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JAPAN'S STRATEGIC VIEWS ON TAIWAN STRAIT UNDER FORMER PRIME MINISTER FUMIO KISHIDA AND IMPLICATIONS UNDER ISHIBA SHIGERU'S LEADERSHIP

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Abstract
Under Kishida's leadership, Japan and Taiwan relations have strengthened and Taiwan is considered as an extremely important partner of Japan. Japan shares the basic value of democracy and maintains close economic and people-to-people exchanges with Taiwan. Geopolitically, both Taiwan and Japan share growing anxiety about the expansion of China and the regional balance of power shifting in favor of Beijing. Taiwan and Japan are both island countries, maritime security cooperation will be promoted with their allies and like-minded partners to build an international community based on universal values, including freedom of navigation and overflight, ensuring safety and the rule of law, and promoting the maintenance and development of maritime order. In addition, Taiwan has been the primary benefactor of the global drive to diversify supply chains. An unanticipated economic spur and attempts to expand semiconductor manufacturing have been brought on by a sharp increase in demand for semiconductors which Taiwan is the most valuable export. In this essay, the author will estimate Japan's strategy toward the Taiwan Strait under Kishida's leadership and forecast this strategy under new current administration in the conclusion. Besides, the Taiwan Strait issue has become one of the important topics of concern to the United States and Japan and it is also a priority consideration in the defense strategy of both the U.S and Japan.

***Keywords**: Japan's strategy, Taiwan strait, Kishida leadership,*

I. Introduction

Kishida's vision for Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy identified the underlying elements: enhancing regional connectivity; working toward the goal of a region that values freedom; the rule of law; freedom from coercion; and diversity, inclusiveness, and openness as well as prosperity(New Plan for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific": Policy Speech by PM Kishida, 2023). More considerably, Kishida outlined four key principles for his Indo-Pacific strategy. The first principle he insisted that international values and norms such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, no unilateral changes to the status quo by force, a free, fair and just economic order, and promotion of greater transparency in development finance are the core values to fortify "Free and Open Indo- Pacific" (FOIP). Secondly, Kishida promoted "addressing challenges in an Indo-Pacific way" as the "FOIP's" new area of collaboration. Indo-Pacific nations should look for workable and realistic answers founded on an "equal collaboration" to global issues like food security, public health, natural catastrophes, climate change, and cyber-security, with Kishida contending that such a strategy is necessary for the region's sustainability and resilience. Furthermore, in 2021, cross-strait peace and stability and particularly Taiwan-Japan relations, became a major topic of political and public discourse in Japan. Prime Minister Kishida also emphasized how important it is for the United States and Japan to work together with the aims of demanding serious talks regarding a Taiwan contingency. Besides, Japanese leaders might become more willing to send deterrence signals to Beijing and to engage in meaningful security cooperation with the U.S specifically regarding a cross-strait contingency. In short, Beijing could deploy troops on the adjacent Senkakus, which Tokyo administers and regards as independent Japanese territory. The recent mainstreaming of the idea that "a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency, as well as a U.S-Japan alliance" in Japanese defense circles is motivated by reflection on such situations which was first motioned in a speech by Abe Shinzo in December 2021(Taiwan contingency also one for Japan, Japan-U.S. alliance: ex-Japan PM Abe, 2021).

II. The U.S- Japan cooperation over Taiwan under Kishida administration

The security environment in Japan has grown more complicated as a result of the growing tensions between the U.S and China in the East Asian region. This covers a variety of threats, including North Korea's nuclear and missile arsenal, Russian military operations in the Far East; disputes in the South China Sea; and potential conflict over Taiwan. China is Japan's biggest strategic rival, according to Japan's Defense of Japan 2024 assessment (staff, 2024), which also emphasized the region's rising security threat. Currently, it is anticipated that the East Asian security conflict, which is concentrated on the First Island Chain is supposed to continue. How to improve the U.S-Japan alliance's deterrence capabilities in the region is one of Japan's main challenges. On the other hand, finding a balance between the needs of U.S. economic security measures and the enormous demand from the Chinese market is a crucial challenge for Japan's industries, especially the semiconductor sector. Japan must strike this careful balance in order to maintain its economic relations with China, a significant trading partner, and to comply with U.S security concerns.

The U.S' larger regional policy has traditionally revolved around its bases in Japan, dating back to the early Cold War(Green, 2000). The foundation of the postwar U.S-Japan security relationship was a fundamental agreement: Tokyo agreed to support the U.S.' extensive forward-deployed military presence and accept the U.S forces on

Japanese soil that contributed to regional stability in exchange for their role in preventing an armed attack against Japan.

