

JAPAN'S FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY RECALIBRATIONS 2018-23

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In an August 2023 interview, General Yoshihide Yoshida, Japan's Chief of Staff, Joint Staff, stated that Japan's military could not "currently maintain" Japan's security "in the face of [the] evolving regional and global challenges."¹ At the same time, following the Japanese government's plan to double its spending for all national security-related matters to 2 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2027, its Defence Ministry requested a record \$52.67 billion for its 2024 budget, an increase of 13 per cent from 2023.² In line with this, Japan's 2023 White Paper highlighted the Chinese assertiveness

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1. Naoya Yoshino, "Japan 'Cannot Maintain' Security at Current Capabilities: SDF Chief," *Nikkei Asia*, August 29, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Japan-cannot-maintain-security-at-current-capabilities-SDF-chief#:~:text=Japan%20%27cannot%20maintain%27%20security%20at%20current%20capabilities-%3A%20SDF%20chief,-Gen.&text=TOKYO%20%2D%2D%20Japan%27s%20Self%2DDefense,in%20an%20interview%20with%20Nikkei>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.
2. Sakura Murakami, "Japan Makes Record Defence Spending Request Amid Tension with China," Reuters, August 31, 2023, [https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/japan-makes-record-defence-spending-request-amid-tension-with-china-2023-08-31/#:~:text=TOKYO%2C%20Aug%2031%20\(Reuters\),trillion%20yen%20over%20five%20years](https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/japan-makes-record-defence-spending-request-amid-tension-with-china-2023-08-31/#:~:text=TOKYO%2C%20Aug%2031%20(Reuters),trillion%20yen%20over%20five%20years). Accessed on September 29, 2023.

and is “seen as a break from Japan’s postwar policy limiting the use of force to self-defense.”³ This policy reorientation, a significant one for a pacifist Japan, is indicative of the new geopolitical realities that require adaptation and a shift from the past.

This article examines why despite its post-World War II pacifist nature, Japan has been recalibrating its foreign policy strategies over the past few years. In doing so, the essay will highlight how Japan is being driven to recalibrate its foreign policy strategies to contend with, and adapt to, the increasing Chinese foreign policy assertiveness and military provocations in Northeast Asia. While China’s actions are not new and bilateral relations with Japan have been rocky in the past, developments over the past few years infer a shift in Japan’s previous posture.

JAPAN-CHINA CONTENTIONS

Relations between Japan and China have several points of contention. These stem from history and Japan’s invasion in the 1930s, the territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands, the growing asymmetry between the two countries, and increasing Chinese military belligerence in Northeast Asia.

In modern history, Japan and China have an enmity that goes back to the Japanese invasion of the mainland during World War II. During their invasion of China, the Japanese were brutal in their conquest, including the Nanjing massacre in which as many as 300,000 Chinese were killed.⁴ During this massacre, Japanese soldiers “embarked on an uninterrupted spree of murder, rape and robbery.”⁵ The massacre has not been forgotten in China. Furthermore, Japanese leaders visiting the controversial Yasukuni Shrine and revisions in Japanese textbooks that overlook the atrocities are aspects that

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3. Mari Yamaguchi, “Japan Raises Alarm Over China’s Military, Russia Ties and Taiwan Tensions in New Defense Paper,” *AP News*, July 28, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/japan-defense-china-koreas-us-5f4e043865210f0b7c0fb333053b2bed>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.
 4. Eamonn Fingleton, “70 Years Later, Struggle for Nanking Massacre Justice Continues,” *The Atlantic*, May 26, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/05/70-years-later-struggle-for-nanking-massacre-justice-continues/239478/>. Accessed on 27 July 2020.
 5. Rana Mitter, *China’s War with Japan 1937-1945: The Struggle for Survival* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 130.

continue to sour relations between the two nations. From China's perspective, Japan's apologies have never been enough.⁶

Aside from Japan's actions during World War II, the two countries have a territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. The two countries reject each other's historical claims over the islands and the strategic and economic importance of the islands have made them central to the geopolitical jostling between the two countries.⁷ The Japanese government states that the islands are "indisputably an inherent part of the territory of Japan in the light of historical facts and based upon international law, and are...effectively under the Japanese control."⁸ To add to the tensions, China regularly sends its Coast Guard vessels into Japanese territorial waters. These incursions have been increasing, and in 2021, China sent its vessels into the contiguous zone around the islands for 112 consecutive days.⁹

