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US-JAPAN RELATIONS

A SUMMER OF SETBACKS

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The summer of 2017 was an uneasy one in both Tokyo and Washington. In Japan, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo struggled as public approval dropped precipitously following scandals and a miserable performance for his party in the Tokyo metropolitan elections. In the US, President Donald Trump moved from conflict to conflict, resulting in a historically low approval rating for a new administration and deep fissures within the Republican Party. Alliance cooperation largely focused on the continuing tensions with North Korea. A long-awaited Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (2+2 Meeting) between the defense and foreign policy principals could not be scheduled until after Abe reshuffled his Cabinet in August. While the discussions proved cordial, there was little indication that a strategic look ahead was in the making. Troubles at home for both administrations seemed to forestall any effort at a comprehensive US-Japan discussion about the Asia-Pacific region.

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North Korea's barrage of missiles

North Korea dominated the news over the summer, bringing a growing sense among US allies of an impending regional crisis. As if the spring [warnings](#) that “all [options](#) were on the table” were too vague, President Trump doubled down on his rhetorical [assault](#) on North Korea, promising “fire and fury like the world has never seen.” But was this a threat of a preemptive strike? Was the new US president willing to risk nuclear war? Or was it simply more bluster from a commander-in-chief who wanted to sound tough for a domestic audience? Hard to say. Yet, despite the war of words between Trump and Kim Jong Un, [consultations](#) were frequent between Trump and Abe. Meanwhile, US Cabinet members and military leaders traveled to the region to reassure alliance solidarity in their effort to increase financial and military pressure on the Kim regime.

By the end of the summer, Kim's regime had [fired](#) 21 missiles during 14 tests in 2017, bringing the total to 87 for his tenure in office according to an analysis by the Center for Nonproliferation Studies. This is more than his father (16) and grandfather (15) combined, and indicative of the seriousness of his stated intention to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the US homeland. In June, Pyongyang fired several cruise missiles from its east coast into the Sea of Japan, and in July, two missile tests of the *Hwasong-14*, first on [July 4](#) and again on [July 28](#), revealed the improved range of North Korea's missiles. Kim called the July 4 ICBM test part of a “package of gifts” for the “American bastards” on their Independence Day holiday. The July 28 launch was [scrutinized](#) by technical experts and deemed to be a second successful demonstration of Pyongyang's ICBM capability, although the question of whether it could manage a heavy warhead remained. While it was initially unclear as to how far into the US this ICBM could travel, the conclusion now is that Pyongyang has the ability to strike the US.

By August, Kim decided to take President Trump up on his brinkmanship, and his generals reportedly devised a [plan](#) to send four missiles to the waters of Guam, where the US Air Force maintains their bombers as well as the THAAD missile defense system. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, however, made it clear that any North Korean missiles approaching Guam would be treated as an attack on the US that “could

[escalate](#) into war very quickly,” and Kim seemed to pause. Upon receipt of his general's plan for the Guam launch, Kim stated that he would “[watch](#) a little more the foolish and stupid conduct of the Yankees” before deciding whether to approve the plan. Meanwhile, testing of the alliance capability to intercept a missile accelerated.

Annual US-ROK [exercises](#), known as *Ulchi Freedom Guardian*, began on Aug. 21, and there seemed to be some signaling that the US was willing to take a [step](#) in the direction of de-escalation. Approximately 17,500 US service members took part in the drills, down from the 25,000 involved in the 2016 drills. While the Pentagon did not officially mention the reduction of troops, it did [emphasize](#) the defensive nature of the drills.

But on Aug. 29, as US and Japanese forces in Japan practiced their ballistic missile defense readiness, the North Koreans [sent](#) a missile across Japan without warning. While Pyongyang's rockets have traversed Japan with its *Taepodong* launch in 1998 and skirted Japanese territory with its *Kwangmyongsong* launch in 2009, both of these were described as satellite launch attempts. This year, however, there was no mistaking that this was a demonstration of North Korea's growing missile capability, and that Tokyo faced greater hurdles in responding to Pyongyang's military threat than Washington did.



