

FORUM



CRACKDOWN

The Battle for Democracy in Myanmar

PLUS

Interviews With the
Palau President &
Japan Self-Defense
Forces Chief of Staff

Human Rights and Freedoms

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ABOUT THE COVER:

A protester makes the three-finger salute with the Sule Pagoda and police officers in the background during a demonstration on the streets of Yangon to protest Myanmar's military coup and the arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. REUTERS



Dear Readers,

Welcome to *Indo-Pacific Defense FORUM's* issue on human rights and freedoms.

All nations in the Indo-Pacific have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which establishes the foundation for freedom, justice, and peace in the world. As signatories of the declaration, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, nations agree that preserving human rights is critical for ensuring peace, prosperity, and stability in the region and world.

As the Indo-Pacific advances as a warfighting theater, the requirement for all levers of national power to think, act, and operate differently will be increasingly important. Even more, seizing the initiative from our competitors to prevent them from achieving their objectives will serve to safeguard our way of life. Deterring malign behavior in the region requires the creation of a lethal, combined joint force, distributed west of the international dateline that can be protected, sustained, and capable of fully integrating with all of our allies and partners.

This malign behavior can take many forms, but one example that threatens the established international order is the violation of basic human rights. Holding those accountable who violate these rights is imperative.

This issue of *FORUM* highlights opportunities for the region to improve enforcement of human rights and encourage violators to change their behavior. After all, it is known that governments and militaries that respect human rights are also inclined to support the rules-based international order that the United States and its allies and partners have preserved for decades. This support includes promoting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

The anchor feature of this edition explores the importance of universal human rights standards in enforcing international commitments. The piece provides an overview of how leaders of some Indo-Pacific nations, such as Myanmar (Burma), North Korea, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), have failed to live up to these agreed-upon standards and why this matters. The features that follow illuminate such failures and their ramifications.

In an article reflecting on his experiences on the Korean Peninsula, retired Republic of Korea Army Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun contrasts how government structure, human rights, and freedoms differ between North and South Korea, with the South emerging as not only the clear winner of the Korean War but also of the peace dividends of its resulting democracy. Next, Dr. Miemie Winn Byrd, a Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies professor, analyzes the Myanmar military coup and the response of its citizens who are demanding democracy and that the nation's elected leaders be restored to power.

Dr. Sean Roberts of George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs shares an excerpt from his book, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*. It details how the PRC uses its so-called war on terror to justify settler colonization, ethnic cleansing, and cultural genocide of the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups. A related article examines the PRC's brutal campaign to assimilate ethnic groups in Inner Mongolia and Tibet.

Other articles address additional aspects of human rights and freedoms as they relate to militaries and security organizations. Regional militaries and security organizations play key roles in addressing these challenges to ensure all people in the Indo-Pacific enjoy human rights and freedoms as defined by international law.

I hope these articles encourage regional conversations on these pressing issues. I welcome your comments. Please contact the *FORUM* staff at ipdf@ipdefenseforum.com to share your thoughts.

All the best,

J.C. AQUILINO
Admiral, U.S. Navy
Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command

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LT. GEN. IN-BUM CHUN retired in 2016 from the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army, where he served as commander of the 27th Infantry Division and of the ROK's Special Warfare Command. He also served as the deputy chief of staff for the ROK/U.S. Combined Forces Command and as the senior member of the United Nations Military Armistice Commission. He is a visiting fellow in foreign policy at several think tanks, including the Brookings Institution. Among his awards, Chun received the Hwa-Rang Combat Medal and the U.S. Bronze Star for his service in Iraq in 2005. His research focuses on national security, the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. *Featured on Page 14*



DR. MIEMIE WINN BYRD, a professor at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, specializes in U.S.-Myanmar relations, Indo-Pacific economics, organizational development and adult learning. Her work focuses on civil-military operations, interagency collaboration and corporate financial accounting standards. She received a bachelor's degree in economics and accounting from Claremont McKenna College and holds a master's degree in business administration from the University of Hawaii. She earned her doctorate in education leadership from the University of Southern California. *Featured on Page 18*



DR. SEAN ROBERTS is director of the international development studies program at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. A cultural anthropologist with extensive applied experience in international development work, Roberts conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Uyghur people of Central Asia and China during the 1990s. He has written extensively on this community, including his 2020 book *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*. His present research is focused on China's development of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region as well as on democracy development in former Soviet Central Asia. *Featured on Page 24*



DR. GERRIT VAN DER WEES is a former diplomat who served in the Dutch government from 1982 through 2005, including seven years at the Netherlands Embassy in Washington, D.C. From 1980 through 2016, he served as chief-editor of *Taiwan Communicque*, a bimonthly journal chronicling Taiwan's transition to democracy. After retiring from the Netherlands government, he worked for the Formosan Association for Public Affairs from 2005 to 2016. He currently teaches the history of Taiwan at George Mason University and current issues in East Asia at George Washington University. *Featured on Page 38*

Join the Discussion

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Indo-Pacific Defense FORUM caters to military and security personnel in the Indo-Pacific region. A product of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the quarterly magazine provides high-quality, in-depth content on topics that impact security efforts across the region — from counterterrorism to international cooperation and natural disasters.

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U.K., U.S. BLACKLIST FIRMS CONTROLLED BY MYANMAR'S MILITARY

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The United Kingdom and the United States imposed sanctions on conglomerates controlled by Myanmar's (Burma's) military following its February 2021 coup and deadly crackdown, with Washington calling it a response to "abhorrent violence and abuses."

The U.S. Treasury Department said its sanctions targeted Myanma Economic Holdings Public Co. Ltd. (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corp. Ltd. The U.K. imposed similar sanctions on MEHL, citing the military's serious human rights violations against Rohingya Muslims.

The sanctions against the entities,

which control big sections of Myanmar's economy, were the most significant penalties levied to date against the military's business interests, which range from beer and cigarettes to telecommunications, mining and real estate.

Shortly after the March 2021 announcement, the U.S. Department of State condemned Myanmar authorities' use of lethal force against demonstrators, which had left hundreds of civilians dead. (Pictured: Myanmar civilians protest the military coup during a candlelight vigil in April 2021 in Yangon.)

"These abhorrent and brutal acts against children, one as young as 7 years old who was shot and killed in her home while sitting on her father's lap, further demonstrate the horrific nature of the Burmese [Myanmar] military regime's assault on its own people," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

Washington's move freezes any assets held by the entities in the U.S. and was the latest in a series of sanctions targeting Myanmar's central bank and top generals. It also prohibits U.S. companies or citizens from trading or conducting financial transactions with the Myanmar firms. Reuters

HONG KONG, TAIWAN

IOC Welcomes Teams at Beijing 2022 Winter Games



Hong Kong and Taiwan will be able to send teams to Beijing for the 2022 Winter Olympics in February just as for any other Games despite any ongoing political tension with China, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said in early August 2021.

Beijing was awarded the Games in 2015. "They (China) have been extremely clear in 2015 that the Olympic Charters would be respected," IOC Olympic Games director Christophe Dubi said. "The host city contract is extremely precise about what is expected. We see absolutely no sign that it will be any different. Everybody welcome."

Taiwan competes at the Olympics as Chinese Taipei. Hong Kong also has a separate national Olympic Committee from China identified as Hong Kong, China.

There have been concerns that any Olympic participation for Taiwan's Olympic Committee in the Chinese capital could be problematic. Hong Kong is battling to retain a wide degree of autonomy after the territory returned from British to Chinese rule in 1997. Critics say those freedoms are being trampled, an assertion that authorities in Beijing and Hong Kong reject.

The U.S. announced a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics in December 2021, citing "genocide and crimes against humanity," including mass detention and sterilization of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang in northwest China. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom announced boycotts soon after the U.S. move. Reuters

SCIENCE AGENCY RAMPS UP Security on Foreign Partnerships

Australia's science agency will screen collaborations with foreign partners for national security risks using a new digital tool that vets by country, looking for political interference and human rights abuses.

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) outlined the increased security measures to a parliamentary intelligence and security committee in March 2021. The changes come against the backdrop of increasing diplomatic tensions between Australia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Nima Torabi, CSIRO's executive manager of security and reliance, said the agency had "robust and regular contact" with national security agencies in the past year, leading it to "uplift security."

The digital security tool, under development with the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), was expected to be in use by May 2021, Torabi said.

The ASIO also announced that the government was identifying critical and emerging technologies that will

be subject to restrictions on foreign collaboration.

The Australian Research Council said the ASIO, along with the federal Department of Home Affairs, had also increased vetting of government-funded projects at the country's universities.

The research council's manager, Kylie Emery, said agencies were checking the foreign political party affiliations of funding applicants. The council rejected five applications on national security grounds in December 2020 for the first time. "The ground is changing dramatically," Emery said.

Several university officials said they plan to diversify the source of international students when borders reopen after the coronavirus pandemic because they were too economically reliant on the PRC.

University of Queensland Chancellor Peter Varghese, the former head of the government's foreign affairs department, said there had been "a ramping up of China's coercive behavior and a more blatant use of economic leverage." Reuters

Australia's science agency, using a new security tool, will screen foreign partners before they can collaborate on research such as that conducted at its Radio Telescope Observatory in Parkes, New South Wales.



PACIFIC OPERATIONAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

7-10 March 2022

Faster Together – Accelerating the S&T Community to the Speed of Innovation

The United States Indo-Pacific Command and the National Defense Industrial Association are hosting the 23rd Pacific Operational Science and Technology (POST) Conference from March 7-10, 2022, at the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu, Hawaii, and at Marine Corps Base Hawaii. This premier international event brings together the Indo-Pacific region's foremost experts in science, technology and security to better understand and successfully address operational issues and challenges. Moreover, this conference enables technology providers across the Indo-Pacific region to recommend near-term solutions to such challenges.

The POST 2022 conference theme is "Faster Together – Accelerating the S&T Community to the Speed of Innovation" to encourage international participants to contribute toward a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The accelerated advancement of science and technology in recent years has changed the region's competitive landscape and security environment. As the U.S. military works with its regional partners, the joint community needs to innovate faster with a sense of urgency to develop, experiment and apply new technologies and capabilities to maintaining peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

For more information, visit www.NDIA.org/POST





PEACE DIGNITY *and* EQUALITY

Nations highlight universal human rights standards
to enforce international commitments

FORUM STAFF

NO matter who they are, no matter where they live, all individuals want to be treated fairly and with respect, live free from violence and discrimination, and have opportunities and choices available to them that improve their quality of life. In essence, these are basic human rights.

“Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language or any other status,” according to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). “We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.”

Human rights are so important that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in Paris in 1948, set a record in 1999 for being the most translated document in the world. The

preamble of the UDHR sets forth the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world as inalienable rights of “all members of the human family.” Article 1 of the UDHR emphasizes another foundation of human rights: being treated with dignity. The declaration also forbids slavery and servitude, forced marriage, arbitrary arrest, and interference with privacy and correspondence. It avows that everyone has the right to own property, claim asylum, express opinions and obtain an education.

All but eight countries, all of them outside the Indo-Pacific, have signed the UDHR. That doesn’t mean all is well in regard to human rights across the region. Take, for example, North Korea.

“For over 70 years ... the North Korean government has been oppressing its people and isolating them from the world. Systemic denials of basic rights have caused widespread, sustained and severe poverty,” said John Sifton, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, an international

“Our environment is changing in ways that we do not altogether understand, with consequences that we cannot fully foresee. Yet, human rights remain our most sure and universal point of reference.”

– United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
2018-21 management plan

nongovernmental organization (NGO) headquartered in New York City. “The current situation has turned especially worrying. In the context of COVID-19, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un now appears to be using the pandemic to further entrench his grip on power by installing harsh new controls on the distribution of food and products, stopping all information flows into the country and entirely closing its border with China.”

Sifton made his remarks during an April 2021 U.S. congressional hearing before the bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, which was created “to promote, defend and advocate internationally recognized human rights norms in a nonpartisan manner, both within and outside of Congress, as enshrined in the UDHR and other relevant human rights instruments.”

Other challenges persist where North Korea is concerned. “United Nations entities operating in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea remain confronted with a severe lack of access to data and information, which continues to present challenges in assessing humanitarian needs and providing aid to the most vulnerable persons,” according to a U.N. report on human rights in North Korea.

Nevertheless, the international community continues fighting to enforce human rights in North Korea and elsewhere, pressuring violators to change their behavior.

“Our environment is changing in ways that we do not altogether understand, with consequences that we cannot fully foresee,” according to the OHCHR 2018-21 management plan. “Yet, human rights remain our most sure and universal point of reference. They can help us set a course towards inclusion, sustainable prosperity, justice, dignity, freedom and sustained peace.”

HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES DURING COVID-19

The NGO Amnesty International reported that COVID-19 exacerbated the human rights situation in many Indo-Pacific nations. Governments, it said, used the pandemic to “muzzle critical voices and unduly limit the right to freedom of expression, including the right to receive and impart information on COVID-19.”

Even before the pandemic, some Indo-Pacific governments had already begun taking actions that repressed human rights, according to Amnesty International.

“Across Southeast Asia, repressive governments entrenched themselves further, silenced their opponents,

muzzled the media and shrank civic space to the point where, in many countries, even participation in a peaceful protest can trigger arrest,” Amnesty International said in its 2019 annual report. “In South Asia, governments appeared anxious to keep up, innovating new ways to perpetuate old patterns of repression — especially through the introduction of draconian laws that punish dissent online.”

Since the pandemic’s onslaught, Amnesty International has noted that many governments in the region continue mounting attempts to undermine the operations of human rights NGOs and to prevent human rights defenders from exposing violations.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has subjected human rights defenders and activists to harassment, intimidation and torture, often charging them with vaguely worded offenses such as “leaking state secrets,” according to Amnesty International.

“Their trials were routinely held in secret, and they were deprived of their right to access legal counsel,” according to “Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The State of the World’s Human Rights,” published in April 2021. “Many lawyers of these human rights defenders were denied their right to freedom of movement and were unable to meet with their clients and access case materials.”

The CCP has attempted to change the meaning of human rights to align with party ideology and practices. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in late February 2021 redefined human rights as focusing first on economic development and security and last on democracy and freedom, according to the online news magazine The Diplomat. CCP officials constantly emphasize economic growth over political rights to defend the CCP’s human rights record.

Dr. Li Wenliang, one of eight people who tried to spread information in late 2019 about the emerging virus before the People’s Republic of China (PRC) disclosed the outbreak, was reprimanded by the CCP after he messaged colleagues to wear personal protective equipment to avoid infection. He later died from COVID-19.

In Cambodia, authorities used the Law on Associations and NGOs to designate groups of human rights defenders as illegal. The law requires domestic and international NGOs to register and established quarterly reporting requirements to government officials.

In the PRC’s Inner Mongolia region, protests erupted in September 2020 over a new language policy that would convert the teaching requirements for some classes from

Mongolian to Mandarin Chinese. Hundreds of protesters were reportedly arrested for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” according to Amnesty International.

The NGO called on these Indo-Pacific governments to reverse course, address violence against human rights defenders and hold perpetrators accountable.

“It is crucial that human rights defenders are able to do their work free of punishment, reprisal or intimidation so that everyone can effectively enjoy all human rights,” Amnesty International said in its 2020/21 report.

ASEAN HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

The 10 member-states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reaffirmed their commitment to the UDHR through the adoption in 2012 of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD). The ASEAN document — patterned after the UDHR — outlines nine general principles:

1. All persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscious and should act towards one another in a spirit of humanity.
2. Every person is entitled to the rights and freedoms set

forth herein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, gender, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic status, birth, disability or other status.

3. Every person has the right of recognition everywhere as a person before the law. Every person is equal before the law. Every person is entitled without discrimination to protection of the law.
4. The rights of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, and vulnerable and marginalized groups are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
5. Every person has the right to an effective and enforceable remedy, to be determined by a court or other competent authorities, for acts violating the rights granted to that person by the constitution or by law.
6. The enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms must be balanced with the performance of corresponding duties as every person has responsibilities to all other individuals, the community and the society where one lives. It is ultimately the primary responsibility of all ASEAN member-states to



A member of Turkey's Uyghur community denounces China's human rights abuses in its Xinjiang region during a protest in Istanbul in March 2021.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

7. All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. All human rights and fundamental freedoms in this Declaration must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. At the same time, the realization of human rights must be considered in the regional and national context bearing in mind different political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds.
8. The human rights and fundamental freedoms of every person shall be exercised with due regard to the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. The exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others, and to meet the just requirements of national security, public order, public health, public safety, public morality, as well as the general welfare of the peoples in a democratic society.



