

Foreign Policy Legacy of Prime Minister of Japan Shinzō Abe

A. N. Panov

Abstract

The article analyzes the foreign policy of Shinzō Abe, one of the most notable and unusual political figures of contemporary Japan, who was the head of Japanese government twice for a total of almost nine years. It traces how his political philosophy formed under the influence of ideological views of his relatives, prime ministers N. Kishi and E. Satō, as well as his father, Shintarō Abe. It also considers Abe's approaches to building Japan's relations with the countries which are most important for its interests.

Abe was perceived as a devoted ally of the U.S. in Washington. He established relations of confidence with presidents Obama and Trump. For this purpose, he strengthened Japanese-American military-political cooperation, took steps to support American strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. He implemented, even if without substantial results, steps to stabilize relations with China, trying to combine policy of containing Beijing with efforts to develop bilateral ties. Abe paid substantial attention to relations with India, including for the purpose of the idea, which was put forward by him and supported by the U.S., to establish quadrilateral cooperation of “democracies” in the Indo-Pacific region – the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia.

His policy in the Korean direction was not successful. The relations with Pyongyang remained in deadlock, and, with Seoul, the most acute bilateral problems were not finally solved. Abe also paid great attention to policy aiming to conclude a peace treaty with Russia on the basis of a radical improvement of Japanese-Russian ties in all spheres. The reasons for his failure in these directions are discussed in this article.

The article evaluates Abe's efforts aimed at developing governmental documents and making the Diet adopt laws determining the basic directions of the foreign and military policy of the state. The author characterizes the results of the activity of S. Abe in the sphere of foreign policy and assesses its influence on the formation of the course of the Japanese government after his resignation.

Keywords: political philosophy of Abe, Japan-U.S relations, Japan-China relations, Japan-India relations, Japan-Republic of Korea relations, Japan-DPRK relations, Japan-Russia relations, Japan's security policy.

On July 8, 2022, Shinzō Abe, one of the most prominent and charismatic politicians of Japan, not only of the 21st century, but also in the entire postwar history of Japan, was fatally wounded by a shot in the back at an election rally. In terms of the number of days in the prime minister's chair – 3,188 (and 2,822 days continuously), he surpassed the prewar record holder, Prime Minister Tarō Katsura.

Abe was born in 1954 into a family of statesmen who have left, starting from the prewar period, a substantial, but at the same time a controversial trace in Japan's political life. His grandfather Nobusuke Kishi, as the head of the Ministry of Armaments in the 1930s, supported the war with the United States and oversaw the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Koreans for the production of weapons for the Japanese army. After the war, he was convicted as a war criminal and sentenced to prison.

After the release, Kishi returned to active political life and quickly adapted to the new realities, changing his views from the anti-American to the pro-American ones. It helped him build an impressive career. With the support of the Americans, he became Japan's prime minister (1957–1960) and justified their trust. Despite a large-scale movement in the country against the conclusion of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (Security Treaty) between Japan and the United States, he achieved its signing and ratification.

Shinzō's father's uncle, Eisaku Satō, headed the Japanese government in 1964–1972. Under his cabinets, Japan reached the second place in the world after the United States in terms of economic power. Sato was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts focused on the signing and the ratification of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (in Japan, many consider the grounds for awarding him greatly exaggerated).

Shinzō Abe's father Shintarō was a prominent figure in the Liberal Democratic Party. As minister of foreign affairs in the late 1980s, he energetically launched a personal diplomatic activity, focused, among other things, on improving Japan's relations with the Soviet Union. Only a serious illness and his early demise in 1991 prevented him from becoming prime minister.

It was while serving as his father's secretary that Shinzō first became acquainted with the backstage of Japanese politics. After his father's death, in 1993, he was for the first time elected to the House of Representatives and was subsequently re-elected nine times. Abe served as secretary general of the LDP and chief cabinet secretary, and, in 2006–2007, he headed the Japanese government. In 2007, Abe was compelled to resign from the prime ministerial position due to health problems, but soon he returned to active political life, overcoming the disease with the help of a latest medicine. Five years later, he was elected prime minister again and held this post for a record period, from September 2012 to September 2020. After retiring due to an aggravated illness, for the rest of his life he remained a member of the Diet and an influential politician heading the largest faction in the ruling party.

Shinzō Abe's Political Philosophy

As a member of a prominent Japanese political clan, Shinzō, of course, could not help but feel the influence of its views on shaping his vision of how and where the country's strategic course should be directed. His assessments of Japan's state policy in the period of war and the

subsequent occupation of the country by the United States were largely influenced by the views of Kishi. The latter believed that Japan was waging a “just” and even a “holy” war, advocated the creation of a “new Japan”, implying, not least, the revision of the constitution “imposed by the victors.”

Kishi was not alone in his views. At present, disagreement with the “post-war system imposed on Japan,” generated as a result of the “historical humiliation” brought about by the defeat in the war, is quite deeply rooted in a solid part of the Japanese establishment, the core of which is concentrated in the Liberal Democratic Party.

In contrast to these views, various political circles of Japan remain critical of the country’s militaristic past. Socialist Tomiichi Murayama, who headed the Cabinet in 1995, issued a statement on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, expressing deep regret and apologizing for the suffering that colonial rule and Japanese aggression brought to the Asian peoples. A similar statement on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the end of the war was made by the LDP President and Prime Minister of Japan Jun’ichirō Koizumi.

Judging by his statements, Shinzō Abe was in solidarity not with the above-mentioned views, but with the position of his grandfather and his followers. He described as “stupidity” a statement made in 2010 by Naoto Kan, who then headed the DPJ cabinet, in which he apologized “for the trauma of colonial oppression” inflicted by Japan on the Korean people.¹

At the same time, having headed the government for the second tenure in 2012, Abe had to take into account the fact that more than 50 percent of Japanese public opinion, according to polls, considered the actions of the Japanese wartime leadership as aggression and believed it justified to apologize for them.² The countries which were particularly affected by these actions, China and the Republic of Korea, with whom Abe intended to intensify relations, also strongly condemned these actions.

¹ *The Japan Times* 21.03.2015.

² *Mainichi Shimbun* 19.06.2015.

