

Growing consequences on Taiwan

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Recent remarks of President Marcos on Taiwan have again reignited the debate over whether the Philippines would be involved in the military contingency around the Taiwan Strait. Mr. Marcos emphasized the geographical proximity of Itbayat, Batanes, the northernmost island in the Philippines, which lies only about 160 kilometers from Taiwan's southernmost point.

This was not the first time Mr. Marcos made comments concerning Taiwan. In 2024, he also extended congratulations to Taiwan's current President, Lai Ching-te, following his election victory. The Philippines is not alone in expressing concern over tensions surrounding Taiwan. In 2025, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi irked Beijing in 2025 by stating that, "Taiwan crisis is a threat to Japan's survival."

Both the Philippines and Japan share a common and rising risk of the Chinese naval and coast guard activities within or near their territorial waters. The Philippines have been at the forefront of confronting increasingly aggressive Chinese maritime actions. Around Scarborough Shoal, repeated dangerous maneuvers by Chinese vessels have resulted in injuries and damage to Philippine Coast Guard ships. Similarly, Japan has witnessed a growing presence of Chinese naval vessels near the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands (known in China as the Diaoyu Islands) and surrounding waters.

A closer examination reveals a similar pattern of Chinese maritime incursions around Taiwan, the Philippines, and Japan. These developments have heightened concerns among regional governments regarding Beijing's expanding military and maritime activities.

The concept of a "Taiwan Contingency" is not alien to the region. The Taiwan Strait, the narrow body of water separating China and Taiwan, has long been

a geopolitical flashpoint. Major crises occurred in 1954-1955, 1958, and 1995-1996. Tensions escalated again in 2022 following the visit of then United States House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan. Despite repeated warnings from Beijing, Pelosi proceeded with the visit, prompting China to conduct large-scale military exercises, including live missiles tests and intensified air and naval incursions around Taiwan.

Since 2022, a “new normal” has emerged in the Taiwan Strait, characterized by frequent Chinese air and naval operations around Taiwan. These developments have become a growing source of concern not only for Taiwan itself, but also for neighboring countries throughout the region. These changes in the regional security environment has also raised concerns among neighboring countries, prompting them to adopt new strategic and defense policies. One notable example is the recently concluded Balikatan military exercise, conducted primarily by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the US. The 2026 edition expanded significantly, with the participation from Japan, Australia, Canada, France, and New Zealand.

The US remains Taiwan’s primary security guarantor under its Taiwan Relations Act, 1979, which commits Washington to supporting Taiwan’s self-defense capabilities in the event of military aggression from China. However, due to geographical constraints, any major US military response in a Taiwan contingency would likely rely heavily on its military facilities in Japan and access sites in the Philippines under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. The Philippine government officially refers to these locations as “sites” rather than permanent military bases.

Beyond military considerations, both the Philippines and Japan also hold significant economic stakes in the stability of the Taiwan Strait. According to reports by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a substantial portion of regional trade passes through these waters. The Philippines sends nearly one-fifth of its imports and one-seventh of its exports through the Taiwan Strait, while Japan relies on the strait for approximately 32.1 percent of its imports and 25.2 percent of its exports. Any disruption to these critical maritime trade routes would create serious economic consequences for both countries.

Additionally, more than 200,000 overseas Filipino workers currently live and work in Taiwan. In the event of a military contingency, ensuring their safety and organizing possible evacuation efforts would become a major humanitarian and logistical concern for the Philippine government.

As a result, growing regional concerns regarding Taiwan have intensified broader discussions about regional security, the preservation of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation in international waters. From a Taiwan perspective, the emerging international consensus and expanding discourse surrounding the Taiwan Strait are essential for amplifying Taiwan's voice and conveying its security concerns.

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