Photos of refugees helped by the North Korean Refugees Human Rights Association are displayed in Seoul, South Korea. REUTERS

9. In the realization of the human rights and freedoms contained in this declaration, the principles of impartiality, objectivity, nonselective, nondiscrimination, nonconfrontation and avoidance of double standards and politicization, should always be upheld. The process of such realization shall take into account peoples' participation, inclusivity and the need for accountability.

In addition to the general principles, the AHRD includes detailed declarations on civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, the right to development, the right to peace, and cooperation in the

promotion and protection of human rights.

The Philippines invoked the AHRD in April 2021 to remind ASEAN member Myanmar (Burma) of its international commitments as the Myanmar military junta's hijacking of the elected government raged on. During a meeting of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, Philippine representative Jaime Victor Ledda called on Myanmar to adhere "to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms," *The Philippine Star* newspaper reported. An editorial the newspaper published two days later acknowledged that the Philippines had been organized under authoritarian leaders, calling it "hardly an exemplar of democratic ideals."

"The Philippines in particular has been under fire for gross human rights violations attributed to security forces under" President Rodrigo Duterte's administration, *The Philippine Star* editorial read. "Yet, the killings in Myanmar are egregious; they deserve regional condemnation and must stop."

Significant improvements have occurred regarding human rights in Southeast Asia, and respect for civil liberties has enhanced development in the region, the newspaper noted. The Myanmar junta has seen such benefits. "It should not derail the progress with its ongoing great leap backward," *The Philippine Star* said.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

U.S. President Joe Biden has committed to putting human rights at the center of U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

"And that's a commitment that I and the entire Department of State take very seriously," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in March 2021 as he released the "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." "We will bring to bear all the tools of our diplomacy to defend human rights and hold accountable perpetrators of abuse."

Blinken said no hierarchy exists that makes some rights more important than others. All human rights, he said, are equal.

"Human rights are also interdependent," Blinken said. "If you can't assemble peacefully, how can you organize a union or an opposition party or exercise your freedom of religion or belief? If you're denied equal access to a job or an education because of the color of your skin or your gender identity, how can you attain health and well-being for yourself and your family?"

The State Department report on human rights revealed that trends continue to head in the wrong direction, Blinken said.

"Too many people continued to suffer under brutal conditions in 2020," he said. "In China, government authorities committed genocide against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and crimes against humanity, including imprisonment, torture, enforced sterilization



Human rights activists hold a candlelight vigil in Kathmandu, Nepal, to protest the military coup in Myanmar. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Mongolians demonstrate near the capital of Ulaanbaatar to protest Chinese policies in Inner Mongolia, where officials proposed converting teaching requirements for some classes from Mongolian to Mandarin Chinese. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



and persecution against Uyghurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups.”

Blinken has repeatedly condemned widespread human rights violations and violence in China and abuses by the military junta in Myanmar. The United States remains committed to working with its allies and partners to hold accountable the perpetrators of such abhorrent acts.

“Some have argued that it’s not worth it for the United States to speak up forcefully for human rights, or that we should highlight abuse only in select countries, and only in a way that directly advances our national interests,” Blinken said. “I believe those people miss the point. Standing up for human rights everywhere is in America’s interests.”

Countries that welcome dissent, punish corrupt

officials and respect labor laws are more likely to be peaceful, prosperous and stable. They’re also more likely to have growing economies, Blinken said.

“And governments that respect human rights are more likely to support the rules-based international order that the United States and our allies have built and invested in for decades and decades,” Blinken said. “In addition to all of these reasons, there’s a simpler one: Standing for people’s freedom and dignity honors America’s most sacred values. At our best, we stand for freedom and justice for all. Not just here at home, but around the world.” □

A Tale of **Two Koreas**

How government structure, human rights and freedoms differ between North and South

LT. GEN. (RET.) IN-BUM CHUN/REPUBLIC OF KOREA ARMY

The United Nations defines human rights as “rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.” According to the Oxford dictionary, “freedom” can be defined as the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint. Merriam-Webster extends the concept “to the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action.”

Within the Indo-Pacific region, no nation is perfect, but there are two ways in which nations view human rights and freedom. One is to strive for the above-mentioned definitions and ideals of human rights and freedom, and the other is to define its own view of human rights and freedom that serves the interests of the ruler. As a Korean born in the 1950s, I have experienced both versions and lived next to a very dangerous neighbor: North Korea.

Evolution of South Korea

When I was a teenager, South Korea had a curfew from midnight to 4 a.m. Korean newspapers were monitored and censored. Magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Time* were often missing pages, and sentences were erased with black ink. Police regularly searched your bag, and you always looked over your shoulder if you made a critical comment about the government. Labor unions were oppressed, and political freedoms were limited to say the least. Some people prayed that the United States would come to

Korea's rescue, and some blamed the U.S. for not coming to Korea's rescue.

In the 1980s and 1990s, something extraordinary happened. The South Korean junta loosened its grip on society. The curfew was gone, the economy grew and political changes occurred. After eight years of rule, President Chun Doo-Hwan transferred power to Roh Tae-Woo. Although Roh was a former career military general, a power transition occurred that eventually led to the election in 1993 of Kim Young-Sam, a career politician. Since the 1980s, Korea has become a free and often chaotic democracy that strives to reach the ideals of freedom, democracy and human rights. The political transformation has also brought economic development that has given Koreans wealth and prosperity, which contributes to regional development and prosperity. South Korea is trying to resolve the wealth gap and the inequalities of rapid social change. Although I am concerned about some of Korea's choices, I have no doubt that the values of freedom and human rights can only be achieved through such a process.

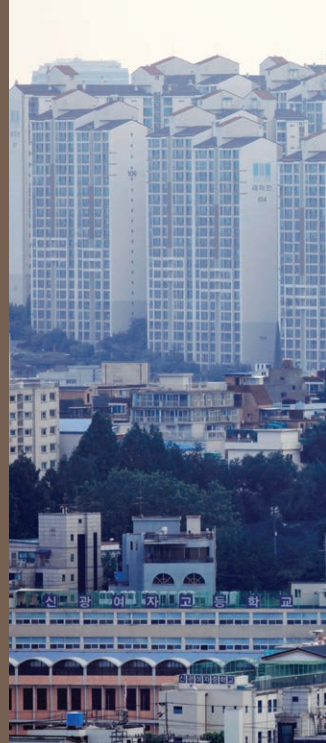




Barbed wire surrounds the Imjingak Pavilion near the Demilitarized Zone in Paju, South Korea. Some Koreans place ribbons on the military fence with messages calling for peace and reunification. GETTY IMAGES



Currency traders watch monitors at a bank in Seoul in April 2021. South Korea's economy ranks as the world's 10th largest and dwarfs North Korea's economy. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Freedom should have no limits beyond mutual respect for others. Based on this assumption, South Korea shows how a society can evolve rapidly into a free society, albeit with inherent dangers. It also shows how a secure and stable environment enabled such an evolution to be possible.

North Korea in Contrast

Meanwhile, just 64 kilometers north of Seoul is North Korea. The infamous Kim Il Sung, who led North Korea from its founding in 1948, started the Korean War. Despite defeat, Kim maneuvered his failure into a political coup during which he executed all political adversaries and their families. Kim created a cult following much like Mao and Stalin, but he was far better at it. Religious doctrine and Confucian values helped him perfect his ideology, and his dictatorship seemed to have an edge because the North's economy was able to achieve a higher standard of living than South Korea's economy in the 1960s and 1970s. A dictatorship can concentrate resources and manpower to achieve quick results, but it can never achieve the full potential of a society. This is evidenced on the Korean Peninsula in the contrast between North and South.

The first mistake Kim made was to identify the U.S. as a threat and to portray South Korea as a puppet of the Americans. Although it served his political objectives, it was at the price of future opportunities with the U.S. It also caused North Korea to invest in a military at the expense of its economy. Even to this day a military-first policy is at the core of North Korea.

Revealing Criteria

To have an objective view of North Korean human rights and freedom, consider the United Nations' findings and the criteria the U.N. applies in its analysis.

The first criterion is public execution. To control its population, North Korea orders people to attend executions, including those by hanging, firing squad and burning, imposed for a range of offenses. Regarding firing squads, it seems the type of offense determines the size of the squad, from three to nine or more. Those who commit the ultimate crime of betraying the "great leader" are subjected to a volley from a large-caliber machine gun. This was the fate of Jang Sung-tak, the uncle of North Korea's current dictator, Kim Jong Un.

Second is the operation of concentration camps. Those committed to the camps, whether with or without trial, no longer are part of society and do not exist in official records. This leaves them subject to arbitrary execution. No outside contact is allowed. No food or medical care is provided, which means the inmates must fend for themselves. Twelve hours of forced labor a day is the norm, plus at least an hour of political education. North Korea denies the existence of these camps and therefore leaves no hope for their improvement.

Third is the categorization of the population. All citizens are subject to a social system known as Sung-Bun, which divides North Koreans into three categories: core, basic and complex. After the Korean War, Kim Il Sung implemented the three classes. This caste system determines an individual's prospects in almost every area of life, including education, occupation, military service, membership in the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, marriage and even food supply. The key factors determining class are: the socioeconomic background of an individual's ancestors at the time of the Korean Peninsula's liberation in 1945; the ancestors' activities during the Korean War (1950-1953); and whether an individual had relatives



South Korea, including its capital, Seoul, has prospered and emerged as a major industrial nation since the Korean War, while North Korea still struggles to feed its people. REUTERS

“First, they came for the communists. And I did not speak out because I was not a communist. Then they came for the socialists. And I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists. And I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews. And I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me. And there was no one left to speak out for me.”

– Martin Niemöller, German theologian and Lutheran pastor

in China or South Korea. Of course, being connected to the outside world is bad for an individual’s status.

Among these three classes, the most privileged is the core, which makes up 28% of the population. The core includes professional revolutionaries, descendants of “war heroes” who died working or fighting for the North, and peasants or those descended from peasant families. The largest group, which has little upward mobility, is the basic or wavering class. This class comprises about 45% of the population. It includes people who previously lived in China or South Korea, those with relatives who went to the South and families of small-scale merchants, among others. The complex (hostile) class is the most restricted, with little access to social benefits. This class is 27% of the population. It includes descendants of landlords, capitalists, religious people, political prisoners or anyone else judged to be anti-party.

The fourth U.N. criterion is the absence of freedom of movement. In North Korea it is nearly impossible to move outside one’s birth province or city. Lack of transportation is one issue, but even if buses, trains and air travel were available, a North Korean can only travel outside his or her district with a permit, which is difficult to gain.

Fifth is the absence of religious freedom. During the Japanese occupation of Korea in the first half of the 20th century, Pyongyang, now the North Korean capital, had the most Christians on the peninsula. Although North Korea’s constitution guarantees religious freedom, in reality, there is only one god, Kim Jong Un.

The sixth criterion is the right to survival. The regime does not have the ability to feed its people, who are left to fend for themselves. From the mid-to-late 1990s, nearly 1 million North Koreans starved to death, yet the regime did nothing to provide relief. It shows the cruelty and the resilience of the North Korean system. Because of its

unique system that combines Sung-Bun, concentration camps and cruel public executions, North Korea can withstand such horror and survive.

Finally, there is no freedom of choice for education or occupation. The Workers’ Party determines every citizen’s future by the Sung-Bun class into which he or she was born — or the size of a bribe. North Korean society does not provide an equal opportunity to its people. All it really achieves is to serve the Kim family.

Negative Consequences

North Korea has become a model for dictators and a handbook for dictatorships. This is the ultimate challenge for the Indo-Pacific, as well as for the world. If the North Korean leadership endures, then others might emulate its methods for controlling its population.

Although the North Korean leadership states that it must have nuclear weapons to defend itself from foreign threats, it is most probable that the regime needs weapons of mass destruction to control its own people and to protect itself from internal threats. That is why denuclearization is unlikely under the Kim regime. It also highlights the danger of nuclear weapons in the hands of such an absolute dictatorship.

North Korea’s absence of freedom and its horrific human rights record cannot be neglected. North Korea contends that it is a matter of culture and that North Korea has a different standard of freedom and human rights that is unique to its people’s needs. Sometimes visitors to North Korea witness happiness from ignorance and brainwashing and think that it might actually be true, but even those who believe this are seldom seen volunteering to live in North Korea.

Human rights and freedom define the very nature of free societies. That is why not only North Korea’s, but all nations’ human rights and freedom matter. □



MYANMAR'S UNREST

**Implications of the Military Coup on
Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific**

DR. MIEMIE WINN BYRD/DANIEL K. INOUE ASIA-PACIFIC CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES
PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORUM ILLUSTRATION



After Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in November 2010, many people feared the possibility of a U-turn by the Myanmar (Burmese) military. This fear materialized February 1, 2021, when the military seized control during the dawn hours and arrested civilian leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, including the nation's democratically elected leader.

Since then, the country has devolved into chaos, and people have risen up in mass demonstrations to demand that democracy is restored and the results of the November 2020 elections are respected. The NLD won the election in a landslide, as it did in 2015. As protests spread across the country, the Myanmar armed and security forces unleashed their signature brutality on peaceful protesters and arrested people at home in night raids. In less than three months, over 700 civilians were killed including by inhumane torture at the hands of the security forces and through its use of weapons. The military had arrested 8,867 protesters, with more than 7,196 still detained, through October 11, 2021. About 1,164 people had been killed. COVID-19 spread rapidly through Myanmar, and the United Nations estimated half of the 54 million population would be infected by mid-August. The military regime is unable and unwilling to collect accurate data on COVID-19 deaths.

As the international community voiced justifiable outrage over the human rights violations in Myanmar, the People's Republic of China (PRC) used the crisis to further its economic, foreign policy and military interests by throwing a lifeline to the embattled military junta.

China's Quest for Control

The military coup put the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a difficult position. The PRC found Myanmar's civilian government led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to be more reliable than the Myanmar military because the leaders prioritized poverty alleviation and job creation, which aligned with the PRC's One Belt, One Road scheme. Beijing was in the process of permanently securing bilateral ties with the civilian-led government when the coup occurred.

Although the PRC preferred dealing with the civilian government, at "the end of the day, the Chinese believe that the Burmese [Myanmar] military holds the ultimate power because they have weapons. They have the guns. They are not really questioning the Burmese [Myanmar] military's capability to prevail in the end," Yun Sun, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, told National Public Radio. Beijing's pragmatism and the transactional nature of its relationship with Myanmar will rule the day. The PRC refused to condemn the coup and blocked meaningful United Nations Security Council resolutions against the military junta.

The PRC has viewed Myanmar as a land bridge to the Indian Ocean. Therefore, safeguarding and controlling the Myanmar corridor remains of vital importance for Beijing's foreign policy. This recognition and ambition dates to the early Chinese explorers, who searched for a route from China's landlocked provinces (such as the modern-day Yunnan area) via Myanmar to the sea.

Additionally, Myanmar provides a strategic alternative

The PRC has viewed Myanmar as a land bridge to the Indian Ocean. Therefore, safeguarding and controlling the Myanmar corridor remains of vital importance for Beijing's foreign policy.



to the PRC's Malacca dilemma. China's dependency on the narrow Malacca Strait, through which most of its shipping and energy supplies travel, creates a significant vulnerability in its strategic competition with the United States. Beijing sees unfettered access to the Myanmar corridor as a key to remedy this vulnerability. Furthermore, having access to over 2,000 kilometers of Myanmar coastline (strategically located at the western entrance to the Malacca Strait) with direct access to the Indian Ocean would give China an enormous commercial advantage over its competitors.

If this comes to fruition, the PRC will be able to control the strait's eastern portion via the artificial features it has built in the South China Sea and the western part via Myanmar. After the U.S. Congress passed the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act, which levied heavy sanctions on the previous military regime in 2003, the PRC used the opportunity to pressure Myanmar to allow it to build the deep seaport known as Kyaukphyu on Myanmar's western

coast and an oil and gas dual pipeline from the port to the PRC's Yunnan province. This was a significant breakthrough for the PRC, delivering the basis of a vital strategic alternative to the Malacca dilemma for the first time.

