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EAST ASIA REGIONAL CRISIS SIMULATION

**Lessons for Stakeholders in the Republic
of Korea and the European Union**

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Content

Executive Summary	4
1. Setting the Stage	6
2. Setup of the Simulation	7
3. What Played Out & Lessons Identified	8
What Played Out	8
Lessons Identified	11
4. Knowledge Gaps (“Known Unknowns”)	14
South Korea-Related Open Questions	14
Taiwan-Related Open Questions	14
Eu-Related Open Questions	15
General Open Questions On Regional Contingency	15
5. Policy Recommendations	16
Policy Recommendations for the ROK and the EU	16
6. Full Script	25
Baseline Situation	25
Move 1: Pressure Building Up	26
Move 2: Chinese Quarantine Build-Up Preparing for Strategic Pressure Campaign	27
References	31
About the Authors	33

Executive Summary

- A potential **East Asian contingency** would significantly impact global stability and reshape relations among **the European Union (EU), the United States (US), and East Asian democracies**.
- The threat would be magnified by the **hostile geopolitical axis of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea**, which could escalate tensions across multiple regions simultaneously.
- **The European Values Center for Security Policy (EVC)** conducted a closed-door **crisis simulation** in Seoul to explore responses to a **dual-theater escalation** scenario affecting East Asia and Europe. The simulation focused on economic security dynamics and humanitarian challenges.
- This report summarizes **participant actions, feedback, and analytical insights**, offering lessons to guide real-world policy and contingency planning.
- **People's Republic of China (PRC)** – During the early phase of a China-led escalation around Taiwan, China's interest would be to **keep South Korea out of a US-led alliance**. Therefore, China would likely **refrain from pressuring North Korea** to carry out military provocations against the ROK while **offering Seoul economic benefits**. China could also deploy **Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) operations** and leverage its social media influence within South Korean society for manipulation purposes.
- **Republic of Korea (ROK)** – The ROK plays a crucial role by hosting **bases for the US military**. However, from an **energy security** perspective, the ROK is partially dependent on China for coal, critical minerals, and clean energy technologies, which could impact US forces stationed there during a crisis.
- **Republic of China (Taiwan)** – Taiwan's **energy security** emerged as a primary concern, with the survival and continuity of industrial production viewed as essential. **Cyberattacks** targeting communication systems were highlighted as a major vulnerability, potentially constraining Taiwan's ability to effectively engage in negotiations with external partners. Furthermore, **domestic political tensions**, especially the ineffective cohabitation between the executive branch and the legislature, might **hinder the implementation of emergency measures**, including export control regimes or

preventing reservists from leaving the country.

- **Japan** – Japan is a cooperative actor, but its crisis response is highly influenced by the Japanese Prime Minister’s leadership. For Japan–ROK or Japan–US security cooperation to be effective, strong personal ties between the leaders involved are essential.
- **European Union (EU)** – The EU tends to prioritize internal consensus-building, often at the expense of swift external action in crisis scenarios. This led not only to limited action and a reduced capacity to address crises, but also to decision-making that appeared slow and disjointed, with actions that lacked both effectiveness and coherence.
- The simulation showed the importance of **having a detailed internal plan** for managing economic pressure campaigns from China to help de-escalate crises. This includes pre-drafted **sanctions packages** as well as a **comprehensive assessment of strategic stockpiles and dependencies on the PRC**.
- Preparedness for an East Asia contingency requires a clear **evacuation plan** for a country’s citizens located in Taiwan.
- Given the existing bilateral partnerships, there is room for addressing challenges related to cybersecurity and hybrid threats such as FIMI, in a **trilateral format between the EU, Japan, and the ROK**.
- Every like-minded country needs to **understand how other allies think** about these East Asia contingency scenarios.

1. Setting the Stage

A potential East Asian contingency, which could transpire as a conflict or crisis involving Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula, would present a complex set of scenarios significantly impacting the international system, particularly the relations among the EU, the US, and East Asian democracies. The magnitude of such events would be amplified by the hostile geopolitical axis formed by China, Iran, Russia, and North Korea, which could escalate tensions across multiple regions simultaneously.

Despite the multifold challenges posed by the potential scenarios, a comprehensive understanding and preparedness are lacking among officials and experts from the EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and their like-minded partners in East and Southeast Asia, both at the regional and national levels. These gaps in knowledge and planning can hinder the development of coordinated and effective policy responses in areas such as foreign policy, defense, trade and economic security, and human rights. Therefore, it is **urgent to inform and educate relevant EU, NATO, and respective Indo-Pacific officials about the practical details and results of possible East Asian contingency scenarios**, including escalatory moves that Russia, China, and North Korea might take during such a crisis.

The following report is based on a closed-door crisis simulation conducted by the European Values Center for Security Policy (EVC) in Seoul, which focused primarily on economic security (e.g., how the PRC could deploy its economic statecraft toolbox) and humanitarian aspects (e.g., the evacuation of civilians). It details the actions taken by active players and the subsequent feedback provided by both the players themselves and observers. None of its contents reflects the formal positions of any state or institution.

This simulation aims to inform real-life policy planning by illustrating **how a two-theater escalation scenario might play out, as well as how individual states and institutions might react. It also seeks to identify potential gaps in planning and decision-making** that could emerge during such a crisis. While this report compiles the opinions of governmental and non-governmental experts, full responsibility for the final formulations lies with the authors, the analysts of the European Values Center for Security Policy. This report cannot and should not be interpreted as representing the positions of any of the individuals or institutions involved in the simulation. For sensitivity reasons, the identities of the participants will not be publicly disclosed.

