

Japan's Defense of the Liberal International Order: The "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" from Abe to Kishida

By Yuichi Hosoya

In the Indo-Pacific region, the liberal international order has increasingly come under threat. Multilateral initiatives inclusive of China have attempted to reinforce it, but they have been exposed as "talk shops" deficient in consensus or action-oriented agendas. In this environment over the decade 2012-22, Japan has tried at least three strategies on behalf of this endangered order: 1) U.S.-centered but autonomous in targeting Russia as if its pursuit of China could be deterred; 2) U.S.-centered but more flexible in appealing to China as if its economic interests, including in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), could prevail over its increasingly aggressive (wolf warrior) geopolitics; and 3) U.S.-centered with full strategic support for the existing order, marked by an about-face on its military.

The Ukraine war proved to be the catalyst for realization of the third strategy, although the first strategy had long since failed without being openly abandoned and the second strategy was dying a quiet death when Xi Jinping's planned state visit to Japan failed to materialize in 2020 and again in 2021 not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic but also as a result of cascading demands inside Japan to cancel it in response to China's actions. If prior to 2022 Japan seemed wary about full-fledged commitment to the U.S.-led order, as seen in its response to Russia's 2014 aggression in Ukraine and to China's BRI plans for regionalism, its simultaneous fulsome backing for regionalism exclusive of China and at times in the vanguard ahead of the United States speaks to a different conclusion. The approach of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo had some contradictory features, but it paved the way to the 2022 breakthrough of Prime Minister Kishida Fumio. Tracing the transition, this article clarifies what are being called the "Abe Doctrine" and the "Kishida Doctrine," which viewed separately or together brought to an end the postwar "Yoshida Doctrine."

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Japan's response to the 2022 Ukraine war played a leading role in expanding the focus from Europe to Asia. Whereas the "Abe Doctrine" separated the two expanses, even to the point of divorcing Russia in Asia from Russia in Europe, the "Kishida Doctrine" united these arenas into a common challenge for the liberal international community. Further, it broadened Japan's geopolitical role in Asia, while agreeing with the U.S. that economic security is becoming the centerpiece in the deepening competition. Critical to this shift was the strikingly different response in Japan to Russia's aggression in 2014 and 2022.

The invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 was a great shock to the international community. Japan was no exception. On February 27, Kishida strongly condemned the invasion, saying, "The recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia is an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force. It is an act that undermines the very foundation of the international order. It constitutes a blatant violation of international law. As such, it is unacceptable, and I condemn it in the strongest terms."¹ Kishida has repeatedly stated that the invasion greatly undermines "the very foundation of the international order." Implicitly or explicitly, he keeps drawing a link between what has occurred in Ukraine and what many fear will happen in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly around Taiwan. Thus, in his speech in Washington D.C., on January 13, 2023, Kishida correctly stated that "Japan's participation in the measures against Russia transformed the fight against Russia's aggression against Ukraine from a Trans-Atlantic one to a global one."² He added, "in this sense, it was a consequential decision with significance for the international community in my view." He stresses Japan's role in this transformation.

Japan's response to the invasion in 2022 significantly differed from its rather lukewarm response to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 coupled with Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine that led to internecine warfare. Abe was eager for a rapprochement with Russia to enable Japan to conclude a peace treaty which would settle Japan's territorial dispute over the "Northern Territories." Rather than argue that the liberal international order was now under threat, the Japanese government viewed Russia's move as a European affair divorced not only from Asian geopolitics, but even from Russia's role in Asia. Agreeing half-heartedly to sanctions on Russia as a member of the G7, Japan left the impression it was doing the minimum possible in order to sustain diplomacy. The goal was not merely a peace treaty with Russia resolving the territorial dispute that had lingered since their 1956 diplomatic normalization, but also a bold agreement conducive to the regional order Japan sought in Asia. Abe was determined to forge a regional order, which he began in 2016 to call the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," and he feared that close Sino-Russian

relations would prove detrimental. Thus, to the end of his time in office in 2020, he kept wooing President Vladimir Putin, even as he increasingly prioritized values in pursuit of his Indo-Pacific framework.

