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Japan, Taiwan, the United States, and the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”

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Executive Summary:

Against the backdrop of worsening tensions across the Taiwan Strait, this study 1) examines democratic Taiwan's importance to the United States' and Japan's shared vision for the region's "free and open" future; 2) highlights recent developments in Japan-Taiwan relations; and 3) suggests policy options to bolster U.S.-Japan-Taiwan cooperation in pursuit of a positive regional agenda beyond strictly deterrence. It argues that the trajectory of Japan-Taiwan relations carries major implications for both U.S. regional strategy and Taiwan policy, and therefore warrants significantly greater attention in Washington than it typically receives. U.S.-Japan cooperation, or lack thereof, in this space will be a critical variable affecting both the region's—and Taiwan's—future. This study closes with a discussion of prospects for more extensive Japan-Taiwan cooperation and explores policy options, including ways to enhance U.S.-Japan coordination to facilitate the diversification of Taiwan's economic linkages and to expand functional cooperation with the U.S., Japan, and other democratic partners.

Policy Recommendations:

- Launch parallel, comprehensive inter-agency reviews of Taiwan policy as part of a more general review of regional strategies aimed at championing a positive vision; consult and coordinate with each other informally.
- Prioritize substantive cooperation that enhances Taiwan's security, prosperity, and resilience against external coercion, and which proactively engages Taiwan as a valued partner in efforts to positively shape the region's "free and open" future.
- Support Taiwan's efforts to diversify economic links and expand trilateral and multilateral functional cooperation, including with partners beyond East Asia, through an expanded Global Cooperation and Training Framework and other ad-hoc bilateral/multilateral coalitions.

- Establish/expand security dialogues and cooperation in counter-coercion, collective resilience, non-traditional security, cyber, and information/intelligence-sharing.
- Significantly expand funding to support bilateral/trilateral Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, as well as scholarly/academic/student exchanges—especially among the United States, Japan, and Taiwan.

A widely-recognized characteristic of the People's Republic of China's (PRC; henceforth, "China") foreign policy in recent years is Beijing's increased use of its growing material power and influence to more assertively, at times aggressively, throw its weight around in pursuit of policy goals. One of the most important and potentially destabilizing manifestations of this trend today is China's increasingly coercive posture toward democratic Taiwan since 2016.¹ As Beijing pressures Taiwan through military, economic, diplomatic, and other means, including efforts to shrink its "international space," the importance of Taipei's ties with and support from major democratic partners—the United States and Japan above all—has surged.

Over the past five years, concerns in Tokyo and Washington about cross-Straits tensions have grown more acute. In 2016, a landslide election victory handed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Taiwan's presidency and its first-ever majority in the Legislative Yuan. Ever since, out of apparent suspicions that the DPP's goal is *de jure* independence, Beijing has effectively refused to engage President Tsai Ing-wen's administration constructively, despite the latter's clear pro-status quo orientation. If Beijing's goal was to convince Taiwanese voters to choose different leadership, its hard line appears to have backfired, at least for now: in January 2020, Tsai was reelected by a historically large margin. Today, public opinion polls suggest that the clear majority of the Taiwanese public still prefers maintaining the cross-Straits status quo. However, since 2019 support for unification appears to have reached its lowest level since at least 1994, while support for independence has increased.²

Though these outcomes are a testament to the resilience of Taiwan's democracy and rejection of Beijing's efforts at intimidation, the resulting cross-Straits frictions have significantly raised concerns about the stability of the status quo, which then U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun characterized last year as a "state of hostility."³ As Richard Bush, former chairman and managing director of the American Institute in Taiwan, argued in late 2019, Beijing's strategy toward democratic Taiwan has shifted "from persuasion to coercion"; with its goal "to end the island's separate political existence and incorporate it into the People's Republic of China...and so place limits on Taiwan's sovereignty and democracy."⁴ For many observers on Taiwan and beyond, Beijing's recent crackdown in Hong Kong provides a sobering reminder of the potential stakes.

The United States’ forward-leaning rhetoric and policies in support of Taiwan have been well documented. Less widely appreciated in D.C. policy circles is that Japan-Taiwan relations have also evolved significantly in recent years. Furthermore, in recent months a few Japanese officials have become unusually outspoken about their concerns about cross-Straits dynamics. For example, in a blog post last May, Japan’s state minister for foreign affairs called Taiwan a “security lifeline” [安全保障上、生命線] for Japan and asserted that Japan “cannot allow [its] people living in [a] free society to be overrun by the [Chinese] Communist Party.”⁵ In a December interview, Japan’s state minister for defense identified China and Taiwan as a “red line in Asia,” and called on (then) President-elect Biden to “be strong” in supporting Taiwan in the face of China’s “aggressive stance.”⁶ Most recently, March 2021 witnessed several exceptional statements from Cabinet-level officials directly referencing the Taiwan Strait. In a March 13 speech to an international conference, Japan’s Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo expressed “grave concern” about Beijing’s recent actions to undermine Hong Kong’s autonomy, subtly stated that the situation made him “recall our friends in Taiwan,” noted that “the military balance between China and Taiwan has changed in favor of China,” and called for cross-Straits issues to be “resolved peacefully by direct dialogue.”⁷ Three days later, he joined his foreign ministry counterpart and the U.S. secretaries of state and defense in releasing a U.S.-Japan joint statement calling out China by name, criticizing its recent “behavior,” expressing the allies’ “commit[ment] to opposing coercion and destabilizing behavior toward others;” and “underscor[ing] the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.”⁸

