

Policy
Recommendations

The Need for Strengthening Efforts to Preserving Peace in East Asia

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Policy Recommendations

■ The purpose of national security policies is to maintain peace and to protect citizens from the horrors of war. But are existing policies that supposedly strengthen deterrence actually preventing war and keeping citizens safe?

Deterrence, which relies heavily on military force, always results in the opponent taking countermeasures, leading to a perpetually unstable arms race that can only be ended some other way. The longer this racing continues, the more terrible the destruction will be when that instability leads to the outbreak of war.

We recommend a shift away from policies that strictly adhere to the logic of ‘deterrence theory.’ We propose instead a policy of ‘reassurance’ where states avoid relying solely on threats of violence to prevent violence and take diplomatic measures that strengthen efforts to preserve peace. We consider this essential in preventing the outbreak of war and avoiding further escalation if a war should start. Reassurance can and should be used in tandem with deterrence.

■ When considering its role in the conflict over Taiwan, Japan is confronted with the ultimate choice between becoming involved in a larger war or causing the US-Japan alliance to collapse. For this reason, Japan should endeavor to conduct visionary diplomacy to avoid a future crisis.

As an example, Japan should encourage the US to avoid taking excessive, confrontational stances and make the issue of direct attacks carried out by US armed forces in Japan a subject to Japanese approval. This is instrumental in communicating to its US counterparts that Japan is not entirely in agreement in terms of getting involved with regard to the Taiwan issue. At the same time, Japan can persuade Taiwan not to press for separation and independence from China, while maintaining and encouraging exchanges between Japanese and Taiwanese people on non-governmental levels as well.

Japan may also remind China that its careless use of military force invites international backlash, putting China in an undesirable situation. From a military perspective, Japan has little choice but to support the United States, however it does not endorse a unilateral declaration of Taiwanese independence.

Along with the above-mentioned points, South Korea and other Southeast Asian countries, including ASEAN member-states, maintain a similar position on this matter. Japan therefore can cooperate with these countries in multilateral dialogue, solidifying international public opinion against war.

A conflict over Taiwan is not inevitable. Whether it escalates further to the level of an emergency also depends on the decisions Japan makes. Even if the path to avoiding war is exceptionally difficult, the suffering that comes with war goes beyond the hardships of diplomatic problem-solving. Politics must stick to diplomacy until the very end.

■ Deterrence, coping maneuvers, or launching an attack on the opponent’s military base (a trigger for escalating conflict) without fulfilling the necessary conditions to do so is an ill-advised initiative..

■ Even if the government does not intend to engage in war, it should make an estimate about possible damages and make this clear to the public. Even for a war waged in the name of defense; this is the minimum politics should be accountable for. Otherwise, expecting the public to support any decision in favor of war is akin to deceiving a whole nation.

Political Challenges in an Era of Instability

Japan has not been involved in a war for more than 70 years. There are multiple reasons for this: one being the stable and mutually deterrent relations established between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Second, although Japan is subject to directions of the US-Japan alliance, it still maintains a controlled defensive stance under the Japanese constitution and draws a line between its own operations and those of the US armed forces. As a result, no missile has hit Japan, no bullet has been shot by the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) while on dispatch overseas, and no person has been killed in action.

However, neither US-Russian, nor US-Chinese relations can be described today as either stable or mutually deterrent. In addition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, tensions over Taiwan are rising, and North Korea is repeatedly demonstrating it has a reliable nuclear arsenal it is prepared to use. It is no wonder many Japanese now feel apprehensive about the possibility of war. The Japanese government is planning a large-scale expansion of new military capabilities, including an ability to launch strikes at military bases in neighboring countries. It also agreed to new national security laws that allow the integrated operations of US and Japanese military forces.

Reports on the war in Ukraine suggest that there is no end in sight. Many civilians, on both sides, have lost their lives, their property, and their freedom. There is no safe place to seek relief. If there is a war over Taiwan, civilians in Okinawa, and other regions in Japan, could find themselves in a similar situation. This is the most important lesson Japanese people are learning from the war in Ukraine. Peace is precious and every effort must be made to preserve it.

The most important goal of defense-related policies is to protect civilians by avoiding the outbreak of war. It is prudent, therefore, given how unstable the situation has become, to ask whether existing policies that supposedly strengthen deterrence actually serve this purpose? Politicians have an obligation to pursue an answer to this question, and to consider alternative policies that may offer more reliable ways to preserve peace.

