

# COMPARATIVE

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## CONNECTIONS

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL  
RELATIONS IN THE INDO-ASIA-PACIFIC

**JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS**

## THE COLD PEACE CONTINUES

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Intermittent declarations of intent to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations notwithstanding, China-Japan tensions continued unabated. No high-level meetings were held between the two, but rather between each and its respective partners: China with Russia, and Japan with members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as well as separately, with Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. All of the latter had apprehension over Chinese expansionism as their focus. Both the Chinese and Japanese economies sputtered in response to COVID lockdowns and the rising cost of energy but trade relations were robust and expected to increase as the number of new COVID cases declines. However, each side continued to develop its military capabilities, with China continuing to voice irritation with Japan for its obvious, though largely tacit, support for Taiwan's autonomy.

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This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 1, May 2022. Preferred citation: June Teufel Dreyer, "Japan-China Relations: The Cold Peace Continues," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp 123-136.

## Politics

Rather than interacting with one another to state their grievances and work toward resolutions, Japanese and Chinese diplomats and statesmen spent much of the reporting period speaking about the other country's threatening actions and statements. Chinese diplomats, in particular, tended to place blame on a small group of Japanese right-wingers and their US allies. In January, Yang Yu, China's charge d'affaires to Japan, [described](#) China-Japan ties like "a boat sailing against the current...we must forge ahead or it will be driven back." An April [seminar](#) hosted by the Japan-China Investment Promotion Organization to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of bilateral relations, saw Chinese Ambassador to Tokyo Kong Xuanyou describing relations as being at a crossroads, listing three main areas where Japan needed to improve, and implying that economic relations might suffer if improvements were not made. He pointed out that China-Japan trade volume is about the same as that with the US and EU combined. Leaving little doubt about which country is the driver of relations, *Kyodo* reported that China was [considering](#) a face-to-face ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations with Japan and would invite "political and business leaders who have contributed to the development of relations" between the two countries, implying that those not considered friendly to China would be omitted from the guest list.

As relations continue to deteriorate Hayashi Yoshimasa—who resigned as head of the Japan-China Friendship Association to become foreign minister—has proved a disappointment, from China's point of view, in his new role. In a January speech to the Diet, Hayashi [emphasized](#) that China's efforts to change the status quo in the East China Sea could not be tolerated, that peace and security in the Taiwan Strait are important, and expressed concern over the human rights situations in Xinjiang and Tibet. However, he said Japan would handle the issues "in a level-headed and resolute way" while helping build a constructive and stable relationship ahead of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China-Japan diplomatic normalization.

Other Japanese statements that alarmed China, included Kishida telling Biden that he "intends to [consider](#)" the possession of capabilities to attack enemy bases. The two leaders agreed to create an

economic version of the "2+2" foreign and defense ministers meeting in response to China's efforts at economic coercion through controlling supply networks and confirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, as well as to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, both of which are anathema to China. After the meeting, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kihara Seiji added that the prime minister would [consider](#) "all options including acquiring preemptive strike capability." Soon after this, the Chinese foreign ministry [accused](#) Japan and the United States of "baselessly smear[ing] and attack[ing] China and wantonly interfer[ing] in China's domestic affairs at their recent meeting as well as "holding to Cold War mentalities and inciting ideological antagonism."

The two sides continued to snipe at each other. [Responding](#) to Japan's House of Representatives adopting a resolution of concern on China's policies in Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Hong Kong, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson stated that, given the innumerable wartime crimes Japan had committed (presumably referring to the period during and leading up to World War II), it had no authority whatsoever to speak on the topic. And two articles that appeared on the same day in *Asahi*, a paper normally accommodative to the PRC, criticized China's policy of [disappearing](#) people, provided biosketches of the more prominent names of the missing, and editorialized that China's Olympic diplomacy risked creating rifts by not urging Russian President Vladimir Putin to refrain from reckless military action and by [expressing](#) support for the Kazakh government's suppression of rioting without condemning the brutality of the suppression.

Japanese citizens in China faced increased media, with media reporting that a Japanese man in his 50s had been [detained](#) in Shanghai since December despite no charges known to have been made against him. In a separate incident a few days later, after an investigation into the Japanese embassy's [complaint](#) that one of its diplomats had been detained in violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Chinese authorities announced that the Japanese claim was "not acceptable." Chinese media also [objected](#) to the Japanese ambassador to Canberra's statement that his country is fully behind Australia on the latter's allegation that a Chinese naval ship pointed a laser at its patrol aircraft. The hostile exchanges were reflected in

public opinion polls: according to an annual six-country [survey](#) by the Japanese Press Research Institute, the proportion of Chinese who have a favorable view of Japan has plunged 13.4 percentage points to an all-time low of 26.3%. By comparison, the figure for the US was 79%.

March brought no improvements. Ignoring Japan's security concerns about China absorbing Taiwan, the Chinese foreign ministry [accused](#) Tokyo of "exploit[ing] the situation in the neighborhood for a military breakthrough." *Yomiuri* [editorialized](#) that China could not achieve stability while complicit with Russian aggression and since its economic outlook was cloudy. *Japan Times* [faulted](#) China's more than three-decades-long military expansion for bilateral tensions rising even as China and Japan were becoming more economically interdependent. Japan's largest and second-largest circulation newspapers, the center-right *Yomiuri* and the center-left *Asahi*, editorialized against the PRC's declaring respect for territorial integrity while not opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with *Asahi* adding that such a stance will not win China the trust of the international community. For its part, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian [accused](#) Japan of using the Russia-Ukraine conflict to further its militarist motives.