2. Setup of the Simulation

In July 2025, the European Values Center for Security Policy hosted the “East Asia Regional Crisis Simulation” in Seoul, following the setup described below:

- **Event format:** Under Chatham House Rule, no media present, no video or audio recording.
- **Information security:** During the simulation, all active players and observers were asked to place their electronic devices in a separate box.
- **Simulation duration:** Eight hours of simulation (Day 1) and a 90-minute lessons-identified session (Day 2).
- **Number of moves (rounds) played:** Two
- **Total number of participants:** 50 (17 active players, 33 observers)
- **Roles played by active players:** EU member states and NATO allies, selected Indo-Pacific countries including the ROK, the DPRK, Taiwan, Japan, and Singapore.
- **Profile of participants:** Think-tankers from EU/NATO member states and Indo-Pacific democracies, senior diplomats representing EU/NATO member states and Indo-Pacific democracies, officials from relevant ministries, as well as representatives from academia, business and political circles.
- **Simulation design:** The exercise simulated gray-zone scenarios involving Chinese and Russian operations against Taiwan and EU/NATO countries. These scenarios included the potential for escalation within the context of a two-theater conflict and growing alignment between China, Russia, and North Korea. The exercise combined tabletop simulations, role-playing, and strategic decision-making processes. Set in the fourth quarter of 2025, the scenario unfolded within the current geostrategic context, including the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine and the related ceasefire negotiations. It focused on projected Chinese operations involving a selective quarantine of Taiwan, combined with the strategic blackmail of EU/NATO countries, a possible Russian escalation in Eastern Europe, and potential escalation by the DPRK in East Asia.

3. What Played Out & Lessons Identified

What Played Out

1. In the initial stages in the simulation, the ROK team decided not to join US-led sanctions on China or US-escorted convoys delivering humanitarian or energy assistance to Taiwan.
2. The ROK team had no plan or significant interest in negotiating specific terms with European players during the simulated escalation. In the early stage, efforts were made to leverage the Digital Partnership as well as the Security and Defense Partnership between the EU and the ROK, but ultimately with no real effect on the crisis.
3. In the simulation, the ROK team engaged primarily with the US team and, to a limited extent, with Japan. Its actions were largely symbolic, such as initiating trilateral U.S.–Japan–ROK naval exercises, as Seoul asserted that it had to primarily focus on the threat from the DPRK.
4. The ROK's attempt to establish a trilateral dialogue format with China and Japan on the economic impacts of a potential contingency created opportunities for China to deploy its tools of economic statecraft in the early stages of the crisis.
5. Beijing sought to capitalize on the primacy of economic considerations for Seoul, which was reluctant to join U.S.-led efforts to deter China from further military escalation.
5. The US team prioritized consultations with Japan and Taiwan before engaging Europe or the ROK, unless the latter actors proactively initiated discussions.
6. The US team persistently showed willingness to return to the status quo ante but also demonstrated its readiness to escalate if needed. It resorted to cyber retaliation, sanctions on machinery and other sectors, cutting off targeted Chinese banks from the international system, a TikTok ban,¹ naval escorts for merchant ships (LNG, industry, agriculture), and freedom of navigation operations. Given that the US one-China policy rests on the assumption that both sides would seek to peacefully resolve their differences, it even considered abolishing it to recognize Taiwanese independence.
7. The Japanese team joined the US in cyber countermeasures, sanctions, and a joint trilateral exercise involving the ROK, while providing logistical support to US forces. It continued to seek a diplomatic

3. What Played Out & Lessons Identified

settlement through platforms such as the G7 and the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, while increasing its readiness, especially in the southwestern Japanese islands.

8. China offered to evacuate EU citizens from Taiwan using Chinese civilian vessels. Team Taiwan strongly resisted such a move, either by formally refusing entry or by physically blocking Chinese ships from entering Taiwanese ports (especially Taipei, Taichung, and Kaohsiung). However, this could strain relations with EU governments whose citizens are at risk and from which Taiwan seeks support.
9. Singapore refused to get militarily involved. However, it declared it could take on a role in evacuating ASEAN citizens from Taiwan. In such a scenario, Taiwan would need to determine which nationals are prioritized for departure, given that a sudden mass exit of migrant workers from strategic industries could severely undermine Taiwan's industrial capacity. Migrant labor from the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand is especially crucial. Taiwan's export-oriented manufacturing sector relies heavily on migrant workers, particularly in labor-intensive segments such as fabricated metal products (33.4 percent of total employment in this segment), electronic components

(14.3 percent), machinery (17.9 percent), and food processing. Recent data show especially rapid growth of migrant employment (13.3 percent year-on-year between 1H2024 and 1H2025) in the computer, electronic, and optical products industry, a critical node in global high-tech supply chains (as of 1H2025, at 12.1 percent). At the same time, government schemes to support "reshoring" of Taiwanese businesses are framed as an economic security measure, yet they further reinforce structural dependence on migrant labor to sustain Taiwan's manufacturing competitiveness and resilience.² Taiwan cannot formally prevent foreigners from leaving its territory, but in such a crisis, Taiwanese authorities could decide how pro-actively they assist with evacuations, as major departure points (ports, airports) would quickly reach their maximum capacity. This fact highlights the need for pre-crisis joint contingency planning between Taiwan, Japan, and ASEAN countries to mitigate expectation gaps and coordinate on evacuation procedures.

10. During the EU's negotiations, there was a significant rift between Germany and Italy on one side, and France on the other, regarding how to stop the escalation. While Germany and Italy sought to de-escalate and avoid direct engagement

3. What Played Out & Lessons Identified

in the Indo-Pacific to protect their economic interests, France believed that the only way to approach the situation was to engage and draw a clear line directly. France argued that if the EU remained uninvolved in this crisis, it would ultimately lose credibility on the global stage. France recognized that the EU itself would not decide the outcome of the crisis but should use its influence to help shape it. Countries like France believed that China would not respect any small measures.

11. Individual EU countries also acted independently. As a result, Poland condemned the PRC's hostile actions but argued it had no navy it could deploy to the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, Poland was bilaterally seeking security assurances from the US. France joined the U.S. freedom of navigation mission together with the United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia. Paris also initiated a 2.0 dialogue with Taiwan and the ROK on energy security.
12. The ROK avoided direct engagements with Taiwanese stakeholders at any level on energy security. Nevertheless, the team asserted that deploying **small modular reactors (SMRs)** could be commercially beneficial for South Korea and strategically advantageous for Taiwan. As a result, the ROK sought the participation of a third party (France) in the energy dialogue.
13. Throughout the simulation, the United Kingdom served as a messenger between the EU and the US, while direct communication between the latter two happened only occasionally. The United Kingdom also took the stance of backing all U.S. actions but not engaging on its own.
14. The simulation saw minimal discussion about resolutions in the UN General Assembly, even though this forum would be crucial for gauging the success of Chinese diplomatic initiatives across the Global South.
15. Regional responses to the first escalation during Move 1 were moderate across Asia, including the DPRK. Without firm signals from China or Russia, the DPRK remained on standby rather than acting provocatively. This passivity offers potential leverage for the ROK, for example, by attempting to drive a wedge between Moscow and Pyongyang.
16. Domestic political considerations received little attention, despite their critical role in shaping national responses. For example, Okinawan issues in the Japanese political context, the role of Chinese diasporas in the ROK, Japan, and the US, or shifting US public opinion on intervention in Taiwan (particularly after lessons from the "war on terror" and the Afghanistan evacuation crisis), could all influence the decision-making of central government leaders.

