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The U.S.-Japan Alliance in the World

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Executive Summary

Main Argument

The current security environment in the Indo-Pacific region pressures the U.S. and Japan policymakers to strengthen the alliance beyond its military origins. We recognize the threat that Russia and North Korea continue to pose to the security landscape, but we focus primarily on China as the region's most assertive actor. Previous attempts at engaging China have not stopped its expansionist and coercive tendencies. As the region's most assertive actor, China works to amplify its domination in the region by bolstering its military capabilities, empowering its economic and technological investments, and leveraging its coalitional frameworks. As such, augmenting efforts in these three spheres will be invaluable for the United States and Japan in maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Policy Recommendations

- **Develop** Japan's military capabilities by supporting equipment and information sharing.
- **Expand** economic networks by opening the semiconductor market for cooperation while internally investing in semiconductor R&D and workforce development.
- **Leverage** existing international coalitions to secure the international rule of law through information sharing and military exercises.

Abbreviations

ACM	Alliance Coordination Mechanism
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMD	Advanced Micro Devices Incorporated
ASDF	Air Self-Defense Forces (Japan)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defense
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEC	Cooperative Engagement Capabilities
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
C2	Command-and-Control
DOD	Department of Defense (United States)
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (North Korea) 
EEZ	Economic Established Zone
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GSDF	Ground Self-Defense Forces (Japan)
GDI	Global Development Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSI	Global Security Initiative

GVC	Global Value Chain
G7	Group of Seven
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity
ISEAS	Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
ISR	Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance
JFY	Japan Fiscal Year
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Forces
MA-tek	Materials Analysis Technology
MDB	Multilateral Development Banks
MSDF	Maritime Self-Defense Forces (Japan)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPA	National Policy Agency
NSS	National Security Secretariat
PJHQ	Permanent Joint Headquarters
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Forces
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PSIA	Public Security Intelligence Agency
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROK	Republic of Korea
R&D	Research and Development

SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
The Quad	The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited
U.K.	United Kingdom
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USFJ	United States Forces Japan
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
UPWARDS	University Partnership for Workforce Advancement and Research & Development in Semiconductors

Introduction

The primary challenge for U.S.-Japan decision-makers today is maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region while acknowledging the complex geopolitical dynamics of the region. While the partnership is currently at a landmark moment for its cultivation and development, it also faces its most daunting difficulties thus far. Both countries recognize that deepening the alliance's internal capabilities, improving technological and economic cooperation, and leveraging international coalitions are critical avenues to pursue in the interest of maintaining stability. However, they also want to temper such approaches so as to not escalate tensions or incite conflict in the region.

The relationship between the United States and Japan has undergone significant transformations since the signing of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1951. Even after the revised treaty in 1960, there was no expectation for Japan to come to the defense of the U.S. in the case of a regional contingency (Krauss 2021, 2). However, the post-Cold War era brought upon circumstances that forced the U.S. and Japan to reconsider the dynamic of their relationship. After the first Gulf War in 1990, Japan was internationally criticized for its “checkbook diplomacy”, indicating that financial support in wartime was not enough, even if the mobilization of Japan's forces defied its constitution (Krauss, 8). As the U.S. conducted war in the Middle East after 9/11, Japan began mobilizing its Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) for the first time (Krauss, 3-4).

The international landscape has only become more complex since 2001. With Russia's invasion into Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated that states are willing to take unilateral actions to change the status quo in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2022, North Korea launched a new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), signifying that tensions in this region are only

increasing (Kim 2023). This is all compounded by the region's most assertive actor, China, which has continued to demonstrate coercive tendencies, particularly in around the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan Strait. Similarly, 61% of Japanese view Chinese territorial ambitions to be a critical threat to its interests (Funatsu et al. 2023). With the threat of instability in the region at its highest, U.S.-Japan decision makers are faced with the challenge of choosing the optimal path towards curbing aggression and promoting stability in the region.

We investigate the principal challenges for U.S.-Japan decision-makers as they consider the optimal path for strengthening their alliance. While the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is a military pact, we argue that China's aggression demands the U.S. and Japan to also cooperate in the economic and technological realm as well as leverage international coalitions to counter Chinese expansionist tendencies and promote regional stability.

The remainder of this report is laid out in five sections. The first section assesses the challenges posed by China's military, economic and technological, and coalitional developments. The second section details China's expanding military initiatives and how the U.S. and Japan have and will continue to respond. The third section discusses potential opportunities for the U.S. and Japan to coordinate a response in the economic and technological domain. The fourth section identifies ongoing coalitional realities pertaining the U.S. and Japan and considers avenues to leverage international responses. The fifth section outlines policy recommendations organized thematically by the three principal dimensions outlined above.

Section 1: Challenges Posed by China in the Indo-Pacific

Introduction

China is actively expanding its military prowess, economic and technological heft, and coalitional influence to reshape the international order to its advantage. This poses challenges for the United States and its allies such as Japan. The United States views China as a "pacing challenge" due to its continuous economic development and coercive actions in the East China Sea (U.S. Department of Defense 2023a, 1). As for Japan, its National Security Strategy states that, "China's current external stance, military activities, and other activities have become a matter of serious concern," (Government of Japan 2022, 9).

This section outlines the nature of three challenges posed by China for the United States and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. In the military domain, China's rapid buildup of nuclear arms and naval forces enables it to engage in increasingly coercive operations in the Indo-Pacific (The U.S. Department of Defense 2023a, 52). In the economic and technological realm, China's rapid GDP growth, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and increase in research and development (R&D) have allowed it to rival the U.S.' influence globally and Japan influence regionally. In terms of the coalitional realities, China's international economic and security initiatives with partnering countries undermine ties between the U.S. and its allies.

China's Expanding Military

China's 2019 Defense White Paper identifies an increasingly complex strategic environment, noting that the U.S. has "adopted unilateral policies" and "undermined global strategic stability" through increasing its defense budget and nuclear capabilities (The State Council 2019, 3). In response, China seeks to resolutely safeguard its security interest and national sovereignty through a defensive military posture (The State Council 2019, 7). The People's Liberation Army (PLA) will maintain its efforts to become a world-class military force and complete its modernization by 2035 to fortify China's national defense. China will continue to increase its defense budget to enhance military strategic capabilities, which contradicts its claims of pursuing of peace in the international community.

In the past 10 years, China's defense expenditures have nearly doubled, showing a 6% growth rate each year from 2013 to 2022 (U.S. Department of Defense 2023a 165). In 2022, China announced a 7.1% (\$229 billion) increase in its annual military budget, equivalent to 1.3% of its GDP. This makes China's defense budget well ahead in the region, where India's annual defense budget is \$74.4 billion, and Japan's is \$51.9 billion (U.S. Department of Defense 2023a 166). As the world's second largest military spender after the United States, China has been upgrading its defense industry by developing hypersonic missile technologies, accelerating naval ship production, and advancing all realms of its armaments industry, including battle tanks, assault vehicles, and ground weapon systems (U.S. Department of Defense 2023a 167).

Through its increased military budget, China has also developed its nuclear industry. China's nuclear buildup is demonstrated through its ongoing construction of three silo fields to house more than 300 ICBMs (U.S. Department of Defense 2023a, 104). The U.S. Department of

Defense (DOD) estimates that China will possess 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030, which advances President Xi's goal to achieve a "world class" level military. Although China justifies its nuclear buildup as simply strengthening its own deterrence capabilities, this undeniably increases its offensive threat capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.

China's growing maritime power is another avenue that emboldens it to increase its aggressive behaviors in the Indo-Pacific, particularly the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (hereinafter referred to as the Senkaku Islands) and Taiwan. It possesses the world's largest naval fleet, which already surpassed the U.S.' naval fleet size with over 370 warships and submarines (U.S. Department of Defense 2023a, 52). China's maritime forces have been active near the Senkaku Islands, the Sea of Japan, and the Pacific Ocean (Ministry of Defense of Japan 2024, 2). With the strong naval capabilities of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), China can conduct expeditionary blue-water operations in the name of securing national interests while also creating maritime pressure that threatens Japan's national security (Yoshihara 2020, 28). China's rising sea power has displaced Japan's leading position in the Indo-Pacific region, stimulating great power realignments that undermine U.S. power projecting in Asia.

