

Taiwan Strait Security under Japan's Strategic Defense Thinking

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1. News Highlights

In an interview on August 2, 2021, Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi told the *Financial Times*, “The international community should be concerned about the survival of Taiwan.” He warned that China has been making various moves to envelop Taiwan. For example, Chinese PLA aircraft have been entering Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) on a regular basis and have also flown around the southern tip of the island to enter Taiwan’s southeast airspace. Moreover, an increasing number of PLA ships are appearing off the east coast of Taiwan as well. Kishi also pointed out that peace in

the Taiwan Strait can only be based on strong demands from the international community. Instead of speculating when the direct military conflict between Taiwan and China will happen, the international community should concern more about Taiwan’s survival.¹

Japan broke a longtime precedent by linking the security of Taiwan and Japan together in its 2021 Defense White Paper. Kishi’s remarks show Japan’s willingness to pay more attention to the Taiwan Strait and explicitly stress the necessity for Japan to become more aware of its own crisis.

1. “Japan Calls for Greater Attention to ‘Survival of Taiwan’,” *Financial Times*, August 2, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/e82fe924-ba9b-4325-b8a4-0d5482ee1d24>.

2. Security Implications

2-1. Japan allies with Western and Indo-Pacific countries to address Taiwan Strait security issues

Japan has been paying more attention to Taiwan Strait issues, and its attitude toward Taiwan's security is becoming even more clear. From the "US-Japan 2+2 Meeting" in March, the "US-Japan Summit" in April, the "Japan-EU Meeting" in May, the "Japan-Australia 2+2 Meeting" in June, the "G7 Joint Statement" to the "US-Japan-South Korea Deputy Foreign Ministers Joint Statement" in July, all have raised concerns and appeals on Taiwan Strait security. Extended from the US-Japan alliance, the recent military cooperation between Japan and the UK is also noteworthy. On July 20, Kishi and his counterpart UK Defense Minister Ben Wallace held a meeting

to emphasize that the two countries are global strategic partners and share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law.² Although Japan and the UK are not formally allied, both oppose China's intention to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas by force, and have stressed the importance of maintaining a free and open maritime order based on the international laws. Wallace also revealed that the Royal Navy's HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group would proceed to the Indo-Pacific region in September this year and berth at the JMSDF bases such as Yokosuka, Maizuru and Kure as well as US Navy bases in Japan's Sasebo, Yokosuka and the White Beach Area in Okinawa Prefecture (FAC6048).³ Wallace also stressed that he plans to permanently deploy two Royal Navy vessels to the Indo-Pacific region by the end of this year.

2. "Minister of Defense Press Conference on July 20, 2021 (Tue), 11:09-11:21" , Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Forces, July 20, 2021.

<https://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/kisha/2021/0720a.html>

3. "Minister of Defense Press Conference on July 30, 2021 (Fri), 11:09-11:21" , Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Forces, July 30, 2021.

<https://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/kisha/2021/0730a.html>

In the new national security strategy announced in 2015, the UK decided to expand defense-related relationships with more countries other than the US, especially with Japan. As a result, Japan and the UK have started to expand their exchanges in the areas of defense, politics and diplomacy.⁴ The last Japan-UK alliance was formed in 1902 when Russia was a common threat to both countries, and Japan won the Russo-Japanese War with support from the UK. Today, although the new Japan-UK cooperation has a common goal toward China, it doesn't need to be totally militaristic like a century ago. Instead, Japan and the UK may actively cooperate systematically in all security aspects, including defense. In this way, the Japan-US alliance, together with the prospective Japan-UK cooperation, will become a solid front facing the potential threats from China.

2-2. Escalation of US-China confrontation calls for Japan's new defense strategy

On April 5, 2021, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi held a telephone conversation with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi,⁵ in which Motegi expressed his strong concern to China over the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands dispute, the South China Sea conflicts as well as Xinjiang and Hong Kong human rights issues. In response, Wang criticized Japan for “reaching its hands too far” and opposed Japan's involvement in China's internal affairs since it would create a “strange atmosphere” between Japan and China. On April 6, Japanese Prime Minister Suga visited the US and held a summit with President Biden. After the summit, a joint statement was released, and the statement mentioned Taiwan again, 52 years after the last one that

4. “2015 National Security and Defense Strategy of UK, and the Strategic Framework” , British Embassy in Japan, November 27, 2015.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/313995.ja>

5. “The Telephone Conversation Between Japanese and Chinese Foreign Ministers” , Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 5, 2021.

https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press6_000787.html

did. With support from the US, Suga's diplomatic policy will see a change from the "balance between China and the US" one he inherited from Abe, his predecessor, to lean towards the US again in terms of security and restore Tokyo's confidence in the US.