3. What Played Out & Lessons Identified

17. Europe focused primarily on Russia, the US on Taiwan and China, and the ROK on drawing attention to the Korean Peninsula, creating a fragmented landscape of responses which is ultimately highly beneficial for the PRC.
18. Following Move 2, European nations agreed to conduct large NATO exercises in Poland and the Baltics, requesting a US presence therein.
19. Following Move 2, the EU agreed on the necessity to act, prioritizing challenges in the following order: 1. Russia, 2. The PRC, 3. Taiwan. The EU advised its citizens to leave Taiwan but left the decision up to individuals with no state-organized evacuations taking place.
20. Following Move 2, Germany and Italy agreed to send commercial ships to the Taiwan Strait to examine the situation. They decided that if the ships were inspected by the PRC for more than two weeks, they would resort to sanctions.
21. Following Move 2, the US requested Taiwan, the ROK, Japan, and countries from Central and Eastern Europe to mobilize, offering to pause tariffs in exchange. Additionally, the US, the ROK, and Japan issued a joint trilateral statement condemning the escalation of the situation. All three countries

also agreed to participate in an air bridge to evacuate their citizens from Taiwan. In addition, the ROK also made its commercial ships available to allies, but only offering to go halfway to Taiwan and then hand over the naval protection to the US to avoid direct participation in possible hostilities.

Lessons Identified

1. During the early phase of a China-led escalation around Taiwan, China's interest would be to keep the ROK out of US-led alliance actions (e.g., hard economic measures against China). Therefore, China would likely refrain from pressuring the DPRK to carry out military provocations against the ROK during the pre-kinetic phase of the escalation.
2. China may seek to deter the ROK from joining US-led actions and offer Seoul economic benefits, including talks to mitigate the impact of sanctions, and providing assurances that it could restrain North Korean provocations. However, even if the ROK does not join US sanctions on China, South Korean companies will have to face secondary effects of such measures, which would effectively force them to decouple either from the Chinese or the American market. This dynamic will be key for decision-making in Seoul.

3. What Played Out & Lessons Identified

3. If China were to pursue full military escalation, its interest would shift to exhausting US military assets across the Indo-Pacific theater. In this scenario, China might pressure the DPRK to take military action against the ROK to divert US assets from contingency operations around Taiwan.
4. The ROK plays a crucial role by providing bases for the US military, including refueling for the US Air Force in the theatre. However, from an energy security perspective, the ROK is partially dependent on China for coal, critical minerals, and clean energy technologies, which could impact US forces stationed there during a crisis. The ROK's reliance on Chinese imports creates a structural vulnerability that China could exploit to force Seoul into submissive policy decisions which is similar to long-term Russian strategy in Europe.
5. China could deploy FIMI operations and leverage its social media influence within the ROK society during contingencies for manipulation purposes.³ For example, around 16 percent of the ROK's adult (over 18) population use the Chinese app TikTok, which has already overtaken Facebook in monthly active users and continues to grow.⁴ However, China can also exploit other social media platforms to manipulate foreign opinion through false accounts, automated software programs ("bots"), and media influencers to generate support for Chinese policies or counter critics.⁵ Among the most popular social media platforms in the ROK are KakaoTalk, YouTube, Instagram, Naver's Band and Naver's Blog.⁶
6. If Taiwan were to lose its position as the leading global semiconductor exporter due to the Chinese attack, the ROK would likely assume a greater role in strategic supply chains. However, this shift would also expose the ROK to heightened pressure from China.
7. Japan's crisis response is highly influenced by the Japanese Prime Minister's leadership. For Japan–ROK or Japan–US security cooperation to be effective, strong personal ties between the leaders involved are essential.
8. Cyberattacks targeting communication systems were highlighted as a major vulnerability, potentially constraining Taiwan's ability to effectively engage in negotiations with external partners during a crisis.
9. Domestic political tensions in Taiwan, especially the ineffective cohabitation between the executive branch (controlled by the Democratic Progressive Party) and the legislature (where the Chinese Nationalist Party and Taiwan Peo-

3. What Played Out & Lessons Identified

ple's Party jointly hold a majority), might hinder the implementation of emergency measures. According to Constitutional Court Interpretation No. 543, a presidential emergency decree has to be ratified by the Legislative Yuan within 10 days. Where ratification is denied by the Legislature, the said emergency decrees shall cease to be valid. During the simulation, the informal KMT-TPP coalition voted against the ratification. If the state of national emergency is revoked, the export control regime would be affected. Additionally, the Taiwanese government would not be able to stop its reservists from physically leaving the country. If Taiwan fails to address internal political divisions amid escalation, foreign governments may hesitate to deepen their support or involvement.

10. Energy security of Taiwan emerged as a primary concern, with the survival and continuity of industrial production viewed as essential. The concerns about the country's energy resilience are further amplified by growing reliance on LNG (liquefied natural gas) imports, paired with low stockpiling capacities for this resource, and the Lai administration's decision to phase out nuclear energy. Taiwan currently holds an 11-day stockpile of LNG. The **Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA)** maintains oil reserves

sufficient for more than 100 days, while Taipower is exploring potential sites to store enough coal to supply electricity for up to 50 days. **CPC Corporation (CPC)**, Taiwan's state-owned petroleum and natural gas company, plans to expand storage at each of Taiwan's three LNG terminals, aiming to reach a 24-day storage capacity by 2027.⁷

11. The EU tends to prioritize internal consensus-building, often at the expense of swift external action in crisis scenarios. This led not only to limited action in the Taiwan Strait crisis but also to a reduced capacity to address Russian belligerence. The EU's decision-making appeared slow and disjointed, with actions that lacked both effectiveness and coherence. During Move 1, the EU team spent a significant amount of time negotiating the wording of its official statement; specifically, whether it was "very concerned" about the situation or "condemning it," which was described by participants as "very European to talk about the use of words." Ultimately, the EU's messaging was about maintaining peace and the status quo in the Taiwan Strait while threatening with sanctions (which it began to prepare) but not imposing them yet. Regarding the situation on the NATO Eastern Flank, Europe agreed to deploy patrol missions to the Baltics.

