

## Chapter 7

# Great Power Competition and Japan

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### What is great power competition?

In December 2017, the United States' new "National Security Strategy (NSS)" was released. The new NSS expressed the view that, as a result of challenges to the United States' dominance since the end of the Cold War and the rise of revisionist states such as Russia and China, great power competition has returned. Since then, "great power competition" has become a key phrase symbolic of contemporary international relations and has been frequently used in academic discourse, various discussions, and the media.

However, the meaning of this phrase is not always clear. To begin with, what exactly does "competition" among great powers refer to? The simplest and most straightforward explanation is that it refers to a struggle for regional or global "dominance" or "hegemony."<sup>1</sup> The United States, which prevailed in the fight for hegemony over Germany and Japan in Europe and Asia, succeeded in consolidating its primacy in the world after World War II based on its overwhelming military and economic power. Repelling the challenge posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the United States enjoyed an era of prosperity known as "Pax Americana." However, it has been argued that as its hegemonic position began to come under threat from the rise of China, the United States has completely reversed its previous policy of "engagement" with China in pursuit of a new

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<sup>1</sup> Major studies that have adopted this position include Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (W.W. Norton, 2011) [Japanese edition is *Shihai e no kyōsō: Beichūtairitsu no kōzu to ajia no shōrai* 支配への競争—米中対立の構図とアジアの将来, trans. & ed. Sahashi Ryō 佐橋亮 (Nippon Hyōron-sha, 2013)]; Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power* (Black Inc., 2012) [Japanese edition is *Amerika ga chūgoku o erabu hi: Hakenkoku naki ajia no meibun* アメリカが中国を選ぶ日一覇権国なきアジアの命運, trans. Tokugawa Ichihiro 徳川家広 (Keisō Shobō, 2012)]; and Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017) [Japanese edition is *Beichūsensō zenya: Shinkyūtaikoku o shōtotsusaseru rekishi no hōsoku to kaihi* 米中戦争前夜—新旧大国を衝突させる歴史の法則と回避, trans. Fujiwara Tomoko 藤原朝子 (Diamond-sha, 2017)]. Studies in Japanese include Mifune Emi 三船恵美, *Beichūhakenkyōsō to nihon* 米中覇権競争と日本 [Japan and the U.S.-China Fight for Hegemony] (Keisō Shobō, 2021), etc.

“containment” posture.<sup>2</sup>

While the view of great power competition as a fight for hegemony between the United States and China certainly highlights an important aspect of the competition, there are also several problems with it. Firstly, if we understand great power competition as a fight for hegemony, such a definition is inevitably limited to describing the competition between the United States and China. In today’s international relations, no other country besides China has the ability to displace U.S. hegemony. Nevertheless, Russia is often positioned as a major player alongside China where great power competition is concerned.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, several countries besides the United States and China have also adopted a posture aimed at countering China’s rise through security cooperation alliances such as the Quad (comprising Japan, the United States, Australia, and India), AUKUS (comprising Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), etc. Are these countries, many of which with larger economies than Russia, not positioned as players in the great power competition? Conversely, are the United States, China, and Russia the only actors in the great power competition?

The view of great power competition as a mere struggle for hegemony also neglects, if not ignore, aspects such as institutions and values in the international community. As Kōsaka Masataka argued previously, international politics is not only a system of power centered on military power but also one that involves the interests and values of various states.<sup>4</sup> The postwar leadership of the United States has successfully gained support in Europe and parts of Asia not simply because of sheer American power but because the international institutions and ideology it offered were attractive and provided benefits to many countries.<sup>5</sup> From the perspective of these countries, China and Russia pose a threat to an international order that is aligned with their interests and values under U.S. hegemony, setting aside the question of whether one should call this a U.S. “hegemonic order”. This explains why “Western” countries have strengthened cross-regional cooperation across Europe and Asia in a bid to counter the influence of China

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<sup>2</sup> This view is often pointed out by Chinese commentators in particular. See, for example, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Minister Qin Gang Meets the Press,” March 7, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, p. 27, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Kōsaka Masataka 高坂正堯, *Kokusaiseiji: Kyōfu to kibō 国際政治—恐怖と希望 [International Politics: Fear and Hope]* (Chūkō Shinsho, 1966).

<sup>5</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2012), esp. chap. 5.

and Russia, which have jointly challenged the existing order.

Based on the above perspective, this paper approaches the phrase “great power competition” not simply as a struggle for dominance or hegemony between the United States and China but as a struggle over the nature and legitimacy of an international order composed of status-quo countries, including the United States and other countries in the West on one hand, and revisionist states such as China and Russia on the other hand.<sup>6</sup> “International order” is a general term that refers to the principles, rules, and norms that govern relations among states, as well as the institutions that serve as a guarantee for these principles, rules, and norms, including the balance of power among the various states.<sup>7</sup> For states with certain agreements on the legitimacy of the international order, incentives are created to maintain the order through alliances and institutions. Conversely, countries that are dissatisfied with the existing order will form coalitions with other discontented countries and attempt to overthrow the existing order through legal or illegal means.

