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Securitization and Climate Change
by Sitong Lin

**Shinzo Abe's Politics in Japan:
Characteristics and Implications**
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WORLD NEWS

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The Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited the island of Taiwan for the first time in 25 years. Although the US State Department maintains that this visit is not contrary to the “One China” policy, the Chinese Foreign Ministry reacted strongly to the visit in question. The Chinese military has conducted numerous exercises around the island to impose a “physical blockade” on the island. The Beijing administration announced that the “One China” policy will continue to be defended, and military options are on the table. The Beijing administration, which has been processing Pelosi's trip to Taiwan, summoned the US Ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns, to the State Department. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Shi Feng “strongly” condemned the visit during the meeting, according to the official Chinese news agency Shinhua.



Within the scope of the normalization process that has started between Turkey and Israel, the two countries announced that they have decided to appoint mutual ambassadors. The foreign ministers of the two countries simultaneously stressed in a statement that “the normalization process has now reached a new dimension.” Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu announced that the normalization process with Israel will not have an impact on the Palestinian issue, and support for Palestine will continue.



Queen Elizabeth II, the longest reigning queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Nations, passed away on September 8, 2022. II. Elizabeth became the queen of 7 countries at her coronation in 1953. In total, the Queen has become the head of state of 32 countries during her reign. After the Queen's death, her 73-year-old son Charles took the throne and became the King of England.



The Pristina administration announced at the beginning of August that people entering Kosovo will have to carry temporary documents instead of Serbian IDs during their stay in the country. The government also reported that about 50 thousand Serb minorities with vehicle license plates issued by Serbia will have to replace their license plates with those issued by Kosovo within two months.

Kosovo police have announced that they have been forced to close border crossings due to violent attacks on teams and people. The NATO Kosovo Force (KFor) announced that the situation in the northern regions of the country is “tense” and that it is “ready to intervene if stability is endangered”. The government of Kosovo announced that it had postponed the implementation of the resolution for a month after consultations with Western countries.



The United Nations (UN) announced that the number of people facing hunger worldwide has increased by 46 million in the last year to 828 million. Considering that about 8 billion people live in the world, it has been revealed that one out of every 10 people is in danger of hunger. According to the report, the number of people suffering from hunger has increased by 150 million since the COVID-19 pandemic, and "The world is gradually moving away from the goal of ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030." approximately 45 million children under the age of 5 are exposed to extreme malnutrition, the report says, and 149 million children face the problem of growth retardation due to malnutrition.



A part of the Crimea / Kerch Bridge, which is Putin's proud monument and for the construction of which billions of dollars were spent, was blown up by sabotage by Ukraine. It is known that this bridge has a very high symbolic and logistical importance for Putin and Russia. This attack, which caused a major blow to the morale and motivation of the Russian army, again raised the issue of how qualified the Russian air defense systems are.

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Geopolitical Influence of Italy on the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road"

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Italy is the only G7 country to participate in China's Belt and Road Initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative offers tremendous opportunities for international economic cooperation, and new international relations featuring peaceful coexistence, harmonious tolerance and win-win cooperation. The Belt is short for "Silk Road Economic Belt", and the Road is short for "21st Century Maritime Silk Road". And the Belt and Road Initiative has drawn inspiration from western geopolitical theories, improving the traditional power theory and geopolitical landscape of Eurasia to build the new silk road. Now, Italy is becoming the new entry market between China and European countries. And the entry of Italy into the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is considered the first and true recognition by the western countries. The partnership established between China and Italy could take advantage of the potential benefits for Italian ports.

China could be studied for its vast size, economical rapid expansion, regional significance and political system. This approach brings to mind the dimension of complexity and makes the reflection on the different categories of cultural geography, the size of which exceeds the realities of the European nation-states inherited from history. The external projection of China towards areas providing materials and markets to be conquered on a world scale (Gavinelli, 2014). China is appearing in the world as a new emerging power.

Throughout history, The Silk Road was not only a trading network but also a cultural road, civilization and people-to-people exchange. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road also shoulders a dual responsibility of promoting international economic, and trade cooperation and promoting cultural exchanges in countries along the Belt and Road Initiative. In the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008, the European economy has continued to decline, and it would be difficult for the European economy to recover only by relying on the domestic market. Nowadays, the economy in the European continent is improving faster. A growing economy means growing wealth and income for European people, a better trade environment and a market to drive industrialization.

