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FROM THE EDITOR

This annual report reflects the ongoing efforts of the Asia-Pacific Studies Department to provide timely and policy-oriented analysis of developments shaping one of the most dynamic regions of the contemporary international system. The Asia-Pacific today is characterized by rapid economic transformation, technological change, and an increasingly complex strategic environment, the implications of which extend well beyond the region itself.

The materials collected in this report focus on key trends and emerging issues that are relevant for understanding the evolving role of Asia-Pacific actors in global and regional processes. Rather than offering a comprehensive overview, the report highlights selected analytical perspectives that help illuminate how regional dynamics interact with broader geopolitical, economic, and institutional shifts.

A particular emphasis is placed on examining how these developments affect Central Asia and Uzbekistan's external engagement. As regional and global interdependencies deepen, analytical clarity and nuanced assessment become essential for identifying opportunities, managing risks, and formulating balanced policy approaches.

The aim of this report is to contribute to informed discussion and expert dialogue by presenting research-based insights grounded in empirical observation and comparative analysis. It is intended as a reference point for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners seeking to better understand the Asia-Pacific region and its growing relevance in a changing international context.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Asia-Pacific region remains a central arena of global political, economic, and strategic transformation. Intensifying competition among major powers, the restructuring of global supply chains, and the growing intersection of security, technology, and development agendas have significantly reshaped regional dynamics. The Asia-Pacific Studies Department examines these processes through the prism of structural change, strategic adaptation, and the evolving behavior of both regional and extra-regional actors.

A defining feature of the current period is the deepening systemic rivalry between the United States and the People's Republic of China. This competition increasingly transcends trade and tariff disputes, extending into technology governance, industrial policy, critical minerals, security partnerships, and normative influence. While episodic tactical de-escalation remains possible, structural drivers of rivalry persist, shaping regional alignments and influencing the strategic choices of middle and smaller powers across Asia and Eurasia.

China's external behavior reflects a gradual transition from a primarily economically driven engagement model toward a more comprehensive approach that integrates security considerations, technological self-reliance, and institutional influence. Policy documents and recent leadership decisions indicate Beijing's growing emphasis on resilience, supply chain security, and the international promotion of Chinese development and governance models. These trends have direct implications for neighboring regions, including Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the wider Indo-Pacific.

At the same time, U.S. policy toward the Asia-Pacific continues to combine elements of containment, selective engagement, and alliance consolidation. Despite fluctuations in rhetoric and tactics across administrations, Washington maintains a consistent strategic objective of preserving technological leadership and limiting China's ability to shape regional rules and institutions unilaterally. This approach reinforces the strategic importance of partners such as Japan, South Korea, and

emerging middle powers, while also increasing the geopolitical salience of Central Asia as a space of indirect competition.

Within this context, regional actors are pursuing increasingly nuanced and pragmatic foreign policies. States such as Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Central Asian countries seek to preserve strategic autonomy through diversification of partnerships, selective engagement with major powers, and participation in multiple institutional frameworks. These strategies reflect a broader regional preference for flexibility over alignment and for economic pragmatism over ideological confrontation.

The report highlights that economic transformation and energy transition have become key vectors of strategic interaction in the Asia-Pacific. Issues such as hydrogen energy development, industrial modernization, critical raw materials, and green technologies increasingly serve not only economic objectives but also broader geopolitical and security goals. Japan's active promotion of advanced energy technologies and China's focus on technological self-sufficiency illustrate how innovation has become a core element of foreign policy.

Another important dimension examined in this volume is the growing role of regional and cross-regional connectivity. Transport corridors, logistics hubs, and trade routes linking East Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe are gaining strategic importance amid efforts to diversify away from traditional chokepoints. These processes elevate the relevance of Central Asia as both a transit region and a potential industrial platform, while simultaneously exposing it to intensified external interest and competition.

The Asia-Pacific Studies Center underscores that the region is entering a phase characterized less by stable blocs and more by fluid configurations of interests. Cooperation and competition increasingly coexist within the same bilateral and multilateral relationships. As a result, regional stability will depend not only on the behavior of major powers but also on the capacity of middle and smaller states to manage risks, leverage external interest for development, and strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms.

Overall, the findings presented in this section suggest that the Asia-Pacific will remain a key driver of global transformation in the coming decade. Understanding the

region requires moving beyond binary frameworks of rivalry and alignment and toward a more differentiated analysis of interests, capabilities, and adaptive strategies. For Uzbekistan and Central Asia more broadly, engagement with the Asia-Pacific offers both opportunities for technological and economic advancement and challenges related to strategic balancing in an increasingly complex international environment.

On the Foreign Policy Approaches of the New U.S. Administration toward China

By A. Bobokhonov, U. Ishankhodjaev, F. Jamalov

Research Fellows, IAIS, University of World Economy and Diplomacy

The second presidential term of **Donald Trump** marks a new phase in the evolution of US-China relations, one characterized by heightened uncertainty, strategic turbulence, and a pronounced degree of policy fluidity. Experience from



Trump's first term suggests that, under "Trumpism," U.S. foreign economic policy tends to deviate from institutionalized mechanisms and multilateral frameworks in favor of a transactional approach aimed at securing short-term economic gains and domestic political leverage.

During Trump's first presidency, China was explicitly designated as the principal strategic challenger to U.S. primacy. Although the administration of **Joe Biden** publicly emphasized stabilization, Washington in practice expanded export controls, restricted China's access to advanced technologies, and encouraged allies in Europe and Asia to coordinate policies designed to limit Beijing's strategic influence.

A key difference between the two administrations lies in their strategic objectives: while the Biden administration prioritized long-term containment through alliance-building and institutional frameworks, Trump has consistently emphasized the prospect of a personalized "deal," the substance of which remains ambiguous but is expected, in his view, to deliver tangible benefits to the United States.

At the same time, the U.S. political establishment demonstrates a rare degree of bipartisan consensus regarding China as a systemic challenge to American leadership. This perception has encouraged key US allies, particularly **Japan** and **South Korea**, to increase defense expenditures and deepen security coordination with Washington.



The prevailing consensus reflects a broader shift in U.S. strategic culture, in which China is increasingly framed as the principal competitor within the global order. It is within this paradigm that the foreign policy team surrounding Trump has taken shape, including figures known for their firm positions on China policy, such as **Marco Rubio**, **Michael Waltz**, **Pete Hegseth**, and **John Ratcliffe**.

One factor complicating bilateral relations is the limited presence of stable, trust-based communication channels. Members of the new U.S. foreign policy team have limited prior engagement with Beijing, while China's current decision-making structure is increasingly centralized. President **Xi Jinping** has consolidated governance through a tightly managed leadership hierarchy, with key figures drawn primarily from domestic political networks rather than from officials with extensive experience in sustained dialogue with Washington.

Trump's foreign policy approach remains predominantly instrumental. It is grounded in the assumption that international engagement should produce immediate, visible, and quantifiable returns. Analytical assessments by US academic institutions indicate that Trump's second term places greater emphasis on economic outcomes and comparatively less weight on ideological considerations. Within this logic, the United States is expected to secure jobs, investment, and technological advantages, while China is implicitly encouraged to shoulder a greater share of responsibility for global public goods, including supply chain stability and climate-related challenges.

This preference for simplicity, however, contributes to an eclectic diplomatic style in which restrictive economic measures coexist with public rhetoric emphasizing personal rapport between leaders. Such oscillation reflects the personalized and improvisational nature of Trump's diplomacy, wherein China's leadership is perceived simultaneously as a strategic competitor and as a potential partner in a high-profile bilateral arrangement. Within this framework, tariff policy functions as a mechanism of calibrated pressure rather than as part of a clearly articulated long-term strategy.

Despite the sharp escalation of tariffs on Chinese goods, analysts note that the overall contours of Trump's China strategy remain only partially defined. China continues to account for a substantial share of U.S. imports, particularly in consumer electronics and manufactured goods, underscoring the persistence of structural interdependence. From Trump's perspective, these asymmetries represent leverage intended to incentivize Beijing toward concessions favorable to the United States.

Recent market dynamics suggest a degree of short-term resilience on the Chinese side, even as international financial institutions caution that sustained tariff pressure could negatively affect China's growth trajectory. At the same time, official Chinese economic targets signal continuity and confidence, despite signs of slower export growth and deflationary pressures.

Notwithstanding increasingly confrontational rhetoric, the United States and China remain deeply interconnected. Bilateral trade volumes have continued to grow, and together the two economies account for a significant share of global output, according to international financial institutions. Global supply chains, cross-border investment flows, and technological interdependencies form a dense network that would be difficult to dismantle without substantial economic costs for both sides.

Past experience suggests that escalating trade restrictions risk producing unintended strategic consequences, including the acceleration of China's diversification toward alternative markets and partners. Measures aimed at economic decoupling also carry implications for the broader international system, potentially encouraging greater fragmentation and competitive alignment among major powers.

A critical dimension of US-China rivalry concerns access to critical minerals and strategic materials. China's dominant position in the extraction and processing of rare earth elements grants it considerable influence within global supply chains. In response to U.S. technology restrictions, Beijing has introduced export controls on select materials, heightening concerns in Washington about long-term vulnerabilities and reinforcing efforts to diversify supply sources through partnerships with resource-rich states.

From the Chinese perspective, responses to the renewed Trump presidency are mixed. On the one hand, Chinese policymakers are expanding engagement with

emerging markets and seeking to reduce exposure to U.S.-centric trade channels. On the other, segments of China's expert community interpret Trump's return as evidence of growing polarization and institutional strain within Western political systems. This assessment portrays the United States as a power facing internal challenges, yet retaining substantial global influence.

Security-related competition continues to evolve alongside economic rivalry, increasing the risk of misperception and unintended escalation. Although the likelihood of a deliberate military confrontation remains low, heightened military activity, intensified nationalist discourse, and recurrent incidents in sensitive regions such as the **South China Sea** and the **Taiwan Strait** raise concerns about crisis stability. In the absence of robust de-escalation mechanisms, the probability of localized crises remains elevated.



Both sides have expressed interest in reducing tensions through high-level engagement, including the prospect of a summit between Trump and Xi. Preliminary discussions on timing suggest that such a meeting could serve as an entry point for renewed dialogue, even as ongoing economic measures continue to shape negotiating positions.

At the same time, the Trump administration is reportedly considering additional steps to limit Chinese investment, adjust educational and research exchanges, and expand sectoral restrictions on advanced technologies. Beijing has responded by emphasizing its readiness to defend national interests while signaling continued openness to negotiations aimed at preventing further escalation.

Prominent analysts caution that sustained confrontation with China could prove more prolonged and resource-intensive than previous great-power rivalries. Protectionist policies risk weakening established alliances while creating opportunities for Beijing to expand its global engagement.

Conclusions. The prevailing view within the expert community is that China will be compelled to adapt to the evolving U.S. policy environment during Trump's second term. Deep structural contradictions between the two powers - economic, ideological,

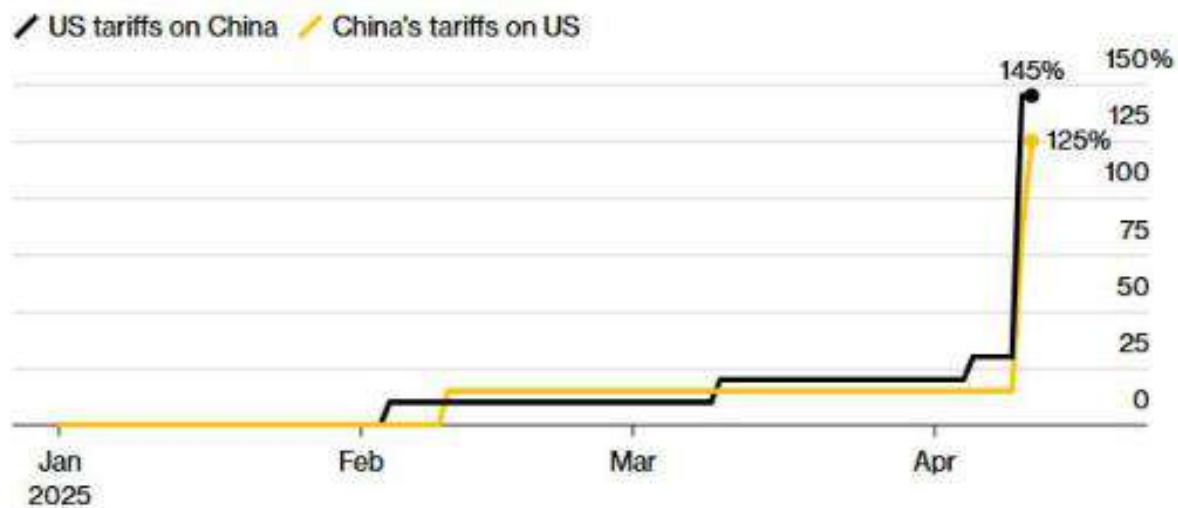
and geopolitical are unlikely to be resolved in the short term. Unlike previous systemic rivals, China is deeply embedded in both the global and U.S. economies, rendering abrupt disengagement costly and difficult.

At the same time, mutual interdependence may provide a foundation for pragmatic dialogue and managed competition. The future trajectory of U.S.–China relations will depend on both sides’ capacity to balance domestic political pressures with the realities of international competition and ongoing transformations within the global system.

The PRC's Response to the Tariff Policy of Donald Trump

Abbos Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center (IAIS)

Between 2 and 9 April of the current year, the United States significantly revised its tariff regime on Chinese goods. Over this period, tariffs were raised multiple times, ultimately reaching an effective rate of 145 percent on the majority of Chinese exports to the U.S. market. In response, **China** announced reciprocal measures, increasing its own tariffs on U.S. imports from an initial level of 34 percent to a cumulative rate of up to 125 percent.



Источник: данные собраны Bloomberg.

By adopting reciprocal measures, Beijing signaled its unwillingness to accept unilateral economic pressure and emphasized its intention to safeguard national interests through proportionate responses. China's countermeasures were designed in a targeted manner and focused on several key areas.

First, Chinese tariffs were applied to U.S. agricultural products. Tariff increases in the range of 10–15 percent are expected to affect U.S. agricultural exporters, particularly in states where farming plays a significant economic role. In 2024, agricultural goods accounted for approximately 26 percent of U.S. exports to China. As such, these measures may exert pressure on segments of the U.S. agricultural sector while remaining calibrated rather than comprehensive.

Second, China introduced measures affecting selected U.S. defense-related supply chains. A number of U.S. companies operating in sensitive sectors were placed under export control restrictions, limiting access to certain strategic materials. Additional entities associated with arms-related transactions were subjected to regulatory measures that restrict their operations within the Chinese market. These steps reflect Beijing's broader emphasis on national security considerations in the context of economic competition.

Third, institutional and regulatory instruments were applied to U.S. companies operating in China. Chinese authorities initiated investigations into compliance with customs and trade regulations and introduced selective restrictions on market access for a limited number of firms. According to official statements, these actions were taken within the framework of domestic legislation and international trade rules.

Chinese officials have stressed that these measures are not intended to escalate tensions, but rather to protect legitimate national interests and reinforce China's negotiating position. Analysts note that Beijing possesses a wide range of economic instruments, yet has opted for a restrained and targeted approach, seeking to emphasize proportionality and legal justification.



At the same time, China has implemented a set of domestic and external measures aimed at mitigating the potential economic impact of reduced access to the U.S. market and at strengthening economic resilience.

First, in anticipation of tariff-related pressures on economic growth in 2025, the Chinese government established a stabilization fund totaling approximately 1.2 trillion yuan (USD 165 billion), alongside a supplementary compensation mechanism amounting to 300 billion yuan (USD 41 billion), designed to support liquidity and affected industries.

Second, expanding domestic consumption has become a policy priority. In recent years, a significant share of Chinese export-oriented companies has reoriented toward the domestic market, resulting in a substantial increase in internal sales. Government

initiatives include targeted subsidies, rural consumption programs, and incentives for the purchase of new energy vehicles. The stated objective is to further raise the contribution of domestic demand to GDP over the medium term.

