

Geopolitics of the United States and Japan in the Context of the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

This study analyzes the geopolitical strategies of the United States and Japan in light of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, examining how their historically developed geopolitical doctrines manifest in the current global context. It explores the evolution of US foreign policy from Mackinder's Heartland theory to Spykman's Rimland concept, emphasizing the US's strategic interests in preventing any emerging dominant powers that could threaten its security. The study also delves into Japan's distinct geopolitical trajectory, from its isolationist past to its more proactive engagement in global security issues, especially in cooperation with the United States and NATO. The research highlights Japan's cautious but significant response to the Ukraine crisis, marked by economic sanctions and strategic alliances, while balancing its longstanding territorial disputes with Russia. Additionally, it examines the broader implications of the US and Japan's policies on global security architecture, focusing on their shared commitment to a rules-based international order. The study concludes by discussing potential shifts in US foreign policy following the 2024 presidential elections and how these changes might affect both nations' strategic objectives and their roles in regional and global security. This analysis provides insight into the evolving dynamics between the US, Japan, and other global powers in the context of current geopolitical tensions.

Keywords

geopolitical goals – Ukraine – national interests – war – foreign policy

Introduction

The current international situation can be described as super turbulent, capable of leading to significant changes in world geopolitics and posing a real threat of global conflict with the maximum involvement of all civilisation centres (states, coalitions, alliances, continents) using any form of economic, informational, and military influence known to present-day mankind (world war with the use of nuclear weapons). In such a geopolitical emergency, it is only natural to pay closer attention to the leading countries (political, economic, military, demographic) on whose actions the nature and means of conflict resolution, and in the present case quite possibly the fate of human civilisation, depend directly. It is important to correctly predict the behaviour of influential international actors, and this requires understanding the motivations behind their actions, which depend to a large (and even decisive) extent on their geopolitical interests that have evolved over a long historical path, as well as the patterns of behaviour on the world stage, determined primarily by these same interests and previous historical practices. It is the neglect of such forecasting that can, it seems, be considered an important cause of the current crisis.

The United States of America, despite its many accumulated problems, continues to be the main actor of the modern world. Japan, even considering its sovereignty constraints by its tight alliance with the US, is the world's third largest economy and China's historical competitor for leadership in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region. While their actions are coordinated in the current situation, each of these states is pursuing its own objectives, guided by its own national priorities. The analysis and forecasting of these actions are now receiving a great deal of attention, both in the media and in scientific historical and theoretical research.¹

1 Gentillet, P.P. (2022). *Ukraine – Russie: ne sacrifions pas les intérêts de la France et du continent européen sur l'autel de nos émotions*. <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/monde/tribune-ukraine-russie-ne-sacrifions-pas-les-interets-de-la-france-et-du-continent-europeen-sur-lautel-de-nos-emotions>.

The main effort of the authors of studies on the problem, however, is naturally focused on highlighting American policy, which is aimed, according to most, at maintaining great power status and global dominance in the world. Such dominance is interpreted primarily as a desire to unite all forces that share democratic ideals and universal values, and to build a system of pan-European, all-Western and global security: “Ultimately, Russia’s war in Ukraine will redefine what it means to be a great power and the nature of future conflicts”.² The high-risk geopolitical motives behind US actions are less analysed by specialists. In particular, the researchers formulate the conclusion about the impossibility of confronting the two powers at once - Russia and China - and the need for the US to learn the following lesson from the Russia-Ukraine war: geopolitical pragmatism is better suited to maintaining peace than the morally absolutist view that each country should be free to choose its own destiny, regardless of geopolitical consequences.³

The geopolitical plans of Japan regarding the events in Ukraine are commented upon in the context of what is commonly perceived as the “most sensitive” issue for the Land of the Rising Sun - “the problem of the northern territories”, namely the Kuril Islands, which Japan has been trying to recover ever since the end of the Second World War, first from the Soviet Union and now from Russia. “Japan is a deliberate strategist who knows to wait for the right conditions to achieve its goals,” the analyst concludes.⁴ Even a partial failure of the Russian Federation on the Ukrainian front could, according to a number of researchers,⁵ lead to the collapse of Russia and the implementation of Japan’s related plans in this direction. In this case, Japan could not only get back four islands but all of the Kurils, Sakhalin and Kamchatka as well. Articles written on the topic reveal two opposing trends in the coverage of Tokyo’s geopolitical perspectives. The first is based on the country’s ideological and economic strengths and leans towards a high probability of success in realising these prospects. The second trend is pessimistic, highlighting Japan’s weaknesses and intractable social, demographic, natural and resource problems: an ageing population trend, rising consumer spending, falling relative savings rates, increasing imports, shifting production to other countries, a gradual structural shift from manufacturing to services, increasing stock market volatility, etc.

