



LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM: JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER SANAЕ TAKAICHI AND HER POLITICAL APPROACH

Shoji Azuma¹

¹*Department of World Languages and Cultures, University of Utah*

Abstract

In the contemporary political landscape, two major ideological approaches are commonly identified: liberalism and conservatism. Liberalism tends to be idealistic and equality-oriented, placing emphasis on freedom, human rights, and international cooperation and dialogue. Conservatism, by contrast, is more realistic and order-oriented, prioritizing national interest and security. Although it can sometimes become self-righteous, it generally maintains a pragmatic outlook and emphasizes the importance of history and tradition. Although liberalism appears to be widely embraced around the world, conservatism—while supported by a smaller number of people—continues to be respected as well. In Japan, the newly appointed Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, tends to advocate a conservative perspective. Her remarks in the Diet regarding a potential existential crisis involving Taiwan can be seen as one such case. This paper examines how Takaichi, as Japan's newly appointed leader, engages in politics, with particular attention to her use of social and political language. The analysis draws primarily on internet-based media sources, including YouTube content, online articles, newspapers, academic journals, and a range of relevant books.

Keywords

China, Japan, Prime Minister, Taiwan

Introduction

After the resignation of Shigeru Ishiba in 2025, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) held a leadership election on October 4. In the first round, no candidate obtained a majority. Sanae Takaichi received 183 votes—the highest among the five candidates—while her main rival, Shinjiro Koizumi, secured 164. Koizumi is the son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who enjoyed considerable popularity among the Japanese public during his tenure from April 26, 2001 to September 26, 2006.

Because no candidate secured a majority in the initial ballot, a runoff was held between Takaichi and Koizumi. In the final round, Takaichi won 185 votes to Koizumi's 156, becoming the first woman to lead the LDP. Following her victory, the Diet held a vote to confirm the new Prime Minister. She obtained 237 votes in the lower house—well above the majority threshold—and prevailed in the upper house, thereby formally succeeding Ishiba as Prime Minister.

Takaichi's policy positions consistently emphasize national security, fiscal discipline, technological self-sufficiency, and the preservation of traditional social and cultural norms. These priorities are widely regarded as defining elements of contemporary conservative ideology in Japan.

Taiwan and China

The most significant recent political development under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's administration has been her statements regarding Taiwan and the subsequent reactions from the People's Republic of China. In late 2025, Takaichi publicly indicated that a potential Chinese military invasion of Taiwan could constitute a situation threatening Japan's national survival, potentially justifying the use of Japan's Self-Defense Forces under the right of collective self-defense. This represents a marked departure from decades of Japan's strategic ambiguity regarding Taiwan. China responded strongly to these remarks, issuing formal diplomatic protests, warning against

Japanese interference in the Taiwan Strait, and signaling potential economic and political consequences. The reactions included both public condemnation and warnings to Japanese citizens, alongside a temporary suspension of certain bilateral exchanges. These developments underscore the heightened tension in East Asia and the delicate balance Japan must maintain between asserting its security interests and managing economic and diplomatic relations with its largest regional neighbor. From an international relations perspective, this episode illustrates the challenges of balancing realist security imperatives with economic interdependence. The Takaichi administration's stance signals a shift toward a more assertive security posture in the Indo-Pacific region, aligning Japan more closely with U.S. defense policy and regional security frameworks. Domestically, these statements have sparked debate over Japan's constitutional pacifism and the risks associated with potential involvement in foreign conflicts, reflecting broader tensions within Japanese society over national security and international engagement. In summary, the Takaichi administration's recent focus on Taiwan has become a defining feature of its foreign policy agenda, with implications for Japan–China relations, domestic political discourse, and regional stability in East Asia. The episode may serve as a critical test of Japan's ability to navigate the complex interplay between security, diplomacy, and economic interdependence in the coming years. A particularly noteworthy development in this episode was the highly provocative statement in Japanese language made by the Chinese Consul General in Osaka, Xue Jian Shi (薛劍氏) on X. In the X post, that was later swiftly deleted, the Consul General reportedly said (Japan Times, 2025a):

「勝手に突っ込んできたその汚い首は一瞬の躊躇もなく切ってやるしかない。覚悟はできているのか。」 (Katte ni tsukkon de kita sono kitanai kubi wa isshun no chucho mo naku kitte yaru shika nai. Kakugo wa dekite iru no ka.)
"The filthy head that has intruded on its own accord must be cut off without a moment's hesitation. Are you prepared for that?"