International cooperation and partnership in economy and trade are crucial for the economic recovery in Europe, especially with China. The 21st

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Century Maritime Silk Road is to build a community of economic and trade cooperation and exchange between Asia and Europe. As the end point of the ancient Silk Road, Italy not only can but should play a key role in the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. And Italy is one of the Group of Seven(G7) countries and also the first country to sign a joint memorandum of understanding for the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative. Former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi (ruling time from 2014 to 2016) strongly endorsed the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, and at the Asia-Europe Meeting Summit organized by him, he made a statement about the common development of European countries and Asian countries, including China. In March 2019, China and the Italian government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Jointly Promoting the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (PRC, 2021).

The Belt and Road Initiative is a global initiative proposed by China, with the interconnection of countries along the route. The goal is to build free and equal development and cooperation among countries, with main connotations of policy exchange, transactions, and people-to-people connectivity. It takes into account the international considerations of the continents of Asia and Africa, covering more than 60 countries and more than 4 billion people in the world. The geopolitical and economic theories here mainly refer to the political and economic game through the change of the spatial situation. The proposal of One Belt & One Road not only plays an important role in China's development but also has different effects on other countries in the world. The countries participating in BRI have an important close relationship (Xi Jinping, 2018).

Ever since the implementation of the BRI, which was first put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2013, and then gradually evolved from theory into action, the subject has increasingly become the focus of research by think tanks around the world. China emphasises the accessibility of some provinces to adapt the infrastructure, and opening up an increasing number of ports to European countries. China's "One Belt, One Road" strategy provides China with an opportunity for trans-Eurasia cultural exchange, connecting Asia, Europe and Africa. This is a theory based on the characteristics of China's geographical location at the eastern end of the Eurasian continent and the combination of land and sea and makes its geopolitical implications.

Alfred Thayer Mahan contented that naval supremacy could be exercised by transnational consortiums acting in defence of a multinational system of free trade (Rhodes, 2020). The previous classical geopolitical theory was mainly about the hegemony among regional power. The level of scientific and military development, emphasizes how a country can gain geopolitical development and gain advantages in national competitions. Western marine geopolitical thought focuses on the world, and the research methods of holistic thinking and comprehensive analysis have great reference significance. The "One Belt, One Road" gives the Eurasian continent a new

geographical perspective of harmonious cooperation. China needs to inherit the ancient but develop modern Chinese national maritime geopolitical thinking, criticize and reconstruct Western maritime geopolitical thinking, and form a new national maritime geopolitical thinking based on a community of shared future for mankind, to guide the national maritime geopolitical practice and contribute to China's peace the rise provides the support (Pengfei, 2021). A geopolitical theory of openness and inclusiveness, a governance system to regional development.

China is deemed to have a potentially hybrid geopolitical character. The BRI focus on the relaunch of both a land-based and a sea route with Europe appears to be the key element to justify an implicit correspondence of the Chinese project with an amphibious idea of the Rimland (Marconi, 2021). The ancient Silk Road, in its land or sea routes, goods and people have circulated for centuries, today seems to be experiencing a new revitalization and greater expansion thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative through the Chinese and other countries' coastal cities (Gavinelli, 2018). And Italy had a strong Roman Empire in its history, which once flourished in the three continents of Europe, Asia, Africa. The Silk Road directly connected Chang'an and Rome and built a major trade channel between the Han Dynasty and the Roman Empire.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the European countries have been in a state of division in the Middle Ages for a long time. This Italian Renaissance movement gradually removed European countries from the shadow of the Middle Ages and pushed a new stage of modern science and social democracy. The current economic and social development of Italy is obviously lacking in the European developed countries, while the construction of the economic belt along the Silk Road has provided a new development opportunity for this ancient civilization. As a country at the end of the ancient Silk Road, if we can make good use of the opportunity of the Silk Road Economic Belt and actively promote the economic, trade and cultural exchanges and cooperation between Europe and Asia, the Italian national economy will keep in a period of revitalization. Unlike the Renaissance period in European history, the BRI will focus on economic revival.

Italy boasts a mature manufacturing industry with world-leading technology. Foreign trade is currently the main support for its national economy. Italy has the world's largest international brand for individual consumers, and also has a high reputation among domestic consumers. Its world-leading mechanical and electronic equipment technology is very important. China's industrial upgrading has great positive significance. The Italian port of Trieste is the most important cargo port in Italy, with a total of 62.68 million tons of cargo per year (Arnone&Sicomo,2019). The port of Genoa, another historic port of Italy, ranks second among Italy's 15 largest ports, with 54.26 million tons of cargo passed through in 2018. With a floor space of 700 square meters and a depth of 500 square meters, it is the largest port in Italy (We Build Value, 2019). The port of Genoa is the

second-largest port on the Mediterranean coast after Marseille, and the port of Trieste in Italy is an important connection point for the Central and Eastern European markets.

