunar probe in 47 years, Luna-25, to the lunar south

10. “Guo Wang: China’s Answer to Starlink?” *RUSI Commentary*, May 3, 2023.

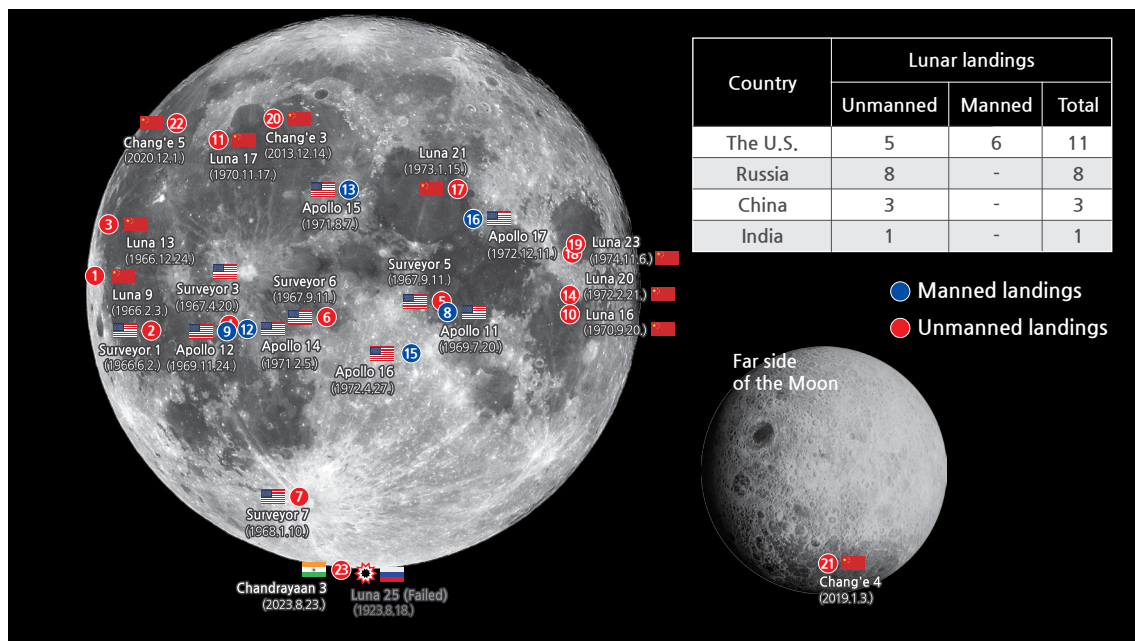
11. Swing-by is a type of space navigation that uses the gravitational pull of a planet or other celestial body to steer and accelerate a spacecraft’s orbit in order to travel long distances with little power.

12. “What’s Happening on the Moon in the Next Decade,” *Secure World Foundation Spotlight Talks*, June 14, 2023.

13. The argument is that the Outer Space Treaty provides for space activities for the benefit of all humanity, stating in Article 1 that “the exploration and utilization of the outer atmosphere, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, shall be conducted ... in the interest of all States.”

pole in 2023, albeit ending up in a crash. However, two days after the Russian crash, India succeeded in landing the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft 600 kilometers from the lunar south pole and is planning to send the Chandrayaan-4 spacecraft in collaboration with Japan to continue their full-scale exploration of the south pole. Japan also launched a rocket in September 2023 with a mission to put an unmanned lunar lander on the lunar surface in early 2024.¹⁴

Figure 12.3. Historic Lunar Landings by Countries



Source: Author's compilation of the history of lunar landings.

In 2024, China will send Chang'e 6 to the lunar south pole to conduct missions such as collecting soil samples, while the upcoming Chang'e 8 mission in 2028 will begin preliminary investigations for the construction of a lunar base.¹⁵ China has proposed a joint construction of the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) to countries and international organizations, and seven countries—Russia, South Africa, the UAE, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Venezuela, and Belarus—have decided to participate. There will be an organization established to coordinate international cooperation on the construction of the ILRS, which is expected to serve as a counterpart to the U.S. Artemis program. Such New Space Coalitions will be a key component of the New Space Race.

14. "Explainer: Japan's moon landing: When is it and why is it important?" *Reuters*, August 28, 2023.

15. "China Proposes International Participation in 'Chang'e 8' Mission to Moon's South Pole," *VOA News*, October 3, 2023.

3. Competition for Space Norms

Meanwhile, countries around the world agree that international governance and norms are needed as humanity expands its space activities. The United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and the Conference on Disarmament already have been active under the UN General Assembly. When it comes to space norms, the United States and the West are at odds with China and Russia, and this is becoming another dimension of the Space Race. First, the West wants to establish norms through national practices and responsible behavior rather than establishing legally binding norms for space. On the other hand, China and Russia call for a binding treaty that prohibits the deployment of weapons in the outer atmosphere but seek to offset their strategic disadvantage by excluding the ground-launched satellites interception from the treaty.

The militarization or weaponization of outer space is regulated by the Outer Space Treaty and the Moon Agreement, but there is a flaw that it is only weapons of mass destruction that are prohibited in Near-Earth orbit. In response, the UN Disarmament Commission is promoting a comprehensive ‘international space law’ through the Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) framework, and China and Russia have proposed a draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT) to PAROS, calling for demilitarization of space.¹⁶ However, the gap between Western and Sino-Russian positions are unlikely to close significantly in 2024, but rather widen due to conflicts such as the war in Ukraine and the intensification of the U.S.-China great power rivalry become major factors of competition between newly formed space coalitions.

While monitoring and mitigation of space debris and transparency and trust-building are other areas of competition between space coalitions, there are points of contact due to common interests rather than militarization and weaponization of space. Especially in the New Space era, the number of satellites launched by states and private companies is growing exponentially. As of 2023, there were about 9,000 satellites in operation, but this number is expected to reach 60,000 by 2030.¹⁷ SpaceX alone operates more than 4,000 Starlink satellites, and by 2026, there will be more than

16. Jun-Koo Yoo, “Issues and Challenges in the Formation of International Norms for Space Security,” *Policy Studies Series, Institute for Diplomacy and Security Studies*, December 2018.

