

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

China-Japan Diplomatic Row and Beijing's Anger Diplomacy

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S*ummary*

Beijing engaged in a sustained display of anger following Prime Minister Takaichi's remarks that a Chinese naval blockade of Taiwan could be considered an existential threat by Japan.

Introduction

The ongoing diplomatic standoff between Beijing and Tokyo following Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s remarks on a Taiwan contingency during a meeting of the budget committee in the lower house of Japan’s Diet on 7 November 2025 has escalated into a major crisis in an already fragmented geopolitical landscape in East Asia.¹ Takaichi’s comments that a Chinese naval blockade of Taiwan could be considered an existential threat by Japan prompted a sharp response from China, which demanded a retraction of the statement. The ensuing diplomatic impasse escalated rapidly, reaching the UN and affecting trade, tourism and other bilateral exchanges.²

This diplomatic spat comes within a week of President Xi Jinping and Sanae’s meeting on the sidelines of the APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting in Korea on 31 October 2025, where Taiwan was a significant issue of discussion.³ Sanae’s concrete response to a hypothetical situation has prompted speculation among observers about a change in Japan’s policy towards Taiwan. Likewise, Beijing’s anger diplomacy, a defining feature of the current confrontation, is notable.

China’s Diplomacy of Anger with Japan

As Todd H. Hall explains, anger diplomacy is a coordinated display of outrage by a state in response to a perceived violation or offence.⁴ The ‘anger’ is conveyed through diplomatic statements, substantive gestures such as military drills, withdrawal from or cancellation of dialogue mechanisms, business and civilian exchanges, or punitive measures such as sanctions and outright trade bans. While there is a very fine line between anger and coercive diplomacy, anger diplomacy is intended to convey ‘red lines’ and strategic resolve to resist perceived wrongs. In contrast, coercive diplomacy is aimed at changing the behaviour of the targeted actor.

One recent instance of China’s anger diplomacy was Beijing’s response to then-Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi’s 2022 visit to Taiwan. In

¹ Sayuri Romei, “[Japan’s Takaichi Stands Firm on Taiwan](#)”, German Marshall Fund, 4 December 2025.

² “[China Spat with Japan on Taiwan Deepens, Reaches UN: What’s it All About?](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, 22 November 2025.

³ “[President Xi Jinping Meets with Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae](#)”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

People’s Republic of China, 31 October 2025.

⁴ Todd H. Hall, “[Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage](#)”, Cornell University Press, 2015.

a coordinated display of anger involving multiple levels of government, the US Ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns, was summoned late at night on 2 August to lodge a diplomatic protest, during which Pelosi’s visit was termed an “unscrupulous move”.⁵

Further intensifying the emotional messaging to highlight Beijing’s displeasure, beginning from 3 August, that is the date of Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, China conducted the largest live fire drill ever around Taiwan as the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) performed joint maneuvers in the air and waters surrounding Taiwan for five days. The PLA also launched 11 Dongfeng-15 short-range ballistic missiles into the waters around Taiwan.⁶

China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, declared Nancy Pelosi’s visit to be “a complete farce” and warned that “those who play with fire will perish by it, and those who offend China will be punished”.⁷ The episode’s notable highlight was Beijing’s decision to cancel or suspend eight key dialogue mechanisms with the US, including China–US Theatre Commander-level talks, as well as cooperation on climate change, cross-border crime and drug trafficking. China also imposed bans on food imports from Taiwan.⁸

Notable is China’s rationale for its angry response. In 2022, Beijing accused Washington of being a “bully, of violating the One China principle, the three communiques, and of disrupting China’s development and rejuvenation”.⁹ Currently, in 2025, Beijing has accused Tokyo of being a reactionary power that is challenging the post-World War II order through “crude interference in China’s internal affairs”, and “attempt to challenge China’s core interests and obstruct national reunification”.¹⁰

Accordingly, Beijing, citing “deteriorating” security conditions in Japan, advised Chinese tourists against travelling to Japan, reimposed a ban on Japanese seafood

⁵ [**“China Summons US Ambassador over Pelosi’s Visit to Taiwan”**](#), The State Council of People’s Republic of China, 3 August 2022.