4. Knowledge Gaps (“Known Unknowns”)

South Korea-Related Open Questions

1. How would the ROK evacuate its citizens (4,944 as of May 2025)⁸ from Taiwan during a Chinese blockade?
2. If the ROK declined to join US-led sanctions or convoys to support Taiwan, how would the US treat the ROK within the bilateral alliance?
3. What would be the secondary economic impact of US sanctions on China for the ROK and other US allies?
4. What leverage does the US possess to pressure the ROK into supporting US regional interests?
5. To what extent would the US require ROK bases for its Taiwan contingency operations, and how might China pressure the ROK to deny base access?
6. Would the presence of the US Forces Korea (USFK) on the Korean Peninsula be maintained, augmented, or reduced during this scenario?
7. How problematic could USFK’s dependence on the ROK for energy supply become during a regional contingency?
8. How could the ROK respond if regional naval disruptions caused commercial shipping insurance prices to spike, in order to mitigate the impact on its trade interests?
9. How would the DPRK respond if China imposed a blockade of Taiwan?
10. What would China and Russia likely request of the DPRK during regional escalation?
11. What would the DPRK seek from Russia and China in exchange for supportive actions?

Taiwan-Related Open Questions

1. How long could Taiwan withstand isolation under a Chinese naval blockade?
2. How long would China keep the airspace around Taiwan open during a maritime quarantine scenario?
3. How would third countries handle large-scale inflows of Taiwanese asylum seekers?
4. How would a Chinese naval quarantine of Taiwan be addressed at the UN level?

4. Knowledge Gaps (“Known Unknowns”)

5. How many people could leave Taiwan daily? Specifically, how many aircraft and ships could depart from Taiwanese airports and harbors, and how many people could they carry?
6. How might domestic political dynamics within Taiwan shape the course of Chinese action?
7. To what extent is the US willing to enter an open kinetic conflict with the PRC over Taiwan?
8. How determined is the Taiwanese public to defend itself?
9. What would be the role of residents of Taiwan who originate from countries not aligned with the US?
2. Can Europe address the Russian threat on its own when the US is distracted by the Taiwan crisis?
3. What are the EU’s practical options for evacuating its citizens from Taiwan?

General Open Questions On Regional Contingency

Eu-Related Open Questions

1. How would India, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and ASEAN states respond to a Chinese naval quarantine of Taiwan?
2. What would be the extent of economic damage resulting from sanctions?
3. Could BRICS (particularly Brazil) play a role in this scenario?
4. How could US political instability impact American involvement?
1. Would the US consider withdrawing forces and weapons from Europe to deploy them in the Indo-Pacific?

5. Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendations for the ROK and the EU

1. The ROK needs a detailed internal plan for managing economic pressure campaigns from China to help de-escalate crises like those simulated in this exercise. This effort should be led by the central government through a comprehensive national strategy and implemented in coordination with local governments and the private sector, as part of a whole-of-society approach.

During the simulation, Chinese actors explicitly framed economic retaliation – targeting South Korean exports and key investors – as a response to any ROK support for US-driven sanctions (Moves 1–2), contributing to Seoul’s reluctance to align fully with its security partners. Specifically, Beijing would likely seek to exploit Seoul’s vulnerability in semiconductors and batteries, threatening to restrict access to upstream inputs where South Korea is heavily dependent on China. In reality, the ROK relies on China for more than 90 precursors of key battery precursors and graphite used in cathodes and anodes, and Chinese export controls on rare earths and battery materials have already delayed shipments to Korea.⁹ This underscores the need for an internal

playbook that includes sector-specific stress tests for chips, EV batteries and critical minerals, rather than a generic approach to “economic coercion.” Building on the patterns identified in What Played Out, this lesson highlights the importance of a whole-of-government plan for anticipating, absorbing, and mitigating Chinese economic pressure in a Taiwan contingency.

2. The ROK should conduct a comprehensive internal assessment of its vulnerabilities (in areas such as critical infrastructure, telecommunications, cyber defense, supply chain resilience, and strategic stockpiling) as well as its dependencies on China (primarily in economic and energy domains). This addresses the structural vulnerabilities identified in the simulation, including dependence on Chinese coal and clean-tech supply chains and susceptibility to PRC FIMI operations, and requires clear vertical coordination between national and local authorities.
3. The scenario demonstrated how naval disruptions and LNG tanker sabotage rapidly threatened both Taiwan’s and the ROK’s energy security, illustrating why Seoul must be able to sustain at least six months of economic and social

5. Policy Recommendations

stability under pressure. The ROK should conduct a comprehensive review of its strategic stockpiling to ensure at least six months of economic and social stability during a major crisis. This review should assess existing reserves and storage capacities across key sectors, including energy (oil, gas, and fuel), food, essential medical supplies, and critical industrial materials such as semiconductors and rare earths. Based on this assessment, the ROK should identify priority areas for expansion of stockpiling capacity, improve logistical coordination between central and local authorities, and strengthen public-private mechanisms for managing and replenishing reserves. Finland, for example, which serves as a role model for national preparedness for crises, has six months' worth of normal consumption of grain and fuel stockpile equivalent to five months of normal use.¹⁰ South Korea currently maintains 450,000 tons of rice and 60,000 tons of soybeans.¹¹ It also holds oil reserves for 206.9 days (combining both government and private sectors).¹²

The six-month benchmark is not arbitrary. Highly exposed, import-dependent states such as Finland and Switzerland already require companies to hold several months of critical supplies in reserve – Finland maintains roughly five months of fuel and up to six months of

cereals,¹³ while Switzerland mandates around four months of key foodstuffs.¹⁴ In the energy domain, IEA members are obliged to hold 90 days of oil stocks as a minimum, and Japan has built reserves for about 154 days of imports. Against the backdrop of a multi-month maritime disruption in a Taiwan contingency, a six-month stockpiling target for the ROK is therefore a prudent, rather than excessive, planning assumption.

