

SAIS Crisis Simulation 2024

Road to War

The document contains the actions and events that lead up to the initial crises. For your convenience, the text has been labeled “Asia Pacific” and “Europe Mediterranean”. However, please note that all the events and actions exist in the same world, and thus, have global effects and implications.



Asia Pacific



Europe Mediterranean

In November 2024, Donald Trump was elected for a second term after a sweeping election win. Scholars and pundits repeatedly warned that his campaign promises would bring upon a new era of American isolationism and an unencumbered second term would allow the president-elect to lean more into his autocratic tendencies.

The president-elect celebrated his sweeping election victory with a Truth Social Post:

No longer will the United States foot the bill for the security of other countries. No longer will American troops die for another country's agenda. It's time to put America first. And I, as your President, will bring American troops back home. It's time to Make America Great Again! God bless America.

In December 2024, President Biden met with his counterparts in Seoul at the second Trilateral Leader's Summit, hoping to reaffirm the U.S.-Japan-ROK partnership against a future of uncertainty.

However, on January 20, 2025, President Trump—fiery and vindictive—vowed vengeance against Washington elites and opponents who, as he claimed, placed the needs of other countries before the needs of Americans. Across the Pacific, Japan and South Korea scramble to determine what this could mean for the newly established Trilateral Partnership brokered under the Biden Administration.

In early-February 2025, President Trump announced he would start the process of withdrawing from NATO. Aided by the Republican majority in Congress, he drew up plans to dramatically reduce troops in Europe, leaving only a small contingent in Stuttgart, Germany.

The announcement sent shockwaves. In Western Europe, prominent voices debated the role of NATO without the United States' strategic backing. In Eastern Europe, fear of an emboldened Russia dominates the public discourse. Initiatives to ramp up defense spending became more pronounced throughout Europe, with some, such as Germany calling for conscription. Leading experts, such as EU Commissioner for the Economy Paolo Gentiloni cautioned that diverting substantial resources to defense could strain already tight national budgets, risking severe financial instability.

Responding to panicked whispers of a splintering coalition, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron held a highly televised press conference cautioning NATO members to hold fast and recommit to the defense of Ukraine and their shared history of collective security.

In a joint statement representing the Visegrad Group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and Baltic Council (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden), leaders from each member country affirmed their support of NATO and pledged their unequivocal defense of Eastern Europe, with or without US or NATO backing.

Vladimir Putin congratulated President Trump on his planned withdrawal from NATO, claiming there would be a new age of peace and prosperity between the

countries. In a meeting with the president, discussing the war in Ukraine, Putin declared:

The United States' decision to recalibrate its NATO engagement marks a moment of reflection and opportunity for the international community. We see this as a chance to move beyond the adversarial legacy of the Cold War, fostering a dialogue based on mutual respect and common interests. Russia is ready to work with European nations towards a security framework that ensures stability and prosperity for all, emphasizing diplomatic solutions over military confrontations.

In late-February 2025, President Trump called South Korean President Yoon and newly elected Japanese Prime Minister Sato to Mar-a-Lago to discuss the U.S.' security treaties with each country. In the past, President Trump frequently berated allies on host nation support costs. Both leaders arrived in Palm Beach, FL and met with President Trump in closed-door meetings. The first meeting appeared to have gone well as the group was seen leaving the room together. However, during the second meeting, President Trump left early and visibly disgruntled.

Later that evening, President Trump called into Fox News and complained:

You won't believe what they're asking from us, Sean. They expect us to pay for the protection of their country. I just couldn't believe it. We spend billions of dollars to have American soldiers just to be there. Billions. So, you know what I said to them? I said they better start paying their fair share or America is out. Period. And then, I just walked out.

During the rest of the week—as global news circulated President Trump's comments—President Yoon of South Korea and Prime Minister Sato of Japan remained silent on the matter. The Japanese and South Korean people were vocally upset at President Trump's comments. The leaders continued their third, fourth, and fifth round of meetings together. At the end of the week, the leaders finally announced that they have come to an agreement on a new path forward for security in the Indo-Pacific. President Trump announced that the United States will decrease its military presence in the Indo-Pacific as Prime Minister Sato and President Yoon concurrently announced plans to expand their country's military capabilities. On the question of nonproliferation, President Trump said in exchange for the promise not to pursue nuclear weapons, he would offer the latest U.S. military technology to his allies and keep them under the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

The next month in March 2025, President Trump addressed the nation to proclaim he had successfully negotiated the best deal in history for the American people:

Not only will American troops be coming home from the Indo-Pacific, but the United States will sell American-made weapons to our Japanese and South Korean allies. Now that's a win for the American people.

