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**SHAKEN CONFIDENCE: VIOLATION OF NORMS AS DRIVER OF  
EXPENDITURE INCREASE**

**MA Thesis**

**Supervisor: Dr. Shpend Kursani**

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### ***Authorship Declaration***

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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## Abstract

The United States' alliances with Japan and the Philippines, built on the principle of mutual defense, stand in stark contrast to the United States' security cooperation with Taiwan which does not guarantee mutual defense in any capacity. Taiwan is thus quite vulnerable due its ongoing sovereignty dispute with China and its ambiguous international legal status. Yet curiously, since 2022 both Japan and the Philippines have increased their defense expenditure at a significantly faster rate than Taiwan, despite possessing much more solid security guarantees than Taiwan. Qualitative cross-case analysis of these three cases reveals two potential explanations. Firstly, within Japanese and Philippine negotiations with China, violation of confidence between leadership can be observed before the 2022 expenditure increase. This is not observable within Taiwanese-Chinese negotiations however, whose leaders largely refrained from formal contact and there was thus little trust to be broken in the first place. Secondly, as a *de facto* state, Taiwan's security situation does not benefit from international norms on non-aggression between states to the same extent as *de jure* states like Japan and the Philippines, and thus does not necessarily face the same pressure to respond to violation of said norms. The findings of this thesis contribute to understanding the strategic motivations of *de facto* states, as well as highlighting how dependency on international norms can affect diplomatic and strategic behavior.

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## Introduction

Free riding within alliances is to be expected, as not all members are necessarily capable or willing to provide the same degree of material support and at consistent intervals.

Nevertheless, accusations of free riding can overshadow otherwise friendly relations between allied partners, particularly when one partner is perceived as contributing greater raw military capability than the other. This dynamic has merged as a significant factor in the relationships among great powers such as the United States and its key allies, including Japan and the Philippines.

The United States has historically assumed a central role in its alliances with Japan and the Philippines, extending mutual defense guarantees and security assurances to these states. Nonetheless, Japan and the Philippines have faced criticism for allegedly engaging in free riding behavior, with detractors pointing to their historically lower proportions of GDP and government share of defense expenditure allocated to military spending compared to the United States. While the Trump administration in particular was quite vocal in its condemnation of Japan's perceived free riding of mutual defense agreements (Klingner, Pak, & Terry, 2019), similar allegations could be heard against both Japan and the Philippines during previous administrations as well (Carpenter, 2015).

This discrepancy in defense expenditures has sparked debates surrounding the equitable distribution of burdens within these alliances and has raised pertinent questions regarding the sustainability and fairness of the security arrangements. In contrast to Japan and the Philippines, Taiwan has taken a much more independent path by channeling a significantly larger share of its state budget towards bolstering its defense capabilities; this is arguably due to its ambiguous international status and absence of any formal mutual defense treaty with external allies.

China poses an existential threat to Taiwanese statehood due to the unresolved nature of its sovereignty conflict, but the former's expanding influence and power projection capabilities have also brought it into security competition with Japan and the Philippines. In quantitative terms, China currently possesses the world's largest military with 2,035,000 active military personnel, and roughly 510,000 reserve personnel. This is further supplemented by an active militia force of nearly 8,000,000 (Corbett, Singer, 2023) that is increasingly being used to complement China's armed fishing fleet of 564,000 vessels (FAO, 2022) including over 4600 distant water fishing vessels (Luo, Panter, 2021), by far the largest in the world. These vessels

are increasingly used to contest sovereignty in the South China Sea in a mixed combination of civilian-paramilitary “greyzone operations” (Luo, Panter, 2021). China also possesses the world’s second highest gross military expenditure at \$293 billion (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022), but according to recent studies even this number fails to take into account purchasing power parity within the defense sector, military-civil branch fusion, and the low cost of Chinese domestic labor; when adjusted for these factors China’s functional defense budget likely exceeds \$700 billion, putting it within close peer distance of the United States (American Enterprise Institute, 2023). Considering this, it is quite sensible for Taiwan to devote such a high share of its government budget to defense, and even more understandable that Japan and the Philippines would continue their military alliance with the United States.

A strong alliance will of course be built through the mutual contributions of its constituent members, yet a degree of free riding is to be expected when one partner is stronger than the other. This has traditionally been a major topic of debate between the United States, Japan, and the Philippines, where the latter two are frequently construed as free riding Washington’s ironclad mutual defense guarantees due to having historically spent relatively low shares on defense compared to the United States. For this study Taiwan stands as an interesting point of contrast to Japan and the Philippines, having historically spent a significantly higher share of its state budget on defense than its two neighbors and having no binding mutual defense agreement with an external partner. Furthermore the cases are ideal for selection as they are all island states, and all exemplify the characteristics of *status-quo* states through their commitment to preserving stability, upholding territorial integrity, and promoting international norms in their respective foreign policies.

Yet despite this, it would prove difficult to make the case in the current day that Japan and the Philippines are still free riders; both Japan and the Philippines witnessed a notable surge in their state defense budgets from the year 2022, coinciding with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the West’s re-securitization of great powers such as Russia and China. In this paper, I make the argument that the marked upswing in defense spending policies can be reasonably attributed to the violation of international norms concerning security, a breach that has heightened the security vulnerabilities faced by norm-dependent states such as Japan and the Philippines. Despite the resurgence of large-scale interstate aggression and global securitization trends that took place in 2022, Taiwan instead maintained consistent expenditure, even dipping slightly until 2023.

But what would the reversal of alleged free riding behavior indicate? Since 2022 Japan and the Philippines have both increased their state share of defense expenditure significantly, while Taiwan's expenditure level has remained consistent despite mounting geopolitical tension. This is even more puzzling considering the ambiguous nature of Taiwan's security assurances from the United States. The Taiwan Relations Act does not guarantee mutual defense, stipulating little beyond the provision of arms, leaving Taiwan in quite a diplomatically insecure position. The United States' alliances with Japan and the Philippines on the other hand guarantee mutual defense quite clearly, putting them in a much more secure position diplomatically speaking. Yet despite this, when confronted with the re-emergence of large scale inter-scale conflict in 2022, Taiwan did not increase their expenditure to anywhere near a significant level as Japan or the Philippines.

The presence of this puzzle consequentially leads one to ask the abundantly simple research question, **“Why would diplomatically secure states display similar behaviors as a diplomatically insecure state?”** In this thesis, I make the argument that Japan and the Philippines's decision to increase defense expenditure was due to violation of international norms; the violation of said norms places them at greater relative level of risk than states such as Taiwan, which enjoy limited protection from international norms. I conduct cross-case comparative analysis of Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan's interaction with these international norms to demonstrate that there are two substantial norm-related factors present in the case of Taiwan that are not present in the case of the Japan or the Philippines.

I also posit that the impact of these normative structures holds particular significance for *de jure* states like Japan and the Philippines, whose security calculus is contingent upon the continued preservation and adherence to established norms. In contrast, Taiwan's security considerations are less tethered to international norms, given its distinct geopolitical circumstances as a *de facto* state and its lack of formalized defense guarantees from external actors. I further argue that this effect is stronger for states like Japan and the Philippines whose security is reliant upon the preservation of this norm structure, and weaker for states such as Taiwan which do not benefit as much from such structures.

This thesis will be divided into three chapters; the first will formulate the research puzzle by relating the theoretical grounding to observable phenomenon among the selected cases, which are Japan and the Philippines with Taiwan as a reference case. The first chapter will also illustrate the historical context of these cases, which is in turn related to the second analysis chapter where the criteria for case selection is outlined and justified. The second chapter is



primarily dedicated to documenting the empirical results of the cross-case comparison and outlining the hypothesized causal mechanism which has facilitated the shift in security priorities within Japan and the Philippines, but it also outlines the methodology of the thesis, primarily dealing with the justifications for using cross-case comparison, the choice of data sources, as well as the criteria for case selection as mentioned previously. The thesis will conclude with a third chapter summarizing the findings of the thesis, as well as elaborating a little further on the implications the findings may have for future studies on alliance theory.

## **1. The Alliance Problem**

Alliance formation and maintenance stand as pivotal pillars within the realm of international relations, exerting deep impact on the distribution of power, the dynamics of security, and the cultivation of cooperative relationships among states. The combination of motivations underlying the decision-making processes associated with the formation of alliances, the strategic maneuvers necessary for sustaining these partnerships, and the far-reaching implications of such alliances on regional and global security landscapes have long been subjects of academic interest. At the core of a strong alliance lies the foundation of mutual contributions and shared interests among its member states; these are tenets proposed by scholars on alliance theory such as Walt (1985) and Schweller (1996).

Alliance theory remains a significant area of study within international relations that focuses on the formation, dynamics, and implications of alliances between states. Preeminent scholarship has explored various aspects of alliance theory, including the motivations behind alliance formation, the factors that influence alliance durability, the role of power in alliances, and the consequences of alliances for global security and stability. The current understanding of alliance theory explains much of the world's currently existing power balance, and any shift in either the durability or reliability of alliance structures holds great implications for their constituent states. In this chapter I will highlight how the research problem is reflected within alliance theory, and further relate that to the selected cases.

### **1.1 On Alliance Theory**

One of the key debates within alliance theory revolves around the question of whether alliances are primarily driven by security concerns or by other factors, such as ideological affinity or opportunism. Scholars such as Stephen Walt (1985) have argued that alliances are

fundamentally a response to the balance of power in the international system. According to his theory, states are more likely to form alliances with fellow weaker partners purely as a *balance* against a common threat in the hopes of sustained survival through the pragmatic pursuit of mutual interests, rather than *bandwagoning* by aligning themselves with the stronger belligerent power (Walt, 1985). This comprises an important component of Walt's balance of threat theory, and he cites numerous historical examples of this phenomenon, ranging from Great Britain aligning itself against the continental supremacy of France during the Napoleonic Era, to Kissinger's reasoning for alignment with China rather than the USSR during the Sino-Soviet split.

Other scholars such as Randall Schweller, have argued against the notion that security is the primary motivation for all states that seek alliances, positing instead that the balance of power incorporates both *status-quo states* who seek to maintain their current status within the international system, and *revisionist states* (Schweller, 1996) who seek to reshape the international system according to their state interest, implying that such revisionist states may be more likely to seek out predatory alliances aimed at bolstering offensive capabilities rather than defensive alliances. However, this does not at all preclude the possibility that status-quo states might form coalitions to balance the growing power of revisionist states, in a similar manner as Walt expressed. The implication of this is that alliance motivations of a state can perhaps be inferred through the actions of that state. Weaker states may be more likely to prefer the status quo as shifts in power structure could prove risky to survival, and would thus form defensive alliances; in contrast, stronger states may be more prone to embrace revisionism due to having the resources for expansion at their disposal, and may thus be more likely to form predatory alliances for this purpose. While Walt's position on alliance formation being motivated by defensive security concerns rather than expansionist intent may be true in the majority of cases, Schweller nonetheless makes a compelling argument that this may not necessarily be the case for both status-quo and revisionist states.