Importantly, such U.S. and Japanese concerns about Taiwan’s future do not unfold in a regional political or strategic vacuum. Indeed, for reasons including and transcending cross-Straits dynamics, recent years have witnessed Tokyo and Washington express deepening concerns about China’s growing power and willingness to use coercion toward its neighbors.⁹ Both governments now openly advocate for a “free and open Indo-Pacific” implicitly (or, in some cases, explicitly) juxtaposed against Beijing’s putative regional vision. To quote the recent U.S.-Japan-Australia-India “Quad Leaders” statement, the goal is a region that is “free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.”¹⁰

Against the backdrop of manifold challenges to regional peace and stability, liberal democracy, and the interests of the U.S. and its allies and partners, this study explores prospects for greater U.S.-Japan cooperation with, and in support of, democratic Taiwan. After briefly discussing the U.S.-Japan partnership and its priorities beyond military deterrence, it provides a brief overview of the importance of Taiwan to the allies' shared vision of a "free and open" order, as well as Beijing's recent challenges to it. In the interest of informing the largely U.S.-centric discourse in Washington on Taiwan, the next section then briefly surveys the recent deepening of Japan-Taiwan ties. The final sections assess prospects for enhanced bilateral/trilateral coordination and suggest some options for policymakers in Tokyo and Washington to consider.

The U.S.-Japan Partnership: Bolstering a Positive Agenda Beyond Strictly Deterrence

Over the past several years, prominent critics argue that the efficacy of U.S. Asia strategy has suffered from by an over-emphasis on military and deterrence-oriented tools in lieu of more balanced employment of what former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates calls "the full range of its power," including nonmilitary tools.¹¹ Given the complexity of contemporary realities in Asia, where many countries count China as their top trading partner, a nuanced, *positive* and comprehensive approach that also maximally resources and employs U.S. diplomatic, economic, and other forms of leadership to support the region's peaceful and prosperous future is essential. After all, recent events make clear that the challenges to the region's "free and open" future transcend strictly military threats. Cases-in-point related to China include an accelerating tech competition, economic security concerns, disinformation, and Beijing's employment of trade-restrictive measures to either signal displeasure or openly coerce its neighbors.¹² All of the above have already affected the United States and/or its regional allies and partners.

Failure to effectively adapt U.S. strategy to the complex reality of today's diverse and interdependent region risks undermining the very alliances and partnerships that are the United States' single greatest comparative advantage in any strategic competition or effort to shape the region's future. In

short, robust military deterrence and security cooperation are necessary, but far from sufficient, conditions for achieving the United States and Japan’s longer-term vision and strategic goals in Asia.

The complexity of regional challenges today creates considerable opportunities beyond the security domain for the United States and Japan, bilaterally and in coordination with others, to support Taiwan in peacetime, bolster its resilience against coercion, and expand its effective international space. Fortunately, the U.S.-Japan partnership is well-suited for peacetime cooperation in support of a *positive* and comprehensive bilateral agenda beyond deterrence.

Despite its early Cold War/containment origins, even the U.S.-Japan security alliance’s objectives have always been more ambitious than a lowest-common denominator cold and negative peace based exclusively on deterring aggression. In 1960, Tokyo and Washington formed their mutual security partnership based explicitly on “uphold[ing] ‘the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law,’ ‘closer economic cooperation,’ and ‘a common concern in the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.’”¹³ The allies called for protecting “international peace and security and justice” and the peaceful settlement of international disputes; “encouraging economic collaboration”; and “contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.”¹⁴ Today, these basic commitments are reflected in the allies’ ever-tightening security partnership from peacetime to gray zone to armed attack; cooperation in a variety of spheres, from trade and infrastructure to climate; and their repeated calls across multiple administrations to “enhance our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region,” and repeated definition of the U.S.-Japan alliance as “a cornerstone for peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world.”¹⁵

Taiwan’s Importance to a “Free and Open” Vision for the Region’s Future

In 2021, a strong, moderate, actively engaged, and democratic Taiwan is a necessary condition of, and a crucial partner for, achieving the allies’ shared vision of a “free and open” region. Taiwan has a unique status as a bastion

of liberalism situated literally and figuratively on the front lines of deepening U.S.-China strategic competition; as an open economy and high-tech leader; as a robust, if unofficial, partner in various endeavors promoted by both Washington and Tokyo; and as the singular example of an advanced democracy in the (primarily) Chinese-speaking world. Accordingly, both the United States and Japan have recognized the importance of democratic Taiwan and its 24 million people to the region's future, and its immense symbolic significance across the Strait, and beyond. As the U.S. AIT Director stated recently, "Taiwan belongs to the family of democracies and is an essential part of the free and open Indo-Pacific."¹⁶ Japanese leaders similarly identify Taiwan as "an extremely crucial partner and an important friend, with which [Japan] shares fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights, and the rule of law."¹⁷ The reasons for Taiwan's importance to the allies and their stated vision for the region's future are manifold, *beyond* the obvious security considerations:

Whether one accepts the most recent (Trump-era) U.S. National Security strategy's portrayal of "a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order,"¹⁸ Taiwan clearly stands out as a regional beacon of freedom and openness through its robust democracy, liberal economy, good governance, civil society, and human rights. Its rapid transformation from a single-party authoritarian state under martial law as recently as the 1980s into one of the world's most liberal democracies is striking, and instructive.¹⁹

Over the past year-plus, Taiwan's extraordinarily effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic has powerfully illustrated its political and social stability, effective governance, economic vibrancy, and ability to contribute internationally. With a *cumulative* total of only ~940 confirmed cases and nine deaths (as of February 22, 2021) and its status as Asia's top-performing economy in 2020 (GDP +3.1%),²⁰ the success of democratic Taiwan's response provides a powerful counter to Beijing's propaganda about the supposed inherent superiority of China's authoritarian political system. Taiwan's effective countermeasures against disinformation, both in terms of its COVID-19 response and during its 2020 election provide another example of the lessons it can share with the world.²¹ Yet Taiwan does not only contribute passively by its example. As leading experts on authoritarian politics recently argued, Taipei's active and constructive efforts "preserving and defending democracy in Hong

Kong and around the world...establishes Taiwan as the new front line in a broader struggle for democracy and human rights in Asia, and worldwide.”²²

In terms of its economy, Taiwan ranks among the world’s most free and open—ranking higher, in fact, than major U.S. democratic allies South Korea, Germany, and Japan.²³ Its economy is also closely tied to the United States’ and Japan’s: Taiwan’s second- and third-largest trading partners, respectively.²⁴ (Despite its relatively small population, Taiwan is Japan’s fourth-largest trading partner,²⁵ as well as a top-10 trading partner of the United States).²⁶

In terms of its approach to potentially incendiary territorial and sovereignty disputes—a critical variable in regional stability today—Taiwan again serves as an important exemplar. Despite officially holding sovereignty claims in the South and East China Seas similar to those asserted by the PRC, Taiwan’s approach and relative self-restraint evince a striking contrast in approach. Under President Ma Ying-jeou’s East China Sea Peace Initiative, for example, Taiwan adopted a firm but constructive position: “while sovereignty is indivisible, resources can be shared.” Japan and Taiwan peacefully negotiated a landmark fisheries agreement to reduce tensions in 2013, without either compromising on its sovereignty claim.²⁷

Finally, Taiwan’s geostrategic position is arguably without parallel concerning its importance for the United States and Japan, and inherent significance for any regional strategy. Taiwan straddles both Northeast and Southeast Asia and the South and East China Seas, is a central node in the “first island chain,” and is only ~70 miles from Japan’s westernmost islands (and just 350 miles from major Japan Self-defense Force and U.S. military bases in Okinawa).

Beijing’s Post-2016 “Squeeze” on Democratic Taiwan

In recent years, a peaceful resolution of cross-Strait frictions has become increasingly difficult to imagine. Since President Tsai’s 2016 election, Beijing’s efforts to coerce Taipei and actively undermine Taiwan’s *de facto* autonomy have expanded significantly. In the words of Ryan Hass, former U.S. National Security Council director for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia, Beijing has “unrelentingly squeezed Taiwan.”²⁸ Its diplomatic, political, economic, and military pressure on Taipei includes freezing official cross-Strait communication, reducing tourist outflows, intensifying provocative military operations,²⁹ peeling away several of

Taiwan's remaining diplomatic allies, disinformation and other forms of "information warfare,"³⁰ and even excluding Taiwan from participating as an observer in the WHO's World Health Assembly during a global pandemic.

Beijing's severe crackdown in Hong Kong on "national security" grounds (and the resulting collapse of the "One Country, Two Systems" model Xi Jinping in 2019 identified as Beijing's desired outcome vis-à-vis Taiwan)³¹ has heightened these concerns. Last summer, the Trump Administration's top diplomat for East Asia stated that Beijing's June 2020 Hong Kong national security law meant the U.S. government "no longer ha[s] the luxury of assuming that Beijing will live up to its commitment to peacefully resolve its differences with Taipei [...Accordingly, the United States] will continue to help Taipei resist the Chinese Communist Party's campaign to pressure, intimidate and marginalize Taiwan."³² Two months earlier, President Tsai tweeted that "China's disregard for the will of Hong Kong's people proves that 'one country, two systems' is not viable (不可行)."³³ In his March 2021 speech, Japan's defense minister expressed "grave concern" over Beijing's decision earlier that month to change Hong Kong's electoral system, noting that it will "further undermine confidence in the Hong Kong Basic Law and the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework...and represents a major setback for the high degree of autonomy in Hong Kong."³⁴

These recent developments across the Strait and in Hong Kong contribute to a sobering trajectory for a region already defined the past several years by a post-1970s nadir in U.S.-China relations, and in which both Tokyo and Washington already see Beijing as their primary long-term geopolitical and geoeconomic challenge.