In such revolutionary situations, diplomacy often becomes dysfunctional as a restraint on the use of force. As Henry Kissinger has pointed out, when two states with fundamentally different views on legitimacy and their desired order confront each other, it becomes difficult for the two sides to reconcile their interests through a common language. In such cases, diplomatic dialogue tends to devolve into an exchange of accusations of unreasonableness and immorality on the part of the opposing side or an attempt to win over neutral parties to their own side.<sup>8</sup> Under these circumstances, it not only becomes extremely challenging for opposing sides to reconcile their views but also raises the specter of war and arms races sparked by the fear that existing allegiances to their respective regimes may be overturned.<sup>9</sup> Great power competition is nothing but a power struggle between regimes with fundamentally different views on their desired

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<sup>6</sup> Studies offering a similar perspective on U.S.-China relations include, for example, Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford University Press, 2021). Also, on issues of order and legitimacy, see Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812-1822* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1964) [Japanese edition is *Kishshinjā: Kaifukusareta sekaibeitwa* キッシンジャー 回復された世界平和, trans. Itō Yukio 伊藤幸雄 (Hara Shobō, 2009)], chap. 1; Kurt Campbell and Rush Doshi, “How America Can Shore Up Asian Order: A Strategy for Restoring Balance and Legitimacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-01-12/how-america-can-shore-asian-order>.

<sup>7</sup> Hedley Bull, *Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1977) [Japanese edition is *Kokusaishakairon: Anāikikaru sosaieti* 国際社会論—アナーキカル・ソサイエティ, trans. Usuki Eiichi 臼杵英一 (Iwanami Shoten, 2000)].

<sup>8</sup> Kissinger, *Kishshinjā: Kaifukusareta sekaibeitwa*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

order based on mutual distrust and the partial (or total) breakdown of the possibility of negotiations.

## The struggle for an order

The end of the East-West conflict after the Cold War created the appearance that a liberal international order founded on the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law had become universal. The United States and its allies emphasized the inclusion of Russia, other former Eastern Bloc countries, and China in the international order through the expansion of free markets, human rights diplomacy, and multilateral institutions. The post-Cold War eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), as well as the provision of aid to China by countries in the West, were basically founded on this idea of integrating the former Eastern Bloc into the West. Behind this approach was the expectation that as Russia and China became increasingly integrated into the international community, domestic reforms such as democratization and support for open markets would simultaneously take place in these countries.<sup>10</sup>

This policy of U.S. engagement seemed to be going smoothly until around the early 2000s. Russia joined the G7 in 1998, and China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Both China and Russia also took collective action with the United States in the war on terror following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. China and Russia had a number of policy elites, especially in their respective foreign policy departments, who embraced the values of the international society and believed that it is in their country's interest to abide by the international society's existing rules, thus providing impetus for greater international cooperation.<sup>11</sup> President Vladimir Putin agreed to manage Russia's relations with NATO in a manner that was not mutually hostile even after former Eastern European countries, including Estonia, Latvia, and

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<sup>10</sup> Sahashi Ryō 佐橋亮, *Beichūtairitsu* 米中対立 [*The U.S.-China Rivalry*] (Chūkō Shinsho, 2021), p. 17. In his book, Sahashi identifies “three expectations” (China's political reform, marketization reform, and contribution to the existing international order) that were behind U.S. support for China after the Cold War.

<sup>11</sup> On China, see, for example, Susan L. Shirk, *Chūgoku: Ayau chōtaikoku* 中国一危うい超大国 [*China: Fragile Superpower*], trans. Tokugawa Ichiro 徳川家広 (NHK Publishing, 2008), chap. 5; on Russia, see Hyōdō Shinji 兵頭慎治, “Pūchin/roshia shinseiken no taigai/anzenhoshō seisaku” プーチン・ロシア新政権の対外・安全保障政策 [“The New Putin/Russian Administration's Foreign and Security Policies”], 防衛研究所紀要 [*NIDS Security Studies*], vol. 4, no. 3 (2002).

Lithuania, began the process of joining NATO in 1999.<sup>12</sup>

However, China and Russia's cooperative policy toward the West gradually began to break down in the mid- to late 2000s. At the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, President Putin delivered an aggressive speech in which he claimed that the rules-based international order was merely an "instrument of domination by the United States" and explicitly condemned the trend of NATO expansion and the strengthening of the NATO missile defense system.<sup>13</sup> In the following year, Russia launched a military intervention in a conflict on Georgian territory. Russia subsequently intensified its rhetoric on seeking a "multipolar" world and strengthened its ties with authoritarian states in Asia that also oppose the U.S.-led order.<sup>14</sup> Despite U.S. President Obama's calls for a reset in U.S.-Russia relations after taking office in 2009, Russia suddenly occupied and annexed Crimea in 2014 before intervening in the Syrian civil war in support of the Assad regime's suppression of civil society in the following year.

