

Revision of Japan's Foreign Policy After Donald Trump's Electoral Victory

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Abstract

The article analyzes the process of modification of Japan's foreign policy after Donald Trump's election as US president. As short- and middle-range aims of Japan's diplomatic strategy were outlined with expectation of victory of Hillary Clinton, Tokyo was forced to abruptly change its policy. Relying on the neoclassical realist theory, the article examines the complex interaction between the external factors, such as security threats from North Korea or China, and domestic factors both in Japan and the US, that is personal, institutional, societal and economic determinants. It is argued that while it was strategic convergence between Tokyo and Washington that enabled relatively smooth cooperation between Prime Minister Abe and President Trump, internal factors, such as right-wing credentials of both decision makers, distorted and to some extent facilitated this process.

Keywords: Japan, foreign policy, Donald Trump, Japan–US relations.

Introduction

The aim of the article is to analyze the process of adaptation of Japan's foreign policy after election of Donald Trump as US president. Due to the importance of the US as the main ally and trade partner of Japan, presidential elections in this country have frequently exerted influence not only on relations between Tokyo and Washington, but also on wider initiatives of Japan on the international scene. Because short- and middle-term aims of Japan's foreign policy were formulated with expectation of victory of Hillary Clinton, the surprising result of election compelled Tokyo to implement abrupt changes in the diplomatic line. They concerned particularly the plans of economic liberalization through accession to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), but also to some extent the problem of nuclear armaments of North Korea, relations with Russia and China, or the question of the status of American military bases in Japan. The article examines how Prime Minister Abe Shinzō established contact with the president-elect as well as how he tried to persuade Trump to mitigate the difference of interests in the spheres of security policy and economy.

The analysis relies on the neoclassical realist interpretation of foreign policy making. As stressed by Gideon Rose (158), the structure of the international system delineates the limits of rational decisions by statespersons, but "the translation of capabilities into national behavior is often rough and capricious over the short and medium term." The article examines the complex interaction between the external stimuli, such as security threats from North Korea or China, and domestic factors both in Japan and the US, that is personal, institutional, societal and economic determinants. It is argued that while it was strategic convergence between Tokyo and Washington that enabled relatively smooth cooperation between Prime Minister Abe and Donald Trump, internal factors, such as right-wing credentials of both decision makers, distorted and to some extent facilitated this process.

Japan's policy towards the US at the end of the Obama administration

After Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) return to power in December 2012, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō put much effort into restoring cordial relations with the US, which had been wavered under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government. In 2009 Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, who ousted the LDP from power, announced his intention to renegotiate the conditions of relocation of the US military base Futenma. According to the agreement from 2006, Futenma was to be moved from the city of Nago to the Henoko coast in the northern part of

Okinawa.¹ As Hatoyama had promised during electoral campaign that he would force the Obama administration to relocate this controversial base outside of the island, he felt pressure from the public to try to persuade Washington to concession on this matter. Eventually, Americans remained unyielding and in May 2010 Hatoyama had to agree to the previous conditions. However, the eight months of difficult negotiations contributed to the weakening of mutual trust between both allies. Apart from the Futenma issue, Washington felt suspicious about Hatoyama's plans to create East Asian Community and his statements that Japan should not be overly reliant on the US. All these factors contributed to creation of a cool atmosphere in Japan–US relations under the Hatoyama government. Although Prime Ministers Kan Naoto (2010–2011) and Noda Yoshihiko (2011–2012) managed to “normalize” bilateral contacts, Washington remained less confident in the DPJ's than LDP's eagerness to promote mutual alliance. Moreover, disorder during the Fukushima crisis in March 2011 made the Obama administration believe that Japanese authorities were hiding from the US crucial information on the scale of the nuclear disaster that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake.² As a result, strengthening the alliance with Washington became a priority for the LDP after electoral victory.