Japanese diplomats continued to seek support from other countries, including those with whom it has key differences of opinion on current affairs, or those considered to be in China's orbit. [Concerned](#) for the cohesion of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad") among Australia, India, Japan, and the US, Kishida urged Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to take a clearer stance on the crisis in Ukraine. India would later refuse to allow Japan to transport aid to Ukraine through India. Kishida also visited Cambodia, a close ally of China, for talks with long-term Prime Minister Hun Sen. The resulting [joint statement indirectly](#) criticized some of China's actions in the South China Sea, since it reaffirmed the importance of sustaining peace, security, safety, freedom of navigation in and overflight about the South China Sea as well as non-militarization of the area. The director of Japanese studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences accused Japan of [using](#) the Ukraine crisis to push further against the constraints of its pacifist constitution. And, [responding](#) to the Japanese foreign minister's statement that Japan would help African countries escape China's debt trap, *Global Times*

described it as an absurd, futile attempt to slander Chinese-Africa cooperation. At the end of March, after more than 40 years and a \$29 billion expenditure, Japan [ended](#) its official development assistance (ODA) to China, with *Yomiuri* observing that Japan's generosity was not well-known in the PRC, nor had it supported democratization.



Figure 1 Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen at the welcome ceremony in Phnom Penh on March 20, 2022. Photo: Kyodo

Surprisingly, China had an unusually low-key [reaction](#) to Kishida's offering to the Yasukuni Shrine, with a foreign ministry spokesperson at a regular press briefing merely urging Japan to "completely cut itself off from militarism and win the trust of its Asian neighbors and the international community with practical actions." Although Kishida did not attend in person, former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and current LDP policy chief Takaichi Sanae did visit, as did a multiparty group of 103 Diet members that included ministers, for its spring festival, resuming a practice that had been interrupted by the pandemic.

## Economics

Although its effects will not be known for some time, the Chinese-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership ([RCEP](#)) agreement formally entered into force. Comprising the PRC, the 10 ASEAN members, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, it will eventually allow the trade among the 15 to be conducted with zero tariffs.

But even as trade between them, and the rest of the region, looks to deepen, Japanese concerns about Chinese inroads into its traditional markets continues to mount. The controversial

Chinese company Huawei would follow Tesla by [selling](#) large-scale battery systems for renewable energy storage in Japan, with both Chinese and US companies able to sell at prices far lower than Japanese producers; China [became](#) the world's largest importer of liquefied natural gas in 2021, surpassing Japan, and the Chinese-based computer-generated anime is [challenging](#) Japanese animation studios, who have virtually dominated the global market in recent years. With China seen as catching up to, and in some areas surpassing, the US in quantum computing, Japan [aimed](#) to become self-sufficient in the area. The focus is to shift from basic research by institutions such as universities to measures such as support for start-ups. Although Japanese companies excel at quantum computing for secure data transmission, costly specialized equipment has been a hurdle to greater adoption. According to news released in April, Chinese companies have [displaced](#) their Japanese counterparts in producing automotive battery materials, which account for about a third of the price of EVs and a major factor in whether an EV can compete on the market.

China's role in import markets also continued to cause concern for Japan. In February, Japan's Cabinet Office [warned](#) that the country's import structure was "risky," with 23% of the country's imports in 2019 coming from China and that it would be more difficult for Japan than for the US or Germany to find substitutes if supplies from the PRC ran short. Trade data revealed that China had [become](#) the largest importer of Japanese goods for the first time in 2021, surpassing previous leader Hong Kong, with the US in third place. *China Daily*, citing *Asahi*, emphasized the supply chain [difficulties](#) for Japanese firms if the government's economic security bill became law. However, China's economic clout also resulted in Japan making some surprising choices on the energy front: in March, the Japanese government announced that it would [maintain](#) its interests in energy projects in Sakhalin despite sanctions on Russia since, if Japan were to give up its interests, China would likely take them. Japanese energy group JERA, one of the world's largest importers of liquefied natural gas, is [exploring](#) expanding its LNG business to China, with one scenario being that LNG stocks in China could be diverted to Japan to meet a shortfall.

## Defense

Throughout the reporting period Japanese sources expressed alarm at China's military capabilities and Japan's perceived inability to counter them. Proposed steps for addressing these imbalances, however, generated debate, and not just between China and Japan.

In January it was reported that Japan and the United States are [deepening](#) their military integration, with one of the most important objectives being to stop Chinese forces before they cross the first island chain. Left-of-center Japanese publications, while not discounting the threat, tended to oppose these because of the cost. An *Asahi* editorial expressed [skepticism](#) about the government's plan to increase defense spending in the face of worsening fiscal problems due to higher social security payments and anti-pandemic measures. Measures intended to counter Chinese assertiveness were also implicit in Australia and Japan signing a defense [agreement](#) that would allow greater interoperability of their military forces. They [discussed](#) a forthcoming Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, pledged their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, and [clarified](#) such points as the status of personnel of each country in the other.



Figure 2 Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison sign a bilateral defense cooperation pact during their online meeting on January 6, 2022. Photo: Kyodo

Then, at the virtual 2+2 meeting of foreign affairs and defense ministers, the US and Japan [agreed](#) to bring together their scientists and engineers to collaborate on emerging defense technologies, including ways to counter hypersonic missiles, increase the shared use of facilities, and affirmed their commitment to the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues. China countered, with a foreign ministry spokesperson [expressing](#) "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to

the 2+2 agreement, which a Chinese academic described as motivated by rightwing politicians to justify changing Japan's war-renouncing constitution by cooperating with the US to hype imaginary threats from China, Russia, and North Korea.