China, on the other hand, having successfully held the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and grown in confidence following its rapid recovery from the Global Financial Crisis, has intensified its activities in the so-called "gray zone" and adopted a more hardline diplomatic approach on issues such as land reclamation and militarization in the South China Sea. Xi Jinping, who was nominated as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2012 and became China's President in March of the following year, brought Marxist ideology to the fore and stepped up China's centralization, domestic surveillance regime, and information control, while simultaneously strengthening efforts aimed at achieving the nationalistic goal of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." In November 2013, China's Ministry of National Defense suddenly declared the establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea, and in August of the following year, a Chinese Air Force fighter was involved in an abnormal approach toward a U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft flying over the high seas in the South China Sea.

At the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs held in November 2014, President Xi Jinping made a high-profile declaration that China would conduct

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<sup>12</sup> Yamazoe Hiroshi 山添博史, "Daisanshō: Roshia no kotenteki na taikokukōsō: Tōnoku 'seiryokuken'" 第3章 ロシアの古典的な大国構想—遠のく「勢力圏」["Chapter 3: Russia's Classical Notion of Great Power and Waning 'Sphere of Influence'"], in *Taikokukankyōsō no shinjōtai* 大國間競争の新常態 [*The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition*], ed. Masuda Masayuki 増田雅之 (NIDS, 2023), p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

“major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.” Behind this declaration is believed to have been China’s recognition that the international balance of power is undergoing a major shift due to the decline of U.S. hegemony and the rise of China.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, around 2016, China began to express its support for the United Nations and a UN-centered international order while clearly stating that it does not support a U.S.-centered security network or Western values.<sup>16</sup> At the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2017, President Xi Jinping presented his view that “socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” would pave the way for the modernization of developing countries and “offer a completely new alternative” to these countries and their peoples.<sup>17</sup>

Under these circumstances, it was a natural progression for China and Russia, which have both become increasingly resistant to the U.S.-led order, to deepen their cooperation. In his speech in March 2014 declaring Russia’s annexation of Crimea, President Putin expressed his gratitude to China for understanding Russia’s actions in Crimea. In March 2015, the two countries committed to a “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership” in a joint statement issued after the China-Russia summit. China and Russia then conducted their first joint exercises in the South China Sea in 2016 and in the Sea of Okhotsk in the following year. The two countries also promoted

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<sup>15</sup> Yatsuzuka Masaaki 八塚正晃, “Daihashō: ‘Chūgoku no tokushoku aru taikokugaikō’ to chūtō” 第8章「中国の特色ある大国外交」と中東 [“Chapter 8: China’s ‘Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics’ and the Middle East”], in *Beichūkankai o koete: Jiyū de hirakareta chiikichitsujo kōchiku no ‘kijiku kokka nibon’ no indotaiheiyō senryaku chūtō/afurika* 米中関係を越えて—自由で開かれた地域秩序構築の「機軸国家日本」のインド太平洋戦略 中東・アフリカ [*Beyond U.S.-China Relations: The Indo-Pacific Strategy of Japan as a Cornerstone State in Building a Free and Open Regional Order—The Middle East and Africa*], ed. Japan Institute of International Affairs (Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2022), p. 106.

<sup>16</sup> Kawashima Shin 川島真, “Madarajō no ryūdōteki chitsujokukan e: Beichūsōkokuka no sekaichitsujo” 『まだら状』の流動的秩序空間へ—米中相剋化の世界秩序 [“Toward a ‘Dispersed’ Dynamic Spatial Order: The World Order Amid Intensifying U.S.-China Rivalry”], in *Afutākōrona jidai no beichūkankai to sekaichitsujo* アフターコロナ時代の米中関係と世界秩序 [*U.S.-China Relations and the World Order in the Post-COVID Era*], eds. Kawashima Shin 川島真 and Mori Satoru 森聡 (University of Tokyo Press, 2020), p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> “Shī jīnpīn-shì: Shōkōshakai no zenmenteki kansei no kessen ni shōrishi, shīnjidai no chūgoku no tokushoku aru shakaishugi no idai na shōri o kachitorō—Chūgokukyōsantō dai-109-kai zenkokudaihyōtaikai ni okeru hōkoku” 習近平氏：小康社会の全面的完成の決戦に勝利し、新時代の中国の特色ある社会主義の偉大な勝利をかち取ろう——中国共産党第19回全国代表大会における報告 [“Xi Jinping: Let’s Win the Decisive Battle for the Perfection of a Moderately Prosperous Society and Achieve a Great Victory for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—Report of the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party”], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 28, 2017, [http://jp.xinhuanet.com/2017-10/28/c\\_136711568.htm](http://jp.xinhuanet.com/2017-10/28/c_136711568.htm).

cooperation with countries surrounding Afghanistan and strengthened ties in the region, including in the area surrounding Japan as we will see later, and steadily expanded their influence in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, known collectively as the “Global South,” through social media as well as military and economic aid.

