

Welcome to This Week's Asia on the Horizon

This week's edition of Asia on the Horizon captures a region responding to global headwinds and intensifying strategic competition with renewed diplomatic energy, deeper alignment, and sharpened resilience. The Indo-Pacific is not merely navigating turbulence—it is redefining the contours of global order.

At the heart of the regional realignment is the 13th Trilateral Economic and Trade Ministers' Meeting in Seoul, which marked the first high-level economic dialogue between China, Japan, and South Korea in five years. Amid mounting U.S. tariffs and supply chain disruption, the meeting highlighted both shared economic interests and underlying tensions.

In parallel, the Bay of Bengal region took center stage with the 6th BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok. With the theme "Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC," the summit adopted the ambitious Bangkok Vision 2030, finalized a landmark Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement, and saw Bangladesh assume the rotating chairmanship. The summit reaffirmed BIMSTEC's emerging role as a critical bridge between South and Southeast Asia, advancing shared goals on connectivity, trade, disaster management, and regional security, particularly in the wake of Myanmar's devastating earthquake.

Economic and geopolitical turbulence defined much of the week, with U.S. President Trump's sweeping new tariffs triggering global market sell-offs and fears of a renewed trade war. China responded swiftly with reciprocal 34% tariffs, rare earth export controls, and sanctions against American firms. As our Analysis of the Week explores, these moves mark a new chapter in global protectionism, with cascading effects across Asian economies. The implications for global supply chains, inflation, and regional trade cooperation are profound—as are the geopolitical risks of a full-scale decoupling.

Security cooperation also featured prominently. In Brussels, the United States, Japan, and South Korea convened for a trilateral foreign ministers' meeting that reaffirmed commitments to extended deterrence, maritime security, and collective response to North Korea's growing military and cyber threats. The joint statement also voiced concern over recent Chinese military drills around Taiwan and emphasized the importance of preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait—echoing sentiments increasingly shared across Indo-Pacific democracies.

The Quad partners—Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.—also issued a joint statement pledging over \$20 million in humanitarian assistance to Myanmar following the March 28 earthquake. The statement welcomed partial ceasefire commitments in Myanmar and reinforced the Quad's role as a responsive, value-driven coalition addressing both humanitarian and strategic challenges in the region.

In South Korea, a momentous constitutional ruling removed President Yoon Suk Yeol from office following his controversial imposition of martial law in December. The unanimous verdict by the Constitutional Court was widely celebrated as a reaffirmation of South Korea's democratic resilience. With elections now expected within 60 days,

the political landscape is poised for a major shift, with opposition leader Lee Jae-myung emerging as a frontrunner.

Meanwhile, China staged aggressive military drills encircling Taiwan in response to Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te's policies and recent U.S. statements in support of the island. The PLA exercises simulated blockades and precision strikes, accompanied by a barrage of propaganda imagery targeting Lai. Taiwan's military elevated readiness levels and condemned the drills as destabilizing, while the U.S., EU, and Japan reiterated their opposition to unilateral changes to the cross-strait status quo.

As always, this week's Statistics of the Week and Map of the Week provide deeper context—highlighting Asia's role as the top contributor to global GDP growth in 2024 and visualizing the evolving geometry of Indo-Pacific alliances, respectively. Our Photo of the Week captures the symbolic moment of regional economic diplomacy in Seoul, while the Infographic of the Week dissects the latest U.S.-China tariff escalation and its projected global impact.

From economic resilience and shifting alliances to democratic accountability and rising tensions, the Indo-Pacific continues to define the pace and pattern of global transformation. As we look to the weeks ahead, Asia on the Horizon remains your compass for decoding the region's most pivotal developments.



1. KEY DEVELOPMENTS

China, Japan, and South Korea Reopen Economic Channels as Trump's Tariffs Reshape Trade Landscape

In their first trilateral economic dialogue in five years, China, Japan, and South Korea convened in Seoul to discuss strengthening regional trade and supply chain resilience amid growing concerns over U.S. protectionism. While Chinese state media claimed the three countries agreed to “jointly respond” to President Trump’s escalating tariffs, both Seoul and Tokyo pushed back on this characterization—emphasizing that the discussions focused on dialogue rather than coordinated retaliation. Nonetheless, all sides expressed a shared interest in stabilizing semiconductor supply chains and enhancing cooperation on export controls. The meeting marked a rare moment of economic convergence between the three Asian powers, whose relations have often been strained by historical grievances and geopolitical disputes.

Significantly, the trilateral meeting also revived long-stalled negotiations on a China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement, with ministers agreeing to accelerate talks in light of Trump’s newly announced tariffs—set to be formally unveiled on what he dubbed “Liberation Day.” Although no concrete commitments were made on a joint response, the urgency of the talks suggests that Washington’s hardline trade stance is prompting renewed regional coordination. Analysts see the rekindled FTA discussions as a strategic hedge by East Asia’s export-heavy economies to counter mounting uncertainty in global trade. The symbolic timing—just days after the U.S. Defense Secretary’s high-profile tour of the Indo-Pacific—further underscores the decoupling of economic and security priorities in the region’s evolving balance of power.

