



# Strategic Annual Report 2021

## COP26

Contested Values, Technologies and Oceans:  
Intensifying US-China Competition  
and International Response



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Message from the President .....	01
1. Overview	
Contested Values, Technologies and Oceans: Intensifying US-China Competition and International Response .....	02
2. Intensifying Strategic Competition between the United States and China ...	11
3. Expanding Battles over Techno-hegemony between the United States and China .....	20
4. Increasing Military Tensions in Northeast Asia and Japan's Response .....	28
5. Intensifying US-China Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN Faced with Challenges .....	42
6. Changing European Perceptions of China and Deepening Engagement in the Indo-Pacific .....	49
7. Russia Seeking an Exit Strategy .....	55
8. Middle East: Withdrawal of US Forces, Revival of the Taliban Regime, and Search for a New Regional Order .....	62
9. The Revival and Challenges of Multilateralism .....	68
10. JIIA Councilors, Directors, Executive Officers and Research Staff .....	74
11. Ongoing Research Projects .....	78
12. Research Reports .....	79
13. JIIA Strategic Comments .....	81

## Message from the President



President, The Japan Institute  
of International Affairs

Kenichiro Sasae

The inaugural *Strategic Annual Report* was published and the 1<sup>st</sup> Tokyo Global Dialogue was held to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) in 2019, reflecting the commitment I had made upon becoming president to effectively introduce JIIA research results in both Japanese and English. The *Strategic Annual Report* and the Tokyo Global Dialogue reflect the fruits of research activities conducted by JIIA research groups and focus on a strategic theme worthy of particular attention in each year to broadly disseminate JIIA's analyses of regional situations and prospects within Japan and internationally. They have been so well received by all quarters that we have made them annual endeavors, this being the third year for both.

Under the theme of “Contested Values, Technologies and Oceans: Intensifying US-China Competition and International Response”, *Strategic Annual Report 2021* examines the strategic competition between the US and China that has taken the feature of a contest between great powers with governance models based on differing values, and focuses its analyses on the Indo-Pacific region where the contest has manifested itself most acutely in military and security affairs, on the impact of this rivalry on advanced technology supply chains and access to strategic materials, and on attempted cooperation between the two countries on global issues such as climate change. Region-specific trend analyses have also been conducted. Based on these analyses, brief commentaries are presented covering the outlook for US-China relations and international affairs as well as the recommendations for actions and roles expected of Japan.

In addition to releasing its research group reports, JIIA has in recent years been stepping up its timely circulation of research results in both Japanese and English and its international intellectual exchange activities by posting “JIIA Strategic Comments” and “Research Reports” on its website and by hosting numerous virtual events. Interested readers are encouraged to look through the materials whose URLs are provided at the end of this report.

I hope this report will help readers to enhance their understanding of international affairs.



## Overview

# Contested Values, Technologies and Oceans: Intensifying US-China Competition and the International Response

The confrontational relationship between the United States and China that characterized the international situation in 2020 showed no signs of easing in 2021, but intensified and became more multifaceted and structured. The strategic competition between the United States and China has taken the shape of a struggle between major powers with different values-based governance models. This has become most acutely visible in the Indo-Pacific region, and the conflict and competition between the two countries is intensifying not only over military and security issues but also in areas such as safeguarding supply chains for advanced technologies and securing strategic resources. The new US administration of President Joe Biden sees competition with China as a long-term struggle over the values and governance models between democracy versus authoritarianism. Positioning the Indo-Pacific region as its main arena, the US administration is committed to a “free and open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP), and strengthening cooperation with allies and friends by strengthening the framework for cooperation among Japan, the United States, Australia and India (the QUAD), cooperating in the G7 and NATO, and launching a new framework for security cooperation with the United Kingdom and Australia (AUKUS). In response, China has become increasingly hostile to and critical of the United States’ defining of US-China relations and its diplomacy highlighting human rights. There have been moves by the United States and China to seek cooperation and dialogue on global issues such as climate change, and to manage the overall relationship between the two countries notably in the latter half of 2021. However, there is little prospect of improvement in their overall relationship.

The security environment in Northeast Asia is becoming increasingly severe due to heightened tensions around Taiwan and North Korea’s modernization of its military. The relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) showed no signs of improvement throughout 2021, and this has had an impact on efforts to strengthen increasingly important Japan-US-ROK security cooperation. The Indo-Pacific region has seen deepening cooperation through the QUAD and the launch of AUKUS. There were increased lobbying efforts by the United States and China directed at ASEAN, which faced challenges with the situation in Myanmar and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the economic arena, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)’s entry into force has been confirmed, and China and Taiwan have applied for membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Europe’s perceptions of China become much harsher, and it has shown increased interest in the Indo-Pacific with clearer stance. While Russia has maintained a certain level

of relations with the United States, it has increased its cooperation with China amid the polarization between democracy and authoritarianism, and tension with the US and Europe has risen over Ukraine. In the Middle East, the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the resurgence of the Taliban regime symbolized the transformation of the regional order. Negotiations aimed at reviving the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) have stalled, heightening tensions in the region. Multilateralism, which faced a crisis in 2020, was revived by the Biden administration's policy of emphasizing international organizations and multilateral cooperation, but its effectiveness continues to be questioned. As the world continues to be deeply affected by the coronavirus pandemic, the vaccine gap between North and South has become apparent. In the area of climate change, some progress was made at COP26, including cooperation between the United States and China, but strengthening the international efforts to achieve the 1.5 °C target remains a major issue.

The Strategic Annual Report 2021 reviews global developments in 2021 focusing on the intensifying competition between the United States and China over values, technologies and oceans; it also describes the international response, and presents perspectives and recommendations.

### **Intensifying Strategic Competition between the United States and China over Values, Technologies and Oceans**

China's leadership in curbing the spread of COVID-19 and its own economic recovery ahead of other countries bolstered its confidence in its governance model, and it is applying more authoritarian and heavy-handed policies at home and abroad. Domestically, China has tightened its control over Hong Kong and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region despite strong concerns expressed by Western countries and the imposition of sanctions. In addition, China has announced a policy of strengthening the Communist Party's rule led by President Xi Jinping in the economy, society, speech and ideological education. On the security front, China continues to step up its influence in the Western Pacific by enhancing its naval and A2/AD capabilities, enforcing its Coast Guard Law and increasing its activities around the Senkaku Islands, intensifying its military activities around Taiwan, and reinforcing its military bases in the South China Sea, even as it expands its nuclear capabilities. The increase in its military activities in the air and sea areas around Taiwan has been particularly significant. On the diplomatic front, China has continued its Belt and Road Initiative and deployed vaccine diplomacy, and has been actively seeking to restrain the United States and further expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific region, including through its application for membership in the CPTPP.

The Biden administration has taken over the Trump administration's harsh perception of China and regards China as the only competitor that could challenge the stable and open international system, and

believes that the fight over values and governance models will continue for a long time. Based on this viewpoint, President Biden has taken a tough stance against China on human rights and Taiwan issues, and made clear his diplomatic stance of placing emphasis on the Indo-Pacific by holding his first face-to-face summit after taking office with Japan. Prioritizing diplomacy over military arena to win the competition with China, the Biden administration has been engaged in active diplomacy to strengthen cooperation with allies and friends by bolstering the QUAD framework, pursuing cooperation in the G7 and NATO, and launching AUKUS, a new security framework with the UK and Australia, to complement bilateral diplomacy. The US also held the Summit for Democracy, which embodies diplomacy based on values. While positioning Russia, along with China, as an authoritarian competitor, the US has nevertheless indicated its willingness to maintain a certain level of relations by such means as starting a new strategic dialogue. However, tensions have increased over Ukraine.

In the area of economic security, differences in values concerning technology and data are acting as a centrifugal force between the United States and China. The United States is trying to gain an edge over China in developing advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum technology and hypersonic technology. To reduce dependence on China for strategic technologies and products such as semiconductors and information and communications equipment, as well as for resources such as rare earths, the Biden administration has issued policies to step up R&D and production in the United States and strengthen network supply chains among democratic countries. In terms of security, the United States is particularly concerned about the situation around Taiwan and is working with its allies and friends to counter China's growing military strength and activities in the Western Pacific. Statements on the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits were issued in summit meetings, and the United States and its allies have deployed the largest number of troops in the Western Pacific since the end of the Cold War. The launch of AUKUS can also be seen to reflect US concerns over the military balance in the region.

China strongly opposed the US' definition of Sino-American relations as a competition between democracy and autocracy and its intervention in human rights issues, and has intensified its criticism of the United States, stressing its unwillingness to compromise on its core interests as it defined. China is also pursuing advanced technology superiority against the United States, as well as policies to mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities and strengthen state control over data. In the second half of 2021, both the United States and China announced their intention to ease tensions, sought cooperation on common agenda such as climate change, and endeavored to manage overall US-China relations through high-level meetings, but these efforts did not lead to improvement in their overall relations. China also made clear its intention to strengthen its relations with Russia, as shown by the first joint cruise in waters around Japan by Chinese and Russian naval vessels.

## International Impact of US-China Relations and the International Response

In Northeast Asia, the DPRK continued to strengthen its nuclear capabilities and modernize its military despite its economic difficulties. Since September, it has increased and diversified its missile launches to include cruise missiles and SLBMs as well as new ballistic missiles. North Korea has shown no willingness to respond to the Biden administration's call for dialogue, and the security environment in the region has increased its severity due to North Korea's continued development of nuclear weapons and missiles amid the prolonged stalemate in US-North Korea relations since the end of the Trump administration, and to the aforementioned heightened tensions around Taiwan. Under these circumstances, closer Japan-US-ROK security cooperation has become ever more important, but Japan-ROK relations showed no signs of improvement throughout 2021, which also affected Japan-US-ROK cooperation.

The Biden administration has clearly committed to a "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) and cooperation through the QUAD has deepened significantly, with two summits held and specific cooperative measures agreed upon and implemented. A military coup in Myanmar in February upset the tortuous course of democratization, and had a significant impact on ASEAN unity and integration. ASEAN countries and the South Asian region including India suffered from widespread COVID-19 infections that had a major impact on the region's politics, economies and societies. Faced with the challenges of dealing with the problems surrounding Myanmar and the coronavirus pandemic, ASEAN has not made notable progress in implementing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), while external actors, including the United States and China, have stepped up their lobbying to ASEAN countries. In the economic arena, the entry into force of the RCEP has been confirmed, and China and Taiwan have applied to join the CPTPP.

In Europe, the perception of China has become much more severe, and a growing interest in the Indo-Pacific region has been accompanied by a clarification of the EU's position, as demonstrated by the European Parliament's decision to freeze consideration of the investment agreement with China and its adoption of a strategic document containing a harsh view of China, as well as by the release of an Indo-Pacific strategy by the European Commission and the External Action Service. Some countries in Central and Eastern Europe also reviewed their relations with China and strengthened political and economic ties with Taiwan. The United Kingdom, France and Germany each sent naval vessels to the Indo-Pacific and conducted joint exercises with Japan, the United States, and QUAD countries to demonstrate their more active engagement with the region in a concrete manner. Following its departure from the EU, Britain has taken a markedly greater interest in the Indo-Pacific region, as demonstrated by its application to the CPTPP and the AUKUS agreement with the United States and Australia, but its relations with the EU have been strained. There were moves in NATO to reaffirm and improve the unity that had been strained under the Trump administration, but the disarray caused by the withdrawal of US forces

from Afghanistan without consultation with NATO drew criticism. Relations between NATO and Russia continued to deteriorate, and tensions with Russia over Ukraine is escalating from autumn.

Russia established a certain degree of relations with the United States through holding of a US-Russia summit meeting and launch of the Strategic Stability Dialogue agreed upon at that meeting. However, in the midst of the polarization between democracy versus authoritarianism, Russia has showed increased cooperation with China. The Chinese and Russian navies conducted the first joint cruise in waters near Japan and Russia was engaged in more in-depth dialogue with regional countries in cooperation with China after the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

In the Middle East, the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the resurgence of the Taliban regime symbolized the transformation of the regional order. As President Biden shifted his diplomatic and security focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific, the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan was implemented at the end of August, but the Taliban took control of Kabul ahead of the withdrawal, and the withdrawal took place amid chaos. Some observers suggested that the withdrawal of US forces would undermine the Biden administration's international standing by raising questions about its emphasis on human rights and democracy and its commitment to cooperate with its allies. There is growing concern about Afghanistan under Taliban rule over its governance policies such as protection of human rights, and the possibility that it will once again become a hotbed of international terrorism. China and Russia have increased their presence in the region since the US withdrawal. There have been changes of government in Israel and Iran, and following the establishment of a hardline anti-US administration in Iran, negotiations with the countries concerned aimed at reviving the Iranian nuclear agreement (JCPOA), from which former US President Donald Trump withdrew, have been facing difficulties, heightening tensions in the region.

Multilateralism, which faced a crisis in 2020, was revived as the Biden administration promoted a return to international organizations and agreements and took the initiative in multilateral international collaboration and policy coordination. Although concrete improvements have been made in the field of international taxation, the effectiveness of multilateralism continues to be questioned. As the coronavirus pandemic continues, provision of vaccines to developing countries was slow, highlighting the North-South disparity in vaccine supply. In the area of climate change, some headway was made at COP 26, including cooperation between the United States and China, but the 1.5 degree target remains a major issue.



## Perspectives and Recommendations

The strategic competition between the United States and China is expected to be prolonged, and it will inevitably continue to have various implications on the international community. For Japan, situated at the forefront of this competition, the United States is an ally that shares fundamental values and strategic interests, and the Japan-US alliance is the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy. Japan and the United States need to further promote the maintenance and strengthening of democracy and the rules-based international order and consider bilateral cooperation to reinforce their security capabilities.

The competition for technological hegemony between the United States and China is heating up over the semiconductor supply chain, export control policies, and data handling, but the United States and China have not completely decoupled over economic and technology issues. While Japan shares security interests and democratic values with the US, it is deeply tied to China economically. Based on these circumstances, Japan needs to address technology policy from the viewpoint of economic security. The Kishida Cabinet has made clear its position of placing importance on economic security by appointing the first minister responsible for economic security. In addition to establishing a new fund to support R&D in advanced technologies and making the semiconductor supply chain more robust, ensuring the security and reliability of core and digital infrastructure is a particularly urgent and important issue. It is also necessary to promote policies that support private companies and research institutes in taking concrete measures. Scheduled to host the G7 Summit in 2023, Japan will be also expected to play a leading role in making data processing rules. As the battle lines for technological hegemony between the United States and China expand, it is important for Japan to promote a balanced approach to economic security in both domestic and foreign policies.

China continues to build up its military capabilities while lacking transparency and intensify its offensive moves in the East China Sea, South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. North Korea's development of new weapons already poses a direct threat to Japan's defense posture, and the DPRK has vowed to further strengthen its military. Given the increasingly severe security environment in Northeast Asia, establishing a comprehensive deterrence posture has become an important agenda. In this context, the Biden administration's National Security Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review scheduled for early 2022 will draw attention.

In Japan, the Kishida cabinet announced a review of the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Program Guidelines. Adapting its foreign and security policies to the times and radically improving its own defense capabilities are of crucial importance to Japan. The times demand that defense spending be increased to a level of 2% or more of GDP within, say, in the early part of ten years. The

debate on Japan's capability to strike enemy bases should not simply be an argument over the pros and cons, but should be structured in a manner consistent with the deterrence theory. There is also an urgent need to develop arms control measures such as crisis management mechanisms, confidence-building measures, and transparency measures between the United States and China and between Japan and China. With regard to the denuclearization of North Korea, it is hoped that Japan-ROK cooperation on security issues will advance under the next president of the ROK.

It is important that Japan continue to pursue concrete cooperation through the QUAD as one of the useful frameworks contributing to the FOIP concept. It is important to pay heed that the benefits of the QUAD as a flexible framework for cooperation among a few friendly countries are not undermined by excessive structuring or an overly diverse scope of activities, and to promote the values of freedom and democracy and a rules-based international order and pursue closer security cooperation. In addition to Japan-US, Japan-Australia and Japan-US-Australia security cooperation, active promotion of stronger Japan-UK cooperation is desired as it will also lead to closer relations between the QUAD and AUKUS. More thorough explanations will be required to gain the understanding and support of ASEAN and other regional countries regarding the contributions of the QUAD and AUKUS to regional security and FOIP, and Japan can play a major role with regard to the QUAD. Multi-layered initiatives, including strengthening cooperation with ASEAN and other countries in the region as well as with countries in Europe and elsewhere outside the region that share fundamental values, will continue to be important in promoting FOIP. It will be important for Japan to actively support ASEAN's efforts to implement the AOIP, and provide assistance to ASEAN and Pacific countries in the areas of vaccine supply, development of high-quality infrastructure, and maintenance of maritime order.

Japan can also play a leading role in international rulemaking. The strategic significance of the TPP is well understood in Japan, and while many in Japan hope the US will return, few welcome China's participation. It is important for Japan to uphold the principles of maintaining the CPTPP's high standards for both market access and rules in considering membership applications. Some observers contend that China's application presents an opportunity to correct various aspects of China's behavior through negotiations. However, even if strategic and political considerations are set aside, Japan will need to carefully evaluate whether China can meet the strict requirements for joining the CPTPP. Taiwan has applied for membership as an independent customs territory, which poses no problems under the CPTPP provisions and is consistent with WTO rules. In assessing Taiwan's application, it will be necessary to take into account Taiwan's democratic maturity and its development of practical economic relations in high-tech and other sectors. It is important, along with the expansion of economic relations between Japan and China, to further promote working-level economic relations with Taiwan while maintaining Japan's

principled position on the stability of the Taiwan Strait. Japan can also contribute to maintaining and strengthening the trade system through a multilayered approach that employs multilateral trade regimes and free trade agreements (FTAs), by emphasizing the importance of the CPTPP in the context of China policy to the United States, and by engaging the US through greater cooperation in labor, environment and high-tech areas.

Japan should also undertake diplomatic efforts that emphasize values such as human rights. Japan has made the concept of human security an important pillar of its diplomacy, but it is the only G7 country that has yet to impose sanctions on China over human rights issues in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, showing some difference with Western countries. In light of the establishment of the post of special advisor to the prime minister on human rights issues, discussions should be advanced on how the nation should deal with human rights issues.

It is important for Japan to employ proactive diplomacy with Europe, a strategic partner with which Japan shares fundamental values, through further strengthening of its bilateral relations as well as its cooperation with the EU and NATO, so that support for FOIP will continue to be reflected in the policies and actions of European countries. Japan and Europe should cooperate in promoting multilateral cooperation that combines values and technologies such as advanced technology supply chains made up of democratic countries. It is also hoped that Japan will actively work to enhance Japan-UK relations, including by supporting the UK's participation in the CPTPP and further strengthening ties between the Self-Defence Forces and the British Armed Forces.

Moves by Russia to provoke Japan are likely to push Japan to reconsider its view of Russia, and Japan's policy toward Russia will require not only addressing the Northern Territories issue but also adopting a new approach that balances security and economy. It is essential to maintain and utilize such channels as the Foreign and Defense Ministerial Consultations (2 + 2) and keep close communication between Japan and Russia. To improve its security environment, Japan should also actively cooperate with Russia in areas where it is able to pursue mutually beneficial interests.