The challenges of Japan's foreign policy under Kishida were to strengthen U.S.-Japan collaboration to counter China's expanding economic and military power. Japan's long-term security and prosperity rely on building a stable peace in the region to maximize the benefits of interdependence with China in common with deterring China from unilateral changes to the status quo. As a result, the Kishida administration has developed a balanced regional strategy to enhance Japan's collaboration with the U.S in a way that is founded on a recognition of the current complexities (Japan, 2024). Globalization has led to increased competition between the world's two largest economies- the U.S and China. This impacted on Japan and other U.S allies and partners in this region which have increasingly concerned about being caught in the middle. Moreover, the U.S- China relationship is complex and can be characterized using the "four C's" framework: military confrontation; political competition; economic coexistence; and cooperation on global challenges. On the other sides, The U.S. might manifestly intensify its utilization of the "Taiwan card" to impede China's development and reunification, provoking more extreme opposition with China. Hence, Asia Pacific countries and Japan in particular must hedge against uncertainty in the Taiwan Strait to avoid losses or maximize gains and this makes Japan's Taiwan Strait policies to be put under increasing pressure than before(Yuan, 2023).

With China's rising in the 21st century, Japan and the U.S have both expressed interest in fortifying their alliance to counter the new strategic adversary, and strategic containment of China has become a bilateral alliance consensus. However, the prospect of Japan getting dragged into a fierce confrontation has increased due to the escalation of the U.S-China rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, Japan has progressively attempted to fulfill its alliance responsibilities in a balanced way so as to avoid upsetting the U.S and trap itself. For this reason, Kishida might carry out his Japan's strategy which could be seen as a form of "double-betting". On this side, Japan has responded favorably to the U.S Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy and has shown remarkable enthusiasm for the Taiwan issue, which can be seen as a commitment to the U.S. At the same time, Japan is strengthening its position among its Asian neighbors and extending its reach to Southeast Asia and European nations with the effort to create a regional mechanism led by Japan and mitigate the risk of the U.S abandonment (Henry, 2020).

Yet, when economic considerations are added to the alliance security issue, a new alliance dilemma emerges. Japanese strategists contend that Japan's excessive reliance on China, in particular, for political and economic advantages, will weaken its strategic independence by "exposing it to the possibility of intersecting military and economic coercion in the region". The U.S is likewise conscious of the potential threats to alliance relations posed by China's regional economic advantage. Thus, the U.S has worked hard to create the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which does not include China in order to coordinate economic interests and policies of the different alliance members, where the security implications are obvious in an attempt to address the congruence dilemma (Jaramillo, 2020).

Since the Biden administration's reaffirmed Indo-Pacific strategy, Japan has made a major increase in its aim to play a more active role in the Taiwan Strait(Liff, The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Taiwan, 2022). It is mostly manifested as regular talks with the U.S on issues of military security in the Taiwan Strait and frequent high-profile remarks on the Taiwan Strait by Japanese lawmakers and the administration. In December 2022, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida declared Japan's plan to obtain stand-off attack capabilities and significantly increase its defense expenditure to 2% of GDP to engage actively in regional and global security(Teraoka, 2024).

In other words, Japan has been changing its policies with Taiwan, as seen by its views on the Taiwan Strait issue. It is thought that Japan is deviating from its conventional strategy, which was founded on the idea of maintaining the core bilateral ties between China and Japan so as to become a crucial participant in the Taiwan Strait affairs. Moreover, the U.S has made it plain that it" opposes any unilateral action that seeks to undermine Japan's administration of these islands" in response to Japan's positive reaction on the Taiwan Strait issue, which furthered the growth of the U.S-Japan military cooperation (MORIYASU, 2024).Plus, Japan's involvement in the Taiwan issue deepened, and the U.S-Japan alliance's crisis management mechanism in the Taiwan Strait gradually evolved as its role in the U.S deterrence deployment and its responsibility and support to the U.S. in a potential Taiwan Strait crisis became more tangible.

To summarize, Taiwan's prominence and the urgency of the Taiwan Strait issue in the U.S-Japan security system have grown significantly over the years, and Japan has taken incremental steps in the process, implying that Japan will have a greater influence on future developments in the Taiwan Strait. Japan aims to strengthen its military role in the U.S-Japan alliance and adapt its Taiwan-related strategies to address unexpected incidents in the Taiwan Strait by increasing alliance obligations, revising domestic laws, and strengthening its southwestern defense posture. The evolution of the situation in the Taiwan Strait, as well as Japan's domestic political decisions, will have a significant impact on Japan's response and participation in future confrontations in the Taiwan Strait under Kishida administration.