U.S. Report Details Alarming Erosion of Freedoms in Hong Kong, Imposes Sanctions on Key Officials

The U.S. Department of State’s latest report to Congress on conditions in Hong Kong highlights a deepening deterioration of rights and autonomy in the territory, citing Beijing’s continued imposition of repressive national security laws and transnational crackdowns that directly threaten U.S. interests. Covering the period from January to December 2024, the report outlines how Hong Kong authorities—under Beijing’s supervision—used the National Security Law (NSL) and the newly enacted Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO) to silence dissent, prosecute pro-democracy figures, restrict media and academic freedoms, and erode judicial independence. Particularly troubling were the arrests and sentencing of prominent democracy advocates, including the “NSL 47,” and the targeting of overseas activists—some based in the U.S.—with arrest warrants, canceled passports, and frozen assets. The Secretary of State again certified that Hong Kong no longer warrants differential treatment under U.S. law compared to mainland China.

In response, the Trump administration imposed sanctions on six officials from Hong Kong and Beijing, holding them accountable for policies that undermine Hong Kong's autonomy and for engaging in transnational repression against U.S. residents. These actions, taken under Executive Order 13936 and aligned with the Hong Kong Policy Act, underscore the administration's intent to confront violations of democratic freedoms and international norms. The report further notes that U.S.-Hong Kong law enforcement cooperation has significantly deteriorated, with Hong Kong authorities delaying or denying U.S. requests and increasingly referring matters to Beijing. Despite Hong Kong retaining some technical distinctions from the mainland in trade, finance, and data policy, the overall trajectory, according to the State Department, is one of accelerated centralization and repression—posing growing challenges for U.S. interests and citizens alike.

China and Russia Affirm Strategic Alignment Ahead of Xi-Putin Summit, Signal Willingness to Mediate Ukraine Conflict

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Moscow this week to prepare for the upcoming Xi-Putin summit in May, reinforcing what both sides described as an “unprecedented” level of strategic cooperation. During talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov and a meeting with President Vladimir Putin, Wang emphasized that the China-Russia partnership is a “constant, not a variable,” underpinned by shared historical memory, regional security concerns, and alignment in global affairs. The discussions highlighted joint planning for multilateral coordination across platforms such as the UN, BRICS, the SCO, and the G20, as the two powers seek to shape a “more just and democratic multipolar world order.” Lavrov hailed China as a vital stabilizing force amid geopolitical turbulence, while Putin reaffirmed satisfaction with the trajectory of bilateral ties.

Wang also reiterated China's readiness to play a “constructive role” in resolving the war in Ukraine, stating that recent ceasefire efforts—while modest—offered a foundation for broader peace talks. While Beijing maintains its stance as a neutral actor, it continues to back Moscow diplomatically and economically, a relationship Western powers say effectively enables Russia's war effort. Nevertheless, Wang dismissed U.S. accusations of bloc-based maneuvering, characterizing them as outdated Cold War thinking. He welcomed signs of normalization in U.S.-Russia dialogue despite President Trump's recent frustrations with Putin's rhetoric toward Ukraine. With preparations underway for Xi Jinping's high-profile visit to Moscow for Victory Day celebrations in May, the meetings signal a deepening Sino-Russian alignment on both regional diplomacy and global power recalibration.

China Stages Major Military Drills Around Taiwan, Escalates Rhetoric Against President Lai

China concluded two days of large-scale military exercises around Taiwan on April 2, involving over 70 warplanes, 13 navy ships, and long-range live-fire drills in the East China Sea. The drills included simulated strikes on ports, energy infrastructure, and military bases across Taiwan, with propaganda videos depicting encirclement and missile strikes. Taiwan responded by scrambling its own aircraft and deploying warships, including in reaction to the Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong operating east of the island. The drills followed U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's tour of the Indo-Pacific, during which he criticized Beijing's aggressive posture. While Taiwan's defense ministry reported no live fire directly in its response zone, it elevated alert levels and condemned the exercises as provocative and destabilizing.

Beijing framed the drills as a "stern warning" against what it labeled separatism under Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, whom Chinese state media grotesquely portrayed as a "parasite" in a series of inflammatory videos. China's foreign ministry insisted the exercises were legitimate acts of sovereignty defense and reiterated its claim that reunification is inevitable. Taiwan, supported by strong statements from the United States, Japan, and the European Union, rejected China's sovereignty claims and denounced the drills as intimidation tactics aimed at shifting the cross-strait status quo by force. Washington reaffirmed its commitment to peace in the Taiwan Strait and criticized Beijing's actions as reckless threats to regional stability. As geopolitical tensions rise, the war games underscore the growing military risks surrounding Taiwan's autonomy and Beijing's readiness to escalate coercive pressure.