This statement, emanating from an official Chinese diplomatic representative, is exceptionally severe in tone. Japanese media outlets, analysts, and political commentators widely characterized the remarks as highly inappropriate and, in some cases, argued that they could warrant the expulsion of the diplomat from Japan. The statement represents a serious violation of diplomatic norms and protocol, constituting an extraordinary breach of the principles governing official conduct in international relations. U.S. ambassador to Japan, George Glass, called the Chinese Consul General's post a threat, blasting it as evidence that Beijing's conduct falls short of its rhetoric. Glass made the following comment:

“Once again their true colors are revealed. He is attempting to intimidate Prime Minister Takaichi and the Japanese people,” (Japatopi, 2025).

From an academic perspective, this incident illustrates the potential for rhetoric by state actors to escalate diplomatic tensions, as well as the challenges of maintaining decorum and reciprocity under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. The rapid deletion of the comment suggests recognition, even within the Chinese diplomatic apparatus, of its inappropriateness. The dispute was triggered after Takaichi said that if military force were used in a Taiwan crisis, it could be considered a “survival-threatening situation” for Japan. That classification would provide a legal justification for Japan to deploy its military to help defend friendly nations. According to subsequent newspaper reports, Chinese President Xi Jinping reportedly placed a direct phone call to U.S. President Donald Trump. Although the specific details of their conversation have not been disclosed, Xi appears to have expressed—albeit indirectly—his dissatisfaction with Japan's response to the situation (e.g., Asahi Shinbun, 2025). Furthermore, the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo intensified its criticism of Japan by posting that “*Takaichi's misguided remarks revive the specter of Japanese militarism and constitute interference in China's internal affairs*” (Daily, 2025). On 1 December, China's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Fu Cong, submitted a second letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres requesting the withdrawal of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's parliamentary remarks concerning a potential contingency in Taiwan. In the letter, Fu reiterated his view that the immediate cause of the current deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations lies in what he characterized as Takaichi's “erroneous statements.” He further condemned the Japanese government's late-November rebuttal to his earlier communication as an “unreasonable argument,” and once again called on Tokyo to retract the Prime Minister's remarks (Sankei Shinbun, 2025a). These reports suggest a deepening sense of distrust within the Chinese leadership toward Japan regarding issues related to Taiwan, as well as an increasingly explicit articulation of China's objections.

A meeting between Japanese and Chinese diplomats earlier this week appeared to have done little to soothe tensions, with the Chinese side expressing dissatisfaction with the outcome of the talks. Furthermore, Takaichi strongly maintains that there is no problem with her remarks (Japan Times, 2025b). She further states that, even in the event that the United States were to take measures to defend Taiwan, her position remains unchanged: given the Japan–U.S. security framework, it is within the realm of possibility that the Japanese Self-Defense Forces

could be deployed to cooperate with U.S. forces and contribute to the defense of Taiwan. She thus explicitly affirms that her original stance does not require revision.

Nevertheless, the episode has contributed to heightened scrutiny of Japan–China relations and has reinforced debates regarding the limits of diplomatic speech and accountability in contemporary international politics. A considerable number of public intellectuals appear to share similar views. For instance, Yukihiro Hasegawa, former deputy editor-in-chief of *The Tokyo Shimbun*, has expressed firm support for Takaichi. He argues that Japan must articulate its position with courage and without hesitation, contending that such an assertive stance is essential for safeguarding the country's international standing (Hasegawa, 2025a). It appears that Professor Stephen Walt of Harvard University and Professor John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago share a broadly similar orientation in their understanding of a conservative approach to international politics (Hasegawa, 2025b).

Likewise, a well-respected commentator, Yoichi Takahashi, has declared his support for Takaichi, asserting categorically that there is nothing internationally problematic about her remarks regarding a potential Taiwan contingency (Takahashi 2025). Also, a former president of Daio Seishi, Mototaka Ikawa has made a very similar comment on Takaichi regarding the Taiwan issue (Ikawa, 2025).

