From Ukraine to Taiwan: Charting a New US-Japan Alliance

TRANSCRIPT

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A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/2144-virtual-event-from-ukraine-to-taiwan-charting-a-new-us-japan-alliance92022

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H.R. McMaster:

Welcome everyone to this session on the war in Ukraine and implications for the US-Japan Alliance. It's a real privilege for me as the Japan chair here at the Hudson Institute to welcome the perfect person with whom to talk about this topic, Mr. Kunihiko Miyake. Miyake-san, welcome. Miyake-san is the Research Director at The Canon Institute for Global Studies and is the perfect person to help us understand the past, present, and the future of the US-Japan alliance based on what we've learned from the conflict in Ukraine. Miyake-san, welcome. Great to see you.

Kunihiko Miyake:

Thank you, sir, or if I may call you H.R., because four or five years ago, first, I must tell you that you and some of your colleagues are our hopes when it comes to the US-Japan relation. I never met you before. I was thinking about you. So, it was a great opportunity. Thank you for this great opportunity.

H.R. McMaster:

It's a real privilege for me and I'll tell you, people think it's crazy when I say I'd do that job again, national security advisor, but one of the reasons I would do it again is the real privilege I had working with my Japanese colleagues and Miyake-san in particular. Sometimes, Miyake-san, we would look at each other and say, "Hey, we don't really have anything to talk about because we agree on just about everything in connection with..."

Kunihiko Miyake:

We agree on too many things. We do something additional today.

H.R. McMaster:

Yes. Well, of course, what we've seen is this horrible reinvasion of Ukraine on February 24th of this year. It's an event that has had global ramifications already with the energy market, what we might call the food crisis or what some people are calling Farmageddon and so forth, but there are long-term strategic implications, I think, Miyake-san. And what do you think are the biggest implications?

Kunihiko Miyake:

It's funny that after leaving the Foreign Ministry seventeen years ago, I became more and more interested in history. I'm not as educated or learning as you are, but now I'm trying to look back on the past seventy, eighty years we shared since 1945. I was there for thirty, forty years. There was basically a cold war in Europe and the exception was the Vietnam War, but there was a collapse of the Soviet Union. And then we thought that the history will end, but it never ended and the world is not flat. And unfortunately, the war on terror started in the '90s and 21st century. You've fought in the Middle East on the ground for twenty, thirty years. I was an Arabic language officer and I was posted in Baghdad. So, I know how the CPA went. I would say it went wrong, but it went. But now you left the Afghanistan.
And now I think we are entering a new era. I think we should focus on the status quo changes in our part of the world. So, basically, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, you stopped the never ending fight against terrorism in the Middle East and now focused on China. We thought that we can keep the Russia at least for a while in Europe, but unfortunately, the war in Ukraine has changed. We thought that we could focus on deterring China in our part of the world, basically paying less in attention to the Russians, but now Russians are in the game. And I think this is a strategically new element when we discuss the strategic issues in our part of the world.

H.R. McMaster:

In the cold war, we had this idea of triangular diplomacy in the United States and it's really pioneered by President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, the idea that you could have a closer relationship with China and Russia than they had with one another. And I think that days are gone, right? I think that's feasible anymore, right? I mean, they've professed their enduring love for one another.

I'm thinking of this joint statement and I wonder how that was received in Japan right before the Beijing Olympics, in which they declared their friendship has no limits. Miyake-san, I think what the message from that to us was, "Hey, you're finished free world. It's now our time in this new era of international relations," in which they saw themselves as ascendant. And I think the free world is in decline. Is that how you saw it?

Kunihiko Miyake:

Both Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi Jinping made some strategic mistakes. Actually, at least I thought that Putin would be more smarter and strategically minded, but actually he wasn't. Russia is in decline and probably the best strategic decision for Russia to do. I would improve relationship with the NATO countries, because potentially and probably, ultimately the strategic threat comes from the East, not from the West. So, remember in 1972, when China changed this foreign policy and improved relationship with the US and Japan, that wasn't what I call diplomatic revolution. Why they did that? It's simple.

