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Abe continued to lead on defence

Aurelia George Mulgan¹

Abstract

The late former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, among the most influential politicians in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) even after his resignation in 2020, extended his significant influence over matters of defence, security and foreign policy at home and abroad. His continuing thought leadership on defence issues generated a political status which almost paralleled that of factional rival and current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. His opportunistic strategizing that asserted his reformist ambitions for Japan's defence posture and capabilities ranged from exercising direct policymaking influence within LDP processes and over Kishida, to leading public debate as an "influencer" in domestic media and international fora.

Abe's foreign policy realism, which informed his desire to balance China by launching the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept and the Quad framework, paved the way for Kishida to follow in his footsteps. Proactive lobbying on Abe's part extended to issues of the intertwining of Japanese and Taiwanese security interests and enhancement of their relations, and the simultaneous deterrence of China with an independent and strategically unambiguous defence policy reliant on the bedrock of the Japan-US alliance. Post-resignation and posthumously, Abe moved Kishida, LDP policy platforms and public opinion on issues such as increasing defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP, consideration of a 'nuclear sharing' arrangement with the United States and revision of the Japanese constitution.

While the independence of Kishida's future defence policy positions remains to be seen, this paper reviews Abe's tools of policy influence, his leadership of national debates on the issues that animated him, and the accompanying political and bureaucratic manoeuvrings in the contentious area of Japanese security policymaking. The possibility for fulfilment of Abe's 'unfinished business', including the normalisation of Japan's security posture, and its defence and military roles, will ultimately be determined by its deteriorating security environment.

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Throughout his political career, Shinzo Abe was consistently at the forefront of Japan's domestic policy debate about the need for Japan to cast off the shackles of its post-war peace constitution, normalise its security posture, restructure its defence policymaking institutions and assume the military and defence roles of a 'normal nation'. He built a substantial record as a defence policy reformer during his prime ministerial tenure in 2012–20. Most significant was his success in 2015, after years of advocacy, in achieving another 'revision by reinterpretation' (George Mulgan 2005) of Article 9 of the constitution. The new Legislation for Peace and Security permitted the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to undertake collective 'self-defence' actions to assist the United States military in the event of conflict that threatened Japan's security.

Without an official government role in the Kishida administration formed in October 2021, but with his record as Japan's longest serving prime minister who took over the leadership of the ruling party's largest faction (Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyukai, or Seiwakai) in November 2021, Abe constructed a prominent and influential role for himself as a leading thinker, opinion leader, strategist and outspoken communicator of his views. Indeed, rather than retreating from the political and international limelight as ex-prime minister, Abe's words and actions grew more prominent over time. He not only led the debate on constitutional reform, but he also made active policy proposals in a range of defence-related fields, both within his party and more broadly within the government. The Prime Minister met with Abe frequently and received pointers on everything from domestic politics to diplomacy and national security (Ogura 2022). Kishida sought his advice on national security with respect to the situation in Ukraine, for example. Such was Abe's enduring influence on the direction of Japan's national policy that he effectively set in place and leveraged a dual power structure with the Prime Minister, becoming one of the most influential politicians in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) whose support was critical for the Kishida administration (Kaiya 2022).

Abe also maintained a highly visible regional and international role as a 'political leader at large'. He regularly received foreign visitors in Tokyo for discussions on matters of regional and international security and appeared at meetings with foreign leaders and groups as a leading spokesperson for Japan's security interests. This offered him opportunities to advance his views to other countries on security issues in the Asia Pacific, emphasising threats to the rules-based regional security order and such issues as attempts to change the status quo by force. Abe was one of the 'influential parliamentarians' that the first US congressional delegation to Japan since the pandemic began met in Tokyo in May 2022 (Hagerty, Cardin and Cornyn 2022). Then in June, he attended a panel discussion in Tokyo along with new US Ambassador to Japan, Rahm Emanuel, hosted by an organisation promoting Japan–US relations. Abe appeared on stage with Emanuel to speak on matters relating to regional security, the US–Japan alliance and Japan's defence policy. Thus, far from settling into the role of a backbencher in the new government, Abe effectively assumed the role of 'prime minister at large'. Indeed, the fact that he was no longer Japan's prime minister or occupied an official policy position allowed him greater freedom to speak his mind, with at least one observer saying that 'Abe is now free to say what he was thinking all along as leader' (Ryall 2021).

Abe's political assets, strategies and channels of influence

Leveraging his power as leader of the largest LDP faction, Abe influenced the policymaking process directly. He submitted multiple requests to the government across a range of domestic, foreign and security policy matters that were under active consideration. In particular, the fact that Japan was in a major transitional period with a reformulation of three crucial national defence documents due by the end of 2022 provided a golden opportunity for Abe to exert influence over the future direction of government policy in this sector. The documents were Japan's first National Security Strategy (NSS) formalised in 2013 under Abe's leadership, the five-year National Defence Program Guidelines and the Medium-Term Defence Program (MTDP).² Abe sought to take advantage of this process to promote some long-term objectives. Alongside the government, the LDP's Research Commission on National Security (Anzen Hosho Chosakai) was also actively investigating and discussing Japan's national defence policy options and capabilities with a view to coming up with recommendations that would be incorporated into the updated NSS and other defence documents. This provided another transmission route through which Abe could channel his influence. He readily stepped into the role of 'influencer' in the nation's defence policymaking process, and in this capacity, pressed for major changes in Japan's defence posture and capabilities, conscious of the fact that the government and LDP were now at a major turning point (*Yahoo News*, 16 April 2022) given the dramatic changes in Japan's security environment.

On numerous occasions Abe also met with the Prime Minister directly for discussions on Japan's foreign and defence policy options, taking advantage of Kishida's consultative style. Most of the conversation centred on foreign policy, with Abe advising Kishida to watch how Europe dealt with Russia, particularly its stance that was both tough and flexible. Over dinner on 10th April, for example, he gave Kishida advice on how to deal with Russia and on foreign policy towards China and South Korea (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022e). Abe suggested ways to manage the relationship with China responsibly (Kaiya 2022). The fact that Abe not only led the largest faction in the party but that the LDP was also facing an Upper House (UH) election in July was another consideration encouraging Kishida to meet with Abe. In addition to strengthening his political links with the Abe faction, Kishida sought Abe's advice as someone with considerable experience in dealing with other national leaders, and as an influential national leader on the world stage who had built memorable relationships with other political and opinion leaders. Many of Abe's policy-related statements were directed to external powers, particularly China (Ryall 2021), in ways that would enhance Japanese security.

Domestically, Abe sought to exert a strong influence not only over the ruling party and the government but also over the broader policy community and public opinion. He delivered

² The NSS elaborates the strategies that will guide the country's diplomacy and defence; the National Defence Program Guidelines outlines the SDF's strategies and systems; and the Medium-Term Defence Program is an estimation of SDF equipment development plans and defence spending over five years.

major defence lectures, published on various topics in mass media outlets both in Japan and overseas, and appeared in international discussions on Indo-Pacific defence. As political columnist, Kenji Goto, observed, ‘Not a day goes by that former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe does not appear on the political pages of newspapers. In fact, over time, his words and actions have become more and more “intense”’ (2022c). Similarly, a veteran lawmaker close to Abe commented, ‘the message of an experienced prime minister is influencing the formation of public opinion’ (*Yahoo News*, 16 April 2022). In particular, Abe led the public debate on what defence roles and capabilities Japan should acquire in a rapidly and vastly changing regional and global security environment. Indeed, he was frequently out ahead of both his own party and the administration in the active debate on the future of Japan’s defence policy. In certain areas, they played follower to his leadership. On Abe’s death Kishida himself acknowledged that Abe ‘was a great politician who ... was always one step ahead of us’ (*The Japan News* 2022c).

Abe’s role as ‘influencer’ was also facilitated by his acumen as one of Japan’s leading strategic thinkers. He had an unmatched record of generating ideas and implementing them, turning Japan from a ‘reactive’ into a ‘proactive’ state, and he continued in this style as ‘prime minister at large’. As Miyake (2022a) observed, Abe was ‘a seasoned foreign policy strategist. ... [with] knowledge and experience in international policies and strategic thinking ... unparalleled in the Liberal Democratic Party’. The ‘visionary concept’ of the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ (FOIP) (*NHK World News* 2022) and the creation of the Quad framework, with the two now inextricably linked (Wilkins 2022) remain his most important strategic legacy as prime minister (George Mulgan 2021). At the Quad summit in Tokyo in May, Abe held separate talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and tweeted afterwards that he was deeply moved by the fact that a Quad summit had been realised in Tokyo because he had strongly advocated the idea for years (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022g). Abe thus generated ideas and concepts that resonated not only in Japan but also in many other countries, building a wave for change in Japan’s defence policy and also in its international relations more broadly in the region and beyond. Prime Minister Kishida, for example, referred to ‘proactive pacifism’ (so-called ‘proactive contributions to peace’, or *sekkyokuteki heiwashugi*) at the August Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead, the phrase first used in a speech by Abe at the same ceremony in (*Yomiuri Shinbun*, 2022a).

Abe’s view of Japan’s international relations — both regional and global — was underpinned by a dominant realist perspective. He was described variously as a ‘pragmatic realist’ (Green 2013, Nilsson-Wright 2020, Miyake 2022a), ‘conservative realist’ (Green 2013), ‘defensive realist’ (Katagiri 2020, 179) and as introducing a ‘tough’ ‘new realism’ (Auslin 2016) and the ‘Abe Doctrine’ or ‘regional realism’ (Envall 2020). His realist perspective rejected Japan’s idealist pacificism as out of step with Japan’s deteriorating security environment and sought to maximise Japan’s capacity to build and maintain a balance of power through deterrence both regionally and globally, relying on a range of instruments centring on Japan’s own military forces, on the alliance with the United States, and on forging stronger, multilayered bilateral, minilateral and multilateral security ties with other like-minded nations in the region and beyond. In particular, the Quad formed the bedrock of Abe’s strategy of building

multilayered security frameworks and relationships, including broadening Japan's security ties with other Indo-Pacific nations and even European countries. Abe argued strongly for balancing China, saying that it was important to maintain a balance with China, and in order to improve the military balance, the US–Japan alliance, the Quad, and like-minded countries that supported the FOIP should firmly demonstrate their commitment to the region (*Japan Forward* 2022b).

