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THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE BEYOND ABE AND TRUMP

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
GDP	Gross domestic product
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
NSC	National Security Council
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
EU	European Union
FTA	Free trade agreement
TAG	Trade agreement on goods
WTO	World Trade Organization
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
FMS	Foreign military sales
INF	Intermediate-range nuclear forces
UN	United Nations
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiative

Introduction

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe resigned on September 16, 2020, citing the recurrence of a chronic illness. The second Abe administration, which he inaugurated at the end of December 2012, lasted for seven years and eight months, giving him the longest continuous tenure as Prime Minister in Japan's history. Since the end of World War II, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has almost continually been the ruling party, thanks to its system of midterm elections. They spent their time fighting for power within the party, repeatedly making pseudo power changes. In 2009, the LDP became the opposition party. Abe returned as the party's president and restored the LDP to the ruling party in 2012. At the time, however, it was difficult to predict that Abe would be able to maintain a stable and long-term government.

The reasons why Abe was able to stay in power for so long can be divided into three main categories. The first is that he ran his government in a very pragmatic manner. Known as a conservative, he tried to implement a flurry of conservative policies in his first administration, which began in 2006, but a series of scandals involving his ministers led to a disastrous defeat in the 2007 Upper House election, forcing him to resign after losing his base of power.¹ In the management of his second administration, Abe wanted to reflect his regret at not being able to keep the first administration in power for even a year. For this reason, he first of all scaled back his conservative behavior. Most symbolic of all was constitutional reform, which was his most important political goal. In the second Abe administration, constitutional reform was always only a long-term goal and was never incorporated into a realistic political schedule. Sure, Abe insisted on a controversial visit to war-linked Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013, but that was an appeal to his core supporters. He was able to emphasize to his conservative supporters that he was the

¹ Abe, Shinzo. *Utsukushii kuni e =To A Beautiful Country*. Bungei Shunju, 2006.

first prime minister to visit Yasukuni Shrine since Junichiro Koizumi (2001–06), while he was able to show society in general that he was the first prime minister to visit Yasukuni Shrine only once and did not adhere to patriotic ideals.

The second reason that he was able to stay in power for a long time was that he thoroughly weakened the opposition. He had won a total of six national elections, from the House of Representatives election in December 2012, when he wrested power from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), to the Upper House election in 2019. National elections in Japan can be divided into two types: Upper House elections, where half of the members are re-elected every three years, and House of Representatives elections, where the prime minister is given the right to dissolve the parliament and set the election date. Abe always set a schedule to handle political issues so that the election would work in favor of the ruling party. Regardless of the number of years since the change of government, Abe criticized the DPJ administration that held power before him and compared it to his own administration, working the backlash against the DPJ in his favor. The DPJ split up, and the parties that came after it lost power through a series of breakups. In all elections, Abe scored major victories for the LDP and its coalition partner, the New Komeito. And after his victories, Abe declared that all the criticism that his administration had been subjected to before the elections had been reset.

Third, and more importantly, the reason why Abe has long had a reputation for stable leadership is that he brought stability to the U.S.-Japan relationship. Abe has always placed the continuation of good relations with the United States at the core of his foreign policy. In the first half of his term, President Barack Obama, and in the second half, he faced President Donald Trump as his counterpart. Trump was not a stable president, which caused friction between him and many world leaders and worsened ties with the United States. Abe succeeded, however, in

building a better relationship with Trump than with Obama. For example, in 2019 alone, they met 11 times, including six phone conversations.² How did Abe build, maintain, and politically leverage a good relationship with two U.S. presidents with completely contrasting personalities, political beliefs, and support bases? In particular, this paper will focus on the U.S.-Japan relationship under Trump, with whom Abe developed a unique bond. How did they benefit each other, how did they influence both Japan and the United States, and what legacy did they leave in their relationship with Yoshihide Suga and Joe Biden, the current leaders of Japan and the United States, respectively?

The situation in Japan and the United States when the Abe administration came into power

A reaction to the failure of the administration of the Democratic Party of Japan

The reason why Abe was able to reappear on the political stage was a reaction to the domestic turmoil caused by the DPJ administration, which lasted for three and a half years from 2009. Three prime ministers, Yukio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan, and Yoshihiko Noda, took over the political reins of government, rotating almost every year, but they failed to revive the Japanese economy from the weakening triggered by the Lehman shock, and Japan's economic power and diplomatic clout declined. In particular, Prime Minister Hatoyama's "East Asian Community Initiative," which he set forth along with the "deepening of the U.S.-Japan alliance," raised concerns in the world that he had chosen China as a partner for Japanese diplomacy, leaving out the United States. Furthermore, the confusion over the issue of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa led to disruption in the U.S.-Japan relationship, exposing its fragility. On the other hand, the U.S. rebalancing policy came as a great shock to Japan. Concerned about the turmoil caused

² "Diplomatic Bluebook." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2020/html/chapter2/c020201.html>.

by the Hatoyama administration, the Obama administration often took a tolerant stance toward a rising China, anticipating the relative decline of Japan's position in Northeast Asia. There was also a period when the Obama administration took a stance that emphasized China as a more important partner in Asia than Japan, and this U.S. diplomatic stance was accepted in Japan with a sense of crisis, as it was the return of "Japan passing."³ For these reasons, Abe made the restoration of U.S.-Japan relations a major policy issue in the 2012 Lower House election.

Obama's first-term policy toward Japan and its impact

In his first term, Obama prioritized "building a cooperative relationship" with China.⁴ The administration emphasized Asian policy, and its policy toward Japan was to some extent an important part of its larger Asian strategy. China surpassed Japan in nominal gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010 to become the second-largest economy in the world. Proportionally, its military presence has also increased, threatening the absolute dominance of the United States. The Obama administration, with its strong economic interests, used its relationship with traditional allies like Japan to encourage China to coexist peacefully.⁵ As an extension, it demanded that Japan join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which at the time was viewed positively by some in the Japanese government, but by many as a new demand by the United States to open up its markets.⁶

Since around 2010, China has not been able to hide its ambitions in areas surrounding Japan, such as the Senkaku Islands and the South China Sea. While Japan was economically

³ The United States' growing disregard for Japan as China's economy rises.

⁴ Obama, Barack. *A Promised Land*. First edition., Crown, 2020.

⁵ Castro, Renato Cruz De. "The Obama Administration's Strategic Rebalancing to Asia: Quo Vadis in 2017?" *Pacific Focus*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2018, pp. 179-208. Wiley Online Library, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/doi/abs/10.1111/pafo.12115>.

⁶ "Exit Memo: United States Trade Representative." *The White House*, 22 Dec. 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/cabinet/exit-memos/united-states-trade-representative>.

dependent on the Chinese market, it continued to be threatened by China in terms of security. In September 2010, when the DPJ's Naoto Kan was in power, there was a collision between a Chinese fishing boat and a Japanese Coast Guard patrol boat off the Senkaku Islands. Kan's successor, Yoshihiko Noda, nationalized the Senkaku Islands in September 2012. After that, ships from China Coast Guard constantly intruded into Japan's territorial waters. Thus, Japan was faced with the need to confront an expanding China. The period just before Abe came on the scene was when the entire country was beginning to realize that Japan alone could no longer stably maintain its territory and territorial waters and that there was a need to further deepen the degree of mutual security cooperation between Japan and the United States.⁷

The Obama administration in its second term and the Second Abe Administration

Japanese bureaucrats who influenced Abe

Abe's foreign policy was influenced by diplomats who had long been friends with him. One of the most influential was Hisahiko Okazaki. A former ambassador to Thailand, Okazaki became active as a pro-U.S. conservative commentator after he retired from the military, and, in the course of his activities, he grew close to Abe—in 2004, he co-authored the book *Determination to Protect This Country* with Abe, who was then secretary-general of the LDP.⁸ He provided theoretical support for Abe's foreign policy and put into Abe's mind that Japan should be able to exercise the right of collective self-defense. He was a member of the Roundtable on Rebuilding the Legal Foundations of Security, an advisory body privately set up by Abe in his first and second administrations. Several days after the passage of the security-

⁷ Kanehara, Nobukatsu. *Senryaku gaiko genron = A grand strategy of Japan for the 21st century*. First edition., Nihon Keizai Shinbun Shuppansha, 2011.

