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The Impact of the Taiwan Issue on China–Japan Relations

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The Taiwan issue, as one of the primary points of contention in East Asia, has had a profound impact on the trajectory of China–Japan relations. In recent decades, amid increasing geopolitical and military competition between Beijing and Washington, the strategic significance of Taiwan in regional and international equations has risen substantially. Consequently, the policies of both China and Japan have become more sensitive to this matter. The central question of this study is: "What impact has the Taiwan issue had on China–Japan relations, and how has it influenced the strategic approaches of both countries?" The hypothesis of this research posits that growing tensions surrounding Taiwan have deepened the rift and mutual distrust between Beijing and Tokyo, while simultaneously strengthening Japan's motivation to expand its security cooperation with the United States and other Western nations. This development could, in the medium term, lead to a restriction in economic interactions and the intensification of regional rivalries. Using an analytical–descriptive approach and examining the latest political and security developments in East Asia, this study demonstrates that the Taiwan crisis has not only exacerbated military pressures and threats in the region but has also significantly influenced the foreign policies and behaviors of Japan and China toward one another. As a result, Japan, while maintaining its traditional alliance with the United States, has adopted a more proactive diplomacy in the realm of regional security. Simultaneously, China has intensified its deterrent and warning policies against foreign interventions in Taiwan. Furthermore, this crisis has weakened bilateral economic relations and increased trade disputes, casting uncertainty over the future of China–Japan relations and presenting new challenges. Overall, the Taiwan issue has become a key determinant in shaping the future trajectory of China–Japan relations as well as the broader security order in East Asia.

Keywords: *Taiwan issue, East Asian security, foreign policy, regional rivalry, security cooperation, Asia–Pacific diplomacy.*

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the Taiwan issue has become one of the main security, geopolitical, and diplomatic focal points in East Asia. Beijing's extraordinary sensitivity to the Taiwan question, framed within the "One China" policy, has caused any international movement concerning the island to quickly cast a shadow over the region's political and security environment. In this context, Japan, as one of the region's major economic powers and key players, plays a vital role in its relationship with China, and its approach to the Taiwan issue directly affects China–Japan interactions. The scope of the issue is not limited to geographic borders or traditional rivalries; rather, with China's emergence as a global power and the intensification of its

structural competition with the United States and its allies, Taiwan has become a point of convergence of interests and sensitivities between China and Japan.

Japan's approach to the Taiwan issue has always been a combination of caution, strategic prudence, and alignment with U.S. policies. However, with the increasing level of Chinese pressure on Taiwan, the emergence of hypothetical military crises, and the intensification of threats to maritime security, Japanese policymakers have grown increasingly concerned about the region's geopolitical future. The vital importance of Taiwan Strait security to Japan stems from the fact that any instability could impact Japan's maritime trade and threaten its energy and commercial routes. Additionally, the roots of Japan's expanding security cooperation with Taiwan, the United States, and even other regional countries can be traced to these same security concerns. From Beijing's perspective, any support by Japan for Taiwan is interpreted as a challenge to the principle of China's territorial sovereignty and has provoked strong reactions. This sensitivity is not limited to official statements or diplomatic talks; rather, it has been expressed through military exercises, naval maneuvers, and both explicit and implicit warnings directed at Japanese authorities. China perceives Japan's increasing involvement in the Taiwan issue as a step toward forming a regional alliance against its strategic interests. Furthermore, U.S. policies and Washington's efforts to strengthen Taiwan's position have intensified China's motivations to increase pressure on Japan.

Japan's growing alignment with Washington regarding Taiwan has added layers of complexity to the bilateral relationship between Beijing and Tokyo. On the one hand, Japan seeks to maintain regional stability and preserve its longstanding economic interests in its dealings with China; on the other hand, it cannot disregard its security commitments under the Japan–U.S. alliance or its concerns about China's increasingly assertive behavior. This duality in Japan's foreign policy has often led to misunderstandings, temporary diplomatic crises, and even intensification of technological and military rivalries. In recent years, Japanese officials have publicly voiced concerns about the security of the Taiwan Strait and emphasized the importance of peace and stability in the region—reflecting a shift from Japan's traditional silence to more explicit political stances.

Economic developments have also not remained immune to the impact of the Taiwan issue on China–Japan relations. On one side, trade and investment relations between the two countries remain broad and vital, and given their economic interdependence, Japanese economic actors are inclined to keep tensions at a manageable level. On the other side, competition in the field of advanced technologies, export restrictions, and fears of secondary U.S. sanctions on firms investing in China have cast a shadow over the future of bilateral economic relations. This trend has not only raised doubts among Japan's economic elites but also pushed the Japanese government toward diversifying supply chains and enhancing technological cooperation with other Asian countries.

At the societal level and within public opinion, the Taiwan issue has influenced Japanese perceptions of China. Surveys show that whenever a crisis or threat related to Taiwan arises, public distrust toward China increases in Japan, which in turn narrows the social space necessary for political and economic rapprochement. Japanese media also play a significant role in shaping public sentiment through extensive coverage of Taiwan-related issues and, in some cases, contribute to the creation of a security-driven and alarmist atmosphere toward China.