As a realist Abe also understood better than any other politician in the Diet how Japan should develop its military capabilities and strategies to stand as much as possible on its own two feet in the event of conflict and to maximise its defence independence even in an alliance context, particularly in view of what the former US commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) remarked was ‘an erosion of US deterrence’ (*Asahi Shinbun Digital* 2021) as a result of China's military build-up. In Abe's view, China's acquisition of a nuclear strike capability putting the US mainland in range raised the risk of its using nuclear weapons against Japan if it thought the United States was less likely to retaliate with nuclear weapons to protect Japan for fear of a nuclear attack on US territory (Nakamura 2022). In response, Abe argued that ‘Unless the other side has assurance that the US will retaliate with nuclear weapons, there will be no deterrence. It is important to determine concrete steps to be taken’ (Goto 2022c). As prime minister, he once issued instructions to senior defence ministry officials along the lines of ‘When the Senkaku Islands are invaded, the last thing you should do is seek immediate US help. An alliance will not work unless Japan first tries hard to defend itself’ (Akita 2022).

Even Prime Minister Kishida – leader of the Kochikai faction widely perceived as ‘dovish’ – followed in Abe's footsteps by moving unequivocally towards assuming a realist posture in late 2021. Its initial launching was at the Yomiuri International Economic Society meeting in Tokyo on 22nd December 2021 (Kaiya 2022). Given the Prime Minister's predilection to give all-subsuming labels to his policies, he called for ‘a “new era” of “realist diplomacy”, based on a tough and thorough realism’ (Yoshino 2022). He then elaborated on his ‘Realism Diplomacy for a New Era’ in his first policy speech to the Diet on 17th January (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2022). Kishida also considered himself personally as a realist in line with his foreign policy, placing realism at the core of his faction's policy based on a view of what Japan needed to do to survive the new era (Kaiya 2022). Political calculations were also in play on Kishida's part — because Abe's support as the leader of the LDP's largest faction was critical for his administration, it encouraged him even more to adopt a realist approach, including to the issue of constitutional reform on which Abe continually urged change (Kaiya 2022).³

Abe also shared close familial ties and views with his brother, former defence minister Nobuo Kishi, with whom he was ideologically aligned. They espoused the same nationalist views on history and on constitutional reform, and championed so-called ‘hawkish attitudes in defense and diplomacy. ... [including] strong ties with Taiwan. ... [the acquisition of

³ See also below.

nuclear weapons] if required. ... [and even indirect backing for] the idea of Japan acquiring a strike capability to better defend itself against the threat of nuclear-armed North Korea' (Osaki 2020). Abe's former secretary and chairman of the Japan–Taiwan parliamentary friendship association, the Japan–Republic of China Diet Members' Consultative Council, Keiji Furuya, also explained that 'Building Japan–Taiwan ties initially started from the time of former prime minister Nobusuke Kishi' (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2022a) who had been a leading member of the pro-Taiwan faction in the LDP (Kanda 2021).

In terms of the actual policy process, Kishi's familial connection also provided Abe with a direct line of communication with the incumbent leading the Ministry of Defence (MoD]. Clearly, for Abe, influencing his brother meant pushing on an open door. Just before his death, Abe was working on a scheme to replace Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi with Kishi in the expected post-UH election cabinet reshuffle, particularly because Hayashi was from the dovish Kochikai. Abe's plan was reputedly to exert direct influence over the drafting of the NSS and National Defence Program Guidelines by having Kishi installed as foreign minister and a close ally as defence minister (*Sentaku* 2022b).

The regional security environment

In this domestic political and policy setting, and drawing on his considerable policy-related assets, Abe seized the opportunity once again to lead on defence. The scope for him to assume this self-appointed role was expanded by a dramatically deteriorating and increasingly hostile regional and global security environment dominated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to the former Ground Self-Defence Force chief of staff, Kiyofumi Iwata, it was 'the toughest situation since the end of the Cold War'.⁴

The realities of Japan's strategic circumstances weighed heavily on Abe and he felt that no time should be lost in responding appropriately in a way that would maximise its security. Japan was located in the eye of the storm, facing active security threats on three fronts in its near neighbourhood. As Abe's former adviser Tomohiko Taniguchi observed, Japan was 'in arguably the most dangerous geopolitical setting in the world. ... For the first time in Japanese history, Japan must now confront military threats from three fronts all at the same time' (2022). It was surrounded by hostile nuclear-armed powers posing an existential threat and therefore highly vulnerable to nuclear attack. As Abe's former deputy chief cabinet secretary from 2012 to 2019, Nobukatsu Kanehara (2022) observed, 'Nuclear powers surround Japan as if it were located in the most dangerous "nuclear valley" in the world'. The LDP's Security Commission in its 26th April defence policy recommendations to the government (*Jiyuminshuto* 2022) noted that the security environment surrounding Japan had deteriorated at an 'accelerated pace' and called on the government to identify China as a 'serious security threat', North Korea as a 'more serious and imminent security threat' and Russia as a 'realistic security threat' in the updated NSS.

⁴ *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 8 June 2022, p. 4.

Both Russia, Japan's closest neighbour, and China, were states bent on either acquiring or continuing to hold Japanese territory, believers in the use of force and subjecting Japan to 'repeated military intimidation' (*Japan Forward* 2022a) by their armed forces. They were also opposed to the US–Japan alliance, allied to North Korea developing nuclear weapons for regime preservation, and seeking to upend the current geopolitical order in their own strategic interests (Walker 2022). Published not long after Abe's death, Japan's 2022 Defence White Paper emphasised the severity of the security environment surrounding Japan and went beyond a mere annual report by focussing on a 'message' seeking widespread understanding of the need to strengthen defence capabilities in response to the increasingly severe security environment, arguing that 'deterrence was essential' (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022b).

Abe was particularly concerned about the dramatic deterioration in territories and waters around Japan. The Russians with over 6000 nuclear weapons (Imao and Nose 2022) were conducting large-scale military drills in Japan's Northern Territories (*Nikkei Asia* 2022c) where the Russian navy had a base, as well as test-launching a new type of anti-submarine missile in the Sea of Japan in December 2021 and submarine-launched missiles off the Japanese coast in the Sea of Japan in April 2022 (Yamaguchi 2022). There were also many examples of Chinese and Russian military forces acting together to 'menace the skies and seas around Japan' (*Japan Forward* 2022) by conducting joint naval and air force exercises near Japan's coasts (Sharp 2022). In October 2021, Russian and Chinese naval vessels conducted 'an unusual exercise', practically circumnavigating the Japanese archipelago (*Nikkei Asia* 2022a). Then in May 2022, Chinese and Russian bombers conducted joint long-range flights around Japan (*Nikkei Asia* 2022a) and flew in formation over the Sea of Japan, while in June, Chinese and Russian naval vessels circumnavigated the Japanese archipelago, with seven Russian naval ships sailing as close as 170 kilometres off Chiba Prefecture. The following month on 5th July, two Chinese and Russian naval vessels were seen entering the contiguous zone of Japan's territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands (*Japan Forward* 2022a). Between January and April 2022, the total number of Russian and Chinese warships transiting through Japanese straits also nearly doubled the number in a typical year.⁵ Overall, in the four months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Chinese and Russian military activity around Japan more than doubled, with 90 instances of activity by their navies and air forces near Japan (compared with 35 in the four months before) in a demonstration of what they could do together if necessary (Shiozaki 2022). Not surprisingly, the 2022 Defence White Paper took particular note of the deepening military cooperation between Russia and China (*Nikkei Asia* 2022a).

Equally concerning was Japan's geographic proximity to Taiwan — just over 110 km away from Japan's westernmost inhabited Yonaguni Island in the Sakishima Island chain — a position that would place Okinawa on the front line of a China–Taiwan conflict (Sakaguchi 2022). These were waters patrolled around-the-clock by a Chinese warship. China's nuclear ambitions also posed a direct threat to Japanese security. It had a nuclear warhead inventory of 350 in 2022 (FAS 2022), intended to expand this to at least 1,000 by 2030 (Yamada 2022)

⁵ *Sankei Shinbun*, 6 May 2022, p. 5.

and was not a participant in the New Start (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) (Kanehara 2022). It also possessed ‘a growing number of medium-range ballistic missiles deployed with Japan as a primary target’ (Green 2013) — reportedly as many as 900 (Yamada 2022) — and a combined total of ‘1,600 medium- and short-range missiles aimed at Japan’ (Kanehara 2022). To make matters worse, China was contesting the ownership of Japanese territory (the Senkaku Islands) and conducting a range of military exercises directly to harass and intimidate it. These included aircraft carrier exercises engaging in landing and take-off drills in waters and airspace south of Okinawa near Japan and Taiwan, exercises by Chinese warplanes including Chinese H-6 bombers passing between the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island in Okinawa Prefecture, and Chinese naval ships repeatedly entering Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands, with two Chinese warships permanently deployed north of the islands. Equally concerning were the frequent passage of Chinese warships through Japan’s five major straits — Miyako, Osumi, Tsushima, Tsugaru and Soya’ (Takahashi 2022b) — as well as ‘Chinese coast guard vessels repeatedly entering Japanese territorial waters and harassing Japanese fishing boats, and submarines navigating underwater in the contiguous zone around Amami Oshima, — an island near Okinawa’ (Sharp 2022). The pattern of these Chinese military exercises strongly suggested that Japan’s Nansei (Ryukyu) Islands⁶ would be part of the battlefield in a Taiwan contingency (Hanzawa 2022). In this event, China might attempt to decouple Japan and the United States with nuclear threats (Kanehara 2022) and to deter US military intervention by threatening to use small nuclear weapons with limited strike capabilities against US aircraft carriers.

