Diplomatic and Security Practice under Abe Shinzō:

The Case for Realpolitik Japan

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In what ways are Japanese foreign and security policies changing? How far will these changes go? Will they result in a policy posture that breaks from the post-1945 approach as originally designed by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru? This special issue presents six articles that address these questions. They tackle the relationship between recent changes in Japanese domestic policy institutions and Japanese diplomatic and security practice. In this introduction, we outline the significance of the essays' findings and propose a methodological shift in the interpretation of Japanese policy. We make the case that Japan's approach to diplomatic and security affairs under Abe is evidence of the emergence of a 'Realpolitik Japan'. From this perspective, we argue that values and political ideology have translated into practical choices that make the question of the 'break with the post-1945' approach less relevant to understand the significance of political change.

Keywords: Japanese decision-making, Foreign Policy Analysis, International Relations, Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Abe Shinzō

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There is little doubt that Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, along with that of his handpicked diplomatic team, has had ample opportunity to reinvigorate Japanese foreign and security policy. In 2007, shortly before his first mandate ended, he proposed a new Japanese perspective on economic and political development in Asia. Speaking in the Indian Parliament he delineated the wider geographic contours of an embryonic 'Indo-Pacific' framework for the nations inhabiting the two oceans (MOFA 2007). In 2012, shortly after returning to government, he decided to tackle the sensitive matter of security. In an article for the *Project Syndicate* platform he explained − through the efforts of the same authors of the Delhi speech (Interview 2018a) − how Japan was to think in more than just bilateral ties to tackle core issues like freedom of navigation. He envisioned a 'security diamond' of democratic powers, including Japan, India, Australia, and the United States (Abe 2012). At home, Abe had equally busy years. During his first mandate he upgraded the Japan Defence Agency to a fully-fledged Ministry of Defense (JMoD); he later established a National Security Secretariat (NSS) and strengthened the Prime Minister's office powers in ways previously unrivalled. In less than a decade, Abe had planted the seeds abroad and at home – and created a narrative – for Japan 'to be back' with renewed purpose in international politics (Liff 2018a; Shinoda 2018).

Like any narrative with actions in multiple directions, the one of Abe's Japan has solicited a wealth of new work seeking to assess his motivations as much as the significance of his reforms. State actors inside and beyond Asia wanted to understand Japan's direction of travel. Had Abe set in motions new trends? Was he building on a series of processes of change that were already ongoing? Was he simply responding to changing times? Answers to these questions mattered to allies and partners – to understand how far Japan meant business in foreign and security action. They also mattered to Japan's closest neighbors, notably China and South Korea, as they sought to gauge what kind of engagement they could expect from a conservative leader.

While answers to these questions have varied, Abe's image as a nationalist politician has weighted heavily on how the literature engaged with the subject (Kolmas 2018). Some argue the core of his wide-reaching foreign, economic, and security agendas is best comprehended through the Prime Minister's revisionist ideology (Hughes 2015). This certainly resonates with how some experts partly explain, for example, the escalations of tensions with China over outstanding maritime and territorial issues (Hall 2019). It is also true that initial media portrayals of Abe did little to point to the contrary. In 2014, the editorial board at the *New York Times* went as far as presenting Abe as a 'dangerous' political figure (New York Times, 02 March 2014). But as policies were more fully implemented media coverage changed in tone. As a senior diplomat later noted, by 2018 it seemed fairer to suggest that Abe's nationalist posture had in fact aimed at more specifically reviewing Tokyo's status on the world stage (Warren 2018, 7). According to others, however, Abe's revisionist agenda had narrowed down to an attempt to 'shape' how history is understood, in Japan and abroad, to counter progressive views (Kingston 2019). Notwithstanding this, leading constructivist scholars, looking at Abe's impact in Japanese policy-making from a normative perspective, maintain that his political dominance has eroded the country's long-standing security identity as a pacifist actor (Gustafsson et alia 2018).

In part, preferences for specific views in the literature depend on how one assesses the balance between structural and domestic factors in constraining Abe's aspirations of 'breaking away from the post-war regime'. Authors like Thomas Berger have emphasized, for example, that in the 1990s and early 2000s a more pluralist Japan − a state with a multitude of actors that grapple with enduring stagnation − developed a distinctively liberal, if pragmatic and adaptive policy outlook: Japan promoted financial regionalism, opened up its economy to globalization and

engaged in ‘international contributions’ in the security sphere, notably through Peace Keeping Operations and UN-mandated missions (Berger 2007). Authoritative Japanese observers have similarly argued that an adaptive behavior best explains Abe’s policy focus on the defence of the rules-based international order in response to both an assertive China and a disruptive Trump administration (Hosoya 2019). Indeed, under Abe, the adaptive nature of the Japanese government’s behavior would help explain the sidelining of some powerful interest groups (Mulgan 2000) to favor an image of a country strongly supportive of global norms and open economies. Important agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the Japan-EU Economic Partnership and Regional Comprehensive Partnership would suggest as much.

