



When we look at the Russia of today, there is no room for old dreams. Our countries are standing against each other today.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier



The historical period of the West's undivided dominance over world affairs is coming to an end. We are standing at a historical frontier: Ahead is probably the most dangerous, unpredictable and, at the same time, important decade since the end of World War Two.

Russian President Vladimir Putin



If he has no intention, why does he keep talking about it? Why is he talking about the ability to use a tactical nuclear weapon? He's been very dangerous in how he's approached this.

US President Joe Biden



Everybody is holding its breath about this. Further tests, of course, means that they are refining the preparations and the construction of their arsenal.

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi on possible N Korea nuke test



Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan (3R) gestures during an anti-government long march towards Islamabad to demand early elections, in Lahore, Pakistan, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

China is the only competitor

Says Pentagon, warns Russia poses 'acute threat', but not a challenger in the long run, defines climate change as 'emerging threat'

AFP, Washington

Russia's invasion of Ukraine highlights the "acute threat" posed by Moscow, but China is the most consequential challenge for the United States, the Pentagon has said.

The dangers are both conventional -- Moscow's aggression toward its neighbors and Beijing's efforts to gain control of Taiwan -- and nuclear, with Russia possessing an extensive arsenal and China's stocks of atomic weapons growing fast.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin highlighted the different challenges posed by China and Russia as he unveiled the unclassified versions of several military strategy documents.

China "is the only competitor out there with both the intent to reshape the international order, and increasingly the power to do so," Austin said.

"Unlike China, Russia can't systemically challenge the United States over the long term. But Russian aggression does pose an immediate and sharp threat."

The National Defense Strategy, which was released Thursday, likewise places the primary emphasis on China.

Beijing is seeking to "refashion the Indo-Pacific region and the international system to suit its interests and authoritarian preferences," it says, describing this dynamic as "the most comprehensive and serious challenge to US national security."

The strategy says Chinese rhetoric about and "coercive activity" toward self-ruled Taiwan -- which Beijing has vowed to take control of, by force if necessary -- is a destabilizing factor that risks miscalculation and threatens peace in the area.

As for Russia, it says the "acute threat" posed by Moscow has been most recently demonstrated by Moscow's February invasion of Ukraine.

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"The Department (of Defense) will support robust deterrence of Russian aggression against vital US national interests, including our treaty Allies," the strategy says.

In a departure from the previous National Defense Strategy, which was issued during Donald Trump's presidency, the newly released document classifies climate change as an "emerging threat."

The US "will integrate climate change into threat assessments," as well as increasing the "resiliency of military installations" and taking "climate extremes" into account in decisions on training and equipping the armed forces, the strategy says.

In an updated report on US nuclear posture released in parallel with the National Defense Strategy, the Pentagon defines the role of its nuclear arsenal as deterring both nuclear and non-nuclear attacks that have strategic consequences.

"This includes nuclear employment of any scale, and it includes high-consequence attacks of a strategic nature that use non-nuclear

means," a senior defense official told journalists. The Nuclear Posture Review emphasizes that China's nuclear arsenal is growing, but says Russia's is currently more extensive.

"By the 2030s the United States will, for the first time in its history, face two major nuclear powers as strategic competitors and potential adversaries," the document says.

It emphasizes the importance of modernizing US strategic assets, while scrapping a submarine-launched nuclear cruise missile program and saying a type of obsolete nuclear bomb will be retired.

The document also contains a stark warning for Kim Jong Un against employing North Korea's growing nuclear arsenal.

"Any nuclear attack by North Korea against the United States or its allies and partners is unacceptable and will result in the end of that regime. There is no scenario in which the Kim regime could employ nuclear weapons and survive," it says.

The Missile Defense Review -- also released Thursday -- likewise points to growing threats from China and Russia.

Beijing is closing the gap with Washington when it comes to ballistic and hypersonic missile technology, while Moscow is modernizing its intercontinental-range missile systems and developing advanced precision-strike missiles.

The document says drones -- which Russia has used to strike against Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure -- are also a threat that is likely to grow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin meanwhile offered a distinctly different take on the international strategic environment Thursday, saying Moscow is trying to "defend its right to exist" in the face of Western efforts to "destroy" his country.

"Ahead is probably the most dangerous, unpredictable and at the same time important decade since the end of the Second World War," he said.

