



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Beijing is in a quandary after the US-Japan summit – what will its response be?



Following the US-Japan summit in Washington, China cannot relax its growing ambitions to support economic interests in the Indo-Pacific with aggressive military engagement.

The meeting between US President Joe Biden and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida in Washington was a confirmation of one of the strongest **global alliances**. But even more so, it regarded a third party—China and its security-disruptive engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

In this respect, the summit made decisions that could be a turning point regarding the security situation in the Far East Asia region.

A **telephone conversation** with US President Biden 10 days ago provided Chinese leader Xi Jinping with assurances that the long list of controversial issues he has had with the US will not leak from the pipeline of constant communication and turn into a crisis.

The US-Japan summit, however, could convince him that the allies are moving a few steps further in strengthening their security capacities and regard China merely as a threat.

In both cases, Beijing will have a clear picture. The US, as its biggest competitor but also a partner, showed that it wanted to work together to resolve disputes, but at the same time supported its readiness for dialogue by strongly strengthening security ties with its most significant ally in the Indo-Pacific: Japan.

Expected first reaction

As was to be expected, Beijing responded angrily, **accusing the US and Japan** of "smearing and attacking" China with their decisions to forge an unprecedented military partnership in bilateral history.

The US and Japan "grossly interfered in China's internal affairs and seriously violated the basic norms governing international relations", said the spokeswoman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing.

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The language used in the Chinese government's initial response was easily predictable, and obsolete when it came to characterising the new conditions that the Indo-Pacific region faced under Xi Jinping's leadership.

But this is only the first and general reaction of Beijing to the summit in Washington. China's leadership has yet to show its actual response, but first, it needs to come up with one, which will not be easy.

Policy of deterrence and experience with Russia

With the agreements between the US and Japan, China received more than a clear sign that the US and its allies in the region will not allow an escalation that primarily regards Taiwan. Everything that Biden and Kishida agreed on has the purpose of deterring Beijing from a military takeover of Taiwan.

In this respect, the inclusion of the President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., in the US-Japan summit is particularly significant. With this, both Washington and Tokyo showed how **important the alliance** with the Philippines is in the context of the Taiwan issue.

Beijing is facing the unprecedented determination of the US and its Asian partners to counter its disruptive influence in the region.

The inclusion of Japan in the already existing security integrations of the US, Australia, and the UK in the Indo-Pacific is becoming a reality, and its biggest challenge is deterring China from its increasingly aggressive strategies in the region.

The Philippines also strongly joined this

alliance, and last year's approval by the US to start using 4 more bases in the north of the country, very close to Taiwan, in addition to the previous 5, makes this cooperation strategic.

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It seems that part of the (bad) experience from the period before the Russian aggression against Ukraine was incorporated into the American-Japanese agreements. At that time, there were warnings in the West not to take steps that could anger Moscow and provoke its aggressive reaction towards Ukraine.

There are indications that a series of US-Japanese security agreements could infuriate Beijing, which would feel threatened and therefore react aggressively. First of all, towards Taiwan and possibly throughout the region.

However, the experience with Ukraine showed that the West's reluctance to issue a stern warning to Moscow was perceived as its weakness and that the deterrence strategy was not strong enough.

The US-Japan security deal represents a tangible warning to Beijing that the allies could step forward towards a stronger military alliance if they assess that diplomatic and even economic warnings are not enough.

PM Kishida repeated his belief in Washington that what has been happening in Ukraine could be repeated in the Indo-Pacific.

Xi Jinping's entire policy is being tested

After the summit in the US, the sustainability

of Xi Jinping's overall policy, which from the very start projected China not only as an economic but also a military leader in the region, will be put to the test.

This policy of showing his muscles and, in particular, his aggressive behaviour towards Taiwan and in the South China Sea has raised Xi to a degree of adoration among his countrymen that no leader before him has achieved.

However, there are very firm and visible limits to which he will have to respond. At the same time, he needs to maintain some sort of stable relations with the US, given that he needs to bring the national economy back from the current downward trend.



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China will have to demonstrate in practice the determination it initially sent through a diplomatic spokesperson because the domestic public expects some new water cannon attack on Philippine ships, the overflight of the Taiwan Strait by fighter jets, or some similar action as confirmation that the leadership is determined.

With some new joint exercises or political-military meetings, Beijing could demonstrate the strengthening of its alliance with Russia and North Korea as a kind of counterbalance to the tripartite summit in Washington.

However, any more aggressive move than the previous one, particularly towards Taiwan,

would be extremely risky for China, given that the region's security situation has changed dramatically since the US-Japan summit.

The leadership in Beijing therefore found itself in a gap after the American-Japanese agreements, because a possible stronger security tightening might reflect badly on its desire for economic détente with the US.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will have an important job when he visits Beijing in a few weeks, according to the announcement made after the recent telephone conversation between Joe Biden and Xi Jinping.

This visit is also the moment Beijing should use to formulate its actual response to the decisions of the US-Japan summit.