Overall, the source base on the problem is sufficiently broad, although not uniform in scientific importance, allowing for a variety of methods to be used to assimilate and apply it. These are not only media materials focusing on the immediate aspects of geopolitical confrontation in the context of the unprecedented acute West-Russian confrontation, but also special studies of a general theoretical, historical, economic, and military nature, which provide an opportunity to understand the origins and traditions of the geopolitics of these two influential states and to extrapolate these origins to the present day. Nevertheless, according to the experts themselves, “the sharp aggravation of international security problems requires additional investigations into strategic planning and management of the process of implementing the national interests of individual

2 US grand strategy after Ukraine. (2022). <https://katehon.com/ru/article/bolshaya-strategiya-ssha-posle-ukrainy?>; Semenenko, O., Onofriichuk, V., Tolok, P., Riezniak, V., Momot, D. (2024). Analysis of Ukraine’s external military-economic relations during the war with Russia. *Scientific Bulletin of Mukachevo State University. Series “Economics”*, 11(1), 71-82. <https://doi.org/10.52566/msu-econ1.2024.71>.

3 Velchev, A. (2024). Influence of Central and Eastern European countries on EU’s foreign policy. *Foreign Affairs*, 34(5), 59-71. [https://doi.org/10.46493/2663-2675.34\(5\).2024.59](https://doi.org/10.46493/2663-2675.34(5).2024.59); Hunko, L. (2022). The paradigm of nonlinearity and the aggression of the russian federation against Ukraine. *Democratic Governance*, 15(2), 109-119. <https://doi.org/10.23939/dg2022.02.109>; Tropina, V., Yevtushenko, N. (2023). Innovative development of Ukraine in the context of European integration processes. *University Economic Bulletin*, 18(4), 41-49. <https://doi.org/10.69587/ueb/4.2023.41>.

4 Sharko, M.V. (2016). Traditional foundations of Japanese geopolitics in the context of the transformation of the modern world. *Ethnosociety and International Culture*, 2(92), 79-92.

5 Sahashi, R. (2020). Japan’s strategy amid US–China confrontation. *China International Strategy Review*, 2(2), 232–245.

countries, primarily of a procedural and methodological nature”.⁶ It is precisely this kind of synthetic developments that seems to be lacking for a deeper and more accurate understanding of the problems associated with identifying the internal logic and actions of all participants in the current process of changing the geopolitical situation in the world.

US Geopolitical Strategy and Internal Challenges

To understand the directions and objectives of the countries’ foreign policies and the specifics of their conduct at the present stage of world history, it is necessary to consider how each state has come to understand and articulate its geopolitical interests. And also, how the tools for achieving the main tasks have changed or improved over time.

In 1904, an English academic Halford Mackinder published an article called *The Geographical Pivot of History*, which many researchers consider to be the cornerstone of geopolitics as a science.⁷ Mackinder’s theory of the eternal confrontation between the civilisation of the Sea and the civilisation of the Land (Heartland) and the resulting permanent war of the continents is a classic example of a geopolitical doctrine designed to provide a theoretical basis for possible future actions to change the balance of forces in the world. Its main theses: whoever rules Eastern Europe will rule the Heartland, whoever rules the Heartland will rule the world. At that time, 10 years before the outbreak of the First World War, the Sea Civilisation was understood to be primarily Britain and Western Europe (washed by the Atlantic Ocean), and Heartland was understood to be Eurasia, a vast part of which was occupied by Russia.

The geopolitical interests of the United States at that time were determined by the frontier thesis, introduced in 1893 by Professor Frederick Turner. According to it, the United States are intended to move its borders towards the Pacific Ocean, taking what appears to be empty and uncivilised territory.⁸ This meant that the US were moving beyond the previous geopolitical construct, the Monroe Doctrine, formulated as early as 1823, which officially limited possible US enlargement exclusively to the Western Hemisphere. Under this doctrine, the Americans undertook not to interfere in the European sphere of influence, but also not to allow anyone to violate “vital US interests” on the American continent.⁹ The transition to the “shifting frontiers” concept marked a new stage in the formulation of the geopolitical goals of the United States, and by 1898 the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam and virtually Cuba had come under their control. The fact that this concept was not just a theory, but a real mechanism for promoting new American interests in the world is evidenced by the recognition it received from Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Wilson.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, American political scientist Nicholas Spykman formulates a postulate that legitimises all the subsequent inevitable manifestations of perpetual continental warfare: “Since the geographical characteristics of the states are comparatively unchanging and immutable,

6 Nomoto, K. (2021). *Japan’s Geopolitical Balancing Act – A Conversation with GGF 2035 Fellow Kazuhiro Nomoto*. <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/27/07/2021/japans-geopolitical-balancing-act-conversation-ggf-2035-fellow-kazuhiro-nomoto>.