Xi Calls for Closer China-India Cooperation in Symbolic 'Dragon-Elephant Tango'

Marking the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and India, President Xi Jinping called for a renewal of bilateral cooperation, urging both countries to embrace a "Dragon-Elephant tango" as a metaphor for peaceful coexistence and strategic collaboration. In a message to Indian President Droupadi Murmu, Xi emphasized the need to improve communication, strengthen coordination on global affairs, and maintain stability along their contested border. His remarks signal a deliberate softening of tone following years of heightened tensions, particularly since the deadly 2020 border clash in the Galwan Valley.

Xi's comments arrive amid a broader effort by Beijing to ease friction with key regional powers as it navigates escalating tensions with the West. For India, which has deepened security ties with the U.S. and other Indo-Pacific partners, the gesture reflects China's attempt to prevent further strategic drift. While the symbolism of the "Dragon-Elephant tango" draws on the countries' civilizational identities, it also highlights their enduring rivalry and mutual interdependence. Whether this diplomatic overture leads to substantive breakthroughs remains to be seen, but it adds a cautiously optimistic note to one of Asia's most complex bilateral relationships.

North Korea Unveils Advanced Warship Capable of Launching Dozens of Missiles

Satellite imagery and expert analysis suggest North Korea's latest class of warships—under construction in Chongjin and Nampo—will be equipped with vertical launch systems capable of carrying more than 50 missiles, marking a significant leap in the country's naval firepower. While much about the vessels remains undisclosed, researchers note that the deck cavities are large enough to accommodate a mix of anti-ship, land-attack, and air defense missiles. The new ships reportedly mirror some characteristics of South Korean naval standards and reflect Pyongyang's intention to bolster its deterrent capabilities beyond its traditional coastal defense fleet. Analysts say the ships could also boost North Korea's appeal as a low-cost arms exporter, particularly to states isolated from mainstream defense markets.

The developments come as North Korea continues to criticize growing U.S.-Japan military cooperation, including a recent agreement to co-produce AIM-120 air-to-air missiles. Pyongyang denounced the move as a threat to regional stability and accused Washington of militarizing Japan under the guise of countering threats from China. North Korea's defense ministry framed the U.S.-Japan deal as another indicator of shifting strategic balances in the Asia-Pacific and vowed to respond by further strengthening its own military capabilities. With leader Kim Jong Un recently emphasizing naval modernization and nuclear deterrence, the unveiling of these new warships underscores Pyongyang's commitment to expanding its maritime reach despite technological limitations and economic constraints.

Vietnam to Host Xi Jinping and EU Leaders Amid Global Trade Realignments

Vietnam is poised to become a focal point of diplomatic engagement this month as it prepares to host Chinese President Xi Jinping and several high-level European Union leaders amid rising global trade tensions, particularly with the United States. According to officials familiar with the plans, Xi is expected to arrive in Hanoi on April 14 as part of a broader Southeast Asia tour, which also includes Cambodia and Malaysia. The visit, Xi's second to Vietnam in under two years, will focus on enhancing connectivity through cross-border railway infrastructure and possibly finalizing Vietnam's approval of China's COMAC aircraft for domestic use—signaling deepening economic ties amid strategic uncertainty.

Shortly before Xi's arrival, Spanish Prime Minister Sanchez and EU Trade Commissioner Sefcovic will also visit Hanoi, followed in the coming weeks by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron. These back-to-back visits reflect a broader push by the EU to expand trade with "trusted partners" as U.S. protectionism intensifies under President Trump. With Washington preparing to unveil a new wave of tariffs on countries with large trade surpluses—like China, the EU, and Vietnam—Hanoi's rising diplomatic clout underscores its emerging role as a strategic bridge in an increasingly fragmented global trade environment.

U.S., Japan, and Philippines Conduct Joint Naval Drills in South China Sea

On March 28, 2025, the United States, Japan, and the Philippines conducted a multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity (MCA) within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone, reaffirming their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific amid rising tensions in the South China Sea. The joint exercise featured the U.S. Navy destroyer USS Shoup, the Philippine Navy's BRP Jose Rizal, and Japan's JS Noshiro, supported by surveillance aircraft from all three nations. The activity emphasized interoperability in maritime defense operations and showcased advanced coordination in doctrines, tactics, and reconnaissance, bolstering the trilateral security framework.

This latest MCA builds on previous joint operations and reflects deepening security cooperation between the three countries as they confront growing regional assertiveness, particularly from China. Conducted in accordance with international law, the drill also served as a public reaffirmation of the allies' commitment to safeguarding freedom of navigation and lawful maritime activities. With the Philippines increasingly at the center of Indo-Pacific strategic dynamics, such exercises underscore the evolving defense posture of U.S. allies and partners as they seek to counter coercive behavior and ensure stability in contested waters.