In this context, Taiwanese officials' champion Taiwan's status as a liberal, democratic partner and seek out robust international partnerships to counter Beijing's efforts to isolate it.³⁵ The U.S. government's response has received significant attention, including arms sales, legislation (e.g., the *Taiwan Travel Act* (2018), *Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act* (2020), the *Taiwan Assurance Act* (2020), and Taiwan-related measures in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act), and exploration of a bilateral free trade agreement with Taiwan. Yet Japan's embrace of "like-minded" partners—especially democratic U.S. partners—under its own (2013) National Security Strategy and "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" concept

is also significant in this context. To inform U.S. policy debates, the next section briefly summarizes the recent expansion of cooperation and exchange between Japan and Taiwan.

Japan-Taiwan Relations in the 21st Century: Toward a Deepening Partnership

For historical, geographical, political, economic, and manifold other reasons, Japan-Taiwan relations have long been very important for Taiwan—both directly and indirectly. Taiwan’s leaders rank Japan alongside the United States as Taipei’s most important international partner.³⁶ Taiwan’s cross-strait engagement relies heavily on the U.S.-Japan alliance as a stabilizing force and is itself a major variable in trilateral relations among Beijing, Washington, and Tokyo. Meanwhile, Beijing also recognizes Japan’s importance, both for cross-strait relations and because, as one of Japan’s leading experts on Taiwan notes, China’s leaders perceive “the Taiwan issue...as the most uncertain and the most serious problem facing China-Japan-U.S. relations.”³⁷ Relative to their central importance for U.S. policy objectives and shared status as “front-line” democratic U.S. partners, the deep and complex ties between Japan and Taiwan attract remarkably little direct attention or analysis from the U.S. policy community.³⁸ Yet the vicissitudes of Japan-Taiwan relations are hugely consequential for U.S. interests in East Asia and beyond.

Despite switching diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1972, Tokyo has long enjoyed extensive, if “unofficial,” ties with Taiwan. In recent years, relations have deepened in practically significant ways. The past decade, in particular, has witnessed a clear and official acknowledgment by Japan’s government of democratic Taiwan’s importance to Japan as a like-minded “partner” (not just an “economy”), an expansion of meaningful cooperation and exchanges, and a blossoming of people-to-people ties.

21st Century Developments

Though Japan-Taiwan relations are not without their frictions, one remarkable theme over the past two decades is that interest in deepening cooperation in both Taipei and Tokyo has been a relative constant and generally transcended

party politics—at least across administrations. The most salient case-in-point is developments during the administration of former KMT chairman and President Ma Ying-jeou (2008–2016). Though many expected the KMT’s return to power to cause Japan–Taiwan relations to worsen, the significant relaxation of tensions across the Strait under Ma ended up facilitating an unprecedented expansion of practical cooperation between Tokyo and Taipei, including numerous bilateral agreements, exchange of memoranda of understanding between the two sides’ de facto embassies, and a historic 2013 agreement on fisheries aimed at deescalating tensions over the Senkaku (Diaoyu in Chinese) Islands, which Japan administers but over which Taiwan also claims sovereignty in the name of the ROC.³⁹

The Past Decade: A Deepening Partnership

As noted above, in its most recent (2020) *Diplomatic Bluebook* Japan’s government identifies Taiwan as “an extremely crucial partner and an important friend, with which [Japan] shares fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights, and the rule of law, and enjoys close economic relations and people-to-people exchanges.”⁴⁰ Viewed in isolation, such language may seem insignificant; perhaps even boilerplate. But the contrast with the same passage eight years earlier, which identified Taiwan merely as an “important region with which Japan has close economic relations,” illustrates just how much Japan’s perspective on Taiwan has evolved in recent years.⁴¹

For example, the past decade has witnessed an expansion of significant, if nominally “unofficial,” political contacts. Most remarkably, between 2010 and 2016, four former LDP prime ministers and three former DPJ ministers visited Taiwan.⁴² In 2013, Japan’s then Chief Cabinet Secretary (now prime minister) Suga Yoshihide reportedly hosted the chairman of Taiwan’s Association of East Asian Relations (now the Taiwan–Japan Relations Association) at the prime minister’s office—the first such contact since 1972.⁴³ Two years later, then Prime Minister Abe Shinzō reportedly was at the same Tokyo hotel as—and allegedly met with—Taiwan’s former President Lee Teng-hui and DPP chairperson (and future president) Tsai Ing-wen during their respective visits to Japan.⁴⁴ After Tsai’s election, during 2017 Japan sent the highest-level government representative to visit Taiwan officially since 1972;⁴⁵ launched

annual maritime cooperation dialogues with Taiwan;⁴⁶ and added characters representing “Japan” and “Taiwan” into the name of Japan’s de facto embassy in Taipei.⁴⁷ Last year, former Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō led a supra-partisan delegation of Dietmembers to pay its respects following the death of former Taiwanese President Lee. The trip reportedly included a meeting between Mori and Tsai at the presidential office.⁴⁸