Third, Beijing has continued to diversify its external trade by gradually reducing reliance on the U.S. market and expanding engagement with the **European Union, ASEAN, and countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative**. In 2024, the share of Chinese exports to the United States declined, while trade volumes with alternative partners increased. Early 2025 data indicate continued growth in trade with Europe, Southeast Asia, and BRI partner countries, alongside a contraction in bilateral trade with the United States.



Parallel to this, China has pursued production diversification by relocating selected manufacturing capacities to Southeast Asia and other regions, thereby enhancing supply chain flexibility.

Fourth, China has activated diplomatic channels aimed at maintaining and expanding trade relations with a broad range of partners. Outreach efforts have included dialogue with several U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as intensified engagement with Southeast Asian countries. In this context, **Xi Jinping's** regional diplomacy underscores Beijing's emphasis on economic cooperation and regional stability.



In addition, China has signaled interest in adjusting procurement strategies in the civil aviation sector and expanding economic engagement with European partners. Selective regulatory measures in the services and cultural sectors have also been introduced, reflecting a broader effort to balance external pressure with internal policy tools.

Chinese analysts generally assess that tariff-based pressure may yield short-term effects but is unlikely to alter China's long-term economic trajectory. Compared to the earlier phase of trade tensions in the late 2010s, China is viewed as better prepared, with a more diversified industrial base, enhanced technological capabilities, and broader international economic partnerships. Acknowledging the broader economic implications of elevated tariffs, the United States announced exemptions for several categories of consumer electronics and technology products. These items represent segments where domestic U.S. production capacity remains limited. Chinese experts interpret this move as a pragmatic adjustment that reduces immediate market disruption and reflects the complexity of managing interdependent supply chains.

Despite these developments, both sides currently demonstrate limited readiness for substantive compromise. Attempts to restore high-level communication channels in the early phase of the renewed tariff measures have yielded few tangible results, highlighting the absence of stable mechanisms for sustained dialogue.

Chinese analysts further note that prolonged tariff escalation could disproportionately affect export-dependent middle-income economies and contribute to global capital volatility. In this context, Beijing has expressed interest in deepening cooperation with partners across the Global South, Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Such engagement is framed as part of a broader effort to promote economic diversification and shared development opportunities.

Overall Assessment. Given the substantial combined weight of the United States and China in the global economy, sustained trade tensions between the two are likely to generate broader systemic effects. While reciprocal measures may continue in the near term, most experts assess that both sides remain interested in preventing uncontrolled escalation.

Importantly, Beijing does not frame its policy objectives in terms of inflicting economic damage on the United States. Rather, China's response, including tariff measures, appears primarily aimed at signaling resolve and strengthening its position ahead of potential negotiations. In this sense, current policies may be understood less as a path toward prolonged confrontation and more as part of a broader effort to shape future dialogue under more balanced conditions.

US-China Trade Arrangements Following the Trump-Xi Meeting in Busan

Madinakhon Alimova, Senior Research Fellow, IAIS

The meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping on **October 30, 2025**, in Busan marked the first in-person contact between the two leaders since 2019 and was widely regarded as



an important indicator of the current state of US-China trade relations. During the meeting, the two sides reached an **oral understanding** aimed at temporarily stabilizing the most sensitive areas of bilateral trade.

The US administration agreed to reduce the so-called “**fentanyl tariff**” to **10%** and to postpone the introduction of new sanctions targeting Chinese companies. In return, Beijing committed to a **one-year suspension** of its planned export restrictions on rare earth elements as critical components for electronics, high-tech manufacturing, and defense industries. This move carries considerable weight, as **The Times of Central Asia** notes that China processes around **90%** of the world’s rare earth metals and accounts for approximately **70%** of global extraction, making it a central supplier in international value chains.

Despite the positive tone of the announcement, experts have described the outcome as a **tactical pause** rather than a **strategic shift**. According to **Lukas Fiala**, Director of the **China Foresight Project** at **LSE IDEAS**, the meeting represents a temporary truce intended to reduce the risk of further escalation without addressing the structural roots of competition. Fiala emphasizes that the fundamental drivers of strategic rivalry as technological autonomy, industrial policy, and supply chain control remain unchanged and will continue to shape the nature of US-China relations.

Analysts cited by **The Times of Central Asia** similarly argue that the Busan agreement does not signify a strategic rapprochement between the two powers. Rather, it reflects an attempt to reduce short-term volatility amid global market fluctuations,

the downturn in the electronics sector, and rising demand for critical minerals. Many experts thus interpret the talks as a form of “**recalibration**”, through which both sides seek to minimize geoeconomic risks without altering their long-term strategic orientations.

For **Central Asia**, the Trump-Xi negotiations carry particular significance. The temporary easing of tensions between Washington and Beijing may reduce external pressures that had driven the US to accelerate the diversification of critical mineral supply chains. However, the long-term logic remains unchanged: structural competition between the US and China will persist, and the diversification of supply routes, including those running through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and other regional states, will remain a core strategic objective for Washington. In this sense, the Busan meeting sets the **tone** for the next phase of dialogue rather than redefining the strategic priorities of either side.

In sum, the Busan negotiations embody a combination of tactical de-escalation and ongoing structural competition. While they have softened immediate trade frictions, they do not alter the strategic trajectories of either Washington or Beijing. For Central Asia where US-backed initiatives on critical minerals and infrastructure are advancing, this development underscores the need to maintain a **multi-vector foreign policy** while remaining attentive to potential adjustments in US messaging amid the short-term stabilization of the US-China dialogue.

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The tariff policy initiated by President Donald Trump's administration has been driven by the objective of reducing structural imbalances in U.S. external trade with major economic partners, including close political allies. Approaching foreign economic relations from a transactional and results-oriented perspective, President Trump has consistently elevated economic interests to the level of strategic priority, increasingly linking trade arrangements with broader alliance-related issues and burden-sharing expectations.

Within this framework, Washington has sought to revise long-standing assumptions of the post-war international economic order, emphasizing that access to the U.S. market should be regarded as a conditional privilege rather than an unconditional entitlement. The policy shift has contributed to heightened uncertainty in global trade, affected investor sentiment, and complicated economic forecasting for key partners. It has also encouraged the United States to pursue country-by-country negotiations, focusing on achieving tangible outcomes with strategic partners, including Japan.

Trade and Strategic Relevance of the U.S.–Japan Economic Relationship. U.S.–Japan trade remains one of the most significant bilateral economic relationships in the world, with implications extending beyond the two states and affecting regional supply chains and global market stability. In 2024, total trade in goods between the United States and Japan amounted to approximately **USD 227.9 billion**. U.S. exports to Japan reached **USD 79.7 billion**, while imports from Japan accounted for **USD 148.2 billion**, resulting in a trade imbalance of around **USD 68.5 billion** in Japan's favor.

Beyond its economic dimension, U.S.–Japan cooperation is anchored in long-standing security commitments, including the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. This alliance continues to play a central role in regional stability in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, Washington's evolving approach suggests that economic and

security tracks are increasingly interconnected, as U.S. decision-makers call for greater contributions from allies in areas such as defense spending and strategic resilience.

The Tariff Agenda and Pressure on Key Japanese Export Sectors. From Japan's perspective, the tariff agenda has created a substantial challenge for the bilateral economic pillar of the alliance. The United States introduced tariff measures targeting major categories of Japanese exports, including automobiles and industrial products. The automotive sector has been particularly exposed due to its importance for Japanese manufacturing, employment, and export revenues.

The pressure associated with tariff measures has been reflected in corporate financial projections and strategic planning among major Japanese producers. Japanese firms have faced incentives to reconsider production geography, supply chain configurations, and investment priorities. In addition to direct impacts on exports, broader uncertainty has contributed to weaker investor confidence and volatility in Japanese financial markets.

Domestic Constraints Shaping Japan's Policy Response. Japan's ability to respond to U.S. tariff pressure has been shaped by domestic political and fiscal constraints. While Tokyo has gradually increased defense-related expenditures and adopted new strategic planning approaches, a rapid escalation in spending commitments would remain politically difficult, particularly in a context of electoral cycles, public concerns over inflation, and competing demands for social support measures.

The combination of economic pressures and internal political considerations has influenced Japan's negotiating posture. Tokyo has sought to balance its interest in preserving stable alliance relations with the need to protect key national industries and maintain fiscal sustainability.

Japan's Institutional and Diplomatic Measures. Japan's government has treated the tariff issue as a major economic challenge requiring coordinated response. Tokyo has initiated inter-agency consultations, strengthened analytical capacity within relevant ministries, and pursued dialogue with U.S. counterparts to seek exemptions or adjustments, particularly in sectors considered strategically critical for Japan's economy. Japan has also emphasized its role as a major investor in the United States and a long-term contributor to the stability of bilateral economic relations.

In parallel, Japan adopted domestic mitigation measures aimed at cushioning the impact on affected industries and supporting households. These steps were intended to reduce short-term pressure on businesses while preserving economic confidence.

Regional Implications and Emerging Multilateral Signals. The tariff environment has also accelerated Japan's interest in strengthening economic coordination in the broader region, particularly in relation to supply chain stability and trade diversification. This has contributed to increased attention toward regional cooperation frameworks and dialogue on resilient industrial networks. Such developments reflect a broader trend in which economic security considerations are increasingly central to strategic decision-making across East Asia.

Key Implications. Overall, President Trump's tariff policy has introduced a new level of complexity into U.S.–Japan relations, placing pressure on trade cooperation while reinforcing the transactional logic increasingly visible in U.S. alliance management. Despite these challenges, the strategic value of the U.S.–Japan partnership remains substantial, particularly in the context of broader Indo-Pacific dynamics.

In the short term, tariff-related uncertainty has contributed to risks for Japan's export performance and industrial stability. In the long term, the trajectory of U.S.–Japan relations will depend on whether the two sides can reach a sustainable compromise that preserves alliance cohesion while addressing trade concerns. Should negotiations result in partial adjustments, bilateral relations may return to a more predictable framework. If not, Japan may further diversify its economic partnerships and expand cooperation through regional platforms to reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

At the same time, the evolving U.S. approach also creates incentives for Japanese companies to deepen industrial presence inside the American market, potentially generating new business opportunities through localized production, investment expansion, and targeted supply chain restructuring.

Chinese Society's Perception of The Los Angeles Protests

Ubaydullo Khojabekov, IAIS volunteer

The recent protests in Los Angeles, sparked by the Trump administration's tightening of immigration policy, have caused a huge stir both inside and outside the US. This situation is being discussed particularly actively in the Chinese media, due to both domestic political and geopolitical factors. This article examines the interpretation of events by the Chinese media, the expert community and users of digital platforms, and analyses the political narratives that are emerging in the context of US-China relations.

The mass protests in Los Angeles, dubbed the 'Los Angeles riots' by the press, were a reaction to the intensified activities of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) against illegal immigrants. The use of federal forces, including the National Guard and Marine Corps units, drew criticism from both American society and abroad, becoming the subject of controversy over violations of the principles of civil governance and federal law (in particular, the **Posse Comitatus Act**).

California Governor Gavin Newsom described what was happening as a 'threat to democracy' and warned of the possible transformation of the United States into an authoritarian state. Against this backdrop, suspicions of external influence on the protest movements intensified in political discourse. Republican congressmen have claimed that the protesters may have ties to organisations affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Particular attention is being paid to Neville Roy Singham, an American entrepreneur who, according to a number of sources, is linked to the financial support of left-wing movements in the United States, including the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL).

The events in Los Angeles have attracted widespread public interest in the Chinese information space. The digital platforms WeChat and Little Red Book have become venues for ironic comments, among which the expression 'a beautiful sight' has become particularly popular. Thus, part of Chinese society perceives what is happening in the United States as a 'backlash' against American foreign policy rhetoric.

State-run publications, including **Global Times** and **China Daily**, interpret the protests as a reflection of a systemic crisis in the American model of governance. Editorial articles emphasise the duality of the US approach to protest movements: while they are supported abroad as a manifestation of democratic freedoms, they are met with harsh repression on US soil.

At the same time, a significant portion of Chinese users and commentators are taking a wait-and-see or neutral stance, preferring to remain observers. One popular comment on the WeChat platform, quoted by **The Monitor**, reads: “As Chinese people, we should not take sides in what is happening in America. We can simply be observers and watch this picturesque American spectacle unfold — that is enough”.

In the context of analysing Chinese perceptions, the events in Los Angeles are seen not only as a local crisis, but as a manifestation of deeper systemic failures in the governance of the largest Western state. Chinese analysts point out that President Trump may use the situation to mobilise the electorate and expand presidential prerogatives. But international attention to the use of force against peaceful protesters, as well as to the legal aspects of this intervention, may affect the foreign policy image of the United States as a ‘bulwark of democracy.’

Beijing is officially refraining from assessing the events, but is actively monitoring developments. The events in Los Angeles illustrate the vulnerability of democratic institutions in the face of internal contradictions and, according to Chinese commentators, may serve as a lesson on the need to focus on internal governance rather than foreign policy intervention.

EU-China Relations and the Prospects for Cooperation in Central Asia

By A. Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center, IAIS

M. Usmanova, Senior Research Fellow, IAIS

In recent years, competition between the **European Union** and **People's Republic of China** has entered a phase of gradual escalation. Despite objective incentives for closer coordination, including growing pressure from the **United States** on both Europe and China, the EU-China summits



held in 2024 and 2025 did not produce the expected thaw. Instead, they revealed a further deterioration of dialogue and consolidation of a systemic crisis in bilateral relations. Against this background, experts increasingly point to **Central Asia** as a potential new area of overlap for the economic interests of both the EU and China.

I. The Current Dynamics of EU-China Relations. According to **European Institute for Asian Studies**, the current state of EU-China relations can be described as one of a “structural trust deficit.” European concerns regarding excessive dependence on China have intensified, particularly since 2022, when the concept of “de-risking” became central to policy debates in Brussels. In practice, however, the implementation of this strategy remains inconsistent. Major EU economies, including **Germany** and **France**, continue to maintain close trade relations with Beijing, while several Central



and Eastern European states oppose overly restrictive measures due to potential economic costs. As a result, the EU remains internally divided over the formulation of a unified China policy.

Professor **Yang Cheng** of **Shanghai University of International Studies** highlights what he terms the “Ukraine crisis trap,” which has significantly distorted EU-China relations. While Beijing emphasizes its non-military stance and calls for dialogue, many European policymakers continue to

view China as a systemic rival. This perception undermines trust and limits the scope for pragmatic engagement.

The high-level meeting in 2025, marking the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the EU and China, was relocated to Beijing after **Xi Jinping** declined to travel to Brussels. The summit was shortened from two days to one, and the agenda was largely confined to formal issues, leaving little room for substantive discussion of sensitive topics.

Key sources of friction for Europe include China's strong position in several high-technology sectors, which European actors perceive as crowding out domestic competitors, as well as concerns over cyber activities and alleged unfair competition. These factors have prompted the EU to restrict the participation of Chinese companies in strategic sectors and public procurement. Trade imbalances remain a persistent issue, with EU imports from China exceeding €500 billion compared to approximately €200 billion in exports, alongside continued complaints about limited market access for European firms in China.

China's position on the war in Ukraine represents another area of contention. Beijing's declared neutrality is often interpreted in Europe as indirectly undermining sanctions against **Russia**, raising broader concerns about European security.

In response, the EU has formally designated China as a "systemic competitor" and intensified its de-risking policy, aimed at reducing dependencies in critical raw materials, technologies, and supply chains. In 2024, Brussels introduced higher tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles and strengthened controls on investment and high-tech exports. Targeted measures were also imposed on certain Chinese entities accused of facilitating sanctions circumvention. EU institutions increasingly frame these steps as a collective response to emerging strategic risks.

