

EAI Distinguished Public Lecture on Zoom
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Russia's Invasion of Ukraine a Year After: Impact on the Korean Peninsula and its Vicinity?

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Let me start with a point that some might find controversial. Dangerous as it may be, as wide-reaching in its impact as it may be, the war in Ukraine is, to my mind, a second order issue. The first order issue is and remains to be the US-China relations. I think some of you may remember about a year ago, US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin said, with remarkable candour but perhaps not too prudently, that the United States was going to use Ukraine to weaken Russia so it could never invade another country.

Left unsaid, but I think it is clear enough, because the invasion of Ukraine came only a couple of weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Beijing and declared that their partnership has no forbidden areas and no limits. The war in Ukraine is, in a sense, intended to be an object lesson to China, and unfortunately, the Ukrainians inadvertently and unwittingly—it was not planned that way—have emerged as something of a proxy in what may be the first US-China proxy war. So, was it an object lesson to China? And if so, what was the lesson that China took from it?

Well, we cannot be sure about China, but it was not just China by the way. But the lesson also applies to North Korea, South Korea, Japan and almost every country in the region. But let me start with China. One of the most key geopolitical impacts of the war in Ukraine has been the revitalisation of the idea of the West, which has always been a loose



Mr Bilahari Kausikan

idea, but the idea was in some danger of disintegrating completely after the end of the Cold War. But the West has been revitalised and re-energised, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been expanded, the transatlantic alliance is closed, and I think many people, like me, were surprised. I was pleasantly surprised at least by the strong, unexpectedly strong, and cohesive response of Europe.

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While we do not know for sure what lessons China took from Ukraine, I think we know what lessons we hope China took from Ukraine. One of the lessons, I hope, is that it has led China to rethink its idea of the West. One thing I think Mr Vladimir Putin and Mr Xi Jinping had in common was their utter contempt for the West—the West means the United States and Europe. These were effete countries in irrevocable and absolute decline. Have Putin and Xi changed their mind? I am not sure; it is at the very least too early to tell. I think at least Russia, and probably China too, still hopes that Europe will break (up). Just a couple of days ago, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made a very important speech, which I am not intending to summarise, but I would commend to your attention. To me, it marks the end of the age of naïveté in Europe's engagement with China. What she said was not that Europe is going to stop engaging China, but rather it will de-risk its engagement with China. Now, has China understood this lesson? I am not so sure.

As we speak (today), French President Emmanuel Macron is in China with a business delegation. There were also business delegations led by the leaders of Germany and undoubtedly, there would be more to come. How is China reading this? China has long had a belief that it is such a big market that nobody can ignore and that part is certainly true. Nobody wants to ignore China. But has China taken the lesson that Europe is not a continent in irrevocable decline? To be sure, Europe is certainly not a continent in irrevocable decline. But has this lesson been taken by the top leaders in Beijing? I am not so sure—not yet. I think there is still a Chinese hope that Europe will break up, and I think there is a hope that the US presidential election in 2024 will bring a change in US policy.

Personally, I think these are forlorn hopes. Why I am not so sure whether they are taking the right lesson or not is because there is a very profound difference of political culture between China and many Asian countries, and the West. That difference is as follows: centuries of history have taught China and Russia that a good government is one that has a strong, central government; and even an authoritarian government is better than a weak government, because the consequences of a weak government are more horrendous. Framing the conflict in Ukraine as one between democracy and authoritarianism is unlikely to impress anyone except the already converted. My take is that there is going to be a lot of arguments within Europe, within the United States, and between Europe and the United States in the months and years ahead. Well, democracies are argumentative, but I hope that the arguments will be taken the right way in Beijing and in Moscow, and that these will be arguments mainly over the means and not over the ends. Of course, the key is how the Ukrainians do on the battlefield. I think a lot of the support that has been maintained is because they are doing much better than anybody could have imagined. But what will happen? What does doing better really mean? What does winning mean in this context? Before I move on to my next point, let me just leave you with a thought experiment:

later this spring, with all the new weapons Ukraine has been given by the West, it launches an offensive, breaks the Russian line, and looks like it might overrun a substantial part of Crimea. Is this a good or bad thing? I do not think it is so easy to tell. It is not a straightforward situation. How will Putin react? I will leave you with that open thought.

As I said, I commend that speech by European Commission President von der Leyen, in which she said, and I am paraphrasing, “we are not going to decouple, we are going to de-risk”. But will China take a full circle from continuing engagement by the Europeans with China? Who knows? China is certainly in an extremely awkward position, and it has been doing all kinds of things, (albeit) not very effectively, to try to mitigate the awkwardness of the situation that it has a no-limits partnership with Russia as it placed it in. But I do not think Russia and China will break. China cannot

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break with Russia and Russia cannot break with China for one very simple reason: neither of them has any other strategic partner anywhere else in the world of comparable strategic weight shares their distrust of the West. Whether Russia, over the long term, is going to prove to be an asset or liability to China is another matter and is still an open question. But I tend to think it is going to be far more of a liability than an asset. But they will not break.

I think we can be a little clearer about the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). North Korea has responded to the situation in Ukraine and has reportedly supplied ammunition, artillery shells and other lethal aid to Russia. It is not surprising that it would have done so. The DPRK has little choice, not very many options, and none of these is good in the world. As an aside, let me say that I do not think China will be foolish enough to provide Russia with lethal aid. In fact, I do not think it ever had any intention of doing so. But as far as North Korea, and more generally I think, the most serious impact of the conflict in Ukraine is to further weaken, if not fatally weaken, the (nuclear) non-proliferation treaty regime. It was not in good shape in the first place, and perhaps it is a little premature to consider it dead, but it is certainly in the ICU (intensive care unit), and the prospects of recovery are not good.

One of the things that has always been puzzling me is the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances signed by three nuclear powers: the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. Why did Ukraine think that it was a good idea to give up its nuclear weapons in return for security guarantees, the most important one with which was from the country that was obviously its major threat? Now, that is a mystery that I have no answer to. It undoubtedly seemed a good idea to Kyiv and the other signatories to the Budapest Memorandum at the time, but I think we now know better. The implication of this is that if you really thought that the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula was a practical proposition, well, I think you better think again. And if you still think that North Korea can somehow be coerced or persuaded to give up its nuclear weapons, you are obviously hallucinating.

To North Korea, the possession of nuclear weapons is an existential issue of regime survival, and you really cannot provide any cost or any incentive to North Korea that is greater than the cost of giving up their nuclear deterrence. So how do you deal with it? You deal with it the way you deal with all nuclear-weapon states: by deterrence. Some of you may remember a few years ago during the Trump administration, Supreme Leader of North Korea Kim Jong Un was getting a little carried away with the lack of an effective Western response during the second Obama administration to all his missile tests, and he threatened to blanket Guam. Then US President Donald Trump responded by threatening to rain fire and fury on Pyongyang. As far as I know, North Korea has since then never tested a long-range missile on any trajectory that took it anywhere near Guam. So, deterrence does work. Deterrence is essentially a very crude thing—if you do something I do not like, I will kill you, and believe me, I will. Maybe Trump did it by accident, but anyway, it seems to have worked. So, you will have to strengthen deterrence.

For Japan and South Korea, I think there are two very key questions arising from this. Not just Ukraine, of course,

but from the North Korean nuclear programme, and more essentially on the Chinese nuclear modernisation programme. What is the future of an extended US deterrence? How credible will it be? Can you deter a nuclear-armed state by conventional means? I suspect that both in their inner councils have come to a decision on these questions already, and Ukraine is an additional push in a trajectory that they have reluctantly—I think, more reluctantly in the case of Japan, less reluctantly in the case of South Korea—already decided upon. Many years ago, a comparable situation arose in Europe and the late Charles de Gaulle asked the question, "Will New York be sacrificed to save Paris?" The answer was obviously no. And some comparable questions: "Will San Francisco or Los Angeles [be] sacrifice[d] to save Tokyo or Seoul?" I do not think the answer is going to be a resounding yes.

I think both they—the ROK (Republic of Korea) and Japan—are on a trajectory that will eventually—I am not able to predict a timeframe—make them nuclear-weapon states within the American alliance system, just as France and Britain embarked on their course many decades ago. I am not saying it is going to be easy for them, maybe a little easier for South Korea, because I think opinion polls show overwhelming support for it. It is going to be very politically difficult for Japan, and I do not think neither of them is eager to become nuclear-weapon states, but the logic of their circumstances will take them in that direction.

This is evident not just in Northeast Asia. In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has made it very clear. As early as 2018, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud said: "Well, I don't want to become a nuclear-weapons state, but if Iran becomes a nuclear-weapons state, I will not be far behind." And they have been taking steps in that

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direction. The recent deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia has not changed that essential dynamic. What will be China's response to all of this? This new trajectory is what I think at least South Korea and Japan may be on. Well, I think they will acquiesce in it because the alternatives are all worse. They are certainly not going to mitigate or give up their nuclear modernisation programme. Why should they? It is a key interest for China, and it is not something they will give up. I do not think they can dissuade or persuade Pyongyang from giving up its nuclear weapons programme. As I said earlier, to Pyongyang, this is an existential issue, so there is no cost anybody can impose on them that is greater

than the cost of proceeding. In effect, if you are going to stop Pyongyang from proceeding on this nuclear weapon and ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) programme, you must seek regime change. I do not think anybody is prepared to do that, and certainly not China, for a variety of reasons.

I now come to my very last point and that is on Taiwan. This is my key point. When I speculate that Ukraine is meant to be an object lesson for China, I think that is directed at the possibility of changing whatever Chinese kinetic intentions may have on Taiwan. Now, the Chinese have said over and over again that Ukraine is a different issue from Taiwan, and I think they are right. They are right in the details, and they are right in the underlying concern. But will that change China's calculus over Taiwan? I am not too sure about that. Mind you, I must say that while China will never forswear the option of forceful reunification with Taiwan, I do not think that is its preferred option. Despite all its fierce rhetoric, I do not think China is keen to launch a war to reunify Taiwan. The risk over Taiwan is war by accident, not war by design. By "war by design", I mean war as an instrument of policy, such as the kind of war Putin launched and completely botched against Ukraine. Why do I say, perhaps counterintuitively, that I do not think forceful reunification is China's preferred option?

First, I think right now China lacks the capability to launch an amphibious operation against Taiwan. Of course, they can destroy Taiwan tomorrow. But what is the point of reunifying with a smouldering rock? Over time China will develop the capability, but capability has two aspects to it. One aspect is the hardware that it can build, and that is the relatively straightforward aspect, but the other aspect—the more important and perhaps the more difficult aspect—is the software.