In the Middle East, Japan is expected to actively contribute to endeavors involving Afghanistan, Middle East peace, and the Iranian nuclear issue. With regard to Afghanistan, Japan should continue its efforts in calling on the Taliban to ensure that the regime upholds basic human rights, particularly the rights of women, while providing humanitarian assistance through international organizations. With regard to peace in the Middle East, it is important for Japan to appeal to both Israelis and Palestinians to stop the exchange of violence and build trust, and to continue making steady efforts through its assistance based

on relationships of trust with both sides. With regard to the Iranian nuclear issue, Japan needs to continue diplomatic efforts through close channels of dialogue with both the United States and Iran to ensure that the issue does not escalate tensions in the region.

Regarding the supply of COVID-19 vaccines, it is essential that Japan continue its assistance, especially “last mile” support, to developing countries. In the area of climate change, Japan should continue making bold efforts to fulfill the reduction targets it has set. Japan will also need to urge that China set and implement reduction goals that are appropriate for a responsible great power. Furthermore, Japan should actively support climate change countermeasures in developing countries, and take proactive and strategic approaches to rulemaking on decarbonization. ■

## Intensifying Strategic Competition between the United States and China

U.S.-China Strategic competition has taken the form of a new Cold War between major powers that have different values and political systems. The new administration of US President Joe Biden, which was inaugurated in January, has taken over the Trump administration's harsh view of China, and positioned China as "the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system". It has taken a tough stance toward China on issues such as human rights and Taiwan, and has been pursuing vigorous diplomacy to strengthen ties with its allies and friends by, for example, bolstering the QUAD framework with Japan, Australia and India, and launching AUKUS, a new security framework with the United Kingdom and Australia. China, on the other hand, has strongly opposed the United States' defining of US-China relations and US moves to counter China, and has escalated its criticism of the United States. While it has developed vaccine diplomacy and pursued economic and aid diplomacy internationally, China has also continued its "wolf warrior diplomacy". The ways in which the United States and China regard each other and their policies toward each other strongly reflect their respective domestic circumstances. In the second half of 2021, some moves were made to manage US-China relations through high-level talks and bilateral cooperation on global issues such as climate change. However, there is no prospect of improving US-China relations overall.



US President Joe Biden speaks about foreign policy at the State Department, March 2021. (Photo by AP/Aflo)

### **US-China relations in 2021 characterized by "strategic competition"**

The United States and China are at loggerheads over their political systems and values such as human rights. President Biden made it clear that he would emphasize cooperation and collaboration with allies, friendly nations, international organizations, and other multilateral systems, in contrast to the previous Trump administration, which adopted a unilateralist approach based on the principle of "America first". However, regarding relations with China, he inherited from the Trump administration the perception that the two countries are engaged in a strategic competition. The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance released on March 3 recognized that the strategic competition is intensifying between the United States and China, Russia, and other authoritarian states, and stated that the greatest geopolitical



challenge to the United States in the 21st century was the management of its relations with China. The Biden administration has defined China as “the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system,” and unveiled a policy of countering China by strengthening cooperation with countries that share democratic and human rights values.

Symbolically illustrating the 2021 US-China conflict was a March 18–19 meeting in Anchorage, Alaska, between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, and Chinese Politburo member Yang Jiechi and State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The meeting was held in the form of the two top Chinese diplomats following the step of Blinken on his way home from a visit to Japan and South Korea, a sign that China was eager for high-level talks with the United States. The talks, however, took an unusual turn, with the two countries asserting their own positions and exchanging criticisms on camera, highlighting the chilly US-China relationship. After the meeting, China repeatedly condemned the United States’ criticism of China and its economic sanctions, while sending signals that the United States was responsible for intensifying the confrontation between the two countries and that China did not want a confrontation.

In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States actively pursued diplomacy against China in partnership with its allies and friends. On March 12, less than two months after Biden’s inauguration, the first online summit between the leaders of four democracies in the Indo-Pacific region, namely Japan, the United States, Australia and India (the QUAD), was called by the United States. Immediately thereafter, Secretary of State Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Japan and South Korea, holding 2+2 meetings with the foreign and defense ministers of both countries with a view to strengthening cooperation in dealing with China. On September 15, AUKUS was established as a new security framework for the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region by the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. This included plans by the United States and Britain to assist Australia with acquiring nuclear submarines, with China’s increasing maritime presence in mind. On September 24, the United States hosted the QUAD’s first face-to-face summit.

The United States also placed advocacy for human rights and democratic values in the forefront of its diplomacy, strongly condemning China over its crackdown on pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong and on Uighurs and other Muslim minorities. It aimed at tightening regulations to remove products associated with Xinjiang from supply chains and strengthening cooperation between countries to eradicate forced labor in global supply chains. Disputes between the United States and China over the origins of COVID-19 and the superiority of vaccines have also intensified. Furthermore, the Biden administration hosted the

Summit for Democracy on December 9-10 via online, for which 110 democratic countries and region, including Taiwan, were invited. The Biden administration has made a series of concrete efforts to join forces with allies and friends to compete with an autocratic China, but it is unclear whether this summit will serve as a gathering of countries that defend democratic values and regimes, as the United States expects. In addition, on December 6, the Biden administration officially announced a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics to be held in China in the winter of 2022, citing human rights violations in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In this way, the Biden administration continues to demonstrate its strong stance that it will not tolerate the human rights situation in China.

For China, the United States' criticism of Chinese despotism poses a challenge to the most important concept of political security within the "Holistic Approach to National Security" advocated by Xi Jinping's leadership, namely the Communist Party's rule itself. While the United States tries to stabilize the bilateral relationship by defining it as "responsible competition," China opposes defining Sino-US relations as "competition" and takes a position that emphasizes cooperation. China's top priority is the survival and development of itself (its own government), and there is nothing related to the "values" that the United States emphasizes in this context. China continues to show a strong aversion to and rejection of Western assertions of human rights and other values as a pretext in countering China's rise and interfering in China's internal affairs. Xi Jinping's leadership, citing the principle of noninterference in domestic affairs, has stressed its unwillingness to yield on its core interests, and has vehemently retorted that Canada and Australia, as well as the United States, should do a better job on human rights issues themselves. China needs to avoid the impression of weak-kneed diplomacy at home, and the Xi administration has therefore maintained its strong stance and been assertive at every opportunity. Xi's speech for the centennial celebration of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party on July 1 was symbolic. Wearing the same gray tunic suit as that in Mao Zedong's portrait displayed at Tiananmen, Xi boldly and loudly declared, "Attempts to oppose the Chinese Communist Party by dividing it from the Chinese people will never succeed" and "We will never accept the preaching of foreign 'teachers.'" Although he did not explicitly mention the United States, that name was clearly in his mind. The ambivalence seen in expressing a desire to improve relations while adopting a hardline attitude is characteristic of Chinese diplomacy and causes confusion in other countries. In addition, China has demonstrated more clearly its stance of working together with Russia to counter the United States. China and Russia have taken the initiative to promote cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbors through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a framework that they lead, after the withdrawal of US forces. China has also taken steps to strengthen cooperation between Chinese and Russian forces in the region including areas surrounding Japan. Regarding Russia, the United States has made it clear that, unlike its policy toward China, it intends to maintain a certain level of interaction, including the launch of a new strategic dialogue. These fierce

conflicts between the United States and China have had a serious impact on the world in a wide range of areas beyond traditional security, including economic issues that are becoming ever more closely tied to security, and global challenges including climate change and infectious disease countermeasures. In terms of trade, the US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He held telephone talks in May and October to review China's implementation of the phase one agreement reached with the Trump administration, including its purchase of US products. The United States also announced that it would begin a review of its tariffs on China, which it inherited from the previous administration. At the same time, as detailed in Chapter 3, the United States focused on strengthening regulations on China regarding advanced technologies and building supply chains among democratic countries. Many countries in Asia and the rest of the world are deepening their trade and investment ties with China, and many, especially developing countries, are receiving economic assistance and investment from China under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as assistance such as the provision of masks and vaccines in response to the coronavirus outbreak. The Biden administration, which advocates a "Foreign Policy for the Middle Class," cannot offer these countries appealing enough economic incentives to replace China, including the absence of indication that it will return to the TPP. With China emphasizing the legitimacy and superiority of its own governance model, numerous developing countries and countries with undemocratic tendencies are attracted to and support China's governance model, which combines autocratic governance with economic development. In addition, the United States and its allies are concerned about China's attempts to make its standards the international standards in international rulemaking and its growing influence over international organizations, backed by its market power and rapidly growing technological capabilities.

On the other hand, the United States and China do not want to intensify the conflict. President Xi Jinping said in a video speech at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference on April 20 that he opposed both the "new Cold War" and "ideological confrontation." President Biden, on his part, said in his remarks at the United Nations General Assembly on September 21 that he did not want a "new Cold War". In the second half of 2021, there were moves to ease tensions between the United States and China through summit meetings and bilateral cooperation on global issues such as climate change. Following up on their February meeting, President Biden and President Xi held a second telephone conversation in September and their first online summit on November 15. The online summit affirmed the need for the two countries to avoid conflict and the importance of bilateral cooperation. In the area of climate change, a joint declaration was issued at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) to work together to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. Although no concrete progress has been made on pending issues such as Taiwan, human rights and trade that have become increasingly controversial between the United States and China, highlighting once again the extent of the gap between the two

sides, the holding of this meeting itself reflects the stance of two countries to avoid conflict and to build and maintain channels for dialogue.

### **The domestic circumstances of the United States and China and their impact on their foreign policies**

The new Biden administration inaugurated on January 20, 2021 faces many challenges. One is the partisan divide that has characterized US politics in recent years, which also surfaced in the 2020 presidential election. While the peaceful transfer of power through elections is an important element of democracy, an extraordinary situation unfolded in which then President Donald Trump refused to accept his defeat by claiming fraud in the election, and the process of a smooth change of government was impeded. On January 6, a mob, believing the president's claims, broke into the US Capitol, where the results of the presidential election were to be officially confirmed, and occupied the building. The intrusion into and occupation of the Capitol Building, which embodied denial of elections and politics based on democracy, shocked both the American people and the world. This incident, along with former President Trump's absence from the inauguration ceremony of President Biden on January 20, severely damaged the image of the United States as the standard-bearer of democracy. However, with few exceptions, there was no major criticism of Trump from the Republican Party, showing the radicalization of the partisan conflict between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. In addition, partisan confrontation has further intensified over mandatory workplace vaccinations against COVID-19 and other issues and has continued to undermine the cooperation between the two parties needed to deliver on President Biden's promises.

The Democratic Party currently holds a majority in both the House and the Senate: the Democratic Party has 222 seats in the House of Representatives (number of seats: 435; term of office: two years) and the Republican Party 211 seats, while the two parties have 50 seats each in the Senate (number of seats: 100; term of office: six years). In the Senate, therefore, the Democratic Party barely holds the majority as the Vice President, who plays the role of chairperson, would vote when the votes would be split in the equal number. In addition to the partisan divide described above, the intraparty division between the left wing and the centrists within the Democratic Party has deepened, making it difficult for President Biden to implement his signature policies, such as the infrastructure investment bill to improve aging roads and bridges and the Build Better Back Plan for improving environmental measures and child-rearing support. This situation was compounded by the confusion surrounding the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, which will be described later, as well as the ongoing inflation that has adversely affected people's lives as they try to put the economy back on track to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, leading to a decline in President Biden's approval rating. The Democratic loss in the November 2 gubernatorial election in Virginia, which had been a stronghold of the Democratic Party, highlighted the decline in Biden's approval rating, and President Biden is now faced with a difficult situation in the

run-up to the midterm elections in a year's time. Although the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was finally enacted on November 15 in the form of halving the scale, there was no enactment of Build Better Back Plan before the end of the year due to the lack of consensus within the Democratic Party.

As part of the realignment of US forces towards the Indo-Pacific region, President Biden followed the Trump administration's policy of withdrawing US forces from Afghanistan, announcing in April that the withdrawal would be completed by September 11, 20 years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and then completing the withdrawal even earlier, on August 30. Prior to the completion of withdrawal, the Taliban took control of Kabul on August 15 and the evacuation operation was conducted amid great confusion. In addition to criticism of the way in which US forces were withdrawn, the Taliban's seizure of the entire country, despite 20 years of time with enormous war costs, allowed the Taliban to return to power and raised concerns about human rights violations against US collaborators and women in Afghanistan. This situation exposed the difficulty of upholding democratic values promoted by the Biden administration and, combined with the growing threat of international terrorism, led to a harsh assessment of the Biden administration on both foreign and domestic fronts.

China is heading into its own political season, and domestic politics will take precedence from 2021 to 2022. The biggest political event for China in 2021 was, of course, the centennial anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP has related heroic episodes from its 100-year history, touted its achievements and avowed the legitimacy of its regime. Culminating these efforts, the Xi administration has adopted the Party's third-ever "historical resolution". The 20<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress is scheduled to be held in autumn 2022. Preparations, including personnel appointments, have already begun within the Party. Although the centenary of the Party's founding is a milestone, the Party Congress is a substantially more important political event for keeping Xi in office.

The Xi administration has launched a series of aggressive domestic policies. In an effort to ease public discontent over the concentration of the fruits of economic growth among a small group of wealthy people, he has called for "common prosperity". On the other hand, the Party's leadership has been emphasized, socialist ideology has been brought to the fore again, and the government's stranglehold on the entertainment and education industries has been strengthened. Since 2012, Xi Jinping has established a strong power base and maintained a stable administration. Nevertheless, he seems to be working hard to make further progress as the Party Congress approaches.

China has maintained a foreign policy designed to assert its status as a great power as it looks ahead to the second of the "two centenaries" mentioned repeatedly over the past several years – the centenary



celebration of the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 2049 – and its diplomacy is conspicuously characterized by great-power chauvinism. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, its wolf warrior diplomacy has once again drawn attention as spokespersons at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomats stationed in various places have fiercely criticized other countries. At the end of May 2021, Xi Jinping asserted that China should endeavor to create an image of “a reliable, admirable and respectable China”, leading to speculation that China would attempt to make policy adjustment. However, Xi's remarks meant not that China should make efforts to improve its international image, but rather that other countries should correct their misperceptions of China. Wolf warrior diplomacy has not been abandoned since then, nor has China's foreign policy softened. Its intensification of military pressure and continued coercive rhetoric against Taiwan, as well as its response to Lithuania's efforts to strengthen relations with Taiwan, are typical examples. On the other hand, Xi Jinping did not mention the use of force against Taiwan in his speech at the 110th anniversary celebration of the Xinhai Revolution in October, and his speech has remained relatively moderate. In the run-up to the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022 and the Party Congress in autumn of the same year, it is clear that the Party wants to make as few waves as possible while highlighting its presence in the international community.

In September, China surprised countries concerned by formally applying to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). However, as noted in last year's Strategic Annual Report, President Xi already expressed his willingness to join the CPTPP nearly a year ago, and it can be said that the speech has simply been turned into action. Taiwan announced its own application for CPTPP membership shortly thereafter. Although Taiwan may appear to be following China, it should be noted that Taiwan had been considering and preparing to join the CPTPP for some time. China's application to join the CPTPP poses a challenge for the countries involved, but it is also an expression of China's willingness to participate in the international community and strengthen its economic influence in the Asia-Pacific region (see Chapter 5).



Xi Jinping delivers a speech at a ceremony marking the centenary of the CCP in Beijing, July 2021. (Photo by Xinhua/Aflo)

### **Perspectives and recommendations**

How will US-China relations develop going forward? The United States and China do not want to engage in armed conflict with each other, and it is unlikely that the rivalry between the two countries will develop into a large-scale armed conflict for the foreseeable future unless driven to that point by distrust and a

succession of misunderstandings. However, the possibility of accidental clashes, minor conflicts, gray-zone confrontations and further competitions in cyberspace, as well as the potential that such incidents could lead to a large-scale conflict, cannot be ruled out. In addition, the competition for superiority between democracy and authoritarianism in the background of these “undesirable scenarios” cannot be easily settled. Thus, the discord between the two countries will inevitably be prolonged and have a considerable impact on the international community.

Japan is at the forefront of the US-China conflict. To Japan, the United States is an ally that shares fundamental values and strategic interests, and it goes without saying that the Japan-US alliance is the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy. In order to counter challenges to democracy, Japan and the United States need to uphold democracy and further strengthen a rules-based international order in order to counter the challenges to the democracy. The two countries also need to consider what can be done in Japan-US cooperation to strengthen security capabilities. In particular, as detailed in Chapter 4, Japan needs to adapt its foreign and security policies to the trends of the times and to radically improve its own defense capabilities, along with strengthening its relationship with the United States not only on economic and traditional security issues, but also on global issues such as climate change and infectious diseases.

On the other hand, China is Japan’s largest trading partner, and it ranks first in the number of Japanese corporate bases overseas, indicating the close economic relationship between Japan and China. US-China and Japan-China cooperation is essential on global topics such as climate change, as well as on economic issues.

Specifically, it will be important for Japan to reinforce its policy of integrating economic security, including the strengthening of supply chains, and traditional security while encouraging China to observe international rules, as peace and stability in the region are important. In doing so, it is essential to cooperate and coordinate with countries inside and outside the region that share universal values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. In this regard, it is important that Japan consciously engage ASEAN countries besides its QUAD partners of Australia and India. In addition, countries outside the Indo-Pacific region, such as NATO and EU member states, should be encouraged to cooperate more broadly and flexibly in a wide range of areas to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific, and to consider ways to reach out to China together with these countries and regions.

Beyond multilateral cooperation, Japan can also play a leading role in international rulemaking. As for the CPTPP, Japan holds a core position. China and Taiwan have applied for CPTPP membership, following the United Kingdom. Regarding China’s application, even if setting aside strategic and political

considerations, Japan will need to evaluate whether China can meet the strict requirements for CPTPP membership, as China is no longer in a position to assert its status as a developing country in the traditional sense. As for Taiwan, it is necessary to take into account its democratic maturity and the development of practical economic relations in high-tech and other sectors. It is important, along with the expansion of economic relations between Japan and China, to further promote working-level economic relations with Taiwan while maintaining Japan's principled position on the stability of the Taiwan Strait. Based on the concept of the "data free flow with trust" (DFFT) proposed by Japan, it will also be necessary for Japan to take the lead in formulating international rules on data distribution and electronic commerce in cooperation with relevant countries, regions and international organizations, while at the same time making efforts to effectively involve China in this process.

In addition, Japan should undertake diplomatic efforts that emphasize values such as human rights. Japan has made the concept of human security an important pillar of its diplomacy and has taken a dialogue-and-cooperation approach by disseminating and supporting the concept in the international community. Japan is the only country in the Group of Seven that has yet to impose sanctions on China over human rights issues in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, showing some difference with Western countries. In light of the recent establishment of the post of special advisor to the prime minister on human rights issues, discussions should be advanced on how the nation should deal with human rights issues.

Furthermore, Japan will need to respond proactively to the major challenges facing the democratic process due to foreign influence operations, including disinformation campaigns. Recognizing that such activities constitute a serious threat that may divide public opinion and adversely affect the democratic policy-making process, it is desirable to explore the possibility of multilateral cooperation in new diplomatic and security domains while independently developing disinformation countermeasures. ■

## Expanding Battles over Techno-hegemony between the United States and China

The battles over techno-hegemony between the United States and China are continuing and seem to be expanding. The United States and China are competing not only for technological superiority in emerging technology fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum technology and hypersonic technology, but also for supply chains in critical technology fields such as semiconductors and information and communications equipment. Moreover, value-based differences over technology and data act as centrifugal forces that further separate the United States and China.