Russia's aggressive behavior is a threat to an international order that depends on the United Nations Security Council, where its status as a permanent member gives it the right to veto any proposed response from the council. Without effective UN action how can the international system prevent conflicts between the five permanent members?

Encouraging decision-makers to prioritize self-restraint for the common good over self-interest is essential. Policies based solely on deterrence; that is, on threats to use force, are undermining UN-led rules-based order. Russia has lost confidence in that order and China may too.

Japan now faces the related challenges of how to preserve the rules-based international order, starting with United Nations, while preventing the imminent danger of a war between the United States and China over Taiwan.

The ruling party in Japan is focusing exclusively on the possibility of war. Because it believes Japanese military alliance with the United States has successfully prevent war so far, it is acquiescing in US demands to strengthen military forces and their ability to credibly threaten China. But it seems clear that these threats are not reducing but rather increasing the possibility of a war. Instability is increasing, not decreasing. People in Japan

can see a response based solely on increasing the credibility of the United States to threaten China, with Japanese help, is not working. Japanese do not want to appear to contradict or disobey a dependable friend of their country. But they do not want to be dragged into a US war with China over Taiwan either.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, the United States refused to send US combat forces, fearing that a direct conflict between the two nuclear-armed countries would widen and escalate the war. In order to effectively cope with the danger of a military conflict between large, well-armed countries like Russia and the United States, or China and the United States, other nations must admit there is a real risk it can occur. And they must realize deterrence alone cannot prevent such a conflict or assure it will not escalate if it starts. This is the reality of the failure of deterrence for Ukraine. **All sides know a major war between large, nuclear-armed militaries is not a viable option, yet a war that devastates the smaller nations in between them can occur.**

This is why, if preserving the peace Japan has enjoyed for more than 70 years remains the main objective of Japanese security policy, we must shift away from relying on solely on deterrence.

Unfortunately, Japanese Diet sessions, as well as Japanese media reports, often limit debate to the potential tactics of fighting a future war, for example, the imagined benefits of Japan acquiring an ability to attack military bases inside other nations, such as China or North Korea. The focus of these tactical discussion is often very narrow and ignores the broader military reality; any new military capability Japan acquires will be insignificant compared to the existing and rapidly growing military capabilities the United States and China would bring to bear in a war Japan cannot hope to prevent, or contain, by military means.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida promised he would make diplomatic efforts to prevent a Taiwan contingency. But he also warned that in an emergency, his government would respond “in accord with security-related laws and new security legislation.” He seems afraid to tell the Japanese people that may mean direct Japanese military involvement in a war between the United States and China. Perhaps that is because there is very little confidence within Japan that such an emergency will not arise in the near future.

Some argue that diplomacy must be backed by power. Japan has already invested extensively in acquiring advanced military capabilities. As it debates acquiring more, there is no corresponding investment in reimagining and investing in the primary defensive function of Japanese diplomacy, which is to exercise a degree of persuasiveness that can encourage China to consider the importance of moral and ethical imperatives aligned with and strongly supported by international public opinion. Japan’s military and economic strength need to be combined with efforts to exert its cultural influence, sometimes referred to as soft power, which helps define and strengthen international norms that discourage aggressive language and behavior that create conflict and encourages language and behavior that preserve peace. Currently, there is not enough discussion in Japan about the defensive potential of Japan’s soft power and how strengthen the impact of Japanese diplomacy.

Japanese and US politicians, especially legislators, need to think more about how to prevent military conflict between the United States and China, how to build a stable international order, and they can work together to achieve both those goals. We make this request to all political leaders, regardless of party or faction.

How will Japan Respond to a US-China War over Taiwan

Wars tend to begin with military optimism; with a belief that the will and ability of the other side to defend itself can be overcome with little cost. This appears to have been Russia's belief when it invaded Ukraine. Demonstrating the will and ability to defend is necessary to discourage such optimism about the prospects for victory before a war begins. At the same time, however, wars also tend to begin with diplomatic pessimism; with the belief that there is no recourse other than the use of military force. Demonstrating the will to compromise and the ability to engage in earnest discussion is necessary to discourage a pessimistic attitude towards what might be gained through diplomacy. Preventing war requires political flexibility that always leaves an open path for diplomatic solutions.

Deterrence is threatening those who contemplate starting a war that they will suffer intolerable damages that far exceed the imagined benefits of war. Those threats must be credible for the threat to have the desired effect; one must demonstrate an ability and a willingness to inflict intolerable suffering in a counterattack. It is easy to understand how difficult it is to know what is in the mind of another and how easy it is to miscalculate. An opponent may misjudge the other's intentions or underestimate their capability to inflict damage. Having taken the risk to start a war, the mentality of the aggressor may not permit any concession, no matter the harm inflicted in a counterattack. This appears to be how Russia is responding in Ukraine.