At that time, for China, the Soviet Union became a strategic threat to Beijing. That's why they improved relationship with US and they counterbalance the Russians. I think what Russia has to do now is to do the same thing, another diplomatic revolution to improve relationship with the West while confronting China, but Russia didn't get that way and China didn't think that either. So, therefore, unfortunately, Russians made a big mistake and Mr. Xi Jinping followed it. But as you said, their decisions, strategic mistakes have made our ideas and policies more difficult.

H.R. McMaster:

Miyake-san, I think that Europe and I wonder if Japan is looking at it this way as well is viewing China more and more through the lens of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the fear or concern that this aggression by a Revanchist power on the Eurasian landmass, both two of them, Russia and China, could carry over to aggression in the Pacific region, specifically focused on Taiwan or-

Kunihiko Miyake:

Exactly.
H.R. McMaster:

... maybe this land grab so to speak in the South China Sea. What lessons do you think that the Japanese leadership and Armed Forces and Foreign Ministry... What lessons are they learning from the invasion of Ukraine and how have you seen it change Japanese policy?

Kunihiko Miyake:

I cannot say anything on behalf of the Japanese government, but what I'm telling my audience these days, five lessons we learned from the war in Ukraine. Number one is most important. Number two, I said, "Well, without forces, we cannot defend ourselves." Number three, third lesson is without information, we cannot win. Number four, if there's no alliance, we cannot win and defend ourselves. And number five, even if we have an alliance, if you don't try to defend your territories by yourself, then allies will not help you. Then I tell them, "Look at what happened to Afghanistan. The president fled the country while in Ukraine, their president stayed and fought."

So, that's the four lessons I explain to my audience, but the first most important lesson I learned is that leaders make mistakes and dictate us. Mistakes are much more difficult to amend. So, once a dictatorial regime made up strategic mistake, it's so difficult to amend or undo it. In the case of our part of the world, there's another dictatorial regime and there's no check and balance in the policy making. They are also interested in changing the status quo. So, I hope that our neighbor, the biggest neighbor, I don't want to name, will not make a strategic mistake, but dictatorial leaders tend to make mistakes.

H.R. McMaster:

Miyake-san, I think you're so right about that. I mean, just look at the zero COVID policy, right? He's just doubling down on that policy.

Kunihiko Miyake:

Exactly.

H.R. McMaster:

I think maybe a very important lesson of Ukraine is to pay attention to what a dictator says he's going to do, because really it was quite obvious. Going back to 2003, I think you could say with the poisoning of a presidential candidate in Ukraine, what Putin was going to do to subvert the Ukrainian government across all those years and then of course, the first invasion of 2014. And then this wasn't a black swan, Miyake-san. This was a pink flamingo. It was right in front of us. I think it's a similar situation with Taiwan as well.

So, let's go to your first lesson about, "Hey, you have to be prepared to use force. You have to have strong defense. You have to be prepared to defend yourself." What do you think the priorities ought to be for Japan, but especially for the US-Japanese Alliance to strengthen our defense and hopefully prevent a war through deterrents by denial?
Thank you. Before that, let me tell you why I think Japan is so forthcoming this time. Usually, we have been quite cautious about imposing sanctions, especially tough sanctions against other countries. But in this case, the Ukraine is an exceptional case to me because the Prime Minister Kishida has been so active and forthcoming and imposed very difficult, politically difficult sanctions against Russians. Why they did that? People ask me why. I said, the answer is simple because we have similar problem in our part of the world and I don't want to name that country, but that country may repeat the same mistake.

So, in order to deter such aggressions or such use of force against small island in our neighborhood or maybe on ours, we should be able to send the right message to our neighbors. So, that means that if you did something similar in our part of the world, you will face the same problems, economic difficulties, political difficulties, and probably military difficulties. That's the reason I believe why Japan has been so active and forthcoming in terms of economic sanctions.