China Hits Back at Trump's Tariffs, Escalating Global Trade War

China has launched a sweeping retaliation against the United States after President Donald Trump announced an unprecedented set of global tariffs, including a 54% total levy on Chinese imports. In response, Beijing imposed its own 34% tariffs on all U.S. goods, barred 11 American firms from doing business in China, and introduced new export controls on rare earth materials vital to high-tech industries. The Chinese government also began investigations into key U.S. exports, including medical imaging equipment and agricultural products, signaling its intent to apply pressure on strategically important sectors. Officials in Beijing condemned the U.S. actions as reckless and destabilizing, warning that these measures "seriously undermine the global economic order" and pledged continued countermeasures to defend China's sovereignty and economic interests.

Trump's tariffs—framed as "reciprocal" to correct perceived trade imbalances—have stunned global markets and trading partners alike. Major economies including the EU, Japan, South Korea, and India expressed alarm, while Canada and Mexico prepared their own countermeasures. Experts estimate that the tariffs could reduce Chinese exports to the U.S. by up to 30% and shave 1.3 percentage points off China's GDP growth, complicating Beijing's efforts to sustain its 5% growth target amid deflationary headwinds. The ripple effects have already hit global supply chains: companies like Nissan are shifting production to the U.S. to avoid penalties, and markets have suffered their worst losses since the COVID-19 era. The S&P 500 dropped 9% for the week, while the Nikkei experienced its steepest decline in five years.

Despite the mounting economic pain, both Washington and Beijing appear dug in. Trump described the tariffs as a powerful negotiation tool, even as advisors gave mixed signals on whether the levies were a means to force concessions or a permanent policy shift. Meanwhile, China's restrained stimulus response in March now appears strategic, with officials hinting at a larger reserve of fiscal and monetary tools to deploy if tensions worsen. Analysts caution that further escalation could push the world into recession, reignite inflation, and fracture the global trading system. With a potential Trump-Xi summit rumored for June, the standoff sets the stage for a high-stakes showdown between two leaders balancing economic pressure with political pride.

Nissan considers transferring some domestic production to US

In response to escalating U.S. tariffs, Nissan is reportedly considering shifting some of its Japan-based production of U.S.-bound vehicles to its existing facilities in the United States, according to the Nikkei. The automaker may reduce output at its Fukuoka plant as early as this summer and increase production of its popular Rogue SUV at its Smyrna, Tennessee factory. The move comes amid broader adjustments to mitigate tariff-related costs, including halting new U.S. orders for two Mexican-built Infiniti models. With roughly 16% of Nissan's U.S. sales last year originating from Japan, the production shift underscores how Trump's trade measures are reshaping global manufacturing strategies and could disrupt local supply chains in Japan.

6th BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok Aims to Deepen Bay of Bengal Cooperation

Leaders from the seven-member Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) convened in Bangkok on April 4 for the 6th summit under the theme "Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC." The summit adopted the Bangkok Vision 2030, a forward-looking agenda to strengthen collaboration in trade, security, connectivity, and sustainable development across South and Southeast Asia. Key agreements included a landmark Maritime Transport Cooperation pact and new memoranda of understanding with the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, signaling BIMSTEC's growing institutional maturity and international engagement.

This year's summit marked a leadership transition, with Bangladesh assuming the chairmanship for the next two years. The leaders also endorsed the Report of the Eminent Persons Group, which lays out a roadmap for the organization's future direction. Amid growing geopolitical and economic uncertainty, BIMSTEC is increasingly positioned as a vital platform for regional integration, bridging SAARC and ASEAN, and addressing shared challenges such as climate change, maritime security, and disaster management. While the attendance of Myanmar's junta chief remained uncertain due to a recent earthquake, the summit reaffirmed BIMSTEC's relevance in shaping a more connected and resilient Bay of Bengal region.

South Korea's Constitutional Court Removes President Yoon Suk Yeol in Landmark Ruling

South Korea's Constitutional Court unanimously upheld the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol on April 4, formally removing him from office just four months after he attempted to impose martial law amid political unrest. The decision, broadcast live and watched by millions, capped a dramatic constitutional crisis that tested the nation's democratic resilience. The court ruled that Yoon had violated the constitutional order and his duties as commander-in-chief when he deployed military forces to the National Assembly in December. With the ruling, Yoon is barred from holding public office for five years and now faces ongoing criminal charges for leading an insurrection.

The court's verdict sparked jubilation across the capital, where anti-Yoon protesters had gathered in large numbers, chanting and waving flags as the decision was read aloud. While his supporters expressed anger and disappointment, the transition to post-Yoon politics began swiftly, with the National Election Commission announcing that candidates could begin registering to run in the upcoming election, to be held within 60 days. Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung, a frontrunner in the upcoming race, hailed the ruling as a restoration of democracy. The impeachment and removal of Yoon marks a defining moment in South Korea's modern political history, underscoring the strength of its judicial institutions amid deepening polarization.

