

# MP-IDSA

## Issue Brief

# Japan's New Prime Minister: Domestic and Foreign Policy Impacts

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## Summary

While Sanae Takaichi is a selected, not an elected, head of government, opinion polls indicate broad support for her appointment. She has assumed office at a time when Japan is experiencing the resurgence of populist far-right parties. On the foreign policy front, while relations with the US are unlikely to encounter any friction, Japan–China relations are likely to remain the real point of tension throughout Takaichi's tenure.

## Introduction

Japan's 104<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, breaks the glass ceiling in more than one way. Not only does her accession mark the elevation of a woman to the highest constitutional office, but also the elevation of an arch-conservative woman to power within one of the longest-running 'big tent' ruling political parties in Asia.<sup>1</sup> Although she continues to lead a predominantly minority government in Japan's bicameral legislature and the longevity of her tenure remains uncertain, the domestic and foreign policy impacts of her tenure are likely to be substantial.

## Who is Sanae Takaichi?

Born on 7 March 1961 in Nara Prefecture to a corporate employee father and a police officer mother, Sanae Takaichi attended Kobe University for a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, graduating in 1984. She was subsequently admitted to the prestigious Matsushita Institute of Government and Management, which has trained many future senior politicians and bureaucrats. She spent two years as a Congressional Fellow in the United States of America, where she was assigned to Democratic Party Congresswoman Patricia 'Pat' Schroeder from 1987 to 1989.<sup>2</sup>

Upon her return to Japan, Takaichi worked variously as a legislative analyst and political commentator. In the early 1990s, she also served as a television personality at Asahi Television. From this position, she decided to run for public office despite her parents' opposition, and she was elected to the House of Representatives (the Lower House of Japan's parliament) in 1993.<sup>3</sup>

It is notable here that she was initially elected in 1993 as a member of the New Frontier Party, a short-lived formation founded by former Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members, and thus served as a ruling coalition lawmaker at a time when the LDP lost its grip on power for the first time since 1955.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, she crossed the aisle to join the LDP in 1995 and has been elected to the Diet nearly continuously since then. It is at the time of her defection that she came into the orbit of politicians

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<sup>1</sup> Yoichi Serikawa, "[Takaichi Sanae: The LDP's Last Hope to Avoid Further Decline?](#)", *Nippon.com*, 7 October 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Sim, "[Meet Sanae Takaichi: Heavy Metal Fan, Former Biker Chick and Japan's PM-in-waiting](#)", *The Straits Times*, 4 October 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See "[Ozawa Ichiro](#)", Encyclopedia Britannica. Founded by Ozawa and other former LDP leading lights, the party was envisaged as a formation comprised of nine non-LDP parties. However, within a year of its formation, internal dissension caused the collapse of the party. It is out of this party that the LDP successfully managed to break the Komeito away, in order to form the governing coalition that collapsed in October 2025.

such as Jun’ichiro Koizumi and his protege, Shinzo Abe, the latter of whom took her under his wing.

As with her predecessor, Shigeru Ishiba, Takaichi enters the office of Prime Minister with a broad range of policy experience, most of which she gained during the Koizumi and Abe administrations. She has served as Minister of State for territorial issues, science and technology policy, youth affairs and food safety. During Abe’s second tenure as Prime Minister, she served as Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications (2014–17, 2019–20) as well as Minister for Economic Security under Fumio Kishida (2022–24).<sup>5</sup>

Within the LDP, she headed the powerful Policy Research Council (which sets the party’s policies) from 2012 to 2014 (and again in 2021–22), during which she was instrumental in bringing about the so-called ‘Abe Statement’.<sup>6</sup> This document upheld Japan’s earlier official apologies for its conduct during the Asia-Pacific War (1937–45) while underscoring the need to end the perpetual issuance of apologies for its actions in that conflict.<sup>7</sup> This experience, along with her repeated official visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, confirmed her arch-conservative credentials, earning her the ire of China and the Republic of Korea.

## **Takaichi’s Road to the Prime Ministership**

As the saying goes, for Takaichi, the third time has indeed proven to be the charm: her successful election to the Presidency of the LDP in 2025 was her third attempt to secure the party’s leadership. Her first attempt, in 2021, resulted in her elimination in the first round of voting against the charismatic Fumio Kishida.<sup>8</sup> In her second attempt, she came closer to the prize, mounting a cogent and persistent challenge to Shigeru Ishiba in 2024. It was only a final-round runoff that clinched enough votes for Ishiba,<sup>9</sup> thanks in large part to successful manoeuvring by Kishida and other moderates to consolidate votes behind him.