In the end, it must be acknowledged that the Taiwan issue is not only a critical element in the bilateral dynamics between China and Japan but also holds a special place in shaping the future of their relations due to its deep connection with extra-regional factors—such as the China–U.S. rivalry and the reconfiguration of the Asia–Pacific security order. Any major shift in the Taiwan situation—whether in the form of increased Chinese pressure or diplomatic and military movements by Japan and its allies—could significantly influence the region's security, economic structure, and political order. Therefore, the analysis of the Taiwan issue's impact on China–Japan relations has become more important than ever.

2. Theoretical Framework

Realism, in its broader perspective on international relations, does not confine its analyses to a single image as the only determinant of international politics. Instead, it is divided into multiple approaches. Kenneth Waltz, in *Man, the State, and War* (2001), describes three levels of

analysis—individual, state, and international system—as factors influencing the struggle for power in international relations (Waltz, 2010).

Applying Waltz's logic within the realist camp allows for identifying distinct classifications. For example, classical realism focuses primarily on the first level of analysis—individuals and human nature—as determinants of behavior in international relations. In this theory, human nature is assumed to be inherently evil and unchanging. Since classical realists regard the root cause of conflicts and struggles for power among individuals and states as rooted in human nature, the anarchic environment of international relations is seen as a secondary factor. In contrast, neorealist scholars reject the decisive role of anthropological sources and unit-level factors, placing primary emphasis on systemic-level variables. Neorealism evaluates the structure of the international system based on ordering principles such as anarchy and the distribution of power. It holds that, due to the lack of a comprehensive central authority to ensure the security of individual units, states seek to pursue their objectives and ensure their own survival, leading to a condition of self-help. In this view, human nature is irrelevant, and power-seeking is primarily emphasized as a function of ensuring security.

Classical realism and neorealism aim to explain international phenomena rather than foreign policy specifically; these theories are not inherently designed to analyze foreign policy, though one may derive certain hypotheses from them in that context. Neoclassical realism, however, is fundamentally concerned with theorizing about foreign policy and attempts to interpret the reasons behind the behavior of states. It builds upon the core assumptions of the realist worldview to present a theory that incorporates both domestic and systemic factors in the analysis of foreign policy and adds emphasis on second-level (states) and third-level (international system) factors. The term "neoclassical realism" was first introduced by Gideon Rose.

Neoclassical realism seeks to bridge neorealism's scientific precision and emphasis on the causal primacy of the international system with the internal-level concerns, perceptions, and leadership considerations associated with classical realism. Starting from neorealism as its base, neoclassical realists argue that states primarily respond to the constraints and opportunities of the international system in pursuing their foreign and security policies. However, these responses are conditioned by unit-level factors such as state–society relations, domestic regime type, strategic culture, and leader perceptions (Larijani, 2009).

Neoclassical realism emphasizes that its approach marks a significant improvement over existing frameworks in international relations and foreign policy by integrating domestic-level variables. Therefore, neoclassical realism represents an effort to return structural realism to its classical roots without abandoning the key innovations and scientific rigor that Waltz brought to the theory. It revives classical realism's attention to domestic politics and institutions and highlights the importance of the quality of diplomacy in explaining states' external security choices (Fenby, 2020).

Neoclassical realism blends assumptions and elements from both classical realism and neorealism, integrating systemic-level and unit-level variables to analyze the foreign policy of specific states. On one hand, like neorealism, it acknowledges the impact and significance of anarchy on state behavior, beginning with the premise that the anarchic nature of the international system constrains and conditions foreign policy choices. In this view, the primary causal factors in foreign policy decision-making are systemic-level variables, and the goals, aspirations, and content of a state's foreign policy are seen to stem primarily from its relative material power. On the other hand, like classical realism, it gives attention to the influence of unit-level characteristics beyond flawed human nature. Accordingly, the influence of power capabilities on foreign policy is complex and indirect, as systemic pressures are mediated by unit-level variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and state structures. Thus, understanding the relationship between the distribution of relative power and foreign policy requires analyzing both the domestic and international contexts in which foreign policy is formulated and implemented. It is therefore essential to examine how the distribution of power in the international system, along with states' internal motivations and interpretations of that system, shapes their foreign policies.

3. Taiwan Crises

Taiwan is one of the flashpoints where China and the United States could suddenly engage in war. Taiwan appears determined to maintain its de facto

independence from China and eventually turn it into de jure independence, while China is equally determined to reincorporate Taiwan into its territory. In fact, China has made it clear that it is willing to go to war to prevent Taiwan's independence. Meanwhile, the United States aims to help Taiwan defend itself against China—an arrangement that would likely lead to a war between U.S. and Taiwanese forces on one side, and China on the other (Mearsheimer, 2009).