Recent developments indicate that China has explicitly signaled its intent to employ economic relations with Japan as a strategic instrument, applying pressure across multiple sectors, including trade, tourism, and supply chains. Evidence of this pressure has already begun to materialize: Japan has experienced decline in tourism revenue and stagnation in trade, with industries and firms highly dependent on China facing particularly tangible risks. For example, Chinese airlines have significantly reduced flights to Japan, a development that is reported to potentially inflict considerable adverse effects on both the tourism and business sectors (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2025). Nevertheless, these measures have not escalated to a comprehensive sanction capable of immediately destabilizing the entire Japanese economy. Looking forward, the reconstruction and diversification of supply chains and trade relationships involving China, Japan, and third countries may help mitigate these risks, thereby limiting the overall economic impact. With respect to the approval rate, for example, the Japanese daily newspaper, *Mainichi Shinbun* (*Mainichi Shinbun*, 2025), conducted a nationwide public opinion survey on November 22–23, 2025. The approval rating for the cabinet of Prime Minister Takaichi remained at 65%, consistent with the previous survey conducted on October 25–26, 2025. The disapproval rate was largely unchanged at 23% (compared with 22% in the prior survey). Despite increasing instability in Japan–China relations, including Chinese backlash against the Prime Minister's parliamentary statements, the cabinet has maintained high approval ratings, particularly among younger age groups (e.g., *Mainichi Shimbun*, 2025, *Tele Too BIZ*, 2025). This very positive approval rate suggests that Takaichi has been able to maintain its popularity even with the disputed Taiwan issue among other political agenda. Masaki Kanai, Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau made the following statement to defend the Japanese position. Please refer to the 2025 Kyodo News article titled “**Japan's**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Counters Chinese Propaganda on Social Media While Exercising Restraint to Avoid Escalation.”

As China has intensified its propaganda campaign criticizing Japan in response to Prime Minister Takaichi's parliamentary remarks concerning a potential contingency in Taiwan, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has begun issuing rebuttals via social media. In reaction to Chinese claims—such as assertions that “public security in Japan is deteriorating” and that China “has the right to undertake military actions”—MOFA has repeatedly posted explanations grounded in factual evidence. At the same time, in order to prevent an escalation of tensions arising from reciprocal exchanges, the ministry has deliberately employed restrained language, seeking an appropriate balance between strengthening external communication and avoiding further confrontation. At a press conference on the 28th of November, Foreign Minister Motegi underscored the need for accurate public communication regarding China's assertions, stating that it is essential “to clearly convey what the facts are.” He emphasized the significance of articulating Japan's position through social media channels. Incidentally, Mogi is a politician who previously served as Secretary-General of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). During the first Trump administration, he engaged in negotiations with U.S. officials on various diplomatic issues. He was reportedly regarded by President Trump as a “tough negotiator,” earning a measure of respect for his negotiating capabilities (Kyodo News, 2025).

Takaichi as the Prime Minister of Japan

When Takaichi sought the presidency of the Liberal Democratic Party, she was asked which political figures she most respected. She cited Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom, praising her strong will, decisiveness, and capacity to implement policy. When asked to identify a Japanese political figure she admired, Takaichi cited former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who had served in office for an extended period. She further emphasized Abe's robust, pragmatic, and highly effective leadership, noting that it had fostered a close personal relationship with President

Donald Trump. This relationship extended beyond formal policy discussions to include informal interactions, such as playing golf together. (e.g., Azuma, 2022; Associated Press, 2019).

Trump made a visit to Japan, during which he and Prime Minister Takaichi made their first public appearance together at the Akasaka Imperial Palace in Tokyo. At this event, Trump delivered a notably friendly remark to Takaichi and her delegation. His statement may be presented as follows:

I have always had a great love of Japan, and a great respect of Japan, and I will say that this will be the relationship that will be stronger than ever before, and I look forward to working with you. And on behalf of our country, I want to just let you know that any type of questions, any doubts, anything you want, any favor you need, anything I can do to help Japan, we will be there. We are allies at our strongest level, it is a great honor to be with you (Mainichi Shinbun, 2025b)

In this remarkable speech, one point of relevance is Trump's assertion that the United States would "do anything" to support Japan. This remark is strikingly significant, as it implies an exceptionally strong commitment to the U.S.–Japan relationship. The statement was, in fact, extraordinarily friendly toward Japan. In essence, Trump emphasized that the United States would do *anything* to assist Japan, even in circumstances where doubts or challenges regarding Japan might arise. Trump quite overtly expressed an exceptionally strong commitment to supporting Japan in any way he could. His statement went beyond the level of a routine diplomatic remark, signaling a deeply assertive and empowering stance toward the U.S.–Japan relationship.

