

Research Reports

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"Research Reports" are compiled by participants in research groups set up at the Japan Institute of International Affairs, and are designed to disseminate, in a timely fashion, the content of presentations made at research group meetings or analyses of current affairs. The "Research Reports" represent their authors' views. In addition to these "Research Reports", individual research groups will publish "Research Bulletins" covering the full range of the group's research themes.

The Future of the U.S.-China Conflict

Tokuhiro Ikeda

(Director, National Security Institute, Fujitsu System Integration Laboratories/Senior Fellow, Asia Center, Harvard University/Vice Admiral (Ret.) JMSDF)

Looking back over 2022, there have been two major events that have influenced the future of the U.S.-China conflict. One is the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war that began with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. The other is the visit to Taiwan by U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi in early August. I will examine the impact of these two events on the U.S.-China confrontation and consider the future course of the conflict. I will also consider the military responses that Japan should take in light of these events.

1. Impact of the Ukraine-Russia War

In a June 2022 article¹, Professor Barry Posen of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology points out the impact of the Ukraine-Russia war on the international community by noting that the world order is in a state of near anarchy, prone to interstate competition (war) and nuclear escalation. His study also showed that, although war between major powers (especially nuclear-armed states) is unlikely, economic dependence does not deter war and conventional (non-nuclear) combat power thus remains important. The civil defense measures, evacuation procedures, and economic management

tools that Ukraine promptly implemented in the early stages of the war were important preparations for its own defense, and nationalism was shown to be an important factor. In the international community, the United States has strengthened cooperation among its allies, while countries such as India and China that prize independence and autonomy desire multipolar competition and seek to position Russia as a valuable state. In addition, the NPT regime will become more complicated as states that cannot be under the U.S. nuclear umbrella continue to acquire nuclear weapons. A world based on the concept of spheres of influence will be constructed by the connections among geography, interests, and nuclear deterrence.

2. The Possibility of War Between the United States and China

In his book² *"Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?"*, Harvard professor Graham Allison explains that 16 Thucydides traps have occurred in the past 500 years, 12 of which have resulted in war. He also states that the way to prevent the U.S.-China confrontation from escalating into war is to create a predictable situation and strive for stability, with each side clearly pursuing its own national interests. In an article he wrote³ after Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, however, he points out three recent factors that could lead to war.

First, if the Chinese government were faced with a choice between allowing Taiwan independence and waging a war that would destroy Taiwan and China, Xi Jinping would likely choose war.

Second, the American political class does not like competitors interfering in what it considers national security issues. Thus, Republican and Democratic politicians are trying to be tougher on China than the other in the run-up to the midterm elections. Presidential hopeful Mike Pompeo has called for the United States to recognize Taiwan's independence, which will likely be a plank in the Republican platform for the 2024 presidential campaign. In Taipei, Pelosi transmitted a "solemn pledge to support the defense of Taiwan." Senator Bob Menendez, the Democratic chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican leader on defense issues, have also introduced a Taiwan policy bill that would designate Taiwan a "major non-NATO ally" and commit \$4.5 billion in military aid. Meanwhile, as President Xi looks toward a third term at the party congress scheduled to be held in the fall of 2022, the pressure to stand up to the United States and to stand strong towards Taiwan is more robust than ever.

Third, the military balance in the Taiwan Strait has shifted decisively in favor of China, and the United States could lose the war over Taiwan. In the Pentagon's most realistic simulations, the United States has not been able to win in a conflict limited to the area around Taiwan. If the United States fights a localized war over Taiwan, the president will likely face the fateful choice of whether to escalate to a broader war in which the United States has the upper hand to win. That broader war could escalate further and even lead to the use of nuclear weapons.