Myanmar Lost

After a relatively short period of Western reengagement from 2012-17, Myanmar again landed on the West's pariah list. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was blamed for the military's ruthless assault on the Rohingya Muslim minority, and international sanctions that further isolated the country soon followed.

The PRC viewed the condemnation of the Myanmar military's atrocities as an opportunity. It regained influence and access to Myanmar with a considerable boost from Western countries' concerted pressure on Myanmar. A clear indicator was CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's visit to Myanmar in January 2020 on the eve of the International Court of Justice ordering Myanmar



Hundreds of motorcyclists in Mandalay protest the Myanmar military coup in March 2021.

to prevent the genocide of the Rohingyas. Beijing's desire to establish a back door through Myanmar to the Indian Ocean was getting closer to becoming a reality.

Then came the military coup early on February 1, 2021, ending Myanmar's experiment with democracy, as the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi-led NLD prepared to take its seats in the Parliament that morning. Election fraud was the official reason given for the coup. The West's criticism had damaged Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's ability to counter the military. The original reason for the military's willingness to flirt with democracy in 2010 and tolerate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was its need to reduce dependence on the PRC. Military leaders believed that by releasing her and going down the path of "disciplined democracy," Myanmar could attract Western engagement to diversify from the PRC.

However, when Western support waned for Daw Aung

San Suu Kyi and the PRC stepped back in, the military saw the end of her usefulness and of the pretense for democracy. Despite previous military regimes allowing construction of the Chinese dual pipeline and dams and the depletion of forests while also giving away rights to much of Myanmar's land to the PRC's extractive industries, the current military perceived that it would be superior to the civilian-led government at managing the PRC. Additionally, the military leadership handsomely benefited from such China-backed projects in the past, while they did not under a democratic government.

Protesters at an April 2021 demonstration in Yangon, Myanmar, criticize China's support of the military coup.



As the anti-coup protests continued, the military brought back its strategy from previous uprisings: Jail the leaders, beat protesters into submission, create fear in the populace and clear troublemakers out of cities and into border areas or out of the country, if possible. Once the cities were clear, the military would consolidate its efforts and conduct clearance operations in the border areas. This strategy worked before and the military followed the same path in 2021.

Pro-Democracy and Anti-Coup Movement

Three days after the coup, the Myanmar people, led by the young adults of Generation Z, took to the streets to protest. They brandished the three-finger salute, a symbol of resistance made famous by *The Hunger Games* movies. Millions of people in cities, towns and villages publicly and peacefully asked for the military junta to respect their



Anti-coup protesters flash three-fingered salutes, a symbol of resistance, as they gather to pray for those killed during a protest against the Myanmar military in Yangon in April 2021.

votes and restore democracy. Although many carried NLD flags and wore logos, the focus was not on party politics but on restoring the democratic system and denouncing military authoritarianism. Many civil servants went on strike in the form of a civil disobedience movement, initially led by the health care and education sectors before spreading across the entire bureaucracy and even parts of the private sector, bringing the economy to a halt.

As nationwide protests ensued, the Myanmar military and security forces deployed lethal tactics and conducted nightly raids in residential areas. The indiscriminate killings and arrests awakened a sense of injustice and anger among the populace. “Opposition to the junta is deep and widespread. I have never seen anything like it,” reported Tom Andrews, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar. It has “unified the country to a degree that I have never seen, people of all ages, all ethnicities, all social and economic groups, united in opposition.”

Uniting Ethnic Groups

The security forces’ relentless onslaught caused protesters in urban areas to flee to border areas controlled by ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Many of them sought training and arms from the EAOs to counter the security forces’ brutality.

Over a dozen of Myanmar’s parliamentary members, lawmakers and cabinet members escaped arrest during the first week of February 2021. This group formed the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), with many of its members operating from EAO-controlled areas under the protection of the EAOs. The crisis created extraordinary cooperation and unity among the Burman ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups, as Andrews noted.

Larger armed groups such as the Karen National Liberation Army, the militia under the Karen National Union, and the Kachin Independence Army, the militia under the Kachin Independence Organization, went from being seen as separatist insurgent groups to legitimate self-defense forces by the Burman majority. EAO combined forces are estimated to total over 80,000.

After eight months, efforts to counter the military regime and restore democracy had not waned. The CRPH also formed an inclusive government, the National Unity Government (NUG), with an unprecedented level of ethnic representation in its leadership positions. The NUG’s main line of effort is to lead the process of restoring democracy and building a “federal democratic union.” At the ground level, unparalleled cooperation between the EAOs

and People’s Defense Force, coupled with explicit political support from the Myanmar majority, is creating formidable alliances against the military regime. The military’s capacity is being stretched as it faces a high number of defections, personnel killed-in-action and COVID-19 deaths. Its sustainability is being questioned for the first time in post-colonial Myanmar’s history.

Future Prospects

The outcome of the crisis is difficult to predict with so many variables and actors. However, after a decade of democracy and freedom, protesters have more capabilities, awareness and networks throughout the world than Myanmar citizens did in the past. They can mobilize people and resources domestically and internationally to support their efforts. The unprecedented cooperation among ethnic and religious groups is also changing the dynamics in favor of the



Bicyclists in Jakarta, Indonesia, rally in April 2021 against the military coup in Myanmar.

people. Women are playing larger and leading roles in the pro-democracy and anti-coup activities. The Myanmar diaspora is providing technical knowledge, political advocacy and economic support.

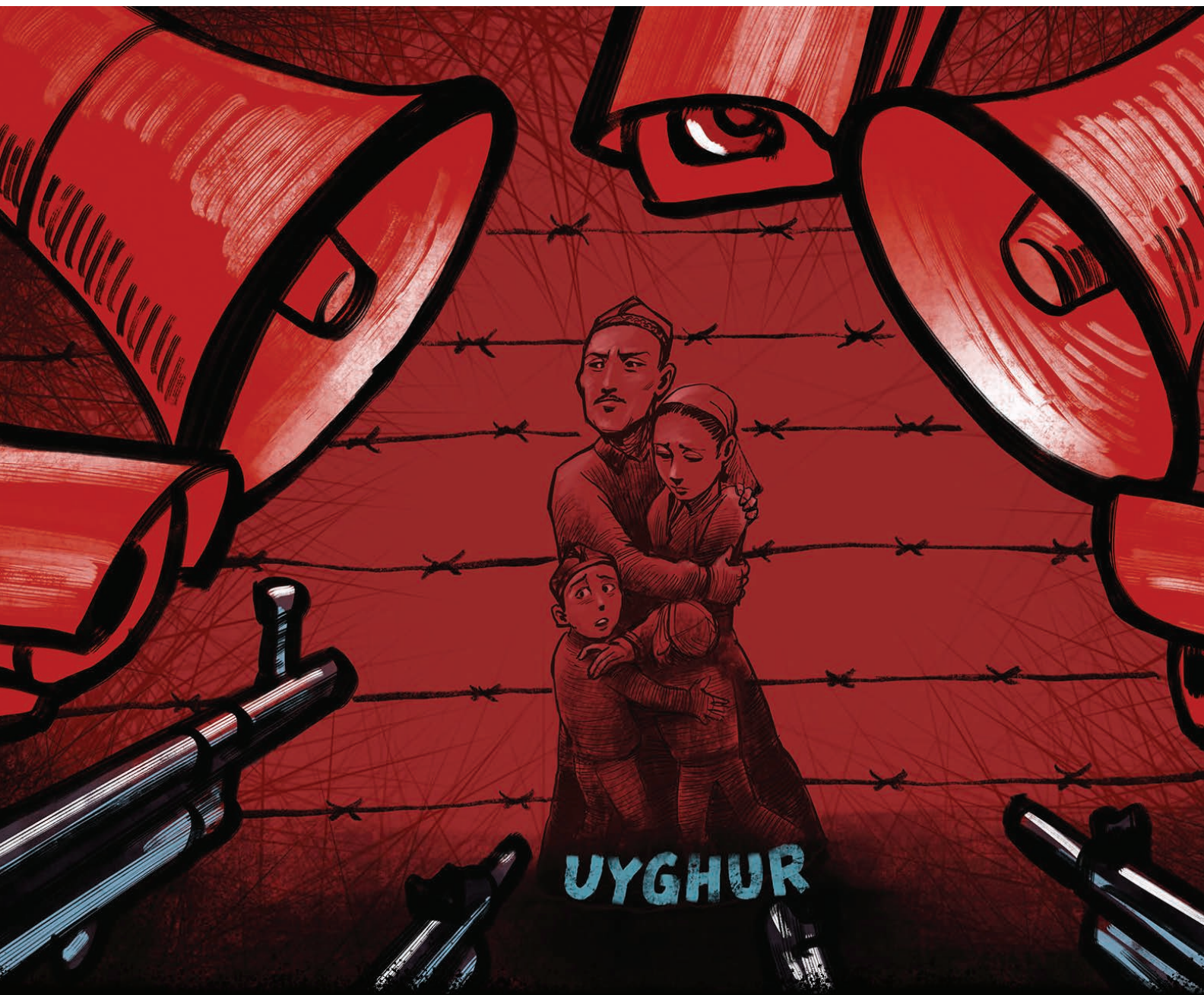
The Myanmar military has never seen this level of opposition from inside and outside the country. It is remarkable that the NUG was formed in less than three months. Meanwhile, the CRPH, with critical assistance from the Myanmar diaspora, was able to persuade the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the U.N. and many countries not to recognize the military regime as legitimate.

Even as Western countries levy sanctions and isolate the military regime, such actions are not enough to force the regime to release political prisoners, stop the killings and restore democracy in the short term. The PRC, as Myanmar's largest investor and northern neighbor, is the only major power that has leverage over the military junta. As the junta becomes more isolated, it will likely be forced to depend on the PRC even more. However, eight months after the coup, the military's leadership was still struggling to gain control of the country and the majority of the populace. As the long-term viability of the military regime became uncertain, the PRC had begun to hedge its bets. It reached out to the NLD party leadership and hosted a summit for four of Myanmar's political parties including the NLD, according to a report on The Irrawaddy website.

Although the coup is an opportunity for Beijing to pull Myanmar tighter into its grip, a huge wave of anti-China sentiment is gaining momentum within Myanmar and among its diaspora. Although the U.S. and its allies do not support such activities, some protesters have called for destroying Chinese-owned businesses and infrastructure investments in Myanmar and for boycotting Chinese products. Chinese-owned factories on the outskirts of Myanmar's capital, Yangon, were torched. Many from the Myanmar diaspora have demonstrated outside Chinese embassies throughout the world. China has a serious public relations problem with Myanmar's people.

Strategic Competition Stakes

The PRC's problem presents an opportunity for the U.S. If Myanmar's people can force the military to restore democracy, the PRC will be the loser in the long run. However, should the military regime win or Myanmar descend into a failed state, the PRC will benefit. Despite the military regime's belief that it can better manage the PRC, this perception is not supported by historical reality. If the Myanmar people prevail and democracy wins, the shockwaves will reach Hong Kong, Taiwan and the various members of the Milk Tea Alliance pro-democracy movement. Myanmar is the last remaining democracy on mainland Southeast Asia. That's why Myanmar is the front line for democracy in the Indo-Pacific. □



TERROR_{and} *Tragedy*



The CCP's War on Uyghurs has Spawned Repercussions for the Future of Counterterrorism

DR. SEAN ROBERTS

The Uyghur cultural genocide has been facilitated by the unfounded narrative that a terrorist threat exists within the Uyghur population at large. However, it is reasonable to ask the counterfactual question of whether the Chinese state's dismantling of Uyghur identity would be happening now if the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) war on terror had never been declared. After all, the cultural genocide perpetrated against the Uyghurs today is more about China's colonization of the Uyghur homeland than it is about terrorism.

While this is true, I don't think the situation could have so readily escalated to genocidal extremes without the PRC framing Uyghurs as a "terrorist threat" and Uyghur culture as having been infected by "extremism." These assertions about the alleged threat posed by Uyghurs have greatly assisted the PRC in deflecting international criticism of its actions and have helped inform how it could carry out cultural genocide with impunity.

In October 2019, the United Nations General Assembly considered a nonbinding statement

presented by the United Kingdom and supported by 23 states condemning the PRC's actions in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region as gross violations of human rights. In an immediate response, 54 countries backed a statement presented by Belarus that applauded the PRC's human rights record, noting that its actions in the Uyghur region were an appropriate and even humane approach to combating a dangerous Islamic extremist and terrorist threat. The PRC's strong-arming of 54 nations to vote against a nonbinding statement against human rights abuse demonstrates how the PRC has leveraged its membership in international organizations and how its position enables the PRC to pressure countries to vote in line with PRC policy positions.

I doubt that many, if any, of the U.N. representatives from these 54 countries believed that the Belarus statement was true. They were defending the PRC for myriad reasons of self-interest. However, they would have had much more difficulty doing so if it had not been for the war on terror narrative and its implicit assumption

Uyghur Population in Xinjiang

There are about 12 million Uyghurs, mostly Muslim, in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang. Human rights groups say the Chinese state has detained more than 1 million Uyghurs in reeducation camps over the past few years. Former United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has said that the treatment of Uyghurs amounts to "appalling violations of the most basic human rights."



This facility in China's northwestern Xinjiang region is a detention camp where mostly Muslim minorities are detained, according to analysts. AFP/GETTY IMAGES





January 31, 2017



January 31, 2019



January 31, 2021



Satellite images from the European Union's Copernicus program show a detention facility near Dabancheng, Xinjiang. Some camps have been converted or expanded into prisons as Xinjiang's incarceration rates have spiked in recent years.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Uyghur woman holds her child at a market in Hotan, in China's Xinjiang region. Reports of mass sterilization may have impacted Uyghur birth rates, according to The Associated Press.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

that the fight against terrorism justifies the suspension of human rights. Additionally, the biopolitical nature of the war on terror's logic has been influential in the ways that the PRC has carried out this cultural genocide.

By asserting that it faces a terrorist threat from within the Uyghur population, the Chinese state has targeted this entire ethnic group as suspected terrorists, for whom rights are justifiably suspended. Furthermore, by using the logic of the war on terror to locate the foundations of the threat in the vaguely defined ideology of religious extremism, the Chinese state has enjoyed the ability to target and criminalize Uyghur culture itself, especially its religious aspects, as allegedly having been infected by extremist influences.

This has led the state down an explicitly genocidal

path rather than encouraging a more gradualist approach to settler colonization, which could eventually overwhelm and marginalize Uyghurs by a market-driven migration of Han Chinese settlers to the region. This had been the direction of the PRC's engagement of the Uyghurs and their homeland in the late 1990s and early 2000s and could have remained so if the PRC had not been seduced by the war on terror's logic of dehumanization and cultural/ethnic profiling, which lends itself almost inherently to genocidal strategies. Thus, while the PRC would likely have sought to colonize the Uyghur homeland regardless of the war on terror, it is difficult to imagine that this could have taken place so rapidly and violently without the benefit of the narrative the war on terror created around the label of terrorism.



A Uyghur woman waits for customers at her fruit stand in the old town of Kashgar, long considered to be the cultural heart of Xinjiang for its mostly Muslim residents.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

It appears that the narrative of the war on terror is now evolving into a tried-and-tested tool for new efforts at settler colonization, ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide.

In this context, one could say that the crisis facing Uyghurs inside China is a prime example of the mutations of the war on terror over time and space.

Two decades into this amorphous war, it appears that the narrative of the war on terror is now evolving into a tried-and-tested tool for new efforts at settler colonization, ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide. This was the case with the Rohingya in Burma; it is the case with the Uyghurs in the PRC. This observation alone should be enough to realize that this loosely defined and persistent war must come to a conclusion. The only way to end the war is for the international community to reimagine the concept of terrorism itself.

This would require adopting an internationally recognized and objective definition of how terrorism should be defined and how it should be identified. Doing

so would neutralize the term's instrumental use and would establish rules of engagement for future wars involving nonstate militant actors. It is certainly possible that forging an international consensus on what constitutes terrorism proves to be impossible in today's world, but not addressing this issue almost guarantees that it will be a "forever war" that will continue to fuel human atrocities.

