



# US-JAPAN SECURITY ALLIANCE:

## POINTS TO WATCH IN UKRAINE



Analytical  
commentary

# US-JAPAN SECURITY ALLIANCE:

## POINTS TO WATCH IN UKRAINE



**OHARA, Bonji**  
Senior Fellow, The Sasakawa  
Peace Foundation

March, 2021

Japan possesses a certain level of economic, technological, and military power, but it is not a major power. In an international situation which is mainly defined by major powers game, cooperation with other countries is essential for Japan to defend itself, maintain regional stability, and protect the rule-based international order. Among other things, the Japan-U.S. alliance is the foundation of Japan's diplomacy and security.

---

**Among other things, the Japan-U.S. alliance is the foundation of Japan's diplomacy and security.**

---

However, the national interest of Japan is not completely same as it of the U.S. Furthermore, there are some gaps or differences about the situation awareness, decision making process and commanding line of military forces between Japan and the U.S. Japan is always trying to fill those gaps. As my understanding, these kinds of situation in Japan can be seen in many European countries, to a greater or lesser extent.

The basis for decisions is situational awareness. Japan recognizes that security environment surrounding Japan is rapidly changing. Military powers with high quality and quantity are concentrated in the region surrounding Japan, where clear trends such as further military buildup and an increase in military activities are observed.

Japan and the U.S. are striving to share the perception of the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region. Former Prime Minister Abe raised the concept of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" in 2016, and succeeded to share the concept with the Trump administration.

Japan's Defense White Paper 2020 describes the security environment surrounding Japan as that states in the Indo-Pacific region, including Japan, abound in political, economic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Also, each country has different security views and threats perceptions. Therefore, a regional cooperation framework in the security realm has not been sufficiently institutionalized, and longstanding issues of territorial rights and reunification in this region continue to remain.

Recent years have seen a continued tendency towards the prolongation of so-called gray-zone situations, or situations that are neither pure peacetime situations nor contingencies and are associated with territories, sovereignty and economic interests, and such situations may increase and expand in the future. The gray-zone situations harbor the risk of rapidly developing into more serious situations without any clear forewarning.

The Trump administration appeared to be fixing the U.S-China new Cold War structure. The U.S. excluded the products of major Chinese ICT companies such as Huawei from the U.S. market for security reasons,



engaged in a military presence competition with China in the South China Sea and the waters around Taiwan, and Secretary of State Pompeo and others made clear the ideological confrontation between the U.S. and China.

In response to this posture of the U.S., China has reacted against the concept of FOIP which Japan raised and the U.S. agreed with, as something that would contain China, while it has been trying to avoid U.S.-China new Cold War. This is because an all-out confrontation between the U.S. and China would be detrimental to Chinese development, which is a fundamental condition to maintain

the authority of the CCP (China's Communist Party).

China's goal is the continued stable rule by the CCP, and this will not change. Therefore, the CCP needs to keep and raise its authority and gain the support of the people. It must show the people that China has developed and become strong, and that it has achieved «the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation» in a way that they can see and feel. How to achieve this goal is the strategy, and it can be said to be the one that bridges the gap between the goal and the current situation, which is restrictive. Even if the goal does not change, the strategy can change as the situation changes.

**Fig. 1.** Free and Open Indo-Pacific



**Source:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e\\_000278.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e_000278.html)

The reason for Japan's concern is China's attempt to change the status quo by force or coercion. China claims sovereignty on the Senkaku Islands, which are Japanese territory, and continues to exert pressure by sending Coast Guard patrol vessels into the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands to harass Japanese fishing boats. Through the Coast Guard's actions, China is attempting to change the status quo of Japan's effective control over the Senkaku Islands and create a situation in which the islands are under Chinese jurisdiction.

China has also been pushing for a change in the status quo by force in the South China Sea. It has used military force to seize reefs or rocks in the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands, which are disputed with Southeast Asian countries, to build artificial islands, and to construct military facilities such as runways, radar, anti-air missile systems, and ammunition depots, turning the entire South China Sea into a Chinese military base.

Among them, Taiwan has become a military hot point between the U.S. and China in connection with the South China Sea issue. The reunification of Taiwan is an issue that concerns the legitimacy of governance for the CCP, and China has consistently insisted that Taiwan is part of China. China has declared that it will not abandon the option of armed reunification of Taiwan. If China considers a landing operation against Taiwan, it needs maritime blockade around Taiwan. Japanese

territory will be involved in Chinese blockade operation.