### US-China Competition for Technological Superiority

The United States and China continue to vie for technological superiority and there has been no change in the US government's stance of seeking superiority in critical and emerging technologies since the inauguration of the new Biden administration. In March, President Biden released the Interim National Security Strategy Guidance, positioning China as 'the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.' In its final report released in March, the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence (NSCAI) expressed concern that the United States would be overtaken by China in the field of AI, and recommended measures to promote innovation and maintain American superiority. In October, Michael Brown, director of the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) at the US Department of Defense, said that the United States should invest in basic research in these areas in order to gain an edge in critical and emerging technologies.

Preventing the outflow of critical and emerging technologies is another policy that the US government continues to emphasize. In October, the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) listed AI, bioeconomy, autonomous systems, quantum, and semiconductors as critical and emerging technologies that should be protected first. The Commerce Department added biotechnology software to its list of emerging technology export controls in October and is expected to include brain-computer interfaces in the future. Export controls were imposed on seven supercomputer-related entities in China in April, on eight quantum-computer-related entities based in China in November, and on Chinese companies and research institutes allegedly misusing biotechnology to support surveillance and military modernization in December. Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that researchers associated with the Chinese military are conducting joint research with overseas research institutes in critical and emerging technology fields such as AI technology and

brain science. In December, a world-renowned nanotechnology professor at Harvard University was convicted of lying to US authorities about his participation in China's Thousand Talents Plan.

The new Biden administration has placed greater emphasis on cooperation with allies and friends than the previous Trump administration. For example, at the Japan-US Summit Meeting in April, the two countries agreed to deepen Japan-US cooperation in research and development (R&D) in fields such as AI, quantum information science, and biotechnology. In addition, the two leaders announced that, under the Japan-US Competitiveness and Resilience (Core) Partnership they launched, their countries would invest in research, development, demonstration and dissemination of secure networks such as 5G and next-generation mobile communications networks and advanced information and communications technology (ICT) and cooperate in fostering and protecting critical technologies. Furthermore, efforts were sought to complement traditional international cooperation frameworks through new plurilateral measures consisting of a small set of countries sharing common interests and values. Established in September, AUKUS, consisting of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, drew attention to the issue of nuclear submarines, but also announced that it would strengthen its integrated capabilities and interoperability with a focus on cyber, AI, and quantum technologies. In the same month, Japan, the United States, Australia and India, too, announced the establishment of cooperation in critical and emerging technologies via the QUAD. The US-EU Technology Trade Council (TTC), which also met for the first time in September, decided to closely coordinate information sharing on investment screening, export control, and the development and implementation of AI by the next meeting.

China is scrambling for technological superiority as well. The 14th Five-Year Plan, announced in March, indicated the Chinese authorities' determination to emphasize technological innovation by focusing on seven fields, including AI, quantum information, integrated circuits, brain science, and aerospace science and technology. In fact, China's technological progress has been spectacular. Reports that China tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic glider orbiting the Earth in July and August caused much interest and concern. It was also reported that the engine of the J-20, which was demonstrated at an air show in September, was made in China instead of Russia. As the former chief software officer of the US Air Force pointed out, the United States is losing to China in AI development in the military sphere, thus the era in which the United States had overwhelming technological superiority and China was playing catch-up is coming to an end.

However, China's speed and rates of achievement in innovation vary by technological field, and some observers contend that China's technological innovation has not made much progress. The impact of the US government's export controls on semiconductors is particularly significant. The smartphones that



Huawei launched in July did not support 5G, and the company's sales are reportedly down significantly. Huawei has been unable to procure advanced chips from Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (TSMC), Google apps, and Qualcomm 5G wireless modems, leading some to speculate that the company is running out of the stock of chips it developed on its own. China's largest foundry, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), has also been unable to procure lithography equipment from ASLM in the Netherlands. In July, Tsinghua University's Tsinghua Unigroup, which had been expected to play a leading role in improving China's semiconductor self-sufficiency rate, admitted bankruptcy. This will make it difficult to achieve the Chinese government's goal of 75% semiconductor self-sufficiency by 2030. In addition, some point out that technological innovation in China has been hampered by tighter regulations on the big-tech BATH (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei) companies, as illustrated by Tencent and Baidu being punished for antitrust violations in March.

### Competition amid Economic Interdependence

Battles over techno-hegemony go beyond superiority in technology. As competing countries are economically interdependent, networks linking their industrial and technological bases are sometimes used for foreign policy and national security purposes in what has been termed the weaponization of interdependence.

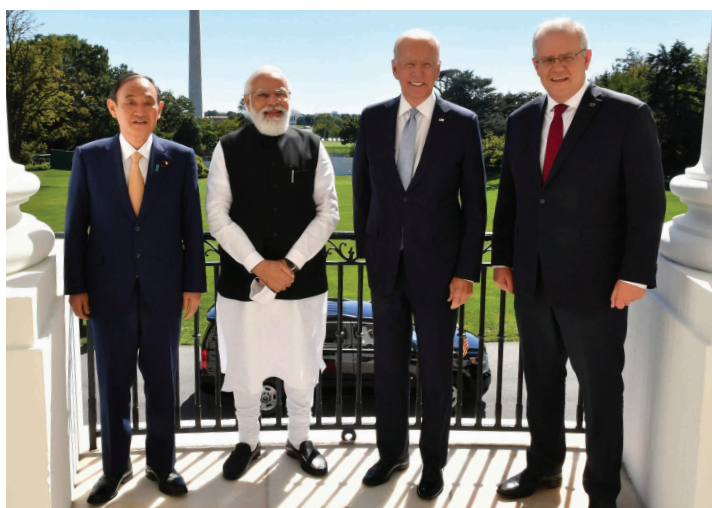
As a result, concerns about the risks to cross-border supply chains have increased. The escalating tension between the United States and China, as well as the coronavirus crisis, exacerbated such concerns, and governments have begun to review and restructure their supply chains. In particular, the US government's efforts to restructure supply chains were distinctly oriented toward excluding China. In February, President Biden issued an Executive Order 14017 demanding supply chain reviews for four areas of products (pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, batteries and minerals including rare earths), the results of which were to be reported within 100 days, and for six sectors (defense industrial infrastructure, public health, ICT, energy, transportation and agricultural products), the results of which are to be reported within a year. The results of the review for four product supply chains published in June identified risks such as weak supply chains, malicious supply chains, and inappropriate use of older-generation semiconductors, and made recommendations for strengthening supply chains, including use of the Defense Production Act (DPA).



U.S. President Joe Biden delivers holds a semiconductor chip as he speaks prior to signing an executive order, aimed at addressing a global semiconductor chip shortage, February 2021. (Photo by REUTERS/Aflo)

As the US-China conflict and the coronavirus crisis disrupted semiconductor supply chains and caused semiconductor shortages on a global scale, semiconductor supply chains began attracting a great deal of attention. Semiconductors are not only essential for the digital world but are also widely used in the latest defense equipment. The US government appears to have embarked on efforts to rewind existing trans-Pacific semiconductor supply chains to its side of the international system. One such attempt is reshoring advanced semiconductor manufacturing processes. The reason for this was the growing sense of crisis within the US administration over the country's dependence on certain countries for the most advanced semiconductor manufacturing processes, although the United States did certainly also lament its declining share of the global semiconductor market. In June, the Senate passed the "US Innovation and Competition Act," which provides legal backing for the \$50 billion pledged by President Biden to fund semiconductor manufacturing and other projects. In September, a public-private consultative meeting on semiconductor supply chains was held to discuss public-private cooperation to improve the transparency and resilience of supply chains.

In addition, reviews of the supply chains for critical goods and technologies such as semiconductors were pursued through international cooperation. This is also called friendshoring as opposed to reshoring. Japan and the US announced that they would cooperate on sensitive supply chains, including those for semiconductors, in the aforementioned Japan-US Core Partnership. In November, Japan and the US agreed to establish the Japan-US Commercial and



Japan-U.S.-Australia-India 'Quad' Leaders Meet in Person for First Time, September 2021. (Photo by Press Information Bureau via AP/Aflo)

Industrial Partnership (JUCIP) to advance cooperation toward strengthening industrial competitiveness and supply chain resilience in Japan and the US in cooperation with like-minded countries. Cooperation with Taiwan was also increased. Strengthening supply chains was an important topic at the second US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue (EPPD) held in November. In December, the United States indicated its intention to launch a new technology trade and investment cooperation (TTIC) framework and, in particular, the US government expressed its continued interest in working with Taiwan on common commercial concerns in the area of semiconductor supply chains and related ecosystems. With regard to US-ROK relations, the first US-ROK Semiconductor Partnership Dialogue was held in December to enhance public-private partnerships between the two countries. Efforts were also sought

through plurilateral measures. At the second QUAD Summit in September, the leaders launched the Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative, and at the US-EU TTC they announced the realignment of the global semiconductor supply chain, the identification of gaps in the semiconductor value chain, and the strengthening of domestic semiconductor ecosystems. In October, the Biden administration also announced plans to launch a new Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to advance cooperation with allies in technology and supply chains. The focus is on the digital economy, supply chains, workers' rights and sustainability. In this way, the US government is seeking cooperation in identifying vulnerabilities in the supply chain and developing industries. These were efforts to rewind the semiconductor supply chains, which had already extended beyond national borders, to their own side of the international system.

The US government is also keenly interested in restructuring the supply chain for information and communications equipment. Information and communications equipment, like semiconductors, is a keystone of the digital society. However, software and hardware vulnerabilities in information and communications equipment undermine the security and reliability of the digital society. In particular, the frequent occurrence of ransomware attacks, which are carried out through malware previously installed on information and communications equipment, has raised interest in securing the supply chain of information and communications equipment. In May, a ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline disrupted gas supplies to the southeastern areas of the United States. Ransomware attacks reported in July exposed vulnerabilities in the software of US IT company Kaseya. The impact was worldwide and the amount of damage was the largest ever. Although it has been pointed out that it is difficult to identify the attributions of cyber-attacks, connections with the militaries and government agencies of Russia, China, North Korea and Iran was suspected. In July, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, as well as other countries and institutions jointly accused China of carrying out ransomware and other attacks around the world. There are concerns that malware could be activated, affecting critical infrastructure, government facilities, and defense equipment in an emergency.

Against this backdrop, the Biden administration, which is committed to securing the supply chain for telecommunications equipment, appears to be pushing ahead with the Trump administration's review of the supply chain, mainly with China in mind. The temporary information and communications technology and services (ICTS) supply chain security rules that the Commerce Department issued just before Trump left office were carried over into the Biden administration and took effect in March. Since then, the Biden administration has been busy identifying ICTS supply chain risks by summoning Chinese companies that conduct ICTS business in the United States and holding virtual meetings on supply chain risk. The US government also pushed for the removal of Chinese equipment from the ICTS supply chain. Since July, subsidies have been provided to companies that switch from Huawei and ZTE equipment to

other products. Furthermore, President Biden signed in November the Secure Equipment Act, making it impossible for ZTE, Huawei, Hytera, Dahua and Hikvision to obtain new equipment licenses in the US. The five companies were already barred from government procurement under the Trump administration, and the Biden administration's action means they will be effectively barred from the private sector as well.

On the other hand, the Chinese authorities, faced with disruptions in the supply of foreign technology due to the US-China competition, are also seeking to increase domestic production capacity and build alternative supply chains in order to mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities and ensure independence. In January, Chinese authorities announced the Basic Electronic Components Industry Development Action Plan, a plan to strengthen the electronic components industry, and declared their intention to focus on improving the development capabilities of the electronic components industry (semiconductors, sensors, printed circuit boards, optical communication components, etc.). In May, the government ordered 96 major state-owned enterprises to accelerate the development of core technologies for machine tools, high-value-added semiconductors, new materials, and electric vehicles.

Moreover, the stock market is showing signs of a decoupling between the United States and China. The US government has imposed a ban on the trading of listed securities of Chinese companies for security reasons. The US government added Chinese defense and surveillance technology companies to this ban in June and drone and AI development companies in December. In December, the Chinese authorities announced plans to tighten regulations on Chinese companies' listing on overseas markets and to prohibit them from listing or offering additional shares on security grounds. Furthermore, Chinese authorities are also trying to strengthen their capital markets by encouraging them to raise funds on the mainland and in Hong Kong. In November, trading began on the Beijing Stock Exchange, which is said to be a market for high-tech companies and start-ups, suggesting China's intention to reduce its dependence on the United States for capital. However, China seems to want to continue to enjoy the benefits of an open international economic order. At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed his negative view on decoupling, saying, "decoupling...or sanctions...will only push the world into division and even confrontation."

### **Value aspects of technology**

The issue of value aspects of technology has also surfaced. In October, the US Commerce Department issued a draft interim final rule on export controls for cybersecurity tools used in surveillance and malicious cyber activity. The measure, due to take effect in 2022, did not specify the names of companies or organizations, but in November the Commerce Department targeted four companies, including Israel's NSO, which has come under fire for exporting Pegasus spyware to government agencies and

public security agencies in authoritarian countries. In December, the US Treasury Department imposed economic sanctions on the Chinese AI company SenseTime Group and others for human rights violations caused by the misuse of technology. A working group on the “misuse of technology that threatens security and human rights” set up at the US EU TTC in September said it would consider measures to counter illegal surveillance. In the same month, the EU enacted a new general export regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/821) and instituted catchall controls on cyber surveillance technology. At the Democracy Summit held in December, the United States, Australia, Denmark and Norway announced the launch of the Export Control and Human Rights Initiative to prevent the misuse of technology by authoritarian governments and promote a positive vision of technology underpinned by democratic values. Canada, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom also endorsed the initiative.

Value-based differences in countries’ position on data also stood out. The QUAD pointed out the importance of data sharing among democratic countries and data governance based on democratic values as technological competition in the AI field intensifies. In addition, authorities in the United States and the EU agreed to establish a working group on data governance and technology platforms at the US-EU TTC to promote information sharing on data governance, etc., while acknowledging differences in the way data is handled between the United States, which tends to emphasize technological innovation and voluntary data governance by companies, and the EU, which demands strict data protection. In December, the US and UK governments issued the US-UK Joint Statement on Deepening the Data Partnership to promote and advance data protection and interoperability between the two countries and to create a global data ecosystem.

China, on the other hand, has tightened state control over data. The Data Security Act went into effect in September and the Personal Information Protection Act went into effect in November. Complementing the Cybersecurity Act of 2017, these two laws are said to have completed the legal framework for data control. In fact, data control in China was strengthened with the enforcement of the Basic Information Infrastructure Safety Protection Ordinance under the Cybersecurity Act in September and regulations governing the management of vehicle driving data in October. These measures highlight the Chinese authorities’ strategic goal of creating an independent data zone while preventing foreign governments, particularly that of the United States, from using their data. In December, Chinese ride-hailing company DiDi delisted its shares from the New York Stock Exchange and announced that it would be re-listing on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. Chinese authorities were reportedly worried about data leaks to the US.

### **Perspectives and recommendations**

Even after the inauguration of the new Biden administration in the United States, the race for technological supremacy between the United States and China continues unabated. Indeed, competition in technology



is seen to be expanding due to factors such as the global shortage of semiconductors. The United States and China are scrambling to shift the center of gravity of the international economy to their own sides by stepping up their gears in advancing their competitive edge in technology. The review and restructuring of the semiconductor supply chain is one such effort. Moreover, differences in national values and norms are clearly reflected in export control policies and the way data is handled.

In an era of competition between the US and China for technological hegemony, flexible and balanced economic and technological security policies are required. Although both countries have taken a series of measures to maintain or gain technological superiority, they have not become completely decoupled over economic and technology issues. In October, the US Department of Commerce acknowledged that it has issued export licenses worth over US\$100 billion to Huawei and SMIC over a period of five months from November 2020. There are also reports that US companies are continuing to invest in Chinese chip-related companies, so the US government and US private companies have different approaches to China. For companies in countries such as China deeply embedded in international supply chains, excessive reshoring can threaten efficiency of supply chains. Depending on the level of technology, interdependence may be maintained or circumstances akin to decoupling may ensue. Governments and companies are strategically switching between the accelerator and the brake, taking into account the policies of the US and China and their implications.

While Japan shares security interests and democratic values with the US, it is deeply tied to China economically. Based on these circumstances, the Japanese government needs to address technology policy from the viewpoint of economic security. The Kishida Cabinet, which was inaugurated in October, appointed the first minister responsible for economic security. The current challenges are strengthening supply chains, ensuring the security and reliability of core infrastructure, promoting public-private technical cooperation for supporting the development of critical technologies, and ensuring patent nondisclosure. These are important policy issues that need to be urgently addressed amid the international politics of competition for techno-hegemony. In addition to establishing a new fund to support R&D in advanced technologies for which concrete measures have already been devised and making the semiconductor supply chain more robust, ensuring the security and reliability of core and digital infrastructure is a particularly urgent and important issue. Furthermore, it is necessary not only to undertake efforts to deepen the understanding of private companies and research institutes on Japan's economic security situation but also to promote policies that support these parties in taking concrete measures as soon as possible. Scheduled to host the G7 Summit in 2023, Japan will be also expected to play a leading role in making data processing rules. As the battle lines for technological hegemony between the United States and China expand, it is important to promote a balanced approach to economic security in both domestic and foreign policy. ■



## Increasing Military Tensions in Northeast Asia and Japan's Response

Throughout 2021, the security environment in northeast Asia became more challenging. The United States and its allies deployed the largest number of troops in the Western Pacific since the end of the Cold War, while the international community increasingly called for China to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as it increased military pressure on Taiwan. Despite its economic difficulties, North Korea pushed ahead with the enhancement of its nuclear



North Korea has successfully tested a new hypersonic gliding missile, September 2021. (Photo by AFP/Aflo)

capabilities to make their nuclear weapon possession a *fait accompli* and the modernization of its armed forces in order to rebuild its relations with the United States. Meanwhile, the challenges facing the cooperative systems among the United States, Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan were highlighted. As the security environment surrounding Japan has become increasingly severe, there was intensive discussion in Japan about Japan's role in the event of a contingency in Taiwan, and about attacking enemy bases in preparation for the threat of North Korean and Chinese new nuclear and missile capabilities.

### US-China tussle over Taiwan

The United States has been deliberately vague about whether it would intervene if China invaded Taiwan, but with tensions rising over the Taiwan Strait, attention has turned to whether the Biden administration will abandon this strategic ambiguity. Shortly before leaving office in January, the Trump administration declassified the Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework approved in February 2018. This Framework assumed that China would take stronger measures to compel unification with Taiwan and stipulated that the US would defend Taiwan in the event of an armed invasion. This shows that strategic ambiguity over Taiwan's defense had been abandoned within the Trump administration. At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in March, outgoing US Indo-Pacific Command Commander Philip Davidson testified that the military balance in the Western Pacific was becoming more unfavorable to US forces, charting China's military capabilities over the past 20 years. He mentioned the possibility of China invading Taiwan "within the next six years" amid growing nationalism in China and expressed his support to consider

reexamining the strategic ambiguity. His successor, Admiral John Aquilino, testified at his confirmation hearing that the timing of the invasion “may be much earlier than most expected.” In table-top exercises conducted by the US military, it is said that the US military is increasingly being defeated by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), and the statements of these commanders reflect the sense of crisis prevailing within the Indo-Pacific Command.