As noted earlier, Takaichi has maintained a high level of public support since assuming office. Interestingly, however, the approval rating of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), to which she belongs, remains significantly lower and does not match her personal popularity. This raises an important question: why does Takaichi enjoy strong support while the LDP continues to struggle with comparatively weak approval ratings? Equally noteworthy is the persistent weakness of support for the opposition parties. The Constitutional Democratic Party, Komeito, the Japanese Communist Party, and others have all continued to register low levels of public approval. In sum, while Prime Minister Takaichi's personal approval remains high, both the LDP and most opposition parties continue to suffer from stagnant support. What explains this divergence?

Liberalism and Conservatism

One possible answer to this question, beyond immediate political calculations or strategic considerations, may lie in a more fundamental distinction between conservatism and idealism. Put simply, Takaichi—together with Abe—can be viewed as operating from a conservative standpoint that seeks to move politics forward in concrete and pragmatic ways grounded in existing realities. By contrast, the opposition parties, as well as the anti-Takaichi faction within the LDP (likely including former prime ministers such as Kishida and Ishiba), appear to pursue policies informed more strongly by idealist orientations. In this sense, the divergence may be understood as a difference between conservatism and idealism. Conservatism entails confronting empirical realities and implementing specific and reliable policies designed to serve the interests of the nation and its citizens. Idealism, in contrast, is rooted not only in an awareness of current conditions but also in normative principles such as liberty, equality, and human rights, and it typically emphasizes conciliatory and flexible policy approaches.

The distinction between conservatism and idealism represents a fundamental division in political philosophy. Conservatism emphasizes a pragmatic approach to governance, grounded in the realities of the present. Conservative actors prioritize the careful assessment of existing conditions, seeking to implement concrete policies that ensure stability, continuity, and the effective functioning of the state. Policy decisions under this framework are guided less by abstract principles than by considerations of feasibility, historical experience, and tangible outcomes for society. Idealism, in contrast, is rooted in normative principles and overarching philosophical ideals such as liberty, equality, and human rights. While idealists do not ignore empirical realities, their primary concern is to align political action with these guiding concepts. This approach often favors policies that are conciliatory, aspirational, or reform-oriented, emphasizing the realization of moral and ethical standards, sometimes at the expense of immediate practical constraints. Thus, the contrast between conservatism and idealism lies in their orientation toward reality versus principle: conservatism prioritizes pragmatic and actionable solutions based on existing conditions, whereas idealism emphasizes the realization of normative values, even if achieving them requires navigating complex or uncertain circumstances. In this contrastive analysis, Takaichi's high personal approval ratings may be understood, at least in part, as reflecting public recognition of her conservative pragmatism: a leadership style that balances principled governance with actionable policies, distinguishing her from both opposition leaders and intra-party actors whose idealist orientations may appear less immediately effective in addressing pressing political challenges.

The following incident illustrates this point. In 2023, when an unidentified object (commonly described as a balloon) entered Japanese airspace, it was widely considered likely to have originated from China. In contrast, the United States, when faced with a similar situation, responded by launching a missile to intercept and destroy the object (The Wall Street Journal, 2023). In Japan, however, no such interception occurred. The primary reason for

this was the absence of a legal basis: under the current Self-Defense Forces Act, there is no provision authorizing such an action. Consequently, Japan's response capabilities were effectively constrained; in practice, the government and the Self-Defense Forces were unable to act beyond the explicit scope of existing legislation. This underscores that Japan is legally constrained and cannot act outside the provisions of its laws, unlike the situation in the United States. This situation could potentially change under Takaichi's administration, given that she has expressed support for a more active role for the Self-Defense Forces and for strengthening Japan's overall security posture.

As has been discussed historically, Japan has maintained what is known as the *Three Non-Nuclear Principles* (非核三原則). This policy states that Japan will not possess, not produce, and not permit the introduction of nuclear weapons into its territory. Adopted in 1967 by Prime Minister Eisaku Sato and endorsed by the Diet in 1971, the principles have served as a cornerstone of Japan's postwar security policy and its identity as a non-nuclear state. While they are not legally binding, the principles have shaped Japan's defense posture and public opinion, reflecting the country's commitment to nuclear disarmament and its domestic anti-nuclear sentiment rooted in the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Among these principles, the provision that prohibits the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japanese territory has been the most contested. A fundamental question inevitably arises: when U.S. aircraft carriers, submarines, or military aircraft enter Japanese territory, do they in fact remove all nuclear weapons beforehand? This concern becomes even more pronounced in the current international environment, where global instability is increasing and strategic unpredictability is growing (e.g., The Ryuukyuu Shinpoo, 2025). In this context, it is unsurprising that calls for a reassessment of the Three Non-Nuclear Principles have gained renewed attention. For example, political commentator Yukihiro Hasegawa has suggested that Japan may have reached a point at which reconsideration of these principles is warranted (Hasegawa, 2025c).