Such manoeuvring favoured Takaichi the third time around. In September 2025, as Ishiba announced his decision to step down after devastating LDP losses in elections

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<sup>5</sup> See “[TAKAICHI Sanae \(The Cabinet\)](#)”, The Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, for posts held up to 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Martin, “[Official Urges Abe to Review War Apologies](#)”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 January 2013.

<sup>7</sup> “[Statement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe](#)”, The Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, Government of Japan, 14 August 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Justin McCurry, “[Fumio Kishida Set to be New Japanese PM After Winning Party Election](#)”, *The Guardian*, 29 September 2021.

<sup>9</sup> “[自民党新総裁に石破茂氏 1回目と決選投票の結果詳報](#)” [Mr. Shigeru Ishiba for LDP President, Details of First-Round and Runoff Voting], *日本経済新聞* [Nihon Keizai Shimbun], 27 September 2024.

to both houses of the Diet, internal polls indicated that the arch-conservative wing of the LDP was consolidating behind Takaichi, led mainly by former Prime Minister Taro Aso and Toshimitsu Motegi. This proved decisive, as her closest competitor, Shinjiro Koizumi, could not rally sufficient support to run against her. As a result, she sailed to victory in the second round of general voting with a healthy margin of 185 votes against Koizumi’s 156.<sup>10</sup>

Takaichi’s election to the LDP leadership did not, however, guarantee her premiership. As previously mentioned, the LDP and its coalition partner, the Komeito (or Clean Government Party), were in a minority in both Houses of Parliament. The latter party, an affiliate of the influential Japanese Buddhist sect *Soka Gakkai*, leans largely centre-left on most issues. This includes thorny matters such as Constitutional revision (to grant the Self-Defence Forces constitutional status, or, as some on the far-right would prefer, abrogating the pacifist Article 9 entirely to enable Japan to have a ‘normal’ military force) and the history issue (of Japan’s conduct during World War II).<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Takaichi’s emergence raised alarms in that party. Komeito leader Tetsuo Saito met the new LDP leader and requested (some say demanded) policy coordination on several issues deemed necessary by the former. Failing to receive concrete guarantees on either issue, the party announced that it would exit the ruling coalition, thereby ending 26 years of political coordination and triggering a scramble for new allies.<sup>12</sup>

After a concerted search for new partners within the conservative ecosystem (including newly resurgent far-right parties), Takaichi was ultimately supported by the Nippon Ishin no Kai (the Japan Innovation Party).<sup>13</sup> The JIP emerged out of the former Osaka wing of the LDP in the late 2010s, breaking off into its own party to emphasise Osaka’s regional identity more prominently. It is a centre-to-hard-right party that is dominant in Osaka and its surrounding regions.

The result of their negotiations with the LDP was that the JIP would agree to provide outside support to ensure that Takaichi’s nomination as Prime Minister would succeed in the Diet, while tabling, for the moment, discussions on a more formal coalition. In exchange, the JIP drove a hard legislative bargain, committing the LDP to implementing a 12-point manifesto that included second-capital status for Osaka, increased defence spending, a constitutional reinterpretation of Article 9 with an eye

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<sup>10</sup> “[自民党総裁選挙2025](#)” [LDP Presidential Election 2025], NHK ニュース [NHK News].

<sup>11</sup> “[公明党](#)” [Komeito], コトバンク [Kotobank].

<sup>12</sup> Kyodo News, “[Japan Ruling Party's Junior Ally Komeito to End Coalition After 26 Years](#)”, *The Mainichi Shimbun*, 10 October 2025.

<sup>13</sup> “[LDP, Ishin Sign Agreement for Coalition on Eve of Diet Vote](#)”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 20 October 2025.

to future revision, raising income tax exemption thresholds, and tighter immigration policy.<sup>14</sup> With this agreement in place, the Takaichi Cabinet took office on 21 October.