1North Korea launches a Hwasong-12 IRBM on Aug. 29, 2017 (KCNA)

Diplomatic efforts to muster an international response to North Korea's belligerence also paid off. At the United Nations, US Ambassador Nikki Haley consistently [pushed](#) a new harder international line against Pyongyang, arguing for global sanctions on the North Korean

economy. Meanwhile, President Trump tweeted repeatedly that while he thought China was trying, it was not doing [enough](#). Secretaries Mattis and Tillerson continued to [argue](#) for more pressure to get Kim to the negotiating table.

At the [G20](#) Summit, Prime Minister Abe also made North Korea his priority as he met European leaders and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The United Kingdom was on board with the notion that Pyongyang's proliferation was of global consequence, and France had already committed itself to a bigger role in Asia's largest security challenge. Abe and Putin reiterated their concern over rising tensions in the region, and Abe continued to appeal to China to increase efforts at sanctioning its ally.

As Abe sought greater US pressure on the North, others were less sanguine about the military escalation. Beijing and Moscow, alarmed at the precipitous rise in tensions between Kim and Trump, openly advocated a freeze on missile tests in return for a freeze on US military exercises. On Aug. 5, the UN Security Council announced [Resolution 2371](#), which imposed sanctions on trade in four critical commodities: coal, iron ore, lead, and seafood products, threatening an estimated one-third of North Korean earnings from trade.

Perhaps one silver lining to be found is the increased cooperation between Japan, the United States, and South Korea. The troubled bilateral relationship between Seoul and Tokyo seemed destined to backtrack when Moon Jae-in came into office on May 9 as he had campaigned on reopening the "comfort women" [agreement](#) reached by impeached President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Abe in December 2015. However, Moon quickly sent an emissary to Tokyo to indicate that he was not going to let differences over history get in the way of cooperation on other [issues](#). Moreover, as Pyongyang's missiles continued to fly, Moon and Abe found ample cause for cooperation. Not only did Moon consult with Trump during the heightened tensions over North Korean launches, he and Abe too were in direct contact over how to respond to the August launch over Hokkaido.

By Aug. 31, it was clear that Japan, Korea and the US were now militarily [aligned](#) to respond to any actual use of force. Not only were Japanese and US forces exercising simultaneously with the

annual US-Korea exercises, but Japanese Air Self-Defense Force fighters joined the South Korean Air Force as they accompanied US B1-B bombers across southern Japan to the Korean Peninsula. The demands of presenting a united front against Pyongyang's provocative displays of its new military power eased some South Korean concerns about working closely with Japan's military when planning for a contingency.

Abe's political troubles

It was not just North Korea that challenged Prime Minister Abe this summer. From June to August, the Abe Cabinet support rating dropped by over 20 points in most media polls. The *Yomiuri Shimbun*, perhaps the most sympathetic to his leadership, recorded a 12-point [drop](#) from 61 to 49 percent in June, followed by another [drop](#) of 13 points to 36 percent in July.

Scandals eroded Abe's public approval rating throughout the summer. While the first scandal to break in the spring seemed to have little direct connection to the prime minister, a second involving the Ministry of Education's approval for a veterinary school seemed more damaging. Memos produced by a former ministry bureaucrat, Maekawa Kihei, suggested a direct [link](#) to the Cabinet in giving priority to one of Abe's friends, Kake Kotaro. It did not help that the government was widely rumored to have tried to discredit Maekawa.

The second blow to the prime minister's popularity came in of the Tokyo Metropolitan [elections](#) on July 2. The Liberal Democratic Party(LDP) had already been dealt a critical blow when their candidate failed to win against the popular Koike Yuriko in the governor's race. Koike won that seat by a margin of 3 million votes, and then began to form her own party, which she dubbed Tokyo First. In July's Assembly elections, 50 candidates carried the banner of Tokyo First, and 49 of them won seats. Six incumbents joined Koike's party for the race. This election was interesting for one of Koike's interests – women's empowerment. Of Tokyo First's 55 members, 18 (32.7 percent) are women. Today, women hold 36 of the 127 (28.3 percent) Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly seats. By comparison, women comprise 20.7 percent of Japan's House of Councillors and only 9.3 percent of the House of Representatives. The average percentage of women elected to local assemblies in Japan is 9.9 percent, making

Tokyo a striking example of the growing number of women who seek political leadership.