Japan believes that China's military expansion has become a threat and caused an imbalance of power in the region. During the Cold War era, Japan was convinced that its security would only be protected if there was an ongoing crisis in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula. However, recent actions of China in the East China Sea, particularly the implementation of its Maritime Police Law, have created strong security pressures on Japan and forced Japan to return to the protective umbrella of the US.

In the meantime, public opinion in Japan also support Suga's "pro-US, anti-China" approach. According to a survey, 80% of Japanese people feel threatened by China,⁶ and 74% agree that Japan should participate in maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait.⁷ That is, both Japan's government officials and the general public are concerned about the security of Taiwan Strait more than ever; Japan is worried that it would be affected if the Taiwan Strait situation gets out of control. Therefore, based on the US-Japan alliance, Japan is actively conducting joint military exercises and is growing its military power under US consent. In addition, Japan's military exercises with Indo-Pacific countries and an increasing number of troops deployed to its southwest islands are also part of Japan's strategic changes.

6. "China's Threats on Security: 80% 'Feel it' in NHK Poll," *NHK NEWS WEB*, June 15, 2021. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20210615/k10013083981000.html>

7. "Nikkei Poll: 74% in Favor of Involvement in Stability of Taiwan Strait," *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, April 26, 2021. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20210615/k10013083981000.html>

3. Trend Forecast

3-1. Strategic value of Taiwan Strait security becoming clearer to Japan

On February 10, 2021, the Foreign Affairs Division of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) established the "Taiwan project team" for the first time, and on June 1, the team made its first policy recommendations. The team clearly stated that Taiwan shares common democracy and the rule of law values with Japan, and the two countries have close economic and friendship ties, making Taiwan a very important partner for Japan.⁸

On July 7, former Japanese Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Takeo Akiba replaced Shigeru Kitamura as the head of Japan's National Security Secretariat, which heads Japan's National Security Council. Akiba is known as an outstanding diplomat and was appointed by Prime Minister Abe to head the China Division of the Foreign Ministry. In fact, the ideas

for a free and open Indo-Pacific, promoted by the Abe administration, were Akiba's works. As the new national security advisor, Akiba may continue to offer suggestions in diplomacy for the Suga cabinet to consider.

At the end of September, Japan may hold an election for the House of Representatives or for the LDP president. Given the current political situation, there seems to be no younger, suitable candidate to succeed Suga as the next LDP president while LDP Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai also supports Suga's reappointment. If Suga is re-elected as prime minister, Japan's policy toward Taiwan may become clearer and more visible.

3-2. Sharing of defense resources between US-Japan alliance and Taiwan is urgent

According to a July 1, 2021, report in the Financial Times, the US and Japanese military forces have been conducting military exercises for the prevention of the Taiwan Strait crises, and some officials pointed out that the US, Japan and

8. "First Proposal from Taiwan Policy Review Team of Foreign Affairs Council," LDP, June 1, 2021. https://jimin.jp-east-2.storage.api.nifcloud.com/pdf/news/policy/201712_1.pdf

Taiwan militaries must share important intelligence, especially related to the PLA.⁹ According to Taiwan's Defense Ministry, the PLA has harassed southwestern Taiwan airspace for 129 days with 378 sorties as of August 15, 2021, putting a lot of pressure on the air defense system. In addition, the PLA air and naval forces also have been harassing the Japanese side of East China Sea, Miyako Strait and all the way to the eastern coast of Taiwan to add pressure onto Japanese defense.

In terms of air defense, if a military plane does not respond to the ground broadcast warning to steer away from foreign airspace, it can be forced to land or shot down by missiles according to international law. Since PLA aircrafts approach the Taiwanese and Japanese ADIZ frequently, and there may be planes from China, Taiwan, Japan and the US in the airspace at the same time, the four countries should establish an air communication protocol to prevent military misjudgment or accidental conflicts.

9. "US and Japan Conduct War Games Amid Rising China-Taiwan Tensions," *Financial Times*, July 1, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/54b0db59-a403-493e-b715-7b63c9c39093>.