This strengthening of cooperation between China and Russia and the expansion of their influence certainly reflect a shift in the balance of power between the United States and China. At the same time, it is no doubt also a result of “own goals” by the West and the loss of its legitimacy. The appeal and legitimacy of core values on which the Western order was founded, such as freedom and democracy, have been severely undermined by events such as the rise of populism in the United States and European countries, the division and confusion surrounding identity politics, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU known as Brexit, as well as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the subsequent rise of the Taliban.

In particular, the emergence of the Trump administration in the United States in 2017 and the ensuing political turmoil around that period left a strong impression on China and Russia that the United States was on the decline and that a shift toward a multipolar world was under way.<sup>18</sup> The bitter confrontations that took place during the U.S. presidential election were said to have further weakened the admiration for democracy, as exemplified by the United States, that existed even within China.<sup>19</sup> Beijing and Moscow also often contributed to the chaos in the West by spreading disinformation, intervening in elections, and carrying out cyber attacks. The Trump administration’s “America First” policy and disregard for international organizations provided further impetus for the expansion of Chinese and Russian influence in the arena of multilateral and economic diplomacy. Even as Trump decided to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and refused to participate in the East Asia Summit, trade volume between China and Southeast Asian countries continued to grow steadily, making ASEAN the largest trading partner of China in 2020.<sup>20</sup>

In February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine with Russian forces and condemned the “hypocrisy” of the world order led

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Rush Doshi, “Beijing Believes Trump Is Accelerating American Decline,” *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Carrie Gracie, “US election 2016: China eyes chance to weaken US power,” *BBC News*, November 10, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37924880>.

<sup>20</sup> Issaku Harada, “ASEAN becomes China’s top trade partner as supply chain evolves,” *Nikkei Asia*, July 15, 2020.

by the United States and other countries in the West, while justifying Russia's actions in terms of self-defense.<sup>21</sup> China, which denied the possibility of a military invasion by Russia until shortly before the invasion, implicitly endorsed Russia's military actions and even criticized the West's reaction, including its sanctions against Russia. In a video conference held in December 2022, President Xi Jinping and President Putin committed to strengthening strategic cooperation between China and Russia, including in the military arena.

Many countries in the Global South supported the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine but did not support the resolution calling for the suspension of Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council. Although these countries are critical of Russia's use of force to change the status quo, they are also skeptical of Western countries that have swept their past actions during the era of colonial rule under the rug while brandishing the "rule of law." As a result, the waning fortunes of the liberal order led by the United States have sparked a complex game involving the West, China, Russia, other revisionist states, and various other countries.

Confronted with this reality, the United States has abandoned its goal of "integrating" China and Russia into the international order and shifted its policy toward pushing back against China together with its allies. The United States' 2017 National Security Strategy, which proclaimed the return of great power competition as mentioned at the start of this paper, demonstrated the country's determination to unite with its allies and friends to confront the threat posed by China and Russia. President Trump's policy of unilateralism had initially raised concerns that he might adopt a conciliatory policy toward China. Yet he ultimately adopted a hardline stance toward China that included a "trade war" through export control and tariff hikes in response to the outcry from people who had lost their jobs due to the influx of cheap Chinese goods.

The Biden administration that took office in 2021 has basically inherited the same strategy but departed from its predecessor's unilateralism to adopt a strategy that places more emphasis on partnerships and cooperation with allies and friends. In particular, ever since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration has fully embarked on the rhetoric of "democracy versus authoritarianism" and sought to reinforce the unity among democratic states through events such as the Summit for Democracy. This can be

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<sup>21</sup> "[Enzetsu zenbun] Ukuraina shinkō chokuzen pūchin-daitōryō wa nani o katatta?" 【演説全文】ウクライナ侵攻直前 プーチン大統領は何を語った? ["[Full Text of Speech] What Did President Putin Say Right Before the Invasion of Ukraine?"], *NHK*, March 4, 2022, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20220304/k10013513641000.html>.



seen, so to speak, as an attempt to revive the unity among countries in the West as well as the legitimacy of the democratic order that had been undermined under the Trump administration.

### Where is the competition headed?

Putin's plan to overthrow the Western order by invading Ukraine has, ironically, reinforced the unity among countries in the West, something which had been faltering under the Trump administration. On the other hand, it is unclear the extent to which the West will be able to maintain this sense of unity, given that the war in Ukraine is starting to look like a long grind that will test the patience of both Russia and the West. In particular, Russia is the EU's fifth largest trading partner, and sanctions against Russia have hit the European countries harder than the United States.