And let me answer your question now. Number one, I think our alliance has been evolving quite successfully, first of all, but having said that, I could be a little bit more sarcastic because in the '40s, '50s, and '60s, even '80s, you were focused on cold war in Europe. And basically, our contribution is limited. Although there's some contribution probably during the Vietnam War, but indirectly. So, our presence was not as important as it is now. Then you started the war on terror. Then we tried to cooperate.

**H.R. McMaster:**

We didn't start it. Actually, Al-Qaeda started it.

**Kunihiko Miyake:**

Al-Qaeda started it.

**H.R. McMaster:**

Both the mass murder attack. Yeah. Right.

**Kunihiko Miyake:**

I'm sorry. But then we have tried to cooperate with the United States, but our physical strength, our physical presence was not indispensable. But when it comes to deterring our huge neighbor on the Eastern part of the European continent, then you need US forces in Japan and you need US bases in Japan. And by the same token, in order for us to deter such a big, huge neighbor, we need US presence. Of course. So, in my view, finally, we became mutual really in a real sense and not totally, I mean, dependent on one sided, I mean, structure.

So, Japan probably, I hope I'm wrong, used to be the subject, which the United States must unilaterally protect. That was until the 1990s probably. But after that 1990s and until recently, there's an ally which Americans can expect support and cooperation. But now I think Japan and the United States are real allies of equal footing to fight together. We should be able to fight together to deter whatever attempt to change the status quo. That's my first point.

**H.R. McMaster:**
Yeah. I think it's a very important point. And I think we ought to give credit to Abe-San. Of course, all of us are deeply, deeply saddened by his loss. Decades ago, a decade and a half ago, he first talked about the concept of a free and open into Pacific and then of course the reinterpretation of the constitution and the improvements in the self-defense force capabilities. These are some very, very significant changes that we ought to give him credit for. How would you describe the progress that has been made in terms of building up defensive capabilities, our mutual defensive capabilities? What war do you think needs to be done to make sure that we can maintain deterrents by denial in the Pacific?

Kunihiko Miyake:

As you said, Mr. Shinzo Abe was in a sense a revolutionary in our making of the foreign policy. I think he has dramatically changed the policy making style, foreign policy making style in my country. It has been the philosophy that, well, we should have the minimum level of defense spending, that we focus on economic development to become prosperous again. That was our philosophy in the '60s and '70s and '80s, and we were successful. But unfortunately, at this moment, the strategic environment surrounding Japan has dramatically changed and Shinzo knew that. He knew what was going to happen. That's why he proposed various change, dramatic change in the making of the foreign policy and strategic national security policies.

So, he established the National Security Council in Japan and also, he amended so many security related laws, if not the constitution itself. So, I think without him, Japan could not have accomplished that far so far, but unfortunately, it's still halfway. We have a lot to do, because now we know that threat may not come from the North and we may not need as many tanks in Hokkaidō anymore, but we need more ships and marines in the South because the threat may come from the waters, from the sea to the islands in our neighborhood. So, I think what the homework we must do after is to be really able to, I would say, fight together effectively, if necessary, in order to deter the aggressions.

So, in that sense, probably what we need is we should be able to fight, of course, as I told you, but from the international point of view, we need to have strong US, Japan, South Korea coordination, especially improvement of Japan-South Korea relations, which is in partially. I hope we are in the process of doing that, but still 90% of the South Korea-Japan relations are domestic politics, and likewise in Japan, to a certain extent. That's why it may take some time. And also we need to enhance cooperation among the allies or semi-allies among the United States, Japan, maybe Australia, and maybe United Kingdom, those countries you have AUKUS already, but it could be expanded. Also, we need to do more on Quad. Although it's not a military alliance.

H.R. McMaster:

But just for our listeners, I'll just say AUKUS is the Australian-US-UK Alliance. And then the Quad is Japan, the United States, Australia, and India, just to acquaint our listeners. But go ahead, go ahead.