Alleviating the Uyghur Crisis

While ending the war on terror could go a long way toward preventing future tragedies like the one facing Uyghurs, it will unfortunately have little impact on the cultural genocide underway in the Uyghur homeland. Stemming the tide of this cultural genocide will require concerted and persistent pressure on the PRC. Unfortunately, most states have thus far been either

People wait to pass a police checkpoint near a facility believed to be a reeducation camp in Xinjiang. AFP/GETTY IMAGES





Police detain demonstrators after a December 2019 rally in Hong Kong in support of the Uyghur minority in China.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Graffiti relating to the People's Republic of China's human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong is seen on the pavement during a December 2019 rally in Hong Kong. Riot police broke up the solidarity rally, as the city's pro-democracy movement likened its plight to that of the oppressed Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjiang.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

unwilling to criticize China publicly about its treatment of the Uyghurs or ineffective in getting acknowledgment of the criticisms they have aired publicly. This is mostly due to the international economic power that the PRC projects around the world.

It is noteworthy, for example, that no Muslim country has made an official statement of concern about what is happening to Uyghurs inside China. Even Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, whose citizens and co-ethnics have been documented as being sent to camps in Xinjiang, have been silent. While Turkish officials have made some critical statements about the issue, the government has not taken any substantive or official diplomatic actions to back up these statements. Furthermore, the U.N. and its member states have been unsuccessful in starting a serious discussion on



A Uyghur woman works at a small workshop in Hotan in China's Xinjiang region.
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

the issue as the votes in the U.N. General Assembly indicate. This is particularly true given that the PRC has become increasingly adept at U.N. processes, using them to prevent sustained criticism of Chinese policies and actions. The only states that have spoken out about the situation of the Uyghurs in China have been liberal democracies.

Australia, Japan, many European nations, the United States and several other liberal democracies have all voiced substantial concern about the situation ongoing in the Uyghur homeland.

At the same time, liberal democracies do not want to use the only leverage they do have over China, which is economic engagement, since disengagement could be equally damaging for both parties. Given this situation, one should not expect that other states will be able or willing to pressure China to change its course of actions in the Uyghur homeland unless they are pushed to do so by their citizens. Thus, the only real action that can put significant pressure on China at the moment must come from the grassroots, and it must target the PRC in the only way that can create real leverage, economically.

There is a precedent for such action in the anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s. Citizens from around

the world engaged in concerted advocacy to boycott the South African government for its apartheid policies, forcing universities and pension funds to divest from South African companies and pressuring international companies to stop their operations in the country. While a complete boycott of Chinese goods is difficult to mobilize in today's global economy, which is largely built around Chinese production, an attempt to do so may begin to have results. Likewise, an effort to get major funds and institutional investors to divest from Chinese stocks could have an impact, especially if it is a worldwide movement.

Such efforts can also target international businesses working in China and especially those with operations in the Uyghur homeland or whose supply chains employ forced Uyghur laborers. Finally, such a grassroots movement needs to alert people to the fact that action on this issue is not only about the fate of Uyghurs. It is also about the precedent the Uyghur cultural genocide sets for their own fate in a world where the values of human rights, privacy and diversity are under siege. □

This article was excerpted from Dr. Sean Roberts' book *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*, published in September 2020 by Princeton University Press. It has been edited to fit FORUM's format.

ERASING HISTORY



Buddhist monks await prayer during a ceremony marking the Lunar New Year, or Losar, at the Rongwo Monastery in Huangnan, Tibet, in 2018. Chinese Communist Party officials shuttered monasteries and banned public gatherings ahead of Losar celebrations in 2021, angering many Tibetans. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

CCP's brutal campaign of ethnic assimilation gathers pace in Tibet, Inner Mongolia

FORUM STAFF

In early March 2021, as democracies worldwide raised their voices in unison against the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) genocide of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, exiled Tibetans around the globe gathered again to commemorate their homeland's own long plight under Chinese oppression.

On the 62nd National Uprising Day — the anniversary of a 1959 revolt by Tibetans against the occupying Chinese forces that invaded their nation in 1950 — the exile community called anew for independence for their ancestral homeland. Tens of thousands of Tibetans are estimated to have died at the hands of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) during the weeklong uprising, and many more fled the country but not before ensuring that their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, reached safe haven in neighboring India.

The rebellion was crushed; the Tibetan spirit was not. "Over a million Tibetans have lost their lives in the past six decades under Chinese rule. Today, we have come together to collectively mourn this loss," Lobsang Sangay, then president of the Central Tibetan Administration, the India-based government in exile, said in a March 10, 2021, statement. "But we are also here to mark the undaunted resilience of Tibetans in Tibet. Even under the threat of losing their lives, they continue to protest by protecting and preserving our language, our religion, our land and our identity."

Days before the remembrance events, and 2,500 kilometers northeast of the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping was focusing on suppressing an uprising by another of China's ethnic minorities, one that began six months earlier in the classrooms of Inner Mongolia. In unprecedented scenes, thousands of students and parents demonstrated on the streets and boycotted schools in defiance of a CCP mandate to replace Mongolian language teaching with Mandarin Chinese. "Mongolians feel that language, the last stronghold

of their national identity, is about to be wiped out by this new policy," Enghebatu Togocho, director of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center in New York, told the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper. "That's why Mongolians feel urgency: If we lose this, we lose everything. We cease to exist."

By March 2021, Xi was warning party leaders in Beijing that local officials must "persist in taking the correct path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics" and rectify "wrong ideas" on nationality and culture, the Agence France-Presse news agency reported. The implication of Xi's directive — and the nature of those "Chinese characteristics" — will be unmistakable to the Indigenous populations of the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) so-called autonomous regions. From the schoolhouses of Inner Mongolia, a land of vast steppes and endless horizons, to the monasteries of the Tibetan plateau, where the mountains seem to pierce the sky, the CCP is waging a campaign of forced assimilation and cultural eradication.



The Tibetan plateau, the "roof of the world," is the source of many of the great rivers of East, South and Southeast Asia and a strategic vantage point for the People's Republic of China.

Conducted somewhat in the shadow of the party's brutal repression in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the accelerating crackdown in Tibet and Inner Mongolia is widely seen as an attempt to wipe away culture, mute language and rub out religious tradition — in short, to erase millennia of national heritage and history. The CCP "is determined to stamp out the unrest that has flared repeatedly over the past two decades, from Xinjiang to Tibet," noted a March 2021



article in Bloomberg Opinion. “Ensuring ethnic unity, long a preoccupation among China’s leaders, is now a top priority.”

A Stream of Suppression

The COVID-19 pandemic first detected in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 continued to provide a pretext for the CCP’s assimilation push into 2021. Party functionaries in Tibet prohibited travel and public gatherings during the Lunar New Year, or Losar, in February 2021. Buddhist monasteries and other religious sites were ordered closed over purported coronavirus concerns, and punishment was promised for violators, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported.

Residents and analysts alike dismissed the sincerity of the CCP’s stated motives, noting the central role monasteries play in upholding Tibetan culture. “Monastic institutions attract more legitimacy than local communist authorities in Tibet, and reverence for Buddhist leaders, especially the Dalai Lama, is palpable,” Apa Lhamo, a doctoral student at Jawaharlal Nehru University’s School of International Studies in New Delhi, wrote in *The Diplomat* magazine in March 2021. “For many

Tibetans, even those under CCP rule, religion and Tibetan national identity are inextricable.”

To many, the true impetus behind the CCP’s forced assimilation is as clear as the meltwaters flowing from the Himalayas. By virtue of location, topography and natural resources, Tibet is of immense strategic value. It shares external borders with Bhutan, India, Myanmar (Burma) and Nepal, as well as an internal border with Xinjiang. Home to some of the world’s highest peaks, it is the wellspring of many of the great rivers of East, South and Southeast Asia, including the Mekong, providing sustenance and livelihoods for more than 1 billion people, as well as water for the CCP’s voracious megadams. The plateau holds deposits of precious metals such as gold and uranium and rare earth elements essential to the manufacture of everything from electric cars and wind turbines to missiles and fighter jets. (The PRC produces more than 60% of rare earth minerals globally each year, according to the nonprofit Institute for Energy Research. That’s a national security concern for many democracies.)

For centuries, Chinese and Tibetan armies

fought for control of the land and Central Asia's trade routes. Since the CCP annexed their nation seven decades ago, ethnic Tibetans, who account for more than 90% of Tibet's estimated population of 3.2 million, have been subjected to a steady stream of suppression, including surveillance, arbitrary detention and torture, according to the exile community and human rights organizations.

In January 2021, a 19-year-old Buddhist monk died in custody, five months after being jailed on charges related to shouting slogans and distributing leaflets in support of Tibet's independence. The following month, a Tibetan serving 21 years in prison died after being transferred to a Lhasa hospital with a brain injury. Kunchok Jinpa, 51, was among hundreds of Tibetans detained in 2013 for peacefully protesting a CCP order to fly the Chinese flag from their homes, according to Human Rights Watch. Many of the detainees are still unaccounted for. "Kunchok Jinpa's death is yet another grim case of a wrongfully imprisoned Tibetan dying from mistreatment," Sophie Richardson, the international nongovernmental organization's China director, said in a statement. "Chinese authorities responsible for arbitrary detention, torture or ill-treatment and the death of people in their custody should be held accountable."

Splitting the Nation

Even infrastructure investments designed to speed assimilation through economic integration favor Han Chinese workers and companies at the expense of ethnic Tibetans, according to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. Although a minority in Tibet, Han Chinese account for 92% of the PRC's 1.4 billion people. "Because China's development policy has succeeded in urbanizing rural Tibetans and erasing their land rights, it has succeeded in creating pristine wilderness through depopulation, sinicizing economic centers in towns and cities ensuring investments and profits flow back to China," the India-based center reported in February 2021.

Much of the CCP's assimilation campaign continues to revolve around religion, according to *The Economist* magazine. That includes denigrating the 14th Dalai Lama, now 86 and still in exile in India more than 60 years after his escape from Chinese forces. Since Xi assumed control in 2012, the CCP increasingly has sought to displace Buddhism from the heart of Tibetan culture. Using bribes and threats, party officials force Tibetans to display images of Xi and Mao Zedong, among other communist leaders, rather than those of the Dalai Lama in their homes. In December 2020, a Tibetan herdsman was sentenced to a year in prison after he posted a Losar greeting from the

Dalai Lama on the CCP-surveilled social media platform WeChat, according to media reports. His crime: splitting the nation.

"As in Xinjiang, however, sinicization — though officially limited to religious affairs — involves a much broader effort to make ethnic-minority residents feel they belong to China," *The Economist* noted in February 2021. "In schools, 'patriotic education' is emphasized. Mandarin has replaced Tibetan in most classes. Surveillance has been stepped up. Networks of informers relay information to the state; smartphones are tapped."

For Tibetans, the stakes are as high as their land. "We usually consider human rights to be an issue of an individual's own rights and freedoms, but in the case of Tibet, this has come to involve the survival of the Tibetan people themselves," Tsering Tsomo, director of the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, told RFA. "This is about protecting the human rights of an entire race."

It is a cry that echoes across thousands of kilometers.



With his face painted the colors of the Tibetan flag, a protester joins a march in Dharamshala, India, in March 2021 to mark the 62nd anniversary of National Uprising Day, which commemorates Tibet's struggle against Chinese occupation. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A Brewing Storm

A week after Xi directed party officials to correct ethnic problems in Inner Mongolia, a monstrous sandstorm enveloped Beijing, turning day to dusk, choking commuters and forcing schools to cancel outdoor activities. The biggest storm to hit the city of 22 million in almost a decade had swirled to life in the Gobi Desert on the Mongolian plateau — an atmospheric omen, perhaps, that turbulence in Inner Mongolia would not easily be calmed despite Xi's wishes.

At nearly 1.2 million square kilometers, Inner Mongolia accounts for about 13% of China's landmass and, if independent, would rank among the world's 25 largest nations by area. Home to about 25 million people, it scythes across northern China, bordering the independent nation of Mongolia and Russia along its 2,400 kilometers. Like Tibet, the largely arid region is blessed with abundant natural resources — the city of Baotou on the edge of the Gobi, for example, is a mining hub, accounting for an estimated 70% of the planet's reserves of rare earth elements, according to the BBC.

After World War II ended more than a decade of Japanese occupation, the region came under Chinese dominion in 1947 when the CCP carved out the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Since then, Inner Mongolia has become overwhelmingly Han Chinese, with ethnic Mongolians numbering about 4.2 million, or less than 20% of the populace. Mongolian identity is potent, however, with a vibrant history that encompasses nomadic pastoralists, masterful horse riders and the warrior-ruler Genghis Khan, who in the 13th century established what would become one of history's largest empires.

Inner Mongolia still uses traditional Mongolian script, a unique alphabet of 26 letters written vertically that was adapted from the old Uyghur alphabet and traces its lineage to the reign of Genghis Khan. So, when the CCP ordered in August 2020 that use of the mother tongue in schools would be cut back, the ensuing uproar was unsurprising. "We Mongolians are all against it," Angba, a herder whose 8-year-old son joined the widescale classroom boycotts, told CNN. The father, fearing retribution for speaking out, used a pseudonym. "When the Mongolian language dies," he said, "our Mongolian ethnicity will also disappear."

Authorities contended that learning Mandarin is the obligation of all Chinese citizens — a lesson in

national devotion. "It is a concrete manifestation of love for the party and country," the state-run *Inner Mongolia Daily* said. Rewards were offered for the capture of protest leaders.


Observers say silencing the Mongolian language is the latest piece in a pattern of CCP persecution that, as in Tibet, includes party indoctrination and forced clearances of pastureland for lucrative but environmentally destructive mining operations. In 2011, thousands of people protested the death of a herder killed by a coal truck he tried to block from encroaching on his land, CNN reported. The party responded with paramilitary police and a clampdown on social media sites. "PRC authorities have spent the past 70 years slowly chipping away at the rights of ethnic minorities, in what appears to be a sweeping attempt at ethnic and national homogenization," noted a September 2020 article in *The Diplomat*.

Parents and others, however, pledge that their cultural passion will not be dimmed. "As long as we're Mongolians," Qiqige, a mother of two, told CNN, "we'll resist to the end."

Standing in Solidarity

Under cover of a pandemic that has claimed more than 3 million lives globally and consumed the world's attention and resources for nearly two years, the CCP has hastened its ethnic suppression. For the peoples of Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang, it seems ever clearer that the party's designation of their homelands as "autonomous" grants them only the freedom to do as the party dictates.

The global community continues to highlight their plight. Dismissing CCP demands to stay out of China's internal affairs, democratic governments, international entities and human rights organizations are calling for greater access to oppressed populations and protections for ethnic



A lake of toxic sludge surrounds refineries producing rare earth elements near Baotou, Inner Mongolia. The city on the edge of the Gobi Desert accounts for an estimated 70% of the world's supply of the elements, which are essential for everything from mobile phones to missiles. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A shepherd rests in a pasture in Xilinhot on Inner Mongolia's vast steppe lands. The nearly 1.2 million-square-kilometer region has a vibrant history that encompasses nomadic tribes and masterful horse riders. REUTERS



cultural traditions. “The Chinese government’s authoritarianism was on full display in 2020 as it grappled with the deadly coronavirus outbreak first reported in Wuhan,” the New York-based Human Rights Watch noted in its 2021 annual report. “Beijing’s repression — insisting on political loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party — deepened across the country.”

Following the CCP’s ban on Lunar New Year events in Tibet, the U.S. Department of State held a virtual Losar celebration and reiterated the United States’ commitment to working with allies and partners to preserve Tibetan heritage. “We will not tolerate the Chinese government’s relentless assault on the dignity and human rights of Tibetans and other minority groups,” State Department senior official Lisa Peterson said in February 2021. A week later, on UNESCO’s International Mother Language Day, protesters in Japan, Mongolia and Sweden, among other nations, decried the CCP’s assault on Inner Mongolians’ language traditions.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights directed the PRC to address concerns ranging from: the representation of ethnic groups in public administration, including military and police, in

Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang; expropriation of Tibetan herders’ land and “environmental degradation on the Tibetan plateau” caused by infrastructure projects; and abuse and forced labor of Tibetans, Uyghurs and other minorities. The committee’s March 2021 report also called for China’s response “on reports that the State party has ... attempted to eradicate the culture, religion and language of Uyghurs and Tibetans through massive destruction of sacred cultural and religious sites and bans on the practice of religious rituals and on the use of Uyghur and Tibetan languages in schools.”