Beyond deepening bilateral links, Japan’s government has also expanded substantial cooperation in support of Taiwan in partnership with the United States—a country with a unique status as both Taiwan’s and Japan’s most important political partner and de facto security guarantor.⁴⁹ Today, as the Tsai administration seeks to parry Beijing’s efforts to “shrink” Taiwan’s international space by deepening international cooperation and reducing its economic dependence on the PRC, Japan’s government has joined the United States in repeatedly calling for Taiwan to gain observer status at the World Health Assembly, expressed its support for Taiwan joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and, in 2019, formally joined the theretofore bilateral U.S.-Taiwan Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF; est. 2015). The State Department defines GCTF as “a platform for expanding U.S.-Taiwan cooperation on global and regional issues such as public health, economic development, energy, women’s rights, and disaster relief.”⁵⁰ Importantly, the GCTF was deliberately designed to provide a means for Taiwan—which is prevented by Beijing from participating in many international organizations—to “demonstrate and share Taiwan’s strength and expertise with the rest of the world.”⁵¹

In short, the past decade has witnessed incremental but important efforts to deepen practically significant—if nominally unofficial—ties, exchanges, and cooperation between Japan and Taiwan. Supplementing and providing fertile soil for continued expansion are extensive economic and extraordinarily friendly people-to-people ties. Taiwan is Japan’s fourth-largest trading partner; while Japan is Taiwan’s third-largest.⁵² Japan regularly polls as—far and away—the most popular foreign country in Taiwan, and vice versa.⁵³ Meanwhile, recent years have witnessed a surge in cross-border tourism to an all-time high (in 2019; before COVID-19).⁵⁴ Despite its relatively small population, more tourists visit Japan from Taiwan (4.9 million) than anywhere else except the PRC and Korea.⁵⁵

Prospects for Enhanced Japan-Taiwan Cooperation

The U.S., Japan, and Taiwan are natural partners. All three parties share a commitment to democratic values, express deepening concerns about authoritarian China's domestic and foreign policy trajectory, generally champion a "rules-based" and liberal regional order, and oppose any attempts to subjugate Taiwan through coercive or violent means. As fellow democracies, close treaty allies, and the first- and third-largest economies in the world, the U.S. and Japan have an especially critical role to play in not only deterring cross-Straits conflict but also ensuring that Taiwan is able to benefit from, and actively contribute to, a positive agenda for the region's peaceful and prosperous future.

The United States, Japan, and Taiwan entered 2021 with momentum to further deepen cooperation, and no shortage of challenges to demand it—beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic and associated fallout. 2021 brings a new U.S. administration eager to reassert U.S. leadership and democratic values, and (potentially) the first full year with Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide at the helm of Japan's government. At a major trilateral security forum held in Taipei last December, President Tsai announced that 2021 would be a year of "Japan-Taiwan Friendship" and that she "look[s] forward to an even closer partnership with Japan and our efforts to address traditional and non-traditional threats."⁵⁶ With the details of U.S. strategy under President Biden a work-in-progress but likely to focus on "build[ing] a united front of U.S. allies and partners to confront China's abusive behaviors and human rights violations"⁵⁷ and multilateral approaches to tackling various other challenges, it is a particularly opportune moment to consider the prospects for enhanced Japan-Taiwan and U.S.-Japan-Taiwan cooperation. Last October, then candidate Biden called for "deepening our ties with Taiwan, a leading democracy, major economy, technology powerhouse—and a shining example of how an open society can effectively contain COVID-19."⁵⁸

As discussed above, Japan-Taiwan relations are robust, if unofficial, and extensive—permeating politics, economics, and people-to-people ties. A solid foundation exists for expanding cooperation in pursuit of a positive agenda for the region, both bilaterally and in partnership with the United States. Opportunities abound. But challenges must also be acknowledged.

Opportunities

Taiwan has expressed interest in joining the Japan-led, 11-nation CPTPP, and the Suga administration—which holds the CPTPP’s rotating chair in 2021—has expressed its support.⁵⁹ (In contrast, Tokyo has expressed skepticism that China—which also recently expressed interest in joining—could meet CPTPP’s high standards).⁶⁰ Taiwan joining CPTPP would be both powerfully symbolic and practically important. Roughly one-fourth of Taiwan’s total trade is with current CPTPP members, and if Taiwan were a member its economy would be the fifth-largest. If the United States were to also (re-)join, CPTPP’s importance to Taiwan (and Japan) would increase significantly.

As it concerns regional economic strategies beyond trade, there is clear complementarity between Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision and Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy (新南向政策; NSBP)—a comprehensive initiative launched by President Tsai in 2016 to diversify and deepen Taiwan’s links across the region through economic and trade cooperation, people-to-people exchanges, resource sharing, and regional integration.⁶¹ Similar to FOIP, NSBP also has a strategic motivation. For example, it is designed to reduce Taiwan’s asymmetric dependence on China’s economy.