Control over rare earth exports has become an additional point of tension. According to the European Commission, China supplies approximately 98 percent of the EU's rare earth metals and magnets, which are essential for green technologies. This dependence heightens European concerns regarding supply chain resilience.

Beijing, for its part, has shown limited willingness to compromise. Many Chinese analysts view the EU as strategically constrained by its alignment with the United States

and therefore prioritize bilateral engagement with individual member states. In response to European demands, China often advances counter-conditions, including the removal of existing restrictions, without offering significant concessions on issues central to EU concerns.

Structural factors further complicate de-escalation. China's export-oriented economic model conflicts with European calls for trade rebalancing, while a large-scale shift toward domestic consumption would require adjustments that could challenge China's current development trajectory. European experts therefore warn that continued geopolitical escalation risks entrenching a cycle of sanctions and countermeasures, limiting economic and technological cooperation.

At the same time, Chinese policymakers continue to signal that selective cooperation remains possible. Climate policy and sustainable development are widely regarded as areas where dialogue has not fully broken down and where mutual interests remain evident.

II. Central Asia in the Context of EU-China Interaction. Despite rising tensions, both European and Chinese experts increasingly describe Central Asia as a potential “testing ground for trust” between the EU and China. The region is gaining prominence in European strategies related to critical minerals, energy security, and infrastructure development.



However, analysts from the European Institute for Asian Studies note that the EU is currently constrained by multiple challenges, including the ongoing Ukraine crisis, energy shortages, and political and economic pressure from the United States. These factors absorb significant financial and political resources, limiting Europe's investment presence in Central Asia relative to China.

This assessment is echoed by **Emin Huseynov** of the **Center for Eurasian Studies at Ibn Haldun University**, who argues that direct competition between the EU and China in Central Asia remains limited. China dominates transport infrastructure investment, while EU investment volumes lag considerably. European imports from the region consist predominantly of **Kazakhstan's** oil, whereas China secures a broader

range of raw materials. According to Huseynov, Europe could pursue more balanced partnerships by investing in local processing capacities and value-added production.



Ma Bin, Deputy Director of the **Center for Russian and Central Asian Studies at Fudan University**, notes that EU–China cooperation in Central Asia remains sensitive due to the spillover effects of the Ukraine conflict. Nevertheless, he identifies three areas where cooperation is feasible:

climate and environmental projects, transport initiatives such as the Middle Corridor, and business-to-business cooperation, provided political tensions are kept to a minimum. Importantly, such initiatives should be driven by Central Asian states themselves and may also involve third actors, including **Turkey** and the **Gulf states**.

Chinese experts emphasize that deeper regional integration within Central Asia is essential if the region is to leverage external interest as a development resource rather than becoming an arena of geopolitical rivalry. Reducing political risks, stabilizing economic conditions, and building sustainable partnerships are therefore viewed as key priorities.

According to **Mikael Weissmann** of the **Swedish Defence University**, Central Asian states should pursue a three-level autonomy strategy. This includes domestic reforms and social consolidation, regional cooperation through formats such as C5+1 and transport corridor development, and a multi-vector foreign policy that balances relations with major external powers. In this framework, Europe occupies a distinct niche through its focus on infrastructure, education, youth policy, and support for post-colonial transformation processes.

Overall Assessment. These dynamics create a complex external environment for Central Asia. On the one hand, deteriorating EU–China relations increase the risk of pressure to align with one side, exposure to secondary sanctions, and intensified competition over resources and influence. On the other hand, the region gains opportunities to attract investment from multiple directions, strengthen its role as a transit and industrial hub, and enhance its position within regional economic networks.

Both European and Chinese companies are increasingly interested in establishing logistics hubs in Central Asia. For China, the region also provides opportunities to diversify transport routes and expand engagement with Russia, Iran, and Southwest Asia. Freight volumes transiting through **Kazakhstan** and neighboring states to Europe increased approximately 2.5 times between 2021 and 2024, with further growth expected.

In the foreseeable future, deep-seated disagreements between the EU and China are unlikely to be resolved. Nevertheless, the high level of economic interdependence and the costs associated with severing ties constrain the shift toward open confrontation. Despite persistent tensions, Central Asia represents a rare space for pragmatic interaction, where competition between major powers may, under certain conditions, translate into development opportunities and enhanced regional resilience. At the same time, mutual sanctions and tariff measures continue to pose risks for third countries, including Central Asian states that depend on trade flows and transport links between Europe and China.

A. Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center

I. Gafarov, Head of the Center for Afghanistan and South Asian Studies



Traditionally, Mongolia has pursued a balanced, multi-vector foreign policy in its relations with **China** and **Russia**, while simultaneously adhering to the concept of the “third neighbor.” Within this framework, the

United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea are viewed as key partners capable of diversifying Ulaanbaatar’s foreign policy and external economic orientations.

At present, interest in the role of “third neighbors” is also being expressed by **India, Iran, Pakistan**, and the countries of Central Asia. Despite pursuing the third neighbor policy, Mongolia continues to take into account the interests of China and Russia in order to avoid provoking tensions with its two immediate neighbors.

***Background note:** The “third neighbor” policy is Mongolia’s foreign policy strategy aimed at strengthening relations with countries other than China and Russia, which are traditionally regarded as its first and second neighbors and exert significant influence on Mongolia.*

Despite the close partnership between Beijing and Moscow, the two have historically competed for influence in Mongolia. Today, against the backdrop of Russia’s strategic focus on the conflict in Ukraine, China views the situation as an opportunity to consolidate its position in Mongolia. Mongolia’s geographic vulnerability is thus transformed into a strategic asset, as its rich natural resources and transit potential attract interest from both China and Russia. At the same time, notwithstanding Ulaanbaatar’s efforts to pursue an autonomous course, China and Russia continue to exert substantial influence over Mongolia’s foreign policy.

China effectively dominates Mongolia’s trade, supplying consumer goods and purchasing raw materials. Russia, for its part, retains a strong position as the country’s

primary supplier of energy resources. An analysis of Chinese and Russian policies toward Mongolia highlights several key aspects.

I. China's Policy toward Mongolia. The Mongolian vector represents one of the most important directions of China's geopolitical strategy, encompassing historical, political, economic, and ethno-cultural dimensions in both foreign and domestic policy contexts.

Background note: Mongolia gained independence from China in 1924 with the support of the Soviet Union. Beijing formally recognized Mongolia only in 1949, under pressure from Moscow. During the Cold War, Mongolia functioned as a Soviet satellite and buffer between the USSR and China. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations with China improved significantly. Trade expanded, border demarcation was completed, and the relationship was elevated to a strategic partnership in 2011 and to a comprehensive partnership in 2014.

Today, China benefits from access to Mongolia's natural resources and transit routes. According to Mongolian experts, China's real influence in Mongolia lies less in political rhetoric and more in its economic presence. Mongolia seeks to reduce its economic



dependence on China, which accounts for over 90 percent of Mongolian exports and around 40 percent of imports. In 2024, bilateral trade reached USD 27.4 billion, with Mongolia recording a trade surplus of approximately USD 4 billion.

Over the past 18 years, China has remained one of the leading sources of foreign investment in Mongolia. Chinese direct investment accounts for around 21 percent of total foreign inflows. In 2024 alone, Chinese companies invested USD 29.4 billion, an increase of 10 percent compared to 2023. Mongolia's dependence on China extends beyond trade to include capital, technology, and access to maritime routes through the port of Tianjin.

As noted by A. Erdenebileg, a representative of the Mongolian School of Business in Ulaanbaatar, historical mistrust toward China persists in Mongolian society. As a

result, cooperation is largely concentrated in trade, investment, and economic sectors rather than in the political sphere.



China is interested in deepening its strategic partnership with Mongolia, particularly in mining, infrastructure, energy, and finance. However, cooperation based on “loans in exchange for resources” carries risks for Mongolia. A frequently cited

example is the 2011 agreement with the Chinese company Chalco, under which loan repayment was linked to coal deliveries. Over six years, Mongolia paid approximately USD 420 million under this arrangement, including interest. Experts warn that excessive reliance on such mechanisms could increase Mongolia’s economic dependence on a single partner.

From a demographic perspective, the presence of a large Mongolian-speaking population in China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region acts as a constraint on the use of coercive measures by Beijing. Any pressure on Mongolia could generate both domestic and external complications for China. Within China, there are numerous administrative units with Mongolian populations, including dozens of townships and several counties and prefectures. The deterioration of interethnic relations with Mongols inside China is viewed as highly undesirable, especially given the historically sensitive relationship between the region and the central authorities.

Under these conditions, China has opted for a strategy centered on economic engagement and soft power rather than pressure. Policymakers in Beijing recognize that coercive approaches could prompt Mongolia to reorient its foreign policy toward Russia or other major powers, thereby creating unfavorable conditions for China.

Despite Mongolia’s cultural and educational orientation toward Western countries, its economic dependence on China remains substantial. Geographic realities objectively limit the scope for diversification, as no alternative partner can currently match the scale and accessibility of Chinese markets and port infrastructure.

II. Russia's Policy toward Mongolia.

Russia's primary interests in Mongolia are linked to cooperation in transport, energy, and natural resource development. Mongolia remains dependent on Russia in certain sectors, particularly electricity and petroleum products. For decades, the country's railway connections linked it exclusively with the Soviet Union and later with Russia.



Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian language served as Mongolia's main foreign language, and much of the national elite was educated in Soviet universities. As a result, a significant portion of the older generation within Mongolia's political and economic elite remains Russian-speaking and maintains favorable views toward Russia. At the same time, younger Mongolians increasingly pursue education in third neighbor countries, especially in the West.

Politically, Mongolia views Russia as an important strategic partner capable of balancing China's growing influence. Given Mongolia's deep economic ties with China, cooperation with Moscow helps Ulaanbaatar preserve its multi-vector approach. Annual joint military exercises such as "Selenga" carry both practical and symbolic significance, signaling Mongolia's continued security cooperation with Russia amid international uncertainty.

From Russia's perspective, Mongolia functions as a geopolitical buffer limiting China's influence in Siberia and the Russian Far East. In the context of strained relations with the West, Moscow seeks to strengthen ties with neutral or friendly states. Mongolia is therefore perceived as both a strategically important neighbor and a reputational asset that demonstrates Russia's capacity to engage with countries of differing political systems.

Economically, Mongolia is regarded as a promising partner within the framework of Eurasian integration. Ulaanbaatar has shown sustained interest in cooperation with the **Eurasian Economic Union**, either as an observer or through sector-specific agreements.



agricultural and light industrial products. As of early 2025, Russia accounted for approximately 10.2 percent of Mongolia's foreign trade turnover, while trade growth between January and April 2025 exceeded 25 percent.



through Mongolian territory, are particularly significant. Russia views this route as a means of redirecting gas exports toward Asia, while China has approached the project cautiously.

In the longer term, Ulaanbaatar aims to position itself as a key transit hub connecting Europe, Russia, China, and Central Asia. However, the 2014 initiative “China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor” has yet to produce tangible results. Analysts cite Russia’s constrained capacity under sanctions and Mongolia’s reluctance to deepen dependence on China as contributing factors.

The conflict in Ukraine has tested Mongolia’s foreign policy balance. Mongolia adopted a neutral position in international forums, including abstentions in the United Nations. Some analysts argue that maintaining this balance is becoming increasingly difficult. High-level contacts with Russia have generated reputational challenges for Mongolia and complicated the implementation of the third neighbor concept.

According to experts from *The Diplomat*, while Russia was previously seen as a counterweight to China, China's influence in Mongolia now significantly exceeds Russia's capabilities. At the same time, major infrastructure projects could partially strengthen Russia's position, though their implementation remains uncertain.

In the context of ongoing geopolitical shifts, it is becoming increasingly challenging for Mongolia to maintain a stable balance between China and Russia without sufficient space for a genuinely autonomous foreign policy. Despite ambitious efforts to strengthen ties with third neighbors, these relationships remain limited in scope and are unlikely, in the near term, to offset the structural influence of Mongolia's two immediate neighbors.

Trends in the Development of Relations between China and the United Arab Emirates

Abbos Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center (IAIS)



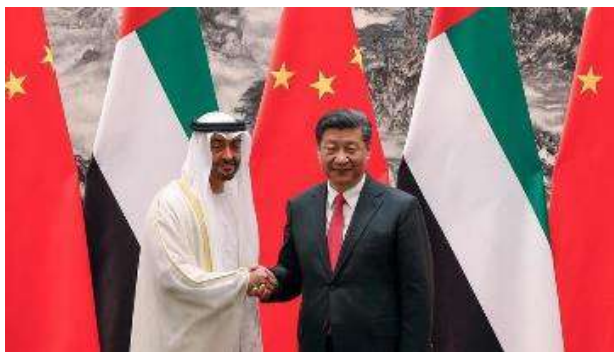
The diplomatic relations between China and the United Arab Emirates were established in 1984. In 2024, the two countries marked the 40th anniversary of bilateral cooperation. Over four decades, China–UAE relations have evolved into a multidimensional partnership encompassing economic, political, cultural, and technological cooperation. Both countries actively participate in multilateral frameworks, including **BRICS**, while the UAE joined the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** as a dialogue partner in 2023.

A key milestone was the state visit of Chinese President **Xi Jinping** to the UAE in 2018, the first such visit in nearly three decades, during which the two sides agreed to establish a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The framework significantly broadened cooperation in trade, investment, energy, advanced technologies, and humanitarian exchanges.

Energy and Investment Cooperation. Energy trade remains a cornerstone of China–UAE economic relations. China sources a substantial share of its energy imports from Gulf countries, while simultaneously expanding exports and investment flows to the region. In this context, Abu Dhabi–based **Masdar** and the Chinese **Silk Road Fund** concluded a joint investment agreement worth USD 2.76 billion to support renewable energy projects under the **Belt and Road Initiative**.



Several flagship projects have emerged as part of this initiative, including industrial cooperation platforms and large-scale energy infrastructure. These projects reflect the alignment of China’s external economic engagement with the UAE’s long-term development and diversification strategies.



Political and Security Dialogue.

Political dialogue between China and the UAE has intensified in recent years, supported by regular high-level exchanges and coordination within international and regional forums. The two sides emphasize principles of development-oriented cooperation, sovereignty, and multilateralism, and continue to expand dialogue on security and defense-related issues, primarily through exchanges of experience, training, and institutional cooperation.

Joint activities between relevant agencies and periodic military-to-military contacts indicate a gradual broadening of engagement in this sphere, conducted within the framework of bilateral agreements and international norms.

Trade, Infrastructure, and Connectivity. China is the UAE's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding USD 100 billion in 2024. Both governments have expressed their intention to significantly expand this figure by 2030. The UAE plays a critical role as a logistics and re-export hub for Chinese goods across the Middle East and North Africa, reinforcing its position within regional supply chains.

Infrastructure cooperation has been particularly prominent. The development of the UAE's national railway network has benefited from the participation of Chinese engineering companies. The **Etihad Rail**, spanning approximately 1,200 kilometers, connects major industrial zones, logistics hubs, ports, and population centers, and forms part of the broader Gulf railway vision.



People-to-People and Educational Exchanges. Humanitarian cooperation has expanded steadily, with education and culture playing a central role. Academic exchanges are facilitated through national scholarship programs and institutional partnerships, including cooperation between Emirati universities and Chinese educational institutions. Cultural initiatives, such as language programs, artistic

exchanges, and academic mobility – have further strengthened mutual understanding and societal links.

Outlook. Despite the positive trajectory of bilateral relations, China-UAE cooperation operates within a complex regional and global environment shaped by intensified geopolitical competition. Both sides, however, consistently emphasize pragmatism, strategic balance, and the importance of diversified partnerships.

Looking ahead, China is expected to further expand its economic and diplomatic engagement in the Middle East, while the UAE is likely to consolidate its role as a key connectivity hub linking Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This convergence of interests suggests that China-UAE relations will continue to deepen, with an emphasis on economic resilience, infrastructure development, and long-term strategic coordination.