Quad Pledges Over \$20 Million in Earthquake Relief for Myanmar, Urges Ceasefire for Aid Delivery

In a joint statement issued on April 4, the Quad partners—Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—expressed deep condolences to the victims of the devastating March 28 earthquake in central Myanmar, which also impacted neighboring Thailand. The statement emphasized the urgent need for humanitarian access amid widespread casualties and infrastructure damage that have compounded Myanmar's pre-existing crisis. The Quad welcomed recent temporary ceasefire commitments and echoed ASEAN's calls for these to be expanded to allow uninterrupted delivery of emergency aid.

The four countries announced a collective humanitarian assistance package exceeding \$20 million, aimed at supporting relief supplies, emergency medical teams, and international aid organizations operating in Myanmar. The Quad's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Partnership has established a coordination group working alongside regional partners, including the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance. Reaffirming their origins in the 2004 tsunami response, the Quad underscored its enduring role in disaster relief and regional stability, as part of its broader commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

U.S., Japan, and South Korea Deepen Trilateral Security and Economic Cooperation at Brussels Meeting

At a trilateral meeting held in Brussels on April 3, top diplomats from the United States, Japan, and South Korea reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation on Indo-Pacific and global security challenges. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Japanese Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi, and South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul emphasized the importance of extended deterrence and defense coordination, particularly amid growing nuclear threats from North Korea and rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait. The three nations jointly condemned provocative military drills around Taiwan and unlawful maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific, calling for the preservation of peace and stability across the region and the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.

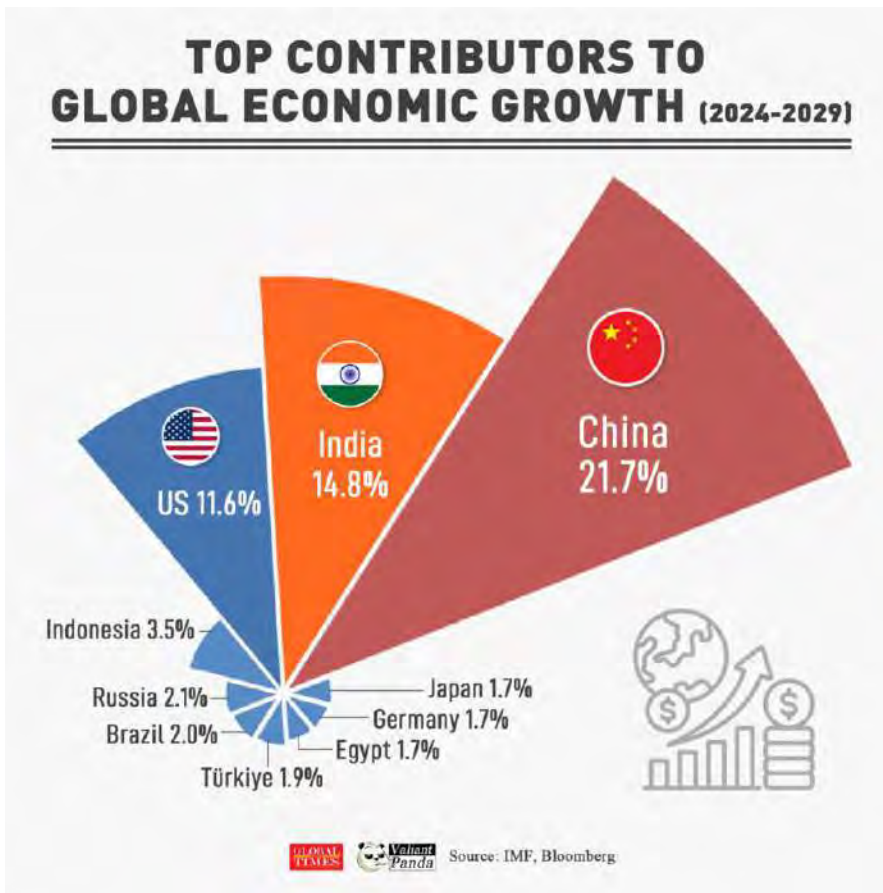
The ministers also pledged enhanced collaboration in economic security, including diversifying supply chains, expanding energy cooperation, and developing advanced nuclear technologies. They announced new initiatives such as trilateral coast guard cooperation and maritime capacity-building under a newly formed framework. Addressing North Korea, the leaders expressed grave concern over Pyongyang's military ties with Russia and recent cyber theft of \$1.5 billion in cryptocurrency, calling for strengthened sanctions and coordinated responses. The meeting concluded with commitments to ongoing trilateral engagements and support for South Korea's upcoming hosting of APEC 2025.