Meanwhile, Kurt Campbell, who became the Indo-Pacific coordinator of the Biden administration’s National Security Council, indicated that he would maintain strategic ambiguity because of the adverse impacts that would result if the United States were to openly declare an obligation to defend Taiwan. General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed skepticism about a Chinese invasion of Taiwan anytime soon as China does not yet possess the overwhelming power to control the whole Taiwan, saying that China’s armed reunification with Taiwan was “unlikely to happen in the near future,” and went along with Campbell in asserting that revising the strategic ambiguity policy posed a risk and that the policy should be maintained for the foreseeable future. However, President Biden repeatedly referred to a US obligation to defend Taiwan in his remarks to the US media and the general public and, every time he did so, senior administration officials corrected him by saying that there was no change in policy. While some believe that these statements were intentional and that the Biden administration was effectively abandoning its strategic ambiguity, there is little basis for asserting that the Biden administration has revised this policy. At the US-China online summit in November, which was mainly aimed at preventing a conflict between the United States and China, President Biden explicitly told President Xi Jinping that the US would maintain its “one-China policy” but, immediately afterward, he contradicted this by saying that Taiwan was “independent,” a remark he later corrected. President Biden’s series of remarks should be taken as slips of the tongue, but his remarks on Taiwan seem to have aroused China’s suspicion.

In recent years, the Chinese military has increased its flights in the air defense identification zone in southwestern Taiwan, with 920 confirmed flights in 2021 as of the end of the year. Immediately after the inauguration of the Biden administration in January, eight Chinese bombers and four Chinese fighter jets flew through Taiwan’s air defense identification zone for two consecutive days. The purpose of the flight was initially thought to be an expression of dissatisfaction with the invitation of Taiwan’s representative to the US inauguration ceremony. However, it was reported that the actual purpose of the flight was a mock attack on the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, which was heading from the south of Taiwan to the South China Sea. It has been believed that Chinese warplanes are flying through Taiwan’s air defense identification zone to put military pressure on the Tsai administration, which does not accept the “one China” principle, and to express dissatisfaction with the US government’s relationship with Taiwan and

its continued provision of weapons, but it is possible that these flights also serve a new purpose of training to check US military intervention in the event of a contingency on Taiwan.

Since then, several Chinese planes have conducted threatening flights in conjunction with a series of visits by US congressmen to Taiwan, exercises conducted by US forces around Taiwan, and Taiwan's application to join the CPTPP. In October, about 150 Chinese warplanes flew through Taiwan's air defense identification zone over four days, apparently in response to naval drills by six countries, including Japan, the US and the UK, in east of Taiwan. Unlike in 2020, however, Chinese aircraft seemingly avoided crossing the midline of the Taiwan Strait, and it is believed that they are acting cautiously to avoid incidents. Meanwhile, China built up air bases in Fujian Province on the shore opposite Taiwan, and it was confirmed that it had expanded runways, reinforced hangars and installed surface-to-air missiles. Military use of civilian airports was reported to be underway, and shows of force against Taiwan were expected to increase in the future. From June to August, the PLA conducted about 40 exercises in the waters around Taiwan, and in September, the PLA carried out live-fire naval and air exercises off the southwest coast of Taiwan. In November, the PLA undertook an unusual landing exercise in the waters off eastern Taiwan, indicating the possibility that the PLA was planning to land not only from the Taiwan Strait side but also from the eastern side of Taiwan in the event of an invasion. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a congressional advisory panel, said in its annual report that the PLA has acquired or is gaining the initial capabilities needed to invade Taiwan.

In February, Taiwan said US aircraft were flying in its air defense zone, apparently to show that the zone was not dominated by the Chinese military. In addition, US naval forces passed through the Taiwan Strait once a month. In August, an Aegis-equipped destroyer and a Coast Guard patrol ship passed through the Strait, and in October, a US Aegis-equipped destroyer and a Canadian Navy frigate jointly passed through the area. In August, the Biden administration announced for the first time since its inauguration that it would sell Taiwan 40 self-propelled artillery pieces and related equipment worth \$750 million. While the Obama administration, Democrat, was cautious about arms sales to Taiwan, it was confirmed that the Biden administration would follow the Trump administration's policy and continue to sell weapons to Taiwan.

In recent years, Taiwan has been seeking to build a multilayered and asymmetric military under the Overall Defense Concept. In September, the Taiwanese armed forces conducted their annual "Han Kuang" large-scale military exercise in various parts of Taiwan in preparation against a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The maneuverability and stealth of the navy's surface-to-ship missile unit was tested for the first time, and fighter jets were trained for takeoff and landing on open roads in the event of a military airport

being bombed. Taiwan's armed forces have placed greater emphasis on the introduction of asymmetric weapons, such as anti-ship missiles, air defense missiles, and torpedoes, and are ready to deter the PLA more effectively from invading Taiwan. Taiwan has a regular army of about 93000, but more than 1.6 million reservists could be deployed, and the US Congress introduced a Taiwan partnership bill that would allow the National Guard to train Taiwan's reservists. In addition, it had been reported for some time that US special forces and others secretly trained Taiwanese troops in Taiwan, and Tsai herself confirmed this in an interview with US media in October. In response, China vehemently opposed any intervention by outside powers in the Taiwan issue, and warned that Taiwan's independence would be a "dead-end road."

### **US-China military relations in the western Pacific**

The Biden administration, like the Trump administration, has shown that it places top priority on the Indo-Pacific region, and it has also shown that it will prioritize the region in terms of defense spending. Before leaving office, Commander Davidson, in a report on the war potential of the Indo-Pacific Command, expressed the view that the Command would require about \$4.9 billion in spending in FY2022 and a total of \$22.7 billion from FY2023 to FY2027. Subsequently, the Biden administration requested \$5.1 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) in the FY2022 defense budget, a substantial increase from the \$2.2 billion requested in FY2021. The FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act set the total defense budget at \$77.7 billion and raised the total PDI to \$7.1 billion. This provides budgetary support for missile defense in Guam, a constellation of small satellites, decentralization and strengthening of base functions, training and logistics, and maintaining survivability and strike power in the Chinese A2/AD environment, which the Indo-Pacific Command wanted but was neglected in the administration's request. However, cuts in the military budget are seen as inevitable under the Biden administration, partly due to the wishes of the left wing of the Democratic Party. In November, the Biden administration completed a global posture review and positioned the Indo-Pacific region as the most important region. However, while the administration indicated its intention to diversify its forces within the region, such as by deploying air force units to Australia on a rotating basis and strengthening military infrastructure in the Mariana Islands, it did not significantly redeploy forces from the Middle East and other regions.

On the other hand, China's defense spending in fiscal 2021 was reported to be 1.35 trillion yuan, up 6.8% from the previous year and equivalent to about one-fourth of the US defense spending. The increase was earmarked for reform, science and technology, and training of talented personnel, but no details were given. China is said to be improving the capability of its nuclear missiles, using advanced technologies such as hypersonic weapons, quantum technology, and unmanned aerial vehicles for military purposes, and using artificial intelligence (AI) to prepare for intelligentized warfare in the cognitive domain as well

as the land, sea, air, space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains. There is no doubt that the military use of AI will continue. In August, China flew reconnaissance and attack drones back and forth from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean, possibly for AI machine learning purposes.

Deterrence between the United States and its allies on one hand and China on the other, coupled with China's aggressive modernization of its nuclear and missile forces, is making the situation increasingly opaque and unstable. "China is accelerating the pace of its nuclear expansion and is likely to be able to possess 700 nuclear warheads by 2027. China appears to have an intention to possess at least 1000 warheads by 2030, at a pace and size that exceeds the Pentagon's 2020 projections," the US Defense Department stated in its November 2021 annual report on China's military capabilities.

As for China's strategic nuclear forces, which had numbered only 20 silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in the 2000s, new mobile ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) were increasingly deployed in the 2010s. The US Department of Defense estimated in 2021 that China possessed 100 ICBM launchers and 150 ICBMs. Further deployment of the latest multiple independently-targetable reentry vehicled (MIRVed) DF-41 ICBMs and JL-2/3 SLBMs is also likely to increase China's number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads. In July, analysis of satellite images revealed that more than 300 ICBM silos, probably for DF-41 missiles, had been constructed at three sites in inland China. It was reported in October that China had test-fired a nuclear-capable hypersonic glider vehicle (HGV) in August, orbiting the Earth at a low altitude before landing off-target. China explained that it was experimenting with reusable spacecraft technology, but some experts analyze Beijing may pursue an attack system that launches HGVs from a fractional orbital bombing system (FOBS).

At the theater level, China's approximately 2000 DF-21, DF-26 and other ground-launched medium - and intermediate-range missiles (including hypersonic missiles) are among the world's best in terms of both quality and number of missiles. China's non-strategic missiles are considered to have relatively high accuracy and are expected to be used as an important component of A2/AD in counterforce strikes against Taiwan, Japan, Guam and other targets, and in the event of interventions by the United States and its allies in regional conflicts. In addition, China's overall military capabilities at the theater level are increasingly superior to those of the United States and its allies due to, among others, the deployment of the DF-17 hypersonic missile, the reinforcement of naval and air power, the enhancement of precision strike capabilities, and the introduction of cyber-attack capabilities for combat management networks. At the March meeting of the US Senate Armed Services Committee, Commander Davidson expressed a sense of urgency about the increased risk that China would attempt to unilaterally change the status quo before the United States could take effective action, saying "the greatest danger to the United States is that



conventional deterrence is eroding.”

China has not provided a convincing explanation whether and to what extent its nuclear and missile modernizations will transform its nuclear posture. Since China acquired nuclear weapons in 1964, it has maintained a declaratory policy of minimum deterrence, no first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons, and negative security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon states. In addition, the modernization of strategic nuclear forces, such as the adoption of mobile and/or MIRVed ICBMs and the expansion of SLBM capabilities, seems to be aimed at enhancing survivability vis-à-vis counterforce strikes and ballistic missile defense (BMD) by adversaries, particularly in order to preserve and strengthen its assured retaliation capabilities against the United States.

However, it has been pointed out that China, which is building up MIRVed ICBMs such as the DF-41s, improving the readiness and precision of intermediate- and longer-range missiles, and constructing an early warning system with Russian cooperation, may shift to a higher alert status such as launch under attack (LUA) or launch upon warning (LOW), as in the case of the United States and Russia, or not only maintain a retaliatory countervalue posture but also adopt a counterforce strike posture including first use of nuclear weapons. In addition, it is not clear to what extent China intends to expand its nuclear arsenal numerically. China has insisted that it would maintain only the minimum nuclear force necessary for national security, but *Global Times* (July 2) linked to the Chinese Communist Party noted “that minimum level will change as China’s security situation changes.”

As the military confrontation between the United States and China deepened, crisis management between the two countries became increasingly important. In January, amid confusion in the United States over the results of the presidential election, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Milley telephoned the Chief of the PLA’s Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission to say that the United States had no intention of attacking China because he had been informed that China was concerned about an attack from the United States. It turned out that he had the clearance from higher ranking officials within the administration and that the two sides had been in daily contact with each other. However, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has been unable to contact the Chinese side since the inauguration of the Biden administration. A working-level dialogue was held in August to discuss crisis management. At the US-China summit held online in November, the two sides discussed the establishment of a “guardrail” to manage “strategic risks,” and it was reported that they had agreed to setup a consultation between the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China. Nevertheless, progress in talks on strategic stability and arms control for missile forces, including hypersonic weapons, remains difficult to predict.



**Strengthening cooperation between the United States and its allies and moves by China and Russia**

In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States and its allies conducted the largest exercises since the end of the Cold War, and China and Russia also deepened their military cooperation. In August, the U.S. military carried out the largest global exercise since the end of the Cold War. First, the US Navy and Marine Corps conducted large-scale exercises (LSE) in the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The exercises tested a shift from conventional tactics focusing on carrier strike groups to tactics of conducting dispersed operations across theaters. This is believed to have been aimed at building the capacity to deal simultaneously with threats posed by China and Russia. In addition, a large-scale global exercise (LSGE 21) was hosted mainly by the US Indo-Pacific Command, and joint exercises for surface warfare, landings, ground warfare, air warfare, and resupply were conducted with the United Kingdom, Japan and Australia. Japan, the United States, Australia and India also conducted their Malabar exercises off Guam starting in August and in the Bay of Bengal in October. The US Navy sent the aircraft carrier *Carl Vinson*, which carries the state-of-the-art F-35C, to participate in both exercises. Three aircraft carriers, the US Navy's *Ronald Reagan* and *Carl Vinson* and the British Navy's HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, participated in the above-mentioned six-nation exercise off Taiwan's east coast.

In September, it was announced that Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States would establish AUKUS, a new framework for military cooperation, under which the UK and the US would assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. The French government, whose joint development of submarines with Australia was cancelled, strongly opposed the deal, and President Biden admitted that there was a problem in the way the matter was handled. However, since the US Navy's nuclear submarine fleet is expected to be temporarily reduced from the 2030s, the acquisition of nuclear submarines by Australia is a strategically significant arrangement for filling that gap. AUKUS will also collaborate on AI and quantum technologies.

As the United States was deepening its cooperation with its allies, the navies of China and Russia conducted an annual joint exercise in the Sea of Japan in October and thereafter a group of ten warships from both countries passed through the Tsugaru Strait, headed south into the Pacific Ocean, passed through the Osumi Strait via the Izu Islands, and entered the East China Sea. This is believed to be the first joint cruise by the fleets of the two countries in waters around Japan. Along the way, China and Russia launched and landed ship-based helicopters near the Izu Islands, while China operated its ship-based helicopter in the East China Sea. In November, for the third consecutive year, bombers from both countries flew jointly over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. In recent years, the two countries have deepened their cooperation in Asian waters, and similar actions are expected to be repeated in the future. As China and Russia pursue closer strategic and operational cooperation, there is growing concern

that the two countries may simultaneously start conflicts in Asia and Europe, respectively, and that they may work together to make it difficult for the United States and its allies to operate in conflicts in Asia.

### **Situation on the Korean Peninsula: stagnation in US-North Korea negotiations and inward-oriented policies**

In 2021, following the stalemate in negotiations with the United States over the nuclear issue, North Korea announced at the 8th Party Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea at the beginning of the year a policy of pursuing "restoring of the military balance" and of strengthening its military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, while also advocating economic development through "internal motive force." The new Biden administration inaugurated in the US immediately after the convention reviewed its North Korea policy and announced an "open and practical approach" in May. Details of the approach were not disclosed but the general direction indicated was that of "strategic patience 2.0", as the US says that the ball for resuming dialogue was in North Korea's court. Against this backdrop, North Korea has taken the opportunity of closing its borders due to the coronavirus pandemic to mobilize its scarce resources to the maximum extent possible while further advancing its nuclear development program. By continuing and expanding its existing policy of strengthening domestic control and making nuclear weapon possession a *fait accompli*, it has also apparently adopted a policy of increasing its bargaining power with the United States.

North Korea's actions, which surfaced under such intentions, had three main characteristics. The first is the realization of the strengthening of its military capabilities. At the Party Congress, the following were listed as National Defense Development Strategies: advancement of nuclear technology and development of miniaturization, weight reduction, and tactical weaponization of nuclear weapons; production of supersized nuclear warheads, upgrading of the capability to preemptively strike and retaliate against strategic targets within a range of 15,000 km; introduction of the Hypersonic Gliding Combat Unit; development of underwater and ground-launched solid-fuel ICBMs; possession of nuclear submarines and submersible strategic nuclear weapons; operation of military reconnaissance satellites; and development of high-performance unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. In 2021, a total of eight missile launches were carried out, ranging from cruise missiles, hypersonic missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, and SLBMs. While avoiding any decisive provocation against the United States through ICBM launches or nuclear tests, the aim seems to diversify and improve the reliability of nuclear weapons delivery systems, and to strengthen the "escalation ladder" from conventional weapons to tactical and strategic nuclear weapons in all directions.

The second feature is the move towards closer relation with China. North Korea emphasized the US-

China conflict by referring to the “neo Cold War structure” in international affairs, linking the Taiwan issue with the situation on the Korean Peninsula and portraying the resistance to interference by the “United States and its allies” as a common denominator between China and North Korea, such as the reference by the leader Kim Jong-un in his September policy speech. On the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the China-DPRK Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in July, North Korea expressed its active support for China’s “core interests” such as the Taiwan issue, and emphasized its position in the Chinese camp in the Sino-American confrontation, likening China-North Korea relations to a pseudo-alliance.

Third, the North Korean authorities’ heightened sense of crisis over the coronavirus pandemic and economic sanctions has become clear, and visible improvements in living standards, such as the construction of large-scale housing and the stable supply of food, have become urgent issues. The resources for these projects were sought through “internal motive force”, i.e., clawing back surpluses and improving efficiency through strengthened control. However, the facts that Kim Jong-un reasserted in February that strengthening controls would help realize the so-called “people-first principle”, and that he set a new goal of “building a powerful and prosperous socialist country within about 15 years” in April, suggest that the Kim Jong-un regime, which has been in power for 10 years, has no choice but to take greater pains to stabilize public lives and views.

In the wake of the stalemate in negotiations with the United States, North Korea demanded more strongly than ever that the ROK “cease its complacency toward the United States as a precondition for dialogue” and implement joint projects based on the inter-Korean agreements stalled by sanctions. At the same time, North Korea reacted coolly to the ROK’s offer of humanitarian assistance and other measures that would not improve its relations with the United States. After a US-ROK joint military exercise, which North Korea demanded to cancel under a threat of abrogation of the North-South military agreement (September 2018), was held in August (albeit on a smaller scale than usual due to the coronavirus pandemic), North Korea one-sidedly restored the inter-Korean communication line that had been severed following the June 2020 demolition of the inter-Korean liaison office building. However, North Korea did not respond positively to President Moon Jae-in’s “declaration to end the Korean War” (described below), which he proposed in his address to the UN General Assembly, stressing that a change in the US’ hostile policy should come first.

In the ROK, the Moon administration’s intent of building a legacy came to the fore ahead of the next presidential election in March 2022. At the US-ROK Summit Meeting in May, references were made to the ROK’s interests in areas outside the Korean Peninsula, such as confirming the common ground between

the ROK's ASEAN policy (New Southern Policy) and the Indo-Pacific strategy, and the importance of stability in Taiwan and the South China Sea. Domestically, however, support from the new Biden administration for the Moon Jae-in administration's policy of inter-Korean dialogue and the abolition of the US-ROK "missile guidelines" that would allow the ROK to develop its own missile capabilities were presented as the achievements of the meeting. In September, the launch test of an independently developed SLBM was made public, and in December the ROK government confirmed a budget plan that included a 3.4% year-on-year increase in defense spending, again emphasizing the "self-reliant national defense" pursued by the Moon administration. Although President Moon tried to push for a declaration of the end of the Korean War in his final speech to the UN General Assembly in September, North Korea's response was lukewarm, as mentioned above, and it did not lead to a new momentum in inter-Korean and US-North Korean relations.

