

Global Agendas 2022 - NATO and RIMPAC

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Abstract: War – its preparation, rehearsal, prosecution, and remediation – is increasingly the preoccupation of 21st century states and peoples. Attention in 2022 focussed on the savage fighting in the Black Sea and Ukraine, but preparations, plans and rehearsals on a hitherto unprecedented scale for conflict were underway around the world, notably in the form of US-led and organized exercises in the Baltic, the East and South China Seas, the Mediterranean and the Pacific, with an expansive NATO and US-led regional engagement involving new roles for Japan, India, Australia and others in the Western Pacific.

set up in 1949 as Europe divided into Cold War/Iron Curtain camps lost its original purpose when the “other” or “enemy” side, the Moscow-centred Warsaw Pact organization, dissolved in 1991 as the Soviet Union split into pieces. NATO, however, steadily grew and continues to grow. RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific), is a biennial air, land and sea war exercise that is not part of NATO but shares its geo-political frame and US direction. It is hosted and administered by the US Navy’s Indo-Pacific Command (in Hawai’i) in conjunction with other bodies including the Marine Corps. The 2022 iteration is about to commence.

NATO and RIMPAC

War – its preparation, rehearsal, prosecution, and remediation – is increasingly the preoccupation of 21st century states and peoples. Attention in 2022 focussed on the savage fighting in the Black Sea and Ukraine, but preparations, plans and rehearsals on a hitherto unprecedented scale for conflict were underway around the world, notably in the form of US-led and organized exercises in the Baltic, the East and South China Seas, the Mediterranean and the Pacific. For the most part, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is in command, though in the case of the Pacific the primary role is played by the US Navy.

NATO (The North Atlantic Treaty Organization)



Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), Royal Australian Navy auxiliary oiler replenishment ship HMAS Supply (AO 195), Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley (DDG 101) and Arleigh Burke-class guided-

missile destroyer USS Spruance (DDG 111) sail in formation with Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group (ABECSG), Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and RAN ships in the Pacific Ocean on June 23, 2022. U.S. Navy Photo (Source: [USNI News](#))

Russian fear and insecurity over NATO's "Eastward expansion" cannot justify invasion and war, but it nevertheless played an undisputed role in setting the stage for the war now raging in Ukraine. In Russia it is widely believed that the West has been in breach of pledges from 1990 that NATO would not take advantage of Soviet collapse to expand "by one inch" towards Russian frontiers. In February 2022 Russia made its fateful decision to - as it saw it - stop the process of attrition. From its North Atlantic heartland, NATO is currently fiercely contested in the Black Sea, while expanding to the North, East, and South.

Belying its title, in other words, NATO becomes a global organization. The thirteen member states of 1949, now grown to 30 and with several more, notably Sweden and Finland - plainly not in the North Atlantic - currently waiting in the wings for the outcome of the formal application for membership they submitted in May 2022.¹ Ukraine too, it seems clear, will join NATO in due course provided it survives the current war.

That war, commencing in late February and sparking fear of Russian aggression and expansionism, has shaken the global system, prompting inter alia the dramatic reversal in thinking within months of the war's breakout on the part of Sweden and Finland. Both quickly abandoned long historical stances of neutralism and peace, 200 years in the case of Sweden and 77 in that of Finland, to seek shelter in the NATO tent.

NATO North

From early in June 2022, weeks after formal lodging of Sweden's and Finland's applications, the US amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge (40,500 ton, 257 meter runway, thus an aircraft carrier in all but name) docked in Stockholm where Swedish Prime Minister [Magdalena Andersson](#) and Défense Minister Peter Hultqvist met with US Joint Chief of Staff Chair Mark Milley and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. Their agenda can be assumed to have focussed on enhanced military cooperation and full Swedish (and Finnish) NATO membership.²



Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson greets General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on board USS Kearsarge, June 4 2022

That Stockholm meeting was followed by the "Baltop" exercise that brought the Kearsarge and roughly 7,000 troops, 45 ships and more than 75 aircraft from 14 NATO allies, plus Sweden and Finland, to Baltic waters early in June, tasked, inter alia, with rehearsing the recapture of regional islands from a fictional aggressor (i.e., for war with Russia, though serving equally to address the "China threat"). Welcoming Anderson on board the Kearsarge, Hultqvist declared that the ongoing and

forthcoming exercises would send “a strong signal that Sweden is willing to act with its friends,” while Milley praised Sweden’s interoperability, its intelligence sharing with NATO allies, and its modern military prowess, more than a match, he said, for “Russian military adventurism.”³

NATO East/South

NATO’s northern expansion is to be matched by Eastwards and Southwards expansion, far from the North Atlantic, to the Pacific states of Japan, Australia, and New Zealand,⁴ all by now NATO “partners” or “key partners” rather than full members, whose participation is assumed in NATO projects and from 2020 in regular NATO Foreign Ministers’ conferences and in the May 2022 meeting of “the NATO Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence session at NATO Headquarters.”⁵ Whether full membership follows or not, the relationship is very close and deepening.