3.1. Origins of the Crisis

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Taiwan was colonized by Western powers and, at times, occupied by the Ming and Qing dynasties. In 1683, Qing forces defeated the Ming loyalists in Taiwan and held command of the island until the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed between China and Japan in 1895. In the late 19th century, the situation in China shifted due to its conflict with Japan over Korea. On April 7, 1895, China and Japan signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, under which Japan's sovereignty over Taiwan was recognized. However, during World War II, as the tides of war turned against the Axis powers, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek met in Cairo to discuss Japan's colonial holdings. The Cairo Declaration, issued in December 1943, stipulated that all Chinese territories seized by Japan must be returned to China as a precondition for negotiations. This was reiterated in the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945, and Taiwan was returned to Chinese sovereignty. However, following the revolution in China and the defeat of the Chinese Nationalists by the Communists, Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan and established an independent government there. Thus, the Taiwan crisis began in 1949 (Shafiei, 2009), and over time, it has triggered several major confrontations over the island.

3.2. The First Taiwan Strait Crisis

At the national level, this crisis emerged in 1949 as a result of China's civil war between the Nationalists and Communists. Weakened by the war against Japan, the Nationalist forces retreated to Taiwan and occupied a series of small islands near China's coast, forming a separate government known as the Republic of China or Taiwan. This new political entity received support from the United States, while the Soviet Union backed the People's Republic of China. These circumstances, coupled with the strategic importance of the islands, led to a crisis that could have escalated into a U.S.–China confrontation in 1955 (Bozorginezhad et al., 2019).

After the People's Republic of China launched missiles at Formosa in 1945, the U.S. immediately supported the Nationalists and signed a bilateral defense treaty with Taiwan in December of that year. In January 1955, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution authorizing the President to use military force, if necessary, to defend Formosa. In the same month, Nationalist aircraft retaliated by bombing certain Chinese positions on the mainland (Bozorginezhad et al., 2019).

3.3. The Second Taiwan Crisis

In August 1955, Chiang Kai-shek declared that his government was preparing plans to retake mainland China. At the time, Chiang believed that the U.S. would support an attack on Communist China—but the U.S. withheld support. One of the key points of divergence between the Republic of China and the U.S. was the continued disagreement over the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). Chiang assumed that the U.S. would back an offensive against the mainland, whereas the U.S. viewed the MDT solely as a commitment to defend Taiwan from aggression by Beijing. Chiang tried to leverage the treaty to encourage U.S. military action against Communist China, and thus sought to strengthen his forces on Formosa in preparation for war.

Meanwhile, the United States had opened negotiations with Beijing in Geneva in 1954, during which it demanded assurances that China would not attack Taiwan. However, Beijing's officials insisted that Taiwan was an internal Chinese matter and denied the U.S. any right to intervene in the issue (Hadian, 2009).

Nationalist forces launched artillery strikes on the Chinese mainland from islands under their control, which were heavily militarized and located less than two kilometers from China's coast. Nikita Khrushchev, despite his commitments under the 1950 agreement to support the Communists, failed to act decisively until the crisis subsided (Shahandeh, 1997).

3.4. The Third Taiwan Crisis

After Chiang Kai-shek's death, his deputy, Lee Teng-hui, assumed power and put Taiwan on a new path that

altered its global position. Pursuing a pragmatic diplomacy, Lee frequently visited small countries to build diplomatic relations, a strategy known as "travel diplomacy." In May 1995, the U.S. Congress and Senate passed a resolution requiring the Clinton administration to grant Lee Teng-hui a visa. Consequently, in June 1995, he was issued a visa to visit Cornell University.

This visit alarmed the People's Republic of China. Upon his arrival in Los Angeles, large crowds of supporters waved Taiwanese flags. Several U.S. senators also welcomed him in New York. The PRC immediately condemned the visit as promoting Taiwanese separatism. On July 18, China began a week-long program of surface-to-surface missile tests that, despite Taiwan's protests, commenced shortly afterward. The missiles were aimed at Taiwan and fell less than 100 miles off its coast. Additionally, China deployed a large number of troops to Fujian Province, which lies directly opposite Taiwan. These military provocations caused political and economic shock in Taiwan.

Beijing's actions prompted a U.S. response. On December 19, 1995, a U.S. aircraft carrier passed through the Taiwan Strait. In response, the PRC recalled its ambassador from Washington and warned that continued American interference in China's internal affairs would lead to further consequences (Schaie et al., 1991NotInList — closest: Daraj, 2021 #229231).

In February 1996, China mobilized its forces in Fujian and eventually stationed 150,000 troops there while testing another round of missiles. The exercises took place near the Taiwan Strait. China engaged in this show of force because it believed Taiwan had taken major steps toward independence (Mearsheimer, 2009). These maneuvers were meant to warn the pro-independence factions preparing for the March 23, 1996 election that Beijing envisioned nothing beyond the "One Country, Two Systems" model for Taiwan—a clear rejection of separatist ambitions (Shahandeh, 1997). In response, the U.S. dispatched two aircraft carriers to the waters surrounding Taiwan. Fortunately, the crisis ended peacefully.