The port of Trieste in the development of China's Belt and Road Initiative can provide more opportunities for Chinese products to enter European markets, as well as improve the infrastructure between China and western countries to facilitate transportation. The Italian port is back in action, and the port of Trieste will not only serve as a destination on the Belt and Road Maritime Silk Road but also as a hub in the Mediterranean area. China Maritime Logistics COSCO SHIPPING acquired a 67% stake in Piraeus Port for 368.5 million euros (Xinhuanet, 2016), which fully proves China's commitment to strengthening sea routes and relying on Southern Europe.

Italy offers new areas to attract the Chinese market. Italy occupies an important geopolitical position in the European Mediterranean region. The Mediterranean region today is a "geopolitical paradox" (MED, 2017) not only distributed but also interrelated between regions. On the one hand, the hegemonic rivalry is the centre of ideological and conservative confrontation. On the other hand, is the node connecting the economy, energy and infrastructure among Europe, Africa and Asia. In recent decades, with the development of sea power, the concept of the Mediterranean has gradually changed. New Mediterranean spaces are emerging with new political influence. Today's Mediterranean region is the centre of multiple power, a new global centre. So Italy gained new meaning as a platform for global connections. With the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative between Italy and China, the Mediterranean region has become an important hub in terms of transport and logistics networks.

Infrastructure investments related to the Maritime Silk Road have undoubtedly improved connectivity between Europe and Asia. Therefore, the Maritime Silk Road project can expand trade in these regions by reducing costs, and expanding foreign investment and connectivity. From 2013 to 2018, China invested more than \$90 billion in countries that have signed the initiative, including Egypt's Suez Canal, the largest container port in the Mediterranean - Greece's Piraeus, ports in Spain and Italy. Meanwhile, the annual volume of China-Europe freight trains has increased from 80 to more than 6,000 during the same period (Xinhua Finance Agency, 2018).

In 2019, while the new Genoa-Savona port system is poised to act as a link with Northern Europe and Trieste as a link with Eastern European countries, Venice remains Europe's natural gateway to the East, with an ancient port of 1200 Years of history connected to the surrounding developed modern railway network and entrepreneurial hub, enabling complementary and mutually beneficial transactions with Chinese counterparts. Faced with the EU's reluctance to show a coherent plan, Italy, with its unique capabilities in different sectors, will have to deal with

governments like Beijing, where the Chinese government is accustomed to five-year plans and ten-year visions.

To achieve coordination, stability, and continuity, the Italian government attaches great importance to that could potentially change the landscape of globalization and engage institutional interlocutors, port authorities, and business organizations to commit to regional development in the medium- and long-term. China is Italy's fourth largest trading partner, Asia's largest trading partner, and Italy is China's fourth largest trading partner in the EU. According to China Customs statistics, in 2020, the bilateral trade volume between China and Italy was 55.19 billion US dollars, an increase of 0.4%; among which, China's exports to Italy were 32.94 billion US dollars, a decrease of 1.7%; China's imports from Italy were 22.25 billion US dollars, increased of 3.8% (MOFCOM Guide, 2022). And The Belt and Road Initiative offer China a valuable opportunity to set norms for the international economic and trade order.

Now, the port has become one of the essential elements of this initiative, enhancing local competitiveness by making ports more efficient, flexible, and productive (IMD, 2012), which could stimulate consumer demand from Northern Europe and transform it into a multi-modal transport hub. China and Italy are located at the eastern and western ends of the Eurasian continent respectively, and Italy's contribution to the Belt and Road is not only a testament to China's growing influence as well as a new dawn of the new era of bilateral relationships between China and Italy. References

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Securitization and Climate Change

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After having been widely conceptualized as a security concern, climate change is being recently questioned about whether it is or even should be a security issue (Von Lucke et al., 2014). This paper argues that the answer to this question depends on how states frame or understand the climate change issue and implement corresponding policies that lead to complex consequences. In the case of climate change, this paper believes concluding the yes or no simplifies the states and institutions' evolving and contested framing process.