Observing the [mismatch](#) between Japanese and Chinese military strength, a *Nikkei* correspondent advocated giving the SDF the ability to strike back, stating that Japan must break with the tradition of restricting the SDF to defense while leaving reprisal to the United States. Center-left *Asahi*, [editorialized](#) that while Japan "may need enough defense to discourage China from taking actions that threaten the regional peace and security," excessive reliance on a military approach could heighten tensions: Japan should be seeking peaceful coexistence with China. Center-right *Yomiuri*, responded that since Spring 2021, MSDF destroyers had repeatedly [sailed](#) through waters outside the territorial waters of areas which China claims as its territorial waters but were inside its contiguous zone, citing a defense ministry spokesperson saying the operations were meant to warn China and protect freedom of navigation and the law and order of the sea.

Japanese sources noted with alarm that the country's defense industry is [contracting](#) even as the threat from China and North Korea grows: while weapons technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated, the amount of equipment ordered by the defense ministry has dropped by half over the past two decades, affecting Japanese companies' decision to withdraw from defense production. Meanwhile, in what a Japanese defense ministry official [described](#) as a race against time in national security, the island of Mageshima was chosen as a new training site for US carrier-based aircraft that are currently using Iwoto, for landing practice. In the first of a two part [interview](#) with *Yomiuri*, Abe described Taiwan as the biggest issue of 2022 and advocated that the international community continue sending support to Taiwan. He linked the issue directly to Japan's control over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, adding that there was room for Japan to get involved with the development of Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) defense equipment, that he supports deepening interaction with the Quad, and urged Japan to acquire striking power against enemy ballistic missiles and bases. Chinese Coast Guard vessels [patrolled](#) within the territorial waters of the

disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands on Jan. 15, for the first time in 2022. Chinese analysts stated that Japan must accept that the islands belong to the PRC and that such patrols are nothing out of the ordinary.

In a statement that must have further disconcerted Beijing, former SDF Chief of Staff Oriki Ryochi, chair of a study group on policy proposals for the upcoming revision of the National Security Strategy, advocated [enhancing](#) Japan's ability to act independently. While the alliance with the US was becoming ever more important, Oriki continued, the US must pay attention not only to China but to other regions and hence the SDF must become more active in the East China Sea and waters near the Japan Sea. Having the ability to counterattack, including enemy bases, would reinforce deterrence. Japan's defense ministry announced that it [scrambled](#) fighter jets against possible airspace intrusions 785 times from April to December 2021, the highest for the same period over the last five years, with 571, or over 70%, of the scrambles being against Chinese aircraft. As January closed, and following the "2+2" meeting and an increase in Chinese military activity in the East China Sea, Japan was [considering](#) the deployment of US military drones at the MSDF's Kanoya base in Kagoshima.



Figure 3 Ships of the America and Essex Amphibious Ready Groups and Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 3 transit the Philippine Sea with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force during exercise Noble Fusion. Photo: U.S. Navy photo/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Matthew Cavenaile

With China and Russia making progress on the development of [high-power microwave \(HPM\) weapons](#), Japan's defense ministry announced in February that as of the new fiscal year in April it will begin full-scale research and development on HPMs. Following the intensification of

Chinese pressure in areas near Japan, US and Japanese forces conducted [exercise](#) *Noble Fusion* involving the Aegis-equipped *Kongo* destroyer, and a US aircraft carrier and amphibious assault ship. The GSDF's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, which is tasked with protecting remote islands, also took part. In response to [concerns](#) about leakage of classified information from defense suppliers who are exiting the industry, such as the May 2021 discovery that a Chinese company had obtained the designs of components of SDF machine guns and, in a separate incident, that China had acquired shares of a Japanese company that makes submarine antennae, the Japanese government is seeking 100 billion yen (\$8.7 million) for the FY 2022 budget to buy technical documents from such companies. Chinese media interpreted Abe's statement on a *Fuji Television* talk show that Japan should consider a nuclear-weapons sharing agreement with the US in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine as [unlocking](#) the country's militarism.

Following a statement by Abe about opening debate on nuclear sharing with the United States, in March some members of both the LDP and opposition parties called for a [discussion](#) on such an arrangement, to allow nuclear weapons, operated jointly with the US, to be stationed in Japan. Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party) leader Matsui Ichiro called for discussions on leasing US nuclear submarines, while Tamaki Yuichiro, head of the Democratic Party for the People, said at a press conference that the three non-nuclear principles "should be thoroughly discussed." Continuing this theme, while [speaking](#) to a gathering of the Diet's largest faction, Abe repeated his call to discuss the possibility of nuclear sharing, opining that if Ukraine had entered NATO it would have been protected through nuclear sharing. On the same day, Nippon Ishin no Kai submitted a policy proposal on nuclear sharing to Foreign Minister Hayashi.

Also in March, a Japanese amphibious rapid deployment brigade and Okinawa-based US marines held their first airborne landing and combat training exercise in [response](#) to growing maritime activity by China and Russia. Japanese analysts [interpreted](#) Tokyo's tougher response to the Ukraine invasion as likely to portend a stronger response to China so as to avoid encouraging Beijing to be incentivized to follow Putin's lead. Adding to Beijing's annoyance, Japan commissioned its first new *Mogami*-class

multirole frigate, [designed](#) to help defend the southwestern Nansei islands against Chinese expansionism. Additionally, responding to concern about Chinese military activities in the waters of the East China Sea, the Diet passed an expanded defense budget [aimed](#) at strengthening the alliance with the US. Included is a funding category of up to \$164 million for advanced virtual combat training systems for joint exercises between the two countries' forces. Chinese activities in the South China Sea were also noted, with *Yomiuri* complaining that the Chinese fishing vessels that [continued](#) to appear in the area off the Philippines were apparently not conducting actual fishing activities. In a clear mismatch of forces, the Japan Coast Guard had 69 patrol [vessels](#) of 1,000 tons or larger as of the end of fiscal 2020, while China had 131 of comparable size at the end of calendar 2020, and according to the Japanese defense ministry, the disparity is likely to widen.