To explain the contrast between 2014 and 2022 I first trace the evolution of thinking about the international order over seven decades from Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru to Abe. Then, I analyze factors that arose between 2014 and 2022 affecting Japanese thinking. The next section focuses on the shifts in Japan in 2022-23 linked to thinking about the international order. In the conclusion I summarize what has transpired from the context of Japan's longstanding search for national identity as both a member of the Western community and a leader in the transformation of Asia since the 1950s.

From the Yoshida Doctrine to the Abe Doctrine

Kishida's policy initiatives are being equated with those of only two other postwar prime ministers of Japan, Yoshida Shigeru and Abe himself. Even with Kishida out of the picture, analysts have argued that the critical shift was from the reluctant, reactive power of the "Yoshida Doctrine" to the more proactive contributor to peace and stability affirmed by the "Abe Doctrine."³ The former defined the postwar era, and modifications under such prime ministers as Nakasone Yasuhiro in the 1980s and Koizumi Junichiro in the 2000s never uprooted its essential nature as "non-militarism to guide a nonaggressive, low-cost post-war Japanese security policy" based on the U.S.-Japan alliance diplomacy.⁴ It is widely accepted that this foreign policy doctrine survived until Abe transformed its essence.

Japan aligned with the U.S. and relied on its Seventh Fleet and nuclear umbrella without fully subscribing to U.S. thinking about the liberal international order. It accepted most principles about democracy, free markets, and deterrence of the Soviet Union, but hopes rested on an expanding role for Japan in Asia based on the appeal of its peace-loving, non-nuclear ideals and its tolerance of greater political diversity with less pressure over human rights. Japan would overcome the legacy of its colonialism and win the trust of Asian nations, creating the conditions for a regional sub-order of the international order reliant on U.S. military power but increasingly welcoming of Japan's economic and moral leadership too. In this worldview, Japanese looked ahead to a growing role while setting aside concern for responsibility on geopolitical matters, which were left to U.S. handling.

The challenge of clarifying Japanese leadership in Asia grew much more complicated in the 1990s-2000s. Assumptions about a growing leadership role in Asia confronted the reality of China's pursuit of regional leadership, increasingly

questioning fundamentals of the liberal international order. Caught between Chinese and U.S. leadership claims, Japan increasingly embraced U.S. ones: freedom of navigation, the rule of law, inclusive regional organizations open to the U.S. as well as China. After a spurt of optimism about Japan leading Asia in a tripartite global order with the U.S. and the EU, China's rise and growing assertiveness refocused Japanese thinking on reinforcing the U.S. role in Asia.

Prior to Abe, one final burst of Asian idealism of doubtful compatibility with the U.S.-led international order occurred in 2009-10. Democratic Party of Japan Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio advocated an East Asian community, exclusive of the United States but welcoming to China. The notion that Japan could stand for different values than the U.S. in Asia drew more attention. This occurred against the backdrop of the unprecedented security challenges from China in the East and South China seas and from North Korea, having abandoned the Six-Party Talks. On the eve of Abe's return as prime minister in late 2012, as President Barak Obama was affirming the U.S. role with his "pivot to Asia," Japan lacked clarity on its role in both the international and the regional order.

The "Abe Doctrine" and Factors that Led to Japanese Rethinking

In December 2013 Abe issued Japan's first ever National Security Strategy. It stated that; "surrounded by an increasingly severe security environment and confronted by complex and grave national security challenges, it has become indispensable for Japan to make more proactive efforts in line with the principle of international cooperation."⁵

Around this time, Chinese public vessels frequently came to the Senkaku islands, and presented challenges to Japan's administrative right over these islands. Thus, it was declared in this document that; "Japan will continue to adhere to the course that it has taken to date as a peace-loving nation, and as a major player in world politics and economy, contribute even more proactively in securing peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community, while achieving its own security as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, as a "Proactive Contributor to Peace" based on the principle of international cooperation."⁶