Japan’s Maritime Self Defense Forces are actively involved in these exercises, in the Mediterranean in June,⁶ and in Australia and the South Pacific in June to August. A Japanese flotilla comprising the de facto aircraft carrier, the Izumo, set sail in June on an extended (June-August) Pacific Vanguard operation involving Australia as well as South Korea, and including visits to the US, India, Australia, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Palau, Vanuatu, Fiji, Vietnam and the Philippines).⁷

Calling the shots, without doubt, was the United States. Focusing only on the Western hemisphere,

XX“On a single day in late May 2022, the Kearsarge was in Talinn, Estonia, while the guided missile destroyer Paul Ignatius was in Haakonsværn, Norway; the destroyer Gravelly and amphibious dock landing ship Gunston Hall were in Helsinki; and the guided-missile

destroyer Jason Dunham was in Durres, Albania.”⁸

On 7 June, the chief of NATO’s military committee (Admiral Rob Bauer) met the top officer of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (General Yamazaki Koji) in Tokyo to discuss the Ukrainian situation and ways of increasing cooperation. Japan’s Prime Minister Kishida, along with his opposite numbers in Australia and New Zealand, Anthony Albanese and Jacinda Ardern, all accepted invitations to attend the NATO “Leaders” summit scheduled for Madrid on 29 and 30 June, at which a “New Strategic Initiative” was to be announced.⁹

The Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government had from 2012 under Abe Shinzo been explicitly pursuing military expansionist goals, pressing ahead with works on the huge base for the US Marine Corps at Henoko in northern Okinawa and of a chain of Japanese (MSDF) bases along the Ryukyu arc on the islands (Mage, Amami, Miyako, Ishigaki, Yonaguni) between Kyushu and Taiwan, and (from 2018) on the commitment to double its war-related (“defense”) budget. That would mean the 5.4 trillion Japanese yen (roughly \$US39.5 billion) of 2020 would become 11 trillion yen (\$80.6 billion) within about five years, likely elevating Japan from Number 9 on world military scales to Number 3, surpassing the UK, France, Germany, India, and even Russia, and ranking below only the US and China.¹⁰ Its participation in NATO, essentially as a US proxy, becomes ever more crucial.

Matching these various “Games,” Japan has been engaged in recent years on a deep and wide-ranging process of institutional change, step-by-step shifting its constitutional peace democratic state (however imperfect) under the prodding of Prime Minister Abe and his successor Kishida, toward becoming a national security state. Despite the concern that Japan’s de facto assimilation to the world’s largest military alliance might well be in breach of the

UN Charter, not to mention Japan's own constitution and its long-established nuclear "Three No's" and the policy of holding military spending "below 1 per cent of GDP", the process of incorporation continues.¹¹

and counter-missile systems, fighter jets and submarines are all proliferating. British, French, German, and Australian vessels join with those of the United States and Japan to rehearse war with China."¹³

The Pacific - RIMPAC 2022

The Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, to be conducted from 29 June to 4 August 2022, off Hawai'i and the West Coast of the U.S., would be the grandest of all war games, the largest air, land, and sea war manoeuvres in the world. They would assemble a staggering 238 ships, 170 aircraft, 4 submarines and 25,000 military personnel from 26 countries (Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, the United Kingdom and the United States). The cost, while unknown, is bound to be prodigious, and the environmental damage will match it. To China, scarcely surprisingly these exercises are seen as expression of an anti-China "Asian NATO design."¹² They are war games, and they are to include various simulations engaging "enemy forces," attacking targets and conducting amphibious landings on Hawaii Island and in Hawaiian waters.

Korea and The East China Sea

Meanwhile, the East Sea Northeast Asian core region, especially the long unresolved matter of Korean division and confrontation and the steadily rising matter of China's rise, threatens to erupt. As I wrote in early May 2022,

"Over and under the East China Sea, battleships and aircraft carriers, missile

On 24 May, newly elected South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol and US president Joe Biden jointly declared intent to "reinforce" the alliance. Weeks later, from 2 to 4 June, joint (US-South Korea) naval exercises were conducted, for the first time since 2017, in what could be described as Korea-Okinawa waters. The US nuclear aircraft carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan, participated after a hiatus of four years during which large-scale war exercises had been suspended under the presidency of Moon Jae-in (2017-2022) following agreements between US President Donald Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong-un that they were provocative and counter-productive.¹⁴ From 2022 under Biden and Yoon, that inhibition would be cast aside. Three-sided war games (US-South Korea-Japan) are expected to resume.¹⁵ They would be neither NATO nor Rimpac, but would fall under the same US direction.