Moreover, being aware of Abe's views on the Japanese militaristic past, Washington disapproved of his statement about the "illegitimacy and injustice" of the decisions of the International Military Tribunal, which condemned Japanese aggression and the crimes of wartime Japanese military leaders. Abe's visits as head of Japanese government to the Yasukuni Shrine, a "symbol of Japanese militarism," were perceived critically by the U.S. When Abe visited the shrine in 2013, the Obama administration issued an unprecedented statement of "disappointment" with the Japanese Prime Minister's action. Washington feared that Abe's revisionist views excusing Japan's aggressive actions could also lead to justifying the Japanese attack on the United States as "righteous" and, ultimately, to the cultivation of anti-American sentiment in Japanese society. It is no coincidence that the U.S. Congressional Research Service, in its report analyzing Abe's political views, described him as a "historical revisionist" (see [Panov 2016]).³

As a result of internal and external pressure, Abe adjusted his position. Now it looked ambivalent. On the one hand, in his statement as the head of the Japanese government dated August 14, 2015, issued in connection with the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, he mentioned recognition of the "immeasurable damage" and suffering inflicted by Japan on "innocent people," and expressed his "deep remorse for the war." On the other hand, the statement did not contain an apology for what the Japanese military had done, but only stated that Japan had "repeatedly expressed a sense of deep remorse and sincere apology for its actions during the war" and that such a position, set out by previous Japanese governments, would remain unchanged "in the future." At the same time, his speech carried out the idea that, since the post-war generation makes up more than 80 percent of the country's population and has nothing to do with the war, then he and the next generations do not need to continue to apologize for the past.⁴

³ *The Japan Times* 01.04. 2015.

⁴ Statement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. August 14, 2015. *Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet*. <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97abe/statement/201508/0814statement.html> (date of access 04.05.2024).

Abe followed the “recommendations” of the Obama administration to refrain from visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, but, at the same time, he did not stop sending “commemorative offerings” to the shrine and did not prevent the pilgrimage to it by his cabinet ministers and the Diet members from the ruling party.

Abe made considerable efforts to remove the Americans’ “concerns” about his assessments of the Japanese aggression during World War II and to regain their trust. He paid special attention to his official visit to the United States at the end of April 2015. The speech of the Japanese prime minister in the U.S. Congress was prepared with special care, given the sentiments of American lawmakers.⁵

Abe began his speech (he spoke in English), with assurances of his love for America in all its guises. On behalf of Japan and the Japanese people, the Japanese prime minister expressed deep condolences to “the souls of all Americans who died in World War II” and expressed deep regret that “Japanese actions brought suffering to the peoples of Asian countries.” He also put forward an idea that the former adversaries, Japan and the United States, had won, in cooperation with the Western world and other democracies, in the Cold War and that they could now work together to spread and strengthen the common values of democracy and freedom around the world.

Abe then outlined the main parameters of Tokyo’s policy, which was proclaimed under the new slogan of “making an effective contribution” to ensuring peace and stability by Japan assuming greater responsibility in the interests of peace. Further clarifications indicated that this should be ultimately done in order to further strengthen cooperation between the two countries, including the military sphere. As a result, the Japan-US alliance would become, as Abe argued, more durable, “trustworthy and providing deterrence in the interests of peace in the region.” The “Union of Hope” – this is how he pompously described the Japan-U.S. military-political alliance.

⁵ *The Japan Times* 29.04.2015.

The members of the Congress liked the speech of the Japanese Prime Minister; it was repeatedly accompanied by ovations. And although the words “apology” and “aggression” were missing there, the American political elite understood the main thing: in the person of Abe, the United States acquired a faithful and loyal ally on whom it could fully rely in the implementation of its strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.

U.S. President Obama welcomed Prime Minister Abe more than cordially. At a dinner at the White House, he read a haiku of his own composition; the tables were set not only with European cutlery, but also with chopsticks. The American president made a toast, raising not a glass of champagne, but a glass of sake made in Yamaguchi, the Japanese prime minister’s native prefecture. Obama also thanked the Japanese for introducing karaoke and anime into American culture. The American president described Abe’s visit as “historic” and stressed that the US-Japanese relations had never been so strong before.

The official visit of the Japanese prime minister to the United States convinced the American establishment that, in the person of Abe, the United States had “its own man” in Tokyo.

From Philosophy to Practical Actions

Shinzō Abe proved himself a proactive, strategic-minded politician, an authoritarian person not corresponding to the Japanese style, a skilled administrator who created a team of associates devoted to him, and a talented speaker, again, not in the Japanese tradition.

First of all, he built a system of making and implementing the most important decisions on domestic and foreign policy issues personally subordinate to himself. The role and responsibility of the Prime Minister’s Office increased significantly, and it effectively transformed from a secretariat under the head of the Cabinet into the main coordinating, executive, and control body of the Government. The National Security Council was established and tasked with intensifying the analysis of information on issues of international politics, bilateral

relations with the most important countries and security problems, and developing the pivotal decisions in the area of military and defense policy on the basis of this analysis. The NSC included, in addition to the prime minister, the chief secretary of the Cabinet of Ministers, and the ministers of foreign affairs and defense. High-level representatives of various ministries and departments were involved in its work.

In the matters of foreign policy, Abe had little confidence in information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, with rare exceptions, did not listen to the advice and opinions of diplomats.

Among his closest advisers on foreign policy issues were the people from business, academia, and journalistic circles. In addition, Takaya Imai, a native of the bureaucracy of the economic bloc, joined the circle of special confidants, taking up the post of special advisor to the prime minister. In general, Abe preferred personal diplomacy based on establishing trusting relationships with leaders of other countries [Mulgan 2018; Abe 2021].

Relations With the United States

For every head of the Japanese government, it is very important, even necessary, to establish friendly, trusting relations with the occupant of the White House and, accordingly, with the members of his administration. Japan's entrenched dependence on the United States, in the alliance with which Tokyo occupies a subordinate place and is often forced to follow Washington's decisions, even negatively affecting Japanese interests, puts the Japanese government and its head in front of a difficult choice.

For the Japanese side, the question thus becomes acute: by what means can it ensure that its opinion is taken into account, especially in the context of inevitable trade and economic contradictions, and at the same time not causing serious discontent of the American ally?

Having achieved a significant role for the country in the sphere of global economic relations, the Japanese political elite have been

looking for opportunities to increase Japan's political authority in the international arena since the 1970s. It is obvious that the solution to this problem is hampered by the strict binding of Japanese strategy to American policy. Not a single Japanese prime minister has set the task of radically restructuring the military-political alliance, much less abandoning it in favor of complete independence. Attempts have been made and continue to be made to simply achieve greater consideration of Japanese interests by Washington. This would seem an intractable task. However, practice has shown that even simple rhetoric in favor of independence within the framework of allied relations can have the most negative consequences for its authors.