There are also opportunities to further deepen (unofficial) Japan-Taiwan political exchange. Japan’s powerful and longest-ever serving former prime minister Abe Shinzō is reportedly planning to visit Taiwan this year.⁶² In February, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) Foreign Affairs Division launched a new Taiwan Policy Project Team (台湾政策検討プロジェクトチーム), which its director stated was a direct response to both the Biden administration’s call to work with allies to support Taiwan and China’s recent provocative military activities near Taiwan. He also expressed a desire to launch a “legislator-level 2+2” (議員レベルの2+2) dialogue between LDP foreign and defense committee members and their Taiwanese counterparts.⁶³ The Project Team is reportedly planning to submit recommendations for strengthening Japan’s relations with Taiwan to the Suga government by April.⁶⁴

Within some LDP and extra-governmental circles in Japan there are intermittent calls for a “Japan Taiwan Relations Act” (日本版台湾関係法; JTRA); a notional proposal for Japan to create a rough analogue to the 1979 U.S. Taiwan Relations Act.⁶⁵ The basic idea has been around for decades, and has some prominent supporters in both Taipei and Tokyo. For example, the

DPP explicitly called for a JTRA during the Chen administration (2000–2008).⁶⁶ Over the past decade, the idea has received support from key Japanese politicians, including current Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo in 2014 (six years before, it should be stressed, he took his current Cabinet post), and conservative commentators in Japan.⁶⁷ Also in 2014, then DPP lawmaker (now Taiwan’s representative in the United States) Hsiao Bi-khim called for a bilateral security dialogue to be part of a Japanese TRA aimed at deepening security ties.⁶⁸

Challenges

Though Japan-Taiwan relations today demonstrate remarkable dynamism, practical cooperation is more extensive than ever before, and opportunities to further expand cooperation abound, important constraints, especially in the security domain, must also be acknowledged. Constraints include, but are not limited to, the most obvious: concerns in Tokyo about how Beijing—Japan’s close neighbor and top trading partner—may respond.

As indicated above, Japan’s leaders clearly see national security and Taiwan as inextricably linked. The two sides have also started regular maritime dialogues and engage in nontraditional security cooperation through the GCTF. In early 2019, President Tsai reportedly called for more security cooperation between Taipei and Tokyo.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Japan and Taiwan do not engage in military cooperation or exercises. Though the idea of a “JTRA” is sometimes discussed within the ruling LDP and beyond, media and public discourse on this topic often creates more heat than light. Japan’s Diet actually passing legislation similar to the U.S. Taiwan Relations Act, in particular its famous security-focused Section 2, anytime soon seems unlikely.⁷⁰

As it concerns U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation on Taiwan specifically, in 2005 the allies identified “encourage[ing] the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue” as a “common strategic objective.”⁷¹ To date, however, the direct applicability of the alliance to, and Japan’s potential role in, a cross-Strait contingency is left rather ambiguous in the public record. Though it has long been implied (e.g., in the “Far East” clause of the 1960 U.S.-Japan security treaty, or in the famous 1997 reference to “situations in areas surrounding Japan”), explicit references to “Taiwan” in alliance

statements/documents are extremely rare. Nevertheless, alliance managers almost certainly factor in a possible cross-Strait contingency-type scenario into planning—something that recent reforms in Japan over the past decade have facilitated.⁷² Soon after the release of the March 2021 U.S.-Japan joint statement—which, as noted above, “underscored the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait”—Japanese government sources reportedly confirmed that the allies would cooperate in the event of a cross-Strait military contingency.⁷³ Exactly how, and under what circumstances, remains unstated. This may not be due entirely to concerns about Beijing’s response. As U.S. Taiwan policy since 1979 attests, ambiguity can also have stabilizing effects.

Finally, Japan-Taiwan relations do not exist in a domestic political vacuum. Within Japan, conservative political leaders seeking more forward-leaning policies vis-à-vis Taiwan have often been constrained by various factors within and outside the LDP-Komeitō ruling coalition, particularly from colleagues concerned about Beijing’s reaction. Also affecting prospects for cooperation are Taiwan’s ban on food imports from five prefectures near Japan’s 2011 nuclear disaster; frictions over sovereignty claims and fishing rights related to the Senkaku (Diaoyutai) Islands and Okinotorishima; and historical issues. All have festered intermittently in recent years—especially when KMT influence is high. For example, high hopes within Japan that the Tsai administration would end the ban on food imports—which Taiwan’s own FDA reportedly states carry “negligible” risk—have so far been dashed, owing in significant part to a popular 2018 public referendum pushed by the KMT. The consequences are not only symbolic. The Japanese Chamber of Commerce recently argued that economic agreements with Japan (including a bilateral FTA or CPTPP entry) are likely to stall unless Taiwan lifts the ban. Some observers hope that the Tsai administration’s recent executive action on U.S. pork imports may augur a breakthrough.⁷⁴

Despite the aforementioned constraints, the deepening of Japan-Taiwan relations over the past decade—together with the salient example of the transformation of U.S.-Taiwan relations since the mid-1990s—makes clear that the cumulative effect of gradual, evolutionary change can be significant. Expanded exchanges, direct engagement, and deepened economic and functional cooperation are already underway. There are significant prospects for additional forward movement in the months and years ahead.

Policy Options

In recent years, and without modifying its ambiguous 1972 official position on “One China,” Japan has deepened its practical cooperation and exchanges with Taiwan, both independently and in concert with the United States. Given the region’s contemporary geopolitical vicissitudes, worsening cross-Strait frictions, Japan’s status as a key U.S. treaty ally, and Taiwan’s unique status as a close—if unofficial—democratic partner of both countries, the United States and Japan should further enhance coordination aimed at supporting Taiwan’s democracy and international space comprehensively, and in ways beyond strictly deterrence.