7 Mackinder, H.J. (1904). *The geographical pivot of history*. *Geographical Journal*, 23(4), 298-321.

8 Turner, F.G. (1893). *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/empire/text1/turner.pdf>.

9 James Monroe speech before the US Congress on December 2, 1823. (1823). <http://www.grinchevskiy.ru/19/doktrina-monro.php>.

the geographical claims of these states will remain the same for centuries to come”.¹⁰ In 1944 he also redefines Mackinder’s concept, replacing the concept “Heartland” with “Rimland”. Now the new formula of geopolitics is: “Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia, who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world”.¹¹ Rimland, according to Spykman, is the perimeter of the core of Eurasia, consisting of Western Europe, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, China, and the Far East. The most important feature of these regions, to which the theorist also added “coastal islands” (Britain and Japan), is that they have both land and sea power.¹² Based on this redefinition of geopolitical concepts, Spykman sets forth the central principle of US foreign policy, which becomes decisive for all subsequent decades: “...our constant concern in peacetime must be to see that no nation or alliance of nations is allowed to emerge as a dominating power in either of the two regions of the Old World from which our security could be threatened”.¹³

In Mackinder’s terminology, Japan is, much like the US, a classic civilisation of the Sea. Heartland for which it must fight for is South-East Asia, a large part of which is occupied by China. And Japan has made such attempts in its history, but they have ended in failure. At the same time, trying to apply the same theoretical and geopolitical mould to the United States and Japan is misleading. Coming from the “civilisation of the Sea”, the two states are the embodiment of two completely different civilisational histories on the planet. Japan has never seen itself as the ruler of the whole world. In fact, this world was simply alien to it. And not only in a cultural or any other sense, but literally. It is well known that until the second half of the 19th century Japan’s borders were closed to foreigners. Moreover, the features of the Asian mentality, the worldview formed under the influence of Oriental philosophies, did not encourage unbridled and unjustified expansionism.

After opening borders in 1868 followed by rapid economic development, Japan became an equally tumultuous foreign policy player. The energy accumulated during the years of self-isolation begins to find an outlet and is embodied in the form of militant nationalism. As noted by scholars, the main action of the state during this period in the international arena was, firstly, the abolition of unequal treaties with the Western countries (in geopolitics, this trend is called Asianism), and secondly, the annexation of those domains in South Asia that had not been openly claimed by others.¹⁴ At the beginning of the 20th century, geopolitical explorations in Japan intensified, forming two main groups - those independent and those influenced by the German geopolitical school. The leader of the former is the “Kyoto school”, led by S. Komaki. Being ardent nationalists, they called for a “greater Japan”. Pro-Germanic geopoliticians (Pan-Asianists, Eurasians) appealed in one form or another for a redivision of the world, the liberation of Asian countries from the domination of “white” imperialism, the defeat of the USA, Britain, and the USSR and even for world domination.

After its defeat in the Second World War, Japan was deprived of any military capability, allowed only to form a so-called self-defence force, and was occupied by Allied forces. The restoration of real full state sovereignty is one of Japan’s main concerns. Among the geopolitical priorities is the reclaiming of lost territories.

10 Spykman, N.J. (1938). Geography and foreign policy. *The American Political Science Review*, 32(1), 28-50.

11 Spykman, N.J. (1944). *The geography of the peace*. New York: Harcourt, 85 p.

12 Bekkevold, J.I., Tunsjo, O. (2022). The geopolitical foundations for U.S. strategy in a new U.S.–China bipolar system. *China International Strategy Review*, 4(3). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361606197_The_geopolitical_foundations_for_US_strategy_in_a_new_US-China_bipolar_system.