Following the events of 1995–1996, Washington and Beijing sought to de-escalate tensions. During Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to the U.S. in late October and early November 1996, Taiwan's Foreign Minister stated that improved U.S.–China relations would inevitably affect Taiwan and harm its interests (Shafiei, 2009).

During his 1998 visit to China, President Clinton declared the "Three Noes" policy: the U.S. would not support Taiwan's independence, would not endorse the idea of "One China, One Taiwan," and would not support Taiwan's membership in international organizations.

Nevertheless, the Taiwan issue remains unresolved. China is deploying large numbers of ballistic and cruise missiles in Fujian Province and purchasing aircraft and warships from Russia—developments that could complicate future U.S. troop deployments in a regional crisis. In February 2000, China issued a white paper asserting its readiness to go to war before allowing the Taiwan issue to remain unresolved indefinitely. Afterward, China and the U.S. exchanged veiled nuclear threats. Taiwan, for its part, is acquiring new weapons to counter China's growing arsenal and remains determined to preserve its independence. Consequently, the U.S. may be drawn into war with China over both Korea and Taiwan (Mearsheimer, 2009).

Moreover, the rise of George W. Bush and the U.S.'s ambiguous Taiwan policy—combined with growing frictions between Beijing and Taipei—further heightened the risk of escalation.

4. China–Japan Relations

China–Japan relations have experienced many ups and downs and remain highly complex, influenced by a range of factors. The roots of this intricate relationship date back to the first century CE, when China was the central power in East Asia—boasting vast geographic territory, a progressive civilization, and well-structured political systems. In the bilateral dynamic, China enjoyed a more dominant status than Japan, maintaining a superior position in the Asian region as a whole. Naturally, as neighboring states, China and Japan were in frequent contact, engaging in various aspects of bilateral interaction such as cultural exchange, economic interests, maritime navigation, and even military confrontations. Historical evidence indicates that Japanese culture was heavily influenced by ancient Chinese civilization, including religion, literature, philosophy, and cultural practices.

The Meiji Restoration in Japan marked the beginning of the first Sino-Japanese War. The conflict began when Japan sought to expel Chinese forces from the Korean

Peninsula. Japan subsequently occupied Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands—territories that had previously been considered legitimate Chinese possessions. The final blow occurred when Japan expanded its invasion into mainland China and forced China to accept new treaties. This confrontation waned during the events surrounding World War I, when Japan agreed to a ceasefire over its territorial aggressions in China in 1922. Japan resumed its aggressive stance toward China in 1937, particularly through its invasion of Manchuria. A series of subsequent events followed, including Japan's invasion of China in 1937, the occupation of French Indochina in 1940, the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the invasion of the Philippines in 1942. At that stage, Japan appeared to have established dominance over China. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki abruptly altered Japan's fate. As a result, Japan was forced to cede its territorial claims over Taiwan and Manchuria to China. Moreover, the islands it had acquired in the Pacific Ocean were transferred to the Americans. The year 1945 marked the end of military hostilities between China and Japan.

The end of World War II fueled strong anti-Japanese sentiment in China. The war had left a deep sense of bitterness among the Chinese, stemming from Japan's military campaigns and atrocities—sentiments that continue to affect China–Japan relations to this day. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in mainland China in 1949, while Taiwan separated from the mainland. Taiwan relied heavily on the United States for its defense until the PRC was formally recognized by Washington. Since the founding of the PRC and the fall of the Qing dynasty, there have been numerous efforts to improve China–Japan relations, though these efforts have also been marked by phases of confrontation and tension—up to 1991, when an official organization for bilateral relations between the two countries was formed.

The historical background of China–Japan relations shows that the balance of power between the two countries has constantly shifted. At one time, China was the epicenter of power. However, all of this changed during Japan's Meiji period and the two World Wars. In 1949, the Qing dynasty was replaced by the government of the People's Republic of China. Since that period, bilateral relations have shifted from "warm to cold." Hostility between the two states replaced the possibility of "genuine contact and close cooperation in many areas." Although Japan had lost most of its military power, China considered it a threat due to its alliance with the United States. Additionally, the Chinese public feared that Japan might become militarized again. On the other hand, the Japanese were concerned about China's growing military and economic power. A treaty between Russia and China further heightened Japan's security anxieties. More broadly, Japan's use as a U.S. military base during the Korean War also shaped strategic perceptions.

China–Japan relations were further influenced by the "Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty" signed between the United States and Japan in 1951. Japan's decision to establish relations with Taiwan, China's estranged neighbor, exerted additional pressure on the PRC. Like most Western countries, Japan recognized Taipei as the sole legitimate government of China.