Election turnout was also notable, with an additional 1 million voters participating. Voter turnout for the 2017 assembly election was 51 percent, up from 43.5 percent in 2013. Whereas Tokyo voters were enthusiastic about Koike and her new party, they were far less impressed with the prime minister's party. The LDP suffered an ignominious defeat in Japan's capital. Abe's party had 57 seats going into the election, yet held on to just 23. Moreover, the LDP lost 373,000 votes compared to the previous election despite the larger voter pool. Equally devastating were the results for the Democratic Party, once thought to be the champion of Tokyo's urbanites: its share of the Assembly declined from 7 seats to 5. The crushing defeat by Koike of the LDP sent Abe's public support numbers plunging once again.

The LDP responded to these setbacks by rallying around a new Cabinet. This was the third Abe [Cabinet](#) since his return to office in December 2012. But unlike the previous two, it included a conspicuous number of critics of the prime minister or who had been marginalized in his return to office. Noda Seiko joined the Cabinet, becoming one of its most senior politicians, to take on three portfolios: minister for internal affairs and communications, minister in charge of women's empowerment, and minister of state for the social security and tax number system. Kono Taro was the surprise pick for minister of Foreign Affairs. Folded into this reshuffle was the replacement of the beleaguered Defense Minister Inada Tomomi by the return of Onodera Itsunori, who served in Abe's first Cabinet. In his time out of the ministry, Onodera had led the LDP's policy discussion on Japan's missile defenses, presenting Abe with a proposal for considering the acquisition of Japan's own conventional missiles. By the end of the summer, the Cabinet's support rating had [risen](#) slightly to 42 percent, perhaps aided by concern over North Korea's missile launches as well as by the "all LDP" [effort](#) to regain the public's trust.

A shakeup for the 7th Fleet

The cascade of accidents involving the US Navy also troubled the US-Japan alliance. The US 7th Fleet faced an unprecedented series of accidents and mishaps in and around Japanese waters over

the summer, prompting the [firing](#) on Aug. 23 of Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, the fleet commander.

Several [incidents](#) of sailors falling overboard were [reported](#) in Asian waters. One turned out to be a false alarm after the missing sailor was [found](#) hiding in the engineering compartment, but the other [sailor](#) was never found. Earlier in the year on Jan. 31, the *USS Antietam*, a *Ticonderoga*-class guided-missile cruiser, ran [aground](#) in Tokyo Bay just outside the entrance to the US naval base at Yokosuka. No personnel were injured, although the ship did discharge hydraulic oil into the bay.

But it was the two *Aegis* destroyers colliding with civilian vessels that shocked the region. The first [collision](#) involved the *USS Fitzgerald* and a Philippine container ship in the early hours of June 17 in the busy shipping lanes near Tokyo Bay. The captain of the ship was badly injured in his cabin and seven sailors lost their lives, as sleeping compartments were flooded. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and the Coast Guard joined in the search and rescue [effort](#), and provided assistance in getting the hobbled destroyer back to Yokosuka. The US Navy [investigation](#) found the crew derelict in their duty, and three officers were [relieved](#) from duty.



2Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) sits in Dry Dock 4 at Fleet Activities (FLEACT) Yokosuka to continue repairs and assess damage sustained from its June 17 collision with a merchant vessel (US Navy)

A second remarkably similar [collision](#) took place when the *USS John S. McCain* collided with a Liberian tanker in the busy Strait of Malacca near Singapore. Again, the crew sleeping quarters were flooded, and 10 sailors were reported missing. Singapore provided [assistance](#) to the *USS John S. McCain*, as did Indonesia and

Malaysia. The US Navy [paused](#) operations globally for several days. Although the investigation into this second collision is still ongoing, Adm. Scott Swift, commander of US Pacific Fleet, [relieved](#) the commander of the 7th Fleet of his post because he no longer had confidence in his leadership.

Rumors that cyber attackers might be to blame for the collisions circulated in the press, but Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson said that while he could not rule this out, he would be focused on “how we do business on the [bridge](#).” Vice Adm. Aucoin’s replacement, Vice Adm. Phil Sawyer, had already been [confirmed](#) to take command of the 7th Fleet, and is now tasked with a comprehensive review of fleet operations to determine what caused the series of accidents.

Damage to the reputation of the US Navy in the Pacific is unmistakable. Chinese media did not hesitate to [highlight](#) the troubles as the *Global Times* gloated that the days of US maritime dominance were receding. It did not help that in the midst of Pyongyang’s intensifying missile threat, both of these destroyers were *Aegis*-equipped as part of the US Navy’s missile defense system in the Pacific. On Sep. 2, Adm. Harry Harris, commander of the US Pacific Command, [announced](#) that two other *Aegis* destroyers will be assigned to the 7th Fleet in 2018 to replace the damaged ships, and ensure US readiness.

