

# US global retreat shows Japan's folly in defying China

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Retrenchment appears to be the buzzword following the Trump administration's release of its new [National Security Strategy](#) (NSS). Under the heading "Balance of Power", the report states that "the US rejects the ill-fated concept of global domination for itself". And under "burden-sharing and burden-shifting", it says that "the days of the US propping up the entire world order like Atlas are over".

The document asserts a "'Trump corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine" and vows to "restore American pre-eminence in the Western Hemisphere", effectively reaffirming the Americas as the US' sphere of influence.

The NSS also warns of "civilisational erasure" facing Europe and says the US should prioritise re-establishing the "conditions of stability within Europe and strategic stability with Russia".

The first Trump administration singled out China as a [strategic competitor](#) and the Biden administration designated it as America's "[most consequential geopolitical challenge](#)" in their respective NSS papers. However, the latest strategy identifies China as a "near-peer", with which it wishes to "rebalance America's economic relationship ... prioritizing reciprocity and fairness to restore American economic independence" while "maintaining a genuinely mutually advantageous economic relationship with Beijing".

Meanwhile, it makes clear that the administration's preference is deterring a conflict over Taiwan by "preserving military overmatch". It also maintains that "the US does not support any unilateral change of the status quo in the Taiwan Strait".

The NSS is really confirmation of the obvious under Donald Trump: an America-first policy recalibration imprinted with the US president's mercurial personality. To see this in action, one does not have to look beyond what the US is doing to [coerce Venezuela](#) under its interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine.

That said, confirmation is important. The NSS is sending shock waves through key geopolitical regions including Europe and East Asia. Europe [was stunned](#) by the wording, given that it is in disarray over Russia's war in Ukraine as Moscow holds firm in ceasefire negotiations with the Trump administration.

For East Asia, it comes as America faces a dilemma over China as Beijing pressures Japan in an attempt to push for regional supremacy beyond the Taiwan Strait, thus testing the NSS' "balance of power" interpretation.

The catalyst was Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's statement that an operation by Beijing to take Taiwan by force could constitute a "[survival-threatening situation](#)" for Japan, potentially triggering a military response under its US alliance.

Beijing's response was swift, with officials and the media demanding that Takaichi retract her statement and accusing her of having crossed Beijing's "red line" on Taiwan, which represented a [grave violation of sovereignty](#).

More importantly, Beijing launched a new narrative, condemning Japan for contriving to overturn the existing international order. Beijing has gone so far as to threaten to invoke the "enemy state clauses" of the United Nations Charter, provisions it claims would allow it to take direct military action.

In a sign of escalating tensions, PLA fighter jets recently [locked radars](#) on two Japanese aircraft during a People's Liberation Army (PLA) naval drill southeast of Japanese territorial waters.

Meanwhile, the response from Takaichi's government has been one of measured defiance. While Takaichi [subsequently reaffirmed](#) that Tokyo's basic position on Taiwan remains as stated in the 1972 joint communique, in which Japan "fully understands and respects" Beijing's position, Beijing [said](#) it "absolutely does not accept" Takaichi's clarification.

Takaichi's refusal to accede to Beijing's demands means the diplomatic affair continues to simmer, which Beijing might have expected and may even welcome. Beijing has long maintained that its preference is for peaceful reunification, unless its hand is forced by the US.

Beijing believes its growing power means peaceful reunification with Taiwan is still a viable option despite Washington's repeated attempts to encroach on the "[red line](#)". With time on its side, it could secure Taiwan's return by steadily narrowing Washington's ability to obstruct it.

One precedent could be Germany's unification in 1871, which Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck managed by routing the obstructionist France in the Franco-Prussian War instead of annexing principalities in southern German lands through blood and fire. The difference is that Beijing does not need to fight a war to reunify with Taiwan as long as it can obstruct those who wish to get in its way.

That Japan chooses to continue in its defiance is only a small part of the game. The resurgence of great power politics among the US, China and Russia is made obvious with the latest NSS, which bluntly states “the outsized influence of larger, richer and stronger nations is a timeless truth of international relations”.

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