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CLIMATE CHANGE AS NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR JAPAN

BY JAMIE LEE

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At the April US-Japan summit President Biden and Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy marked an unprecedented phase in its defense posture. Not only did the strategy formally recognize climate change as a national security issue, but it also demonstrates that addressing climate change is compatible with advancing its military capabilities. The 2022 report is significantly revised from when it was first published in 2013, with Japan's formal recognition of climate change as a national and global security threat summed up in three main objectives: 1) adaptation and response to future impacts of climate change, 2) carbon neutrality, and 3) greenhouse gas reduction within the defense sector, achieved through implementing 10 policy measures under a climate change adaptation framework. Its effect on critical infrastructures further emphasizes the urgent need for full integration of a joint climate change response framework for Japan's defense and security policies.

Now, with the fall 2024 election of Japan's prime minister, Ishiba Shigeru, we may see a new focus on building capacity for addressing intersection between national security and climate change. His experience as former 2002 director-general for Japan's Defense Agency and minister of defense in 2007-08, plus a long-standing career focus on defense issues equips him to carry out Japan's current ambitious defense policy reforms. He also held previous leadership positions at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, as well as the Ministry of Regional Revitalization. The Ishiba administration will entail more focus on security issues, while climate issues may receive more attention than under former Prime Minister Kishida Fumio. His administration proposed a new Ministry of Disaster Prevention, a dedicated Disaster Management Agency, and introduce nuclear shelters nationwide. The Japanese government may focus on enhancing national resilience against natural disasters since they may make Japan more vulnerable to external geopolitical threats. Nevertheless, Ishiba's proposals demonstrate an immediate need for Japan to dedicate more personnel and budget for disaster relief and prevention for bolstering Japan's existing disaster prevention and response measures.

Current challenges

The implementation of tangible responses of the framework, however, will not be without challenges. Climate change remains in the backdrop of the 2022 National Security Strategy, where geopolitical conflict with China and North Korea alongside traditional national security threats takes center stage. The financing sources and the distribution of resources to implement the climate change responses could be more clearly identified and streamlined. Japan remains the leading nation among G7 countries in fossil fuel emissions, as public sentiment remains mixed on nuclear power since the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster.

Public sentiment is likely to remain mixed, while the Ishiba administration faces a far greater challenge as the first Japanese prime minister to lead a minority government in 30 years. In fall 2024 Liberal Democratic party lost its parliamentary majority for the first time in 15 years following a large political finance scandal and its inability to address Japan's most pressing societal issues of inflation and the labor shortage amid an aging population. Going forward, he will find it difficult to garner support to drive forward his proposed changes. This may put Japan at risk of entering further political instability as it is already

beginning to grapple with the increased uncertainty of the United States under the Trump administration.

The challenges posed to existing alliances further drive the importance of maintaining multilateral efforts to address climate change. Climate change is an especially unpredictable transnational security threat; as no two climate-induced events are alike, there will always be the need to tailor existing disaster response procedures to individual disasters. The effect climate change will pose to the global supply chain will be the most direct example of its implications for global security. Just three years ago, the global semiconductor supply chain experienced an acute shortage after Taiwan faced the worst drought in its history. Responsible for the manufacturing of 90% of the world's semiconductors, Taiwan's largest semiconductor manufacturing plants are still required to reduce their use of water by 15%, a concerning fact when global demand for semiconductors is expected to increase. Smaller island nations are less likely than larger countries to have more means to diversify their means of production, making them more vulnerable and in need of external support to help cope with natural disasters. In an analysis of the supply chains of 100 critical technology manufacturers, 72% of those in the United States and 38% of those in China and Taiwan lacked a business continuity plan or alternative sites that could quickly operate in the event of a natural disaster. The pace, scale, and scope of effort that have been undertaken to address supply chain vulnerabilities are not yet sufficient to meet both the current and expected disruptions.

Japan as a leading multilateral actor

As an especially important US ally and a trusted Indo-Pacific partner country, Japan has the potential to spearhead supply chain diversification and influence regional interest in climate change. In the past, Japan has carried out multilateral climate change initiatives under close coordination with the US. The recent signing of climate and environment executive orders and the US' Paris Agreement withdrawal under the Trump administration may signal the waning of US influence in multilateral climate and environment initiatives. Japan, however, holds a unique position in preserving the region's security architecture: it can encourage greater integration of regulations, as exemplified in Japan playing a leading role in enforcing fair environmental regulations for the CPTPP—it demonstrated the ability to uphold robust trade standards, notably in upholding environmental sustainability. The minimization of damage to the global supply chain can be mitigated by diversifying existing add vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Recommendations

For Japan to be a leading actor in global climate change initiatives, it is imperative that the Japanese government start by reducing the impact of its current infrastructures and systems. The following are prescriptive policy measures to guide actions that Japan could take to lead the effort on addressing climate change with its Indo-Pacific partner countries:

- The government should maintain its ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets, namely its 40-50% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by its coal plants by 2030, and net-zero emissions by 2050.
- Japan should promote a multilateral framework that articulates climate change as a security threat. Its position as a trusted Indo-Pacific partner country could serve as a starting point for other countries in the region to develop their own frameworks and regulations to address the national security threats induced by climate change.
- Japan, alongside the US, should create integrated responses to climate change-induced events that will undermine infrastructures, namely military installations and integrated climate change induced disaster contingency exercises.
- Along with partner countries in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Japan should build on its existing disaster responses and multilateral contingency planning exercises so that it can streamline coordination between its partner countries' government agencies, embassies, and organizations to streamline the disaster response information channels when a

climate-induced event occurs.

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