
Responding to Chinese Pressure: A Comparative Analysis of Military Spending in Taiwan and Japan

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Résumé

Cet article examine les dépenses militaires de Taïwan et du Japon suite à l'intensification des pressions économiques, politiques et militaires de la Chine depuis 2012. Taïwan et le Japon, deux démocraties économiquement développées, étroitement alignées sur les États-Unis et dépendantes de ceux-ci, ont réagi différemment à l'accroissement de la pression chinoise, comme en témoignent leurs dépenses militaires. Via une analyse comparative de la nature de la menace chinoise à laquelle chacun est confronté, de l'alliance sécuritaire qu'il entretient avec les États-Unis, de son historique en matière de défense, ainsi que de la polarisation politique de sa politique intérieure, cet article explique pourquoi les dépenses militaires par habitant de Taïwan ont constamment dépassé celles du Japon depuis 2012. Grâce à cette analyse, ce travail conclut que les dépenses militaires plus élevées de Taïwan s'expliquent par la nature existentielle de la menace à laquelle il fait face, l'absence d'un accord de sécurité formel avec les États-Unis, un fort engagement historique envers l'autodéfense ainsi qu'un paysage politique intérieur fortement polarisé en ce qui concerne les relations avec la Chine. Les conclusions de ce travail démontrent que des facteurs à la fois politiques et historiques contribuent de manière significative aux chiffres et aux tendances contemporains des dépenses militaires à Taïwan et au Japon et permettent de les expliquer. Comprendre le contexte plus large des réponses de Taïwan et du Japon en matière de dépenses militaires est pertinent aujourd'hui, puisque la Chine continue de faire pression et de créer des tensions militaires avec ces pays.

Mots-clés: Taiwan, Japon, Chine, dépenses militaires, menace chinoise, alliance de sécurité, pacifisme, polarisation politique.

Abstract

This paper examines Taiwanese and Japanese military spending in response to increased economic, political, and military pressure from China since 2012. Taiwan and Japan, two economically developed democracies that are closely aligned with and dependent on the United States, have responded differently to this increased Chinese pressure, as evidenced by their respective military spending. Through a comparative analysis of the nature of the Chinese threat that each country faces, the security alliance each has with the United States, their respective historical defence orientations, and political polarization within their respective domestic politics, this paper explains why Taiwan's military spending per capita has consistently exceeded that of Japan since 2012. Through this analysis, this paper concludes that Taiwan's higher military spending per capita is due to the existential nature of the Chinese threat that it faces, the absence of a formal Taiwanese security agreement with the United States, a strong historical commitment to self-defence, and a domestic political landscape that is highly polarized as it pertains to relations with China. The findings of this paper show that both political and historical factors contribute significantly to and explain contemporary military spending figures and trends in Taiwan and Japan. Understanding the broader context of Taiwan and Japan's military spending responses is relevant today, China continues to exert pressure and create military tension towards each of these countries.

Keywords: Taiwan, Japan, China, military spending, Chinese threat, security alliance, pacifism, political polarization.

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Introduction

Since Xi Jinping assumed control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2012, political, military, and economic tensions between China and several of its regional neighbors in the South and East China Seas have increased notably. China's shift toward a more assertive and aggressive foreign policy in the region is responsible for this increase (Miura, 2023). Two countries that have been significantly threatened by this shift are Japan and Taiwan. Each country has responded differently to this aggression, particularly in regards to military funding. To better understand these responses and differences in military spending, this paper will first present Taiwanese and Japanese military budgets and allocations of resources. Taiwan and Japan also share several similarities, which makes this comparison reasonable. That said, among their differences is their military spending, defined here as all expenditure on armed, peacekeeping, and paramilitary forces, ministries involved in defence projects, and outer space military operations. This paper will get to the root of the discrepancy of the military spending between these two countries since 2012. This will be done through an analysis and comparison of specific factors. In particular, it tests the following hypothesis: Taiwanese and Japanese military spending is directly influenced by the nature of the threat that each country faces from China, its security alliance with the United States, its historical defence orientation, and the degree of polarization in its domestic politics. Through this examination, a better understanding of the difference in military spending between Taiwan and Japan, specifically as it pertains

to Chinese aggression since 2012, will be achieved.