The most striking example is related to Yukio Hatoyama, a prime minister from the Democratic Party, who, in the opinion of the American side, allowed himself to make statements that could translate into actions not fully meeting the interests of Washington's policy. As a result of active steps to discredit the policy of the "non-standard prime minister" with the support of the influential pro-American lobby in Japanese political circles, Hatoyama was forced to resign before serving for a full year as head of the cabinet.

Abe took a "different path." He emphasized his commitment to Tokyo's allied relations with Washington in every possible way. He tried and achieved recognition that he was a loyal ally of the White House in implementing its strategic objectives.

To ensure such an image in the American establishment, Abe acted in several directions. First, he took steps to develop military cooperation with the United States, as well as to increase Japanese military potential as a contribution to the American strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. This course was fully approved by Washington.

Secondly, the Abe cabinet demonstrated its willingness to "work" with Japan's Asian neighbors in order to involve them in supporting the American strategy in the region.

Thirdly, Tokyo made concessions to the U.S. administration, especially under President Trump, in order to resolve a number of trade and economic contradictions. At the same time, it should be noted that

the Japanese negotiators defended the interests of Japanese companies without bringing the matter to an acute negotiation stage.

Finally, fourthly, Abe achieved the establishment of personal trusting, friendly relations with the heads of the White House during his premiership – with Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Having achieved such relations, he purposefully used them in the interests of his policy.

He managed to persuade President Obama to visit Hiroshima in 2016. Although the latter did not apologize or express regret for the American nuclear bombings of Japanese cities, it was the first time an acting American president visited the site of the barbaric U.S. attack. In turn, Abe visited Pearl Harbor. With the Japanese attack on the naval base located there, the Japanese-American war started. Although Obama spoke out against Abe's intention to launch negotiations and improve relations with Russia at the time when the G7 was pursuing an anti-Russian policy after Russia's reunification with Crimea, he did not resort to any "punitive measures" against this course of the Japanese prime minister.

Not trusting the forecasts of the Foreign Ministry and of political scientists, Abe assumed that Donald Trump, not Hillary Clinton, would win the presidential race. It would seem that Clinton's victory would be preferable for Japan, since Trump had been known for his anti-Japanese sentiments since the 1980s, harshly criticizing Tokyo for depriving Americans of jobs by increasing its exports to the American market and restricting access of American goods to the Japanese market, and for manipulating the Japanese currency for the same purposes. Trump did not forget to reproach Japan for ensuring its defense "at American expense." It is noteworthy that Trump began his presidential activity in the Japanese direction in line with his long-standing "dislike" for Japan. However, with his political intuition, Abe realized that he would be able, albeit not without difficulty, to "tame" his obstinate counterpart, who was simply not aware of all the nuances of the U.S.-Japan relations.

Just ten days after the election results were announced, Abe managed to secure a meeting in New York with the new head of the White House. The Japanese Prime Minister prepared well for this meeting, he carefully

studied and took into account Trump's "weak points" – golf accessories and gold jewelry. He presented the future American president with a set of gold-plated golf clubs worth \$4,000. And Trump liked Abe. It was already on February 10, 2017, immediately after the inauguration, that Trump hosted the Japanese leader, who arrived in Washington on an official visit. The Japanese Prime Minister turned out to be the first head of a foreign state to receive such attention [Abe 2020].

Relations With China

In the first decade of the 21st century, China, Japan's most important neighbor, was also assessed in Japan as the partner posing the most serious problem in terms of building bilateral relations. Abe had to answer a hard question: how to combine the response to the "Chinese challenge" (and many in Japan believed that there was already the "Chinese threat") with the need not to close access to such a profitable and huge market for Japanese manufacturers.

The National Security Strategy, first adopted in 2013, emphasized that a comprehensive policy would be pursued in the Chinese direction. However, there were no specific details explaining this thesis.

Abe sought to ensure Japan's role as a full-fledged world power and a regional leader. China, which in 2011, according to the World Bank, ranked second in the world after the United States in terms of economic potential, was clearly on the path to implementing such plans, as it demonstrated an assertive policy in the East China and South China seas, built up its armed forces and pursued a proactive global diplomacy. It was to be taken into account.

Initially, Abe tried to establish a personal, if not friendly, then at least a politely businesslike contact with Chinese President Xi Jinping, something similar to his relationship with the U.S. president. In October 2014, he paid a visit to Beijing. In 2016, he met with the president of the People's Republic of China in Hangzhou. In October 2017, at a bilateral meeting in Vietnam, he obtained the PRC President's consent to give

a “new start” to bilateral relations. This was regarded in Japan as a return to “normal Sino-Japanese relations.”

In the same 2017, Abe spoke positively about China’s “One Belt, One Road” strategy. However, later, in June 2017, he publicly stated that Japan was ready to cooperate with China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative only if it did not contradict the principles of the Trans-Pacific Partnership concept, in which China does not participate. As the Japanese prime minister emphasized, cross-continental infrastructure projects should be open to everyone who wants to participate in them, under the condition of their transparency and honesty. In addition, these projects should be economically significant, and their financing should not lead to a serious debt for the countries in which the projects are being implemented.⁶ The Japanese Government has not taken any steps to join the large-scale transcontinental Chinese project since then. Apparently, Abe took into consideration the negative attitude of the United States towards it.

Ultimately, Abe’s strategy of trying to “sit on two chairs” in relations with Beijing (on the one hand, together with the U.S. actively pursuing the China containment policy, and, on the other, maintaining normal relations with Beijing) did not bring the desired results. As expected, the perception of China as a “threat” prevailed and materialized in a series of anti-Chinese steps.

After his resignation, in an interview with the Economist, Abe noted that Japan alone could not balance China’s growing military power, and “therefore Japan and the United States must cooperate with each other to achieve this balance.” To that end, he said, “I have applied the interpretation of the right of collective self-defense and initiated the legislation under which Japan and the United States can cooperate closely in such situations.”⁷

It was Abe who prompted Washington to support and use the Indo-Pacific concept of regional cooperation, which he had put forward in a speech to the Indian parliament in 2006. Initially, Washington had

⁶ *Mainichi Shimbun* 06.06.2017.

⁷ *The Economist* 26.05.2022.

essentially ignored the initiative of the Japanese prime minister: Obama was busy implementing the concept of “rebalancing” to the Asia-Pacific. However, at the end of his term in the White House, Trump drew attention to it, and the U.S. administration proceeded to the documental conceptualization of the idea of the “Open and Free Indo-Pacific region.” The basis for it was taken from Abe’s statement on the “Democratic Security Diamond,” made in late 2012, which concretized his concept of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Now it was about creating a coalition of four countries in the region, the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, actually aimed at “detering the advance of authoritarian China” into the security zone of the democratic countries.