New faces in alliance management

The summer also brought some new faces to US-Japan alliance management. On June 13, the Senate approved William Hagerty as US ambassador to Japan. A businessman from Tennessee, Hagerty served on the Trump transition team and his experience in the George H.W. Bush administration made him a valuable asset. He spent several years in Japan with the Boston Consulting Group early in his career. During his confirmation [hearings](#), Hagerty mostly faced [questions](#) about challenges posed by North Korea and China, as well as how to expand US exports to Japan. In the absence of political appointees at Defense and State responsible for East Asia, Hagerty is now the most senior Japan policymaker.

Tokyo has also changed its team at the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While Onodera is returning to office after a

relatively short absence, Kono is a fresh face in alliance management. However, he does have experience with the US-Japan alliance and Japan’s foreign policy in Asia. Educated at Georgetown University, Kono speaks English fluently and is widely respected by many in the United States as one of Japan’s leading globalists.

As a member of the Lower House from Kanagawa Prefecture, Kono has particular expertise related to US military bases and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that governs their presence in Japan. Moreover, Kono is one of Japan’s most knowledgeable legislators on nuclear issues, and as foreign minister will be well-suited to lead the conversation with Washington over the US-Japan nuclear cooperation agreement which is due for renewal next year.

The Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”) [meeting](#) on Aug. 17 provided an early opportunity for these new members of Japan’s alliance management team to meet their US counterparts. Coming as it did on the heels of Pyongyang’s intensified missile launches, Secretaries Tillerson and Mattis joined Ministers Kono and Onodera in condemning North Korea’s missile tests and agreeing to [bolster](#) alliance capabilities to respond in areas such as missile defense. Japan’s Defense Ministry plans to [introduce](#) a land-based *Aegis* Ashore missile defense system, and hopes to convince the US government to share its next-generation radar, known as *Spy-6*. Washington appears reluctant, however, to share the advanced radar technology in the near future, given that the first *Spy-6*-equipped *Aegis* warship is not expected to begin operations until 2022. Without *Spy-6*, Tokyo will have to rely on existing radar technology, which has a smaller range than the newest generation of ballistic missile defense interceptor missiles.

Apart from North Korea, the 2+2 meeting participants also expressed concern about the security environment in the East and South China Seas. They reaffirmed that Article 5 of the US-Japan Security Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands and stressed that any disputes in the South China Sea must be settled peacefully in accordance with the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea.

Looking ahead

As fall approaches, the Abe Cabinet will be looking to restore public confidence in government. Diplomacy is likely to be high on the agenda as the prime minister and foreign minister head to the UN General Assembly meeting in New York in September. [Conversations](#) between Abe and Trump have been frequent throughout the summer, and both leaders continue to insist publicly that the correct course is to continue to increase pressure on the Kim regime.

North Korea can also be expected to intensify its military challenge to the US-Japan alliance. The Sep. 9 anniversary of the founding of the DPRK is expected to bring new demonstrations of Kim Jong Un's increasingly lethal arsenal. A sixth nuclear [test](#) on Sept. 3 offered a prelude to the anniversary that has many in the region worried. In response to the nuclear [test](#), Abe [instructed](#) his government to monitor North Korean behavior, measure radiation levels, and do all that is necessary to defend the Japanese people. US and Japanese military planners will continue to accelerate their ability to intercept a North Korean missile should Kim test Japanese or US defenses further. Cooperation with Seoul will also be imperative, but Abe is likely to reach out to the leaders of China, Russia, and Europe to gain support for a global coalition of condemnation.

Finally, although the planned meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro and Vice President Mike Pence has been [cancelled](#), it remains to be seen how Tokyo and Washington will manage their economic relationship as the Trump administration continues to unsettle its trading partners by threatening to [terminate](#) the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Korea-US Free Trade [Agreement](#) (KORUS). President Trump has also created strain in the US-Korea alliance by accusing President Moon Jae-in of "[appeasing](#)" North Korea. As the region faces the worst security crisis in decades, the tension between the Trump administration's trade agenda and its strategic aims continue to undermine confidence across the region, and concerns over the alliance continue to grow in Tokyo.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-JAPAN RELATIONS

MAY – AUGUST 2017

May 9, 2017: Guided-missile cruiser *USS Lake Champlain* [collides](#) with a South Korean fishing vessel in international waters east of the Korean Peninsula. No injuries are reported.

