

The Washington Brief: Challenges in the Indo-Pacific for the 118th Congress

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Washington, DC, USA - The Washington Brief is the premier monthly webcast on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia security issue. The episode for Tuesday, December 6, 2022, "Challenges in the Indo-Pacific for the 118th Congress," featured guest panelist Congressman Steve Chabot (R-OH), ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia and Nonproliferation.

Congressman Chabot discussed the many thorny issues the incoming Congress, along with the White House, will face in Indo-China with Taiwan, the Pacific Islands, Korea and Japan and the Quad. Vital interests of the U.S. are interwoven into all of these. Former Six-Party Talks envoy Amb. Joseph DeTrani served as moderator. Also participating were Georgetown University security studies professor Dr. Alexandre Mansourov and former Foreign Affairs Committee member Congressman Dan Burton.



According to Congressman Chabot, President Biden's foreign policy has "weakened America on the world stage." He warned that administration officials have moved to "coddle" [China](#) despite that regime's clear determination to "replace the United States as the globe's sole superpower." He added that the incoming GOP House majority plans a more robust oversight on foreign policy, including a new Select Committee on [China](#), which, [he](#) said, is a rival that seems to be bent on waging a "new Cold War" against America and its allies. "After decades of inaction, it's time to reevaluate our basic approach. Unfortunately, the Biden administration has taken one step back for every two steps forward and congressional Democrats have done nothing to hold them to account." The Ohio Republican contended that House Democrats in particular "have done practically nothing relative to [China](#)," and noted the

Democratic majority held just one full Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on [China](#) over the past two years. "That's about to change, I believe, under the new Republican majority," [he](#) said.

Congressman [Chabot](#) more broadly ripped into the Biden foreign policy record: "[The] administration in my view has weakened America on the world stage, from the bungled pullout in Afghanistan, to the failed attempts to renegotiate the failed Iran deal, the mishandling of the relationship with the Saudis and the weak approach to Latin America. Trying to purchase oil from Venezuela, for example, because of our energy policies here, [has] made us more vulnerable across the globe, and our allies as well."



While [he](#) said Mr. Biden has done a "tolerable job" backing Ukraine against Russia's invasion, Mr. [Chabot](#) asserted the administration should be more focused. "Every move they take seems to be too late and too weak in my view." He added that the administration's Indo-Pacific strategy in particular needs clarity. "Their strategy keeps lurching from meaningful competition with [China](#) to what can only be described as a desire, I think, to coddle the [Chinese Communist Party] in many ways This is particularly evident in the mood we've seen since the last summit between the Biden administration and [Chinese President Xi Jinping], and especially with respect to the recent [COVID-19] protests in [China](#)."

Mr. Chabot, who has held a House Foreign Affairs Committee seat since 1994, said Washington has long "attempted to play nice with the [ruling Communist Party] in hopes that incorporating it into the post-World War II order would push [China](#) to become responsible global stakeholders. Those hopes were at least overly optimistic... The communists in Beijing were never interested in joining our system," he said.



"We need to get our military house in order," Mr. [Chabot](#) said, adding that "our military posture is not ready, quite frankly, for a fight with the CCP if we want to absolutely make sure that we would prevail."

He also stressed the importance of the U.S.-Taiwan alliance, saying the island democracy's fate in the face of growing Chinese threats "should be the top concern of our war planners right now. Because of all the potential flashpoints around the globe, it's the one that's most likely to go off and it would in all likelihood draw the United States in."

Mr. Chabot accused the Biden administration of sending mixed signals. The time has come, Mr. [Chabot](#) said, for the U.S. to move away from long-held "strategic ambiguity" on [China's](#) claim of sovereignty over Taiwan and the question of whether American forces would fight for the island if Beijing invades. "The U.S. has kept the peace in the Taiwan Strait for 40 years because the Chinese couldn't do anything about it due to our decisive military superiority. Now our superiority is by no means clear," he said. "If we aren't crystal clear, there's a possibility that Beijing could miscalculate and start a war that drags us in."



Mr. [Chabot](#) said the administration "has had basically no answer" to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's "stepped-up provocations," which have featured increasingly aggressive waves of ballistic missile tests this year. "With the administration's feckless approach," he said, the U.S. is "sleepwalking into a crisis."

"Kim's provocations must be met with a firm response." Congressman [Chabot](#) called on the administration to "tighten sanctions even more," while also finding clear-cut ways to pressure [China](#) - North Korea's primary ally - to pressure the Kim regime.

The administration could sanction Chinese entities doing business with North Korea and push to re-open talks on basing enhanced U.S. defense systems in both South Korea and Japan - talks Mr. [Chabot](#) said would "get [China's](#) attention" and "might work to put pressure on [China](#) to put pressure on North Korea."

The Congressman's gloomy assessment is that without a more effective U.S. policy, there will be "an increasingly nuclearized Korean Peninsula and a dominant [China](#) across the region and potentially, ultimately across the globe."

Panelist and former congressman Dan Burton expressed concern about the possible spread of communist ideology among U.S. democratic allies in Asia, specifically Japan, pointing to the ongoing blowback surrounding former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assassination in July. Abe had long warned of [China's](#) continued push for dominance in the region.

"The Communist Party in Japan seems to be, from what I've heard, trying to take advantage of [Abe's] assassination to reach out and have closer ties to [China](#)," said Mr. Burton. "One thing we don't need right now is to have the government of Japan undermined by [China](#) or the [domestic] communists in Japan."

Congressman [Chabot](#) agreed. He said there were parallels to the Japanese experience in the Chinese push for influence on U.S. college campuses, using disinformation campaigns and money to push the Chinese government line.

"That's something else that hopefully this select committee will be looking at and getting more information and more attention out there to the public," Mr. Chabot said.