Demonstrations of North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions, which constantly raised the threat level to Japan, presented another major security concern. It conducted a record number (31) of ballistic missile tests by early June 2022 (US Department of State 2022), reputedly including short-, intermediate- and long-range ballistic missiles, most travelling eastwards into the Sea of Japan. Of particular note was North Korea’s claim that it had tested two hypersonic missiles in January with gliding warheads, which travelled too fast and were too manoeuvrable for existing ballistic missile defence systems to detect and intercept. The question that the acquisition of such a capability raised was whether the US or Japanese defence systems could adequately defend against them.

In another particularly significant development, North Korea test-fired on 24th March what it claimed to be a new and upgraded version of the Hwasong-15 ballistic missile called the Hwasong-17 (Minegishi 2022). In theory, the missile was capable of carrying multiple nuclear warheads and of travelling more than 15,000 kilometres bringing the entire continental United States within range. It landed in Japan’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) near the southernmost part of Hokkaido — possibly the closest to Japan of any North Korean missile to date, the longest flight of any North Korean ICBM and at the highest altitude of 6000 kilometres (*Japan Forward* 2022c). Former Defence Minister Kishi called it ‘a serious

⁶ The Ryūkyū Islands, also known as the Nansei Islands, or the Ryūkyū Arc, are a chain of Japanese islands that stretch southwest from Kyushu to Taiwan: the Ōsumi, Tokara, Amami, Okinawa, and Sakishima Islands, with Yonaguni the westernmost.

threat that differs in an order of magnitude than previous launches' (Miki 2022), with its normal trajectory of 15,000 kilometres or more 30 times further than the 500 kilometres of North Korea's first full-scale missile test of a medium-range Nodong in May 1993. The ICBM launch was also the first since the earlier model Hwasong-15 in November 2017 with the resumed ICBM testing underscoring the rising level of military threat from North Korea, including to the United States. It was particularly concerning given that such an attack capability would bestow a minimal deterrence capability vis-a-vis the United States and thus pose an even greater threat to Japan given its reliance on the US nuclear umbrella (*Japan Forward* 2022c). In particular, it raised the issue of 'decoupling' where the United States would not protect its ally at the risk of sacrificing its own people, making it more likely that North Korea would attack Japan with conventional weapons.⁷ In other words, developing a capability to hit the US homeland with nuclear missiles raised doubts about the credibility of US extended deterrence, giving North Korea a new weapon to intimidate Japan directly (Fraser Katz and Cha 2022).

The launch of the Hwasong-17 was followed in mid-April by what North Korea claimed was the test-firing of a new type of 'tactical guided weapon' also aimed at boosting the country's nuclear capabilities and specifically the use of tactical nuclear weapons (Nakagawa and Makita 2022). It was North Korea's first missile explicitly said to have a tactical nuclear role (Smith and Shin 2022). North Korea was also developing its capabilities in submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) and train-mounted ballistic missiles (Mi Terry 2022). According to Kishi, the short-range SLBM test-fired on 7th May followed an irregular path and appeared to be the same model as the SLBM fired on 19th October 2011 (Boeisho-Jieitai 2022). It was followed a few days later by another ballistic missile. The prevailing view amongst experts was that North Korea, with US bases in Japan and South Korea in mind, was endeavouring to acquire strike capabilities to attack by combining saturation and surprise attacks as well as firing missiles on irregular trajectories (Nakagawa and Makita 2022).

On 25th May, just after US President Joe Biden left Asia following a trip for bilateral talks with new President Yoon Suk-yeol of South Korea and to attend the Quad summit in Tokyo, North Korea fired an additional three missiles — one ICBM and two short-range projectiles — with the long-range missile potentially able to reach the US mainland, and the short-range missiles able to reach all of South Korea and the US military bases of Iwakuni and Sasebo in Western Japan. This led to speculation that North Korea was attempting to create the capacity to attack the United States, Japan and South Korea simultaneously (Kobara 2022).

These tests were followed by the test-launch of eight short-range ballistic missiles from multiple locations towards the Sea of Japan outside Japan's EEZ on 5th June, the largest single test ever by North Korea. According to Kishi, at least one missile had a variable trajectory indicating that it could potentially evade missile defence, and he speculated that North Korea was trying to improve its capability to conduct successive missile launches

⁷ Sugimoto, Kojo, 'North Korea's new missile sparks concerns about hole in "nuclear umbrella"', *Sankei Shinbun*, 25 March, p. 2.

necessary for saturation attacks (*Asahi Shinbun* 2022b), making it difficult for the United States, South Korea and Japan to intercept them (Nakagawa and Makita 2022).

Kim Jong-un a month earlier on 26th April in a speech marking the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Korea People's Revolutionary Army, had pledged to develop nuclear forces 'at the fastest possible speed' (*Korea Herald/Asia News Network* 2022). He stated that North Korea should boost its nuclear capabilities both in terms of quality and quantity and be ready for combat. Any forces seeking confrontation with North Korea would be destroyed. He also suggested that North Korea could launch a pre-emptive strike if enemies violated the country's 'fundamental interests', thus enunciating a very aggressive nuclear strategy. It was now clear that the country could use nuclear weapons pre-emptively even in a non-military conflict. This signalled a major shift in North Korean nuclear doctrine 'from assured retaliation to first use', in short, not just using nuclear weapons as a deterrent but also lowering the bar for their deployment — and not necessarily just against nuclear-armed states. This was described as an 'expansive, ambiguous and potentially destabilising doctrine for using its nuclear weapons' (Smith and Shin 2022). It amounted to a "secondary mission" for the country's nuclear forces', [which were no longer tied to the sole] mission of war prevention' (Glosserman 2022, 2). The change made North Korea's threshold for using nuclear weapons very low, which put direct pressure on Japan to augment its defence preparations.

These developments were accompanied by strong indications that North Korea was preparing to conduct a further and 7th nuclear test of its nuclear warheads, preparations for which had been completed. This would be the first test since September 2017 and was anticipated to be a tactical nuclear warhead (Lee and Komiya 2022) with the aim of miniaturising nuclear warheads and thus enhancing North Korea's capability to attack Japan with nuclear missiles (Sharp 2022). Japan's MoD speculated that its objective was to miniaturise the weapons to a size small enough to be mounted on a ballistic missile and to develop 'multiple re-entry vehicles' containing several warheads, each aimed at a different target. The miniaturisation of nuclear weapons supported the development of tactical nuclear weapons, which were small and had a short range (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022h). With North Korea already possessing 60 nuclear warheads, its ability to produce half a dozen more annually and Kim's ambition to develop multiple independent re-entry vehicles, the threat was that these would likely evade not only Japan's limited missile defences but also those of the United States. These developments took place alongside a further strengthening of North Korea's trilateral military cooperation with China and Russia (*Korea Herald/Asia News Network* 2022).

The specifics of Abe's defence policy recommendations

Abe's public profile on defence policy was very prominent. He regularly made proposals in policy-related public presentations and in the media as well as in policy circles. His primary focus was the direction that Japan's defence policy should take and the policies that should be adopted by the government. He presented a constant stream of proposals including asserting that 'Japan needs to show its determination to defend itself so other countries do not mistake

Japan's intentions and resolution' (*Yahoo News* 2022). Some of his proposals could be traced back to earlier times when he pressed for similar kinds of defence policy reforms.

Enemy base attack capability (*teki kichi kogeki*)

Given the steadily increasing missile threat to Japan, not only from China but also from North Korea, Abe had repeatedly raised the issue of whether Japan should acquire an enemy base attack capability since he was chief cabinet secretary in 2006 (Schoff and Song 2017). He argued that Japan needed to possess the capability to attack enemy bases and thus disable an enemy country's missiles on its own territory. This would involve the Japanese military forces attacking missile launch bases and other locations before the enemy country could send missiles towards Japan (*The Mainichi* 2022c).

The policy urgency of this matter rose dramatically towards the end of Abe's second term in office in 2020. In his view, it was getting increasingly more difficult to intercept missiles given the dramatic and rapid progress in missile technology, particularly by China and North Korea, and this raised the concern that Japan could not defend itself, viz., Japan's current missile defence system would not be able to amount an effective defence of the nation. It was rational, therefore, for Japan to develop a missile base attack capability.

After the cancellation of the Aegis Ashore system in June 2020 by the defence minister in his government, Taro Kono, Abe commented privately that 'With the advent of new [North Korean] missiles, there's a limit to what can be done with a shield. We have to have a halberd' (Klinger 2021). He questioned whether intercepting missiles alone would be sufficient to protect Japan and called for alternatives to defend against ballistic missiles asking, 'Can we really protect the lives of the people and their peaceful existence just by improving our interception capability?' (Herskovitz and Reynolds 2020). This pointed to the need for a more offensive capability. In September 2020 just before stepping down from office, he argued strongly for Japan to develop a capability to mount a pre-emptive strike on enemy bases (Herskovitz and Reynolds 2020, Yamaguchi 2020). He asserted that Japan should make a major change in its defence policy by developing and permitting a first-strike capability against enemy bases in order to defend against an imminent attack in the light of expanding missile and nuclear threats in the region. He argued that defending Japan by intercepting missiles after they had been launched might not be sufficient to defend Japan and it should develop a greater, independent deterrent capability — hence the need to permit pre-emptive strikes on enemy bases (Yamaguchi 2020). As Klingner (2021) observed, Abe 'called for Japan to pursue a new course in its national security policy that would allow for a strike capability against enemy targets preparing for missile launches against Japan. Abe emphasised that this was compliant with international law, Japan's constitution, the country's defence-oriented security posture, and the terms of the US alliance. Abe directed the government to create a new National Security Strategy, as well as formally make a decision on Japan acquiring strike capabilities by the end of 2020'.