Abbos Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center, IAIS

In May of the current year, the Information Office of the State Council of the **People's Republic of China** released the White Paper “*China's National Security in the New Era*.” The document represents the first systematic public articulation of China's comprehensive approach to national security and is widely interpreted as outlining policy orientations for the medium term, tentatively covering the period 2026–2031.

Background note: *A White Paper is an official government document that presents a structured overview of state policy priorities and strategic approaches in a specific domain.*



Against the backdrop of an increasingly complex external environment and evolving domestic challenges, the Chinese authorities have opted to formalize a “holistic national security strategy.” The stated objective is not the securitization of all policy areas, but rather the enhancement of coordination, systemic coherence, and effectiveness in national security governance.

Analysis of the document and expert commentary highlights several key dimensions.

I. Strategic Significance of the Document



This is the first openly published strategic document in China's history devoted specifically to national security. Beyond outlining internal priorities, it signals Beijing's intention to assume a more visible and proactive role in global security affairs. The White Paper reflects a new

phase in China's external posture, aimed at presenting its policies as constructive and predictable, while also clarifying issues that Beijing considers fundamental to its security interests.

The document emphasizes that China's security agenda extends beyond territorial integrity and sovereignty to include active participation in shaping the international environment. Beijing positions itself as a contributor to global stability, economic resilience, and responses to emerging challenges such as cyber risks, public health threats, and climate change.

Many experts interpret the White Paper as evidence of a recalibration of China's self-perception from a primarily regional actor to a state with broader global responsibilities. This shift implies a greater emphasis on diplomacy, economic engagement, and participation in international institutions, alongside the protection of national interests. In this sense, the document illustrates a gradual departure from the earlier principle of maintaining a low international profile, reflecting changing geopolitical realities under the leadership of **Xi Jinping**.

Drivers and Core Perceptions. International analysts identify four major trends that have shaped China's national security priorities.

First, intensifying geopolitical competition among major powers, particularly the evolving relationship between the United States and China.

Second, a slowdown in economic globalization, which carries implications for



China's long-term development model. Third, heightened concerns regarding political and social stability amid regional and global uncertainty. Fourth, the growing impact of technological change and non-traditional security risks, including environmental pressures, cyber security, and public health.

The White Paper notes that external pressure on China has increased, generating new challenges for national security planning. It refers to foreign interference and destabilizing activities in regions that Beijing considers sensitive, while also expressing concern over rising military activity in the Asia-Pacific region. These developments are presented as factors necessitating enhanced preparedness and policy coordination.

The document argues that the current international environment requires a higher level of security capacity to support sustainable development and modernization. Accordingly, economic decision-making is increasingly framed through a national security lens, with an emphasis on risk assessment and resilience.

Some Western analysts observe that the White Paper implicitly acknowledges structural challenges facing China, including economic adjustment and social transformation. In this context, economic performance and social stability are presented as integral components of national security, reinforcing the importance of effective governance and institutional coordination.

European research institutions similarly note that the document reflects heightened awareness of uncertainty associated with the transition from rapid growth to a more structurally managed development phase. While references to openness and cooperation remain prominent, they are consistently framed in terms of China's own conditions and security considerations.



A central theme throughout the White Paper is the reduction of reliance on foreign technologies. Observers note that technological self-reliance is elevated to a strategic priority, with a focus on investment in critical infrastructure, innovation capacity, and supply chain resilience.

Key External Dimensions. Experts highlight three aspects of the White Paper that are particularly relevant to the current external security environment.

First, China seeks to portray itself as a stabilizing force in an increasingly volatile international system and as a supporter of open economic cooperation. This narrative is intended to reinforce China's image among developing countries as a responsible major power capable of contributing to security through non-confrontational means.

Second, the document addresses cross-strait relations, reiterating Beijing's preference for peaceful resolution while underscoring the importance it attaches to national unity. The language reflects continuity with long-standing positions, while emphasizing stability and dialogue.

Third, supply chain resilience is identified as a strategic priority. Food security receives particular attention, alongside policies aimed at agricultural self-sufficiency, energy diversification, investment in critical mineral resources, and the development of low-carbon technologies.



Global Security Initiatives and International Implications. The White Paper also underscores the role of the **Global Security Initiative**, proposed by Xi Jinping in 2022, as an integral component of China's national security outlook. The Initiative is presented as a framework for promoting

inclusive and cooperative security, particularly with partners in the Global South.

Background note: By the end of 2024, the Global Security Initiative had reportedly received support from 119 countries and international organizations and had been referenced in over 120 bilateral and multilateral policy documents.

Chinese scholars describe the Initiative as an effort to advance a more comprehensive and cooperative approach to international security, emphasizing dialogue, development, and mutual benefit. Beijing is expected to continue promoting this framework as part of its broader engagement in global governance and economic cooperation.

Overall, experts view the White Paper as an important signal of China's long-term strategic thinking in the field of national security. It reflects an effort to align security, development, and modernization objectives within a single policy framework, while enhancing China's ability to manage both internal and external risks.

Rather than indicating a shift toward confrontation, the public articulation of a national security strategy appears intended to clarify priorities, improve policy coordination, and shape China's external environment in a more predictable manner. In this sense, the White Paper can be understood as part of a broader attempt to balance national resilience with continued international engagement in a period of global uncertainty.

Expert Assessments of the Outcomes of the Fourth Plenum of the 20th CPC Central Committee

A. Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center, IAIS

M. Alimova, Senior Research Fellow, IAIS

The 4th Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) concluded in Beijing, approving the “Recommendations on the Formulation of the 15th Five-Year Plan for Socio-Economic Development of the PRC (2026–2030)”. The plenary reaffirmed the national course toward high-quality growth, innovative modernization, and technological self-reliance as strategic priorities of China’s long-term development.



At a press conference on October 24, representatives of China’s State Council outlined the key objectives of the new plan: sustained economic growth, deepening reform and opening-up, cultural and ecological development, strengthening national security, and revitalization of rural areas. According to Han Wenxiu, Executive Deputy Director of the Office of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission (CFEAC), particular emphasis will be placed on modernizing the agricultural sector, enhancing production quality, and improving rural infrastructure.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and Peking Ensign (October 18, 2025), China’s GDP grew by 5.3 percent in the first half of 2025, exceeding the target of “around 5 percent.” Growth in exports (+6.9%), retail sales (+4.6%), and industrial production (+6.2%) reflects the effectiveness of stimulus measures and the expansion of domestic demand.

Experts from the Center for China Analysis, Asia Society note that Beijing is “doubling down on innovation” to reduce external dependence and boost productivity.

The focus is on developing “new quality productive forces” driven by original technologies, digitalization, and artificial intelligence. Minister of Science and Technology Yin Hejun outlined four priorities: advancing fundamental research, achieving breakthroughs in critical technologies, integrating science and industry, and cultivating scientific talent.

Analysts at the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) similarly emphasize that China is “doubling down on innovation and high-tech industries,” continuing its pursuit of scientific and technological self-strengthening.

Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) Zheng Shanjie reaffirmed the goal of building a modern industrial system that combines the modernization of traditional sectors with the growth of emerging industries, services, and infrastructure.

According to the NDRC, government funds amounting to 500 billion yuan are expected to mobilize up to 5 trillion yuan in total investment, including 600 billion yuan in the fourth quarter of 2025. Experts note that this approach opens new opportunities for foreign partners, including Central Asian countries, to engage in projects related to industrial, energy, and transport modernization.



For China’s external partners, particularly Central Asia , this strategic orientation has tangible implications. It creates new opportunities for industrial cooperation, digitalization, green investment, and agricultural partnerships.

The development of high-tech and agricultural clusters in China could foster technology and knowledge exchange in areas such as agrotechnology, water efficiency, and agricultural processing. China’s focus on domestic consumption and high-quality imports also generates additional demand for agricultural and textile exports from Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, while the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) continues to offer new possibilities for transit and infrastructure projects.

A significant part of the plenary's agenda focused on intraparty discipline and personnel reshuffles. The CPC reaffirmed its commitment to a policy of "strict internal control" and an ongoing anti-corruption campaign.

General Zhang Shengmin was appointed to the Central Military Commission (CMC), while several high-ranking military and civilian officials, including General He Weidong and former Minister of Agriculture Tang Renjian, were expelled from the Party.

According to the Center for China Analysis, Asia Society, such measures reflect not weakness but rather the consolidation of Xi Jinping's authority, aimed at strengthening party discipline and governance efficiency.

As Reuters reports, these dismissals form part of the largest military purge in recent years, intended to restore discipline and command accountability. Analysts at the Beyond the Horizon International Strategic Studies Group (BtH/ISSG) and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) argue that the current anti-corruption campaign within the defense sector has a systemic managerial nature, designed to reinforce the command hierarchy and institutional effectiveness of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

In the economic and external policy domains, the plenary reaffirmed China's commitment to openness and multilateral trade. Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao announced expanded access to the services market, the removal of restrictions in several sectors, and new incentives for foreign investment.

According to Xinhua News Agency, beginning December 18, 2025, the island of Hainan will implement new customs regulations introducing zero tariffs for 74 percent of tariff lines — a step toward establishing a fully functional free-trade port and promoting cross-border commerce.

An article in the People's Daily under the pseudonym Zhong Caiwen (the official signature of the CFEAC Secretariat) emphasized that "China's new development philosophy has global significance: it not only suits China but also provides reliable solutions to global challenges." China positions itself as a defender of the multilateral trading system and seeks to "bring certainty to the global economy," contributing to a more stable environment for shared growth.

The outcomes of the 4th Plenary Session reaffirmed Beijing's steady commitment to domestic modernization, technological self-strengthening, and open integration into the global economy. For Central Asia, this translates into expanded opportunities to cooperate with one of the world's leading innovation hubs and to participate in emerging industrial, digital, and green initiatives that can shape a pragmatic and mutually beneficial framework for regional development.

China The Significance of the Third Plenum of the Communist Party of China for Central Asian Countries

Dr. Abbos Bobokhonov's article, published in the **China Currents** journal by the **China Research Center** in Atlanta (Georgia, USA), offers a detailed and nuanced analysis of how the recent Third Plenum of the Communist Party of China (CPC) may shape Beijing's policy directions, particularly as they relate to Central Asia. Drawing parallels with the historic Third Plenum of 1978, the author positions the latest assembly as a moment of introspection and recalibration in the face of mounting economic challenges within China — including a slowing growth rate, industrial contraction, and demographic pressures. The Plenum's adoption of the "Decision on Further Deepening Reform for Advancing Chinese Modernization" signals a continued commitment to market-oriented reforms, albeit under the cautious watch of party oversight.

Dr. Bobokhonov highlights how the outcomes of the Plenum have already catalysed intensified diplomatic exchanges and investment deals. Trade figures between China and Central Asia have risen markedly — from \$70 billion in 2022 to nearly \$95 billion in 2024 — complemented by massive investment pledges secured during recent presidential visits. These developments point to deepening interdependence, where Central Asia plays a dual role as both a source of raw materials and a logistical corridor linking China with Europe and the Middle East. Simultaneously, China's support for green energy initiatives in the region — including wind and solar energy projects by companies such as Xinjiang Goldwind — reveals a growing alignment with global climate commitments and the region's own ecological transformation goals.

Another emerging vector of cooperation identified in the article is agribusiness. With the Chinese leadership keen to ensure long-term food security, Central Asia's agricultural capacity is seen as a valuable complement to China's domestic needs. The Third Plenum's call to make China's vast market a shared global opportunity may pave the way for greater agricultural exports from the region. Finally, the article underlines that China's strategic interest in regional stability — particularly due to its sensitivity regarding Xinjiang — will also shape its future engagement. Enhanced cooperation in security, counter-terrorism, and regional coordination through platforms like the

Shanghai Cooperation Organization is expected to continue alongside economic engagement.

In conclusion, Dr. Bobokhonov offers a comprehensive forecast of the multi-dimensional ties likely to evolve between China and Central Asian countries in the wake of the Third Plenum. He argues that Beijing's renewed reform trajectory — while domestically driven — will inevitably generate structural consequences for the region, reinforcing its role as both a strategic partner and a testing ground for China's outward-facing economic initiatives. Central Asia, in this framework, becomes both a beneficiary and a stakeholder in China's long-term economic recalibration.

Full article: <https://www.chinacenter.net/2025/china-currents/24-1/the-significance-of-the-third-plenum-of-the-communist-party-of-china-for-central-asian-countries/>

Abbos Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center, IAIS

Ubaydullo Khojabekov, IAIS volunteer

The 25th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, held from 31 August to 1 September 2025 in Tianjin, marked a turning point in the organisation's history in terms of both scale and political significance. The summit was recognised as the largest and most important event in the SCO's 24-year history, reflecting its transformation from a regional security bloc into a platform with growing geopolitical influence. The outcomes and symbolism of the summit highlighted the SCO's role as a key mechanism for regional integration and international cooperation. [Chinese scholars noted](#) that hosting the summits on Chinese territory is accompanied not only by financial and organisational support but also by the articulation of a strategic vision, demonstrating China's increasing role in the global governance system and multilateral diplomacy. Moreover, the SCO summit clearly demonstrated China's aspiration to transform the existing world order with the support of its partners and allies, including the SCO member states.

Initially established to combat terrorism and strengthen regional stability, the SCO has gradually evolved into a comprehensive multilateral platform promoting Eurasian integration in economic, technological, and humanitarian spheres. As [Zhao Long](#), Deputy Director of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, noted, the organisation today contributes "positive elements to the post-war world order, previously characterised by great power rivalry", reflecting a global trend towards strengthening multilateralism. In this context, the Tianjin summit became an important forum for the Global South and middle-power states seeking alternatives to U.S.-led institutions.

[Henrietta Levin](#) from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) observed that China, within the SCO framework, had initiated the creation of six new platforms aimed at deepening cooperation in energy, the green economy, digital

technologies, and education. Despite implementation challenges, these initiatives reflect Beijing's ambition to institutionalise its leadership role within the organisation. The Tianjin summit confirmed the SCO's transition towards a multifaceted structure shaping the contours of a new multipolar order. [As Reuters summarised](#), “global governance has reached a new crossroads” — and China, through the SCO, positions itself at the centre of this transformative process.

China played a key role in shaping the summit's agenda and outcomes. As the chairing country during 2024–2025, the People's Republic of China organised over 100 high-level events and initiated the drafting of two key documents: the Tianjin Declaration and the SCO Development Strategy until 2035. These documents reaffirmed commitment to the principles of peaceful coexistence, non-interference in internal affairs, and opposition to unilateral sanctions and trade barriers, while calling for expanded cooperation in areas such as artificial intelligence, data governance, and sustainable development. [According to an expert from the British Chatham House](#), this summit formed part of Beijing's broader diplomatic campaign to position China as an architect of a multipolar world order — in stark contrast to Washington's policy of “retreat” and isolationism.

One of the key institutional outcomes was the decision by SCO member states to establish the SCO Development Bank, which received direct financial support from China amounting to 10 billion yuan (USD 1.4 billion) in loans and 2 billion yuan (around USD 300 million) in grants. Economists described this institution as the “main practical achievement of the summit”, emphasising China's strategy to expand yuan usage and reduce dependence on the U.S. dollar.

Zhou Mi, an expert from China's Ministry of Commerce, noted that this approach promotes equitable cooperation and addresses real issues rather than exacerbating geopolitical confrontation. [Professor Zhao Huasheng](#) from Fudan University stressed that the SCO's slow but steady institutionalisation represents a viable alternative to the declining activity of U.S.-led multilateral structures, especially for states suffering from sanctions and discriminatory trade measures.