Conversely, other authors have stressed the relevance of domestic politics to make sense of Abe’s Japan. In the mid-1990s, as security issues gained traction in domestic public discourse, political elites started to recognize the need to become proficient in foreign and security matters. In line with scholarship on the effects of the 1994 electoral reform in Japan, Amy Catalinac has found evidence that the introduction of single-seat constituencies forced electoral candidates to brush up their foreign and security policy expertise (Catalinac 2016). Other scholars observe instead that long-term social norms kept constraining Abe and his predecessors’ ambitions to turn Japan into a great power (Soeya et alia 2011; Oros 2017). Seeking to find some convergence in the impact of external and domestic factors on Abe’s foreign and security policy, a prominent *Asahi Shinbun* journalist suggested that Abe’s ‘pragmatic actions’ on the international stage − including the 2015 Japan-South Korea Comfort Women Agreement and the Statement on occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War – have widened the gap between the Prime Minister and the right-wing conservative *Nippon Kaigi* association (Sonoda 2015: 51-3).

Realist scholars have mostly pursued a different line of argument. They sought to prioritize the understanding of the scope of Abe's reforms – rather than his motivations – and came to two different opinions. On the one hand, those investigating domestic reforms have tended to agree that change was not radical. It enhanced the Japanese existing practice to use diplomatic and economic levers to pursue influence and advance national interests. Some authors have indeed remarked how foreign and security policy have gone through a period of 'renaissance' in that security and economic initiatives have been more systematically employed to support diplomacy (Oros 2017; Wallace 2019). Abe's engagement with Russia is a case in point, one that is premised on cool-headed calculations of Russia's shrinking strategic horizons in the near future: according to a high-ranking government official, Tokyo believes that Moscow will soon see the merits of responding positively to Japan's overtures (Interview 2019c). Similarly, Japan's regional economic initiatives provided alternatives to China's indents in a distinctively realist fashion that did not shun engagement with authoritarian or repressive governments alike. These examples strongly suggest that the Abe administration acted on a clear distinction between propping up the *economic* international liberal order, where Japan retained substantial vested interests, and a *political* international liberal order that was more malleable to Japan's strategic interests. Along similar lines, other authors have noted how challenges from North Korea and China have led reforms – especially in the security field – to enhance ties with the United States through a more coherent and invigorated national security apparatus (Liff 2018a). For non US-based scholars, the reforms of the Abe years have been remarkable also because Japanese activism has stretched to new levels of cooperation with NATO, the UK, Australia, India, and France (Patalano 2016; Vosse and Midford 2018; Ishibashi 2018). Yet, as one author put it, such a diversification of ties and initiatives has not dislodged the primacy of the US-Japan alliance (Liff 2019).

Realist authors that have focused on changes in terms of capabilities, however, have expressed more mixed opinions. Some have pointed out that changes in capabilities have empowered Japan with a more maritime-centric military posture to meet alliance management requirements as well as Abe's more ambitious international diplomatic agenda (Patalano 2018). Others see Japanese military reforms as trapped in domestic debates that box Japan in a security posture that remains fundamentally on 'borrowed military power' from the United States (Smith 2019). The latter argument is particularly problematic since, beyond a superficial rhetoric, Abe has not gone nearly far enough to address emerging military challenges – notably from China (Heginbotham and Samuels 2018). In clear contrast, other leading UK-based scholars have come to consider Abe to have introduced a 'doctrine' that has fundamentally altered legal structures and defence posture, planting the military seeds that would see the country tying itself ever close to the United States and its strategy for the region (Hughes 2015; Hughes 2016).

In many respects, Christopher W. Hughes has neatly summarized all the different positions by boiling them down to whether one considers Abe's Japan to continue to follow the trajectory of a 'reluctant' realist state actor, or whether Japan has embarked on a more 'resentful' realist pathway. Those in favor of continuity – albeit more active – in Japanese behavior would easily sit within the 'reluctant' camp, as it was first articulated by longtime leading Japan-hand Michael J. Green (Green 2001). In its latest reincarnation, a 'reluctant' Japan under Abe remains overall comfortable with the US alliance, despite higher costs under President Trump, and has instead chosen to navigate relations with China through a mix of a tailored military pushback and wider international cooperation to maintain the existing regional power balance. For others, including Hughes, Abe's Japan is rather resentfully supporting the existing international US-led security order, driven by the Prime Minister's fears of the ever-growing

Chinese might, the lack of trust towards the United States, and a continuous desire to reaffirm his country on the global stage.

A Practice-Centred View: Abe as a Realpolitik Statesman?