Abe's statements mirrored an earlier LDP report arguing that Japan should develop a pre-emptive strike capability in the light of North Korea's increasing missile and nuclear developments and China's increasingly assertive behaviour in the East and South China Seas. The report also followed former defence minister Kono's scrapping of the plan to deploy two defensive Aegis Ashore land-based missiles (Yamaguchi 2020), which left Japan reliant on Aegis-equipped destroyers shooting down upper-atmosphere missiles and PAC-3 missiles shooting down lower altitude missiles (Herskovitz and Reynolds 2020).

In August 2021, Abe argued strongly for Japan to develop a capability to mount a first, pre-emptive strike on enemy bases (Klinger 2021). However, the issue was not actively raised until just before the Lower House general election in October 2021 when newly minted Prime Minister Kishida called for a wide-ranging discussion on whether to develop this capability given advances in missile technologies. In his December policy speech, Kishida repeated that the government would realistically examine the option of developing a base-attack capability given changes in the security environment. He stated that Japan would 'realistically examine all options, including possessing what is called "enemy base attack capability" without excluding any possibilities' (Takahashi 2022a, 62). He repeated this many times in the Diet, including the possibility of including this capability in the revised NSS. However, the question this raised in terms of Japan's defence policy was whether such a missile deterrence capability would amount to the development of an offensive capability requiring the acquisition of long-range offensive weapons such as ballistic missiles, including cruise missiles and other advanced military equipment, rather than limiting Japan's defence options to self-defence (Yamaguchi 2020).

In an interview with the *Sankei Shinbun* on 1st April 2022, Abe's arguments became even more strident. He said, 'To make the aggressor hesitate to attack, "we need to possess striking power to attack an enemy at its military bases". ... No country fights alongside a nation that is not defending itself. ... we need to share the US deterrence capability for punishment and retaliation. Japan's self-defense capability is insufficient without this shared deterrence"' (Ogawa 2022a). Two days later on 3rd April 2022, in a lecture in his home constituency in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Abe again brought up the issue of Japan acquiring a so-called 'enemy base attack capability', including expanding the military scope of such a capability by saying, 'It should be possible to attack not only the opponent's missile base but also the command and control functions of the headquarters etc.' (*Yahoo News* 2022). He stated, 'Targets should not be limited to enemy bases. They should include enemy nerve centres as well' (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022i). One week later, he gave a lecture in Fukui Prefecture emphasising that 'Japan needs to show its determination to defend itself so that other countries do not mistake Japan's intentions and resolution' (*Yahoo News* 2022). On 11th April the LDP's Security Commission agreed to propose acquiring an enemy base strike capability to the government's committee on revising the NSS. Members of the commission told reporters that there was no opposition to this controversial idea during their meeting (*Kyodo News* 2022d). The Prime Minister also said publicly that his government was considering building a capacity to strike enemy bases (*Nikkei Asia* 2022b).

Ten days later on 21st April, Abe repeated his argument at the Symposium on ‘The Taiwan Strait Crisis and Japan’s Security’ saying, ‘There have been discussions about the concept of enemy base attack capability. But there is absolutely no need to limit the discussion to enemy bases themselves. The targets need also to include the command and control systems of attack missiles. Even with North Korea in mind, we wouldn’t be able to strike all of its TELs (transporter erector launchers). We’d need to zero in on the nerve centre’ (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022f). He added, ‘There are varying opinions on what should be considered “key”. But I won’t say any more about this. It is absolutely essential for the Japan–US alliance that Japan possess and use strike capabilities. ... There is no need to change the basic framework of being dependent on the United States for main strike capabilities. But it is absolutely necessary for Japan to have minimum strike capabilities to maintain deterrence — that is, to maintain the power *not* to start a war (*Japan Forward* 2022b).

Abe’s proposal was incorporated into the 26th April 2022 LDP Security Commission’s package of recommendations to the government on bolstering Japan’s defence capabilities. They were designed to set the tone for policy debate on the new NSS due to be finalised before the end of the year (*Asahi Shinbun* 2022d). In a section entitled ‘Possessing the ability to counterattack against armed attacks on our country, including ballistic missile attacks’, the Commission came up with a specific proposal that the SDF should be permitted to possess platforms for launching ‘counterattacks’ not only on enemy bases but also on ‘command and control functions’ (Jiyuminshuto 2022), [namely the ‘nerve centres’ in enemy territory as targets]. The specific proposal was for the government to obtain a ‘counterstrike capability’ [*hangeki noryoku*] (Jiyuminshuto 2022) by shifting away from just the ‘capability to attack enemy bases’ intended to destroy missile launch bases of an enemy.

The importance of acquiring such a capability recognised that simply trying to intercept missiles might not be sufficient to defend Japan against missile attacks, given improvements in military technology in China and North Korea (*Nippon.com* 2022c). The expanded mission for missile defence thus stemmed from the inability of Japan’s current system to shoot down missiles following irregular trajectories and those launched by mobile launchers as well as other platforms outside missile bases.⁸ Japan would, therefore, have more options for retaliating against mobile- and submarine-launched missiles and the targets might even include China’s Central Military Commission (*Kyodo News* 2022b).

With the expansion of the function and target of Japan’s missiles, the terminology accordingly shifted from ‘enemy base strike capability’ to ‘counterstrike capability’, with the word ‘counterstrike’ far more defensive in tone than that of ‘attack capability’ by ‘not implying the ability to make preemptive strikes’ (Takahashi 2022a). The language also harked back to the Abe government’s interim report on defence modernisation leading up to the 2013 National Defence Program Outline, which noted that developing unilateral capabilities to counterstrike enemy bases ‘should be taken into consideration’ (Green 2013, 12). After consultations with the United States, this ultimately yielded language in the Outline in which

⁸ *Nikkei Shinbun*, 28 April 2022, p. 2.

‘Japan would study an indigenous capability to strike enemy launch facilities’ (Green 2013, 12).

The language had now changed but the concept remained the same as Abe’s original proposals. In addition, the actual capability and targets had been expanded, rather than narrowed, and, as Takahashi points out, Japan already had equipment that could be used to attack enemy bases (2022a). The LDP justified its recommendations by arguing that Japan had been “reliant on the United States in terms of strike capabilities against an enemy region” and “it is feared that only (relying on) interception (would not be enough to) defend our nation”, suggesting that Japan needs to possess strike capabilities’ (*Asahi Shinbun* 2022c).

Moreover, although the LDP had changed the terminology of its proposal from ‘attack capability’ to ‘counterattack capability’, this did not necessarily restrict Japanese military forces to counteroffensive operations after Japan had been attacked. According to committee chairman, former defence minister in the Abe administration and the most knowledgeable defence expert in the Kishida faction, Itsunori Onodera, ‘Japan would be able to strike targets in enemy territory when it recognizes that the adversary is gearing up to attack this country’ (*Asahi Shinbun* 2022d). The LDP also argued that a base attack capability was within the scope of self-defence. Nevertheless, the terminology used — counterstrike capability — avoided any inference that it could be mistaken for a pre-emptive strike (Moriyasu 2022b). The reasoning behind the acquisition of such a capability was the same as Abe’s, namely that rapid advances in missile technology were making it difficult to intercept incoming missiles and acquiring counteroffensive capabilities would help to deter attacks against Japan. Moreover, a lack of counterattack capabilities could invite North Korean aggression (Yoshino 2022).

Kishida quickly took up the terminology of his party, using the phrase ‘counterstrike capabilities’ in public for the first time in a joint press conference with Biden during the latter’s visit to Tokyo in late May in a bid to emphasise his administration’s plan to boost security coordination with the United States (*Asahi Shinbun Digital*, 2022). By early June, developing this capability had also become an election pledge decided by the LDP’s General Council for incorporation into the party’s UH election manifesto. It pledged a drastic strengthening of Japan’s defence posture including its possession of counterstrike capabilities, given North Korea’s missile tests and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (*Nippon.com* 2022b). This was despite critics arguing that calling the use of such weapons as ‘counterstrike’ just depended on when it was used, given that such a capability could also be used for pre-emptive strikes (Nakamura 2022).

When finally released, the party’s campaign platform announced on 16th June contained not only a sharp focus on diplomacy and defence, it also included the ‘first-ever pledge to deter regional missile threats to Japan by acquiring a so-called counterstrike capability’ (Johnson and Fee 2022). It specified that Japan would ‘acquire a “counterstrike capability” to destroy an enemy’s missile bases and other targets for the purpose of self-defense’ (*The*

Japan News 2022e). These and other campaign pledges⁹ strongly reflected Abe's views as well as those of other conservatives in the LDP, particularly former LDP policy chief Sanae Takaichi (*Mainichi Shinbun 2022d*) who interpreted the counterstrike commitment to mean 'We will maintain the ability to counterattack against any armed assaults on Japan, including with the use of ballistic missiles, allowing us to deter and respond to such attacks in kind' (Johnson and Fee 2022).

Reflecting other concerns, the LDP's platform also pledged to "protect Japan's independence, honor, the lives and citizens and their property, as well as its sovereignty over its territory, territorial waters and airspace" while "strengthening cooperation" with allies and partners, including Taiwan, "towards the realization of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'" (Johnson and Fee 2022). A poll in mid-June showed that over 60 per cent of those surveyed thought it was necessary for the country to possess counterstrike capabilities, as proposed by the LDP (*Jiji Press 2022c*). The 2022 Defence White paper released in July also made positive statements on Japan's possible possession of counterstrike capabilities, which the Kishida government was reportedly planning to realise via the NSS revision by the end of the year (*Asahi Shinbun Digital 2022a*). This was complemented by the MoD's later budget request for improvement in the range of the nation's standoff missiles to form part of counterstrike capabilities and the acquisition of 1000 long-range cruise missiles for this purpose.