Relations With India

Abe’s achievements include his “opening” of India to Japanese foreign policy. Apparently, already in his first term as prime minister, he realized the significance of relations with India as a counterweight to China. It was during his visit to Delhi in August 2007 that Abe strongly emphasized the importance of Japanese-Indian relations, and, in his speech to the Indian parliament, he put forward a concept that essentially envisaged the formation of a “belt of democratic countries” surrounding authoritarian China.

Abe prepared for his visit to India thoroughly. It should be noted that, in drafting the speeches for a foreign audience, he paid special attention to their content. His speeches were prepared by a small group of speechwriters who, with professional skill, embodied his ideas into meaningful, but at the same time easily digestible and memorable statements addressed to a specific audience. Abe’s speech to the members of the Indian parliament was vivid and emotional. He noted the historical and ideological proximity of the two countries. In the ideological sphere, it manifests itself in the commitment to democracy, in the religious sphere – in the postulates of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Japanese prime minister met with relatives of Subhas Chandra Bose, an Indian nationalist who, with the support of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, tried to achieve the liberation of India from the British colonial rule during World War II. Although the attitude towards this politician is controversial in India, there are those who revere him. Abe appeared to share the view that Imperial Japan “helped” Indian patriots in their fight for independence.

Abe met with the son of Radhabinod Pal, one of the judges of the Tokyo Military Tribunal, who questioned its legality and, on this basis, believed that the Japanese defendants should be acquitted. Needless to say, Abe himself repeatedly spoke negatively about the “victors’ tribunal.”

During his second term as prime minister, especially after Washington drew attention to his idea of the Indo-Pacific Partnership and to some extent began to attribute its authorship to itself, Abe paid special attention to the development of Japanese-Indian relations. And now, largely due to his efforts, there is noticeable progress in the contacts and exchanges between Japan and India in the military sphere. Since 2019, consultations have been held in the “two-plus-two” format between foreign ministers and defense ministers. In 2018, the first joint maneuvers of the ground forces of the two countries were held, followed by bilateral naval exercises, and deliveries of Japanese amphibious aircraft and naval reconnaissance aircraft to India started. An agreement was signed on the admission of Japanese warships to Indian ports on the islands of Andaman and Nicobar, and of Indian warships to the Japanese base in Djibouti. Cooperation in the technological field is being established. It is planned to build high-speed railways in India based on Japanese technologies at a cost of \$17 billion.

Relations With the DPRK and the Republic of Korea

Abe largely made his political name as a fighter for the return to Japan of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean special services in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1990s, this problem, along with Pyongyang’s

nuclear missile program, became one of the most acute in relations between Japan and the DPRK. At that time, an aspiring politician and a member of parliament, Abe actually led a broad public campaign for the return of the abductees to their homeland.

And the very beginning of the 21st century was marked by a brief period of thaw in Japanese-North Korean relations. In 2002 and 2004, Prime Minister Koizumi paid two visits to Pyongyang at the invitation of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, during which the Japanese side succeeded in securing the return of some of the abducted Japanese. However, the issue was not finally closed, since, according to the Japanese side, several more abductees remained in the DPRK. But the North Korean side refused to provide any information about their fate.

After taking over the post of head of cabinet in 2012, Abe regularly stated his serious intentions to solve this problem and to hold at any time a meeting with the new leader of the DPRK, Kim Jong-un. However, even at present, the abduction issue remains unresolved, manifesting itself in constant demands to the Japanese government from relatives of the abductees and representatives of the general public to take measures for their return.

The thaw in Japanese-North Korean relations ended quickly. Japan resolutely condemned Pyongyang's nuclear and missile tests and imposed anti-North Korean sanctions. The DPRK's response was decisive and undiplomatically rude: the Japanese were called "disgusting devils," "enemies of the Korean nation," "insulting Pyongyang's legitimate measures to ensure self-defense." Abe was advised "to never think about visiting the DPRK or meeting with the North Korean leader." Thus, the Japanese prime minister's policy regarding North Korea ended in failure.⁸

Abe could not boast of any serious achievements in Japan's relations with South Korea either. Overcoming the contentious, often tragic legacy of Japanese colonial policy in Korea turned out to be a very difficult task, although certain efforts of Abe's cabinet in this direction were made. In December 2015, a Japanese-South Korean agreement was signed,

⁸ *The Japan Times* 11.08.2019.

in which the Japanese side acknowledged its historical responsibility for the problem of Korean “comfort women,” whom the Japanese military forced to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers during World War II. A special fund was created to help the “comfort women” who survived to this day. Abe apologized to President Park Geun-hye in a telephone conversation. However, in South Korean political and public circles, the actions of the Japanese side were assessed as insufficient, and it was announced that the aforementioned problem in relations with Japan was “not closed.”

There was no settlement of the territorial dispute between Tokyo and Seoul over the ownership of the island of Dokdo (Takeshima in Japanese), which is under the control of the Republic of Korea. The sovereignty of the Republic of Korea over Dokdo/Takeshima is not recognized by Japan. In general, under the Abe cabinets, Japanese-South Korean relations continued to remain unstable: periods of warming were followed by periods of frost.

The Sphere of National Defense and Security

Abe’s political dream of raising Japan’s international status and increasing its presence in world affairs was not new. Almost all of his predecessors dreamed of a “beautiful Japan,” which, due to its peacefulness, non-participation in conflicts, generous financial and economic gifts to developing countries, and the charm of its distinctive culture, is effortlessly able to secure a place in the first row of the most influential and revered countries of the world.

However, dreams were shattered by prosaic reality. Times were changing rapidly, but Japan remained frozen in its post-war shell. First, China bypassed it, then India, and even the Republic of Korea began to demonstrate their willingness to surpass their pre-war colonizer. Moreover, Tokyo ceased to be perceived as a model of advanced scientific and technical innovations. The money allocated to development assistance, mainly to African countries, did not make much impression

against the background of the huge economic assistance provided by China to developing countries. Even sophisticated Japanese culture began to lose ground under the onslaught of the Korean wave of pop culture.

Japan could not boast of attractive foreign policy initiatives either. The work of the Japanese diplomatic apparatus, the members of which were traditionally focused on supporting the American strategic course, was characterized by a lack of activity and initiative.

Apparently, Abe was aware of the limitations of Japan's foreign policy potential. In his view, a country that occupies a subordinate position and, being unable to independently ensure its defense, is forced to rely on a powerful ally, cannot claim full consideration of its national interests and honorable treatment in the outside world. It is no coincidence that Abe so persistently set the task of revising the provisions of Japan's constitution limiting the development and use of its armed forces.