In this special issue, we propose an alternative way to explain Abe's Japan and seek to shift the analytical focus of the debate. Rather than debating how Japan fits a particular realist framework – whether reluctant or resentful – we focus on practice. We turn the debate on its head, proceed from the ground-up, and seek to apply methodologies that more comfortably sit within the realms of Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations to assess how the practice of foreign and security policy has changed under Abe. Given the importance of Japan as an economic and security actor in the contemporary world, our aim is not merely to assess Abe's reforms as an exercise in normative compliance against a self-imposed standard (an anti-militarist security identity) or the specific primacy of a political objective (maintaining the US-Japan alliance). The aim of our special issue is to explain how change is taking place, why it matters, and what one could expect as the Abe years move towards a close. To do so, we set forth a different conceptual framework.

Going back to our opening questions, we argue that, yes, Prime Minister Abe has set in motion changes that have taken Japan towards a different diplomatic and security direction. What we argue, however, is that the bulk of such a change is in *how* Japan pursues its foreign and security policy – the practice of Japanese statecraft. Little indication exists that Japan will be a much more assertive international security player, in the narrow sense of military security. We also agree with the part of the literature arguing that crucial changes in practice built on existing economic and military tools, notably Official Development Assistance and strong maritime

capabilities. Abe's initiatives gave these tools greater focus, sought to fill in some pre-existing gaps – such as the establishment of the amphibious brigade, or the cyber and space components for the JMoD – and reviewed draconian legislative structures that made them less relevant to the contemporary world (Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security 2014, 12-16).

These two points lead to a third, more controversial observation. Abe has been an enterprising prime minister. Yet, his policies – whilst initially very ambitious – have been shaped by the need to respond to external circumstances and have materialized in ways that were more modest than originally assumed. Internationally, from the election of President Trump to the rise of Xi Jinping as a strong and uncontested leader in China, to Kim Jong-Un's choice to empower North Korea with the military capabilities to renegotiate its political space, Abe was dealt a security landscape that required high political adaptability. Domestically, the original recommendations for a reinterpretation of the second clause of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution in a way that would enable Japan to better approach national defence and international security commitments only limitedly informed the security legislations enacted in 2015 (Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security 2014, 22-45; Kitaoka 2015; Hosoya 2019). The history of international politics is full of 'what ifs' but what the essays in this issue clearly indicate is that external and domestic factors matter considerably when examining how policy change occurred under Abe. His own revisionist ideology, therefore, remained a much less influential factor than the literature seems to assume.

How do we, then, explain the link between his personal revisionist views and change in Japanese foreign and security practice? From the perspective of the practice of statecraft, we argue that Abe's Japan has been neither reluctant nor resentful. We argue that Abe's Japan is

an excellent example of what John Bew calls a 'Realpolitik' state actor (Bew 2015). By Bew's own admission, his historical reappraisal of the term Realpolitik and its intellectual development was aimed at engaging how it is used in the Anglo-American political and policy contexts. Yet, Bew's observations on the term's contemporary relevance are particularly useful to set up a conceptual map within which to examine how the practice of statecraft in Japan has changed under Abe. In particular, we see this as a constructive alternative to the predominant normative-centric debate that seeks to assess change in Japanese foreign and defence policy against the implied dichotomy between a (good) pacifist past and an (problematic) assertive present. Similarly, we consider this as an opportunity to escape the temptation of most American literature to assess Japan against the status of the US-Japan alliance. There is more that can be appreciated from the study of Japanese foreign and security practice under Abe than understanding whether Japan is doing too little or too much (but in a not-sufficiently desirable way) to maintain and support Washington's desires for the regional order.

What is then a Realpolitik Japan? The answer to this question requires a brief review of the term. Bew's original contribution to our understanding of the term pertains to his call for a return to the *Foundations of Realpolitik* – a re-appreciation of a work authored by Ludwig von Rochau (Bew 2016, 21-30). According to Bew's contextualization of the utility of the *Foundations* in modern politics, a statesman operating within the realm of Realpolitik would be following three core principles. First, Realpolitik requires statesmen to identify and mould the three key factors as they seek to formulate foreign policy: the centres of power within the state, the socio-economic structures of society, and the country's overall cultural/ideological setting. Realpolitik is therefore a basic 'how to' formula to inform statesmen's approaches to the formulation of foreign and security policy (Bew 2016, 300). Second, in terms of meaning, Realpolitik is not a theology of statecraft – rather, the opposite is true. It is about a statesman's

ability to judge what facts need to be processed to purse a specific action. From this point it unfolds a third observation. Realpolitik is about understanding the specific circumstances in which policy needs to take place in order to act within the realm of political possibility (Bew 2016, 301-302).

Yet, for Rochau, whilst Realpolitik is not a theology of statecraft, it does require statesmen to believe in ideas and values informing and sustaining the international order. For the three principles to work, statesmen need to hold on to a specific set of ideas and principles. In Bew's analysis of Rochau, Realpolitik sits at the intersection of the aspirations of idealism and pragmatism of running state affairs. As Bew aptly puts it, a Realpolitik statesman is a 'liberal mugged by reality' (Bew 2016, 21). From this it unfolds that statesmen operating effectively within the realm of Realpolitik do so because of the beliefs and principles they hold dear about the international system (Bew 2016, 303). These forces propel them to seek change, but change is pursued within the context provided by specific external circumstances and negotiated within the boundaries of what is politically possible.