## The Takaichi Cabinet

As presently constituted, key members within the cabinet of Prime Minister Takaichi are as follows:

**Table 1. Key Cabinet positions<sup>15</sup>**

Name	Position
Yoshimasa Hayashi	Internal Affairs and Communications
Toshimitsu Motegi	Foreign Affairs
Shinjiro Koizumi	Defence
Minoru Kihara	Chief Cabinet Secretary
Hiroshi Hiraguchi	Justice
Satsuki Katayama	Finance
Norikazu Suzuki	Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Ryosei Akazawa	Economy, Trade and Industry
Kimi Onoda	Economic Security, Coexistence with Foreign Nationals, Cool Japan Strategy, S&T Policy, Space & AI Strategy

Yoshimasa Hayashi’s appointment as Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications not only elevates a former rival but also serves to recognise the great variety of experience Hayashi has accumulated in his rise through the party. As the ‘hope’ of the relatively liberal centre-right section of the LDP, Hayashi’s pivotal experience as Chief Cabinet Secretary under both Prime Ministers Kishida and Ishiba makes him indispensable to smoothening internal inconsistencies within the party.

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<sup>14</sup> “[2025年10月18日\(土\)【12本の矢】自由民主党への政策協議要望](#)” [18 October 2025 (Sat) – ‘The 12 Arrows’: Demands for Policy Coordination to the LDP], 日本維新の会, 18 October 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Drawn from “[The Cabinet](#)”, The Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, Government of Japan.

Another rising star is Toshimitsu Motegi, newly reappointed Minister for Foreign Affairs. As previously mentioned, Takaichi owed her election in large part to Motegi’s support. Still, he has the potential to be a formidable claimant of the top office in his own right, in part because he, too, has vast legislative and intra-party experience.

Another potential candidate for the prime ministerial office who has been making his presence felt is Shinjiro Koizumi, Takaichi’s erstwhile challenger and current Minister of Defence. Having served as agriculture minister in the Ishiba Cabinet, Koizumi was at the forefront in ensuring that the Japan-US trade deal remained favourable to Japanese agricultural interests (a staunchly protected sector of the economy and one of the LDP’s most reliable vote banks). Under Takaichi, Koizumi has been assigned arguably the most critical ministry in the government, responsible for implementing Japan’s ambitious 2 per cent target for defence spending by 2027 and for delivering revised national security doctrines.<sup>16</sup> His diplomatic skills will also be tried, as he will need to work closely with the US and other partners to ensure broader convergence in strategic affairs.

The final name worth focusing on is Kimi Onoda, who has been appointed to oversee the economic security, soft power strategy, science and technology policy, and space and Artificial Intelligence strategy portfolios. Additionally, she has been appointed to lead a new ministry responsible for the induction and integration of Japan’s growing migrant population. It is instructive to note the specific portfolios assigned to Onoda. As highlighted previously, these are the very same ministries and agencies that the Prime Minister previously held (apart from the immigration-related ministry, which is a new construct). In light of Onoda’s age (she is only 42) and her status as one of the few staunch supporters of Takaichi, it is not out of the realm of possibility that a future prime ministerial candidate or party heavyweight is being groomed from among the LDP’s conservative women in the form of Onoda. This is especially relevant, as one of the biggest obstacles women across the political spectrum face in Japanese politics is the lack of strong female superiors in positions that can train and prepare the next generation to advance.

## Domestic Policy Impacts

Although it is not possible to ascertain medium- to long-term policy impacts for an administration that has been in power for little more than a month, three key considerations may help guide observations of Takaichi’s behaviour. The first key consideration is that Takaichi is currently a selected, not an elected, head of government. In other words, she has been made Prime Minister by the party, not by

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<sup>16</sup> “[New Japan PM to Move Up Defence Spending Goal by 2 Years in Policy Speech](#)”, *Kyodo News*, 22 October 2025.

the Japanese people. Members of the current Diet voted on her nomination as Prime Minister, but a genuine popular mandate has not yet been tested. Although opinion polls indicate broad support for her appointment, it is unclear how long her popularity will last. If she seeks a popular mandate, she will need to be acutely conscious of the political timing.

In this light, it may be in Takaichi’s best interest to effectively ‘do nothing’ as the best means to prolong her time in office. In other words, she may choose to delay or deter legislation that could carry political costs, while moving forward on issues the Japanese electorate cares less about (or supports more action on) to create the impression of progress. This is especially likely, as her government holds a minority in the Upper House and a razor-thin majority in the Lower House, ensuring that the Opposition benches have a say in key policy matters.

