

The Japan-U.S. Alliance Aiming to Build a “New Golden Era” and Its Implications for the Energy Challenge Involved

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On October 28, Prime Minister Takaichi and U.S. President Donald Trump held their first in-person summit meeting. The discussions took place in an extremely friendly and constructive atmosphere, culminating in a mutual agreement to further strengthen Japan-U.S. relations. Prime Minister Takaichi expressed her desire to build a “new golden era” of the Japan-U.S. alliance together with President Trump, who responded by affirming that the alliance would become stronger than ever before. For both leaders, this inaugural face-to-face summit served as a pivotal moment to reaffirm the strategic importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance. It resulted in a mutual commitment to intensify efforts toward further strengthening and deepening the alliance. Moreover, the summit marked a significant advancement in the establishment of personal trust between the two heads of state—an achievement that must be regarded as one of the most consequential outcomes of this diplomatic engagement.

As part of his Asia tour, President Trump, who visited Japan from October 27 to 29, was welcomed by Prime Minister Takaichi at the State Guest House in Moto-Akasaka on the morning of the 28th, where they held their first summit meeting. Following a working lunch, the leaders discussed a wide range of issues, including alliance strengthening, responses to China and North Korea, economic security, and the implementation of tariff agreements. They signed two key documents: one proclaiming the “new golden era” of the Japan-U.S. alliance, and another outlining cooperation on the supply security of critical minerals such as rare earths. Later, the two leaders met with families of abductees and, in an extraordinary gesture, Prime Minister Takaichi accompanied President Trump aboard the presidential helicopter to the U.S. Navy base in Yokosuka. There, aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *George Washington*, they addressed U.S. military personnel, reaffirming the importance of the alliance for stability in the Pacific region. These events collectively demonstrated the building of personal trust between the leaders and underscored the significance of the summit for the future of Japan-U.S. relations.

Prime Minister Takaichi, having assumed office just one week prior, faced her first summit with President Trump—a critical diplomatic engagement aimed at strengthening the bilateral relationship. Despite the short preparation time and demanding schedule, she proactively addressed key issues such as increased defense spending, which President Trump has long emphasized. Her strategic approach, including taking the initiative to explain Japan’s policy direction, reportedly earned President Trump’s understanding. The legacy of former Prime Minister Abe, who had a close personal relationship with President Trump, also played a positive role in fostering trust, given Takaichi’s political alignment with Abe. President Trump is known to value leaders with clear visions, strong will, and decisive leadership—traits that appeared to resonate with Prime Minister Takaichi, contributing to the friendly and constructive nature of the discussions.

For President Trump, the summit held significant political value. Strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance and building rapport with Prime Minister Takaichi laid the groundwork for broader

cooperation across various sectors. Strategically, the summit preceded his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, with the reinforced Japan-U.S. and U.S.-South Korea alliances serving as a backdrop. Domestically, the summit allowed President Trump to highlight Japan's commitment to fulfilling the \$550 billion investment agreement, thereby bolstering his appeal regarding economic growth. Taken together, the summit yielded meaningful outcomes for both leaders.

While the summit produced important achievements, it is essential to build upon these results and deliver tangible outcomes. Maximizing the momentum from this promising start will be crucial.

In evaluating the summit's outcomes, I would like to highlight two key areas related to energy. First, the emphasis on cooperation to ensure the supply security of critical minerals, including rare earths, was particularly noteworthy. As mentioned earlier, the leaders signed a document establishing a bilateral framework for securing these resources. This underscores the strategic importance of the issue, especially for the United States.

As I discussed in my essay "Perspectives on the Global Energy Landscape" (Issue No. 761), my experience participating in U.S. policy discussions has made it clear that the supply security of rare earths is a pressing strategic concern for the United States. In the context of strategic competition with China, rare earths have become a top priority. The U.S. is pursuing comprehensive strategies to address this issue, and Japan's experience in reducing dependence on Chinese rare earths following past export restrictions has attracted significant interest. The prioritization of cooperation in this area during the summit reflects the realities and strategic needs of both countries.

Rare earth elements and other critical minerals are indispensable resources whose demand is certain to expand as the global energy transition progresses. Ensuring their supply security constitutes a vital challenge for both economic security and energy security in the 21st century. The recent bilateral agreement between Japan and the United States places particular emphasis on cooperation in the mining and processing of rare earths, with a notable focus on the supply side. Undoubtedly, expanding supply and promoting diversification of sourcing are of paramount importance, and the significance of Japan-U.S. collaboration in this regard cannot be overstated. However, considering China's formidable cost competitiveness in rare earth production, it is difficult to expect sufficient outcomes from supply-side measures alone. Moreover, an excessive focus on supply-side strategies may inadvertently provoke resource nationalism through intensified competition for resource acquisition. Therefore, it is imperative that Japan and the United States pursue truly comprehensive countermeasures. These should encompass not only supply-side initiatives but also demand-side strategies such as resource conservation, the development of alternative technologies, and recycling. Additionally, strengthening strategic stockpiles and establishing international cooperation frameworks for emergency response are essential components of a robust and resilient approach.

The second point of interest is the summit's focus on economic cooperation, particularly in energy-related investments. Among the various agreements—tariff implementation, rare earth cooperation, shipbuilding, and AI—the potential for energy investment stood out. A "Joint Fact Sheet" listing candidate companies and projects for Japan's \$550 billion investment in the U.S. was released, with energy projects comprising a significant portion. Of the approximately \$390 billion in proposed projects, Japanese companies such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Toshiba, IHI, and Hitachi expressed interest in nuclear energy initiatives, including small modular reactors (SMRs), and in investing in U.S. power infrastructure. Additionally, many companies showed interest in energy development and infrastructure projects to support the growing power demand from AI applications. This indicates a clear Japanese interest in addressing real challenges in the U.S. energy market. While

these are still candidate projects, their future realization will be key. Notably, LNG-related projects—an area of high interest for the U.S.—were not included in the current list but are likely to emerge as important issues going forward. In conclusion, the summit underscored the pivotal role that energy and critical minerals can play in strengthening Japan-U.S. relations. Continued efforts in these areas are highly anticipated.

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