Upon this basis, we argue that under Abe Japan has witnessed a return to Realpolitik. In this special issue the different contributors – mostly early-career academics based in Europe and Japan experimenting with new source materials and methods – help us understand how Abe the conservative ideologue with a revisionist view of history – should be separated from Abe the Prime Minister of change in Japanese foreign and security practice. The issue examines how original ideas and ambitions about a more active Japan, unshackled by the imperial past and ready to look to the future – as the Prime Minister explained in his August 2015 address on occasion of the end of the Second World War – have had to adapt to the realities of a state with departments of government, close advisors, social, and political parties with diverse

opinions over how Japan should matter internationally. Especially in security and military terms, the narrative of a Japan that is back has been accompanied by a very selective way of contributing to international crises. The case of Japan's withdrawal of military engineers from UNMISS in South Sudan only to continue the dispatch of personnel to the mission HQ is a case in point. Last but not least, the articles in the issue further engage with the wider question of the worldview that informed the Abe years, one predominantly anchored in an idea of the international order as a maritime order, one in which Japan – as a longstanding seafaring nation – has to share the responsibility to support a rule of law that rewards the existing American-led regional system.

The remainder of this introduction explores the three governing concepts that we argue define Abe's Japan Realpolitik approach to foreign and security policy before drawing some conclusions to help set in motion new avenues of research. These concepts are: the *Kantei*'s decision-making system; the reconfiguration of the realm of the 'politically possible'; and Japan's new worldview centred on the Indo-Pacific region.

Re-centralizing Power: Abe's Kantei

Abe's first act of Realpolitik was to consolidate the role of the *Kantei* as the main centre of influence on matters of foreign and security policy. The existent academic literature has questioned the true significance of Japan's diplomatic comeback and of Abe's effective legacy in foreign and security policy. Most scholars highlight the evolutionary nature of Japan's security renaissance (Samuels 2007; Oros 2017; Liff 2018a) and highlight the continuity with earlier initiatives by previous governments, including those under the Democratic Party of Japan (Grønning 2014; Wallace 2019). Policymaking-wise, earlier administrative reforms had

certainly prepared the ground for the rise of Japan's prime ministerial executive – defined as the Prime Minister's Office and the organizational infrastructure within the Cabinet Secretariat and Cabinet Office aimed at assisting the premier (Shinoda 2007 and 2018). And Abe has certainly consolidated and expanded the remit of the prime ministerial executive, or *Kantei*, and centralized power, especially during his second term.

Still, authoritative voices contend that Abe's grip on policy is not as presidential as it meets the eye, instead it rests on 'a system of collective leadership that revolves around the prime minister and his executive' (Mulgan 2018: 94-95). How was the second Abe administration's *Kantei* able to exercise top-down leadership in the face of persistent veto players, some of which had contributed to the downfall of an earlier DPJ government (O' Shea 2014; Zakowski et alia 2018)? Because it overcame the traditional nodes of Japanese power, the so-called 'iron triangle' of a consensus-based policy process: politicians, the business community and bureaucrats (Johnson 1982).

From the perspective of party politics, Chief Cabinet Secretary (CCS) Suga Yoshihide proved a fine operator in managing Abe's grip on the ruling party. Abe's successive victories at the ballot box through media-savvy politics and surprising Diet dissolutions – both matters orchestrated by his CCS – granted the Prime Minister the upper hand over both LDP and Komeito MPs, because their political fortunes increasingly depended on the Cabinet Office's electoral strategies and policy agenda setting. In terms of the business community (and also in connection to the above), Abe's inauguration of generous monetary and fiscal policies cemented his political base and bolstered his wider economic and security agendas. Abe ensured that likeminded policy-makers oversaw his Abenomics' expansive fiscal and monetary initiatives. Asō Tarō was selected to head the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and Kuroda Haruhiko

as Governor to lead the Bank of Japan (Park et alia 2018, 161-75). During the troubled years of Sino-Japanese tensions and global rivalry (Schulze et alia 2019; Rose et alia 2017), Abenomics had the additional advantage to partly insulate Japan's economy from excessive dependency on the Chinese market; this, in turn, reinforced the reputation of *Kantei* as a coordinating body of national power vis-à-vis the business community, which had traditionally pushed for a softer China policy (Li 2016). For instance, Abe's *Kantei* went a step further and doubled overseas financing programs, thus defusing their demand (and MOF's cadres' strong desire) for Japan to become a member of China's Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (Nishimura 2015, 67-70). As Raymond Yamamoto's article demonstrates (this issue), the *Kantei* has towered over development financing decision-making for strategic purposes; Abe loyalists have also submitted a proposal to further strengthen the *Kantei*'s economic remit through an Economic (security) Team within the National Security Secretariat (Sankei Shinbun 2019; Sankei Shinbun 2020).