What is important, Prime Minister Abe perceived policy towards the US as a part of a wider strategy of containing the rising Chinese power in East Asia. In 2010 and 2012 Tokyo became involved in two intense diplomatic crises with Beijing over the territorial dispute in the East China Sea.³ Abe used this opportunity to decisively criticize the DPJ for being excessively soft towards China as well as for alienating Japan from its only ally, the US. As soon as he returned to power, he started promoting institutionalization of the network of US alliances in the Asia-Pacific. In December 2012 he announced the concept of a geopolitical “Asia's democratic security diamond” composed of Japan, India, Australia, and the US state of Hawaii. According to Abe, these four actors were predestined to protect the maritime commons between the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific against China's growing ambitions of regional hegemony (Abe).

¹ As Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, situated in the middle of the city, constitutes a constant nuisance for local inhabitants. The negotiations on its relocation started after an incident of rape of a 12-year old Japanese committed by two US servicemen in 1995.

² On March 11, 2011, Japan was hit by a large-scale earthquake and a tsunami that caused massive damage in the Tōhoku region, including radioactive leakage in the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The Japanese government was overwhelmed with the emergency situation, which led to organizational chaos in countering the crisis. See: Zakowski, 140–153.

³ In September 2010 a Chinese trawler collided near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with a Japanese Coast Guard patrol vessel. In order to force Japan to release the fishing boat's captain, China resorted to many controversial measures, such as stopping export of rare earth metals. In September 2012, in turn, the Noda administration nationalized three islands of the disputed archipelago, which provoked massive anti-Japanese demonstrations in China.

In order to demonstrate that Japan was ready to assume greater responsibility for maintaining regional stability, Abe implemented profound changes in security policy. In December 2013 he announced the National Security Strategy that introduced the concept of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” (*sekkyokuteki heiwashugi*). The new strategy was based on the plan to enhance Japan’s deterrence capabilities, strengthen alliance with the US, and promote such values as freedom of the seas (Cabinet Secretariat). In July 2014, in turn, the cabinet issued a revolutionary decision that changed interpretation of the Constitution to allow participation in collective self-defense initiatives. Moreover, in April 2015 the new regulation was reflected in the Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation which not only made the alliance more equal, but also lifted geographical limitation that had been included in the guidelines from 1997 (Ministry of Defense). All these decisions were fully consistent with the “Pivot to Asia” strategy that had been announced by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in October 2011. After all, the Obama administration’s East Asia policy put emphasis on such elements vital for Abe as adapting alliances to the changing international environment, enhancing the defense capabilities of regional allies, or protecting freedom of navigation (Clinton).

While the LDP administration’s security policy was in line with the US grand strategy, Abe failed to establish a close relationship with President Obama. After assuming office, Abe wanted to choose the US as the first target of his visit abroad in order to deliver a speech in the Congress. However, due to problems with adjusting dates, the American side refused, and instead in January 2013 Abe was forced to pay a visit to Southeast Asian countries. What further exacerbated trust between Abe and Obama was the fact that when in August 2013 the Bashar al-Assad regime used chemical weapon during civil war in Syria, the Japanese government refused to support American military intervention without sound proofs of al-Assad’s responsibility. Moreover, in December 2013 Washington used exceptionally strong words of “disappointment” to condemn Abe’s visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo that commemorates Japanese war dead, including class-A war criminals who were executed in 1948 (Yamaguchi, *Sōri*, 189–214).

It took long time for Abe to approach Obama personally. To that end, the Japanese prime minister had to partly sacrifice his own nationalist convictions. Most importantly, despite his previous opposition against the Kōno Statement and the Murayama Statement, after assuming power he abandoned the plan of retracting both documents. The former was an explicit apology for forceful recruitment of sexual slaves (so-called “comfort women”) before 1945 by the Japanese Imperial Army, issued by Chief Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yōhei in 1993. In 2014 the Abe cabinet examined the decision-making process on the drafting of the statement, but eventually Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide confirmed that Japan upheld and did not intend to revise the document. The latter were apologies addressed to all victims of Japanese territorial expansionism, offered by the Socialist Prime

Minister Murayama Tomiichi in 1995. In August 2015 Abe issued a new statement that contained, although in an indirect form, all key expressions from the Murayama Statement, such as “aggression,” “apology” and “colonial rule.” Perhaps thanks to this accommodative posture on history issues, Abe was eventually allowed to deliver a speech in the US Congress in April 2015, and he even managed to persuade President Obama to pay a historic visit to Hiroshima in May 2016.