Only such a unified response can halt further spread of the CCP’s forced assimilation, exile community leaders say. “Standing against China in relation to its record on human rights violations of minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang is not in the control of one country or a small group of countries, but the whole world community needs to stand in solidarity,” Lobsang, then Tibet’s president in exile, said at an April 2021 event hosted by the New Delhi-based Centre for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights, according to *The Times of India* newspaper. “Not authoritarian policies of China but democratic policies for development that respect diversity is what the world needs.” □



Was Taiwan Ever Part of China?

*The historical relationship
is more complicated than
Beijing would like to admit*





DR. GERRIT VAN DER WEES

Then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo caused quite an uproar during a November 2020 radio interview when he said: “Taiwan has not been a part of China, and that was recognized with the work that the Reagan administration did to lay out the policies that the United States has adhered to now for 3½ decades.”

Since its founding in 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government in Beijing has never had any sovereignty over Taiwan. It has always been ruled independently, first by the regime of Chiang Kai-shek, who wanted to “recover the mainland.” Since the early 1990s, Taiwan has been a vibrant democracy that wants to be accepted as a full and equal member in the international family of nations.

Specifically, in one clause in the Six Assurances, promulgated by U.S. President Ronald Reagan in July 1982, he stated that the U.S. “has not altered its position regarding sovereignty over Taiwan.”

Reagan was referring to the U.S.’s position that it considered Taiwan’s international status “undetermined,” in accordance with the outcome of the 1951-52 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Under that treaty, Japan formally ceded sovereignty over the island, but it was

not decided to whom. Most countries at the 1951 peace conference argued that Taiwan’s status needed to be determined in due time, in accordance with the principle of self-determination enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Was Taiwan Part of China During the Ming and Qing Dynasties?

What about the PRC argument that Taiwan is a “domestic” issue and has been an inalienable part of China since the Ming and Qing dynasties?

When representatives of the Dutch East India Company arrived in Taiwan in 1624, they found no trace of any administration by the Ming dynasty, which ruled China from 1368 to 1644. In fact, the Dutch — who in 1622 had established a small fortress in the Pescadores Islands in what is now the Taiwan Strait — were told by the Ming Tianqi emperor that they should “go beyond our territory,” so the Dutch moved to what was then called Formosa and ruled the island for 38 years, establishing the first administrative structure on Taiwan. Thus, Taiwan certainly was never part of the Ming dynasty.

Dutch rule ended in 1662 when Ming follower Koxinga — escaping the newly established Qing/Manchu dynasty — sailed from the Fujian coast with 400 ships and 25,000 men and

This 1675 drawing shows the 1662 surrender of the Dutch fortress Zeelandia on the island of Formosa, now known as Taiwan.
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

laid siege around the Dutch fortress Zeelandia. After nine months, the Dutch surrendered, and Koxinga established his rule in the southwestern corner of Taiwan. This lasted for 21 years, until the surrender by his grandson to the forces of the Qing dynasty in the Battle of Penghu in 1683. Koxinga and his family ruled Taiwan as the independent Kingdom of Tungning, not as part of the Ming dynasty, which was gone by that time.

The Qing emperor's aim was to destroy the rebellious Koxinga regime, not to conquer the island. In 1683, the Kangxi emperor said that "Taiwan is outside our empire and of no great consequence" and even offered to have the Dutch buy it back. Perhaps this is an inconvenient truth for the current rulers in Beijing.

That year did, indeed, start a period of 200-plus years when Taiwan was ruled — mainly indirectly as part of the Fujian province — by the Manchu rulers in Beijing. But under Qing rule there were more than 100 recorded rebellions, some requiring more than 50,000 troops to put down. Taiwan historians characterize it as: "Every three years an uprising, every five years a rebellion." The population considered the Manchu very much as a foreign colonial regime; there was no appetite for being part of China.

In 1887, at the end of the Qing dynasty, the Manchu rulers in Beijing decided to upgrade Taiwan's status from a subsidiary of Fujian to a formal province of China. This was mainly done to ward off French and Japanese attempts to establish a colony on

Taiwan, but the governor appointed by Beijing, Liu Mingchuan, did a lot to develop the island, introducing electricity, starting a railway from Keelung to the south and setting up a telegraph cable network. However, the modernization process lasted only eight years.

An Independent Formosan Republic

The next episode is probably even more telling. When Japan won the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese war, the Qing government in Beijing agreed under the Treaty of Shimonoseki that Taiwan would be ceded to Japan in perpetuity. The elites in Taiwan, including Gov. Tang Jingsong, sided with the local gentry and declared an independent Formosa Republic to forestall becoming part of Japan.

The republic was short-lived because of the overwhelming force of the Japanese, but it did mount major resistance, particularly by the local militia in central and southern Taiwan. The leader of the regular army was the famous "Black Flag" commander, Liu Yongfu, who led 100,000 soldiers.

A Model Colony of Japan

Taiwan became a Japanese colony in 1895, and over the next 20 years or so, there were many rebellions and uprisings against Japanese rule by the local Hoklo, Hakka and Indigenous populations. But the Japanese did much to improve infrastructure, building roads, railroads, harbors, hospitals and schools. By the 1920s the island had become a prosperous model colony with a good educational system and health care, but with strict governance.

During the 1920s and 1930s, when Chiang and



Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has vowed to defend Taiwan's freedom and democracy.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Taiwan Soldiers participate in a military exercise in Hsinchu County, northern Taiwan, in January 2021. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Statues of Chiang Kai-shek, the late Chinese Nationalist Party leader, dot a mountainside park in Tashi, northeastern Taiwan.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mao Zedong were fighting for supremacy in China, neither the nationalists nor communists cared very much for Taiwan. In fact, both Chiang and Mao are reported to have expressed their support for Taiwan independence — from Japan, of course.

Their respective positions began changing in 1942-43, when in the runup to the November 1943 Cairo Conference, Chiang started to claim that Taiwan should be “returned to China.” Not to be left behind, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders made similar statements. Taiwan, thus, became a pawn in the competing narratives of the Chinese Nationalists, or Kuomintang (KMT), and the CCP.

Status To Be Determined

Taiwan’s formal status became nebulous after the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Through 1949, Taiwan was officially considered occupied by the Republic of China (ROC) on behalf of the Allied forces. Its status was to be determined later, via the formal treaty that would end World War II, which eventually became the San Francisco Peace Treaty. The U.S. government did not formally consider Taiwan to be “part of China,” but it was obviously administered — albeit with some challenges — by Chiang’s KMT forces and the ROC.

Of course, the KMT government itself took the position that Taiwan had been “returned” to China on Retrocession Day on October 25, 1945. But the U.S. government never recognized that position. Some in the U.S., such as Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur, continued to push for a

referendum under the auspices of the U.N., but after MacArthur’s falling-out with U.S. President Harry S. Truman, his advice was not followed. However, the debate showed that the U.S. had not taken the position that during the period in question “Taiwan was part of China.”

1949 to Present: Separate Existence

Clearly, the claim “Taiwan has always been part of China” is dubious at best. It was always at, or primarily outside, the periphery of the Chinese empire.

From recent history, it is also clear that the PRC — established in 1949 — and the ROC/Taiwan have gone very different ways. The PRC has undoubtedly become powerful and influential, but it is still ruled by a repressive, authoritarian regime under CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping.

Taiwan, on the other hand, has morphed from a repressive, authoritarian regime under Chiang and the KMT into a vibrant democracy, with the once-opposition Democratic Progressive Party now holding both the presidency and legislature. The country has its own proud history, has developed its own identity as Taiwan and is eager to play its role as a full and equal member in the international community — a role it has been denied due to the competing narratives of the Chinese Nationalists and the CCP. In that sense, Pompeo deserves thanks for countering those narratives and for looking at Taiwan in its own right and its own light. □

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NATIONAL SECURITY LAW STIFLES FREEDOMS, RIGHTS GROUP FINDS

HONG KONG FREE PRESS

The state of human rights and freedoms in Hong Kong deteriorated under the ill-defined national security law imposed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2020, according to rights group Amnesty International Hong Kong.

“The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, among other human rights, were greatly stifled in Hong Kong in 2020,” its annual human rights report released in April 2021 noted.

The organization concluded that Hong Kong authorities have restricted freedoms under the guise of protecting national security and controlling the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The two factors were “a destructive combination” for human rights in Hong Kong, the group said in a statement.

The report said that the vaguely defined national security law enforced in June 2020 has allowed authorities to make arbitrary arrests.

“The chilling effect of the [security law] on Hong Kong civil society has been rapid and deeply disturbing,” the report found. It referred to at least seven political groups which disbanded immediately following the law’s enactment and the banning of the popular pro-democracy slogan “Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times” as “subversive” under the law.

In June 2020, Beijing inserted national security legislation directly into Hong Kong’s mini-constitution — bypassing the local legislature — following a year of pro-democracy protests and unrest. It criminalized subversion, secession, foreign interference and terrorist acts, which were broadly defined to include disruption to public transport and other infrastructure. The government has said the law is necessary to ensure stability and prosperity.

“While protection of ‘national security’ is in principle a legitimate ground for the restriction of many human rights, governments should

not use ‘national security’ as an excuse to deny people their human rights as protected by international law and standards,” the Amnesty International report noted.

It also detailed authorities’ use of pandemic control measures to restrict freedom of assembly, such as limitations on group gatherings which were invoked to ban all peaceful demonstrations, including the annual June 4 vigil for the CCP’s Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 and the July 1 annual pro-democracy demonstration.

The report added that any restrictions on fundamental rights in the name of public health protection must be “necessary and proportionate.”

“Any law restricting human rights on the grounds of national security and pandemic prevention must have clear provisions and definitions to avoid abuse and excessive interpretation,” Amnesty International Hong Kong said in a statement.



Police officers detain protesters under the new security law in July 2020 in Hong Kong during a march marking the anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Supporters of pro-democracy activists charged with conspiracy to subvert state power under Hong Kong's national security law protest outside West Kowloon Court in March 2021. REUTERS

'UNPRECEDENTED' PRESSURE

The report also addressed “unprecedented” pressure on the city’s academic and press freedoms. “Press freedom and independent media institutions are increasingly under threat in Hong Kong,” it found, adding that journalists risk arrest “when merely exercising their right of newsgathering.”

In 2020, the publisher and senior executives of pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily were arrested, while over 100 officers raided its newsrooms. Separately, a journalist was arrested for accessing public car registration records. The report also referred to “tightening control” by the government on public broadcaster RTHK over politically sensitive content.

Meanwhile, the report detailed increasing pressure on the city’s schools and teachers to censor political content: “Freedom of expression enjoyed by education professionals was severely limited and their professional judgments compromised,

giving way to arbitrary and politically motivated decisions of the Education Bureau to remove ‘political messages’ at schools and put teachers and students under tighter scrutiny.”

The report listed content pulled from textbooks, including lessons on the “separation of powers,” the Tiananmen massacre and civil disobedience. “These attempts demonstrated the government’s intention to increase censorship via tighter institutional oversight and expunge teaching materials that may be critical of the Hong Kong and Chinese governments.”

The nongovernmental organization also raised concern over arrests related to a peaceful pro-democracy demonstration by graduating students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong’s campus in November 2020, calling the move “a blatant attack on the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly on campus in the name of ‘national security.’”

The group called on the Hong

Kong government to fulfill its human rights obligations under international and local law: “The authorities should not deprive people in Hong Kong of their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the name of ‘ensuring national security’ or ‘controlling the pandemic.’”

Hong Kong’s Bill of Rights Ordinance guarantees its inhabitants the freedoms enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Hong Kong officials have asserted that the new national security law does not infringe on fundamental human rights.

The report comes amid international criticism over shrinking civil liberties in Hong Kong after Beijing approved sweeping changes to the global financial hub’s electoral system in March 2021 to ensure the city is run by CCP loyalists. □

This article was first published in the *Hong Kong Free Press* on April 7, 2021. It has been edited to fit FORUM’s format. The *Hong Kong Free Press* is a nonprofit, impartial, English-language newspaper, operated by journalists and completely independent.



GANGSTERISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Beijing's Ties to Organized Crime Undermine
Democracies and Threaten Regional Stability

FORUM STAFF

A mob of pro-Beijing demonstrators attacked Hong Kong pro-democracy activists arriving at Taiwan's Taoyuan International Airport on January 7, 2017. Taiwan's police later identified members of the Four Seas Gang, the Bamboo Union organized crime syndicate and the Chinese Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) among the attackers. The mob also included Chang Wei, the son of former Bamboo Union leader and CUPP founder Chang An-lo (also known as White Wolf).

On January 15, 2020, former 14K triad leader Wan Kuok-koi (also known as Broken Tooth) was pictured with John Momis, then president of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The month before, Bougainville held a nonbinding referendum in which over 90% voted for independence from PNG. Wan was visiting Bougainville in partnership with retired Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Senior Col. Li Yingming, an associate professor at the PLA's National Defense University. The two men pitched development of a special economic zone and digital bank for Bougainville. Li operates a company in PNG advocating civil-military fusion along the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) One Belt, One Road (OBOR), a network of trade routes and infrastructure projects extending globally.

These seemingly unrelated incidents in Bougainville and Taiwan highlight a trend of transnational organized crime groups acting in support of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) national strategic interests. While there is no evidence that these activities are state directed, Beijing has shown willful blindness to the harm caused by criminal enterprises that claim to act in support of CCP objectives. Moreover, evidence going back nearly four decades indicates that the CCP has repeatedly sought to leverage transnational criminal organizations to achieve state priorities.

Transnational crime organizations with substantial ethnic Chinese populations are typically considered triads. Often the triads are based in China, Singapore or Taiwan. The groups weren't always connected to crime. In 17th century China, the triad originated as a secret society that opposed the Qing dynasty. In the early 1900s, the group fractured and gradually some factions focused more on crime than politics, according to a report by the United States Congress. The 14K and Sun Yee On triads are among the largest engaged in organized crime.

THE CCP EMBRACES ORGANIZED CRIME

In Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, CCP officials have shown willingness to work directly with Chinese organized crime in support of Beijing's objectives. In October 1984, then-CCP leader Deng Xiaoping remarked that the party was prepared to work with organized crime elements as long as they supported the country's interests. He noted that Chinese triads contained "patriotic elements," that "there are many good guys among them," and that triads had provided protection for senior Chinese officials overseas.

In 1993, the chief of China's Public Security Bureau, Tao Siju, expounded by stating, "As long as these people are patriotic, as long as they are concerned with Hong Kong's prosperity and stability, we should unite with them." Tao would go on to open the Top Ten bar and nightclub in Beijing with Charles Heung, a Hong Kong entertainment mogul identified as a leader of the Sun Yee On Triad.

Since Hong Kong's 1997 handover to China, the city's triads have taken increasingly aggressive action in support of China's interests. Journalists critical of Beijing have been targeted by triad members, exemplified by the brutal machete attack against former *Ming Pao* newspaper editor Kevin Lao in February 2014. In July 2019, triad gangs attacked pro-democracy protesters at a train station. Beijing's new hand-picked Hong Kong government sought to obfuscate the role of triads, falsely claimed the incident was a riot and arrested pro-democracy lawmakers.

Chang An-lo founded the CUPP in September 2005 in mainland China, where he lived in exile for nearly two decades to escape arrest. The gang leader has become a passionate advocate for Beijing, declaring, "China is my god." Since Chang returned to Taiwan in 2013, the CUPP's paramilitary force of criminals, drawn from the Bamboo Union and Four Seas Gang, has engaged in frequent, violent confrontations with Taiwan's pro-independence groups. Chang has further claimed he was recruiting "red troops" in Taiwan to support reunification with China. Taiwan authorities alleged that Chang was acting on orders from Beijing to undermine Taiwan's democracy and sovereignty.