Furthermore, China's military asymmetry compared to Japan also has implications for the regional dynamics. The modernisation of the Chinese military, its \$230 billion defence budget, and China's civil-military fusion strategy have concerned the Japanese leaders.¹⁰ Japan's Ministry of Defence has raised alarm on Twitter over the Chinese military assertiveness around Japan's borders.¹¹ This includes Chinese Navy and Air Force activities around Japan and the Senkaku Islands along with joint exercises with Russia.

6. David Volodzko, "China Doesn't Need Another Japanese Apology," *The Diplomat*, March 12, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/03/china-doesnt-need-another-japanese-apology/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

7. Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury, "The Senkaku Islands Dispute," *International Policy Digest*, August 1, 2016, <https://intpolicydigest.org/senkaku-islands-dispute/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

8. "Trends in China Coast Guard and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response," *MOFA Japan*, September 1, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

9. Junnosuke Kobara, "Chinese Ships Sail near Senkaku Islands for Record 112 days Straight," *Nikkei Asia*, June 5, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Chinese-ships-sail-near-Senkaku-Islands-for-record-112-days-straight>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

10. Yuka Koshino, "New Domains of Chinese Military Modernization: Security Implications for Japan," *NBR*, December 15, 2022, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/new-domains-of-chinese-military-modernization-security-implications-for-japan/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

11. Japan Ministry of Defence, https://twitter.com/ModJapan_en/status/1705132845520597248. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

China's support for the North Korean regime is an added thorn in bilateral relations. In June 2023, North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), not for the first time. Combined with an assertive China, North Korea's increasing belligerence has bolstered Japan-South Korea relations and resulted in a trilateral summit hosted by the United States in August 2023.¹² A new 'trilateral' developing among China, North Korea, and Russia is also of serious concern. China's activities towards Taiwan have further added to the bilateral tensions with Japan, linking peace across the Taiwan Strait to its own security for the first time in its 2022 National Security Strategy.¹³ Additionally, China also views the American presence in Japan as part of the US strategy to contain China.

These points of contention, therefore, have contributed to the overall tensions between China and Japan. The following section will examine specific Chinese actions over the past few years that have compelled Japan to recalibrate its foreign policy strategies.

CHINA'S INCREASING MILITARY ASSERTIVENESS

Despite the points of contention between Japan and China, the latter's military assertiveness over the past decade, which has only been increasing, has been the primary factor for Japan's reorientation.

Under Xi Jinping, the Chinese military has undergone a significant modernisation drive. On the naval front, China has successfully built the largest naval fleet, surpassing that of the US, with more than 370 vessels and submarines.¹⁴ Amongst its impressive fleet, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy (PLAN) already operates two aircraft carriers, with a third currently undergoing various trials after being

12. Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury and Benjamin Ho, "Will Thawing Japan-South Korea Relations Change the Security Landscape of Northeast Asia?," *RSIS IDSS Paper*, September 18, 2023, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip23066-will-thawing-japan-south-korea-relations-change-the-security-landscape-of-northeast-asia/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

13. "National Security Strategy of Japan," December 2022, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

14. Brad Lendon and Simone McCarthy, "Blue-water Ambitions: Is China Looking Beyond its Neighbourhood Now it has the World's Largest Navy?," CNN, September 2, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/01/asia/china-navy-overseas-military-bases-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

launched in June 2022. The newest *Fujian* carrier is of 80,000 tonnes, significantly larger and more powerful than its predecessors.¹⁵ The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has steadily been inducting the fifth generation J-20 fighter aircraft and is no longer reliant on Russia for its engines.¹⁶ On the missile and nuclear front too, there have been significant developments. The US Department of Defence's 2022 report on China's military and security developments highlighted three new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) silo fields being constructed.¹⁷ The department's 2023 report added that China has more than 500 nuclear warheads, estimated to be more than 1,000 by 2030.¹⁸ The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has estimated that China had 410 nuclear warheads as of 2023, an increase of 60 warheads from 2022.¹⁹ Undoubtedly, China has been increasing its military forces, capabilities, and power projection.