Abe invested much effort also in establishing personal connection with Hillary Clinton who was considered as the strongest candidate in American presidential race. For the Japanese government, Clinton, as the person behind such initiatives as “Pivot to Asia”, seemed to guarantee stability in bilateral relations. During his visit to the US in September 2016, Abe personally met with Hillary Clinton, while the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) managed to arrange a meeting only with one of Donald Trump's associates, future Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. Until the presidential election day, MOFA bureaucrats were convinced that Trump would lose, so they neglected building personal ties with his camp. For that reason, immediately after the surprising result of election on November 8, 2016, Abe ordered his entourage to arrange a meeting with the president-elect (Yamaguchi, *Antō*, 37–50).

In order to establish initial contact with Donald Trump, Abe relied on assistance from two subordinates – Ambassador to the US Sasae Ken'ichirō and Prime Minister's Special Advisor in Charge of Foreign Affairs Kawai Katsuyuki. Sasae was one of few MOFA bureaucrats who put some effort into approaching Trump's entourage, especially his daughter Ivanka Trump and her husband Jared Kushner, during the electoral campaign. It is through this connection that Sasae managed to persuade Trump to meet with Abe immediately after the election. Kawai, in turn, was sent by Abe to Washington to prepare the ground for the upcoming visit. In order to gain information about Trump, Kawai met with 19 officials and experts from the Congress, CIA, different departments, conservative think tanks, as well as the army. Thanks to this “reconnaissance” Abe became familiar not only with the president-elect's policy agenda, but also with his personal preferences. According to Kawai's report, it seemed that Trump liked three things: his own family, patriotism, and golf. Eventually, the president-elect agreed to meet the Japanese prime minister in New York on November 17, 2016, only nine days after election. Abe gave him a luxurious golf club as a present and reminded him that Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke (Abe's grandfather) had played golf with President Dwight Eisenhower in 1957, which was considered at that time as a breakthrough in promotion of bilateral friendship (Yamaguchi, *Antō*, 51–66). Since then, Abe used every opportunity to play a round of golf whenever meeting Trump.

As outlined above, despite the fact that Abe implemented revolutionary changes in security policy that responded to long-lasting American pressures, his right-wing credentials alienated him from the Democratic US president. Obama's liberal

ideological leaning made it difficult for the conservative Japanese prime minister to establish with him a close interpersonal relationship based on mutual trust. While Donald Trump's election posed a challenge to Japanese diplomacy, Abe reacted quickly by attempting to enter into better contact with Trump than with Obama. After all, Trump's controversial anti-immigration and anti-feminist posture seemed to guarantee that the Republican government would not be as sensitive as the Democratic administration against Abe's right-wing initiatives in Japan.⁴ Tokyo's efforts focused on assuaging Trump's anti-Japanese slogans that were used during the electoral campaign, adapting to the new US administration's economic policy agenda, as well as exploiting the shift to the right in US security policy.

Assuaging Donald Trump's anti-Japanese posture

One of Trump's declarations that particularly touched the Japanese government was his statement regarding the costs of maintaining American military bases abroad. During a debate of Republican candidates in the primaries for the presidential election in Houston in February 2016, Trump criticized Japan, South Korea and Germany for their insufficient contribution to the maintenance of US military bases on their territories. As Japan covered 75% of the costs of hosting US bases, compared to 40% covered by South Korea and only 32.6% covered by Germany, MOFA bureaucrats felt offended by this statement. In order to assuage Trump's criticism, Ambassador Sasae contacted Senator Jeff Sessions who was Trump's advisor on foreign and security policy. Sasae explained that for the US the cost of maintaining bases in Japan was lower than the one of facilities on American territory, and that these bases served not only protection of Japan, but also fulfillment of American security policy in the whole Asia-Pacific region up to the Middle East. It seems that these arguments met with understanding, as in his subsequent statements Donald Trump lessened criticism towards Japan in comparison with other allies (Yamaguchi, *Antō*, 40–45).