China has no experience of amphibious warfare of this scale. In fact, no country in the world has any experience of amphibious warfare of such a scale except the United States, and the last time they did such an operation was quite a long time ago. I am referring to the Incheon Landing in September 1950 during the Korean War. So, even when China develops the hardware capability, it is going to be an immense gamble for China to launch a war against Taiwan. It is a gamble China will not take lightly because while Putin can probably survive the mess he has made in Ukraine, I do not think any Chinese leaders can survive a botched operation against Taiwan, and probably even the roots of Communist Party rule will be severely shaken. Why do I say that? Because Taiwan is a part of the China dream by which the Communist Party legitimates its right to rule. But we should not forget that there are two sides to the Taiwan Straits. There is the mainland side, the People's Republic of China, and there is a Taiwan side.

It is also worth asking what lessons Taiwan has taken from Ukraine. I think there are two scenarios in which even if China thinks it is going to lose, it must fight over Taiwan because no Chinese leaders can survive not fighting under those scenarios. The first scenario is of a very low probability but a high-impact scenario, i.e. if Taiwan revised the nuclear ambitions it had in the 1970s. In the 1970s, Taiwan had begun a nuclear weapons programme with the help of Israel, but then the Americans found out about it, stepped in on both of them and said stop it. I know that Taiwan's

ambitions in this respect have never gone away, and I am not so confident now that an American president—the wrong or right kind of American president—will necessarily react in the same way as the Americans did in the 1970s. As I said, the probability of such things happening is very, very low. Supposedly, on a scale of one to five, five being high probability and is at less than 0.001 per cent, but not zero per cent. But if there is some credible evidence that Taiwan has revived a nuclear weapons programme and may be in reach of getting a nuclear weapon, worse still, China must fight—because a nuclear-armed Taiwan means the end of the China dream which requires reunification. The other scenario, which is unfortunately of not so low probability, is of Taiwan's domestic politics taking a turn that will lead to China needing to take kinetic action. I do not think there is any Taiwanese politician that is so daft as to unilaterally declare independence. But Taiwan's domestic politics is extremely volatile, and I do not think whoever is the next president will be as good as Tsai Ing-wen. Tsai Ing-wen has been extremely skilful in navigating red lines while

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expanding Taiwan's international space and the red lines are extremely difficult to navigate because I do not believe they are clear to anybody, including China.

But over the long time I have been looking at Taiwan, I perceive two trends which are rather disturbing to me in the context of Taiwan's domestic politics. One trend is a decline over time in the Taiwanese will to defend themselves. Some years ago, during the Ma Ying-jeou administration, there was a training accident and a Taiwanese conscript was killed. That is tragic, of course, but the fact is (even) if you train properly, training accidents will (still) happen. There is just no way to avoid training accidents except not training, and that is unfortunately the course that the Taiwanese did take. They reduced their period of conscription to four months. Now, those Singaporeans in the audience who have done national service and served in the armed forces will know that four months is just about enough time to teach a soldier not to shoot themselves in their foot. Taiwan is now debating to increase the period of conscription to a year, but I am not entirely confident that the shock of Ukraine has fundamentally changed Taiwan's attitudes towards defence, because there is another trend that I have observed over a long time. In my view, as the will to defend themselves has declined, there has been an increase in the Taiwanese sense of entitlement over the same period. Entitlement in the sense that the argument goes like this: "I'm the only Chinese democracy in the world. Therefore, somebody must help defend me" and now, "I'm the only



Mr Bilahari Kausikan with Prof Bert Hofman, Director, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore at the Q&A Session

Chinese democracy in the world, and I have semiconductor chips to boot, so definitely somebody should help me defend myself". Helping to defend yourself and defending you without you doing your bit are two different issues, and I am not quite sure where the balance will finally lie. But certainly, the intersection of these two trends in the context of Taiwanese domestic politics is rather disturbing to me.

In the meantime, of course, the risk of conflict is mainly not by war by design, but an accident getting out of control, and I think that risk has slightly risen. That has got nothing to do with Ukraine per se, but it has slightly risen. Now, I shall end here and I would be happy to take your questions.

Selected Questions from the Q&A

EAI Director Professor Bert Hofman: China's position vis-à-vis Russia and its unlimited friendship has a real cost in terms that it is losing Europe, and I am using the continuous tense because I do not think that is necessarily a done deal. So my question: Is China missing its moment? Should it lean more on Russia to make peace on reasonable terms in Ukraine and spend some of that friendship capital that China has with Russia? It seems to be right now—the definition is what Evan Feigenbaum called them—pro-Russia neutral. I think that is a little unfair, but China does not seem to be very keen to address the real issues, aside from giving general principles. What is your take on that?

Mr Bilahari Kausikan: I do not think China has any choice because it does not have any other partner anywhere in the world comparable with Russia that shares its attitude towards the West, so it is not that it has a lot of choices there. Secondly, what is the Chinese currency vis-à-vis Russia? Can it really be spent? Because, in effect, Russia has lost this war—by not winning it quickly, Russia has lost the war. But can Mr Putin admit that and remain in office, and shall we say, not falling out a window shortly after? I think these are questions that are running not through Mr Putin's mind, but also through Mr Xi Jinping's mind. It is quite clear that they have a close relationship because they need each other. I think, as we all know, the Russia-China relationship has historically been an extremely difficult one. But this is one driven by interest, and they do not have much choice. So, I do not think you can really spend that currency of a partnership with no limits on this commodity: peace. It is just there is not enough to pay Putin to contemplate this. On the other hand, the Chinese

are going to be and have been very careful about the kind of support they are giving Russia. The last thing they want to do, with all the problems they have at home, is to get entangled in secondary sanctions. So, they have tried to do it by smoke and mirrors by having 12 principles of rather broad nature, by giving diplomatic support in the UN (United Nations) and other places, and perhaps some non-lethal support, which, I was told, comprises food, purchases of uniforms and things like that. But I think US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was being quite clever and devious when he warned China against doing something they had no intention of doing. That is, to give lethal aid; put them on the defensive, put them on the back foot, and I do not think it is an accident that shortly after that, suddenly those 12 principles, which showed every evidence of being rather hastily cobbled together, appeared on the table. But I do not think the Chinese can be the peacemaker without breaking with Russia, and I do not think they can break with Russia.

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Professor Bert Hofman: That leads me to a question by Paul Haenle. After von der Leyen gave her speech, she also joined a visit with Macron. Do you believe that China would be keen to mend the fences with Europe? What would China do if it cannot lean on Russia?

Mr Bilahari Kausikan: No, I find nothing incompatible with making that tough speech and visiting China. These are complementary rather than alternatives, and I think you and Paul understand that. The question is not whether you, I, and Paul understand that, but how the Chinese understand this. Do they see this as a weak link? In the past, the Chinese have always believed that their magic weapon was not just the united front, but their market. To paraphrase Lenin, these capitalists will always sell us the

rope with which we will hang them. But I think something has changed and that speech was a clear indication of that in the European attitude. Yes, engagement must go on. You must engage a big country like China, but you must engage it without illusions, and the key part of that speech is that “we are not going to decouple, we are going to de-risk”. Now, I hope the Chinese understand the nuances and subtleties of this position. My view is that they have not shown great understanding of Europe historically. In the last few years, they have misread Europe repeatedly, and I think the

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reason is that there is a difference in the political culture. Europeans, and Westerners in general, distrusts power and therefore disperses it. That has certain disadvantages because it takes you a long time to get your act together, and it can be mistaken for weakness—it often is mistaken for weakness—but push comes to shove, you can get your act together, as Ukraine has shown. Unless China is going to substantially change its position on Ukraine, it is not going to be able to substantially improve its relationship in Europe, even though Europe is going to continue to engage China.

Professor Bert Hofman: Let us turn to the region. A question from Samir Puri, formerly with the IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies): well, you talked about the Northeast Asia reaction, but what about the rest of Asia and the Middle East? They seem to be quite divided, and they seem to, in part, take some opportunity—Singapore has been very outspoken on the war, but others seem to take this opportunity to move away from the West, notably the Middle East, and some other countries in Asia as well. What is your view on that?

Mr Bilahari Kausikan: I think Singapore is an outlier. We are a small country and we are allergic, obviously, to big countries invading small countries just because they do not like their faces or something like that. But I think it was French President Macron at the Munich Security Conference that warned the West, I think correctly, that support from the Global South for the war in Ukraine is not as strong as you may think it is. In that sense, the votes in the United Nations, which have been overwhelmingly in support of the West, are a bit misleading, because a vote in the UN is not nothing, but it is a vote in the UN. It has its own limited importance. Now, why is that so? The principle that has been violated in Ukraine is clear enough. Everybody understands that. It is a very immediate principle to a small country like Singapore, but it is perhaps not so immediate a principle to larger countries—which, by the way, in much

of the Global South, the Middle East, and in parts of Africa, even in parts of Asia—this violence that the Ukrainians are enduring daily has been a constant reality for many, many, many years, and nobody has made such a big fuss about it.

Those of us who have engaged in international relations one way or the other professionally, for all our lives, understand that the double standard is inherent in international relations. It is not nice but it is a reality. That is not so evident to many people and not to many people in Southeast Asia. In Singapore, the surveys I have seen show that there is an overwhelmingly support, 60–70%, for the position the government has taken. But that still leaves a substantial minority who blame NATO expansion, blame Ukraine, blame the West, blame somebody else, blame everybody except Russia for the war. Now, we may think this is ridiculous, but this is a fact. It is a fact about Singapore that I think many people, Westerners who live here in particular, do not understand because they interact with a certain stratum of Singapore. The Singapore ground is not naturally pro-Western. It does not mean we are or are not anti-Western but rather we are not naturally pro-Western. So, if this is true for Singapore, which is probably the most Westernised of all Southeast Asian countries, what does it mean for Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and so on? I think this is something to bear in mind.

The Middle East is a slightly different issue. I do not want to get diverted, but I think the Middle Eastern countries have started to diversify their relationships long before the war in Ukraine. The general strategic posture of countries in the Middle East—and I do not want to sound condescending and I do not mean it that way—was for the longest time to look for the strongest external power and hug it. Now, what do you do when all the strong external powers do not wish to be hugged, not in the same way anyway, and that includes China? The Chinese role in brokering that deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran is an achievement, but it was not a game changer. The heavy lifting was done by the states of the region themselves, by Oman and Iraq—and if Saudi Arabia and Iran had not wanted to stabilise their relationship for their own reasons, there would be no deal

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in Beijing or anywhere else. We always forget that countries in what was called the “Third World” have agency. These are not uninhabited regions with which great powers would just play their games. The Middle East is a place where the tail, more often than not, wags the dog.