The increase in capabilities, combined with a more assertive foreign policy under Xi Jinping has also led to increasing military posturing around Japan. In May 2022, it was reported that Chinese warships were circling Japan and its aircraft carrier flotillas have exercised several times in the Western Pacific.²⁰ Additionally, the Chinese have also carried out joint military exercises with Russia since the start of the war in Ukraine. Air and naval exercises have taken place in the Sea of Japan and bombers from both countries have also flown missions around Japan as a show of force. Japanese officials

15. China Power Team, "How Advanced Is China's Third Aircraft Carrier?," *CSIS China Power*, May 17, 2023, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-type-003-fujian-aircraft-carrier/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

16. Liu Xuanzun, "China's J-20 Stealth Fighter Flies with New Engines: Reports," *Global Times*, July 3, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202307/1293620.shtml>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

17. "2022 Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," U.S. Department of Defence, <https://www.defense.gov/CMPR/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

18. "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2023," U.S. Department of Defense, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>. Accessed on October 29, 2023.

19. Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Chinese Nuclear Forces" in *SIPRI Yearbook 2023* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

20. Jesse Johnson, "China Sends Flotilla led by Aircraft Carrier near Okinawa," *The Japan Times*, May 3, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/05/03/national/china-pla-aircraft-carrier-miyako/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

have lodged their concerns and stated that the flights “were a grave security concern for Japan as they appeared to be directed towards Japan” and further complicate Japan’s security environment.²¹

In a serious accident that could have escalated, five Chinese ballistic missiles landed in Japan’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) near Okinawa in August 2022. The missiles were part of China’s largest military exercise in the Taiwan Strait.²² This had never happened before and highlights how increasing Chinese belligerence towards Taiwan also has ramifications for other Northeast Asian nations. Additionally, with Japan having linked peace in the Taiwan Strait to its own security, China’s military posturing and the almost daily PLAAF and PLAN missions towards Taiwan have heightened concerns. China also regularly began crossing the median line between the two countries in 2022, a significant increase in its assertive posturing. On September 18, 2023, Taiwan’s Defence Ministry stated it had tracked a record 103 PLA planes in the span of 24 hours with 40 of them crossing the median line.²³ During the same week, 20 Chinese military vessels were spotted around Taiwan. By the end of September 2023, 565 aircraft had been detected, with 225 of them crossing the median line. This was in stark contrast to a total of 380 sorties throughout the year in 2020.²⁴ Given the significant uptick in incursions over the years, the Chinese have successfully normalised such incursions.

Apart from military exercises, China has regularly been sending its coast guard vessels into Japan’s EEZ around the Senkaku Islands.

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21. Dzirhan Mahadzir, “Russian, Chinese Bombers Make 2nd Round of Flights Near Japan, Korea,” *USNI News*, June 9, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/06/09/russian-chinese-bombers-make-2nd-round-of-flights-near-japan-korea>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.
 22. “Japan Protests after Chinese Missiles Land in its Exclusive Economic Zone,” *Reuters*, August 4, 2022, [https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-protests-after-chinese-missiles-land-its-exclusive-economic-zone-2022-08-04/#:~:text=TOKYO%2C%20Aug%20%20\(Reuters\),China%20earlier%20in%20the%20day](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-protests-after-chinese-missiles-land-its-exclusive-economic-zone-2022-08-04/#:~:text=TOKYO%2C%20Aug%20%20(Reuters),China%20earlier%20in%20the%20day). Accessed on September 29, 2023.
 23. Lawrence Chung, “PLA Warplanes Set New 24-Hour Record, Destabilising Security: Taiwan Defence Ministry,” *South China Morning Post*, September 18, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3234912/pla-warplanes-set-new-24-hour-record-destabilising-security-taiwan>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.
 24. John Xie, “China Is Increasing Taiwan Airspace Incursions,” *VOA*, January 6, 2021, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_voa-news-china_china-increasing-taiwan-airspace-incursions/6200418.html. Accessed on October 31, 2023.