CHINESE ORGANIZED CRIME AND CORRUPTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

In Southeast Asia, the PRC's murky relationships with criminal organizations fuel corruption and regional instability. The PRC touts its leadership in the regional fight against illegal drugs. China's Public Security Bureau has led patrols along the Mekong River, with occasional participation from Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and



Wan Kuok-koi, known as Broken Tooth, leaves a prison in Macau, China, after serving nearly 15 years for loan sharking, money laundering and leading a gang. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Chang An-lo, founder of the Chinese Unification Promotion Party who is also known as White Wolf, speaks during a rally in Taiwan. The party's paramilitary force of criminals is accused of engaging in violent confrontations with Taiwan's pro-independence groups. REUTERS

Thailand, beginning in December 2011. Upon closer examination, however, Beijing provides diplomatic and security support to the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Myanmar. The UWSA, an armed ethnic group assessed to be one of the world's largest heroin and methamphetamine trafficking organizations, is designated by the U.S. Treasury Department under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act.

Beijing has also turned a blind eye to the activities of Chinese national Zhao Wei, who operates the Golden Triangle special economic zone (SEZ) and the Kings Roman Casino in Laos. The SEZ has become a hub for the trafficking of wildlife, narcotics and humans in the region. In January 2018, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned Zhao, his companies and associates as a transnational criminal organization. Journalists visiting the Golden Triangle SEZ have noted that Chinese state-owned companies, such as China Communications Construction Co., have played a key role in building facilities for Zhao's operations.

Farther south, in Myanmar's Karen State, Chinese companies are building SEZs copying Zhao's casino-centric model. The Yatai New City project, also known as Shwe Kokko, is led by a Chinese national claiming Cambodian citizenship, and its parent company shares its name with a Chinese state-owned enterprise. The project's local partner is Col. Saw Chit Thu, leader of the Karen Border Guard Force and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, an ethnic armed group linked to narcotics, arms and human trafficking.

While Beijing denies any state role in Yatai New City, the China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs publicly endorsed the project in a ceremony held in Yangon, Myanmar's commercial capital. The federation is approved by China's State Council and registered with the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs. It is administered by the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, a component of China's United Front Work Department. Another nearby development project in Karen State is Saixigang, a casino project led by Wan.

CRIMINAL NETWORKS ESTABLISHING BEACHHEADS FOR BEIJING'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS

Wan's activities illustrate how criminal actors are pursuing Beijing's strategic interests along OBOR. He has enjoyed unfettered access to senior foreign political leaders and the support of well-connected Chinese security officials throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Some of his most ambitious projects are in countries that still recognize Taiwan, such as Palau, or in autonomous and breakaway regions such as Bougainville and Karen State, where overt Chinese state involvement could be perceived as interference in the host nation's domestic affairs.

Wan, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), has pursued a

range of projects throughout the Indo-Pacific aligned with China's strategic interests. In 2018, he established the World Hongmen History and Culture Association office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and launched Hongmen-related private security and cryptocurrency projects in Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

From 2018 to 2019, Wan sought multiple casino and gaming resort-related business developments in the Pacific island nation of Palau. He also tried to establish a Hongmen branch there and advocated for Palau's switch of recognition from Taiwan to the PRC.

Wan has advertised that his Hongmen private security company can contract Chinese special forces veterans in support of OBOR projects. In October 2019, Wan was photographed with Chinese People's Armed Police Snow Leopard Commando Capt. Shi Weidang in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He has also been pictured visiting members of the Cambodian prime minister's bodyguard unit and the Cambodian military. In March 2020, the website African Intelligence noted that Wan was "starting to make his presence felt in Uganda as a champion" of OBOR. Hongmen security and construction companies have been registered in Uganda, indicating the scope of Wan's global ambitions.

Wan's partner in Bougainville, the retired PLA senior colonel Li, also is a former United Nations military observer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He has been profiled by China's *People's Daily* newspaper as a proponent of expanding the PLA's international footprint and perspective. Wan and Li pledged to finance construction of an airport, port facilities and urban infrastructure in Bougainville. These activities align with the PRC's goals of enhancing its forward posture in the South Pacific.

In December 2020, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned Wan and his companies for international corruption under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. In an interview published December 24, 2020, Wan responded by declaring his intent to unify ethnic Chinese organized crime syndicates around the world in support of Beijing and against the U.S., to include 14K, the Sun Yee On and Wo Shing Wo triads; the Bamboo Union and Four Seas Gang in Taiwan; and the U.S.-based Wah Ching and Fujian gangs.

In February 2021, Malaysia announced it had indicted Wan on charges related to securities fraud during his time as chairman of the Malaysian technology company Inix from August to December 2020. In late March 2021, Malaysian police took down a massive criminal network linked to Wan's associate Nicky Liow, who had also been appointed a vice president of Wan's Hongmen organization. Malaysia cited Liow's connections to Wan and the U.S. Treasury Department sanctions as catalysts for its investigation.



Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Bador, then Malaysia's police chief, announces the March 2021 takedown of the so-called Macau scam syndicate linked to Wan Kuok-koi's associate Nicky Liow. The operation resulted in 68 arrests, seizure of more than U.S. \$1 million in properties, freezing of 41 bank accounts and the public outing of 34 Malaysian law enforcement officers suspected of having ties to the criminal group. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Despite the U.S. Treasury sanctions against Wan, his public admission of continued ties to transnational organized crime and his indictment on criminal charges by Malaysian authorities, the Chinese government-sponsored China Association for Promoting International Economic and Technical Cooperation (CAPC) honored Wan with a ceremonial plaque and the title "Chief Representative of Hongmen Patriots" at a March 27, 2021, ceremony in Beijing. CAPC falls under the China Association for Science and Technology, led by CPPCC Vice Chair Wan Gang.

SILENCE IS CONSENT

The CCP has been silent regarding the actions of ethnic-Chinese criminal organizations that purport to represent Beijing's strategic interest. The most Beijing could muster in response to the U.S. Treasury Department action against Wan was a terse denial of reports that he was a member of the CPPCC, a fact widely reported in regional and international media. China has taken no action to constrain drug kingpin Zhao, who is now expanding his investment with a U.S. \$50 million port facility in Ban Mom, Laos. Beijing also maintains its support for the UWSA and its notorious drug factories, even amid the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in Myanmar.

To demonstrate respect for international norms and the rule of law, Beijing must disavow the criminal networks acting in its name and work with international partners to clamp down on the flow of corruption along OBOR. In the absence of any serious commitment to reform, it must be assumed that the PRC is calculating that the benefits of supporting gangsterism, at home and abroad, outweigh the risks to its international reputation. □



FORUM ILLUSTRATION

Japan's vision for a **Free and Open** Indo-Pacific

FORUM STAFF

Chief of Staff Gen. Koji Yamazaki highlights multilateral approaches to security

FORUM interviewed Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) Gen. Koji Yamazaki in Honolulu, Hawaii, after the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's (USINDOPACOM's) change of command ceremony April 30, 2021, at Pearl Harbor. Gen. Yamazaki has served as chief of staff, joint staff, for JSDF since April 2019. Prior to assuming the post, he served as chief of staff for the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) from August 2017 to March 2019.

He graduated in 1983 from the National Defense Academy of Japan with a degree in civil engineering and began his career as a military engineer. He went on to hold key engineering positions, including chief of the first personnel section of the ground staff office in 2003, researcher in the ground research and development command and director of the logistics management division in 2006, and commanding general of the 4th Engineer Brigade in 2008.

Gen. Yamazaki completed the JGSDF's Ranger course and studied at the National War College in Washington, D.C., in 2005. He served as the deputy chief of staff of the Western Army in 2010, the director general of the personnel department of the ground staff office in 2012, commander of the 9th Division in August 2014, vice chief of staff of the joint staff in 2015 and commander of the Northern Army in 2016.

What are the leading challenges in the Indo-Pacific region?

Japan, geopolitically, is facing China, North Korea and Russia. We are surrounded by those military powers, who militarily are modernizing themselves and who are also invigorating their military activities.

Domestically, there are threats by natural disasters, namely the probable threat of a great earthquake directly beneath the Tokyo metropolitan area and a Nankai megathrust earthquake [the fault under the Nankai Trough that ranges beneath southwestern Honshu] or disaster from heavy raining and flooding and volcanoes as well.

To effectively respond to these situations, the Japan Self-Defense Forces decided to evolve to a joint operational posture in 2006. What I have been making an utmost effort to accomplish is to fortify the strengths of Japan Joint Operational structure and posture and, secondly, to build upon and strengthen the Japan-U.S. Alliance. The Japan-U.S. Alliance is the cornerstone of peace, security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. Through Japan-U.S. training and exercises we mutually expand our interoperability and build upon our joint operational structure and posturing to enhance our deterrence and response capability.

Also, Japan raised the banner for the vision for a

Free and Open Indo-Pacific. To realize the vision, from the standpoint of the JSDF, we have made an utmost effort to strengthen not only the Japan-U.S. bilateral engagement but also to build a multilateral framework for joint and bilateral training and exercises.

In summary, what I have made my utmost effort to focus on is how to strengthen our joint operational posture and build the bilateral context as well, strengthen the Japan-U.S. Alliance and interoperability and realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision.

Do you believe multilateral approaches are important for security in the region?

I strongly believe that engagement and cooperation with those countries who share common values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and rule of law are critically important. Therefore, as I mentioned, multilateral engagement and activities involving Japan, the U.S. plus Australia are very important. In this framework, adding India, thereby forming the Quad, is critical. And because Japan, as a nation, is part of Asia, cooperation with ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] member states is also very important.

And today outside the region, such as namely the United Kingdom and France, these like-minded countries are important, so I also emphasize engagements with those countries.

We have strongly pushed that Japan, the U.S., Australia, India and ASEAN member states conduct bilateral and multilateral exercises and engagements. We will continue to push those efforts. The U.K. recently announced it will deploy the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth with the U.K.'s Carrier Strike Group 2021 (CSG 21) deployment to this region and announced they will make a port visit to Japan as well.

We very much will welcome the Queen Elizabeth's deployment and planned port visit to Japan.

I am willing and hoping to take this opportunity to further strengthen the Japan-U.K. and the U.S. and other countries' relationships in a multilateral context to strengthen coordination and cooperation.

What are Japan's top security concerns?

There are several concerns and threats. However, the imminent threat is posed by North Korea, namely the regime's development program of a nuclear arsenal as well as ballistic missiles. As for our mitigation efforts against the North Korean nuclear and missile development program, what the United Nations Security Council resolutions clearly stated as complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement, or CVID, or seizure of those weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear arsenals and ballistic

missiles of all ranges, need to be realized.

And next is China. They are modernizing their military power and invigorating their military activities as well as exercising lawfare — for example, recently enacting the China coast guard law. As a statistical fact, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased its defense budget to become 44 times larger within 30 years since 1990. Even since 2010, the defense budget grew 2.4 times larger. Invigorated Chinese military activities are not only seen in the South and East China seas but also in the Sea of Japan and West Pacific.

The PRC's activities are inconsistent with the existing international order. Their activities and actions ignore the existing rules-based international order and attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force. As for the issue of our indigenous territory, the Senkaku Islands, in 1992 China enacted its territorial water law and claimed those islands are its territory.

As of February 2021, China also enforced its China coast guard law. The law has ambiguous parts, such as those acts to enforce their rights in their so-called jurisdictional waters, and sections, such as that on use of weapons, which are inconsistent with existing international law and order.

These kinds of issues we are very much concerned with and not only for Japan but for the world.

All these unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force is something that we absolutely cannot accept.

How is Japan modernizing the Japan Self-Defense Forces?

Against these unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, Japan is resolutely and strongly conducting our own efforts to protect our territorial integrity of sea and air space to strengthen our deterrence. The JSDF has a plan to build a multidomain [also known as cross-domain] defense force capable of dealing with all domains including space, cyber and electromagnetic spectrum, according to the Midterm Defense Program and based on the National Defense Program Guidelines.

I also feel that at the service-component level, they are making their own efforts to improve cross-domain operational capabilities. In addition to our efforts to build up our own defense capabilities and posture, it is important to improve the interoperability between Japan and the U.S.

A symbolic effort that we mutually made in 2020 was what we achieved during Keen Sword, a major Japan-U.S. joint bilateral field training exercise. Over 40,000 both U.S. military and JSDF personnel participated in the ground, maritime and air exercises and training events, as well as amphibious



As far as achieving the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, the world is now very interdependent, and no single country alone can realize peace and security in the region. Therefore, Japan is committed to achieving that vision in cooperation with like-minded countries.

operations and space situational awareness-type multidomain training events.

Against any probable situation, to respond appropriately to any possibility, we are strengthening our joint capabilities as well as bilateral operational capabilities.

As for ground forces, to strengthen the defense posture for the southwestern islands, we recently established our garrisons/stations in Yonaguni, Miyako and Amami islands with ground units. Also, we established our amphibious troops to be able to carry out amphibious operations. Additionally, we have developed our defense capabilities to support sustainment and logistics for these units on these islands.

Within the Maritime Self-Defense Force, the largest multipurpose destroyers, JS Izumo and JS Kaga, will be converted to allow fielding the F-35B. As for the Air Self-Defense Force, we are advancing our program fielding the F-35A and B. Also, to enhance our ballistic missile defense, we are planning to create the vessel fielding the Aegis system on board.

As far as the new domains, cyber and outer space, as well as managing the electromagnetic spectrum, we are establishing new units.

What is your view of foreign military engagements in Southeast Asia?

As I mentioned earlier, to realize our vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, it is very important to engage with Vietnam and the Philippines as ASEAN member states. The Japan-U.S. Alliance is

critically important for our two nations; however, it also serves as a core for other ASEAN member states to engage in the context of multilateral engagements and trainings to enhance defense cooperation in the region.

Japan is surrounded by a very severe security environment. Under such circumstances, Japan must strengthen our own defense posture and capabilities. After U.S. President Joe Biden's administration kicked off [in 2021], we have witnessed that the new U.S. administration's first 2+2 ministerial meeting was held in Japan on March 16, and a month later, April 16, then-Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and U.S. President Biden had a Japan-U.S. summit meeting in person in Washington, D.C. Through those events, Japan and the U.S. reaffirmed our alliance as the cornerstone of peace, security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

As a military aspect, we are the ones who built the foundation and base for such values for the alliance. Therefore, it was profoundly significant to have meetings with my counterparts, namely Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley, former USINDOPACOM Commander Adm. Philip S. Davidson and new USINDOPACOM Commander Adm. John C. Aquilino in person consecutively following Japan-U.S. 2+2 and summit meetings.

As far as achieving the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, the world is now very interdependent, and no single country alone can realize peace and security in the region. Therefore, Japan is committed to achieving that vision in cooperation with like-minded countries. □

PALAU'S PATH *to prosperity*

PRESIDENT SURANGEL WHIPPS JR.
SHARES HIS APPROACH TO
SECURITY FOR HIS NATION
AND THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION





FORUM STAFF | PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Surangel Whipps Jr. was sworn in as the Republic of Palau's 10th president January 21, 2021, after serving two terms as a senator. A champion of economic growth, he previously was the CEO and president of one of Palau's largest growing companies, leading its expansion from 50 employees to over 600. His policy priorities include developing opportunities for all Palauans and protecting the environment for long-term sustainability for future generations. FORUM interviewed President Whipps in early August 2021 during his visit to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) in Hawaii to provide insight into the economic challenges the island nation faces — particularly under the strain of COVID-19 restrictions — despite the country achieving a vaccination rate for adults exceeding 99%. He also discussed Palau's contributions to maintaining a Free and Open Indo-Pacific while ensuring a more secure and stable Palau.

What are the major challenges facing Palau?

My concern has always been to improve the livelihood of the Palauan people — really help them achieve the Palauan dream in Palau. One of the major issues that has always plagued us is [that] because of a weak economy our kids are moving to the United States, so it is hard to build a strong economy where they can be empowered and enjoy Palau. Over the past 25 years, I would say almost half of our population has migrated to the U.S. and, at the same time, we have had foreigners move in and replace that population, so that provides a lot of issues, to include security. How can the country remain Palau if it is all made up of foreigners?

One of the biggest challenges is we are a tourist-dependent economy. We've had challenges because of China since they've turned off the faucet [by prohibiting Chinese tourism to Palau], but most of our economy was progressing. But then what happened is since the economy continued to be OK, then our partners no longer consider Palau a least-developed country, and they say that

Palauan President Surangel Whipps Jr. speaks at a news conference in Taipei, Taiwan, in March 2021 to announce the Palau-Taiwan Travel Corridor that allows residents to travel between the islands quarantine-free, provided they follow certain guidelines.