Meanwhile, the organisation's functional agenda has significantly expanded, as reflected in the Tianjin Declaration. [Professor Xiao Qian](#) from Tsinghua University compared the SCO with U.S.-led alliances such as AUKUS and QUAD, noting

that the SCO's openness, diversity, and pragmatic economic orientation make it attractive to states seeking to avoid entanglement in great power conflicts. A notable element of the summit was the active participation not only of member states but also of ASEAN countries, many of which face trade frictions with the United States. Experts highlighted that countries like Malaysia and Indonesia view the SCO as a "gateway" to Asia-Pacific markets and as a platform for enhancing their international status.

The geopolitical significance of the Tianjin SCO summit was further underscored by the participation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for the first time since the 2020 border incident between India and China in the Galwan Valley. According to scholars, the Indian leader's decision reflects New Delhi's desire to maintain strategic autonomy in its foreign policy despite growing pressure from Washington. The resumption of diplomatic contacts between India and China, the restoration of direct air links, and support for the Tianjin Declaration demonstrate the SCO's ability to function as a unique multilateral platform for dialogue among states with often conflicting interests.

Prime Minister Modi's signing of a separate provision of the Tianjin Declaration condemning the attacks by Israel and the United States on Iran sent an important political signal. This was especially notable as earlier in June, India had refused to join a similar joint SCO statement, citing its strategic partnerships with those states. However, the U.S. administration's tariff policies under President Donald Trump, including those targeting India, were perceived by New Delhi as unfriendly, influencing a shift in its foreign policy priorities.

In the economic sphere, the summit marked a new stage in Eurasian integration. It is expected that infrastructure projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will attract up to USD 10 billion in investment by 2030. The development of digital trade, unification of customs procedures, and transition to paperless documentation contribute to more efficient cross-border logistics. The significance of key transport routes is increasing, including the China-Europe railway artery, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

In the technological sphere, the summit highlighted the SCO's ambition to lead in emerging sectors. In May 2025, Tianjin hosted the Artificial Intelligence Cooperation

Forum, where experts and government representatives discussed open-source software, cybersecurity, and regulatory issues. It was noted that despite disparities in technological development among member states, pilot projects in AI and digital infrastructure are already being implemented, aimed at fostering regional digital sovereignty.

The SCO's institutional complementarity with other multilateral organisations, particularly BRICS, adds to its significance. Both frameworks bring together China, Russia, and India, forming overlapping networks aimed at rethinking Western-centric models of global governance. While BRICS focuses primarily on economic coordination, the SCO expands its agenda to include regional security, infrastructure connectivity, technology, and financial innovation.

In the geopolitical dimension, the SCO is viewed as a potential stabilising factor amid the growing trend towards a multipolar world order. Despite persisting internal contradictions — particularly between India and China, as well as India and Pakistan — the organisation demonstrates a unique capacity to integrate divergent interests within the so-called “Shanghai Spirit,” based on principles of consensus, mutual respect, and equal cooperation.

It is especially noteworthy that the SCO does not seek confrontation with Western states, particularly the United States, but actively fills the geopolitical vacuum created by Washington's current unilateral foreign policy and economic stance and the fragmentation of the old global order model. In these circumstances, the SCO offers a more inclusive and pragmatic approach to regional security and economic interaction. Its focus on infrastructure connectivity, the resilience of logistics and trade chains, and stability in member and partner countries allows the organisation to expand its strategic presence. This makes the SCO a significant actor not only in Central Asia but also in the broader Eurasian context — encompassing the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, and South Asia. Thus, the organisation becomes an important element of the evolving architecture of regional and global security, offering alternative mechanisms for interact

Uzbek-Japanese Cooperation in Hydrogen Energy: Potential, Opportunities, and Strategic Directions for Development

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Uzbekistan is entering a phase of structural transformation in its energy sector, in which technological and investment partnership with Japan is acquiring strategic relevance. Global trends indicate that hydrogen is moving beyond the realm of experimental solutions and increasingly becoming a foundational element of the emerging energy system. As international climate requirements tighten and carbon regulation expands across key export markets, participation in the hydrogen agenda is becoming a necessary condition for national economies to preserve competitiveness, maintain market access, and strengthen long term industrial resilience.

A landmark development in this context was Japan's adoption in October 2024 of the *Hydrogen Society Promotion Act*. The importance of this legislation lies in the establishment of concrete financial mechanisms, including long-term subsidies for the price differential between conventional grey hydrogen and low-carbon hydrogen, including blue and green variants, for a period of fifteen years. This framework creates investment predictability, guarantees demand for advanced technologies, and forms a logical basis for the expansion of Japanese business activity abroad, including in Central Asia.

Against this background, Tokyo's updated institutional strategy appears both consistent and forward-looking. In the revised *Basic Hydrogen Strategy* adopted in June 2023, the Japanese government shifted its emphasis from a narrow focus on securing domestic energy security through imports toward the active international promotion of Japanese technological solutions. The strategy explicitly states that Japan's priority interest lies not only in the direct procurement of hydrogen but also in the deployment of its own technologies in partner countries as a means of reducing global carbon emissions.

According to research by the Asian Development Bank Institute, Japan holds the largest number of international patent families in the hydrogen sector, accounting for approximately twenty-four percent of the global total, surpassing both the United States and Germany. This technological leadership enables Japan to offer a model of joint innovation that goes beyond the simple sale of equipment and instead emphasizes co-development and adaptation of technologies to local conditions, thereby reducing investment risks for all parties involved.

A key mechanism for implementing this approach is Japan's *Joint Crediting Mechanism*. Under this scheme, Japan subsidizes the supply and installation of advanced equipment in partner countries, while the resulting reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are credited toward Japan's international climate commitments. This mechanism is particularly relevant given the high cost of green hydrogen production, which in the short term is estimated to range from approximately 2.5 to 6 US dollars per kilogram. The Joint Crediting Mechanism helps bridge this cost gap relative to grey hydrogen, providing Uzbekistan with access to advanced equipment and investment resources on preferential terms, without requiring the immediate development of complex physical export infrastructure for energy carriers.

The technological foundation of Uzbek–Japanese cooperation is reinforced by the experience of major Japanese corporations whose competencies have high practical relevance for Uzbekistan's infrastructure development. In particular, the work of Kawasaki Heavy Industries, widely known for its projects in liquefied hydrogen transportation, is important for Uzbekistan as evidence of the reliability of hydrogen storage systems and safety technologies. The technical challenge of hydrogen lies in the need to maintain extremely low temperatures and ensure complete system integrity. The expertise of Japanese engineers, who have developed systems capable of operating safely under demanding conditions, provides strong assurances regarding the safety of constructing land-based storage facilities and terminals. The application of such proven solutions is especially important for Uzbekistan, as it minimizes the risk of industrial accidents and losses of high-value energy resources.

A new and highly promising area of cooperation is the modernization of Uzbekistan's existing thermal power generation fleet. On 26 May of the current year, the Ministry of Energy of Uzbekistan and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries signed a

Memorandum of Understanding to conduct a joint study on energy sector development. The document envisages an assessment of the feasibility of upgrading gas turbines to enable the co-firing of hydrogen and natural gas. This technology allows for a gradual reduction of the carbon footprint of thermal power generation without the need to decommission existing capacity. Given Uzbekistan's plans to increase the share of renewable energy sources to fifty-four percent by 2030, Mitsubishi's hydrogen co-firing technologies can play a stabilizing role by compensating for the intermittency of solar and wind generation. Financial support for this study is being provided by Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, underscoring the state-level significance of the initiative.



Significant practical interest for the modernization of Uzbekistan's municipal sector and regional energy supply is also presented by Japan's ENE-FARM program. Under this initiative, more than 220,000 household units have been deployed in Japan. These systems function as decentralized mini power plants, capable of producing electricity and heat directly at the point of consumption, whether in private homes or social infrastructure facilities. Connected to conventional gas networks, these units convert fuel into electricity for household use while simultaneously producing heat for water and space heating, thereby addressing the problem of energy losses associated with long-distance transmission. In Uzbekistan, where gasification often outpaces the stability of electricity supply, the widespread adoption of such systems could significantly enhance household energy security.

Japan's experience with localized hydrogen ecosystems, demonstrated in the city of Shikaoi, also offers valuable insights for adaptation in Uzbekistan's agricultural regions. In Shikaoi, a closed-loop model has been implemented in which biogas derived from livestock waste is used to produce hydrogen that subsequently fuels agricultural machinery and transport. The introduction of similar localized hydrogen systems based

on biomass in Uzbekistan could simultaneously address waste management challenges and fuel supply needs in agriculture, reducing dependence on fossil diesel fuels.

In the industrial sector, one of the most promising areas for hydrogen integration is the chemical industry, where Uzbekistan already possesses a substantial production base. Major enterprises such as Navoiyazot, Fergana Azot, and Maksam-Chirchik collectively produce around one million tons of ammonia annually. At present, natural gas is used as the primary feedstock, generating a significant carbon footprint. Most of the ammonia produced is used for nitrogen fertilizers such as urea and ammonium nitrate, both for domestic consumption and export. In addition, Uzbekistan already produces industrial hydrogen as a by-product at oil refineries, including the Fergana and Bukhara refineries, as well as at chemical plants. These processes also generate emissions, creating potential risks for exports to markets with stringent environmental regulations. The existence of established hydrogen and ammonia consumption infrastructure makes these enterprises ideal candidates for early modernization.



Uzbekistan is simultaneously building a scientific and human capital base for hydrogen sector development. The *Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026* provides for funding of research programs, including international training and internships for young scientists.



Practical implementation entered an active phase on 8 February 2024, when the Uzbek–Japanese Youth Innovation Center signed an agreement with the Japan International Cooperation Agency under the SATREPS framework. This five-year project received grant

funding of 500 million yen, approximately 3.5 million US dollars, and is aimed at

developing innovative hydrogen production technologies adapted to Uzbekistan's geographic and industrial conditions.

The project brings together Japanese institutions such as Kyushu University and Waseda University with Uzbek partners including the National University of Uzbekistan and the Navoi State Mining and Technology University. Four key research directions have been identified. The first focuses on the production of blue hydrogen directly from depleted oil fields through in-situ conversion, enabling hydrogen extraction while retaining associated carbon dioxide underground. The second addresses the adaptation of solar panels to Uzbekistan's climatic conditions, improving efficiency and durability under high temperatures and dust exposure. The third direction involves the development of low-temperature steam electrolysis systems that utilize waste heat from industrial enterprises, integrating green hydrogen production into existing industrial cycles and improving overall energy efficiency. The fourth explores the creation of new photocatalytic composites from mining waste materials, allowing both waste utilization and hydrogen production using solar energy.

The implementation of this project will not only provide Uzbekistan with robust techno-economic foundations for new hydrogen generation methods but will also contribute to the formation of a skilled workforce capable of managing future hydrogen infrastructure. The integration of Japanese technologies has the potential to significantly improve the environmental performance of national production. In this regard, the launch of pilot projects in regions with high renewable energy potential, such as the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Bukhara region, appears particularly justified. These areas possess favorable solar and wind conditions, making them suitable for integrating new generation capacity with electrolysis facilities.

An additional advantage of Japanese technologies, including solid oxide electrolysis cells, is their ability to utilize excess industrial heat, thereby enhancing energy efficiency. Transitioning to such a model would allow local enterprises to produce low-carbon fertilizers, opening access to premium markets in Europe and Asia. Exporting value-added products such as ammonia is also logistically more feasible than transporting pure hydrogen, particularly for a landlocked country.

Given Uzbekistan's geographic characteristics, the optimal strategy at the initial stage is not to focus on exporting raw hydrogen, but to move away from a **resource-based model** toward the localization of high-technology production using Japanese equipment and expertise. In this context, the establishment of an *Uzbek-Japanese Hydrogen Dialogue* and the adoption of a joint Roadmap through 2030 would be advisable. Such an approach would enable Uzbekistan to transition from a raw-material-oriented economic model to the production of innovative, high-value products, while allowing Japan to implement its technology export strategy and strengthen its long-term presence in the region.

The Visit of Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya to Central Asia and Its Significance for Uzbekistan

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The visit of Japan's Foreign Minister **Takeshi Iwaya** to Central Asian states was closely linked to Tokyo's domestic political and economic agenda. The trip, which included **Kazakhstan** (24–26 August) and **Uzbekistan** (26–28 August), was conceived as a preparatory stage for the upcoming “C5+Japan” summit. This format is intended

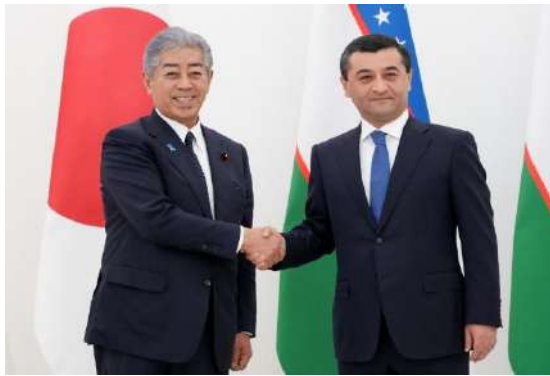


to inject new substance into Japan's engagement with the region, where Tokyo seeks to restore a degree of influence that has diminished in recent years.

Amid intensifying competition from China, Russia, Türkiye, and the European Union, Japan aims to underscore its readiness to remain a meaningful partner for Central Asia by relying on economic diplomacy, technological cooperation, and support for structural reforms. A key driver of this approach is Japan's economic security policy, which has become a central pillar of its national strategy since 2022. The Economic Security Promotion Act has prompted Tokyo to actively seek reliable sources of critical minerals, including uranium, copper, lithium, tungsten, and rhenium, thereby directly elevating cooperation with Uzbekistan.

Equally important are Japan's domestic technological and resource-related challenges. Tokyo seeks not only to safeguard its critical technologies from external competition, but also to ensure long-term access to strategically important raw materials, particularly metals required for battery production and renewable energy technologies. In this context, cooperation with Uzbekistan assumes particular relevance. Projects in uranium mining and other extractive sectors are viewed as promising instruments for strengthening Japan's energy security and diversifying its resource base.

At present, Japanese diplomacy is characterized by efforts to “catch up” and reassert its role, reflecting constraints associated with domestic political instability and declining public approval of the prime minister. Nevertheless, Minister Iwaya’s visit to Uzbekistan resulted in a number of tangible agreements in the fields of industry, energy, and logistics. These included the establishment of a Strategic Dialogue format between the foreign ministers, with regular meetings scheduled every two years, as well as the



signing of a grant worth 496 million yen (approximately USD 3.4 million) to support vulnerable groups in Surkhandarya region through projects focused on hydroponics and IT development.

In addition, the Japanese side announced a further grant exceeding 400 million yen (around USD 2.7 million) to support young Uzbek civil servants, as part of Japan’s broader strategy to consolidate its presence in the region. Ahead of the Strategic Dialogue meeting with Uzbekistan’s foreign minister on 27 August, Japan reaffirmed its intention to continue supporting Uzbekistan’s economic development and to strengthen cultural exchanges, including through initiatives linked to the Osaka–Kansai Expo.

Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has emphasized in its official statements that since President **Shavkat Mirziyoyev** took office in 2016, Uzbekistan has demonstrated sustained economic growth, while bilateral relations with Japan have significantly deepened, particularly following the Uzbek president’s visit to Japan in December 2019.

For Uzbekistan, the significance of the visit manifests itself in several key dimensions.

First, the launch of the Strategic Dialogue establishes an institutionalized and predictable framework for engagement, enhancing the resilience of Japan’s relations with Central Asia. Regular meetings make it possible not only to formalize specialized working groups in priority areas such as energy, critical minerals, digital skills, and logistics, but also to create a mechanism for early-stage coordination, including preparation of the agenda for the forthcoming “C5+Japan” summit.

Second, the visit expands opportunities for development assistance and access to advanced technologies. The Surkhandarya project introduces a model combining “human security” with “green growth,” which could be replicated in other regions such as the Aral Sea area, Fergana Valley, and Kashkadarya. At the same time, given Japan’s interest in the development of critical minerals in Central Asia, Uzbekistan already hosts joint ventures in this sphere, including the Nurliqum Mining enterprise.