⁸ Harris, Tobias. *The Iconoclast: Shinzo Abe and the New Japan*. CHurst and Company Publishers Limited, 2020.

related law allowing Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense in 2015, Abe visited the graves of his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, and his father, Shintaro Abe, to report on the situation. Later, he visited the home of Okazaki, who had died about a year earlier, to report on the fulfillment of his intentions, which is a good indication of Okazaki's influence on Abe.⁹

Okazaki's junior colleague, Shotaro Yachi, was another diplomat Abe relied on, and, as Deputy Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary in the Koizumi administration in 2002, when Abe was Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, Yachi dealt with the North Korean abduction of Japanese nationals from the same Prime Minister's Office. He later served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in the first Abe-era administration. When Abe took office the second time, Yachi became involved in the administration as a Cabinet Secretariat Counselor and became the first Director-General of the National Security Bureau.

Abe then selected Nobukatsu Kanehara, who had been deeply involved in creating the foreign policy of the first Abe administration, to be his deputy chief cabinet secretary. The origin of "diplomacy with a bird's eye view of the globe" advocated by Abe in his second administration is based on the same philosophy as that of the "arc of freedom and prosperity" value-based diplomacy in which Kanehara was deeply involved during the first Abe administration. As such, they designed much of Abe's foreign policy. They particularly emphasized the U.S.-Japan alliance and argued that Japan should be allowed to exercise its right to collective self-defense. For Abe, the cornerstone of his foreign policy was nothing less than the restoration, maintenance, and development of good U.S.-Japan relations.

⁹ "The prime minister visited the graves of his grandfather and father and reported on the passage of the Security Law." *The Asahi Shimbun*, 24 Sep. 2015.

Abe completes two “tasks”

During his second administration, which lasted about eight years, Abe had to be constantly aware of his neighboring country, China, when thinking about diplomacy. By the time the second Abe administration took office, Obama had become increasingly wary of China.¹⁰ Abe was fortunate to be aligned with the Obama government on Asia policy from the start of his second administration. To stabilize his base of power, Abe emphasized his “Abenomics” economic policies, which were likely to gain public support, and, in 2013, by emphasizing his achievements, he won the Upper House election, the very occasion that had once forced him to step down as prime minister. He channeled the political energy he gained from that victory into key policies on U.S.-Japan relations.

The timing of his inauguration was fortunate for Abe. The global economy was still recovering from the Lehman Shock, and there was a demand for reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, which helped the Japanese economy recover. Abe vociferously emphasized “Abenomics,” which is made up of three pillars: bold monetary easing, flexible fiscal policy, and the “three arrows” of growth strategy. As a result, the Japanese stock market began to attract foreign investors, including those from the United States, again. As a result, the Nikkei Stock Average, which had fallen to 7,045 in March 2009 amid the Great Recession immediately after the Lehman Shock, recovered to the 20,000 level in 2015 for the first time in about 15 years.¹¹ Also, in March 2014, Abe formally announced his participation in the TPP agreement. Domestic opposition to the opening up of markets, led by the agricultural,

¹⁰ National Intelligence Council (U.S.), editor. *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds: A Publication of the National Intelligence Council*. National Intelligence Council, 2012.

¹¹ “Nikkei Stock Average: Indices: Smart Chart Plus: Nikkei Electronic Edition.” *The Nihon Keizai Shimbun Electronic Edition*, <https://www.nikkei.com/smartchart/?code=N101%2FT>.

forestry, and fisheries industries, was twisted around by emphasizing Abenomics' track record of boosting the economy by continuing to push the gas pedal.

Thus, having won the support of the public under the banner of the economy, Abe poured his political resources into national security. In December 2013, he passed the Law on the Protection of Secrets, and, in April 2014, he changed Japan's "Three Principles on Arms Exports," which had been strictly enforced, to the "Three Principles on the Transfer of Defense Equipment" to facilitate the exchange of arms between Japan and the United States. In July 2014, the cabinet approved the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, fulfilling one of Abe's long-held ambitions since his first administration. In September 2015, he enacted a security law that divided Japanese national opinion. The enactment of this law made it possible for the Self-Defense Forces to exercise the right of collective self-defense, which had previously been judged to violate the Japanese Constitution. Among diplomats and security officials in Japan and the United States, the passage of this law is regarded by many as the most significant legacy of the Abe administration.¹² This legacy has been demanded of the Japanese government for many years by experts known as "intellectuals," including those in charge of U.S. government policy toward Japan and researchers who influence them. Abe has faithfully complied with their demands.

During his visit to the United States in February 2013 for his first summit meeting with Obama, Abe gave a speech titled "Japan Is Back" at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). After emphasizing his closeness to Richard Armitage, who served as Deputy Secretary of State in the George W. Bush administration, and Michael Green, who served as Senior Director for Asia at the White House National Security Council (NSC) in the same

¹² Green, Michael, and Schoff James L. "The Merits and Demerits of Abe's Diplomacy as Seen by the U.S. Two Experts." *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 1 Sept. 2020, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASN8033S4N8YUHB1029.html>.

administration, by calling them “Rich” and “Mike,” Abe said, “Japan will not become a second-class state. I have made a comeback. Japan must do the same.”¹³ In addition to Armitage and Green, U.S. experts on Asia, including Joseph Nye, who served as assistant secretary of defense in the Clinton administration, have issued four policy papers on Japan since 2000, including a third in 2012 that asked, “[d]oes Japan want to remain a first-class country? If you want to be a second-class country, you don’t need this report.”¹⁴ Abe’s statement was a response to this provocative statement. It was only three years after this speech that Abe proceeded to make their long-standing demands of the Japanese government by improving Japan’s security capabilities to contribute more than ever to the United States military operations in the Asia-Pacific.

Friendship is staged, personal relationships are tenuous

In August 2016, the last year of the Obama administration, Obama visited the bombed city of Hiroshima, where the United States dropped the first atomic bomb in human history, killing more than 200,000 people. This visit was symbolic of reconciliation in U.S.-Japan relations. Four months later, Abe visited Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and laid flowers at the cenotaph with Obama, just as he did in Hiroshima. It was the first time in history that an American leader had visited the A-bombed city and the first time in history that the leaders of Japan and the United States had come together to visit the place that triggered the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States.

By demonstrating a historic reconciliation both at home and abroad, Obama and Abe left a legacy in the history of U.S.-Japan relations. But these events were not achieved through a

¹³ Abe, Shinzo. “Japan Is Back,” Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe the CSIS (Speeches and Statements by Prime Minister) | *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet*. https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201302/22speech_e.html.

¹⁴Armitage, Richard L, et al. The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia: *A Report of the CSIS Japan Chair*. CSIS, 2012. Open WorldCat, http://csis.org/files/publication/120810_Armitage_USJapanAlliance_Web.pdf.

personal relationship of trust between Abe and Obama.¹⁵ Rather, Abe was critical of Obama's businesslike approach and dryness. When Obama came to Japan in April 2014, for example, Abe hosted him at Sukiyabashi-Jiro, a high-end sushi restaurant in Ginza, Tokyo. As soon as Obama sat down at the counter of the sushi restaurant, however, he started negotiating the TPP. Abe later told people around him that he had tried to create a relaxed atmosphere for friendly relations but was dismayed to find that Obama was all business. Obama left immediately after the last piece of sushi was served, and their dinner at the upscale sushi restaurant lasted an hour and 40 minutes, less than planned, symbolizing the relationship between the two.¹⁶

Obama did not hide his alarm at the fact that Abe had been holding a series of summit meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin since 2014, showing his willingness to take back the Northern Territories and conclude a peace treaty with Russia. Of course, it was not Obama's personal alarm, but a natural alarm at the approach of an ally to Russia, a potential threat to the United States. This expression of natural concern, however, was enough for Putin to use it as a check on Abe in the negotiations. In this way, Abe and Obama remained at loggerheads, but both were able to accumulate historic results.