III. Japan's hedging strategy over Taiwan

Japan's sense of risk in the Taiwan Strait has significantly increased due to the U.S-Japan alliance crisis and geographical proximity. In addition, the complicated political environment in Asia has led to the development of hedging strategies because of the uncertainty about the rivalry between the U.S and China, as well as other governments' intentions. The current situation in the Taiwan Strait has prompted Japan to pursue a hedging strategy since it does not want to be exposed to increased dangers(Ying Ying, 2023).Japan's policy adjustment has been influenced by three key interests at the time of rising competitiveness

with the U.S. and China as well as uncertainties over the Taiwan Strait. The first one is Japan hopes to increase its economic influence in Taiwan by participating in the Taiwan Strait while also retaining links with China and capitalizing on China's economic growth. Japan strives to enhance relations with Taiwan and expand its influence in Asia through the U.S.-Japan alliance's Taiwan Strait management mechanism. However, Japan does not want to negatively impact China's interests. Japan planned to use the U.S.- Japan military cooperation in the Taiwan Strait to modernize its military and participate in multilateral security initiatives. Nevertheless, it is concerned about being entrapped by the U.S. in an affordable war. As a result, Japan's hedging strategy has been justified due to opposing interests.

Japan's present strategic choices in the Taiwan Strait demonstrate numerous offsetting characteristics. Japan's hedging strategy includes some instruments. Firstly, Japan seeks greater autonomy on Taiwan Strait issues by fulfilling alliance obligations and interacting constructively with China. Japan tends to avoid over-depending on the U.S to a certain extent. The Japanese government's stated stance on Taiwan Strait appears to be moderate than that of the lawmakers and former officials. Moreover, Japan's "One China" policy has altered since the Cold War although its diplomatic relations with Beijing and Taipei still follow the core" 1972 structure"(Liff, Japan, Taiwan, and the 'One China' Framework after 50 Years., 2022). Pro-Taiwan forces in Japan have been advocating for a Japanese version of the "Taiwan Relations Act", but the Japanese government has expressed doubts and no substantive progress has been made on this proposal. In addition, Japan supports the U.S approach of balancing China and demonstrates the strong devotion to the U.S on Taiwan-related matters as a sign of goodwill for the alliance. When it comes to relations with Taiwan, "playing the edge ball" remains a popular Japanese strategy. In general, Japan has matched the U.S. posture on Taiwan-related security problems, expressing concerns over the Taiwan Strait through joint declarations and accused China of upsetting the status quo. This reflects Japan's need to balance a rising China and also shows its loyalty to its allies.

More considerably, Japan can reap economic benefits from Taiwan through maintaining good economic and trade connections with Taiwan. Japan seeks to bolster its supply chain for semiconductor materials by partnering with Taiwan among the technological competition between the U.S and China. Further, Japan has promoted cooperation between Japan and Taiwan in chip production by investing in TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company)- which is considered as the leading semiconductor manufacturing technology and capabilities in the world(Chou, 2023).

All in all, Japan has cooperated with the regional powers and middle powers in Asia-Pacific regions for maritime security based on values. Besides, Former Prime Minister Kishida also committed to working closely with the QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) to promote the security in this region, especially underpinned by the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait(Huynh Tam Sang, 2021).

IV. Conclusion

Japan's Taiwan policy was a result of strategic consideration which Japan's policy towards Taiwan and its move on issues related to the Taiwan Strait under the former Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. His cabinets hailed Taiwan as Japan's extremely important partner and affirmed that Japan would attentively monitor the Taiwan Strait and prepared for any potential uncertainties in the Strait. Further, the new cabinets under Shigeru Ishiba might value the national defense and call for robust deterrence against great-power competition. Ishiba led a delegation to Taiwan in August, 2024 and discussed regional security problems with President William Lai. He also emphasized the need to maintain stability in East Asia while avoiding confrontations. With Ishiba as Japanese Prime Minister, Japan and Taiwan are likely to strengthen ties, but it is unknown how far the two allies would improve relations in the face of a rising China. Ishiba campaigned on the promise of increasing semiconductor and artificial intelligence investment. In line with former Japanese Fumio Kishida's polices which supported semiconductor investments from Taiwan, Ishiba has numerous incentives to foster closer semiconductor collaboration with Taipei because the semiconductor sector is a cornerstone of the Japan-Taiwan relations, accounting for 40% of their US$75.7 billion bilateral trade(Huynh Tam Sang, 2024).

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