In the wake of a series of missile launches by North Korea, the need for security cooperation among Japan, the United States and the ROK was reaffirmed at the Japan-US and the US-ROK summit meetings, and dialogues were frequently held among officials of Japan, the United States and the ROK and between Japan and the ROK (7 Japan-US-ROK, 12 Japan-US, and 13 Japan-ROK working-level and high-level consultations and exchanges). However, challenges remained in implementing the Japan-ROK General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in response to North Korea's missile launches. As for Japan-ROK relations in general, differences in positions on the so-called Korean laborers and comfort women issues could not be bridged, and direct talks between the leaders of the two countries were not held on the occasion of the G7 Summit (June) or the Tokyo Olympic Games (July-August).

### **The case for a new way of thinking in defense issues in Japan**

In addition to traditional preparations against threats from North Korea and China, the possibility that a contingency in Taiwan could lead to an emergency in Japan has been pointed out, and responses have been publicly discussed in Japan. Following the Japan-US 2+2 meeting in March, the peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait were discussed at the Japan-US summit in April for the first time in 52 years since 1969. In December, it was reported that Japan and the United States were discussing a joint operation plan for a possible Taiwan contingency. At the G7 summit and the Japan-EU summit, Japan confirmed with other countries the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and together with the international community, continued to signal China to think better of invading Taiwan. In addition, legislators from Japan, the United States and Taiwan held a dialogue in July and the ruling parties of Japan and Taiwan held a "2+2" dialogue in August, deepening exchanges at the legislator level.

As North Korea and China increased their nuclear missile capabilities, the issue of attacking enemy bases

was debated during the Liberal Democratic Party leadership election in September and became a point of contention during the October House of Representatives elections as well. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has announced his intention to review the National Security Strategy, as well as the National Defense Program Outline and the Medium Term Defense Program, and more in-depth discussions are expected in future.

From August to November, the Ground Self-Defense Force conducted its largest exercise ever, the first in 30 years involving the participation of all units. The JSDF and US forces carried out mobile deployment, logistics and hygiene training, and system communications training with the aim of improving integration and Japan-US joint operational capabilities. In October, the Maritime Self-Defense Force conducted a test to launch and land a US F-35B on the destroyer JS *Izumo*. Now that it has been confirmed that the F-35B can complete deck landings without any problems, the government aims to put the F-35B, which will be introduced into the Air Self-Defense Force inventory in the second half of the 2020s, into full-scale operation.

As of the end of December, vessels belonging to the China Coast Guard (CCG) entered Japanese territorial waters off the Senkaku Islands on 40 occasions. The total number of days of entry into the contiguous zone was 332, the second highest after the previous year. CCG vessels repeatedly followed Japanese fishing boats in Japanese territorial waters but took no coercive measures and employed no weapons. In August, the Japan Coast Guard and the US Coast Guard deepened their cooperation in the East China Sea off the coast of Kyushu by conducting tactical exercises, intelligence conveyance drills, and law enforcement drills. In November, the US military participated for the first time in a joint exercise of the Self-Defense Forces exercise to practice regaining control of a remote island.

The China Coast Guard Law, whose contents had raised concerns among neighboring countries, came into effect on February 1. The law stipulates that the CCG can take all measures, including the use of weapons, to protect Chinese sovereignty, and that it conducts defensive operations based on orders from the Central Military Commission, making the CCG less of a law enforcement agency and more of a branch of the military. The Japanese government announced that any attempted landing by a CCG vessel on the Senkaku Islands would be considered a serious and flagrant crime and that the vessel could be fired on in self-defense. However, despite the concerns sparked by passage of the China Coast Guard Law, there have yet to be any confirmed use of weapons or landings on the Senkaku Islands by the CCG.

In April, a Chinese naval contingent led by the Chinese aircraft carrier *Liaoning* made a round trip through the Miyako Strait, and an airborne early warning helicopter launched from the *Liaoning* and



flew in the vicinity of the airspace of the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture. Fighters from the Air Self-Defense Force scrambled in response, but the helicopter did not violate Japanese airspace. As of the end of December, the Air Self-Defense Force had scrambled 652 times to intercept Chinese aircraft, and airspace violations by drones and ship-based aircraft have been confirmed, highlighting the need to consider means of more efficiently scrambling fighter aircraft.

Confidence-building measures between Japan and China continued, with holding of high-level maritime consultations and annual meetings of their maritime and aerial communication mechanism. The February high-level maritime talks were upgraded from deputy director-general level to director-general level. At the third annual meeting/expert meeting of the Japan-China maritime and aerial communication mechanism held in March, while Japan conveyed its strong concerns about Chinese actions heightening tensions in the East China Sea and about the China Coast Guard Law, China simply asserted its own position and the meeting ended inconclusively. At the end of the year, Japanese and Chinese defense ministers held a meeting and agreed to establish a hotline between defense authorities in 2022.

Throughout 2021, Japan expanded its security cooperation with Australia, the UK, France and other countries. In May, at France's request, Japan, the United States and France conducted an island defense drill in Kyushu, simulating landings and land battles. At a June 2+2 meeting between the Japanese and Australian governments, Australian naval vessels became the first foreign warships that the SDF can protect all the time outside the US military. The two governments also agreed in principle



The Liaoning, China's first aircraft carrier, departs Hong Kong, July 2017. (Photo by AP/Aflo)

by the end of 2021 on a reciprocal access agreement that would simplify procedures for SDF and ADF personnel entering the respective countries for joint exercises etc. In addition, in conjunction with the deployment of the UK's HMS *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group to Asia, the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) conducted joint tactical training in the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea. Negotiations on a facilitation agreement between Japan and the UK began in October, and it is expected that Japan will consider protecting British naval vessels. As the British Navy plans to station two patrol ships in the Indo-Pacific region for at least five years, further cooperation between Japan and Britain is expected. In addition to the US Navy, ships from Germany, Australia and Canada participated in the MSDF exercise for the first time in November.



**Perspectives and recommendations**

The formulation of security policy needs to be based on a dispassionate deterrence perspective, and it is particularly important for Japan and the United States to face up to the necessity of pursuing enhanced deterrence. China continues to build up its military capabilities in a wide range of fields without transparency and is increasingly intensifying its “offensives” in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and Taiwan Strait. In response to the modernization of China’s nuclear and missile forces, the United States and its allies, including Japan, are faced with the question of how to build a comprehensive deterrence posture, to include studying the feasibility of deploying ground-launched intermediate-range missiles in the Indo-Pacific region as well as establishing an integrated air-defense missile defense system.

As for the situation on the Korean Peninsula, the development of new weapons by North Korea has already become a direct threat to Japan’s defense posture. Since North Korea has declared its intention to build up its military to enhance deterrence, it is possible to estimate that it will resume ICBM and nuclear tests if no progress is made in US-North Korea relations. In addition, North Korea has made it clear that it intends to avoid a repeat of the Hanoi US-North Korea summit structure in which North Korea renounces its nuclear weapons program in exchange for the lifting of sanctions by increasing its nuclear capabilities. In this context, in addition to reaffirming and adhering to the principle of North Korean denuclearization, it is also important that Japan, the United States and other countries reexamine their deterrence posture. From this point of view, it is hoped that Japan-ROK cooperation on security issues will advance under the next president, regardless of whether the current ruling party candidate Lee Jae-myung or opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol becomes the next president of the ROK.

Given this regional outlook, the Biden administration’s National Security Strategy (NSS) and Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), scheduled to be formulated in early 2022, are of particular interest from the perspective of restoring deterrence by the United States and its allies. In Japan, the new administration of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, which was inaugurated in October, announced a review of the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Program Guidelines. The direction of Japan’s and the United States’ deterrence posture to be defined in these strategic documents is not yet clear, but the most important thing for Japan is to adapt its foreign and security policies to the times and radically improve its own defense capabilities. The times demand that defense spending be increased to a level of 2% or more of GDP within, say, in the early part of ten years. In addition, the debate on Japan’s capability to strike enemy bases, which has become increasingly necessary in recent years, should not simply be an argument over the pros and cons, but should be structured in a manner consistent with the deterrence theory, in which a first strike is prevented by missile defense and the second and subsequent strikes are hindered by the capability to counterattack. At the same time, as China accelerates the modernization of its nuclear

and missile forces and intensifies competition and confrontation over various flashpoints, there is also an urgent need to develop arms control measures such as crisis management mechanisms, confidence-building measures, and transparency measures between the United States and China and between Japan and China to prevent escalation into a deliberate or accidental armed conflict or even a nuclear and missile attack. Japan's overall foreign and security policy must respond to regional structural changes. ■

## Intensifying US-China Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN Faced with Challenges

The new US administration of President Joe Biden has clearly committed to a “free and open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP), and cooperation through the QUAD has been deepened significantly by the holding of summit meetings and the agreement and implementation of concrete cooperation. The United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have launched AUKUS as a new security framework. Faced with the challenges of dealing with the military coup in Myanmar and the coronavirus



President Joe Biden walks to the Quad summit with, from left, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, September 2021. (Photo by AP/ Aflo)

pandemic, ASEAN has not made notable progress in its efforts to put the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) into practice, while external actors such as the United States and China have stepped up their approaches to ASEAN. In the economic realm, it has been confirmed that the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will come into effect in January 2022, and China and Taiwan have applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

### Deepening Cooperation through the QUAD and the Birth of AUKUS

The Biden administration has placed importance on the Indo-Pacific region in its foreign and security policy, clearly committed to the FOIP, and articulated its policy of emphasizing cooperation and collaboration with allies and friends. The QUAD, a quadrilateral framework for cooperation among the US, Japan, Australia and India, has raised its meetings to the summit level, and has become an important platform for the four countries to agree and implement concrete cooperative measures, including cooperation for the provision of public goods such as vaccines and infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region, and the announcement of a common policy on critical and emerging technologies. The United States has also launched AUKUS, a new framework for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, together with the United Kingdom and Australia.

Regarding the QUAD, a foreign ministers’ telephone talk was held at the initiative of the United States in February, shortly after the inauguration of the Biden administration. In March, the first summit meeting

was conducted online, also led by the United States, and three working groups were agreed on: vaccines, critical and emerging technologies, and climate change. In September, the first face-to-face summit meeting was held in Washington, where it was agreed to regularize the summit meeting. At the summit meeting, progress in vaccine cooperation was confirmed, and in the area of critical and emerging technologies, the Japan-US-Australia-India “Principles on Technology Design, Development, Governance and Use” were issued and the Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative was launched. In addition, new working groups in the areas of cyber security and space and an infrastructure coordination group were established, and a decision was made to establish a Quad Fellowship program. The four countries’ commitment to a “free and open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) and their support for ASEAN’s unity and centrality were repeatedly affirmed in a series of QUAD meetings, and the September summit welcomed the EU’s new Indo-Pacific strategy.

Providing high-quality infrastructure to the Indo-Pacific region is one of the areas of cooperation emphasized by the QUAD. In December, Japan, the US and Australia announced they would be cooperating in laying subsea cables to eastern Micronesia. In a joint statement, the three countries noted that the project is not just an infrastructure investment but also a response to the economic and strategic challenges facing the region.

On the security front, following Australia’s participation in the Malabar exercise for the first time in several years in 2020, Australia and India confirmed their intention to engage in continued quadrilateral exercises at a 2+2 meeting held in September. In addition, opportunities for conducting exercises among the four countries increased, such as the participation of Japan and India in Exercise Talisman Sabre led by the US and Australia. Furthermore, cooperation with countries outside the region was strengthened, with one European country after another sending naval vessels to the region and conducting exercises with QUAD countries (see Chapters 4 and 6).

Australia-China and India-China relations remained tense. At the border between China and India, there have been attempts to ease tensions through the partial withdrawal of troops by both sides and foreign ministers’ meetings, but the situation has not yet fundamentally improved, with the two militaries clashing anew in September and deploying more defense equipment. Apparently with India in mind, China also passed a law on its land borders set to take effect in January 2022, and decided to establish defense facilities on the Chinese side of the border. In response, India has been working to improve its ability to counter China by, for example, acquiring satellite data under an agreement reached with the United States in October 2020. There have also been no signs of improvement in China-Australia relations. With China restricting imports of Australian coal and agricultural products since 2020, Australia has been revising or canceling

agreements previously signed with China as incompatible with Australia's foreign policy. Australia followed the United States in announcing a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics in December.

On September 15, the leaders of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States announced the establishment of AUKUS, which takes its name from the initials of the three countries, creating an important new framework for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. As the first initiative under this framework, it was agreed that the US and the UK would support Australia in acquiring at least eight nuclear submarines. At the press conference announcing the establishment of AUKUS, President Biden stressed that the future of the three countries and the world depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific enduring and flourishing in the decades ahead. The AUKUS framework will also include cooperation in advanced technologies such as cybersecurity, quantum computing and artificial intelligence. Japan welcomed the new framework, while China and Russia made clear their opposition. Opinions among ASEAN member countries differed, with some expressing concerns while others taking the news positively.

### **Political Upheaval in Myanmar and Challenges Facing ASEAN**

On February 1, a military coup occurred in Myanmar, reversing the tortuous course of democratization that had been taking place in the country, dealing a blow to the progress of democratization in Southeast Asia, and significantly impacting ASEAN unity and integration. Myanmar's military has detained senior members of the government, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and senior members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), while the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Defense Services, Min Aung Hlaing, declared a state of emergency and announced the transfer of the whole national authority to the military command. The military crackdown on civilians who refuse to accept the coup and continue to resist has resulted in many casualties, and no solution has yet been found despite the efforts of ASEAN and the international community.

ASEAN adheres to a basic principle of non-interference in internal affairs, but a Leaders' Meeting in April produced the "Five-Point Consensus" that included an immediate cessation of violence, the commencement of dialogue among all parties, the appointment of a special envoy to mediate the dialogue process (the second foreign minister of Brunei, which holds the ASEAN Chair, was selected), humanitarian assistance from ASEAN, and a visit by the special envoy to Myanmar to meet all parties. The G7 and the QUAD also supported the Five-Point Consensus and called for its prompt implementation. However, Myanmar did not agree to ASEAN's repeated requests to accept the special envoy, nor did it stop the violence. As a result, ASEAN made the unusual decision to reject the participation of Commander-in-Chief, General Min Aung Hlaing, in the October Summit. There has been continued



resistance from citizens and ethnic minorities in Myanmar who oppose the junta, and there is no prospect of a breakthrough in the immediate future.

ASEAN countries and the South Asian region including India saw a significant spread of coronavirus infections in 2021 that claimed many lives and had a major impact on the region's politics, economies and societies. Following the spread of infections in India, the number of new daily cases in Southeast Asia rose rapidly, reaching the 100,000 level across ASEAN in the first half of August. In Indonesia, where ASEAN is headquartered, the number peaked around July and has reached more than four million cases and 140,000 deaths by the end of 2021. The number of cases also increased in Vietnam and other countries in the region, causing major disruptions to supply chains that led to difficulties in procuring raw materials and delays in deliveries due to the suspension of plant operations. (see Chapter 9)

Faced with the challenges of dealing with the issues surrounding Myanmar and the coronavirus pandemic, ASEAN in 2021 did not make notable progress in its efforts to put the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) into practice, while external actors such as the US and China stepped up their lobbying of ASEAN and its member states. As part of its Indo-Pacific policy, the Biden administration sought to improve relations with ASEAN countries, which the Trump administration had been accused of downplaying, particularly with Singapore and Vietnam. In July, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines, and Vice President Kamala Harris visited Singapore and Vietnam. In October, the US-ASEAN Summit was held for the first time in four years, and the United States pledged approximately US\$100 million in assistance in the areas of COVID-19 and climate change mitigation. In December, Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Indonesia and Malaysia, delivering a policy speech entitled "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific" in the former, but his scheduled visit to Thailand was cancelled due to coronavirus infections. On the occasion of the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in the United Kingdom in December, a joint meeting with ASEAN was held for the first time.

While the United States' return to Southeast Asia was welcomed by Indonesia and other countries, ASEAN countries have increasingly developed ties with China in the economic arena, and China has actively engaged in diplomacy with ASEAN by conducting visits in a manner to counter those by US cabinet officials and actively supplying vaccines. In November, President Xi Jinping attended a special summit marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of dialogue between China and ASEAN, and ASEAN announced that it would be upgrading its ties with China from a "strategic partnership" to a "comprehensive strategic partnership". The summit's joint statement called on the participating parties to seek out areas of cooperation that would benefit both AOIP and the Belt and Road Initiative, and President Xi made five proposals that covered such topics as vaccine supply, maintenance of peace in the South China Sea, and Chinese economic assistance for ASEAN.

### RCEP Enforcement and CPTPP Developments

It was confirmed that the RCEP, signed in November 2020, will enter into force on January 1, 2022 in ten countries – Japan, Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Laos, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – as these countries have completed the domestic procedures and met the conditions required for enforcement. It will take effect in South Korea in February 2022 once the requisite domestic procedures have been completed. As a result, a new free trade agreement (FTA) will be concluded among Japan, China and South Korea, which had no pre-existing FTA in place.

Regarding the CPTPP, chaired by Japan in 2021, the United Kingdom formally began the process for accession in June. China formally applied for membership in September, followed by Taiwan. Thailand and South Korea are preparing to apply, and South Korea announced in December that it would be seeking to apply during the Moon administration. The official statement from China stated that China has been a staunch supporter of trade liberalization and an important



Ships during the second phase of the Malabar naval exercise in which India, Australia, Japan and the U.S are taking part in the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean, October 2021. (Photo by AFP/Aflo)

participant in the economic integration of the Asia-Pacific region, and referred to further promoting regional cooperation and economic integration by China's participation in the CPTPP now that the RCEP negotiations have concluded. Suggestions have been made about China's intentions, including seeking to lead the process for shaping trade rules, the country's pursuit of internal reforms, and the impact of the US-China trade war, but there remain uncertainties, including its negotiating stance.

### Perspectives and Recommendations

The Biden administration is committed to a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and is expected to continue to work actively to strengthen the QUAD and promote cooperation through AUKUS. The development of the QUAD into a platform for promoting concrete cooperation among the four member countries across a wide range of fields is welcomed, including the provision of public goods such as vaccines and infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region and the announcement of common policies on important and emerging technologies. It is important for Japan to continue pursuing concrete cooperation through the QUAD as one of the useful frameworks that contribute to the FOIP concept. At the same time, it is important to pay close attention that the QUAD's advantages as a flexible cooperative framework among a

small number of friendly countries are not undermined by excessive structuring or an overly diverse scope of activities, and that the QUAD makes further progress in the promotion of a rule-based international order consistent with the values of freedom and democracy and in the area of security cooperation. Synergies will naturally arise with AUKUS, two of whose participants – the US and Australia – are also QUAD members, through Japan-US, Japan-Australia bilateral cooperation and trilateral cooperation among those countries. In addition, active promotion of Japan's closer cooperation with the UK on security matters is hoped for, as it will also lead to strengthening the ties between the two frameworks. More thorough explanations on how the QUAD and AUKUS frameworks can contribute to regional security and FOIP will be needed to gain the understanding and support of ASEAN and other regional countries, and Japan can play an important role in this regard with respect to the QUAD.