The State Department notified its Japanese and South Korean counterparts that the

United States would progressively withdraw American troops. During this process, the United States off-loaded and sold most of its present American military equipment to each country. In addition, the United States made available for purchase the latest in U.S. military precision weapons and drone technology.

Both Japan and South Korea announced they would increase their defense spending the following year with the intent to double it by fiscal year 2027.

In November 2025, President Xi also met with President Trump in South Korea ahead of the 2025 APEC Summit. The two leaders were photographed engaging in what appeared to be friendly conversation. Later that evening, President Trump told a group of reporters that he respected Xi:

Though I don't agree with his policies on America, I respect him as a leader. He's strong and focuses on helping his people. We should be doing that here in America. That's what I plan on doing.

President Yoon was praised by the international community for bringing the two leaders together in Seoul.

In December 2025, the third U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral Leader's Summit took place in Tokyo, and the leaders agreed that Japan and South Korea would play a greater role in the partnership. Prime Minister Sato and President Yoon announced that they will begin bilateral military exercises and negotiations with the United States on buying more military equipment. President Trump announced the United States would begin withdrawing troops in 2026.

In response to the summit, North Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un addressed the international community to denounce the planned U.S.-South Korea weapons deal and Japan-South Korea bilateral exercises:

To my fellow countrymen in the South, I warn you against capitalist imperialism by buying American military technology. You are not an ally, but a client to the Americans. I also urge you to remember the atrocities the Japanese committed when they annexed our land. You are not an ally, but a pawn to the Japanese.

For the most part, Kim Jong Un's speech was mostly brushed off by governments. However, regional experts warned that an expanded South Korean or Japanese military could be seen as a threat to North Korea. This analysis appeared to be true as North Korea dramatically increased missile testing in the Sea of Japan.

In January 2026, Japan received its first order of Tomahawk missiles from the United States. President Yoon announced that he has also reached a weapons deal with the United States.

Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un made a surprise visit to China and Russia at the beginning of the year. Though details of the meeting were kept secret, press released photos reveal him posing with President Xi and President Putin in their respective countries. In retaliation to the newly minted US-South Korean weapons deal, Kim Jong Un produced additional footage of its Haeil-5-23 underwater UAV.

The following month, North Korea unveiled new footage of its first airborne UAV, the Heolikein-1, which seems to resemble Russia's Orion drone design. Kim Jong Un also announced plans to launch a second satellite into space. China also ramped up its activities in the East China Sea as its fishing and research vessels explored closer towards South Korea and Japan. The United States remained focused on domestic issues. Already many U.S. troops had left the region.

In the months between March to August 2026, East Balkan began seeing increased instability and violence. In Bulgaria, the far-right Revival party achieved significant electoral success, with party leader Konstantin Kostadinov clinching the presidency in July 2026. Darkening the election cycle was the mysterious fall of the opposition leader from a window before the election. Following Kostadinov's inauguration, French intelligence accused Russia of election interference throughout Bulgaria. Within months of the new administration, investigative reports uncovered widespread ethnic violence targeting Turkish minorities, led by Revival-affiliated militias.

In a formal statement condemning Russia's involvement, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen stated:

We are deeply concerned by the recent developments in Bulgaria and the involvement of foreign actors in the internal affairs of an EU member state. The European Union stands firmly by the principles of sovereignty, independence, and the rule of law.

In a fervent press conference, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan vehemently decried violence against all Turkish people and called on NATO allies for immediate support. Other European leaders also publicly condemned the violence, led by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Bulgaria's new administration, however, denied the reports and remained intransigent in the face of its fellow NATO and EU members.

In a move that stunned the European community, key Russian foreign ministry representatives initiated resolution talks with their Bulgarian counterparts, culminating in a memorandum of agreement affirming the rights of all Bulgarian citizens. In response, President Erdogan of Turkey publicly thanked the efforts of

Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and President Putin himself. Despite this, reports continued to identify anti-Turkish violence in the weeks and months following the MOU.

In September 2026, an international consortium of energy companies announced the discovery of major natural gas deposits off the coast of Cyprus in Zone 6 within Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Estimated to contain tens of billions of cubic meters of natural gas, the Zone falls within the region disputed by Turkey (a non-UNCLOS observer) to be a part of its continental shelf and within the EEZ of Northern Cyprus, a country unrecognized by the UN.

Following the deployment of drillers alongside Hellenic navy escorts, President Erdogan passionately affirmed Turkey's "Blue Homeland" sovereignty, reasserting its rights to the territory and threatening military action. The subsequent deployment of Turkish frigates, corvettes, submarines, aerial reconnaissance to Zone 6 prompted a standoff between the two Aegean rivals. Following weeks of aggressive maneuvers and near accidents, France President Emmanuel Macron ordered a naval Surface Action Groups to the region, signaling a robust commitment to France's strategic ally, Greece. East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) members Egypt and Israel vocally support their French and Greek partners, citing international law and signaling backing for a French-led regional security initiative.