Professor Bert Hofman: Coming back to the region where, as you say, Singapore has had the strongest reaction. But what I also see is a broader arms race in the making. Japan has declared that it will increase its defence spending to two per cent, Korea has revisited and strengthened its alliance with the United States, the Philippines has invited the United States back in and announced four or five new bases, which would have been unimaginable in the past 25 years. Carl Worker, in the audience, has a question on AUKUS (a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States): now with an announced feasible path, which is still quite a long path, but will nevertheless in the end lead to nuclear-powered submarines in the region, is that at all a reaction to the war in Ukraine? How does that play out?

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Mr Bilahari Kausikan: I think these things were underway anyway. Ukraine may have been a catalyst in the sense that it may have speeded up some things, but it did not create it per se. I think what Ukraine has underscored is something that has always been more evident in this region than in Europe or some other regions, and that is the vital role of the United States in maintaining a balance in the region. This is something Singapore has never been shy about saying since time immemorial, but I think there is greater acceptance of that fact around the region. This is not so much about Ukraine, Ukraine has underscored this fact, but I think it was basically driven by concerns about Chinese behaviour. So, it would have happened anyway, or it may have speeded it up a bit, but it is not the cause per se.

Professor Bert Hofman: Okay, let us go to a question from Professor Yongwook Ryu, who is a visiting fellow here at the Korea Centre. You talked largely about the strategic, military and political aspects, but can you give your views on the economic ties, and what are the consequences of the Ukraine war for the economic ties? What does it mean to be de-risking and does that result in economic fallout? What is the US agenda with its measures to contain the technological progress of China? How does that play out for the region economically? Does that have consequences that you see?

Mr Bilahari Kausikan: The United States and China are competing within a single global system, but neither are very comfortable with that. I do not think this global system can be bifurcated completely into two separate systems.

There will be partial separation in high-tech areas to disrupt China's plans and delay them, but even that, I do not think you can completely separate the system. The cost is just too high, and American friends and allies are just not going to play that game. They will play the game up to a point; Holland will stop selling some machinery, Japan has now stopped selling some machinery, chemicals and so on, but separating the whole system is not going to happen. Neither the United States nor China is terribly comfortable with this. The United States wants to pursue a strategy of diversification to spread risk, but that is easier said than done. Some will happen, some is already happening. The Chinese want to pursue a strategy of greater self-reliance in certain areas of technology, with more emphasis on domestic consumption to drive growth, but that is also easier said than done. For the time being, there will be opportunities. For Southeast Asia, India hopes to benefit from diversification strategies, Vietnam hopes to benefit from diversification strategies, so does Thailand, and you can go on. But only time will tell how much they will benefit. I do not think this is going to be an automatic process. You have to prepare yourself, make sure you have the right kind of workforce with the right kind of skills, and ensure that you have the right kind of regulatory and legal frameworks to welcome these new businesses that may come. But there will be opportunities.

There is another point here. The war in Ukraine is going to be a long walk. We now know this. It was one of Putin's main miscalculations. I find it very hard to envisage at this present moment any realistic scenario in which there can be a lasting political settlement. At best, and I do not think we are close to that either, I can envisage some form of armistice of the Korean model that leaves Ukraine formally de facto divided, which very few countries will recognise, but Russia will be in occupation in some form or the other. What does that mean? It means sanctions will continue, disruptions of sanctions will continue and the uncertainties that are incumbent on the possibility of getting entangled

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LASTING POLITICAL SETTLEMENT.**

in secondary sanctions will continue. This is a kind of new norm that all of us will have to navigate.

Professor Bert Hofman: What about Japan? Pheng Hui Yap has a question on that—Japan seems to be acting more assertively now against China, and behave more like a “normal country”. I mentioned previously the doubling

of their defence budget that was announced. Is Japan taking the opportunity of the conflict in Ukraine to be more assertive?

Mr Bilahari Kausikan: I think Japan has made that decision long ago that the Yoshida Doctrine, which was the fundamental basis of its foreign policy and strategic policy, was obsolete. That decision was taken by the late Mr Shinzo Abe and he worked systematically, particularly in his second term, to put it into effect. What we are seeing now is the denouement of things Mr Abe started. As I said earlier, I think Ukraine may have speeded this up a little, but it did not fundamentally create this new trajectory for Japan. This new trajectory for Japan was created by, if anybody, Mr Xi

**THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA ARE
COMPETING WITHIN A SINGLE GLOBAL
SYSTEM, BUT NEITHER ARE VERY
COMFORTABLE WITH THAT. I DO NOT THINK
THIS GLOBAL SYSTEM CAN BE BIFURCATED
COMPLETELY INTO TWO
SEPARATE SYSTEMS.**

Jinping, and Mr Abe took advantage of it to move Japan in a new direction.

Professor Bert Hofman: We are talking, to some extent, of a long war, and so, these issues are going to be with us for a very long time. What do you think in the long term will change in the region? One of the factors is, of course, China. Will China change its position vis-à-vis Russia over time, say five or 10 years from now? Or is this more of a Xi-Putin relationship, or is it structurally China and Russia? What would be the consequence of that for China's behaviour in the region?

Mr Bilahari Kausikan: If I were China, I would try to move to a less partisan position so that I could be a kind of balancer between the United States, China and Russia. It is a little puzzling that they have not done so, but I think it is because of things that China did before the war in Ukraine that have created a certain path dependency, a political path dependency. So, I think it is going to be difficult for them to shift. Now, over the long term, China is a geopolitical fact and is also a geoeconomic fact, and we will have to deal with it. It is not as if anybody has a choice. You may have concerns about Chinese behaviour and I know of no country in this region that has not got concerns about some aspects of Chinese behaviour. Simultaneously, I know of no country in this region, including close American allies, that do not have some concerns about some aspects of American behaviour. So, I think if you put these two things together, you have to deal with both the United States and China, and in fact, I think there is a better appreciation that dealing with both simultaneously is the necessary condition for dealing with either effectively. You have, at the same time, concerns about Chinese behaviour and concerns about American

behaviour. The concerns are not the same and they are not held with the same intensity, but they exist. So, if you put these two facts together, what do you get?

The immediate effects are AUKUS, the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), the strengthening of defence budgets and so on. But the long-term effect is going to be to seek more strategic autonomy to pursue your interests independently of both the United States and China. It does not mean that the alliance systems will break up and I am not arguing that at all. But you are going to see people seek more manoeuvring space for themselves, and I think you are going to see increasingly more small coalitions of countries forming and re-forming around specific issues. Some of these coalitions may include China but not the United States, some may include the United States but not China, some may even include both. But they are not going to be permanent, they are going to be issues-based, and dynamic and fluid situations. That would be for the long term and I am not saying this is going to happen next week, but to some degree, it has already occurred. When Trump pulled out of the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), it was the late Mr Abe who took the initiative to form a semi-coalition, which now has got the United Kingdom. You also have the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership)—all of these are just economic alliances. You have the AUKUS, the Quad and there will be other things that will develop. I cannot predict what will develop but I do not envisage a situation where ASEAN will work with or join the Quad. But I can see situations where ASEAN might do projects with the Quad, for example, on the supply chain resilience or health, which are also part of the Quad agenda. So, you are going to have a much more fluid situation where people are not going to necessarily align all their interests across all domains neatly in one direction or the other. They want more freedom of choice, if you like, to pursue their interests in any direction.

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K-Movies: Images of Imperial China and Asymmetrical Relations with Korea

Lam Peng Er

Head, Korea Centre, East Asia Institute, National University of Singapore

Jointly commissioned by the *JoongAng Ilbo* and the East Asia Institute (Seoul), the public opinion poll conducted by the Hankook Research revealed that Koreans who viewed China negatively rose from 51.5% in 2019 to 70.3% in 2022. Reasons for these negative sentiments include Beijing's fury with Seoul's decision to deploy the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) anti-missile system, closure of Korean Lotte departmental stores in China as punishment, restrictions on Korean cultural products in the Chinese domestic market and curbs on Chinese tourism to South Korea. Apparently, many Koreans perceive a rising China, undeniably a very important economic partner, as also a big bully.

Arguably, such unequal relations are nothing new if we were to observe the historical pattern of asymmetrical relations between the powerful Chinese suzerain and its weaker Korean vassal. What irks many Koreans is that these unequal ties of yore with China may persist today. Indeed, the hard truth of naked power politics is covered by the fig leaf of formal state equality in the 21st century.

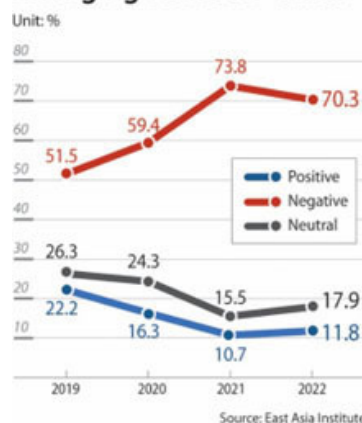
My hypothesis is that popular K-movies about China's historical invasions and dominance of the Korean peninsula might have coloured the perceptions of many Koreans at the box office towards China beyond the current issue of THAAD missile deployments. Admittedly, there are K-movies about the Korean civil war (1950-1953) and Korean Admiral Yi Sun-sin's David versus Goliath victory against the huge Japanese imperial navy during the Imjin war in the Joseon Dynasty. Notwithstanding these movies about Japanese

**APPARENTLY, MANY KOREANS PERCEIVE
A RISING CHINA, UNDENIABLY A VERY
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invasions and the Korean civil war, K-movies with the themes of China's aggression have resonance with many Korean viewers and possibly reinforce their perceptions that China was the once and future great power which threatens Korea.

There are at least four recent K-movies which depicted the difficult and precarious historical relationship between a powerful imperial China and a weaker Korea. They are *War of the Arrows* (2011), *The Fortress* (2017), *The Great Battle* (2018) and *The Swordsman* (2020). All four are action-packed, well-directed, well-acted, interesting and entertaining movies which deserve a big international audience.