John Mearsheimer (2001) takes a somewhat different view, suggesting that states will favor power maximization simply because it is optimal for their survival, rather than being guided by any ideological tenets. Whether this takes place in the form of direct territorial expansion or through alliance formation is determined by the military, economic, and diplomatic capacities of the state in question. Yet the inherent flaw within his thought on offensive realism is that it tends to focus primarily on great powers, while the role of smaller states' contributions to the global power balance is neglected. Furthermore, it does not sufficiently

take into account the ways in which great powers state behavior might appear to mimic that of smaller states with presumably less options for direct coercion. Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin (1995) identify this problem in Mearsheimer's earlier publications, arguing that he underestimates the effect of international institutions on state behavior. They state that his approach to realism contains numerous generalizations stemming from an unqualified presumption of logical privilege, expressing quite directly that:

“Mearsheimer assumes that his view is privileged, in the sense that we must accept realism unless overwhelmingly convincing evidence is presented for an alternative view; but the fact that states invest in international institutions make this stance quite problematic.” (Keohane & Martin, 1995)

The dynamics of alliances themselves are also an important component to consider in alliance theory, pertaining to factors that influence the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of alliances. Scholars such as Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing (2017) have highlighted the role of power and credibility in shaping alliance behavior. At the core of their work is the concept of the international crisis, defined as a situation in which two or more states are engaged in a conflict that threatens to escalate into a full-blown confrontation. They argue that crises are characterized by uncertainty, as states must make decisions under conditions of limited information and high stakes. They further emphasize that the outcomes of international crises are not predetermined, but rather result from the interplay of various factors, including the preferences of the actors involved, their perceptions of the situation, and the strategies they employ to achieve their objectives (Snyder & Diesing, 2017). Distinction is also drawn between cooperative and competitive bargaining models, where cooperative bargaining involves efforts to reach a mutually acceptable agreement through negotiation and compromise, while competitive bargaining involves attempts to achieve one's objectives at the expense of the other party.

The authors also highlight the role of decision-making processes in shaping the outcomes of international crises. They argue that states must make choices under conditions of bounded rationality, meaning that they are constrained by limited cognitive resources and time constraints. As a result, decision-makers often rely on simplifying heuristics and cognitive shortcuts to process information and make judgments. Snyder and Diesing analyze how these cognitive limitations can lead to biases and errors in decision-making, affecting the strategies that states adopt and the outcomes of international crises.

Therefore, it seems logical to formulate a number of conclusions from the debate on alliance motivations and dynamics. Firstly, we can understand through a fusion of Walt and Schweller's theories on alliance formation, that states which favor the status quo are more likely to form defensive alliances for the purpose of sustained security and survival, and that these alliance motivations can be inferred through analysis of state behavior. Secondly, participation in international institutions must matter on some level, as they are pursued by great powers and weaker states alike.

Can the selected cases be designated as *status-quo* states then? Japan aligns closely with Schweller's definition of a *status-quo* state by demonstrating strong opposition to changes that may disrupt regional stability. This is no doubt incentivized by the fact that the status quo in regards to territorial sovereignty works in Japan's favor for the time being as can be observed in the island nation's territorial disputes, as can be seen in the East China Sea where Japan maintains control over the Senkaku Islands. The historical context of Japan's post-World War II pacifist stance and mutually binding defense pact with the United States further reinforces its status as a state that favors and upholds the current international order. The country's strategic partnerships and diplomatic engagements reflect its efforts to promote multilateral cooperation and uphold the rule of law in international affairs.

Similarly, the Philippines emerges as a status-quo state that prioritizes the preservation of the existing order in its foreign policy approach. The country's territorial disputes in the South China Sea, particularly with China, highlight its commitment to upholding maritime sovereignty and territorial integrity. By asserting its claims through legal avenues, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Philippines aims to maintain the status quo and prevent unilateral changes to the regional maritime boundaries. Moreover, the Philippines' security partnerships with countries like the United States and its engagement in regional forums like ASEAN underscore its status-quo orientation.

Taiwan presents a unique case as a status-quo state, given that its sovereignty is not internationally recognized. However as a self-governing island with *de facto* independence but lacking formal recognition as a sovereign state, Taiwan's very existence is contingent upon the maintenance of cross-strait stability with China. The preservation of the status quo in the Taiwan Strait is therefore paramount for Taiwan's security and continued existence as a distinct political entity. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically then, despite not possessing international legitimacy, Taiwanese state survival is directly dependent on the legitimacy of

international institutions which discourage aggression between states, ergo continuation of the status quo.

It can thus be said that Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan all exemplify the characteristics of *status-quo* states through their commitment to preserving stability, upholding territorial integrity, and promoting international norms in their respective foreign policies. Yet a crucial difference between these cases however, is the effect of alteration to the status quo on their respective security paradigms. While Taiwan is in a geopolitically and diplomatically vulnerable position due its history of tension with China as I will demonstrate in the historical context chapter of this thesis, it is precisely because of Taiwan's ambiguous legal status that it also has less to lose from direct violation of norms on state sovereignty compared to the other two cases in this study.

While this seemingly conflicts with Taiwan's designation as a *status-quo* state, it is worth noting that unlike Japan and the Philippines, Taiwan's security has been troubled ever since its emergence as an independent entity. While Taiwan's security is of course directly contingent upon preservation of the status quo within the context of continued cross-strait stability, it is precisely because of this consistent vulnerability in security that it does not suffer to the same extent from the status quo being violated elsewhere; Taiwan boasts no institutional protection under international law, why should it care if it is undermined elsewhere? Japan and the Philippines have significantly increased both their military expenditure and security apparatus in response to external provocation, but it is post-2022 in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and flouting of international norms on non-aggression between states that the most radical changes in expenditure patterns took place.

What prompted this response? As stated before, in this study I argue that violation of international norms threatened confidence in the existing order to deter conflict, in turn prompting Japan and the Philippines to increase military expenditure and individual deterrence capabilities. I further suggest that among *status-quo* states as defined by Schweller, the effect is stronger for those that possess institutional recognition and protection than for states which have none.

## 1.2 Historical Context of Cases

In this chapter I will introduce the historical context of the cases in question, going into depth regarding the origins of their treaty status, their degree of participation within ongoing conflicts, as well as the origin of these conflicts. This is integral to understanding the context

of their security engagement and defense spending, as well as their motivations for alliance continuation. Historical context is particularly crucial for the sake of understanding the strategic incentives for alliance formation, as well as how the disparity between security guarantees amongst the selected cases came to be. Furthermore, the topic of how Taiwan came into fruition as a state lacking formal diplomatic recognition will also be touched upon. For the sake of brevity, the terms “Mainland China” or simply “China” shall be used interchangeably with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the incumbent Republic of China (ROC) *de facto* state governing Taiwan shall be referred to by the name of the island as is frequently done in Taiwanese internal government documents.

It is worth noting that Taiwan is also a party to the island sovereignty disputes, in both the case of the Sino-Japanese island dispute over the Senkaku Islands, as well as the Sino-Philippine dispute over contested islands in the South China Sea. However, as China by far claims the largest share of the surrounding islands and waters and has the greatest quantitative military capacity to enforce these claims, the diplomatic cleavage is more apparent in the case of China’s disputes with the Philippines and Japan and less pronounced in the case of Taiwan’s maritime disputes with these two countries. However, the more moderate of the latter’s dispute does not necessarily mean that Taiwan is willing to give up its claims in the region, as will be further examined in the empirical analysis chapter of this thesis.

### **1.2.1 Taiwan and Mainland China – Existential Conflict**

The conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China has its roots in the Chinese Civil War and the subsequent division of China into the People's Republic of China (referred to as the PRC) on the mainland and the Republic of China (referred to as the ROC) retreating to Taiwan. Direct hostilities continued into the 1970’s, but have since subsided. However, no mutually binding treaty or ceasefire has ever been agreed upon by the two states, and the possibility of the conflict’s resumption lingers until the present day.

The Chinese Civil War began in 1927 following the Kuomintang (KMT) nationalist government’s mass purge of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Shanghai, and continued until 1936. The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the chaos of the Xi’an Incident (Taylor, 2009) led to a brief respite that lasted until 1945, where four more years of intense warfare took place until the Communist Party’s victory in the mainland in 1949, and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. The KMT initiated a full-scale retreat to

Taiwan, and established a nationalist government under martial law opposed to the newly proclaimed communist state on the mainland.

A crisis of sovereignty ensued with both governments claiming to be the sole representative of China, and both the CCP and KMT attempted to stage invasions and insurgencies on one another's respective territory (Rushkoff & Bennet, 1981). After decades of tension between the two governments, in 1971 the United Nations passed General Assembly Resolution 2578, which recognized the PRC as the legitimate government of China and effectively isolated the ROC from the international stage. However by the 1990s the KMT's monopoly on political power came to an end, resulting in Taiwan transitioning into a democratic system of governance and moving away from rhetoric of re-unification. This can be seen in the ROC's 1998 bid for restoration of United Nations membership where the population and territory was defined as only consisting of 21.8 million people (United Nations General Assembly Session 53/145, 1998) a move reflected in constitutional amendments confirming the ROC's territory as only consisting of the Taiwan, Kinmen, Penghu, Wuqiu, Matsu, Dongsha, and Nansha archipelagos thus constituting an inferred abandonment of sovereignty claims over the mainland (The Additional Articles of the Constitution of the Republic of China, 2005).

Taiwan and Mainland China have since maintained separate political systems and identities, with Taiwan evolving into a full parliamentary democracy while Mainland China remained under one-party rule by the CCP. The two sides have engaged in limited diplomatic interactions and have not formally recognized each other's governments. A thaw in relations between the two states took place under President Ma's administration, but this reversed rapidly during the Tsai administration due to increased geopolitical tension on both sides of the strait.

The PRC considers Taiwan to be a renegade province that must be reunified with the mainland, while Taiwan views itself as a sovereign state with its own government and institutions. The PRC insists that Taiwan is an integral part of Chinese territory and has repeatedly stated its commitment to reunification with Taiwan under the "One China" principle. The PRC explicitly identifies absorption of Taiwan under a mainland government as an internal affair of top priority, and has not renounced the use of military force in order to fulfill this (Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

The legal status of Taiwan remains a contentious issue within international relations, with most countries recognizing the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China stipulated in Resolution 2578, and adhering to the "One China" policy. However, Taiwan has managed to maintain informal diplomatic relations with numerous countries and as of 2024 still maintains formal diplomatic relations with 11 United Nations member states. While the Taiwanese government advocates for greater international recognition and sovereignty, these moves are met with strong opposition from Mainland China, which has threatened to use force to prevent Taiwan from formally declaring independence. Efforts to resolve the conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China through diplomatic means have been limited, with both sides maintaining firm positions on the issue of sovereignty. The "One China" principle continues to be a major stumbling block in negotiations, with Taiwan unwilling to accept the PRC's terms for reunification and the PRC refusing to consider Taiwan as a separate and independent entity.

The conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China has broader implications for regional security and stability, particularly in the context of the growing rivalry between the United States and China. While the United States maintains limited defense commitments to Taiwan in the form of the Taiwan Relations Act, this however does not equate a mutual defense pact as will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 1.3 of this thesis. The potential for a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait poses a significant risk to regional peace and could have far-reaching consequences for international relations.

For the convenience of the reader, below is a rough timeline of the conflict between Taiwan and China. This constitutes an equivalent summary of the text above:

1945: WW2 ends and second phase of Chinese Civil War resumes with mass battles between Republic of China (ROC) and CCP forces.

1949: CCP emerges victorious in Mainland China, establishes People's Republic of China (PRC). KMT retreats to Taiwan and establishes government under martial law.

1954: First Taiwan Strait Crisis takes place with PRC and ROC forces shelling each other's positions. PRC takes control of Dachen and Yijiangshan islands.

1958: Second Taiwan Strait Crisis takes place involving both artillery and naval battles, ultimately inconclusive, occasional shelling continues until 1979.



1971: United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2578, recognizing PRC as the sole legitimate government of China and leaving ROC with unclear legal status.

1987: Martial law repealed in Taiwan, liberalization and transition process into full constitutional democracy continues for about five years.

1988: First presidential election takes place in Taiwan with President Lee Teng-hui assuming office.

1995: Third Taiwan Strait Crisis takes place following PRC missile tests in Taiwan Strait.

1998: Taiwanese re-application for UN membership clarifies state territory as consisting only of Taiwan and surrounding islands; application is unsuccessful.

2005: Pan-Blue visits to Mainland China involving KMT and political allies take place.

2015: PRC General Secretary Xi Jinping and ROC President Ma Ying-jeou meet in Singapore, exchange views on interpretations of the “One China Principle”, this was the first meeting between ROC and PRC state leadership since 1949.

2016: Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Tsai Ing-wen assumes presidency, relations with PRC decline and diplomatic contact is suspended.

### **1.2.2 Japan and China – The Senkaku Islands Dispute**

In contrast to the conflict between China and Taiwan, tension between China and Japan primarily results from disputes over sea sovereignty. The Senkaku Islands, known as the Diaoyu Islands in China, are a group of uninhabited islands located in the East China Sea. These islands have been a source of territorial dispute between China and Japan for decades, with both countries claiming sovereignty over the territory. Historically, the Senkaku Islands were under Japanese control since the late 19th century, when they were formally incorporated into Japanese territory at the end of the First Sino-Japanese War (Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1895). The roots of the Senkaku Islands dispute can be traced back to the end of World War II, when Japan was forced to relinquish control of its overseas territories as part of the post-war settlement. The islands were placed under U.S. administration, but their ultimate sovereignty was left unresolved.

One of the key issues in the Senkaku Islands dispute is the interpretation of historical documents and legal agreements that govern territorial claims. Japan argues that it has

maintained effective control over the islands for centuries, citing historical evidence to support its claim. China, on the other hand, points to its own historical records and argues that the islands have always been part of Chinese territory. Since the end of the Second World War both the PRC in Mainland China and the exiled ROC government on Taiwan dispute Japan's claim to the islands, arguing that they were a constituent part of the "Formosan" entity which was ceded to Japan per the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, and should have thus been returned to China (Suganuma, 2000). The dispute is further complicated by the presence of valuable natural resources in the surrounding waters, including fishing grounds and potentially significant oil and gas reserves. In the 1970s, as the potential economic value of the islands became apparent, both China and Japan began asserting their claims more forcefully, leading to increased tensions between the two countries.

The dispute over the Senkaku Islands is not just about territorial sovereignty; it also has important strategic implications for both China and Japan. Control over the islands would give the owner access to valuable maritime resources and potentially enhance its military presence in the region. For China, the dispute is part of a broader strategy to assert its influence in the East China Sea and challenge Japan's position as a regional power. Japan, meanwhile, sees the islands as a crucial part of its national security strategy and is determined to defend its territorial integrity. The Senkaku Islands dispute has led to a series of confrontations between Chinese and Japanese vessels in the waters surrounding the islands. Both countries have deployed coast guard ships and naval vessels to assert their claims and protect their interests, with China first deploying vessels to the islands in 1978; in the aftermath of these tensions however, the situation was relatively peaceful until 2010 following a collision involving a Chinese fishing boat and two Japanese coast guard vessels (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023) These incidents have raised concerns about the potential for a military confrontation between China and Japan, which could have far-reaching consequences for regional stability and international security. The United States, as a key ally of Japan, has expressed support for Japan's position on the islands and has called for peaceful resolution of the dispute through dialogue. In recent years, the Senkaku Islands dispute has become entangled with broader geopolitical tensions in the region, particularly between China and the United States, which as an ally of Japan plays a critical role in supporting the latter's claims to the Senkaku islands.

For the convenience of the reader, below is a rough timeline of the Senkaku Islands dispute and equivalent summary of the text above:

1895: Japan formally takes control of the Senkaku Islands per the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The islands are placed under the administration of Okinawa Prefecture.

1945: At the end of World War II, Japan surrenders and the United States occupies Okinawa, including the Senkaku Islands. The islands are placed under U.S. administration as part of the post-war settlement.

1951: The San Francisco Peace Treaty is signed, formally ending the state of war between Japan and the Allied Powers.

1972: The U.S. returns Okinawa, including the Senkaku Islands, to Japanese control as part of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement. Formal diplomatic contact between China and Japan takes place, where Japanese prime minister Tanaka proposes discussing resolution of the maritime dispute.

1978: Reports of potential oil and gas reserves in the waters around the Senkaku Islands spark renewed interest in the dispute. Japan begins exploration activities in the area, drawing protests from both China and Taiwan.

2002: The dispute escalates when a Chinese fishing boat collides with a Japanese patrol boat near the Senkaku Islands. The incident sparks anti-Japanese protests in China and raises tensions between the two countries.

2010: A Chinese fishing trawler captain is arrested by Japanese authorities for fishing in waters around the Senkaku Islands. The captain is later released, but the incident further strains relations between Japan and China.

2012: The Japanese government purchases and subsequently nationalizes the Senkaku Islands from their private owner, further angering China and Taiwan. The move leads to a series of protests and confrontations between Japanese and Chinese vessels in the waters around the islands.

2013: China establishes an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that includes the Senkaku Islands, requiring foreign aircraft to identify themselves before entering the area. Japan and the U.S. criticize the move as provocative and destabilizing.

2014: Chinese fighter jets are spotted flying near the Senkaku Islands, raising concerns about the risk of a military confrontation between Japan and China.

2016: The United States reaffirms its commitment to defend Japan in the event of a conflict over the Senkaku Islands, underscoring the strategic importance of the disputed territory in the context of U.S.-Japan security relations.

2018: Japan and China agree to set up a communication hotline to prevent accidental clashes in the waters around the Senkaku Islands.

2024: The Senkaku Islands dispute remains unresolved, with periodic incidents and confrontations continuing to occur in the waters around the islands. The competing territorial claims and strategic interests of Japan, China, and Taiwan make a resolution to the dispute difficult to achieve.

### **1.2.3 The Philippines & China – South China Sea Dispute**

As in the case of Japan, the conflict between the Philippines and China is also centered around sea sovereignty, and less directly existential than in the Taiwan case. The competing claims to territory and resources in the South China Sea have led to tensions and confrontations between China and the Philippines, as well as other claimant states in the region.

Nevertheless, the South China Sea is a vital waterway that is rich in natural resources, including oil and gas reserves, and serves as a key shipping route for international trade.

Nearly a third of global maritime trade passes through the South China Sea, and over half of all global maritime trade volume passes through the Strait of Malacca continuing to and from the South China Sea (U.S Energy Information Administration, 2024). The implications of violence in the South China Sea are thus catastrophic. Potential blockages would trigger massive disruptions to the international supply chain; damage to global trade would be temporary but highly costly, and put significant strain on more fragile economies in the region (China Power Project, 2021).

One of the key issues in the conflict between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea is the question of territorial sovereignty over the Spratly Islands, a group of islands, reefs, and shoals located in the southern part of the sea. China claims sovereignty over 90 percent of the South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands, based on historical records and the "Nine-Dash Line" map, which delineates China's maritime claims in the region (Mastro, 2021). The Philippines, along with other claimant states such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, also asserts its own claims to the Spratly Islands and the surrounding waters based on historical

presence and international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The conflict between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea has escalated in recent years due to China's aggressive actions to assert its claims in the region. China has undertaken extensive land reclamation and construction activities on various features in the Spratly Islands, transforming them into artificial islands with military facilities and airstrips. These actions have raised concerns among neighboring countries, including the Philippines, about China's intentions in the region and its impact on regional security. The issue of resource exploitation in the South China Sea has further fueled tensions between China and the Philippines. The sea is believed to contain significant oil and gas reserves, as well as valuable fisheries, making it a critical economic and strategic asset for the countries in the region. China's assertive actions to control access to these resources have raised concerns among neighboring countries, including the Philippines, about their ability to benefit from the natural wealth of the South China Sea.

The Philippines has been at the forefront of challenging China's actions in the South China Sea through legal and diplomatic means. In 2013, the Philippines filed a case against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, challenging the validity of China's claims in the South China Sea under UNCLOS. In 2016, the tribunal issued a landmark ruling in favor of the Philippines, declaring that China's claims to historic rights in the South China Sea had no legal basis and that China had violated the Philippines' sovereign rights in the region (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016).

Despite the tribunal's ruling, China has continued to assert its claims in the South China Sea and has ignored calls to comply with international law. China has rejected the arbitration ruling as null and void and has insisted on resolving the disputes through bilateral negotiations with individual claimant states, excluding multilateral mechanisms or third-party mediation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2016). This approach has hindered efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in the South China Sea. China has deployed a significant military presence in the region, including naval vessels, coast guard ships, and aircraft, to assert its claims and protect its interests. The Philippines, with limited military capabilities, has sought to strengthen its defense cooperation with other countries, particularly through the continuation of its alliance with the United States, to enhance its maritime security and deter Chinese encroachments in what the Philippines regards as its sovereign waters.

1947: The Republic of China (ROC) government issues a formal declaration asserting its sovereignty over the South China Sea islands; “Nine-Dash Line” first emerges in national maps.

1951: The Philippines formally claims sovereignty over some of the islands in the South China Sea, including the Spratlys.

1995: China commences construction activities on Mischief Reef, a feature in the Spratly Islands claimed by both China and the Philippines. The Philippines protests China's actions, leading to increased tensions between the two countries.

2013: The Philippines files an arbitration case against China under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), challenging the legality of China's claims and actions in the South China Sea.