Furthermore, the governments of most G7 countries, including Japan, have seen their approval ratings decline due to factors such as prolonged inflation, while radical populism is on the rise in several countries. Although the Democrats fared better than expected in the November 2022 U.S. midterm elections, losing control of the House of Representatives is expected to make their management of national policies more difficult moving forward.<sup>22</sup> George Kennan, who advocated a policy of long-term containment against the Soviet Union, once suggested that the only way to overcome the international communist movement was to continue to demonstrate the value of the United States, including its ideology, to the international community.<sup>23</sup> If democratic societies continue to be mired in turmoil, the legitimacy of the liberal order itself will surely be further shaken. In this sense, it can be said that the real threat to a free society comes not from outside but from within.

On the other hand, problems are also piling up for China and Russia. In addition to stagnant economic growth in China, it also cannot be denied that the legitimacy of the communist regime may be undermined by issues such as wealth inequalities, an aging society with a declining birthrate, the lack of education among young people, rising unemployment, a massive brain drain, excessive debt, corruption, and the excessive

<sup>22</sup> For example, Watanabe Tsuneo 渡部恒雄, "Chūkansenkyo kekka wa baiden gaikō ni dō eikyōsuru ka?" 中間選挙結果はバイデン外交にどう影響するか? ["How Will the Midterm Election Results Affect Biden's Diplomacy?"], 日米関係インサイト [Insights into Japan-U.S. Relations], December 26, 2022, [https://www.spf.org/jpus-insights/spf-america-monitor/spf-america-monitor-document-detail\\_129.html](https://www.spf.org/jpus-insights/spf-america-monitor/spf-america-monitor-document-detail_129.html).

<sup>23</sup> George F. Kennan, *Amerika gaikō gojūnen* アメリカ外交50年 [American Diplomacy, 1900-1950], trans. Kondō Shin'ichi 近藤晋一, Iida Tōji 飯田藤次 and Aruga Tadashi 有賀貞 (Iwanami Shoten, 2000), pp. 188-190.

pursuit of a zero-COVID policy. In particular, some people are starting to question if the former view that time is on China's side is still necessarily valid in light of the looming "middle-income trap" in China.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, some have pointed out that the exacerbation of China's dictatorship has led to more rigid decision-making and greater unpredictability, and that even if President Xi Jinping were to make poor decisions in foreign or domestic affairs, it is becoming increasingly difficult for these mistakes to be rectified given that he has surrounded himself with an entourage of "yes men."<sup>25</sup>

Russia, too, is experiencing problems such as stagnant economic growth and rising unemployment due to sanctions imposed by the West, in addition to a protracted war that has resulted in countless casualties. Even if Russia were to ultimately achieve its military objectives in Ukraine, it could become economically vulnerable due to its heavy reliance on Western technology and markets, from which it could be isolated. Although Russia would become more reliant on China in such a situation, China and Russia may not necessarily become a monolith as they possess markedly different political regimes, economic systems, and cultures. In particular, although the two countries share the major goal of overthrowing the U.S.-led order, it can be said that there is a certain difference in temperament between them. While Russia seeks to change the order through violent and radical means, China seeks to supplement the use of force with a gradual transformation of the existing order through gray zones and peaceful means such as international organizations.

In the first place, countries in the region accept aid from China and Russia from a pragmatic standpoint, and it is doubtful that they are actually attracted to the regimes themselves. It is no doubt true that many countries are attracted to China's governance, advanced technology, and political mobilization capabilities, but these qualities alone will not necessarily result in the widespread adoption of the "China model," as it is also necessary to assess if the values on which the model is based, the legal structure

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<sup>24</sup> Tsugami Toshiya 津上俊哉, *Beichūtairitsumo no saki ni matsu mono: Gurēto risetto ni sonae yo* 米中対立の先に待つもの—グレート・リセットに備えよ [What Awaits Us Beyond the U.S.-China Rivalry: Prepare for the Great Reset] (Nikkei Publishing, 2022), p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> Jude Blanchette, "Xi Jinping's Faltering Foreign Policy: The War in Ukraine and the Perils of Strongman Rule," *Foreign Affairs*, March 16, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-03-16/xi-jinpings-faltering-foreign-policy>. For a discussion on the vulnerabilities of the Xi Jinping regime due to the problems and inefficiencies inherent in authoritarian regimes, see Matthew Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

founded on such a model, etc., will be adopted worldwide.<sup>26</sup> Daniel A. Bell, a professor at Tsinghua University who has written positively on the meritocratic principles that undergird the Chinese political model, is nevertheless pessimistic about the possibility of its spread to other countries, including authoritarian states, because such a model is deeply entrenched in Chinese history and culture.<sup>27</sup>

The Chinese model is also characterized by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party across all areas and domains, down to every nook and cranny of society. It is said to be a model that is inextricable from the very existence of the party itself.<sup>28</sup> Radical policies such as the so-called zero-COVID policy are only possible under such a unique Chinese model, and it is highly dubious that other countries can emulate it. Moreover, there are views that the appeal of the Chinese model has been undermined by domestic problems, social disparities, environmental degradation, and occasional episodes of political repression.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the Chinese model has already sparked a backlash in many countries in response to its excessive debt and surveillance regime, resulting in the defeat of pro-Chinese parties in elections. In short, while the liberal international order advocated by some in the West has not been as universal as they would like, the Chinese model is even less universal.