3. The Future of the U.S.-China Conflict

From the above, it is clear that the international community will become even more confused as the management of nuclear weapons becomes more complicated and the confrontation between the United States and China becomes even more intense. On the other hand, Allison wrote in the above-mentioned article, "The U.S. and China have demonstrated over the past 50 years that irreconcilable does not mean unmanageable. The two countries have created a framework of ambiguity that has provided citizens on both sides of the Strait with the greatest happiness in their history." In another article⁴, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd wrote, "Normalization of U.S.-China relations may be difficult, but stabilization is important, and strategic competition must be pursued. The United States and China will not change their pursuit of their respective national interests, but they both want stability." Further, he argued: "In addition, it is assumed that China, having learned the price of international isolation that Putin paid in the Ukraine-Russia war, will continue to exercise strategic patience with regard to Taiwan's unification."⁵ Therefore, the U.S.-China confrontation is basically expected to continue in a more controlled manner. However, under the aforementioned circumstances in which the U.S.-China confrontation is becoming increasingly severe, the risk of unintended escalation will be higher if a situation such as China conducting military exercises in response to Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan continues."

4. Military Responses Japan Should Take

Japan needs to institute military responses to the unintended escalation of the U.S.-China confrontation. In this section, we will consider enhancement of defense capabilities, operational planning, and nuclear strategy.

(1) Enhancement of Defense Capabilities

The U.S.-China military balance around Taiwan is in favor of China and, if this situation is left unchanged, the United States will likely gain the upper hand only by expanding the battle to a wider area from Taiwan. Efforts must be made to shift the balance to its advantage by mobilizing not only Japan and the United States but also U.S. allies in East Asia such as South Korea and the Philippines, as well as forces dispatched from Australia and Europe that are part of the U.S. encirclement of China. Japan needs to further enhance its defense capabilities and contribute to this effort so as not to give China the false impression or confidence that it can win if it fights.

The Japanese government is said to be gradually expanding its defense budget toward 2% of GDP, but it is necessary to pay attention to "toughness" and "sustainability" to win the battle. As mentioned earlier, conventional (non-nuclear) combat power has become important, but the Ukraine-Russia war is being fought as a hybrid war with warfare in new domains (cyberspace, outer space, and the electromagnetic spectrum). Therefore, information functions must be enhanced to prepare for information warfare that makes full use of information obtained in these new areas of warfare. Furthermore, it is necessary to enhance both the quality and quantity of conventional combat forces, including advanced weapons such as unmanned aerial vehicles and unmanned naval vessels, as well as improve logistical functions, such as securing ammunition, fuel, and spare parts to improve warfighting capability. A command and control system that can be linked to the command and control concept known as JADC2 (Joint All-Domain Command and Control)⁶ being promoted by the U.S. Department of Defense must also be developed.

(2) Operational Planning

After upgrading equipment, it is necessary to formulate an operational plan in preparation for battle, conduct training based on the plan, and repeatedly reflect the results in the operational plan. Since various forms of fighting can be assumed in the U.S.-China confrontation, detailed operational plans are necessary for each of them.

Plans must be drawn up in advance for civil defense measures, evacuation procedures, and the creation of economic management tools, such as those Ukraine initiated immediately after the Russian invasion. In other words, it is important first for Japan to formulate its own operational plan, including a plan for Japan's defense operations (not only for the SDF but for the government as a whole), as well as a civil defense plan and a plan for maintaining economic activities while the battle is in progress. After that, it is necessary to prepare a "Japan-U.S. Joint Operation Plan" and a "Taiwan Support Operation Plan." Since these operational plans cannot be devised by the Self-Defense Forces of the Ministry of Defense on their own, the government needs to conceive them comprehensively.

A system under the operational command of the prime minister is required in order to smoothly carry out operations that integrate government functions, so it is also vital to keep the prime minister informed and prepared to ensure that the system functions.

(3) Nuclear Strategy

In late February, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Japan's late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pointed out that, if Ukraine had joined NATO, which engages in nuclear sharing, the Russian invasion might not have taken place, and then stated that Japan also needs to advance discussions on nuclear sharing in which allied nations share the nuclear weapons of the United States. Current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida did not get into specific discussions, claiming that the government was not considering discussing the issue. Looking back at Japan's postwar nuclear policy, there was a time early