It was necessary for Japan to reassure surrounding countries that Japan remained a peace-loving country, and upheld important historical statements such as the Murayama statement and the Kono Statement. These became the necessary foundation for the transformation of Japan's security policy and the security legislation.⁷ The evolution of Japan's security policy under Abe needed to start with his statement on historical issues, which would reassure both

domestic and international public opinion.⁸ Thus, the Lowy Institute, a leading Australian think tank, responded that “Japan has become the leader of the liberal order in Asia.”⁹ Although South Korea reconsidered its agreement with Abe on the “comfort women” issue lingering from WWII and China refused to let up in its insistence on playing the “history card,” Abe’s moves by the end of 2015 succeeded in removing historical concerns for assessments of Japan’s support for universal values.

The Abe Doctrine put emphasis on value-oriented diplomacy. Ichihara Maiko wrote that; “being aware of the necessity of proactive diplomacy to support the liberal international order, values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law have been brought to the forefront of Japanese diplomacy as ‘universal values’ since the mid-2000s, especially under the Abe administrations.”¹⁰ By defending universal values such as democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights, Japan was playing an important role in consolidating the liberal international order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Abe launched a new foreign policy doctrine at the opening session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) on August 27, 2016, Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategy, or FOIP, which stimulated a broader debate on the future Indo-Pacific regional order.¹¹ He stated that; “What will give stability and prosperity to the world is none other than the enormous liveliness brought forth through the union of two free and open oceans and two continents. Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous.”¹² Abe emphasized on the importance of “the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans” as well as “of Asia and Africa in to a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion.” This important new regional concept of the “Indo-Pacific” embraces two oceans and is supported by the U.S. government, as well as a large part of Japan’s like-minded partners including those in NATO, the EU, and ASEAN.

Domestic and international observers recognized the significance of the evolution of Japan’s policy in defending the liberal international order. At a time of the rise of populism in leading liberal democracies, Yoichi Funabashi and John Ikenberry wrote, “it is unsurprising that the world is turning to Japan to shoulder greater responsibility in shaping the liberal international order.”¹³ This shift was reflected in foreign policy as well. According to Christopher Hughes, “the rise of the ‘Abe Doctrine’ is undoubtedly generating a more proactive Japanese foreign policy.”¹⁴

Perhaps the most globally influential Japanese diplomatic initiative since the establishment of Japan's foreign ministry at the end of the 19th century, FOIP was a refinement of ideas Abe raised earlier. In December 2012, Abe seemed to prefer a more limited grouping than called the "Quad," i.e., quadrilateral security cooperation among the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India. In an article entitled "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," which appeared in Project Syndicate on the day after the start of his second administration,¹⁵ Abe proposed what can be called the FOIP 1.0. It was clear that Abe intended to compete with China with "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond." He wrote, "increasingly, the South China Sea seems set to become a "Lake Beijing," which analysts say will be to China what the Sea of Okhotsk was to Soviet Russia: a sea deep enough for the People's Liberation Army's navy to base their nuclear-powered attack submarines, capable of launching missiles with nuclear warheads. Soon, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy's newly built aircraft carrier will be a common sight—more than sufficient to scare China's neighbours."¹⁶

Abe argued that it was necessary for Japan to form a counterweight to expanding China's military activities, leading him to "envisage a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific. I am prepared to invest, to the greatest possible extent, Japan's capabilities in this security diamond."¹⁷ This became the original conception of the Quad. However, Abe would not use this phrase again in his long second administration. One reason, perhaps, was that a majority of the Southeast Asian countries seemed unwilling to choose either China's camp or the camp of "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," as China had become their biggest trading partner. Japan could not match China in providing economic benefits as the BRI gained traction.