With regard to a different area of defense, artificial intelligence, the investigation division of the Japanese defense ministry [established](#) the position of global strategy intelligence officer in response to the Chinese military's introduction of such advanced technologies as artificial intelligence.

April began with the Air Self-Defense Force announcing its intent to [upgrade](#) its irregular mobile radar unit on Yonaguni to permanent in response to increasing Chinese activities in the area. A GSDF coastal surveillance unit established in 2016 is to be joined by an electronic warfare unit as early as 2023. And Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo announced that discussions would proceed on acquiring the [capability](#) to attack enemy bases. Though not explicitly naming China as the reason, the "2+2" meeting between Japan and the Philippines agreed to begin formal [discussions](#) on a defense pact that would allow reciprocal visits by their troops for training and to increase interoperability in equipment. A US naval expert opined that because of public opposition to the cost, Japan could not [outpace](#) Chinese naval construction, although it can harness the latest technologies to increase the capabilities of its existing platforms. Other experts lamented that the MSDF's vision was still defense-centered and emphasized the need for supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles.

The draft of the National Defense Program Guidelines being prepared by an LDP commission [called](#) for changing the description

of China from “serious security concern” to “a threat to Japan’s security and increasing defense spending to 2% or more of GDP, from its current 0.957%. At the same time, the MSDF announced that one of its patrol aircraft had monitored the [passage](#) of a Chinese *Dongdiao*-class reconnaissance ship through the Tsushima Strait, though noting that it had not entered Japanese territorial waters.

*Yomiuri* continued a favorite theme, [editorializing](#) on the need for Japan and the US to work together to help coastal states improve their capabilities against China’s aggressive expansion into the South China Sea. A collaborative training exercise to the Philippine Coast Guard began, followed immediately by four Chinese Coast Guard vessels entering the territorial waters off the Senkakus.

Japan also expressed concern about [interdiction](#) of its seabed cables, most of which are concentrated in two landing stations, in time of conflict with China. Australian sources revealed that China had built a new long-range early warning [radar](#) that can be used to detect ballistic missiles from thousands of miles away, likely giving it coverage of all of Japan. Beijing, wary about the formation of an “Asian NATO” for some time reacted with derision to Abe’s address to the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, [warning](#) that Japan would become a laughing stock if it did not raise its defense budget in line with NATO countries’ 2% of GDP.

In what *The New York Times* [interpreted](#) as a move toward including Japan in the Five Eyes intelligence sharing partnership among English-speaking powers, prime ministers Jacinda Ardern and Kishida began talks on a “seamless” sharing of classified information. Realization of the degree to which New Zealand has been penetrated by Chinese influence activities and the recently concluded pact between Beijing and the Solomon Islands are thought to have shifted Wellington away from its past China-friendly policies. Stating that the [development](#) of new missiles, especially by China, had raised fears that Japan can no longer defend itself by only intercepting incoming missiles, the LDP’s Research Commission on Security recommended the use of the term “counterattack capability” to allow the SDF to strike an enemy base that is believed to be preparing for a missile attack against Japan. Komeito, the LDP’s coalition partner, had objected to the previously proposed term, “pre-emptive strike “on grounds that it

might violate Japan’s exclusively defense posture. Nonetheless, *Asahi* editorialized against the [proposal](#) to allow a counterattack capability on grounds that it could endanger Japan’s security should a mistake be made in judging an enemy’s intentions.

A perceived [linkage](#) between China’s avowed neutrality on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its expansive behavior in the Pacific region added an additional element to Sino-Japanese tensions. Foreign Minister Hayashi, without naming any country, described the security situation in the area as increasingly severe and affirmed that Japan and the US were fully prepared to take on any contingencies at any time. The Japanese Foreign Ministry’s 2021 Diplomatic Bluebook reiterated Tokyo’s perception of the linkage, adding to the previous edition’s concerns with China’s unilateral attempts to change the status quo.. However, in [response](#) Da Zhigang of the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences opined that the reason Japan had not reacted as strongly against China as against Russia was not only because of the upcoming 50th anniversary of normalization but because there “would be no diplomatic wiggle room for Japan if it defines both of its nuclear-armed neighbors as enemies at the same time.” [Concerned](#) that the recent agreement between China and the Solomon Islands could affect the security of the entire Indo-Pacific region, Japan dispatched its vice foreign minister to the area. And, as the report period closed, Japan [protested](#) the presence of a Chinese ship in its territorial waters.

## Taiwan

Beijing continued to react against several examples of closer Japan-Taiwan ties. At a Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association meeting in January Chairperson Ohashi Mitsuo [called](#) for more chip tie-ups between the two with Taiwanese ambassador-equivalent Chiou I-jen thanking Japan for his country’s bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and stating that since Taiwan is of crucial importance to the world’s supply chain, economy, and trade, joining the CPTPP would greatly increase the importance and visibility of the pact in the global economy. In February, [removing](#) a major irritant to Taiwan-Japan relations, Taipei ended the overall ban on products from the Fukushima area, though some items will continue to be excluded. A few days later, in a step forward to

Japan's [diversifying](#) its semiconductor supply chain, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), along with Sony and auto parts maker Denso, announced that it would increase its investment in TSMC's first plant in Japan. The plant, to be built in southern Japan's Kumamoto, will be a joint venture called Japan Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing, JASM, with TSMC the majority partner.