Many regions, including the Global South, have also adopted the strategy of reaping the benefits of this competition by maintaining relations with both powers instead of choosing between the United States and China. For these countries, although great

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<sup>26</sup> Kawashima Shin 川島真, “Joshō: Gendai chūgoku o yomitoku sanyōso: Keizai, tekunoroji, kokusaikankei” 序章 現代中国を読み解く三要素—経済・テクノロジー・国際関係 [“Introduction: Three Elements for Reading Contemporary China: Economy, Technology, and International Relations”], in *Gendai chūgoku o yomitoku sanyōso: Keizai, tekunoroji, kokusaikankei* 現代中国を読み解く三要素—経済・テクノロジー・国際関係 [Three Elements for Reading Contemporary China: Economy, Technology, and International Relations], eds. Kawashima Shin 川島真 and The 21st Century Public Policy Institute (Keisō Shobō, 2020), p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 195-198.

<sup>28</sup> Miyamoto Yūji 宮本雄二, “Joshō: Beichū-dekappuringuron e no shiten: Ryōkokukankei no fukuzatsusa to chūgoku no kahensei?” 序章 米中デカップリング論への視点—両国関係の複雑さと中国の可変性 [“Introduction: Perspectives on the U.S.-China Decoupling Theory: The Complexity of Bilateral Relations and China’s Unpredictability”], in *Beichūbundan no kyōjitsu: Dekappuringu to sapuraichēn no seijikeizaibunseki* 米中分断の虚実—デカップリングとサプライチェーンの政治経済分析 [The Myth of the U.S.-China Divide: A Political and Economic Analysis of the Decoupling and Supply Chain], eds. Miyamoto Yūji 宮本雄二, Ijūin Atsushi 伊集院敦 and the Japan Center for Economic Research (JCER News Publishing, 2021), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Phillip C. Saunders, “China’s Role in Asia: Attractive or Aggressive?,” in *International Relations of Asia*, ed. David Shambaugh, 3rd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022), p. 125.

power competition amplifies geopolitical risks, it also presents them with opportunities to draw the attention of the international community and maximize their own interests. Taking all these points into consideration, it seems reasonable to suggest that the world will likely become a “dispersed” order in which different gradations of U.S. and Chinese influence manifest themselves across disparate issues and domains, instead of an order founded on a rivalry characterized by a simple “democracy versus authoritarianism” dichotomy, such as that which existed during the Cold War.<sup>30</sup>

## Japan’s response

Japan is said to have been one of the greatest beneficiaries of the free and open international order led by the United States in the postwar era.<sup>31</sup> However, until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Japan had attempted to keep a certain distance from the great power competition.<sup>32</sup> At the 2018 Japan-China Summit, then Prime Minister Abe and President Xi Jinping agreed to move Japan-China relations “from competition to cooperation.” These words were strongly insisted on by the Japanese instead of the Chinese.<sup>33</sup> Japan thought it possible to maintain its own relations with China even if the rivalry between the United States and China were to escalate further. This could be seen as an idea inspired by Japan’s successful experience in developing its own trade relations with China through its policy of “separation of politics from economics” during the Cold

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<sup>30</sup> Kawashima Shin 川島真 and Mori Satoru 森聡, “Beichūtairitsu to afutākorona jidai no ‘madarajō’ no sekaichitsujo” 米中対立とアフターコロナ時代の『まだら状』の世界秩序 [“The U.S.-China Rivalry and the ‘Dispersed’ World Order in the Post-COVID Era”], in *Afutākorona jidai no beichūkankēi to sekaichitsujo* アフターコロナ時代の米中関係と世界秩序 [*U.S.-China Relations and the World Order in the Post-COVID Era*], eds. Kawashima Shin 川島真 and Mori Satoru 森聡 (University of Tokyo Press, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Funabashi Yōichi 船橋洋一 and G. John Ikenberry, “Joshō: Nihon to jiyū de hirakareta kokusaichitsujo” 序章 日本と自由で開かれた国際秩序 [“Introduction: Japan and a Free and Open International Order”], in *Jiyūshugi no kiki: Kokusaichitsujo to nihon* 自由主義の危機—国際秩序と日本 [*The Crisis of Liberalism: The International Order and Japan*], eds. Funabashi Yōichi 船橋洋一 and G. John Ikenberry (Tōyō Keizai, 2020), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Takahashi Sugio 高橋杉雄, “Nihon wa ‘mirai’ o kaerareru: ‘Taikokukankyōsō’ ni okeru tōjishishiki no jūyōsei” 日本は『未来』を変えられる:『大國間競争』における当事者意識の重要性 [“Japan Can Change Its Future: The Importance of Being an Interested Party in Great Power Competition”], Research Report, Japan Institute of International Affairs, March 24, 2021, <https://www.jiia.or.jp/research-report/post-75.html>.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Nicchu kyōdōkshihappyō ni okeru abe-sōri hatsugen” 日中共同記者発表における安倍総理発言 [“Statement by Prime Minister Abe at the Japan-China Joint Press Conference”], October 26, 2018, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page3\\_002632.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3_002632.html).