The North Korean response was swift. On 5 June it fired 8 short-range missiles into adjacent seas. That was followed on 6 June by a salvo of 8 "retaliatory" missiles fired by the US and South Korea into the Japan Sea. Two days later, on 7 June, during a visit to Seoul by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, the US and South Korea carried out a joint air power demonstration and South Korean intelligence reported that preparations might be underway for a resumption of nuclear testing.

How US-tied neighbor countries would respond in such an event remains to be seen. Whether the thin line dividing war as "game" from war as reality can be preserved will be tested.

Peace in and around the East Sea/Sea of Japan surely calls for breaking the cycle of tit-for-tat. With South Korea under its new government evidently ready now to join in a full US-Japan-South Korea military (China confronting and constraining) alliance, and with NATO and RIMPAC ramping up tensions and military exercises proliferating, the opposite process gathers momentum.

Agendas in Conflict - NATO and RIMPAC versus UN

NATO acknowledges that its nuclear character is fundamental, declaring that the “strategic forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security of Allies.”¹⁶ American bombs and missiles, which “belong to” the United States and could only be launched upon its orders, are known to be stored in at least six NATO military bases: Kleine Brogel in Belgium, Buchel Air Base in Germany, Aviano and Ghedi Air Bases in Italy, Volkel Air Base in the Netherlands, and Incirlik in Turkey.¹⁷ The UK-based Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament gives an estimate of “150 B-61 nuclear gravity bombs,” in these NATO sites. It points out that their presence conflicts with the legal obligations of states such as the “non-nuclear” Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Turkey under Articles 1 and 2 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).¹⁸ UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres refers to the world’s 13,000 nuclear weapons as a “global scourge” and “recipe for annihilation” that must be eliminated before they eliminate us.”¹⁹

A major gathering of the UN forces favoring nuclear disarmament, led by Secretary-General Guterres, took place in Vienna on 21-23 June 2022, on the eve of the Madrid NATO summit. One year since the coming into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

(TPNW), it adopted a “Vienna Declaration and Action Plan.”²⁰ Squarely in its sight was not only the Security Council nuclear great power club but also, implicitly, countries (such as Japan and Australia) whose security policy rests on the U.S. nuclear “umbrella.” The Vienna Declaration was unequivocal about the failure of both the nuclear powers and “umbrella” adherents to take “serious steps” towards nuclear disarmament. With states under the 2021 law obliged not to “develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons,” nuclear deterrence was simply not permissible. In Vienna it was denounced as a “fallacy,” because of the risk of inflicting global catastrophic consequences, and nuclear weapons were declared “incompatible with respect for the right to life.” It suggested that there might even be reason to doubt whether the NATO nuclear-based organization could be compatible with international law as now governed by the nuclear ban treaty.²¹

The message coming out of the United Nations (Vienna) contrasts sharply with the nuclear-based military message from NATO and Rimpac in Madrid one week later.

Japan was a notable absentee from the UN Vienna conference but already from February 2022 shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a debate had opened there over the call by Japanese political heavyweight and long-term Prime Minister Abe Shinzo that Japan should follow the European - NATO - model of “shared” nuclear weapon hosting.²² The current Kishida government’s policy suggests it is intent on distancing itself further from the pacifist ideal of its constitution and closer to the status of full (i.e. nuclear weapons) global great power.

For its part, Australia under the newly elected Labor Government of Anthony Albanese seems to have thought it no contradiction to attend both the Vienna anti-nuclear and (as NATO

“partner”) the Madrid NATO (fundamentally nuclear) gathering. Despite the recent Australian national elections, parliamentary and public debate on the options, and appreciation of the seriousness of the choices to be made, is all too rare.

Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeals to the world’s leaders and legislatures for weapons and money and insists on uncompromising military victory – however improbable that goal becomes, and however cruel and destructive the imposed on the people of Ukraine fighting to try to achieve it. As former senior CIA intelligence official Graham E. Fuller recently put it, it may be that Ukraine has already lost the war and NATO will emerge weakened from it. He suggests that “Europe already perceives the US as a declining power with an erratic and hypercritical foreign policy ‘vision’ premised upon the desperate need to preserve ‘American leadership’ in the world,” and that the war’s lasting effect could turn out to be, not Ukraine victory but global militarized confrontation and insecurity.²³

Such massive, multilateral war drills as are now underway or imminent around the world under and expanded NATO and RIMPAC direction feed a militaristic approach that sharpens rather than resolves contradictions, accelerates ecological destruction, aggravates global climate crisis, and intensifies global nuclear risk. Instead of large-scale military exercises, often conducted in deliberately threatening proximity to territories considered “hostile,” what is needed is an outlawing of war and war preparation (precisely the principle that Japan could declare in accord with its own constitutional Article 9). Instead of conforming its institutions and message to the world around NATO and RIMPAC, Japan could take seriously the urgent plea of the UN’s Guterres and the Vienna Declaration. It needs to address the global climate crisis and reduce the risk of nuclear war by declaring a demilitarized Pan-Pacific Zone of Peace, with the resources and energies being now appropriated to vast destructive purpose diverted instead to respond to the urgent existential crisis facing humanity.

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Notes

¹ Initially at least the obstacle was the concern on the part of Turkey that the Baltic countries were insufficiently severe in dealing with Islamic militant groups. However, as the Leaders Conference got underway in Madrid on 28 June, Turkey withdrew its opposition.

² NATO, "[Brussels Summit Declaration – NATO](#)," 11 July 2018.

³ Joe Gould, "[Major Baltic sea exercise kicks off as Swedish, Finnish NATO bids wait on Turkey](#)," *Defense News*, 4 June 2022.

⁴ Strictly speaking South Korea and New Zealand should both be discussed more fully in this context as NATO "Partners." See NATO, "[Relations with Asia-Pacific partners](#)," 17 June 2022.

⁵ NATO, *ibid.*

⁶ Naval Defense Global News, "[NATO ships train with Japanese Navy in Mediterranean Sea](#)," 9 June 2022.

⁷ Kyodo news, "Japan Employs Self-Defense Fleet to Indo-Pacific with Eye on China," 18 June 2022.

⁸ Gould, citing US 6th Fleet in Naples as source.

⁹ David Crowe, "Australia to Attend NATO Summit, Invited to Visit Ukraine," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June 2022. See also Kuno Shigeaki and Tanaka Toshiyuki, "Kita Taiseiyo (NATO) shuno kaigi ni shusseki yotei no Kishida Fumio shusho e no kokai shitsumonjo," (Open Letter of Inquiry to Prime Minister Kishida Fumio), 13 June 2022.

¹⁰ Saito Takao, "Keizai anpo no jinmyaku to bunmyaku," Part 2, "Ho seiritsu, misugosareta giron," *Sekai*, July 2022, pp. 123-131, at p. 129.

¹¹ For one discussion of this point, Kihara Satoru, "Nihon to kyu sekkin, NATO wa kokuren kensho rinen ni hansuru gunji domei," *Ari no hitokoto*, 8 June 2022.

¹² Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's term.

¹³ "[Japan's peaceful foreign policy is under siege from right-wing militarism](#)" *Jacobin Magazine*, May 3 2022.

¹⁴ With the suspension of negotiations over its missile and nuclear plans, North Korea had been steadily intensifying its missile development efforts. In 2022, already prior to the June tests mentioned here it had conducted 16 missile-tests.

¹⁵ In accord with the Singapore Agreement of June 2022. (Kyodo, "[Japan, U.S., South Korea to Resume Drills to Counter North Korean Offensive](#)," 11 June 2022).

¹⁶ NATO, "[Brussels Summit Declaration – NATO](#)," 11 July 2018.

¹⁷ Center for Arms Control and Non-proliferation, "[US Nuclear Weapons in Europe](#)," n.d.

¹⁸ Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, "[United States Nuclear Weapons in Europe](#)," n.d.

¹⁹ "Message to the Opening of the First meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," Vienna, 21 June 2022.

²⁰ ICAN, "[The Vienna Declaration Adopted 23 June 2022](#)."

²¹ For further thoughts on this aspect, Gavan McCormack, "Supplementary Amicus Brief – The Case against Japan," International People's Tribunal on the Nuclear Powers and Human Extinction, University of Sydney, 7-8 July 2016.

²² Nohara Yoshiaki, "[Japan Should Discuss NATO-like Weapons Sharing, Abs Says](#)," *Bloomberg*, 27 February 2022.

²³ Graham E. Fuller, "[Some Hard Thoughts about Post-Ukraine](#)," Information Clearing House,

5 July 2022. Fuller is “former Vice Chair of the National Intelligence Council at CIA with responsibility for intelligence estimates.”