The birth of the Trump Administration and Abe's Response

Vigilance

In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Hillary Clinton, who wielded her arm as secretary of state in the Obama administration and was seeking to become the first woman president, was considered the favorite to win. Nonetheless, Donald Trump, the Republican candidate, made some comments on the campaign trail that made the Japanese government uneasy. In his

¹⁵ Uchida, Akira, and Sato, Taketsugu. "(Jiji-Kokukoku) Prime Minister avoids apology, stresses 'spirit of tolerance' at Pearl Harbor." *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 29 Dec. 2016, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S12727556.html>.

¹⁶ Based on the author's interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

campaign, Trump called his foreign policy “America First.” “America First” meant isolationism in foreign and security policy. For example, he criticized the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as outdated and argued that America’s allies should defend themselves without relying on the United States.

Regarding the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which is the foundation of the U.S.-Japan alliance, Trump argued that it is unequal for Japan not to be obligated to defend the United States and suggested that he would withdraw U.S. troops from Japan if Japan did not bear the full cost of stationing U.S. forces there. The other, “America First,” meant protectionism in trade policy: withdrawal from the TPP and renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the U.S.-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement. Trump also called out Japan for unequal trade, similar to the trade imbalance of the 1980s. Trump’s insistence on the inequality of relations with Japan in two aspects of “America First” continued to cast a shadow over U.S.-Japan relations for the next four years.¹⁷

Obama made it clear that Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty would apply to the Senkaku Islands and praised the Abe-led administration for paving the way for Japan to join the TPP over domestic opposition. Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty obligates the U.S. to defend Japan in the case Japan gets an attack. Therefore, it has been significant for Japan to confirm to the U.S. that Article 5 also applies to the Senkaku Islands, where China has repeatedly violated Japan’s territorial waters. The Japanese government warned that, if Trump became the new president, he would adopt a strategy toward Japan that is the exact opposite of Obama’s in terms of both security and trade.

¹⁷ Les Grossman News. Donald Trump & Mike Pence In Des Moines 8/5/16 FULL SPEECH. 2016. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LegMeHaPGno>.

Getting Closer

As the November election approached, the Abe administration attempted to contact Trump and his entourage through the U.S. Embassy to prepare for a possible Trump victory. In addition to the usual diplomatic channels, such as the Japanese Embassy in Washington DC, Japan used the personal connections of Masashi Adachi, a member of the House of Councilors who is a licensed attorney in the New York state. This shows just how quick the Japanese government and the Abe administration were to build relations with Trump at the time.¹⁸ And fortunately for them, the day after Trump was declared the winner of the presidential election, Abe personally called and arranged a face-to-face meeting. Nine days after the results of the presidential election, he became the first foreign leader to rush to Trump Tower in New York for an unprecedented meeting.

Abe's visit to Trump drew criticism from within Japan. They said it was highly unusual for the leader of a country to visit a businessman who had not yet been officially inaugurated as president. Abe's visit to Trump must have seemed strange even to world leaders. However, Abe left Japan one day earlier than scheduled to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting in Peru and landed in New York. Before his departure, Abe told a reporter, "[t]he Japan-U.S. alliance is the cornerstone of Japan's diplomatic security. Only when there is trust can the alliance be intimate, so I want to build a relationship of trust."¹⁹

Abe's strategy was to build a relationship of trust with Trump that he could not build with Obama, and to use that relationship to maintain the U.S.-Japan relationship. Abe and Trump met for about an hour and a half, double the scheduled time, at Trump Tower, where Trump's home

¹⁸ "Special Advisor to Prime Minister Adachi Says PM Suga's Diplomatic Skills "Bring Out the True Intentions of the Other Party." *The Sankei News*, <https://www.sankei.com/politics/news/200929/pli2009290041-n1.html>.

¹⁹ "Prime Minister, wishing to build trust with Trump, left for United States." *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 17 Nov. 2016, https://digital.asahi.com/articles/DA3S12663195.html?iref=pc_ss_date_article.

is located. According to Abe, he explained North Korea's nuclear missile problem to Trump and asked for his understanding concerning the abduction of Japanese nationals. Abe also explained the threat posed by China, and Trump listened to Abe's "lecture." Abe explained the tension in Northeast Asia, which was a distant world for Trump, and asked for an understanding of the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance.²⁰

Confrontation – U.S.-Japan Trade Relations

U.S. Withdrawal from the TPP

Trump, who announced the U.S. withdrawal from the TPP immediately after taking office, gradually began to make tough demands on Japan along the lines of "America First." He first drew up a strategy to enter into bilateral trade negotiations with Japan and force Japan to make concessions such as lowering tariffs on U.S. agricultural products. Tariffs on auto and steel imports from Japan were also expected to be on the table for discussion. Trump declared that he would "abide by the principles of fair and reciprocal trade."²¹ He also engaged in bilateral trade negotiations with NAFTA signatories, the European Union (EU), South Korea, and other countries, and set his sights on a trade war with China, the largest U.S. trading partner.

Abe initially hoped that Trump would change his mind. Abe did not criticize Trump for withdrawing from the TPP as European countries and Australia did. But he had a slight hope that Trump would realize the importance of the TPP and its benefits to the American economy. Nonetheless, in response to the support of the U.S. Rust Belt, which was the driving force behind his presidential victory, Trump criticized the TPP as "catastrophic" and boasted of having withdrawn from it. He had no choice but to force his opponents to accept his demand to "reduce

²⁰ Based on the author's interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

²¹ Trump, Donald J. "Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit | Da Nang, Vietnam." *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>.

the trade deficit” by negotiating a bilateral free trade agreement. For Trump, the TPP was the symbol of the Obama administration and the policy most opposed by his supporters. He also withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement, the international rules on global warming, and repealed the Obamacare health care reform law.

The Battle for Bilateral Negotiations

At his first summit with Trump in February 2017, Abe proposed an “economic dialogue.” The aim was to avoid being asked to negotiate a full-fledged bilateral free trade agreement (FTA).²² Furthermore, the dialogue was to be held between Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso and Vice President Mike Pence. It was Abe who nominated Pence for the dialogue. Abe hoped that Pence, who had served as governor of Indiana, a state where many Japanese companies have established operations, would have a better understanding of Japanese companies. The main objective was to avoid any negative impact on the good relationship that had been established between Abe and Trump should they have been direct parties to the negotiations.²³

Also, the framework for the dialogue was broadened to include three areas: cooperation in macroeconomic issues such as fiscal and monetary policy; U.S.-Japan cooperation in infrastructure, energy, cyber issues, and space; and bilateral frameworks for trade and investment to prevent the United States from escalating its demands. A senior Japanese government official said, “[t]his is stalling. Sooner or later, the Trump administration will be so occupied with negotiations with the EU and China that it won’t have time to confront Japan.”²⁴ There was no progress in the dialogue between Aso and Pence. It was pointed out within the Japanese

²² “Japan-U.S. summit.” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/na/na1/us/page1_000297.html.

²³ Aoyama, Naoatsu, et al. Trade talks, U.S. pressure to negotiate bilaterally, including on auto tariffs. *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S13631513.html>.

²⁴ Based on the author’s interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

government that this was due to the lack of personal trust between the two men, but the main reason was that Japan was not proactive in the dialogue itself. The Japanese side repeatedly told the United States that Japan's basic line of trade negotiations would be at the same level as the TPP on the premise that the United States would return to the TPP, but that wish would be abandoned in 2018.

A Hasty Agreement

Trump sought concrete results ahead of the November 2018 midterm elections. It would have been an important achievement for him if he could have reduced the trade deficit with Japan, which in 2017 was second in size to China and Mexico in the country results. In March 2018, the United States applied high tariffs on steel and aluminum products from Japan. At a summit in April, Abe and Trump agreed to establish a new ministerial-level framework to discuss trade issues between the two countries.²⁵ In May 2018, Trump strongly indicated that he would not back down from imposing high tariffs on automobiles imported from Japan under Section 232 of the U.S. Trade Expansion Act on security grounds. In September 2018, Abe agreed to enter U.S.-Japan trade negotiations at a summit with Trump.