Kunihiko Miyake:
I should be more kind to the listeners, but in addition to that, we shouldn't focus in the Pacific region. It's my thinking because I was an Arabic language officer and I know a little bit about the Middle East. I was part of the CPA.

**H.R. McMaster:**

Miyake-san, I was probably there with you at the occasion. You're talking about your time in Baghdad. Miyake-san, if I just want to interject, I'm so glad to hear you say this and I want to hear you expand on this, because I think there's a tendency to view the competition with China or with Russia very myopically in a narrowly refined geographic area when this competition is global and there are big implications for it in the Middle East, as you mentioned. But I'd love to hear your thoughts about Japan's role and the US-Japan Alliance's role in competing with China, with Russia, more broadly in the Middle East, as well as across the end of Pacific or in the Western hemisphere for that matter.

**Kunihiko Miyake:**

I fully agree with you. And when I used to talk to the Europeans, they only focus on Russian. I used to tell them, "Okay, Europeans, you have one serious threat, potential threat from the East. So, in your neighborhood, it's only one threat. But in my neighborhood, there are 2.5 threats." In addition to Russia, we have another big country and another difficult country to deal with. So, we have more threats than the Europeans, but unfortunately, they are all interrelated. Therefore, I said, "In addition to strengthening our alliance or alliance mechanism or deterrence mechanism in the Pacific region, we need two more things, important things."

One is a strong NATO. Strong NATO is needed because they could stabilize the European threat. That's why Japan has to do a lot. To my surprise for the first time this year in history of the NATO Summit Meeting, Japanese Prime Minister and the Korean President were invited. So, that's a phenomenon. That's a strategic achievement. But in addition to that, not only Europe, but also we need stability in the Middle East, especially we should stabilize the Gulf region. I don't want to name the country, but there is another potential status quo changer in that neighborhood.

**H.R. McMaster:**

Miyake-san, I'll name it, it's Iran. I remember when Abe-san visited and the Iranians attacked a Japanese tanker while he was in Toran.

**Kunihiko Miyake:**

They didn't like us to do that.

**H.R. McMaster:**

But I do think you're right to point this out. And also, I think being reliable partners for Gulf states is important to reducing Chinese and Russian influence in the region as well. I mean, one of the things that always disappoints me, Miyake-san, is we always declare our intention to immediately leave the Middle East. We never leave, but by saying we're leaving, we encourage a whole range of hedging behavior in the UAE, in Saudi Arabia, and other countries. But I think you're right. There's an important competition playing out. And of course, if you could comment
on this, Iran has increasingly been drawn in to this nefarious club of actors here of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

**Kunihiko Miyake:**

Right. Simply because our sea lines of communication doesn't end at the Strait of Malacca. It goes all the way through the Indian Ocean, to the Gulf states, oil-producing states. So, this is the vital sea lines of communication and for us and for China as well. That's why we need a stable sea lines of communication. In order to do that, we need stable Middle East, especially the Gulf region. And as you rightly said, people ask me why Americans are leaving the Middle East.

And I said, "They are not leaving the Middle East. Are you kidding? They just moved the combat units from Afghanistan, maybe eventually from Syria, but did the First Fleet leave the Gulf? Did the US Air Force leave the Gulf? No, because they are not only defending those oil-producing states and deterring Iran, but they are protecting us. Because without them, we cannot secure our sea lines of communication all the way down to the Gulf region."

**H.R. McMaster:**

This is important implication. Now you mentioned that we need to bring coordination of our alliance to the next level. Is this something you have in mind as a concrete step to see US and Japan have dialogues and to actually conduct planning beyond the Indo-Pacific region in terms of security architectures? What do you mean when you say we need to improve coordination in our alliance?

**Kunihiko Miyake:**

Well, the policy coordination is extremely important. And as I said, though, internationally, we need to have strong US, South Korea, Japan relations, or AUKUS, as you kindly explained, or Quad, but we need to do more bilaterally. And of course, having a strategic understanding, a strategic perspective beyond our Indo-Pacific vision is extremely important. But I like to focus on today on our region and especially what Japan need to do and what the United States may need to do is something I like to talk about last.