17. Rohini Krishnamurthy, “Scientists call for legally-binding treaty to protect Earth’s orbit. Here’s why,” *Down to Earth*, March 10, 2023.

12,000 satellites in low Earth orbit.¹⁸

As the number of satellites increases, space debris is rapidly increasing, blocking space navigation and preventing safe use of space. In response, countries around the world are devising solutions such as burning space debris with laser weapons or sending satellites to collect them, none of which is yet practical. The most realistic solution is to reduce space debris as much as possible through international cooperation, but it is not easy to reach an agreement due to differences in the opinions of major powers. As the High Seas Treaty¹⁹ was signed in 2023 after 20 years of talks,²⁰ the possibility of a similar treaty in space has been raised. Nevertheless, the competition between the New Space Coalitions will be even more intense in the area of space norms due to the conflicting national interests.

Unlike other middle powers preparing for the fast pace of the New Space era, South Korea's space endeavors have been stalled for some time. Despite having its first astronaut in 2008, the Korean space program had to go through a period of stagnation without gaining much momentum. In line with the government's policy of focusing on securing indigenous technology, South Korea developed "Naro" space launch vehicle with Russia, and its first indigenous launch vehicle, "Nuri." It was not until 2023 that Nuri achieved a successful space launch.

Despite having its own space launch capability, South Korea is still lagging behind in the space sector. Owing to the severe security situation due to North Korea's continuous nuclear threats, the first satellites of "425" military reconnaissance satellites was launched only recently, at the end of 2023, and space exploration has not yet materialized into an independent national project. As the nuclear threat extends to outer space with the launch of North Korea's military reconnaissance satellite, securing superiority in the space domain is no longer an option but an essential requirement. Especially given the observation that space dominance will determine the future, faster action is required. In response, the current South Korean administration has decided to open the Korea AeroSpace Administration (KASA), a Korean version of NASA, under

18. Ian Krietzberg, "SpaceX slams report implicating it in a potential threat to 'people on Earth'," *The Street*, Oct 11, 2023.

19. The full name of the treaty is the "Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biological diversity of areas Beyond National Jurisdiction."

20. "Nations Agree on Language for Historic Treaty to Protect Ocean Life," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2023.

the Ministry of Science and ICT, presenting an ambitious plan to land on the moon by 2032 and on Mars by 2045.

By choosing to join in the coalition of democracies, South Korea is expanding the ROK-U.S. alliance to include the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation and participating in U.S. efforts to restructure global supply chains such as “Chip 4.” At a time when the U.S.-China great power rivalry and the war in Ukraine are reorganizing international coalitions into democracy versus authoritarianism, we must eventually form an optimal New Space Coalition in the space sector. For South Korea, a Space Coalition has already begun in bilateral cooperation with the United States, such as the abolition of the ROK-U.S. Missile Agreement and Korea’s signing of the Artemis Accords, but it is necessary to diversify and pursue multilateral cooperation as the case with Japan’s cooperation with India. Since New Space is truly driven by the civilian space industry, it is time to focus national efforts on building coalition and an ecosystem that can support civilian-led space development.

13. Economic Security: Geopolitical and Technology Coalitions

Dr. YEON Wonho | Head, Economic Security Team
Korea Institute for International Economic Policy

■ 2023 in Review: Entering a New Era

1. The United States at an Historical Turning Point

More than 30 years have passed since the end of the Cold War, and the international community is rapidly changing. As the free and open international economic order based on values such as liberal democracy, human rights, and the rule of law expanded, globalization and increased interdependence of the world economy brought economic growth and stability to the international community, but at the same time, the rise of emerging and developing economies as well as the possibility of economic threats that take advantage of economic interdependence have altered the international power dynamic. In particular, geopolitical competition between the United States and China has been intensifying since the recent rise of China.

The expression “de-risking” attracted a lot of attention in 2023, which seemed to hint at a change in the U.S. policy towards China, but in reality, there is no fundamental shift in the U.S. policy of keeping China in check. “de-risking” is an act of reducing exposure to risk, and this is not a policy goal of one particular nation but of all nations, including the United States and China. We must pay attention to the means to achieve this, and the United States has indicated that in order to de-risk, it will no longer tolerate the rise of China in certain areas. The basis for the United States’s choice of this “small-yard, high-fence” strategy is a change in U.S. perception: The United States recognizes the present as an historical inflection point.

The United States divides the post-World War II era into three parts and recognizes that it is entering the third era. The first was the period of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War when the United States made efforts to achieve the dual goal of spreading democracy and containing the Soviet Union. The second was the period following the Cold War when the United States tried to establish a framework for cooperation on key issues by expanding the rules-based order in the absence of competitors. The United States now recognizes that it stands at the beginning of a third era of interdependence and transnational challenges.¹ Therefore, in the new era of strategic competition, the United States reexamines its existing assumptions in order to lay the foundation for new power and prepare for the future.

2. The New Washington Consensus

In April 2023, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan proposed a “new Washington Consensus” during a conversation with the Brookings Institution.² The view Sullivan presented is that a new approach is needed to solve the emerging challenges as the United States enters a new era. In a rapidly changing world driven by clean energy transition and digital transformation, the rise of dynamic emerging economies, strengthening supply chain resilience, and artificial intelligence and biotechnology revolution, existing strategies are deemed invalid and new strategies are needed.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is one of the main mechanisms of the new U.S. strategy. Launched in May 2022 with four pillars of trade, supply chains, clean economy, and fair economy, the IPEF agreement on supply chains was reached in May 2023 and on clean economy and fair economy in November 2023 through negotiations between 14 countries. The underlying view is that ensuring more resilient supply chains for critical goods and inputs, accelerating the clean energy transition, ensuring tax fairness, and fighting corruption are the challenges currently facing the international economy. Some commentators point out that IPEF is different from traditional free trade agreements (FTAs) and lacks incentives such as market access. However, the United States explains that this is the core of the new strategy. The recognition is that to solve the problem at hand, traditional models are insufficient, and that trade policy must go beyond tariff reductions and be fully integrated into domestic and international economic strategies.