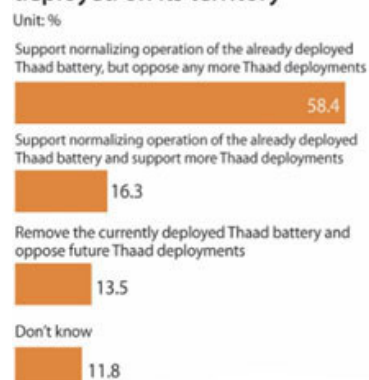
Changing views on China



Reasons for having a negative opinion about China recently



What do you think of Korea's decision to allow Thaad to be deployed on its territory



Source: East Asia Institute, Seoul.



Source from left: *War of the Arrows* poster (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Arrows); *The Fortress* poster [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fortress_\(2017_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fortress_(2017_film))]; and *The Great Battle* Poster [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Battle_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Battle_(film))].

Directed by Kim Han-min, the *War of Arrows* was the highest grossing Korean movie in 2011. Set after the Qing invasion of Korea, the film is about an archer who risks his life to save his sister from slavery. Certainly, the Manchus dominated China at the time, but it is unclear whether the Korean audience would make a distinction between the Manchu and Han overlords from dynastic China.

Hwang Dong-hyuk directed the multi-award winning *The Fortress* which captured the fierce struggle between two Korean ideological cliques on whether to appease or resist Qing China. The existential dilemma for the Korean court was the unpalatable choice between a humiliating submission to the Qing and live, or fight for national dignity and die. In the end, the Korean king pragmatically kowtowed to the Qing and accepted his place in the suzerainty pecking order.

Directed by Kim Kwang-sik, *The Great Battle* was another box office success. The plot was about the heroic and successful defence of the Ansi Fortress in an epic 88-day battle by Commander Yang Manchun and his heavily outnumbered Goguryeo troops against around half a million troops from Tang China.

Another outstanding period movie is *The Swordsman* directed by Choi Jae-hoon. The story is about Tae-yul, reputedly the best swordsman in Korea then who served the King as his bodyguard. After the King's abdication, the swordsman clandestinely raised and protected the King's daughter as his child. According to the tale, Tae-yul rescued his adopted daughter in a duel with Qing slave traders led by a relative of the Qing Emperor.

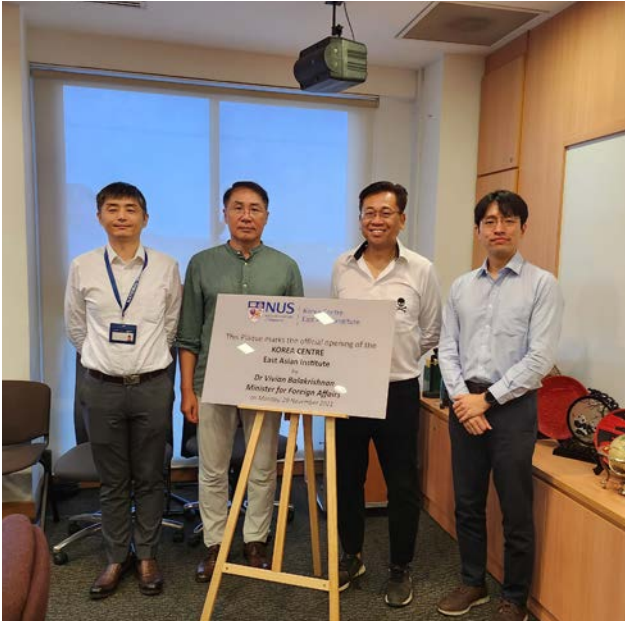
It would be interesting if a scientific survey can test the hypothesis that K-movies and box office successes about the historical threat posed by dynastic China might have coloured and reinforced the perceptions of overbearing Chinese behaviour in the 21st century among movie buffs.



Source: *The Swordsman* poster [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Swordsman_\(2020_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Swordsman_(2020_film))].

However, it is also conceivable that this may be a “chicken and egg” issue. It is plausible that there is already a deep subconscious unease over China then and now which prepares a receptive Korean audience for such K-movies with an angst about the menace from China real or imagined.

Highlights at the Korea Centre



(Top left) 9 January 2023. The Korea Centre hosted Professor Suh Seung Won of Korea University for a discussion on strategic relations between South Korea and Southeast Asia.



(Top right) 9 February 2023. The Korea Centre welcomed Dr Cho Young-hee, chief of research and education at the Migration Research and Training Centre in South Korea, and Ms Song Jieun, a PhD candidate at the National University of Singapore, for a discussion on migratory patterns and bilateral relations between Singapore and South Korea.



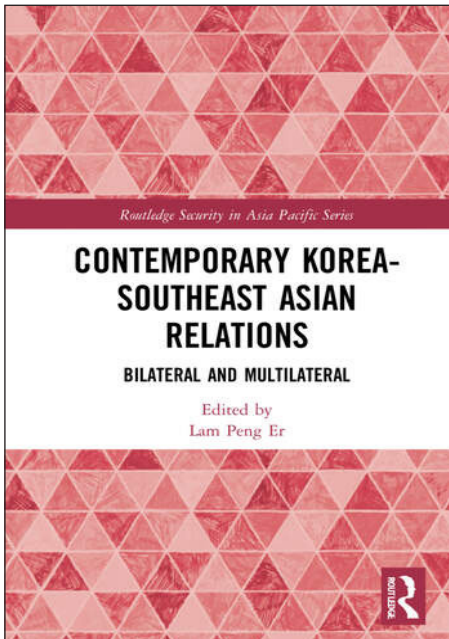
(Top left) 15 February 2023. The Korea Centre met Dr Paul Midford, professor of international relations at Meiji Gakuin University, for a discussion on foreign policy developments between South Korea and Japan and regional issues in East Asia.



(Top right) 22 February 2023. The Korea Centre held an informal dialogue with a visiting delegation from the College of Asia and the Pacific (CAP) of the Australian National University (ANU), consisting of dean of CAP, Professor Helen Sullivan, and Head of Advancement for CAP Brooke Disney. In their discussion, they exchanged views on contemporary international relations issues in the region and academic engagements between both institutions.

Recent Publications

Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations: Bilateral and Multilateral



Editor:

Lam Peng Er

Publisher:

Routledge

Year of Publication:

2022

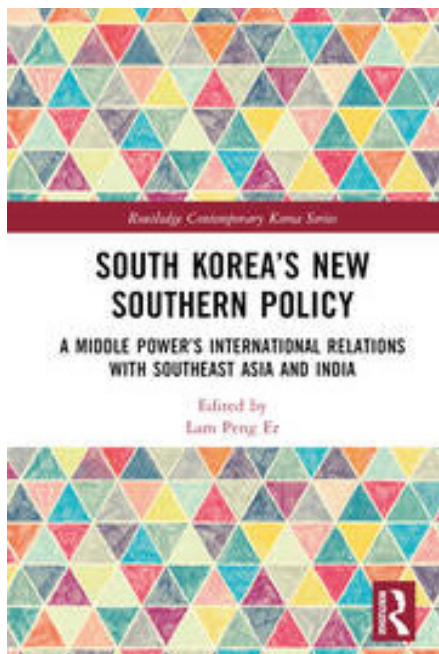
Description:

This book presents a comprehensive overview of the relations between the two Koreas and the different ASEAN states, including their relations with ASEAN as an organisation. It outlines a complex picture with both bilateral and multilateral relations in play at the same time. It charts how the present situation has arisen for each relationship, discusses current difficulties and strains, and assesses how the relationship may develop in future.

For more details, visit:

https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Korea-Southeast-Asian-Relations-Bilateral-and-Multilateral/Peng-Er/p/book/9781032111797?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI-duGysbL_gIVxYBLBR019w6SEAAAYASAAEgIMS_D_BwE

South Korea's New Southern Policy: A Middle Power's International Relations with Southeast Asia and India



Editor:

Lam Peng Er

Publisher:

Routledge

Year of Publication:

April 2023

Description:

This book examines the first regional strategy of South Korea towards Southeast Asia and India. At issue is how a middle power (a G20 country with the tenth largest economy in the world) seeks to play a larger and more comprehensive role in regions beyond the Korean peninsula. Hitherto, South Korean foreign policy has focused on nuclearizing North Korea, alliance maintenance with the United States, tricky relations with its most important economic partner China, and difficult ties with Japan marred by historical and territorial disputes. The Moon Administration has sought to diversify South Korean foreign policy by elevating ASEAN and India to the same strategic level as the United States, China, Russia and Japan. To be sure, the latter countries continue to be most significant to the Korean peninsula. However, this book offers different country and regional perspectives on Seoul's first regional grand strategy to play a role commensurate with its status as a middle power.

For more details, visit:

<https://www.routledge.com/South-Koreas-New-Southern-Policy-A-Middle-Powers-International-Relations/Er/p/book/9781032404479>

CHRONOLOGY

ASEAN - Korea Relations

A Chronology of Key Events:

January 2023 to March 2023

Gordon Kang

Korea Centre, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore

THE Korea Centre at the East Asian Institute closely monitors Southeast Asian regional developments vis-à-vis the Korean Peninsula. This chronology considers key bilateral and multilateral interstate interactions between both Koreas and individual ASEAN countries, as well as with ASEAN as a regional institution.

January 2023

2nd	The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement for Indonesia entered into force on 2 January 2023, allowing businesses exporting to and/or importing from Indonesia to benefit from preferential tariffs and simplified rules of origin and trade facilitation. The Indonesian Ministry of Trade expects the agreement to increase competitiveness, strengthen global production networks, promote regional supply chains, reduce or eliminate trade barriers and enhance technology transfer. The RCEP Agreement's entry into force for Indonesia marks the start of Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship in 2023. The RCEP has previously taken effect on 1 January 2022 for Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Australia, China, Japan and New Zealand, 1 February 2022 for South Korea and 18 March 2022 for Malaysia.
3rd	South Korea expressed grave concern over Myanmar's conviction of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, calling for a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the nation. Suu Kyi was given a seven-year jail term on corruption charges on 30 December 2022, adding to a total of 33 years in prison. Seoul's foreign ministry spokesperson Lim Soo-suk stated that the government expresses "grave concern" over the latest trial result of Aung San Suu Kyi.
6th	South Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs Park Jin held a telephone conversation with Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Zambry Abd Kadir. During the call, they discussed pending issues between their countries, situations on the Korean Peninsula and in other regions, and international cooperation. They also discussed ways to enhance bilateral relations, with 2023 marking the 40th anniversary of the Look East Policy (LEP) between the two countries. Additionally, Park shared more about South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy and emphasised their commitment to working closely with Malaysia as one of their key cooperation partners in ASEAN in implementing the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative.
10th	Vietnam's Finance Minister Phoc Ho Duc met Samsung Electronics President and Chief Financial Officer Park Hark-kyu in Hanoi. Phoc assured Park that the Vietnamese Finance Ministry will continue to create favourable conditions for foreign direct investment (FDI) companies to operate effectively and sustainably in the country. Phoc acknowledged that Samsung Electronics is the largest investor of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in Vietnam and has greatly contributed to the country's export revenue, job creation and state budget. Park announced that the company plans to increase its investment in Vietnam and emphasised that Vietnam is a crucial manufacturing base for Samsung having continued with the company's operations in the country despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
12-18th	On the invitation of the Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam Vuong Dinh Hue, Speaker of the National Assembly of the ROK Kim Jin Pyo led a delegation on an official visit to Vietnam. This was Kim's first official visit to Vietnam since taking office in July 2022 and the first visit by a high-level leader from the ROK since the two countries upgraded their bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in December 2022. During his visit, Kim held talks with Chairman Hue, met several Vietnamese leaders and visited several Vietnamese localities. The two national assemblies have maintained exchanges of delegations at various levels in the spirit of the Cooperation Agreement signed in July 2013.
13th	HE Dr Kao Kim Hourn, secretary-general of ASEAN, received a courtesy call from HE An Kwang Il, ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to ASEAN, at the ASEAN Secretariat.