Aware of Southeast Asian state insistence on ASEAN centrality, Abe launched FOIP. This was the time when the British chose to leave the EU in their national referendum of June 23, 2016, and Americans chose Donald Trump as president on November 8, 2016, leaving the liberal international order in flux. "Japan would suffer the greatest of strategic losses" from "the self-destruction of the American-led order," Funabashi and Ikenberry wrote.¹⁸ Abe moved to defend the liberal international order, which had benefited Japan over decades. Abe did not radically increase Japan's defense spending, nor did Japan begin to acquire nuclear weapons. Rather than competing militarily with China, Japan concentrated on enhancing the rule of law in the international order.¹⁹

In National Security Strategy 2023, it was written that; "Japan will continue to faithfully comply with international law as a guarding of the rule of law. In addition, in order to establish the rule of law in the international community,

Japan will participate proactively in international rules-making from the planning stage, so that Japan's principles and positions based on fairness, transparency and reciprocity are duly reflected."²⁰

Japan's broad FOIP objectives foster inclusiveness, in part to balance against China's rising power.²¹ This inclusive approach was essential, as Japan needed to embrace ASEAN, which preferred to avoid the division of the region into two opposing camps. Without ASEAN, it is impossible to connect the Pacific Ocean with the Indian Ocean. With this in mind, Abe declared Japan's willingness to support China's BRI for the first time in his speech on June 5, 2017, saying, "The 'One Belt, One Road' initiative holds the potential to connect East and West as well as the diverse regions found in between."²² Furthermore, he stated that he "would expect that the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative will fully incorporate such a common frame of thinking, and come into harmony with the free and fair Trans Pacific economic zone, and contribute to the peace and prosperity of the region and the world." Therefore, he mentioned, "Japan is ready to extend cooperation from this perspective."²³ Then, at the Japan-China summit on July 8, 2017, Abe and President Xi Jinping agreed that "Japan and China will discuss how to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region and the world, including the One Belt, One Road initiative."²⁴ Thus, Abe sought to coordinate two diplomatic initiatives, namely China's BRI and Japan's FOIP.

From then on, Japan and the U.S. were taking different approaches to China. Trump had become more hostile to Xi's China. In the U.S. National Security Strategy published in December 2017, it was written that "China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity."²⁵ It was also mentioned that "China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests. China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor."²⁶ It was quite unlikely, on the contrary to Japan, that the Trump administration would support China's BRI under the strategic competition between the two giants.

Given Abe's continued wooing of Putin and accommodation of China on the BRI, along with wariness of taking as strong a line as the U.S. on intensified Chinese human rights violations, there was concern that he did not embrace the liberal international order to the same degree as American critics of Trump, who on a bipartisan basis agreed with the need for a tougher posture. As late as 2020, Abe was planning on a state visit by Xi, even as Sino-U.S. relations had sunk further and many in Japan were asking that it be cancelled.

The U.S. response to Japan was positive although the two had somewhat different notions of FOIP. The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy stated, “A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region.”²⁷ With Trump pressing countries in Europe to boost their defense budgets as well as Japan and South Korea for more host-nation support, Japan’s low defense budget drew some concern. Yet, the U.S. security community found much to appreciate in Abe’s policies to reinterpret the Constitution in support of collective defense and to establish a National Security Council. Moreover, despite Trump’s withdrawal from TPP, experts largely welcomed Abe’s success in rallying eleven states behind CPTPP. As Mireya Solis wrote, “The relaunch of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after the American exit from the mega trade deal showcased a very different Japan, willing to step up and bring to fruition delicate negotiations among the remaining members.”²⁸ As for FOIP, the U.S. credited Abe with proposing it, stating “We welcome and support the strong leadership role of our critical ally, Japan.”²⁹ Furthermore, the American FOIP was viewed as almost equivalent to the Quad, which is similar to Abe’s earlier “security diamond” and relied heavily on Japan and its overtures to India. Thus, it was written that “We will seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India” to strengthen the FOIP.