China has also expressed plans to establish an international network of "strategic strong points", which further expands the PLA's global footprint and secures China's trade routes (Singleton 2023a). Even though the PLA only has one overseas military base in Djibouti, China has been actively considering at least 13 other locations for military outposts. Additionally, through the BRI, they gain access to resources for development. If China acquires Cambodia's Ream Naval Base as its second overseas base, it will further empower the PLA to monitor vital maritime trade routes. Such routes include the Malacca Strait, which occupies 40% of the world's trade flows. However, Washington has not outlined any specific strategies to counter the PLA's

military global expansion activity (Singleton 2023b). If China's military expansion is not addressed, then the U.S. and Japan will eventually be unable to deter prospective acts of aggression.

China's Developments in the Economic and Technological Realm

China's rapid economic development is evident in three key areas: its expanding GDP, growing R&D funding, and the BRI. Figure 1 below illustrates China's rapid economic growth. China's GDP surpasses the European Union (EU), Japan, and Russia, making it the world's second largest economy after the United States. Economists estimate that China's GDP has the potential to surpass the U.S. in the next 10 years (Ross 2019, 303). The current pace of China's and the U.S.' GDP growth rates in Figure 1 supports this evaluation. China's exponentially rising GDP growth further consolidates its influence in the trade regional system (Ross 2019, 311).

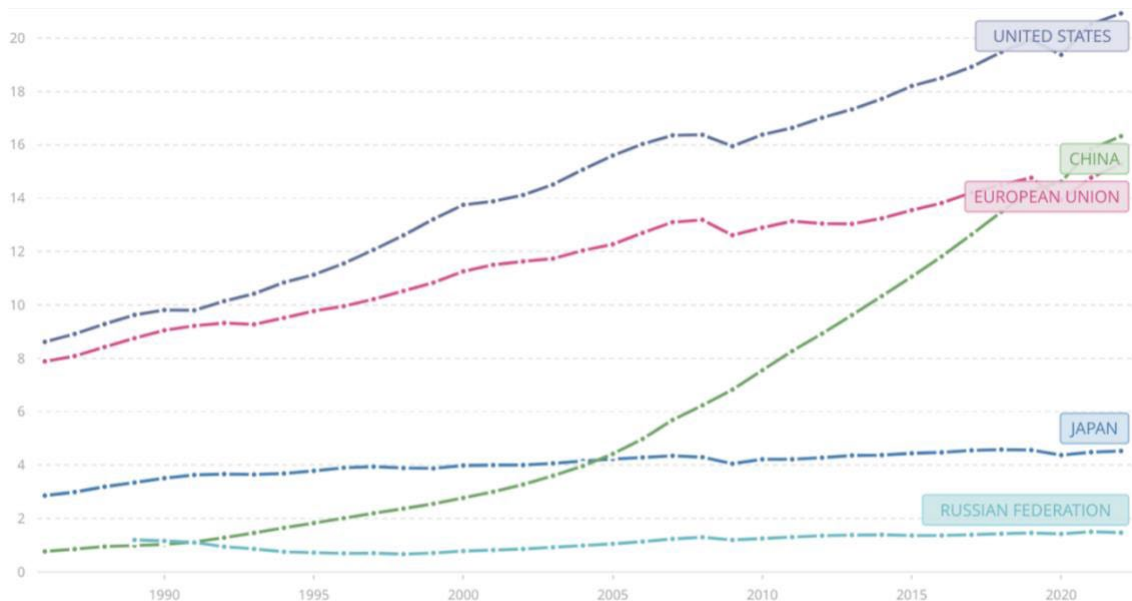


Figure 1. "GDP (constant 2015 US\$) - Japan, China, United States, European Union, Russian Federation". The World Bank. World Bank Open Data. 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1392-4>.

China's R&D expenditure is one of the reasons for its impressive GDP growth. China's 1,669% growth rate in its R&D expenditures from 2000 to 2020 affirms its potential to economically challenge the U.S. and other developed countries (Sargent 2022, 4). The centerpiece of Beijing's R&D has been the semiconductor sector—the chips critical for cutting-edge, commercial, and defense applications alike. China investment in fields like semiconductors allows it to enhance economic competitiveness and military capabilities simultaneously.

The semiconductor industry is not the only sector in which China excels economically. By 2014, China had become the most important export market for six major exporters including Australia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (Ross 2019, 311). This reality indicates that many economies in the region largely rely on China. As one of the largest trading nations, China's share of global trade has increased from 2.5% in 1997 to 12% in 2022. Since the 1990s, China's share of global value chain (GVC) exports has increased fivefold (International Monetary Fund 2023, 24). China plays an important role in contributing to global trade dynamics and maintaining crucial links for the global supply chain to support countries' industries. Thus, the growing importance of China's role in the global economy is undeniable.

China's most ambitious economic endeavor is the BRI. China's BRI project aims to improve its world economic connectivity through the development of railway infrastructure, power plants, telecommunication services, and information technologies. The BRI corridor economies occupy around 35% of the world's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), with 80% of FDI within these economies going to East Asia and the Pacific (World Bank 2019, 16). The BRI has since increased the number of countries that borrow from it, with China investing in 139 countries (Sacks 2021). Japan too has shifted from a position of strength to a position of dependence on China (Wan 2021, 837).

Being the largest trade partner of thirty BRI recipients, China has effectively established hub-and-spoke model in the Indo-Pacific region (Yoshimatsu 2022, 650). Increased connectivity with over one hundred countries allows China to establish global standards that challenge the Western order. This expanding sphere of influence restricts critical international market access for the U.S. and weakens existing economic ties between the U.S. and its partners (U.S. Department of Defense 2022, 73).

Japan's attitude towards the BRI has shifted from indifference to opposition, recognizing that the BRI has captured a significant market share of Southeast Asia's infrastructure sector (Joe 2022). More critically, China has utilized the BRI as an instrument to expand regional geopolitical influence, threatening Japan's geostrategic interests and hindering the U.S. and Japan from achieving stability in the Indo-Pacific. If territorial disputes continue to progress in China's favor, this will further strengthen China of leveraging political influence in the East China sea which undermines Japan's regional influence.

China's Usage of Coalitional Frameworks

As China continues to leverage relationships with other countries and increases its military power projection through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI), it limits the U.S.' freedom of navigation in Asia and poses operational challenges for the U.S.-Japan Alliance (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2020, 1).

Beijing has leveraged the SCO to increase security cooperation with Russia and four Central Asian countries to combat terrorism, promote economic cooperation, and maintain and strengthen regional stability and security. With this intergovernmental partnership, China aims to

grow its military presence through security cooperation and diplomatic relationships in Asia to further elevate its global influence. However, China also utilizes the SCO as a strategic platform to develop diplomatic relationships to practice air-ground operations and extend military deployment beyond its borders (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2020, 2). Due to the member countries' proximity, China is an ideal location to carry out conventional military operations to defend against attacks that challenge Chinese national security. In addition to China's role in the SCO, the GSI reinforces the "China + Central Asia" mechanism to construct a multilateral dialogue platform for security information sharing and cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2023).

China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) initiative has increased its stature in the global economy as it establishes new China-led trade and financial institutions. Its main aim is to address the region's significant infrastructure funding gap (CRS 2023, 1-2). Competitive pressure from the AIIB and the development of a stronger Chinese commercial foothold in Asia could disadvantage, or even exclude, the U.S. from infrastructure and commercial projects by setting standards and networks that favor Chinese companies, particularly in sectors such as communications, transportation, and energy infrastructure. China holds a dominant voting share of 27%, raising concerns about the bank's independence. Additionally, AIIB's lending practices could undermine governance and safeguards that have been established by multilateral development banks like the World Bank and Asia Development Bank. Since the U.S. and Japan are part of major multilateral development banks (MDB), the growing influence of the AIIB and China's bilateral sources of financing raise concerns. This is so as it may lead for some MBDs to reconsider the World Bank's international practices in reinforcing policies and other safeguards that help China in parity with other nations, guaranteeing global order.

Through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), China was able to leverage its members, which include ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Vietnam and Philippines, South Korea and Japan to further shift and undermine U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific. This limited the U.S.' pursuits of adopting U.S.-friendly foreign policies with RCEP countries (CRS 2022, 2). By establishing closer ties with other nations, China increases its economic leverage and undermines the influence of the U.S. and Japan in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2021, President Xi promoted the Global Development Initiative (GDI) to offer the "China Model" to emphasize 'development' as a solution to developing countries (Ratiu 2023). This emphasizes China's role as a global provider and deepens its relations with other global nations. The GDI's pursuit of increasing multilateral alliances through externalizing China's internal policies is a challenge to the U.S. as it threatens U.S. primacy on the global stage.