13th	Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam Le Minh Khai met Samsung Electronics President and Chief Financial Officer Park Hark-kyu in Hanoi. Khai encouraged Samsung Electronics to expand its investment in Vietnam and leverage opportunities from the strong partnership between the two countries in all fields. Khai commended Samsung on the opening of Southeast Asia's largest R&D centre in Hanoi in December 2022. He emphasised that Vietnam is prioritising projects with high technologies, innovation and widespread effects, and that the Vietnamese government is always creating optimal conditions for foreign investors to operate in the country in the long term. Park stated that Vietnam is the most important hub for the company globally and Samsung will increase its investment in the country. He also affirmed that Vietnam has provided significant support for Samsung to operate effectively in the country, and that Samsung would continue urging its subsidiaries to continue investing in Vietnam.
13th	Ambassador of the ROK Yung Soo Jung handed over a donation of 1,314 tons of rice, worth approximately US\$1.26 million, to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Baykham Khatthiya at the ministry's and the United Nations World Food Programme's warehouse in Vientiane. This donation is to support the most vulnerable populations in Laos affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19 and the global food and fuel crisis. The donation is also expected to benefit over 100,000 people around the country.
14th	The Korea-Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement came into effect on 14 January 2023, after both countries completed their domestic procedures. The agreement expands the number of Korea-Singapore trade rules from the initial four to 34, providing opportunities for collaboration in new digital technologies as well as improvement in e-commerce and digital business environment conditions. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) aims to hold the first bilateral digital economy dialogue during the first quarter of 2023 to seek joint business projects that can mutually benefit both countries, in alignment with the Korea-Singapore Digital Economy Dialogue Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2022.
15th	The Embassy of South Korea, Korean Association in Thailand and Bangkok Hospital group signed an MOU to enhance medical services for South Korean nationals living in Thailand. The MOU will provide comprehensive medical services, including emergency care, to the South Korean community in Thailand. This cooperation aims to improve quality of life while promoting health and well-being by providing high-quality medical services supported by advanced technology and specialised teams. The Korean Association in Thailand, staff and diplomats of the Embassy of the ROK in Thailand, as well as other South Korean nationals, can access medical services at 11 hospitals under the Bangkok Hospital Group.
17th	HE Dr Kao Kim Hourn, secretary-general of ASEAN, received a courtesy call by HE Kwon Hee-seog, ambassador of the ROK to ASEAN at the ASEAN Secretariat.
17th	Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh met Speaker of the ROK's National Assembly Kim Jin-pyo in Hanoi. The two leaders considered each other as long-term strategic partners and expressed their appreciation for the positive bilateral relationship between Vietnam and the ROK as important. During the discussion, Kim encouraged the Vietnamese government to support the ROK's hosting of the World Expo 2023 in Busan, facilitate Korean firms' operations in Vietnam, allow Korean banks to open branches, promote ROK citizens' travel, work and life in Vietnam, and back the expansion of ROK's educational establishments in Vietnam. Chinh pledged to consider Kim's proposals and urged the ROK parliament to continue to promote cooperation between the two countries.
17th	Communist Party of Vietnam General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong welcomed Speaker of the ROK's National Assembly Kim Jin-pyo in Hanoi. Noting the positive development of Vietnam-ROK relations, Trong expressed his support for continued maintenance of close coordination to develop cooperation, such as through focusing on increasing high-level mutual visits and meetings, enhancing mutual policy understanding, developing connections between their ministries, sectors and localities, and sharing legislative experiences to create favourable business experiences for both countries. Kim agreed with his host's statements and pledged the continued development of positive ties bilaterally and through the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative for relations to continue to strengthen.
17th	Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam Vuong Dinh Hue held talks with Speaker of the ROK's National Assembly Kim Jin-pyo in Hanoi. The leaders agreed to build on the positive relationship between their countries by consolidating political and diplomatic trust, expanding collaboration in technology transfer, human resources training and defence technology, and increasing the number of Vietnamese workers in the ROK. They also agreed to organise exchange forums to create legal frameworks for the formation of an equitable and sustainable digital transformation and energy transition ecosystem, as well as regularly exchange information to resolve problems related to visas and work permits.
19th	Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Brunei HE Kim Soung-eun visited the Prime Minister's Office in Brunei and met Dato Haji Sufian, deputy minister of Prime Minister's Office, to discuss ways to promote cooperation between the two countries, focusing on IT and E-government areas.

19th	South Korean National Assembly Speaker Kim Jin-pyo met Indonesian President Joko Widodo in Jakarta where they discussed enhancing bilateral cooperation in various areas, including strengthening economic and security cooperation under the bilateral "special strategic partnership". Both leaders expressed interest in improving their supply chain cooperation, with Kim highlighting South Korea's advanced technology in mining and smelting and Indonesia's supply of key minerals, such as nickel. Kim also urged President Widodo to support South Korean companies' investment in the country, particularly in the automobile, petrochemicals and other industries, as the two countries implemented the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) starting this year. President Widodo mentioned the potential for new areas of cooperation such as the medical and digital finance industries, while Kim called on Indonesia to denounce North Korea's illegal actions as the Chair of ASEAN.
25-27th	Jeju Governor Oh Young Hun visited Singapore and held meetings with Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sim Ann and other officials. They discussed ways to promote cooperation between Singapore and Jeju, and held separate meetings with the Chief Executive of EnterpriseSG Png Cheong Boon and CEO of Singapore Tourism Board Keith Tan.
27th	The Korea-Cambodia Business and Investment Forum was held in Seoul and attended by South Korea's Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun, Cambodia's Commerce Minister Pan Sorasak, and government and corporate officials from the two nations. The two countries agreed to strengthen their trade and investment partnership by utilising their Cambodia – Korea free trade agreement effective in December 2022. Officials from both countries agreed to enhance bilateral trade across multiple sectors, including textiles, cars, machinery, agriculture and fisheries. Ahn also expressed support for Cambodia's technology development and its goal to achieve net-zero emissions, suggesting the two nations can further cooperate on digital economy and clean energy sectors. The bilateral FTA allows for a higher level of market opening than the existing South Korea-ASEAN FTA and the multilateral trade pact of RCEP.
30th Jan - 1st Feb	A delegation of members of the National Assembly of the ROK, led by Kim Kyo-heung, chairman of the Korea-Singapore Parliamentary Friendship Group, visited Singapore from 30 January to 1 February 2023 and met Deputy Speaker of Parliament of the Republic of Singapore Jessica Tan Soon Neo. The delegation discussed ways to promote close cooperation between Korea and Singapore, including Korea-Singapore diplomacy, and met Korean residents and companies.
31st	Vietnamese Ambassador to the DPRK Le Ba Vinh and his embassy members visited Mansu Hill in Pyongyang to commemorate the 73rd anniversary of diplomatic relations between the DPRK and Vietnam. They laid a floral basket before the statues of President Kim Il Sung and Chairman Kim Jong Il and paid their respects.

February 2023

1st	Marking the second anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea Park Jin, together with the foreign ministers of Albania, Armenia, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, the Federated States of Micronesia, Georgia, Ghana, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the High Representative on behalf of the European Union, issued a joint statement expressing concern about the worsening political, economic and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. The statement also expresses support for the role of the United Nations and ASEAN in addressing the crisis and reiterates the international community's commitment to support efforts for Myanmar's peace, inclusivity and democratic future.
1st	Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Brunei HE Kim Soung-eun held a meeting with Haji Muhammad Nazri, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Transport and Infocommunications of Brunei, to discuss ways to strengthen cooperation between Brunei Darussalam and Korea in the areas of ICT and E-government.
2nd	The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in Laos and BNK Capital Lao Non-Deposit Taking Microfinance Institution Co. Ltd. (BNK MFI) of the ROK signed an agreement to provide financial support for Lao workers to work overseas. The partnership will enable Lao workers to formally work in South Korea and access low-interest funding sources, as well as facilitate the transfer of their wages back to Laos. BNK MFI will also be able to facilitate seasonal employment of Lao workers in Korea's agriculture and fishery sectors. The partnership also allows the Lao government to collect data from those working overseas to develop laws and other relevant legislations in the future.
3rd	South Korean underwear tycoon Kim Seong-tae was indicted for illegally transferring millions of dollars to North Korea for inter-Korean cooperation projects. The former chairman of Ssangbangwool Group is suspected of transferring \$8 million to North Korea via China in 2019 on behalf of Gyeonggi province. Kim was arrested in Thailand on 10 January 2023 and brought back to South Korea to face multiple charges that include bribery, embezzlement, breach of trust and violations of the foreign exchange transaction act and the political fund act. The prosecution suspects that \$5 million was delivered to support a smart farm project in North Korea and the remainder was intended to facilitate the then-Governor of Gyeonggi province Lee Jae-myung's planned visit to the North. The prosecution is investigating whether the payment was made in return for the Gyeonggi government's promises of business favours and support for Ssangbangwool in connection with future cooperation projects with North Korea. Lee has denied the allegations, claiming the investigation is politically motivated.