Despairing of Trump’s foreign policy, security experts gave credit to Abe for keeping ideals alive. Uncertain whether Trump would be willing to defend the liberal international order, some saw Japan as leading in defending it. Ikenberry wrote, “if the liberal international order is to survive, leaders and constituencies around the world that still support it will need to step up. Much will rest on the shoulders of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, the only two leaders of consequence left standing who support it.”³⁰

In September 2020, when Abe was replaced by his close political partner, Suga Yoshihide, concerns over the future trajectory of Japan’s foreign policy were raised. Suga clearly stated that “I intend to strategically implement the free and open Indo-Pacific while also building stable relations with neighboring countries, including China and Russia.”³¹ Yet, it was precisely Japan’s policies toward China and Russia in 2020 that raised concern about its commitment to the liberal international order. Suga promoted the Quad together with Biden, joining the two other leaders in a joint statement, “The Spirit of the Quad.” It stated, “Together, we commit to promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond ...We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity”³² One of the biggest legacies of

Suga's foreign policy was his strong will to defend and enhance Abe's foreign policy vision of the FOIP, together with his contribution to advance the cooperation in the Quad framework. On October 4, 2021 Kishida became prime minister as the U.S. began warning that Russia was preparing an all-out invasion of Ukraine. The response in Japan was delayed until war broke out.

The “Kishida Doctrine”

The year 2022 unfolded strikingly differently from Japanese expectations. Abe had set the agenda that was expected to prevail. This included an ever-closer security alliance with the U.S. and further institutionalization of the “FOIP” buttressed by the Quad, but also a cooperative approach to China in what would be the fiftieth anniversary of the 1972 breakthrough normalization and lingering support for the momentum left from Abe's repeated summits with Putin.

Surprises of the sort caused by COVID-19 in 2020-21 or Trump over four years were thought to be a thing of the past. While new challenges to globalization and a deepening confrontation between democratic and authoritarian systems, symbolized by the U.S.-China clash, were occurring, intensified dialogue was foreseen as Xi Jinping sought stability for validation at the fall 20th Party Congress and Biden proceeded more pragmatically than Trump had. As much as Taiwan was a hotspot, it was not an imminent threat to regional stability. This upbeat outlook had no mention of how Russian aggression, Chinese support for Russia, concern over aggression toward Taiwan, and new polarization over North Korea could derail these existing expectations. The “Abe Doctrine” seemed to have survived despite Biden's appeal for certain changes.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine tested Japan's commitment to the international order unlike anything that had proceeded. Four challenges stood out. First, would it react to Russia in lock-step with the U.S. and its European allies? Second, would it recognize the parallels with China's behavior over Taiwan and transform its military posture accordingly? Third, would Japan join in forging a multilateral framework with NATO for resisting both Russia and China? And fourth, given the nature of the China challenge and the thrust of the economic sanctions decoupling from Russia, would Japan prioritize economic security even at the cost of pain facing some of its companies? If, in all these respects, Japan was following the U.S. lead, the question remained what about the “Kishida Doctrine” would be unique in the way Japan backed the liberal international order at a critical turning point.

In responding to Russia, despite some wavering on energy projects in Sakhalin, Japan stood firmly with the West, where some European states also delayed over energy. On Taiwan, Japan played a leading role in drawing parallels and convincing other states that the crisis in Europe and China's support for Russian logic required a response extending to the Indo-Pacific. Kishida's decision to boost defense spending to 2% of GDP and acquire offensive capabilities was a gamechanger. On NATO, Japan in June 2022 joined its meeting for the first time and as a member of the G7 Japan led in linking the trans-Atlantic to the trans-Pacific. Finally, after the October 7 U.S. announcement of export controls limiting China's access to advanced semi-conductor inputs, Japan took quite similar measures.³³

Russia's war in Ukraine aroused alarm about parallels with a possible war launched by China involving Taiwan and was a wake-up call for a new outlook befitting a new era for Japan. This earthshaking geopolitical event not only spelled the death knell of nearly a decade of hopeful diplomacy with Putin, it led to a reassessment of Japan's security posture, its preparedness for war in the Indo-Pacific, and its sense of separation of Europe and Asia.