⁶ Michael T. Klare, [**“China Reacts Aggressively to Pelosi’s Taiwan Visit”**](#), Arms Control Association, September 2022.

⁷ [**“Those Who Offend China will be Punished: Wang Yi”**](#), *People’s Daily Online*, 4 August 2022.

⁸ Shannon Tiezzi, [**“China Suspends Military Dialogues, Climate Change Talks With US”**](#), *The Diplomat*, 5 August 2022.

⁹ John Haltiwanger and Natalie Musumeci, [**“China Called the US a ‘Bully’ after an Official said China ‘Overreacted’ to Pelosi’s Taiwan Visit”**](#), *Business Insider*, 18 August 2022.

¹⁰ [**“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian’s Regular Press Conference on November 10, 2025”**](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, 10 November 2025.

imports, and cancelled cultural events such as concerts and exhibitions by Japanese artists. Also, Beijing postponed the China–South Korea and Japan Culture Ministers meeting. The Chinese Permanent Representative to the UN, Fu Cong, sent multiple letters demanding a retraction of Takaichi’s comments, rejected a proposal for an official meeting on the sidelines of the G20, and Chinese military aircraft locked their radars on Japanese fighter jets.¹¹ Moreover, the Eastern Theatre Command of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) released a poster of a Chinese sword decapitating a skeleton wearing a Japanese military cap.

Beijing has dismissed claims of ‘over-reacting’ and has sought to justify its response, stating it as a message to the international community about China’s resolve to defend its core interests.¹² In the past, the Chinese leadership has on numerous occasions expressed its indignation at perceived violations of the ‘red line’ by Japanese officials. But they remained confined to diplomatic protests and limited punitive measures—this time, as Beijing has engaged in a sustained display of anger through various channels.

Two possible motivations emerge: the first is to assess the consensus within the current ruling coalition regarding the Taiwan contingency.¹³ Takaichi’s statement, seen as the most concrete response at the highest level, in which successive Japanese premiers have maintained strategic ambiguity regarding the Taiwan contingency, comes at a time when Tokyo is revising its security posture through constitutional reinterpretation, new laws and amendments to existing rules.¹⁴

These changes are rooted in bipartisan support for defence reforms in Japan, as none of the presidential candidates following Shinzo Abe reversed or backtracked on the defence policy initiatives he initiated.¹⁵ At this point, Beijing may consider it imperative to understand the extent to which military transformation will affect

¹¹ Erin Hale, [“Japan, China Continue to Spar at UN over Takaichi Remarks on Taiwan”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 5 December 2025; Mari Yamaguchi, [“Japan Protests after China Military Jet Locks Radar on Japanese Aircraft”](#), *Associated Press*, 8 December 2025.

¹² Park Sun-min, [“Chinese Military Poster Depicts Japanese Skull Decapitation on Nanjing Anniversary”](#), *The Chosun Daily*, 14 December 2025; [“Is China Overreacting to Japanese PM’s Erroneous Remarks on Taiwan?”](#), *Xinhua*, 10 December 2025.

¹³ As observers note, change in Japan’s position with regard to Taiwan has been perceptible for quite some time. For instance, Japan’s 2021 Defense White Paper, in view of China’s increasing military pressure on Taiwan, had termed stability around Taiwan as important for Japan’s security and had called for observing cross-strait tensions with a “sense of crisis”. See Ryan Ashley, [“Japan’s Revolution on Taiwan Affairs”](#), *War On The Rocks*, 23 November 2021.

¹⁴ Daisuke Kawai, [“Japan’s Defence Budget Surge: A New Security Paradigm”](#), *RUSI*, 2 December 2024; Purnendra Jain, [“Proactive Pacifism and Beyond: Japan’s Foreign and Security Policy Pivots to Pragmatism Replacing Idealism”](#), *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 4, December 2025.