Japan too clearly identifies China as the greatest global strategic challenge to its interests and regional stability. China's growing investments pose an economic threat of potentially hollowing out Japanese industries and constant claims of Japanese territories that are crucial for sectors such as trade and semiconductors. China continues to actively establish security cooperation and economic partnerships with regional countries through a variety of initiatives. This further affirms its ambition to reshape the international order and fracture ties between the U.S. and its allies. Economically, the AIIB, RCEP, and GDI further enable the dependence of other countries on China, reshaping the region to its advantage. This is because countries are inclined to prioritize economic benefits over geopolitical alliances, undermining the U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Section 2: Military Domain

Introduction

In the military domain, China is increasing its spending to develop advanced capabilities and expand its navy, directly threatening the territorial integrity, freedom of navigation, and rule of law in the Indo-Pacific. To deter such threats, the United States and Japan have been considering different avenues with which to improve the alliance's capacity to respond in the case of these specific regional contingencies.

The first section highlights salient, regional contingencies that threaten territorial integrity and the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific. The second section focuses on how freedom of navigation has been undermined by China, as observed in the Philippines. The third section outlines initiatives the United States and Japan have considered to improve their ability to respond to China's coercive actions.

Territorial Disputes in the Indo-Pacific

The dispute over the Senkaku Islands between Japan and China is one area of greater concern to the U.S. and Japan. To de-escalate the bubbling tensions over the Senkaku Islands, on May 16, 2023, both Defense Ministers from Japan and China held the first phone call as part of the hotline initiative (Ministry of Defense of Japan 2023). Despite this, according to Japanese tracking data, teams of Chinese Coast Guard ships spent 336 days near the Senkaku Islands that same year, increasing significantly since 2017, as 171 days were spent in the region (Cave 2023).

Additionally, 2023 saw a record number of 1,287 Chinese government ships operating in the contiguous zone, with an uninterrupted presence for 134 days.

China has signaled its intentions to intensify efforts to assert Beijing's sovereignty claims over the Senkaku Islands in 2024. To achieve this, President Xi proposed to maintain a prolonged presence of Chinese ships near the islands for 365 days (Kyodo News 2023). This is yet another example of China's employment of incremental "salami-slicing" tactics that seek to steadily chip away at Japan's territorial claims and control (Michishita 2021). In April 2024, President Biden reaffirmed Article V's application to the Senkaku Islands, signaling the U.S.' commitment to opposing any unilateral attempts by China to alter the status quo through force or coercion (The White House 2024a). Furthermore, a domino effect could occur, with China potentially eyeing other Okinawan islands (Hall 2019, 27). In short, American and Japanese policymakers stand to lose their credibility and influence in the region.

This concern has also been demonstrated over Taiwan. The United States and Japan state that the, "encourage[ment of] the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues," is a shared strategic objective (The White House 2024a). Former Prime Minister Abe had also declared that "a Taiwan contingency is a contingency for Japan," interlinking Taiwan's security with Japan's (Kyodo News 2021). Consequently, in May 2024, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Rahm Emanuel, visited Yonaguni and Ishigaki. These islands are closer to Taipei than Tokyo and could thus serve as a strategic function if China invades Taiwan (McCurry 2024). This visit symbolized a united front to deter destabilizing actions by China in the East China Sea, accentuating the pivotal role of the U.S.-Japan alliance in maintaining regional stability. Both the U.S. and Taiwan heavily rely on this area for maritime trade and the transportation of essential goods, including semiconductors

and other high-tech components crucial for its industries. Any conflict or blockade could disrupt these vital supply chains, leading to economic turmoil and affecting Japan's industrial production.

Given the escalating tensions, the Senkaku Islands, Taiwan, and the Yonaguni and Ishigaki islands require support against Chinese military and economic coercion. Unlike the other islands, however, Taiwan presents a unique challenge. Both the U.S. and Japan have joint communiques with China which established diplomatic relations with China and revoked official relations with Taiwan. As a result, the U.S. and Japan cannot directly challenge the One China Policy established in those communiques by recognizing Taiwan as a country independent from China.

Nonetheless, preparations for such escalations should not be ignored in case deterrence strategies fail, as evidenced by an increase in Chinese military presence in the Senkaku Islands despite the hotline initiative. Unanswered Chinese aggressions may lead to the establishment of Chinese hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, threatening the alliance's vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (Sacks 2022).

In 2022, the Kishida administration approved an increase in Japan's military spending from the self-imposed 1% of GDP to 2% by fiscal year 2027 (Government of Japan 2022, 20). This increase in military spending has resulted in the birth of new strategies and areas of cooperation for the alliance. For example, Japan has loosened its ban on lethal weapons exports, working with Italy and the United Kingdom (U.K.) to develop a new advanced fighter jet (Yamaguchi 2024). Likewise, the U.S. has signed a deal with Japan to sell 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles to them (Mahadzir 2024).

Furthermore, the U.S. is currently considering outsourcing repairs of U.S. Navy ships to Japanese shipyards to address ongoing delays in repairs (Moriyasu 2023). This move could

potentially alleviate these concerns as well as revitalize the Japanese industrial base. Once established, Japanese shipyards could service ships from additional like-minded nations such as the U.K. and Australia to further contribute to the strategy of integrated deterrence. Such build-up of the Japanese defense industry and self-defense capabilities has and will continue to allow Japan to take on a more active role in the security alliance to mitigate China's coercive behaviors and deter escalation.

Considering the current security environment and initiatives, two immediate legal barriers that may affect the U.S. and Japan's preparations and responses to China. The first is interpretations of how the JSDF can act. The second is the disconnect between the U.S. and Japan in terms of military base usage.

Due to Japan's unique laws and constitution, the role the JSDF can play in military conflicts remains limited by its laws and the Diet's interpretations. Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security grants Japan the ability to retaliate with the minimum amount of force required against an attack on not just Japan, but also on countries with a close partnership with Japan if it threatens Japan's survival (Government of Japan 2016).

Of course, a direct attack on Japan or U.S. troops in declared Japanese territory such as with Senkaku Islands or Yonaguni and Ishigaki would allow legally allow Japan to wholly strike back. However, what constitutes a survival-threatening situation and what countries qualify as having a close partnership with Japan remains ambiguous. If Japan concludes that Taiwan has a close partnership with Japan and that a Chinese attack on Taiwan is a survival-threatening situation to Japan itself, they theoretically will have the authority to provide full support following approval from the Diet. However, if a Chinese attack was deemed likely to lead to a direct attack on Japan,

the JSDF's role would remain limited to supportive, non-combative activities. Thus, the situation-dependent plurality of Japanese responses and interpretations adds a layer of uncertainty to U.S.-Japan coordination.

Another difficulty revolves around the American usage of bases in Japan. Under Article VI of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, U.S. forces can use Japanese bases, “to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East,” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024a). Prior to deployment, consultation with Japan is required. Japan believes that the U.S. must consult them before using its bases for any purpose outside of the defense of Japan while the U.S. believes that notification of its intentions is sufficient (Cancian, Cancian, and Heginbotham 2023, 117).

According to a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) study, one of the two most impactful variables that worked to China's advantage in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan was Japan limiting American operations by not permitting U.S. basing (Cancian, Cancian, and Heginbotham 2023, 99). The proximity of Japan to Taiwan provides a strategic advantage to the U.S. forces that they cannot fail to overlook. Without Japanese basing, American fighter aircraft must come from airbases in Alaska, Hawaii, or Guam—far less efficient in comparison to Japan. Taiwan's stability is crucial to the U.S. and Japan as it is an important partner in sectors of trade, investment, technology, and semiconductors. If Japan were to remain neutral and not cooperate in some form with the U.S., the security alliance itself would become merely a skeleton. While Japan's recent more proactive buildup is one welcomed by Washington, ultimately, the future success of the U.S. and Japan's security alliance's goals falls on whether they can effectively and swiftly collaborate in emergencies in the Indo-Pacific.