Furthermore, the United States seeks to pursue modern industrial and innovation strategies with trusted partners, rather than with all countries. It seeks to work together with fair, open, transparent nations and with them invest in economies and sources of technology, promote diverse and resilient global supply chains, set high standards for everything from labor, environment, technology, and governance, and cooperate to provide public goods such as climate and health.

3. China's Response

A notable movement of coalition centered around China in 2023 is the expansion of BRICS, the five-nation cooperation group consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China,

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1. “The Sources of American Power: A Foreign Policy for a Changed World,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 24, 2023.
 2. “The Biden Administration’s International Economic Agenda: A Conversation with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan,” *The Brookings Institution*, April 27, 2023.

and South Africa. In August 2023, at its meeting in South Africa, BRICS agreed to expand its membership to six more countries. From January 2024, BRICS will expand to an 11-nation system, adding Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Argentina, Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Ethiopia to the existing five countries. Considering the newly added countries, it is clear that this is consistent with the strategy China outlined in the “White Paper on China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era,”³ announced in 2021. In the White Paper, China expressed the view that it would place greater emphasis on international cooperation in Asia and Africa, especially on developing countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

However, the fact that shared values between the countries participating in BRICS are not clearly visible suggests that the strength of coalitions may be low. China is aware of this, and therefore it would be correct to understand that China is taking self reliance as its core strategy. China’s policy is also obvious in that it is pursuing “asymmetric decoupling” to minimize its reliance on the rest of the world while the rest of the world relies more on China in trade.

2024 Outlook: Onset of the Geopolitical Era

1. Formation of Geopolitical Blocs

The global economy is becoming increasingly uncertain due to the formation of blocs based on trust and values. To take on this era of uncertainty, governments are strengthening government-led industrial and technology policies and cooperation with trustworthy like-minded countries. Paradoxically, it is likely that these efforts will further increase uncertainty, deepen trade and technology blocs, and strengthen solidarity within the blocs in 2024.

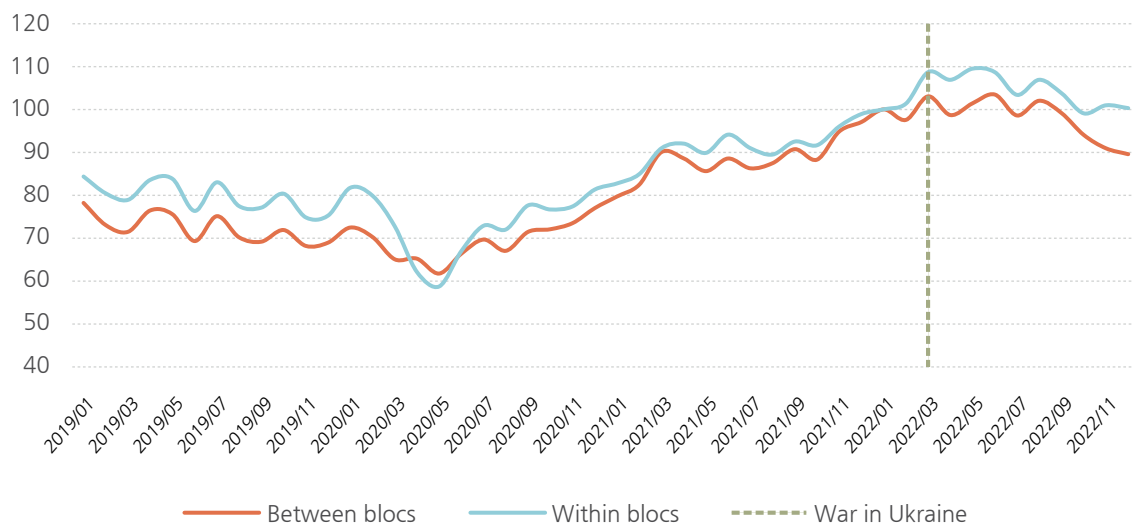
Due to the U.S.-China strategic competition, blocs in the global economy have begun to manifest. Data from the September 2023 World Trade Report published by the World Trade Organization (WTO) shows that trade within geopolitical blocs has a greater growth rate than trade between geopolitical blocs, and that recently the gap between intra-bloc and inter-bloc trade is widening. In particular, this phenomenon appears to be intensifying since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022.⁴

3. “White Paper on China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era,” *Chinese Government Network*, January 10, 2021 [“《新时代的中国国际发展合作》白皮书,” 中国政府网, 2021.01.10].

4. “WTO Trade Report 2023: Re-globalization for a secure, inclusive and sustainable future,” *WTO*, September 2023.

At the center of these changes are high-tech products. A prime example is the trade between the United States and China. The WTO paper reports that trade in high-tech items was hit the hardest since the tariff war between the United States and China. For example, for general-purpose technology products, since 2018, the United States has increased its Chinese imports vis-a-vis other countries. With regards to general-purpose technology products, price is an important factor. However, for high-tech products such as semiconductors and telecommunications equipment, the United States has reduced its dependence on China and increased imports from countries other than China since 2018.

Figure 13.1. Trade Between and Within Blocs (January 2022=100)