13 Kolosov, V.A., Mironenko, N.S. (2001). *Geopolitics and political geography*. Moskow: Aspent Press, 509 p.

14 Kolosov, V.A., Mironenko, N.S. (2001). *Geopolitics and political geography*. Moskow: Aspent Press, 509 p.

The war in Ukraine is now universally recognised as the most critical crisis in international relations since the Second World War.¹⁵ However, Japan remains cautious about stepping out of its comfort zone amidst international instability. Deeply rooted anti-war and anti-risk sentiments, similar to those observed in Germany, are still palpable in Japanese society. These sentiments restrain the government from engaging in risky international ventures with its neighbors, despite growing pressure to take on a more active role in regional security. With every day, it resuscitates more conflicts that seemed to have ceased for good nearly 80 years ago. Geopolitical grievances and the hopes and plans associated with them, the realisation of which seemed impossible yesterday, are now back on the agenda of different countries and peoples.

In relation to the US, it would be misleading to try to determine the specific application of its geopolitical principles to the current situation, since it is the result of the application of those same principles. The postulate formulated many years ago by N. Spykman about the readiness of the United States to prevent the slightest threat of the emergence of any dominant force threatening Washington's interests has been strictly observed for all subsequent decades.¹⁶ In recent years, the United States has seen such threat in the possibility of an alliance of its powerful economic competitors – primarily China and the European Union – with Russia. In the long term, a significant leadership change in Russia could theoretically lead to defensive alignment with various Asian nations against China, driven by concerns over China's interest in Russia's Far Eastern resources and territorial expansion.

The dissolution of the USSR opened the door for a permanent separation of Ukraine from Russia, to deprive the latter of the possibility of restoring its Eurasian-imperial status, as prophesied by the famous American geostrategist and political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski.¹⁷ But this too is part of one of the most popular and sought-after geopolitical concepts among American top officials - chaos theory. Its author, Steven Mann, argues that stabilisation of long-standing conflicts by means tried and tested in history is often futile, as conflict will inevitably flare up again.¹⁸

Under threats of the sanctions pressure, the United States is trying to weaken the economic and political ties of the PRC with the Russian Federation.¹⁹

And it is already being used, but so far only in the form of strong support for sanctions policy. However, the Japanese certainly have ambitious geopolitical interests of their own, but they prefer to avoid bringing them into the spotlight. It is believed that “the origins of the traditional foundations of Japanese geopolitics originate in the East Asian, namely, the Chinese geopolitical tradition”.²⁰ And the nature of views on war and peace are determined by the teachings of Sun Tzu, central to which is the idea of avoiding wars by skilfully employing all political and diplomatic means. This does not mean that the Japanese, like all East Asian

15 Polinkevych, O. (2024). The economic consequences of military conflicts: The Ukrainian context. *Economic Forum*, 14(1), 28-39. <https://doi.org/10.62763/cb/1.2024.28>

16 Spykman, N.J. (1944). *The geography of the peace*. New York: Harcourt, 85 p.

17 Brzezinski, Z. (1998). *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York: Basic Books, 240 p.

18 Mann, S. (2021). *Chaos theory and strategic art*. <https://spkurdyumov.ru/what/mann/>; Stępniewski, T. (2022). Russia's war with Ukraine and Russia's revisionism on the international stage. *Historia I Świat*, 11, 329-336. <https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2022.11.19>

19 Kushnir, O. (2022). *US policy toward Ukraine should be more supportive and proactive*. <https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2022/08/05/us-policy-toward-ukraine-should-be-more-supportive-and-proactive/>.

20 Sharko, M.V. (2016). Traditional foundations of Japanese geopolitics in the context of the transformation of the modern world. *Ethnosociety and International Culture*, 2(92), 79-92.

peoples, are very peaceful. It means that they are very patient and do not like to make any sudden moves until they see their strength is insufficient.

The current war in Europe is only a chance for Japan to change the situation in the Asia-Pacific region in a way which could address its most acute and long-standing problems. First and foremost, of course, it is the island dispute with Russia. Japanese analysts are already actively discussing the transfer of some Russian troops from the Far East to Ukraine, noting the natural weakening of the remaining grouping, as well as the fact that the Pacific Fleet has no more than 20 large ships and 13 submarines at its disposal. However, the US has already warned Japan of the fact that the Kuril Islands are de facto part of the Russian Federation and are not part of the US-Japanese security zone. Although in the event of an unforeseen escalation of the military situation in Europe, the US might be motivated to use the Japanese fleet in the Pacific, and the Japanese might find it rather tempting to use their own forces.