LEFT: Vietnamese fishermen sit on their vessels at Palau's Marine Law Enforcement Division port in Koror after being caught fishing illegally.

now you can't get any grants, so you need to get loans. So now we have debt for our sewer, debt for our fiber optic cable, now debt to survive through COVID-19, and our biggest challenge going forward is how do we get back with a mountain of debt? How do we build a strong and diversified economy so that we can take care of our people and not be susceptible to outside influences?

Tell us about your approach to preserving a Free and Open Indo-Pacific in terms of COVID-19 vaccinations.

We're excited to come here and meet USINDOPACOM Commander Adm. John Aquilino and see the enthusiasm and the shared values that we all maintain and discuss how to maintain that Free and Open Indo-Pacific. We have defense capabilities, and it is now about how to build a strong, stable economy — and build back better. So, we are very fortunate because we are considered part of the U.S. homeland. (The Compact of Free Association between Palau and the U.S. took effect October 1, 1994.) During Operation Warp Speed, Palau had access to the vaccines, so we were able to receive our first vaccinations in January 2021. The U.S. ambassador and I were part of the first group to receive the vaccination on the very first day. I told him at the time that we need to go and get vaccinated because the people need to know the importance and, most of all, trust the vaccine. Because if you and I do it, then the people won't think they are being guinea pigs or being experimented on. These were some of the rumblings going on amongst the people.

The fortunate thing about that was, as a result, the vaccines kept coming. A team from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services came down to help with the vaccination process. When I left to come here in early August, 99.7% of the adult population was vaccinated. Now it's more than 70% of the total population. Then in late July 2021, we started vaccinations on the 12-to-18-year-old age group. We hope to be over 80% of the total population by the end of September 2021. That's allowed us to slowly open up. Being COVID-19-free also has its cost. You have no tourists, and the economy isn't open. But ... it shouldn't be about money, it should be about people's health.

We have continued to be very cautious and do things based on science, so now we have weekly flights from Guam again. Pre-COVID-19, we had daily flights. Weekly is good, and we hope the frequency of flights will increase soon, hopefully by Our Ocean Conference in early 2022, which Palau has the honor of hosting as a partner with the U.S. It is a big conference about climate change, marine protected areas, sustainable fisheries, marine economy — those are the topics that we will be talking about and hopefully U.S. special climate envoy John Kerry will be able to join us in Palau for that conference. It is our opportunity to show the impacts of climate change, to show how we can work together as large ocean states, and, hopefully, many Pacific leaders will be there. We are doing our part, and we need our partners to do their part, so we can all work together to keep our planet sustainable.

How is Palau combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing?

Palau cannot take care of IUU fishing on its own. We have a large exclusive economic zone (EEZ), over 1.6 million square kilometers, and we have a limited, small economy to support it. That is why partnerships are critically important. The U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy's presence are key to deterrence. Our friends from Australia have provided us a new patrol boat after the one they provided previously was retired, and that is an important part of our capability. We have another that was donated by the Nippon Foundation of Japan. All these patrol boats are operated by a Palauan crew.

We also have increased satellite capability and air surveillance capability through several programs with USINDOPACOM, which provide us visual images of what is going on in Palau. IUU fishing is happening, in part, because we have a large, protected area, so people think there is no one fishing there, so why not go fishing in an area that is a preserve? That's our challenge. We have to be more effective in deterring that. There is a program called Sea Dragon, which has put the aerial assets in to surveil the area. We are also looking at adding drones and additional satellites. But satellites detect [vessels] that turn on their automatic identification system. If they don't turn the system on, how do you know they are there? Usually those who are illegal aren't turning anything on. You must go out and see them. You can't keep everyone out, but I think with all the partners that we have, we have definitely made a dent and made it more difficult for illegal fishing activity.

In December 2020, there was a Chinese fishing vessel that was caught inside one of our reefs. The crew offered bribes and tried to avoid penalties. But our Rangers reported them, and ... our patrol boat, along with the U.S. Coast Guard, apprehended them and brought them back to Koror. We contacted the Chinese government and they said, "We don't know anything about them. They are on their own," which made it difficult for us because now we needed to feed and house the crew. Generally, these IUU fishing cases ... end up becoming a burden on us once we have caught them.

A few years ago, after Vietnamese boats were caught IUU fishing, our former president decided to send the offenders back on one boat and burn the other three boats. We haven't had any Vietnamese boats back since.

We do have only a few cases now, but the ones we have are concerning because we are not just concerned about IUU fishing but also about human trafficking and drugs. Collaboration and cooperation are very important in protecting our EEZ.

How has Palau's commercial fishing ban enacted in 2020 contributed to protecting national resources?

Under the current sanctuary law, 80% of our EEZ is conservation area, and fishing is only allowed in the remaining 20%. That is really based on the Palauan



A Palauan Maritime Surveillance Agency official displays a lobster found aboard a Vietnamese boat caught fishing illegally in Palau's waters near Koror.



Travelers from Taiwan prepare to take COVID-19 antigen tests in April 2021 before departing for Palau.

concept of “bul.” Bul is when the Palauan chiefs get together and decide we are going to section off a part of the reef as a no-fishing zone for a certain amount of time to allow it to regenerate. It is really about sustainable use for the people. This is the concept that has been practiced for thousands of years and, with overfishing, it is time to relook at this to determine how we make the fishing industry more local and encourage greater participation in conservation. It is about using that resource to best help our people.

How is Palau cooperating with other Pacific island nations?

Cooperation with other island nations is very important. We are the nation the farthest to the west, and if anyone is going to get hit, it will be us first. So together we can serve as a defensive chain. Intruders, illegal fishermen and traffickers have to go all the way through our waters before they get to our neighbors. It is important to have this maritime protected area. We serve as a deterrence, too, since we can catch those unlicensed boats there before they get deeper into the region.

One of the programs that Palau and the Micronesian countries put in place a few years ago was maintaining marine protected areas at 30%. In Palau, we have pan sites in the near shore areas. About 30% of them are conservation areas, and we have Rangers who protect them. The idea is to have a spillover effect into the rest of the areas. This has proven to be effective and it is an initiative we have shared with our Micronesian allies — the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam and the Marshall Islands. It is important that we do

those initiatives but also to share information to see how we can do things more effectively. For us, the important one is how we can effectively maintain our large EEZ. How do we make sure we have sustainable use? Maybe we should consider all of us designating an area — maybe not 80% but an area that all of us agree to, maybe it is 30% like we did for near shore areas — that all of us commit to in order to conserve our areas, ensure we are not overfishing, our resources are sustainable and they are protected for the generations to come.

Hopefully, the Our Ocean Conference will stimulate that discussion and generate commitments because it is about commitments. How do we get other leaders to commit to programs that are effective? We can do our part to keep our world safe and protect our important resources, so our kids don’t have to just read about them in magazines or dig them up like fossils, like dinosaurs.

Are there other issues you’d like to highlight?

Our partnership with the United States is very important. The rest of the freely associated states [the Marshall Islands and Micronesia] are an important part of that. We are part of the U.S. homeland as far as security. Our biggest challenge going forward is to find a way to build a strong economy. One of the things we are going through now is the review of our agreement with the U.S., the Compact Review Agreement, and I think that is an important mechanism in which we can build that capacity and a stronger economy that really provides for security. Keeping Paluans in Palau is security to me. It is looking at Palau like Hawaii or Guam, making



those same efforts to build those same opportunities, so Palauans will want to stay in Palau.

And it's about encouraging U.S. investment. We are so close to Asia. Maybe instead of relying solely on Singapore as a hub, perhaps nations could look at Palau as a hub. Just to spread some of the growth in the area. Or if you are in Hong Kong as a U.S. business, think about Palau as a hub. Palau has the opportunity — since we have control over our borders, it is easier for people to get in and out. We have opportunities to build a stronger partnership. We would like to see U.S. hotels in Palau as well.

How important is U.S. military training in Palau?

Presence is deterrence, so it is good to have the training in Palau. The side benefit to that is the economic benefit. Having the military there, they spend money in restaurants, hotels and services they need. Especially now when we don't have the tourists due to COVID-19, it's very appreciated, and we want to see more of it! We welcome it. There is a lot of infrastructure that the military needs and that Palau can also make use of — whether it is new runways, expanded runways, port facilities, roads — those all help us locally but also advance the capability of the U.S. military. Those are part of the partnership that we speak of on how we help each other. There are old airstrips from World War II that remain to this day, to include three that were built by the Japanese. If you look at how the Japanese fortified the islands, you can see why. We are so close to Asia, with our southernmost island less than 240 kilometers from Indonesia. All of those small islands had fortifications on them. The U.S. is now helping

put surveillance systems on those islands. Continuing to expand capability by improving small airstrips and places for helicopters to land will also provide us additional capabilities to rescue people. One of the improvements is adding lights on the airstrips, so aircraft can land at night to evacuate a sick patient, for example. That's just another way that the cooperation and collaboration works.

What is Palau's top long-term security threat?

Economic threats are Palau's top security issue because we are vulnerable, particularly given our high debt and need to care for our people. Sometimes, our leadership may be forced to make a decision, whether on an investment opportunity or other activity, that might not be the best, but because there is an allure, because there is available money, that might increase our tax base. They may decide to take these actions even if it may not be in the best interest of our people for the long term. These economic dilemmas continue to be a threat. We have to find ways to build up, build back better, especially after COVID-19, so we don't fall into that debt trap.

For the past 77 years, since the first U.S. Marines landed in Angaur and Peleliu in 1944, I think the relationship between Palau and the U.S. has been strong and continues to get stronger. At times, we might be forgotten since we are so far away, but it is good to see the interest in us and to remember that we are important to each other. We need each other! It is all about partnership and how we can win together. □

Palauan President Surangel Whipps Jr., left, meets with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the U.S. State Department in Washington in August 2021.

VANQUISHING



Virus

Indo-Pacific militaries provide a first line of defense in COVID-19 battle

FORUM STAFF

The story of how New Zealand prevailed in “crushing the curve” and halting the advance of the coronavirus within its borders can be traced, in part, to a crucial step taken soon after the nation’s first COVID-19 case was confirmed in late February 2020. By April’s arrival, the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) had been enlisted in the fight, with more than 700 personnel supporting local and national authorities with logistics, intelligence, strategic planning and operational coordination in the pandemic’s infancy.

It would prove an opening salvo in New Zealand’s battle against COVID-19 — an ongoing campaign that has garnered worldwide acclaim for the country’s quick, decisive action — and serve as a bright illustration of the military’s centrality in the whole-of-government response, deemed essential to conquering a relentless and deadly foe. Fourteen months after the coronavirus arrived on its shores, the island nation of 5 million had tallied just 2,500 cases and barely two dozen deaths.

Over that time, the NZDF response to the public health crisis grew in scale and scope to include: supporting police with vehicle checkpoints; assisting in personal protective equipment acquisition and supply chain management; operating facilities; and planning vaccination deliveries. Royal New Zealand Navy maritime patrol and response assets supported the New Zealand Customs Service in securing and monitoring ports nationwide, and New Zealand Army Brig. Jim Bliss was seconded to lead the nation’s managed isolation and quarantine program.

Throughout, the NZDF has balanced its pandemic contributions with its duty to protect the nation, as well as with its force generation activities, mandated operational deployments, training obligations and

additional assistance to civil authorities. “Regardless of the alert level, we continue to play our part in the all of government response while maintaining our normal responsibilities and operational commitments,” the NZDF website states. “We are structured, equipped and trained for a range of crisis contingencies, and it’s this preparedness that has seen us fill a wide range of roles as part of the COVID-19 response.”

A GENERATIONAL CHALLENGE

Military forces are no stranger to epidemics. In Cuba, during the Spanish-American War of 1898, yellow fever and other infectious diseases killed more United States Soldiers than died fighting. Two years later, the U.S. Army’s surgeon general created the U.S. Army Yellow Fever Commission to study the disease’s cause and prevention. Led by Army Medical Corps Maj. Walter Reed, the commission established that yellow fever is mosquito-borne, rather than spread by poor sanitation. That discovery helped the Army eliminate the disease as a threat in future conflicts.

Since the coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, however, it has posed a generational challenge like few seen before, taxing the resources and patience of the planet’s population. As of late November 2021, there had been more than 260 million cases globally, including 5.2 million lives lost, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), and national economies have shuddered under the burden of lockdowns and disappearing jobs. If adversity is a test of character, then the pandemic has revealed much, stripping away any lingering illusions about the motives of some of the world’s authoritarian regimes.

Nearly two years on, the world has witnessed



A Royal Thai Army Soldier disinfects a classroom at a school in Bangkok. Across the Indo-Pacific, militaries are playing a central role in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

inspirational efforts, from the science community's extraordinary work to outwit the virus to the combined contributions of allies and partners in delivering care, equipment and hope to vulnerable communities. It has also seen deeply disturbing acts, no more so than the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) concealment of potentially lifesaving information, a cover-up that began at the pandemic's outset and persisted even as WHO scientists visited Wuhan in February 2021 to probe the virus's origins.

Across the Indo-Pacific, military forces have teamed with civilian agencies, nongovernmental organizations and private companies to combat COVID-19 on multiple, concurrent fronts, all while safeguarding the health of their own service members and their families. "At the most basic level, the military possesses a national command network and constitutes a pool of disciplined manpower, including reserves, that can be deployed at relatively short notice to supplement civilian frontline services during national emergencies," according to Euan Graham, a senior fellow for Asia-Pacific security at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "Some armed forces have acquired substantial experience in crisis planning and emergency response, including during previous epidemics, at home or overseas.

"Most militaries can offer logistical support, including transport, as well as medical staff and infrastructure," Graham wrote in an April 2020 analysis on the think tank's website. "The more capable armed forces possess specialist knowledge in epidemiology and virology, as well as self-protection capabilities developed for biological and chemical warfare."

Among the contributions of Indo-Pacific military forces and civilian defense agencies:

- In Australia, engineers and researchers with Defence Science and Technology (DST), part of the Department of Defence, used 3D printing to design a face shield for health care workers, moving from initial concept to mass manufacturing capability in just three weeks. DST sent prototypes to hospitals for testing and hired a military-accredited contractor to manufacture the

shields, which are easy to disinfect and reuse. "We often need to rapidly respond to defense and national security challenges by generating engineering solutions, and we've used the same approach to help get protective equipment to frontline health care staff," DST program leader Ben Barona said in an article on the Defence Department's website.

- In May 2021, as India battled a devastating spike in COVID-19 cases, the nation's Armed Forces were at the forefront of relief efforts. The Air Force and Navy transported critical supplies of oxygen and medical equipment, including donations from around the world. The Indian Army and the Defence Research and Development Organisation opened hospitals for civilians, with nurses, physicians and other staff assigned from the Directorate General Armed Forces Medical Services. "People have great faith and trust in the capabilities of the Armed Forces," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh wrote in a blog post. "As the whole of India stands united in the fight against the current surge in the pandemic, the Armed Forces are walking the extra mile for the nation to emerge a winner."
- Beginning in early 2020, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) provided transportation and quarantine assistance for returning Japanese nationals and foreign travelers, including nearly 3,000 cruise ship passengers after a coronavirus outbreak aboard the Diamond Princess, according to the Japan Ministry of Defense. JSDF personnel also trained staff members from private companies and local governments on the use of protective clothing. In late May 2021, the JSDF was deployed to support the nation's mass vaccination campaign, with medical officers and nurses administering vaccines in Osaka and Tokyo, Nikkei Asia reported. "I am relieved after seeing vaccinations being carried out in an orderly and organized manner expected of the SDF," then-Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said.
- As the world's third-most densely populated nation, with 8,000 people per square kilometer, and a global hub of trade and transportation, Singapore faced steep challenges in preventing a mass contagion among its 5.7 million residents. Within days of the island state recording its first coronavirus case in late January 2020, about 1,500 Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) personnel were distributing masks to the public, monitoring air travelers and making contact tracing calls. The SAF employed tactics honed during the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak in the Indo-Pacific in 2003. "The deployment of the SAF is not just about the government's commitment toward addressing the contingency; by involving everyday Singaporeans through the largely conscript SAF, it also communicates the message that the entire nation is united in overcoming the common adversity," Vivian Ng, a retired Republic of Singapore Navy officer, wrote in the online news magazine *The Diplomat* in March 2020.