Perhaps the most consequential of the Abe government's achievements is its attempt to place the *Kantei* at the heart of Japanese policymaking was its ability to hold unprecedented levels of control over the bureaucracy. In particular, building on previous reforms, the Abe government established a Cabinet Personnel Bureau in 2014 that allowed the *Kantei* staff to bypass the authority of ministers, administrative vice-ministers and even director generals in senior personnel management (Chūō Kōron 2018). Prime Minister Abe's political longevity and relative lack of personnel replacements in his official residence empowered the *Kantei* vis-à-vis bureaucrats and their career advancement. According to Makihara Izuru, it was not just Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide and Abe's Chief Executive Secretary Imai Takaya that exerted greater control over bureaucracy. The *Kantei* cadres all the way down to the

Premier's Special Advisors and the Cabinet Secretariat Councillors had a degree of influence within public agencies (Chūō Kōron 2018, 32-33).

The *Kantei*'s remarkable influence over, and reach to, traditional centres of power in Japan enabled the Abe administration to inaugurate a foreign and security policy 'control tower' (*shireitō*) within its remit. The National Security Secretariat – an inter-agency coordinating body designed to favour a 'whole-of-government' approach to crisis management and mid- and long-term strategic planning – defined both the terms of the Kantei's powers (through the National Security Strategy) and ways in which the government would respond (through the National Security Council) (Chijiwa 2015, 12-26; Liff 2018b). Under Abe, Japan has seemingly reached a new formula for coordinating traditional stakeholders in the policy power games, enhancing the ability to channel their energy towards the government's agenda.

Expanding the Realm of the Politically Possible: Converging Foreign and Security Policy

The second governing principle underlying Abe's Japan Realpolitik approach to foreign affairs concerns the unprecedented level of cooperation and coordination between MOFA and JMoD. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that Japan's advancements in this area are comparable to the type of working relationship in countries like the UK and France. Yet, it is true that diplomats and defence officials in Japan have largely overcome the stove piping attitudes that distinguished Japanese foreign and security action in the past. It is perhaps no coincidence that the '2+2' formats of interactions with close partners – from the United States to the UK – have become a standard for Japanese diplomacy.

Upon coming back to power in 2012, Abe reappointed – this time around at the *Kantei* − the same senior bureaucratic taskforce who had initially handled diplomatic affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) under the influential Asō Tarō, who saw eye-to-eye with Abe on this subject. *Kantei* and MOFA senior officials maintained policy objectives that resonated with the defence agenda, They aimed at strengthening the US-Japan alliance, widening Japan's security partnerships and Japan's role as a country that respects and supports the international 'rule of law'. Within this context, Japan's widening ties with India were certainly contextual to China's rise and US desiderata (Pugliese 2017; Vosse and Midford 2018). Yet, former Japanese Ambassador to India and China Tanino Sakutarō suggests that Abe's family history and his romantic idealization of the Subcontinent considerably warmed up Tokyo's overtures, notwithstanding the hard realities of India's limitations (US Embassy in Tokyo 2006). By 2013, the second Abe administration had doubled down its engagement with India with little prompting from either the US or Japan's bureaucratic stakeholders. On the contrary, in late 2015 the *Kantei* had instructed the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to finance the expensive Ahmedabad-Mumbai highspeed railway project on very lenient loan terms, and notwithstanding the high economic risks of said investment (Interview 2018b; Kitaoka 2019). These soft loans amounted to fully one third of Japan's total nominal amount of ODA to India since 1958.

MOFA's increased attention to pursuing foreign policy goals consistent with Abe's security objectives was coupled by and coordinated with the JMoD. This became particularly evident in light of the positive effect created by the Japanese participation to the disaster relief operations in the aftermath of the 2013 disaster in the Philippines, and was further strengthened by the country's more structured naval diplomacy across Southeast Asia (Patalano 2018). In this respect, it is worth noting that key stepping stones in the ability of the JMoD and the Self-

Defense Forces to support Japanese foreign policy were set in motion already under the governments led by the DPJ – preceding Abe's second turn. Nonetheless, the 2014 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) and the relaxation of arms export controls were finalised, and further expanded in the case of export controls, under Abe.

The rapid establishment of a UK and US-style National Security Council and a State Secrecy Law also testify to Japan's progressive security maturation, *but* it was the first Abe administration that planted those very seeds with its 2007 US-Japan agreement on security measures for the protection of classified information (Handa 2014), and the drafting of a National Security Council bill, later ignored by Fukuda Yasuo. Finally, it is indicative of Abe's strategic preferences that his government officials had consistently aimed at new US-Japan security guidelines – aimed at strengthening the alliance as well as Japan's military role; indicative of his *modus operandi*, in 2015 Abe announced new guidelines well ahead of parliamentary deliberations on the connected peace and security legislation, thus effectively presenting Diet Members with a *fait accompli*. The Abe government acted swiftly in that regard, because it acknowledged the interlink between security initiatives, deterrence and Japan's diplomatic initiatives towards China (Pugliese 2017). Under Abe, the realm of the politically possible reached new levels as the two main arms of Japanese diplomatic and security actions were re-engineered to work more closely together and provide more coordinated assessment to operationalize policy ideas.