Japan's "Asia-centrism" does not suit the long-term plans of the US, which would prefer to shift the attention of this ally to the global issues, thereby "enlarging" its zone of interest while retaining priority in reshaping the APAC to the advantage of the United States. But it is unlikely that the Land of the Rising Sun would find it profitable to accept such a transformation. After all, it is "the struggle for Asia (e.g., the gas resource of Turkmenistan, the thorium sands of India, the desolate coasts of Australia)" that has been called the most promising geopolitical game of the 21st century for Japan.²¹

There are very few relevant academic studies on the specifics of US and Japanese geopolitical interests in relation to the war in Ukraine. At the same time, the course of the war between Russia and Ukraine is at the centre of global attention. Commentary and analysis, including by political scientists and experts in geopolitics and its refraction in current international situations, are heard daily in a wide range of media outlets. Moreover, as the conflict has been raging for a considerable time, there have been many publications in previous years, both analytical and academic, which have not only elaborated on the causes and possible consequences of the conflict, but have inevitably touched on the geopolitical goals pursued by the Americans and their allies.

In the array of available studies, both those accompanying today's agenda and earlier ones, the primary focus is on the US. There have been attempts to predict the course of the conflict, the consequences for the world and geopolitical constructions of one or another of its outcomes, the reasons and justification for such a deep involvement of the Western world in the Ukrainian issue, the degree of probability of direct armed intervention by the Western community in the hostilities, the presence or absence of "red" lines and the degree of controllability of the conflict.²² At the same time, many researchers, touching upon the geopolitical issue, most often boil it down to Brzezinski's famous formula that without Ukraine Russia is incapable of rebirth as an empire and that ends the search for the sources and explanation of the causes of war, or appeal to the problem of fighting terrorism, which has no relation to geopolitics.²³ At the same time, the analysis of the geopolitical interests of the US itself is limited to mere references to transatlantic and trans-Pacific geo-projects, and secondly, is not supported by any attempts at a historical analysis of the formation of these

21 Sahashi, R. (2020). Japan's strategy amid US-China confrontation. *China International Strategy Review*, 2(2), 232-245.

22 Stephen, M. (2022). *Walt the Ukraine war doesn't change everything*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/13/ukraine-war-realism-great-powers-unipolarity/>.

23 Klaus, J. (2014). *Global Geopolitics*. London: Imprint Routledge.

interests.

Closely linked to the ongoing hostilities in Ukraine, political scientists and geopolitical theorists discuss US policy towards the PRC, which, unlike Russia, is described as a major threat in the mid- and long term. One of the actively promoted ways of solving the “China problem” is so-called “geopolitical pragmatism”, the essence of which is to involve the PRC as much as possible in various kinds of economic or humanitarian “multilateral groupings”.²⁴ In the context of this study, a number of articles focusing on the geopolitical interests of the states around the PRC, especially in Central Asia (e.g., Kazakhstan), are also considered.²⁵ “There is no indication that Russia and China will stop cooperating, hence this interaction will have a negative impact on the promotion of transatlanticism in Europe and neoliberalism in Asia. Sooner or later Beijing will start solving the Taiwan issue, and the US is unlikely to be able to stop China,” the analyst argues.²⁶ Ultimately, it is not only the United States but also China and Russia that are not willing to compromise their geopolitical interests. The future trajectory of the United States is a critical factor in shaping global international relations. Over recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in US foreign policy marked by growing introspection and a diminishing appetite for its traditional role as the world’s “policeman.” This trend reflects broader societal debates within the United States about the costs and benefits of global leadership, especially in the face of significant domestic challenges.

Internal tensions, including political polarization, economic disparities, and social unrest, have contributed to a perception that the US may increasingly prioritize its internal stability over external commitments. This inward focus raises questions about the sustainability of its extensive global alliances and military engagements, potentially leading to a recalibration of its foreign policy objectives. The possibility of US retrenchment could create vacuums in regions where its presence has long been a stabilizing force, opening the door for other powers, such as China or regional coalitions, to assert greater influence. Moreover, the shifting public sentiment toward a less interventionist foreign policy could redefine how the US engages with multilateral institutions and addresses global challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity, and international security. While the United States remains a leading global power, these internal dynamics may gradually reshape its role in the international system, compelling its allies and adversaries alike to adapt to a less predictably interventionist America. This evolution highlights the interconnectedness of domestic and international politics in determining the US’s future position on the global stage.

