

## Taiwan Contingency in the Context of Japan's New Defense Strategy

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Here are the Big Questions. Will Japan defend Taiwan when China attacks Taiwan? What is Japan's role in a Taiwan contingency? I would like to answer these questions today.

Since the Japan-U.S. summit in the spring of 2021, concern about a Taiwan contingency has grown stronger in Japan. One year later, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated that "a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency and also a Japan-U.S. alliance contingency," sparking interest. In February 2022, Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine. In Japan, interest in Taiwan increased, with about 90% of the population worried about a Chinese invasion of Taiwan; at the end of 2022, the Japanese government released its three strategic documents, which decided to double defense spending and acquire counterattack capabilities. Many people speak of the importance of Japan-Taiwan defense cooperation. About 40% of Taiwanese believe that Japan will mobilize the Self-Defense Forces to defend Taiwan. Similarly, the Chinese strongly believe that Japan will intervene.

So, what is the reality? Here, I would like to clarify the position of the Taiwan contingency in Japan's defense strategy.

As the defeated nation in World War II, Japan has been extremely restrained in its military actions. For the past 25 years, Japan's defense budget has barely increased. Japan lacks the standoff counterattack capability. In Japan, moving the Self-Defense Forces is more of a legal issue than a strategic one, and political discretion is extremely limited.

Regarding the Taiwan contingency, three situations are considered in Japan. The first is the situation of important influence. This used to be called a situation of area surrounding Japan. When a situation occurs that could have a significant impact on Japan's peace and security and U.S. forces are deployed, Japan can support U.S. forces from non-combat zones. However, Japan can provide ammunition and fuel, but not weapons.

The second is the situation of existential crisis. This is a situation in which Japan's existence is endangered even if Japan is not directly attacked. To simplify, if the U.S. is attacked, Japan can exercise its limited right of collective self-defense. In other words, Japan could launch a counterattack against the country that attacked the U.S.

The third is the situation of armed attack. This is a situation in which, if Japan is attacked, it may exercise its right of individual self-defense and launch the minimum necessary counterattack against the country that attacked Japan.

These three contingencies are described and explained in the abstract. So, what options does Japan have in the event of a Taiwan contingency? Basically, the conclusion is that Japan will be attacked and the situation will ultimately become a situation of armed attack. It is only a matter of whether it is early or late. Therefore, Japan's defense strategy is to prepare for a Taiwan contingency, which means that Japan should strengthen its ability to defend itself.

Let us consider more specifically. First, there is the case in which China's attack is limited and attacks only Taiwan. In this case, the U.S. forces in Japan would not be attacked and would be unharmed. However, the U.S. would support Taiwan in some way, and Japan would support U.S. forces. Thus, China could attack the US and Japan. Moreover, if Washington decides, the U.S. military could directly intervene militarily at any time. In other words, Japan is likely to be attacked after all.

Second, if U.S. military assets in the region out of territory of Japan are attacked by China, Japan should counterattack because Japan protects U.S. forces. In other words, in this case, Japan would also eventually be attacked by China.

Third, there is the case in which China, fearing intervention from the U.S. and Japan in an attack on Taiwan, preemptively attacks U.S. forces and Self-Defense Forces in Japan on all fronts. In this case, China would attack and paralyze US forces in the region, buying weeks of time, during which time China would attack and attempt to occupy Taiwan. This is the same great gamble as Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. In this case, Japan will be attacked from the very beginning.

In other words, in all cases, Japan must assume that it will be attacked by China. This is precisely what is meant by "a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency." China has the capability to attack Japan, and Japan's Self-Defense Forces are extremely vulnerable to ballistic missile attacks and lack the ability to counterattack. Therefore, what Japan needs to do is to significantly strengthen Japan's defense capability.

On the other hand, Japan has no laws justifying the defense of Taiwan. The possibility of Japan directly defending Taiwan is zero. However, please do not cherry-pick this statement alone. Cherry-picking only this statement of mine is very misleading.

In this case, Japan is busy defending Japan. It cannot afford to physically defend or support Taiwan. Some say that Japan should play the role of Poland in the Russo-Ukrainian war in the event of a Taiwan contingency, which is probably true in terms of accepting refugees and so on. However, Japan is legally, politically, and physically unable to supply arms and ammunition to Taiwan.

So, does Japan have no importance whatsoever in the event of an emergency in Taiwan? No. In fact, Japan's role is extremely important.

In a Taiwan contingency, the four seas of the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Western Pacific would be the battlegrounds. Taiwan and Japan would be the main battlegrounds, with the United States supporting them. And Australia will be a safe rear base. Therefore, it is not important that Japan defend or support Taiwan. Japan can only support or defend the U.S. military. Since Japan will be on the same front line as Taiwan, it is important that the U.S. and Taiwan, as well as Japan and the U.S., create operational plans for their own defense. In particular, Japan is rushing to introduce Tomahawk missiles because it currently lacks the ability to counterattack. Japan is increasing the resiliency of its bases. And Japan is strengthening its stockpile of weapons and ammunition to improve its warfighting capabilities.

If Japan increases its defense capability, China will not be able to attack Taiwan with confidence. This is because China most fears U.S.-Japan military intervention. In other words, the most effective way to deter China is to increase the defense capabilities of Taiwan and Japan, respectively. That is why Japan has decided to double its defense budget in five years. Likewise, it is important that Taiwan do the same, regardless of which political party comes to power.

There is a certain need for security cooperation between Japan and Taiwan. However, defense cooperation between Japan and Taiwan will not strengthen deterrence much. Rather, Japan-Taiwan defense cooperation will strongly provoke China, and there is a risk that China will become more hostile. On the other hand, if Taiwan and Japan each enhance their defense capabilities, China's use of force will become more costly and risky and will be

deterred. I think this is why Japan's Ministry of Defense is reluctant to engage in defense cooperation with Taiwan and active in defending Japan.

In conclusion, if China attacks Taiwan, Japan will not defend Taiwan, nor will Japan support Taiwan. However, Japan can make a significant indirect contribution to deter China's use of force against Taiwan by strengthening Japan's defense capability. Once again, please do not cherry-pick my statements. Japan-Taiwan defense cooperation will not be easily realized. But even if it were, Japan is a strategically crucial actor in deterring China's use of force against Taiwan.