on after World War II when the Japanese government seriously considered possessing nuclear weapons: Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi's cabinet in 1952 stated that the possession of nuclear weapons for defensive purposes, especially tactical nuclear weapons, was consistent with Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. After China conducted its first nuclear test in December 1964, Prime Minister Eisaku Sato believed that, if China had nuclear weapons, Japan should also possess them. Subsequently, Sato declared the three non-nuclear principles, and Japan adopted the policy of "not possessing, not producing, and not allowing the entry" of nuclear weapons. The 1970 White Paper on Defense referenced these policy limitations: "It is legally possible to possess small nuclear weapons if they are within the minimum capability necessary for self-defense and do not pose a threat of aggression to other countries, but it is the government's policy not to acquire nuclear weapons as a matter of policy, even if they are constitutionally feasible." Since then, the three non-nuclear principles have become the basis of Japanese Policy, and discussion of nuclear weapons has gradually become taboo. Dr. Vipin Narang, a professor (on leave of absence) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and currently the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy at the U.S. Department of Defense, describes Japan as one of 29 nuclear powers in his book⁷, placing it into the Insurance Hedger category. The reason for this is that "Japan has laid the technological foundation for possessing nuclear weapons by developing a strong civilian nuclear energy program that would enable it to develop nuclear weapons and gain control of a complete nuclear fuel cycle, and it seeks to extract from the United States stronger reassurances of extended deterrence." He noted that "Japanese leaders have mostly questioned the reliability of the U.S. nuclear umbrella" and followed this by stating "If U.S. extended deterrence is inadequate, Japan will maximize the credibility of its extended deterrence to Japan by building an Insurance Hedge of Japanese nuclear weapons production that the U.S. perceives as a threat against Japan." This means that Japan's retention of the ability to build nuclear weapons is an insurance hedge to maintain the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent. Japan is, in fact, under a nuclear threat. China will be able to possess up to 700 nuclear warheads by 2027 and plans to have at least 1,000 warheads by 2030.⁸ In addition, North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests in the past and continues to develop ballistic missiles at an extremely rapid pace; it is believed to already possess the capability to attack Japan using a nuclear-armed ballistic missile with sufficient range to reach Japan.⁹ From a foreign perspective, it is hard to believe that Japan has stopped thinking about its nuclear strategy under the three non-nuclear principles despite the growing nuclear threat surrounding Japan.

Although the possibility of nuclear war between the United States and China is low, it is assumed that China's nuclear threats will have a significant effect on Japan. Japan needs to consider concrete measures on how to ensure the value of extended nuclear deterrence by the United States. In light of Narang's view that Japan's promotion of nuclear power is exerting political pressure on the U.S. government to maintain an extended nuclear deterrent, Japan's nuclear strategy must be comprehensive, including not only arms control, disarmament and nuclear deterrence but also nuclear energy policy.

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- ¹ *Defense Priorities*, "Hypotheses on the implications of the Ukraine-Russia War", Jun. 7. 2022, Barry Posen (Ford International Professor of Political Science, MIT)
- ² "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?", May 30, 2017, Graham Allison (Douglas Dillon Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School)
- ³ ANALYSIS & OPINIONS - The National Interest, "Taiwan, Thucydides, and U.S.-China War": "If the best the current U.S. and Chinese governments can manage is statecraft as usual--which is what we've seen this past week--then we should expect history as usual.", Aug. 5, 2022, Graham Allison (Douglas Dillon Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School)
- ⁴ *Foreign Affairs*, "Rivals Within Reason? U.S.-Chinese Competition Is Getting Sharper-but Doesn't Necessarily Have to Get More Dangerous", Jul. 20, 2022, Kevin Rudd (President of the Asia Society in New York and former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Australia)
- ⁵ *Foreign Affairs*, Beijing Is Still Playing the Long Game on Taiwan: Why China Isn't Poised to Invade", Jun. 23, 2022, Andrew J. Nathan (Professor of Political Science at Columbia University)
- ⁶ Congressional Research Service, "Joint All-Domain Command and Control: Background and Issue for Congress", January 21, 2022 Update
Commentary by the author in *Ships of the World* (2022.9-No.979 P94-P99), "Current Status and Problems of Anti-Ship Missile Defense Systems"
- ⁷ *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, 2022, Vipin Narang (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy: public service leave from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
- ⁸ "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021", Annual Report to Congress Office of the Secretary of Defense
- ⁹ *Defense of Japan 2022*