Japan’s Evolving Geopolitical Role

The role of Japan in the current geopolitical situation, its stance on the conflict in the former Soviet Union and the associated foreign policy expectations and initiatives have been given less attention by political scientists and geopolitical experts. Nevertheless, a number of aspects are being discussed in great detail. And they refer exclusively to the three main thrusts along which Japanese geopolitical strategy is built: the

24 US grand strategy after Ukraine. (2022). <https://katehon.com/ru/article/bolshaya-strategiya-ssha-posle-ukrainy?>

25 Ospanova, A., Nursultanova, L., Abdullin, R., Shenin, A., Akhmet, A. (2018). Silk Road Travelers: China or the USA? *Research Gate*, 6(2), 2-16.

26 US grand strategy after Ukraine. (2022). <https://katehon.com/ru/article/bolshaya-strategiya-ssha-posle-ukrainy?>

Japanese-American, the Japanese-Chinese and the Japanese-Russian.²⁷ According to experts, serious changes are possible in each of the directions, given Japan's long-standing status as an inferior global player and its centuries-old national ambitions. Here, for example, is an analysis of the "geopolitical status" (position) of contemporary Japan, confirming its high readiness to return to first roles.

The final score of 92 ranks second to China in the Northeast Asia region, the authors argue.²⁸ First of all, virtually all Japanese scholars agree that the country is prepared, with the right circumstances, to start its game to the point of emancipation from American guardianship. The war in Ukraine is precisely seen by analysts, especially those in Japan,²⁹ as an important test of the US ability to remain a global hegemon and to assert its position.

Despite the commitment of this state to an active foreign policy, economically, militarily, and ideologically, this option of geopolitical movement, being actively considered by analysts, is only a hypothetical scenario. Like any globally influential state, Japan is extremely pragmatic in its response to the world. To date, the alliance with the United States is absolutely beneficial for it and has not exhausted its potential. U.S. support, especially at such a critical moment for them, will surely be guaranteed for Japan in matters crucial to them - abrogating the constitutional article limiting the use of armed forces, obtaining a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and defending their interests against China and Russia. At the same time, Japan will keep a close eye on the war in Ukraine, seeing it, by analogy with Afghanistan, as another lesson for itself. This is also why Japan has sought to emphasise its commitment to diplomacy in the struggle for its national interests.³⁰ It is significant that today this state is part of almost all the various influential international organisations and unions. It would therefore seem reasonable to study Japanese geopolitics more actively as a gradual diplomatic reinforcement of its influence and its advantageous positioning in the world.

Closely related to the American geopolitical direction is that of China, although Japan views it more broadly as Asia-Pacific. "Japan faces a range of threats, which it can only eliminate by uniting with China in some sort of alliance that can end US dominance in the Pacific. In the event of this alliance, the US will permanently withdraw from the Far East. Japan will become a nation independent of the West. The only question is whether the Japanese actually experience a such need".³¹ The question of Japan's possible alliance with China is extremely interesting for all its apparent geopolitical paradoxes and is important for understanding the range of China's geopolitical aspirations. But so far not enough has been done by scientists in this regard.

Japan and Australia have been strengthening their military cooperation in recent years, reflecting shared strategic concerns and a commitment to maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite Australia's relatively small population of 27 million, its status as the world's 12th largest economy and a key member of

27 Butkovskaya, A., Fokin, N. (2014). Current trends in the development of the Japanese armed forces: economic aspects. *Proceedings of the Eastern Institute*, 15, 105-112; Readout of discussions between administration officials and a delegation from China regarding the trade relationship between the United States and China. (2018). <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/readout-discussions-administration-officials-delegation-china-regarding-trade-relationship-united-states-china/>; A global strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy. (2016). https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

28 Nomoto, K. (2021). *Japan's Geopolitical Balancing Act – A Conversation with GGF 2035 Fellow Kazuhiro Nomoto*. <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/27/07/2021/japans-geopolitical-balancing-act-conversation-ggf-2035-fellow-kazuhiro-nomoto>.

29 Hikotani, T. (2022). *How the Ukraine war changing Japan*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2022-04-28/how-ukraine-war-changing-japan>.