May 11, 2017: US Senate [confirms](#) Robert Lighthizer (82-14 vote) as US Trade Representative.

May 14, 2017: North Korea [tests](#) a *Hwasong-12* intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM), which it says is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. The missile flies 430 miles before falling into the Sea of Japan.

May 16, 2017: Fourth US-Japan Comprehensive [Dialogue](#) on Space convenes in Washington. The dialogue is co-chaired by the Executive Office of the President's National Security Council and Office of Science and Technology Policy for the US, and by representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Space Policy Secretariat, Cabinet Office for Japan.

May 21, 2017: North Korea [tests](#) a *Pukguksong-2* medium-range ballistic missile, which flies 310 miles before falling into the Sea of Japan.

May 26, 2017: President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [meet](#) in Taormina, Italy on the sidelines of the G7 Summit. They discuss [cooperation](#) on North Korea, maritime issues, and terrorist threats.

May 29, 2017: North Korea [tests](#) a *Scud*-class short-range ballistic missile, which flies 280 miles before falling into the Sea of Japan.

June 1-2, 2017: Acting Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation Eliot Kang travels to Japan to attend the biannual Plenary [Meeting](#) of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

June 8, 2017: North Korea [test-fires](#) cruise missiles from its east coast into the Sea of Japan.

June 8, 2017: US sailor is [reported](#) missing and assumed overboard from the guided-missile cruiser *USS Shiloh* while it is conducting routine operations 180 miles east of Okinawa.

June 11, 2017: US Navy suspends [search](#) for missing US sailor from the *USS Shiloh* after US Navy, JSMDF, and Japan Coast Guard assets spend more than 50 hours in a comprehensive search of 5,500 square miles of the Philippine Sea.

June 14, 2017: US-Japan bilateral Extended Deterrence Dialogue [convenes](#) in Tokyo. Japan is represented by Deputy Director General of the North American Affairs Bureau Ono Keiichi and Deputy Director General of the Defense Policy Bureau Oka Masami. US is represented by Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance Anita Friedt and Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans and Capabilities Thomas Harvey.

June 15, 2017: Missing US sailor from *USS Shiloh* is [found](#) hiding in an engineering space on the ship.

June 17, 2017: *Aegis* destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* [collides](#) with Philippines freighter *ACX Crystal* off the coast of Japan, resulting in the deaths of seven US sailors and injuries to three others. US Navy search and rescue [efforts](#) begin with the help of the Japan Coast Guard and JMSDF.

June 23, 2017: North Korea tests a rocket [engine](#) that, according to US officials, could be part of a program to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

July 2, 2017: Tokyo Gov. Koike Yuriko's Tokyo First party scores sweeping [victory](#) in Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly elections, upsetting the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Supporters of Koike now control 79 of 127 seats, including 49 held by Tokyo First.

July 2, 2017: President Trump and PM Abe [speak](#) by phone to exchange views on the threat posed by North Korea.

July 4, 2017: North Korea [tests](#) its *Hwasong-14* ICBM, which flies 578 miles before landing in the Sea of Japan.

July 6, 2017: President Trump, PM Abe, and President Moon hold a US-Japan-ROK trilateral [meeting](#) on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany.

July 8, 2017: President Trump and PM Abe meet on sidelines of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany. They [condemn](#) North Korea's July 4 missile test.

July 13, 2017: US Senate [confirms](#) William Hagerty (86-12 vote) as US ambassador to Japan.

July 19, 2017: Senior Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State and Director of Policy Planning Brian Hook, Deputy Foreign Minister for Foreign Policy Suzuki Satoshi, and Director General of the Policy Planning Bureau Ma Sang-yoon hold trilateral policy planning [dialogue](#) in Washington, DC.

July 20-21, 2017: Fifth Japan-US Cyber [Dialogue](#) is held in Tokyo. The Japanese delegation is led by Deputy Director General of the Foreign Policy Bureau and Ambassador for Cyber Policy Otaka Masato. The US delegation is led by Christopher Painter, Coordinator for Cyber Issues at the State Department.