Abe referred to the problem of bases during his first meeting with the president-elect in November 2016. Provided with hard data from his administrative staff, Japanese prime minister explained that only 7% of American soldiers stationed in Japan belonged to land forces, while they constituted 70% of those hosted by South Korea. It meant that while the US army on Korean Peninsula was tasked mainly with protection of the Republic of Korea from North Korean invasion, the air forces, navy and marines stationed in Japan could be easily dispatched to intervene in different parts of the world (Yamaguchi, *Antō*, 63–64). Persuasion by Abe

⁴ Donald Trump decided to build a wall on the border with Mexico and he issued an executive order that refused entry to the US by the citizens of seven Muslim countries. During the electoral campaign he was accused by several women of sexual assault.

proved successful. During his visit to Japan at the beginning of February 2017, US Defense Secretary James Mattis stated that “Japan has been a model of cost sharing” that can be “an example for other nations to follow” and he expressed his satisfaction with an increase in budget spending for defense by Japan (US Department of Defense). Moreover, one week later in Washington President Trump himself thanked Prime Minister Abe for hosting American military bases and he called the bilateral alliance “the cornerstone of peace and stability in the Pacific region” (AP and Stars and Stripes).

What helped Abe in assuaging US's criticism regarding cost sharing was the fact that Prime Minister Abe put much effort in resolving the Futenma problem. As was already mentioned, according to the agreement from 2006, which was reconfirmed by the Hatoyama government in 2010, the controversial base was to be relocated to the Henoko coast. Still, this plan encountered strong opposition from Okinawan NGOs and local authorities. Immediately after assuming office, Abe, with the help from Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide, invested much energy in pushing forward the base's relocation. As early as in December 2013, Okinawa Prefecture Governor Nakaima Hirokazu eventually authorized construction of the new base (Yamaguchi, *Sōri*, 195–196). Nevertheless, Onaga Takeshi, who was elected as Okinawa governor in 2014, revoked the land reclamation permit that was necessary to continue construction works. Situation deteriorated in spring 2016, after a rape and murder committed by a US serviceman on a Japanese woman. Despite these problems, the Abe administration was determined to push Futenma relocation forward.

The personal relationship between Abe Shinzō and Donald Trump proved helpful in assuaging the new American president's initial anti-Japanese posture. Thanks to persuasion from Tokyo and the efforts for relocation of Futenma, Washington to some extent toned down its demand for an increase in Japan's contribution for maintenance of US military bases.

Adapting to the change

While Abe managed to persuade Trump not to put pressure on Japan regarding financing of military bases, he was unable to change the new president's mind on accession to the TPP. This free trade agreement was signed in February 2016 by Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the US, and Vietnam. The most controversial issue during negotiations was Washington's insistence on protection of American automobile industry and Tokyo's unwillingness to remove all barriers on import of agricultural products. Due to the pressure from car producers, during the electoral campaign Donald Trump clearly stated that he would abandon the controversial agreement and he

repeatedly criticized Japan for the trade imbalance. For example, during a speech in Nebraska in May 2016 he called for introduction of a 38% tariff on Japanese cars – the same as Japan maintained on American beef (Yamaguchi, *Antō*, 64).

Abe, in turn, had put much effort into achieving a compromise on TPP with the Obama administration and was determined to protect the agreement. For the Japanese prime minister, TPP not only would provide access to the American market, but it would also solidify US influence in the Asia-Pacific region as a counterbalance against the rising China. For that reason, Abe pushed ratification of TPP forward in December 2016, even after Trump's victory in presidential election.