Third, the visit provides impetus for the expansion of educational and humanitarian cooperation. Scholarship programs, Japanese language studies, and academic exchanges open new avenues for Uzbek universities to develop dual-degree programs and train specialists. In this regard, the planned establishment of the first Japanese university in Tashkent is expected to serve as a foundation for long-term cooperation and human capital development in support of joint initiatives.

Practical steps to maximize the outcomes of the visit span several time horizons. In the short term, it is important to appoint a national coordinator and establish working groups in priority areas with 12-month action plans. In parallel, at the “C5+Japan” summit it would be advisable to advance initiatives such as green transport corridors, visa programs for IT specialists and engineers, and the organization of a critical minerals forum.

Implementation of the Surkhandarya project should be accelerated through the establishment of a Reform Implementation Office under the regional administration, as well as by integrating Japanese innovations into small and medium-sized enterprises and opening women’s entrepreneurship centers, including for Afghan refugees.

In the medium term, Uzbekistan would benefit from preparing a “flagship project pipeline with Japan” comprising 10–15 initiatives in the fields of energy, hydrogen, smart cities, and minerals. This should be complemented by the signing of an intergovernmental agreement on critical minerals incorporating commitments to corporate social responsibility and transparency, the organization of a “Tokyo roadshow,” and the creation of one-stop information hubs in Tashkent for Japanese investors.

In the long term, priorities should include expanding quotas under scholarship programs such as JDS and MEXT, co-financing Japanese language centers, launching pilot labor mobility schemes, and further developing tourism and air connectivity.

Overall, Minister Iwaya's visit confirmed Japan's renewed interest in Central Asia and underscored Uzbekistan's strategic role in supply chains, sustainable development, and humanitarian initiatives. The institutionalization of dialogue, acceleration of pilot projects, and establishment of the first Japanese university in Tashkent together create a strong foundation for fully leveraging the outcomes of Japan's recent diplomatic engagement.

Japan's First Female Candidate for the Post of Prime Minister

M. Abdurasulova, Senior Research Fellow (IAIS)

On 4 October this year, **Sanae Takaichi** won the leadership election of the **Liberal Democratic Party of Japan**, defeating **Shinjiro Koizumi** in the second round by 185 votes to 156. Given the dominant position of the ruling coalition in parliament, this outcome effectively opens the



path for Takaichi to assume the office of prime minister. The formal parliamentary vote is expected to take place in mid-October. Although the LDP has lost its outright majority in both chambers, the likelihood of opposition parties uniting behind a single alternative candidate remains extremely low due to deep ideological fragmentation among opposition forces.

Takaichi's victory represents a historic milestone, as she may become the first woman to lead the Japanese government. This development is widely interpreted as a potential catalyst for advancing gender equality in a political system where women remain significantly underrepresented. The leadership race unfolded against the backdrop of the resignation of **Shigeru Ishiba** and declining public trust in the ruling party amid persistent economic challenges and growing pressure to reinforce Japan's international standing.

The LDP leadership election is conducted in two rounds involving both Diet members and rank-and-file party members. In the first round, 590 votes were cast, while the second round was decided by 342 votes. Candidates are required to be incumbent LDP lawmakers and to secure at least twenty endorsements from fellow party members. In addition to Takaichi and Koizumi, the 2025 race featured **Yoshimasa Hayashi**, **Takayuki Kobayashi**, and **Toshimitsu Motegi**.



Takaichi's success was made possible by the consolidation of conservative factions within the party, her clear and consistent stance on national security issues, and strong support from regional party organizations. This outcome reflects an internal shift within the LDP

toward ideological continuity with the legacy of **Shinzo Abe**, combined with Takaichi's personal emphasis on economic resilience and technological sovereignty.

Following the announcement of the results, Takaichi stated that she felt not so much joy as a profound sense of responsibility and the weight of the challenges ahead. She emphasized that the primary objective of the new leadership would be to reinvigorate the party and to transform public anxiety into confidence and hope through sustained reform efforts.

At the age of sixty-four, Takaichi succeeded in securing the party leadership on her third attempt. She is widely regarded as one of the most conservative figures within the LDP and possesses extensive experience in government. She first entered the cabinet in 2006 under Shinzo Abe, serving as Minister for Okinawa and the Northern Territories. During Abe's second term in office, she returned to the cabinet, holding the positions of Minister for Women's Affairs and Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications.

Takaichi has openly expressed her aspiration to become Japan's equivalent of a "Iron Lady," citing admiration for the political style and leadership approach of **Margaret Thatcher**. Her political rhetoric consistently emphasizes the need to strengthen Japan, restore its global standing, overcome prolonged stagnation, and provide a sense of hope for future generations. In the constitutional sphere, she advocates revising Japan's basic law to explicitly recognize the Self-Defense Forces, arguing that formally designating them as armed forces of self-defense would clarify their legal status.

In economic policy, Takaichi calls for swift measures to address rising prices. She argues that proposals to reduce the consumption tax, championed by opposition

parties, require careful consideration and time, while supporting a flexible approach to income taxation that combines targeted compensation with selective tax reductions.

In foreign and security policy, the new LDP leader intends to pursue a more assertive and proactive course. Japan is expected to continue increasing defense spending beyond two percent of GDP, with priority given to missile defense, cybersecurity, and space capabilities. Takaichi also supports revising Article 9 of the Constitution to formally enshrine Japan's right to self-defense, in line with her principle of achieving peace through strength.

With regard to China, Takaichi favors a strategy of deterrence combined with the strengthening of alliances with the United States and other like-minded partners. She has openly supported closer ties with Taiwan, viewing them as a contribution to democratic resilience and regional stability, a stance that has already prompted warnings from Beijing. The cornerstone of her foreign policy agenda remains the reinforcement of the Japan–United States alliance, alongside deeper cooperation in defense technologies, human resource development, and the security of supply chains. At the same time, she seeks to advance trilateral cooperation with South Korea and Australia, despite persistent historical and political sensitivities.

At the global level, Takaichi aims to enhance Japan's leadership role in the Indo-Pacific region by leveraging platforms such as ASEAN, the Quad, and the Group of Seven. If elected prime minister, she is expected to continue humanitarian and infrastructure initiatives in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Island states, while intensifying dialogue with the Middle East on energy security and freedom of navigation. Particular attention is likely to be devoted to expanding cooperation with Central Asian states in the fields of energy, digital infrastructure, and human capital development within the framework of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept.

Takaichi's rise symbolizes both continuity with the Abe-era strategic trajectory and a qualitative renewal of Japan's political elite, not only in gender terms but also in generational outlook. Her strong emphasis on defense, technology, and resilience reflects an ambition to position Japan as an active, autonomous, and responsible actor in international affairs amid growing regional tensions. In the coming months, she will face the challenge of balancing assertive diplomacy with domestic economic stability,

while upholding democratic values, strengthening alliances, and managing a complex and sensitive dialogue with China and neighboring states.

It is also noteworthy that on 4 October former prime minister **Taro Aso** made a decisive political move by urging approximately forty-three members of his Shikokukai faction to support Takaichi in the second round of the leadership election, significantly bolstering her chances of victory.



Aso has long viewed Central Asia as an important dimension of Japan's foreign policy within the framework of Silk Road diplomacy. He has consistently promoted the "Central Asia plus Japan" dialogue format aimed at strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties, enhancing regional stability, developing transport and logistics corridors including the southern route via Afghanistan, and expanding cooperation in energy, infrastructure, and security. Given the continuity of foreign policy priorities, it is reasonable to expect that a government led by Sanae Takaichi would seek to further deepen Japan's engagement with the states of Central Asia.

Abdugani Karimov, Research Assistant (IAIS), PhD Candidate (UWED)

At present, Japan's state model continues to operate within the paradigm of *soft power* and a knowledge-based economy, maintaining both stability and latent dynamism. On one hand, this model emphasizes export-oriented industries, technological innovation, and international cultural openness; on the other hand, it faces growing contradictions: a slowdown in economic growth, demographic decline, rising public debt, and limited adaptability to the rapidly changing East Asian environment.



Against this backdrop, the appointment of Sanae Takaichi as Japan's Prime Minister on October 21, 2025 may be interpreted as a shift in trajectory—from a cautious survival policy toward a strategy of active state initiative and re-evaluation of Japan's foreign-economic and defense paradigms. Her policy orientation remains grounded in cooperation with allies and international institutions, ensuring that Japan's growing autonomy contributes to regional and global stability.

Biography. Sanae Takaichi Born in Nara Prefecture into a politically engaged family, she rose from a legal background to become one of the key figures of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Her career developed within the political climate dominated by the legacy of Shinzo Abe and the strategic line of strengthening Japan's role as a “normal” state actor in international relations.

From the early stages of her political formation, Takaichi supported discussions on updating Japan's constitutional framework to reflect evolving security realities - a stance consistent with the conservative mainstream within the LDP—an orientation later reflected in her election campaign.

Main Elements of Takaichi's Campaign¹

¹ **Policy Speech by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi**, delivered on 24 October 2025 at the 219th Extraordinary Session of the National Diet of Japan. Official website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. Available at: <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/104/statement/202510/25press>

1. **Economic Growth and Fairness.** Takaichi's campaign centered on the slogan "*Turning the people's anxieties about their present into hope and action*" (「人々の現在の暮らしや将来に対する不安を希望に変えて」).

She pledged to raise the income-tax exemption threshold, introduce refundable tax credits, temporarily suspend fuel excise hikes, and accelerate infrastructure investment. In her view, the state must once again become an active agent of economic revitalization.

2. **Energy Independence.** Distinguishing herself from her predecessors, Takaichi openly called nuclear power as Japan's main source of energy, aiming to reduce hydrocarbon imports and ease inflationary pressure. as part of an industrial modernization agenda.

3. **Security and Foreign Policy.** Takaichi declared that Japan must become a more active actor in global security by raising defense spending to 2% of GDP by 2025–26, strengthening cybersecurity, and creating a Japanese defense. This vision implied a less passive foreign policy and greater initiative in the Indo-Pacific and Central Asian regions for example Taiwan case.

In analytical terms, Takaichi's ascent reflects Japan's broader historical dilemma-how to balance its status as a technological superpower with its socio-demographic vulnerabilities, and how to reconcile soft-power diplomacy with the hard realities of the 2020s. Her figure symbolizes a transitional moment-not mere continuity, but reconfiguration.

Cabinet Composition and Institutional Design. Takaichi introduce her cabinet on **October 24, 2025**. Key positions went to ideological allies:

- **Defense Minister** Kazuhiro Kishihara, from the Abe faction;
- **Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)** Naomichi Taniguchi, a pro-nuclear politic;
- **Finance Minister** Toshimitsu Motegi, a moderate macroeconomist ensuring internal balance.

This structure reflects a deliberate synthesis of *Abeism* and pragmatic economic interventionism. Political scientist **Masayuki Tada (Waseda University)** described it

in *Mainichi Shimbun* as “the first cabinet to blend ideological continuity with interventionist economics.”²

While the appointment of Japan’s first female prime minister was widely hailed as progress, Takaichi avoids gender-based identification. In an *Asahi Shimbun* interview (October 23, 2025) she stated: “私は女性である前に政治家です” - “I am a politician before I am a woman.” Her government nevertheless includes a record six female ministers (out of 19) and has established a **Council for Women’s Participation in STEM Fields**.³

Unlike the European discourse on gender equality, Takaichi promotes **meritocracy**-emphasizing professionalism rather than gender quotas. This pragmatic stance aligns with Japan’s cultural tradition of *quality through experience* and coincides with Japan’s relatively low gender income gap.

Economic Program and Fiscal Measures. In her first 100 days, Takaichi defined a course of “state-led growth activation.” In her policy speech before the Diet on October 24, 2025, she proclaimed: 「国家が主導して、経済成長と国民生活の向上を両立させる時です」 - “It is time for the state to lead both economic growth and improved living standards.”⁴

Takaichi announced a series of steps to strengthen economy of Japan :

- **Canceling of the temporary gasoline tax** (in place since 1974), effective November 1, 2025, easing transportation inflation.
- **Raising the income-tax exemption line** to 1.6 million yen the first increase since the 2010s.
- **Refundable tax credit** new project for low- and middle-income households in five prefectures.
- **Supplementary budget** allocation of 14 trillion yen targeting domestic demand, digital infrastructure, and business support.

² Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s Press Conference following the Cabinet Meeting, 25 October 2025 [Electronic resource]. — Official website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. — Access mode: <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/104/statement/202510/25press>

³ Asahi Shimbun. “私は女性である前に政治家です [I’m a politician before I’m a woman].” *Asahi Shimbun*, October 23, 2025. URL: <https://www.asahi.com/articles/20251023000000.html>

⁴ Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s Press Conference following the Cabinet Meeting, 25 October 2025 [Electronic resource]. — Official website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. — Access mode: <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/104/statement/202510/25press>

These measures had an immediate impact: the yen weakened significantly, boosting exports in the short term but sparking debate on fiscal sustainability.

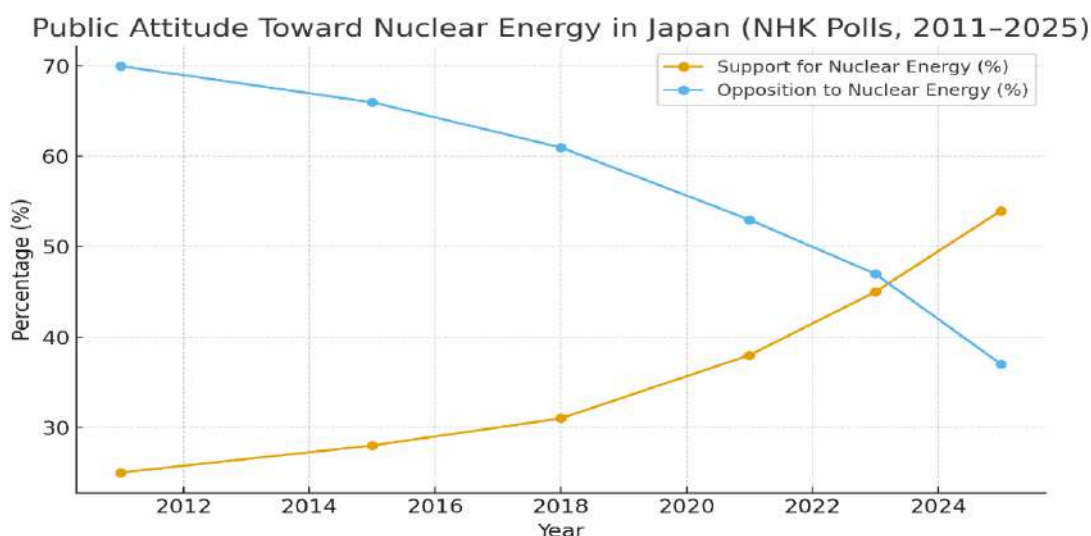
In analytical perspective, Takaichi appears to employ economic policy as a tool of political legitimization. Her reforms seek to deliver tangible outcomes within the first year-to consolidate her mandate and neutralize intra-party opposition.

The most consequential decision was the **return to nuclear energy**. In November 2025, METI approved a program to restart at least 17 reactors by 2030 and commission next-generation designs.⁵

As Takaichi declared: The government emphasized that safe and responsible use of nuclear power remains one of the key options for ensuring Japan's long-term energy stability and sustainability. For a nation importing over 90% of its energy resources, this signals a pragmatic turn toward energy sovereignty.⁶

Public reaction was cautiously positive: according to an **NHK poll (November 6, 2025)**, 54% supported the move and 37% opposed it-the first majority approval of nuclear policy since the Fukushima disaster in 2011.