30 Nakasone, Y. (2001). *Japan's State Strategy for the 21st Century*. Moscow: Nota Bene.

31 Sahashi, R. (2020). Japan's strategy amid US–China confrontation. *China International Strategy Review*, 2(2), 232–245.

the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum positions it as a significant partner for Japan. The two countries share common apprehensions about China's expansionist policies, particularly regarding maritime trade routes, which are vital for their economies and regional security. In response to these shared concerns, both nations have substantially increased their naval expenditures, aiming to enhance their capabilities in safeguarding freedom of navigation and deterring potential threats in the region. This alignment underscores their strategic partnership, which has grown increasingly prominent in the context of evolving geopolitical challenges. Additionally, both Japan and Australia have been officially designated as "Unfriendly Countries" by the Russian Federation, a status reflecting their alignment with Western policies and their active participation in imposing sanctions against Russia amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Notably, the historical antipathy towards Japan in Australia and other parts of Asia, stemming from the events of World War II, has dissipated over time. Today, the relationship between Japan and Australia is characterized by mutual respect and shared interests, fostering a robust partnership that contributes to the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. This growing cooperation highlights the significance of their bilateral relationship in addressing regional and global challenges.

The current Japanese government policy reflects a delicate balancing act between maintaining strong alliances, particularly with the United States, and addressing domestic and regional challenges. A cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy is the resolution of the territorial dispute with Russia over the "Northern Territories" (referred to as the Kuril Islands in Russia). The government has consistently upheld its stance on concluding a peace treaty with Russia, hinging on this territorial issue. However, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has further complicated these negotiations, as Japan aligns closely with Western sanctions against Russia, a move that has strained bilateral relations.

In the Indo-Pacific context, Japan remains a staunch advocate of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative. The FOIP seeks to ensure a rules-based international order characterized by free trade, open navigation, and adherence to the rule of law. Japan's commitment to the FOIP underscores its view that the security of the Euro-Atlantic region and the Indo-Pacific region are intrinsically linked. This perspective positions Japan as a critical player in fostering stability across these interconnected regions, aligning its policies with those of its allies, particularly the United States. Domestically, the political landscape in Japan is undergoing significant shifts. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) faces declining popularity, partly due to economic stagnation and public dissatisfaction with the government's handling of various crises. With parliamentary elections for a new leader of the LDP scheduled for September 27, the political future remains uncertain. The election could result in changes in leadership, which might subsequently influence Japan's foreign and domestic policies. A potential general election, should it be triggered, poses the risk of the LDP losing its dominant position, which could lead to a more fragmented or opposition-led government.

Regarding opposition policy, while there is no unified stance that starkly contrasts with the government's approach, opposition parties often critique the LDP's close alignment with U.S. policies and advocate for a more independent foreign policy. These parties may emphasize increased diplomatic engagement with China and a reassessment of Japan's security strategies to avoid over-dependence on U.S. military support.

Public opinion in Japan reflects a mix of support and skepticism toward current government policies. While there is widespread backing for Japan's alliance with the United States and the principles of the FOIP, many Japanese citizens express concern over the growing regional tensions, particularly with China. Attitudes toward China are shaped by territorial disputes, economic competition, and security concerns, such as China's

expanding military presence in the region. At the same time, Japan's historical and economic ties with China compel a nuanced approach, as complete estrangement is neither feasible nor desirable. Japan's stance toward Russia is similarly multifaceted. While the public largely supports the government's alignment with Western sanctions against Russia, there is an awareness of the long-standing goal of resolving the Northern Territories issue, which complicates outright hostility toward Russia.

In conclusion, Japan's foreign policy is deeply rooted in its strategic alliances and historical imperatives, but it is also influenced by shifting domestic political dynamics and public sentiment. The upcoming elections could herald significant changes, with potential ripple effects on Japan's approach to regional and global challenges.

US and Japanese Reactions to the War in Ukraine

The United States and Japan have reacted to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine with a range of foreign and security policy measures, reflecting their respective geopolitical priorities and commitments to global stability. These reactions span unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral frameworks, showcasing a coordinated yet distinct approach to addressing the conflict. Both nations have employed diplomatic, economic, and security instruments, aimed at curbing Russian aggression and signaling support for Ukraine and its sovereignty.