Figure 4 President Tsai Ing-wen holds a videoconference with former Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo at the Presidential Office in Taipei. Photo: Office of the President, ROC

In March, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and Abe held a half-hour [videoconference](#) as part of an annual meeting of the 270-member Japan-Republic of China Diet Members' Consultative Council. Among other statements objectionable to Beijing, Abe called for overcoming diplomatic and professional barriers between the two nations and reiterated support for Taiwan joining the CPTPP provided that it could meet the pact's high standards. [Speaking](#) on a morning television talk show in April, Abe argued that it was time for the US to abandon strategic ambiguity about Taiwan and make clear that it would defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion, saying explicitly that a Taiwan contingency is also a Japanese contingency. In April he reiterated this call in an op-ed, [stating](#) that Xi Jinping must not doubt Japan's resolve concerning Taiwan nor its intention to defend the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands, and urging the United States to make clear that it will defend Taiwan against any attempted Chinese invasion. In late April it was announced that a waiver had been [granted](#) from Taiwan's inbound visa quarantine requirement so that an 11-person delegation from the LDP's youth division could visit Taiwan from May 3-7 to pay their respects at pro-Japanese former President Lee Teng-hui's grave and meet high-ranking Taiwan officials. The exchange, an annual event that is

unabashedly aimed at reinforcing friendly relations between Taiwan and Japan, is much resented by Beijing.

China did not meet these actions with silence. In late January, following US-Japan joint naval exercises off Okinawa, and Biden and Kishida vowing to ensure peace in the Taiwan Strait, the Chinese air force [sent](#) 39 warplanes toward Taiwan, the largest such intrusion since the record-setting 56 planes of Oct. 4, 2021. [Responding](#) to Abe's urging of the US to drop its ambiguity, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office criticized "certain people" for making malicious remarks and urged adherence to Beijing's interpretation of the one-China policy.

### The Future

While the most likely scenario is a continuation of the current controlled tensions between China and Japan in which Beijing moves toward its objectives of territorial and economic dominance, this could be changed by unlikely though implausible circumstances such as a "Minsky moment" implosion of the PRC's property market that spreads to the rest of the economy, internally generated resistance to Xi Jinping's effort to attain a third term as China's president, or an invasion of Taiwan. Despite strong statements by conservative politicians, the Japanese public appears to be reluctant for the country to play a strong role on the international scene. For now, the impetus seems to be with China.

# CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

## JANUARY—APRIL 2022

**Jan. 1, 2022:** Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement [enters](#) into force.

**Jan. 2, 2022:** Komeito leader Yamaguchi Natsuo [advocates](#) Japan create a permanent framework which would include the US, China, and the other countries of the Indo-Pacific region.

**Jan. 3, 2022:** While not referencing threats, an *Asahi* editorial [expresses](#) skepticism about the government's plan to increase defense spending given worsening fiscal problems due to higher social security payments and anti-pandemic measures.

**Jan. 5, 2022:** Taiwan's foreign ministry [declines](#) to comment on reports that when, in February 2019, it proposed to the Japanese government that the two sides regularly exchange intelligence about the locations and activities of Chinese warplanes, it was turned down on grounds that the two have no formal diplomatic ties.

**Jan. 6, 2022:** Australia and Japan [sign](#) a defense agreement to allow greater interoperability of military forces.

**Jan. 7, 2022:** At the virtual 2+2 meeting of foreign affairs and defense ministers, the US and Japan [agree](#) to bring together their scientists and engineers to collaborate on emerging defense technologies, including ways to counter hypersonic missiles, increase shared use of facilities, and affirm their commitment to the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.

**Jan. 7, 2022:** Beijing municipal government [fines](#) Japanese-owned 7-11 stores \$23,500 for describing Taiwan as an independent country on its website.

**Jan. 7, 2022:** Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson [expresses](#) strong dissatisfaction with the 2+2 agreement, with an academic describing it as motivated by rightwing politicians to justify changing Japan's war-renouncing constitution.

**Jan. 8, 2022:** Chinese professor at Yokohama University [interprets](#) the Australia-Japan agreement and the US-Japan 2+2 meeting as Tokyo seeking to discard the shackles of its constitution by joining with the US to contain the PRC.

**Jan. 9, 2022:** Observing the [mismatch](#) between Japanese and Chinese military strength, a *Nikkei* correspondent advocates giving the Self-Defense Forces the ability to strike back.

**Jan. 10, 2022:** Center-left *Asahi* [editorializes](#) that while Japan "may need enough defense to discourage China from taking actions that threaten the regional peace and security."

**Jan. 11, 2022:** At a Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association meeting, Chairperson Ohashi Mitsuo [calls](#) for more chip tie-ups between the two; Taiwanese ambassador-equivalent Chiou I-jen thanks Japan for his country's bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

**Jan. 11, 2022:** *Yomiuri* [reports](#) that since spring 2021, Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyers have repeatedly sailed through waters outside the territorial waters of areas that China claims as its territorial waters.

**Jan. 12, 2022:** Japanese defense industry reportedly [contracts](#) even as the threat from China and North Korea grows.