Securitization is a transforming process where an issue is dramatized through speech acts, and finally becomes a prioritized security topic to legitimize certain actions (Peters, 2018). In other words, whether an issue is a security issue depends on how states frame and define it. Otherwise, climate change will just be a worthen governing entity in normal politics (Corry, 2012). Then, this paper wants to clarify two dimensions of framing climate security discourses. On the one hand, there are two logics of securitization. First, threat-based securitization considers the issue as the direct cause of harm (Corry, 2012). Its corresponding policies call for defence against the threat through exceptional measures, such as militarization and adaptive measures (Von Lucke et al., 2014). Second, the risk logic believes the issue is a possible condition of harm, meaning the issue is located in the future and cannot be eliminated (Corry, 2012). Compared with threats' logic, the riskification removes the immediacy and friend-enemy thinking in policy design, and requests to enhance resilience and construct precautionary measures in managing the long-term impacts, such as increased cooperation and governance (Corry, 2012). On the other hand, there are two climate security discourses based on different objects. First, environmental conflict focuses on the potential conflicts over resources, which requires interventions to ensure the stability of states (Detraz & Betsill, 2009). This discourse emphasizes a sense of urgency to construct short-term adaptation strategies and prioritizes the state's security over human populations (Detraz & Betsill, 2009). Second, environmental security considers a wide range of threats and vulnerabilities of climate change that negatively affect human populations (Detraz & Betsill, 2009). The focuses of this discourse include both long-term and short-term strategies with various actors for combating climate change (Detraz & Betsill, 2009). These two logics and two discourses construct the framework for states to define climate change as a specific type of security issue that requests different policies and generates various influences.

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In practice, states can integrate or intertwine different dimensions or discourses in constructing a particular frame of climate change. For example, the Chinese government uses human rights concerns to frame climate change as an external and existential threat (Trombetta, 2019). Moreover, the framing process of climate change is a gradual process, which means the interpretations of climate change are evolving and being contested within and across states (Peters, 2018). For example, the European Union (EU) experienced changes from constructing climate change as an environmental issue in the 1980s to risk in the mid-1990s, and finally to a global threat after 2001 (Dupont, 2019). Given this evolving process of securitization, this paper believes that deciding whether states should frame climate change as a security issue depends on a holistic analysis of the limitations and advantages of securitization. For now, almost all discourses come with their own problems but also benefits (Von Lucke et al., 2014).

On the one hand, different securitizations suffer criticisms about their scope of policy options, performative effects, and even underlying logic. First, environmental conflict discourse may generate counterproductive effects in facilitating global response to climate change by narrowing policy options and shifting focus. For example, a discursive shift toward an environmental conflict perspective in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) will result in narrow policy options that centralize the solutions in states' military apparatus, and marginalize other human security issues or optional mitigation strategies (Detraz & Betsill, 2009). Also, introducing this new discourse has already created Global South and North tensions that may constrain the UNSC's ability in climate governance (Detraz & Betsill, 2009). For instance, Egypt and India argue that framing an environmental conflict discourse will make the Northern states shift the focus from controlling greenhouse gas toward addressing potential climate-related conflicts through military strategies, especially in the poor Global South states (Detraz & Betsill, 2009). Second, threat-based securitization comes with exceptional measures that may ignore social inequality and implemented issues. For example, constructing climate change as a threat legitimizes India to concentrate decision-making power at the highest political level while ignoring the asymmetrical energy consumption between the poor and rich populations (Sahu, 2019). Besides these disadvantages of exceptional measures, the underlying logic of friend-enemy thinking is problematic in the context of climate change, since there is not an external aggressor that requires defending against others like war, but an internal danger against humans (Corry, 2012). Hence, such a defending logic may not transform into an opportunity to reduce future violence through adaptive measures and benefit people (Corry, 2012). Third, constructing a risk-based securitization on climate change can also raise disagreement in evaluating effects and determining policy measures. On the one hand, it is hard to reach an agreement on to what extent a tolerable level is enough for all states (Von Lucke et al., 2014). The acceptable level for some states may still threaten the survival of small island states (Von Lucke et al., 2014). On the other hand, compared with urgent and observable measures from

threat-based discourse, riskification may lead to a permanent and infinitive status that raises the difficulties of monitoring and implementing measures in the long term (Von Lucke et al., 2014).