Multilayered initiatives, including bolstering collaboration with ASEAN member states advocating AOIP and other countries in the region as well as European nations and others outside the Indo-Pacific that share fundamental values, will continue to be essential for promoting FOIP. It is essential that Japan actively support ASEAN's efforts to put the AOIP into practice and actively provide assistance to ASEAN countries as well as to the Pacific Island countries that took part in the triennial Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting in 2021 in such areas as vaccine supply, including support for the “last mile”, greater connectivity through the development of high-quality infrastructure, and the maintenance of the maritime order. Japan needs to engage in continuous dialogue with the European countries that significantly strengthened their commitment to the Indo-Pacific in 2021, and to continue undertaking specific activities aimed at promoting cooperation with these countries such as the dispatch of naval vessels and joint exercises carried out in 2021, and Japan's proactive initiatives are expected.

On the issue of Myanmar, Japan needs to continue its steadfast diplomatic efforts to support ASEAN's mediation efforts, effectively utilizing both its close relationship with the United States which shares its fundamental values, and its traditional channel of dialogue with Myanmar's military, in order to bring about an early resolution to the situation.

In the economic domain, about 70% of the FTAs and economic partnership agreements (EPAs) used by Japanese companies are in the RCEP region. Because RCEP incorporates business-friendly elements such as “accumulation” and “self-certification” in its rules of origin, it increases the options available to companies for building supply chains, so it is expected that RCEP will be used frequently. The strategic significance originally aimed for by the TPP is well understood in Japan, and while Japan hopes the US will return, there are few voices welcoming China's participation. The Biden administration has stated that the US will not rejoin the TPP and that it will leave the decision on whether China joins the

agreement to member states. The United States lost its Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) at the end of June while Congress has made little attempt to extend it, meaning it is highly unlikely that the US will return to the CPTPP. It has been pointed out that negotiations with China will provide a chance to rectify its various actions. Taiwan has applied for membership as an independent customs territory, and this poses no problems under the CPTPP provisions, which are also consistent with WTO rules. At the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in November, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida signaled his commitment to maintaining the CPTPP's high standards in terms of both market access and rules, and it is important that these principles be upheld in considering membership applications. Furthermore, it is imperative that Japan reinforce its capabilities to create, enforce and monitor trade rules that support free trade through a multi-layered approach that employs multilateral trade structures and FTAs such as the RCEP and CPTPP. Stressing to the US the importance of the CPTPP in the context of its own China policy and involving the US through greater collaboration on labor, environmental and high-tech issues could serve as the building blocks for maintaining and strengthening the trade system. ■

## Changing European Perceptions of China and Deepening Engagement in the Indo-Pacific

European countries continued to have their hands full dealing with coronavirus infections in 2021 like in 2020. As the competition for supremacy between the United States and China continued to intensify, the EU's and European countries' perceptions of China changed significantly. Against this backdrop, European countries' interest in the Indo-Pacific region has been growing and this is reflected in their policies and activities. After leaving the EU, the UK deepened

its involvement in the Indo-Pacific region while experiencing difficulties in its relations with the EU. With the transition of the United States to a new administration, cooperation through NATO, which had been neglected during the Trump years, was once again promoted, but the lack of coordination at the time of US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan sparked criticism of the United States.



Specialists on the laybarge Fortuna performing an above water tie-in during the final stage of Nord Stream 2 pipeline construction in the Baltic Sea, September 2021. (Photo by NORD STREAM 2 AG/AFP/Aflo)

### Changing European perceptions of China and deepening engagement in the Indo-Pacific

One significant strategic change in Europe in 2021 was the change in perceptions of China. At the end of 2020, an agreement was reached on a “Comprehensive Agreement on Investment” between the EU and China under the leadership of Germany, which held the presidency of the European Union. However, sentiment in the European Parliament, whose approval is required for ratification of this agreement, radically changed in 2021. The European Parliament has long been concerned about issues of human rights and democracy under the Chinese government, particularly the issue of forced labor involving the Uighur minority. When the EU, the UK, the US and Canada announced sanctions against Chinese government officials in March for human rights violations against ethnic Uighurs, China responded by immediately imposing sanctions on European parliamentarians and EU diplomats. This led to further backlash, and the European Parliament froze its deliberations on ratifying the investment pact in May.

The European Council launched “A Globally Connected Europe” initiative in June. This new strategy underlines the need for the EU to pursue a geopolitical and global approach to connectivity, and aims to



promote the EU's economic, diplomatic, development policy and security interests and advance European values. Targeting Africa and Latin America, where China has made significant inroads in recent years, the strategy appears designed to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It can be said that the EU's relationship with China has also become more competitive from the perspective of connectivity.

The EU and the European Parliament have taken an increasingly harsh view of China. The Taiwan Strait was mentioned for the first time in the joint declaration adopted at the US-EU summit in June. In September, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made a policy speech in which she criticized China and worried about dictatorial regimes using the Indo-Pacific region to expand their own influence. In the same month, the European Parliament adopted a new EU-China strategy report. The report, which spent 17 paragraphs on China's human rights record in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Hong Kong, said there could be no lifting of the freeze on the ratification process unless retaliatory sanctions imposed by China against the EU were lifted. In a report on EU-Taiwan relations adopted by the European Parliament in October, the EU expressed its readiness to further strengthen ties with Taiwan and to begin preparations for concluding an investment agreement with Taiwan. These responses by the EU overturned the impression that the EU had been "soft" on China.

China established the "16+1 (later expanded to 17+1)" economic cooperation framework with Central and Eastern European countries in 2012 and has since held summits almost every year. China has also been expanding cooperation under the BRI and its mask and vaccine diplomacy in response to the coronavirus outbreak. For this reason, many Central and Eastern European countries had been considered "pro-China," but these relations also changed in 2021. At the 17+1 Summit held online in February, the three Baltic states as well as Romania and Bulgaria decided not to attend at the head of state level, and in June, Lithuania announced its withdrawal from the 17+1. In July, Lithuania also approved the establishment of a mission using the name "Taiwan," and China downgraded diplomatic relations with Lithuania in response. In addition, some countries such as the Czech Republic repeatedly made clearly pro-Taiwan statements backed by the public opinion. Relations between Europe and Taiwan are growing stronger, with Taiwanese ministers visiting the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Lithuania, and European delegations from the Baltic states, France and the European Parliament visiting Taiwan one after another.

European countries' interest in the Indo-Pacific region has further increased as the EU's views on China have become more disapproving, and this has been demonstrated in concrete terms through policies and activities. In September, the European Commission and the High Representative issued a joint policy paper entitled "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", in which the EU committed to deepening its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. It said that rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific could

have a direct impact on European security and prosperity and that the EU was prepared to “use all tools at its disposal” as “a consistent defender of human rights and democracy”.

European countries are also taking a greater strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region and demonstrating their commitment to the region in concrete actions. France has territories in the Indo-Pacific and has been demonstrating strong interest in this region. French President Emmanuel Macron visited Japan and French Polynesia in July and announced the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” a few days later. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the French army conducted its first joint exercise with the Ground Self-Defense Force in Japan in May, and French navy dispatched ships at regular intervals to the Indo-Pacific. The German navy has dispatched warships to the Indo-Pacific region since August, and these ships made a port call in Japan in November for the first time in about 20 years.

The United Kingdom, faced with an urgent need to conduct a comprehensive review of its foreign policy strategy after its withdrawal from the EU, has been working to materialize its “Global Britain” initiative. In its Integrated Review 2021 released in March, the UK declared that the Indo-Pacific region is becoming the geopolitical center of the world, and included measures to strengthen ties with countries like Japan, South Korea, Australia and India. In August and September, the new aircraft carrier



The Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth (R 08), the guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey (DDG 97) and the guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh (CG 67) operate in formation in the Gulf of Aden, July 2021. (Photo by U.S. Navy/Abaca/Aflo)

HMS *Queen Elizabeth* was dispatched to the Indo-Pacific, and in September it made a port call in Japan and conducted training with American and Dutch forces. On September 15, Australia, the UK and the US announced the establishment of AUKUS, a new security framework, and made it clear that they would step up their commitment to the Indo-Pacific region. Japan and the UK are aiming to hold joint exercises between the Self-Defense Forces and the British Armed Forces. Negotiations began in October for the conclusion of a Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement. The UK has also announced its intent to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and deepened its involvement in various fields in the Indo-Pacific region by engaging with ASEAN as a “Dialogue Partner.”

### Opportunities and challenges for European solidarity and multilateral cooperation

The aftereffects of Brexit continued to be felt in 2021. Residents and businesses in the UK were strongly

dissatisfied with special measures taken for Northern Ireland, especially those pertaining to customs clearance and quarantine, following the UK's exit from the EU, leading to violent incidents in Northern Ireland. Britain has sought changes to the Northern Ireland Protocol and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, but the EU has not altered its positions of refusal. There was also discord between the UK and the EU over coronavirus vaccine exports. Anglo-French relations have deteriorated due to the ongoing conflict over fishing rights following Brexit, as well as Australia's abrogation of its contract with France to procure submarines in favor of obtaining nuclear-powered submarines from the US and the UK under the AUKUS framework.

European countries continued to suffer from the coronavirus pandemic in many ways in 2021. Vaccination rates varied across Europe, with high vaccination rates achieved in southern and northern Europe while rates remained low in central and eastern Europe. Countries began easing restrictions in the summer, but the autumn brought a serious resurgence in infections, with Germany recording the highest number of cases since the outbreak began. As a result, some countries have announced plans to reimpose new restrictions or enact vaccine mandates. Hungary and Poland strongly opposed an EU proposal that the distribution of funds from the coronavirus recovery fund be conditional on observing the "rule of law," leading to a situation in which agreement on the coronavirus recovery fund was threatened at one point, thus the problem of "authoritarian states" within Europe came to the fore. In Poland, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled in October that EU law may not prevail over domestic law, prompting the European Parliament to call on the European Commission to impose measures aimed at suspending the implementation of the EU's budget for Poland, claiming that this ruling could undermine the fundamental values of the EU, and European Commission President von der Leyen added to the harsh criticism of Poland. In response, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki claimed that he was being attacked by EU leaders, exposing the confrontation with the EU. However, in November, when Belarus was suspected of deliberately gathering thousands of refugees on its border with Poland in order to pressure the EU to lift its ongoing sanctions imposed over Belarus' presidential election, the EU and Poland united to challenge President Alexander Lukashenko's increasingly authoritarian rule.

Following the establishment of the Biden administration, moves were made in NATO to reaffirm and bolster the unity that had been greatly strained under the Trump administration. Regarding NATO 2030, which was announced at the end of 2020, the NATO heads of state reaffirmed their agreement in the Summit Communiqué at the June NATO Summit and pledged to strengthen the alliance politically. This joint statement recognized China and Russia as security risks, and called on China, which it said presents "systemic challenges", to act responsibly in international affairs, while maintaining dialogue. NATO took an unyielding stance toward Russia, terming its actions "a threat to Euro-Atlantic security" and demanding that Russia withdraw its forces from Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

Relations between NATO and Russia deteriorated further following the release of the Communiqué. After it was announced on October 7 that eight diplomats in Russia's NATO mission had been disqualified for being intelligence officers, Russia announced on the 18th that it would suspend the activities of the NATO office in Moscow and halt the activities of the Russian mission in Brussels. The assembly of a large Russian force near the border with Ukraine since autumn has been met with an exchange of accusations between NATO, which views this as an increased threat to Ukraine, and Russia, which regards this as a measure to counter NATO's support of Ukraine. In December, Russia published a draft treaty between the United States and Russia guaranteeing that NATO will not expand eastward. The United States stated that the legally binding guarantee included provisions that were clearly unacceptable, but expressed its willingness to discuss the issue.

The Biden administration stressed the importance of US commitment to NATO and strategic communication between allies. However, in Afghanistan, it continued the Trump administration's withdrawal policy and decided on a schedule for pulling out by the end of August without consulting NATO, which had been working together with the US to rebuild the country. As the Taliban took control of Kabul, the withdrawal of troops and evacuation of other personnel from various countries took place amid chaos. The Biden administration's approach was denounced as "self-centered" by other NATO countries, as it resembled the Trump administration's disdain for multilateral alliances in essence despite a change in language and style.

Germany, which has become more prominent in the post-Brexit EU, held its quadrennial federal elections in September. Angela Merkel, who had been in power for 16 years and influential in many EU policies, announced her resignation ahead of the elections, marking the end of her long-term incumbency. The elections ended in a crushing defeat for the ruling CDU, and led to the formation of the first three-party (SPD, FDP and Green Party) coalition government in German federal history. Merkel has been known to place importance on economic relations with China and not take a hostile attitude toward China. However, Germany's policy toward China is expected to change, as the Green Party leader who emphasizes human rights became foreign minister of the new government and that a critical view on China's human rights situation was expressed in the November 24 coalition government agreement. The coalition agreement also calls for Germany to participate as an observer in the March 2022 Meeting of States Parties to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. NATO countries under the US nuclear umbrella have consistently opposed the treaty, and with Germany following the lead of Norway, which announced in October that it would be participating as an observer, there will likely be discussions within NATO on Germany's policies.

### Perspectives and recommendations

Following the Bundestag elections in Germany, a presidential election will be held in France in April 2022. With the exit of Merkel, who has been a driving force behind European integration for many years, attention will be focused on whether there will be a change in the EU policy of Germany, which has been increasing its presence in the post-Brexit EU. The outcome of the presidential election in France, which has a major influence on EU policy along with Germany, will be of particular interest, even more so as the country also holds the EU presidency in the first half of 2022.

Japan and Europe share fundamental values such as democracy and can expect continued substantial cooperation as strategic partners. European countries have designated Japan as a partner in the Indo-Pacific region, and it is important for Japan to continue its efforts to ensure that support for a “free and open Indo-Pacific” is reflected in the specific policies and actions of European countries, as well as of the EU and NATO, by further promoting bilateral cooperation with these countries and by stepping up cooperation with the EU, which in 2021 took a sterner view of China and greater interest in the Indo-Pacific, and with NATO. From this viewpoint, closer military and security cooperation, including the dispatch of warships to the Indo-Pacific by European countries and joint exercises with Japan that happened one after another in 2021, is a welcome means of opening new possibilities for cooperation. The Japanese government needs to continue pursuing active diplomacy to further heighten the interest of European countries, the EU and NATO in the Indo-Pacific, and deepen their engagement. In doing so, it is crucial to consider improving cooperation not only between Japan and Europe but also between QUAD countries and European countries. Japan and Europe should also team up in promoting multilateral cooperation in areas that combine values and technology such as the advanced technology supply chains consisting of democratic countries advocated by President Biden and endorsed by Europe and Japan.

It is also essential that Japan reinforce its relations with the UK, which has become more involved in the Indo-Pacific region under the Global Britain initiative since its departure from the EU. Japan and the UK, both close allies of the United States, have been gradually strengthening their diplomatic and security cooperation. Japan should actively pursue policies to further consolidate bilateral relations, including support for the UK’s accession to the CPTPP and promoting closer ties between its Self-Defense Forces and the British military. ■



## Russia Seeking an Exit Strategy

If 2020 was the year Russia was forced to deal with an unknown coronavirus, 2021 was the year it sought an exit strategy from the pandemic. Since the beginning of the year, when the coronavirus situation had improved slightly, Russia has made clear its stance of prioritizing the economy and has gradually loosened measures put in place to prevent infections. On the diplomatic



President Joe Biden meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin, in Geneva, Switzerland, June 2021. (Photo by AP/Aflo)

front, Russia has sought to recover from the stagnation it was forced to endure in the previous year by holding the first face-to-face summit between the United States and Russia in June and resuming large-scale international meetings. However, because Russia prioritized economic reopening over infection prevention measures, the virus began spreading again in Russia in the autumn. Diplomatic relations with the United States and other Western countries have not improved significantly, and it is expected that confrontational relations will continue into the near future. As the US-China confrontation intensifies, Russia is increasingly leaning toward China to counter the US.

### Resurgence of COVID-19

The second wave of infections that got underway in late September of the previous year began gradually subsiding in very early 2021. Unlike the first wave in spring 2020, the Russian government took few measures against the coronavirus, with the exceptions of aggressive infection testing and a campaign to inoculate the country with domestic vaccines such as Sputnik V, and proceeded to relax behavioral regulations as if the country had overcome the coronavirus. The Russian government, weighing the economic losses it would incur against stricter measures to prevent infections such as lockdowns, decided to focus on avoiding economic losses.

The citizens of Russia have accepted this pro-economy stance and they have been trying to live fairly normal lives while not self-isolating or actively trying to get vaccinated out of mistrust of domestic vaccines. The attitude of the Russian government and citizens to prioritize the economy is reflected in economic indicators. The Central Bank of the Russian Federation acknowledged that the economy had recovered to pre-pandemic levels in the second quarter of 2021, mainly due to a rapid recovery in

household consumption and other domestic demand, but then continued to raise its key interest rate in stages from March due to concerns about demand-pull inflation.

In the diplomatic arena, Russia was quick to return to the pre-COVID-19 era. Major international events resumed in 2021, and in June the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum was held for the first time in two years in a hybrid face-to-face and online format. The Moscow International Aviation and Space Salon (MAKS 2021) took place in July and the International Military-Technical Forum (ARMY 2021) in August. At the Eastern Economic Forum convened in early September, the announcement of a new special zone plan for the Kuril Islands inclusive of the Northern Territories drew considerable attention.

Russia, which has given priority to the economy and diplomacy and half abandoned measures against the coronavirus, suffered two outbreaks in 2021. In the fourth wave that began in September, the numbers of infections and deaths have increased at a faster pace than ever before, with more than 1000 deaths per day since October 16. Public mistrust of both domestic vaccines and the government and a lack of fear of the disease are also believed to be factors contributing to the spread of the disease. In the wake of the rapid spread of the disease caused by the fourth wave, the government, which had not taken any serious measures, finally decided to change its policy. President Putin decided to designate October 30 to November 7 as “non-working days” throughout Russia, while the city of Moscow independently decided to make October 28 to November 7 “non-working days” and imposed a limited lockdown. Although the number of new infections temporarily decreased, the outbreak did not stop until the end of December.

### **US-Russia Relations Showing No Signs of Improving**

Over the past several years, US-Russia relations have deteriorated steadily, as seen in the imposition of sanctions against Russia by Western countries triggered by the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Russia’s intervention in the Syrian civil war since 2015, its alleged intervention in the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections, and the expiration of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019. Extending the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which was set to expire on February 5, 2021, became an urgent issue.

US president Joe Biden, who took office on January 20, 2021, proposed an extension of the New START treaty, about which former president Donald Trump had been passive, and the leaders of the United States and Russia agreed to an unconditional five-year extension of the treaty in a telephone conversation on the 26th of the same month. On February 3, the two countries exchanged memorandums of understanding to complete the process of extending the treaty. Although this prevented the complete elimination of the arms control framework between the United States and Russia, relations between the two countries did

not improve and in fact further deteriorated.

On March 17, the Russian ambassador to the United States was recalled over President Biden's remarks about President Putin. On April 15, President Biden decided to impose new financial sanctions and expel ten Russian diplomats from the United States over Moscow's involvement in election meddling and cyberattacks on American companies. In response, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on the following day that it would take similar retaliatory measures and it also recommended the temporary recall of the US ambassador to Russia. Furthermore, President Putin decided to compile a list of countries unfriendly to Russia on April 23, and the Russian government included the United States and the Czech Republic in the list on May 14. As a result, the number of staff at the embassies of the United States and the Czech Republic in Russia was restricted.