Japan, on the other hand, was preparing for local and Upper House elections in 2019. In exchange for allowing bilateral negotiations, Abe urged that the non-negotiable line be to adhere to the levels agreed to in the TPP for agricultural products and to make clear that this is not the same as an FTA, which is a comprehensive agreement. He stressed that, if the negotiations were criticized domestically before the election, the United States will not be able to gain the benefits it would have gained from the negotiations. There was a strong sense of caution among those

²⁵ Trump, Donald J., and Shinzo Abe. "Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Conference." *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-conference/>.

involved in agriculture in Japan, an important base of support for local and Upper House elections in 2019, that if an FTA were negotiated, the United States would be forced to open up its market for agricultural products to a greater extent than under the TPP.

The Japanese side demanded that the tariff negotiations be divided into two stages: “goods and services” and “investment.” The Japanese side also proposed that only the tariff negotiations on goods be separated, calling it the U.S.-Japan Trade agreement on goods (TAG).²⁶ This was to be able to explain to Japanese farmers that the negotiations were not comprehensive and, therefore, were not aimed at an FTA. In April 2019, just before the election, Minister for Economic Revitalization Toshimitsu Motegi and the United States Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer narrowed down the immediate scope of the TAG negotiations to goods such as agricultural products and automobiles, and the creation of rules for digital trade such as big data. At the summit in May 2019, Trump said, “I think we will be announcing some things, probably in August,” indicating that he expected the negotiations to be concluded in August.²⁷ August was just after the Upper House Election. Trump made a concession to Japan on the timing of the conclusion of the negotiations, finally agreeing to September 2019.²⁸ According to the Japanese government, the United States and Japan have eliminated about 92 percent and 84 percent of tariffs, respectively, in value terms, reaching the 90 percent level required by World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. Tariffs were eliminated on 37 percent of Japan’s agricultural

²⁶ Hoagland, Isabelle. “Motegi: No Deal with Japan ‘in Any Particular Category before the Others.’” *Inside US Trade*, Vol. 37, No. 19, Inside Washington Publishers, May 2019. ProQuest, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2222622029/citation/DF093FD4B0934630PQ/1>.

²⁷ Trump, Donald J., and Shinzo Abe. “Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Abe of Japan Before Bilateral Meeting,” *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-abe-japan-bilateral-meeting-4/>.

²⁸ Fact Sheet on the U.S.-Japan Trade Agreement | *United States Trade Representative*. <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/fact-sheets/2019/september/fact-sheet-us-japan-trade-agreement>.

products in value terms, a result that Abe can be proud of achieving for domestic farmers.²⁹ The United States won the same treatment as TPP members on agricultural products such as beef, pork, and wheat, which account for a large number of exports to Japan. This is a result that Trump can be proud of, as well as an achievement for domestic farmers who complain that they are at a disadvantage because the TPP has gone into effect. Japan had focused on the automotive sector, which accounts for about 35 percent of its exports to the United States, but passenger cars and auto parts were subject to “further negotiated elimination of tariffs,” not only a step backward from the TPP, but also there was no indication of when the negotiations would be completed.³⁰ Japan tried to prevent the United States from imposing high tariffs on imported automobiles on security grounds, but the joint statement only said that Japan and the United States “will not take any action contrary to the spirit of the agreement and the joint statement while this agreement is being implemented in good faith.”

The result Japan got was about the same as the TPP, and what it would have gotten if the United States had not withdrawn from the TPP. Abe spent almost three years trying to bait, dodge, and keep Trump from focusing his attacks so that Japan would not receive a fatal blow from the United States. He also avoided a decisive clash between Japan and the United States by setting a tight timetable for the election and letting Trump boast of his achievements.

²⁹ Shibuya, Kazuhisa, Director for Policy Coordination. Administrative Briefing Administrative Briefing. *Naikakukanbou = The Cabinet Secretariat of Japan*, https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/tpp/jpusinfo/pdf/190925_tpp_jimugaiyou.pdf.

³⁰ “Joint Statement of the United States and Japan.” *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-united-states-japan-2/>.

The Gap Between the Two

Disregard for the Alliance

As with trade negotiations, Trump also viewed diplomacy as a transaction. As for the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, which began in 2001, Obama aimed for a complete withdrawal during his term, but gave this up when the security situation deteriorated. Trump criticized this on the campaign trail, calling the stationing of U.S. troops in Afghanistan a waste of money and insisting that the troops should be withdrawn immediately; in 2018, he achieved the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Syria. This inward-looking stance was the same for allies. In 1987, in an advertisement that appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Boston Globe*, asserted that that the defense burdens imposed by U.S. allies was unfair.³¹ Titled “There’s Nothing Wrong with America’s Foreign Defense Policy That a Little Backbone Can’t Cure,” the ad laid out “reasons why the United States should stop paying for the defense of other countries that can afford it,” and pointed to Japan, insisting, “[t]hey’ve been using the United States. Let them pay for it.”

He viewed the alliance as a “zero-sum game” rather than a “win-win” relationship. In a March 2016 interview with the *Washington Post*, when asked if U.S. military contributions in the Asia-Pacific region would benefit the United States, Trump replied, “I don’t think so.”³² He suggested that the United States withdraw its troops from Japan, urged Japan and South Korea to defend themselves against North Korea, and mentioned the acceptance of nuclear weapons. Upon assuming the presidency, Trump intensified his demands for increased stationing costs for allies. The targets were South Korea, Germany, and Japan. According to Bob Woodward’s book

³¹ “That Time Trump Spent Nearly \$100,000 On an Ad Criticizing U.S. Foreign Policy In 1987.” *BuzzFeed News*, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ilanbenmeir/that-time-trump-spent-nearly-100000-on-an-ad-criticizing-us>.

³² Staff, Post Opinions. “Opinion | A Transcript of Donald Trump’s meeting with The Washington Post Editorial Board.” *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/03/21/a-transcript-of-donald-trumps-meeting-with-the-washington-post-editorial-board/>.

Fear: Trump in the White House, even after taking office, Trump asked “[w]hat do we gain by maintaining a large military presence on the Korean Peninsula?”³³ In 2019, he demanded about \$5 billion from South Korea, more than five times the amount current at that time. He also complained about the burden of defense spending by members of NATO and urged Germany to set 2 percent of its GDP for defense spending. According to the memoirs of former presidential aide John Bolton, Trump had told the Japanese side that Bolton wanted U.S. military spending in Japan to be \$8 billion a year. Bolton was in Japan in July 2019 to explain to National Security Agency Director Shotaro Yachi why Trump was seeking this amount, rather than the \$2.5 billion Japan was currently paying. According to Bolton, Trump had long argued that the United States should ask for “cost plus 50 percent,” which is an additional 50 percent on top of what it costs to station the troops. He also threatened to withdraw U.S. troops if the countries did not comply. Bolton was not the only one to put a stop to Trump’s demands. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis both emphasized international cooperation, with Mattis stressing how the presence of allies helps the United States.

Trump was advocating “America First” in foreign policy, as well as “Peace through Strength.” This is Reagan-style diplomacy of force, a concept that stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from “America First” in foreign and security policy. These two irreconcilable principles were always present in the Trump administration, and, thus, it was difficult for Japan to second-guess U.S. foreign policy. The suggestions of his advisors like Tillerson and Mattis worked, and Trump initially chose a policy that emphasized alliances based on “Peace through Strength” for diplomacy. Trump had publicly stated that he appreciates NATO and that he intended to respect the alliance with Japan. But Tillerson left the administration in 2018 and Mattis and Bolton left in 2019, one after the other. In his resignation letter to Trump, Mattis

³³ Woodward, Bob. *Fear: Trump in the White House*. Simon & Schuster, Simon & Schuster, Limited, 2018.

stressed that “the United States cannot protect its national interests unless it maintains strong alliances and shows respect to its allies.”³⁴ Having lost his grip on international cooperation, Trump accelerated his “America First” policy and escalated his demands for allies to bear more of the cost of stationing troops.