For Japan, thanks to the serious, large scale military exercise surrounding the island of Taiwan recently, after the visit of the Speaker of the House, we were alarmed because they launched at least three or five missiles on to our EZ water areas. But that's not only a symbolic gesture, but the reality. It's another black sheep for Japan. It's so difficult for us to unilaterally change ourselves, but sometimes we try to wisely react to the change of situation externally. So, it's not an external pressure, but given the situation surrounding Taiwan, more and more people in Japan seems to be aware of the necessity of expanding our defense capability.

And in order to do that, we need to increase our defense budget. It's around 1.2 something percentage point of GDP by the NATO standard. And hopefully, it will increase, but still, we need to expand defense spending and also, we should be able to continue fighting. We don't have enough bullets to shoot. We don't have enough missiles to launch. We don't have enough ships to protect ourselves. So, we need to do a lot, especially the war fighting capability. Continuous war fighting is extremely important for us. And then we need to work on realistic various contingency plans. And then also, we have to raise Japanese people's national security
awareness. These are the point we on our Japanese part has to do and that's the responsibility of the Japanese government, I believe.

H.R. McMaster:

I should just note, Miyake-san, do you think we'll see these sorts of initiatives in the new strategic documents that the Kishida administration is working on right now?

Kunihiko Miyake:

I think it's being contemplated seriously, and they will be finished by the end of this year, as you may know. Those issues will be all tackled, looked into, and probably clearly stated in those three documents. One is the national security strategy. Then we have a long-term defense plan. Then we have a fiscal defense budget. These three elements are all important interrelated. So, I'm sure they're doing their best to incorporate those elements I explained to you into those three documents, but having said that, of course, we are democracy and we have various views on there. So, it will be very difficult political process to go through in order to come up with the right viable and the functionable documents on national security affairs.

H.R. McMaster:

Well, the other aspect of this is then what does the US do? What more should the US do to strengthen the alliance and the relationship? Of course, you've already mentioned, capacity is important, the size of the force. You need forces that can operate in sufficient scale and for ample duration to prevail. That's what gives you deterrence.

Kunihiko Miyake:

That's right.

H.R. McMaster:

And I think from an American perspective, it's very important these days to explain why forward presence is very important for deterrence purposes. And then of course, we know how hard it is to fight for readmission to a treaty if you vacate it. But what advice would you have on the American side in terms of priorities for strengthening deterrence?

Kunihiko Miyake:

In 1998, I was Director for the Security Treaty Affairs in the United States. And in 1988, 1989, I was Deputy Director for the SoFA Division. SoFA means Status of Forces Agreement. It is an agreement between the United States and Japan to stipulate the legal status of the US forces in Japan. And of course, you have NATO SoFA and you have SoFA with the Koreans as well. But the SoFA issues has been one of the most difficult elements when it comes to the healthy alliance between Japan and the United States. So, I like to focus on SoFA issues a little bit today. Fortunately and unfortunately, US forces are in Okinawa and all over Japan, but especially heavily stationed in Okinawa Island. That's for sure.

Unfortunately, as I told you before, the threat comes from the sea, from the South to the island. So, that means that as compared to 10 years ago, 20 years ago, as I told you, we should be
ready to fight if necessary as a last resort. So, in that case, what we need to do is to win the hearts and minds of the Japanese and especially the hearts and minds of the Okinawans who has experienced very tough history and they have suffered. All the families in Okinawa suffered a lot. So, in order to win the hearts and minds of Okinawans, this is one of the most difficult task to do in the ’80s since the 1950s. So, my suggestion, for example, is of course we should focus on the modernization of the Japanese self-defense forces, ground self-defenses.