Notably, even American scholars have argued that Japan should begin seriously considering the option of acquiring nuclear weapons (Foreign Affairs, 2025). In the article titled "*America's Allies Should Go Nuclear*," Moritz S. Graefrath and Mark A. Raymond explicitly argue that Japan, together with Germany and Canada, should enter the race to acquire nuclear weapons. The article further suggests that the proposal for Japan to acquire nuclear weapons might even contribute to the United States' pursuit of its "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) objectives. The underlying logic, as presented by the article, is that such a proposal could mitigate potential burdens on the United States by ensuring that Japan would not be compelled to align itself with global disarmament initiatives, thereby reducing strategic uncertainties for Washington. This proposal becomes particularly salient when considered in relation to a potential Taiwan contingency, especially with respect to whether Japan should become militarily involved.

How Takaichi, as a self-identified conservative leader, will address this issue remains an important question. Her future policy direction on this matter will be closely watched, particularly as Japan seeks to balance its long-standing national principles with the demands of contemporary security realities (Prime News, 2025). On the *Prime News* program broadcast by Fuji Television, the prominent political commentator Yoshiko Sakurai is a frequent guest. She has expressed strong support for Prime Minister Takaichi, characterizing her as a leader who combines integrity with a resolute commitment to advancing a wide range of political issues. In particular, Sakurai has argued that, within the eighty-year history of the postwar era—during which Japan, in her view, remained in various respects in a subordinate position to other states—Takaichi is the first Prime Minister to establish, or restore, a Japan that does not rely on any foreign power and thus embodies the qualities of a fully "independent state (独立国家)."

According to press reports, one of Prime Minister Takaichi's remarks was selected for the 2025 *Ryuukoogo Taisho* (New Words and Buzzwords Award), an annual prize granted to expressions that have attracted significant public attention. As reported by the *Sankei Shinbun*, one of Japan's major newspaper companies, the grand prize was awarded to the phrase derived from Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's statement: "*Hataraitte hataraitte hataraitte hataraitte hataraitte mairimasu / josei shusho*" ("I will work, work, work, work, and work / Japan's first female Prime Minister") (Sankei Shinbun, 2025b). The phrase originated from Takaichi's address to party members on 4 October 2025, when she was elected as the Liberal Democratic Party's first female president. This outcome may be interpreted as evidence of the degree to which Takaichi's language has permeated public discourse.

As another episode illustrating the enduring popularity of Japanese musicians in East Asia, the case of Ayumi Hamasaki is instructive. Hamasaki, one of Japan's most influential pop artists over the past several decades, recently faced the abrupt cancellation of her scheduled concert in Shanghai, reportedly following directives from local authorities amid heightened sensitivities surrounding Prime Minister Takaichi's statements on Taiwan. In an interview with the *Sankei Shinbun*, however, Hamasaki offered a measured yet resonant message that conveyed both composure and a sincere sense of gratitude toward her Chinese audience. She observed: "Even the smallest positive things can enrich the heart. Please hold on to them and protect yourselves. Entertainment should serve as a bridge that connects people, and I continue to believe strongly that my role is to help build that bridge" (Sankei Shinbun, 2025c).

While her remarks might superficially be interpreted as modest or even self-effacing, they can equally be understood as an instance of intentional moral clarity—a quiet assertion of her commitment to the transnational cultural ties that have long connected Japanese performers and their Chinese supporters. Rather than distancing herself from political tensions, Hamasaki chose to reaffirm the normative value of cultural exchange and the human connections it fosters. In this respect, her statement functions not merely as a personal reflection but as an articulation of the broader ethical responsibility that artists may assume in times of political uncertainty.

In summary, Takaichi's conservative approach, in contrast to more idealistic orientations, can be characterized as follows. The following examples illustrate her emphasis on national security, constitutionalism, traditional social values, and a pragmatic approach to international affairs.