Freedom of Navigation

With an estimated \$3.4 trillion in global trade passing through the South China Sea each year and about 11 billion barrels of oil reserves, the sea is a critical world trade route (Dolven, Campbell, O'Rourke 2021). Circumnavigating the region would result in considerable expenses and delays to shipments of goods. As such, several countries bordering the sea declare sovereignty of some of the Spratly and Paracel Islands to claim abundant resources, leading to territorial disputes.

In 2012, China claimed the sovereignty of Scarborough Shoal. The U.S. claimed that the Scarborough Shoal did not qualify as an island, and thus did not come to the Philippines' aid. This U.S. inaction to help its ally repel China's advances weakened the faith of some countries in American reliability (Burgess 2020, 120). The lack of countermeasures to deny Chinese expansion has only further emboldened its actions in the South China Sea.

China has since increased its efforts to expand its presence in the South China Sea such as physically increasing the size of islands or creating new islands or positioning PLAN and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) units alongside missiles in the Spratly and Paracel Islands (Center for Preventative Action 2024; Burges 2020 113). Furthermore, China utilizes "gray-zone" tactics to justify its actions by asserting that it is simply protecting its maritime claims rather than committing acts of war (Misalucha-Willoughby 2023).

Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia have been repeatedly threatened by Chinese violations of territorial sovereignty. However, due to intimidation of potential retaliation from China, these actors are apprehensive to counter Chinese

encroachment. As China continues to take control of the sea, this only further allows Beijing to pressure neighboring countries to accept the nine-dash line and renounce its exclusive economic zones (EEZ).

If a single nation were to hold power over the South China Sea, it would be able to unilaterally control the activities that occur in one of the world's most valuable trade routes. With China's increasing influence and military strength in the seas, international ships could be barred from entering this region, severely limiting the U.S. and Japan's economic power. Furthermore, the islands in the South China Sea provide strategic access to Taiwan. If China were to control the sea, it could partially cut off American assistance to Taiwan during an invasion. Taking this territory would therefore embolden China and allow it to encircle and take both Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands by force.

In response, the U.S. and Japan have strengthened ties with other regional players like Australia, India, and Southeast Asian nations to deny Chinese encroachment (U.S. Department of Defense 2024). For example, Japan has sold military ships and equipment to the Philippines and Vietnam to improve their maritime security capacity and to deter Chinese aggression. In 2024, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and the United States issued a joint statement around maritime cooperative activity within the Philippine EEZ. Furthermore, during the first-ever U.S.-Philippines-Japan trilateral summit, President Biden declared, "any attack on Philippine aircraft, vessels or armed forces in the South China Sea would invoke our mutual defense treaty," (The White House 2024b). These measures aim to strengthen the interoperability of forces, tactics, techniques, and procedures while safeguarding the rule of law and international order as they serve as the foundation for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

The U.S. and Japan's Response: Improving Interoperability

Considering China's military threat to the security of the Indo-Pacific, the United States and Japan's policymakers have begun drafting structural reforms to their bilateral command and control structure. To begin, this section will trace critical joint developments that have led to the alliance's current state of interoperability. Then, this section will outline current initiatives the U.S. and Japan have considered to improve joint operations between United States Forces Japan (USFJ) and the JSDF.

The development of U.S.-Japan security arrangements has followed a gradual, upward trajectory since the publishing of its guidelines. In 2017, Japan successfully conducted its first SM-3 Block IIA intercept test with the help of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency (Missile Defense Agency 2017). Japan's successful implementation of this missile defense system demonstrated that the alliance could develop sophisticated, joint, defense projects. Since then, the U.S. and Japan have taken on increasingly ambitious projects that demand a deeper integration of their alliance. In 2021, Japan commissioned its second Maya-class destroyer, equipped with U.S.-developed ballistic missile defense (BMD) and cooperative engagement capabilities (CEC) (Vavasseur 2021). In 2022, Japan's Air Self-Defense Force purchased three of Northrop Grumman's Global Hawks (Jenne 2022) to expand Japan's prospective intelligence surveillance reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.

As Japan developed its self-defense capabilities, it also coordinated with the U.S. to develop a bilateral coordination mechanism for the Alliance. As specified by the Guidelines, a central focus for the U.S. and Japan has been to "ensure seamless and effective whole-of-government Alliance coordination" since 2015 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015, 1). The

alliance began realizing this goal by establishing the Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) as the core administrative framework to plan and execute bilateral operations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015, 3). The ACM formalized how each country's respective government would coordinate policies and operations pertaining to USFJ and the JSDF. This framework has since been implemented in response to events such as the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake and Chinese activities surrounding the Senkaku Islands (Ministry of Defense of Japan 2022, 285).

Information sharing allows both the United States and Japan to monitor Chinese activities in the Indo-Pacific region, including military deployments, maritime expansion, and economic influence. Efficient exchange of information and ideas protects technological interests, helps both parties innovate, strengthens the alliance's deterrence posture, and enhances military cooperation (Fodale 2020). In fact, the U.S. and Japan already have both an information sharing pact and a reciprocal military intelligence agreement. In 2013, the United States and Japan entered into an agreement to set the groundwork for increasing the flow of classified information.

In 2022, the JSDF Cyber Defense Command was established (U.S. Department of Defense 2023b). The Bilateral Intelligence Analysis Cell opened later that year with the purpose to “jointly analyze and process information gathered from assets of both countries in support of mutual security and cooperation” in real-time (United Forces Japan 2022). This signals deterrence, trust, and the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance in stabilizing the Indo-Pacific region (U.S. Department of Defense 2023b). In the following years, both the U.S. and Japan have pledged to modernize command and control structures and deepen intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance cooperation to stay ahead of growing cyber threats and build resilience in the information and communication technology domain (The White House 2024a).

While the ACM has seen success in its applications to the events above, none of such events have tested its full operability. While the Kumamoto Earthquake demanded the close coordination of USFJ and JSDF, the scope of operations constricted to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (Schoff 2023, 17). Moreover, Chinese activities surrounding the Senkaku Islands are considered to exist in gray-zone situations, which are ambiguous circumstances that have highlighted an ambiguous joint response in the case of escalation (Schoff 2023, 21).

Another critical weakness of the ACM is the lack of civilian-political input into military decision-making. While it is the Chief of Staff, Joint Staff that ultimately executes Japan's military operations, the scope of his execution must be first authorized by the Diet (Schoff 2023, 12). This legal process of authorization means that Japan's command structure operates at a much slower tempo than the chain of command necessary to mobilize U.S. forces. This lethargy is compounded by the "as needed" nature of the ACM, which pulls relevant ministries and agencies into the Alliance Coordination Group as needed by the contingency.

Joint operations between the USFJ and SDF are further inhibited by the information security disparity that exists between the U.S. and Japan. In 2020, Chinese military hackers gained access to Japan's classified defense networks which included information about the U.S. ally's military capabilities (Reuters 2023). Due to the nature of the event, details are sparse, but the Pentagon spokesperson reaffirmed the American commitment to intelligence sharing with Japan as well as strengthening the two countries' cyber warfare defense capabilities and infrastructure. In 2023, when U.S. officials were notified of a Chinese state-sponsored infiltration into U.S. critical infrastructure and abroad (Microsoft Threat Intelligence 2023). While members of Five Eyes of notified of this infiltration, Japan was not aware of this incident until shortly before the event was publicized (Schoff 2023, 25). While Japan is looking to invest \$7.5 billion into its

cybersecurity infrastructure, the direction in which Japan ought to invest such resources remains obscure. The U.S.' intelligence infrastructure provides an opportunity for Japan to acquire the information sharing capabilities necessary for bilateral coordination.

Because there are so many avenues for modernizing the Alliance's C2 structure, the optimal policy direction is not to overhaul the current Alliance infrastructure, but to take incremental and concrete measures to modernize the alliance. Improvements to the ACM can be broken down into components which gives the U.S. and Japan specific administrative components to develop.

Section 3: Economic and Technological Realm

Introduction

China's rapid economic development undermines the interests of U.S. and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. Technology has become a crucial area of contestation. The recent cooperation and convergence for the United States and Japan to tackle this challenge stands in stark contrast to the trade frictions that plagued the relationship in the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike past tensions over alleged Japanese dumping and market access issues, the U.S. and Japan now view resilient supply chains as a vital economic and national security priority. Both countries have expressed growing concerns over vulnerabilities exposed by potential disruptions, as well as fears over the risks of becoming overly dependent on China.