Throughout the year after the massive invasion, Japanese put the spotlight on how the liberal international order was shaken and what is needed to restore it. For instance, it can be argued that the impact of the Ukraine war was a tectonic shift in world history, deeply impacting the postwar, international order, to which Japan cannot be a bystander.³⁴ This large-scale war among European powers has shaken the post-Cold War belief that such a conflict was impossible in Europe. As a firm supporter of a rules-based international order, Japanese foreign policy insists that Russia's behavior stop, and Japan must join internationally to apply more pressure. If this were not to happen, it would mean Japan would be denying the diplomatic principles it has professed to date.³⁵ Separately, I called Putin's war a "nineteenth century" and Zelensky's war a "twenty-first" century" view of the future international order.³⁶

By the late summer of 2022, Japan's position had been clarified by the Kishida-Biden summit in May, the NATO summit in June, and the Chinese missiles fired into Japan's exclusive economic zone in response to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August. The message from the May 24 summit was Japan and the U.S. must lead, in diplomacy, security, and economics in opposition with China and Russia.³⁷ Just a month later, the Japanese prime minister journeyed to Europe to join the G7 and NATO summits.³⁸ Press coverage recognized the transformative nature of these meetings and of Kishida's responses. Three points were reaffirmed in the media reports. First,

the transformation under way is far-reaching and irreversible, a milestone comparable to the end of the Cold War. In Europe, the war will be long-lasting, and NATO will hold together. Second, Europe and Asia are indivisible, facing shared security challenges and recognizing that they need to face them together. Third, Japan faces unexpected uncertainties over energy ties to Russia and also economic security relations with China. These remain to be resolved to set an agenda for an emerging era.

It should be noted that Japanese companies need to take economic security seriously. An intense debate on it is needed in Japanese society. Southeast Asia is a key to networking for economic interests. Their fear of U.S. abandonment is great, but trust of the U.S. is not strong. Japan's loss of national power makes its existence less noticeable. We are entering an era with a mix of 19th century power politics and 20th century bipolarity. Japan has two missions: first, to strengthen the cohesion of the G7 and NATO, using its greater political stability and taking advantage of its different and more cohesive democracy; and to provide needed outreach to Asia and Africa. To do this, however, requires struggling at home with anti-American, pro-China voices, who would stand by in a "Taiwan contingency" and even let the Senkakus and Okinawa go. Reliance on the U.S. military has led to a spiritual vacuum, which must be addressed.

It is necessary to grasp the changing nature of the Japan-U.S. strategy toward China. Unlike the U.S. conflict with Russia, that with China is a competition over economic and technological power. Kanemaru traces the beginning of economic security thinking in Japan, differentiating knowing, protecting, raising up, and activating. Supply chain fragility in the pandemic and the Trump administration controls on technological outflow to China alerted a METI team to begin to call the alarm and an LDP team to begin to act independently. There was no economic group in the National Security Secretariat then, but a technological innovation advancement office began to meet and set the goals listed above. The defense ministry, METI, and big defense companies lacked an understanding of the problem. In 2022 under a new law a think tank was established to survey technology. As far as protection is concerned, responses to the 1987 Toshiba violation of COCOM regulations set a precedent. New restrictions were put in place under METI on the share of relevant Japanese companies under foreign ownership, meeting resistance in business circles and leading to exceptions.

Given that the Finance Ministry lacked security consciousness, the Kantei took charge. A CFIUS-like committee was established, placed under a new national economic security office. As for raising Japan up, proposals were taken for joint research from academic associations and enterprises, which had long opposed

cooperation on security. In the National Security Secretariat Kitamura Shigeru, a pro in dealing with Chinese, Russian, and North Korean espionage activity, became secretary general as the LDP under Amari Akira provided strong political leadership.

Kitamura Shigeru in *Yomiuri* on September 18 pointed to the importance of new areas linking economics and security, referring to them as gamechangers.³⁹ Advanced technology developed in civilian industries can be converted to military uses. This is leading both China and the U.S. to take steps toward decoupling and raising the need for security clearances in industry. Meanwhile, the *Yomiuri* editorial on the same day, which covered a Japan-U.S. defense ministers' meeting, noted that Japan is facing danger unprecedented since the postwar era. Japan and the U.S. are only beginning joint research on hypersonic weapons that China and North Korea are developing. Until now Japan has relied on the U.S. for attacking forces and concentrated on defense, but U.S. power has relatively declined, and defense alone is insufficient for Japan. The editorial warns that should intelligence leak from the defense ministry and defense industries, trust in Japan would decline.

