

The Japan-U.S. Alliance as a Means for Detering and Dissuading China's Use of Force

Editor's Note:

This is an abbreviated version from the original article Kazuhisa Ogawa presents to International Conference "A Rising Chinese Hegemony & Challenges to the Region" held by Taiwan Brain Trust in Taipei.

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The Japan-U.S. alliance is a powerful instrument for preventing a military crisis in the Taiwan Strait from happening. If Japan addressed peaceful resolution of cross-strait relations as a necessary condition of its own security, then military crisis would become easier for everyone to avert. China's least implausible military option against Taiwan, on the basis of both sides' capabilities, is decapitation attack combining special operations and missiles. U.S. forces in Japan help deter this. In conclusion, I prescribe how Japan can make better use of the alliance to avert a military crisis.

China now uses its armed forces to improve foreign relationships and China's image abroad, and calm concerns abroad about China's rise. Nevertheless, China does not renounce the use of force against Taiwan in circumstances like a formal declaration of independence.

As a scenario for China's use force against Taiwan, we can expect a combination of decapitation attack against political, military, and economic centers; air strikes; airborne and amphibious operations; and blockade.

Decapitation attack targets the central nervous system of Taiwan's government,

armed forces, and economy. If tensions rise across the Taiwan Strait, between China and the United States, or both, China may be motivated to crush these targets with missiles; seize them with special operations forces; and establish a puppet government. If this Chinese attack succeeded before U.S. military intervention, then an occupation of Taiwan may well become a *fait accompli*. The 2008 edition of the Pentagon's annual report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China cites the PLA's theory of decapitation attack as a limited use of force or a "non-war" option.

A campaign of air strikes is not likely to succeed operationally. China does not have enough tankers or airborne warning and control systems (AWACS) to sustain operations over the Taiwan Strait, or enough modern fighters.

China's capability for amphibious operations is limited. Occupation of all of Taiwan would require shipping a million-man army rapidly, which is beyond China's capacity. According to the 2009 edition of the Pentagon's report, the PLA Navy is "capable of sealift of one infantry division" of about ten thousand troops, and the PLA Air Force

can “deliver about five thousand parachutists in a single lift” with all of its large transport aircraft, assuming air superiority.

How plausible is a submarine blockade? China’s nuclear-powered attack submarines are most useful outside the first island chain, to restrain U.S. carrier battle groups. China can deploy at most ten conventional submarines against Taiwan at any one time. Cross-Strait conflict would be a “situation in areas surrounding Japan” under the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation. Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force would chase Chinese submarines hand in hand with the U.S. Navy.

The Japanese Archipelago comprises a power projection platform indispensable for the United States’ global leadership. U.S. military forces supported from the Japanese Archipelago range over one half of the globe: the entire Indian Ocean, two thirds of the Pacific Ocean, and their coasts. Thus, no one can attack the Japanese Archipelago militarily without resolving to fight a general war with the United States.

The U.S. units in Okinawa are important especially for deterring escalation of cross-strait tensions. Preventing a decapitation attack requires a show of the U.S. Marines’ capability to intervene immediately. Although only a thousand Marines can deploy immediately from Okinawa to Taiwan, the PLA cannot fight them without escalating to

general war with the United States. The U.S. Marine forces’ deterrent presence in Okinawa is about getting Beijing to hesitate in this way.

Having analyzed various military instruments, we see that China does not have the initiative to use force against Taiwan. China would launch a military operation only if Taiwan pushed ahead with “independence.” The likelihood of U.S. military intervention depends on China’s attitude toward Japan.

Even if Beijing, Taipei, and Tokyo do their best for peaceful resolution, however, we cannot rule out the possibility of armed conflict across the Strait. In that event, Japan’s security would be under great threat. Because Japan is not capable of dealing unilaterally with spread of cross-strait crisis, it would be a matter of course to activate the Japan-U.S. alliance.

In a crisis in which the United States showed intent to intervene militarily, if China is not using force and is maintaining friendly relations with Japan, then Japan would be in a legal position to stop U.S. military intervention, and attempt peaceful resolution. Thus, if Japan addressed peaceful resolution of cross-strait relations as a necessary condition for its own security, then cross-strait crisis would become easier to avert.

What Japan needs now is a grand strategy at the level of the United States’ constructive engagement strategy. According

to the latter, when China has become wealthy, it would have democratized, and become less likely to brandish military force excessively. In order to guide China toward soft landing, the United States retains coercive leverage over China from the alliance with Japan, which gives the United States access to the Japanese Archipelago as a power projection platform. The Chinese side has been showing some understanding of Japan's role in this U.S. strategy.

For the sake of averting cross-strait crisis and securing Japan, I propose a “peaceful state model,” which specifies conditions for security and prosperity of any independent state. The model is a pyramid with three stages, with the building of trustworthy relations at the foundation; capabilities for building peace in the middle; and the choice of alliance or neutrality on the top. For Japan, the first stage requires (1) resolving disputes arising from World War II in a way that shows awareness of the war's causes and conduct; (2) declaration to seek peace through defensive military capabilities; (3) specification of the Japanese people's responsibility for World War II; and (4) enactment of a constitution consistent with the above. Then, Japan would be able to prove that it truly seeks world peace rather than subordinating all foreign and security policies to the alliance with the United States, and have a role in resolving cross-strait crises peacefully. **B**