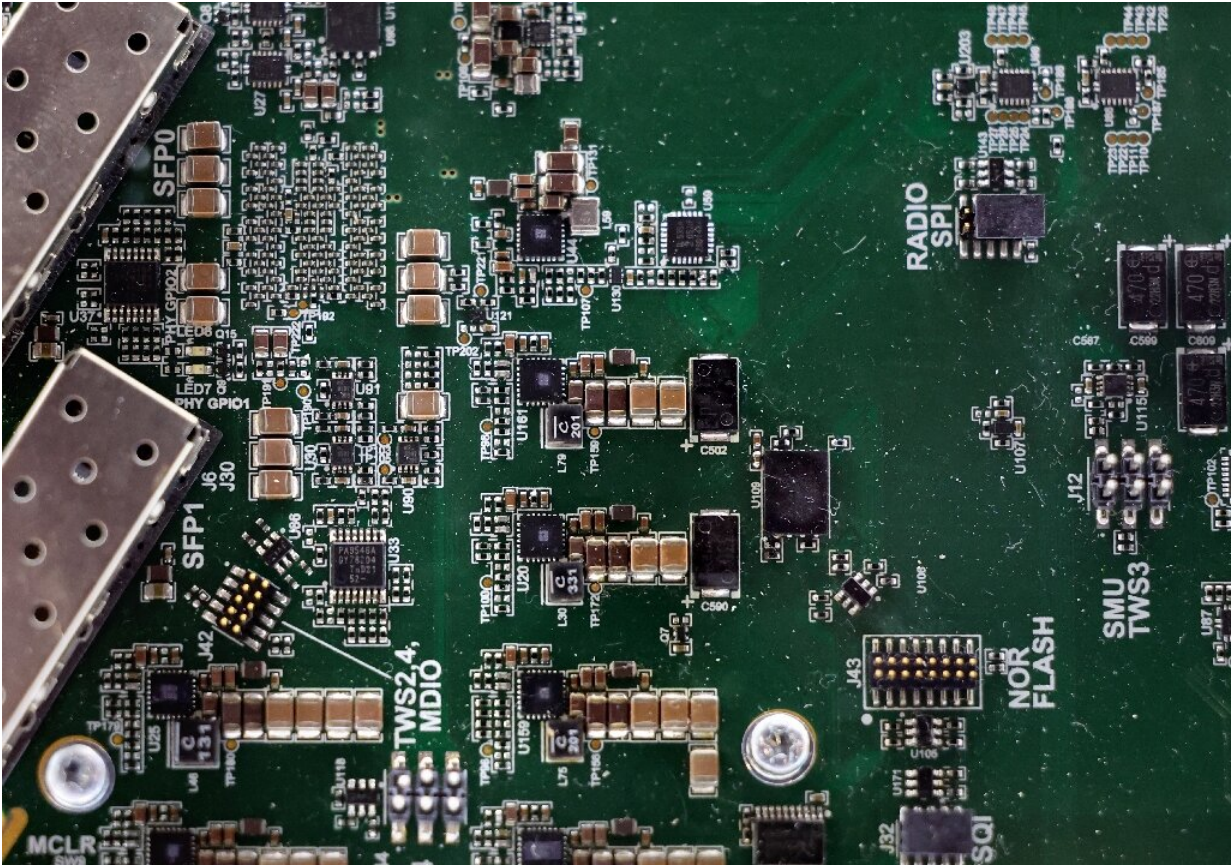


Japan unveils export control plans for chip equipment

March 31 2023, by Kyoko Hasegawa and Hiroshi Hiyama



Tensions have been growing in the global microchip market.

Japan on Friday unveiled planned export controls on 23 items used to make semiconductors, following US pressure for countries to restrict

China's access to the technology.

The move was immediately slammed by Beijing, which warned against measures that "politicize, instrumentalise and weaponise" trade.

It comes as Tokyo confirmed its top diplomat will visit Beijing this weekend, the first Japanese foreign minister to make the trip in more than three years.

As the world's second and third-largest economies, China and Japan are key trading partners, but diplomatic ties have been strained in recent years, with Tokyo wary of Beijing's growing military and economic power.

The two are also divided by their approach to the Ukraine conflict, with Tokyo backing Kyiv, and China seeking closer ties with Russia.

Friday's export announcement came after the Netherlands implemented similar restrictions this month, citing "international and national security".

Western officials, particularly in Washington, have repeatedly raised alarm over the provision of core components in the manufacturing of semiconductors to increasingly adversarial trading partners.

And while the Netherlands did not cite China specifically in announcing its restrictions, Beijing lashed out at the move.

Japan too declined to characterize the rules as targeting any one country, with trade minister Yasutoshi Nishimura saying they were intended to "prevent the military diversion of technologies".

Japan "intends to play a responsible role in the international community"

as a country with advanced memory-chip technology, he added.

Still, Washington has been clear that it wants to see allies join it in limiting Chinese access to the technology.

And in Beijing, foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning criticized Tokyo's decision.

"To politicize, instrumentalise and weaponise trade and technology issues is artificially destabilizing the global production and supply chain," she told reporters.

"With this type of action, they are harming others, but they are also harming themselves at the same time."

'Bullying and hegemony'

Japan's trade ministry will now solicit public opinion on the measures, which are expected to come into force from July.

About 10 major companies, including Tokyo Electron and Nikon, will be affected by the new measures, Jiji Press reported, citing unnamed government sources.

The United States in October announced export measures aimed at curbing China's ability to buy and make advanced chips.

They included restrictions on some chips used in supercomputing as well as stricter requirements on the sale of semiconductor equipment.

At the time, the US Commerce Department said those moves were to prevent "sensitive technologies" from being acquired by China's military, intelligence and security services.

Beijing has sunk billions of dollars into building up its own semiconductor industry over the past decade, and filed a dispute with the World Trade Organization over the US measures.

And it called the Dutch move the result of "bullying and hegemony" by the West.

The chip measures came on the eve of a trip by Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi to Beijing, where he will hold talks with his Chinese counterpart.

Last November, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Chinese President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines of a summit in Bangkok and pledged to continue high-level contact.

And on Friday evening, Tokyo announced work was now complete on establishing a new hotline for senior Japanese and Chinese defense officials, though no date was given for when it will be operational.

But the policy differences between them were laid bare this month when Kishida visited Ukraine to offer support to the country's president as Xi visited Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Kishida has supported Western-led sanctions on Russia over its invasion, and offered Ukraine aid.

The Japanese prime minister has also repeatedly warned that "Ukraine may be the East Asia of tomorrow", echoing growing fears in the region about China's territorial ambitions.

Last year, Kishida's government announced a major security overhaul, including plans to boost defense spending to two percent of GDP, and labeling China its "greatest strategic challenge ever".

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