Kishida at the UN made clear his thinking in opposing China and Russia. He stressed Japan's support for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law and called for the restoration of the international order shaken by Russia and China. He called for clarity that "Ukraine is tomorrow's East Asia" and sharing consciousness of the threats ahead with international society, particularly China's hegemonic behavior. It is advancing in the southern Pacific and the Indian Ocean and has the ambition to annex Taiwan, seen in August in its response to the Pelosi visit there.

On New Year's Day 2023 Kishida described 2022 as a "tumultuous year," citing the contagious omicron variant, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the assassination of former prime minister Abe Shinzo. He added that Japan is "facing the severest security situation" in the post-World War II era, and he projected leadership in rejecting attempts "to change the status quo by force" and responding to Putin's possible use of a tactical nuclear device against Ukraine. Japan's term on the Security Council and the G7 Hiroshima summit offer him opportunities. Revising three defense documents, Japan is poised to respond decisively to security threats.

What is unique about Japan's support for the liberal international order? In Kishida's speech in Washington just after meeting Biden on January 13, he drew attention to two distinct themes: a special role for Japan in the Global South, tempering its support for bipolarity and advocacy of universal values; and renewed advocacy for nuclear disarmament, as would be showcased when he

hosted the G7 in Hiroshima in May. In recognizing the reluctance of about 100 countries, notably in Southeast Asia and India, to join in sanctions against Russia, Japanese argued for assuming a bridge role to reach out to them for restoring the international order. The message conveyed was that on security Japan was sticking as closely as possible with the U.S., while on values and also on economic security, to a degree, Japan would find some space in the Global South to pursue its own interpretation of the liberal order.

Conclusion

When Biden was elected president, the Japanese government was quick to adapt to a new situation. The U.S. became more proactive in defending the liberal international order with like-minded partners such as Japan, and Japan agreed, although a turning point awaited the war in 2022. Four years before, Biden said, “In recent years it has become evident that the consensus upholding this system is facing increasing pressures, from within and from without... It’s imperative that we act urgently to defend the liberal international order.”⁴⁰ When Russia invaded in February 2022, Biden sought a greater commitment from Japan, and Kishida responded, labelling the invasion “an act that undermines the very foundation of the international order.” By doing this, Kishida “transformed the fight against Russia’s aggression against Ukraine from a Trans-Atlantic one to a global one.”⁴¹

Japan is no longer a free rider in the international order without any role to play. The “Abe Doctrine” proved to be a critical transition, making possible Japan’s moves in 2022.

As long as the focus is on Ukraine and possible coercion by China against Taiwan, there is little distance between the Japanese and U.S. conceptions of the liberal order. Yet, the legacy of Japan’s inclusive vision of the international order is not dead, even if it has become less relevant under the current international situation. It applies primarily to the Global South, putting some distance between the Japanese and U.S. interpretations of FOIP and of how to deal with states wary about condemning the Russian aggression or standing up strongly against China’s behavior.

Endnotes

¹ Press Conference by the Prime Minister regarding Japan's Response to the Situation in Ukraine, February 27, 2022, Prime Minister's Office of Japan (PMOJ), https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202202/_00014.html

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³ For example, Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Foreign and Security Policy under the 'Abe Doctrine': New Dynamism or New Dead End?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Joshua W. Walker and Hidetoshi Azuma, "The Rise of the Abe Doctrine," *The National Interest*, February 1, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-rise-the-abe-doctrine-15072>; Daisuke Akimoto, *The Abe Doctrine: Japan's Proactive Pacifism and Security Strategy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

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⁸ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁹ *Asia Power Index 2019* (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2019) p.8.

¹⁰ Maiko Ichihara, "Universality to Plurality? Values in Japanese Foreign Policy," in Yoichi Funabashi and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism: Japan and the World Order* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), p. 145.

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