Abe’s “Management” of Trump’s Diplomacy

Trump’s disregard for the alliance could have increased ambitions in Northeast Asia by China, which does not hide its quest for territory and territorial waters.³⁵ Abe felt threatened by the weakening of the U.S.-Japan Alliance, which would prevent Japan from gaining an advantage in the military balance against China. He used his political energy in 2015 to pass a security law that would allow the U.S. Seventh Fleet and Japan’s Self-Defense Forces to conduct joint fleet operations in peacetime. “This would be an overwhelming improvement in deterrence,” Abe told his followers.³⁶ But if the U.S. pulls out of the alliance, that deterrence will be lost at a stroke. Furthermore, after Trump’s inauguration, North Korea had repeatedly launched medium-range ballistic missiles over Japan.

Japan needed not only a deterrent against China’s escalation, but also a more responsive missile response capability to be operated jointly by Japan and the United States. Nonetheless, Trump asked Abe during a phone summit in 2017, “[w]hy doesn’t Japan shoot down ballistic missiles flying from North Korea?” Abe was not surprised. According to one of Abe’s aides, at a summit with Obama in April 2014, when Abe explained his idea that Japan wanted to be able to launch missiles flying over Japan toward the United States, Obama held out his hand to Abe and

³⁴ Mattis, James. Resignation Letter - *CNN Politics*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/12/20/politics/james-mattis-resignation-letter-doc/index.html>.

³⁵ Schoff, James L. “Political Change in America and Implications for the US-Japan Alliance.” *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Routledge, July 2018, pp. 45–63, doi:10.1080/13439006.2018.1545489.

³⁶ Based on the author’s interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

said, “[t]hank you! Do it right away. When can you do it?” A senior U.S. government official who was also present asked him to do it immediately. Abe hurriedly explained that there were constitutional barriers to Japan’s implementation of the plan and that legal arrangements had to be made. Abe was pessimistic about the fact that the United States was barely aware of Japan’s security situation.

Not only was Trump even less aware than Obama, but Trump also positioned the meeting with North Korea as something to promote as his diplomatic achievement. Trump had no hesitation about recognizing North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as a decent negotiating partner by meeting with him, and no interest in working to ensure a successful outcome in the talks. In a series of meetings with Kim, Trump expressed his willingness to tolerate short-range ballistic missiles launched by North Korea in 2019, as their range did not threaten the United States.³⁷ Trump’s vacillation between “Peace through Strength” and “America First” had increased the threat to allies.

Status Quo and Postponement

At his first summit meeting with Trump, Abe was able to get the president to say that Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands and that the U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia is important. Abe then demonstrated the benefits of the U.S.-Japan alliance to Trump by responding to the “Buy American” call. In fiscal 2019, the amount of arms purchased from the United States through “foreign military sales (FMS),” a system for the United States to export arms, had ballooned to more than 16 times the amount in fiscal 2011, before the second Abe administration took office. Buying weapons from the United States would

³⁷ Bolton, John R. *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir*. First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition., Simon & Schuster, 2020.

put Japan's military industry out of work. Abe continued to buy American weapons, however, including F-35 fighter jets. During his summit meeting with Trump, Abe focused on gaining Trump's favor by showing him data and explaining to him that Japan is creating American jobs, promoting industry, and increasing investment.³⁸ In doing so, he also emphasized that the Japan is the buyer of the F-35 fighter jets and other weapons. This was done in the hope that Trump would be able to demonstrate to his supporters at home his track record of putting the United States first, but at least Trump did not maliciously attack Japan as he blatantly did with other countries.³⁹

Abe also sought Trump's understanding of the cost of stationing U.S. troops in Japan, which is due for renewal every five years in March 2021. In his meeting with Trump, Abe told him that Japan bears 70 percent of the cost of U.S. troops stationed in Japan and that Japan's share of the cost is extremely high compared to other allies. Trump then took Abe's words into negotiations with NATO on the cost of stationing U.S. troops there and asked for more cost-sharing.⁴⁰ The Abe administration delayed the start of negotiations with the United States on the cost of stationing U.S. troops in Japan until around October 2020, planning to start in earnest after the presidential election, keeping in mind the history of negotiations between South Korea and the United States. The United States and Japan began negotiations in November 2020, but due to the change of U.S. President Biden in January 2021, the two governments agreed in

³⁸ Bolton, John R. "Opinion | Abe Will Be Missed, Not Least Because He Tethered Trump Somewhere Close to Reality." *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/08/28/john-bolton-shinzo-abe-trump/>.

³⁹ Trump, Donald J., and Shinzo Abe. "Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Abe of Japan Before Bilateral Meeting." *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-abe-japan-bilateral-meeting-4/>; Trump, Donald J. "Remarks by President Trump on Supporting the Passage of the U.S-Mexico-Canada Agreement | Milwaukee, WI." *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-supporting-passage-u-s-mexico-canada-agreement-milwaukee-wi/>.

⁴⁰ Trump, Donald J., and Jens Stoltenberg. "Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg After 1:1 Meeting | London, United Kingdom." *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-stoltenberg-11-meeting-london-united-kingdom/>.

March to extend the agreement by one year, in line with the current level. 2022 and beyond will be discussed again in 2021.⁴¹ Abe was trying to manage the situation so that Japan would not be directly affected by Trump's disregard for the alliance.

Abe's management of Trump was extremely ad hoc and patchy. He told those around him, "Trump's memory is always being overwritten by the latest thing. So, it is important to input information to him as soon as possible before he makes a decision." Abe also told those around him that Trump "has an unusual interest in numbers, so when I explain something to him, I have to show him data that is easy to understand and make him understand how it is beneficial to him. That's why it's so tiring to deal with Trump."⁴² This perception was shared within the Trump administration and among Trump's aides.⁴³ To avoid upsetting Trump, Abe praised him, carefully explained his agenda so that it would be easy for him to understand, and tried to influence his decisions in Japan's favor.

Above and beyond expectations

In December 2017, the Trump administration, in its National Security Strategy, characterized China as a "revisionist state" that plots to oust the United States and engage in economic aggression.⁴⁴ In January 2018, the Department of Defense, in a summary of its National Defense Strategy, described China as a "strategic competitor," a "central challenge" to America's prosperity and security.⁴⁵ The Trump administration was highly wary of China's

⁴¹ "One-year extension of Host Nation Support approved." *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 1 Apr. 2021, https://digital.asahi.com/articles/DA3S14855416.html?iref=pc_ss_date_article.

⁴² Based on the author's interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

⁴³ Wolff, Michael. *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*. First ed., Henry Holt and Company, 2018.

⁴⁴ Trump, Donald J. "National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2017." *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Vol. 1, 2017, p. [i]-IV.

⁴⁵ Mattis, James. "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy." *The United States. Department of Defense*, 2018, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=807329>.

foreign policy as a whole, not only in terms of diplomacy and security, but also in terms of trade. A speech by Vice President Pence in October 2018 did not hide that wariness. Pence expressed in strong terms the dissatisfaction the United States had with China across all areas—economic, military, and political.⁴⁶ In October 2019, Pence gave another speech on China’s policy, harshly criticizing China’s behavior as “increasingly aggressive and stability-inhibiting.”⁴⁷ This Trump administration policy toward China was a combination of both the Democratic aspects of China policy, which were tough on trade, and the Republican aspects, which were hard-line on security.

In this regard, it can be said that there was a combination of “America First” protectionism in trade policy and “Peace through Strength” in foreign security policy. It could also be a reaction to the Obama administration’s policy toward China, which was based on engagement and cooperation. In any case, Trump took a hard-line stance against China on all fronts except human rights issues. A senior Japanese government official who listened to Pence’s speech in 2018 praised it, saying, “[t]he U.S. policy in Asia, which had been shifting back and forth between a focus on dialogue with China and a focus on allies, has now shown itself to be a mistake.”⁴⁸ The more the United States took a hard line against China, the more the Abe administration’s regard for the Trump administration increased. The confrontation between the United States and China, however, became more intense than Abe expected. As a result, tensions in Northeast Asia became even higher as Trump withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear

⁴⁶ Pence, Mike. “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China.” *U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China*, 5 Oct. 2018, <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/remarks-by-vice-president-pence-on-the-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

⁴⁷ Pence, Mike. Video: Vice President Pence Delivers Inaugural Frederic V. Malek Public Service Leadership Lecture | *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/video-vice-president-pence-delivers-inaugural-frederic-v-malek-public-service-leadership>.