Japan's Taiwan policy

Free from the constraints of government office, Abe assumed a strongly critical position on China and an equally strongly supporting position on Taiwan, something that was difficult for him to do as prime minister. After his death, he was described as 'the most ardent and influential proponent in Japan's political circles of deepening ties between Tokyo and Taipei. ... [displaying a] steadfast pro-Taiwan policy and high expectations for the Kishida administration to uphold it' (*Asahi Shinbun Digital 2022b*). In a similar vein, he was described as having 'a strong attachment to Taiwan ... [and his faction was] extremely close to Taiwan' (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun 2022a*). Abe played a central role in building ties between the two countries, including serving as an adviser to a Japan–Taiwan parliamentary friendship group that had long served as the primary political link between the two countries. He also promoted ties amongst US, Japanese and Taiwanese legislators. He had hoped to visit the island after the 2022 UH election, something undertaken by fellow LDP conservative and former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba in late July.

Because the Kishida government and particularly Kishida himself as well as Foreign Minister Hayashi were widely regarded as 'pro-China', Abe was pressed further to be consistently forthright in his support for Taiwan. He wanted a strong commitment from Japan to Taiwanese security, which carried great risk in terms of Japan's economic and security

⁹ See also below.

relations with China, but which would have beefed up deterrence of Chinese military adventurism, which Abe prioritised.

Abe also promoted direct political relations with Taiwan and forging bonds between the Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and himself in virtual meetings together with a Japanese nonpartisan parliamentary group promoting Japan's relations with Taiwan. In a virtual meeting in March 2022, Abe and Tsai discussed the Russian invasion of Ukraine and boosting ties between the two countries (Tobita 2022a) agreeing that attempts to change the status quo by force should not be allowed. Tsai later made a point of expressing appreciation for Abe's consideration of Taiwan during Ishiba's visit.

Abe had also joined a virtual dialogue session among Japanese, US and Taiwanese politicians and parliamentarians in July 2021 (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2022a) and again in November 2021, speaking to a virtual forum organised by the Taiwanese think tank, the Institute for National Policy Research. While noting that the Senkaku Islands, Sakishima Islands and Yonaguni Island were a mere 100 kilometres or so from Taiwan, Abe stated that 'an armed invasion of Taiwan would be a grave danger to Japan and the United States and Japan could not idly stand by if China attacked Japan, and Beijing needed to understand this (*Reuters* 2021). In Abe's words, 'A Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency, and therefore an emergency for the Japan–US alliance. People in Beijing, President Xi Jinping in particular, should never have a misunderstanding in recognizing this' (*Reuters* 2021). He also asserted, 'If Taiwan is forcibly invaded (by China), it will inevitably result in a grave crisis regarding Japan's national territory. A Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency, and a contingency for the Japan–US alliance' (Rui 2022). This paraphrased the position of Abe's former deputy chief cabinet secretary from 2012 to 2019, Nobukatsu Kanehara, who in 2013 became the inaugural deputy secretary-general of the National Security Secretariat. A year earlier in a newspaper column in April 2021, Kanehara had argued, 'a Taiwan contingency is a contingency for Japan. ... Japan has a big responsibility. It is not only responsible for Taiwan's defense; it is responsible for Japan's defense'.¹⁰ Abe also went on to state that Taiwan was a 'dear friend' of Japan and that the Taiwan and Bashi Straits were potential choke points for Japan, arguing that in the event of a Chinese invasion, the airspace that had to be controlled to ensure air superiority completely overlapped with Japanese airspace. He concluded that 'There is no doubt that this would be a critical situation for Japan. ... That is why we need to clearly communicate our intentions to China' (*Diamond Online* 2022). He also expressed his desire for a strong Taiwan and a free Taiwan, 'A strong Taiwan, a growing Taiwan, a free Taiwan that we can associate with, is an asset to Japan and an asset to the whole world' (*Reuters* 2021). He proposed a trilateral relationship among Japan, Taiwan and the United States for peace and stability in the region.

In an interview with the *Nikkei* newspaper Abe elaborated further, asserting that Japan needed stronger defences and more frequent security reviews, rationalising that 'Deterrence keeps rogue countries "from hitting the missile launch button"' (Shimada and Imao 2021). He

¹⁰ *Sankei Shinbun*, 21 April 2021, p. 7.

repeated that a ‘military crisis over Taiwan would be “an emergency for the Japan-U.S. alliance,” adding that his country needs to strengthen its own defenses to make the partnership a solid deterrent against threats in Indo-Pacific region’ (Shimada and Imao 2021). He also ‘called for more flexibility in updating Japan’s security strategy to adapt to the fast-changing environment in East Asia’ (Shimada and Imao 2021). He emphasised the need for the administration to respond to a rising China and to defend against the threat from North Korea, as well as strengthening the Japan–US alliance as the bedrock of Japan’s security policy. As a country in the front line of US–China tensions, Japan should also show leadership and promote stronger cooperation with willing partners (Shimada and Imao 2021).

Another argument he made was for Japan to put more substantial effort into defence so that it could play its part with the United States to defend Japan. In this way, the US–Japan alliance could play a similar role in the Indo-Pacific as NATO in Europe during the Cold War. Because the combined strength of the United States and Japan was important, it followed that Japan needed to strengthen its own ability to fight, noting that China had double the number of submarines and aircraft of Japan. He emphasised the importance of deterrence and the importance of having the ability to counterattack to discourage a first strike against Japan. He also noted that if Japan and the United States exercised strike capabilities together, it would create a solid deterrent (Shimada and Imao 2021).

In mid-December 2021 in an address to the Taiwan–US–Japan Trilateral Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue, Abe warned Beijing that it would be ‘suicidal’ to invade Taiwan (Chung 2021). He also broached the possibility of Japan becoming militarily engaged in a contingency involving Taiwan saying, ‘In the event of an attack on a U.S. vessel, it could be a situation posing a threat to Japan’s survival, which would allow the exercise of collective self-defense’ (*The Japan Times* 2021). With this condition met, Japan’s SDF could provide logistical support to the United States military (*The Japan Times* 2021). He also accused China of being territorially expansionist and of provoking and often bullying its neighbours. He repeated that Yonaguni Island — Japan’s westernmost territory — was only 110 kilometres away from Taiwan, arguing that “‘If something happens here, it will definitely become a crucial situation” affecting Japan’s peace and security’ (*The Japan Times* 2021), citing the necessary phrases that would legitimise the mobilisation of the Japanese military as stipulated in Japan’s security legislation. The 2015 Peace and Security Law states that if “‘an attack occurs against a foreign country related closely to Japan, it could as a result threaten Japan’s survival”. That would constitute an “‘existential crisis” and fulfill one of the three conditions that must be met in order for Japan to exercise its right of limited collective self-defence’ (Rui 2022).

A few days later in a roundtable discussion sponsored by *Seiron* magazine held in Kyushu on 19th December, Abe explained the reason for his statement ‘If China were to invade Taiwan, that could well develop into an existential crisis for Japan.’ He said, ‘We need to make clear beforehand that we could be facing a truly consequential situation’ (Rui 2022). His remarks at these events reflected the position that he had espoused even before his first prime ministership, given his categorical statement in 2005 that ‘It would be wrong for us to send a

signal to China that the United States and Japan will watch and tolerate China's military invasion of Taiwan ... If the situation surrounding Japan threatens our security, Japan can provide US forces with support' (Faiola 2005).

Abe also repeatedly campaigned for the United States to abandon its policy of strategic ambiguity on Taiwan. On 27th February 2022 on a Fuji TV morning talk show, he said that it was time for the United States to 'make clear that it would defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion and ditch its longstanding strategic ambiguity' (Moriyasu 2022c). He argued that 'By showing it may intervene, it keeps China in check, but by leaving the possibility that it may not intervene it makes sure that the [Taiwanese] forces for independence do not run out of control. ... It is time to abandon this ambiguity strategy. The people of Taiwan share our universal values, so I think the US should firmly abandon its ambiguity ... a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency. ... If it [China] were to secure wide air superiority, it would also cover Japan's airspace. [China] would conduct operations in and above the waters too, so this would affect Japan's territorial waters, or at least our exclusive economic zone' (Moriyasu 2022c). The phrase 'a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency' later entered standard commentary about a potential conflict centring on Taiwan.¹¹

In March Abe met with Taiwanese President Tsai in a virtual session organised by the bipartisan Japan–Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Association, with Tsai stating that she would look forward to meeting Abe in Taiwan, arrangements for which were being made when Abe died (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2022a). President Tsai also said that Japan was an important trade and security partner for Taiwan, while Abe asserted, 'It is important for Japan and Taiwan to share information for regional stability' (*Nippon.com* 2022d). He was interested in promoting an agreement on shared principles such as no attempts to change the status quo by force should ever be tolerated. Tsai expressed high hopes for Taiwan's early entry into the TPP free trade agreement and welcomed Abe's wish to visit Taiwan. Abe was later rapped by China for 'colluding with Taiwan independence forces' (*Colours of India* 2022) following the online meeting with Tsai who called him 'Taiwan's "good friend"' (Imahashi and Take 2022) after his assassination. Taiwanese parliamentarians visiting Japan in the wake of Abe's death also called Abe a 'genuine friend' of Taiwan (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022a).