Despite these criticisms, it is unfair to deny the benefits of securitization that give reasons for states to securitize climate change. First, because of employing environmental conflict thinking in constructing climate change in the security sector with exceptional actions, the US think tank and politicians can separate this narrative from traditional frames, such as left-wing environmentalist framing, which helps them to overcome the political division in Congress and finally mobilize adaptive measures (Diez et al., 2016, p.61). This case shows that securitization can forge political coalitions among actors with different positions, and transform disagreements into real actions. Second, the EU provides a successful example of collective securitization through recursive interactions in the framing process and adopting measures, which persuades domestic and international audiences, especially fossil fuel states, to accept global climate securitization and take action (Dupont, 2019). These two successful examples show that securitization enables states to establish domestic and international collaboration in addressing climate change issues.

In conclusion, the point of whether climate change is a security issue depends on how states frame it. As for which type of security issue the climate change is, it depends on whether states frame on a threat- or risk-based logic, and which climate security discourses are chosen by states. Despite the criticisms of the underlying logic, policy options and implementation, securitization enables states to build effective coalitions domestically and internationally in addressing climate change concerns. In this way, whether states should securitize climate change must be based on a holistic analysis of the limitations and advantages. However, the framing process is always evolving and contested, meaning it is still too early to conclude whether climate change is or should be a security issue permanently.

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Introduction

On 8 July 2022, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (1954-2022) was shot-killed by a gunman while giving a speech in support of a candidate for the House of Councilors election in Nara prefecture, Japan. This incident was an exceptional event in terms of security in Japan and gave a big shock to the Japanese people. An article appeared that commented on this event on the same ground as the assassination cases in the United States, such as John F. Kennedy (JFK) case in 1963 (Lane, 2022). Certainly, there are many puzzling points in this assassination case but limited information on the event can be available at this stage and nobody identifies the whole story.

In any case, Abe, who served as the longest-serving prime minister in postwar Japan, has passed away. No Japanese prime minister is as divided in opinion as Abe. Because Abe's politics had diverse aspects that seemed to be positive and negative, and thus Japan's national opinion has been divided. Abe's negative aspect can be assumed to include political methods that had not been seen in Japan's politics (Yakushiji, 2020). This commentary summarizes some of Abe's political characteristics based on domestic and foreign materials on Abe and discusses the implications of his sudden death in Japan.

Characteristics of Abe's politics

(1) Hereditary politics and family business

In Japan, politicians are often a group of people who ascended office through hereditary succession, but some are ex-bureaucrats, representatives of trade unions or some industry groups, celebrities (in entertainment, sports, etc.), and ex. local parliament members (Scartozzi, 2017). Hereditary succession is a system that places the highest priority on blood ties and does not necessarily emphasize the abilities of politicians. In hereditary succession, politicians can inherit the support groups and supporters of the single-seat constituency system. In general, this method brings the interest of maintaining vested interests for both supporters and politicians, but it creates a weak point that prevents new entrants from politicians and prevents progress in reform.

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Abe was a typical hereditary succession politician. The father of Abe was former Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe (1924-1991), his grandfather was former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi (1896-1987), and his great-uncle was former Prime Minister Eisaku Sato (1901-1975). It is said that Abe most respected his grandfather Nobusuke Kishi, who was a pro-U.S. politician in postwar Japan (Johnson 2000), through Abe's mother and Kishi's daughter Yoko's orientation (Abe 2022). Abe's profession was part of a family business, but he was capable. Abe was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1993. After serving as deputy chief cabinet secretary, secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and chief cabinet secretary, Abe served as prime minister from 2006 to 2007 and from 2012 to 2020 for eight years and eight months (a total of 3,188 days).

(2) Power of Control

Abe had institutional power of control over the parties concerned in his politics.

Politicians

Abe was so strong that he won six national elections as president of the LDP. Through his election victory, he secured a firm position in the LDP. Abe was called "Abe the strongest." Abe's politics were said to be characterized by his friends' cabinet. Because Abe appointed his friendly politicians to be ministers in his cabinet. In contrast, Abe tended to treat politicians he didn't like as cold as possible. Abe tended to shy away from people who disagreed with him and avoid discussions. Consequently, LDP politicians have come to agree with Abe's views and refrain from openly opposing him. This tendency to divide has taken the same attitude not only toward politicians but also to the people. This sounds like Donald Trump's political approach. In fact, Abe had a close personal relationship with Trump.

State institutions

A distinctive feature of Abe's politics was the appointment of his supporters to heads of major state institutions, some of which required the consent of the National Diet. The state institutions are the Bank of Japan, Cabinet Legislation Bureau, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Japan Broadcasting Corporation, etc. (Kamikawa, 2018). The arbitrariness of his personnel appointment was often criticized by the opposition and mass media, but he took advantage of the power of the coalition-ruling parties, which held a majority in the National Diet, to force his way. Consequently, major state institutions might have lost neutrality.