However, Abe failed to achieve what he called a "historic mission" in his speech delivered in January 2020 to the Diet: to amend the constitution and provide the Self-Defense Forces with the status of a full-fledged army.⁹ The widespread domestic opposition to the "modernization" of the constitution did not allow him to realize his dream.

However, he compensated for the failure of his plan with practical steps to improve and increase the military potential of Japan's armed forces. In the field of military defense, Abe achieved the adoption of several important documents and decisions aimed at increasing the combat capability of the Self-Defense Forces. Among them are the National Security Strategy (2013), the Law on the Protection of State Secrets (2013), the new edition of the National Defense Program Guidelines, and the Medium-term Defense Program for 2019–2023.

The National Security Strategy, adopted for the first time in 2013, emphasized the importance of developing Japan's own defense potential, but the main focus was aimed at cooperation with the United States in the development and production of military equipment. The importance

⁹ *Asahi Shimbun* 20.01.2020.

of providing the Self-Defense Forces with the capabilities in new areas – space, cyber, radio-electronic – was pointed out. In line with Abe's concept of "proactive pacifism," an increasingly active participation of Japanese military personnel in UN peacekeeping missions was envisaged, raising Japan's contribution to international cooperation for maintaining security in the Asia-Pacific region, but, of course, in active interaction with the United States.

The adoption by the Diet, thanks to Abe's insistence, of legislative measures to implement Japan's right to collective self-defense, was particularly significant. Under his leadership, on May 25, 2015, the Cabinet submitted bills to the Diet for approval, which define situations in which Japan can use its armed forces in order to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

According to the Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, "the Japanese people forever renounce war as the sovereign right of nations" and "the right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." In 1959, the Supreme Court ruled that this article allows for the exercise of the right to self-defense in a limited form in the interests of ensuring the existence of the country. Accordingly, Japan's right to create Self-Defense Forces was recognized. In other words, self-defense is not the war referred to in Article 9 of the Constitution.

In 1972, the Japanese Government stated that the Constitution prohibits the use of the right to collective self-defense. It turned out that, in the event of an attack on Japan, the Japan Self-Defense Forces would have to repel the aggression and, according to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, await the arrival of American armed forces for help. A strange situation arose. The specified interaction between the armed forces of the two countries did not fall under the definition of collective self-defense. However, Japan preferred not to think about such an interpretation of the right to collective self-defense.

Prime Minister Abe was the first to dare to state that the constitution does not deprive the country of the right to collective self-defense, and that the Self-Defense Forces can act jointly with the U.S. armed forces, both in Japanese territory and abroad, in the situations prescribed in

the bills. Among the latter, the bill specified an armed attack against Japan or against a foreign state in close relations with Japan, which could pose a threat to the existence of Japan. This was the most significant provision of the bill and caused heated debate both in the Diet and among the general public. Opponents of the bill demanded specific clarification of situations in which Japanese military forces would be used outside the country. It was pointed out that the lack of specifics allowed for different interpretations of security-threatening situations and enabled the government to single-handedly and arbitrarily determine the grounds for the use of armed forces within the framework of collective security.

The explanations from Abe himself and the representatives of his cabinet were contradictory, indicating that the expedited preparation of the bill drafts was not carefully verified. Ultimately, the most convincingly cited example of a situation where the right to collective self-defense could be used was when an attack was carried out on an American warship that was evacuating the Japanese from a dangerous area, which meant, first of all, the Korean Peninsula.

The Cabinet's unconvincing explanation of the need for a new law caused growing discontent in wide public circles of Japan. Mass protest demonstrations were held. Even some Diet members from the ruling party were demonstratively absent during the voting, and deputies from five opposition parties left the meeting room and did not participate in the voting. Nevertheless, the law was passed on July 16, 2015, by the majority of Diet members from the LDP and the Komeito party, which was its partner in the ruling coalition.

Washington officially approved the adoption of new legislation, reasonably believing that the main thing was to create a legal basis for the use of Japanese armed forces abroad. If necessary, specific situations of application of the right to collective self-defense could be "worked out" together with the Japanese government.

China reacted in a sharply negative way, officially declaring that the new legislation, which allowed Japan to send troops abroad for the first time since World War II, "complicated regional security and global

stability” and called into question Tokyo’s commitment to the “path of peaceful development.”¹⁰

Abe has done a lot to strengthen the country’s military potential. Even during his first premiership, he achieved the elevation of the status of the defense department of the government from an agency to a ministry. The prime minister initiated a regular increase in budget spending on defense. Although the annual growth was not so significant, and the allocations have not yet gone beyond 1 percent of GDP, the first steps have been taken.

Purchases of modern weapons have increased. In the arms procurement program for 2019–2023, the Japanese government has earmarked funds for the purchase of 105 F-35 fighter-bombers, missiles and anti-missiles, helicopters, and reconnaissance drones from the United States. These purchases were to some extent consistent with President Trump’s wishes for Japan to acquire more American weapons, but they also met the interests of modernizing the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. In particular, some F-35 aircraft were purchased for use on the Izumo and Kaga ships converted from helicopter carriers to aircraft carriers.

In June 2013, the first Cybersecurity Strategy was adopted, according to which the Ministry of Defense was tasked with countering cyber-attacks at the national level. This was preceded by cyber-attacks on the information systems of government agencies, the Diet, as well as the largest companies in the defense sector. It was suggested that these attacks were associated with “relevant Chinese structures.” In May 2020, the creation of a space operations unit within the Air Self-Defense Force was announced, primarily for military purposes, with the main task of ensuring the protection of Japanese satellites.

As a response to China’s growing military power, and primarily for the necessity of fending off Beijing’s forceful seizure of the Senkaku Islands, in 2016, the deployment of Self-Defense Force units of 500–600 people began on the southern islands of Amami – Oshima, Miyakojima,

¹⁰ *The Japan Times* 17.07.2015.

Ishigakijima. In 2018, for the first time in the post-war period, an Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade was formed with the task of conducting amphibious operations in the event of attempts to capture the southern Japanese islands.

In June 2020, at the initiative of Defense Minister Tarō Kōno, Prime Minister Abe and then the Japanese Cabinet made a decision to abandon the deployment of ground-based Aegis missile defense batteries in Akita and Yamaguchi prefectures, which were supposed to cover the country's territory primarily from possible missile attacks by the DPRK and China. This decision was justified by the high costs of purchasing, deploying, and maintaining interceptor missiles. The negative attitude of the residents of these prefectures towards the placement of anti-missile missiles in close proximity to their places of residence was also taken into account.