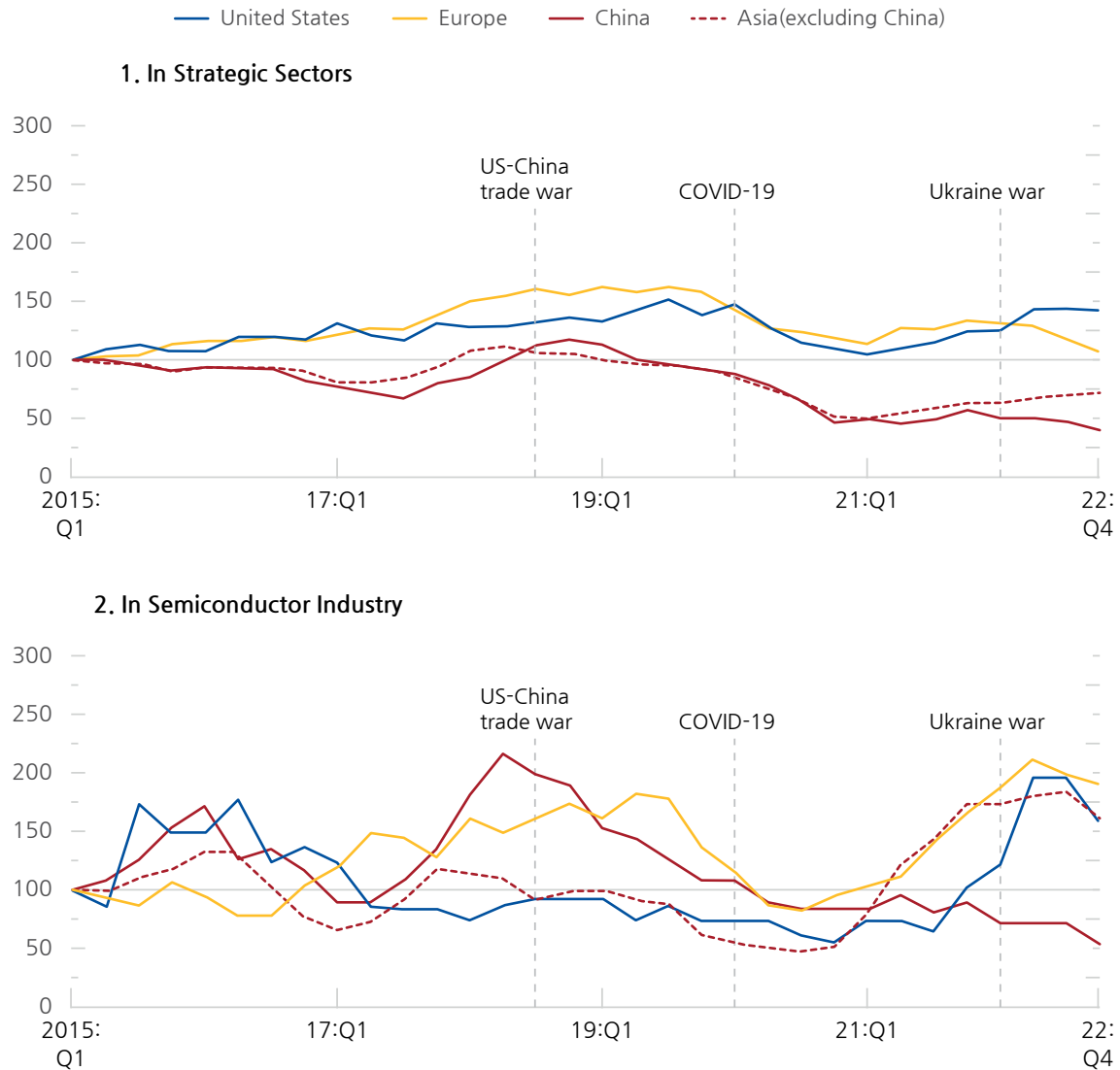


Source: WTO.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) report from April 2023 also reveals the formation of blocs in foreign direct investment. There is a divergence in foreign direct investment (FDI) flows across various regions as China experiences a decline in its market share, and this phenomenon is especially evident in strategic industries such as semiconductors. Over the past decade, the share of FDI among countries in a similar geopolitical position has been increasing more significantly compared to the share of FDI among countries that are close together geographically. This phenomenon is also noticeable in strategic industries such as semiconductors. The IMF points out that FDI into China's high-tech industries has been steadily decreasing since the U.S.-China strategic competition began in 2018 (see Figure 13.2).⁵

Figure 13.2. Number of Investments in Strategic Industries and Semiconductor Industries
(4-quarter moving average, base year: 2015 Q1=100)

Foreign direct investment flows to different regions are diverging, with China losing market share.



Source: IMF.

2. Advanced Technology Coalitions

With the blocs manifesting in high-tech sectors against the backdrop of the U.S.-China strategic competition, technology is an object of competition as well as of partnership among value-sharing countries. Major powers have already been quickly searching for technology partners. In 2021, the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), the U.S.-Taiwan Technology Trade and Investment Collaboration Framework (TTIC); in 2022

5. "World Economic Outlook: A Rocky Recovery, chapter 4, Geoeconomic Fragmentation and Foreign Direct Investment," *IMF*, April 2023.

U.S.-Japan Commercial and Industrial Partnership (JUCIP); in 2023 U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), and the EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) were launched. Korea also established a cooperation channel with the United States on core and emerging technologies in April 2023,⁶ and in August laid the foundation for cooperation on technical standards and technical norms as well as joint research at the ROK-U.S.-Japan summit.⁷ This technological coalition movement is expected to expand in 2024.

Given that dual-use is the most marked characteristic of cutting-edge technologies, the competitiveness in emerging technologies has the significance of dominating the market, ensuring future growth, and strengthening diplomatic leverage medium- to long-term. As the Japanese case shows, securing and maintaining a technological “super-gap” is becoming increasingly critical. Japan aligned itself with the United States in sanctions against Huawei and for the human rights issue of Uyghurs in Xinjiang before any other nation, yet we have not heard of any economic retaliation from China. Ultimately, this is because Japan possesses the technologies that China needs.

Usually, high-tech innovation strategies of major powers consist of three stages: development, protection, and utilization of technology. From the traditional view of the science and technology community, development would be a research and development (R&D) issue, protection would be an intellectual property issue, and utilization would be a technical standards issue. Science and technology are value-neutral. However, given the reality that geopolitical conflicts are further deepening and cutting-edge technologies are increasingly dual-use, the tendency to view science and technology in combination with the economy and security is expected to strengthen in 2024. Major powers now view the development of science and technology as a ‘subject of economic security cooperation,’ protection as a ‘subject of export control and foreign investment review cooperation,’ and utilization as a ‘subject of technical standards cooperation.’

3. New Export Control Coalitions

Discussions on introducing a new international export control mechanism are expected to continue in 2024, following the talks in 2023. On September 16, 2022, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan mentioned that export controls could be used strategically

6. “ROK-U.S. Joint Statement on Launching the Next Generation Critical and Emerging Technologies Dialogue,” *Office of the President (ROK)*, April 26, 2023.