China actually seized the reefs and rocks in the South China Sea because China thought it could suppress the resistance of the other country in the territorial dispute, and also because it thought there would be no intervention by the U.S. For example, the military power of the Philippines is small, and substantial resistance is not expected. Also, the Philippines' power grid is controlled by China, and China can threaten to cut off the Philippines' power supply if the Philippines does not bend to China's will. Furthermore, on February 28, 2021, China delivered 600,000 doses of COVID19 vaccine to the Philippines using military aircraft. With other developed countries scrambling to secure vaccines for their own domestic use, China is the only country that the Philippines can count on to supply vaccines. Because of this relationship, even if China were to use military force to seize Philippine territory, it would be difficult for the Philippines to make a strong stand against China.

On the other hand, China cannot easily seize the Senkaku Islands or Taiwan because Japan and Taiwan have economies that are not subordinate to China, they have a certain amount of military power, and furthermore, there is a fear that the US will intervene if China uses its military power. The scenario for China's seizure of the Senkaku Islands incorporates a storyline in which the U.S. does not intervene. Whether China will use force against the Senkaku Islands or Taiwan depends on the reaction of the U.S.

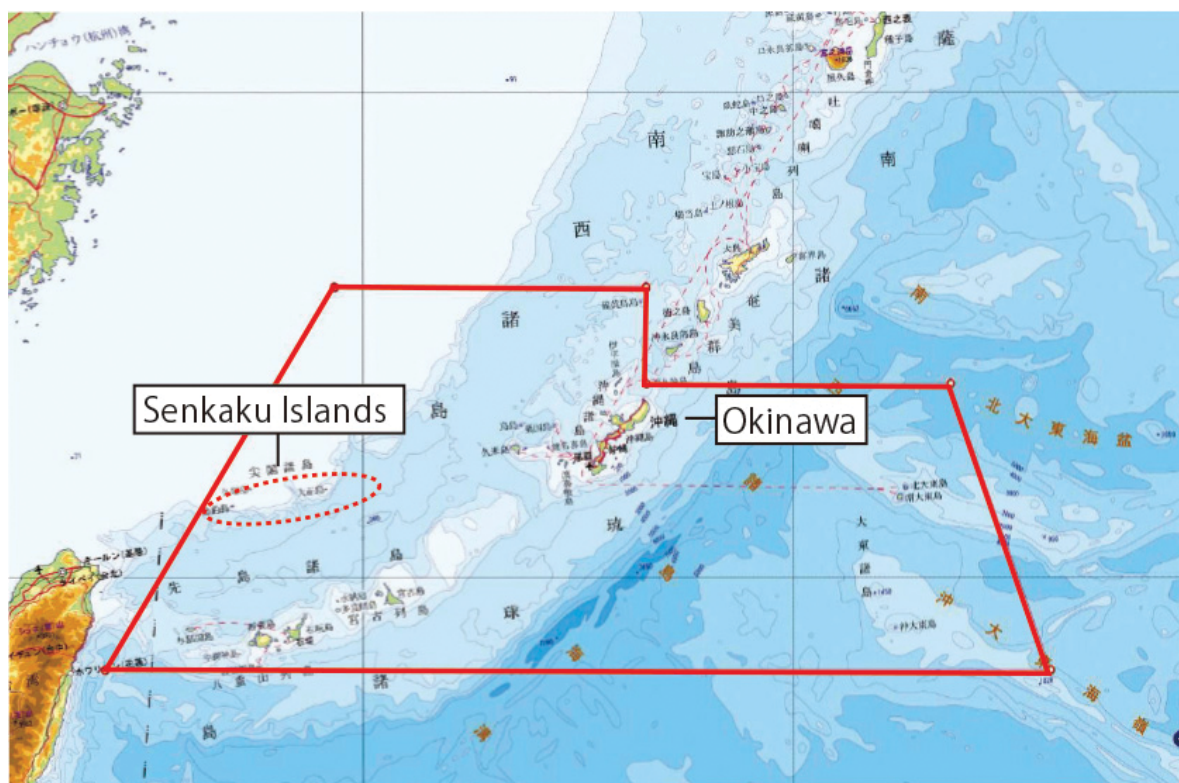


**The scenario for China's seizure of the Senkaku Islands incorporates a storyline in which the U.S. does not intervene. Whether China will use force against the Senkaku Islands or Taiwan depends on the reaction of the U.S.**

China will create a situation in which the Senkaku Islands are controlled by China, and then tries to make the U.S. to recognize that Chinese Coast Guard operations over the Senkaku Islands are

not the military attack to Japan. If China succeeds to do so, the U.S. will not intervene militarily by applying Article 5 of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. It means that the condition allows China to seize the Senkaku Islands easily. In addition, China will use influence operations, such as manipulating public opinion in the U.S. society, to convince the U.S. people that they will only lose if the U.S. military forces intervene in the Senkaku issue and oppose the U.S. government's involvement in the defense of the islands.