Despite repeated objections from Japan and the establishment of a hotline to prevent accidental clashes, these incursions²⁵ and provocations have continued.²⁶ Additionally, on September 15, 2023, the Japanese Defence Ministry stated that a Chinese naval vessel had sailed through Japan's territorial waters for the twelfth time since June 2023.²⁷

Aside from China's provocative military posturing that has been driving Japan's foreign policy and security outlook, Christopher Hughes has made the convincing argument that Japanese leaders' confidence in their ability to read China's intentions has "been progressively undermined."²⁸ Furthermore, younger Japanese leaders no longer have personal relations with their Chinese counterparts and are suspicious of their western neighbour. At the bureaucratic level, too, the Foreign Ministry's China division has been superseded in importance by the North American Affairs Bureau. In his autobiography, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has stated that China was the most difficult country to negotiate with.²⁹ Uncertainty, therefore, has led to the deterioration of strategic trust. Ultimately, it has become harder for Japan to understand China and, therefore, a rethink is needed to adapt and deal with an assertive Beijing. This is complimentary to China's military assertiveness as it causes unease amongst policy-makers if they are unable to understand their neighbour and, thus, must adapt to the changing realities on the ground. 'Reluctant realism,' therefore, causes Japan to seek alternative methods of dealing with Beijing's activities when Tokyo feels it is unable to understand the Chinese intents. China's

25. "Tokyo Urges Beijing to Stop Intrusions into Japanese Waters near Senkakus," *The Japan Times*, November 23, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/11/23/national/jpn-china-maritime-mtg/>. Accessed on September 29, 2023.

26. "Trends in China Coast Guard and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response," *MOFA Japan*, September 1, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html. Accessed September 29, 2023.

27. Japan Ministry of Defence, Twitter, https://twitter.com/ModJapan_en/status/1702748113168191640. Accessed on October 5, 2023.

28. Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's 'Resentful Realism' and Balancing China's Rise," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016): 109-150, p. 125.

29. Satoshi Sugiyama, "How Kishida's Political Journey has Shaped his Views on China," *The Japan Times*, January 3, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/01/03/national/politics-diplomacy/kishida-background-china-views/>. Accessed on October 31, 2023.

overall activities have not been confidence-inducing. This invariably leads to an increasingly tense region.

Rather than China's actions and the inability of Japan to understand its intentions, an argument can be made that Japan's recalibration is due to a faltering and unreliable US security umbrella, especially after the US pullout from Afghanistan. This, however, does not stand scrutiny for three reasons. First, the US-China rivalry is only increasing and while limited thaws might emerge, the nature of their relationship will remain competitive. Second, a contingency over Taiwan invariably involves Japan, given the 85 American military bases in the country, housing 54,000 troops, and the Japanese linking a Taiwan contingency to their own security strengthens the American resolve for supporting Japan. Third, the US-Japan alliance stood firm even during Donald Trump's term despite his attacking the alliance and stating that Japan was taking advantage of the US.³⁰ The US-Japan alliance, therefore, has been an "anchor of the US security role in Asia" and given the present geopolitical environment, Washington will remain the region.³¹

China's increasing military assertiveness which includes modernising its military, exercises around Japan and incursions into its EEZ, along with an increasingly aggressive posture towards Taiwan which has led to Chinese aircraft crossing the median line have all contributed to Japan recalibrating its foreign policy outlook. This has been further cemented by the Japanese no longer believing they can read China's intentions, making Beijing's military assertiveness even more concerning.

JAPAN'S RECALIBRATION

Having established the points of concern of Japan toward China and Beijing's increasing military assertiveness that is causing Japan's foreign policy and security recalibration, this final section highlights the measures Tokyo is taking to adapt to the situation. Japan's policy

30. Linda Sieg, Daniel Leussink, "Trump Renews Criticism of Japan-US Alliance Before G20 Summit," Reuters, June 27, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g20-summit-trump-japan-idUSKCN1TS057>. Accessed on October 2, 2023.