4. The ROK should calculate the impacts of US-led sanctions on China (for example on machinery, banking and other strategic sectors), including secondary effects on the ROK economy. In the simulation, South Korean companies faced the risk of de-facto decoupling from either the US or China regardless of Seoul's formal position on sanctions. A systematic ex-ante assessment would allow the government to anticipate these trade-offs and communicate them clearly to domestic stakeholders.
5. The ROK should prepare a plan for its possible involvement in US-led coalition efforts to break a Chinese blockade of Taiwan.

The exercise highlighted that Seoul currently lacks a clear policy framework for participating in coalition efforts to break or loosen a PRC-imposed blockade of Taiwan. In the

5. Policy Recommendations

game, ROK actors offered commercial vessels but insisted they sail only “halfway” toward Taiwan before transferring responsibility to US naval protection, reflecting deep uncertainty over escalation risks, domestic political tolerance for casualties, and the legal basis for action. A pre-contingency plan should therefore spell out the conditions under which the ROK would join coalition escort or convoy operations; the desired division of labor with the US, Japan and like-minded partners; applicable rules of engagement; and how such operations would be communicated to domestic and international audiences. This planning should also clarify how ROK contributions to a coalition effort would be balanced against simultaneous deterrence requirements on the Korean Peninsula, reducing the temptation to “half-step” in a future crisis.

6. In terms of economic security, both Japan and the ROK face vulnerabilities due to their economic dependence on China. China is Japan’s largest trading partner, with major imports from China including telecommunications and computer equipment. It also hosts the largest number of overseas bases of Japanese companies.¹⁵ Similarly, China is the ROK’s main trading partner, with key imports consisting of electronic equipment, machinery, nuclear reactors, and boilers.¹⁶ The

exercise showed that a Taiwan contingency and Russian pressure in Europe would simultaneously stress global supply chains. Joint diversification efforts by Japan and the ROK would therefore not only mitigate PRC coercion but also reduce spillover from Russia-linked disruptions highlighted in the two-theater scenario.

7. Regarding strategic stockpiling and civilian protection, Japan is reassessing its reserves and evacuation plans for its southwestern islands. Coordination with the ROK on mutual support mechanisms and evacuation logistics from Taiwan to Japan would enhance regional preparedness.

The simulation underlined how ad hoc and fragmented evacuation planning quickly becomes when states improvise, with Singapore stepping in for ASEAN nationals and persistent ambiguity over the treatment of migrant workers in strategic industries. In the real world, there are over 20,000 Japanese nationals residing in Taiwan and a smaller but non-trivial community of around 5,000 Korean nationals, on top of large tourist and business flows. Past crises such as the 2011 Libya evacuations, where a multinational coordination cell helped evacuate 4,500 people from 78 countries, show that **non-combatant evacuation**

5. Policy Recommendations

operations (NEOs) are inherently multinational and hinge on pre-agreed mechanisms and logistics, including forward stockpiles of fuel, food, and medical supplies at staging points.¹⁷ Japan's recent plans to evacuate more than 100,000 civilians from islands near Taiwan in a contingency further highlight the scale of potential movements around a Taiwan crisis.¹⁸ Building on these precedents, Tokyo and Seoul should jointly map evacuation routes, staging areas and stockpiling requirements, and regularly exercise shared NEO concepts with Taiwan and like-minded partners so that responsibility for their nationals – and key categories of migrant labor – is clearly allocated before a crisis.

8. Japan shares concerns about Chinese social media platforms and disinformation. A bilateral framework between Japan and the ROK for monitoring and regulation could be explored. Ideally, this could be done in cooperation with the EU, which fosters bilateral partnership with both Japan and the ROK. The EU-Japan Security and Defense Partnership covers areas such as cybersecurity, hybrid threats, including foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and more.¹⁹ Similarly, the ROK-EU Security and Defense Partnership covers cooperation in 15 different areas including cyber issues, strategic communica-

tions, and countering hybrid threats and FIMI.²⁰ The EU and the ROK are now developing bilateral exchanges on FIMI, and seek to expand them towards more structured, operational cooperation, as discussed during the 7th Cyber Dialogue in Seoul which was held in May 2025.

9. Strengthening top-level ties among the ROK, Japan, and the US is crucial for effective security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. This includes both bilateral and trilateral engagement among top representatives at the presidential, prime ministerial, and ministerial levels to strengthen personal relationships between the actors involved.

The exercise confirmed that effective crisis management between the ROK, Japan, and the United States hinges on both robust governance architecture and credible political signaling. Leadership-level trust cannot be left to personal chemistry alone. Building on the 2023 Camp David commitments, the three governments should institutionalize trilateral coordination through standing councils, regular leaders' summits, a crisis hotline, and routinized joint scenario exercises that explicitly include Taiwan contingencies. At the same time, this architecture must be used to project resolve outward. Coordinated public messaging, joint press conferences, and communiqués that consist-

5. Policy Recommendations

ently reference peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait would shape Beijing's and Pyongyang's perceptions of trilateral cohesion. Embedding Taiwan-relevant language and rehearsed response options in these formats would further help ensure that deterrent signals are seen as cross-partisan, resilient to domestic political change, and backed by concrete mechanisms for consultation and action rather than aspirational rhetoric alone.

10. The ROK should develop a pre-contingency strategy for structured engagement with Europe, particularly in the domains of cyber, economic cooperation, and evacuation logistics.

In the simulation, South Korean decision-makers focused overwhelmingly on engaging the US and Japan, leaving Europe as an afterthought despite the EU's growing interest in Indo-Pacific security and explicit references to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait in recent Council conclusions and EU-ROK joint statements. Yet Europe remains a major trade and investment partner for the ROK and a key global normative actor in sanctions, export controls, and technology governance. A pre-contingency strategy should therefore craft a political narrative that frames ROK-EU cooperation on a regional stability, including in the Taiwan Strait, as

a natural extension of their existing digital, green, and security partnerships. By socializing European partners into Korean threat perceptions and expectations in advance – through regular strategic dialogues, joint tabletop exercises, and coordinated public messaging – Seoul can increase the likelihood that the EU responds quickly and coherently, and that Beijing perceives ROK-EU alignment as durable rather than ad hoc.

11. The ROK and Japan should keep encouraging European involvement in Indo-Pacific contingencies based on the EU-Japan Security and Defense Partnership and the EU-ROK Security and Defense Partnership. A good example of putting these partnerships into practice is the 1st Japan-EU Security and Defense Dialogue that took place on June 11, 2025.