This would, of course, put her at odds with the JIP, which would be invested in getting her to ‘do something’ on the 12-point agenda it has imposed as a condition for its support. Which policy items are picked up for action, and the pace of the reform, would thus become key to mollifying the JIP. For example, ‘low-hanging fruit’ such as taking forward action to grant second-capital status to Osaka would be highly likely, as the overconcentration of all government-related functions in Tokyo has attracted domestic concern. On the other hand, it is highly improbable that there will be much forward movement on the revision of Article 9 or on ramping up defence spending beyond 2 per cent, as the former will require a plebiscite while the latter will be fiscally demanding for an electorate already facing significant food inflation.

The second key consideration is that Takaichi has assumed office at a time when Japan is experiencing the emergence (and, in some cases, resurgence) of populist far-right parties, many of which seek to emulate US President Trump’s Make America Great Again (MAGA) tactics. Two parties in particular, the *Sanseito* and the much-smaller Conservative Party of Japan, have recently managed to secure sizeable footholds in Japan’s Diet, and their leaders have been aggressively adopting the methods used by other far-right parties throughout the world to demonise migrants, promote science denial and rewrite history. Their efforts have been successful, as evidenced by the results of July’s elections.

Takaichi’s prime task would therefore be to ‘drain the swamp’ of support for these parties. She would need to woo back far-right voters (who did, until recently, vote for the LDP) while ensuring that mainline conservatives, who do not necessarily share the xenophobia and science denialism of the far-right, remain on her side.<sup>17</sup> A key site of activity for the new prime minister could be policy governing Japan’s foreign residents and tourists, which emerged as a salient electoral issue in the July Upper

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<sup>17</sup> Yoichi Serikawa, “[Takaichi Sanae: The LDP’s Last Hope to Avoid Further Decline?](#)”, no. 1.

House elections. Although most of the political establishment in Japan is keenly aware of the economic importance of foreign labour migrants and students, issues related to overtourism have brought highly publicised incidents of misbehaviour by some tourists to the forefront of public consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, Japan’s immigration policy has traditionally centred around immigration control, leaving critical issues of integration and socialisation to local and prefectural governments.<sup>19</sup> As a result, specific policies governing certain socio-economic activities of foreign residents have often exhibited leakages, which a small minority of the latter have exploited. The severe human rights abuses perpetrated by certain employers under Japan’s Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP), which has attracted censure and concern from both the United Nations and the US in the past, have also resulted in several technical interns choosing to abandon their workplaces and go underground, making them easy recruits for criminal activities.<sup>20</sup>

All these issues have been adroitly exploited by the far-right, which has conflated all these varied grievances into a potent narrative of xenophobia and exclusion.<sup>21</sup> They have been helped in this by foreign actors from both the West and the East. Western (UK and US) far-right propagandists have already been active recently on social media to spread disinformation about talent mobility agreements with African countries and India. In contrast, the far-right’s message has been boosted by Russian state-supported sources.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, powerful lobbies such as business federations and agricultural organisations, heavily dependent on foreign labour, would not countenance a reversal of the Abe-era opening of Japan.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, any action by Takaichi (and

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<sup>18</sup> Soji Lee, “[Classifying Tourist Destinations in Japan for Overtourism](#)”, *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2022, pp. 27–34; Takumi Taniguchi, “[In Europe There Would be Protests': Scholar Weighs Japan's Approach to 'Overtourism'](#)”, *The Mainichi Shimbun*, 10 March 2025.

<sup>19</sup> A Japanese scholar on migration notes: “The government of Japan..., long ruled by the pro-business conservative party, is far more enthusiastic about *labour* importation than human incorporation. Its integration ambition...is not well-realised, the responsibility for which mostly devolves to subnational actors, such as municipal governments and grassroots support groups”; see Toake Endoh (ed.), *Open Borders, Open Society? Immigration and Social Integration in Japan*, Verlag Barbara Budrich GmbH, Berlin and Toronto, 2022, pp. 7–8. See also Gracia Liu-Farrer, “[Immigrant Japan: The Reality of Immigration in a ‘No-immigration’ Country](#)”, Article, *日立グローバルソサイエティレビュー* [Hitachi Global Society Review], No. 2, June 2024, pp. E1–E5.