Budgets and Resource Allocations

Budgets and resources made available to the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) have increased incrementally since China increased its assertive and aggressive position in the South and East China Seas in 2012. 2024 was a notable year; total military spending increased to \$55.3 billion, which represented nearly 1.4% of GDP, a level that hadn't been achieved since Japan regained its independence from the Allies in 1952 (Liang, et al., 2025). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) military spending dataset, this translates to US\$445.5 per capita and marks an overall increase of almost 12% since 2013 (SIPRI, 2025). These most recent increases are part of a larger scale plan put in place in 2022 by the Fumio Kishida administration which committed to gradually increase defence spending, which includes military spending, as well as additional defence-related costs such as veteran compensation, up to 2% of GDP over a five-year period between 2022 and 2027 (Shinomoto, 2025).

While these increases were announced by the Kishida administration, this investment plan has also been strongly supported by other Japanese leaders and decision-makers. For example, former prime minister, Shinzo Abe, as well as other Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members, have shown support for the 2% of GDP target for increased defence spending (Mulgan, 2022). More recently, newly elected Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, has also publicly communicated her desire to reach the 2% of GDP defence spending threshold, and to do

so two years ahead of schedule, by the end of 2025 (Corben, 2025). This increase in spending will inflate Japan's defence budget to the third largest in the world, with only the United States and China spending more on defence (Nobukatsa, 2023).

This increased budget has been allocated across several areas. The most notable has been the increased investment in modernizing existing infrastructure, weapons, and systems. For example, as of 2023, "80% of the Self-Defense Forces' 23,254 facilities did not meet the Ministry of Defense's standards for resilience against enemy attack" (Boswinkel, 2024). This issue was addressed in the form of a \$26 billion investment scheduled for 2023-2027, the goal of which is to improve Japanese resilience against enemy attack and to meet the standards set by the MOD (Boswinkel, 2024). In addition, Japan is investing significantly in modernizing the Japan Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF), reflecting its crucial role in the defence of Japan. It is allocating up to US\$10 billion to acquire around 147 new fifth-generation F-35 stealth fighter jets from the United States, a deal that would give the JASDF access to the highest number of F-35 stealth fighter jets outside of the U.S. (Wong, 2019). Alongside this sizable investment, Japan is also investing in upgrading two of its existing aircraft carriers to accommodate these new F-35 stealth fighter jets (Wong, 2019). Japanese leadership also considers the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force as crucial in defending against and countering Chinese naval power and have consequently allocated significant investments to this branch of its military as well. The country plans to build a new line of "destroyers, submarines, and maritime surveillance

vessels" with the end goal of improving its maritime awareness and response capabilities in the East China Sea (Bandara, 2025).

Similarly to Japan, Taiwan has also increased its military spending in response to China's increasingly aggressive and assertive posture in the South and East China Seas. In 2024, its military spending rose to \$16.5 billion, marking a 1.8% increase from the previous year and an overall increase of 48% from 2015 (Liang, et al., 2025). This military spending represented 2.1% of GDP in 2024 (SIPRI, 2025). Additionally, Taiwan's per capita military spending also jumped; in 2024, it was US\$708.2 per capita, a significant increase from the 2012 per capita figure of US\$450.5 (SIPRI, 2025). These increases in investment reflect the significant importance afforded to the Taiwanese military over the last decade. Under the new leadership of President Lai Ching-te, elected in 2024, this upwards trend in military spending is likely to continue. While addressing the media in August 2025, he stated that Taiwan's defence budget is set to reach \$31.27 billion (Lee, Blanchard, & Kao, 2025). This new value represents 3% of Taiwan's GDP, a defence spending threshold that hasn't been achieved since 2009 (Lee, Blanchard, & Kao, 2025).

Like Japan, Taiwan also seeks to modernize its military capabilities. Thus, it invests in new infrastructure and technology. However, the infrastructure and technology in which Taiwan is investing is different from that of Japan. Taiwan is focusing on acquiring predominantly asymmetric capabilities that are mobile, cost-effective, and mass-producible, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (Toshitaka, 2024). While this

sort of investment has taken the main focus, the Taiwanese have also invested in developing more traditional warfare hardware and systems. For example, the country's first ever indigenously developed submarine, called the *Haikun*, was introduced in 2023 (Shen, 2023). According to the Taiwanese Submarine Combat Capability Plan, the goal is to have a total of four *Haikun* submarines patrolling and defending the southeastern, eastern and northern waters around Taiwan by 2027 (Shen, 2023). Taiwan has also invested in upgrading its fighter jet inventory. Under the leadership of Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan presented an upgraded fleet of F-16 Viper fighter jets, and has pre-ordered a total of 66 more, which are to be delivered in 2026 from the United States' primary aircraft manufacturer, Lockheed Martin (Alkatiry & Triantama, 2024). These significant investments indicate that Taiwan has placed a high level of importance on developing and improving its military capabilities since China adopted its increasingly assertive and aggressive posture in the South and East China Seas.