As an alternative to the option of ground-based missile defense, it was decided to increase the number of destroyers of the Maritime Self-Defense Force with Aegis missile systems. Abe announced his intention to consider the possibility of creating a potential for preemptive strikes on enemy military bases, in case there begin preparations for a missile attack on Japan. With Abe's light hand, the idea of preventive strikes became an object of active debates in Japan and materialized in the National Security Strategy adopted at the end of 2022.

Relations With Russia

One of the most important directions of Abe's foreign policy, and, in fact, the most important one, was the strategic task of building a new quality of relations with Moscow. He set this task from the first days of his premiership and consistently moved towards its implementation, stubbornly sparing neither time nor effort.

Solving the primary task of radical improvement of relations with Russia pursued two organically combined, but outwardly divergent goals. The first one was to prevent, as far as possible, rapprochement

and, moreover, cooperation between Moscow and Beijing on an anti-Japanese basis, especially in the military-political field. It had to be shown to Moscow that the benefits of multifaceted relations with Tokyo in all spheres – from politics to culture – could outweigh its ties with Beijing, by developing which the Russian side would inevitably play the role of a “younger brother” [Kensho 2022, p. 176]. Abe openly stated that, since China has significantly increased its expansion in the Southeast and Southwest seas, and Japan has maritime borders with China, it is necessary to improve relations with Russia.¹¹

The second goal, a more ambitious one, the achievement of which would be of historical significance for both Japan and Russia, and for the bilateral relations between the two countries and their peoples, seemed at its core quite logical: by actively changing the nature of bilateral relations, radically improving them, to create an environment conducive to the settlement of the territorial problem and the conclusion of the “ill-fated” peace treaty. As a result, the international positions of both Japan and Russia would be substantially transformed into much more serious and influential ones, both in the world and especially within the regional Asia-Pacific balance of power.

Implementing his strategy in the Russian direction, Abe began with small steps. Essentially ignoring the boycott by Western countries of participation in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sochi in February 2014, he defiantly attended this ceremony. Then, the Japanese government joined the condemnation by the G7 countries of Russian measures to reunify with Crimea but did it for the most part symbolically. Moreover, Tokyo welcomed Russia’s actions to defeat terrorist groups in Syria, which were actually condemned by Western countries.

Finally, preparations began for Abe’s meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which took place in Sochi in May 2016. It lasted 3.5 hours and was of particular significance. First of all, the meeting opened the way for the establishment of personal friendly relations between the leaders of the two countries. Subsequently, they met 26 more times. They

¹¹ *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

talked with each other for 48 hours, including one-on-one negotiations for 9 hours. It was obvious that the leaders had the feelings of personal affection and trust for each other.

The previously united front of the Western powers on large-scale restrictions on contacts with Russian officials, who were included in special lists of “untouchables,” was broken through. Almost all of them, starting with members of the leadership of the Federal Assembly, ministries and, most importantly, high-ranking Russian military officials, received invitations and visited Japan. It is worth noting the visit to Tokyo in December 2017 of the First Deputy Minister of Defense, Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, as well as the visit of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Colonel-General Oleg Salyukov. Nikolai Patrushev, the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, and Shōtarō Yachi, the Secretary General of the National Security Council of Japan, met several times in Tokyo and Moscow. The “two-plus-two” dialogue – between the foreign ministers and defense ministers of the two countries – was resumed.

Abe proposed an eight-point plan to boost economic cooperation. It is noteworthy that Shintarō Abe, the father of the prime minister, while serving as foreign minister in the late 1980s, also put forward an eight-point plan for the development of bilateral ties in the interests of improving Japan’s relations with the Soviet Union. It is no coincidence that, when starting his policy in the Russian direction, Abe visited his father’s grave and promised there to solve the territorial problem with Moscow.

The economic plan of the Japanese prime minister provided for the establishment of cooperation in the energy sector, in the fields of urban planning, medicine, cooperation between small and medium-sized businesses, advanced technologies, agriculture and fisheries, the development of the Far East. It was proposed also to significantly intensify and expand cultural, scientific and humanitarian exchanges.

At the Sochi meeting, an exchange of views took place on the issue of peace treaty. An agreement was reached to hold regular consultations at the level of foreign ministers and their deputies. The Japanese side

noted its principled position on the simultaneous implementation of economic cooperation projects and the negotiations on a peace treaty.

The meeting in Sochi testified to Japan's withdrawal from the united anti-Russian "sanctions front" of the United States and European countries. The Japanese prime minister showed political courage and, despite Washington's statement, made a choice not in favor of "Western solidarity," but in favor of Japan's national interests.

The Sochi agreements contributed to a significant improvement in the general atmosphere of Japanese-Russian relations [Brown 2016]. At the first stage, Abe's plan for economic cooperation was received with particular enthusiasm. According to the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, by 2021, more than 200 cooperation projects had been put forward and considered by both sides. However, only a small part of them reached the implementation stage. Significant differences emerged in the approaches of Russian and Japanese companies to the goals and formats of cooperation. Many projects of the Russian side were not sufficiently prepared, set inflated, unrealistic production goals, and offered cooperation on terms that did not correspond to the practice of Japanese companies.

As Abe himself noted later in his interview, "not everyone in Japan correctly understood the purpose of the economic cooperation plan... Some believed that this was government assistance, but it was meant that Japanese companies and businesses would participate. If it is not profitable for them, if there is no profit, they will not participate."¹² At the same time, explaining his approach to economic cooperation with Russia, Abe proceeded from the fact that Russia would understand the importance of pushing forward relations with Japan and developing the Russian Far East with the help of Japanese technology. However, according to his assessment, "in Russia, this understanding has not been achieved."¹³

¹² *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

¹³ *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

Nevertheless, a number of important projects, especially those aimed at solving socio-economic problems in the Far Eastern regions of Russia, have been successfully implemented. Of particular importance were the energy projects Yamal LNG, Arctic LNG-2, and the construction of a polymer plant in the Irkutsk region. At a time when Western financial institutions did not issue loans to Russian companies, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation allocated a loan of 200 million euros for the implementation of the Yamal LNG project, and LNG shipments to Japan began. The Japan Bank for International Cooperation, together with Mitsui Corporation, invested about \$3 billion in the Arctic LNG-2 project, becoming the owner of 10 percent assets of the project operator.

Attempts were made to approach the implementation of the idea of joint economic activity on the South Kuril Islands. In September 2017, a roadmap was even approved with a list of possible joint activity projects: aquaculture, wind energy, creation of greenhouses, waste disposal. However, no specific agreements were reached. Fundamental disagreements on legal issues were the main obstacle. For the Japanese side, economic activity on the islands based on compliance with Russian laws, which would mean recognition of their belonging to Russia, was unacceptable.