<sup>20</sup> See Hironori Onuki, “[Informalization and Temporary Labor Migration: Rethinking Japan’s Technical Intern Training Program From a Denationalized View](#)”, *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2025, pp. 35–53; Phengse Chhour, “[Between Precarity and Protest: Cambodian Migrants and the Failures of Japan’s TITP](#)”, *Social Science Japan Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2025, pp. 1369–1435.

<sup>21</sup> Akari Sugiyama, “[Voters Afraid of ‘Scary Foreigners’ Propel Sanseito Before Election](#)”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 26 June 2025.

<sup>22</sup> “[False Claim Spreads of Japan ‘Mass Deportations’ Ministry](#)”, *Straits Times*, 24 October 2025; Junnosuke Kobara, “[‘Japanese First’ Party Rocked by Suspicions of Russian Interference](#)”, *Nikkei Asia*, 17 July 2025.

<sup>23</sup> “[65% of Japan Firms Hire Foreign Workers to Cover Labour Shortages](#)”, *Kyodo News*, 26 December 2024; Junko Horiuchi, “[FEATURE: Japan Firms Working to Attract, Retain Skilled](#)

Onoda, who herself has an American father) would have to thread the needle between avoiding the appearance of encouraging claims of state-sponsored xenophobia and tightening rules wherever necessary to prevent undue leakage.

The final consideration concerns alliance stability. There has been considerable media speculation about the stability of the ‘right-right’ alliance between the LDP and the JIP.<sup>24</sup> Many have deemed it brittle and transactional because the JIP has not formally joined a coalition, thereby precluding future electoral cooperation. However, the JIP’s most considerable merit is its broader policy alignment with the LDP’s archconservative wing. Most of the items enumerated above, such as constitutional revision and stricter immigration policy, may create strong cross-cutting cleavages that promise a stronger, more stable alliance, despite petty disputes. Juxtaposed with the Komeito’s centre-left orientation, which saw them acting as a ‘brake’ on the LDP’s policy manoeuvre space due to fundamentally antithetical policy perceptions, the current alliance may indeed have the potential to solidify into a new ruling constellation.

A caveat applies, however. The situation discussed above applies only if, and as long as, the leadership of the LDP continues to reside in Takaichi’s archconservative allies. The LDP is a party that has always been ‘more right of the average Japanese and more left than the average global conservative’, and that is the balance it needs to retain to retain power in coalition. If a centre-right or centrist candidate (such as Ishiba or Kishida) emerges once again from the LDP, alliance stability may face a severe test, calling into question the JIP’s fidelity to its internally consistent policy plank.

## Foreign Policy Impacts

Japan’s ties with India are likely to remain stable and forward-looking. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s tweet of congratulations to Prime Minister Takaichi was warmly reciprocated by the latter with a message in English, Japanese and Hindi, indicating a desire on the Japanese side to be widely heard and understood by the Indian media sphere.<sup>25</sup> It is almost certain that greater collaboration on defence and security, as well as on economic cooperation, in third countries will continue. There is every reason to expect that others will follow the UNICORN mast deal, while the

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**Foreign Workers**”, *Kyodo News*, 5 January 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Tomoyuki Tachikawa, “[LDP-Japan Innovation Party Marriage of Convenience May Face Rocky Future](#)”, *The Mainichi Shimbun*, 21 October 2025; Eric Johnston, “[The Newly Formed LDP-JIP Coalition May Not be as Solid as It Seems](#)”, *The Japan Times*, 23 October 2025.

<sup>25</sup> “[PM Congratulates H.E. Ms. Sanae Takaichi on Her Election as Prime Minister of Japan](#)”, Prime Minister’s Office, Government of India, 21 October 2025; Takaichi Sanae (@takaichi\_sanae), “[Thank you very much H.E. @narendramodi...](#)”, X (formerly Twitter), 24 October 2025.

recently announced Indian Ocean-Africa Economic Zone Initiative is likely to remain active.<sup>26</sup>

However, Takaichi's government, facing domestic inflation and the Japanese far-right's Trump-inspired disdain for foreign economic assistance, is likely to scrutinise more closely the disbursement of funds by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and others. It may be less tolerant of undue delays in projects. It may demand a greater voice in policy formulation concerning megaprojects such as the Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (MAHSR) project. The present administration may also seek greater policy coordination on issues such as Russia and China, particularly given its closer alignment with the Trump administration (see below). Finally, there is a medium-to-low likelihood that the administration will adopt a go-slow approach to talent mobility from India.