The simulation showed that European contributions to a Taiwan contingency are likely to be indirect and uneven, with some states prioritizing sanctions and export controls and others cautiously probing the blockade with commercial vessels. Rather than simply "inviting" Europe in, the ROK and Japan should work with a small group of like-minded EU and NATO members to define realistic roles: naval presence in the broader Indo-Pacific sea lines

5. Policy Recommendations

of communication, cyber defense support, coordinated sanctions and export-control packages, and joint planning for evacuations and humanitarian assistance. Recent EU documents already highlight maritime security, resilience of critical infrastructure, and economic security as priority themes for engagement in the Indo-Pacific, including around the Taiwan Strait and undersea cables. Building on these priorities, Tokyo and Seoul can use their existing bilateral dialogues with Europe to identify specific capabilities and niche contributions, so that when a crisis unfolds, Europeans plug into a pre-agreed division of labor rather than improvising ad hoc gestures.

12. The ROK needs a clear evacuation plan for its citizens in Taiwan before or during a contingency. The exercise showed that Korean decision-makers had only a vague sense of how an evacuation from Taiwan would work, despite the complexity revealed by existing non-combatant evacuation planning within the peninsula itself. US Forces Korea's NEO instructions, for example, illustrate just how demanding it is to move civilians from a conflict zone to designated safe havens, requiring detailed registration systems, assembly points, transport sequencing and communication plans. Seoul's own experience running charter

evacuations during COVID-19 and from crisis-hit regions such as Iran also shows that such operations cut across ministries (foreign affairs, defense, transport, health) and require close coordination with allies. A Taiwan-contingency evacuation plan should therefore be treated as a whole-of-government and alliance-linked task, rehearsed in peacetime, and explicitly integrated with US, Japanese and EU efforts, rather than being left to post-factum consular improvisation.

13. The EU should develop a coordinated evacuation plan for its citizens in Taiwan in the event of a contingency. This plan should be prepared under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in close coordination with member states, the **European External Action Service (EEAS)**, and relevant partners in the region, such as Japan and the ROK. Depending on the evolving security situation, evacuation routes could include temporary relocation to nearby safe locations, including the ROK, before onward travel to the EU. The simulation mirrored long-standing critiques of EU consular crisis management: fragmented national responses, unclear burden-sharing, and slow mobilization of collective tools. Recent non-papers by several member states and academic analyses of the Consular Protection Directive argue that the EU should move toward more integrated con-

5. Policy Recommendations

sular crisis structures, including reinforcement teams, common training (“consular Erasmus”), and better articulation between consular and civil-protection assets.²¹ Experiences from evacuations in Sudan and other recent crises show that EU Civil Protection Mechanism-supported operations can move thousands of EU citizens and third-country nationals when properly coordinated.²² A Taiwan-contingency plan should therefore be used as a test case for operationalizing these proposals: mapping which member states would lead, how others would “plug in” their consular staff and transport assets, and how EU-level coordination would interface with partners such as the ROK, Japan, and the United States.

14. The US and the EU should test the permeability of a potential Chinese blockade at an earlier stage by sending commercial ships to the Taiwan Strait and/or through a freedom of navigation mission. In the course of the simulation, German and Italian commercial ships were sent to the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait with the implicit understanding that they would trigger political and legal consequences if the PRC unduly delayed or harassed them. This reflects a broader reality: both the EU and US have repeatedly stressed in official Indo-Pacific and maritime security documents that freedom of navigation and over-

flight, as codified in UNCLOS, are core interests, and that economic coercion using quasi-blockades will invite coordinated responses – including sanctions, export controls, and legal countermeasures. By pre-agreeing that unjustified interference with clearly identified European or allied commercial vessels will automatically trigger specific steps (public demarches, coordinated listings under existing sanctions regimes, or WTO-consistent trade responses), Americans and Europeans can use “testing” transits not only to gather information on blockade strictness but also to send unambiguous legal and economic signals. In this sense, early commercial voyages become part of a broader deterrence script, linking shipping incidents directly to pre-sequenced diplomatic and economic costs for Beijing.

15. The EU, specifically the EEAS, in coordination with the European Commission and willing member states, should increase direct engagement and communication with Taiwan during a potential crisis while maintaining the one-China policy. The EU and NATO need practical, real-time communication channels with Taiwan to understand how Taiwan would likely react during different crisis phases, since any Chinese action against Taiwan would impact key European interests.²³ In the simulation, the EU

5. Policy Recommendations

struggled to calibrate messaging and sanctions options because it lacked direct, timely feedback from Taipei on how different measures might affect Taiwan's resilience or domestic politics. Analyses of Ukraine-related sanctions and their relevance for a Taiwan conflict scenario stress that credible "hard, fast, and where it hurts" sanctions require close consultation with the targeted partner to avoid unintended collateral damage and signaling gaps.²⁴ Within the constraints of the EU's one-China policy – which it has used to deepen non-diplomatic engagement with Taiwan in many domains – Brussels should therefore establish discreet but reliable crisis-time channels (through EETO and designated counterparts in Taipei) to align messaging, sanctions sequencing, and support packages. This would help ensure that EU actions are seen in Beijing and Taipei as coherent, coordinated with partners, and grounded in a realistic understanding of Taiwan's situation.

16. The EU needs strategic plans for implementing a maximum-pressure campaign against the PRC to stop its escalation and/or compel it to pressure Russia into military de-escalation along NATO's Eastern Flank. This primarily economic campaign should be a well-prepared, pre-approved, and sequenced plan,

developed with the same level of detail and authorization as NATO's existing strategic and operational plans for responding to Russian aggression against its members.²⁵ The simulation showed that, in a fast-moving Taiwan crisis, the EU risks losing precious time debating language rather than preparing concrete measures. Since 2022, however, the Union has built a substantial "Russia playbook," including multi-round sanctions on finance, technology, and trade, and has launched a broader European Economic Security Strategy to map vulnerabilities in critical technologies and supply chains. In parallel, the new Anti-Coercion Instrument and de-risking agenda acknowledge the need to respond collectively to third-country economic pressure while reducing over-dependence on China in strategic sectors. A Taiwan-related maximum-pressure concept should therefore pre-design sequenced sanctions and trade options against the PRC – aligned with G7 partners – and pair them with flanking measures such as stockpiling, diversification, and support for exposed member states. If clearly communicated in advance, the very existence of such a survivable, China-specific plan becomes part of deterrence, signaling that coercion or blockade will trigger automatic and politically sustainable EU responses.