The problem of TPP was high on the agenda of the first unofficial meeting between both leaders in November 2016. In order to persuade Trump to ratify TPP, Abe cited hard data concerning US–Japan trade exchange. He argued that as many as 3.85 million out of 6.57 million Japanese cars sold in the US in 2015 were produced in the factories situated in the US. Furthermore, in many cases Japanese cars were manufactured to a greater extent from the components originating from the US than their American counterparts. As a result, Japanese companies created new workplaces rather than deprived Americans of their jobs. In addition, Abe emphasized that TPP would not only contribute to economic growth in all member countries in the middle and long term, but it should also be treated as an important instrument for building a new US-centered order in East Asia against the China threat (Yamaguchi, *Antō*, 64–66).

Despite persuasion by Abe, the decision to abandon the TPP treaty was one of the first made by Trump after assuming office in January 2017. As commented by the president: “We’re going to stop the ridiculous trade deals that have taken everybody out of our country and taken companies out of our country, and it’s going to be reversed” (Baker). On the other hand, Trump did not exclude negotiation of bilateral trade deals with individual countries. From that moment on, Japan’s foreign policy regarding the defunct TPP focused on two issues: negotiation of a potential agreement with the US alone, as well as examining the possibility of continuing the TPP initiative without Washington.

In order to deepen bilateral economic exchange, Abe and Trump decided to initiate the US–Japan Economic Dialogue in February 2017 in Washington. The Dialogue was indeed launched by Japanese Deputy Prime Minister Asō Tarō and American Vice President Mike Pence in Tokyo in mid-April 2017. Both sides agreed to structure negotiations “along three policy pillars: Common Strategy on Trade and Investment Rules/Issues; Cooperation in Economic and Structural Policies; and Sectoral Cooperation” (Executive Office of the President). Nevertheless, the talks turned out to be more difficult than anticipated. During the second round of the Dialogue in Washington in mid-October 2017, Asō and Pence made only slight progress. Within the first pillar, they decided to lift restrictions on persimmons from Japan and on potatoes from Idaho, to streamline noise and emissions

testing procedures for American car exports, ensure transparency and fairness in Japanese system for geographical indications as well as regarding reimbursement policies related to innovation in life sciences. Within the second pillar, both sides confirmed their intention to cooperate on global challenges in the spheres of economy and finance, as well as to promote sustainable development. Regarding the last pillar, they only stated that they would “deepen discussions in areas such as (1) cooperation in the transportation infrastructure sector, including measures to deal with infrastructure deterioration and the development of high-speed rail, increased investment and promotion of quality infrastructure through infrastructure development in third countries; (2) energy ties, including liquefied natural gas, civil nuclear energy and energy infrastructure; (3) leveling the global playing field; (4) cooperation in the digital economy; and (5) inclusive workforce participation, including women’s economic participation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Second Round of the Japan-US Economic Dialogue between Deputy Prime Minister Aso and Vice President Pence of the United States of America”). It was evident that Japan would not cede easily to American pressure. When in early November 2017 President Trump, during his visit to Japan, once again called for “free, fair, and reciprocal” trade with that country, he was answered by Vice Premier Asō who clarified that Tokyo would not enter into a free trade agreement with Washington to resolve the problem of trade imbalance in bilateral relations (NBC Universal Media).

Trade talks between Japan and the US accelerated under American pressure in 2018. In January 2018 the Trump administration started trade war with China by imposing tariffs on solar panels and washing machines. Succeeding protectionist decisions of the US government were detrimental also to the Japanese economy. In March 2018 Washington set import tariffs of 10% for aluminum and 25% on steel, which met with protests from Tokyo. In September 2018 President Trump deplored the US trade deficit with Japan and mentioned a possibility of introducing a 25% tariff on Japanese cars. In addition, in an interview to the *Wall Street Journal* he said that Washington’s relations with the Japanese were very good, but “that will end as soon as I tell them how much they have to pay” (AFP-JIJI). Having no other choice, during a summit meeting with the US president on September 26, 2018, Prime Minister Abe issued a Joint Statement in which he agreed to “enter into negotiations, following the completion of necessary domestic procedures, for a Japan–United States Trade Agreement on goods, as well as on other key areas including services, that can produce early achievements” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Joint Statement of the United States and Japan”).