Washington has been at the forefront of the Western response, leveraging its leadership in NATO and other multilateral organizations. The US administration has facilitated unprecedented levels of military aid to Ukraine, ranging from advanced weapons systems to intelligence sharing, while also spearheading economic sanctions against Russia in coordination with its European allies. These measures align with the US geopolitical doctrine of maintaining a rules-based international order and deterring authoritarian aggression. Within NATO, the US has reinforced the alliance's eastern flank, deploying additional troops and resources to member states bordering Russia, thereby ensuring collective defense under Article 5. The US response also extends to its role in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), where it has emphasized the importance of upholding the principles of territorial integrity and human rights. Washington has used this platform to call for accountability for Russia's actions and to strengthen international support for Ukraine. Simultaneously, the US has engaged bilaterally with key allies in Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia, to ensure a cohesive stance against Russian aggression, while also addressing concerns over China's potential emboldenment in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan's reaction to the invasion, while historically unprecedented, underscores its evolving role in global security. As a state constitutionally limited in its military engagement, Japan's response has focused on economic sanctions, humanitarian aid, and enhanced security cooperation. Tokyo has aligned itself with Western sanctions, freezing Russian assets and restricting exports of dual-use technologies. This marks a significant shift in Japanese foreign policy, reflecting a growing willingness to take a proactive stance on international conflicts that threaten global stability. Japan has also strengthened its security coordination with NATO, highlighting its role as an OSCE Partner for Co-operation. Tokyo's increasing engagement with NATO demonstrates its recognition of the interconnectedness of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security. Japan has sought to underscore this connection through enhanced military collaboration with the United States, solidifying the US-Japan Security Alliance as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Joint military exercises and discussions on the deployment of advanced defense systems have underscored the alliance's readiness to address shared security challenges. Moreover, Japan has expanded its security partnerships with Australia and South Korea, reflecting a broader regional strategy to counterbalance authoritarian influences. These

partnerships, supported by the US, aim to enhance interoperability and readiness among like-minded democracies in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan's engagement in these multilateral and bilateral frameworks highlights its growing role as a security actor and its commitment to maintaining a rules-based international order.

The respective responses of the US and Japan are reflective of their geopolitical doctrines. The US reaction aligns with its long-standing strategic objective of preserving its global leadership and deterring threats to the liberal international order. Japan's response, while more constrained, reflects its emerging doctrine of proactive contribution to peace, as articulated in its National Security Strategy. Both nations' policies emphasize the importance of alliances and multilateral cooperation in addressing global conflicts. Explicit references to geopolitical considerations in the foreign and security policies of both nations are evident. The US has framed its response to the Ukraine war within the broader context of great power competition, positioning itself as the primary counterbalance to authoritarian regimes. Japan has highlighted the implications of the Ukraine conflict for regional security, drawing parallels to potential challenges in the Indo-Pacific, particularly regarding Taiwan and the East China Sea.

Looking ahead, the outcome of the November 2024 US presidential elections may significantly influence American foreign and security policy. A shift in administration could result in changes to the scope and intensity of US support for Ukraine, as well as broader adjustments to its global engagement strategy. For Japan, such changes could necessitate a recalibration of its security policies and alliance dynamics, particularly within the US-Japan Security Alliance. Both nations will likely continue to adapt their strategies to address evolving geopolitical realities, with a shared emphasis on reinforcing the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law.

Conclusions

This study has highlighted the geopolitical responses of the United States and Japan to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, emphasizing how these reactions align with their broader foreign policy doctrines and strategic objectives. The United States, firmly positioned as a global hegemon, has taken a leading role in coordinating multilateral responses through NATO and the OSCE, reinforcing its commitment to maintaining a rules-based international order. By providing substantial military aid to Ukraine and imposing economic sanctions on Russia, the US has demonstrated its adherence to its long-standing strategy of preventing any dominant power from emerging in Eurasia that could threaten its interests.

Japan, historically constrained by its pacifist constitution, has undertaken unprecedented measures, aligning itself with Western sanctions against Russia and enhancing security cooperation with NATO and regional allies such as Australia and South Korea. This represents a notable shift in Japanese foreign policy, reflecting its evolving role as a proactive contributor to global security. Japan's responses underscore the interconnectedness of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security, positioning the US-Japan Security Alliance as a critical framework for addressing global challenges. Both nations' reactions reflect their respective geopolitical doctrines. For the US, its actions are rooted in the principles of great power competition, aimed at deterring authoritarian threats from Russia and China. Japan's approach, while more cautious, demonstrates its strategic balancing act between maintaining strong alliances, addressing regional challenges, and cautiously advancing its national interests.

The study also underscores the implications of domestic and global shifts. For the US, internal political polarization and shifting public sentiment toward interventionism could influence its future foreign policy trajectory, particularly in the wake of the November 2024 presidential elections. For Japan, upcoming political developments, including leadership changes, could recalibrate its foreign policy priorities. Ultimately, the war in Ukraine serves as a critical test of the strategic coherence and adaptability of both nations. Their responses not only shape the immediate course of the conflict but also have broader implications for the evolving geopolitical landscape, including the balance of power in both Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. Continued coordination and strategic foresight will be essential for both countries in navigating these complex challenges.





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