The Making of a Worldview: The Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The most remarkable factor in Abe's Realpolitik approach is, without question, the vision that his administration has articulated since his return to power in 2012. Formally announced in

2016, Tokyo's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) represents the ultimate evolution of earlier geopolitical initiatives. Abe's national security advisor acknowledges that from a security perspective there is a link between the 2006 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity', the 2012 'Asia's Democratic Security Diamond' and the clunkier-sounding 'Diplomacy that Takes a Panoramic Perspective of the World Map' (Yachi 2013). Whilst FOIP includes elements of geopolitical anxiety vis-à-vis the need to propose alternative visions to China's Belt and Road Initiative, it also clearly represents an attempt to project a specific worldview. Indeed, the wider conceptual frameworks informing its core tenets are the result of three other public speeches delivered by the Prime Minister: the already mentioned 2007 'Confluence of the Two Seas' speech in India, the 2013 planned intervention in Jakarta titled 'The Bounty of the Open Seas', and Abe's keynote at TICAD in 2016, provide the conceptual pillars for FOIP (Mori 2018). Abe and his close political associates are behind its core tenets.

From the perspective of Bew's observations on the power of ideas in Realpolitik, Abe's FOIP is a powerful construct. It sees the future of the world resting on how Africa and Asia combine their forces to shape economic and social developments. FOIP as a worldview clearly shifts the centre of world gravity away from North America and Europe with a project that is first and foremost about the pursuit of economic prosperity. It aims at promoting physical connectivity by means of infrastructural projects – from ports to roads, and railways, people-to-people connectivity, as well as institutional and cross-boundaries links – by facilitating custom controls (Mori 2018). FOIP's second and third pillar unfolds from the first. The second pillar is about shaping – by preventing instability through capacity and capability building, as well as by enhancing responses to crises through more coordinated efforts in disaster relief. The third pillar is about security – intended as the respect of the existing maritime order (including freedom of navigation and over flight) and of 'rule of law', intended as the legal

framework governing both the management of the oceans and disputed unfolding from ill-defined boundaries and sovereign disputes (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2014).

In many respect, Japan's foreign aid program has long been among the world's largest, given its long-standing engagement with developing countries for nation-building and regional stabilization. In fact, Japan's ODA policy and government financing in South-East Asia and other regions testify to Japan's traditional 'comprehensive security' policy (Lam 2012; Pressello 2018; Murashkin 2018; Murashkin 2020). Yet, FOIP's ideational construct propelled and guided changes in a more markedly strategic direction, one that was dictated by the logic of power politics (including the need to provide alternative to Chinese growing economic influence) and the prime minister's belief that Japan needed to empower emerging realities such as India (Abe 2006, 150-161). The power for change of the ideational construct behind FOIP has favoured and has been accompanied by a series of initiatives, from the 2015 revision of Japan's ODA charter to support 'national interests', to the adoption of a Japan-led Partnership in High Quality Infrastructure and a stronger support for the Asian Development Bank (Yoshimatsu 2018). Within this context, Japan's engagement with Sri Lanka provides an excellent window into the multi-faceted opportunities created by the ideas enshrined in FOIP. In 2018, Tokyo offered de-commissioned coast guard patrol vessels and infrastructure assistance for developing the Colombo and Trincomalee ports, in an evident jab to China's appropriation of the Hambantota port and the lingering fear of a potential militarization of the same (Leone 2019, 350). Similar dynamics have been at play throughout the Indo-Pacific region, to the extent that Japan's quiet economic diplomacy outshines its rival's (Wall Street Journal 2019).

FOIP has also enabled Abe's Japan to engage in a realm of international politics that had previously been relatively underexplored and underutilised: strategic communications. Contrary to some more pessimistic views (Aoi 2017), Abe's Japan has been quite successful at understanding the importance of a vision, a set of ideas, to enhance the country's communication power with international and domestic audiences in mind. It also dedicated specific resources to it. For example, the government's budget for information activities more than tripled in 2015 to favour the understanding of Japan through the engagement with a variety of stakeholders, including the recent establishment of a Japan Chair at the Hudson Institute, strategically assigned to US President Donald Trump's former National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster (MOFA 2019a). The appeal of FOIP's ideals provides a tangible measure of Japan's successes: its positive, prosperity-focused narrative and geographic contextualisation have gained currency among research specialists, journalists, and policymakers alike. Even within the United States government, the notion of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific – albeit conceptually different in content – is enshrined in the new National Security Strategy and new documents by the Department of Defense and of State as a result of continuous exchanges with Japanese counterparts (Interview 2019a; Interview 2019b). In connection to that, Abe holds the world record for countries visited by a sitting head of government (MOFA 2020). In FOIP, Abe's Japan had the ideas of a regional order that enabled policy to produce effect.

