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JAPAN'S FOREIGN AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY UNDER KISHIDA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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- Prime Minister Kishida intends to build on his predecessor's foreign policy efforts over the last nine years, to include advocating the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) to accelerate "Quad" cooperation.
- At the same time, Kishida also intends to make his mark by incorporating his own preferences, including his personal commitment to nuclear disarmament and economic security.

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On October 8, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida delivered his first policy address to the Diet. In the speech, he identified three “determinations” on which his foreign and national security policy will be based: (1) the determination to protect universal values, (2) the determination to protect Japan’s peace and security, and (3) the determination to lead the international community’s battle with global challenges.

None of these issues he identified is new. Indeed, from advocating the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept to leading the international effort to salvage the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal after the US announced its withdrawal at the outset of the Trump administration, the foundation of Kishida’s foreign policy “determinations” was laid during the eight years of the Abe administration. The succeeding Suga administration carried the torch further when Suga himself intensified his government’s effort to propel cooperation among “the Quad” into collaboration in specific policy areas, including COVID-19 vaccine production and distribution, emerging technologies, cybersecurity, infrastructure, space and climate change, as seen in the September 2021 Quad Summit in Washington, DC. In short, Kishida’s policy principles are built upon his predecessors’ efforts over the last nine years.

That said, Kishida has already been busy adding his own touches. Kishida demonstrated his government’s determination to “protect universal values”, for instance, through holding virtual and phone meetings not only with his Quad—US, Indian and Australian—counterparts but also with his Russian, Chinese and South Korean counterparts. Additionally, he has been actively participating in other virtual opportunities for summit diplomacy, including the G20 summit, the ASEAN+3 summit, the Japan-ASEAN Summit, and the East Asia Summit. While taking part in these meetings, Kishida has been reiterating his government’s commitment to FOIP and the importance of an international order that upholds universal norms. Furthermore, his recent appointment of former defense minister Gen Nakatani to the newly-created position of Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Human Rights has attracted a great deal of attention. In particular, the recent decision by the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) to cancel all tournaments scheduled to take place in China out of concern for Peng Shuai—one of the world’s top players, who had gone missing after publicly discussing how she had been subjected to unwanted sexual advances by China’s vice premier—has brought renewed attention to China’s human rights violations. How Kishida will leverage Nakatani to push human rights issues vis-à-vis not only China but also other parts of the world will need to be closely watched.

Similarly, Kishida's "determination" to play a leading role in the international community in the battle with global challenges was on full display when Kishida attended the COP26 summit in Glasgow. During the COP26 summit, Kishida reaffirmed Japan's commitment to the goal of "Net Zero by 2050" and pledged \$10 billion in assistance to support the rest of Asia in reaching their zero-emission goals, adding to the \$60 billion that his predecessor Suga had pledged in June. Furthermore, Kishida committed Japan to a \$100 million project to pursue the development of non-carbon-emitting technologies such as hydrogen and ammonia-fired gas power generation.

Finally, being a politician from Hiroshima, Kishida is personally committed to nuclear disarmament. Japan already has a long history of identifying nuclear disarmament as one of its foreign policy priorities. In his policy speech, Kishida re-iterated this decades-long commitment. As he emphasized his own identity as a political leader from Hiroshima, Kishida declared his commitment to ensuring Japan will be a "bridge" between nuclear states and non-nuclear states, bringing the international community closer to the goal of "a nuclear weapon-free world".

While all these assurances and actions are important, the most important decisions that await Kishida pertain to his second "determination", the determination to protect Japan's peace and security. When he came to power in October, he indicated that his government would revise three key foreign and national security policy documents: the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), and the Mid-Term Defense Program (MTDP). Now that he has led his ruling coalition to an election victory on October 31, the revision processes for these three key documents will proceed full speed ahead over the next 12 months.


The most significant of these three will be the NSS. In fact, its revision—the first revision since it was originally formulated in 2013—is long overdue, given that the security environment surrounding Japan has been quickly intensifying. Compared to December 2013 when Japan's first NSS was unveiled, Japan now faces a much more assertive and confident China that is militarily stronger, as demonstrated by not only its aggressive behavior in the South China Sea but also its increased military operations near Taiwan. In addition, North Korea has shown no sign of slowing down its military buildup, and Russia seems to be pursuing closer security cooperation and coordinated action with China, as the recent joint circumnavigation of Japan by naval vessels demonstrated. Even though the US has finally recognized the gravity of the geostrategic challenges that Beijing poses to the existing international order and unambiguously

identified China as its strategic competitor, it is by no means certain how and whether the US can come up with a strategy that would allow it and its allies and partners to effectively deter China. Kishida will oversee the revision of Japan's national security strategy as Japan grapples with such a shifting power balance in its strategic environment.

The revisions of the NDPG and the MTDP, mid-term defense policy and acquisition planning documents, will likely proceed in parallel with the revision of the NSS. Again, the decisions that are made in this document will be critical, as it directs how Japan will invest its limited defense budget to acquire military capabilities that help Japan work with the US and other like-minded countries to mount an effective deterrent against China.

Finally, in the context of bilateral US-Japan alliance management, Kishida is going to see through a few important initiatives. These include the completion of host-nation support (HNS) negotiations and consultations under the umbrella of "two plus two" aimed at reaching key decisions on issues such as responsibility-sharing between the two countries' militaries in various contingencies as well as the deepening of bilateral defense technology cooperation.

In fact, it is no understatement to say that these decisions to be made under Kishida's watch will be consequential for Japan's foreign and national security policy for the next decade, possibly longer. In this context, it is noteworthy that the general elections held on October 31 resulted in *Ishin no Kai* (Innovation Party), a center-right conservative party that originated in Osaka, dramatically increasing the number of seats it holds in the House of Representatives. With *Ishin's* position on constitutional reform being much closer aligned with that of the LDP, for example, Kishida may finally be able to introduce constitutional reform for Diet deliberation. *Ishin* can also be an important advocate for Kishida's aspiration to increase Japan's defense spending to 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to bring it on par with the defense spending of the US's European allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

It is ironic that Kishida, not known to be as visionary as Abe, finds himself in the position of making these profound decisions. However, given the magnitude of these decisions, Kishida's political style that prioritizes compassion, pragmatism and consensus building may very well work in his favor. 

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