In a speech to followers in Yamaguchi Prefecture on 3rd April, Abe again took the opportunity to urge the United States to abandon its policy of 'strategic ambiguity' when it came to the defence of Taiwan because this policy made the region more vulnerable to the threat posed by China (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022i). He later spoke at a Tokyo Symposium on 'The Taiwan Strait Crisis and Japan's Security' on 21st April repeating, 'With regard to Taiwan, it may be time for the United States to reconsider its policy of "strategic ambiguity"'. ... The United States needs to review its stance on strategic ambiguity and make clear its commitment to Taiwan's defense. As long as Japan asks the United States to do this, it must respond together with the United States. Japan is fully capable of doing so because of the

¹¹ See, for example, Ryo Nemoto and Rieko Miki (2022).

legal framework provided by the Peace and Security Preservation laws. In the event of a Taiwan Strait crisis, it would without a doubt be considered a situation that has an important influence on Japan's peace and security under Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security Preservation. If there is an armed attack against the United States that threatens its survival, there is a possibility that Japan could exercise its right of collective self-defense' (*Japan Forward* 2022b).

Such was Abe's reputation as an outspoken supporter of Taiwan, former politicians, businesspeople and scholars in Taiwan who were knowledgeable about Japan were preparing to establish the so-called 'Friends of Abe Shinzo Association' prior to his death with a view to promoting exchange between the two countries. In particular, the group aimed to promote good will between the two countries through exchange with Abe. Former Taiwanese foreign minister and secretary-general of the National Security Council, Mark Chen, would have served as chairman of the new body. He commented that 'Abe is known for making efforts to promote relations with Taiwan since his tenure as prime minister and there are many Abe fans in Taiwan' (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022e). Chen also commented that many Taiwanese were impressed with Abe's comment that a 'Taiwan contingency is a Japanese contingency' and it was this comment that had led to the establishment of the association, with planned activities including study sessions on Abe's Indo-Pacific strategic concept and receptions for Abe when visiting Taiwan (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022e).

Abe became the most forceful and internationally prominent spokesperson pushing — indeed campaigning — for the need for US strategic clarity on Taiwan. At a meeting of his faction two days after Biden's departure from Japan in late May, Abe said he welcomed President Biden's positive response to a question from a reporter in Japan who asked whether or not the United States would be willing to get militarily involved in a Taiwan contingency. He pointed out that although there had been no change in the US policy of strategic ambiguity, the President had expressed his resolve and sent a warning to China (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022f). According to Abe, this was the third time that the president had made such an affirmation, and it was, therefore, an expression of Biden's intention, despite the view of some that it was a slip of the tongue and despite the formal US position of strategic ambiguity. According to Abe, 'They must have discussed the topic and agreed beforehand how to answer such a question. ... In some sense, he was adjusting the policy of strategic ambiguity, expressing his intent and checking China' (Moriyasu 2022a). Abe's former adviser, Tomohiko Taniguchi, also commented that Biden's comments were 'welcome to Japan, Taiwan, and to the Indo-Pacific region' (Kelly 2022).

Abe had earlier penned an op-ed for Project Syndicate¹² on 12th April calling for the United States to switch from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity, making clear that it would rush to the defence of Taiwan (Moriyasu 2022a). In a long article he stated,

¹² Project Syndicate describes itself as 'The World's Opinion Page', 'publishing and providing...original commentary by the world's leading thinkers to more than 500 media outlets in over 150 countries', <https://www.project-syndicate.org>.

‘The US has maintained its Janus-faced policy for decades. But the third, most important difference between Ukraine and Taiwan suggests strongly that it is time for the US to reconsider its approach. Simply put, whereas Ukraine is an independent state beyond any doubt, Taiwan is not.... The policy of ambiguity worked extremely well as long as the US was strong enough to maintain it, and as long as China was far inferior to the US in military power. But those days are over. The US policy of ambiguity toward Taiwan is now fostering instability in the Indo-Pacific region, by encouraging China to underestimate US resolve, while making the government in Taipei unnecessarily anxious. Given the change in circumstances since the policy of strategic ambiguity was adopted, the US should issue a statement that is not open to misinterpretation or multiple interpretations. The time has come for the US to make clear that it will defend Taiwan against any attempted Chinese invasion’ (Project Syndicate 2022).

Abe added that ‘If the US clearly states that it will intervene with force, China will avoid war with the US and will not use force. I think that this needs to be made clear now. Specifically, if the president of the United States says so, it will be clear’ (*Diamond Online* 2022). He also claimed that whenever he met Xi Jinping during his time as prime minister, he always made it a rule to convey to him clearly that ‘he should not misjudge Japan’s intention to defend the Senkaku Islands, and that Japan’s intentions were unwavering’ (Abe 2022d).

Abe’s commentary was picked up by local media in around 30 countries and regions, including the United States, France, Germany, Ukraine, India and Hong Kong (Rui 2022). In *The Independent* on 18th April, Abe added, ‘There must no longer be any room for doubt about our resolve concerning Taiwan, and in our determination to defend freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law’ (Abe 2022c). He put the same argument in a single-authored piece in *The Straits Times* (Abe 2022b) and *The Japan Times* on 19th April (Abe 2022a) as well as in an op-ed in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 19th April. As a result, the conservative *Sankei Shinbun* newspaper on 21st April, under the title ‘Abe’s essay attracting global attention,’ called him an ‘influencer’ [*eikyoryoku no aru yuryokusha*] (Rui 2022). Abe also publicised his views domestically. In an earlier speech in Fukushima Prefecture he had made the fundamental point that ‘The United States should clearly demonstrate its stance on defending Taiwan. Its strategic ambiguity is dangerous’ (Chen 2022), while in the immediate aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine he had also argued on a TV program that ‘The United States is adopting an ambiguous strategy toward Taiwan. The US should abandon its ambiguity’ (*Inquirer.net* 2022).

In June, Abe again spoke about the Taiwan situation at the Kojunsha Club Open Forum on the theme of ‘How Japan should handle the tense situation in the Taiwan Strait’. He stated, ‘It is important to create a security environment that will discourage China from unifying Taiwan by force’ (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022d). He argued that this could be done by

strengthening US–Japan bilateral ties as well as trilateral ties among Japan, the United States and Taiwan and quadrilateral ties among Japan, the United States, Australia and India (viz., the Quad) and ties with other like-minded nations. He reinforced this view by stressing the need for Japan to fundamentally strengthen its defence capabilities in order to enhance deterrence, particularly through the US–Japan alliance, arguing that ‘It is critical that we have the defence capabilities to do so and that we also show the will to do so’ (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022d). He added, ‘We must not underestimate China’s will. A Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency’ (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022d), repeating his earlier remark along the same lines. Abe again welcomed Biden’s comment that the United States would come to the defence of Taiwan in the event of a contingency, saying ‘Japan has a responsibility as long as we seek the commitment (involvement) of the United States’ (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022d). Also notable was the difference in the government’s stance on Taiwan between the draft and final versions of its 2022 economic and fiscal policy outline. The latter mentioned ‘concern about threats faced by Taiwan’ whereas the former did not (Leussink and Kelly 2022).

When he died, Abe was reportedly planning to visit Taiwan after the Upper House election to commemorate the second anniversary of former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui’s death on 30 July. Instead, Taiwan’s Vice-President Lai Ching-te paid his respects to Abe with a personal visit to Tokyo to attend Abe’s funeral. As Nakazawa writes, ‘Although described as a private visit based on his personal friendship with Abe, the entry of Taiwan’s No. 2 official into Japan was one of the most significant events in relations between the two countries since diplomatic ties were severed in 1972. ... [particularly as] Lai is one of the candidates to success President Tsai Ing-wen’ (Nakazawa 2022).

Following Abe’s death, former LDP policy chief Takaichi also affirmed in a speech that she would honour Abe’s wishes by building stronger relations with Taiwan. She said, ‘The current Japan–Taiwan relationship would not exist if it weren’t for Abe. Together with my fellow lawmakers, we will uphold his wishes and build a stronger relationship with Taiwan. ... Japan and Taiwan have maintained close relations even after the severing of their diplomatic relations, and the ties are becoming stronger’ (*The Sankei News* 2022a). This was followed in mid-August by a visit to Taiwan by Keiji Furuya, head of the Japan–Republic of China Diet Members’ Consultative Council in order to cement stronger ties between the two countries and not allow Abe’s death to weaken ties between the two countries (*Kyodo News* 2022a). Japan’s 2022 annual Defence White Paper published in July reiterated that ‘the stability of Taiwan’s situation is also important for our national security’, doubling the number of references to the Taiwan situation. According to a spokesperson for Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs such a statement reportedly ‘demonstrated the importance that the Japanese government attached to the security of the Taiwan Strait’ (*The Sankei News* 2022b).

Nuclear sharing

Abe also thought that the time had come to raise the issue of nuclear weapons in relation to Japanese defence, something that his grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, as early as 1957, claimed Japan could possess (Auer 2017, 186). Abe called for discussions on

the topic saying, ‘it is important to deepen awareness of nuclear weapons and engage in discussions involving the public’ (*Yahoo News* 2022). He referred to nuclear sharing in Europe on a private TV program in the wake of Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine, insisting that ‘discussion without taboos’ was necessary’ (*Diamond Online* 2022), and floated the idea of hosting US nuclear weapons in Japan in order to enhance deterrence against the threat of military attack. Such a scheme would see the deployment and joint operation of American nuclear weapons in Japan. Abe also suggested that Japan should have an internal debate about ‘nuclear sharing’, reasoning that nuclear sharing allowed countries to be protected from the threat of attack by nuclear weapons. He said, ‘In NATO, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy take part in nuclear sharing, hosting American nuclear weapons ... We need to understand how security is maintained around the world and not consider it taboo to have an open discussion about the reality we face’ (Moriyasu 2022c). A few days later, Abe doubled down on his suggestion, asserting that it was ‘only natural’ for Japan to discuss the possibility of nuclear sharing with the United States, despite Japan’s long-standing ‘three nonnuclear principles’ of not possessing, manufacturing or permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons on to Japanese territory. At a meeting of his faction, he argued, ‘It is only natural to discuss how to protect the independence of our people and Japan in this reality that we live in’ (Imao and Nose 2022). For this, he was strongly condemned by the LDP’s coalition partner in government, the Komeito (Teller Report, 2022).