In summary, while both countries have clearly placed a high level of importance on increasing their military spending in recent years, it is worth noting the glaring gap between the per capita military spending profiles of each country. As of 2024, Taiwan's military spending was US\$708.2 per capita, compared to Japan's which was only US\$445.5 per capita (SIPRI, 2025). This means that Taiwanese per capita military spending was around 59% higher than that of Japan's. This is a notable difference and not just a coincidence; Taiwan has outspent Japan in terms of per capita military spending every year since

2013 (SIPRI, 2025). The disparity is significant because it indicates how both countries have adopted fundamentally different responses to a shared security threat. What follows explains why two countries, namely Taiwan and Japan, that are dealing with the same threatening neighbor are responding in similar yet very different ways.

Similarities

To understand the differences, it is important to first understand the ways in which Taiwan and Japan are similar. Firstly, both countries are islands within geographic range of Chinese missiles and naval fleets, making them susceptible to a potential Chinese invasion. Secondly, they both formally recognize Chinese aggression as their respective country's primary security threat. This is clearly defined in both countries' primary formal defence documents. The most recent Japanese National Security Strategy, published in 2022, states that China's activities pose "the greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan" (Government of Japan, 2022). As for Taiwan, the 2013 ROC National Defense Report similarly recognizes that "the PRC [People's Republic of China] remains the greatest threat to our national security" (Ministry of National Defense, 2013). The more recent 2023 ROC National Defense Report discusses the "ever-growing scale and intensity of PRC's intimidation against Taiwan" as well as its commitment to "staunchly defend" its sovereignty through a sustained "robust defence power" (Ministry of National Defense, 2023).

Japan and Taiwan are similar in other ways; both are democratically and

economically developed countries. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2024 democracy index, Japan and Taiwan ranked as the only two "full democracies" in Asia (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). Economically, both have a relatively high level of income, industrialization and innovation. Since the turn of the century, Japan has developed into a global leader in electronics and technologies such as LED lighting systems and mobile internet (Holroyd, 2022). Taiwan also holds an important global economic role. As of 2021, Taiwan held the second-largest market share for global semiconductor production, with 26% of the share worldwide (He, Liu, & Lin, 2024). Consequently, each country's economic standing is impressive. As of 2024, Taiwan and Japan's GDP per capita adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity was just over \$80,000 and just over \$52,000 respectively (International Monetary Fund, 2025). This is particularly impressive when compared to the East Asian average of just over \$31,000 (International Monetary Fund, 2025). These figures indicate that both countries are economically strong and have the economic capacity to dedicate to and sustain high military spending. This also indicates that the military spending gap cannot be explained by economics.

Demographically, Japan and Taiwan both face an important issue: they both have an ageing population (Evans, 2023). This often tends to force governments to shift spending from defence to social welfare-focused initiatives (Shi, 2024). However, this doesn't seem to be impacting either Taiwanese or Japanese military spending, which has continued to increase despite their ageing populations.

Finally, another similarity is that both countries benefit from United States security support. Japan produced its 2022 National Defence Strategy in parallel with the 2022 American National Defence Strategy with the purpose of facilitating and promoting coordination with the U.S. in the event of security threats (Hughes, 2024). In Taiwan, the de facto relationship with the United States is particularly important because the U.S. provides it with "advanced defensive arms sales and an ambiguous security guarantee" (Fell, 2018). Because U.S. support and reliance is central in both countries, its presence and influence are not a contributing factor to why Taiwan outspends Japan in terms of per capita military spending.

At first glance, Taiwan and Japan seem to be quite similar. They both identify China as their primary threat, both are successful democracies with prosperous economies, both are dealing with ageing populations, and both rely on the U.S. for security. However, a closer examination reveals several key differences between Taiwan and Japan and serves to explain the per capita military spending difference between them.

Nature of the Chinese Threat

While both Japan and Taiwan are experiencing Chinese aggression in the South and East China Seas, the nature of the threat faced by each country differs. In the case of Taiwan, the threat from China is direct, immediate, and existential. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) One China policy asserts unequivocally that Taiwan is a part of and belongs to mainland China (Chen, 2022). This position was articulated on the national stage by Xi

himself when he stated that “The reunification of the motherland is a historical inevitability” during his New Year’s speech in 2024 (Jack, 2023). Not only does the CCP consider the reunification of Taiwan with mainland China as inevitable, but it also considers it a necessity; it views the idea of an independent Taiwan as a national threat (Wagner, 2023). In fact, Taiwan finds itself in the precarious position where China views it as a rogue Chinese province that must be reunified.