This section, first, briefly outlines the broad range of economic challenges posed for the United States and Japan. The second section draws attention to the specific case of semiconductors,

which have transformed into a catalyst for unparalleled U.S.-Japan cooperation spanning the defense, economic, technological and supply chain domains. The third section sets out the alliance's current initiatives and considerations.

Impact of China's Economic and Technological Expansion

China's economic rise has introduced challenges such as trade imbalances, technological competition, supply chain vulnerabilities and increased geopolitical tensions. China's vast manufacturing capabilities and its export-oriented growth strategy have led to significant trade imbalances with the United States and Japan. For the U.S., the persistent trade deficit with China has been a major point of contention, contributing to policies aimed at reducing dependency on Chinese imports and encouraging the reshoring of manufacturing jobs (The White House 2021a, 10). Similarly, Japan faces competitive pressure in various industries, including high-technology, automobiles, and heavy machinery, where Chinese companies often benefit from lower costs and state subsidies (Okita 1979, 1100).

China's focus on technological advancement and innovation presents a formidable challenge to the technological dominance of both the United States and Japan. Through initiatives like "Made in China 2025," China aims to become a global leader in high-tech industries such as artificial intelligence, robotics and biotechnology. This has led to intense competition for technological supremacy, with concerns over intellectual property theft and forced technology transfers exacerbating tensions (Kennedy, 2015). According to Okita, "given this almost total dependence and the instability of foreign supplies, the development of high-technology, knowledge-intensive industries is, for Japan, a matter of life or death," (Okita 1979, 1100). The

U.S. and Japan are increasingly investing in R&D and strengthening their alliances to counterbalance China's growing influence in these sectors.

Furthermore, China's expanding influence in international trade and finance, exemplified by initiatives like the BRI, poses a threat to the established global economic order. COVID-19 highlighted the vulnerabilities in global supply chains heavily dependent on China. Both the United States and Japan have taken steps to diversify their supply chains to mitigate risks associated with overreliance on Chinese manufacturing. This includes efforts to relocate production facilities to other countries or back to domestic markets, enhancing supply chain resilience in critical sectors like semiconductors, critical minerals and pharmaceuticals (The White House 2021a, 4).

A U.S.-Japan Joint Response: Semiconductors

The role of semiconductors spans military, economic, technological and supply chain dimensions that are driving bilateral coordination and investment. From a military and technological security perspective, advanced semiconductors are critical components in a wide range of defense systems including weapons, communications, surveillance and computing capabilities. The U.S. relies on cutting-edge semiconductor technology to maintain its military capabilities and technological superiority. As Japan's security heavily relies on the U.S., the alliance is seeking to develop Japan's defense capabilities while securing the semiconductor industry within it.

Japan's defense budget for Japan Fiscal Year (JFY) 2023 was ¥6.8 trillion (around \$480 billion), making Japan only the third largest defense budget in Asia (Department of Commerce

2024). As noted previously, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has publicly expressed Japan's strategy to double this budget to 2% of its GDP to match it with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) standard. Japan's rising defense spending primarily stems from its evaluation of a more complex regional security landscape, which includes concerns about the advancement of North Korean missile capabilities and China's assertive actions in the region (Department of Commerce 2024). Securing reliable semiconductor supply chains has become an acute priority for both nations.

The semiconductor industry is not only a major driver of economic growth and innovation, but also underpins virtually every other advanced technology sector like Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G, autonomous vehicles, and aerospace. With semiconductor chips embedded in technology from smartphones to fighter jets, a robust domestic chip industry is crucial for long-term economic competitiveness. The global semiconductor market was already worth around \$618 billion in 2022 and is projected to swell to \$1 trillion by 2030, making this industry a critical engine for economic growth, innovation and competitiveness (Satoh and Ting-Fang 2024).

While the U.S. still leads in semiconductor design through firms like Nvidia, Advanced Micro Devices Incorporated (AMD) and Qualcomm, it has lost significant manufacturing capabilities to Asian corporations like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited (TSMC) and Samsung. Rebuilding cutting-edge manufacturing capacity through private-public partnerships and initiatives like the National Semiconductor Technology Center is crucial. Developing the next breakthroughs in areas like the 2 nanometer chips and quantum computing chips will shape military power and economic competitiveness. However, the U.S. and Japan face a tough challenge from China. China has launched its own national initiatives such as the \$40 billion Big Fund and an expected \$27 billion addition to achieve semiconductor self-sufficiency

(Cao and Gao 2024). Keeping pace with China will require sustained R&D funding, talent development and protection of intellectual property in both the U.S. and Japan.

Finally, enhancing semiconductor supply chain resilience has become a strategic necessity after COVID-19 disruptions and amid the U.S.-China tech rivalry. Both governments are prioritizing restoring production through substantial subsidies and incentives, as evidenced by major investments like TSMC's planned \$20+ billion Kumamoto facilities and Samsung's Yokohama R&D center—key pillars of Japan's semiconductor “reboot” (Satoh and Ting-Fang 2024). Regionally, the alliance cooperates through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) supply chain resilience agreement alongside India, Fiji and Singapore to strengthen semiconductor supply security across the Indo-Pacific (ABC News 2024). The multi-faceted strategic significance of semiconductors highlights how this field has transformed from a past source of trade frictions into a catalyst for unparalleled U.S.-Japan cooperation today, spanning the defense, economic, technological and supply chain domains. This evolution highlights semiconductors as not just a commercial interest, but also as a vital priority for the military alliance.

Current U.S. and Japan Initiatives

The U.S. and Japan have offered financial incentives such as subsidies and tax incentives to attract major semiconductor investments from companies such as TSMC, Samsung, Micron and others to build or relocate facilities within their borders (Glosserman 2024). In July 2023, the U.S. and Japan launched joint R&D initiatives including the Leading-Edge Semiconductor Technology

Center. This initiative is modeled after the U.S. National Semiconductor Technology Center and its purpose is to develop next-generation chip technologies for the alliance.

Initiatives such as the \$60 million U.S.-Japan University Partnership for Workforce Advancement and Research & Development in Semiconductors (UPWARDS) launched in May 2023 to deepen industry-academia ties and build up the semiconductor workforce in both nations (Glosserman 2024). Japanese and American cooperation can also be seen in the private sector, as eight major Japanese companies (Denso, Kioxia, MUFG Bank, NEC, NTT, SoftBank, Sony and Toyota) created Rapidus, a semiconductor manufacturer who is collaborating with International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) to manufacture cutting-edge technology, such as the 2-nanometer chips by 2027.

Regionally, the U.S. and Japan are collaborating through the IPEF, a 14-country initiative to promote a new regional economic architecture (Glosserman 2024). One of its outcomes was a supply chain resilience agreement between Japan, the US, Fiji, India and Singapore initiated on February 24th, 2024. It sets up a supply chain crisis-response network to strengthen supply chain resiliency for semiconductors, critical minerals and other “critical sectors” to be determined by each country.

In the United States, the Chips Act of 2022 provided \$39 billion in federal grants to the Commerce Department to revitalize American semiconductor manufacturing and \$75 billion for loans (Rooks 2024). Some experts argue that the Chips Act is the most effective way to achieve self-sufficiency and regain technological leadership from rivals. According to Chris Miller, the U.S. government has now – as of April 2024 – allocated over half of the incentives provided by the Chips Act in grants to semiconductor manufacturers like Intel, TSMC, Samsung and Micron

(Miller 2024). This funding has catalyzed a surge in investment within the American semiconductor industry. According to the Semiconductor Industry Association, chip companies and supply chain partners have announced a combined \$327 billion in planned investments over the next decade. Miller also highlights a 15-fold rise in the construction of American computing and electronics manufacturing facilities. As a more detailed example of the Chips Act's effects, Micron is opening semiconductor manufacturing facilities in Idaho and upstate New York after a \$6.1 billion grant was given to them by the U.S. government (Davis 2024). It is expected that over 20,000 jobs will be created thanks to this investment.

Beyond economic incentives, semiconductors have taken on heightened strategic significance as the U.S. increases export controls on advanced chips to China amid the broader tech rivalry between the two superpowers. However, the proposed \$14 billion sale of U.S. Steel to Japan's Nippon Steel has emerged as a major test case for whether the U.S. will accept reciprocal Japanese investment—a key principle the Japanese side has emphasized for the revived semiconductor partnership to succeed (ABC News 2024). Japan remains a top source of foreign direct investment in the U.S., supporting over 1 million American jobs (C-SPAN 2024). According to Mark Manger, no country in the Group of Seven (G7) has such a large discrepancy between inward and outward FDI as Japan (Manger 2020, 601). Ensuring an open investment environment that allows Japanese companies to access the U.S. market and make investments in critical sectors like semiconductors is important to balance the economic partnership.