31. Emma Chanlett-Avery and Caitlin Campbell, Joshua A. Williams, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance," Congressional Research Service, June 13, 2013. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33740>. Accessed on October 2, 2023.

shifts have been reactive in nature, drawing from the ‘reluctant realism’ analogy. While Japan does not want to provoke China, it feels it has little choice, given Beijing’s actions. It must also take into account China’s economic might and its position as Japan’s largest trading partner. Nevertheless, Tokyo’s approach towards Beijing is changing. Thematically, this includes Japan strengthening its own defence capabilities and increasing its defence spending, focussing on alliances and minilateral organisations, and taking a harder stance against China. These actions are not only driven by the government: as a poll conducted by Nikkei-TV showed, 55 per cent of Japanese people want the government to take “a harsher stance against China.”³² Additionally, according to *The Economist*, 71 per cent viewed China as a “threat” in 2021 and more than 90 per cent in 2022 believed but Japan should prepare for a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.³³

Despite the American alliance umbrella, Japan is still responsible for its own security. To this end, documents released by the Japanese government in December 2022 laid the foundations of Japan’s defence and security policies that signal a shift away from its traditional pacifist outlook. These included the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defence Strategy, and the Defence Buildup Programme. In the most direct evidence of Japan recalibrating its foreign and security policies due to China, the NSS stated that China is “the greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community.”³⁴ Japan’s 2023 Defence White Paper added, “China’s current external stance, military activities, and other activities have become a matter of serious concern for Japan and the international community, and present an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge.”³⁵

32. “Majority of Japanese Want Harder Line Against China,” *Nikkei Asia*, August 29, 2016, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Majority-of-Japanese-want-harder-line-against-China>. Accessed on October 2, 2023.

33. “How Japan sees China,” *The Economist*, January 1, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2022/01/01/how-japan-sees-china>; Lin Tsui-yi, Jonathan Chin, “Most in Japan Urge a Plan for if China Seizes Taiwan,” *Taipei Times*, June 1, 2022, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2022/06/01/2003779135>. Accessed on October 2, 2023.

34. “National Security Strategy of Japan,” MOFA Japan, December 2022, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

35. “Defense of Japan 2023,” Ministry of Defence Japan, 2023, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2023/DOJ2023_EN_Full.pdf. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

The documents also outlined Japan's *defence spending* for the years ahead. The government announced a budget of 2 per cent of its GDP for all "national security-related spending" which amounts to US\$321 billion till 2027. By 2027, therefore, Japan's defence budget is expected to be 65 per cent higher than in 2022 at US\$ 66 billion.³⁶ Furthermore, at US\$ 51 billion, Japan's defence budget for 2023 "is larger than Tokyo's combined defense budget increases of the past 30 years".³⁷ For a pacifist country which had earlier imposed 1 per cent of its GDP as a limit for such spending, this is a symbolic and historic measure that highlights the changing attitude of Japanese lawmakers in how they adapt to their geopolitical environment. On the military front, Japan is also strengthening its capabilities. Japan has been fortifying its remote islands of Honshu, Kyushu, and Ryuku amongst others.³⁸ The country is also planning to upgrade its Aegis destroyers by 2027 which would also allow them to operate the 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles that Japan purchased from the US.³⁹ The acquisition of the Tomahawks gives Japan significant counter-strike capabilities. From a constitutional and policy perspective, the government maintains that counter-strike capabilities are possible under the Constitution as a measure of self-defence.⁴⁰ However, till now, it had relied on the US for this role and had not sought it for its own military. According to the 2023 defence White Paper, Japan has also strengthened its *air and missile defence capabilities* and command and control capabilities, and utilised the space domain, built up a stand-off defence capability, utilised unmanned assets, strengthened maritime and air capabilities, and also strengthened its joint operational architecture.

36. Adam P. Liff, "No, Japan is not Planning to 'Double its Defense Budget,'" Brookings, May 22, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/no-japan-is-not-planning-to-double-its-defense-budget/>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

37. Ibid.

38. Michiyo Ishida and Darrelle Ng, "Japan, Alarmed by China's Regional Activities, Fortifies Southwest Islands and Hikes Defence Budget," CNA, May 26, 2023, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/japan-self-defense-force-spending-fortifies-southern-islands-china-sea-3517466>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

39. "Japan Eyes Upgrading Aegis Ships with Tomahawk Missiles by FY 2027," *The Japan Times*, March 25, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/03/25/national/msdf-aegis-destroyers-tomahawk-missiles/>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

