

Japan's Shinzo Abe warns China: Invasion of Taiwan would be 'suicidal'

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe warned China that an invasion of Taiwan would incur incalculable costs as the senior Japanese politician and U.S. officials spoke up for the island democracy's autonomy.

"When there is a threat over Taiwan and its democracy, it is a dire challenge to all of us, especially to Japan," said Abe, who resigned from the premiership over health reasons but remains a heavyweight among Japanese legislators. "An adventure in military affairs, if pursued by such a huge economy like China's, could be suicidal, to say the least."

Abe's reference to the economic costs of a conflict did little to dull the edge of the threat, as he emphasized the need for both Taiwan and Japan to coordinate security cooperation with the United States — which does not maintain official relations with the government in Taipei. And yet, that diplomatic lacuna has prevented neither Japanese nor American officials of late from characterizing Taiwan as the linchpin of Indo-Pacific security in the face of a rising Chinese Communist power.

"It's critical for the United States, Japan, and Taiwan, as three indispensable cornerstones, to continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in order to address common challenges in the Indo-Pacific," Sen. Bill Hagerty, a Tennessee Republican and former ambassador to China, told the Prospect Foundation's Taiwan-US-Japan Trilateral Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue .

Secretary of State Antony Blinken's representative to the forum, deputy assistant secretary Scott Busby, struck a similarly affirming note after touting the importance of "democracy and human rights" to American diplomacy.

"These values are a critical source of our strength, and a key advantage of the United States and our closest partners on the global stage — including Taiwan," Busby told the trilateral forum.

Chinese Communist officials, who have claimed sovereignty over Taiwan since taking power in 1949 but have never ruled the island, regard such rhetoric as a sign of disrespect for their territorial claims. U.S. officials historically have tread carefully when discussing this subject, yet a bipartisan consensus is emerging in Washington that augurs for more forthright acknowledgment that the mainland Chinese regime's acquisition of Taiwan would represent a serious threat to American interests.

"It's plain to see that the Chinese Communist Party aims not only to achieve dominance in the world's most vibrant and rapidly growing region, but also to fundamentally revise the environment here, placing the People's Republic of China at the center and serving Beijing's authoritarian and hegemonic ambitions," Hagerty said. "The defense of Taiwan and Japan lies at the center of pushing back against the Chinese Communist Party's revisionist ambitions."

Hagerty's remarks followed a line of analysis offered earlier this month by Abe, who said that Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping should bear in mind that "a Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency, and therefore an emergency for the Japan-U.S. alliance." The Chinese Foreign Ministry rebuked Abe for "openly challeng[ing] China's sovereignty and [giving] brazen support to Taiwan independence forces," a tongue-lashing delivered directly to the Japanese ambassador in Beijing.

Abe, for his part, cited the mainland Chinese threats against Taiwan as a key motivation for the Japanese military upgrades that took place during his tenure as prime minister.

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"Lest we forget, weakness invites provocations," Abe told the trilateral security forum. "The three of us must stop no effort in building our capabilities in all domains, from the undersea, sea surface, air space, to the cyber and outer space. To that end, let us consider new ways of sharing our knowledge and technologies even more effectively."

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