With the Biden administration opposing the deal on economic and security grounds, its fate could impact the trajectory of U.S.-Japan cooperation on semiconductors and other critical technologies. The report *The U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2024: Toward an Integrated Alliance* argues the deal would create economic growth, jobs and innovation (Armitage and Nye 2024, 8). However,

we strongly oppose the proposed deal as it could jeopardize national security interests and technological competitiveness. Moreover, we are concerned about the possible erosion of a critical domestic industrial base.

Considerations: Mutual Competition

While the U.S. and Japan have made semiconductors a centerpiece of their revitalized economic and technology alliance, this strategic partnership faces significant challenges and considerations moving forward. A key test will be balancing legitimate economic and national security interests with the complexities of globalized semiconductor supply chains. Both governments have embraced interventionist industrial policies like subsidies and incentives to “reshore” chip manufacturing and reduce dependence on potential adversaries like China. However, such moves risk instigating trade tensions or retaliatory actions that could undermine the economic benefits they aim to achieve (The White House, 2024a).

The controversial proposed acquisition of U.S. Steel by Nippon Steel exemplifies these tensions (Dasgupta 2024). How this deal is ultimately resolved could shape the trajectory of reciprocal investment flows considered vital for semiconductor cooperation. Adopting overly protectionist stances that shut out foreign capital may prove counterproductive for an industry that requires significant resources. At the same time, the U.S. must carefully weigh the national security risks of potential technology transfers to geopolitical rivals through investment and partnerships. The semiconductor industry’s global supply chains increase the challenges of protecting intellectual property and cutting-edge capabilities. Striking the right balance of enhanced investment screening, export controls and counterintelligence efforts will be an ongoing challenge.

Another considerable challenge is fostering a skilled semiconductor workforce pipeline to support industrial ambitions in both nations. Despite high-profile partnerships like the \$60 million UPWARDS program linking academia and industry, sustaining a talent pool sufficient to maintain technological leadership will likely require more comprehensive initiatives around education and workforce development policies (Holtz 2024). Moreover, the U.S. and Japan face intense competition from not only China's national corporations, but also other Asian nations like Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam that are aggressively courting semiconductor investment as well. Whether through generous subsidies, business-friendly regulations, or strategic geographic positioning, these other players aim to drive growth away from the alliance (Beattie 2024).

Section 4: Coalitional Realities

Introduction

China has increased its connectivity with regional countries through a wide variety of initiatives, such as the BRI. China's increasing ties with and pressure on states across the Indo-Pacific undermines U.S. leadership and influence in the region. Specifically, China's use of economic coercion campaigns can threaten the integrity of longstanding coalitions led by the United States as well as newer partnerships jointly supported by the U.S. and Japan.

This section surveys the principal coalitions and partnerships of interest to the United States and Japan, namely with the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), and Five Eyes. For each of these, it provides the relevant background, details

current initiatives and responses to counter Chinese influence, and identifies factors that empower and constrain U.S. and Japanese decision-makers.

Republic of Korea

The U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral partnership allows U.S. and Japanese decision-makers to leverage the ROK's pivotal position on the Korean peninsula and jointly address security threats. The ROK's economic, military, and technological capabilities, combined with its shared democratic values, enhance the resources available to U.S.-Japan decision-makers to counter China's regional and global influence.

Following the Summit of Camp David in 2023, the three leaders announced a defensive partnership framework, including trilateral military exercises and cooperation against foreign information manipulation (U.S. Department of Defense 2023c). Since then, notable initiatives include a shared real-time DPRK missile warning data sharing mechanism and a multi-year trilateral exercise plan. A primary security concern for this coalition is a nuclear DPRK, which China supports through aid and trade necessary despite U.S. sanctions for its accelerating WMD program. Despite the shared goal of a stable Korean peninsula, the U.S. and China have opposing approaches. China's economic support directly undermines U.S. denuclearization efforts (Council on Foreign Relations 2024).

As top investors in critical U.S. sectors, Japan and the ROK have a vested interest in securing global supply chains and maintaining the U.S. economic presence in the Indo-Pacific. The three countries cooperate closely through information sharing, export controls to prevent sensitive technologies from being used for military capabilities, and exchanges between the U.S.

Disruptive Technology Strike Force and its respective Japanese and Korean counterparts (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2023). The Camp David Summit also announced annual trilateral meetings across all leadership levels, expedited consultation, and the coordinated development of global assistance (U.S. Department of Defense 2023c).

There are concerns about the future progress of this trilateral partnership, considering the historical disputes between the ROK and Japan. Since the Japanese colonization of Korea, the two countries have developed opposing reflections of the past, especially when remembering Japan's abuse of comfort women (Sakaki 2020, 860). While the 2015 Japan-ROK Comfort Women agreement declared the issue "finally and irreversibly" resolved, recent lawsuits in Seoul reignited disputes (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2024b). If tensions remain unresolved, continued legal and political disputes risk the efficacy of diplomatic trilateral cooperation.

ASEAN

China has increased its militarized behavior and unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea. However, ASEAN members – Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam – do not unanimously agree on how to respond. This poses a challenge for American and Japanese efforts to advance multilateral relations with member states (ASEAN 2024; The White House 2024c).

Data published in 2020 by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) showed that 63.6% of member states had little to no confidence in China's economic initiatives, such as the BRI (Terada 2021). However, China has become ASEAN members' largest trading partner (ASEAN-China Missions 2024). Furthermore, Indonesia, Laos, and Malaysia now highly benefit

from China's BRI and trade and investment relations (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024, 48). Thus, ASEAN member states are opposed to economically decoupling from China (U.S. Institute of Peace 2023).

ASEAN's economic dependence on China threatens U.S. influence in the region as member states are not incentivized to side with the U.S. This is further evidenced by the recent ISEAS survey in 2024. The survey concluded China's popularity has risen from 38.9% to 50.5% amongst member states from 2023 to 2024 (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024, 48 & 53). On the contrary, U.S. popularity has declined from 61.1% to 49.5% within the same period. This significant change in trust is correlated to a lack of involvement from the Biden administration, as he failed to appear at the ASEAN Summit in September 2023 (Kurlantzick 2024).

Due to the inverse relations with China and the U.S., ASEAN member states claim they will continue their strategy of maintaining unity and hedging between the U.S. and China, as members have growing concerns regarding internal political uncertainty in the U.S. (Kurlantzick 2024). ASEAN members – no matter how concerned they are with China's militarized activities – will not make extreme decisions that may alienate Beijing. This can be seen through the recent actions of the president-elect of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, who has criticized China in the past, is nevertheless hedging by strengthening security links with the U.S. while seeking Chinese investment.

However, ASEAN cannot be treated as a unitary bloc. Figure 2 shows that the Philippines favors the U.S. in this rivalry due to their long-standing relations and shared concerns over Chinese military activity in the South China Sea (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024, 48; U.S. Department of State 2024). The U.S. and the Philippines became formal treaty partners in 1951, as they both signed the Mutual Defense Treaty (Yale Law School 2024; U.S. Department of State 2017). The

treaty lays out that if there were an armed attack in the Indo-Pacific region that would threaten the peace, safety, and security of both states, they would respond based on their constitutional processes.