40. Ibid.

While building upon its own capabilities, Japan has also been strengthening its bilateral and multilateral *alliances and partnerships*. Several developments over the past year are indicative of this trend. They include the US Army bolstering ties with Japan which includes the sharing of intelligence,⁴¹ and working with the US and Australia to further logistics cooperation which would enhance troop movement, and weapons and supply deliveries across the Indo-Pacific region.⁴² For the first time, in January 2023, India and Japan conducted joint fighter aircraft exercises in Japan's Ibaraki Prefecture.⁴³ India exercised with the Russian Su-30MKI fighter that is also used by the Chinese Air Force. Similarly, Germany and Japan conducted their first air force exercises over Japanese territory in September 2022. There have also been reports of Japan and Germany beginning negotiations for a defence cross-servicing deal which would allow the two nations to exchange fuel and other supplies.⁴⁴ On the multilateral front, a trilateral was held among the leaders of the US, Japan, and South Korea to address regional challenges posed by China and North Korea. A joint air force exercise among the three countries followed. The thawing of relations with South Korea indicates the gravity of the strategic concerns, despite the historical baggage which has earlier prevented rapprochement.⁴⁵ The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) countries (India, Japan, US, and Australia) have also held joint naval exercises and are broadening their scope of engagements. Although not a military alliance, the QUAD has irked China several

41. Ryo Nakamura, "U.S. Army Bolsters Ties with Japan as Focus Shifts to China," *Nikkei Asia*, September 26, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/U.S.-Army-bolsters-ties-with-Japan-as-focus-shifts-to-China>. Accessed October 4, 2023.

42. Ryo Nakamura, "U.S. Army, Japan, Australia Expand Logistics Cooperation," *Nikkei Asia*, September 18, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/U.S.-Army-Japan-Australia-expand-logistics-cooperation>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

43. Gabriel Dominguez, "India-Japan Defense Ties Enter New Phase with First Joint Fighter Drills," *The Japan Times*, January 16, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/01/16/national/india-japan-fighters-joint-exercise/>. Accessed October 4, 2023.

44. Ryo Nemoto, "Japan, Germany to Start Negotiations on Defense Cross-Servicing Deal," *Nikkei Asia*, September 30, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/Japan-Germany-to-start-negotiations-on-defense-cross-servicing-deal>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

45. Roy-Chaudhury and Ho, n. 12.

times.⁴⁶ Japan, along with Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea, is also one of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO's) partners in the Indo-Pacific. Although Japan and NATO have been engaging since the 1990s, over the past few years, the engagement has increased. This has been due to NATO 'looking East' and its linking of trans-Atlantic security to the Indo-Pacific, undoubtedly driven by concerns over China. In December 2020, Japan, for the first time, attended a NATO ministerial meeting. Subsequently, in April 2022 and April 2023, it participated in the NATO foreign ministers' meetings. More importantly, in June 2022, the Japanese prime minister, along with the leaders of the other Indo-Pacific partners, attended a NATO summit for the first time. Areas of cooperation include cyber defence, new technologies, maritime security, and interoperability.⁴⁷ Closer cooperation was cemented by the NATO-Japan Individual Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP) in July 2023.⁴⁸

Japan has also begun to take a harder stance against China on several fronts. In September 2023, Japan elevated defence and security relations with Taiwan by appointing a serving official as its defence attaché in Taipei.⁴⁹ This enhances direct contact between defence and military officials in the backdrop of China's manoeuvres. This is a significant development as the post was earlier always held by a retired military officer to prevent aggravating China. In the South China Sea (SCS), Japan has held several naval exercises with the US and other nations over the past few years.⁵⁰ In 2018, a Japanese submarine was in the SCS for the first time since World War II to participate in

46. Qian Jiayin, "Quad Collective Maritime Defense an Illusion in the 21st Century," *Global Times*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202308/1296040.shtml>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

47. "Relations with Japan," *NATO*, July 28, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50336.htm. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

48. Gabriel Dominguez, "Japan and NATO Usher in New Era of Cooperation Amid China Concerns," *The Japan Times*, July 12, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/07/12/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-nato-new-cooperation-agreement/>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

49. Kaori Kaneko, Yukiko Toyoda, Tim Kelly, Sakura Murakami, "Exclusive: Japan Elevates Taiwan Security Ties in Move Likely to Rile China," *Reuters*, September 13, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-elevates-taiwan-security-ties-move-likely-rile-china-2023-09-12/>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