⁴⁸ Based on the author’s interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

Forces (INF) Treaty.⁴⁹ This tendency has been carried over to the Biden administration, and now there are concerns about a Taiwan Strait crisis.

A strange “win-win” relationship

Abe saved Trump

Trump and Abe developed a strange relationship that resonated with each other, albeit without substance.⁵⁰ The *Asahi Shimbun* analyzed about 18,500 posts by Trump from March 1, 2016, to October 9, 2020, using Brandwatch, a British social networking analysis tool, and found that Abe tweeted the most using the words “friend” and “friendship” eight times.⁵¹ By flaunting his relationship with Abe, Trump tried to make himself look great by showing his domestic supporters and the leaders of other countries that there are foreign leaders who appreciated him.

Trump followed the America First principle, eschewing multilateral negotiations and international cooperation, and always seeking one-on-one deals. America First has sown chaos in the international community. The greatest damage was done at the G7 summit. Trump isolated himself on free trade, global warming, the Iran situation, etc. At the 2018 summit in Canada, Trump abruptly proposed the return to the G7 summit of Russia, which the G7 had excluded by consensus because of its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. After leaving this summit, Trump announced in a tweet that he would not approve the summit declaration; the composition of the G7 summit after 2017 became “G6+1” and Trump was isolated. Abe worked hard to build a bridge between Trump and Europe and Canada. According to Abe’s accounts made to those

⁴⁹ Trump, Donald J. “Remarks by President Trump Before Air Force One Departure.” *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-air-force-one-departure-4/>.

⁵⁰ “Japan PM Shinzo Abe’s Diplomatic Hole in One with Trump.” *BBC News*, 14 Feb. 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38934469>.

⁵¹ Sakamoto, Susumu, et al. “Analyzing Trump’s Post; US Presidential Election 2020.” *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 31 Oct. 2020, <https://digital.asahi.com/articles/ASNB032VPNBZUHBI02N.html>.

around him, Trump complained that he spent too much time discussing environmental and other issues at past summits and could not show off his achievements. Trump asked Abe, “[w]hy should I attend the G7 summit?” Abe persuaded him that attending international meetings and compiling multilateral consensus documents would be an achievement for him.⁵²

Abe’s policy toward Trump was not to deny him and to placate him. He did not reject Trump’s proposal for Russia’s return to the G7, although he did not express his support for it, saying that “Russia’s constructive involvement is necessary.”⁵³ He urged European leaders who criticized Trump to find a compromise since their criticism would only escalate Trump’s criticism. Still, it was difficult to adopt the traditional formula of a summit declaration on the last day of the summit, with bureaucrats meticulously adjusting the wording. Increasingly, summit declaration had contained only abstract and simplistic content, or significant consensus had downgraded to some countries’ (other than the U.S.) opinions of reference. Abe emphasized, however, that the confrontation between Europe and Trump over the content of the document would keep the United States, led by Trump, from leaving the framework of the G7 summit.⁵⁴ It was also an advantage for Trump that Abe would follow through with his complaint. Thus, Trump remained a part of the international team and did not have to be completely isolated from the international community.

Even in bilateral relations, Abe’s presence was important to Trump at times. As the confrontation with Iran deepened, Trump asked Abe to act as a mediator, as the prime minister of Japan, which has traditionally maintained friendly relations with Iran. For Abe, Iran was one of the countries he had strong feelings for, having visited the country in 1983 when his father,

⁵² Based on the author’s interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

⁵³ “The United States and Europe in conflict, suffering G7 summit.” *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 28 Aug. 2019, https://digital.asahi.com/articles/DA3S14155180.html?iref=pc_ss_date_article.

⁵⁴ Based on the author’s interviews with senior Japanese government officials.

Shintaro, was foreign minister, and in the Iran-Iraq War as his father's secretary. At Trump's request, in June 2019, Abe became the first Japanese prime minister in 40 years to visit Tehran since Takeo Fukuda in September 1978 and the first to meet with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.⁵⁵ Although Abe conveyed Trump's message, he failed to persuade the stubborn ayatollah or to mediate between Trump and Khamenei. Such cooperation by a U.S. president with a Japanese prime minister is extremely rare. One exception was in 1986 when President Ronald Reagan secretly asked then-Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone to rescue Americans kidnapped by Islamic extremists under Iran's influence.⁵⁶ But Trump's true intentions were revealed in Bolton's book; Bolton was been assistant to the president for national security at the time of the negotiations between Abe and Khamenei. According to Bolton, after being briefed by Abe, Trump said, "[t]here is no need to feel responsible for what was a complete failure," and added, "I appreciate the effort. What is more important to me personally is that Japan buys more U.S. agricultural products."⁵⁷ Although Abe acted as a loyal friend to Trump so as not to offend him, Trump asked for more in return. Rather than getting a diplomatic payback, Abe ended up paying the price for being pushed around by Trump.

Trump did not criticize Abe's ambition

Instead of confronting Trump, Abe focused on demonstrating his closeness to him at home and abroad. The strange "win-win" relationship with Trump worked to Abe's advantage. Trump did not criticize Abe for his diplomatic ambitions. The diplomatic legacy that Abe sought

⁵⁵ "Diplomatic Bluebook." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2020/html/chapter2/c020602.html>.

⁵⁶ "Diplomacy in China in 1986 - Release of Diplomatic Papers." *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 21 Dec. 2017, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S13283071.html>; Mochizuki, Mike M. "Strategic Thinking Under Bush and Koizumi: Implications for the US-Japan Alliance." *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 10, No. 1, Routledge, May 2003, pp. 82–98, doi:10.1080/13439000301606.

⁵⁷ Bolton, John R. *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir*. First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition., Simon & Schuster, 2020.

is encapsulated in “Summing Up of Postwar Diplomacy,” which he made his major policy statement in 2018.⁵⁸ Abe declared that he would try to resolve the most difficult issues for Japanese diplomacy, such as negotiations with Russia over the Northern Territories and the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea.

Abe gave up on constitutional reform and instead demanded the legacy of his administration be diplomacy. He had two-thirds of the seats required to initiate a constitutional amendment in both the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors. However, even if Abe were to initiate the motion, he could not foresee gaining majority support in the referendum that would ultimately be necessary to revise the constitution, due to lack of public support for the amendment in his hands. This was too grim a prospect for Abe since he could not achieve the constitutional reform that he had longed for, even though he had been in power for a long time. By comparison, diplomacy involves a negotiating partner and a complexity of factors, including the international political situation and the domestic situation of the other side, and, thus, like constitutional reform, there is room for Abe to avoid criticism of failure if he fails to achieve it on his own. The prospect of taking on the most difficult issue in the history of Japanese diplomacy was an attractive leadership image for Abe, whose political base had been adversely affected by the Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen scandals.⁵⁹

Negotiations between Japan and Russia on the Northern Territories have been attempted by many prime ministers. They have all failed, however, due to unsuccessful negotiations with Russia, changes in the Japanese government, and interference by the United States, which is not

⁵⁸ Minutes of the 197th Session of the National Assembly, House of Representatives Meeting No. 1., *House of Representatives*, <https://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/minutes/api/v1/detailPDF/img/119705254X00120181024>; Liberal Democratic Party. LDP Presidential Election Candidate Comments Speech (10 Sept. 2018). 2018. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n65WYY3Hmwk>.

⁵⁹ Saeki, Keishi. “PM Abe Did His Job, but Not His Commander in Chief.” *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 26 Sept. 2020, <https://digital.asahi.com/articles/ASN9T25MZN9NUPQJ001.html>.

happy with the approach of Japan and Russia. Abe planned to enter negotiations with Russia at a time when his long-term stable government was on track, and with the help of former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, who had established good personal trust with Putin. The Obama administration, however, was staunchly opposed to Russia, so Abe made full-scale contact with Putin after the 2016 presidential election. The fact that Trump was less cautious about Russia also worked in Abe's favor. Ultimately, Abe was unable to achieve any results in his negotiations with Russia, but Trump's presence came in handy as he acted to fulfill his ambitions.