The Special Issue's Articles

How does the idea of a Realpolitik Japan under Abe translate into policy practice? This section summarizes the articles' content and highlights their stance in the lively debates surrounding Japan's security comeback. Raymond Yamamoto sheds light on the evolution of Japan's ODA policymaking into a *Kantei*-led top-down process centred on the Abe administration's twin

goals of balancing China and propping up Japan's infrastructure exports. These goals are enshrined in the National Security and Revitalization Strategies, both from 2013. According to Yamamoto, the second Abe administration benefitted from earlier administrative reforms and changes in informal practices, such as Koizumi's politicized personnel policies, but he credits Abe's team with the strategic turn of Japan's government financing. Momentum in this direction had started with a Yachi-led MOFA's 2005 decision to terminate ODA to China (Drifte 2006), the passage of a new Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) law in late 2006, and the use of ODA as part of Japan's strategic engagement in Southeast Asia and beyond under the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and, later, its Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision.

Similarly, the second Abe administration's relaxation of Japan's strict export control regime targets interlinked economic and strategic goals. According to Alexandra Sakaki and Sebastian Maslow's detailed study, Tokyo aims at joint development and big-ticket sales of defence equipment to cement security cooperation with like-minded parties, such as Australia and India, and develop its indigenous military industry. Their article underlines the evolutionary qualities of the Abe administration's reforms, but its expansions are noteworthy. While the Noda government issued a set of comprehensive exemptions to the quasi-total ban on arms exports, the 2014 guidelines fully reversed course. Moreover, the Abe government has made the new export control regime ancillary to Japan's national security strategy. Finally, the Abe administration ventured in institution building, with the establishment of new agencies concerned with oversight, procurement and coordination with foreign partners, such as the JMoD's Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Agency, and the promotion of defence technology research in public universities. Yet, the two authors argue that a deep antimilitarist ethos prevent horizontally integrated *keiretsu*, such as the Mitsubishi Group, from proactive

overseas expansion of their military industries, lest these incur in widespread public opprobrium, thus staining their brand.

Matsuoka Misato's article looks at the empowerment of the *Kantei*-led policymaking process and at one of the key policymakers under both Abe administrations, Kitaoka Shin'ichi, a diplomatic historian and long-time policy advisor who currently serves as JICA's President. Embodying Abe's Japan's rich diplomatic and defence agenda, Kitaoka has chaired a variety of advisory bodies which were responsible for overhauling Japan's security regime. Under Kitaoka's watch, Japan endowed itself with the right to collective self-defence, a state secrecy law, the above-mentioned new arms exports control regulations, and its first-ever National Security Strategy. Yet, no study has ever shed a comprehensive light on the actual role of Kitaoka and the advisory bodies he chaired. The author demonstrates how informal political actors have shaped Japanese diplomacy through prime ministerial advisory bodies in formulating important security reforms and, as a function of Abe's presidential style of foreign policymaking, they have gained substantial political weight, compared to past practice (Hattori 2018). The article confutes the widespread misconception that advisory bodies function as rubberstamp councils composed of 'embedded scholars' (*goyō gakusha*). In fact, Kitaoka and his activities embody Japan's transformation into a *Kantei*-centred strategic actor, where key personalities do shape elected politicians' visions; for instance, Kitaoka's Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century successfully tamed Abe's statement commemorating the end of World War II (Reynolds 2015).

Matsuda Takuya instead tries to square the circle between Japan's China-specific realism and its long-standing preoccupation with the preservation of regional maritime commons. It does so by showing that Japan's security policy is best described as a maritime realist one, which

rests on and ultimately complements US-led command of the seas to provide common public goods, such as security and regional maritime governance. Noticeably, Matsuda highlights the long shadow of the 1990s, when calls for an 'international contribution' shaped domestic debates in favour of Japan's military 'normalization'; these narratives are evident in the 2013 National Security Strategy (NSS) and its call for Japan's 'proactive contribution to peace'. The meshing of liberal internationalism with geopolitical balance-of-power calculations constitutes the kernel of Japan's post-Cold War maritime 'realism'. Matsuda's arguments fit nicely with Abe's foreign policy team's penchants for naval strategist Alfred T. Mahan's thinking and, at the same time, the *longue durée* of a post-war maritime centric strategy that caters to Japan's trading and energy needs (Kōsaka 2008). Interestingly, Matsuda's evolutionary angle on Japan's security renaissance complements Matsuoka's article: Kitaoka was *the* earliest proponent of Japan as a 'normal nation' in 1993 and the leading intellectual force behind the 2013 NSS. In a sense, then, Abe's blueprint for a strong Japan (Maslow 2015) is an offshoot of Ozawa's Blueprint for a New Japan (1993).