5. The Impact of the Taiwan Issue on China–Japan Relations

Taiwan's geographic location adjacent to the East and South China Seas has rendered it a significant security concern for both China and Japan. Policymakers especially emphasize Taiwan's central geographic position and proximity to critical maritime routes, which makes the island a forward-operating position either for China's sea control or for Japan's (U.S.-backed) regional coalition. Such a posture would reduce response time to perceived or real threats. This strategy could also be leveraged in nearby resource and territorial disputes, increasing Taiwan's strategic weight for both nations (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

Although China's growing capability to protect its interests at sea and over adjacent maritime routes is impressive, realizing such capabilities in full may not be possible without satisfying specific strategic prerequisites. These include securing control over the continental shelf and adjacent islands to deter adversaries from blockading sea lines or seizing underwater resources—both of which would significantly damage China's economic stability (Daraj & Basiri, 2021). China's broader maritime strategy reflects these concerns. Firstly, Taiwan must be contained, as it is a central element of the "First Island Chain." Secondly, national interests are increasingly projected beyond this chain. Senior Chinese military and political leaders such

as Admiral Liu Huaqing and former President Jiang Zemin helped institutionalize this approach through revisions to the concept of "active defense," particularly its offshore variant. Over time, offshore defense evolved into its present form—"far-sea defense"—which requires military modernization and projection of national interests beyond the First Island Chain. It extends China's strategic reach up to 200 nautical miles and includes large portions of the East and South China Seas.

Many Japanese officials perceive the loss of Taiwan's status as a "longstanding de facto independent entity" as a precursor to the closure of adjacent sea lanes. Moreover, they suspect that China may use this momentum to endanger or blockade more distant maritime routes and assert expansive territorial claims and seabed resource control—potentially leading to economic collapse and heightened insecurity. Officials argue that this potential threat requires a firm response. The actions taken by China and Japan could lead to a worsening security dilemma in which reactive military strategies dangerously destabilize relations. If both countries continue to intensify their military build-ups, it could unintentionally result in Japan's full remilitarization and "further competition for economic influence in other regions." Both states are competitively expanding their presence in other parts of the world—such as Russia, Africa, and the Middle East—in an effort to counter each other's influence in those regions and in East Asia. One example was China's opposition to Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in 2005. Such military build-up and rivalry could trigger a "downward spiral of a destructive security dilemma." This in turn could escalate into a conflict that would be catastrophic for China, Japan, Taiwan, and the broader region (Mearsheimer, 2009).

The East Asian region also holds geostrategic significance due to its oil and gas reserves in the East and South China Seas and Taiwan's strategic location. These factors have motivated the intensification of extraregional power presence in the region. In response, China and Japan have engaged in strategic competition to constrain external influence while both seek strategies to secure Taiwan and thereby safeguard their maritime routes, territorial claims, and resource interests (Cancian & Eric, 2023). State participation in such strategies can be considered rational from a realist standpoint.

Structural realism, as a macro-level security theory, seeks to resolve the security dilemma by focusing on comparative analysis and strategic interpretation. As an evolved realist theory, structural realism emphasizes systemic variables and points to the strategic interactions between states. It assumes that states prioritize security among their national objectives. While maximizing security may be an extreme version of this view, a more moderate interpretation—emphasizing rational security maximization—remains central to the structural realist perspective (Mearsheimer, 2009).

5.1. The Strategic Importance of Maritime Routes

Given the immense strategic importance of oil in both the Chinese and Japanese economies, analyzing oil imports provides deeper insight into why Taiwan and surrounding sea lanes are vital for their national security. Most imported oil for both nations travels through maritime routes originating in the Middle East, which pass through the South and East China Seas. Taiwan's location between these seas and its role as a central node in the First Island Chain (including the Pratas, Spratly, and Diaoyu Islands) makes the island increasingly critical to energy security (Daraj & Basiri, 2021).

As China has become more reliant on a stable flow of oil imports, fears over maritime threats and contested territorial and resource claims have grown. Many Chinese policymakers and military leaders believe that reunification with Taiwan is essential to defend nearby national interests against such threats. Some further argue that reunification would enable the PLA Navy (PLAN) to break out beyond the First Island Chain, thereby enhancing its ability to safeguard China's distant maritime interests in the two seas and even in the Indian Ocean. With these national security concerns in mind, the preoccupation of Chinese leadership with resolving Taiwan's political status represents a substantial strategic imperative (Mearsheimer, 2009).

5.2. Conflict or Reunification of Taiwan?

Chinese officials contend that Japan is maximizing its power by granting greater operational freedom to its armed forces. The U.S.–Japan Defense Cooperation

Guidelines of 1997 and the War Contingency Law of 2003 transformed Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF), allowing them to support U.S. troops within and around Japanese territory (Roehrig, 2017). Other Chinese concerns include joint U.S.–Japan military exercises near Taiwan, combined island-landing drills, and the 2005 U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee Joint Statement, which called for peace, stability, and dialogue in resolving issues concerning "Taiwan security" and the Taiwan Strait. Beijing viewed this statement as provocative and responded by declaring Taiwan's security an internal matter.