**Jan. 13, 2022:** Mageshima Island [is chosen](#) as new training site for US carrier-based aircraft currently using Iwoto for landing practice.

**Jan. 14, 2022:** Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [describes](#) Taiwan as the biggest issue of 2022 and calls on the international community continue sending support to Taiwan.

**Jan. 14, 2022:** Yang Yu, China's charge d'affaires to Japan, [describes](#) Sino-Japanese ties like "a boat sailing against the current...we must forge ahead or it will be driven back."

**Jan. 14, 2022:** Chinese company Huawei announces it will follow Tesla by [selling](#) large-scale battery systems for renewable energy storage in Japan, with both Chinese and US companies able to sell at prices far lower than Japanese producers.

**Jan. 16, 2022:** Chinese Coast Guard vessels [patrol](#) within the territorial waters of the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands on Jan. 15 for the first time in 2022.

**Jan. 18, 2022:** *Kyodo* [reports](#) that China is considering a face-to-face ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations with Japan and would invite "political and business leaders who have contributed to the development of relations."

**Jan. 20, 2022:** Former SDF Chief of Staff Oriki Ryoichi, chair of a study group on policy proposals for the upcoming revision of the National Security Strategy, [advocates](#) enhancing Japan's ability to act independently.

**Jan. 20, 2022:** China [becomes](#) the world's largest importer of liquefied natural gas in 2021, surpassing Japan.

**Jan. 22, 2022:** Chinese analysts interpret Biden's virtual [meeting](#) with Kishida as a probe to test Tokyo's loyalty to Washington rather than aimed at producing concrete results.

**Jan. 23, 2022:** Kishida [tells](#) Biden that he "intends to consider" possession of capabilities to attack enemy bases.

**Jan. 24, 2022:** Japan's ambassador to Poland [describes](#) Poles as finding promised China's economic benefits less than they had expected and advocates that Japan strengthen relations with Poland.

**Jan. 24, 2022:** China's foreign ministry [accuses](#) Japan and the United States of "baselessly smear[ing] and attack[ing] China and wantonly interfer[ing] in China's domestic affairs" at their recent meeting as well as.

**Jan. 25, 2022:** China's air force [sends](#) 39 warplanes toward Taiwan, the largest such intrusion since the record-setting 56 planes of Oct. 4, 2021.

**Jan. 25, 2022:** *Nikkei* reports that Japan [aims](#) to become self-sufficient in quantum computing, with China seen as catching up, and in some areas surpassing the US.

**Jan. 25, 2022:** Japan's defense ministry announces that it [scrambled](#) fighter jets against possible airspace intrusions 785 times from April to December 2021, the highest for the same period over the last five years, with 571 or over 70%, being against Chinese aircraft.

**Jan. 26, 2022:** In what *Yomiuri* says was aimed at [countering](#) China's growing influence in Tonga, Japan dispatches relief supplies to the island kingdom where China accounts for about 60% of external debt.

**Jan. 28, 2022:** Honda executive [predicts](#) that EV sales in China will make or break the company in the next five years.

**Jan. 29, 2022:** Japan reportedly [considers](#) deployment of US military drones at MSDF Kanoya base in Kagoshima.

**Jan. 31, 2022:** *Tokyo Review* [speculates](#) that Beijing's recent fairly restrained attitude toward Japan reflects its assessment that Washington is the real instigator of heightened tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

**Feb. 1, 2022:** Japan expert at Shanghai's Fudan University [expresses](#) concern that rightwing forces are slowly taking the initiative in Japan to provoke Sino-Japanese conflict.

**Feb. 1, 2022:** [Responding](#) to Japan's House of Representatives adopting a resolution of concern on China's policies in Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Hong Kong, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson states that Japan has no authority whatsoever to speak on the topic.

**Feb. 3, 2022:** Japan's Cabinet Office [warns](#) that the country's import structure was "risky," with 23% of the country's imports in 2019 coming from China.

**Feb. 6, 2022:** China [becomes](#) the largest importer of Japanese goods for the first time in 2021.

**Feb. 6, 2022:** With China and Russia [making progress](#) on the development of high-power microwave (HPM) weapons, Japan's defense ministry will begin full-scale research and development on HPMs in the fiscal year that begins in April 2022.

**Feb. 8, 2022:** *Asahi* [criticizes](#) the PRC policy of disappearing people and [editorializes](#) that China's Olympic diplomacy risks creating rifts by not urging Vladimir Putin to refrain from reckless military action.

**Feb. 8, 2022:** Taipei [removes](#) overall ban on products from the Fukushima area, though some items will remain excluded.

**Feb. 9, 2022:** US and Japanese forces [conduct](#) exercise *Noble Fusion* involving the Aegis-equipped *Kongo* destroyer and a US aircraft carrier and amphibious assault ship.

**Feb. 11, 2022:** Quad foreign ministers [meet](#) in Melbourne a week after China and Russia declared a "no limits strategic partnership," their most detailed and assertive statement to work together.

**Feb. 15, 2022:** In a step toward [diversifying](#) Japan's semiconductor supply chain, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, along with Sony and auto parts maker Denso, will increase its investment in TSMC's first plant in Japan.

**Feb. 17, 2022:** Media [reports](#) that a Japanese man in his 50s has been [detained](#) in Shanghai since December, though no charges are known to have been made against him.

**Feb. 18, 2022:** *China Daily* [emphasizes](#) the supply chain difficulties Japanese firms will have if the government's economic security bill becomes law.

**Feb. 21, 2022:** In response to concerns over leakage of classified information, the Japanese government [seeks](#) 100 billion yen (\$8.7 million) for the fiscal year 2022 budget to buy technical documents from such companies.