In a concerted effort to address the escalating tensions in Zone 6, European Union leaders stepped forward to offer mediation services, aimed to facilitate a peaceful resolution. Significantly bolstering this initiative, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy pledged to take leading roles in the mediation process. However, with violence on-going in Bulgaria, Ankara remained intransigent, and negotiations stalled for months.

Back in East Asia, Prime Minister Sato made a trip to China to meet and discuss regional security with President Xi. However, the talks broke down as China accused Japan of returning to its imperialist ambitions. They cited Japan's increased defense budget spending and continued naval operations around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. China also repeated that Japan has failed to fully apologize and has continued to minimize its role in WWII and the Nanjing Massacre.

In December 2026 at the fourth US-Japan-South Korea Leader's Trilateral Summit in Washington D.C., Prime Minister Sato and President Yoon announced the first Japan-South Korea joint exercise would take place the following year. President Trump also announced that U.S. troops would be fully withdrawn by the end of 2027.

During the same month, North Korea produced footage and announced its successful launch of its second satellite. According to North Korean state media, this spy satellite will help produce even more high resolution images of hostile targets. Kim Jong Un, reportedly, viewed images of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan and the Presidential Residence of South Korea.

In January 2027, Japan and South Korea conducted their first bilateral exercise in the Sea of Japan. In a press statement released by the South Korean military, this combined exercise is a show of strength against a nuclear-armed North Korea. Japan also received another order of U.S. Tomahawk missiles.

On February 12, 2027, at 8:00AM, North Korea launched a missile over the island of Hokkaido, alerting millions of Hokkaido residents through the J-Alert system for a second time in the 21st century. The missile flew over the island and landed just outside of Japan's eastern EEZ. Kim Jong Un announced on state media that the joint military exercises of Japan-South Korea were a threat to North Korea and a rehearsal for an invasion into North Korea. Kim reaffirmed that reunification is no longer possible with South Korea and called to make South Korea and Japan "hostile states" within its constitution.

Japan's Defense Minister strongly condemned North Korea's action and reaffirmed the Japan-South Korea partnership. President Yoon appeared on television to publicly condemn Kim Jong Un and stated that South Korea will stand strong against a nuclear-armed North Korea.

Later the same month, The US officially leaves NATO. Aside from a few remaining assets in Stuttgart, Germany, and a handful of other locations, the U.S. military presence in Europe became virtually nonexistent. With the U.S. no longer supporting Ukraine, many large European countries such as Germany, U.K., and France, take up the mantle and strain their economies to support the Ukrainian war effort.

In March 2027, presidential elections took place in South Korea and President Yoon was succeeded by President Park of the same conservative party, the People Power Party. President Park promised to continue his predecessor's expansion of South Korea's military capabilities and to tackle the issue of a growing North Korean threat.

In April 2027, Marine Le Pen won the French Presidency. In her inaugural address as French President, Marine Le Pen unequivocally denounced "all threats to French and European sovereignty," condemning Turkey's actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and Russia's interference in European affairs. Underscoring her speech was the theme of vigilance in safeguarding Europe's borders against foreign threats.

After developing a plan with her cabinet, Le Pen deployed an additional Greco-French Joint Expeditionary Task Force (JETF) to the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, led by aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle. Significantly bolstering the Greco-French fleet with airpower and surveillance, special operations forces, and cyber and electronic warfare capability, the combined JETF undertook a series of naval exercises decried by Turkey as "irresponsible and provocative." While not outright condemning, leaders of Germany, Italy, and the UK cautioned against

unnecessary escalation and unilateral action.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu expressed Turkey's concerns regarding the militarization of the Aegean islands, highlighting a significant point of contention between Turkey and Greece:

A fundamental issue in the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece is the demilitarized status of the Eastern Aegean Islands, as established by various international agreements, most notably the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. This treaty imposes clear legal obligations on Greece regarding the demilitarization of these islands." Cavusoglu cautioned that if Greece's current approach persists, it could prompt discussions that challenge the islands' sovereignty.

In May 2027, Turkish Media published images depicting Greece militarizing “demilitarized” islands. Turkish army drones have recorded the deployment of a record number of Greek armored vehicles on the islands of Lesbos.

In response, the Greek government reiterated their long held and internationally recognized position on the status of the Aegean islands. They defended their sovereign rights, and vehemently denied the accusation that military activity on Lesbos violates any treaty.