6th	Jeju Air, South Korea's largest low-cost carrier, announced plans to expand its flights to Vietnam and Laos after a three-year suspension caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The company will resume services on routes from Incheon to Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city and Vientiane on 20 April 2023, according to a statement from the airline. At the end of 2019, the budget airline operated eight routes to five Vietnamese cities. However, most of the routes were suspended in early 2020 due to the pandemic's impact on the airline industry. In June 2022, the company resumed the routes from Incheon to Danang and Nha Trang, as well as the Busan-Da Nang route.
9th	Vice-minister for Southeast Asia of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK Pak Sang Gil extends his well-wishes to Indonesia for its new tenure as chair of ASEAN.
13th	The Korean Aerospace Research Institute and the Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency of Thailand signed an Implementation Arrangement (IA) for a feasibility study of building a space launch site in Thailand. The IA will be using Korea's space launch vehicle development experience and expertise. In the past, Korea has worked with Thailand on their earth observation satellite development plan, as well as through collaborations such as the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum and the International Astronautical Congress.
15th	The Embassy of South Korea in Thailand confirmed the arrival of South Korea's donation of 501,120 doses of Pfizer's BA.1 bivalent Covid-19 vaccine to Thailand to celebrate the 65th anniversary of their diplomatic relations. The donation would help Thailand combat the spread of subvariants more effectively, such as XBB.1.5 (Kraken) and CH.1.1 (Orthrus). This is the second vaccine donation from South Korea to Thailand, the first being 470,000 doses of AstraZeneca received in October 2021. South Korea has also prepared other activities to mark the occasion, including setting up a friendship trail in Khao Yai National Park and holding auditions to support Thai youths in becoming K-pop singers.
15th	South Korea's Navy and Marine Corps announced their participation in a multinational humanitarian exercise, Cobra Gold, in Thailand from 28 February to 10 March 2023. The exercise will take place in 11 regions of Thailand and will be led by the Thai and U.S. armed forces. The South Korean military will mobilise six assault amphibious vehicles, two K808 armoured vehicles, two K55 self-propelled howitzers, and a K77 fire direction centre vehicle for the exercise. The troops are set to take part in amphibious landing drills with Thai and US troops and special operations training in a jungle environment. The Cobra Gold drills will also include a command post exercise, humanitarian civil assistance activities and cyber defence training.
16th	The new Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Cambodia HE Park Jung-wook paid a visit to His Excellency Prak Sokhonn, deputy prime minister and minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cambodia.
16-17th	The ASEAN-Korea Centre (AKC) held its 15th annual council meeting in Seoul with high-level officials from the ROK and 10 ASEAN member states in attendance. During the meeting, they reviewed a report on the implementation results of the centre's 2022 budget, proposed the budget for 2023 and exchanged views on action programmes. The parties affirmed their aim to strengthen prosperity and solidarity between ASEAN and the ROK in the post-COVID-19 period. The AKC plans to carry out various programmes in 2023 to promote cooperation in innovation and e-mobility, and explore new growth engines, among other things. They also intend to strengthen information exchanges in culture and tourism, and promote mutual understanding and exchanges between experts and scholars.
17th	The Ambassador of Indonesia to South Korea HE Gandhi Sulistiyanto hosted the Annual Media Briefing at his official residence in Seoul. During his speech, he stressed the importance of people-to-people ties to develop a closer friendship and mutual understanding between Indonesia and Korea, not just government-to-government and business-to-business relations. The briefing aimed to share the two main priorities of the Indonesian embassy in 2023: the 50th Anniversary of Indonesia-South Korea diplomatic relations and the chairmanship of Indonesia in ASEAN. Throughout the year, the embassy plans to hold several highlighted activities, including talk shows and dialogues, forums on economic relations and cultural events. Sulistiyanto also emphasised the crucial role of youth in strengthening collaboration in various fields, including becoming "creativepreneurs and digipreneurs", as future leaders of the two nations.
17th	The ROK-PH Eighth Policy Consultation was held in Seoul. During the meeting, 1st Vice Minister Cho Hyundong of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK and undersecretary for Bilateral Relations and ASEAN Affairs Ma Theresa P Lazaro of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines discussed mutual concerns such as defence, maritime engagement, trade, investment, energy, nuclear power, infrastructure, science and technology, climate change, and people-to-people exchanges. The two ministers agreed to further elevate bilateral relations as the two countries approach their 75th year of diplomatic relations in 2024.
17th	In a briefing at the Indonesian embassy in Seoul, diplomats from South Korea and Indonesia stated that defence cooperation between the two nations is set to expand after having resolved a dispute over funding for a joint fighter jet project in 2022. Indonesia halted payment for its 20% share of development costs for the KFX jet in 2019, but resumed payment in late 2022. The KFX project, which is a cornerstone of South Korea's expanding defence industry, is designed to be a cheaper, less stealthy alternative to the US-built F-35, on which South Korea relies. The next-generation aircraft, developed by Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI), is expected to increase defence cooperation between the two countries.

18th	Busan IT Industry Promotion Agency (BIPA) signed an MOU with the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications to promote the ICT industry in Korea and Cambodia through the ASEAN-ROK ICT Convergence Village Project. This project is aimed at promoting ICT exchange and mutual growth between Korea and ASEAN, supported by the Ministry of Science and ICT and Busan Metropolitan City since 2020. BIPA has been working with the National IT Industry Promotion Agency to establish various infrastructure and production supporting programmes based on Korea and ASEAN ICT convergence technology.
20th	Three Singaporean men working for Sea Hub Tankers, which owned and operated the Singapore-registered MT Sea Tanker II, were charged with obstructing justice by presenting false logbooks to authorities to cover up an oil transfer to a North Korea-flagged vessel that violated UN sanctions. Ong Chou Hong, an assistant marine superintendent, received a nine-month jail term, while cargo officer Benny Tan Chun Kiat was sentenced to six months' jail after they pleaded guilty to obstructing justice. Another cargo officer, Jeremy Koh Renfeng, has yet to face trial.
20th	The Indonesian embassy in Seoul, in cooperation with the Korean Financial Supervisory Services (FSS), organised a business forum to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Korea. The event was called "Developing Closer Friendship and Stronger Partnership through Enhanced Financial Cooperation" and was attended by around 100 guests, including leaders and representatives from Korean financial institutions. The forum highlighted Indonesia's strong economic growth, political stability and commitment to improving its financial services sector. It also showcased the significant rise in FDI and total trade with the world. The forum marked a significant step in increasing collaboration between Indonesia's and Korea's financial sectors, which is hoped to further catalyse bilateral cooperation. The guest of honour and keynote speaker at the event was HE Mahendra Siregar, chairman of the Indonesian Financial Authority. In his remarks, the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to South Korea HE Gandhi Sulistiyanto emphasised the promising economic growth in Indonesia, which has made it an attractive destination for Korean financial companies looking to expand their businesses. Representing the ROK government, Senior Deputy Governor of the FSS of Korea Lee Joon Soo welcomed more Indonesian financial companies to establish businesses in Korea and affirmed the support of the FSS in their operation.
21st	Singapore condemned the recent ballistic missile tests conducted by the DPRK, including the launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile on 18 February 2023. The government emphasised that these tests are dangerous and provocative, exacerbating tensions and jeopardising regional stability, while also violating United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Singapore called for the DPRK to cease all provocations and comply with its international obligations and commitments.
21st	South Korea's MOTIE attended the third Joint Committee meeting of the RCEP via videoconference. There were also 40 participants, including the delegation heads of co-chairs Indonesia and Australia. The meeting discussed RCEP Secretariat management, joint projects related to the economy and technology, and implementation measures. The MOTIE delegation acknowledged Vietnam's RCEP preferential tariffs application as of January 2023, which was raised during the previous Joint Committee meeting, and called for member states' concerted efforts to utilise the RCEP agreement as a means to restore exports and investment.
21st	Malaysia condemned the ballistic missile launches carried out by North Korea, including the launch of an intercontinental-range ballistic missile on 18 February 2023. The government expressed regret over these actions, stating that it threatens global peace and security and increases regional tensions. Malaysia called on North Korea to cease its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions and international commitments, and avoid any further provocative or illegal acts. Malaysia also urged all concerned parties to resume dialogue to achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.
22nd	The Philippines condemned North Korea's testing of an intercontinental ballistic missile and other ballistic missile tests on 18 February 2023. The Philippine government stated that these actions exacerbates tensions and poses a threat to peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula and the international community. The Philippines reaffirmed its demand for North Korea to immediately halt its missile tests, comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions and pursue peaceful dialogue with South Korea.
22nd	Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen met South Korean Ambassador to Cambodia Park Jung-Wook to discuss bilateral cooperation between their countries in Phnom Penh. The ambassador highlighted that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the two countries have seen steady growth in their relations. South Korea is Cambodia's second-largest investor and two-way trade reached \$1 billion in 2022. Park believed that the free trade agreement and double taxation avoidance agreement will continue the rise of trade volume between the two countries and encourage more South Korean investment in Cambodia. Hun expressed his gratitude towards South Korea for its continued support for Cambodia during the pandemic, such as by accepting Cambodian workers despite the crisis and funding bridge construction across the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers in Cambodia.