There was no progress in political-level negotiations on the peace treaty issue either. In September 2018, President Vladimir Putin, speaking at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, proposed to the Japanese prime minister to sign a peace treaty without preconditions by the end of the year, and to resolve other issues, i.e., territorial ones, later.

At a meeting with Putin in November of the same year in Singapore, Abe made a counterproposal that indicated a radical change in the Japanese side's approach to the problem of settling the territorial issue. In contrast to Tokyo's previous principled position "on the simultaneous return of the four islands," Abe demonstrated the Japanese side's readiness to negotiate on the basis of Article 9 of the Joint Declaration of 1956, which envisaged the transfer of the Habomai and Shikotan islands to Japan. The negotiating plan proposed by Abe was not disclosed

in more detail. However, according to unofficial information, it was intended to sign a peace treaty, transfer the Habomai and Shikotan islands to Japan within a certain time period, and fix the Russian-Japanese border between the islands of Shikotan and Kunashir.

Abe himself explained the radical, hitherto unthinkable change in the Japanese position as follows: if you set the task to achieve 100 percent success, but foresee that the result will be zero, then there is no point in setting such a task. First of all, it is necessary to determine the achievement of the possible. If we seek the return of not two islands, but four, then this is the task of achieving 100 percent success, but then Japanese-Russian relations will be thrown back.¹⁴

Abe saw the possibility of solving the most difficult problem in Japanese-Russian relations in the strong, stable leadership of President Vladimir Putin and in his determination to use the stability of his political position in Japan. “To solve the territorial problem and conclude a peace treaty,” he emphasized, “a strong governance is necessary in both Japan and Russia. I believe that Putin’s governance is very strong.”¹⁵

After Abe put forward a new proposal to resolve the peace treaty issue, negotiations began in January 2019 at the level of the Foreign Ministers. The parties did not disclose the content of these negotiations. However, according to a number of statements by representatives of the Russian side, already at the first stage the Russian delegation actually put forward a preliminary condition – the Japanese side had to officially recognize that Russia legally possesses all the territories received as a result of the war with Japan.

Apparently, the Japanese delegation was not inclined to start negotiations with such recognition, obviously fearing that the negotiations might not lead to an agreement on a peace treaty, and that the Japanese side would lose one of its fundamental positions: non-recognition of the settled state of the territorial problem. However, Abe himself was optimistic about this issue, “I think,” he said, “diplomats would be able

¹⁴ *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

¹⁵ *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

to solve the question posed by the Russian side that Russia received the islands as a result of the war.”¹⁶

The Russian side expressed concern over the scenario by which the Habomai and Shikotan islands, after their transfer to Japan, would fall under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the U.S. armed forces would appear on them. Abe’s statements during his talks with Putin that Japan was capable of pursuing an independent policy regardless of its relations with the U.S. seemed unconvincing to the Russian side. At the same time, according to Abe, the negotiations did not reach a specific discussion of security issues.¹⁷

In general, the Russian side developed a two-stage approach to solving the problem of the peace treaty and the territorial issue. Since, as the Russian side believed, at this stage, Japan is an ally of the United States, which is pursuing an openly anti-Russian policy, and Japan has joined many anti-Russian sanctions, occupies positions in the UN and other international structures identical to those of Washington and NATO countries, this creates serious contradictions in Russian-Japanese relations. Therefore, it was proposed to conclude a peace treaty contributing to a new quality of bilateral relations in all areas, a treaty which would ultimately help to find a solution to the problem of territorial demarcation. In turn, the Japanese side, apparently, continued to insist on concluding a peace treaty, the essence of which would be to determine the conditions for the transfer of the Habomai and Shikotan islands to Japan.

The negotiations actually reached an impasse. Abe attributed this to the fact that, as he noted, “the positions of opponents of negotiations have strengthened in Russia.”¹⁸

It should be noted that opponents of the solution of the territorial problem according to the “Abe formula” also became more active in Japan. If, at the initial stage of the negotiations, criticism of Abe’s policy

¹⁶ *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

¹⁷ *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

¹⁸ *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

in the Russian direction was rarely heard in statements by politicians, political scientists, and journalists, then, after their interruption with the Covid-19 epidemic and especially after Russia launched the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, disagreement with the course of the Japanese Prime Minister began to prevail. Summarizing the complaints about Abe's policy, Director of the Slavic-Eurasian Center at Hokkaido University Akihiro Iwashita concluded that the Japanese Prime Minister had seriously damaged Japan's interests, since he offered Russia a lot, but received nothing in return [Iwashita 2019, pp. 111–133].

This perspective is generally shared by a well-known Japanese journalist Akiyoshi Komaki, who twice headed the representative office of the Asahi newspaper in Moscow. In his book devoted to a detailed analysis of the negotiations between Prime Minister Abe and President Putin on the issue of peace treaty, he critically assesses Abe's policy towards Russia. According to Komaki, it did not lead to any agreements, and, moreover, for quite a long time its contents were not explained to the Japanese public [Komaki 2020, p. 354].

Responding to criticism, Abe said in an interview at the end of 2021: "If the course is changed, then Japanese-Russian relations will roll back 100 percent... Everything will return to the previous Japanese position. And if this is done harshly, then no changes should be expected. This will be a big mistake."¹⁹

It was as if he had foreseen the further development of the events. Japan fully supported the anti-Russian position of the U.S. and the European countries towards Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine, imposed a huge number of sanctions against the Russian leadership, and almost completely curtailed bilateral trade and economic relations. In this regard, the Russian side added Japan to the list of "unfriendly countries" and stated that it was pointless to negotiate a peace treaty in such an environment. Bilateral relations between Moscow and Tokyo have reached the lowest point in history since the normalization of relations in 1956.

¹⁹ *Hokkaido Shimibun* 26.12.2021.

Many details of the Russian-Japanese negotiations on a peace treaty and territorial issue from February 2019 to March 2022 remain undisclosed at this stage. However, their outcome is known. Prime Minister Abe's "grand project" for radical restructuring of Japanese-Russian relations ended in failure.

The Foreign Policy Legacy of Abe

As the head of the Japanese government, Abe expended much effort to increase the importance and influence of Japan in world politics. To this end, he sought to prove to the US that Tokyo's greater independence within the framework of the Japan-US military-political alliance not only does not contradict American interests, but, on the contrary, complements and strengthens Washington's position in the Indo-Pacific region.