To fulfil its political commitment to reunification, China has employed aggressive intimidation strategies, which have become more frequent and extensive since Xi came to power in 2012. These tactics have included military exercises in the South China Sea, the largest of which took place in 2022. These exercises were referred to as the “Joint Sword Exercises” and involved the deployment of upwards of 100 planes, along with 10 naval vessels (Gentry, 2025). These particular exercises continued in 2023 and 2024, during which three additional exercises, which also involved planes and naval vessels, took place (Gentry, 2025). While these exercises are a demonstration of Chinese power and military capability, they also represent an increased normalization of Chinese military activity around Taiwan and are likely to increase in scale and frequency in the future. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Pete Hegseth, has even gone as far as to claim that these military exercises are a rehearsal for a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that he believes “could be imminent” (Shichor, 2025).

While Japan is not facing an existential threat of annexation or invasion, it has also been experiencing threats and intimidation from China, the nature of which

is different from those being carried out against Taiwan. For example, China has frequently employed grey-zone tactics such as intruding without permission into guarded Japanese Air Defence Identification Zones (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2024). China has also steadily increased its presence in and around the Senkaku and Diaoyu Islands, a controversial grouping of islands situated just north of Taiwan which were purchased by Japan and have been formally nationalized as Japanese since 2012 (Smith, 2013). In 2023, an unprecedented number of PRC vessels were active in the contiguous zone around the Senkaku and Diaoyu Islands, which China has historically claimed and continues to claim sovereignty over (Kosuke, 2024).

All of these points considered, the nature of the Chinese threats imposed on Taiwan and Japan, as well as the intended outcomes as articulated by Chinese leaders, suggest that Taiwan is investing notably more per capita in military spending because it has so much more to lose, namely its survival and continued existence as a sovereign state.

Security Alliance with the United States

The per capita military spending gap between Taiwan and Japan can also be explained by examining each country’s security alliance with the primary ally of both, the United States. Japan signed a mutual security treaty with the U.S. in 1960, which formally obligated the U.S. to defend Japan in the event of an attack and allowed U.S. forces to use military bases in Japan ever since (Packard, 2010). In fact, as of September 2022, Japan was hosting around 54,000 American troops, the most of any country around the world (O’Dell, 2023). This

treaty remains in place today and continues to play an important role in Japanese security; it guarantees American intervention and support in the event of a Chinese attack on Japanese soil. Japan's defence also leverages the United States' nuclear capabilities as a tool of deterrence against regional rivals, such as China (Kawai, 2022). This is highlighted in the Japanese National Security Strategy of 2013, which describes U.S. nuclear "extended deterrence" as central, alongside the "strengthening of its [Japan's] own defense capability" (Government of Japan, 2013). Thus, the Japan-U.S. defence partnership offers significant security guarantees and consequently relieves Japan of having to spend even more than it already does on its own defence.

Taiwan, on the other hand, has a very different relationship with the US; the two parties have yet to sign any kind of official security agreement. While the U.S. has historically supported, and continues to support Taiwan, especially in terms of procurement of arms and resources, it has never officially committed to defending Taiwan in the event of a military conflict with China; all military commitments from the U.S. have remained ambiguous and informal (Liff, 2022). Additionally, Donald Trump's second term as U.S. president increased this ambiguity and offered several hints indicating that the U.S. may be deprioritizing support for Taiwan. Trump has repeatedly downplayed the level of the Chinese threat against Taiwan. For example, he stated "I think we'll be just fine with China. China doesn't want to do that" when asked about a potential conflict in Taiwan (Attrill, 2025). Such ambiguous comments from the United States create even greater risk for Taiwan

because they may be interpreted by China as a sign of hesitancy, which could, in turn, encourage an invasion (Attrill, 2025). Furthermore, in September 2025, the Trump administration also refused to send a military aid package worth over \$400 million to Taiwan (Robertson & Nakashima, 2025). This decision indicates a waning of U.S. military support for Taiwan and has consequently increased distrust among the Taiwanese with regard to U.S. support. In fact, studies show that Taiwanese public opinion of the U.S. is deteriorating. According to a 2025 study conducted in Taiwan by the Brookings Institution, 46.7% of respondents believed that it was "unlikely" or "very unlikely" that the U.S. would intervene if China declared war on Taiwan (Nachman, Kim, & Yen, 2025). This represents an increase in distrust by over 10% from the previous year (Nachman, Kim, & Yen, 2025).