Relations between the United States and Russia were thus at their worst since the end of the Cold War when, on June 16, the leaders of the two countries met face-to-face for the first time in Geneva and agreed to return their repatriated ambassadors to their posts and to begin working-level talks for all forms of cooperation in the diplomatic domain. According to the "Joint Statement on Strategic Stability" adopted at the meeting, the two presidents "reaffirmed the principle that 'nuclear war has no victors and must never be fought'", and noted that the two countries would soon begin an integrated bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue through which they would "seek to build a foundation for future arms control and risk reduction measures". This agreement came about because the Biden administration, unlike its predecessor that had insisted on involving China as well as the United States and Russia in arms control measures, has indicated that it will go ahead with the reduction of nuclear weapons by the United States and Russia.

Prompted by the success of the Geneva summit, the United States and Russia have continued their dialogue. Information security and cybercrime were discussed during the Putin-Biden telephone conversation on July 9, and the Strategic Stability Dialogue agreed at the June Summit was held in Geneva on July 28. Although details of the discussions have not been made public, the Strategic Stability Dialogue has been held twice in 2021. At the second meeting in September, agreement was reached on setting up two expert working groups on "Principles and Goals of Future Arms Control" and "Capabilities and Actions with Strategic Implications".

Nevertheless, the Geneva talks have not led to any drastic improvement in US-Russia relations. Although the ambassadors of the United States and Russia have returned to their respective posts following the Geneva talks, the numbers of embassy staff members in both countries have not been normalized and working-level talks on this issue continue. There have also been no signs of improvement in relations with

NATO. Immediately after the Geneva talks, an incident occurred on June 23 in which Russian troops chased a British warship off the coast of Crimea. On July 7, a Russian plane scrambled to intercept an American warplane flying over the Black Sea, and on November 25 the Russian fleet began surveillance on a US warship sailing in the Black Sea, heightening tensions with NATO. On October 18, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced the suspension of Russia's mission to NATO in Brussels and the closure of NATO's information office in Moscow. The move was in response to NATO's expulsion of Russian mission officials as "undeclared intelligence officers" earlier that month.

Tensions between Russia and NATO are also rising over Ukraine. In late October, it was discovered that 100,000 Russian troops were massing near the border with Ukraine, sparking fears among NATO countries that Russia would soon invade Ukraine. At the US-Russia summit held on December 7 amid continuing tensions, President Putin called for a legally binding guarantee of Russia's security, as well as a halt to any further NATO expansion into the former Soviet bloc and the cessation of NATO military activities in Eastern Europe. Biden, for his part, warned of strong additional sanctions if Russia invaded Ukraine, saying that Russia's demands were unacceptable but that he would continue talks to ease tensions.

### **Rapid Rapprochement between China and Russia**

As relations with the United States have grown ever more tense, Russia has moved closer to China, and the areas of cooperation between China and Russia has become increasingly extensive. In 2021, a series of events marked the deepening of Sino-Russian cooperation.

On May 19, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping attended an online groundbreaking ceremony for a new nuclear power plant to be built in China with Russian technology. About a month later, on June 28, a China-Russia summit was held online. In a joint statement adopted at the meeting, China and Russia singled out the United States for criticism, denouncing its withdrawal from the INF Treaty and its pursuit of a global missile interceptor program as undermining global strategic stability. China and Russia announced that they would continue to cooperate on various fronts, including politics, security, economics and energy. They also agreed to automatically extend for five years the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation concluded 20 years earlier.

In response to the rapidly developing situation in Afghanistan, China and Russia, which share a common interest in the stability of the Central Asian region, have been exchanging views. At the above-mentioned China-Russia summit meeting held on June 28, it was emphasized that China and Russia would closely monitor the situation in Afghanistan and cooperate on regional peace and stability. On July 14, the foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) met and adopted a joint statement

calling for an early ceasefire and a peace process in Afghanistan. At the 21st meeting of the SCO, held on September 16 and 17 after the Taliban had seized power and US forces had withdrawn, President Putin called for the cooperation of member countries to ensure the security and sustainable growth of the Eurasian region and to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and stability.

What stands out more than such political and diplomatic cooperation is military cooperation. On August 9, with the situation in Afghanistan in mind, the China-Russia joint military exercise “Western United-2021” was held in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in inland China, with the exercise scenario based on a response to “terrorist forces” invading the region. In addition, the navies of China and Russia conducted joint exercises in the Sea of Japan off the coast of Vladivostok from October 14 to 17 and engaged in their first joint maritime patrol from October 17 to 23 after the exercises. The joint exercises between the Chinese and Russian navies are believed to be designed to check US naval activities in the western Pacific, including the passage of US naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait, as well as the US-UK-Australia “AUKUS” security framework announced on September 15. China reacted strongly to the announcement of AUKUS, and President Putin showed his willingness to go along with China, expressing concern on October 13 that “it would clearly undermine regional stability”. During the joint patrol, Chinese and Russian naval vessels left the waters off Vladivostok, passed through the Tsugaru Strait, headed south in the Pacific Ocean, and then transited the Osumi Strait into the East China Sea. This is the first time that Chinese and Russian naval vessels passed through these straits at the same time, drawing attention in Japan. On November 19, one month after the joint maritime patrol, the air forces of China and Russia conducted joint patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. Thus, the two countries are demonstrating closer military cooperation in the sea and in the air around Japan.

### **Russia’s “World View” and Diplomatic Strategy**

While President Biden has made clear his stance against authoritarian countries such as Russia and China, Russia has also strongly opposed the Biden administration’s policy of “democratic solidarity” as seen in the hosting of the December 9-10 “Democracy Summit”. The US-Russia divergence over worldviews and values is thus widening further.

On June 28, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov published a paper entitled “On Law, Rights and Rules” in which he severely criticized Western countries. According to the Lavrov paper, the West is trying to impose “liberal” values on Russia (and China) in what it calls a “rules-based order”, a hierarchy with itself at the top, and to sanction them for not obeying its wishes. The Western countries should respect that Russia has its own values and should treat Russia as an equal partner, and the West’s view that Russia should change its attitude first in order to improve relations is unacceptable, as Russia will not make any



unilateral concessions. In today's multipolar world, countries must not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and must respect the sovereignty and self-determination of other states, and international issues must be resolved through multilateral consultations centered on the United Nations. These are the basic principles of Russian diplomacy, according to the paper.

The Lavrov paper can be read as follows. Instead of a unipolar world centered on the United States, Russia aims to create a multipolar world in which regional powers cooperate to maintain stability. This requires the United States to be on a par with major powers such as Russia, China and India. Russia does not seek to improve its relations with the United States across the board at the moment but does at least want to maintain a relationship of mutual recognition without mutual interference.

For Russia to compete with the United States, cooperation with China will become increasingly important. However, even though Russia is cooperating with China, it is trying to avoid becoming totally dependent on China. At present, Russia has no intention of elevating the aforementioned Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between China and Russia into a military alliance between the two, as this could embroil Russia in a confrontation between



Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin visits Etorofu Island, a part of the Northern Territories, July 2021. (Photo by REUTERS / Aflor)

the United States and China over, for example, Taiwan. Russia's "strategy" for the time being is to cooperate politically and militarily with China in countering the United States, but not to go too far into the US-China conflict itself.

### Perspectives and recommendations

In 2013, the Japanese government adopted a national security strategy that called for expanding Japan's overall relationship with Russia. With China's rapid rise foremost in mind, this approach reflected a strategic view of strengthening relations with Russia, which sought to maintain certain distance from China, while keeping the Japan-US alliance at its core, so as to improve the security environment. However, moves by Russia to provoke Japan, such as joint patrols by the Russian and Chinese navies and air forces around Japan in October and November 2021 and the announcement of a new special zone plan for the Kuril Islands inclusive of the Northern Territories at the Eastern Economic Forum in

early September, are likely to push Japan to reconsider its view of Russia, on which its national security strategy was based.

Against this background, Prime Minister Kishida expressed his intention to review the National Security Strategy in his policy speech on October 8, 2021. Japan's policy toward Russia will require not only addressing the Northern Territories issue but also adopting a new approach that balances security and economy. Some observers may assert that it is no longer possible to separate China and Russia from a security perspective and that, while there is no need to regard Russia as an enemy, Japan must be careful and vigilant in monitoring its movements. Others may argue that, in order to fulfill its international pledge on pursuing decarbonization, Japan should place greater emphasis from an economic point of view on cooperation with Russia, which can provide energy resources such as natural gas and hydrogen. A new security strategy that balances these voices is needed.

Since the second Abe administration, various channels have been established between Japan and Russia, both in the public and private sectors. Creating forums such as the Foreign and Defense Ministerial Consultations (2+2) where both sides can directly confirm their intentions has been a particularly critical achievement. As the possibility cannot be excluded that the US-China and US-Russia confrontations might heighten tensions in areas surrounding Japan, it is essential to maintain and utilize such channels and keep close communication between Japan and Russia to avoid inadvertent clashes. To improve its security environment, Japan should actively cooperate with Russia through dialogue in areas where it is able to pursue mutually beneficial interests. ■

## Middle East: Withdrawal of US Forces, Revival of the Taliban Regime, and Search for a New Regional Order

The completion of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the restoration of the Taliban regime symbolized the transformation of the regional order in the Middle East in 2021. As the United States shifts its diplomatic and security focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific, China and Russia are increasing their presence in the region, and China in particular is taking part in reorganizing the regional order by strengthening ties with Israel, Gulf Arab oil producers, Iran and Turkey. The US-Iran relationship has entered a new phase with a change of administrations on both sides, and the future of the JCPOA has garnered attention. In addition, security issues including those in North Africa are mounting, such as the ongoing proxy wars and refugee deadlocks in Syria and Yemen, the political upheaval in Tunisia triggered by protests against inadequate responses to the coronavirus crisis, the military coup in Sudan during the transition to civilian rule, and the military conflict in Ethiopia.



Protesters gather at Marble Arch ahead of a march in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan, in central London, August 2021. (Photo by AFP/Aflo)

### US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Its Impact

As the US shifts its diplomatic and security focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific, the Biden administration decided to carry on with the Trump administration's decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan with the new deadline of the end of August. On August 15, before the withdrawal was completed, the Taliban seized control of the capital Kabul, regaining power for the first time in 20 years after being ousted by the US invasion following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Some Afghans, including the elites and those living near the capital, had enjoyed the benefits of democratization and economic prosperity over the preceding two decades, but no improvement was seen on issues such as bribery and corruption, social injustice and poverty, creating a climate that allowed the Taliban to return to power, particularly in rural areas. Ashraf Ghani's government, which had been supported by the international community, collapsed suddenly without a fight, and the confusion caused by the withdrawal of US troops and the exodus of Afghans who felt themselves in danger under a revived Taliban regime, as well as terrorist attacks across the country, shocked the world. The establishment of an "inclusive

government” encompassing multiple ethnic groups, women and former government officials has not been realized as initially asserted by senior Taliban officials, and there are concerning signs of suppression of women. Although the Taliban are seeking international recognition and continued humanitarian assistance, an emergency summit meeting of the G20 in October confirmed that member countries would provide humanitarian assistance through UN agencies rather than through the Taliban interim government. Although no countries have yet officially recognized the Taliban regime, some, including China, Russia and neighboring countries, are dealing with the interim government on a working level. As the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan deepened, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held an emergency meeting in December and decided to establish a food procurement fund. The World Bank also announced that \$280 million would be transferred from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which had been frozen since August, to UN agencies.

The resurgence of the Taliban regime has had a major impact on the situation in the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as on the foreign policies of neighboring countries, including Russia, China, Pakistan and India. Threat of international terrorism has also increased. For Russia and Central Asian countries, which have long regarded the rise of the Islamic State (IS) militant group in Afghanistan as a threat, the reinstatement of the Taliban, which is hostile to IS, could serve as a check on that militant group. However, it has been suggested that, in addition to al-Qaeda, which is believed to still have ties with the Taliban, IS might intensify its activities to highlight its resistance to the Taliban or take advantage of gaps in the Taliban’s hold on security. Concerned about the impact on its internal security, China, which has the Uighur issue, criticized the US’ withdrawal, saying that the US should take responsibility for Afghanistan’s future. China attaches importance to its relationship with Afghanistan from the perspectives of the Belt and Road Initiative routes and that country’s underground resources such as rare earth elements and has been working to build relations with the Taliban regime by contacting them even before the US withdrawal was completed.

As the US withdrawal from Afghanistan shows, the Biden administration is trying to reduce the engagement of resources in the Middle East. Amid this power shift, major countries in the region, including US allies like Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt are seeking closer relations with China, as are Iran, which is at odds with the United States, and Turkey, a regional power that has adopted omnidirectional diplomacy. Iran has been particularly active in strengthening its ties with China, signing a 25-year comprehensive agreement with China in March and joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in September. The SCO, led by China and Russia, has already been joined by Turkey as an observer, in addition to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar that were approved as dialogue partners in July 2021. Many other Middle Eastern countries, including Israel, Syria, Iraq and

Bahrain, have also been applying for the dialogue partnership, regardless of their relationship with the United States. Afghanistan has already been participating as an observer since 2012, which offers one route for the country to strengthen cooperation with neighboring countries.

### **Establishment of an Israeli Coalition Cabinet and Relations with the United States, Airstrikes in Gaza, and the “Shadow War” with Iran**

In June, hardline Netanyahu government, which had been in power for 12 years since 2009 in Israel, was replaced by the Bennet coalition cabinet led by the centrist Yesh Atid and including eight parties from the right to the left, in addition to Arab Israelis.

In May, just before Netanyahu’s departure, Israel and Hamas clashed for 11 days before reaching a ceasefire brokered by Egypt. It was the first major confrontation since May 2018, when President Trump decided to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. Behind the military confrontation lay tensions over one of the key points of contention in recent years on the Palestinian issue: the campaign by Jewish settler groups to expel the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem. During Ramadan in April, clashes broke out between the Israeli government and Palestinian Muslim residents at the Damascus Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem. When the decision to evict Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem was announced, the protests escalated into a mass demonstration. The Israeli army under the Netanyahu administration just before the change of government repeatedly exchanged massive air strikes and rocket fire with Hamas. Israeli air strikes on Gaza continued intermittently between June and September, causing extensive damage and casualties, including among children.

While President Trump effectively permitted settlement activity, the current Biden administration supports the “two-state solution” and has opposed settlement expansion. Despite the US’ opposition and the differing views within the Israeli ruling coalition, the Bennett government announced a series of new housing projects for Jewish settlers in the West Bank in October, East Jerusalem in November, and the Golan Heights at the end of December. The international community, including the United States, continues to criticize settlement activities as a violation of international law. In particular, the Syrian government strongly condemns Israel’s plan to double the number of settlers within five years in the Golan Heights, which Israel has occupied since the Third Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and annexed in 1981 (without the approval of the international community).

In the Middle East waters, the “shadow war” between Israel and Iran continued. Attacks on Israeli-linked ships, possibly by Iran, began in February and at least five attacks were confirmed. At the end of July, two crew members were killed in an attack on the *Mercer Street*, an oil tanker owned by a Japanese



company and operated by an Israeli firm, off the eastern coast of Oman. The Israeli, British and American governments have determined that Iran used suicide drones to attack, but the Iranian government has denied any connection. Israel believes Iran is using profits from its crude oil deals with Syria's Assad regime to support Hizbullah, and the Israelis in recent years have attacked at least 12 Iranian ships in the Red Sea and in the Mediterranean Sea off Syria. Iran's attacks on Israeli ships could be considered retaliation. With the amount of maritime trade between Israel and the Gulf region expected to increase following the summer 2020 Abraham Accords, Iran may have attacked Israeli ships in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea to place greater restraints on Israel. Iran and Israel have not officially admitted their involvement in any of the attacks but have repeatedly retaliated in a manner that did not inflict any casualties to avoid escalation into an all-out conflict. However, the attack on the *Mercer Street* resulted in casualties, and it is necessary to keep a close watch on the possibility of a similar incident or further expansion.

### **Iran's Presidential Election, Establishment of a New Government, and Future of the JCPOA**

In Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline anti-American conservative, put together a cabinet after the presidential election in June 2021. A close associate of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and head of the judiciary since 2019, Raisi has been subject to US economic sanctions for his role in the execution of scores of political prisoners in the past and has faced criticism from Amnesty International. While the disqualification of many candidates through preliminary screening by the Board of Supervisors had made Raisi the favorite to win, turnout for the presidential election was 48.8%, far below the 70% turnout in the previous election (2017).

The circumstances surrounding the Iranian nuclear issue have become even more challenging. Immediately after its inauguration, the new Biden administration sent a positive signal on returning the US to the JCPOA. Indirect talks between the United States and Iran were held from April through the mediation of other JCPOA signatories, but no accord was reached before the Iranian presidential election in June. Although President Raisi vowed, along with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, to remain committed to the JCPOA, the new



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi speaking during the first meeting of his cabinet, in Tehran, August 2021. (Photo by AFP/Aflo)

Iranian government sought assurances that the countries involved, including the United States, would not withdraw from the agreement or impose new sanctions, and no noticeable progress was made in the indirect talks that resumed at the end of November after a five-month hiatus. During this time, Iran's nuclear activities in violation of the JCPOA have further expanded. In addition to the start of production of uranium metal in February, Iran has begun to enrich uranium to 20% and 60%, well above the upper limit of 3.67% specified in the JCPOA, and has been steadily increasing its stockpile of enriched uranium. As of September, Iran's breakout time - the time it takes to produce enough weapons-grade fissile material for one nuclear weapon - is believed to have been reduced from the one year envisioned by the JCPOA to one to two months. Iran has also suspended many verification and monitoring measures by the IAEA under the JCPOA, thereby reducing the transparency of its nuclear activities. The United States has indicated that it will consider other options if indirect talks fail to produce results, and the situation needs a close watch, including on Israel, which is determined to check Iran's nuclear development. In December, the UAE accepted the visit of the Israeli prime minister based on the Abraham Accords and sent a special envoy to Iran, a longtime trade partner. These moves by the UAE that take the regional balance into consideration are worth noting.

### **Perspectives and Recommendations**

The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the resurgence of the Taliban regime have raised new concerns about the destabilization of the situation in the Middle East and the increased risk of international terrorism, and these factors are expected to have an impact on international relations between major powers, not least the increased involvement of neighboring countries, including China and Russia, in Afghanistan. Despite the shift of the United States to the Indo-Pacific, however, the basic structure in which events in the region have a significant impact on global security has not changed, and Japan needs to actively take initiatives and contribute in three areas in particular: Afghanistan, Middle East peace process, and the Iranian nuclear issue.

The first is Afghanistan. While the international community is trying to ascertain the direction of the Taliban regime and is withholding its approval, the country's economic and social activities continue to be severely affected by insecurity, logistical disruptions and food shortages, making humanitarian assistance highly urgent. While it is important that the international community continue to encourage the Taliban to run a government that upholds basic human rights, particularly the rights of women, it is essential that humanitarian assistance in response to the immediate humanitarian crisis continue through international organizations. Since 2001, Japan has invested a total of approximately 775 billion yen in wide-ranging assistance, including capacity building for maintaining security, social reintegration of armed opposition groups, and development assistance. Aid to increase food production will be particularly crucial in

supporting Afghanistan's economy in the future. However, any development assistance above and beyond humanitarian assistance will need to take into account the situation regarding the recognition of the Taliban government. The number of Afghan students who have studied in Japan now stands at nearly 1400, and many of them have only barely managed to escape to neighboring countries or have been internally displaced since the Taliban regime returned to power. Japan should also take measures to ensure the safety of, and provide relief to, those who have studied in Japan.