They're not fighting in the Hokkaidō anymore. They're fighting on the sea. So, they're becoming marines and they are training themselves with the US Marines. I hope they will help the US Marines stay inside the first island chain. But at the same time, probably what we need is to seriously review the role of the US forces in Japan, especially in Okinawa. I'm not talking about the revision of SoFA. Revision of SoFA is not a good idea to me. I'm always opposed that, but probably we can think about something like increasing the joint use of bases in Okinawa if it became Japanese base and with the US forces as a guest and used the base together. So, we are fighting, we are defending ourselves.

H.R. McMaster:
Like we have in other bases where we have a half of the base. I'm thinking about the bases around Tokyo. That's the model in some cases, isn't it?

Kunihiko Miyake:
That's true. But in Okinawa, they say 70 or 80% of the US military bases for exclusively US use is centered around Okinawa. That's probably under the headache among the Okinawans. As a marine, you may not like my idea, but I think what something can be done-

H.R. McMaster:
I'm an army officer.

Kunihiko Miyake:
We could do a little bit more about the US bases in Okinawa so that we could win more hearts and minds of Okinawans then make ourselves more readier for a real contingency that may happen at any time in the next 10, 20 years.

H.R. McMaster:
Miyake-san, you make a really, really important point because it's easy to overlook. There's so much to talk about, but coming so soon after the Two-Plus-Two meetings that really emphasized economic dimensions, technological dimensions of the competition with China, I just wanted to give you an opportunity to give your assessment. How well do you think we are doing as allies in the arenas of competition that are not directly military, but are very consequential in terms of our security and our interests?

Kunihiko Miyake:
People in my country do not remember COCOM scheme. COCOM is the export control system against the communist countries during the cold war. And I believe that after the cold war is
over, then we switch to Wassenaar arrangement to something similar to COCOM. But basically, it's the same thing in order to deter whatever aggression from the adversaries. Of course, we should be able to militarily deter, but also from the technological point of view, we should be able to control the flow of state of the art important technologies to the other side. We must have forgotten about that for a while, especially the business focus on the mutual economic dependence between China and Japan or China and the United States.

So, some people say, "Well, with this significant economic interdependence, we will have no war." No, you are wrong, you're wrong. We should be able to control our state of the art important technologies, which could be used, which could be damaging to our national security. These are the ideas Shinzo and others started to spread in country again. And finally, fortunately, we have been able to ultimately discuss this issue recently. And now we have an economic Two-Plus-Two with the United States and especially focused on this aspect of security cooperation.

And I think we are in the right direction, but it may take a long time because it's so difficult to a businessman or business circles whose main job is to make money, of course, that's their job to sacrifice some of their profits then work with us for the national security of Japan or the United States. That's not an easy thing for those business people. To maybe understand, it's easier, but to implement, it's more difficult.

H.R. McMaster:

Miyake-san, thank you so much for these insights. Abe-san when he addressed a joint session of Congress, he called our alliance a miracle. I'll tell you, we can't take it for granted, but I do think our alliance is stronger today than it's ever been. And I think that there are a number of reasons for that. Maybe we should send a thank you note to Two-Plus-Two for making it clear how important it is. But also, I do think going back to Ukraine, what we began with, has really opened the eyes of so many of our citizens in both of our countries and opened our eyes to the opportunity of working together to build a better future, to remain free and to preserve or really rebuild peace and connection with Ukraine. I'd like to just offer you a last word, anything you'd like to say to our audience before we call it a close here?

Kunihiko Miyake:

Well, it was a great opportunity to see you and talk to you in person, although virtually. I think our alliance will and can evolve and can do more not only for our two countries, but for the rest of the world, especially in our part of the world in the Pacific. So, I think I'd like to continue discussing these issues with you whenever possible and I hope to see you soon.

H.R. McMaster:

Miyake-san, thank you so much. I've learned so much from you over the years and from The Canon Institute. It's been a real privilege to be with you. Arigato gozaimasu.

Kunihiko Miyake:

Thank you.

H.R. McMaster:
Thank you.