2. STATISTICS OF THE WEEK

Asia Powers Global Growth Surge (2024–2029)

According to the latest projections from the IMF and Bloomberg, Asia is set to dominate global economic momentum through 2029. China, India, and the United States emerge as the top three contributors to global growth, with China alone accounting for a commanding 21.7%, followed by India at 14.8%, and the U.S. at 11.6%.

Crucially for the Indo-Pacific, four of the top ten contributors are Asian economies. Indonesia (3.5%) stands out as Southeast Asia’s growth engine, while Japan (1.7%) and Türkiye (1.9%) also make notable appearances. This underscores the region’s expanding economic weight and the central role it will play in shaping global growth, investment flows, and supply chains over the next five years.



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3. MAP OF THE WEEK

Interlinking Alliances: AUKUS and the Quad in Strategic Focus

This week’s map by Andrew Rhodes visually captures the evolving geography of Indo-Pacific security through the overlapping frameworks of AUKUS and the Quad. Highlighting capital-to-capital flight paths and key naval operational distances in nautical miles, the map offers a sharp illustration of the strategic depth and complexity connecting Washington, Canberra, London, Tokyo, and New Delhi.

While the Quad (India, Japan, Australia, U.S.) focuses on regional resilience and maritime stability in the Indo-Pacific, AUKUS (Australia, U.K., U.S.) sharpens the edge of technological and defense collaboration. With Australia and the United States bridging both groupings, this hybrid architecture signals a tightening of transregional coordination in response to shared challenges—from the Taiwan Strait to the South China Sea. As unilateral security mechanisms deepen, expect enhanced interoperability, intelligence sharing, and joint presence across this wide arc of strategic geography.



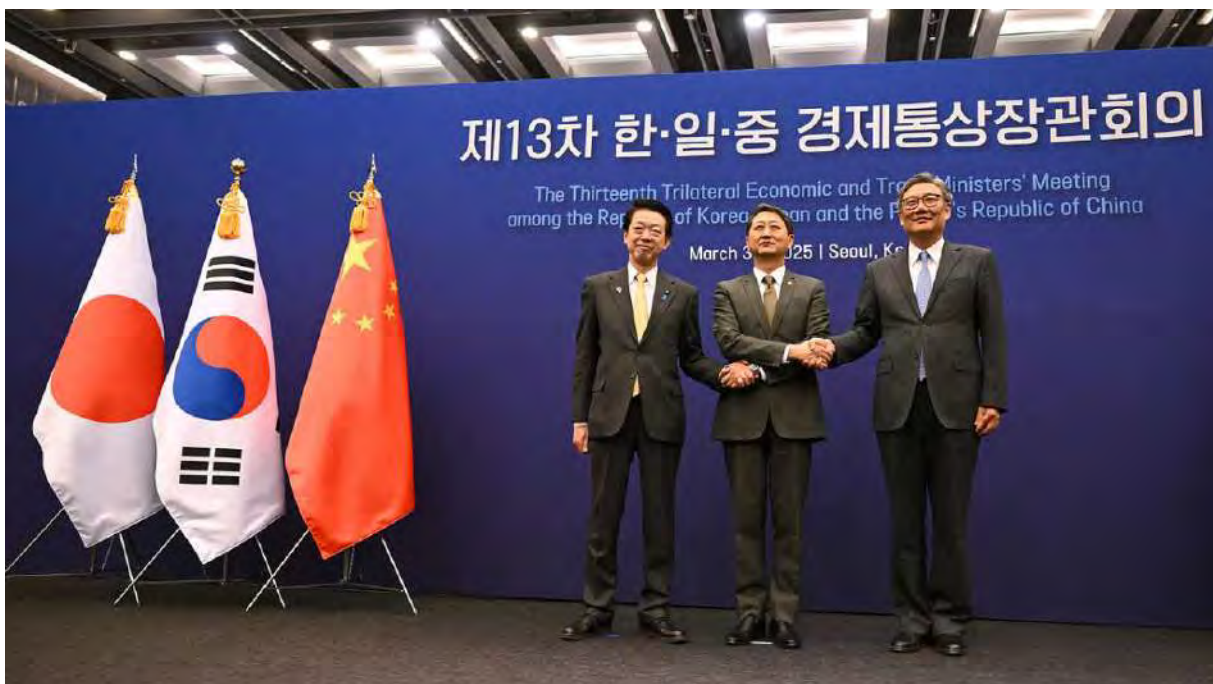
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4. PHOTO OF THE WEEK

Trilateral Trade Talks Resume in Seoul

In a moment symbolic of cautious optimism, South Korea's Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun (center) stands alongside Japan's Economy Minister Yoji Muto (left) and China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao (right) at the 13th Trilateral Economic and Trade Ministers' Meeting, held in Seoul on March 30, 2025. Against the backdrop of shifting global trade dynamics and mounting geopolitical pressures, the meeting underscored renewed momentum toward economic cooperation among Northeast Asia's three largest economies.