National bureaucrats

Abe was powerful to control national bureaucrats. This is due to a change in the personnel system for national bureaucrats. The cabinet of Japan has collectively administered executive personnel affairs of each ministry and

agency through the Cabinet Personnel Management Agency since the 2014 Abe administration. With this system, each ministry or public agency is under the control of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister can behave like a President (Toda, 2015; Kamikawa, 2018). Consequently, national bureaucrats began to read between the lines, interpreting laws in favour of Abe, and even falsifying official documents. Some issues were argued in the National Diet. Abe's politics was led by Prime Minister's Office, namely Abe and his close staff, and the LDP must follow his decisions. Therefore, Komeito, one of the leading coalition parties, has the power to influence Abe outside the LDP.

Mass media and public opinion

The mass media and public opinion were divided between those who supported Abe and those who criticized him. Abe's supporters are conservative, but some of them have nationalistic ideas and are called "*net-uyoku*" (nationalist supporters in SNS). Abe's cabinet office controlled public opinion by using mass media and journalists who supported Abe.

(3) Monetary, fiscal, and economic policy

Abe promoted so-called "Abenomics," which comprise the three arrows of "bold monetary policy," "flexible fiscal policy," and "economic growth strategy to stimulate private investment." In Abe's second office, the Bank of Japan changed its policy to quantitative easing with a 2% inflation target as a countermeasure against deflation, and this policy is still being maintained even in the current era of inflation. Apart from the real economy, stock prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange remained high, giving the impression that the Japanese economy was doing well. Abe's economic policy relied on neo-liberalism although he himself had a conservative moral and ethical mind.

The analysis based on the December 2014 national poll was as follows. (a) The individual evaluation that had the strongest correlation with the overall evaluation was the economic stimulus evaluation. (b) Gender was a social attribute variable for an overall evaluation, and males were a factor that enhances evaluation. (c) The recognition of the economic situation of the country stipulated the evaluation of the Abe administration rather than the recognition of the economic situation itself (Ida, 2020). Experts however criticized Abenomics for not having reached the goals after years.

(4) Diplomacy and national security

Diplomacy and national security are two essential agendas for Abe's politics. Shinichi Kitaoka (2021) notes "three particularly significant achievements by the Abe administration in the fields of diplomacy and [national] security, which are: (i) the 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security (MOFA, 2015); (ii) Prime Minister Abe's statement marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2015); and (iii) his 2016 initiative for pursuing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific ("FOIP,"

MOFA, 2022).” Abe, known by world political leaders, could make dialogues with foreign leaders through his words. This was rare for Japanese politicians to do so. Abe respected universal values such as the rule of law, democracy, and human rights and frequently expressed these values in his speech. As for national security, Abe had a strong wish to amend the constitution for Japan to have military forces for effective defence, keeping strong ties with the U.S. For this purpose, he paved the way to take necessary steps such that Article 9 of the constitution has been reinterpreted to allow for collective self-defence but had not reached the goal.

Political Implications of Abe's Sudden Death

As reviewed above, Abe was a powerful politician who tactfully took leadership in his prime minister's office and was influential with the LDP politicians and the people even after he left office. What political implications of Abe's sudden death can be expected?

First, Abe has no children, and Abe's spouse Akie announced no possibility to run for the national election at Yamaguchi prefecture. Abe's relative may succeed in the lawmaker position under Abe's mother Yoko's initiative.

Second, the LDP comprises several groups and Abe's group was conservative and the biggest in scale. It is unclear who will take over Abe's position in this group. Abe's followers are suffering from pressures caused by political issues. Namely, one is the issue related to the former Unification Church that supported many LDP politicians in elections while making anti-social activities, and the other is the bribery suspect case related to the Tokyo Olympics/Paralympics 2020. Both issues were discovered soon after Abe was gone.

Third, the vacuum of the presence of Abe may make Japan's political powerless powerful and change the balance of politics in Japan (Sneider, 2022). As social environments surrounding Japan become severer in the interior, diplomacy, and national security, it is apparent that Japan needs a capable political leader. Abe was sometimes criticized for his political methods, but he was capable to behave as the national leader, involving his team and advisors, and making dialogues with foreign leaders to determine the way. Therefore, it can be said that Japan will suffer from the vacuum of political leadership for the time being.