5. Policy Recommendations

- 17.** Every EU/NATO capital needs to understand how other allies think about these scenarios. The simulation underscored how diverging priorities across capitals – Washington focused on Taiwan and China, many Europeans on Russia, Seoul on the Korean Peninsula – produced a fragmented response that ultimately advantaged Beijing. This echoes real-world analyses of allied cohesion in NATO and the EU, which stress that effective deterrence depends on shared threat assessments and predictable consultation mechanisms. Recent documents such as NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept and the 2022 EU Strategic Compass already recognize China as a “systemic challenge” while reaffirming Russia as the most immediate threat. To turn this into practice, allies should invest in regular cross-regional tabletop exercises, red-teaming, and scenario planning that explicitly connect Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres, and ensure that diplomats, parliamentarians and defense planners in every capital understand not only their own priorities but also those of key partners in Asia and North America. This would reduce misperceptions, speed up decision-making, and make it harder for adversaries to exploit seams between the theatres.
- 18.** The EU and NATO need a coordinated strategic stockpiling review to decide in which specific segments China could coerce them. The scenario’s emphasis on a prolonged crisis involving China dovetails with mounting concern in Europe about PRC leverage over critical materials and technologies. The new European Critical Raw Materials Act explicitly aims to secure supplies of rare earths and other inputs where import dependence and concentration of supply are high, with China currently dominating many mine-to-magnet chains. Recent reporting highlights trade clashes over Chinese export controls on rare earths and the EU’s scramble to diversify and build up its own production and processing capacity, including large investments in EU-based projects and strategic partnerships abroad. The Commission is also considering emergency stockpiles of critical materials and repair kits for key infrastructure, explicitly framed against “war risk” and sabotage of undersea cables and pipelines. An EU–NATO stockpiling review should therefore focus on China-exposed sectors – rare earths, permanent magnets, battery materials, semiconductors and key spare parts for military and energy infrastructure – and coordinate targets, locations and burden-sharing, so that a PRC-related crisis cannot be leveraged to paralyze European defense and economic security.

6. Full Script

Baseline Situation

Date: September 1, 2025

General Situation Overview: Steady developments since spring 2025

In the Euro-Atlantic

- The Russian war in Ukraine continues with the same intensity. Negotiations over a possible ceasefire are ongoing. Ukraine has been forced out of Kursk Oblast and continues tactical retreats. The country faces internal political turmoil, raising uncertainty over a potential collapse that could trigger a refugee wave of 5–10 million people into EU/NATO countries.
- The US focuses primarily on domestic issues and pressures allies on defense spending, LNG imports, trade deficits, and de-risking from China.
- The NATO Hague Summit in June 2025 agreed on a 5 percent of GDP defense spending threshold by 2035. Allies approved New Capability Targets.
- In Europe, the political situation remains unchanged from spring 2025.
- Tariff negotiations between the US and the EU are ongoing, with the cur-

rent scope unchanged since June 2025.

In the Middle East

- The Israeli offensive against Iran has resulted in the strategic degradation of Iranian military and sabotage capabilities. However, the operational capabilities of Houthi groups remain unaffected.

In the Indo-Pacific

- In Taiwan, the KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party) and TPP (Taiwan People's Party) continue to block many DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) decisions in the Legislative Yuan. The only change is a compromise on Taiwan's defense budget, which is increasing toward 3 percent of GDP.
- In Taiwan–US relations, Taiwan has committed to 5 percent of GDP defense spending in the mid-term, promised to sign large LNG import contracts with the US, and pledged major semiconductor investments there.
- China continues aggressive military exercises around Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines, with Russian vessels and air assets participating. The DPRK often takes provocative

military actions below the threshold of war against the ROK. PLA-led exercises increasingly resemble full-blockade rehearsals, akin to Joint Sword-2024B around Taiwan, involving more than 100 combined People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), Chinese Coast Guard (CCG), and maritime militia vessels.

Move 1: Pressure Building Up

- **September 1, 2025:** The Chinese ambassador in each NATO capital informs host-country foreign ministries and NATO international staff that any interference in Taiwan is an internal PRC matter and will result in retaliatory actions by Chinese companies, particularly in the pharmaceutical, defense, agriculture, telecommunications, rail transport infrastructure, green energy, and automobile-manufacturing sectors.
- **Cyberattacks in Taiwan:** China launches cyberattacks on Taiwan's communication and financial infrastructure, causing widespread power outages and significant internet disruptions. Immediate attribution to China is difficult without further investigation.
- **Attack on Green Energy Infrastructure:** Solar panels and wind turbines containing Chinese components in all US-allied countries malfunction, requiring repairs from Chinese companies.
- **Massive information influence campaign:** A coordinated Chinese campaign targets public opinion in US treaty-allied states. In South Korea, where 16 percent of the population actively uses TikTok, the Chinese government allegedly leverages user data to deliver well-segmented messaging. The central warning states: *"Your government must adopt the One China Principle, or your citizens will face severe economic consequences."* Similar operations are detected across multiple allied nations, with content and tone specifically tailored to each country's social and political environment.
- **Supply chain naval disruptions in the Red Sea:** Iran-backed Houthi groups, supported by Russia and China, rapidly escalate attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea. The wave of maritime aggression delays international shipping from Europe to East Asia by an average of one week and increases insurance costs for trade through the region by approximately 20 percent. These disruptions begin to affect global supply chains, particularly for energy and industrial components. Chinese vessels remain untouched.
- **Undeclared naval militia incidents:** A surge of harassment incidents is reported involving unmarked vessels in the South China Sea and waters near Taiwan. These vessels aggressively interfere with international

commercial shipping, prompting companies to reroute, increasing fuel requirements, and driving a 10 percent rise in maritime insurance costs. China cites the resulting instability as justification for deploying a PLAN task force to “restore maritime order.” Some vessels insist on boarding international commercial ships.