Trump's hostile policies toward China and the deterioration of U.S.-China relations also worked to Abe's advantage. First, they contributed to making it look as if Abe's policy toward the United States, which was aimed at maintaining a strong U.S. government involvement in Northeast Asia, was successful both inside and outside Japan. Also, China softened its previously coercive stance toward the Abe-led government and approached Japan with a more conciliatory position, intending to crack the U.S.-Japan relationship; in 2018, Abe visited Beijing and announced a policy shift from "confrontation" to "cooperation," including Japan-China market cooperation in third countries.⁶⁰ As it turned out, this did not happen due to Abe's resignation, but the plan for Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Japan in 2020 was on the verge of materializing. Abe showed, both at home and abroad, that he is a conservative who can successfully maintain relations with China, the neighboring superpower, contribute to regional peace, and have the chops and diplomatic experience to stabilize business between Japan and China.

In 2015, Abe, with Obama's help, brought some closure to Japan's longstanding problem with South Korea. He reached an agreement with South Korean President Park Geun-Hye on the

⁶⁰ "Japan, China Cooperate on Third Country Development, PM Abe Meets with Li." *Mainichi.jp*, 26 Oct. 2018, <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20181026/dde/001/010/048000c>.

comfort women issue, which has remained a barrier in Japan-South Korea relations.⁶¹ The Japanese government acknowledged the military's involvement and the government's responsibility for the issue and announced that Japan would contribute ¥1 billion to a new foundation to be established by the South Korean government to support the former comfort women. Both Japan and South Korea confirmed that this framework would be a "final and irreversible solution."

This was a major concession for the conservative Abe, and there was a great deal of opposition from the right in Japan, but he prevented the criticism from spreading by explaining that it was a "final and irreversible solution" and that Obama appreciated it. The fact that he himself acted as a bulwark against attacks from the right-wing and paved the way for improved relations with his neighboring country gave Abe new confidence. But when Moon Jae-in became the new South Korean president, he turned against Japan, insisting that he would renege on the 2015 agreement and support a Supreme Court ruling that required Japanese companies to pay compensation to World War II-era workers.

When ties between Japan and South Korea have cooled, the United States has traditionally urged the two allies to improve relations. Trump, however, left the fray unaddressed. Abe was able to expose his right-wing ideas and his conservative side to South Korea. Not caring that Japan-Korea relations would deteriorate further, he imposed export restrictions on South Korea and sued South Korea at the WTO. South Korea also took countermeasures, and the confrontation between Japan and South Korea became a game of chicken, but Trump did not express concern or criticize Japan for this.

⁶¹ "Joint Press Release by the Foreign Ministers of Japan and South Korea." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/na/kr/page4_001664.html.

On the other hand, Abe was pushed around by Trump on the matter of the abductions of Japanese nationals by North Korea. To begin with, this issue was the most important theme for Abe; it gave him public support as a politician and elevated his status to that of prime minister.⁶² After the inauguration of his government, Abe first tried to get closer to North Korea, signing Japan's own Stockholm Agreement in 2014, which included North Korea's reassessment of the Japanese abductees.⁶³ Alarmed by the inadequacy of North Korea's interim report for Japan, however, the Japanese government suspended the re-investigation and decided to impose sanctions in February 2016. North Korea announced the suspension of the re-investigation and the dissolution of the special committee on the abduction issue; in a speech to the United Nations (UN) in September 2017, Abe asserted: "[w]hat we need against North Korea is not dialogue. What we need against North Korea is not dialogue, but pressure."⁶⁴ After switching from his previous line of dialogue to a line of pressure, Abe urged other nations to concur with his hard-line stance against North Korea.

Trump, however, found his diplomatic ambition in dialogue with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and announced that he would hold a U.S.-North Korea summit in March 2018. Abe had to concur with Trump's policy, saying that he appreciated the changes in North Korea. The negotiations between North Korea and the United States were continued to explain to Abe by Trump at a series of repeated U.S.-Japan Summit. Abe's stance, however, continued to vacillate between pressure and dialogue. When the second U.S.-North Korea Summit of February 2019 was canceled because of the bargaining by the United States and North Korea, he reversed his

⁶² Tobias.

⁶³Lies, Ekaine, and Kajimoto, Tetsushi. "North Korea agrees to reopen probe into Japan abductees." *Reuters*, 29 May 2014. [www.reuters.com, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-northkorea-idUSKBN0E90TG20140529](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-northkorea-idUSKBN0E90TG20140529); "Japan-North Korea Intergovernmental Conference" *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/na/kp/page4_000494.html.

⁶⁴ "Japan's Abe, at UN General Assembly, Calls for 'Action Now' on DPRK Nuclear Programme." *UN News*, 20 Sept. 2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/565722-japans-abe-un-general-assembly-calls-action-now-dprk-nuclear-programme>.

assessment, saying that he respected and supported the U.S. president's decision. As a result, Trump held essentially three summits with Kim Jong-un between June 2018 and June 2019. In April, after their second meeting in February 2019, Abe met with Trump and was persuaded by Trump to change course. Abe called for "dialogue without preconditions" with North Korea.⁶⁵ North Korea did not respond to Abe's request, but instead conducted frequent tests of a new type of missile capable of carrying a nuclear bomb. Trump, who wanted to score points in diplomacy, was preoccupied with dialogue with North Korea, but Abe continued to follow his lead. Finally, Abe was forced to resign as prime minister without realizing his legacy.

Abe treated Trump to meetings, meals, gifts, and golf at every opportunity. There were advantages and disadvantages, but Abe believed that the fact that he maintained a close relationship with Trump would influence his counterpart's judgment when negotiating with foreign leaders. It was difficult for world leaders to get along with Trump, so much so that being close to Trump became one of Abe's greatest achievements.⁶⁶ According to what Abe told his friends, he was asked by several European leaders how he could play golf with Trump. By creating a close relationship with Trump, Abe switched his name from "Abe of the economy" to "Abe of diplomacy" to appeal to his domestic constituency. In the summer of 2019, a year before Abe's third consecutive term as LDP president was set to expire, it was openly stated within the LDP that, if Trump were to be re-elected as president, only Shinzo Abe would be able to deal with him. The opinion was that the LDP rules should be amended again to allow Abe to continue

⁶⁵ "Japan-North Korea summit: 'We will discuss without preconditions.' The prime minister said in an interview." *The Sankei News*, 2 May. 2019, https://special.sankei.com/a/politics/article/20190502/0001.html?_ga=2.105572875.988702649.1556340320-144390315.1519223518.

⁶⁶ Sato, Taketsugu, and Ono, Kotaro. "(In the age of Trump.) Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting: A Good Start for Golf Diplomacy." *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 10 Feb. 2017, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S12789905.html>.

as LDP president and prime minister for a fourth consecutive term.⁶⁷ This is the first time since the formation of the LDP in 1955 that it was recommended that the party rules be changed because of who the president of the United States was.

The Trump administration was unique in its high turnover of senior-ranking advisers and cabinet members.⁶⁸ Consistent functioning of the entire administration is essential for building and maintaining stable foreign relations. Trump, however, implemented frequent appointments and removals. This included Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Mattis, and the security sector was no exception. They dared to challenge Trump at times, but that courage led to their removals. For Japan, this has led to frequent changes in the counterparts who are responsible for maintaining stable U.S.-Japan relations. One of Abe's senior bureaucrats feared this situation, saying, "[t]he maintenance of U.S.-Japan relations has been entrusted to just two people, Abe and Trump." That is why Abe's relationship with Trump was the most important theme for Japan in the four years of the Trump administration. While good personal relationships between leaders of states are significant, Japan and the United States thus experienced the risks of having diplomacy between nations rely to a large extent on personal relationships.

Conclusion

Japan and the United States, which have relied on close relations between their leaders, need to hurry up to build a new relationship now that the two main players have both left the scene. Abe's resignation was sudden. For Trump, his defeat would also have been unexpected. Both Abe's successor, Yoshihide Suga, and Trump's successor, Joe Biden are urgently trying to

⁶⁷ "Liberal Democrat Amari: 'The World Situation Is...' Hints at Abe's Election for the Fourth Term as President." *The Sankei News*, 11 Nov. 2019, <https://www.sankei.com/politics/news/191111/pl1911110015-n1.html>.