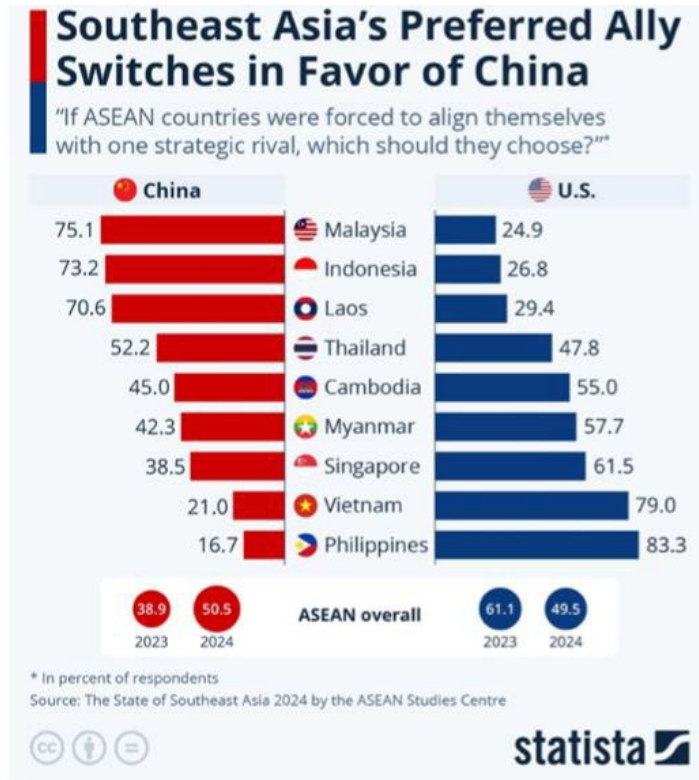


Figure 2. “Infographic: Southeast Asia’s Preferred Ally Switches in Favor of China.” Buchholz, Katharina. ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. Statista. April 8, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/chart/32058/preference-for-us-china-as-ally-among-asean-countries/>.

Under the current Marcos administration, the Philippines has shown considerable interest in further advancing the U.S.-Philippines relationship to stand up to Chinese coercion. In February 2023, the Philippines gave the U.S. temporary access to four more military bases to upgrade the partners’ position in the Indo-Pacific (Gomez & Knickmeyer 2023). Then, on May 3rd, 2023, they established the Bilateral Defense Guidelines to modernize their original defense treaty (U.S. Department of Defense 2023d). The new framework declared that threats may arise in the realms

of land, sea, air, and cyberspace. The guidelines specifically highlight gray-zone tactics to be included as a threat. This reveals that the U.S. has realized the need for further American presence in the South China Sea to deny Chinese expansion, contrasting previous American inaction previously mentioned in Section 2.

Thus, the U.S.-Philippines bilateral partnership has recently developed to hold more substantial weight in security cooperation (The White House 2024c). On April 11th, 2024, Washington invited Japanese Prime Minister Kishida and Philippine President Marcos to meet with Biden and Harris to begin trilateral relations. During the summit, leaders agreed that respecting the sovereign rights of states according to their EEZs consistent with international law is vital. To do so, the U.S. and Japan, as bilateral allies, pledged their support for the capacity building of the Philippine Coast Guard. Additionally, the U.S. will welcome Japan and the Philippines onto a U.S. Coast Guard vessel during patrols in the Indo-Pacific region. As such, the Philippines is one of the few countries in the Indo-Pacific willing to openly side with the U.S. This makes the trilateral relationship between the U.S., Philippines, and Japan vital to protecting the South China Sea.

The Quad

The Quad refers to the coalition of Japan, India, Australia, and the U.S. It is not an official organization as it has no governing documents, but members, “strive for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion,” a vision completely aligned with the U.S.-Japan agenda (The White House 2021b). While the Quad’s rhetoric noticeably avoids mention of China, it is widely understood to be countering China’s expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific (Buchan and Rimland 2020, 1-2). In addition to working

together, the Quad's practical agenda complements rather than challenges existing regional multilateral institutions, and the bloc is open to working with like-minded states (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2024).

In 2007, Prime Minister Abe took the initiative to establish the Quad, focusing on security. However, it was well known that those security goals related to China. In response, China called the Quad "an Asian NATO" – regardless of the alliance not having a collective defense – as well as a "thinly-veiled attempt at containment" (Smith 2021; Manyin, Cimino-Isaacs, and Campbell 2024, 2).

Shortly after its formation, the group stopped meeting as members wanted to avoid a new Cold War (Sharma 2023). However, in light of China's assertiveness and Abe's return to office, the member states overcame their prior hesitations and reinvigorated their partnership in 2017, holding their first official Quad Leaders' Summit in 2021. Since then, the Quad has pursued varied initiatives in addition to maritime security-related projects, with leaders meeting annually. In addition to leaders' summits, ad-hoc "2+2 meetings" occur between states' defense and foreign affairs ministers at the bilateral level (Smith 2021).

Quad leaders participate in six functional working groups to implement their practical agenda in domains including "health security, climate change, infrastructure, critical emerging technology, cyber security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, space policy, supply chains, maritime security, countering disinformation, and counterterrorism" (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2024). These initiatives demonstrate the Quad's emphasis on cooperation to strengthen states' ability to adequately counter China's influence and connectivity in the region (Smith 2021). They serve as a strategic response to China's regional influence by promoting prosperity and stability, making benefiting states more self-reliant and

therefore resilient to Chinese influence and dependence. However, accurately assessing their impact on aligning Pacific states with the U.S. rather than China, improving regional cooperation, and increasing economic development is difficult in the short term. Additionally, since most ASEAN member states have higher trust levels towards China, Quad investment initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region may be building up China's allies instead of "buying them," worsening the U.S.-Japanese posture in the region.

While downplaying the security goals of their alliance, Quad states have simultaneously increased their military preparedness and interoperability. In fact, joint military – especially naval – exercises have been an important component of the bloc since its inception (Australian Institute of International Affairs 2024). Most Malabar exercises have been held off India's coast, but by holding the 2023 exercise near Australia, the Quad members demonstrated their expanded reach, influence, and deterrence potential.

In addition to Malabar exercises, Quad members participate in other military exercises bilaterally and multilaterally. For example, member states participate in the U.S.'s Rim of the Pacific Exercise, and Japan and Australia frequently participate in non-Naval exercises with the U.S. These exercises increase mutual trust and compatibility between Quad militaries, which all possess advanced air and sea powers (Manyin, Cimino-Isaacs, and Campbell 2024, 1-2). Increasing mutual trust and compatibility is important because it increases the Quad states' military readiness as well as deters aggression in the Indo-Pacific region.

Domestic conditions in the U.S., Japan, and Australia are favorable for the Quad, but India's commitment is less clear. While the U.S.' commitment to multilateral blocs varies across administrations, both the Biden and Trump administrations understood the importance of working through the Quad to achieve U.S. goals in the Indo-Pacific. Japan's updated national security

strategy has allowed for increased defense spending and more flexibility in terms of military strategies (Manyin, Cimino-Isaacs, and Campbell 2024, 2-3). Likewise, Australia has also increased its defense budget and is shifting towards a more integrated approach. However, India practices “strategic autonomy,” historically avoiding joining multilateral and values-based coalitions. Thus, India’s participation in the Quad defies its status quo, and its long-term commitment remains questionable (Australian Institute of International Affairs 2024).

The greatest concern about the Quad is its unclear durability, resulting from the coalition not being bound by anything other than shared values and commitments. However, the Quad’s ambiguous commitment is largely beneficial since India may not remain in the Quad if it is institutionalized. Moreover, the Quad’s current “strategic ambiguity” is effective—the bloc does not unnecessarily provoke China and does not reveal how it would respond to a military attack on a Quad state or mutual ally while simultaneously increasing and demonstrating its ability to do so.

Five Eyes

Five Eyes is an Anglosphere intelligence alliance consisting of five members: the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The key purpose of the group is information warfare: offensive and defensive electronic capabilities, intelligence gathering, and cyber operations. As new technologies develop and China continues its aggressions (economic and physical), real-time intelligence sharing helps maintain coalitional integrity.

In 2023, the Five Eyes had their first official public meeting at Stanford University in California (Siddiqui 2023). There were two main issues in their statement—an Indian assassination

on Canadian soil and combatting Chinese state-backed hackers. This highlights how the United States-led Five Eyes is prioritizing combatting Chinese aggression and influence.

However, Chinese economic coercion influences the actions that Five Eyes can take. After the 2021 condemnations of China's treatment of dissidents in Hong Kong and Uighurs in Xinjiang by four of the members (minus New Zealand), China placed sanctions on those countries that particularly affected Australia (Zheng 2020). New Zealand, meanwhile, has been emphasizing its bilateral relationship with China, expressing reluctance to sign joint statements from its Five Eyes partners condemning Beijing (Mercer 2021; Gardner 2021). With Japan's close economic ties to China, they would also likely be reticent to condemn Beijing.