7. “Camp David Spirit: Joint Statement of the US-Korea-Japan Summit,” *Office of the President*, August 18, 2023.

to widen the technology gap with China in a speech at the Special Competitive Studies Project (SCSP). Advanced semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum computing are the main fields of concern.⁸ For example, the outbound investment monitoring of the United States, introduced by a presidential executive order in August 2023, actually targets these three technology sectors: (1) advanced semiconductors, (2) AI, and (3) quantum computing.⁹ In addition, the U.S. Department of Commerce further tightened export controls on China's semiconductor and AI industries in October 2023.¹⁰

The U.S. government seeks to expand this independent effort through coalitions with other countries. In 2023, the United States strengthened cooperation in export control of semiconductor equipment with Japan and the Netherlands. Furthermore, it is highly likely that discussions on establishing a new international cooperation system that complements or replaces the existing multilateral export control system in certain fields will begin in 2024. The most marked limitation of existing multilateral export control regimes, including the Wassenaar Arrangement that coordinates controls of dual-use technologies, is that they only address non-proliferation and goals regarding conventional weapons.

The efforts of state actors to improve existing export control regimes are expected to become more concrete in 2024. This is to address limitations in effectively dealing with emerging national security issues such as China's Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) strategy, human rights abuses using technology, major disruption of critical supply chains, and control of emerging technologies. According to recent discussions, the new multilateral export control regime is likely to comprise a small group of technology democracies, handling more extensive policy objectives than the current system. Given that the private sector drives technological innovation, the new regime is likely to incorporate business involvement rather than the usual government focus.

It is difficult to be optimistic about the global economy as geoeconomic coalitions are expected to strengthen in various fields in 2024. First of all, the global economy will

8. "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the Special Competitive Studies Project Global Emerging Technologies Summit," *The White House*, September 16, 2022.

9. "Executive Order on Addressing United States Investments in Certain National Security Technologies and Products in Countries of Concern," *The White House*, August 9, 2023.

10. "Updates to Modify and Reinforce Restrictions Initially Released on October 7, 2022, to Address National Security Concerns Posed by PRC Military Modernization," *Bureau of Industry and Security*, October 17, 2023.

likely slump further than in 2023. The inflationary pressure that the world is currently experiencing is due to rising supply costs rather than excessive demand. The U.S.-China conflict, the war in Ukraine, reorganization of supply chains, and transition towards decarbonization are creating additional economic costs, prolonging inflation, and reducing the efficiency of the global economy. According to the most recent IMF's baseline forecast, global growth is expected to slow from 3.5% in 2022 to 3.0% in 2023 and 2.9% in 2024, far below the 2000-2019 average of 3.8%. In particular, developed countries, including South Korea, are expected to see growth slowing for three consecutive years to 2.6% in 2022, 1.5% in 2023, and 1.4% in 2024.¹¹

Also, elections in a number of countries are a significant variable that will affect the global economy in 2024. Taiwan's presidential and general elections are scheduled for January 13, 2024, and the European Parliament elections are scheduled for early June. Given that Japan's Kishida cabinet's approval rating is in the 20% range, there is a high possibility that Japan will hold elections next year, and the U.S. presidential election will be held on November 15. Since the government's China policy easily attracts public attention, there is a high possibility that it will be used politically during the elections in each country. Considering that the U.S.-China summit held at APEC in November 2023 did not improve relations between the two major powers, but rather reaffirmed each other's positions and ran parallel paths, it is expected that there will be no fundamental change in the hardline policy of the West, including the United States, toward China in 2024. The economic blocs based on values and trust will be accelerated further.

With internationally agreed rules like the WTO not working, countries base their trade, investment, and cooperation decisions on whether they can trust each other. However, given the differences in industrial capabilities and trade structures among countries, specific perceptions of economic security threats and response strategies cannot be the same for each nation. In other words, while coalition to address new challenges seems commendable, there are concerns that the competition for subsidies through industrial policies that is unfolding within the coalition may pose a significant economic loss not only to potential adversary nations outside the alliance but also to allied and similarly positioned countries within the alliance.

Therefore, it is crucial for nations that have benefited significantly from free trade, such as South Korea, to take the lead in restoring an order of free trade within their blocs while striving to maintain inter-block trade as much as possible. Addressing the issues

11. "World Economic Outlook, October 2023: Navigating Global Divergences." *IMF*, October 10, 2023.

should not be limited to coalition but should extend to efforts within the alliance to establish new rules. To eliminate the uncertainties arising from the U.S.-China conflict, South Korea needs to apply its distinct trade and diplomatic principles of inclusiveness, trust, and mutual benefit consistently in its responses.¹²

12. "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, December 28, 2022.

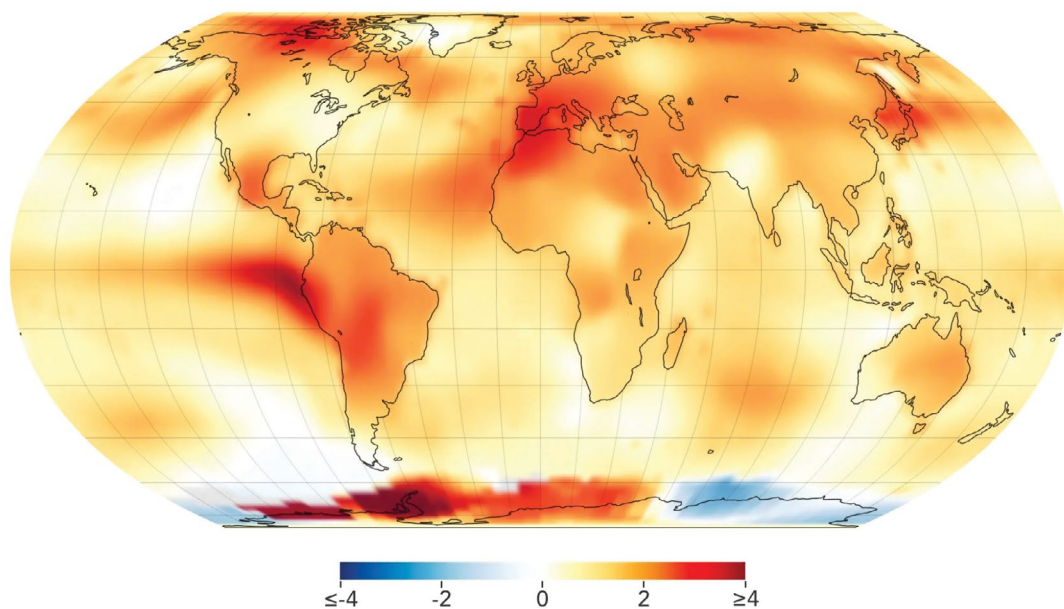
14. Climate Change: International Coalitions in the Climate Crisis Era