The gathering focused on enhancing supply chain resilience, deepening trade connectivity, and revitalizing stalled discussions on the long-delayed China-Japan-Korea free trade agreement (CJK FTA). Though political tensions remain, this visual of solidarity signals a pragmatic turn toward economic diplomacy—at a time when regional integration may be more vital than ever. The meeting also marked the first such high-level trilateral engagement since 2019, potentially paving the way for a long-anticipated trilateral leaders' summit later this year.



South Korea's Trade, Industry and Energy Minister Ahn Duk-geun (C) poses for a photo with Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yoji Muto (L) and China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao (R) during the 13th Trilateral Economic and Trade Ministers' Meeting in Seoul on March 30, 2025. Photo: AFP

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/world/news/china-japan-south-korea-will-jointly-respond-us-tariffs-chinese-state-media-says-3861491#lg=1&slide=0>

5. INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

China and Russia Reaffirm Their Strategic Bond

This week’s infographic, titled “Friends Forever, Never Enemies,” captures the enduring and evolving nature of the China–Russia strategic partnership, as reaffirmed during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visit to Moscow. With preparations underway for the landmark Putin–Xi summit in May—coinciding with the 80th anniversary of WWII victory commemorations—both sides emphasized the multipolar momentum their alliance represents.

The infographic outlines key themes, including expanded coordination in multilateral forums (UN, SCO, BRICS, G20), a push for a new Eurasian security architecture, and Beijing’s call for deeper strategic alignment with Moscow amid tensions with the West. Notably, China also reiterated its readiness to play a “constructive role” in Ukraine peace efforts, while firmly defending its neutrality. Against a backdrop of heightened global polarization, the Sino-Russian bond is portrayed not merely as a bilateral relationship but as a cornerstone of an emerging alternative global order.

FRIENDS FOREVER, NEVER ENEMIES
China and Russia Reaffirm Strategic Bond

"Thanks to the two leaders, our relations have reached an unprecedented level and continue to develop dynamically in all areas. The Global Majority regards our collaboration as the most significant stabilising factor in today's complex international landscape."

"The principle of 'friends forever, never enemies'... serves as a solid legal basis for advancing strategic cooperation at a higher level. With peace, it is no pain, no gain. You need to work hard to achieve it."

Framed Wang Yi's visit as **preparation for the upcoming Putin–Xi summit in May**, marking 80 years since WWII victory.

Highlighted the **strategic depth of Russia–China relations**: not just historical, but essential to today's multipolar world.

Advocated for **expanded coordination in multilateral forums** (UN, BRICS, SCO, G20, APEC) to shape a more democratic world order.

Emphasized urgency in **creating a new Eurasian security framework** as Euro-Atlantic structures stagnate.

Reaffirmed China's readiness to play a **constructive role in Ukraine peace efforts**.

Defended **Beijing's neutrality**, rejecting Western claims of enabling Moscow, and positioning China as a diplomatic stabilizer.

Welcomed **improving US–Russia ties**, calling it a positive step for international balance and optimism.

Called for **deeper strategic alignment with Russia** across global and regional challenges (Ukraine, Taiwan, Asia-Pacific).

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6. REGIONAL ALLIANCES

BIMSTEC Summit 2025: A Roadmap for Resilient Regionalism

The Sixth BIMSTEC Summit, held on April 4, 2025, in Bangkok, marks a significant milestone in the evolution of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Under the theme “Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC” (PRO BIMSTEC), this summit showcased the bloc’s commitment to strengthening institutional mechanisms, enhancing connectivity, and confronting emerging regional challenges, from disaster resilience to economic integration.

Strategic Vision: Bangkok 2030

A centerpiece of the summit was the adoption of the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, the grouping’s first long-term strategic roadmap. It outlines a clear trajectory toward greater economic integration, seamless connectivity, and human security. The vision aligns with broader geopolitical shifts and aims to position BIMSTEC as a more agile and effective regional actor amid uncertainty in global governance structures.

Institutional Deepening and Sectoral Expansion

The summit reinforced BIMSTEC’s institutional architecture by formalizing the Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC Mechanisms, ensuring greater procedural clarity and coordination. Key approvals included sectoral action plans in Science, Technology & Innovation, Public Health, and Climate Change, as well as the creation of new expert groups on fiscal and monetary policy. The ratification of these frameworks reflects BIMSTEC’s push to evolve from a loose consultative forum into a results-oriented, policy-driven institution.

Connectivity and Maritime Cooperation

One of the summit’s most tangible outcomes was the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, a pivotal step to boost intra-regional trade, reduce logistical costs, and enhance people-to-people exchanges. This also aligns with the “Blue Economy” agenda and supports sustainable development initiatives in the Bay of Bengal. With Thailand and India also announcing the elevation of their bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership, the region appears poised for more synergized infrastructure and digital connectivity projects.