In 2006, the Japanese government sent its first military attaché to Taiwan, an event accompanied by a striking statement from a senior Japanese diplomat: "Now the Taiwanese can say that both the U.S. and Japan are on their side" (Roehrig, 2017).

Chinese officials also refer to statements by Japanese policymakers as evidence of power maximization. Former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone suggested that Japan should consider nuclear armament, while former Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa asserted that "Japan must take into account the latent intentions of the Chinese state and its instability, and communicate this to the entire Asia-Pacific region."

5.3. *Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)*

Many Japanese officials perceive that China is maximizing its power to disrupt the current status quo, thereby threatening the existence of a de facto Taiwan, its adjacent maritime routes, resources, and territorial claims. These officials argue that a median line between the Ryukyu Islands and the mainland of both states should divide the EEZs, thereby rejecting China's claim to an extended continental shelf.

However, just as China's continental shelf and EEZ claims are seen as infringing upon Japan's security interests, Japan's proposed equidistant division is perceived by China as a violation of its own security concerns. The complexity of the issue is further exacerbated by surveys indicating substantial oil reserves in the disputed Diaoyu Islands. The cost of rising hostility would be significant—not only in terms of economic integration between China, Japan, and Taiwan, but also for "developed economies across the globe. Given the severe economic consequences, all actions that could escalate into serious conflict must be carefully reconsidered.

China remains Taiwan's largest trading partner, with over $100 billion in bilateral trade, accounting for 40% of Taiwan's exports and $150 billion in investment in 2009 alone. Both China and Japan operate within an anarchic international system and are engaged in an "unrelenting struggle for survival, advantage, and often dominance." As such, Japan's policy of maintaining the status quo regarding the Taiwan issue—which directly opposes China's reunification ambitions—has not only intensified tensions in East Asia but also resulted in increased strategic alignment between Japan and the United States (Mearsheimer, 2009).

5.4. *Expanding Multi-Domain Deterrence Depth to the Taiwan Strait Based on Japan's Independent National Defense Architecture*

The United States' weakness in managing and responding to emerging global threats—especially the intensifying geopolitical competition among great powers in the Indo-Pacific—has led to increased U.S. pressure on Japan to assume greater defensive responsibilities. This shift in strategic burden-sharing has driven Japan toward a broader security role in the region.

Against this backdrop, Washington's wavering commitment to defending Taiwan—partially due to foreign policy missteps elsewhere—has undermined effective deterrence in the Taiwan Strait, emboldening China to consider military action (Waltz, 2010). Furthermore, the United States' conventional and nuclear capabilities alone are insufficient to ensure effective deterrence against a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan. Thus, it is imperative for Japan's Self-Defense Forces to enhance their autonomous deterrent capacities within the framework of strategic independence.

To this end, the Kishida Doctrine, articulated in Japan's recent defense and security documents (2022–2027 and 2022–2030), underscores the importance of an independent and expanded Japanese security role in the Indo-Pacific—particularly in critical areas such as the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. This doctrine promotes a multi-domain deterrence posture, combining "deterrence by denial" and "deterrence by punishment," to respond to Chinese aggression. Previously, Japan had relied solely on deterrence by denial, leaving punitive deterrence to U.S. forces. However, the Kishida administration's incorporation of counterstrike

capabilities allows Japan to implement deterrence by punishment as well.

To prevent unilateral changes to the status quo by force, Japan is strengthening its flexible deterrence options (FDOs) across multiple domains. Deterrent forces must operate within a multi-domain environment (land, sea, air, cyber, space, and information), requiring new operational concepts, technologies, weapons, and military units. Japan is enhancing these capabilities by deploying advanced naval vessels and fighter aircraft to maintain maritime and air superiority, as well as introducing next-generation surface combatants (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

In fifth-generation multi-domain deterrence, emerging technologies play a pivotal role. The Kishida government is advancing a broad set of defense technology initiatives aimed at strengthening deterrent power across all operational domains. Moreover, the southwestern islands of Japan—forming the "First Island Chain" in the Indo-Pacific—act as a strategic bulwark to contain China and have become the focal point of Japan's "island strategy." Intensified efforts to balance or contain China's growing economic and military power underscore the islands' strategic importance.

As part of the 2021 Pacific Deterrence Initiative, the U.S. has recommended reinforcing this "chain" by deploying flexible, multi-domain strike forces at the tactical defense front along the First Island Chain. This initiative aligns with China's growing military presence in the Taiwan Strait, which Japan perceives as a major security threat (Sazmand & Arghavani Pirasalami, 2017). Consequently, Japan's deeper integration into U.S. military strategy has increased its involvement in any potential military action concerning Taiwan and the First Island Chain (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

These developments have led to a combination of multi-domain deterrence initiatives and Japan's strategic autonomy at the defense front. Japan has accelerated the construction of a deterrent "wall" in the southwestern islands near Taiwan. According to the 2022 National Security Strategy and Defense Strategy documents, Japan's multi-domain forces are now projected to the Taiwan Strait via the southwestern island chain near Taiwan. Through the establishment of new defense bases stretching from Kyushu to Taiwan, Japan has enhanced its deterrence and rapid response capabilities against China.