All of this clearly indicates that the security relationship between Taiwan and the United States heavily influences Taiwanese decisions regarding military spending. Compared to Japan, Taiwan is required to spend more on defence because it does not benefit from guaranteed American support.

Historical Defence Orientation

Another factor that deserves consideration when explaining why Taiwan spends more per capita on its military than Japan is Japan's pacifist ideology. This belief in and commitment to peace are central to the Japanese national identity and emerged largely as a result of the large-scale devastation experienced by the Japanese people after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Cai, 2008).

Pacifism in Japan has taken the form of laws, governmental policies, and fundamental principles, such as restrictions on exports of weaponry, anti-nuclear and anti-military principles, as well as childhood education that emphasizes empathy, peace, and learning from the past (Gustafsson, Hagström, & Hanssen, 2019). This anti-militarization sentiment is also explicitly communicated in Japan's constitution, which states that "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes" (Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 1946). Japan's connection to pacifism has also largely influenced its 'timid' defence posture, which has been characterized by a long period of continuity and stability (Easley, 2017). However, several recent Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leaders have largely been in favor of reforming this section of the constitution (Ward, 2025). That said, they have faced notable backlash and opposition from the political left, which disputes reforming the constitution due to its strong commitment to Japanese pacifism (Ward, 2025). This constraint becomes clear when examining the prime ministerial tenure of Shinzo Abe (2012-2020), who claimed to be a pro-constitutional reform candidate, but failed to present a single attempt to formally reform the constitution during his mandate due to his fears of dividing the country (Ward, 2025). So, despite increases in military investment from 2012 to present, the political left's insistence of preserving the pacifist movement has hindered the LDP's desire to increase military investment more than it already has. This ideological divide means that endorsing strong military and defence reform would likely be politically

costly for the LDP (Ward, 2025). So, the LDP has favored stability over escalation, and has tempered their increases in military spending. However, constitutional reform aside, Abe was able to implement other reforms like the creation of the National Security Council in 2013, which gave more executive power to the Prime Minister to make decisions on defence and security issues (Mulgan, 2018). The reforms implemented by Abe also had significant implications for limiting the influence of pacifism during the tenure of Fumio Kishida, Abe's successor. Kishida implemented the 2022 National Security Strategy, which marked a significant shift in defence posture, including the plan to increase spending to 2% of GDP as described earlier in this paper (Ward, 2025).

In stark contrast to Japanese society, which is grounded in pacifism, Taiwanese society is characterized by a strong historical public will for civil defence. For Chiang Kai-shek, the former leader of the Chinese nationalist government in Taiwan, the defence of the island became a priority in 1950 after having lost the Chinese civil war in 1949 and subsequently leading his forces from mainland China to Taiwan (Li, 2019). Defence became a priority at this time because China's army, the People's Liberation Army, became ready to launch an invasion of Taiwan (Li, 2019). Defence has remained front and centre since then. York W. Chen (2009) describes the Taiwanese defence posture over three distinct eras. During the era of "offensive defence", from 1949-1966, Taiwan increased its military personnel on its offshore islands and regularly launched assaults on Chinese coastal targets (Chen, 2009). Secondly, during the era of "forward defence",

between 1966 and 1979, Taiwan's defence strategy involved the fortification of its offshore islands with both personnel and infrastructure (Chen, 2009). Finally, Chen (2009) describes the era of "defence-in-depth", from 1979 to 2000. During this time, a strategy influenced heavily by General Hau Pei-tsun was implemented and called for concentrating all forces and resources on the Chinese once they had reached the "water's edge", rather than committing naval and air capabilities over the Taiwan Strait. In contrast to Japan, defence has remained foundational in Taiwanese society and politics since 1950.

It, therefore, makes sense that a country with historical foundations of self-defense, Taiwan, spends more per capita on its military than a country whose historical foundation is against militarization.