About ties with the US, Takaichi has already demonstrated that she is likely to emerge as a 'dream partner' for President Trump. This is unsurprising, as mainstream conservatives in Japan are invariably pro-US, sometimes to the point of excess. Under Takaichi, these trends are likely to be turbocharged. The world already received a glimpse of this during Trump's October visit to Japan, when Takaichi took pains to accommodate Trump's preferences wherever possible, even suggesting that the Japanese government would consider nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>27</sup>

Relations are thus unlikely to encounter any friction, barring any demands from Washington concerning the removal of barriers to access to Japan's agricultural sector or an increase in defence spending far beyond 2 per cent of GDP. In the meantime, Takaichi will likely pursue symbolic appeasement of Trump (such as the Nobel Prize nomination above) while retaining the maximum possible policy independence.

Despite significant concern among certain commentators on both sides, Japan's ties with the Republic of Korea (ROK) may prove surprisingly stable. Prime Minister Takaichi's meeting with President Lee Jae-myung in the ROK clearly conveys the sense that both leaders wish to move pragmatically forward despite historical differences.<sup>28</sup> Takaichi's inaugural policy speech, in which she praised aspects of

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<sup>26</sup> Kaveri Jain, "[India-Japan Agreement on UNICORN Masts: A Key Milestone in Defence Cooperation](#)", Comment, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), 6 January 2025; Mohanasakthivel J. and Arnab Dasgupta, "[TICAD 9 and the Indian Ocean: Prospects for India-Japan Collaboration](#)", Issue Brief, MP-IDSA, 1 October 2025.

<sup>27</sup> "[Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting, Signing Ceremony, and Japan-U.S. Working Lunch](#)", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 28 October 2025; Justin McCurry, "[Japanese PM Promises Golden Age in Relations with US During Trump Visit](#)", *The Guardian*, 28 October 2025.

<sup>28</sup> "[Japan-ROK Summit Meeting](#)", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 30 October 2025.

Korean soft power, and her decision to defer visiting Yasukuni Shrine after her appointment, should be read as conciliatory gestures to Seoul.<sup>29</sup>

This is not to say that the potential worsening of ties cannot be imagined. A stray statement from any of Takaichi’s backers, especially Taro Aso, could trigger broader negativity in relations. Further, Takaichi is not likely to refrain from mentioning, as she did during the bilateral summit with Lee, that relations would move forward “while acknowledging that there are various issues on which their positions differ due to their proximity as neighbouring countries” as she seeks to retain her image as an arch-conservative leader and mollify her base.<sup>30</sup>

It is Japan–China relations which are likely to remain the real point of tension throughout Takaichi’s tenure. China did not officially acknowledge her appointment on 21 October. Still, President Xi Jinping congratulated her when they met for a bilateral summit on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in the ROK.<sup>31</sup> The bloom soon wore off, however, when Takaichi made a statement in the Diet on 7 November that a crisis in the Taiwan Strait would constitute a threat requiring the activation of the Constitution’s collective self-defence provisions and the US–Japan Mutual Security Treaty.<sup>32</sup> This simple statement of facts triggered a return of Beijing’s ‘wolf warrior’ diplomacy, when its consul in Osaka issued a direct threat to the prime minister for her remarks.<sup>33</sup> Beijing has resolutely supported its diplomat, calling on Japan to withdraw the comments, whereas Tokyo has refused to do so.<sup>34</sup>

This is consistent with overall predictions about how Japan–China relations will unfold under Takaichi. As demonstrated above, as long as Tokyo’s moves on China’s ‘core’ issues, such as Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands, remain symbolic and do not constitute substantive progress, China is likely to remain cordial. However, a clear statement such as the one above may be met with a barrage of ‘wolf warrior’ style rhetoric and acts of economic coercion. In fact, Beijing has already implemented several retaliatory measures in response to the recent dispute, which could potentially dent Japan’s image and finances.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> “[高市首相「韓国より、コスメ大好き」　日韓関係重視をアピール](#)” [PM Takaichi: ‘I love Korean seaweed, cosmetics’, appeals to the importance of Japan–Korea ties], 時事通信 [Jiji Press], 21 October 2025.

<sup>30</sup> “[Japan-ROK Summit Meeting](#)”, no. 28.