Conclusion

This commentary reviewed former prime minister Shinzo Abe's characteristics of politics based on materials on Abe and discussed the implications of his sudden death in Japan. Abe was a typical hereditary succession politician but was capable of tactfully taking leadership in his prime minister's office in the interior, diplomacy, and national security. Particularly, Abe's three achievements in diplomacy and national security were worth remembering. However, the opposition, part of the mass media

and the people criticized him because he did not respect constitutionalism that much and behaved like a President. Two political issues are ongoing after he was gone, which will make the voice of criticism bigger to the LDP. The political implication of Abe's sudden death is political turbulence caused by uncertainty as to "who will take over Abe's political position." If this is not clarified, Japan will suffer from instability in politics. If a gunman (and his possible supporters, just in case) should have attempted such political turbulence, this can be assumed to be a terrorist attack to damage Japanese politics.

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The Future of Asia

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Why did we not all see this coming? It is perhaps the most repeatedly asked question in apropos to the Covid-19 pandemic. This question carries substantial merit considering the many devastating global challenges surprising us in the past decade. These unanticipated developments shocked the world. Governments are particularly fearful of events requiring fast-moving decisions and policies sans the knowledge of its consequences- "They will lose public support if things go wrong." A paradigm shifts inwards towards the domestic level of governance, thus retreating from global institutional cooperation, appears to be the spontaneous response. The inability to anticipate and respond to international events, therefore subsequently, contributes to the debilitating principles of global institutional governance.

Anterior to the pandemic outbreak in 2020, nations across the Asia-Pacific were confronted by numerous democratic challenges. Continued political fragility, recurrence of military interventions in politics, violent conflicts, intensifying autocratization, the rise of populist narratives, spiralling ethnic nationalism, democratic backsliding, fading of checks and balances, and the spread of disinformation is, is wholly challenging the Asia-Pacific (Seah et al., 2021). States such as Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines witnessed austere crackdowns on critics, free speech, and political opposition. Myanmar returned under the military junta, the people of Thailand held pro-democratic protests, and Duterte granted himself 'thirty special powers' temporarily to manage the Covid-19 crisis. Such clampdowns, including dissent and press freedoms prevalent in defacto democracies like the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia and Malaysia are resumptions of democratic backsliding over the last few years (Croissant, 2019: 3). The surge in authoritarian governance model, especially in the past decade, has posed a phenomenal threat to US national interests. Furthermore, newer democracies in the Asia-Pacific have endured political coercion, corruption, violation of human rights, and deterioration in civil liberties and political institutions (Brands, 2018: 63). These growing trends, along with the assertive rise in the Chinese regional sphere of influence, undermine the progression made by the US in promoting sovereignty, freedom of navigation, and upholding of liberal-democratic institutional world order. The outbreak of Covid-19 worsens the foregoing democratic backsliding with institutions incapable of coping with pressures presented by the pandemic. Ethnic minorities such as Rohingya in Myanmar and Bangladesh, migrant communities in smaller states such as Laos,

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Cambodia, and East Timor, and attitudes of xenophobia, anti-Asian hate crimes, and scapegoating worldwide further destabilized the overall social order, leaving scope for greater public unrest if left unaddressed (Ding and Kananack, 2021). This is, furthermore, exacerbated by malignant actors such as China, aiming at reviving its civilizational history with an underpinning motivation towards regional hegemony.

What is "The New Normal"?

"The New Normal" of the post-pandemic world is predicated on significant socio-economic challenges with rising inequality, poverty, and unemployment (Connell and Campbell, 2021; 518). The Asia-Pacific region faces a slowdown in economic activities, thus deepening its vulnerabilities to political instability.

These testing times call for unprecedented policies on stimulus and relief packages, therefore offering the nations of the Asia-Pacific under its regional institutional frameworks, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Council (APEC), to engage, coordinate, and cooperate on initiatives towards regional integration, identity, and common development for all (He and Feng, 2020: 152).

However, dialogue does not denote cooperation, and cooperation is not coordination; hence, to overcome any constraints, institutional grouping should be necessarily built on economic resilience indicative of growth in regional economic infrastructure. It is crucial to boost international network connectivity and growth opportunity- yet, in inclusive terms.

With the intensifying rivalry between Beijing and Washington in their backyard, the nations of the Asia-Pacific are left with little choices in manoeuvring strategies fitting their national interests. By resisting US pressures to distance themselves from China, the Southeast Asian nations are indicating the need to engage the major powers constructively. The ongoing technological war against Huawei has created strategic divisions in ASEAN. On the one hand, Vietnam opposes Huawei due to rising scepticism, and on the contrary, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Philippines are installing and strengthening Huawei 5G in their domestic telecommunications networks. However, US treaty allies in the region fear their technological decisions in accepting Huawei will restrict sharing of intelligence sharing, thus creating a further strategic dilemma in the region (Acharya, 2021).