1. Support for Constitutional Revision, Especially of Article 9

She has been one of the most vocal proponents of revising Japan's postwar constitution, arguing that Article 9 in its current form inadequately reflects the realities of contemporary security challenges. Her stance embodies a core conservative perspective that Japan must transcend the constraints of its postwar pacifist framework and adopt a constitutional structure aligned with its sovereign responsibilities.

2. Reinforcement of Traditional Social and Cultural Norms

Takaichi has repeatedly emphasized the importance of traditional family structures, cultural continuity, and educational policies that foster national identity. This outlook aligns with conservative values that prioritize social stability, historical continuity, and the preservation of cultural heritage in the face of rapid societal change.

3. A Realist Approach to Diplomacy and the U.S.–Japan Alliance

In contrast to idealist tendencies within certain segments of the Japanese political spectrum, Takaichi adopts a distinctly realist approach to international relations. She stresses the indispensability of the U.S.–Japan alliance while also calling for Japan to assume a greater share of responsibility for its own defense. This reflects a conservative understanding of foreign policy as grounded in national interest, power dynamics, and strategic necessity abstract ideals.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the political orientation of Japan's new Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, with particular emphasis on her approach to the security environment surrounding Taiwan. As Japan's first female Prime Minister to advance an explicitly conservative agenda, Takaichi has raised fundamental questions concerning national survival: What, precisely, constitutes a situation that may threaten the very existence of the Japanese state? What actions are permissible within Japan's current legal framework? And, ultimately, what course of action is most appropriate for the Japanese public and for the nation as a whole? These questions frame her policy stance on Taiwan and broader national security matters. Public discussion—whether voiced by opposition parties, within the Liberal Democratic Party's internal factions, or in contemporary media and political commentary—tends to lean toward an idealist orientation. Yet, as this study has argued, the tension between conservatism and idealism represents a deeper philosophical dichotomy that demands more rigorous reflection. Idealism is, of course, indispensable. However, when confronting urgent realities, guiding the nation toward a desirable trajectory requires a more searching examination of the principles of freedom, equality, and human rights, and a reassessment of Japan's position within the international community.

Idealism, in its most characteristic form, presumes the goodwill of others and assumes that conflicts can be resolved through dialogue—a perspective often associated with traditional Japanese diplomacy. Conservatism, by contrast, urges a reconsideration of foreign policy through the lens of national interest, military capability, and the power dynamics that shape international politics. Some critics may argue that conservatism risks devolving into self-righteousness. Yet, in an era of intensifying geopolitical uncertainty, Japan must cultivate the ability to make calm, deliberate, and comprehensive judgments. Such capacity will be essential for Japan's future. Finally, when considering why wars erupt, it becomes clear that they are driven not merely by military or geopolitical power, but also by deeper psychological forces—most notably, fear. The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine—despite signs that it may be approaching its later stages—continues without resolution. Russia's effort to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO reflects both a geopolitical calculation of power and President Vladimir Putin's profound fear of losing strategic space around Russia's borders. From this perspective, the conflict may be understood as a confrontation between Ukrainian idealism and Russian conservatism, revealing how these philosophical

orientations shape the motivations and actions of states. The struggle between idealism and conservatism may therefore illuminate an essential dimension of international politics.

How this tension will ultimately unfold in Japan—and how it will shape the trajectory of the Takaichi administration—remains a critical issue for continued analysis (AERA, 2025). A final observation may be posed as follows: Will Takaichi initiate a shift from an idealist to a conservative orientation within the Liberal Democratic Party, the opposition parties, the mass media, political commentators, and key bureaucratic agencies such as the Ministry of Finance (MOF)? At stake is a fundamental philosophical contest between conservatism and idealism, a tension that may define the broader contours of Japanese politics in the years ahead.

The United States released its most recent “National Security Strategy” on December 4, 2025 (**National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2025**). This document is highly significant for understanding the future trajectory of U.S. foreign and security policy. Notably, the new strategy places far greater emphasis on “strengthening the American homeland” with a renewed focus on the “Western Hemisphere,” rather than on multilateral cooperation or global engagement. Geopolitically, the strategy represents a shift away from Europe, Russia, and China, and instead prioritizes the United States itself and neighboring states such as Venezuela, Mexico, and Greenland.

