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Digest

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PM Kishida visits Africa, South Korea

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida [embarked](#) on a whirlwind tour of four African countries between 29 April and 5 May, visiting Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique before returning to Japan via Singapore. His visits were aimed at retaining Japan's traditional presence in African countries, as well as to counter China's growing economic influence in the region by promising economic assistance to African countries, as they tackle issues of poverty, conflict and natural disasters. In Ghana on 2 May, Kishida [declared](#) that Japan would provide around \$500 million in financial support to African countries over the next three years in order to 'promote peace and stability in the continent'. He also discussed the importance of providing transparent and equitable development finance in an apparent reference to China's 'debt-trap' diplomacy.

Immediately upon his return from Africa, Kishida [visited](#) Seoul to hold a bilateral meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol, reigniting the long-frozen Japan-South Korea relationship. Following a host of bilateral and multilateral meetings between Japanese ministers of finance, defence and economy and their South Korean counterparts, the summit effectively restarted the 'shuttle diplomacy' in place between the two heads of government, which had been held in abeyance since 2011 due to historical grievances between the two countries. In South Korea, Kishida expressed 'trust' in President Yoon, welcomed further cooperation on security issues, agreed to the establishment of a joint supply chain for semiconductors, and promised to visit with

President Yoon the Memorial for Korean Victims of the Atomic Bomb within the Hiroshima Peace Park on the occasion of the G-7 meeting to be held in the city. He also agreed to host a South Korean fact-finding mission at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, so as to convince them of the steps Japan has been taking to ensure the safety of radioactive water held there, which Japan intends to begin releasing into the Pacific Ocean later this year. In return, Yoon clearly articulated his desire to de-link historical grievances from overall bilateral ties and indicated his willingness to treat Japan as a partner in containing the nuclear threat of North Korea.

Attitudes on defence among Japanese public

On May 1, the Asahi newspaper [noted](#) the results of a survey that asked respondents about their attitudes towards the deployment of Japan's Self-Defence Forces in tandem with the US military should a military conflict break out in Taiwan. Eighty per cent of those polled were "greatly" or "to some degree" concerned that a conflict would result in the deployment of SDF troops to assist the US in pushing back Chinese forces, which could lead to a broader war in the region. Of these, the most, 35 percent, were in the Kyushu region, which includes Okinawa prefecture. When asked what kind of role they felt the SDF should play in a conflict over Taiwan, 56 percent responded by saying that they preferred rear-guard support roles for the SDF, while 27 percent denied outright that any cooperation was necessary. Finally, when asked about the options they felt were more necessary for Japan's national security, 70 percent said

they preferred ‘deepening the relationship with China’ over bolstering indigenous defence capabilities, which 26 percent of respondents chose as their preferred course of action.

However, [another](#) poll conducted by the Asahi in collaboration with a team from the University of Tokyo which asked about Japan’s broad foreign and defence policy moves *in toto* found that 62 percent of respondents supported the necessity of improving Japan’s defence capabilities, as well as its diplomatic and security policies, though respondents were divided on what that meant in practice: as against 39 percent who said that Japan should attack enemy bases should there be moves to attack it, 38 percent replied that they were unsure of their response and 23 percent opposed it. Further, 37 percent of those polled did not agree with Prime Minister Kishida’s intention to ‘increase the burden’ on present generations to finance national security and childcare policies that he argued would benefit future generations. The two polls indicate the complex nature of Japanese public opinion in an environment where the country faces acute strategic challenges.

Global chipmakers meet in Japan

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida [convened](#) an unprecedented meeting on 18 May at the prime minister’s office in Tokyo with the heads of leading semiconductor manufacturers, where he praised their “aggressive” investments in Japan and encouraged further investments. For their part, the heads of several semiconductor giants also touted their upcoming investments, with US-based Micron Technology announcing a 500 billion yen investment in its Hiroshima plant to

manufacture next-generation memory chips, Taiwan’s TSMC declaring a possible expansion of the scope of its initial investment in a plant to be constructed in Kumamoto prefecture if suitable government subsidies are available, and Belgium’s imec making public its plans to develop a research and development centre in Japan to collaborate with Japan’s state-backed Rapidus Corporation, which was set up last year by Toyota, Sony and six other firms. Besides these giants, the heads of the semiconductor arms of Intel, Samsung, Applied Materials and IBM also attended.

Japan’s new Space Policy revealed

Kyodo News has [revealed](#) several details about Japan’s new Space Policy, which is scheduled to be promulgated by the Kishida cabinet later in the summer. The new policy sees an expansion of Japan’s defensive capabilities in space by emphasizing the security of satellites and other space-based platforms. The new policy also emphasizes cooperation with the United States of America to identify and surveil missile launch sites located in countries throughout the Indo-Pacific region so as to enable Japan’s counterstrike capabilities being utilised to the maximum should an attack occur. The policy justifies these measures by pointing to an increase in the number of surveillance satellites being launched by ‘neighbouring countries’, as well as the threat from anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons systems. However, many within the Japanese strategic community are worried that excessive coordination with the US’ surveillance and targeting infrastructure may lead Japan’s capabilities to be used to fight US wars in other parts of the world, and that an attack on the US infrastructure may cripple Japan’s network as well.