⁶⁸ Tenpas, Kathryn Dunn. "Tracking Turnover in the Trump Administration." *Brookings*, 20 Dec. 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/tracking-turnover-in-the-trump-administration/>.

stabilize each of their country's political situations. When Suga took over as prime minister, he retained many of Abe's cabinet members.⁶⁹ On the other hand, Biden is appointing ministers at a pace rarely seen in recent years.⁷⁰

The Obama administration's vice president and the Abe administration's cabinet secretary will have to take on the challenge of maintaining and developing a new U.S.-Japan relationship that is different from that of their predecessors. At every turn, Trump has rejected the system of international cooperation, withdrawing from the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization (WHO). As a result, the world is in danger of being replaced by China as the world leader in the WTO and other international organizations. The TPP, which Trump has left, went into effect without the United States. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), China's largest economic partnership in the region, will also be launched. Trump pulled U.S. troops out of the Middle East one by one and favored Israel. He escalated the confrontation with Iran, making it more difficult to resolve the nuclear issue. He has engaged in direct dialogue with North Korea. However, the security crisis remained unresolved. In the meantime, China continued to expand its territory and territorial waters. China's ambition in Hong Kong was a challenge to democracy, but the democracies of the world were helpless. Abe has not condemned Trump's denial of international cooperation. He stressed the importance of international cooperation and set the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiative (FOIP) as a common goal with the US. He struggled to barely maintain international cooperation in the absence of the United States and worked diligently to preserve values shared by the

⁶⁹ List of Ministers (The Cabinet) | *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet*.
https://japan.kantei.go.jp/99_suga/meibo/daijin/index_e.html.

⁷⁰ "Tracking the Political Appointees Biden Is Nominating to Fill the Top Roles in His Administration." *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2020/biden-appointee-tracker/>; "Trump Nominations Tracker: The People Donald Trump Tapped for Key Roles During His Term." *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/>.

Western world, such as free trade, rule of law, and democracy. Though Abe and Trump called for FOIP, the reality is that China's momentum is winning out.

The new U.S.-Japan relationship will require Suga and Biden to work together with allied countries to support international solidarity.⁷¹ Suga was a stalwart Chief Cabinet Secretary throughout the second Abe administration. He has experience in managing domestic affairs, but none in foreign affairs. Inevitably, Suga has made it a basic policy of his administration to continue Abe's foreign policy.⁷² Compared to other allies, Japan, which is not under pressure to rebuild trust, is expected to be actively involved in the U.S. efforts to repair the alliance. In the Biden administration, policy experts such as Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan are leading foreign policy. This is a return to diplomacy by professionals, rather than the ad hoc diplomacy that relied on individuals during the Trump administration. Shortly after taking office, Biden rushed to reintegrate the United States into the international community. He formally returned to the Paris Agreement on global warming and announced his intention to participate in talks to return to the nuclear agreement with Iran, which the Trump administration had withdrawn from.⁷³ The United States is already rushing to mend the rift between the United States and Europe in NATO and with Germany and South Korea over the sharing of expenses for U.S. troops stationed in those countries. With the expansion of Russia and China in mind, Biden has made clear his message

⁷¹ Chang, Che. "Japan Is the New Leader of Asia's Liberal Order." *Foreign Affairs*, March 2021.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-24/japan-new-leader-asias-liberal-order>.

⁷² Suga, Yoshihide. "October 26, 2020 Policy Speech by Prime Minister Suga at the 203rd Session of the Diet." *Prime Minister's Office website*, https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/99_suga/statement/2020/1026shoshinhyomei.html.

⁷³ "Paris Climate Agreement." *The White House*, 20 Jan. 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/20/paris-climate-agreement/>; Biden, Joe. "Remarks at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference." *The White House*, 19 Feb. 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/19/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-2021-virtual-munich-security-conference/>.

that the United States and Europe should be united again.⁷⁴ Biden held the first-ever summit of the four nations of Japan, the United States, Australia, and India, and sent Blinken and Austin to Asia in March of 2021. A series of world-leading security consultative committees (2+2) between Japan and top foreign and defense officials were held. While the core of a foreign policy to bring order to the world lies in revitalizing alliances, it is also true that it is unclear whether strengthening alliances will change the policies of Russia and China. At a meeting with China in Alaska in March of 2021, the two sides were sharply divided.⁷⁵ Concerning Iran, the Biden administration has announced its intention to return to the six-party nuclear agreement, but Iran has demanded that economic sanctions be lifted as a condition for the U.S. return, and the gap between the United States and Iran is large.⁷⁶

Both Suga and Biden must focus on stabilizing domestic politics for now. Suga's top priority is to win the lower house election, which must be held by the autumn of 2021, and to win the LDP presidential election in September of that year he will begin his new term. Without a stable number of seats in the Diet and stabilization within the LDP, Suga will not have the luxury of focusing his political energies on foreign affairs. However, Suga has been embroiled in scandals that involve him and that have continued since the Abe administration, and due to the delay in COVID-19 vaccination measures, public support for him is on the decline.⁷⁷ Whether or not Suga can determine the most advantageous point in time for himself and dissolve the House

⁷⁴ Sanger, David E., and Michael Crowley. "As Biden and Xi Begin a Careful Dance, a New American Policy Takes Shape." *The New York Times*, 18 Mar. 2021. NYTimes.com, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/us/politics/us-china-relations.html>; China's Sharp Words in Alaska Signal Its More Confident Posture - *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/19/world/asia/china-us-alaska.html?referringSource=articleShare&fbclid=IwAR2cfbP9K-xAPrz3OylqTRmjcgeeKlzvHtvbYdcjKHdE7_iSNLb29WQpCEI.

⁷⁵ Jakes, Lara, and Steven Lee Myers. "Tense Talks with China Left U.S. 'Cleareyed' About Beijing's Intentions, Officials Say." *The New York Times*, 19 Mar. 2021. NYTimes.com, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/19/world/asia/china-us-alaska.html>.

⁷⁶ Tharoor, Ishaan. "Analysis | Biden's Window with Iran Is Starting to Close." *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/03/19/biden-iran-deal-stalemate/>.

⁷⁷ "Suga cabinet support plummets to 33 percent." *The Asahi Shimbun digital*, 17 May. 2021, https://digital.asahi.com/articles/DA3S14905874.html?iref=pc_ss_date_article.

of Representatives at that time will have a major impact on his political drive in the future. There are still many Trump supporters in the United States, and, as symbolized by the January 6th attack on Congress, opposition to the current administration is strong and significant. Biden has inherited some of the Trump administration's policies, including its tough stance on China and protection of domestic industry. The fact that Biden went out of his way to say that to promote foreign policy for the middle class, they must focus on revitalizing the domestic economy shows the difficulty he faces in taking the diplomatic helm.⁷⁸ It remains to be seen whether support for Biden will grow. If he is to gain political traction, he will need to hurry to produce results for the midterm elections in 2022.

The common challenge for Japan and the United States is clear; how to confront China, how to further strengthen and maintain the U.S.-Japan alliance, and how to restore international cooperation. On the issue of China, the Biden administration has called for strong unity with Japan. The fate of the world will depend on whether Japan and the United States, as a nation, can bring order to the Asia-Pacific region and expand it to the entire world. To maintain the international order, both Japan and the United States need to further stabilize their national power. They must use domestic political stability as a driving force to increase their international influence and deepen the relationship between their allies. The challenges to strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance are manifold. It will be important whether Japan and the United States can cooperate with a global perspective on issues such as the cost of stationing U.S. forces in Japan, countermeasures against COVID-19, coping with the global economic downturn, and addressing global-scale issues. In other words, the future development of the U.S.-Japan relationship will

⁷⁸ Biden, Joe. "Remarks on America's Place in the World." *The White House*, 5 Feb. 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>.

depend on how much Suga and Biden can learn from the merits and demerits of the four years of Abe and Trump, and how much they can accomplish.

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<https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/fact-sheets/2019/september/fact-sheet-us-japan-trade-agreement>.
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