50. Dzirhan Mahadzir, "Japanese, U.S., the Philippines Drill in the South China Sea; China Contests U.S. Position on Territorial Disputes," *USNI News*, September 5, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/09/05/japanese-u-s-the-philippines-drill-in-the-south>

exercises with the US Navy. For over a decade, the Japanese have also offered patrol vessels and training to countries in Southeast Asia to improve their coast guards patrolling the disputed SCS waters.⁵¹ Separately, Japan has also called out human rights abuses in China. Before the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, Japan's Parliament passed the "Resolution regarding the serious human rights situation in Xinjiang Uighur and other areas."⁵² On the economic front, Japan has also moved towards reducing its dependence on China.

From China's perspective, Beijing has been predictably critical of Japan's policy developments, which it views as hostile. China reacted strongly to Japan's new NSS and believes Japan is returning to a period of militarisation which is "very dangerous" and has, thus, urged Tokyo to "learn from the lessons of history", given its "militarist aggression" during the 20th century.⁵³ The view from multiple *Global Times* commentaries indicates China's points of contention with Japan's actions. China has been suspicious of the QUAD and increasingly sees Japan as violating its pacifist Constitution. It believes Japan is hyping up the "China threat" to expand its military and as part of its plan to get other countries to also confront China.⁵⁴ From a domestic angle, Japan will use Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands to support revising the pacifist Article 9 of its Constitution. Separately, some Chinese scholars view Japan as an American pawn for encircling China, while others believe that Japan is leading the way, given that the concept of the Indo-Pacific was first touted by

china-sea-china-contests-u-s-position-on-territorial-disputes. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

51. Hiroyuki Akita, "Japan Coast Guard Quietly Helps Asian Nations Counter China," *Nikkei Asia*, October 21, 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-Coast-Guard-quietly-helps-Asian-nations-counter-China>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.
52. "Resolution Regarding the Serious Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang Uighur and Other Areas," The House of Representatives, Japan, February 1, 2022, https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/ketugi_e220201-1.html. Accessed on October 4, 2023.
53. "Japan's Return to Path of Militarization 'Dangerous': China Defence Ministry," Reuters, March 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japans-return-path-militarisation-dangerous-china-defence-ministry-2023-03-16/>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.
54. "Provocative Defense Paper Reveals Japan's Dangerous Intention to Seek Constitutional Revision, Observers Warn," *Global Times*, May 25, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202305/1291331.shtml>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.⁵⁵ The *People's Daily*, also, on several occasions has attacked Japan's policies. Under the pen name of Zhong Shen, used to express the Chinese Communist Party's views on international affairs, it has accused Japan of interfering in China's internal affairs and becoming a "troublemaker for regional peace and stability."⁵⁶ Zhong Shen has also called the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral a "mini-NATO" that undermines peace and stability.⁵⁷

Thus, the evidence showcases several instances in the way Japan has been recalibrating its foreign and security policies due to the challenges from China. Ultimately, Japan has been driven to recalibrate its foreign policy strategies to contend with, and adapt to, the increasing assertiveness of the Chinese foreign policy and military provocations in Northeast Asia.

As the geopolitical situation continues to remain strained and new fissures of contentions arise between the US and China and between Japan and China (such as the issue around the Fukushima water release), it is unlikely that relations between these countries will thaw. China's assertiveness continues despite its internal compulsions and tumultuous domestic politics. With Xi Jinping at the helm, Tokyo's decision to recalibrate its foreign and security policies encapsulates an environment where adaptation and breaking precedence with the past is the necessary way forward.

55. "How Should China Deal with Japan's Destructive Policy?," *Global Times*, July 3, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202307/1293598.shtml>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

56. Zhong Sheng, "Japan Colluding with U.S. in Asia-Pacific Region a Move to Invite Disaster," *People's Daily*, May 26, 2022, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0526/c90000-10101611.html>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.

57. Zhong Shen, "U.S.-led 'mini NATO' Trilateral Alliance Undermines Peace, Stability in Asia-Pacific," *People's Daily*, August 31, 2023, <https://en.people.cn/n3/2023/0831/c90000-20065774.html>. Accessed on October 4, 2023.