¹⁵ Purnendra Jain, [“Despite Shifts, Japan’s Defence and Security Policy Remains on Pacifist Ground”](#), *Observer Research Foundation*, 14 August 2023; Purnendra Jain, [“Proactive Pacifism and Beyond: Japan’s Foreign and Security Policy Pivots to Pragmatism Replacing Idealism”](#), no. 14.

Tokyo’s stance on the Taiwan issue, as reunification remains integral to China’s goal of national rejuvenation. A retraction of Takaichi’s comment, due to Chinese pressure, would likely be seen by Beijing as a lack of consensus among Japanese policymakers on the Taiwan contingency.¹⁶

The second motivation for Beijing could be to test Washington’s balancing act between accommodating China’s sensitivities regarding Taiwan and reassuring Japan. The Sino-Japanese diplomatic row over Taiwan created a significant diplomatic dilemma for Washington. During US President Donald Trump’s late October 2025 visit to Japan, Washington and Tokyo announced the start of a golden age in bilateral relations, with plans to facilitate US\$ 550 billion in Japanese investment in the US by January 2029.

On the other hand, Trump has also been trying to implement a temporary trade deal with China that includes the import of American soybeans, rare earth exports and bilateral cooperation over the fentanyl crisis in the US.¹⁷ China’s multifaceted pressure on Japan may have been aimed at assessing the flexibility of the US transactional approach, which combines significant economic and strategic incentives on both sides with Washington’s security commitments to its regional allies.

Conclusion and Takeaways for India

The question that arises is whether China’s diplomacy of anger realised the strategic objectives. While it successfully conveyed China’s ‘red line’ to Japan and other countries in the region, the inferences China can draw from these developments remain unclear. Regarding PM Takaichi’s comments, there has been no visible rupture within the government, as she has stood firm in declining to retract her remarks.¹⁸ Domestic criticism of this issue has primarily focused on the dangers of relinquishing the leverage of strategic ambiguity, rather than on the remark that a Taiwan contingency would be an existential threat to Japan. On the contrary, the radar-locking incident involving Chinese fighter jets is likely to strengthen support for a more assertive stance in Japan.

¹⁶ You Ran, [“Why Such a Strong Reaction to Sanae Kaoshima’s Remarks this Time?”](#), *Jianliao*, 17 November 2025.

¹⁷ [“Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Strikes Deal on Economic and Trade Relations with China”](#), The White House, 1 November 2025.

¹⁸ Sung Ho-chul and Lee Beul-chan, [“Japanese Prime Minister Reflects on Taiwan Remarks, Refuses Retraction”](#), *The Chosun Daily*, 17 November 2025.

Similarly, although Trump held a telephone conference with Xi and asked Takaichi to avoid escalation with China, Washington has also not pressured Japan to retract the comments. Further, following the radar-locking incident, the US State Department on 9 December criticised China’s actions, and, in a show of support, US B-52 bombers participated in an air drill with Japanese fighter jets on 10 December.

For India, there are two key takeaways: first, China’s costly diplomatic signalling through the weaponisation of trade, mobilisation of international opinion, and aggressive military posturing indicates Beijing’s increasing willingness to move up the escalatory ladder in response to perceived violations of China’s core interests. As the border dispute and related insecurities persist in India–China bilateral relations, it is essential to monitor how China defines its territorial claims *vis-à-vis* India within its core interests. Further, as relations between the two countries normalise, New Delhi will also have to carefully assess the interdependencies that will be created and the potential adverse implications that could follow if China were to leverage them.

Second, regarding the evolving geopolitics in East Asia, with China’s growing assertiveness and the US approach to alliance management becoming increasingly transactional, India’s engagement with the region will be complicated by these undercurrents. East Asia remains vital to New Delhi’s geostrategic interests, defence partnerships and economic opportunities. Therefore, India should continue to prioritise expanding avenues of cooperation with the region and strengthening alliances with like-minded countries to ensure a resilient supply chain and an inclusive regional order.

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