2016: Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague rules in favor of the Philippines in the arbitration case, stating that China's claims to historic rights in the South China Sea were invalid under UNCLOS. China rejects arbitration ruling and continues its activities in the disputed waters.

2019: A Chinese fishing vessel collides with and sinks a Filipino fishing boat near Reed Bank in the South China Sea, sparking a diplomatic incident between China and the Philippines.

### 1.3 Relation of Cases to Alliance Theory

An important factor to consider stems from alliance theory, where states party to mutual defense treaties with great powers tend to rely on them disproportionately for security (George & Sandler, 2022). Free riding is a well-documented phenomenon in international relations, but the extent of it in contemporary alliances is debated. The argument can be made that weaker partners' perceived free riding is a function of coordinated bargaining with alliance partners (Lanoszka, 2015), but other studies suggest that free riding is not only widely present, but financially incentivized in nearly half of all the analyzed cases (Elias, 2017). This of course can affect the reliability of the alliance itself, as an alliance lacking equal commitments from partners may result in decreased reliability. Smith quantitatively demonstrates through a model based in game theory that unreliable alliances lacking solid security guarantees are more susceptible to external attack than reliable alliances with strong security assurances (Smith, 1995).

Taiwan's security assurances are not strong by this definition, in no small way due to its ambiguous international status and lack of recognition. Despite the lack of official diplomatic recognition of sovereignty, the United States has continued to engage with Taiwan in various capacities, including through cultural exchanges, trade agreements, and other forms of cooperation. The Taiwan Relations Act forms the basis of international relations between the United States and Taiwan, enacted by the United States Congress in 1979, and was designed to provide a framework for maintaining unofficial relations with Taiwan in security and economic aspects. This act was passed in response to the United States' decision to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and to terminate official recognition of the Republic of China (Taiwan) as the legitimate government of China. The Taiwan Relations Act continued to act as the basis of the United States' relations with the island even after the end of martial law and its transition into parliamentary democratic governance. The Taiwan Relations Act reaffirms the United States' commitment to the security and stability of Taiwan and makes clear its opposition to forced reunification. While the act seeks to foster engagement and deter conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China, it falls far short of a mutual defense pact due to a problem of wording.

The Taiwan Relations Act commits to maintaining cultural, commercial, and other relations with Taiwan, with its most crucial commitment being the requirement for the United States to provide Taiwan with "arms of a defensive character" and to "resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan", as outlined in Section 2.2.e and 2.2.f (American Institute in Taiwan, 1979). Despite this provision ensuring to a degree that Taiwan possesses the means to defend itself against potential aggression from China, it does not equate mutual defense.

The strategic ambiguity in the case of Taiwan contrasts quite clearly with the two separate defense treaties the United States has signed with Japan and the Philippines, where mutual defense can be invoked following an attack on either party, legally obligating parties to the treaty to come to one another's defense. In the case of the American treaty with the Philippines, Articles IV and V clearly stipulate that an attack on either party will be considered an attack against both, including both states' metropolitan territory as well as any territory under their respective national jurisdictions (*Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America*, 1951), in a manner not all dissimilar to Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty.

In the case of Japan the defensive characteristics of the treaty are somewhat more unilateral and territorially constrained in favor of Japan, as can be seen in Article V wherein:

“Each party recognizes that an armed attack against either party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes.” (Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America, 1960)

Nevertheless, despite the territorial caveats the principle of mutual defense is expressed in no uncertain terms Japan and the United States. This is not the case with the Taiwan Relations Act, as there are no clauses within which legally obligate the United States to provide Taiwan with anything beyond material assistance, which it already it does to a significant extent. In the event that war resumes between the governments of Taiwan and mainland China, the United States is under no legal obligation to provide any military support beyond continuing the supply of armaments that it currently provides Taiwan with, and therefore cannot be considered a mutual defensive treaty. Diplomatically and militarily speaking, this leaves Taiwan in an extremely vulnerable position compared to Japan and the Philippines due to both a lack of official state recognition and absence of legally binding defense guarantees. While both Japan and the Philippines are engaged in ongoing territorial disputes with China, the sovereignty of these states is universally recognized and protected by the norms and principles of international law, placing them on a very different strategic level of risk than Taiwan.

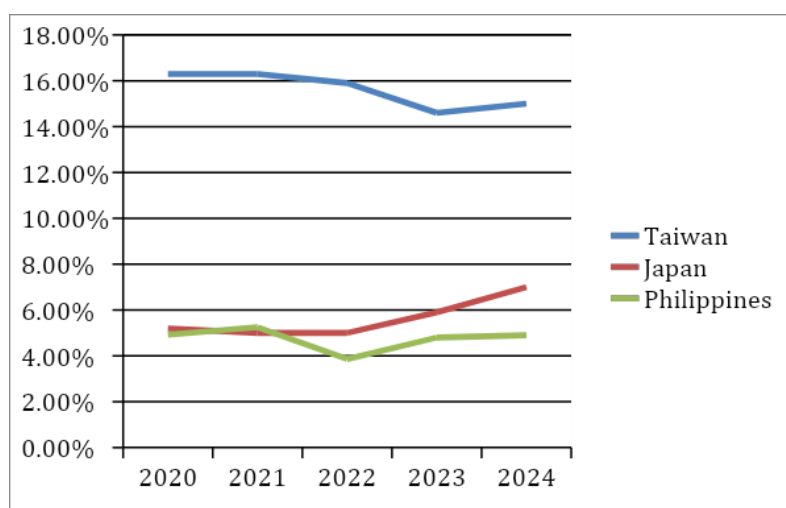




Table 1: Defense Spending as Share of State Budget, 2020-2024

In regards to the feasibility of even staging such an assault itself, China lacks the crucial capability to establish local numerical superiority at potential landing points due to extensive Taiwanese surface-to-air batteries and insufficient numbers of Chinese landing craft (Beckley, 2017), placing them at a disadvantage in any sort of coastal altercation. While China's capacity for power projection seas is certainly growing, the stated goal of absorbing Taiwan under mainland governance remains far from inevitable. This is in no small part due to Taiwan's emphasis on defense expenditure, which for the past five years has averaged at roughly 15% of state in terms of the state budget (see Table 1).

It is here where the puzzle becomes further apparent, as curiously enough, Japan and the Philippines seem to be behaving in a manner inferring similar perception of vulnerability as Taiwan despite possessing ironclad security guarantees from the United States. Japan in particular stands out here, with the share of government expenditure on defense having increased by 40% between 2022 and 2024. This reflects a clear shift away from reliance on alliance partners for defense, a notion that is directly expressed in the FY2023 Japanese Ministry of Defense budget briefing:

“By FY2027 or by five years from now, Japan will reinforce its defense capabilities to the point at which Japan is able to take the primary responsibility for dealing with invasions against its nation, and disrupt and defeat such threats while gaining support of its ally and others.” (Defense Programs and Budget of Japan, 2022)

This quote indicates clear reversal of security behavior from reliance on allies for defense to becoming a self-sufficient military power. However, it is worth noting that it does not in any way constitute negation of Japan's alliance with the US; the need to strengthen this alliance is in fact explicitly mentioned in the National Security Strategy (NSS) published in 2022, stating that “...for the U.S. commitment to the region to be maintained and strengthened, deepened cooperation between Japan and the U.S. at a concrete level in the Indo-Pacific region is of vital importance.” (NSS, 2022)

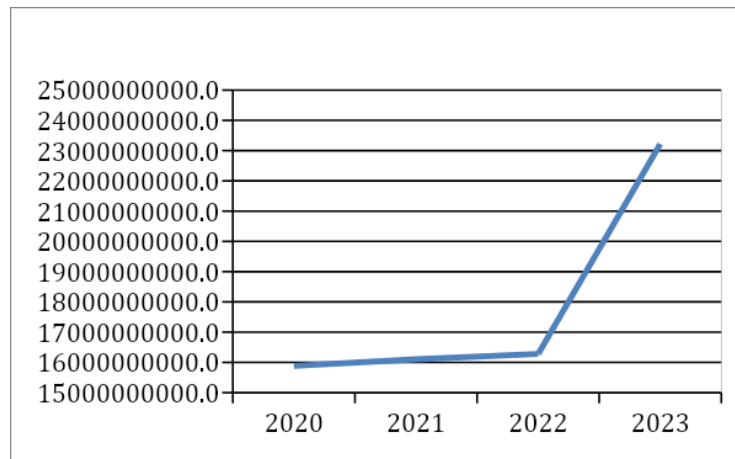


Table 2: JMSDF and JASDF combined expenditure in USD

The National Security Strategy further necessitates the need for the consolidation of defense capabilities post-2022, which Japan has responded to by increasing its capabilities through investments in acquisitions and integration. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and Japanese Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) have further undergone a program of modernization acquiring new destroyers, submarines, fighter jets, and even an aircraft carrier. This campaign also includes the development of unmanned underwater vehicles, anti-submarine warfare systems, and missile defense systems. The extent of the financial burden of these acquisitions and integration is reflected in the 42% increase of combined JMSDF and JASDF spending from 2022 to the end of 2023 (see Table 2).

While the Philippines displays more modest budget increase at first glance, the increase is nonetheless also significant when examined in depth. The Re-Horizon 3 Initiative, a part of the broader AFP Modernization Act, plays an important role in the country's efforts to strengthen its defense capabilities and modernize its armed forces. This ambitious government initiative is part of a broader strategic vision to transform the Philippine military into a more capable and modern fighting force (GlobalData, 2024). It is an amendment to Horizon 3, which focused on acquiring essential defense assets and capabilities to address immediate security needs. Re-Horizon 3 represents the next phase in this long-term modernization effort, with a specific focus on acquiring cutting-edge military equipment and technology to enhance the country's defense capabilities in the medium to long term.

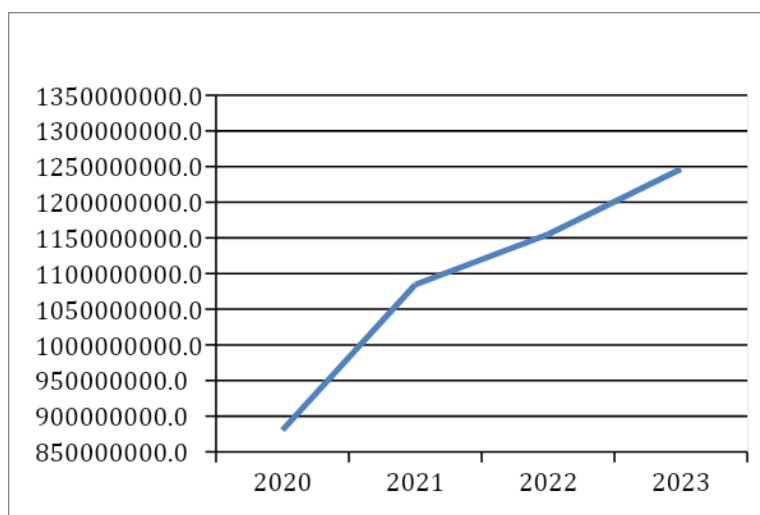


Table 3: PAF and PN combined expenditure in USD

Central to the Re-Horizon 3 initiative is the acquisition of advanced military equipment across various domains, particularly naval and air assets (see Table 3). The program aims to enhance the Philippine military's operational capabilities by procuring modern aircraft, naval vessels, armored vehicles, communication systems, and other critical defense assets. Naval pressure posed by China is a key influence in the Re-Horizon 3 initiative's inception, as the amendment itself was proposed in direct response to clashes with the Chinese maritime militia (The Defense Post, 2023).