This strategy includes creating new military units equipped with long-range missiles (with ranges exceeding 1,000 kilometers) and establishing ground, naval, and air forces across these islands. Japan's future defense plans for electronic warfare, cyber operations, and joint ground-sea-air military maneuvers clearly signal an intention to intervene in a potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

Japan's island-chain strategy, along with the Spratly Islands of the Philippines in the South China Sea, not only reinforces deterrence in the Taiwan Strait but also severely constrains China's maneuvering space in the air and at sea, effectively placing China in a position of strategic compression and limitation.

5.5. *Formation of Defensive and Security Alliances and Partnerships*

Japan, through active diplomatic maneuvering, collective defense mechanisms, and regional alliances, is pursuing strategies that significantly impact China's expansionist ambitions. A multilateral security mechanism involving numerous democracies raises the political costs for China in pursuing provocative actions against Taiwan and effectively halts Beijing's ambitions to alter the status quo. This collective mechanism reinforces deterrence against China and reflects Japan's serious strategy of forging military and diplomatic alliances to guarantee Taiwan's autonomy (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

Accordingly, Japan needs an integrated deterrence strategy based on a networked perspective that includes innovation and partnerships in emerging domains with like-minded countries—mirroring the U.S. approach to integrated deterrence. As per Japan's 2022 National Defense Strategy, this vision is now operationalized (Sazmand & Arghavani Pirasalami, 2017). In this context, due to critical interdependence across regional hubs and communication clusters, a single country (like Japan) must strategically arrange its geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-cultural clusters through network-linking nodes. Consequently, regional and global structural linkages form the foundation of a network order, with deterrence and strategic balance functioning as the base for managing behavioral patterns toward regional stability (Sazmand & Arghavani Pirasalami, 2017).

Within this framework, Japan aspires to leadership in the Indo-Pacific region, demonstrated through initiatives like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for

Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the QUAD revival. Many regional countries have welcomed Japan's efforts, viewing its leadership as essential in counterbalancing China's Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, Japan's increasing support for Taiwan aligns with its broader leadership ambitions.

Japan's growing defense relations through a multi-layered defense network with Indo-Pacific and European states highlight its leadership role—alongside the U.S.—in constructing a networked security architecture. Japan's defense policies enable it to contribute to this architecture and strengthen deterrence. Notably, networked security does not mean militarization but rather preparedness and prevention of aggression and conflict (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

Under Kishida's liberal-realist diplomacy, Japan is emerging as a regional order architect. Kishida's Indo-Pacific strategy has initiated several joint naval drills: Japan–France–Australia–U.S. quadrilateral exercises, Japan–U.S.–Australia multilateral drills, and Japan–Canada–U.S. trilateral operations. This strategy emphasizes security cooperation with like-minded Indo-Pacific partners including the U.S., Australia, India, the UK, France, Germany, Canada, New Zealand, and Asian states. Japan's approach emphasizes maximum deterrence to safeguard its interests and expand its security role in both Asia and Europe.

This strategy, as noted by Panda, enables power balancing in the face of China's hegemonic rise and offers a framework to manage the Taiwan crisis and curb Chinese expansionism. Thus, Japan has entered defense agreements with Vietnam, Singapore, and the Philippines. Bilateral partnerships are further reinforced through mechanisms like the Japan–U.S.–Australia Strategic Dialogue, the QUAD, and trilateral talks with South Korea.

In 2023, Japan and the Philippines agreed to expand their security cooperation, holding naval drills and transferring defense equipment. This agreement grants Japan access to Philippine airbases, paving the way for trilateral cooperation among Japan, the Philippines, and the U.S. (Cancian & Eric, 2023). Military exercises are seen as geopolitical tools to strengthen deterrence and prevent Chinese military moves against Taiwan.

Furthermore, Kishida's strategy includes building regional and global consensus on the Taiwan issue. In February 2023, NATO and Japan committed to increased strategic military and security cooperation. Recognizing the growing threat from China, NATO has expanded its presence in the Indo-Pacific and deepened ties with regional partners. A closer NATO–Japan relationship reinforces deterrence in both Europe and Asia (Roehrig, 2017).

Accordingly, in 2023, the UK and Japan signed a "Strategic Security and Defense Pact," pledging to station forces in each other's countries and plan large-scale Indo-Pacific exercises by 2025. Japan and Germany also agreed to conduct joint drills around Japan and the Indo-Pacific by 2024. With France, a "special partnership" has facilitated exercises in both Japan and the Indo-Pacific.

These treaties enable coordinated responses to potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait. The collective military strength of the QUAD (Japan, U.S., India, and Australia) makes the Strait geopolitically vital. The QUAD's primary deterrence focus is to block and deny Chinese seizure of Taiwan. The growing Japan–Australia strategic partnership under Kishida emphasizes both nations' shared responsibility in maintaining peace in the Strait (Daraj & Basiri, 2021).