Going forward, the United States and Japan’s goals should be three-fold: 1) to proactively engage Taiwan as a valuable *partner* in efforts to positively shape a future for the region that is, to paraphrase the 2021 Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement, free, open, inclusive, and unconstrained by coercion;⁷⁵ 2) to bolster Taiwan’s resilience against economic, diplomatic, and other forms of pressure from Beijing intended to coerce Taipei and/or to shrink its effective autonomy; and 3) to raise reputational and other costs of any effort to unilaterally change the cross-Strait status quo. The U.S. and Japan should pursue these goals bilaterally, in partnership with Taiwan, and together with coalitions of other like-minded democracies, within East Asia and beyond.

A maximally effective approach would place Taiwan policy in the context of a more proactive and comprehensive *regional strategy* aimed not only at deterring aggression but also demonstrating diplomatic, economic, and moral leadership in support of a positive vision for the region’s future. A key priority is working bilaterally and assembling multilateral coalitions to, inter alia, relieve pressure on any targets of PRC coercion—including Taiwan. More constructive engagement of leading democracies within and beyond the region (e.g., the European Union; the UK), championing high quality free trade agreements to raise standards and diversify Taiwan’s economic links, expanding functional cooperation and partnerships, and full-throated promotion of democratic norms and human rights can also help reduce Taiwan’s vulnerability. As Green, Glaser, and Bush argued earlier this year, “Taiwan’s liberal democracy can only survive in an ecosystem of rules and norms.”⁷⁶ U.S. alliances, partnerships, and active championing of liberal values are the greatest comparative advantages Washington has, and are essential to realizing the

vision articulated in the March 2021 inaugural Quad Leaders’ and U.S.-Japan joint statements referenced above.

Specific to Taiwan, it is crucially important for U.S. leaders to differentiate between “symbolic gestures” and “practical, substantive actions...that would sustainably improve Taiwan’s security and prosperity.”⁷⁷ Both can matter for real-world outcomes, but the latter is much more likely to have lasting effects. The United States and Japanese governments should consider the following policy options:

- **Launch parallel, comprehensive inter-agency reviews of Taiwan policy as part of a more general review of regional strategies aimed at championing a positive vision; consult and coordinate with each other informally.**
 - » Both countries are already widely expected to release new national security strategies within a year. For Japan, this would mark the first revision since the Abe administration promulgated Japan’s first-ever national security strategy in 2013.
 - » Comprehensive inter-agency reviews of Taiwan policy should run in parallel, and transcend a strict focus on military or defense affairs by also emphasizing economics, finance, connectivity, intelligence, disinformation, global health, climate, and other functional issues.
 - » Tokyo and Washington should consider setting up an informal bilateral Taiwan working group to consult and coordinate while these reviews are underway.
- **Prioritize substantive cooperation that enhances Taiwan’s security, prosperity, and resilience against external coercion, and which proactively engages Taiwan as a valued partner in efforts to positively shape the region’s “free and open” future.**
 - » As a basic modus operandi, the allies should avoid viewing Taiwan policy through the prism, or merely as an offshoot, of China policy. In rhetoric and action, as they pursue a positive agenda beyond deterrence they should engage Taiwan as a valued partner in its own right.

- » Prioritize functional cooperation and efforts to help Taiwan diversify its political, economic, and (unofficial) diplomatic partnerships across the region and beyond (especially Australia, Canada, India, and the EU) as ends in themselves, to reduce China's economic leverage, and to increase the reputational and material costs for Beijing of any brazenly coercive actions against Taiwan or attempts to unilaterally change the cross-Straits status quo.
 - » Emphasize policy measures that bolster U.S.-Japan cooperation with Taiwan on shared regional strategic objectives through the GCTF and other minilateral and multilateral partnerships.
- **Support Taiwan's efforts to diversify economic links and expand trilateral and multilateral functional cooperation, including with partners beyond East Asia, through an expanded Global Cooperation and Training Framework and other ad-hoc bilateral/multilateral coalitions.**
- » The post-2000 surge of Taiwan's trade and tourism exchanges with Mainland China has had immense positive benefits, but diversification of economic links with third parties can help bolster Taiwan's resilience against any attempted coercion.
 - » The U.S. government must come off the sidelines and join Japan as a proactive champion of regional economic integration and high-quality free trade. Tokyo and Washington should use their massive economies (the world's first- and third-largest) and markets to facilitate the expansion of Taiwan's economic and other linkages with them and the wider region.
 - » This larger effort should include robust support for, and coordination with, Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, pushing forward long-stalled bilateral FTAs/EPAs, actively supporting Taiwan's involvement in the (now) Japan-led CPTPP, and supply chain diversification.
 - » A U.S.-Taiwan and/or Japan-Taiwan bilateral trade agreement would facilitate two-way trade and investment, help Taiwan reduce asymmetric dependence on China, and give other economies (e.g., Australia, the EU, and the UK) political cover to pursue similar agreements with Taiwan.