23rd	South Korea's Deputy Director-General for ASEAN and South East Asian Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dong-bae Kim met Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Political-Security Community Michael Tene at the ASEAN Secretariat.
23-24th	South Korea's Air Force Chief of Staff General Jung Sang-hwa travelled to Malaysia to meet with his Malaysian counterpart, General Asghar Khan, and Air Operations Commander Lieutenant General Mohd Shahada bin Ismail to sign a cooperation arrangement for the establishment of a bilateral Air Force meeting. They also attended a conference to share the two countries' experience in aircraft operations. During his visit, Jung promoted South Korea's defence exports, including the South Korean-made FA-50 light attack aircraft and the Korean Air Force's flight training system.
23rd	POSCO International Corp announced that it had secured the rights to explore gas mines in Indonesia in a bid to expand its energy and resources sector. The Korean commodities trader, in collaboration with the Indonesian state-owned PT Pertamina Hulu Energy, won the rights from the Indonesian government to investigate the Bunga gas block off the coast of eastern Java Island. POSCO International will hold operational rights and a 50% stake in the project. If gas fields are discovered, the company is planning to reinforce its liquefied natural gas business and secure a more stable natural gas reserve. Since 2021, it has also been conducting a gas exploration project in Malaysia.
24th	South Korean aircraft manufacturer KAI secured a contract to sell 18 fighter jets to Malaysia for 1.2 trillion won (\$1.02 billion). KAI beat competition from India, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey to win the contract for the FA-50 light attack aircraft. This is KAI's fourth aircraft deal with a Southeast Asian country, following Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. The company also expects to win another contract to provide 18 more FA-50s to Malaysia as the country plans to increase its aircraft fleet.
24th	Philippine Ambassador to South Korea Theresa Dizon-de Vega joined other women ambassadors at a pre-International Women's Day meeting with ROK Minister Kim Hyunsook of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF). The ambassadors discussed common concerns, including cooperation on youth policies and programmes, family and multicultural family support, gender rights policy, prevention of human trafficking, and Official Development Assistance programmes in women's employment and vocational training. Dizon-de Vega congratulated the MOGEF for the passage and implementation of the ROK Prevention of Human Trafficking Act and highlighted the need for increased international cooperation on this growing cross-border concern. Ambassador Dizon-de Vega also reaffirmed the Philippines-Korea bilateral engagement in promoting responsive youth, women and multicultural family support programmes.
24th	POSCO Holdings, the top South Korean steelmaker, announced that it signed a preliminary agreement with China's Ningbo Liqin for nickel production in Indonesia. The agreement entails the construction of a factory on Sulawesi Island in Indonesia to generate 120,000 tonnes of mixed nickel-cobalt hydroxide precipitate annually. The two companies will initially create a plant capable of producing 60,000 tonnes of nickel, enough to produce 1.2 million electric vehicles. The production of this factory is scheduled to commence in 2025, according to POSCO Holdings.
25th	ROK Ambassador to Brunei HE Kim Soung-eun held a meeting with Pengiran Haji Mohd Hasnan, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei, to discuss ways to promote exchanges and cooperation between the two countries in the areas of culture and sports.
28th	During a reception for Samsung Electronics President and Chief Financial Officer Park Hark Kyu in Hanoi, Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam Vuong Dinh Hue affirmed that Vietnam would continue to facilitate and protect the legitimate interests of foreign investors, including Samsung. Chairman Hue expressed his appreciation for Samsung's investment and development of supporting industrial partners in Vietnam and encouraged the firm to continue to invest in semiconductor technology in the country. Chairman Hue expressed his hope that Samsung will further make long-term investments in Vietnam, emphasising that the government of Vietnam is committed to improving the business and investment environment and creating the most favourable conditions for investors. Regarding the OECD's global minimum tax rate, Chairman Hue said that relevant agencies of Vietnam have been studying the issue and he expects it to be incorporated into the country's law, particularly the revision of the Law on Corporate Income Tax. Park iterated that Samsung will continue to achieve success through long-term investment in Vietnam and contribute as the largest and long-term investor in the country.

March 2023

1st	An event was held at a museum in Lang Son province of Vietnam to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the official goodwill visit of Supreme Leader of the DPRK Kim Jong Un to Vietnam. Officials from the Foreign Ministry of Vietnam, Vietnam-DPRK Friendship Association, Lang Son Provincial People's Committee and DPRK embassy in Vietnam attended the event. The participants paid tribute to a photo taken at the meeting between President Kim Il Sung and President Ho Chi Minh and viewed the section exhibiting mementos related to Kim Jong Un's visit to Vietnam. The roundtable talk highlighted the historic significance of Kim Jong Un's visit to Vietnam and the success of the Korean people under his leadership. Vietnamese officials present at the event affirmed the importance of their friendly relations with the DPRK.
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1st	Vietnamese Ambassador to the DPRK Le Ba Vinh and his embassy staff members visited the International Friendship Exhibition House in Pyongyang to celebrate the fourth anniversary of Kim Jong Un's official goodwill visit to Vietnam. They admired the gifts presented by various people to President Kim Il Sung and Chairman Kim Jong Il, as well as the gifts that were presented to Kim Jong Un during his visit to Vietnam. The ambassador also wrote a message in the visitor's book before concluding the visit.
2nd	Kim Jong Un, the president of the State Affairs of the DPRK, sent a congratulatory message to Vo Van Thuong, the president of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Kim congratulated Vo Van Thuong on his election as the president of Vietnam, stating that his election reflected the deep trust and confidence of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. Kim also expressed his belief that the strong and friendly relations between the two countries would continue to develop, and wished Vo Van Thuong success in his new role.
6th	The President of the National Assembly (NA) of Cambodia Heng Samrin welcomed a courtesy call from Park Jung Wook, the ambassador extraordinary plenipotentiary of the ROK to Cambodia. During the meeting, Heng acknowledged the significant contributions made by South Korea in various sectors, such as economy, trade, tourism, education, culture, health and other fields through the support of grant and loans, concessional loans, and infrastructure development. He stated that the two parliaments have actively contributed to enhancing cooperation between both governments by sharing experiences on legislative work, and hosting exchanges between legislative officials and committees.
6th	ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn delivered the keynote speech at the ASEAN-Korea Business Forum in Jakarta where he emphasised that ASEAN is open to Korean businesses looking to invest and diversify their supply chains in the region.
6th	South Korea and Indonesia renewed their currency swap arrangement worth over \$8 billion to promote trade and enhance financial stability between the countries, according to the Bank of Korea (BOK). The three-year arrangement allows the countries to exchange up to 10.7 trillion won or 115 trillion Indonesian rupiah until 5 March 2026. The BOK said that the local currency swap supports the settlement of trade in local currency between the two countries, even in times of financial stress, and thus supports regional financial stability. The currency swap was first signed in 2014 and renewed in 2017 and 2020; it aims to help prepare the countries against liquidity crunches by allowing them to borrow money in their own currencies.
7th	Yoon Suk-yeol, President of the ROK, congratulated President Vo Van Thuong on his election as President of Vietnam, expressing his satisfaction with the achievements made by the two countries in various areas in recent years. He stated his hope to further develop the Vietnam-ROK comprehensive strategic partnership and discuss ways to improve bilateral relations with President Thuong soon.
7th	The ASEAN Plus Three Senior Officials' Meeting was held, with representatives from ASEAN member states, China, Japan and the ASEAN Secretariat in attendance. The meeting was co-chaired by Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) leaders of Indonesia and the ROK.
9th	LG Electronics announced its plan to expand its research and development (R&D) operations in Vietnam to cater to the fast-growing electric vehicle parts business. The South Korean tech company celebrated the opening of a new entity in Hanoi to build on its existing auto parts-focused R&D centre established in 2016. The new entity is expected to enhance LG's R&D infrastructure and competitiveness in Vietnam. The company plans to increase the number of developers by more than 30% to 1,000 by 2024, focusing on software development and inspection of in-vehicle products, including telematics, audio, video and navigation devices.
10th	The new Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Cambodia Park Jung-Wook paid a courtesy call to Kung Phোক, secretary of state and ASEAN SOM Leader of Cambodia. The meeting discussed enhancing cooperation under the framework of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations, as well as regional and international issues.
10th	The Informal Mekong Senior Officials' Meeting was held via videoconference and chaired by Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and Alternate Cambodia's SOM Leader for Mekong Cooperation Sok Soken. All Mekong SOM Leaders from Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam were in attendance, where they discussed and exchanged views on key issues of the Mekong cooperation mechanisms. This included Mekong partnerships with the ROK, Japan, the United States, and the Ganga, as well as the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) framework. The meeting also discussed Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (CLV) and Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) related works and emphasised the importance of enhancing Mekong cooperation to promote prosperity and sustainable development in the Mekong sub-region.

10th	Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Le Minh Khai co-chaired the second Vietnam-ROK Deputy Prime Minister Economic Dialogue with Choo Kyung-ho, the deputy prime minister and minister of economy and finance of the ROK, in Hanoi. They affirmed their strong economic cooperation, with ROK as Vietnam's largest investor; second-largest partner in Official Development Assistance, labour and tourism; and third-largest trading partner. The meeting discussed trade and investment cooperation, energy and infrastructure development, cooperation development, information technology, labour and health care. The two sides agreed to lift two-way trade to US\$100 billion in 2023 and US\$150 billion by 2030. At the event, Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Finance Vo Thanh Hung and Vice Chairman of the Export-Import Bank of Korea Kim Tae-soo signed an agreement to finance the project on upgrading the Hoa Duyet - Thanh Luyen section of the Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh city railway route.
13-19th	South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines participated in the second round of official negotiations for the United States-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) held in Bali to discuss fair economy, trade, supply chains and green technologies. The session brought together 14 member nations, including Japan, Australia and the United States. South Korea sent a delegation involving officials from the industry, finance, foreign and other related ministries for working-level and chief delegate meetings on the platform's four key pillars of trade, supply chain resilience, clean economy and fair economy. In a joint readout from the Office of the US Trade Representatives and US Department of Commerce, IPEF partners have committed to an "aggressive negotiating schedule" throughout 2023.
14th	National Assembly Vice Chairman Nguyen Duc Hai met ROK Ambassador to Vietnam Oh Young-ju in Hanoi and affirmed the strong bilateral relations between the two countries. Hai praised the evolution of the relationship and regular exchange of delegations at all levels, emphasising the importance of the Friendship Parliamentary Group. He expressed support for ways to deepen political trust and increase high-level delegation exchanges between the two legislative bodies, as well as the sharing of experience in the National Assembly, commerce, price and tender management, and financial management.
14-17th	The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Miti) of Malaysia led a trade and investment mission to South Korea from 14 to 17 March 2023. The mission resulted in the potential investment of RM24 billion and RM4.24 billion of potential exports of products and services. Miti Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz highlighted that South Korean companies, including Samsung Engineering, SKC, Lotte Fine Chemicals, Hyundai, Coway and a consortium of South Korean companies, have expressed a strong interest in Malaysia, particularly in sustainable and green technology sectors such as carbon capture storage, hydrogen energy and electric vehicles. Zafrul also met his counterpart, South Korean Trade Minister Dukgeun Ahn, at the Lotte Hotel Seoul to discuss the resumption of bilateral free trade agreement negotiation, ministerial trade cooperation dialogue and potential cooperation through digital trade regulations, green economy, renewable energy, and supply chain and economic cooperation under the IPEF and RCEP. Several other events were also hosted as part of this mission. More than 250 industry captains participated in a business seminar in Seoul, and more than 20 South Korean VC investors attended a roundtable during the mission which saw the exchange of four MoUs with several South Korean VCs to invest up to US\$400mil (RM1.8bil) in Malaysia. A reception was also jointly organised by Miti and the Malaysian embassy in Seoul to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Look East Policy between the two nations in 2023 in the presence of South Korean Foreign Affairs Minister Park Jin and Vice-Minister Lee Do-hoon.
16th	At the 10th ASEAN-ROK Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting co-chaired by Permanent Representative of Vietnam Nguyen Hai Bang and Ambassador of the ROK to ASEAN Kwon Hee-seog, ASEAN and the ROK have agreed to enhance their partnership and deepen cooperation. The two sides recognised significant progress made in the ASEAN-ROK cooperation over the past year through a follow-up on the outcomes of the 23rd ASEAN-ROK Summit and the activities to implement various areas of cooperation under the ASEAN-ROK Plan of Action (2021-2025). Under the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative, the ROK is expected to double the size of its annual contributions to the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund by 2027. Both sides also agreed to strengthen cooperation in the four priority areas under the ASEAN Outlook in the Indo-Pacific, and continue to advance cooperation in various fields, including trade and investment, digitalisation and innovation, energy, tourism, education, disaster management, environment and climate change, public health, smart cities, connectivity, culture and people-to-people exchanges.
18th	A high-ranking delegation from the National Assembly of Vietnam, led by Vice Chairman of the National Assembly Nguyen Duc Hai, arrived for an official visit to South Korea from 18 to 25 March 2023. The visit is aimed at enhancing the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries and strengthening political trust and cooperation between their parliaments, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The delegation will also have discussions with the ROK to assist with the amendment of several significant laws such as the Land Law, Law on Electronic Transactions, Law on Protection of Consumer Rights, Law on Price, Law on Bidding and Law on Cooperatives, along with the e-parliament building. This is the first high-ranking delegation from Vietnam to visit the ROK since the countries elevated their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership in December 2022.