It is difficult for practitioners of deterrence to estimate how much force is necessary to convince an aggressor to stop. This may lead them to assume the greater the force of a counterattack the better. But this often feeds escalation by encouraging the aggressor to respond with even greater force. Ultimately, practitioners of deterrence must prepare for major losses.

Deterring large nuclear armed nations like Russia and China demands preparing for a world war.

The confrontation between the United States and China over Taiwan has been transformed into an ideological confrontation between democracy and autocracy. If Japan, a front-line base for the US military, joins the United States in this ideological confrontation, it could be involved in a war with China. On the other hand, if Japan takes a neutral stance, the US-Japan alliance could collapse. **Dealing with a Taiwan contingency is not a simple matter, as Prime Minister Kishida said, of responding "in accordance with security-related laws and new security legislations."** It is the choice of whether to become involved in a war or refrain from it, and, if Japan chooses to refrain, to accept the risk of the deterioration of the Japan-US alliance.

The only way to avoid this choice is to resolve the Taiwan crisis as soon as possible by developing a new vision of the problem focused on finding a long-term diplomatic solution.

Deterrence by means of military force alone inevitably leads to countermeasures from the opponent, resulting in an endless arms race. If deterrence fails, and war starts, this same pattern of behavior will lead to escalation with increasingly catastrophic consequences.

Deterrence can help prevent war but complementing it with reassurance is also necessary to diminish incentives for war and increase protection for the vital national interests of all parties. In Japan, however, there is a strong tendency to discuss national security exclusively from the standpoint of deterrence, and the concept of providing reassurance is seldom considered.

Reassurance does not require unilateral concessions. The more difficult it is to settle matters amicably with the other party, the more important it is to understand the minimum needed to tip the opponent's calculation towards preserving peace. This can be just as difficult to determine as the amount of force needed to discourage war. It involves making determinations about excessive demands and the best means to create buffers that make it harder for perceptions of conflicting interests to undermine confidence a satisfactory diplomatic solution is obtainable. Diplomats are subject to the same risks of misunderstanding and miscalculation as military strategists. To be effective diplomacy will require governments to invest more people, skill, time, discipline, and effort than the governments of Japan or the United States invest today. Diplomacy, like war, can be morally compromising and unpleasant, but this can be endured if there is a firm resolve to preserve peace.

We recognize political conditions in East Asia are deteriorating, and the true power of diplomacy is now being tested in ways it was not during the past seven decades when, for Japan at least, peace was preserved. Politicians, especially legislators, must take the lead in developing a new vision of diplomacy that sees it as more than an appendage of deterrence; that is no longer so dependent on threats to use military force.

Preventing Taiwan from Becoming the Next Ukraine

The United States is providing substantial military support to Ukraine to help the beleaguered nation thwart Russian war aims it finds intolerable. It is possible that Russia did not expect this, and that if it would not have invaded Ukraine in February 2022. But we are confident in our contention that all decisions to begin wars are the consequences of the inherent difficulties of trying to predict the response of others, which is always clearer when examining those decisions after the fact.

Chinese predictions about the United States may be influenced by its perception of US decisions regarding Ukraine. It may exercise more caution than Russia did when considering the consequences of using military force to attempt to compel Taiwan to accept its terms for unification. It is likely to prepare for the possibility of substantial US military support. We may have witnessed evidence of that preparation in China's August 2022 demonstration of its ability to interfere with US efforts to provide aid.

There should be room for negotiation on Russian concerns about NATO expansion and force deployments, but Russian claims to control all or parts of Ukraine is clearly contrary to the previously accepted status quo, to international law, the United Nations charter, and Russia's own promises when Ukraine agreed to give up the nuclear weapons left under its control when the Soviet Union disbanded. Accepting those kind of claims is not what we mean by reassurance.

China's claim that Taiwan is a part of China has a firm foundation in international law, is recognized by a large majority of UN member states, and is acknowledged in agreements reached between US, Japanese and Chinese leaders at the time diplomatic relations the communist government in Beijing were established. The open question is whether it is acceptable for China to use military force to impose intolerable conditions on the people of Taiwan, including equally important international recognition of people's democratic right to self-government.