Dr. CHOI Hyeonjung | Senior Research Fellow
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

2023 in Review: The Hottest Summer and the Frozen Climate Cooperation

July 6, 2023, was the hottest day in human history. The day recorded an average global temperature of 17.23°C, breaking the previous record of 16.92°C set in August 2016.¹ The summer (June-August) was also the hottest since weather observations began in the 1880s, measuring 0.23°C above the global summer average and 1.2°C above the 1951-1980 period.² In particular, sea surface temperatures and Antarctic Ocean temperatures increased as a result of the El Niño event.

Figure 14.1. Global Temperature Anomaly, June-August 2023



Source: NASA, "NASA Announces Summer 2023 Hottest on Record" (2023.9.14).

Global average annual temperatures have been steadily rising since the beginning

1. "Here's Where Global Heat Records Stand So Far in July," *The New York Times*, July 19, 2023.

2. NASA, "NASA Announces Summer 2023 Hottest on Record," September 14, 2023.

of the 21st century. Given that 2016, the hottest year on record, actually had a cooler-than-normal summer, 2023, with its hottest months after May, is very likely to be the hottest year in human history.³

More than just a phenomenon of global warming, the calamitous consequences of natural disasters amplified by climate change are expected to continue, precipitating a global crisis and becoming a prime example of an emerging security problem. Since the mid-1990s, when the number and magnitude of natural disasters began to increase dramatically as a direct result of climate change, the loss of life and economic damage in underdeveloped countries with weak disaster response infrastructure has become a major issue. But these days, regardless of a country's level of economic and technological growth, extreme natural disasters due to climate change are affecting more people, including those dwelling in cities of developed countries.

By September 2023, for example, the United States had already experienced 23 severe weather events that could be defined as “climate disasters,” all of which exceeded the \$1 billion minimum damage threshold.⁴ Globally, tropical storms in Queensland, Australia, in March; storms in Zhengzhou, China, in June; massive flooding in western Germany in July; and wildfires in the western United States in August are some of the most notable climate disasters of this year. In the past, climate disasters have typically affected underdeveloped or developing countries, including South and Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and countries of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), but now they are increasingly affecting densely populated urban areas in developed countries. The climate crisis of 2023 is particularly illustrative of this. The flooding that followed heavy rains in late September in New York City, a symbol of the developed world, demonstrates that even the urban infrastructure of developed countries, which is at the heart of modern civilization, is limited in its ability to respond to natural disasters in the era of climate crisis.

In July, during the hottest summer in human history, UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared that “the era of global warming is ended and the era of global boiling has arrived.”⁵ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

3. Zeke Hausfather, “Analysis: ‘Greater than 99% chance’ 2023 will be hottest year on record,” *CarbonBrief*, October 16, 2023; <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-greater-than-99-chance-2023-will-be-hottest-year-on-record/>.

4. “NOAA: Climate disasters cost U.S. \$2.6 trillion since 1980,” *UPI*, September 12, 2023.

5. “Hottest July ever signals ‘era of global boiling has arrived’ says UN chief,” *UN News*, July 27, 2023; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/07/1139162>.

(UNFCCC), which was established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and entered into force in 1994, created a framework for international cooperation to address climate change. Thirty years later, the fact that the head of the UN, the world's premier international cooperation organization, was calling for renewed international attention to climate change in such an alarmist manner is a testament to the lack of global action on climate change and the urgent need for strengthened international cooperation.

In 2023, the world returned to normal after overcoming the global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted more than two years. However, new geopolitical crises have arisen, such as the Ukraine war, which has been ongoing since February 2022, and the Israel-Hamas war, which began in early October. Geoeconomic crises also emerged, such as rising oil prices in the aftermath of these wars and the disturbance of the global supply chain, affected by the strategic competition between the United States and China.

Unlike the climate crisis, geopolitical and geoeconomic crises like international conflicts and trade disputes have traditionally been regarded as more direct and perceptible issues of national security. As sociologist Anthony Giddens has paradoxically pointed out (the so-called "Giddens' paradox"), because the climate crisis is mostly invisible and imperceptible in people's daily lives, it cannot have the same policy priority as traditional military or economic crises, even though the consequences of climate change could have more serious global effects.⁶

In addition, as experienced in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, nationalism or national self-interest, rather than international cooperation, becomes the basis for domestic and foreign policies during extreme national crises. Traditional geopolitical or geoeconomic crises, such as the ongoing wars in Europe and the Middle East or the strategic rivalry between the United States and China, have never fostered integration and interdependence among nations. In particular, the dominant powers' efforts to establish exclusive and self-interested partnerships with like-minded countries resulted in a year without any notable achievements in addressing global and nontraditional crises, such as climate change.

2024 Outlook: Possible to Find a Way Forward?

2024 is unlikely to see any major breakthroughs in international climate cooperation,

6. Anthony Giddens, 2009, *The Politics of Climate Change*, Polity Publisher.

as coalitions centered on the political and economic national interests of the dominant powers will continue to be the main driver of international relations. It is unlikely that this exclusive and self-interested form of international cooperation will create the conditions necessary to overcome the climate crisis. Without a shared sense of urgency about the climate crisis, a shared goal of protecting the global environment as a common good, a shared commitment to global sustainable development, and a shared sense of trust and inclusiveness among all nations, international climate change policies are bound to have disastrous consequences, exemplified by the “tragedy of the commons.”⁷

The average global temperature is already 1.1°C above pre-industrial times, when carbon fuel consumption began to take hold.⁸ In order to meet the international goal discussed by the Paris Agreement in 2015 (the “1.5°C Goal”), i.e., to limit the increase in global average temperature to well below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, global GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions must be reduced by 43% from 2019 levels by 2030, and the “carbon budget,” i.e., the remaining allowable carbon emissions, is set to about 500 GtCO₂e.⁹ In reality, global carbon emissions are currently 59±6.6 GtCO₂e per year (as of 2019), so even simple math shows that we have less than a decade’s worth of carbon budget left.