An Indian Army officer pays tribute to health care staff and other front-line workers at a hospital in Amritsar, India.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

- Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense designated all military hospitals as health care and testing facilities for COVID-19 patients and established nearly 1,200 quarantine shelters at nine military camps on the island. Meanwhile, more than 70,000 troops were deployed to assist with supplying face masks, and chemical task forces totaling almost 1,500 personnel disinfected inbound flights. Despite simultaneously dealing with increasingly aggressive activities by the CCP's People's Liberation Army, the democratic island has been "treating the fight against the virus as real warfare," according to the Defense Ministry.
- The Royal Thai Armed Forces set up more than a dozen field hospitals nationwide, with thousands of beds for coronavirus patients, the *Bangkok Post* newspaper reported in April 2021.
- The U.S. Armed Forces have played an integral role at every stage of the nation's pandemic-mitigation campaign, from researching potential vaccines to administering vaccinations, while also supporting partners and allies worldwide with expertise, personnel, equipment, transportation and more. U.S. Army Gen. Gustave F. Perna was appointed chief operating officer for Operation Warp Speed, the U.S.'s private-public initiative to develop, manufacture and distribute COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. "I've talked to some of our local officials and civilian agency heads, and they've told me that [what] the military brings to this equation is discipline, organizational skills and effectiveness," U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told active-duty and National Guard troops operating a massive vaccination hub in California in February 2021. "They were impressed by the fact that, every day, our troops take a look at things and endeavor to get better. They know good is not good enough."

EMBRACING A NEW REALITY

As it has for much of civil society, virtual has become the new reality for military forces, as pandemic travel restrictions and quarantines saw functions such as recruiting, training and planning shift heavily to remote formats. Indo-Pacific allies and partners quickly transformed long-running bilateral and multilateral training events and exercises for the digital age. In June 2020, with much of the world still in lockdown, the Royal Thai Air Force and U.S. Pacific Air Forces and Washington Air National Guard held their annual Airman-to-Airman Talks by video conference — a first in the seven years of the collaborative discussions. "Despite everything going on in our world, the fact that we are having this virtual Airman-to-Airman Talks highlights the importance of the relationship between the Kingdom of Thailand and the United States," said Brig. Gen. Gent Welsh, Washington Air National Guard commander.

Even with the expansion of in-person military activities with social distancing, masks and other precautions in place, the evolution of day-to-day operations will persist



An Australian Defence Force member assists with passenger arrivals at Perth Airport. Militaries throughout the Indo-Pacific region have contributed to border control measures amid national lockdowns and quarantines. GETTY IMAGES

as the pandemic leaves its lasting imprint on the world.

"Despite the availability of a vaccine, [COVID-19] restrictions are going to remain with us for a while yet, precluding a return to large-scale training activities and preventing international travel to exercise with allies and partners," Tony McCormack, a Royal Australian Air Force veteran and fellow with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, wrote in a February 2021 article for the think tank's online publication *The Strategist*. "Greater investment is needed in alternative approaches that leverage emerging trends in simulation to rectify the deficiencies that the reduction in training will produce."

Meanwhile, the military medical community is dissecting the experiences of the pandemic, using analytics and data modeling to guide how fighting forces and civilian populations alike can be protected in years to come.

"We don't know how long this is going to go on or what the next crisis will be," U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Sheryl Green, a public health career field manager, said in an April 2021 article on the U.S. Military Health System website. "We've certainly dealt with outbreaks before — Ebola, Zika, H1N1 — but what is the next big pandemic-type disease going to be? Based on the experience that all of our public health professionals have gained over the past year, they will absolutely be ready for anything that comes their way in the future."

It's just one of the cascade of challenges, from force protection to combat readiness, with which armed forces across the Indo-Pacific continue to grapple almost two years into a global health crisis — a mission that's been compared to "building a fighter jet while flying it." As in New Zealand, however, the military's central role in the whole-of-government pandemic response has spotlighted its ability to adapt and evolve in real-time. Such adaptations, Adam Saxton and Mark F. Cancian of the Center for Strategic and International Studies wrote in February 2021, have ensured that "deployments, training, and personnel movement have been able to recommence without the collapse of readiness, the fraying of alliances, or the emboldening of adversaries." □



STRENGTHENING THE RANKS

GENDER DIVERSITY, HIGHER SALARIES
PAY DIVIDENDS FOR ROK MILITARY

FELIX KIM

When Im Hyeon-jin straps on her helmet to climb aboard a K1A2 battle tank, she symbolizes the wave of progress sweeping through the Armed Forces of the Republic of Korea (ROK).

The 27-year-old Im, recently promoted to sergeant first class, became the first woman to drive a K1A2 and has logged thousands of hours as a tank driver since 2018, the ROK Army reported. “My ultimate goal is to be an outstanding tank commander, and I feel like I can carry out the job,” Im told Arirang News, a South Korean TV network. “I will also try to become a good role model for future women Soldiers.”



Republic of Korea Army Sgt. 1st Class Im Hyeon-jin has logged thousands of hours as a tank driver since 2018 and hopes to become a role model for other female leaders in the military.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA ARMY



Navy Commander Hong Yoo-jin in December 2020 became the first woman to command a combat ship in South Korea. REPUBLIC OF KOREA NAVY

She joined a growing list of women climbing the ranks of the South Korean military as defense reforms target gender diversity and improved living conditions for conscripts. The goal is to respect human rights while maintaining a robust deterrence against the ever-present threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea.

The list of women in leadership positions in the ROK military includes Navy Commander Hong Yoo-jin, who was commissioned to command a combat ship operating near the inter-Korean maritime border in December 2020. Hong became the country's first female captain of such a vessel, according to the ROK Navy. Hong's ship, the ROKS Wonju, is part of the 12th Combat Squadron, 1st Fleet Command. The Pohang-class corvette is armed with 88 mm and 44 mm guns, light torpedoes and missiles and has a crew of about 120.

Other trailblazers include Lt. Col. Pyeon Bo-ra of the 3rd Flying Training Wing, Lt. Col. Jang Se-jin of the 5th Air Mobility Wing and Lt. Col. Park Ji-yeon of the 16th Fighter Wing, who in 2019 became the first women inaugurated as battalion commanders in the ROK Air Force.

Strength Through Diversity

Defense Reform 2.0, which was initiated by South Korean President Moon Jae-in in July 2018, calls for

more female officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in all branches of the military. It follows the Defense Reform 2020 initiative started by then-President Roh Moo-hyun in 2005.

The push for gender diversity makes the South Korean military "one of the most equal opportunity providers" in the country, said Sheen Seong-ho, professor of international studies at Seoul National University. It also helps ensure the future robustness of the force despite the shrinking demographic of young men, who have historically formed the core of the country's military as conscripted troops.

Along with gender diversity, other military priorities are a larger cadre force of full-time officers and NCOs of both genders, improved conditions and wages for conscripts, and more public input into military budgeting, according to the Ministry of National Defense.

"As of 2020, we had approximately 15,000 female Soldiers in the Korean military," In-Bum Chun, a retired ROK Army lieutenant general, said. "That's about 7.8% of the South Korean cadre force."

Fulfilling the country's constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity for women and satisfying the military's need for expertise are the main reasons behind the government's goal to expand that number to 10% by 2022, Chun added.

Improving Conscript Conditions

Persistent threats from North Korea require South Korea to be prepared for any contingency. Because the North maintains a standing force of about 1 million soldiers, the ROK Armed Forces need a standing force of more than 500,000 troops, Chun said. That means every able-bodied man age 18 to 25 is required to serve 18 to 24 months as a conscripted Soldier, Sailor or Airman unless an exemption is granted.

The need for additional personnel and an evolving awareness of human rights have underpinned efforts to improve the working conditions of conscripts. Upgrades to “barracks culture” and higher monthly wages are Defense Reform 2.0 goals.

“Until the 1980s, we had a surplus of young men, so only about 50% really served,” Chun said. “Now, with a smaller population, nearly 95% are called in, and so these kinds of issues are more heightened.”

Under Defense Reform 2.0, monthly wages for the

average conscript have tripled to about U.S. \$400 per month for an Army private second class, he said. That means conscripts no longer need to ask their parents for money to travel home or to buy food while off-duty, he explained.

There is also zero tolerance for hazing of conscripts by officers, NCOs or other conscripts, Chun said, which has improved morale. He described a time when conscripts had to follow “a thousand little rules,” such as having to wait for permission to lie down at bedtime or being prohibited from leaving barracks unescorted. Violators could be forced to go barefoot for extended periods as punishment.

“A lot of that has gone and that’s good,” Chun said. Seeing these improvements gives conscripts a sense of why they serve and the type of society they are being asked to defend, he explained. “And I think that is a very powerful force.”

Another significant change is that conscripts can

Harmonizing Human Rights and National Duty

FELIX KIM

South Korea requires all able-bodied men age 18 to 25 to serve 18 to 24 months in the military, with exemptions granted in special cases.

For many years, refusal to serve for reasons of conscience was a crime carrying an 18-month prison sentence. That changed in 2018 when court rulings opened the door for conscientious objectors to perform an alternative form of service. The rulings initially applied only to those with pacifist religious beliefs, but in February 2021 a government panel allowed a man with a nonreligious commitment to nonviolence to perform alternative service.

The panel recognized the applicant’s commitment as “genuine and sincere,” *The Korea Herald* newspaper reported. “There had long been discussions on the matter of introducing alternative service, but such discussions could not achieve real progress because the matter needed to be approached carefully, taking public opinion into account,” Yu Kyun-hye, secretary general of the Military Manpower Administration of the Ministry of National Defense, told *FORUM*. Yu emphasized that a “social atmosphere” recognizing the legitimacy of alternative public service had to be created before widespread public acceptance could be achieved.

Skeptics warned there would be no way to discern between conscientious objectors and people who just wanted to avoid being conscripted. More than two years after the courts decriminalized conscientious

objection, however, Yu’s agency perceives no correlation between the introduction of alternative service and the decline in active-duty military personnel. As South Korea’s pool of young men has decreased, the number of applicants for conscientious objector status has mirrored that decline.

Since 2019, 984 applicants have been approved to swap mandatory military service for alternative public service, according to Yonhap, a government-affiliated news agency. Prior to the ruling, 500 to 600 men were imprisoned each year for conscientious objection, Yu said.

The alternative service option consists of 36 months of full-time work in a prison or detention center, Yu explained. Participants live in groups near their workplaces and receive the same wages and benefits as military conscripts, including vacations and leave.

“The alternative system was created from the viewpoint of harmonizing protecting the human rights of members of minority groups and enabling faithful service for mandatory military duty,” Yu said.

Prison work was chosen because the intense demands are comparable to military service, she said. “Once the government accumulates more experience of operating the alternative service system, discussions on ways to change the service environment are expected to take place.”

Jung Da-min of *The Korea Times* newspaper contributed to this article.



South Korean military conscripts salute family members during an induction ceremony at an Army training center. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

now use cellphones while off-duty. “Some among the Korean public are shouting that this is the end of the Korean military,” he said. “But, no, it has actually made things better.”

As the defense reforms progress, suicides have steadily declined among ROK Armed Forces personnel, down from a high of 155 in 1994 to 62 in 2019, according to government statistics.

The military has worked hard to improve the basics of barracks life, Sheen said, including more privacy in bathing facilities and sleeping quarters and enhanced nutrition options.

Wage increases and improved living conditions come with a hefty price tag, Chun said. Of the more than U.S. \$4 billion the South Korean military spends on defense each year, “more than half of that goes to operational costs: feeding, clothing and paying the Soldiers.”

“I think it’s definitely money well spent and worthwhile,” Sheen said.

Greater Transparency

The Moon government responded to questions about the country’s rising defense budget in May 2018 by convening a meeting with Defense Ministry officials, specialists, Soldiers and civilians. Overwhelmingly,

the public’s biggest concerns related to troops’ health and human rights, with parents asking the military to provide their children with winter jackets and personal protective equipment during their service.

“Korean society is becoming more and more democratic and transparent,” Sheen said. “So, our Foreign Ministry now focuses on public diplomacy with the Korean public, as definitely the Ministry of Defense also does.”

The nature of a conscript military means that nearly every family is affected, Chun said. Public outreach helps leadership “highlight areas that are missed” and gives voice to public concerns that could otherwise breed discontent, he added.

Military training must be rigorous, he said, because each Soldier must be ready for combat, potentially in subfreezing conditions. Under Defense Reform 2.0, however, the safety and welfare of each Soldier is taken into account more than ever.

“The concept of the Korean military is to rebuild a young person once they enter the military, and we only have five weeks [of basic training] to do this,” Chun said. “I think it is a great credit to the Korean young people that they are able to transform themselves into dutiful Soldiers within that short period.” □

Felix Kim is a FORUM contributor reporting from Seoul, South Korea.

STANDING WITH THE PEOPLE



HUNDREDS OF MYANMAR MILITARY PERSONNEL HAVE DEFECTED IN OPPOSITION TO THE COUP

A growing stream of Myanmar (Burma) armed forces personnel are defecting in disgust over the military junta's coup and ruthless crackdown on the nation's people. As many as 800 Soldiers and officers from all components of the military, known as the Tatmadaw, had refused to participate in the brutal dictatorship as of mid-June 2021, with many joining the pro-democracy movement, according to one defecting officer.

"That's about the size of five battalions in Myanmar's military structure," Army Capt. Lin Htet Aung told Radio Free Asia. "Some of them were from the army and many are from the navy, the air force, artillery units, the defense service factories, etc." He is among those who have posted to a Facebook page called People's Soldiers, which was created in mid-May to encourage defections and drew more than 25,000 followers within its first two weeks. "Changing sides is an important tactic for this revolution," he said. "At first, we had hoped about 4,000 of the ... military would change sides. But now we are expecting more than 4,000 will come to the aid of the people."

The Tatmadaw is estimated to have about 350,000 members. Its leaders seized control of the Southeast Asian nation of 57 million people in February 2021, claiming that the November 2020 election won by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's party was fraudulent and jailing the deposed leader and other elected representatives. Four months into the coup, nearly 900 people had been killed by military and security forces, some of them from torture, according to the Association for Political

Prisoners. Most of the victims were peaceful protesters and bystanders. Thousands of people had been detained, according to the activist group, and tens of thousands of citizens had been displaced from their homes across the country.

The world has reacted with outrage, with nations, including the United States, imposing sanctions against the Tatmadaw's leaders and military-controlled entities and demanding the release of political prisoners and the return to power of the civilian government. The United Nations General Assembly in mid-June adopted a resolution calling for an arms embargo against Myanmar; the country's two biggest weapons suppliers, China and Russia, abstained from the vote. "The international community needs to unify in its demand that the Tatmadaw cease the outrageous use of heavy artillery against civilians and civilian objects," U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said. "The military leadership is singularly responsible for this crisis and must be held to account."

Despite the threat of reprisal against them and their families, defecting Myanmar military personnel are speaking out to oppose the junta's bloody tactics and express support for the growing civil disobedience movement. "Instead of protecting the people after taking their taxes as salaries, this institution is committing all these atrocities, so I no longer want to be a part of it," Army Lt. Htet Nay Bala told the Myanmar Now news service. "Everyone felt their future being taken away when the coup happened. As a youth who loves my country, I'll continue with the revolution. There's no turning back." *FORUM Staff*

Myanmar police officers hold roses given to them by anti-coup protesters during a February 2021 demonstration in Yangon, Myanmar. *REUTERS*

INSET: Demonstrators in Yangon protest the military coup in February 2021. *THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK



Japan Self-Defense Forces Soldiers participate in a drill with French Soldiers and U.S. Marines at the Kirishima Training Area in Japan's southern Miyazaki prefecture in mid-May 2021. About 200 troops participated in the joint scenario to defend a remote island from an enemy invasion. "Together we were able to show to the rest of the world our commitment in defending Japanese land, territorial seas and airspace," then-Japanese Vice Defense Minister Yasuhide Nakayama said.

Photo by: The Associated Press

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