China refuses to commit to a non-military resolution of the dispute between its government and the government ruling Taiwan. Chinese decision-makers are also very concerned about a declaration of Taiwanese independence that is supported, perhaps even encouraged, by foreign nations, including the United States and Japan. In the past there was a bipartisan US consensus not to support and to actively discourage a Taiwanese declaration of independence. But that consensus is breaking down. Increased visits to Taiwan by high-ranking US government officials, significant and accelerating upgrades to US military assistance, and renewed US emphasis on democracy and human rights, coupled with statements by prominent US political figures in support of independence, are undermining Chinese confidence in US government assurances it seeks to maintain the status quo.

Taiwan itself is divided on the question of its sovereign status but there is a stable majority that rejects unification under the control of the communist government in China but is also content with upholding a status quo where there is no effort to pursue a formal declaration of independence. China's crackdown in Hong Kong in 2019 made China's preferred formula for resolving the problem of two governments: acceptance of the principle of "one country, two systems," a non-starter for both of Taiwan's major political parties.

The United States is very concerned about the geopolitical consequences of a US decision not to come to Taiwan's defense if China chooses to start a war to overthrow the democratically elected government in Taiwan. Renewed Chinese emphasis on the importance of communist ideology, coupled with a much greater Chinese government emphasis on national security, is making China less transparent and its government more difficult for US observers to understand and predict.

These combination of these developments in the United States, Taiwan and China are creating a descending spiral of mutual doubt, misunderstand and mistrust that significantly increases the risk of war. At the same time, the three governments have different interests and intentions, but all understand the dangers of precipitating a war where all three would incur enormous, and possibly intolerable, cost.

Japan could not and did not need to become directly or more actively involved in responding to the outbreak of war in Ukraine. But Taiwan is geographically close and presents a different scenario. Japan would be the most affected country in the event of war. It has close ties with both the United States and China. That obliges Japan to use those relationships and engage in meaningful dialogue with both combatants. Moreover, Japan cannot afford to remain idle as the crisis over Taiwan becomes more acute and the risk of war continues to grow. Yet, the ruling party has not articulated or made readily apparent Japan's diplomatic strategy to lessen the sense of crisis and decrease the risk of military conflict.

Japan has some leverage over the behavior of both nations. It could, for example, use discussions of the need for prior consultations of direct US attacks on China from US bases in Japan to discourage the US government from taking what Japan believes to be an excessively confrontational stance on Taiwan related issues, or at least to make clear when Japan cannot consent to involvement in US actions that escalate the crisis. Japan can also advise China on the likelihood and severity of international opposition to the use of force against Taiwan, It can also warn China about the potential costs, including leaving Japan no choice other than to support the US military in the event of war.

Japan can also encourage Taiwanese officials to avoid language and behavior that suggest a

shift away from the status quo towards independence. It can remind them Japan will not support any effort to unilaterally change the status quo. Because these are Japan's long-standing official positions on the issue, these warnings should be understood as credible. Moreover, Japan's position on Taiwan is similar to the position of many East Asian countries, including South Korea and the member states of ASEAN. Japan could actively work with these like-minded countries to regularly reinforce Taiwanese support for maintaining a status quo that has managed to preserve peace for many decades.

A war over Taiwan is not, as some US observers and military officers seem to imagine, inevitable. Whether the current sense of crisis develops into an emergency depends on the decisions Japan is making now. No matter how difficult the path is to preserve peace, enduring the well-known horrors of war – horrors we see every day in Ukraine – is less far preferable than participating in difficult and unpalatable negotiations that may solve the problem through diplomacy. Politicians, especially legislators, must hold fast to diplomacy until the very end. Finally, regardless of the outcome, such diplomatic practices can help the global majority develop a model for creating and enforcing new international rules to regulate the behavior of the so-called “great powers.”

The Role of Politics in Changing Japanese Defense Measures

The Japanese government recently announced it will double its military expenditures and develop new military capabilities, including the ability to attack enemy bases with missiles based in Japan. The hope is this will raise a potential adversary's costs for attacking Japan and create a potential to preempt such an attack, for example, by destroying enemy missiles before they are launched.

It is questionable if this capability would have a significant impact on a potential adversary's calculations. To do so it must be able to inflict enough damage to cause an opponent to worry it may render further war operations impossible. The ability to damage a few Chinese coastal bases is unlikely to achieve this desired effect. Inflicting sufficient damage on bases and well-protected command and control nodes farther inland is far more difficult, and beyond the realistic military capabilities of what the Japanese government currently plans to spend so much money building.

