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Digest

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Japan in US National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy

The US National Security Strategy released in October underscored China as the most consequential challenge and the “only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it”. Outlining a three pronged approach in response, Washington pledge to (a) to invest in America’s competitiveness, innovation, and democracy, (b) align efforts with America’s network of allies and partners, and (c) compete responsibly with Beijing to defend American interests. The first two strands of investing and aligning are touted essential to outcompeting China in the technological, economic, political, military, intelligence, and global governance spheres. In this regard, the National Security Strategy reaffirmed the iron-clad commitments to Washington’s Indo-Pacific treaty allies, including Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. It reiterates US’s unwavering commitment to defend Japan under the security treaty, encompassing the Senkaku Islands. Furthermore, National Defense Strategy also emphasised the urgency of modernising alliances and strengthening combined capabilities by aligning strategic planning in a more integrated manner. Meanwhile Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi indicated that Tokyo “highly appreciate” Washington’s commitment towards defence of Japan, including the Senkaku Islands. Additionally, he concurred the pressing need to reinforce the US-Japan alliance, and underlined Tokyo’s intention to bolster its own defence capabilities within five years with the

revised national security strategy due by the end of this year.

Joint Command by 2024

With escalating regional tensions, Japan is reportedly establishing a new joint command and a new commanding officer position by 2024 to supervise all three Self-Defence Force (SDF) units including the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defence Forces, and further deepen coordination with the US. This move comes as defence planners are currently revising three key security documents. The goal is to ease the burden on Chief of Staff. In case of a Taiwan contingency, the primary responsibility of Chief of Staff would be to support the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, and the new integrated commanding officer under the Chief of Staff would have the authority to command forces.

20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and Japan’s reaction

Following the 20th Party Congress, Japan’s Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa indicated that the government will deeply analyse the implications of President Xi Jinping’s third term and the new Politburo Standing Committee, and accordingly prepare policies vis-à-vis China. While Hayashi refrained from directly commenting on the Party Congress at the Lower House Committee meeting, he indicated that analysis of recent developments will indispensably feed into formulating Japan’s China policy.

Meanwhile, several commentaries in Japanese media emphasised on the prevailing concentration of power by “China’s forever strongman” President Xi

Jinping and effective abolition of the established system of collective leadership, and further raised questions regarding what kind of nation China wishes to become? There are opinions which suggest that while China was never a democracy, this recent “concentration of power will cloud decision-making and compound mistakes”. China’s posturing on Taiwan drew considerable attention and many expect intensified tension across the Taiwan Strait in the future. While Tokyo seeks “balanced and productive relations” with China, it is disappointed by Beijing’s assertiveness in altering the status quo.

Japan considers getting Tomahawk cruise missiles

Japan is reportedly considering purchasing Tomahawk cruise missiles, having a range of over 1,000 kilometres, with the objective of bolstering its defence capabilities in anticipation of a Taiwan contingency. Defence Ministry at present is weighing the advantages and disadvantages of acquiring this specific “counterstrike” capability. The idea is to retrofit and operate the vertical launchers of the Aegis vessels. Additionally, Japan is also working to advance the domestically produced Type 12 surface-to-ship guided missile. Since production may be time consuming, Tokyo plans to deploy the Tomahawk.

Malabar Exercise off the coast of Yokosuka

Malabar Exercise 2022 will be held from November 8 to 18 off the coast of Yokosuka. The key objective of Malabar Exercise is to enhance interoperability between the four navies of India, the US, Japan and Australia, in addition to strengthening mutual understanding on the

shared challenges in maritime security operations. Separately, India has conducted bilateral Army exercise with the US called ‘Yudh Abhyas’; participated at the multinational Kakadu Exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Navy in Darwin in September; and conducted bilateral naval exercise with Japan in September.

Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security

On 22 October, Japan and Australia signed the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation where both sides agreed to strengthen exchanges of strategic assessments at all levels, including through annual reciprocal leaders’ meetings, foreign and defence ministers’ meetings, dialogues between senior officials, and intelligence cooperation over the next decade. Furthermore, they decided to reinforce their respective alliances with the US as well as trilateral cooperation in pursuit of better strategic alignment, policy coordination and interoperability in the Indo-Pacific. The aim is to work towards realising a favourable strategic balance that deters behaviour undermining international rules and norms.

Economic Stimulus Package

Japan’s Cabinet approved an economic stimulus package of \$264 billion with the objective of easing the impact of escalating prices compelled by the tumbling yen and high commodity prices. One key measure to manage inflation remains curtailing household utility bills. Government intends to reduce monthly electricity, gas and gasoline costs for the average household by ¥5,000. Prime Minister Kishida indicated that in managing rising prices, he has prioritised the impact of energy prices.