The second issue is peace in the Middle East with respect to the Israel-Palestine issue. Centering on the Israeli government's expansion of settlements, which has been strongly criticized by the international community, the Japanese government needs to press harder than ever for an end to the exchanges of violence and for building of mutual trust and confidence. At the same time, the new Israeli government has welcomed Japan's long-standing humanitarian assistance and aid to Palestine in areas such as human resource development and agricultural development. It is important that Japan continue to make steady efforts through such assistance based on relationships of trust with both Palestine and Israel.

Third is the Iranian nuclear issue. Based on its consistent policy on nuclear non-proliferation, and building on the friendship Japan has cultivated with Iran, it is important that the Japanese government continue its diplomatic efforts to ensure that the Iranian nuclear issue does not lead to an escalation of regional tensions, through encouraging Iran to return to compliance with the JCPOA and resume cooperation with the IAEA through channels for close dialogue with both the Raisi and Biden administrations. ■

## The Revival and Challenges of Multilateralism

Multilateralism, which was in a critical state in 2020, was revived by the new US administration of President Joe Biden pursuing a policy of returning to international organizations and agreements and taking the lead in multilateral international collaboration and policy coordination. Concrete progress was made in areas such as the international taxation, but the effectiveness of multilateralism remains to be questioned. As the world continues



A shipment of vaccines against the coronavirus sent to Sudan by the Covax vaccine-sharing initiative, October 2021. (Photo by AFP/Aflo)

to be deeply affected by the coronavirus pandemic, progress has been slow in supplying vaccines to developing countries although the United States has taken a leading role in frameworks such as COVAX, highlighting the North-South vaccine disparity. In the area of climate change, some headway was made at COP26, including coordination between the United States and China, but strengthening efforts to achieve the 1.5 degree target remains a major issue.

### The Biden Administration and the Revival of Multilateralism

The new administration of President Joe Biden decided to renew the United States' leading role in multilateralism. In the area of climate change, the US rejoined the Paris Agreement immediately after Biden's inauguration, and hosted the Leaders Summit on Climate in April to encourage major emitters to further strengthen their reduction goals. In addition, President Biden attended COP26, and the US contributed to the conclusion of the negotiations. Regarding the policy to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, the Biden administration voided the Trump administration's plan to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) and assumed a leading role in COVAX by donating \$3.5 billion and contributing a total of 1.1 billion vaccine doses. The human rights-oriented Biden administration also announced its intent to return to the UN Human Rights Council, from which the Trump administration withdrew, and in October the US was elected as a member for the 2022-2024 term. The World Trade Organization (WTO) had been without a leader for six months when Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala from Nigeria was elected director-general after the Biden administration retracted the opposition expressed by the previous administration. In the area of dispute settlement, however, the United States is in conflict with the EU over the role of

the Appellate Body, which is the second instance of dispute settlement, claiming that the Appellate Body is making decisions that overreach its original authority, leaving the activities of the Appellate Body in suspension. As a result, the dispute settlement process regarding imposition under Article 301 of the Trade Act of additional tariffs as high as 25% on China, which was found to be in violation of WTO rules by a dispute settlement panel in September 2020, has essentially been shelved. The conflict between developed and developing countries continued in discussions on WTO reform, and attention had been focused on whether progress could be made at the WTO Ministerial Conference scheduled for the end of November, the first in four years, but the conference has been postponed indefinitely due to the spread of a new coronavirus variant.

President Biden actively led discussions at the Group of Seven (G7) and Group of Twenty (G20) in cooperation with partner countries. Following changes in European perceptions of China, the G7 also served as a forum for discussing and coordinating policies toward China, including measures against forced labor in supply chains. At the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in December, attempts were made for the first time to strengthen relations with ASEAN countries. The G20 reviewed the principle of international taxation for the first time in about 100 years by agreeing on the introduction of a "digital tax" through the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) framework, and reached an agreement to raise the minimum corporate tax rate to 15% to end the global race to the bottom in reducing corporate taxes.

Thus, multilateralism has shown signs of revival as a place for international cooperation and policy coordination following the crisis it faced in 2020. While concrete progress has been made in some areas, it continues to face difficult challenges, such as the impact of US-China and US-Russia relations, as well as debates over vaccine supply and climate change targets, as described below.

### **Continuation of the Coronavirus Pandemic and the North-South Vaccine Gap**

The coronavirus pandemic continued in 2021, with the emergence of more transmissible variants that triggered waves of new infections around the world. Infections and their impacts have been especially severe in Asia compared to 2020. In India, the Delta strain was rampant from March to June, with a peak in May of 410,000 daily cases and more than 4000 deaths (source: WHO). Since June, the Delta strain has spread to Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand, as well as to South Korea and Japan. As the number of infections and deaths increased, countries took measures to control the spread of the disease that had serious consequences for domestic economic activities and supply chains. As a result, economic growth forecasts for 2021 have been revised downward (the July edition of the IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO) puts Japan at 2.8% and emerging and developing Asia at 7.5%, down 0.5% and 1.1% respectively from the April edition). The negative impacts

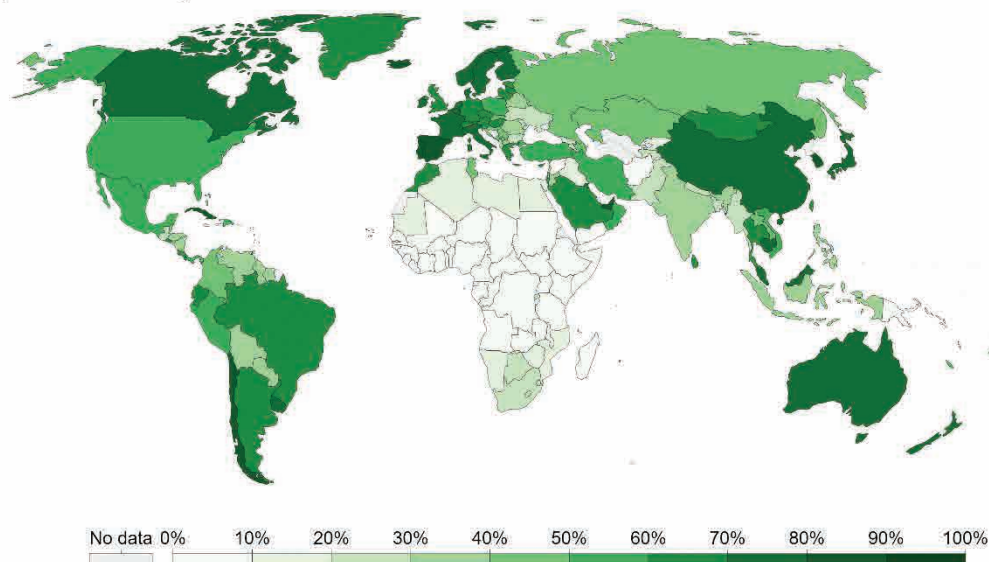


are particularly pronounced in countries and regions where vaccination coverage has been slow, and economic recovery in emerging and developing countries is expected to be delayed. It has also been pointed out that developed countries can implement large-scale economic measures, while emerging and developing countries have not been able to put in place sufficient economic measures out of concern over inflation and other adverse effects.

Amid the prolonged economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, an increasing number of countries, particularly those with high level of vaccination among their populations or those where severe cases and death rates had declined, were resuming their economic activities. Since autumn, however, infections have been spreading again, particularly in Europe, and efforts have been made to restrain economic activities and strengthen infection control measures. In addition, there have been moves to promote boosters and to make vaccinations mandatory in order to enhance vaccine effectiveness as it diminished over time. Prolonged restrictions on economic activities and mandatory vaccinations have sparked protests in many countries, and their social impact is growing. The Omicron strain, a new variant discovered in South Africa, has been confirmed in more than 89 countries as of the end of December 2021, leading to a rapid increase in infections around the world. As the world moves into 2022, there is little prospect to see the end of restrictions on the movement of people across national borders and on economic activities.

### Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

Total number of people who received all doses prescribed by the vaccination protocol, divided by the total population of the country.



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data – Last updated 9 December 2021, 17:20 (London time)  
 Note: Alternative definitions of a full vaccination, e.g. having been infected with SARS-CoV-2 and having 1 dose of a 2-dose protocol, are ignored to maximize comparability between countries.  
 OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

Figure 1. Vaccine coverage rates (percentage of total population that has received the required number of doses) as of December 2021  
 Source: Our World in Data

Although the pace of vaccine production has improved, there has been a significant disparity in the speed of vaccination between developed countries and emerging and developing countries, highlighting the gap between North and South in vaccine supply. As of December 2021, the number of vaccinations had reached approximately 9 billion, and vaccination coverage rates were 67.6% in Europe, 55.5% in North America, 60.0% in South America, 50.9% in Asia, and 7.7% in Africa (Figure 1). Full vaccination coverage reached 68.5% in high-income countries, but the need for boosters to increase the effectiveness of vaccines, which declines over time, has also become apparent, and developed countries are rushing to administer boosters. On the other hand, vaccination rates remain at 29.6% in low- and middle-income countries and only 3.2% in low-income countries, with many people not having received a single vaccination. COVAX is a multilateral framework for the distribution of vaccines involving more than 180 countries/regions that had delivered 965 million doses of vaccines to 144 countries/regions as of the end of December. But there has been a considerable delay from the original target of about 2 billion doses to be distributed by the end of 2021 and the revised target set in September 2021 of about 1.4 billion doses (source: Gavi). Japan hosted a vaccine summit in June and pledged an additional \$800 million, securing an overall donor funding target of \$8.3 billion. The United States, which participated in COVAX under the Biden administration, announced at the coronavirus summit it hosted in September that it would donate an additional 500 million doses of Pfizer's vaccine. To date, the United States has pledged \$3.5 billion in funding and donated a total of 1.1 billion doses. Meanwhile, China has been offering and donating vaccines mainly to emerging countries in South America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and has so far delivered 1.7 billion doses (source: BRIDGE). This suggests that China is moving ever more aggressively to win over emerging economies through vaccine diplomacy. The gap between North and South in vaccines was once again highlighted by the emergence of new variants, and supporting the supply of vaccines to emerging and developing countries through multilateral frameworks such as COVAX will remain a pressing issue in 2022 as the world as a whole works to reduce the spread of the coronavirus and achieve economic recovery.

### **Progress and Challenges Related to Climate Change**

In the area of climate change, multilateralism centered on the Paris Agreement has been rejuvenated, with international discussions centering on the 1.5 degree target. The G7 countries accepted the 1.5 degree target as virtually the only target and set reduction goals consistent with it (reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 45% or more no later than 2030 and achieving net zero emissions by 2050), but the world's largest emitter China and other emerging economies were reluctant to follow suit. Prior to COP26, the United States repeatedly urged China to raise its reduction goals in line with the 1.5 degree target, but China indicated that there would be no cooperation on climate change without improved bilateral relations between the United States and China and did not agree to an increase in the default reduction targets of "net zero emissions by 2060 and peak emissions by 2030".

Despite the attendance of many heads of state/government at COP26, which started on October 31, the leaders of China and Russia did not attend, prompting criticism from President Biden, getting the conference off to a difficult start and making negotiations difficult. However, on November 10, the United States and China issued a joint statement demonstrating their willingness for cooperation in the area of climate change, which greatly increased the forward momentum of the negotiations.

China did not agree to raise its emission reduction targets, while Russia and India only announced their intent to achieve net zero emissions by 2060 and 2070, respectively. The 1.5 degree target continued to be listed alongside the 2 degree target in the Glasgow Climate Pact adopted on November 13, but the emphasis on the 1.5 degree target in the Pact was a major step forward. Other notable achievements of COP26 were the inclusion of phasing down of coal-fired thermal power in the COP agreement for the first time, reaching agreement on rules for the international transfer of emissions reductions, thereby finalizing the “Paris Rulebook” and completing full implementation mechanism of the Paris Agreement. The United States and China are considered to have played major roles in reaching these understandings and to have been the driving forces behind the reinvigoration of multilateralism in climate change.

In the EU, progress has been made in rulemaking with a view to establishing an advantage in economic competition related to climate change. In July, the European Commission released the “Fit for 55” policy package to achieve a 2030 reduction target of 55%, setting out a plan for the automotive sector to ban the sale of new internal combustion engine vehicles, including hybrids, by 2035 and introducing carbon border adjustment measures aimed at protecting the international competitiveness of EU industries with stringent climate change measures. These policies attracted significant attention as moves by the EU to take the initiative in environmental policies.



COP26 President Alok Sharma speaks at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, November 2021. (Photo by REUTERS/Aflo)

### Perspectives and Recommendations

Just as the exit from the coronavirus pandemic seemed to be approaching thanks to widespread vaccination and the development of therapeutics, the emergence of new variants has reminded the world that there are still no firm prospects for overcoming this problem. The gap between developed and developing countries in the supply of vaccines remains particularly serious, and the need for booster shots means that this disparity is unlikely to be eliminated anytime soon. For the world as a whole to escape the effects of

the coronavirus pandemic, it is essential that the supply of vaccines to developing countries be stepped up quickly through bilateral and international frameworks. While it is encouraging that the United States under the Biden administration has revoked its withdrawal from the WHO and has become a leader in COVAX, the delivery of vaccines needs to be sped up. Promoting vaccination in developing countries will also require improvement of their infrastructure, and it is essential that Japan and other donor countries maintain their “last mile” supports in, for example, enhancing low-temperature distribution capacity.

In the area of climate change, COP26 called on countries to reconsider their 2030 goals by the end of 2022 in order to align with the Paris Agreement temperature target. Strengthening efforts to achieve the 1.5 degree target will continue to be a major issue in the run-up to COP27. It is important for Japan to make bold efforts to implement the reduction targets it has set. While developed countries have already raised their reduction goals to levels consistent with the 1.5 degree target, it will be impossible to achieve the 1.5 degree target without raising the goals of emerging countries, particularly China as the world’s largest emitter. To protect the multilateral framework of the Paris Agreement and ensure a level playing field for fair international economic competition, Japan, in cooperation with groups of developing countries that are enthusiastic about climate change issues and with the support of international opinion, needs to urge China to set and implement reduction goals that are appropriate for a responsible great power. With regard to assistance to developing countries, another major issue at COP 27, Japan, together with other developed countries, will need to continue to actively provide support for climate change measures in developing countries.

Furthermore, Japan needs to proactively and strategically respond to the EU’s rulemaking under the banner of decarbonization while assessing the medium- to long-term impact on its own industries, through cooperation between the public and private sectors and with other countries adopting the same position, including the consideration of potentially taking the lead in formulating new rules utilizing Japanese technology. ■

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 Leader: Ken ENDO, Professor, Hokkaido University / Adjunct Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs  
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- B. Japan's security in an era of great power competition  
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Jun Kumakura	Associate Professor, Hosei University	2021/9/15	China and the Joint Statement on Xinjiang and Hong Kong	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/09/china-fy2021-01.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/09/china-fy2021-01.html</a>
Mitsugi Endo	Professor, The University of Tokyo	2021/9/15	Recent Developments in the Horn of Africa with a Focus on Ethiopia and GERD	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/09/middle-east-africa-fy2021-05.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/09/middle-east-africa-fy2021-05.html</a>
Hideyuki Mori	Special Policy Advisor, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	2021/10/13	A Perspective on Net Zero Asia	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/global-issues-fy2021-02.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/global-issues-fy2021-02.html</a>
Satoshi Machidori	Professor, Kyoto University	2021/10/20	Why has there been no rise of third parties in the United States?	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/america-fy2021-01.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/america-fy2021-01.html</a>
Miho Okada	Research Fellow, Global Security Center, National Defense Academy	2021/10/22	Changing Nature of the Civil-Military Relations in Russia	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/russia-fy2021-03.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/russia-fy2021-03.html</a>
Hiroko Naito	Research Fellow, IDE-JETRO	2021/10/25	Conditions for the Implementation and Success of Judicial System Reform	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/china-fy2021-02.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/10/china-fy2021-02.html</a>
Mikio Ishiwatari	Visiting Professor, The University of Tokyo / Senior Advisor, Japan International Cooperation Agency	2021/11/1	Disaster Risk Reduction to Adapt to Climate Change: Approaches and Challenges	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/11/Global-Issues-fy2021-01.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/11/Global-Issues-fy2021-01.html</a>
Masaki Kakizaki	Associate Professor, Temple University, Japan Campus	2021/11/2	Turkey-China Relations amid COVID-19: Has Turkey Truly Changed Its Policy?	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/11/middle-east-africa-fy2021-06.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/11/middle-east-africa-fy2021-06.html</a>
Toshihiro Nakanishi	Professor, Teikyo University	2021/12/22	Saudi Arabia's Foreign and Security Policy Focus: Intervention in the Yemeni Civil War and Prospects for Regional Stability	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/12/middle-east-africa-fy2021-09.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/12/middle-east-africa-fy2021-09.html</a>
Jun Saito	Associate Senior Researcher, Institute of Developing Economies	2021/12/27	The UAE's Economic Development and the Belt and Road Initiative	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/12/middle-east-africa-fy2021-08.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/12/middle-east-africa-fy2021-08.html</a>

## JIIA Strategic Comments

Author	Title/Affiliation	NO.	Date	Title	URL
Nobumasa Akiyama	Professor, Hitotsubashi University / Adjunct Research Fellow, JIIA	2020-17	2021/1/19	Iran's New Legislation for Escalation and Options for the New US Administration	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/01/2020-17.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/01/2020-17.html</a>
Tetsuo Kotani	Senior Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs	2021-01	2021/6/1	The New Taiwan Clause: Taiwan and the Security of Japan	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/06/2021-01.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/06/2021-01.html</a>
Kyoko Kuwahara	Research Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs	2021-02	2021/6/2	The Disinformation Threat and International Cooperation	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/06/2021-02.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/06/2021-02.html</a>
Masaru Watanabe	Professor, National Defense Academy of Japan / Adjunct Fellow, JIIA	2021-03	2021/6/23	US-Cuba Relations under the Biden Administration and the New Cuban Leadership	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/06/2021-03.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/06/2021-03.html</a>
Hirofumi Tosaki	Senior Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs	2021-04	2021/7/21	Joint Statement on Strategic Stability: Managing the US-Russia Relationship under Strategic Competition	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/07/2021-04.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/07/2021-04.html</a>
Tomiko Ichikawa	Director General, The Japan Institute of International Affairs	2021-05	2021/10/13	Afghanistan and the US Disengagement from "Statebuilding"	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/10/2021-05.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/10/2021-05.html</a>
Yoshiaki Takayama	Research Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs	2021-06	2021/10/25	Semiconductor Supply Chains in the Era of Great Power Competition	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/10/2021-06.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/10/2021-06.html</a>
Matake Kamiya	Professor, National Defense Academy of Japan / Adjunct Fellow, JIIA	2021-07	2021/11/1	The United States and the World in the Post-Afghanistan Era: The Hopes and Anxieties of the International Community	<a href="https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/11/2021-07.html">https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic-comment/2021/11/2021-07.html</a>