**Feb. 22, 2022:** Chinese media [object](#) to the Japanese ambassador to Canberra's statement that his country is fully behind Australia on its allegation that a Chinese naval ship pointed a laser at its patrol aircraft.

**Feb. 23, 2022:** After an investigation into the Japanese embassy's complaint that one of its diplomats had been detained in violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Chinese authorities [announce](#) that the Japanese claim is not acceptable.

**Feb. 26, 2022:** Japanese officials [warn](#) that the international community's failure to hold Russia in check would send the wrong message to China.

**Feb. 27, 2022:** Japanese Press Research Institute survey shows that the proportion of Chinese who [have](#) a favorable view of Japan has plunged 13.4 percentage points to an all-time low of 26.3%.

**Feb. 27, 2022:** Speaking on a morning television talk show, Abe [says](#) that it is time for the US to abandon strategic ambiguity about Taiwan and make clear that it would defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion.

**Feb. 28, 2022:** *Nikkei* poll [shows](#) that 77% percent of Japanese are concerned that Russia's invasion of Ukraine will spill over into China using force against Taiwan.

**Feb. 28, 2022:** Chinese media [interpret](#) an Abe statement that Japan should consider a nuclear-weapons sharing agreement with the US in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine as unlocking the country's militarism.

**Feb. 28, 2022:** *Xinhua* [reports](#) that, after a call by Abe to discuss nuclear sharing, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio informs the Diet that "it is unacceptable given our country's stance of maintaining the three non-nuclear principles."

**March 1, 2022:** Concern with China's increasing aggression is [believed](#) to be a decisive factor in the re-election of a pro-base and pro-Self Defense Forces mayor in Ishigaki, Okinawa.

**March 2, 2022:** Members of both the LDP and opposition parties [call](#) for a discussion on a nuclear-sharing arrangement with the US, with weapons to be stationed in Japan.

**March 6, 2022:** *Yomiuri* [editorializes](#) that China cannot achieve stability while complicit with Russian aggression and its economic outlook is cloudy.

**March 7, 2022:** *Japan Times* [faults](#) China's long military expansion for rising bilateral tensions.

**March 8-9, 2022:** Japan's largest and second-largest circulation newspapers, the center-right *Yomiuri* and the center-left *Asahi*, [editorialize against](#) the PRC's declaring respect for territorial integrity while not opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

**March 11, 2022:** *Kyodo* [predicts](#) China may take a softer approach to Japan to curb possible economic downturn as Xi Jinping is eager to secure a third term as leader, but that Tokyo is unlikely to reciprocate.

**March 14, 2022:** Sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine reportedly [give](#) Japanese banks huge leverage over the Chinese economy.

**March 15, 2022:** Japanese amphibious rapid deployment brigade and Okinawa-based US marines [hold](#) first airborne landing and combat training exercise.

**March 17, 2022:** Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian [accuses](#) Japan of using the Russia-Ukraine conflict to further its militarist motives.

**March 20, 2022:** National security expert Takamizawa Nobushige [advocates](#) total security, including economic power, should be assembled in preparation for a deterrence by denial capability "against outrageous acts."

**March 20, 2022:** Japan's Coast Guard's Mobile Cooperation Team, now in its fifth year of guidance, has been [dispatched](#) to 14 countries to advise on tensions in the South China Sea and piracy.

**March 20, 2022:** Kishida [pushes](#) Indian counterpart Narendra Modi for a clearer response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

**March 21, 2022:** Japan analysts [interpret](#) Tokyo's tougher response to the Ukraine invasion as likely to portend a stronger response to China should it follow Putin's lead.

**March 22, 2022:** Japan commissions its first new *Mogami*-class multirole frigate, [designed](#) to help defend the southwestern Nansei islands against Chinese expansionism.

**March 22, 2022:** Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and Abe [hold](#) a half-hour videoconference as part of an annual meeting of the 270-member Japan-Republic of China Diet Members' Consultative Council. Abe reiterates support for Taiwan joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership.

**March 23, 2022:** [Responding](#) to Abe's video call to Tsai, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office [criticizes](#) "certain people" for making malicious remarks.

**March 23, 2022:** Director of Japanese studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences [accuses](#) Japan of using the Ukraine crisis to push further against the constraints of its pacifist constitution.

**March 25, 2022:** Japan's Diet [passes](#) an expanded defense budget aimed at strengthening the alliance with the US, including up to \$164 million for advanced virtual combat training systems for joint exercises.

**March 26, 2022:** *Yomiuri* [complains](#) that Chinese fishing vessels continue to appear in the South China Sea off the Philippines.

**March 28, 2022:** *Global Times* [responds](#) to Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa's statement that Japan would help African countries escape China's debt trap, calling it an absurd, futile attempt to slander Chinese-Africa cooperation.

**March 28, 2022:** *Xinhua* reports the opening of an [exhibition](#) on China's terra cotta warriors at a museum in Kyoto, in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations.

**March 29, 2022:** Japan's defense ministry [says](#) the disparity—in which Japan's Coast Guard had 69 patrol vessels of 1,000 tons or larger as of the end of fiscal 2020, compared to China's 131 of comparable size at the end of calendar 2020—is likely to widen.

**March 30, 2022:** Investigation division of the Japanese defense ministry [establishes](#) global strategy intelligence officer position in response to the Chinese military's introduction of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence.

**March 31, 2022:** Chinese Ministry of Defense spokesperson [reiterates](#) that Taiwan is China's internal affair that Japan must stay out of.