- **Sabotage incidents aboard Taiwan-bound supply ships:** Three explosions occur aboard LNG tankers en route from Qatari ports to Taiwan. Preliminary evidence suggests Russian intelligence involvement using Middle Eastern proxy terrorist groups. The sabotage severely jeopardizes Taiwan’s energy security, as its strategic LNG reserves are estimated to last only two weeks at current consumption rates.
- **Naval supply chain delays to the ROK:** As a result of these developments, all commercial shipping bound for ROK ports is delayed by an average of 20 percent compared to normal schedules.
- **Defense industry supply chain pressure:** The PRC unilaterally halts exports of selected raw materials critical to the defense industries of US-allied countries. Beijing officially states that it is “*placing all defense industry-relevant cooperation under a three-month review to assess whether the countries of origin*

respect the One China Principle.” As a result, imports from China and global supply chains involving China-linked entities face disruptions, placing considerable pressure on the defense production capabilities of affected nations.

- **Russian naval movements in the Baltic Sea:** Russia begins maneuvering naval vessels near strategic chokepoints in the Baltic Sea. NATO shares classified intelligence among Allies suggesting that Russia may be considering the deployment of naval mines around Bornholm Island, potentially aiming to impose a de facto blockade of the Baltic Sea. At present, ten Russian Navy vessels are operating in international waters near Gotland and Bornholm, though no overtly hostile actions have been observed.

Move 2: Chinese Quarantine Build-Up Preparing for Strategic Pressure Campaign

Timeline of Events (Three weeks after Move 1): September 21, 2025

- **Russian mobilization:** Russia publicly announces the mobilization of its Western Military District, citing the need to “*defend the Russian homeland from NATO aggression originating from Baltic-based NATO forces.*” Approximately 200,000 Russian troops, along with supporting assets, including field hospitals,

logistics hubs, and mobile command elements, are deployed near the borders of the Baltic states. US intelligence shared with NATO and EU allies warns: *“This movement could be converted into a full-scale invasion of the Baltic states with less than one week’s notice.”*

- **Russian Pacific Fleet under PLAN command:** The Russian Pacific Fleet is placed under PLAN operational command. Russia grants the PLAN access to storage facilities at Vladivostok Port. This move is not announced publicly but is assessed and confirmed through allied intelligence sources.
- **Russian tactical nuclear deployment to the DPRK:** Russia moves an unspecified number of ground-based tactical nuclear mobile missile launchers into DPRK territory. This deployment is not publicly announced, but US-allied states are fully aware of it.
- **PLA (People’s Liberation Army) exercises:** PLA announces the commencement of regular military exercises around Taiwan and the Philippines. These exercises are to last for an undisclosed period. The Russian Pacific Fleet participates, including surface combatants and nuclear submarines.
- **PLA/PLAN quarantine posture:** People’s Liberation Army Navy and CCG vessels assemble at ports in Fujian Province and begin moving into the seas around Taiwan, positioning for a potential naval blockade. A total of 50 PLAN and CCG vessels are directly involved, mirroring the Joint Sword 2024-A posture.
- **Chinese Quarantine Announcement:** China declares a “quarantine around Taiwan,” citing alleged attempts to smuggle offensive nuclear weapons into the island. The PRC references the US naval quarantine of Cuba in 1962. All non-PRC vessels will be stopped and inspected at sea or required to divert to the nearest Chinese port for inspection.
- **Chinese Diplomatic Action:** Chinese ambassadors in each US-allied capital deliver identical messages to their host governments, stating that if no hostile actions against China are taken (such as voting in favor of any sanction mechanism on China), Beijing will:
 1. Allow the safe evacuation of Taiwan’s citizens. China will open a *“humanitarian corridor from Taiwan to Chinese ports, where vessels carrying European citizens can evacuate safely. This corridor will remain open only for two weeks under such conditions.”*

2. Permit civilian ships carrying country's national flag or cargo to or from that country to pass through the quarantine without inspection.
 3. Offer companies from that country preferential access to the Chinese market, considering the ongoing withdrawal of US firms. The offer includes preferential Chinese state-backed insurance for country's companies and Chinese state entry subsidies for specific European firms to incentivize their entry or continued presence in the Chinese market. This preferential treatment is contingent upon the public and formal endorsement of the One China Principle by both the respective company and its home government.
 4. If the situation escalates further, civilian ships carrying country's national flag or cargo will be escorted by PLAN vessels to ensure secure passage and free naval routes. This offer is announced publicly, prompting major European companies, directly lobbied and threatened by their Chinese business partners, to pressure their respective governments to accept the offer and avoid confrontation with Beijing.
- **Chinese Nuclear Announcement:** China publicly declares that any military attempt to break through the quarantine line around Taiwan will be met with the potential use of tactical nuclear weapons at sea, stating that the situation constitutes an internal Chinese matter and falls under its sovereign right to defend territorial integrity.
 - **First Chinese Armed-Escorted Convoys:** The PLAN conducts its first armed-escorted convoy operation, running from the Middle East through the Taiwan Strait to Chinese ports. PLAN warships provide protection for the convoy, which consists of dozens of commercial vessels flying the flags of, or carrying cargo from, countries that accepted the Chinese ultimatum: Pakistan, South Africa, Russia, Belarus, Venezuela, and Brazil.
 - **Naval Supply Chain Delays to the ROK:** Based on these developments, all commercial shipping bound for ROK ports are delayed by an average of 40 percent compared to normal schedules.

Endnotes

- 1 As of September 26, 2025, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order that should allow TikTok to continue operating in the US in a way that meets national security concerns. The order enables an American-led group of investors to buy the app from China's ByteDance, though the deal was not yet finalized and much was still unknown about it. (*AP News*, 2025)
- 2 Authors' calculations based on the latest data of the R.O.C. (Taiwan) Ministry of Labor for migrant workers; R.O.C. (Taiwan) MOEA for total employees. As of November 14, 2025.
- 3 Klingner 2024
- 4 The Global Statistics 2025
- 5 Klingner 2024
- 6 Woo 2025
- 7 Rice 2023
- 8 Ministry of the Interior, National Immigration Agency, Republic of China (Taiwan) 2025
- 9 Kang 2023
- 10 Yle 2022
- 11 Sangdon 2025
- 12 Vahn 2025
- 13 Stein 2025
- 14 Réservesuisse 2024
- 15 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Japan-China Economic Relationship and China's Economy 2025
- 16 Santander Trade 2025
- 17 Collins 2011
- 18 McCurry 2025
- 19 European Commission 2025
- 20 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea 2024
- 21 The Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation 2023
- 22 Gregory 2024
- 23 Janda, Jerzewski et al. 2025
- 24 Demarais 2024
- 25 Janda et al. 2025

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