The best these new Japanese strike capabilities will be able to offer is a ground-based supplement to US missile forces. It will also open the door for the United States to place far greater numbers of its own ground-based missiles in Japan. The introduction of these missile capabilities will significantly increase the probability of a Chinese or North Korean pre-emptive strike against Japan and create more pathways to miscalculation and unintended escalation that create an undeniable risk of precipitating a world war.

In theory, the capability to destroy missile base facilities could prevent planned launches, but they could also encourage launches that would not occur if the adversary was not concerned about losing those bases in a pre-emptive strike. It is a capability that forces an adversary to be more willing to launch first. Moreover, it is impossible for Japan to destroy all adversarial missile installations, opening the door to retaliation that might not have occurred otherwise. The government's discussion of new defensive strike capabilities does not include protecting the Japanese and US troops stationed in Japan, or the civilians living near the areas where these missiles are based, from possible enemy attempts at pre-emption or almost certain enemy retaliation if Japan strikes first. Protecting Japanese and

US soldiers and civilians should be the most important priority of any new Japanese defensive measures.

Given recent rapid advances in the development of military technologies, Japan's SDF have an undeniable obligation to improve their own capabilities. But decisions about what to develop and how it might be used must be made with greater caution. **It is unwise for Japan to declare it seeks to be able to strike military targets deep inside the territory of another country without clarifying the conditions under which such strikes would be carried out,** and explaining to the Japanese public how they will deter attacks on Japan, how they would be used in response to an attack, and the escalation risks that come with these new capabilities. Such a policy may lead to an overly optimistic view of Japanese defense capabilities, and a neglect of diplomatic measures that may do a better job of preserving peace and protecting the Japanese people from the suffering so many are experiencing in Ukraine.

Self-righteous politically influenced arguments about what is required to preserve peace that overemphasize the role of defense technology and underemphasize the role of diplomacy should be subject to questioning and public debate.

A Reality of War that Japan Overlooks

If an armed military conflict erupts, Okinawa, which is close to China and has a large concentration of US military bases, could suffer unbearable losses. The developing crisis over Taiwan is deepening Okinawan concerns this crisis could lead to war.

Multiple studies and war games suggest front-line missile units will be priority targets in a US-China war. There are plans to build shelters on remote parts of Okinawa, like Ishigaki Island, where Japan's SDF deploy missile units, that can house residents evacuated from their homes during an emergency. But US and Japanese military bases on main island of Okinawa, like those in the heavily populated areas of Kadena and Futenma bases, are also likely to be attacked during a US-China war over Taiwan. If the war escalates, US and Japanese military bases in mainland Japan, including those near population centers in Misawa, Yokota, Yokosuka, Iwakuni, and Sasebo, are also likely targets of attacks.

Are shelters and evacuations a realistic option for these locations? Given the rapid advances in missile technology, which make launches hard to detect in time and the flight path of missiles more difficult to predict, as well as the economic impact, probably not.

It should be obvious that after a war begins, Japan, which is heavily on foreign resources, will not be able to fully function as a nation. China, Japan's largest trading partner, can and most likely will block Japan's trade routes and imposes other coercive economic penalties, including banning exports of critical minerals and other natural resources and freezing the assets of Japanese and U.S. companies. Japanese decision-makers appear to lack the foresight to consider just how economically devastating a US-China war will be for Japan, and too lazy to consider new diplomatic means to prevent such a war from starting.

Japan's national security debate is narrowly focused on military operations, and is ignoring the realities of war, that it is an interaction between two sides, and there can be no war without casualties, and that the graver the situation becomes, the more Japan must face the problem of civil protection. Japanese officials charged with this responsibility conduct various war simulations, but do not practice or seem to value diplomatic crisis management.

Politicians, especially legislators, should alert the public share information about the consequences of war with citizens. It is incumbent upon the Japanese government to fully assess and explain the risks in in order to be fully accountable to the public. Seeking to obtain citizen support for domestic and foreign policies that carry the risk of war without sharing predictions about the potential consequences and costs is an act of deceit.

The objective of defense policy, first and foremost, is to protect the people from the horrors of war. War always brings grave consequences. It is impossible to maintain a state of affairs in which no missiles hit targets in Japan, where no one is killed in during a major military conflict between the United States and China. The only way to ensure civilians are secure is to preserve peace; to make every effort to ensure such a war never occurs. This is not an issue that Japan has considered in a consistent way. It is also an issue for which there is no answer within the framework of the theories of deterrence practiced by the United States and China. Japan's national security is, in this regard, at a major turning point.

We must return to the starting point of our political mission, which is to protect the people and discuss in a comprehensive and meaningful way, what Japan should and should not do to preserve the peace on which the success of that mission depends.

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