Political Polarization

Another important difference between the two countries that affects military spending is their respective levels of domestic political competition. In Japan, one party, the right-leaning LDP, has dominated and continues to dominate the country's politics; it has governed every year since its founding in 1955, with the exception of two brief periods from 1993-1994 and 2009-2012 (Kuriwaki, Horiuchi, & Smith, 2025). The LDP's long-term dominance of Japanese politics and the dominant-party system that has consequently resulted, have led to a relatively low level of political polarization in Japan (Yin, 2024). That said, one opposition party that represented competition for the LDP and even won the election of 2009 was the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was dissolved and reinvented in early 2016

(Smith, 2017). While the DPJ only held power for three years, it did have an important impact on the ideology of the LDP. Because the DPJ was a centrist party with relatively moderate policies, the LDP decided to shift its political position from a more conservative stance to a more centrist one as a means of gaining centrist votes from the DPJ (Lee & Han, 2017). The LDP's shift to a more centrist ideology resulted in a more modest defence posture, which was subsequently reflected in Japan maintaining a modest pace of military spending increases.

In contrast, Taiwan has two very competitive political parties: the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT). In terms of the traditional left-right measurement of political polarization, Taiwan's political polarization is low (Lee & Han, 2017). In terms of Taiwan's relations with China, however, the polarization between the DPP and the KMT is extremely high (Lee & Han, 2017). On the one hand, the DPP advocates for Taiwanese independence from China, while on the other hand, the KMT stands for deepening and increasing ties with China (Hioe, 2024). Consequently, tensions with China often increase when the DPP is in power, as was seen during the tenure of Tsai Ing-wen (Chen, 2025). The more confrontational approach of the DPP also correlates directly with increases in Taiwanese military spending. Since the DPP retook power in Taiwan from the KMT with the election win of Tsai in 2016, military spending per capita in Taiwan has increased from US\$410.2 in 2016 to US\$708.2 in 2024, marking an overall increase of over 72% (SIPRI, 2025). In comparison, military spending over the eight years of KMT leadership under Ma

Ying-jeou from 2008-2016 saw military spending increase from US\$388.8 to US\$410.2, marking an overall increase of only around 5% (SIPRI, 2025).

These figures indicate that the polarization of domestic politics certainly plays an important role in determining military spending in both countries. In Taiwan, there are two very competitive parties whose positions on dealing with China are polar opposites. This polarization causes military spending to fluctuate. When the DPP, which has an aggressive stance toward China, is in power, military spending increases. When the KMT, which has a cooperative and relationship-oriented stance toward China, is in power, defence spending either decreases or increases marginally. In Japan's dominant-party system, where there is a more consistently moderate and centrist stance with regard to China, political polarization remains relatively low. Consequently, military spending has also remained consistently moderate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that Taiwanese and Japanese military spending per capita differs significantly. Each country's spending is influenced by a variety of factors. The nature of the threat that each country faces from China is different in scope and implications. Taiwan is facing an existential threat, either annexation or invasion, or both. This is causing its military spending per capita to be very high compared to that of Japan. The nature of the threat faced by Japan is nowhere close to that of Taiwan. Taiwan must also be more self-reliant because it cannot fall back on ambiguous, informal American support.

Japan, on the other hand, can rely on documented formalized American security guarantees; it is not forced to invest as much as Taiwan. Taiwan and Japan also view the Chinese threat from different historical political orientations. Japan's pacifism remains influential today in setting military spending, whereas Taiwan's historical commitment to self-defence, in combination with China's overtly expressed intention to reunify Taiwan with the mainland, has created an environment in Taiwan where the island's defence remains a priority. Finally, the dominant-party system in Japan has resulted in a political environment where polarization, especially as it pertains to China, is low. In turn, this has resulted in moderate defence spending. In Taiwan, where genuine political competition has created a polarized political arena with regards to China, defence spending is largely dependent on whether the DPP or the KMT is in power. As it turns out, the party that has held power the longest since 2012 is the DPP, which takes a strong stance on self-defence, resulting in higher military spending per capita.

For Japan, the future presents a complex strategic challenge. With China making increasingly aggressive moves in the South and East China Seas, Japan finds itself in the difficult position of determining how best to respond. On the one hand, its ties with the United States remain strong, and offer it protection. The current U.S. administration has, however, demonstrated a degree of unpredictability that has called Japan's dependence on the United States into question. At this point, the more pressing question, however, is the following: will this significant military spending pay off for Taiwan? The answer to this question is

uncertain. What is certain is that Taiwan has invested significantly in strengthening its self-defence capabilities, in turn strengthening its ability to deter and resist a potential Chinese invasion. That said, China's commitment to the one-China policy remains firm. Combined with its rise to

global military and economic superpower status, this presents an ongoing and serious threat to Taiwanese sovereignty. For this reason, continued investment in asymmetric defence capabilities is likely to play an important role in determining Taiwan's future.

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