In parallel, Japan started talks on continuation of the TPP without US participation. The main problem was to elaborate an easy way for suspending those provisions from the previous treaty that had been introduced to please the US without having to start negotiations from scratch. At the same time, it was in the interest

of the Abe administration to leave the door open for the US's potential accession in the future. In the absence of the US, it is Japan who became the largest economy among the participants, and thus Tokyo was expected to play a leading role. A preliminary draft of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership was announced by 11 states, dubbed by Prime Minister Abe "Ocean's Eleven," during APEC summit in Da Nang in mid-November 2017. As stressed by Japanese Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō, the new deal would "serve as a foundation for building a broader free-trade area" in Asia-Pacific (Stevenson and Rich). TPP-11 agreement was signed in March 2018 in Santiago de Chile and ratified by Japan in July 2018.

As a new trade policy constituted a vital component of Donald Trump's electoral promises, Prime Minister Abe was unable to persuade the American president to concessions regarding withdrawal from TPP. Instead, it is Washington who put pressure on Tokyo to redress trade imbalance. Japan adapted to these challenges by renegotiating TPP without US's participation and by agreeing to initiate negotiations on Trade Agreement on goods with the US.

Exploiting the change

While Donald Trump's stance on US bases in Japan or TPP ran counter to Japanese interests, his posture towards North Korea, China and Russia seemed to be in line with the foreign policy of the Abe administration. Since the beginning of his political career, Abe was a supporter of an assertive policy towards North Korea, based on deterrence rather than persuasion. However, as the most serious regional threat he perceived the rapidly growing power of China whose GDP exceeded Japan's in 2010 and by 2016 became more than twice larger. Russia, in turn, was treated by Abe as one of potential partners in counterweighing the PRC's ambitions. For that reason, the Japanese government welcomed Trump's statements on the necessity of displaying a tougher stance towards North Korea and China, as well as his presumably pro-Russian leaning.

During the presidential campaign Donald Trump criticized the "Pivot to Asia" strategy because it had been drafted by his rival, Hillary Clinton. On the other hand, the new president agreed with the aims of this initiative, while condemning the inconsistency in its implementation. In November 2016 Alexander Gray and Peter Navarro, two influential advisors to Trump, published an article in *Foreign Policy*, in which they criticized Obama's decision to cut expenses on US military, especially navy that was necessary to counterbalance Chinese influence. As they summarized, the "pivot has (...) turned out to be an imprudent case of talking loudly but carrying a small stick, one that has led to more, not less, aggression and instability in the region" (Gray and Navarro). Such statements made Prime Minister

Abe believe that President Trump would be even more assertive in responding to Chinese provocative moves in the region than the Obama administration.

Tokyo did not have to wait long for the first diplomatic clash between the president-elect and Beijing. At the beginning of December 2016 Trump broke a taboo and as the first American president since 1979 spoke over the phone with Republic of China President Tsai Ying-wen. Answering to protests from the PRC, Trump criticized China on Twitter for devaluing their currency, taxing American products, and building “a massive military complex in the middle of the South China Sea” (Flores). What is important, at the beginning of February 2017 Abe received a courtesy call from the new US Defense Secretary James Mattis who confirmed that the Senkaku Islands, which are disputed between Japan and China, fell within the scope of the Japan–US Security Treaty, and that Washington opposed any unilateral action aimed at undermining Japan’s administration over the archipelago (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Prime Minister Abe Receives a Courtesy Call from US Defense Secretary Mattis”). One week later, during Abe’s first visit to the US since assuming office by Trump, both leaders issued a Joint Statement, in which they agreed to “deepen cooperation to safeguard the peace and stability of the East China Sea,” “oppose any attempt to assert maritime claims through the use of intimidation, coercion or force,” as well as “call on countries concerned to avoid actions that would escalate tensions in the South China Sea” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Joint Statement”).