President Yoon of South Korea issued a joint statement with Kishida and Biden stressing the importance of peace across the Taiwan Strait (Sazmand & Arghavani Pirasalami, 2017). This trilateral Japan–South Korea–U.S. defense partnership—once focused solely on North Korea—is now shifting toward deterring China. India and Japan, recognizing shared interests in the Indo-Pacific, have also moved closer, agreeing to expand bilateral defense cooperation through joint air, naval, and ground exercises, enhancing deterrence in the Taiwan Strait (Bidallah Khani, 2020).

5.6. *Japan's Broad Participation in U.S. Integrated Deterrence Strategy Against China*

Military deterrence forms the core of the containment strategy. As China emerged as a global power, the idea of containment regained prominence in U.S. policy. Washington's containment strategy comprises three components: 1) increased U.S. political, diplomatic, and military support for Taiwan; 2) expanded U.S. military presence in the Western Pacific—especially in the South China Sea and near Taiwan; and 3) the integration of allies such as India, Japan, and Australia into new security networks against China (Sazmand & Arghavani Pirasalami, 2017).

Since Japan is expected to achieve full operational deterrence by 2027 under its national defense architecture, it must supplement its independent capabilities with participation in U.S. integrated deterrence to ensure strategic stability in the Taiwan Strait. Kishida's balance-and-containment strategy facilitates Japan's engagement in this network, turning it into America's most vital strategic ally for China containment and Taiwan Strait management.

If deterrence in the Indo-Pacific is viewed as a network, Japan and the U.S. are the two central nodes—conventional and unconventional—of this system. Their combined deterrence represents the densest set of nodes and links within the region's deterrent network. Japan's deterrent capabilities are thus connected to the broader U.S. integrated strategic framework, which is heavily focused on preventing Chinese military aggression toward Taiwan.

According to Japan's National Defense Strategy, strengthening Japan's defense capabilities will enhance U.S.–Japan coalition response and deterrence against unilateral changes to the status quo, with Japan playing a greater role in maintaining peace in the Indo-Pacific under this alliance. Kishida also declared in November 2021 that "a Taiwan emergency is a Japan emergency," underscoring the crisis's relevance to the U.S.–Japan alliance.

As Japan's regional role grows and Taiwan's strategic value rises, Japan has become the U.S.'s primary ally in any Taiwan contingency. With the return of great power competition, Japan occupies a central position in Biden's Asia strategy. This alliance plays an increasingly vital role in regional peace and stability. Achieving peace depends on deterrence strong enough to prevent China–Taiwan military conflict (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

President Biden expressed strong support for Kishida's updated security policies, viewing them as vital enhancements to coalition deterrence. Despite U.S. military dominance, it is unlikely to be prepared to counter China's technological edge over the next five years. Hence, America must rely on its allies—first and foremost, Japan.

In a China–Taiwan war scenario, Japanese forces could reduce allied casualties by nearly 30%. Japan's defense architecture and alliance with the U.S., consistent with Kishida's security vision, will significantly aid Taiwan's defense, making U.S. operations more effective (Cancian & Eric, 2023).

Thus, Japan is central to U.S. defense of Taiwan, exerting influence in two key ways: (1) by granting the U.S. access to its bases, and (2) through direct Japanese military engagement. Japan hosts more U.S. troops and bases than any other country. Many of the U.S.'s Taiwan-relevant capabilities are already based in Japan, enabling rapid crisis response and large-scale combat operations near Taiwan. Proximity to Taiwan and lack of viable alternatives mean that most of the U.S. military's response to a Chinese invasion would be launched from Japanese bases.

6. Conclusion

The Taiwan issue stands as one of the most critical geopolitical flashpoints in East Asia, casting a profound shadow over China–Japan relations. It reflects not only historical grievances and power rivalries but also strategic anxieties and evolving security postures in the region. China regards Taiwan as a non-negotiable part of its territory, reacting sharply to any signs of Japanese support for Taiwan—especially political or military.

Beijing perceives Japanese engagement with Taiwan as interference in internal affairs, often responding with harsh rhetoric and retaliatory economic measures. Conversely, Japan's heightened sensitivity stems from China's military rise and a shifting security environment. Tokyo officials frequently emphasize the importance of Taiwan Strait stability for Japan's national security, citing threats to its southern islands, trade routes, and strategic interests.

Although Japan remains committed to the "One China" policy, it maintains informal cooperation with Taiwan in areas such as trade, culture, and humanitarian aid. Deep economic interdependence also acts as a mutual deterrent, preventing either side from escalating tensions into full-blown conflict.

Ultimately, the Taiwan issue affects security calculations, foreign policy alignment, and alliance configurations for both nations—keeping China–Japan relations suspended between mistrust and competition. As great power rivalry in East Asia deepens, Taiwan will remain a pivotal factor shaping the future trajectory of these relations.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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