The shift thus functions not only as an energy measure but also as a mechanism for political legitimation and public reassurance. Rising electricity prices since Japan's



nuclear withdrawal had become undeniable; by promising cheaper energy and

⁵ 経済産業省 (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan). 「原子力再興ロードマップ2035」 (Roadmap for Nuclear Rebirth 2035) [Electronic resource]. — Tokyo: METI, 5 November 2025. — Access mode: <https://www.meti.go.jp/press/2025/11/05a003.html>

⁶ Prime Minister's Office of Japan. "Speech by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi at the Diet Session," November 24, 2025. Tokyo: Kantei Official Website.

URL: <https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/>

industrial cost reductions, the new government aims to stimulate GDP growth and strengthen public confidence.

Immigration policy. Officials have noted that immigration policy reforms will proceed through extensive public consultation and parliamentary review to maintain transparency and societal consensus. Before assuming office as prime minister, Sanae Takaichi took part in coalition negotiations between the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Japan Innovation Party (Nippon Ishin no Kai). One of the key provisions in their policy agreement concerned the tightening of immigration rules. “The coalition emphasized the importance of managing immigration in a way that preserves social cohesion and facilitates gradual integration.”

This line reflected a shared conservative concern within both parties that Japan’s social cohesion could be undermined by a rapid demographic shift. Consequently, the coalition framework emphasized maintaining immigration at “manageable levels,” reinforcing border control, and ensuring that foreign residents “integrate under Japanese norms and values.”

Analyzing the immigration policy of **Sanae Takaichi**, Japan’s new Prime Minister we can see The key features of her policy can be summarized as follows: (1) the tightening of residence and employment conditions for foreign nationals is That means the introduction of quantitative and sector-specific quotas designed to restrict the inflow of foreign worker; (2) enhanced monitoring of visa status and stricter enforcement of stay limits; (3) The policy includes a review of welfare eligibility frameworks to ensure fairness and sustainability while maintaining social balance; (4) a strong emphasis on “cultural and institutional integration”-in a narrow sense-reflecting deep concerns over the preservation of Japan’s national identity.

In her public statements, Takaichi stresses the need for an “orderly coexistence” between Japanese citizens and foreigners, emphasizing “mutual respect” for Japan’s social norms and behavioral standards. She has criticized the current immigration frameworks as overly lenient and called for a comprehensive revision of visa and residency systems. Her approach also includes plans to establish a new governmental agency-or expand the mandate of existing ones-to combat illegal immigration, overstayed visas, uncontrolled tourism, and foreign ownership of land near strategic facilities.

Within the broader context of Japan's demographic and economic crisis-characterized by an aging population, a shrinking labor force, and a growing reliance on foreign workers-Takaichi's hardline stance raises significant concerns. While Japan's economy increasingly depends on migrant labor, her rhetoric indicates that future policy will focus not on large-scale immigration but rather on limited, selective, and tightly managed participation.

Despite her intentions, this policy direction carries several risks. A narrow approach to accepting foreign workers could exacerbate labor shortages in key industries dependent on migrant labor; excessive emphasis on control and cultural conformity may discourage skilled immigrants; and hardline political messaging might intensify social tensions. In essence, Takaichi's immigration policy reflects an effort to preserve social stability and national identity, rather than to embrace immigration as a driver of economic revitalization.

Foreign Policy and Security under Takaichi. Takaichi characterizes Japan's transition as a move from "*cautious pacifism*" to "*controlled assertiveness*" (制御された強硬さ). Under her leadership, Japan demonstrates perhaps for the first time since World War II a readiness to combine soft power and strategic autonomy with defense responsibility.

The 2025 National Security Strategy sets the goal of raising defense spending to 2% of GDP within the same year and introduces new priorities: cyber- and space-defense integration, the creation of a Strategic Intelligence Agency, and the development of counter-strike capabilities (反撃能力). These steps aim not at militarization but at restoring Japan's agency as a full participant in security affairs rather than a "junior partner" of the United States. Japan is simultaneously deepening ties with India, Australia, and Vietnam, seeking to act as an initiator-not merely a participant-of economic and technological coalitions.⁷

Relations with China follow the "three-D" formula: Deterrence, Dialogue, Diversification. Japan reacts firmly on Taiwan and technological sovereignty issues but maintains diplomatic channels and avoids open confrontation - a mature balance between principle and pragmatism. This framework underscores Japan's preference for

⁷ 日本政府. 国家安全保障戦略 [National Security Strategy]. 東京: 内閣官房, 2025. URL: <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/2025nss.html>

diplomacy and preventive engagement over confrontation, reflecting a pragmatic approach to regional security

The statement attributed to Xue Jian, China's Consul General in Osaka: "We have no choice but to cut off the dirty head [of Japan's Prime Minister Takaichi] who rushed in without hesitation. Are you ready?" has become a striking example of the escalating rhetoric between Tokyo and Beijing following Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks on Taiwan.

Takaichi had declared that "a conflict between China and Taiwan would constitute an existential crisis for Japan," emphasizing that Japan's Self-Defense Forces might intervene if regional stability or Japan's national security were directly threatened. Her statement represented a sharp departure from the cautious tone of former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, whose diplomacy focused on maintaining equilibrium in East Asia.

In a broader sense, the confrontation reveals a new era in East Asian geopolitics: Japan, under its first female and overtly conservative leader, is no longer content to act as a reactive power. Instead, it seeks to project **strategic agency**, even at the cost of diplomatic friction with Beijing.⁸

Central Asia Policy under Takaichi. Under Prime Minister Takaichi, Japan's engagement with Central Asia is shifting from its traditional reliance on soft-power diplomacy toward a more multidimensional strategy that combines cultural, economic, and emerging security components. Although the "Central Asia + Japan" dialogue was temporarily paused due to domestic political transitions in Tokyo, the framework is expected to regain relevance. For decades, Tokyo has viewed Central Asia as a venue for "quiet diplomacy," centered on technical assistance, development cooperation, and cultural outreach rather than geopolitical competition.⁹

However, the international environment of the late 2020s is pushing Japan toward a more proactive regional posture. The United States-Japan's closest strategic partner has expanded its diplomatic and economic initiatives in the Middle East, particularly in energy and hydrogen sectors. Because Japan closely coordinates its global strategy with

⁸ *Asahi Shimbun*. "Takaichi Warns: Taiwan Conflict Would Be an Existential Crisis for Japan." *Asahi Shimbun*, October 25, 2025. — *South China Morning Post*. "Chinese Consul in Osaka Threatens Japan's Prime Minister over Taiwan Comments." *SCMP*, November 3, 2025. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia>

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), *Diplomatic Bluebook 2023*, Chapter 2: "Central Asia and the Caucasus" URL: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2023/en_html/chapter2/c020603.htm

Washington, this broader U.S. engagement opens space for Japan to complement these efforts. Central Asia, positioned as both an energy corridor and a logistical hub, fits naturally into Japan's search for more secure and diversified supply routes.

Despite the pause in the official dialogue, Tokyo's interest in the region has not faded. China's growing presence continues to shape Japanese policy calculations. Japan does not seek confrontation but aims to offer an alternative model grounded in technology transfer, human-capital development, and high-quality infrastructure. In this sense, Central Asia functions within Japan's foreign-policy thinking as a "balancing platform," where soft power and economic tools reinforce one another.

Reviving the "CA+Japan" framework would allow Tokyo to deepen partnerships with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan and integrate the region into Japan's renewed focus on energy security and supply-chain resilience. For Japan, Central Asia is arena where Tokyo can project an image of a reliable, technologically advanced, and non-confrontational actor promoting "stability through cooperation." Japan increasingly frames itself as a "bridge between the technological West and the resource-rich East," offering a transparent, rules-based alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. This evolution reflects Japan's broader foreign-policy adaptation to new geopolitical realities, with stronger emphasis on security, technology, and strategic autonomy.

Japan's approach to Central Asia under Takaichi reflects a clear transition from traditional soft-power tools toward a more strategic, multidimensional policy. Although the "Central Asia + Japan" format temporarily stalled due to domestic political pressures in Tokyo, Japan's long-term interests in the region have only grown stronger. Central Asia now plays a dual role in Japan's foreign policy: as a stable corridor for energy and logistics diversification, and as a geopolitical balancing space amid China's expanding influence. By aligning with U.S. initiatives in the Middle East, Japan seeks to position itself as a reliable, technology-driven partner, offering high-quality infrastructure, human-capital development, and non-confrontational cooperation that reinforces regional stability. From this follows several basic scenarios for the development of relations, which include

- Expansion of **Japanese infrastructure and technology projects** (transport, logistics, digital platforms) to diversify supply chains and balance Chinese and Russian influence.

- Strengthening of **educational and research cooperation**, using universities and think-tanks as platforms for economic, security and soft-power projection.

- **Indirect security engagement** through energy, logistics, and resource cooperation focusing on stable transit corridors and regional connectivity.

Future of the C5+Japan framework will be defined by Japan's need to secure stable supply chains and strengthen its presence in the broader Eurasian strategic landscape. He argues that Central Asia will become increasingly important as Japan expands cooperation in critical minerals, hydrogen production, digital connectivity, and security-related capacity building. Rather than confronting China directly, Japan will pursue a differentiated model based on transparency, institutional reliability, and human-capital development. Yamaguchi emphasizes that, as geopolitical uncertainty intensifies, Tokyo will view the C5+Japan dialogue as a platform for creating long-term regional stability while positioning Japan as a trusted, technologically advanced partner in Eurasia¹⁰

Japan is likely to act selectively, prioritizing *flagship partnerships* with Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan rather than launching a large-scale program across the region. Such a targeted approach reduces risk while increasing visibility and efficiency.¹¹

Expert opinion

While policy adjustments under Takaichi appear assertive, they also aim to strengthen Japan's long-term resilience by investing in education, technology, and inclusive social development.

The rise of Sanae Takaichi as Japan's first female Prime Minister in October 2025 marks a decisive turning point in the country's domestic and foreign policy. Her administration represents not merely a change in leadership but a recalibration of Japan's political identity.

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA). ““Central Asia + Japan” Dialogue – 13th Tokyo Dialogue: Geopolitical Outlook of the Central Asia Region” URL

https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/pressit_000001_01901.html

¹¹ *The Japan Times*. “Japan Revives ‘Central Asia + Japan’ Framework with New Focus on Hydrogen, Digital Economy, and Supply Chains.” 8 November 2025. — URL: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>

Analysis presents comparative expert opinions from four major geopolitical spheres: the United States, Europe, Central Asia, and Japan highlight how each interprets Takaichi's emerging doctrine.

According to Sheila A. Smith, a senior fellow for Japan studies at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the rise of Sanae Takaichi represents a turning point in Japan's political trajectory. She argues that Takaichi's government embodies a decisive shift toward nationalism, defense consolidation, and a restrictive immigration agenda. Smith emphasizes that Japan now faces the challenge of balancing its economic need for foreign labor with growing political pressure for tighter border control and domestic security. Furthermore, American analysts underscore that while Washington views Tokyo as an increasingly capable strategic ally, concerns remain that Japan's push for autonomy-especially in defense and immigration-could occasionally complicate bilateral coordination. In short, the United States interprets Takaichi's policy line as an opportunity to strengthen partnership within the Indo-Pacific framework, yet one accompanied by risks of heightened ideological rigidity.¹²

European experts offer a more nuanced reading. Elli-Katharina Pohlkamp, from the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), suggests that Takaichi's Japan may become a more consequential strategic partner for Europe, particularly in the areas of supply-chain resilience, defense cooperation, and technological security. However, she notes that Tokyo's growing emphasis on national identity and restrictive migration policy may reduce Japan's attractiveness to skilled migrants and global talent. Analysts at the Atlantic Council likewise argue that Japan's accelerated goal of raising defense spending to 2 percent of GDP marks its transformation from an "economic partner" into a "strategic actor."¹³

From a Eurasian perspective, Timur Dadabaev, Professor at the University of Tsukuba and a leading specialist on Japan-Central Asia relations, emphasizes that Tokyo's regional diplomacy under Sanae Takaichi continues Japan's long-term commitment to "*bridges, not blocs.*" He argues that Japan's engagement with Central

¹² Understanding Takaichi Sanae: Sheila Smith on Japan's First Female Prime Minister
<https://www.cfr.org/article/potential-impact-takaichi-sanae-japans-first-female-prime-minister-conversation-dr-sheila>

¹³ Pohlkamp, Elli-Katharina. "*Pacific drift: Why Europe needs a Japan strategy for the Takaichi-Trump era.*" European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 5 November 2025. Available at:
<https://www.ecfr.eu/article/pacific-drift-why-europe-needs-a-japan-strategy-for-the-takaichi-trump-era/>

Asia prioritizes confidence-building, institutional trust, and cooperation in the fields of infrastructure, energy, and human-capital development. According to Dadabaev, Japan seeks to maintain its image as a “distant but reliable partner,” offering technological and educational assistance without imposing political conditions. This approach, consistent with the *Central Asia + Japan Dialogue* framework, reflects Takaichi’s broader strategy of diversifying diplomatic partnerships and promoting stability through development-oriented diplomacy.¹⁴

Within Japan, experts such as Naoko Hashimoto (International Christian University, Tokyo) warn that the country’s foreign-resident population has reached record levels-around 3 percent of the total-and that the government remains “structurally unprepared” to manage the social and administrative challenges of immigration. She argues that Japan requires a comprehensive migration management framework rather than merely stronger enforcement and surveillance. Analysts writing for East Asia Forum echo this concern, noting that if Takaichi’s administration prioritizes control and exclusion over integration and skill attraction, Japan’s demographic and labor shortages will intensify further.¹⁵

Conclusion. As we can see across these four regions, analysts converge on the view that Takaichi’s agenda marks a profound transformation in Japan’s domestic and foreign policy. Her leadership integrates national self-reliance, defense modernization, and managed immigration within a framework of pragmatic conservatism.”

American observers see both opportunity and risk in Japan’s newfound autonomy.

Europeans regard Tokyo as an essential but ideologically distinct partner.

Central Asian scholars perceive a pragmatic, infrastructure-driven strategy without mass migration.

Japanese academics identify the internal contradiction between economic necessity and political restraint.

In my opinion, governance of **Sanae Takaichi** marks not only a political transition but a deeper civilizational moment for. Her leadership, reflects a attempt to reconcile the apparent contradictions between globalization and national identity, between

¹⁴ Dadabaev, Timur. “Bridges, Not Blocs: Japan’s Central Asia Approach.” *The Times of Central Asia*, 12 September 2025. Available at: <https://timesca.com/2025/09/12/bridges-not-blocs-japans-central-asia-approach/>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/TokyoGaijinMode/photos/japans-foreign-population-keeps-rising-but-experts-warn-tokyo-is-completely-unpr/1118928623743388/>

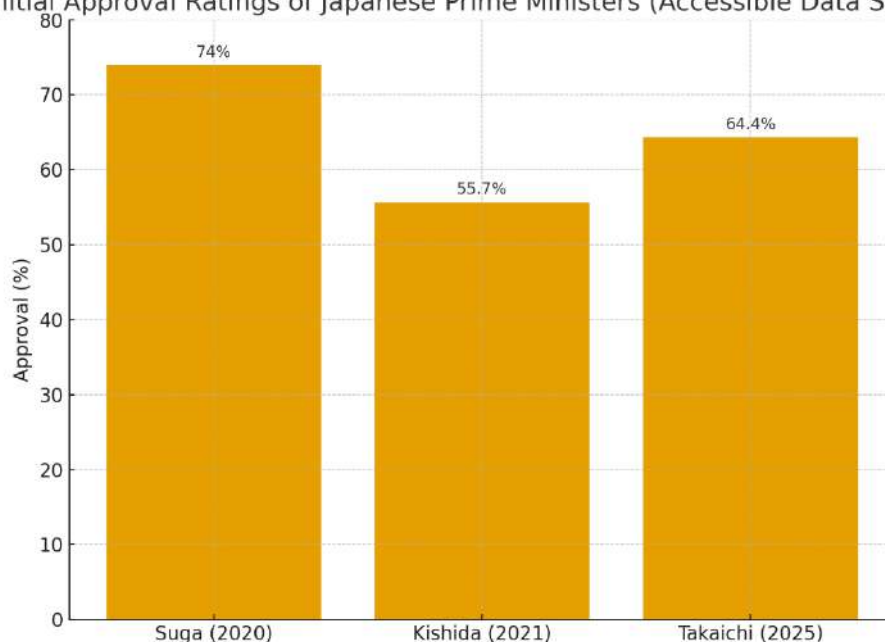
openness and self-preservation. Takaichi's Japan stands at a crossroads between openness and self-protection.