The demilitarization of the Greek islands was originally provided for in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty on the Straits. This was annulled by the 1936 Montreux Treaty, which, as it categorically stated in its preamble, replaced in its entirety the aforementioned Lausanne Treaty.

Greece, like any sovereign nation, retains the inherent right to defend its territory against any threat. This stance is especially justified given Turkey's past actions, which have raised concerns under the principles of the United Nations Charter.

On June 21, 2027, Japan received another shipment of U.S. Tomahawk missiles and conducted its second bilateral exercise with South Korea in the Sea of Japan.

North Korea retaliated in an unprecedented manner by launching its Taepodong-1 IRBM over Japan’s island of Okinawa and deploying an operational Heolikein-1 drone into Japanese airspace. The residents of Okinawa were frightened to receive their first J-Alert as the IRBM flew overhead and Japanese interceptor jets scrambled to meet North Korea’s drone before it turned back into international airspace. The Japanese public called on Prime Minister Sato to act against this clear act of aggression from North Korea.

The following months, North Korea continued to violate Japan’s ADIZ by flying its drones in-and-out. Each time, they are met with Japanese interceptor jets. In one instance, a Japanese fighter jet aggressively maneuvered close to the drone as it

suddenly began turning around, resulting in a collision where the Japanese pilot had to eject and the drone crashed into the water.

North Korea released drone footage of the incident and called Japan's "intentional collision" an act of war. Japan responded, calling the collision an unfortunate accident but asserted the right to defend its airspace.

In August 2027, Turkey invaded Lesbos. The Turkish military quickly crossed the 5 kilometers of water separating Greece from Turkey and secured key locations on the island Lesbos, including the airport and port. Greek forces were caught off guard and quickly overwhelmed. Dozens of members of the 98th National Guard Higher Command Archipelago perished in the fighting. Turkey established a new administration to govern the island.

Greece, humiliated by the swift annexation, vowed to take back Lesbos by force. But Turkey remained resolute, knowing that its military and economic strength gave it the upper hand. Diplomatic efforts by Greece to rally international support have yet not produced meaningful change.

As the world watched, Turkey solidified its control over Lesbos, paving the way for a new era of Turkish dominance in the Aegean. Greece, meanwhile, faced a crisis of confidence, its citizens questioning their government's ability to protect their nation's sovereignty.

During the following months, Greece called on allies to its defense and to retake Greek territory. Prime Minister Mitsotakis called an emergency meeting of the European Union and NATO. The EU universally condemned this annexation. However in NATO, Turkey—as a member state—warned its NATO allies to not intervene.

A determined Greece continued to call on its allies within NATO and the EU to rectify Turkey's invasion. Turkey likewise continued to accuse Greece of dragging the entire NATO alliance into a regional conflict. "Greece's aggression will not be tolerated," Erdogan warned, "We will defend our sovereignty and territorial integrity at all costs."

In November 2027, Prime Minister Sato called President Park to hold an emergency meeting. At the emergency meeting, Japan and South Korea doubled down on their partnership, increasing intelligence sharing and technology transfers between their militaries. In a dramatic act of cooperation, South Korean intelligence shared the details of a North Korean fishing boat being used to spy on Japan. The Japanese Coast Guard was dispatched and arrested six alleged North Korean spies off the coast of Shimane Prefecture. The arrest was highly televised in the Japanese media. Kim Jong Un condemned the arrest and called for the release of its fishermen.

In early December 2027, the fifth US-Japan-ROK Trilateral Leader's Summit was postponed due to scheduling conflicts.

— Crisis Begins December 28, 2027 —

Greece shoots down the Turkish Foreign Minister

As tensions between Greece and Turkey continued to escalate, the Greek government, in a state of heightened alert, authorized a series of snap military exercises near the Turkish border. During the exercise, an apparent miscommunication led to live munitions hitting a Turkish government aircraft and killing the Turkish Foreign Minister, who was en route to diplomatic talks.

The Turkish government issued a statement on the tragedy and condemned the Greek government, holding them responsible. “First Greece militarized the islands of our coast, in clear violation of the Lausanne Treaty, and now a beloved diplomat has been killed. This is a clear example of why we must retake and liberate the islands along our coast. Lesbos is only the start.”

In response to the killing, Turkey has called an emergency meeting of the North Atlantic Council—which includes Turkey, Greece, France, the UK, and Germany.

Kyushu Beetle Ferry traveling from Busan to Fukuoka Goes Missing, 200 Passengers Onboard

Japanese media reports a ferry traveling from Busan to Fukuoka has gone missing. An SOS signal was sent out around noon but neither South Korean nor Japanese authorities have heard from the ferry since.

South Korean authorities on enroute to its last known location.