Paradoxically, while on the one hand the Sino-American trade war facilitated counterbalancing growing regional and global ambitions of China, on the other hand it created an opportunity for Japan to ameliorate relations with the PRC. In the face of economic problems, Beijing became more willing to deepen economic cooperation with Tokyo regardless of political disputes in bilateral relations. In October 2018, Abe paid the first visit to China by a Japanese prime minister in almost seven years, excluding attendance at various multilateral forums. He signed with President Xi Jinping as many as 12 international agreements and memoranda, which symbolized the progress in Sino-Japanese rapprochement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Prime Minister Abe Visits China”).

Japan–US cooperation regarding the North Korean problem was initially even more explicit than regarding China. After a round of golf between Abe and Trump in Mar-A-Lago in Palm Beach in mid-November 2017, both leaders jointly criticized North Korean missile test in the Sea of Japan. During the press conference American president stressed: “I just want everybody to understand and fully know that the United States of America stands behind Japan, its great ally, 100%” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-US Joint Press Conference”). Both leaders remained in telephone contact during the subsequent North Korean ballistic missile launches in the following months. During G7 summit in Italian Taormina in May 2017, Abe and Trump agreed “to put pressure on North Korea rather than to have

dialogue with it,” as well as to “take concrete actions to enhance the Japan–US defense posture and capacity in order to deter North Korea’s threat” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-US Summit Meeting,” May 26, 2017). They also strengthened cooperation with Seoul regarding relations with Pyongyang and held Japan–US–ROK Trilateral Summits during G20 meeting in Hamburg in early July 2017 and during the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in late September 2017. Cooperation between Tokyo and Washington regarding regional security intensified even further after Pyongyang’s provocative moves in the summer 2017: the first North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile test in July, launching of missiles that flew over Hokkaido in August and September, as well as North Korea’s first hydrogen bomb test in early September. In New York in late September 2017 Abe expressed his gratitude to Trump for US’s strong posture against North Korea and for mentioning the issue of Yokota Megumi – a Japanese schoolgirl kidnapped by North Korean spies in the late 1970s – in the remarks to the UN General Assembly. Most importantly, the two leaders “confirmed that the US commitment to defend Japan through the full range of US military capabilities, both nuclear and conventional, is unwavering, and that Japan and the United States are 100% together” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-US Summit Meeting,” September 21, 2017).

Taking into account Trump’s anti-North Korean posture, Tokyo was put in an awkward position when in March 2018 the American president announced that he was envisaging holding a meeting with Kim Jong-un, without having consulted Japan on this move. When Abe visited the US in mid-April 2018, he received a promise from Trump that he would raise the issue of abductions similar to Yokota’s during the historical summit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-US Summit Meeting,” April 18, 2018). Having no other choice, Tokyo started responding to the sudden shift in US’s policy by searching rapprochement with Pyongyang. During his speech at the UN General Assembly in New York in late September 2018, Abe admitted he was ready to meet with Kim Jong-un. At the same time, Japanese Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō told to his North Korean counterpart Ri Yong-ho that Japan was willing to resolve the issues of North Korean missile and nuclear programs as well as abductions in a comprehensive manner (Kiyomiya).

While Japan generally displayed an assertive policy towards Beijing and Pyongyang, partnership with Russia was a part of Abe’s strategy of encircling and containing China. In April 2013 in Moscow he announced with President Vladimir Putin the intention to strengthen economic exchange, re-commence talks on the territorial issue (Northern Territories / South Kuril Islands), as well as initiate regular exchange between foreign and defense ministers of both countries (so-called 2+2). Nevertheless, after annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Abe was persuaded by the Obama administration to introduce economic sanctions against Russia. Still, behind the scenes the Japanese government gave signals that it would not

like the Ukrainian crisis to interrupt cooperation with Moscow. Abe frequently sent special emissaries to Russia, such as National Security Advisor Yachi Shōtarō in May 2014 or former Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō in September 2014, who continued secret negotiations (Tōgō, 186–234). Under these circumstances, Donald Trump's conciliatory gestures towards Vladimir Putin during the electoral campaign were rather welcomed by Tokyo.⁵ After assuming office, the new American president toned down his pro-Russian attitude, but he still sympathized with Moscow to a much greater extent than his predecessor. During G7 summit in La Malbaie in June 2018 he even called for re-admittance of Russia to G7/G8 (Borger and Perkins).