- » Regarding CPTPP, Japan’s 2021 chairmanship provides a clear opportunity to encourage other CPTPP members to constructively engage with Taiwan. To reduce political resistance in Japan, the Tsai administration could use executive action to lift the ban on food imports from areas affected by the 2011 triple disaster.
 - » If and when the United States seeks to (re-)join CPTPP—as it should—Washington should use its leverage to support Taiwan’s entry. As a recent Congressional Research Service report argues, “U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017 hurt Taiwan’s ability to join the TPP, an amended agreement, TPP-11, as well as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that were signed without the United States and Taiwan.”⁷⁸
 - » Expand trilateral cooperation in supporting public and private financing of infrastructure and energy projects across the Indo-Pacific, in part by deepening coordination between and synergies with existing U.S.-Taiwan and U.S.-Japan bilateral/multilateral initiatives.
 - » Establish/expand trilateral/multilateral working groups within the GCTF to exchange best practices concerning economic security, investment screening, 5G, export controls, cyber security, and supply chain resilience.
 - » Expand the formal membership and functional reach of the GCTF, to include close U.S. allies and partners, and to facilitate Taiwan’s engagement with third parties on various issues of shared concern, ranging from global health and fisheries management to countering disinformation and supply chain resilience.
 - » Pursue expanded cooperation with European partners, many of whom have become increasingly concerned about Beijing’s behavior and, in at least a few cases, the potential implications for Taiwan’s autonomy and democracy, specifically.⁷⁹ Beyond being ends in themselves, enhanced ties with other democratic and economic partners will consolidate a massive regional and global network of stakeholders in Taiwan’s peaceful and democratic future.
- **Establish/expand security dialogues and cooperation in counter-coercion, collective resilience, non-traditional security, cyber, and**

information/intelligence-sharing.

- » In terms of indirect security cooperation, the allies should prioritize shaping the regional context and incentive structure in which cross-Strait ties play out by continuing the allies' focus on "networking" with Indo-Pacific partners "sharing strategic interests" and "common values."⁸⁰
 - » Deepen U.S.-Japan bilateral and minilateral (especially with Australia) planning, exercises, and security cooperation relevant to a possible cross-Strait contingency, including in the gray zone. Whether it is publicly referred to as such is less important than actually doing it.
 - » Include and normalize explicit references to Taiwan and its importance in U.S.-Japan "2+2" and other joint statements bilaterally and with other partners. The March 2021 U.S.-Japan statement was a first step; but the 2020 (U.S.-Australia) AUSMIN joint statement's 119-word paragraph about Taiwan provides a better example: It emphasizes Taiwan's "important role in the Indo-Pacific region"; Washington and Canberra's "intent to maintain strong unofficial ties with Taiwan and to support Taiwan's membership in international organizations" (or as an observer where statehood is a condition); "that recent events only strengthened the [allies'] resolve to support Taiwan;" and "that any resolution of cross-Strait differences" should take place free of threats or coercion.⁸¹
 - » Gradually expand trilateral and multilateral dialogues; e.g., to facilitate discussions about functional security cooperation in nontraditional security, intelligence, and cyber
- **Significantly expand funding to support bilateral/trilateral Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, as well as scholarly/academic/student exchanges—especially among the United States, Japan, and Taiwan.**
- » Actively organize and/or provide financial support for more trilateral Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, research projects, academic consortia, and exchanges to share knowledge and deepen professional networks among United States, Japanese, and Taiwanese policy

practitioners, legislators/staff, and scholars—especially among those with diverse expertise on and interest in cross-Strait dynamics, Chinese foreign policy, U.S.-Japan-Taiwan relations, U.S. regional alliances, and the Quad.

- » Encourage U.S. and Japanese universities to establish more bilateral/trilateral student and researcher exchange programs with Taiwanese counterparts, and provide financial support for their efforts.

Conclusion

Since President Tsai Ing-wen’s 2016 election, Beijing has significantly increased military, economic, diplomatic, and other forms of coercive pressure on democratic Taiwan, including efforts to “shrink” its international space—even freezing it out of the World Health Assembly during a global pandemic. Coupled with a Taiwanese public today that favors the status quo and overwhelmingly rejects unification with the PRC on Beijing’s terms, the risks of a reduction in Taiwan’s effective autonomy and a cross-Strait crisis have both grown.

Though most of the focus in Washington has been on U.S. policy, Japan-Taiwan relations are also a very important variable with significant implications for both Taiwan’s and the region’s future. Yet relative to their central importance for U.S. strategy and shared status as “frontline” democratic U.S. partners, extensive, if “unofficial,” relations between Japan and Taiwan attract remarkably little direct attention from the U.S. policy community. This is unfortunate.

Japan is Taiwan’s second most important international partner after the United States. Though relations remain “unofficial,” as they have been since 1972, recent years have witnessed a significant expansion of Japan-Taiwan exchanges and deepening of practical cooperation, both bilaterally and in concert with Washington. This solid foundation of extensive ties, shared democratic values, deep economic links, and robust people-to-people exchange provide a solid foundation and new opportunities for expanded cooperation bilaterally and in partnership with the United States and its other regional (e.g., Australia; India) and extra-regional (e.g., the UK, the EU) partners. Their goals should be three-fold: 1) to proactively engage Taiwan as a valuable

partner in efforts to positively shape the region's "free and open" future; 2) to bolster Taiwan's resilience against economic, diplomatic, and other forms of pressure from Beijing intended to coerce Taipei and/or to shrink its effective autonomy; and 3) to raise reputational and other costs of any effort to unilaterally change the cross-Straits status quo.

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