Simon Schwenke explores the changing power-balance in Japan's civil-military relations. In fact, the close involvement of politicians and uniformed officials in contemporary national security decision-making has been at the expenses of bureaucrats, the traditional gatekeepers of civilian control in post-war Japan. According to him: 'Japan Self-Defense Forces cadres are now incorporated in the wider institutional setting of national security, enjoying clarified rules on their role within the political setting and have thus gained more official influence.' Schwenke makes an important contribution, arguing that the institutional change in favour of political control has been prompted by a deteriorating external security environment in the mid-2000s. His second image reversed take on civil-military relations is based on a vast trove of primary sources, including elite interviews. At the same time, careful readers will notice that

the Asō (2008-09) and Abe administrations qualify as intervening variables in explaining the dismantlement of the remnants of bureaucratic control, such as the defence councillor system within the Japan Defense Agency and its successor, the JMoD. Away from arguments suggesting relative continuity in Japan's security trajectory, Schwenke points at the stalemate of reforms in civil-military relations under the DPJ, notwithstanding the party's interest in political control (Zakowski 2015).

On the contrary, Eitan Oren and Matthew Brummer question the very 'objectivity' of Japan's dire security surroundings by adopting a second image approach. Their article studies the effects of a more centralized decision-making process on the threat assessments produced by Japan's leading security and diplomatic agencies. Through careful cross-referencing and content analysis of primary sources published between 2007 and 2018, they find that, under the second Abe administration, official threat assessments have both converged and ratcheted up. According to them, the *Kantei* has 'led' this harmonization process. Variance and fluctuation in threat assessments between 2013 and 2018 prove that the government-sanctioned notion of a 'more severe international environment' must not be taken at face-value but rather be unpacked, not only in the contemporary context but throughout Japan's post-War history (Oren and Brummer 2020). In turn, its narratives should be understood as variables dependent on the rise of Abe's prime ministerial executive and his administration's political goals: the revision of the anti-militarist constitution and a peace treaty with Russia.

Conclusions - Abe Shinzō: The Ideologue Mugged by Reality?

In this introduction, we have sought to offer the context and a new conceptual framework within which to appreciate the contributions to this special issue. The changes explored in this issue all indicate that under Abe the practice of foreign and security policy have entered a new

phase. Contrary to mainstream views in the literature, we argue that the significance of Abe's changes are not in the ability to tell us whether Japan will be more militarily active in the future to support American military actions, or more dependent on the United States to deal with regional security. Both areas will require further research, particularly in regards to Japan's ability to widen its military behaviour beyond the realm of signalling and into more clearly articulated forms of deterrence and coercion. Certainly, the worldview embedded into the FOIP initiative leaves the scope for this to happen, but there is little evidence from the articles in this issue of the likelihood for this to happen soon. Focusing on the question of whether Japanese foreign and security policy has shifted away from the post-1945 approach may not be particularly helpful in fully appreciating *how* Japanese practice is changing.

This brings to another important issue. Japanese resistance to, and willingness to find alternatives for, the use of military force are not dead. They have changed in practice as Prime Minister Abe sought to change how Japan acts internationally. In this regard, we argued that Abe's Japan is neither reluctant to engage in foreign affairs and security matters by deploying a wider array of tools – including military assets – as it has proven to be in the past. Nor we agree that Abe's Japan is resentfully seeking to protract a status quo in the absence of better alternative and growing challenges. Rather, we believe that a shift in the framework of analysis is needed, and that framework should focus on assessing Japanese practices beyond the current artificial normative constructs. For this reason, we have drawn on a framework used to assess Realpolitik in foreign and security policy and we have shown how through this framework Abe's Japan is a Realpolitik state actor. We argued that three core constructs make Japan a Realpolitik actor. First, under Abe has re-centred its ability to coordinate the sources of Japanese political power around the *Kantei*. This, in turn, has empowered its policy action to be delivered in a coordinated fashion by institutions like MOFA and JMoD that can work

together in ways without precedent, paving the way for the ability for Japan to use military as a tool of statecraft. The second construct pertains, therefore, to how Abe's policy action has changed the frameworks within which the realm of the politically possible exists in Japan. The third construct concerns the realm of ideas. Here we challenge the notion of the impact of revisionism in diplomatic and security practice, commonly being charged of the negative character argued in the literature. Whilst the geopolitics of East Asia, shaped by a fast rising, and assertive, China and a more volatile United States, have required Abe to be strategic about policy. Yet, his personal views as a conservative politician have not prevented the emergence of a positive worldview. Insofar as it has been developed, FOIP presents a coherent and positive aspirational view of a world order centred on the Indo-Pacific space, especially evident in the Japanese reading of FOIP. Paraphrasing Bew's view of Rochau, it may very well seem to be appropriate to suggest therefore that in a Realpolitik Japan, Abe's success is to have become an ideologue mugged by reality.

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