This recent expenditure trend that can be observed in Japan and the Philippines then is indicative of anything but free riding. While the allegations may have had a degree of merit in years prior, in the aftermath of 2022 this has largely disappeared for the United States' Asian allies, who are instead moving beyond notions of relying on external support for matters of security (The National Interest, 2023). This of course begs the question, why exactly are Japan and the Philippines not free riding despite the clear financial advantages of doing so? If these states can in principle rely mostly on the United States for their defense due to the asymmetrical relationship of their security agreements, why did they shift their spending behavior? It is thus thoroughly puzzling that Japan and the Philippines both chose to increase their military expenditure significantly post-2022, despite possessing ironclad defense guarantees from the United States, while Taiwan did not increase its government share of expenditure. This thesis project thus seeks to answer the following question: Why would *de jure* states party to legally binding security guarantees with a great power exhibit similar manifestations of insecurity as a *de facto* state with dubious security guarantees?

As outlined before, there are some differences in the wording of the security agreements Japan and the Philippines each hold with the United States. However, with the exception of the territorial caveat in the treaty between Japan and the United States, there are no articles present that which affect the degree of mutual defense commitments. Considering this, it does not seem likely that concern over treaty ambiguity would be a factor in Japan and the Philippines's defense spending increase post-2022, as one might expect in the case of a diplomatically vulnerable state like Taiwan. Yet curiously enough, Taiwan did not increase their expenditure to anywhere near a significant level as its Asian counterparts, with its government share of defense expenditure in fact decreasing slightly between 2022 and 2023.

What then, could be the cause of Japan and the Philippine's increased spending and emphasis on defense? Most importantly perhaps, why has their spending increased, while Taiwan's spending has remained relatively consistent? In this thesis, I make the argument that a shift in the security paradigm has threatened confidence in Japan and the Philippines' capability to resolve their disputes with China without the risk of direct conflict. I argue that in the case of Japan and the Philippines this process had been ongoing for several years before 2022, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine marked the watershed moment that altered the status quo, thus changing changed defense priorities for these states. This effect would be much more dramatic for states like Japan who relied heavily on external allied support, and contrasts with Taiwan which has consistently relied upon itself for its defense capabilities.

## **2. Methodology**

This study relies on academic literature pertaining to maritime security in the East and South China Sea, but also heavily relies on self-reported military budget figures. These form the primary source for military expenditure; initially the Stockholm Peace Research Institute database was my source, but due to issues of unavailability of data for 2024 as well as methodology that did not take into account gross expenditure of the three cases, I instead opted to rely entirely on self-reported state budget documents. While the case selection features significant quantitative elements, the analysis itself is carried out according to a qualitative cross-case comparative format constructed in adherence to the Most Similar Systems Design framework. The sources for this comparison primarily consist of academic literature on the selected cases' state interactions with China, but will also feature sources which document the Chinese position on the relevant disputes as they play an important role

in illustrating the status of diplomatic relations between China and the aforementioned cases. In this chapter I will briefly justify the applicability of MSSD for this study, highlight crucial similarities within the selected cases that make them ideal for comparison, and also identify differences between the cases that must be taken into account for the analysis but still add to the depth of the research puzzle.

## 2.1 Cross-Case Comparative Analysis

As stated above, the format of this study is built upon a Most Similar Systems Design framework where qualitative cross-case analysis of Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines' state behavior in regards to diplomatic and security norms will be conducted.

Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) is a research methodology commonly used in political science studies to compare and analyze cases that are similar in many respects but differ in terms of the outcome of interest. It is a comparative research method that involves selecting cases that are similar in terms of key characteristics but exhibit variations in the dependent variable of interest. By focusing on cases that share commonalities in terms of contextual factors, MSSD allows researchers to isolate the specific causal factors that contribute to different outcomes. This methodological approach helps researchers uncover the underlying mechanisms and processes that shape political phenomena and provides a nuanced understanding of complex political dynamics (Anckar, 2008).

One of the primary benefits of MSSD in social sciences is its ability to identify causal mechanisms that drive political outcomes. By examining cases that are similar in many respects but differ in terms of the outcome variable, we can pinpoint the specific factors that lead to divergent results. This comparative approach allows us to isolate the causal mechanisms that explain why certain political systems or policies succeed in some contexts but fail in others. Through Most Similar Systems Design, we can uncover the underlying processes and pathways through which causal factors interact to produce different outcomes. Furthermore, the Most Similar Systems Design allows us to control for confounding variables that may influence the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Anckar, 2008). By selecting cases that are similar in many respects, researchers can minimize the impact of extraneous factors that could introduce bias or distort the results of the analysis. This methodological approach allows researchers to focus on the key causal factors of interest and isolate their effects on the outcome under investigation.

Within the context of this study, Most Similar Systems Design is the ideal format for case selection due to the extensive number of similarities between Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, which will be more specifically outlined in the following subchapter on case selection criteria. The outcome variable which will be analyzed in the analysis is the divergence in defense expenditure behavior between Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines following the onset of large scale inter-state conflict and disruption of the international security paradigm in 2022. There are some notable differences between the cases as well, but they further contribute to the research puzzle due to their counterintuitive interaction with security.

### Comparison of Selected Cases

	Taiwan	Japan	Philippines
<b>De jure sovereignty</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Has mutual defense treaty</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Common Security Competitor</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Island State</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Status-Quo State</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Outcome Variable: Increase in Gov. Spending Share post- 2022</b>	No	Yes	Yes

## 2.2 Case Selection Criteria

The cases have been selected on a comparative basis in that Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan all share three crucial similarities which make them ideal for selection. Firstly all

three cases are island states, thus allowing us to make similar inferences about their defense priorities due to the increased importance of naval and air power for island states. Secondly all three states share a common security competitor, which allows us to make inferences on the security posture of the selected cases. Thirdly, all of these states are *status-quo* states as defined by Schweller and introduced in the theoretical sub-chapter of this thesis, in that they largely favor the status quo and generally refrain from engaging in revisionist foreign policy behavior. The outcome variable that can be observed among the selected cases is the divergence in defense spending trends between the three countries. Japan and the Philippines have significantly increased their defense spending post-2022, while Taiwan has not followed the same trend. This puzzling difference raises questions about the factors driving these varying defense investment decisions and their implications for security policies.

Most relevant among these cases is that in Japan and the Philippines we can clearly observe a marked increase in the state share of defense spending post-2022, while in Taiwan this did not take place, with the state share of defense spending instead remaining stable at an average 15% of the total budget for a four year period. This particular phenomenon is what the proposed study seeks to explain; when faced with severe escalation of geopolitical tensions, why did Japan and the Philippines choose to increase their defense spending despite possessing legally binding security guarantees from an external power, while Taiwan did not do so?

The first criterion for case selection is that all three states are island states. Being surrounded by water has significant implications for their military spending, as naval and air assets will typically play a much greater role in the defense of archipelagic and island territories than in landlocked or coastal states (Krepinevich Jr, 2015).

Taiwan is an island located off the southeastern coast of China. It features a mountainous heartland flanked by long strips of fertile land, with a particularly arable but vulnerable patch of flatlands the southeast that serve as an ideal potential landing zone for an invading force. However, the nearby island fortress of Penghu has historically served as a bulwark against a potential invading force, and much of Taiwan's defensive measures can thus be focused on this island to cover most of the eastern flank. Furthermore, the Taiwan Strait and its adjacent waters are quite shallow, which allow for strategic exploitation of terrain through the installation of sea mine defenses as part of its "porcupine strategy" (War on the Rocks, 2024).

Meanwhile Japan is an archipelago consisting of four main islands and numerous smaller islands. Its geography has shaped its history, culture, and economic development. The island nation has a mountainous terrain and limited arable land, and is ravaged by a wide of natural disasters including earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. This has historically negatively influenced its agricultural practices and urban development, but it has also incentivized Japan to prioritize technological development within its military in pursuit of a qualitative edge. Japan's difficult geography nonetheless has also come with defensive benefits, as it being an archipelagic state allows Japan to spend significantly less on land forces relative to other states; despite possessing a relatively small military in terms of total manpower Japan remains among the dominant naval powers in Asia, although it has fallen behind China in recent years in quantitative terms (USNI, 2022).

The Philippines is also an archipelago consisting of over 7,000 islands in Southeast Asia. Like Japan, the Philippines is prone to typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions due to its location along the Pacific Ring of Fire but it benefits from theoretically being able to focus more on sea and air defense rather than land defense. This has proven more difficult in the case of Philippines however, as ethnic and religious tension in the archipelago has created the conditions for domestic conflict, necessitating investment in land troops to a greater degree than Japan or Taiwan. Examples of this include the longstanding Moro insurgency which took place in varying intensity from 1968 until as recently as 2019, the Marawi crisis in 2017 which involved an array of radical jihadist insurgents, and the ongoing communist insurgency against the Philippine government waged by the New People's Army from 1969 until the present day.

The second criterion for case selection is that all three cases share a common security competitor: China. The nature of these states' disputes with China varies on an individual basis as highlighted within the historical context sub-chapter of this study, it is clear that these disputes differ on a state by state basis due to the history of relations between the selected cases and China. The conflict between Taiwan and China is a thoroughly existential one born of irredentism, while China's conflicts with Japan and the Philippines are primarily over sea sovereignty and competition over resources. Japan has a long history of security competition with China, rooted in territorial disputes, historical tensions, and strategic rivalries. The two countries have competing claims in the East China Sea, particularly over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The Philippines has also experienced tensions with China over territorial disputes in the South China Sea. China's expansive maritime claims and island-building activities in the



region have raised concerns about maritime security, resource access, and regional stability. Taiwan of course faces a direct existential threat from China, which considers the island a renegade province that must be reunified with the mainland. Nevertheless the potential for escalation within these conflicts is similarly significant. Japan and the Philippines have both significantly increased their state share of military expenditure over previous years, coinciding with even larger increases in Chinese military expenditure.

The third criterion for case selection is that all three countries can be defined as status-quo states according to Schweller's definition. As posited before, Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan, being the selected cases for this study, all satisfy Schweller's definition of status-quo states quite nicely. In their foreign policy these states strongly oppose changes to the status quo; this is true for Japan and the Philippines, whose island and sea sovereignty claims are benefited directly through preservation of the status quo, but it is particularly relevant in the case of Taiwan whose state survival has been contingent on continued cross-strait stability.