<sup>31</sup> “[Japan-China Summit Meeting](#)”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 31 October 2025.

<sup>32</sup> “[「ライン越えた」　高市首相の台湾有事答弁、にじむ「安倍路線」継承](#)” [‘Crossing the Line’: PM Takaichi’s Taiwan Contingency Statement Displays Colours of the ‘Abe Line’], 每日新聞 [Mainichi Shimbun], 12 November 2025.

<sup>33</sup> “[Editorial: Chinese Diplomat Crosses the Line](#)”, The Japan Times, 14 November 2025.

<sup>34</sup> Tim Kelly and Liz Lee, “[Japan Seeks to Calm Escalating Dispute with China over Taiwan](#)”, Reuters, 17 November 2025.

<sup>35</sup> Sakura Murakami and Erica Yokoyama, “[Japan Calls China’s Travel Warning Unacceptable as](#)

On the other side, Takaichi cannot back down from any confrontation with Beijing, because her base would not countenance it. Indeed, one might expect a more aggressive rhetorical stance regarding China's internal affairs. This was in evidence during the summit meeting in the ROK, where she made explicit reference to China's export controls on rare earth materials, the security of Japanese nationals in China after a wave of seemingly xenophobic attacks on them in 2024, Hong Kong, and the treatment of Uyghur minorities in China's Xinjiang province.<sup>36</sup>

Japan's position on the Uyghur issue warrants scrutiny, as the Takaichi Cabinet currently includes Arfiya Eri, a Japanese lawmaker of Uyghur origin whose parents are of Kurdish and Uyghur descent, who serves as Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. This arrangement provides an additional incentive for a more confrontational stance.<sup>37</sup> Eri herself has been quite vocal about her origins and the problems her community faces internationally, which may not help matters.

Beyond these key relationships, Japan's foreign policy and strategic posture are likely to remain evolutionary. Russia is expected to face further sanctions, though Japan will be sure to protect its interests in the Sakhalin-2 oil and gas project.<sup>38</sup> In West Asia, there is no likelihood of the recognition of a Palestinian state, barring significant Israeli provocation. Japan would likely pay greater attention to Southeast Asia to carve out a proto-sphere of influence. It is somewhat likely that Japan will pay less attention to the United Nations and its substantive agendas beyond calls for reform to secure a permanent seat, while paying more attention to multilateral arrangements such as the Quad and other military alliances or forums. Finally, regarding defence, there is a high probability of a significant increase in defence spending, including the exploration of taboo-breaking technologies such as nuclear-powered submarines.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

It is difficult to predict with any certainty how long the Takaichi administration will endure, given its minority status. Prime Minister Takaichi's best interest may be to

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[Spat Simmers](#), Bloomberg, 17 November 2025; ["No Japan-China Talks Held at G20, Takaichi Gets Fresh Warning from Beijing"](#), Kyodo News, 23 November 2025; ["China Sends Another Letter to U.N. Chief Over Japan PM's Taiwan Remarks"](#), Kyodo News, 2 December 2025.

<sup>36</sup> ["Japan-China Summit Meeting"](#), no. 31.

<sup>37</sup> ["Profile of Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs ERI Arfiya"](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 29 November 2024; Chad de Guzman, ["Time100 Next List: Arfiya Eri"](#), Time, 13 September 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Yoshifumi Takemoto, ["Japan PM Pushed Back Against US Request to Ban Russian Energy Imports, Sources Say"](#), Reuters, 29 October 2025.

<sup>39</sup> Kosuke Takahashi, ["Japan Weighs Nuclear Submarines as New Defence Minister Koizumi Signals Break from Postwar Nuclear Taboo"](#), Naval News, 12 November 2025.

‘do nothing’ on sensitive issues while taking positive steps in matters with lower political costs. The breakup of the LDP–Komeito coalition creates significant challenges, as Komeito is a substantial opposition force with a large voter base. By contrast, it is unknown whether the LDP-JIP alliance will endure if subjected to a popular mandate.

However, this does not mean that Prime Minister Takaichi’s tenure will not be significant. In terms of foreign policy, she could draw Japan closer to the US, while maintaining steady relations with India and the ROK. Her most important challenge is likely to come from China, as both countries will now have to satisfy their increasingly nationalist populations that their leaders will not back down on their ‘core’ interests.

## About the Author



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