War. In other words, it was based on the old paradigm of Japan's foreign and security policies.

Regarding Japan's relations with Russia, then Prime Minister Abe held as many as 29 meetings with President Putin to discuss the Northern Territories issue and economic cooperation even amid deteriorating U.S.-Russia relations. Behind this was Japan's strategic expectation that maintaining good relations with Russia would not only resolve territorial disputes but also prevent the possibility of a two-front conflict with both China and Russia.<sup>34</sup> Here, too, one can identify a dualistic approach that sets Japan's regional strategy apart from the great power competition to some extent.

Contrary to Japan's expectations, however, China has continuously intensified its coast guard and military activities in the area surrounding Japan. China has also continuously strengthened cooperation with Russia and intensified joint activities in the area. Since 2019, Chinese and Russian bombers have conducted joint flight training in this area on an annual basis. In October 2021, Chinese and Russian naval vessels jointly sailed around the Japanese archipelago, and in September of the following year, the vessels engaged in the live firing of machine guns in the Sea of Japan. Furthermore, right before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, China and Russia declared the relations between the two countries as a "no-limits partnership." Instead of having avoided a two-front conflict with China and Russia, Japan is now faced with a three-front crisis involving China, Russia, and North Korea.

In this sense, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 can be said to have served as a "wake-up call" for Japan. Immediately after the outbreak of war, Japan and other countries in the West offered strong support for Ukraine and joined in sanctions imposed against Russia. Indeed, although Japan also joined in the sanctions imposed against Russia when Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, the West had mulled over taking action on Russia and intentionally delayed the imposition of sanctions.<sup>35</sup> The sanctions imposed on this occasion are significantly heavier than those in 2014, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Prime Minister Kishida has also sought to maintain Western unity across the Pacific

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<sup>34</sup> Ōta Masakatsu 太田昌克, Kanehara Nobukatsu 兼原信克, Takamizawa Nobushige 高見澤將林 and Banshō Kōichirō 番匠幸一郎, *Kakubeiki ni tsuite honne de banasō* 核兵器について、本音で話そう [*Let's Say What We Really Think About Nuclear Weapons*] (Shinchō Shinsho, 2022), p. 167.

<sup>35</sup> Kitade Daisuke 北出大介, "Nihon no tairoseisai no kōka ni tsuite kangaueru" 日本の対露制裁の効果について考える ["Reflecting on the Effects of Japan's Sanctions Against Russia"], Mitsui & Co. Global Strategic Studies Institute, July 7, 2016, [https://www.mitsui.com/mgssi/ja/report/detail/1220959\\_10674.html](https://www.mitsui.com/mgssi/ja/report/detail/1220959_10674.html).

and Atlantic through cooperation with G7 and NATO based on the idea that what happened to Ukraine today may happen to Asia tomorrow. This reflects the Japanese government's heightened sense of crisis over the fact that if the European order were to collapse as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Asia would certainly be embroiled in its aftermath as well. Given these circumstances, Japan has become increasingly aware of its position as an "stake holder" in the great power competition.

Based on the above recognition, the Kishida administration has pushed for a fundamental reinforcement of Japan's defense capabilities, including an increase in Japan's defense spending to 2% of GDP. This means reinforcing autonomous capabilities so that Japan does not necessarily need to rely completely on the United States as threats evolve from gray-zone situations into higher-end threats. The National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defense Strategy (NDS) formulated based on the NSS, both of which published in December 2022, set forth a policy of focusing on the reinforcement of Japan's capabilities across seven key domains: stand-off defense capabilities, integrated air and missile defense capabilities, unmanned defense capabilities, cross-domain operation capabilities, command and control and intelligence-related functions, mobile deployment capabilities and civil protection, as well as sustainability and resiliency.<sup>36</sup> Japan is also enhancing its economic security by strengthening supply chains, protecting infrastructure, and supporting the development of specific key technologies.

For a long time after World War II, Japan has adopted the so-called "Yoshida Doctrine," a policy of keeping a low profile with regard to security under the protection of the United States while prioritizing economic activities. Japan has also maintained an approach of adopting the policy of "separation of politics from economics" with respect to China, as mentioned above, in its attempt to maintain relations by disentangling economics from politics. This approach was a highly rational choice in an international environment in which the United States is able to sustain its primacy in terms of military and economic power.