### **2.3 Differences between Cases**

There are also some key differences between the cases which should be taken into account for more objective analysis, and further add to the puzzle. First, as outlined in the earlier theoretical chapter, Japan and the Philippines are both party to mutually binding defense treaties with the United States, while Taiwan is not. Secondly, Japan and the Philippines have *de jure* sovereignty and international recognition, while Taiwan does not, instead functioning as a *de facto* state whose sovereignty is contested by China.

As previously covered in the historical context of this thesis the treaty status of the selected cases is quite different. Philippines and the Japan possess legally binding security guarantees from the United States which stipulate mutual defense in the event of conflict, while the Taiwan Relations Act does not offer much beyond the provision of defensive arms. We must also take into consideration the differing sovereignty status of the selected cases as described earlier in the historical context sub-chapter. Japan and the Philippines are fully *de jure* states with sovereign independence recognized by the United Nations. Neither Japan's nor the Philippines' sovereignty status is disputed, despite domestic turmoil in the case of the latter; all three states maintain fully formalized diplomatic relations with the global community, and play an institutional role in international organizations and global affairs.

As stipulated in its 2022 National Security Strategy document, Japan has ramped up its defense spending in response to regional security challenges, with the primary contender being China, having rapidly increased its defense expenditure at a rate far surpassing its regional neighbors. The Japanese government has also prioritized investments in defense capabilities, technology upgrades, and alliance cooperation to enhance its deterrence posture and strategic resilience. The Philippines has boosted its defense spending to address internal security challenges, modernize its armed forces, and enhance maritime security capabilities, with special emphasis on China being outlined in the Re-Re-Horizon 3 Initiative. The Philippine government has also allocated extensive resources for military modernization programs, infrastructure upgrades, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen its defense posture and address external security threats. As outlined earlier, Taiwan on the other hand has contentious sovereignty status due to the One-China policy, which asserts that there is only one China and Taiwan is a constituent part of the greater Chinese civilizational entity. While Taiwan operates as a separate *de facto* state with its own government, military, and economy, it faces diplomatic isolation as most countries only recognize the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China; this also includes the United States, which is arguably Taiwan's closest security partner.

Curiously though, Taiwan has maintained a relatively stable defense budget without significant increases in recent years. While Taiwan has benefited greatly from United States arms sales to the island, Taiwanese defense strategy largely focuses on the self-development of asymmetric capabilities and deterrence measures to address its security needs as external assistance in the event of invasion. Taiwan therefore serves as the reference case in this study, where I operate on the assumption that is natural for a *de facto* state facing as perilous a security paradigm as Taiwan does to respond to security crises with hikes in defense expenditure. What is of course curious then, is the phenomenon of neighboring *de jure* states increasing their expenditure at a faster rate than Taiwan despite having significantly stronger security guarantees and protection under international law.

### **3. Empirical Analysis of Cases**

In this chapter I will discuss two substantive factors which I argue are capable of sufficiently explaining the divergence between the three cases. These factors are built on analysis of crucial differences between cases that are present in Japan and the Philippines, but not present

in Taiwan: they become apparent through analysis of the interplay between the *de jure* sovereignty and *status-quo* orientation variables. I will then explain how these factors can explain why Taiwan's expenditure behavior differs from that of the Philippines and Japan, in turn justifying the hypothesis of this study: that the violation of international norms affected *de jure* states such as Japan and the Philippines, but has less impact on a *de facto* state like Taiwan whose paradigm is inherently unstable. The international norms in question can be separated into two categories, with the first one pertaining to dependence upon communicative norms across cases, and the second pertaining to differences across cases in dependence on international norms in managing sovereignty disputes.

### 3.1 The Gentlemen's Agreement

First, is the observable presence of the "gentlemen's agreement" norm in the case of China's sea sovereignty disputes with Japan and the Philippines, where one or both sides utilize informal unwritten agreements between leadership, and interpret them as legally binding resolutions; due to the vague and unwritten nature of these agreements, it can result in confusion and violation of confidence between parties. This is entirely absent in communications between the governments of Mainland China and Taiwan, where there is little evidence suggesting the presence unwritten agreements and oral communication; whatever communication does take place generally happens on an indirect basis through non-state bodies rather than through leaders. Similarly in the case of Taiwan's diplomatic relationship with China there is no clearly observable rhetoric pertaining to broken trust, as official communication was a rare occurrence and there was thus little trust to be broken in the first place. I argue that the violation of confidence between political leadership can be observed in the case of Japanese and Philippine diplomatic relationship with China, while violation of confidence was an irrelevant or nonexistent factor in the case of Taiwan's diplomatic relationship with China.

A defining feature of the "gentlemen's agreement" phenomenon in the case of Japanese and Philippine dealings with China, as well as in similar informal arrangements in international relations is the lack of binding legal substance due to their unwritten and unpublicized nature, yet this can be interpreted by one or both sides as a binding agreement (Lipson, 1991). China insists upon the legitimacy of these alleged agreements between political elites, while Japan and the Philippines do not. China has largely rejected multilateral mechanisms in managing its sea sovereignty disputes, instead preferring to build confidence building through bilateral negotiation with rivals, where unwritten oral agreements are given considerable weight. Qin

(2005) points out that despite the lack of any explicit reference to oral agreements in the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, the importance given to oral agreements remains an important aspect of Chinese treaty-making. This echoes Soviet perceptions on the validity of oral assurances, where unwritten agreements between political elites were frequently interpreted as legally binding (National Security Archive, 2017).

In the case of the Philippines, a significant breach of confidence had already taken place in 2016; in a joint statement released by China and the Philippines both sides agreed to “enhance cooperation between their respective Coast Guards, to address maritime emergency incidents, as well as humanitarian and environmental concerns in the South China Sea...in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law including the 1982 UNCLOS” (Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of the Philippines, 2016) despite China’s rejection of UNCLOS’ arbitration ruling on South China Sea sovereignty just earlier that year.

During the Duterte administration, extensive remedial contact took place between Duterte and Xi whereupon the dispute over maritime sovereignty in the South China Sea was discussed outside congressional channels. Political leadership on both sides generally refrained from negotiating through multilateral forums, instead arranging bilateral visits to discuss the issue in an individual capacity. When larger scale meetings did take place, this was primarily through bodies headed by China, such as through the Belt and Road Forum. The informal nature of this relationship between Xi and Duterte can be inferred through statements on both sides, where Xi referring and evidence of consistent bilateral visits can be traced from 2016 until even 2023, well after Duterte’s exit from office (South China Morning Post, 2023). Officially, the visits were conducted purely to discuss issues of state as decided by congressional agendas and foster cooperation, but more informal settlements are also believed to have taken place. Serious tensions during these talks were alluded to by Duterte in 2017 where he claimed that his Chinese counterpart had directly warned him that “if you force the issue, we’ll go to war” (Reuters, 2017). In 2018, Beijing and Manila reached an agreement pertaining to joint exploration and resource exploitation in the South China Sea (Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation on Oil and Gas Development between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, 2018), but it failed to specifically address sovereignty and instead only stipulating the need for cooperation and discouraging unilateral escalation by either side. By 2021 major

tensions emerged yet again, with the Philippines formally protesting the presence of over 220 Chinese fishing ships moored at Julian Felipe Reef (BBC, 2021).

What is curious then, is that despite Philippine assertions of diplomatic confidence being violated, China also makes a similar claim. Following an admission by Duterte in April 2024, it emerged that he had taken informal negotiations between the two sides a step further by establishing a “gentlemen’s agreement” with Xi in regards to Ayungin Shoal in the South China Sea. The terms of the arrangement stipulated that the Philippines would refrain from sending any further construction materials to repair the grounded BRP Sierra Madre, which serves as a Philippine naval outpost in the South China Sea. This arrangement was vigorously condemned by the Congress of the Philippines, stating that Duterte’s settlement with Xi was “tantamount to the surrender of our country’s sovereign rights” (Republic of the Philippines House of Representatives, 2024). Despite the absence of any written evidence of the agreement’s existence or any evidence of having been reviewed by relevant executive branches, China has continued to insist upon its legitimacy and regards the Philippines as having broken the agreement (China Daily, 2024).

One might make the argument that such confusion over informal agreements is symptomatic of communication between political strongmen, but similar behavior can be observed in political dialogue between China and Japan over the Senkaku Islands dispute. Kaseda (2017) makes the argument that that Japan has managed its presence on the islands in accordance with the “gentlemen’s agreement” with China to shelve the dispute following the US transfer of control to the islands to Japan in 1972. He further argues that China was the first to breach this agreement in 1978 by deploying over 100 fishing vessels to the Senkaku Islands, who were armed and commanded by the People’s Liberation Army (Kaseda, 2017). China for its part disputes this interpretation, arguing that Japan was the first to escalate following the latter’s nationalization of the islands in 2012, thus constituting violation of the “gentlemen’s agreement” (Zhao, 2023).

This begs the question then, of what was the actual content of such an alleged agreement? The transcript of a diplomatic meeting published by Chinese state mouthpiece People’s Daily (2012) that took place in 1972 involving the Chinese former Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhou Enlai and Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei reveals two interesting findings. Firstly, on the Chinese side the choice of state representative was questionable as Zhou held no official diplomatic office at the time; while he was indeed the former Minister of Foreign Affairs until 1958, in 1972 he was the chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese

People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory body that is essential in the daily operations of the united front system, but lacks tangible legislative authority and is supervised according to the directives of the Communist Party of China (Mackerras, McMillen, & Watson, 2001). Zhou's rank stands in contrast to his Japanese counterpart; as Prime Minister at the time Tanaka was naturally entrusted with the responsibility of state representation whereas Zhou was representing the state in only a semi-official *de facto* capacity.

This leads to the second curious finding, where it appears that the Chinese side concluded from these negotiations that a tacit agreement in regards to abstention from unilateral moves over the islands was in place, while the Japanese side walked away from these talks concluding that China would not press the issue of sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands (Yang, 2017). Within the text of the transcript, Tanaka appears to have approached the negotiations with the intent of discussing a solution to the Senkaku Islands dispute on orders by the Japan diplomatic ministry, while Zhou disregards this and instead suggests discussing it at a further date, appearing to leave the issue unresolved for the time being, suggesting the agreement the Chinese side regards has having been formulated here was in fact quite inconclusive. This disparity in interpretation over what was ever actually agreed upon due to the absence of formalized written agreements has colored much of the dispute between the two states, and with the deepening of Chinese and Russian strategic relations following the latter's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this may have been the proverbial "straw on the camel's back" to Japanese confidence in the potential for a good-faith diplomatic resolution to the sovereignty dispute. This collapse in confidence on the Japanese side is in all likelihood linked to both the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Zubillaga, 2024), as well as the already problematic disparity in interpretations of what the "gentlemen's agreement" between China and Japan ever actually was.