In his interview with the *Sankei Shinbun* in April 2022, Abe also declared, ‘I have referred to the possibility of nuclear sharing in which a nuclear nation shares its nuclear weapons with its allies to increase deterrence. That is because I think we should discuss the reality of geopolitics without the hindrance of current taboos. ... Japan is situated within the broad umbrella of nuclear deterrence based on the Japan–US alliance, which provides an effective deterrence against our neighboring countries who possess nuclear weapons. However, it is essential to consider how we can ensure the certainty of this function’ (Ogawa 2022).

Following Abe’s lead, other LDP members raised possible alternative arrangements to actually deploying nuclear weapons on Japanese soil. LDP policy chief Takaichi, for example, said that she would like the party to have a discussion about the principle of ‘not permitting the introduction [of nuclear weapons] in emergency situations’ (Tobita 2022b). LDP Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi also raised the possibility of sharing ‘deterrence, decision-making and political responsibility. ... “There’s room for discussion about whether [nuclear sharing] immediately violates” the three principles [for the use of nuclear weapons]’ (Tobita 2022b). While Prime Minister Kishida rejected the nuclear sharing option outright, he did say that he was not averse to discussion about the idea within the LDP with the LDP’s Security Commission later meeting for deliberations on the idea. Nevertheless, Kishida’s position remained that the issue required very cautious handling.

Abe again raised the matter in a discussion with a *Sankei Shinbun* journalist in late March, arguing that nuclear sharing should not be regarded as taboo and that nuclear powers share

nuclear weapons with their allies to enhance deterrence.¹³ His view was that it should not be taboo to discuss the reality of how the world's security had been protected. He claimed that he was not advocating that Japan share US nuclear weapons, but that 'explaining nuclear sharing ... should not be taboo' (*Diamond Online* 2022). Moreover, Abe cited the Ukraine example in his nuclear-sharing remarks as an 'example of what could happen when countries are unable to defend themselves against their nuclear-armed neighbours' (Johnson 2022).

Despite the prime minister's stated position, on this subject, Abe was surprisingly in a majority — 60 per cent of Japanese now acknowledge that Japan has to talk about nuclear weapons, suggesting that Japan's nuclear taboo is no longer effective. Abe's standpoint reflected a realist posture — an understanding of what kind of regional security threats Japan faced and the need for policies that reflected the reality surrounding Japan, particularly the issue that arose 'when we have a neighbour that has no qualms about using armed force' (Imao and Nose 2022), as Abe put it. Underlying the re-emergence of the nuclear-sharing debate was Russia's invasion of Ukraine and US reluctance to commit any forces to the conflict. This generated increasing anxiety about the reliability of the US 'nuclear umbrella', namely concern that Japan's ally might not extend the nuclear umbrella over Japan if such a move would lead to nuclear escalation that would threaten the US homeland, the assumption being that such a nuclear-sharing agreement would warrant a response from the United States if Japan were attacked (Kosaka 2022).

Although the nuclear-sharing idea quickly lost steam in the LDP where it was rated as 'not appropriate for Japan' [and was later also condemned as 'unacceptable' by Kishida] (Johnson 2022), Abe's suggestion was followed up by Osaka Governor Hirofumi Yoshimura who served as deputy chairman of the opposition Japan Innovation Party (Nippon Ishin). He argued that there should be more active discussions about the principle of not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan. In his view, nuclear sharing would enhance Japan's deterrence, particularly given that Japan's neighbours — China, Russia and North Korea — all possessed nuclear weapons and were building up their military capabilities (NHK News Web 2022).

In June, Ishiba also joined the debate by asserting that 'a nuclear-sharing arrangement [with the United States] that did not violate Japan's three non-nuclear principles of not possessing or producing nuclear weapons and not permitting them on Japanese territory would be possible' (*Jiji Press* 2022b). This would involve not actually placing nuclear warheads in Japan under nuclear-sharing scheme but sharing decision-making processes regarding their deployment as well as political responsibility and training (*Jiji Press* 2022b). Kanehara (2022) also took up the issue arguing 'The government should create an environment in which nuclear sharing can be a topic of serious national debate'. He also went further arguing, 'The government must also seriously work to introduce nuclear submarines. The Royal Australian Navy has decided to introduce US-made nuclear

¹³ *Sankei Shinbun*, 26 March 2022, p. 5.

submarines. Japan should follow suit. Japan should no longer rely on protection by the US Japan is at the front line. Japan's survival depends on the nuclear issue' (Kanehara 2022).

Clearly the taboo on Japan's engaging in a nuclear-sharing agreement had eroded notwithstanding the long-standing sensitivities around nuclear weapons in Japan (Hadano and Sakaguchi 2022). On the other hand, Kishida's long-standing position on the issue as a representative of a Hiroshima constituency was well known and resulted in his expression of very cautious views on the subject, emphasising the immensely destructive power of such weapons. In the party leaders' debate at the Japan National Press Club Kishida stated clearly that 'The government will not discuss this' (*The Mainichi* 2022a).

Australia-Japan defence relations and AUKUS

In a keynote address to the Sydney Dialogue organised by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, where Abe was interviewed by former Australian prime minister John Howard in November 2021, Abe took advantage of the Kishida government's multi-trillion-yen stimulus package, which included 770 billion yen (AU\$9.25 billion) in defence spending, to call for greater defence cooperation between Japan and Australia. He argued,

'I welcome the creation of AUKUS. It is extremely important to promote multilayered efforts for peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.... I think that Japan should engage in the co-operation under the AUKUS in such areas as cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies. ... Given the regional security environment which has become increasingly severe, there is a need to elevate Japan-Australia bilateral security and defence co-operation to a new level. ... Also, in science and technology areas, there are ongoing discussions under the newly established Japan-Australia-India-US working group on critical and emerging technologies. My sense is that Japan may be able to coordinate with efforts in the areas of science and technology under the AUKUS or USEU Trade and Technology Council in the coming months (Smith 2021).

Abe and former UK prime minister Boris Johnson had already had multiple meetings in the two years leading up to the establishment of the trilateral Australia-UK-US pact, upgrading Japan-UK ties to a 'quasi-alliance' as part of the 'Indo-Pacific tilt' that so-called 'Global Britain' adopted in response to the Abe administration's foreign (Hosoya 2022).

Defence spending

In the LDP, Abe led the charge for Japan to increase defence spending (Moriyasu 2022b). He spearheaded discussions on a defence budget increase and was reportedly 'the first to insist on greater defence expenditures' (*The Japan News* 2022g). On 21st March 2022, he appealed to reporters in Kobe, saying 'I will make it clear that it is first of all my responsibility to protect my country, and I will demonstrate the will of the nation in the budget' (*Yomiuri*

Shinbun 2022b). He framed the discussion as helping to prevent a clash with China, a topic of growing anxiety amongst the Japanese public (Johnson 2022). He also constantly stressed that Japan should acquire a ‘defence capability that is not simply an extension of existing policies’ as the rationale for a further expansion of the defence budget.¹⁴

In terms of actual expenditure, Abe argued that the defence budget should have a baseline of 6 trillion yen and be increased beyond that level. In a lecture in his home constituency in Yamaguchi Prefecture on 3rd April, he pushed strongly for the need to ramp up Japan’s defence spending in light of China’s rapid military buildup and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. He said that ‘about ¥6 trillion’ should be secured in the initial budget for FY2023, a substantial increase on the initial budget for FY2022 (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022i), which totalled 5.4 (5.368) trillion yen, a record high (*Kyodo News* 2022c) but slightly less than 1 per cent (0.96 per cent) of Japan’s GDP (*Jiji Press* 2022d). He also called for the Kishida administration to increase Japan’s defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP, a level not seen since the 1950s (Sharp 2022), which would mean discarding the long tradition of keeping Japan’s defence budgets to within 1 per cent of GDP.

A few weeks later in a 21st April speech to the Tokyo Symposium of the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies entitled ‘The Taiwan Strait Crisis and Japan’s Security’, Abe repeated his call for the need to increase defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP, pushing for added extra spending to the initial budget earmarked for FY22 and seeking a total allocation of more than 6.17 trillion yen in the FY23 budget. He argued, ‘We must start from at least ¥6.17 trillion in formulating the initial budget and move in the direction of increasing it from there’. ... [He noted that] ‘Japan, which is calling on other nations to cooperate in maintaining regional peace and stability, will look foolish if it doesn’t elect to increase its defence spending’. ... [arguing for the need for Japan to] “demonstrate its commitment” (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022f). Abe also criticised the LDP’s standpoint to increase defence spending ‘as needed rather than based on a numerical target’, [complaining that it was] ‘hard to believe that this is the opinion of politicians as it sounds like something an assistant in the Ministry of Finance’s Budget Bureau would say’ (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022f). He said,

‘the proposal of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for revising the three key defense documents will include an increase in defense spending by 2% of GDP within five years. The LDP is a very open party, so people discuss all sorts of things. I happened to be the first to say 2%. I won’t say who, but a certain person disagreed. This person said, “Instead of starting with a target figure, we must use a bottom-up approach.” These were hardly the words of a politician. They sounded like something an assistant to the budget examiner of the Ministry of Finance would say. Does that mean this person would be happy with 5% if spending happens to accumulate to a 5% increase? The state must communicate its intentions. ... The world will be astounded if Japan...announces that it would be increasing its defense budget by only a

¹⁴ *Tokyo Shinbun*, 24 November 2018, p. 21.

negligible amount. Without a doubt, Japan would become a laughing stock. ... The total defense spending for the current fiscal year, including the supplementary and main budgets, was ¥6.17 trillion. ... The direction we must take is to consider ¥6.17 trillion ... as the initial budget and at least increase the budget from there. I strongly hope that the Ministry of Defense will clearly request this when submitting its budget request this summer' (*Japan Forward 2022b*).