However, today's challenging security environment is making it increasingly difficult to maintain such a traditional approach under the old paradigm. Japan's new economic security policy suggests that it will be leveraging economic means to achieve security objectives, which may lead to the subordination of the economy to security

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<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Defense of Japan, "Kokka hōei senryaku (gaiyō)" 国家防衛戦略(概要) ["National Defense Strategy (Outline)"], December 2022, p. 9, [https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy\\_outline.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy_outline.pdf).

considerations in some cases. This policy is a stark departure from the Yoshida Doctrine, which prioritizes the economy while keeping military forces to a minimum. In this sense, Japan's security in the postwar era has entered a critical juncture.

### **Toward a state of “controlled competition”**

As the competition between great powers intensifies, Japan is also emerging as a player in the competition. Yet, competition is ultimately a means to maintain one's desired order and is not an end in itself. Moreover, since containment as implemented during the Cold War is no longer practicable, competition with China should be premised on the principle of “coexistence” based on the partial resumption of negotiations rather than an attempt to destroy its regime.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, from a global perspective, competition between great powers has not only negative elements such as the escalation of conflict and the risk of division but also positive elements. For example, some developing countries can become major beneficiaries of the competition between China and the West to provide infrastructure support and aid. Climate change initiatives, sanitation, and a stable supply of energy are also public goods that all countries can benefit from. If interstate competition brings about a greater supply of public goods, this may be said to be a desirable result for the international community as a whole.

In this sense, Japan will be required to make an effort to maximize the positive elements of such competition while minimizing its negative elements. In fact, Japan is seeking to further strengthen U.S.-led alliance networks by strengthening the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Quad (a security cooperation framework between Japan, the United States, Australia, and India) while simultaneously pursuing stable relations with China. At the Japan-China Summit Meeting in November 2021, Prime Minister Kishida called for the establishment of “constructive and stable Japan-China relations” in which the two countries would engage in honest dialogue to address existing challenges and concerns, act together on international issues as responsible powers, and cooperate on various common challenges. This can be said to be founded on the new idea of managing bilateral relations on the basis of competition while repudiating the optimistic prospect of moving Japan-China relations “from competition to collaboration” as suggested in

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<sup>37</sup> Kurt M. Campbell and Jake Sullivan, “Competition Without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist With China,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2019.

the past. The expeditious launch of a hotline between Japanese and Chinese defense authorities as a liaison mechanism for maritime- and aviation-related matters and the strengthening of communication through Japan-China Security Dialogues, etc., agreed to by the two leaders at the meeting can be seen as attempts at achieving this.

Japan has also maintained some distance from the dichotomous worldview of “democracy versus authoritarianism” espoused by the Biden administration. For example, the vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” advocated by Japan is highly restrained in its push for values such as human rights and democracy; instead, it focuses on the pursuit of a diverse and inclusive order that encompasses non-democratic states as well.<sup>38</sup> The abovementioned National Security Strategy also calls for the strengthening of a “free and open international order based on the rule of law” while at the same time pointing out the need to achieve “coexistence and coprosperity” in the international community through the promotion of multilateral cooperation and efforts aimed at addressing global environmental issues.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, even as Japan strengthens its readiness for the competition between great powers, it will become increasingly important moving forward to make efforts to keep the competition as controlled as possible through partial collaboration and risk management based on the principle of “coexistence” with China. This is especially true given that China’s rapid buildup of nuclear capability has led some to believe that the world is shifting from a relatively stable bipolar system comprising the two nuclear powers of the United States and Russia to a more unstable “tripolar system” that also includes China as a nuclear power,<sup>40</sup> thus making efforts to avoid nuclear war and the proliferation of nuclear weapons an urgent task.

In order to achieve these goals, Japan must not only rely on its own efforts but also establish cooperative mechanisms in collaboration with other countries in the region that are in a similar position. Especially in an era of great power competition, the need for Japan to strengthen cooperation with countries in the region in the areas of

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<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Kishida-sōridaijin no indosekaimondai-hyōgikai (ICWA) ni okeru sōriseisaku supichi” 岸田総理大臣のインド世界問題評議会 (ICWA) における総理政策スピーチ [“Prime Minister Kishida’s Prime Minister Policy Speech to the Indian Council on World Affairs (ICWA)”], March 20, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100477738.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, “Kokka anzenhoshō senryaku ni tsuite” 国家安全保障戦略について [“About the National Security Strategy”], December 16, 2022, pp. 28-29, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-j.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., “The New Nuclear Age: How China’s Growing Nuclear Arsenal Threatens Deterrence,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2022.



information-sharing and rule-making has become more vital than ever. For example, it is necessary to establish a framework that allows like-minded countries to work together to coordinate export control systems and operations and to counter China's economic coercion in a concerted manner. It may also be possible to encourage both the United States and China to work together to prevent the abuse of systems such as export control.

Other potential areas of cooperation include the establishment of a crisis management mechanism to handle unforeseen situations such as the outbreak of regional conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemics; the promotion of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation; and the development of common standards and a code of conduct to facilitate the exchange of critical goods in times of emergency. As great power competition continues to intensify, Japan's roles and initiatives to stabilize the international order have become more important than ever.