There have been examples of Five Eyes+ initiatives to respond to threats; for example, in 2018, Japan was added in consideration of China and North Korea (Haan 2023). It is a priority for the U.S. to continue to leverage information agreements with Japan and to integrate it into existing multinational agreements as deterrence against the threat of China's aggression and possibilities of espionage and intellectual property theft. More effective and efficient communication means effective deterrence because of increased security and coherent responses in case of any contingencies (Hemmings 2023).

In 2020, Japanese Defense Minister Tara Kono proposed joining the Five Eyes, not only to combat Chinese aggression – especially intellectual property protections – but also to build on the history of a strong U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship (Matsumura 2022). There are currently factors that prevent Japan from joining the agreement. Japan would have to implement a matching classification system to the other Five Eyes nations and develop its security agency (Fodale 2020). There are also more components than just intelligence sharing; for example, cybersecurity, supply

chain, information operations, immigration, and border security. While the United States is working with Japan in some of these sectors (resilient battery supply chains), it is likely unnecessary to cover all these competencies (immigration, border security) with the U.S. and the four other members of the alliance (Hemmings 2023). Japan currently lacks a sophisticated security clearance framework or a dedicated security agency (Akiyama 2022; Koga 2024). This decentralization of intelligence-related activities limits Japan's effectiveness and coordination efforts with the United States.

The 2022 Japanese Security Strategy and joint declaration with the U.S. government emphasizes the need for increased intelligence sharing (especially classified information), developing intelligence gathering capabilities, and strengthening ties (Hemmings 2023; The White House 2024a). There has been progress. As Japan develops its internal security networks and intelligence relationships, it means more efficient communication and response—an effective method of deterrence to cyber warfare, intellectual property theft, and any other aggressive action. Japan also has a strong comparative advantage due to geographic proximity, historical experience, and cultural connections when it comes to intelligence regarding China, North Korea, and Russia.

Policy Recommendations

We propose three sets of policy recommendations for the United States and Japan, with a focus on countering China's expansion and coercion in the Indo-Pacific region. First, we suggest that the U.S. support the development of Japan's military capabilities to strengthen the alliance's military posture. This emphasis is critical because the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance is

fundamentally a military pact. As such, the military capability of the alliance is its primary means of deterrence against China.

However, solely emphasizing the military arrangements of the alliance neglects other dimensions that can also counter China. Therefore, we also recommend strengthening the economic position of the United States and Japan, particularly with a focus on the semiconductor industry, which can affect their military capabilities in a Taiwan contingency. Finally, we assess ways in which the two countries can leverage international coalitions to balance China’s expanding influence and promote the rule of law.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE U.S. AND JAPAN

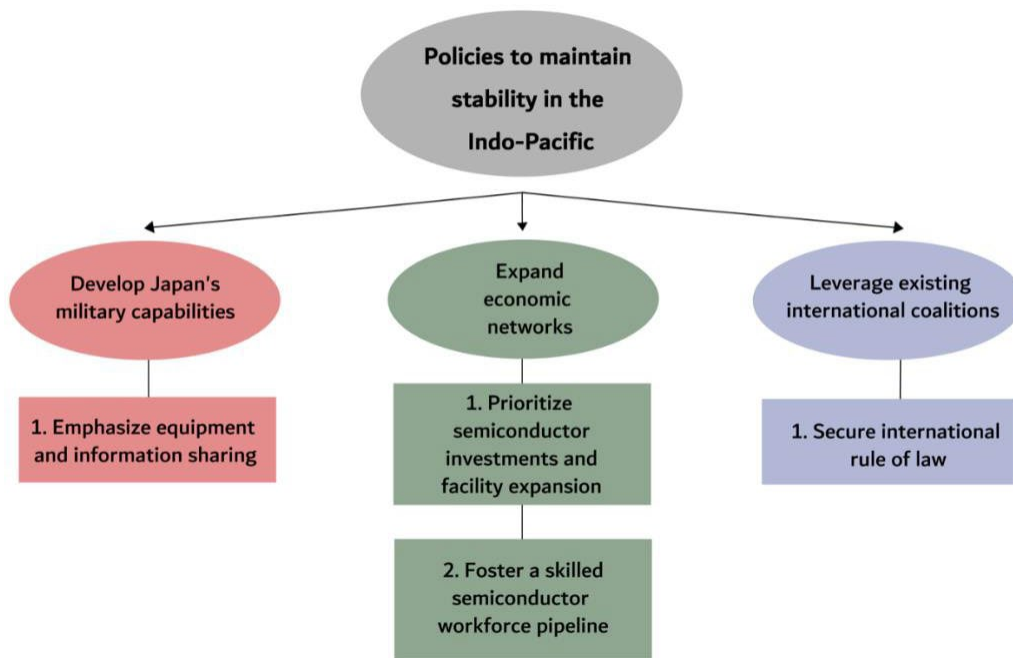


Figure 3. “Recommendations For the U.S. and Japan”. By: Authors.

Developing Japan's Military Capabilities

In order to address the challenges presented in the military domain, we propose that the U.S. increase cooperation with Japan's military development. To do that, the two countries should

- **Emphasize equipment and information sharing to assist Japan in upgrading its military infrastructure and capabilities.**

This includes helping Japan develop and modernize its defense facilities, such as bases and ports, to support the rapid deployment and sustainment of joint forces. Additionally, the US can provide Japan with advanced military equipment and technology, including missile defense systems, cyber defense tools, and unmanned systems. Enhancing Japan's defense capabilities will ensure that both nations are better prepared to respond effectively to potential threats and crises in the region, reinforcing the alliance's overall security posture.

Expanding Economic and Technological Cooperation

In order to address the challenges presented in the economic and technological realm, we propose that the U.S. and Japan expand their internal and external economic efforts, with a focus on the semiconductor industry. To do that, the two countries should:

- **Prioritize investment in semiconductor R&D and facility expansion through tax incentives and grants.**

U.S. and Japanese policymakers are exploring various policy options to strengthen their semiconductor alliance, but it is important to understand that we are still in competition with Japan. How the U.S. prioritizes these options will shape the partnership's trajectory. To maintain

technological leadership, policymakers could increase government funding for semiconductor R&D at universities, national laboratories, and in public-private partnerships. Additionally, providing stimulus through tax incentives and facilitating talent exchanges and training initiatives with nations like Taiwan and Korea are other potential avenues to consider.

In terms of industrial policy, offering investment incentives such as subsidies, tax credits, and land grants may be essential to attract new semiconductor fabrication facilities and capacity from private firms. However, facilitating greater reciprocal private investment likely necessitates harmonizing regulations and standards to establish an integrated alliance-based ecosystem. Implementing more robust antitrust exemptions to allow for industry consolidation could strengthen regional champions.

- **Foster a skilled semiconductor workforce pipeline through educational reforms.**

Developing and sustaining a skilled semiconductor workforce pipeline presents another challenge with numerous potential policy levers. Comprehensively overhauling educational curricula and vocational training with a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics emphasis is one option. Enhancing immigration policies to attract global talent is another. Targeted initiatives like academic scholarships and tuition assistance for semiconductor-related studies could cultivate the next generation of skilled workers. Public-private partnerships between industry and schools could also strengthen workforce readiness.

Leveraging International Coalitions

To address challenges in international partnerships, we recommend that the U.S. and Japan leverage existing coalitions with South Korea, ASEAN, the Quad, and Five Eyes to uphold the rule-based international order. To do that, the two countries should:

- **Secure international rule of law through intelligence sharing and military exercises.**

The U.S., Japan, ROK, and the Philippines should enhance their defense and economic cooperation by increasing defense coordination through regular updates and alignment of defense plans, expanding information sharing, conducting joint military exercises, and developing advanced defense systems such as a joint missile early warning system. Developing a defensive partnership with ROK and the Philippines can capitalize on the current governments' willingness to confront Chinese actions. The Quad should continue to expand collaboration in maritime security and non-military initiatives like developing early-warning systems for natural disasters in the region. Simultaneously, Japan should develop its security agency, while the U.S. encourages the Five Eyes to let Japan join.

Closing Remarks

The U.S.-Japan alliance is poised to undergo significant transformations in the coming years. While the alliance was fundamentally founded on military principles, it is no longer enough for U.S.-Japan decision-makers to only consider the alliance in this context. To achieve regional peace and stability, military deterrence is not the only option any longer. Beyond increasing military coordination, we also propose that the U.S. and Japan to also pursue economic and technological avenues for coordination. Furthermore, the alliance will benefit from looking outwards towards international coalitions that share similar goals of regional stability.

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