July 24-25, 2017: Prime Minister Abe appears in a special Diet [hearing](#) to reassert that he never rigged the government's decision to back a new veterinary department at a university run by his close friend, Kake Kotaru.

July 27, 2017: Defense Minister Inada Tomomi announces that she will [resign](#) following allegations that she withheld information from the Diet about the dangers facing Japanese soldiers on a UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan.

July 27, 2017: House of Councillors lawmaker Renho announces that she will [resign](#) as president of Japan's opposition Democratic Party.

July 28, 2017: North Korea [tests](#) an ICBM that appears capable of reaching the West Coast of the US. It flies 620 miles and lands in the sea near Hokkaido, Japan.

July 28, 2017: Japan's Ministry of Finance announces that the country will [raise](#) tariffs on frozen beef imports from the US and other countries to 50 percent (up from 38.5 percent) until March 2018 to protect domestic farmers.

July 30, 2017: PM Abe and President Trump speak on the phone to exchange [concerns](#) about North Korea's recent missile test.

Aug. 1, 2017: US sailor is [reported](#) missing and assumed overboard from the guided-missile destroyer *USS Stethem* while it is conducting routine operations about 140 miles west of Subic Bay in the Philippines.

Aug. 3, 2017: PM Abe reshuffles his Cabinet. Onodera Itsunori is appointed minister of defense and Kono Taro is appointed minister of foreign affairs.

Aug. 4, 2017: US Navy suspends [search](#) for missing sailor from the *USS Stethem*.

Aug. 5, 2017: UN Security Council passes [Resolution 2371](#) imposing new sanctions on North Korea.

Aug. 7, 2017: FM Kono and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [meet](#) on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila.

Aug. 7, 2017: FM Kono, Secretary Tillerson, and South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha hold a trilateral [meeting](#) on the sidelines of the ARF in Manila.

Aug. 8, 2017: President Trump threatens to unleash "[fire and fury](#)" if North Korea endangers the US or its territories.

Aug. 9, 2017: North Korea announces it is reviewing [plans](#) to strike US military targets in Guam with four ballistic missiles.

Aug. 11, 2017: US Navy releases a preliminary [report](#) on the collision between the *USS Fitzgerald* and a Philippine freighter on June 17.

Aug. 15, 2017: President Trump and PM Abe speak on the phone to [discuss](#) the growing threat from North Korea.

Aug. 16, 2017: FM Kono and DM Onodera [meet](#) National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster in Washington. Kono and Onodera also [visit](#) Arlington National Cemetery.

Aug. 17, 2017: US Ambassador to Japan William Haggerty [arrives](#) in Tokyo.

Aug. 17, 2017: Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (“2+2 Meeting”) [convenes](#) in Washington. The meeting is attended by FM Kono, DM Onodera, Secretary of State Tillerson, and Defense Secretary Mattis. A joint [statement](#) is issued.

Aug. 17, 2017: Following an initial review of the *USS Fitzgerald* collision, Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, head of the 7th Fleet, announces that the commanding officer, executive officer, and command master chief of the ship will be [relieved](#) from duty.

Aug. 21-31, 2017: US and South Korea hold annual *Ulchi Freedom Guardian* [exercise](#).

Aug. 21, 2017: *Aegis* destroyer *USS John S. McCain* [collides](#) with *Alnic MC*, a Liberian tanker, in the Strait of Malacca, resulting in 10 missing US sailors and injuries to five others.

Aug. 21, 2017: US Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson announces that the Navy will conduct a fleet-wide [review](#) and halts some operations to focus on safety procedures.

Aug. 23, 2017: US Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Scott Swift announces that Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, head of the 7th US Fleet, will be [relieved](#) from duty following the collisions of the *USS Fitzgerald* and *USS John S. McCain*.

Aug. 26, 2017: North Korea [tests](#) three short-range ballistic missiles. One explodes immediately after launch, while two others flew approximately 155 miles before falling into the Sea of Japan.

Aug. 29, 2017: North Korea [launches](#) a *Hwasong-12* IRBM over northern Japan. The missile lands approximately 733 miles east of the island.

Sept. 3, 2017: North Korea conducts its sixth nuclear [test](#), a powerful nuclear device that it claims is a hydrogen bomb.