It is therefore interesting to note that this rhetoric of broken confidence and diplomatic confusion does not seem to be present in the conflict between China and Taiwan. Where in Japan and the Philippine's diplomatic disputes with China the two sides can be observed accusing one another of violating trust, this factor is not present in Chinese and Taiwanese political communication. Extensive economic interaction has taken place since the thaw in relations starting from the 90's with China having become Taiwan's largest trade partner (International Trade Administration, 2024). Numerous economic forums have come into place, facilitating a broad range of exchanges on both the city and provincial level. Cross-strait travel and tourism takes place through the Straits Exchange Foundation, and the

Shanghai-Taipei City Forum provides a useful non-state medium for communication between the two sides.

This is not to say however, that relations between Mainland China and Taiwan should be construed as friendly or constructive; while there may be a degree of cross-strait cooperation in the spirit of pragmatic economic gain, the tone of diplomatic communication between both sides remains cold and in recent years, overtly hostile. As neither China nor Taiwan formally recognize one another contact primarily takes place via non-state channels, with no contact between political leadership taking place from 1948 until the Taiwanese Pan-Blue visits to Mainland China in 2005; even then, it is worth noting that the Pan-Blue coalition was not in power at this time and was not representing Taiwan in a state capacity, but was instead representing the pro-unification KMT. The visits were initially condemned by the Pan-Green coalition government at the time, stating that such visits without prior authorization may constitute violation of national law (The China Post, 2005). Official contact between the incumbent state leaders of the two sides took place on only one occasion in Singapore in 2015, with President Ma Ying-jeou on the Taiwanese side meeting with General Secretary Xi Jinping on the Chinese side (The Strait Times, 2016), where both Ma and Xi expressed their states' respective interpretations of the 1992 consensus on non-aggression; while Ma as a KMT member did indeed favor eventual unification, his presidential cross-strait policy was built on the platform of "no reunification, no independence, no war" (Sina, 2008). Cross-strait relations have not improved since the decline of the KMT's domestic power in Taiwan, and by 2016 China had cut official contact with Taiwan, citing the Tsai administration's refusal to endorse the Mainland's interpretation of the 1992 consensus (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

These developments made it exceedingly clear that formal political meetings between the two sides were unlikely to recur, yet even here we do not see rhetoric of betrayed confidence. Where in the case of Japan and the Philippines there is an observable record of broken confidence, or at least the perception of broken confidence, the dispute between Taiwan and Mainland China does not feature this; political leadership speaks to each other very rarely, and the lines of demarcation are quite clear. Taiwan views itself as an independent state, while China views the island as a renegade province that must eventually be united with the mainland, whether by peace or by force. In regards to independence statement there is dispute within Taiwanese domestic politics, as takes place primarily between the KMT and DPP debating over whether or not eventual unification should be pursued. However, both parties

regard preservation of Taiwan's *de facto* sovereignty for the time being as critical to Taiwanese security.

### **3.2 Dependence upon International Norms**

The second substantial difference separating Taiwan from Japan and the Philippines pertains to state interactions with international law. Despite being a *status-quo* state, the degree to which Taiwan is influenced by international norms differs significantly from that of Japan and the Philippines in that Taiwan exhibits greater willingness to go against international arbitration on sovereignty when it is in the national interest to do so. In a sense, Taiwan's legal status and behavior is paradoxical, essentially existing both within the world of international norms yet also being willing to step out of it.

As outlined in the introduction of the research problem, Taiwan is a particularly interesting case due to it being both a *de facto* state yet also a *status-quo* state: it does not possess international recognition, yet it still tries to "play by the rules" in a game it is not officially part of, emulating international standards on maritime sovereignty (Kuok, 2015).. However, a crucial divergence between the three cases can be observed in their past behavior towards international law, and their willingness to uphold the legitimacy of its arbitration. Despite all three cases being status quo states, their willingness and incentive to abide by international norms on this differs, as will be demonstrated through analysis of a particular UNCLOS ruling that took place in 2016. Japan and the Philippines are both party states to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), having ratified the treaty in 1996 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024) and 1982 (United Nations, 2024) respectively. While Taiwan has never ratified this treaty due to lacking formal recognition of sovereignty from the United Nations and thus being unable to do so, the state nonetheless attempts to follow international arbitration on issues pertaining to sea sovereignty in its domestic law. Maritime law passed by the Legislative Yuan of Taiwan in 1998 explicitly leaves out any mention of historic waters or titles, contrasting quite clearly with the People's Republic of China's legitimization for its claims in the South China Sea (National Bureau of Asian Research, 2018).

However, a notable exception to Taiwan's general gravitation towards status-quo oriented policy behavior can be observed in the South China Sea arbitration ruling which took place in 2016. The arbitration ruled in favor of the Philippines, declaring China's extensive claims over the South China Sea to be devoid of legal substance (Permanent Court of Arbitration,



2016). It is unsurprising that China has fiercely disputed the arbitration ruling, but curiously Taiwan has also rejected this ruling. The primary cause of this rejection was the issue of Itu Aba or Taiping Island, an island under the administration of Taiwan that the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea ruled as the sovereign territory of the Philippines (The Diplomat, 2016).

Furthermore, Taiwan's rejection of the arbitration ruling can in part be attributed to its unique status in the international system as a *de facto* state with limited recognition. As a result, Taiwan was not directly involved in the arbitration proceedings and was not given a voice in the ruling. Another factor that influenced Taiwan's rejection of the arbitration ruling was its relationship with China itself. Cross-strait relations have always been complex, with both sides claiming sovereignty over the other. China's aggressive stance on the South China Sea disputes and its refusal to acknowledge Taiwan's separate identity further complicated the situation. When viewed against the backdrop of China's denial of Taiwanese state legitimacy, Taiwan's rejection of the ruling can arguably be viewed as a response to assert its own sovereignty and territorial integrity.

What is interesting to note however, is that for a state which generally seeks to abide by international norms in the hopes of achieving greater recognition of legitimacy, Taiwan took the exact trajectory in its opposition to the ruling. The foreign affairs bureau of Taiwan noted that the ruling possesses no legally binding nature, explicitly pointing out that Taiwan is not a member of UNCLOS and was not invited to the proceedings of the arbitration, meaning Taiwan is thus not bound by the organization's ruling (ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

It is therefore quite interesting that even while not being party to UNCLOS, Taiwan still took the initiative to protest the outcome of the South China Sea arbitration despite actively emulating the principles of UNCLOS in its domestic maritime law. If the goal is to present oneself as a status-quo state willing to abide by international norms, why continue to pursue a territorial claim that is in direct contradiction of these norms? In this case, it would seem that the absence of formal recognition gives Taiwan some "wiggle room" in regards to which international norms it abides by, and which norms it chooses to abstain from. The paradox illustrated here is that while Taiwan is indeed a status-quo state which generally favors the preservation of norms for maintaining the status quo, it does not seem to be **dependent** on the preservation of said norms, and is quite capable of going against them when they contravene preservation of their own status-quo. It therefore stands to reason that this may be true in other

situations as well; why should a state be alarmed by the violation of norms when they do not necessarily reap the benefits of said norms?

This marks a stark contrast with Japan and the Philippine's interactions with international norms on maritime law. Not only do both states actively stand by the principles of UNCLOS, they actively cite them in their *casus belli* for their respective claims. In regards to the Senkaku Islands, Japan invokes UNCLOS to argue the legitimacy of its claim while China primarily relies upon the argument of Senkaku/Diaoyu being part of its "historic waters" under state control prior to the Treaty of Shimonoseki (Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2014). Likewise, the Philippines expressly cited the principles of UNCLOS in its submission to the International Tribunal of the International Laws of the Sea on the arbitrating South China Sea sovereignty, which subsequently ruled in favor of the Philippines in 2016.

Considering this, it appears that despite meeting the classification of a status-quo state, Taiwan's security posture and foreign policy behavior may not necessarily be as dependent on international norms as Japan and the Philippines are. The reasons for this appear pragmatic, as the norm-centric system does not seem to favor Taiwan the way it favors other *de jure* states with status-quo orientated foreign policy behavior. It therefore stands to reason that if Taiwan is not as inherently concerned about the violations of international norms, this may also apply to norms on non-aggression between states; Taiwan has already demonstrated that despite being a status-quo state, it does not necessarily need to rely on international norms and is even willing to question their legitimacy when it comes to matters of sovereignty. This behavior contrasts entirely with Japan and the Philippines, whose respective claims of sovereignty over the Senkaku and Spratly Islands are directly contingent upon international norms regarding maritime sovereignty. If this is indeed the case, it would be logical for more norm-dependent states such as Japan and the Philippines to react strongly should the violation of norms on non-aggression between states take place, while a less norm-dependent state like Taiwan may exhibit a more muted reaction.

### **3.3 Alternative Interpretations regarding Taiwan's Security Posture**

An alternative explanation for why Taiwan may not have increased their defense expenditure at as significant a rate as Japan or the Philippines could arguably be conscription. On a superficial level, the divergence in military expenditure and general perception of urgency can appear to be explained by differences in conscription status; Japan and the Philippines do not currently feature compulsory military service while Taiwan does, which would explain the

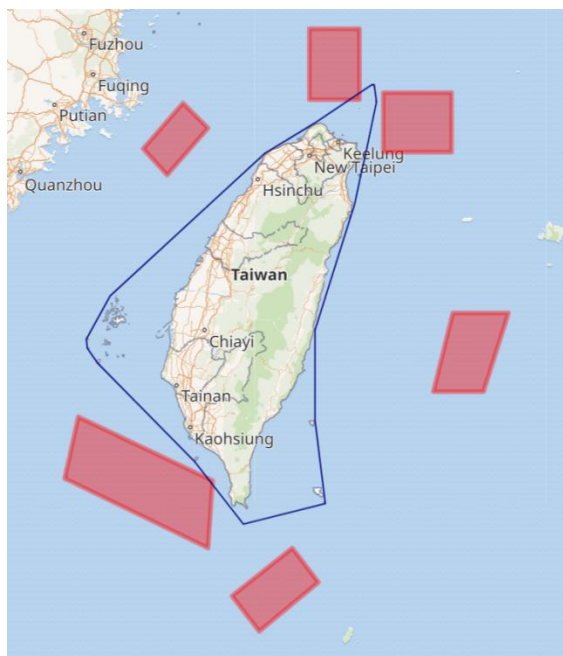
latter's more relaxed expenditure behavior according to this argument. However, in the case of Taiwan I would argue that differences in conscription status as an insufficient explanation for the divergence in state behavior.