19th	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore expressed strong opposition and condemnation towards the DPRK's ballistic missile tests, including the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launch, on 16 March 2023. The ministry emphasised that Singapore has consistently opposed and regarded such tests as dangerous and a violation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions. The ministry also urged the DPRK to cease all provocations and comply with its international obligations and commitments while considering the concerns of the international community.
20th	Vietnamese Vice Chairman of the National Assembly Nguyen Duc Hai and Deputy Assembly Speaker of the ROK Chung Woo-taik held discussions on economic cooperation between the two countries during their talks in Seoul. Hai welcomed Korean businesses to continue expanding their investments in Vietnam, such as in green economy, digital transformation and clean energy, and expressed hopes for promoting new forms of labour cooperation and early implementation of the social insurance agreement between the two nations. Chung underlined the significant role of the National Assemblies of the two countries in promoting bilateral exchange and cooperation.
21st	Vietnamese Vice Chairman of the National Assembly Nguyen Duc Hai met the Speaker of the National Assembly of the ROK Kim Jin-pyo in Seoul. Kim praised the strong development of relations between the two countries, noted the potential for further cooperation and invited Vietnam's National Assembly Chairman Vuong Dinh Hue and legislators to attend an ASEAN-Korean leaders' forum in June in Jeju Island. Hai suggested that the two sides should maintain delegation exchanges and meetings, share views on bilateral cooperation, and supplement cooperation contents based on the 2013 agreement to deepen legislative ties.
22nd	Supreme Leader of the DPRK Kim Jong Un sent a congratulatory message and a flower basket to Thongloun Sisoulith, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and president of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to celebrate the 68th anniversary of the founding of the LPRP. In the message, Kim Jong Un applauded the general secretary and all the members of the LPRP on their achievements in leading the struggle for the country's independence and development over the past 68 years. He also expressed his confidence that the ties of friendship and cooperation between the two parties and countries would continue to grow stronger.
22nd	Vietnamese Vice Chairman of the National Assembly Nguyen Duc Hai and South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo held discussions in Seoul. The two leaders emphasised that they are committed to boosting bilateral ties and Hai proposed that the two countries step up legislative exchanges and cooperate on facilitating people-to-people exchanges, protecting citizens and removing business difficulties. He also expressed Vietnam's desire for Korean firms to expand investments in the country, particularly in high tech, science-technology, green economy, digital economy, digital transformation, clean energy and smart urban development. Hai further stated his hopes for increased labour cooperation and lauded the joint efforts made in maintaining dialogue mechanisms in national defence and security.
22nd	Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Malaysia HE Yeo Seung-bae met YB Tuan Liew Chin Tong, deputy minister of international trade and industry, YB Puan Teo Nie Ching, deputy minister of communications and digital, and YB Tuan Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, member of parliament for Muar and president of MUDA, to discuss enhancing bilateral relations and strengthening economic and trade cooperation between Korea and Malaysia.
23rd	Vo Van Thuong, president of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, thanked Kim Jong Un, president of the State Affairs of the DPRK, and expressed his gratitude for Kim's official goodwill visit to Vietnam in March 2019, which played a vital role in the development of traditional friendly relations between the two countries. The message reiterated that the party, state and people of Vietnam always prioritised the traditional friendly relations between Vietnam and the DPRK and hoped that the good relations would further develop in the interests of the peoples of the two countries and contribute to peace, stability and cooperation in the region and the world. He also wished Kim Jong Un good health and success.
23rd	The embassy of South Korea in Manila stated that the ROK is sending a team of four experts from the Korea Coast Guard along with equipment worth PHP11 million to assist in cleaning up the Mindoro oil spill caused by a sunken tanker on 28 February 2023. The team, due to arrive on 27 March, will work closely with their counterparts in the Philippine Coast Guard. The items include 20 tons of sorbent pads and snares, 1,000 metres of solid flotation curtain boom, and 2,000 sets of personal protective equipment, due to arrive on 5 April. The embassy highlighted that this is the first time South Korea is providing assistance for the prevention of marine pollution.
24th	Thongloun Sisoulith, general secretary of the Central Committee of the LPRP and the president of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, thanked Kim Jong Un for his warm congratulatory message and greetings on the occasion of the 68th anniversary of the LPRP. In his message, he expressed his gratitude to Kim Jong Un for the beautiful basket of flowers and his wish for the further strengthening of friendly and cooperative relations between the two parties, states and peoples with long-standing traditions.

27th	The Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs of South Korea has donated 10,000 bags of milled rice to the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) as aid for calamity-stricken families in the Philippines. The DA expressed gratitude for the support and highlighted the value of food security amid challenges. The rice supply will be distributed in Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, and Davao Region to benefit those affected by the combined effects of low-pressure areas, the northeast monsoon and the shear line. This donation is the third batch under the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve Programme, with the first two donations granted in 2020 for families affected by typhoons in Luzon and Mindanao.
28th	Four individuals, including a high-ranking executive of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions whose identity was not disclosed, were arrested for allegedly making unauthorised contact with North Korean spies. The arrests were made due to their violation of South Korea's National Security Law that prohibits unauthorised contact with North Koreans. Prosecutors alleged that the labour group official met North Korean agents on three occasions between 2017 and 2022 in Vietnam's Hanoi, Cambodia's Phnom Penh and China's Guangzhou. The other three individuals were also accused of meeting North Korean agents in Hanoi.
28th	South Korean Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup and his Vietnamese counterpart, Phan Van Giang, met to discuss strengthening defence cooperation between the two nations. They acknowledged the need to advance cooperation considering the changing security environment and agreed to establish regular ministerial talks to review cooperation projects and discuss various issues. They also agreed to revise the MOU on defence cooperation and explore new opportunities for cooperation in areas such as demining, cybersecurity, educational exchanges and defence technology. The ministers also discussed South Korea's plan to transfer a patrol boat and establish regular naval consultations in April 2023.
28-29th	Around 100 Korean companies participated in the "K-Expo in Bangkok 2023" event organised by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency in Thailand, with the aim of seeking local business partners. The Korean companies promoted their products and services in Thailand and Southeast Asia, including tourism initiatives between the two countries.
28-29th	South Korea, China, Japan and ASEAN held a meeting of vice finance ministers and senior central bank officials in Bali. They discussed a multilateral currency swap deal and ways to boost financial cooperation. Senior officials exchanged policy responses and opinions on the global and regional economic situation and explored ways to boost financial ties among the regional players. They also discussed how to better use and develop their Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation, a \$240 billion pool launched in 2010 that can be tapped through currency swap deals in times of financial crisis.
29th	The Prime Minister of South Korea Han Duck-soo hosted a reception for Vietnamese Minister of National Defence General Phan Van Giang in Seoul. Giang informed Han of the outcomes of his talks with his Korean counterpart, Lee Jong-sup, and the two sides agreed on measures to further strengthen defence cooperation to match their bilateral Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Giang expressed his hope that Han would continue to support the effective collaboration between the two defence ministries.
30th	South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol met Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi in Seoul to discuss potential areas of cooperation between the two countries. The meeting covered economic expansion between the two countries and strengthening of strategic ties, particularly in high-tech industries like electric vehicles and batteries, and steel. Yoon expressed gratitude for the increased cooperation between the two countries, and Retno delivered a handwritten letter from President Joko Widodo that expressed President Widodo's hopes for future-oriented cooperation.
30th	South Korea released a statement expressing concerns over the dissolution of Myanmar's former ruling party, the National League for Democracy, and called for a peaceful resolution to the deepening crisis in Myanmar. The spokesperson of Seoul's foreign ministry, Lim Soo-suk, said that the South Korean government expressed "deep concerns" over the dissolution of the National League for Democracy, which "will not help at all in resolving the crisis".
31st	South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Park Jin and Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs Retno LP Marsudi held the fourth Joint Commission Meeting to discuss ways for the two countries to work together in diverse areas, including trade and investment, resources and energy, infrastructure and defence. They also discussed ways to step up economic cooperation between Korea and Indonesia through implementing the KASI, and optimising strategic cooperation in cyber security, peacekeeping operations, maritime security and counterterrorism through the Defence Industry Cooperation Committee and the Senior Defence and Diplomatic Officials' Meeting. The meeting is expected to serve as a significant opportunity to further advance the relations between the two countries as they mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties this year.

31st	Deputy Prime Minister Tran Luu Quang met Kim Myoung-kyu, vice president of LG Display Co Ltd, a subsidiary of LG Group of the ROK in Hanoi to discuss investment opportunities in Vietnam. Quang suggested that LG Group expand its investment in Hai Phong and other Vietnamese localities, and build an R&D centre in Vietnam. He affirmed that the Vietnamese prime minister has approved the extension of the completion of the master plan of Hai Phong city to 2040, creating favourable conditions for investors to increase investment in the city.
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This chronology of events is cross-referenced from the following ministries, institutions and news sources:

The ASEAN Secretariat; The ASEAN-Korea Centre; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea; Channel News Asia; The Borneo Bulletin; Khmer Times; Phnom Penh Post; The Jakarta Post; The Laotian Times; The Star; The Myanmar Times; The Philippine Star; The Straits Times; Bangkok Post; Nhan Dan; Vietnam News Agency; The Korean Central News Agency; NK News; NK Pro; Yonhap News Agency; and the Korea JoongAng Daily.