EU strikes deal to ban combustion-engine cars by 2035

AFP, Brussels

The European Union on Thursday struck an agreement on legislation to phase out new CO2-emitting vehicles by 2035, negotiators announced.

The talks between representatives of the European Council, fronting the 27 member states, and the European Parliament started Thursday and underpin the bloc's transition towards a carbon-neutral future.

"We have just finished the negotiations on CO2 standards for cars," tweeted French MEP Pascal Canfin, who heads the European parliament's environment commission.

"Historic (EU) decision for the climate which definitively confirms the target of 100 percent zero emission vehicles in 2035 with intermediary phases between 2025 and 2030."

Cars currently account for about 15 percent of all CO2 emissions in the EU, while transportation overall accounts for around a quarter.

The agreed text, based on a proposal by the EU executive in July 2021, calls for reducing CO2 emissions from new cars in Europe to zero by 2035.

This means a de facto halt to sales of new petrol and diesel cars, light commercial vehicles and hybrids in the bloc by that date, in favour of all-electric vehicles.

The European Parliament had in June voted in favour of the 2035 ban on all vehicles with internal combustion engines. Currently around 12 percent of new cars sold in the European Union are electric vehicles, with its consumers shifting away from CO2-emitting models as energy costs and greener traffic regulations bite.

North Korea fires 2 missiles into sea

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) off its east coast yesterday, South Korea's military said, while South Korean forces were wrapping up nearly two weeks of exercises aimed at deterring their northern neighbour. The missile launches, at a time of growing fears that North Korea is preparing its first nuclear test since 2017, were the latest in a year in which North Korea has tested a record number of missiles, whether short-range missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), or others. The SRBMs were fired from the Tongcheon area in the North's Gangwon province, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said, four days after the neighbours exchanged warning shots off the west coast of the divided peninsula.

Xi Jinping expected to visit Saudi Arabia

AFP, Riyadh



Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to visit Saudi Arabia, the oil-rich kingdom's foreign minister said. Prince Faisal bin Farhan hailed the "historical and solid relationship" between the major oil exporter and Beijing

after talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. "Our meeting today comes at an important time, as it precedes the expected visit of the Chinese president to the kingdom," Prince Faisal said in a video statement broadcast on Saudi television. Saudi Arabia is also "finalising arrangements" for summit talks between China and Arab countries, he added. The potential visit comes at a time of strained ties between Saudi Arabia and long-standing ally the United States after the OPEC+ cartel slashed oil production, ignoring pleas from Washington.

Ailing panda brings Taiwan, China closer

AFP, Taipei

Chinese veterinary experts have been invited to Taiwan, zoo officials said yesterday, for a rare visit between the two sides after a male panda that symbolised an era of warmer ties was moved into end of life care.

Relations between China and Taiwan have been on ice since 2016 with Beijing severing official communications and government visits between the two sides scrapped.

But Taiwan has made an exception after Tuan Tuan, a male panda that was gifted to the island by Beijing in 2008, fell ill in recent weeks and looks to be entering his twilight days. Taipei Zoo said the Chinese vets will stay for seven days and observe, rather than conduct, health checks.

It is not clear when the vets will arrive but Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said Wednesday they were processing their visa applications.

Tuan Tuan and his breeding mate Yuan Yuan were given to Taiwan by Beijing at a time when relations between the two neighbours were more cordial.

The couple became huge stars in Taiwan and Yuan Yuan has since given birth to two female cubs.

China only loans pandas to foreign zoos which usually return any offspring within a few years of their birth to join the country's breeding programme. But Taiwan was granted an exception as part of a brief charm offensive China launched in the late 2000s and was fully gifted both Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan and any offspring they had.



Relatives mourn during the funeral of Palestinian Imad Abu Rashid, in Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli forces kill 2 more Palestinians in West Bank

AFP, Nablus

Two Palestinians were killed yesterday by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said.

The ministry announced the death of Imad Abu Rashid, 47, who "was killed by the Israeli occupation, after being shot in the abdomen, chest and head".

In a later statement, it announced the death of Ramzi Sami Zabara, 35, "from a critical wound by the occupation (Israeli) bullets in the heart, in Nablus".

On Tuesday, five Palestinians were killed in an Israeli operation in the city targeting a nascent militant group called "The Lions' Den".

The group is a loose coalition of fighters that emerged in recent months, in parallel with a sharp rise in Israeli raids on the northern West Bank.