For Japan, this strategic reorientation implies a transformation from being a state primarily “protected by the United States” to one increasingly expected to “uphold regional order on its own.” Such a shift may heighten the likelihood of closer coordination between China and Russia and could also render U.S. involvement in a Taiwan Strait contingency more uncertain. In this sense, the new strategy may weaken America’s engagement in Asia while significantly increasing Japan’s geopolitical burdens. Given these developments, the key question is how Japan should respond to this evolving strategic environment. If expectations for Japan’s leadership and regional contributions continue to grow, it will be critical to consider how the Takaichi administration will address the implications of the U.S. National Security Strategy. There is little doubt that Prime Minister Takaichi’s decisions and actions will have a profound impact on Japan’s future trajectory. Her leadership will thus be of considerable importance in the years ahead.

References

- AERA. (2025). Takaichi shushoo wa egao to kansaiben de shinkin-kan mo, her language is "kenka jyotoo" style. Chooki seiken ni hitsuyoo na no wa? *November 16, 2025*.
- Asahi Shimbun. (2025). Beichu shuno ga denwa kyoogi: Xi Jinping shi Taiwan mondai de kainyu shinai yo motomeru. *November 25, 2025*.
- Associated Press. (2019). *Trump, Japanese leader cap visit with golf outing*. April 27, 2019.
- Azuma, Shoji. (2022). Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his message of “hope.” *World Journal of Education and Humanities*, 4(4), 1–15.
- Daily. (2025). Nichiyo hiru ni X areru. *November 30, 2025*.
- Foreign Affairs. (2025). America’s allies should go nuclear. *November 19, 2025*.
- Hasegawa, Yukihiro. (2025a). Chugoku no Taiwan henkanron wa hokai sunzen!? *November 11, 2025*.
- Hasegawa, Yukihiro. (2025b). Amerika de Nihon kaku busoron ga fujoo. *November 29, 2025*.
- Hasegawa, Yukihiro. (2025c). Prime Minister Takaichi's thoughts on the “Three Non-Nuclear Principles.” *November 15, 2025*.
- Ikawa, Mototaka. (2025). Taiwan yuji no hatsugen de Chugoku ga Nihon kara hanarete itte iruken ni tsuite. *November 25, 2025*.
- Japan Times. (2025a). Japan lawmakers eye firm response to Chinese envoy's threat to behead PM. *November 12, 2025*.
- Japan Times. (2025b). Takaichi rejects China’s demand to retract Taiwan remarks. *November 21, 2025*.
- Japato. (2025). US Ambassador in Tokyo rebukes Chinese Consul General over “cut off the dirty head” post. *November 10, 2025*.
- Kyodo News. (2025). Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs counters Chinese propaganda on social media while exercising restraint to avoid escalation. *November 29, 2025*.
- Mainichi Shimbun. (2025a). Takaichi naikaku no shiji-ritsu 65%, Nicchu kankei akaruku mo koosui jun jji. *November 23, 2025*.
- Mainichi Shimbun. (2025b). Trump praises Japan’s new Prime Minister, saying US is an “ally at the strongest level.” *October 28, 2025*.
- National Security Strategy of the United States of America. (2025). 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy. The White House. *December 4, 2025*.
- Nihon Keizai Shimbun. (2025). Chugoku koku kaisha, Nihon-yuki genbin, 900 bin ni kakudai. *November 29, 2025*.
- Prime News. (2025). Takaichi Seiken ga Mezasu Tsuyoi Nihon. *November 27, 2025*.
- Sankei Shinbun (2025a). Japan–China tensions have resurfaced on the stage of the United Nations. *December 2, 2025*.

Sankei Shinbun (2025b). “2025 Hataraitte, hataraitte...” was selected for the New Words and Buzzwords Award. *December 1, 2025*.

Sankei Shinbun (2025c). Ayu Hamasaki performed her entire set — from the opening number to the encore — in the empty Shanghai venue where her concert had been canceled. *November 30, 2025*.

Takahashi, Yoichi. (2024). Taiwan yuji to Takaichi Sanae-shi no kakugo. *September 24, 2024*.

Tele Too BIZ. (2025). Takaichi naikaku shiji 75%, koosui jun wo iji. *November 30, 2025*.

The Ryuukyuu Shimpoo. (2025). Tamaki chiji “hikaku sangensoku wa kenji o.” *November 30, 2025*.

The Wall Street Journal. (2023). Chinese reconnaissance balloons and the growing threat posed by major powers in Asia. *February 15, 2023*.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mariko Azuma at Duke University for the helpful suggestions.