The conscription status of the selected cases differs on an individual basis, with Taiwan enforcing male conscription for a service period of one year while Japan and the Philippines rely entirely on volunteer forces. In Japan's case, its history of militarism and imperialism in the early 20th century led to the establishment of a conscription system. After World War II and surrender to the Allied Powers however, Japan adopted a pacifist stance and formally abolished conscription in 1947, instead forming the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

Conscription is no longer in place, and SDF personnel instead serve on a full-time basis. Public perceptions of the SDF in Japan reflect a cautious approach towards militarism and war due to the country's traumatic past and commitments to pacifism. The Philippines differs in this respect in that its military relied on conscription until fairly recently, having implemented conscription during the Imperial Japanese occupation in World War II and continuing conscription until its abolition in 1992. As in the case of Japan, the abolition of conscription in the Philippines was domestically applauded and seen as a step towards democratization and civilian control of the military.

Taiwan however, continued to rely on conscription due to its complex political situation as a self-governing *de facto* state in an unresolved conflict with the government of Mainland China. Conscription therefore serves as a means to bolster national defense against potential invasion. Conscripts in Taiwan serve for a specified period based on their branch of service and rank, which in previous years was only for four months. In light of growing tensions with China and the People's Liberation Army having orchestrated a live-fire exercise simulating a naval siege of Taiwan in 2022, active-duty conscription has been resumed and the conscription period has been extended to span one year (Global Taiwan Institute, 2024).

Exemptions from military service in Taiwan can be granted on medical grounds, as well as for educational pursuits or family obligations. Public attitudes towards military service in Taiwan largely reflect the geopolitical tensions with China, territorial disputes in the region, and the need to maintain national independence and security.



People's Liberation Army military exercise coordinates scheduled for August 4-7, 2022 (Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, 2022)

However, it is important to note that while Taiwan did increase the duration of its compulsory military service period in 2022, two important facts must be taken into account regarding the timing. Firstly, this did not come into effect for nearly two years, indicating a relative lack of urgency in the decision-making process. If a threat to state security is imminent and present, why wait two years before the recommended security response comes into effect? Secondly, the proposed increase in the duration of compulsory military service is not a new phenomenon, but rather the resumption of an earlier policy that was in place from 2008 to 2013. These two factors make it unlikely that extension of the compulsory military service period in Taiwan contributed to its more relaxed rate of expenditure increase relative to Japan and the Philippines. Instead, I argue that the norm-related factors outlined earlier in the empirical analysis chapter provide greater explanative power as to why Japan and the Philippines significantly increased their defense expenditure while Taiwan did not.

#### 4. Conclusions

The examination of the security alliances between the United States and its partners in the Asia-Pacific region, namely Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan, has unveiled intriguing disparities in defense expenditure growth and strategic decision-making processes among

these countries. Japan and the Philippines possess ironclad defense guarantees from the United States in the form of mutual defense treaties, while Taiwan does not, as their agreement with the United States stipulates arms provision and little more. Yet In Japan and the Philippines we can clearly observe a marked increase in the state share of defense spending post-2022, with Japan in particular being set on a trajectory towards nearly doubling its naval and air force expenditure within the span of a year. In Taiwan however, no equivalent increase can be observed. Taiwan's state share of defense expenditure instead remained stable at an average of 15% of the total budget, having changed little even since 2020.

This particular phenomenon is what the proposed study set out to explain; when faced with severe escalation of geopolitical tensions, why did Japan and the Philippines choose to increase their defense spending despite possessing legally binding security guarantees from an external power, while Taiwan did not do so? The research question can be summarized thus: **why would diplomatically secure states exhibit similar behaviors as diplomatically insecure states?**

This question underscores the need for a deeper exploration of the underlying factors that influence strategic choices in defense expenditure and security policies. The observed phenomenon of Japan and the Philippines increasing their defense expenditure at a faster rate than Taiwan, despite possessing more solid security guarantees, suggests the presence of other factors beyond mere military necessity influencing these strategic decisions. My thesis posits that the decision of Japan and the Philippines to boost defense expenditure can be attributed to the violation of international norms; as *de jure* states they both have more to lose from the violation of said norms compared to Taiwan, which lacks the same level of protection from these norms given their *de facto* status.

The study was built upon a Most Similar Systems Design framework, with the cases being selected on a comparative basis in that Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan all share important similarities that allow for comparison and isolation of diverging variables. All three cases are island states, allowing us to make general inferences regarding their defense priorities due to the increased importance of naval and air power for island states. The three cases also share China as their common security competitor, which allows us to make inferences on both their individual security posture and the severity of their disputes given China's rapid economic and military rise in recent years. Likewise, all three cases are also *status-quo* states, which seek preservation of the status quo in their foreign policy behavior and generally refrain from

the sort of expansion typically exhibited by revisionist states. The outcome variable that can be observed among the selected cases is the divergence in defense spending trends between the three countries; Japan and the Philippines both significantly increased their defense spending post-2022, while Taiwan has not done so. By conducting a qualitative cross-case comparative analysis of Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan's interaction with international norms, this study reveals the presence of two significant norm-related factors in the case of Japan and the Philippines that are notably absent in the cases of Taiwan.

The first substantial difference between the cases highlighted by this study is the presence of the "gentlemen's agreement" norm in the case of China's sea sovereignty disputes with Japan and the Philippines, where informal unwritten agreements between leadership were interpreted as legally binding resolutions; the breach of these informal agreements, whether intentionally or perhaps even unintentionally, in turn facilitated a violation of confidence between parties. Both sides have accused one another of ignoring past agreements on the issue, while more detailed examination of these interactions suggests their content may not be as conclusive or binding as the offended party suggests. In contrast, such informal agreements and broken trust rhetoric are less prevalent in Taiwan's interactions with China, where official communication is extremely limited, implying there was little confidence between the two sides to be broken in the first place. When diplomatic fallout did eventually take place in 2016 however, violation of confidence was not among the reasons cited by either side. Despite the hostility between the two states, for the time being neither China nor Taiwan has accused the other side of going against their word.

The second substantial difference between Taiwan and Japan/Philippines lies in their state interactions with international norms. Despite being a status-quo state, Taiwan demonstrates a greater willingness to go against the international consensus when it aligns with its national interests. This example of Taiwan's reaction to the UNCLOS South China Sea arbitration in 2016 highlights the fact that being a status-quo state, Taiwan's foreign policy behavior is not dependent on norms to the same extent as *de jure* states such as Japan and the Philippines. It therefore stands to reason that should international the violation of international norms take place as they were in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, norm-dependent states such as Japan and the Philippines would react strongly should the violation of norms on non-aggression between states take place, while a less norm-dependent state like Taiwan may exhibit a more muted reaction.

Taiwan, as a non-sovereign entity facing unique geopolitical challenges, occupies a distinct position in the security landscape of the Asia-Pacific region. The island's delicate status quo with China, its lack of formal diplomatic recognition, and its exclusion from international organizations pose significant challenges to its security and defense posture. Taiwan's strategic choices are constrained by its ambiguous legal status, limited international support, and the constant threat of coercion from Beijing. The island's security calculus is further complicated by the changing dynamics of U.S.-China relations and the broader geopolitical shifts in the region.

Perhaps more than any other state, Taiwan walks the line between war and peace, with its existential security rival also being its dominant trade partner. Yet ironically, the findings of this study suggest that Taiwan's diplomatic vulnerability may indeed make it less dependent on the preservation of norms compared to *de jure* states like Japan and the Philippines. Taiwan behaves as a status-quo state, and generally seeks to "play by the rules" in its foreign relations, preferring the status quo in both strategic and diplomatic aspects (Hsiao, 2021). But as the international rules-based system does not provide Taiwan with intrinsic protection due to its unrecognized *de facto* status, it is reasonable to assume that Taiwan may not respond as strongly to violation of norms inherent to the rules-based system.

As was elaborated upon in the empirical analysis, I proposed that a background of violated confidence played a significant role in Japan and the Philippines' decision to increase military expenditure, while it was not a relevant factor in Taiwan's strategic calculus. Taiwan knew what their enemy was capable of, and there was little trust in China to work towards a diplomatic resolution in good faith. This was demonstrated through analysis of cross-strait communication, where it can be observed that diplomatic contact rarely took place, there was little evidence of mutual trust being developed, yet there was also little room for miscommunication given the clarity of each side's position on the issue. Furthermore I also suggested that as Japan and Philippines benefit more from the protection international norms have to offer than Taiwan does, that it was logical for them to react more urgently to the violation of said norms than a state like Taiwan would. I demonstrated Taiwan's willingness to depart from international norms through analysis of their behavior following the UNCLOS South China Sea ruling, where despite purporting to uphold international maritime norms, Taiwan was also willing to go against such norms due to not being party to the protection they have to offer.

My explanation for the divergence in the cases' response to the re-emergence of large scale inter-state conflict in 2022 can thus be summarized in quite a straightforward manner. As norm-centric states, *Japan and the Philippines had more incentives to react to the violation of norms than Taiwan*. The precedent can be observed in the violation of norms in their diplomatic engagement with China, where both sides accused the other of having broken agreements leading to broken confidence.

The findings of this thesis contribute to the academic understanding of normative influences on *de facto* states, in terms of how likely they are emulate international norms, as well as to what the extent participation in the international rules-based system tangibly assists their security. This thesis further contributes to the academic understanding of oral agreements between political leadership, and its applications in international relations. It illustrates the concerning implications regarding the potential dangers that informal "gentlemen's agreements" may hold for parties to such arrangements. As was demonstrated in the case of Japan and the Philippines' diplomatic relationship with China, reliance on opaque common understanding rather than the more arduous yet formal approach of legally negotiated resolutions can result in violations of confidence and escalated tensions in the long term.

The findings of this thesis also illustrate how external security guarantees may not necessarily be the defining factor in a states' confidence in its security capabilities. In the face of an increasingly volatile geopolitical paradigm, Japan and the Philippines chose to increase their defense spending despite possessing legally binding mutual defense guarantees from the United States. Meanwhile Taiwan, a *de facto* state with no mutual defense guarantees and facing down the possibility of an existential conflict with China, did not raise its expenditure in any meaningful way. The re-introduction of year-long compulsory military service in Taiwan can be disregarded as an explanation for this relatively relaxed defense posture, as the policy did take effect until 2024, indicating a lack of immediate urgency in the decision-making process.

Looking ahead, future research should continue to explore the dynamics of normative influences on state behavior, particularly in regards to island states and how their security calculus may differ from landlocked or coastal states. Would a *de facto* state facing a similar existential conflict as Taiwan but sharing a contiguous border with the rival host state exhibit as mutual a reaction as Taiwan did when faced with the possibility of conflict? Likewise, the extent to which external security guarantees affect *de facto* states versus *de jure* states merits



further study. Had Japan and the Philippines possessed similarly ambiguous security agreements as Taiwan, might their response have been similar?

This study illuminates the seemingly counter-intuitive behavior of states with alliances, and critically examines said behavior from the lens of alliance theory and their engagement with international norms. Likewise, it serves as a foundation for future investigations into the complex effects that normative structures, alliance participation, and geopolitical security considerations exert upon shaping state behavior and strategic decision-making processes in the realm of international security.

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