During his first meeting with the US president-elect in November 2016, Abe tried to convince Trump that Russia constituted a much less grave danger for the international community than China, both in terms of economic and military potentials. He also argued that Japan could not remain conflicted with both of these powers at the same time (Yamaguchi, *Antō*, 62–63). Paradoxically, however, the immediate impact of Trump's election on Japan's policy towards Russia was rather detrimental. Abe wanted to exploit the fact that Russia suffered from economic crisis and international isolation, and for that reason Putin was more willing to concessions on the territorial dispute for a financial contribution from Japan. However, the US president-elect's seemingly pro-Russian posture diluted the significance of Tokyo's accommodating policy towards Moscow. Japanese prime minister had high expectations regarding President Putin's visit to Tokyo in December 2016, but they did not materialize.

On the other hand, thanks to Trump's more accommodating stance towards Russia, Abe gained a free hand in intensifying relations with Moscow. In 2017 he visited Russia twice – in April and September. What is important, in March 2017 both sides held Foreign and Defense Ministerial Consultation (so-called 2+2) that had been shelved after annexation of Crimea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-Russia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultation (‘2+2’ Ministerial Meeting”). In 2018 Abe once more visited Russia two times – in May and September. During the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September 2018, he agreed with President Putin to implement five joint economic projects in the Northern Territories (South Kuril Islands) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-Russia Summit Meeting”). All these meetings were aimed at preparing the ground for the resolution of the territorial issue.

Trump's election as US president was interpreted by Tokyo not only as a threat, but also as an opportunity. The new administration's anti-Chinese and anti-North Korean attitude, as well as its pro-Russian leaning, seemed to be in line with Abe's international strategy. Nevertheless, while Tokyo to some extent exploited US's

⁵ Trump praised Putin many times. See: Kaczynski, Massie and McDermott.

hawkish posture, sudden shifts in Donald Trump's security policy constituted a challenge to Japanese decision makers. For that reason, Abe had to display some flexibility in deepening economic cooperation with China or toning down hard-power-like measures against North Korea.

Conclusion

Domestic factors, both in Japan and the US, were of importance in establishing Japan's policy towards the US at the beginning of Donald Trump's term in office. Regardless of the US national interests that compelled the Obama administration to counterbalance Chinese influence through the "Pivot to Asia" and TPP initiatives, the Trump government decided to withdraw from both of these strategic policies. Instead, Washington put pressure on Tokyo and other partner states, demanding from them greater contribution to the alliance.

Prime Minister Abe was fast in reacting to the alternation of power in the US. He mobilized his administrative staff to gain direct access to Donald Trump and his family, thus convincing the president-elect to agree to a private meeting only few days after election. This interpersonal connection helped Abe in assuaging Washington's criticism regarding the problem of financing US military bases in Japan, but it proved insufficient to persuade Trump to continue the TPP initiative. As predicted by neoclassical realism, the domestic-level intervening variables only temporarily destabilized Japan's policy towards the US. Instead of dwelling on the TPP failure, Abe adapted to the change by negotiating a watered-down version of the agreement. Furthermore, he focused on exploiting those elements of Trump's security policy that were beneficial to Japan – especially the assertive posture against North Korea and China, as well as softer stance towards Russia. However, the unpredictability of Trump's policy, especially towards North Korea, to some extent undermined the significance of cooperation between Tokyo and Washington. Therefore, while the surprising result of presidential election in the US did not change the basic vector of Japanese foreign policy, it did influence the pace and intensity of various international initiatives.

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