An attempt was made to find a mutually acceptable formula for building relations with China. However, he failed to ensure their proper balance – the negative perception of Beijing's foreign policy in military and political terms prompted Japan to look for the methods of containing it, by participating in China's "encirclement belt," which also implied improving relations with India.

Abe also failed to radically change the nature of Japanese-Russian relations and conclude a peace treaty based on the settlement of the territorial problem. What Abe was worried about, namely, the Russian-Chinese rapprochement and partnership, including the military one directed against Japan, began to be actively implemented. Joint exercises of the Russian and Chinese navies near the Japanese borders, as well as air patrols over the waters of the Japan and East China Seas by air groups of strategic bombers of the Russian Aerospace Forces and the PLA Air Force, have begun to be held regularly.

Tokyo's relations with Seoul developed problematically during Abe's premiership. Only after Abe's resignation and the election of Yun Seok-yol as President of the Republic of Korea, who made serious concessions to the Japanese side on one of the issues of the historical past in bilateral

relations, was the door opened to removing obstacles to practical issues of bilateral relations, including the cooperation in the fields of confidence building and security.

In response to the missile threat from Pyongyang, Abe spoke in favor of creating the potential to launch missile strikes on bases from which an attack on Japanese territory is planned. This idea was specifically embodied in the National Security Strategy adopted by the Japanese Government on December 16, 2022. The task was set to ensure the possibility of delivering a “counterstrike to prevent further attacks on Japanese territory,” which in itself, as the authors of the document believe, would deter the intention to commit an armed attack on Japan. Obviously, it was about not only North Korean, but also Chinese missiles.

Abe has done a lot to improve the Japan Self-Defense Forces and to formalize their use in law. During his premiership, an increase in defense funding in annual budget expenditures began, albeit within 1 percent of GDP. This policy was continued: the National Security Strategy 2022 set out a provision to increase the defense budget to 2 percent of Japan’s GDP by 2027, which would mean doubling military spending.

It can be said that a comprehensive study of Prime Minister Abe’s foreign and domestic policy by both Japanese and foreign political scientists is only at a starting point now. Among such studies is a monograph by an American political scientist Michael Green, who focused on Abe’s strategy towards China, in which competition was combined with an attempt not to lose the benefits of economic cooperation, as well as on his desire to turn Japan into an influential state on the world stage, and above all in the Asia-Pacific region, by conducting an assertive military policy [Green 2022].

A group of Japanese scientists from leading Japanese universities, members of the Asia-Pacific Initiative think tank, conducted a comprehensive study of Prime Minister Abe’s domestic and foreign policy. It was recognized that, despite the contradictory attitude towards his activities in Japanese public opinion, Abe’s foreign policy course received many positive assessments at a time when the international situation around Japan sharply worsened. The high assessment concerns

the following achievements of Abe's policy: strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance, passing laws on collective self-defense, promoting the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", strengthening the activity of the Quad – the United States, Japan, India, Australia, stabilizing relations with China, establishing relations of trust with ASEAN countries, launching the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership consisting of 11 countries [Kensho 2022, p. 4–5].

As shown in this article, not all of these estimates can be agreed with. At the same time, it is obvious that, compared to many of his predecessors, Abe, as head of the Japanese government, showed himself to be a more active, strategically minded politician who achieved a number of notable results in the sphere of diplomacy.

The international situation, which radically changed as a result of confrontation between the collective West, led by the United States, and Russia, prompted Japan to abandon Abe's policy of aspiring more independence in choosing partners. Showing full solidarity with the policy of the collective West, Japan is doing everything possible to strengthen allied relations with the United States, align itself with the policies of NATO and the European Union towards Russia and China, and intensify ties with NATO structures. As a result, Tokyo is becoming increasingly involved in the global and regional strategy of the collective West, in fact contributing to the split of the Asia-Pacific region into opposing military and political blocs. It is obvious that this course is not capable of achieving the goals set by Abe to ensure Tokyo's independent, influential positions in world and regional affairs.

References

- Abe, Shinzō (2020). Nihon fukkatsu-no so to natta nichibei domei saikyoka [The Reinforcement of the US – Japan Alliance Which Became the Foundation for the Revival of Japan]. *Gaiko*, 67, Nov/Dec., 6–15. Retrieved from www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100121866.pdf (In Japanese).
- Abe, Shinzō (2021). Kantei gaiko wo sasaeta soshiki, hito, kotoba [Structures, People, and Words Supporting the Diplomacy of PM Office]. *Gaiko*, 67,

- May/June, 100–105. Retrieved from <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100195693.pdf> (In Japanese).
- Brown, J. (2016). Abe's 2016 Plan to Break the Deadlock in the Territorial Dispute With Russia. *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 14(4), No. 1, February 15. Retrieved December 5, 2023, from <https://apjif.org/2016/04/brown>
- Green, M. (2022). *Line of Advantage: Japan Grand Strategy in the Era of Abe Shinzo*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Iwashita, A. (2019). Abe's Foreign Policy Fiasco on the Northern Territories Issue: Breaking with the Past and the National Movement. *Eurasia Border Review*, 101, 111–133.
- Kenshō. *Abe Seiken – hoshu to riarizumu-no seiji* [The Legacy of Abe Administration – Politics of Conservatism and Realism]. (2022). Tokyo: Bunshun shinsho. (In Japanese).
- Komaki, Akiyoshi. (2020). *Abe vs Puchin. Nichiro kōshō wa naze yukizumatta no ka?* [Abe vs Putin. Why have the Japan-Russia Negotiations Stalled?] Tokyo: Chikuma shobō. (In Japanese).
- Mulgan, A. (2018). *The Abe Administration and the Rise of the Prime Ministerial Executive*. New York, Routledge.
- Panov, A. (2016). Vneshnepoliticheskie prioritety prem'er-ministra Yaponii Abe Sindzo [Foreign Policy Legacy of Prime Minister of Japan Abe Shinzō]. *Yearbook Japan*, 7–42. (In Russian).

PANOV Alexander Nikolaevich – Doctor of Sciences (Politics), professor of MGIMO MFA Russia, Chief Researcher Institute of U.S. and Canada Studies of RAS. 76, Prospekt Vernadskogo, Moscow 119454 Russian Federation
E-mail: panov.taishi@yandex.ru

This article was originally published in Russian. The reference for primary publication is:

Panov A. N. (2024). Vneshnepoliticheskoe nasledstvo premier-ministra Yaponii Abe Sinzo [Foreign policy legacy of Prime Minister of Japan Abe Shinzō]. *Japanese Studies in Russia*, 2, 21–40. (In Russian). DOI: 10.55105/2500-2872-2024-2-21-40