

Focus: The Taiwan Issue and Japan's Response (Summary)

Essay: The “Taiwan Contingency” and Japanese Diplomacy: Diplomatic Capabilities Put to the Test

Yuji Miyamoto (Chairman, Miyamoto Institute of Asian Research; Former Ambassador to China)

The joint communiqués issued respectively by Japan and the United States upon normalizing diplomatic relations with China contained differing interpretations of the “One China” principle that exhibited an inherent contradiction between this principle and the issue of Taiwan’s security in particular. This contradiction has been embodied in the “strategy of ambiguity.” If this ambiguity were removed, China would find it difficult to maintain diplomatic relations with Japan and the US, potentially ushering in a “cold war” state of military confrontation and economic division. The ultimate manifestation of this contradiction would be a “Taiwan contingency” (a hot war), and Japanese diplomacy has strived to prevent this outcome. China’s transformation, epitomized by a rapid military buildup, is the direct cause of the rise in Taiwan contingency discourse. Even as the circumstances surrounding the Taiwan issue undergo significant changes, the fundamental direction of Japanese diplomacy to avoid a Taiwan contingency remains correct. Now that a long-term standoff between the US and China has become a reality, avoiding a cold war and preventing a hot war requires not only day-to-day diplomatic efforts but also a grand strategy to bring peace and stability to East Asia.

1 A Historical Turning Point in Cross-Strait Relations: Economic Ties and Security Landscapes in Transition

Yasuhiro Matsuda (Professor, Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, The University of Tokyo)

The “prosperity-independence dilemma” that has long plagued Taiwan is showing signs of easing. Although Taiwanese investment in China is rapidly declining due to deterioration in the Chinese economy and US-China relations, Taiwan continues to generate significant wealth through exports to China. Furthermore, Taiwan has been strengthening its defense posture as China sets the stage for a possible use of force against Taiwan, committing to a policy of deterring a Chinese invasion by demonstrating its resolve to fight decisive battles in both open and urban areas and building the capability to do so. However, China’s infiltration operations and cognitive warfare against Taiwan remain largely unchecked. While the Democratic Progressive Party administration has offered up legislation, no consensus has been formed in Taiwan on how to address this issue. Finally, the immediate policy challenge for Japan, stemming from the current state of cross-strait relations, is to deter China from using force against Taiwan. It is crucial to maintain the strategy of ambiguity: deterring China without provoking it excessively, and reassuring Taiwan without giving it false security.

2 US-China-Taiwan Relations Surrounding Taiwan Contingencies: Trump 2.0 and the Future of “Strategic Ambiguity”

Haruka Matsumoto (Senior Research Fellow, Interdisciplinary Studies Center, Institute of Developing Economies)

Taiwan has seen the Democratic Progressive Party consolidate its long-term rule even as China has intensified military, diplomatic, and economic pressure on the island. Recently, multiple senior US officials from the military and intelligence communities and elsewhere have repeatedly warned of the

risks of a Taiwan contingency, fostering growing concern that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan could have severe repercussions for the international community.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 heightened global anxiety over violations of sovereignty and the use of force, further drawing international attention to Taiwan. Amid these developments, the United States has maintained its policy of "strategic ambiguity" toward Taiwan while adopting measures to strengthen deterrence when deemed necessary. These warnings, together with selective signals embedded within the strategy of ambiguity, have cumulatively functioned as a deterrent against China's potential use of force against Taiwan.

This article reviews recent developments in discourse on Taiwan contingencies and examines trends in US policy toward China and Taiwan. It then analyzes the evolving framework of US-China-Taiwan relations during the second Trump administration.

3 Taiwanese Politics After 2024: The Emergence of an Era of Ruling-Opposition Stalemate

Yoshiyuki Ogasawara (Honorary Chair Professor, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan)

Taiwanese politics entered an era of ruling-opposition stalemate with the 2024 presidential and legislative election. Although the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) retained power, the Legislative Yuan was dominated by the opposition. Unable to tolerate this gridlock, the green camp launched a campaign to recall Kuomintang (KMT) legislators, but, lacking sufficient public support, they suffered a crushing defeat in the recall votes. The ruling party suffered a major blow, with President Lai Ching-te's and the DPP's approval ratings plummeting in polls. The effectiveness of the "resist China, protect Taiwan" card has also gradually waned since its peak in 2020, a trend reflected in the recall votes.

Indeed, the structure of Taiwan's identity remains unchanged. Self-identification as Taiwanese and a desire to maintain the status quo of a democratized Republic of China still represent the majority sentiment in Taiwan. Nevertheless, China's repeated attempts at destabilization have succeeded in deepening divisions within Taiwanese society. This fragmentation is also progressing among Taiwan's youth.

The election of pro-China leader Cheng Li-wun as KMT chairperson proved to be an outcome favorable to China. Looking ahead to the 2028 presidential election, the likelihood of Lai's re-election and that of a change in government each stand at 50%. Analysis of circumstances within Taiwan is indispensable for discussions about contingencies involving Taiwan, yet Taiwan's domestic politics are unfolding under extremely opaque conditions.

4 China's Infiltration Efforts Against Taiwan: Threats to Taiwanese Democracy and Countermeasures

Takayuki Igarashi (Research Fellow, China Division, Regional Studies Department, National Institute for Defense Studies)

The risk of a Chinese military invasion of Taiwan has been widely discussed for some time. However, China is looking to avoid a resort to force by endeavoring to undermine Taiwan's democracy from within. Through united front operations, China seeks to co-opt local organizations and the youth to gradually alter people's perceptions and sense of identity over time. Simultaneously, it inundates the public with disinformation and scandals, eroding both voters' ability to engage in informed decision-making and their trust in politics as a whole rather than the electoral system itself. The aim of this infiltration is not to rig elections for or against specific political parties, but instead to exacerbate division and distrust within Taiwanese society over the long term, thereby stripping away the immune system of a free society. Under the guise of exchanges, visits, tourism, and employment support, a "silent invasion" is progressing, slowly permeating the populace. While Taiwan has achieved some success through legal frameworks and information countermeasures, China's tactics continue to grow more

sophisticated, testing the very openness upon which democracy fundamentally relies. This vulnerability is one shared by Taiwan with all democratic societies.

5 Envisaging Situations Surrounding Taiwan and Strategically Prioritizing the Continual Improvement of Japan's Whole-of-Society Resilience

Nobushige Takamizawa (Senior Fellow, Sasakawa Peace Foundation)

The primary purpose of studies on “situations surrounding Taiwan” is to examine and work out specific measures to maintain regional peace and stability and prevent conflict. The pertinent studies involve analyzing the proper balance of comprehensive capabilities inclusive of military power, scenarios and conditions leading up to the use of force, interconnections with circumstances beyond Sino-Taiwan relations, and the timing of these situations.

Typical scenarios include sustained pressure through intensifying gray zone tactics, a quarantine or blockade of Taiwan using naval and air forces, limited incursions into outlying islands, and an armed invasion that incorporates amphibious operations against Taiwan's main island.

Amid shifting US-China strategic dynamics and heightening Chinese pressure to change the status quo, Japan should prioritize initiatives that strengthen whole-of-society resilience both at home and across the region against “ongoing realities and far-reaching challenges” by such means as enhancing economic security – focusing in particular on supply chain issues – as well as cybersecurity, maritime security and energy security without dwelling too much on categorizing situations. These measures should be taken in parallel with efforts to fundamentally upgrade defense capabilities and step up cooperation with allies, partners, and like-minded nations, and alongside efforts to maintain constructive and stable relations with China.

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