**Fig. 2.** The administrative rights of all of the islands within the area inside the straight lines on the map were returned to Japan in 1972 in accordance with the Okinawa Reversion Agreement. The Senkaku Islands are included in this area.



**Source:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/senkaku/page1we\\_000010.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/senkaku/page1we_000010.html)

Japan needs to make the U.S. to continue its involvement in the East and South China Seas, and by extension, the Indo-Pacific region. However, just because Japan asks the US to do so does not mean that the U.S. will get involved in Japan's defense. The U.S. also needs the advantage of maintaining the Japan-U.S. alliance.

---

**Just because Japan asks the US to do so does not mean that the U.S. will get involved in Japan's defense. The U.S. also needs the advantage of maintaining the Japan-U.S. alliance.**

---

Of course, U.S. military bases in Japan are extremely important geographically to U.S. military forces as they deploy from Asia to the Middle East. Japan is politically stable, can replenish high quality fuel, fresh water, and foodstuff to U.S. military ships and aircrafts, and has the technology to perform sophisticated repairs on naval vessels and aircraft. Japan has good conditions for the stationing of U.S. forces.

However, it is not enough. There has been consistent criticism in the U.S. that Japan is taking a free ride on U.S. efforts to protect peace and security in Japan and the East Asian region.

Neither will Japan unilaterally rely on the U.S. for the defense of Japan and the maintenance of the FOIP. Although, Japan's military operations in peacetime and the gray zone are severely restricted, and JSDF cannot possess military capability to attack other countries, but

in case of an emergency, JSDF can act as a military force. The problems are in peacetime and the gray zone. The operations which Japan can cooperate with U.S. military are limited because Japan is not allowed to conduct military operations in peacetime or in the gray zone. Even in a war time, Japan's chain of command and the US chain of command are not aligned. For example, the U.S. INDO-PACOM does not have a counterpart in JSDF. Japan's Chief of the Joint Staff is not a commander, but a chief of staff to the Minister of Defense.

However, now that a hybrid warfare is being fought, starting with cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and influence operations, where it is not even possible to determine at what stage a country has entered a state of war, Japan has begun to make efforts to overcome its own challenges.

And a new situation has arisen. This is the birth of the Biden administration in the U.S. The Biden administration is expected to emphasize alliances, but its China policy and its involvement in the Indo-Pacific are still unclear. China expects it will take about a year for the Biden administration to decide its policy against China, and believes that if it acts proactively during that period, China will get superiority when the U.S. tries to confront China. "China Task Force" has been set up in the U.S. Department of Defense, but it will take four months to produce results. In the meantime, changes in the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region will not wait for the U.S. Japan is making efforts to share





its security perception with the U.S., but the influence of Japan alone is not sufficient. Therefore, Japan is striving to strengthen cooperation with other U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region, to make the relationship between the U.S. and its allies, which in the past was metaphorically described as hub-and-spoke, into a security network.

Furthermore, the current challenges beyond regional issues. For example, China is trying to implement its own standards, norms, and rules into the international systems and mechanism, and to establish its dominant economic and military position in the international community. What we are facing today is the question of how to protect an international order that values freedom, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. This means that security networks are not sufficient only within a particular region. Japan and European countries should aim to build a global security network.

---

**What we are facing today is the question of how to protect an international order that values freedom, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. This means that security networks are not sufficient only within a particular region. Japan and European countries should aim to build a global security network.**

---





---

## ABOUT NEW EUROPE CENTER

The New Europe Center was founded in 2017 as an independent think-tank. Despite its new brand, it is based on a research team that has been working together since 2009, at the Institute for World Policy. The New Europe Center became recognized by offering high-quality analysis on foreign policy issues in Ukraine and regional security by combining active, effective work with advocacy.

The New Europe Center's vision is very much in line with the views of the majority of Ukrainians about the future of their country: Ukraine should be integrated into the European Union and NATO. By integration, we understand not so much formal membership as the adoption of the best standards and practices for Ukraine to properly belong to the Euroatlantic value system.

More about New Europe Center: [neweurope.org.ua](http://neweurope.org.ua)