**April 1, 2022:** Air Self-Defense Force [says](#) it will upgrade its irregular mobile radar unit on Yonaguni to permanent in response to increasing Chinese activities in the area.

**April 1, 2022:** Japan [ends](#) official development assistance to China after 40 years.

**April 2, 2022:** Japan's ambassador to Australia warns Canberra against overreliance on Chinese trade.

**April 4, 2022:** Chinese companies have [displaced](#) their Japanese counterparts in producing automotive battery materials, which account for about a third of the price of EVs and are a major factor in whether an EV can compete on the world market.

**April 5, 2022:** Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo [announces](#) that discussions will proceed on acquiring the capability to attack enemy bases.

**April 9, 2022:** 2+2 meeting between Japan and the Philippines [agrees](#) to formal discussions on a defense pact that will allow reciprocal visits by their troops for training and to increase interoperability in equipment.

**April 12, 2022:** Abe [states](#) that Xi must not doubt Japan's resolve concerning Taiwan, nor its intention to defend the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands and urges the United States to abandon its policy of strategic ambiguity and make clear that it will defend Taiwan against any attempted Chinese invasion.

**April 11, 2022:** US naval expert opines that Japan cannot [outpace](#) Chinese naval construction, recommending that it harness the latest technologies to increase the capabilities of its existing platforms.

**April 12, 2022:** MSDF patrol aircraft [monitors](#) the passage of a Chinese *Dongdiao*-class reconnaissance ship that passed through the Tsushima Strait though without entering Japanese territorial waters.

**April 12, 2022:** Draft of the National Defense Program Guidelines under preparation by an LDP commission [calls](#) for changing the description of China from “serious security concern” to “a threat to Japan's security” and increasing defense spending to 2% or more of GDP from its current 0.957%.

**April 12, 2022:** Two Chinese academics [urge](#) the International Court of Justice to issue an advisory opinion on the illegality of Japan's planned dumping of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the sea.

**April 16, 2022:** *Yomiuri* [editorializes](#) on the need for Japan and the US to work together to help coastal states improve their capabilities against China's aggressive expansion into the South China Sea.

**April 18, 2022:** Japanese energy group JERA is [exploring](#) expanding business operations to include China, with one scenario being that LNG stocks in the PRC be diverted to Japan to meet a shortfall. JERIA is also engaged in building facilities in Vietnam.

**April 18, 2022:** Japan [expresses](#) concern about interdiction of its seabed cables, most of which are concentrated in two landing stations, in time of conflict with China.

**April 18, 2022:** Australian sources [reveal](#) that China has built a new long-range early warning radar that can be used to detect ballistic missiles from thousands of miles away, likely giving it coverage of all of Japan.

**April 19, 2022:** Reacting to a sharp slowdown in exports to China, rising energy prices, and the conflict in Ukraine, Japan's March trade deficit [amounts to](#) more than four times that of market forecasts, though the economy is predicted to grow to an annualized 4.9% in the current quarter.

**April 20, 2022:** *Global Times* [reports](#) that a well-known Japanese lawyer has organized a grassroots "emergency rally" to persuade his government to return Chinese relics stolen during World War II.

**April 20, 2022:** China [has](#) an unusually low-key reaction to Kishida's offering to the Yasukuni Shrine.

**April 22, 2022:** In an address to the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, Abe [warns](#) that Japan will become a laughing stock if it doesn't raise its defense budget in line with NATO countries' 2% of GDP.

**April 22, 2022:** Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand and Kishida [begin](#) talks on a "seamless" sharing of classified information; *The New York Times* [interprets](#) this as a move toward including Japan in the Five Eyes intelligence sharing partnership.

**April 22, 2022:** LDP Research Commission on Security [recommends](#) use of the term "counterattack capability" to allow the SDF to strike an enemy base should it be believed to be preparing for a missile attack against Japan.

**April 23, 2022:** *Asahi* [editorializes](#) against the proposal to allow a counterattack capability on grounds that it could endanger Japan's security should a mistake be made in judging an enemy's intentions.

**April 23, 2022:** Commander of the US 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, speaking to US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel and Foreign Minister Hayashi aboard the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln*, [links](#) Russian aggression in Ukraine with Chinese expansion in the Pacific region.

**April 23, 2022:** A multiparty group of 103 Diet members including ministers visit the Yasukuni Shrine on its spring festival, resuming a practice interrupted by the pandemic.

**April 23, 2022:** In response to the publication of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Blue Book, Da Zhigang of the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences [opines](#) that the reason Japan had not reacted as strongly against China as against Russia was not only because of the upcoming 50th anniversary of normalization but because there "would be no diplomatic wiggle room for Japan if it defines both of its nuclear-armed neighbors as enemies at the same time."

**April 23, 2022:** [Granted](#) a waiver from Taiwan's inbound visa quarantine requirement, an 11-person delegation from the LDP's youth division is to visit Taiwan May 3-7 to pay respects at former President Lee Teng-hui's grave and meet high-ranking Taiwan officials.

**April 27, 2022:** At a seminar hosted by the Japan-China Investment Promotion Organization to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations, the Chinese ambassador to Tokyo [describes](#) relations as at a crossroads, listing three main areas where Japan needed to improve, and points out that Sino-Japanese trade volume is about the same as that with the US and EU combined.

**April 27, 2022:** Professor at Japan's Chuo University [warns](#) that Japan's support for the US position on Ukraine could backfire against its economy.

**April 30, 2022:** Japan [protests](#) the presence of a Chinese ship in its territorial waters.