The consequences of global warming will go far beyond an increase in the global average temperature; they are devastating to ecosystems and the future of humanity. These include sea level rise and biodiversity loss, which will cause fundamental damage to civilization and directly contribute to national security crises. Research shows that over 380 million people already live in places that will be inundated by sea level rise, and the 1.5°C temperature increase will affect more than 510 million people.¹⁰

7. The “tragedy of the commons” was conceptualized by Elinor Ostrom, winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics, in her book *Governing the Commons* (1990), which points out that when a common good is available to all participants without governance because no one is willing to supply it voluntarily and demanders are not willing to bear the corresponding costs, everyone is doomed.

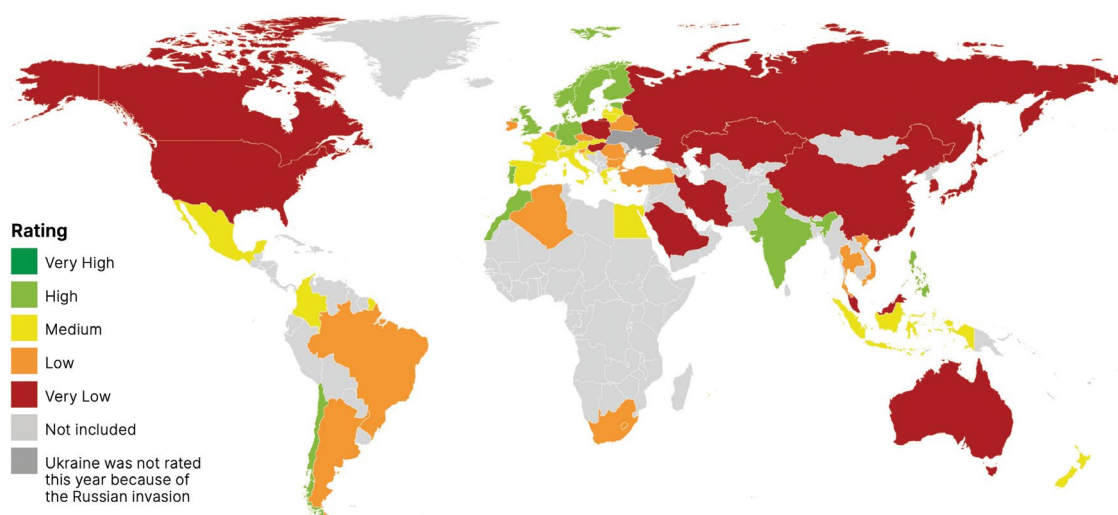
8. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reported in 2021 that the global average temperature increased by 1.11°C compared to pre-industrial times, and the IPCC analyzed in its Sixth Assessment Report released in 2023 that the global surface temperature during the period of 2011-2020 increased by 1.09°C compared to the industrialization era (1850-1900).

9. IPCC, 2023, *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*.

10. “50 major cities to be hit hard by sea level rise, if global average temperature rises by 3°C... 8000 million people at risk,” *Yonhap News*, October 14, 2021; <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20211014047400009>.

In response to the climate crisis, the international community has established a cooperative system and developed loosely binding rules and regulations. The 2015 Paris Agreement stipulated voluntary responsibilities and commitments for all countries and was a major milestone for international climate cooperation in the 21st century. It was seen as a hopeful opportunity to consolidate the international climate cooperation system and overcome the limitations of the Kyoto Protocol system, which stipulated obligations by dividing developed countries responsible for large-scale greenhouse gas emissions in the past into debtors and less developed or developing countries into beneficiaries.

Figure 14.2. Climate Change Performance Index 2023



Source: Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute & Climate Action Network, *CCPI (Climate Change Performance Index) 2023*.

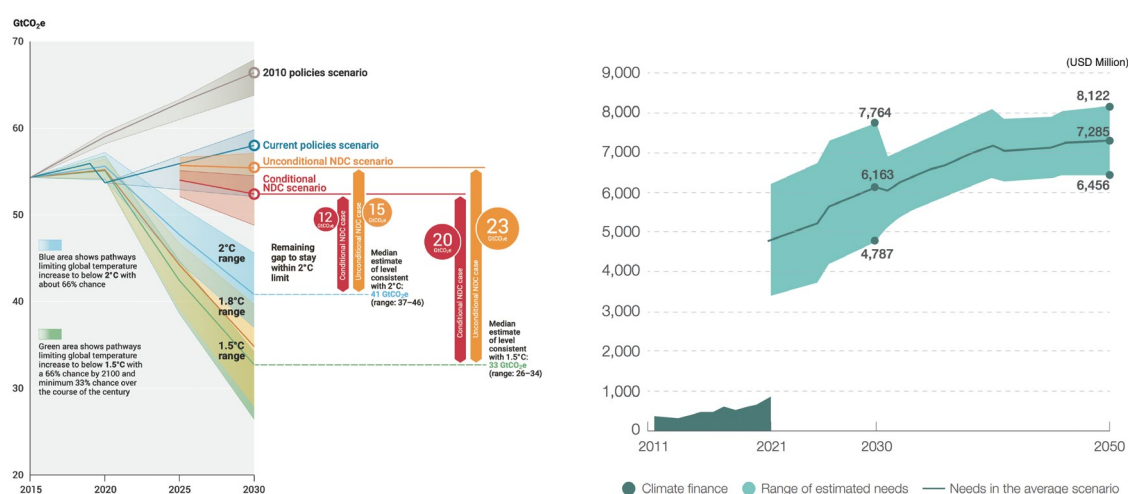
Many argue, however, that even under the Paris Agreement system the international community's common goals and its implementation processes could be unrealistic and idealistic. The Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) principle of the Kyoto Protocol was modified into the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDRRC) principle in the Paris Agreement, whereby all countries have resolved to establish their own voluntary GHG reduction targets and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and implement related policies according to their national capabilities.¹¹ However, there are few cases where the performance of

11. Thomas Leclerc, "The Notion of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities: A Commendable but Failed Effort to Enhance Equity in Climate Law," in Benoit Mayer and Alexander Zahar, ed. *Debating Climate Law*, 2021; Cambridge University Press.

national policies has been evaluated positively.