Her policies embody a careful balance: strengthening sovereignty and defense while cautiously redefining globalization in Japanese terms. For the world, Japan now appears as both a stable partner and an increasingly self-assertive power-one whose conservative pragmatism may shape a new pattern of international cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia.

In summary, the ongoing transformation under Takaichi's leadership should be understood not as ideological radicalization but as an effort to harmonize Japan's domestic stability with its international responsibilities.

The initial actions of **Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's government** confirm a paradigm shift-from Kishida's reactive moderation to proactive governance. The measures already enacted have resonated positively among the Japanese public.

Initial Approval Ratings of Japanese Prime Ministers (Accessible Data Sources)



According to **NHK and Nikkei Research** polls (November 2025), the cabinet's approval rating reached more than **64%**.¹⁶

The new government's strategy can be summarized in three guiding principles:

1. **“Defensive proactivity”** - Japan does not initiate conflicts but prepares preemptively.

¹⁶ New Opinion Poll Highs for a New Prime Minister URL: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h30017/>

2. **“Economic autonomy as leverage of policy”** - Energy and technology are integral to foreign policy.

3. **“Soft power through technological leadership”** - Japan’s image shifts from cultural to techno projects.

Takaichi should not be viewed as Abe’s or Kishida’s successor, but as a reformer advancing Japan into a new stage-combining economic intervention, defense consolidation, and strategic autonomy. This evolution bears particular significance for Central Asia, where Japan has long operated primarily through soft power but now signals greater initiative and investment.¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://uznews.uz/ru/news/104891>

Prospects for Attracting Japanese Investment into the Development of Uzbekistan's Tourism Industry

M. Abdurasulova, Senior Research Fellow (IAIS)



The transformation of Uzbekistan's investment climate after 2016, including currency liberalization, the reduction of administrative barriers, and large scale infrastructure modernization, has created favorable conditions for attracting foreign investment. Against the backdrop of growing interest in Central Asia as a new transport, logistics, and civilizational hub, Japan's attention to the region has intensified. Japan possesses substantial investment capacity and extensive experience in developing tourism clusters, which opens opportunities for the transfer of Japanese technologies and management models into Uzbekistan's tourism sector. Strategic competition among major powers for influence in the region further enhances the importance of Uzbek Japanese cooperation, where tourism functions as an instrument of soft power and a channel for expanding cultural and economic ties.

When assessing the prospects for economically viable and mutually beneficial relations between Japan and Uzbekistan, it is essential to consider that significant geographical distance and high logistical costs impose tangible constraints on bilateral cooperation. Particular emphasis should therefore be placed on sectors in which investment activity is not directly dependent on physical distance. These include education, the creation of IT companies, the use of skilled programming labor, and tourism, which represents a third highly promising sector. Tourism is among the most attractive areas for Japanese capital, as investment decisions in this field rely primarily on branding, institutional guarantees, and infrastructure quality rather than on complex logistics chains.

The rapid development of Uzbekistan's tourism industry in recent years reflects the state's intention to diversify the economy and expand service exports.

The introduction of visa free travel for Japanese citizens became a key instrument for stimulating tourist flows, as evidenced by the steady increase in the number of Japanese visitors since 2017. Changes in travel



patterns, particularly the growth in independent travelers, indicate the formation of stable demand that can be converted into investment interest, provided that appropriate infrastructure is established. The dynamics of tourist inflows demonstrate growth from approximately four thousand visitors in 2017 to more than twenty eight thousand within the first ten months of 2025, excluding the pandemic period. This trend suggests that Uzbekistan is gradually strengthening its position as a new cultural and historical tourism destination along the Silk Road routes.

At the same time, Uzbekistan remains a niche destination within the Japanese outbound tourism market. Visitor numbers are measured in tens of thousands, whereas popular destinations in East and Southeast Asia attract millions of Japanese tourists annually. Factor analysis indicates that the main barriers are predominantly institutional and informational in nature. These include insufficient digitalization of tax and banking services, regulatory complexity, a lack of marketing information regarding the advantages of investing in tourism, and the low visibility of Uzbekistan's tourism brand in the Japanese market. An additional constraint is the absence of systematic support and consulting mechanisms for Japanese investors throughout all stages of project implementation.

These conclusions are corroborated by interviews conducted with representatives of Japanese public and private institutions, ranging from JETRO and JICA to private investors and bilateral cooperation associations. Most respondents note that interest in Uzbekistan is increasing, yet decisions regarding large scale investments are hindered by data shortages, weak inter institutional coordination, and the lack of specialized studies on models for attracting Japanese tourists and investors.



Examples of specific Japanese companies illustrate the mixed nature of their experience in Uzbekistan. The company HIS, which launched operations in Tashkent, and Kyoto Plaza Hotels, which implemented a project in Khorezm, encountered organizational difficulties related to institutional support, business model adaptation, and limited availability of localized information.

These cases demonstrate that Japanese capital is particularly sensitive to issues of transparency, risk management, compliance with standards, and the quality of communication.

Against the backdrop of Japan's growing strategic interest in Central Asia and the intensification of diplomatic engagement between Uzbekistan and Tokyo, attracting Japanese investment into the tourism sector presents new opportunities for strengthening bilateral relations. Tourism serves not only as an economic sector but also as a humanitarian channel that facilitates trust building, cultural diplomacy, and the expansion of people to people contacts.

Further consolidation and deepening of Uzbek Japanese cooperation in tourism requires the establishment of a comprehensive institutional and governance framework based on strategic planning, the reduction of administrative barriers, and targeted positioning of Uzbekistan's tourism potential in the Japanese market. The creation of a specialized Uzbekistan Japan tourism working group would allow for the institutionalization of cooperation among government agencies, business actors, and expert communities, ensuring regular information exchange, project coordination, and monitoring of investment initiatives. The development of a national program aimed at attracting Japanese investment into the tourism industry would provide strategic direction by defining priorities, identifying target regions, and aligning incentives across central and regional authorities.

Enhancing Uzbekistan's tax and regulatory environment remains a critical condition for improving investment attractiveness. Simplifying market entry procedures, increasing regulatory transparency, and digitalizing permitting processes would help reduce transaction costs and strengthen investor confidence. Expanding direct air connections along the Tokyo Tashkent Samarkand route would create

essential logistical prerequisites for sustainable tourist flows and business mobility, thereby reinforcing Uzbekistan's competitiveness in attracting Japanese tourists and investors. In this context, the establishment of joint training centers with Japanese airlines such as ANA or JAL for the targeted preparation of ground staff and cabin crew appears particularly promising.

The creation of an Uzbek Japanese tourism training center would further contribute to the systematic development of human capital by preparing specialists who meet Japanese service standards, including guides and hospitality personnel with proficiency in language, cultural norms, and service practices. This factor is crucial for the successful localization of Japanese business models. A targeted marketing campaign branded as Uzbekistan for Japan would enhance awareness of Uzbekistan as a tourism destination, adapt the national tourism brand to Japanese consumer expectations, and ensure sustained promotion within a highly competitive market.

In order to accommodate the gastronomic preferences of Japanese tourists, it would be advisable to develop dining options that offer lighter and more dietary adaptations of Uzbek cuisine, thereby increasing comfort and strengthening the country's attractiveness as a destination. Targeted investment in rural sanitary infrastructure and its integration into tourism development can simultaneously improve service quality for visitors and living conditions for local communities, creating a socially inclusive foundation for sustainable tourism. In this context, the potential for attracting Japanese investment into the modernization of sanitary infrastructure, including Japanese style facilities, deserves particular attention as a critical yet often overlooked component of the tourism ecosystem.

The introduction of legal guarantees and investment protection instruments specifically tailored for Japanese companies would further enhance institutional predictability, reduce political and regulatory risks, and encourage the long term presence of Japanese capital. Overall, Uzbekistan possesses significant potential to transform tourism into a key sector for attracting Japanese investment. Growing interest from Japanese companies, improvements in the investment climate, and the strategic importance of Central Asia collectively create favorable conditions for expanding investment into infrastructure, hotel networks, digital services, and cultural clusters.

However, sustained success will require a systemic approach based on institutional stability, transparency, professional workforce development, and targeted

promotion of Uzbekistan's brand in Japan. If implemented comprehensively, the tourism industry can evolve into a resilient channel of Uzbek Japanese economic partnership, contributing to economic diversification and the long term strengthening of bilateral relations.

Malaysia's Position and Approaches to the Ukraine and Middle East Crises

Abbos Bobokhonov, Head of the Asia-Pacific Center (IAIS)

Malaysia has maintained a broadly neutral and balanced posture on both the Ukraine crisis and the developments in the Middle East. At the same time, Kuala Lumpur's approaches differ across the two dossiers due to strategic, geographic,



economic, and religious factors. Malaysia consistently advocates peaceful conflict resolution and does not support military escalation aimed at offensive operations against any state. In this context, Malaysia supported relevant UN General Assembly resolutions addressing Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

1. Malaysia's Approach to the Ukraine Crisis

Although Malaysia largely refrained from highly confrontational public messaging on Ukraine, it sought to keep a measured distance from Russia in line with broader Western sanctions requirements and compliance expectations. Analysts note that Kuala Lumpur aimed to avoid being drawn into great-power politics in ways that could complicate relations with other partners. Malaysian diplomats assessed that overly close alignment with Russia could weaken Malaysia's claim to neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. At the same time, despite the conflict, Malaysia remained focused on maintaining and developing economic ties with both Russia and Ukraine.

Russia, while taking note of Malaysia's neutral stance, has attached importance to relations with Kuala Lumpur, which Moscow views as relevant for sustaining links with ASEAN partners under sanctions pressure. Against the backdrop of Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship in 2025, Russia undertook multiple outreach efforts. These included the



first visit in eight years by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Malaysia (July 2024), the participation of Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok (September 2024), and Malaysia's Finance Minister attending the BRICS summit in Kazan

(October 2024). Russia has also expressed support for Malaysia's interest in closer engagement with BRICS-related processes. Experts interpret Malaysia's BRICS outreach as part of a broader diversification strategy aimed at expanding market options while maintaining ASEAN centrality amid intensifying competition among major powers.

Malaysian defense experts have generally argued for limiting defense and military cooperation with Russia. However, specialists point out that a significant portion of Malaysia's air force inventory includes Russian-made platforms, which constrains Kuala Lumpur's ability to rapidly disengage from certain forms of technical cooperation.

According to Malaysia's *Economic Outlook 2023*, the direct economic impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on Malaysia has been limited, reflecting modest trade and financial ties with both countries. Trade with Russia and Ukraine reportedly accounts for around 1 percent of Malaysia's total trade, with trade volumes estimated at approximately USD 3.5 billion with Russia and USD 374.8 million with Ukraine. Nevertheless, the prolonged conflict has produced indirect effects, including higher prices for food and commodities, as well as increased logistics and transportation costs.

Shahrman Lockman, an analyst at Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS Malaysia), argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine could establish a problematic precedent for the Asia-Pacific region. He links this concern to long-standing maritime and territorial disputes in the South China Sea involving China, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. In his view, the Ukraine conflict may divert U.S. attention away from the Asia-Pacific, potentially leaving regional states more exposed to China's growing influence and thereby stressing an already fragile strategic balance.

2. Malaysia's Approach to the Middle East Crisis. The Middle East crisis, particularly developments in Gaza amid Israel's military operations, has generated

significantly stronger concern among Malaysia's political and societal elites than the Ukraine crisis. Malaysia supports a two-state solution, envisaging Israel and Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. In this context, Malaysia advocates a negotiated settlement and supports efforts toward broader international recognition of Palestine, including the question of Palestine's full membership in the United Nations.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim declined to condemn Hamas's 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel and used strongly critical language toward Israel's actions in Gaza. Malaysia's reaction was widely anticipated given the country's long-standing pro-Palestinian orientation and the absence of diplomatic relations with Israel, which Malaysia does not recognize. Malaysian official discourse often frames the conflict through the lens of occupation and international law, presenting the status of Palestinian territories as the central driver of the crisis.



Despite diplomatic pressure from the United States, Malaysia has not designated Hamas as a terrorist organization. Malaysia has also hosted various Palestine-related civil society initiatives over time, and it actively promotes the Palestinian issue within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.



Malaysia's official position aligns with strong pro-Palestinian public sentiment. According to Verve Research Malaysia, broad societal sympathy for the Palestinian cause has shaped Malaysia's foreign policy posture, visible not only through humanitarian assistance but also in consistent political and moral support. The *South China Morning Post* reported that in 2023 Malaysia saw large-scale public demonstrations (around 15,000 participants) in support of Gaza and against Israeli bombardment. The presence of prominent political and religious figures at these events was interpreted as reflecting a high degree of alignment between elite discourse and public attitudes on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Malaysia has also supported boycott campaigns targeting selected corporations. McDonald's and Starbucks were among the most visible targets, and both companies reported substantial losses. In addition, the Malaysian government prohibited cargo vessels flying the Israeli flag from entering Malaysian ports.

Experts from the Washington Institute argue that the Middle East crisis has once again highlighted a persistent tension in Malaysia's foreign policy: balancing robust support for Palestine with Kuala Lumpur's interest in maintaining workable relations with Western partners. Washington expressed concern over Malaysia's political engagement with Hamas, including after Anwar Ibrahim met Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in 2024. Malaysia also publicly voiced support for Iran's missile launches toward Israel, a position that may further complicate relations with the United States if regional escalation intensifies.

According to analysts at IMEMO RAS, the Palestinian issue has become an increasingly important element of both domestic and foreign policy across Muslim-majority Southeast Asian states, including Malaysia. In their assessment, Kuala Lumpur is interested in de-escalation in part due to concerns that prolonged conflict could contribute to domestic radicalization risks, increase extremist recruitment narratives, and heighten interreligious and sectarian sensitivities in a region that is historically responsive to external shocks.

Overall Assessment. From a geopolitical standpoint, Malaysia's neutrality on the major crises of the current period can be interpreted as a strategic effort to secure room for maneuver amid intensifying global competition. Positioning Malaysia as a broadly neutral "partner to all" may help Kuala Lumpur manage friction with Western actors while sustaining its long-standing commitment to supporting Palestine. At the same time, experts note that uncertainty surrounding the trajectory of both conflicts complicates Malaysian decision-making, particularly where foreign policy choices carry reputational, economic, and security trade-offs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies would like to express its sincere appreciation to all partners and colleagues who supported its work throughout 2025. A key achievement of the year was the strengthening of Uzbekistan–China and Uzbekistan–Japan cooperation through sustained expert dialogue, institutional communication, and a growing agenda of joint initiatives. This progress was reflected not only in the expansion of academic exchange, but also in the emergence of new thematic priorities, including green energy, water management, technology, and tourism, which increasingly form the practical foundation of bilateral engagement.

The Centre also contributed to analytical and expert support of major regional processes by ensuring timely research input for conferences, roundtables, and discussions linked to high-level summits, bilateral meetings, and official visits. These activities helped reinforce evidence-based communication and supported deeper understanding of Asia-Pacific dynamics in relation to Central Asia’s strategic interests, including within multilateral Eurasian frameworks.

Looking ahead, the Centre remains committed to broadening its academic outreach and strengthening cooperation with leading research institutions and diplomatic partners. In 2026, efforts will focus on expanding joint research projects, launching new expert platforms, and enhancing opportunities for scholarly mobility and co-authored outputs, further consolidating the Centre’s role as a hub for policy-relevant Asia-Pacific expertise.

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