In the light of failing structural conditions, it seems only natural for smaller and middle power to reinforce their balancing strategies- economically, military, and politically- mainly with the ruling elites preoccupied with problems of legitimacy and governance at home. These political elites wrestle with the neighbourhood's post-pandemic recovery and political stability, with daunting economic and strategic uncertainties, thus necessitating a wide range of partnerships- near and far (Ullah and Ferdous, 2022: 110).

The unprecedented flux in the region's strategic environment has significant implications for regional integration and cooperation. The Asia-Pacific states intend to highlight their strategic balancing through neutrality, hedging and constructive engagement, by simultaneously broadening multi-track diplomacy with multi-layered alignments with numerous agencies. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN-plus continue to present themselves as indispensable to promote converged strategic hedging, scilicet, pursuing bilateral, multilateral, and multilateral efforts on the chessboard of geostrategic competition of- "Low Politics," including supply chains, trade production, cooperation on public health and infrastructural developments; and, "High Politics," implying defence partnerships and military modernization agreements. Nevertheless, strategic hedging is not a desired choice for the competing powers, considering its riskification, it is, still presented as the second-best mechanism for all the players in the region, as it provides these agencies with space, platform, and channels for pragmatic, cooperative yet, cautious partnerships (Kuik, 2022).

Competing Hegemons of the New International Order

It would mean something with the dreadful crisis were a one-off. At the same time, unfortunately, the tragedy of the Asia-Pacific order is motivated by aggressive ethno-nationalistic sentiments directing the uncomfortable truth- The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) intends an assertive revisionist revival of the ancient Chinese civilization. The CCP shares diversely different norms and interests compared to the larger international community, into which it has so momentarily integrated its foreign policy measures. In its best interests, China frequently engages with autocratic leaders of Russia, North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and many more, serving Xi's economic, political and authoritarian interests (Jain and Lee, 2021). Close and dependent ties with China secured strong support from Cambodia as Prime Minister Hun Sen specially visited China in support of handling the pandemic. Revered and cherished friendships between authoritarian Duterte and Xi- "I highly cherish the friendship and good relations with President Xi Jinping." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022) evidently, underscores democratic backsliding in a US ally nation. Historically, there are several instances in history exposing us to the miscalculations by the US- towards integrating and reforming the Chinese political system with behaviour and politics that is acceptable to the West. On the contrary, Chinese politics in the Xi Jinping Administration has distinctly moved from integration into the western-liberal order towards concentrating their efforts on perfecting the surveillance system, regulated by "market totalitarianism." Thus, the competing hegemons present the post-pandemic world with an appalling dilemma of global and regional integration minus solidarity (Bougon, 2018).

The past years and the challenging pandemic have exposed fault lines in the America-led World Order, thus, indicating a decline in Pax-Americana.

Trump's hostilities with trade, attack on NATO allies, withdrawal from crucial international agreements such as the trans-pacific partnership (TPP), Iran nuclear deal, Paris climate accords, resentment toward autocratic regimes, and such on, has concomitantly forged the decline in a liberal, international, rules-based order (Ikenberry, 2018). 'With foes like that, who needs enemies?'- resonates with democracies all over the world rallying for an expansion of G7 to include South Korea, Australia, and India in Democracy 10 (D10), concerting coordinated retort to Beijing's rising autocratic sphere of influence (Brattberg and Judah, 2020).

For the American leaders to harness domestic public support for a revival of Pax-Americana, will require a formula created to generate prosperity for all. The absence of certainty in American foreign policy has directed open questions to the post-pandemic US. Pressures from within and threats from outside are, in unison, the decline of the Pax- American global order.

Finally, yes, we will endure and emerge out of the crisis looming in the world today. Regardless, envisaging a post-pandemic "New Normal" is an overwhelmingly complex task as the world continues to see recurrent waves of tests. Lacking discernment by staring into the dark perhaps offers us some vantage point at what is likely to shape the post-pandemic order. Despite the continual endurance of the pandemic, many questions on the regional security complex, nature of governance, diplomacy and conflicts remain unanswered. The safe prediction in the Asia-Pacific, then and now, is that the region is the locus of global political-economic and military power arrangements- and will continue to remain so in the coming years.

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