In addition, the sum of the GHG reduction targets that countries have voluntarily submitted so far under the Paris Agreement framework is still fundamentally limited, as the existing 2°C goal is still not achievable, let alone the ambitious 1.5°C goal. In terms of common goals, the international community will need additional GHG reductions of about 20-23 GtCO₂e by 2030 to achieve the 1.5°C goal and about 12-15 GtCO₂e to achieve the 2°C goal.¹² These represent 33-38% and 20-25% of current global GHG emissions, respectively, and with no internationally coordinated action in place to complement these additional reductions, it is unlikely that the international community's collective goals can realistically be achieved with current technologies and lifestyles. In addition, it is analyzed that about \$6.2 trillion per year is needed to achieve the 1.5°C goal by 2030, and about \$7.3 trillion per year is needed to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, for a total of about \$200 trillion.¹³ The reality, however, is that only about \$1 trillion in climate change funding was available in 2022, far short of what is needed.

Figure 14.3. Realities and Limitations of GHG Reduction Targets and Financing Needs



Source: UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2022* & CPI, *How Big is the Net-Zero Financing Gap?*

2024 is not expected to be a particularly banner year for reducing GHG emissions or raising needed funds. Rather, national security crises in traditional political and economic realms, such as ongoing wars and post-COVID-19 inflation and recession, are expected to significantly reduce interest and investment in addressing medium- and

12. UNEP, *The Emissions Gap Report 2022*.

13. CPI, *How Big is the Net-Zero Financing Gap?* (September 2023).

long-term security crises such as climate change. This is reflected in the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Global Risks Perception survey released in early 2023.¹⁴ The survey found that the global crises forecasted to have the greatest impact over the next two years are more likely to be driven by political and economic conflicts, while crises with the greatest impact over the next decade are related to climate change.

Figure 14.4. Short- and Long-term Outlook on Global Risks

2 years		10 years	
1	Cost-of-living crisis	1	Failure to mitigate climate change
2	Natural disasters and extreme weather events	2	Failure of climate-change adaptation
3	Geoeconomic confrontation	3	Natural disasters and extreme weather events
4	Failure to mitigate climate change	4	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
5	Erosion of social cohesion and societal polarization	5	Large-scale involuntary migration

Source: WEF, *The Global Risks Report 2023*.

The post COVID-19 pandemic era has not provided the conditions for international cooperation on global risks like climate change, as dominant powers have sought to build coalitions based on national interests and enhance their political and economic competitiveness by sharing exclusive benefits among allies. Climate change is a planetary crisis¹⁵ whose ultimate solution cannot be achieved by like-minded countries alone but requires the cooperation of the entire world. As exclusive cooperation mechanisms led by dominant powers are ineffective at dealing with transnational problems, the international community has established the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international climate cooperation system involving 197 countries, and agreed on the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2016 to achieve the UNFCCC goals.

The international framework for cooperation on climate change has both normative and legal status under the UN system, which cannot be compared to a self-interested international coalition with few participants. Nevertheless, dominant powers' ongoing political and economic coalition-building is likely to take priority at the national level over international cooperation on climate change because it prioritizes more direct and

14. WEF, *The Global Risks Report 2023*.

15. UNFCCC, "What is the Triple Planetary Crisis?" April 13, 2022; <https://unfccc.int/blog/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis>.

tangible national interests. It is also expected that the wars in Europe and the Middle East, as well as high inflation and recession, will continue in 2024, making it difficult for international climate cooperation to gain traction, as national responses to these crises tend to have priority.

In addition, it is expected that greater focus will be given to the issue of climate change “adaptation” at the national level, which requires relatively little international cooperation, as opposed to the issue of “mitigation,” which has received greater attention and funding to date. The fact that natural disasters that overwhelm existing response infrastructure are becoming more common will lead to an increase in investments tailored for the changing disaster environment, especially in developed countries. Progress toward better infrastructure may be slower in less developed countries because they need technical and financial assistance from the international community, while improving disaster-resilient infrastructure in the cities of developed countries will receive greater attention and investment domestically.

It is hard to tell which one would induce more effective international cooperation—a coalition focused on specific interests among a small number of participants or a global cooperation system in which all countries respond to global problems. An international coalition formed by a small number of countries for political and economic interests may seem loose and inefficient compared to a global cooperation system like the UNFCCC, with its pan-international organizations and binding norms and rules. If the positive outcomes of participation, however, have a punitive effect on non-participating countries, it may be more effective for achieving national interests than global cooperation systems. But, because such coalitions are led by dominant countries, consideration should be given to the sustainability of the coalition and its diplomatic relations to non-participating countries.

In an environment where global climate cooperation regimes based on liberalism, and political and economic coalitions based on realism and mercantilism coexist, countries need to make more sophisticated strategic decisions. Countries like South Korea, moreover, which are highly competitive with their neighbors and sensitive to changes in international markets, will need to ensure that their participation in coalitions for geopolitical or geoeconomic security will not conflict with their contributions to global partnerships, including international climate cooperation.

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INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY OUTLOOK

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Coalition Building

Contributors

Introduction		Dr. CHOI Kang	President, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Northeast Asia		Dr. CHA Du Hyeogn	Principal Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
North Korea		Dr. GO Myong-Hyun	Senior Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
The United States		Dr. Peter K. LEE	Research Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
China		Dr. LEE Dong Gyu	Research Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Japan		Dr. CHOI Eunmi	Research Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Russia		Dr. LEE Sang-Joon	Professor, Kookmin University
The Middle East		Dr. JANG Ji-Hyang	Senior Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
ASEAN		Dr. LEE Jaehyon	Senior Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Europe		Dr. CHOI Jinwoo	Professor, Hanyang University
Cyberspace		Dr. SHIN Sohyun	Associate Research Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Space		Dr. YANG Uk	Research Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Economic Security		Dr. YEON Wonho	Head, Economic Security Team, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy
Climate Change		Dr. CHOI Hyeonjung	Senior Fellow, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

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