Disaster Resilience and External Partnerships

In response to the devastating Myanmar earthquake of March 2025, the Summit adopted a Joint Statement on Disaster Management, pledging accelerated efforts toward operationalizing the BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence on Disaster Management in India. Furthermore, BIMSTEC broadened its external engagement by signing MoUs with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and UNODC, and finalizing an agreement with the World Bank for pandemic preparedness. These moves mark a turning point toward a more outward-facing and crisis-responsive BIMSTEC.

Conclusion

The 6th BIMSTEC Summit represents a strategic recalibration of the Bay of Bengal grouping. By institutionalizing reforms, prioritizing regional connectivity, and expanding partnerships beyond its shores, BIMSTEC is positioning itself as a pivotal player in the Indo-Pacific regional order. As Bangladesh assumes the chairmanship, the onus lies on member states to translate summit outcomes into actionable and measurable progress—advancing a cooperative model of resilience and prosperity amidst growing global fragmentation.

7. ANALYSIS

The Strategic Roots of Trump's Trade War with China

The resurgence of protectionism under President Donald Trump's second term represents more than an economic policy shift — it signals a fundamental recalibration of U.S. strategic priorities in an era defined by the U.S.-China rivalry. At the core of this realignment is a deep-rooted anxiety in Washington about the erosion of America's industrial and technological edge, particularly in relation to China's ascent. While Trump's earlier trade policies in his first term were characterized by tariff skirmishes and renegotiated trade deals, the current protectionist wave is broader, more systemic, and explicitly strategic in nature. It is rooted in fears of being eclipsed, technologically outpaced, and economically dependent — and it is reshaping the global trade landscape in ways that will reverberate far beyond the White House.

The Manufacturing Imperative

Trump's 2025 protectionist agenda is grounded in a stark assessment of American industrial decline. The United States now trails China significantly in manufacturing output, with China contributing nearly 29% of global output in 2023 compared to the U.S.'s 15–16%. This erosion of industrial capability is viewed not merely as an economic loss, but as a strategic vulnerability — with implications for jobs, innovation, and even national security. Manufacturing, though diminished as a share of GDP, remains a key driver of research and development in the U.S., making its decline a symbol of broader competitive weakening. Trump's new tariff regime, targeting virtually all Chinese imports and many from third-party manufacturing hubs like Vietnam and Mexico, reflects the urgency his administration assigns to re-shoring industrial capacity.

The U.S. trade deficit, particularly with China, remains a potent political symbol. Though marginally lower in 2023 compared to a decade ago, the \$279 billion goods deficit remains politically toxic. With Trump branding it a "national emergency," the administration has doubled down on tariff escalation, import substitution policies, and federal support for domestic manufacturing. The political resonance of this agenda — especially in the Midwest and other industrial regions — ensures that protectionism will remain a core feature of U.S. trade policy in the near term, regardless of its global economic costs.

Technology as Geopolitical Terrain

If manufacturing decline explains the economic case for protectionism, the technological race with China explains the national security rationale. The U.S. remains the world's largest spender on research and development, but China has nearly closed the gap. In 2023, China's R&D spending was over 92% of U.S. levels, up from just 4% in 2000 — a transformation that alarms American policymakers. The fact that China leads in metrics such as patent filings and AI research output only deepens the sense of urgency in Washington.

Trump's trade measures increasingly target this high-tech frontier. Export controls on semiconductors, investment restrictions, and support for domestic production through legislation like the CHIPS Act are framed not just as economic policy, but as national defense imperatives. The administration's view is clear: if China wins the race in AI, quantum computing, green tech, or biotech, the U.S. risks losing both commercial dominance and strategic leverage. Thus, trade tools are being weaponized to blunt China's ambitions and reinforce U.S. technological primacy.

Supply Chains and Strategic Vulnerability

The third pillar of the protectionist rationale lies in supply chain security. The COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions revealed just how exposed the U.S. is to Chinese-controlled production networks, particularly in semiconductors, green technology, and critical minerals. China's overwhelming control of solar panel and EV battery production, and its near-monopoly on rare earth processing, has turned supply chains into arenas of geopolitical contest.

In response, Trump's administration is pushing for "economic de-risking" through a combination of tariffs, subsidies, and trade restrictions aimed at reshoring production or re-routing supply chains to trusted allies. However, this too is complicated by new tariffs on countries like Vietnam and Mexico, where many U.S. firms had shifted manufacturing to circumvent China-specific sanctions. The result is a more general decoupling from globalized supply chains and a retreat to a form of economic nationalism not seen since the mid-20th century.

Conclusion

Trump's protectionism is not merely a reaction to trade imbalances or domestic political winds — it is the outward expression of a deep strategic anxiety about the shifting balance of power in the global economy. The U.S. fears losing its position as the world's industrial and technological hegemon, and Trump's aggressive trade policies are a bid to arrest that decline. Whether or not these policies will succeed in revitalizing U.S. industry or halting China's rise is debatable. What is clear is that trade policy has become inseparable from national security in the eyes of U.S. leaders.