Abe also warned that Japan would become a 'laughing stock' if it did not raise its defence budget in line with NATO countries — 'Every NATO country, without exception, has agreed to raise its defense budget to 2% of GDP. ... If Japan says it won't raise its budget much, everyone will be surprised' (Moriyasu 2022b).

The LDP had earlier included a 2 per cent or more of GDP spending goal in its policy platform ahead of the Lower House election on 31 October 2021. Its Security Commission subsequently laid out a draft proposal for the government to increase defence spending by 100 per cent to the equivalent of 2 per cent of GDP within five years with a view to the impending revision of the 2013 NSS. The proposal stated, 'With NATO's defense-budget goal in mind, our country too will aim, within five years, to reach the necessary budget levels to fundamentally strengthen defense capabilities' (Moriyasu 2022b).

Bringing the defence budget up to the NATO level¹⁵ would far exceed the less than 1 per cent (0.94) of GDP that the government had targeted for fiscal 2022, amounting to a figure in excess of 10 trillion yen, or more than US\$75 billion according to Japan's news broadcaster NHK (Masuda 2022). Abe ally and LDP policy chief Takaichi and other conservatives in the LDP were already on record as saying that they believed the budget needed to be nearly doubled to around 10 trillion yen, with Takaichi telling journalists, 'Without a strong focus on defense, Japan, its people and its economy would cease to exist' (Johnson and Fee 2022). Takaichi had already made a call in the 2021 LDP leadership race for Japan to double its defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP (*Nikkei Asia 2021d*) requiring about 5.6 trillion yen in additional annual spending.

Not long after on 27th April, the LDP Security Commission formally submitted its recommendation to the government to increase defence spending to at least 2 per cent within five years. This was part of a larger set of recommendations that the party wanted reflected in the government's updated NSS and the other key security documents (*Asahi Shinbun*, 2022, 28 April). The actual wording of the proposal was a recommendation 'that the government "keep in mind the defence spending target for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations of more than 2 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP)"' (Iwaya 2022). The 2 per cent target was, therefore, something to be 'kept in mind' rather than a numerical

¹⁵ NATO countries had agreed that they would strive to increase defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP by 2024, with 2022 figures for the United States at 3.47 per cent, the UK 2.12 per cent, France 1.90 per cent and Germany 1.44 per cent (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2022).

goal (Iwaya 2022). According to the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, achieving it would bring defence spending to about 11 trillion yen (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022b), which would require additional financial resources of about 5 trillion yen, or about 2 per cent of consumption tax (*The Mainichi* 2022a). It would also make Japan the third largest ‘military power’ (*Tokyo Shinbun* 2022). The ruling party aimed to put the 2 per cent target into a plan for the Upper House election in July 2022 along with the Nippon Ishin and the NHK Party, which also had the 2 per cent guideline in their policy manifestos (*Tokyo Shinbun* 2022).

In late May, Abe made another call for the government to increase the defence budget to 2 per cent of GDP, declaring, “‘We must make efforts to move toward 2 per cent’... the Self-Defense Forces do not have a sustainable combat capability and their equipment, ranging from machine gun rounds to SM-3 interceptor missiles, ‘cannot be said to be sufficient’” (*The Japan News* 2022g). He also publicly stated that he aimed to achieve a 2 per cent target for defence spending within five years.

Kishida basically fell into line with the general thrust of Abe’s argument, expressing his determination (*ketsui*) to Biden that he would guarantee an appropriate increase in defence spending (*soto na zogaku*) (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022b) during the summit with the US President in late May and pledging a ‘substantial increase’ in Japan’s defence budget (Yamada 2022). Kishida also told the *Nikkei*, ‘Japan’s defense capabilities need to be fundamentally improved in light of the current changes in the international situation. ... As we revise our defense documents, including the National Security Strategy due out late this year, I want to radically strengthen our defense capacity’ (Yoshino 2022).

During a meeting of the Abe faction two days after Biden’s departure, Abe welcomed Kishida’s stated commitment to substantially increase Japan’s defence budget at the US–Japan Summit talks with Biden, calling it a ‘significant result [of the talks]’ and projecting that the following year’s defence budget might grow to nearly 7 trillion yen. He argued that a ‘substantial increase’ in the defence budget would mean raising it to the upper 6 trillion yen (US\$55 billion) range for fiscal 2023, a marked increase on the government’s allocation of 5.368 trillion yen for fiscal 2022 (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022f). As he put it, ‘The amount of defence spending should be within the upper ¥6 trillion range (nearly ¥7 trillion, or US\$60 billion). It is only natural that the government should secure 2% (of GDP). Defence spending should be clearly stated as a guideline to show the will of the nation’ (Goto 2022c). Likewise, former deputy chief cabinet secretary, Hiroshige Seko, chimed in by stating that the upper 6 trillion yen range, as suggested by Abe was ‘a reasonable level’.¹⁶ On 27th May, three days after Biden’s departure, Abe stated that the Japanese military forces did ‘not have a sustainable combat capability and that their equipment, ranging from machine gun rounds to SM-3 interceptor missiles “cannot be said to be sufficient”’ (*The Japan News* 2022g).

A few days later in a panel discussion with US Ambassador Emanuel on 1st June, Abe again called for the Kishida administration to increase Japan’s defence budget in line with its

¹⁶ ‘LDP official supports over 6.5-t.-yen defense budget’, *Jiji Press*, 24 May 2022.

commitment to strengthening the US–Japan alliance. Referring to Prime Minister Kishida’s statement to President Biden that Japan would ‘substantially increase’ its defence spending, Abe reportedly declared that the government should show its efforts to uphold its commitment. Abe also argued that strengthening the US–Japan alliance would lead to the peace and stability of Japan and the Indo-Pacific in view of China’s military buildup, repeating his call for the government to increase defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP, saying the amount was very important.¹⁷ He made the same call the following day at a meeting of his faction on 2nd June, urging the Kishida administration to specify its goal for raising Japan’s defence budget to 2 per cent of GDP in the FY 2023 draft of the Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform 2022 (the so-called ‘big-boned policy outline’ (*honebuto no hoshin*), Kishida’s first economic and fiscal policy roadmap, which the government’s Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP) was expected to adopt formally in the near future. Abe declared, ‘The administration should demonstrate the nation’s commitment to fundamentally reinforcing its defence capabilities by presenting a general objective and timeline’ (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022d). On 3rd June, the government released the draft to a meeting of the LDP. It referred to the 2 per cent of GDP goal of NATO countries and also said that it would fundamentally strengthen Japan’s defence capabilities within five years. It had decided to revise the draft in response to strong pressure from Abe who opposed the initial GOJ proposal to move the reference to NATO from a footnote to the main text of the document without mentioning the five-year timeline (*The Sankei News* 2022d).

Abe was clearly riding the wave of unprecedentedly high public interest in defence and security matters, giving him the opportunity to push for a more militarily powerful Japan. He often repeated the idea that in order to strengthen the US–Japan alliance, Japan needed to make more self-help efforts. By self-help efforts, he meant increasing defence spending given his belief that no country would fight for another that made no effort to defend itself, an assertion later repeated by LDP Vice-President Tarō Asō. He dismissed arguments coming from both inside and outside the LDP calling for ‘a gradual increase’ in defence spending, repeating his earlier comment, ‘That viewpoint is a bureaucratic theory held at the junior clerk level at the Ministry of Finance Budget Bureau’ (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022d).

It took three general meetings of the LDP’s Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) to approve the government’s draft of its 2022 Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform. This was expected to provide a basis for increasing defence spending because Abe and some other LDP politicians opposed the original draft. They objected to the draft’s incorporating the government’s 2021 policy of exercising fiscal restraint, including on defence spending. Under duress, the government was pressured into changing its stance, incorporating the qualifying phrase that it would not allow important policy options to be narrow, leading Abe and his fellow like-minded lawmakers to believe that the defence budget would be treated as an exception to fiscal discipline (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2022c).

¹⁷ *Tōkyō Shinbun*, 3 June 2022, <https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/180887?ret=politics>.

In the lead-up to the final announcement of the government's policy, Abe continued to reiterate his insistence that defence spending be kept above 2 per cent of GDP. He said, 'I am calling for each country to live up to its responsibilities in accordance with its economic power. No country would endanger its troops for the defence of a country that does not make its own efforts. As Asia and the Indo-Pacific region will face major challenges in the future, Japan should show a firm will as a nation' (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022d).

On 7th June, the Kishida Cabinet finally approved the administration's first annual fiscal and economic policy guidelines, which stated that the government would accelerate its efforts to double the nation's defence spending to 2 per cent of its gross domestic product while making a reference to North Atlantic Treaty Organization member states' commitment to spending a similar level on defence (Leussink and Kelly 2022). The outline did not actually specify an actual percentage of Japan's GDP that would be spent on defence, it only referred to NATO's commitment 'to meet the standard of defense budget of more than 2 per cent of GDP', with some of Kishida's critics alleging that he declined to take the advice of Abe who had been strongly advocating that Japan meet the NATO standard (Miyake 2022b). The actual wording of the guidelines stated 'Japan ... will drastically strengthen its defense capability within five years, which is the ultimate guarantee of its national security, adding the specific time frame which the draft did not mention' (Miyake 2022b). According to a report in the *Mainichi Shinbun*, 'drastically strengthening' was also included in the guidelines owing to pressure from Abe and other ruling party figures (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022e). It was criticised, however, for not setting an explicit target of 2 per cent of GDP within the five-year time frame and for just referencing the 'NATO countries' commitment to spending 2 per cent of GDP on defense as a "consideration" (Johnson and Fee 2022). Nevertheless, the 'statement that "North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries are aiming to spend 2 per cent or more of their gross domestic product (GDP)" on defense, originally just a notation on the Basic Policy, was promoted to the main text' (*The Mainichi* 2022b). As a result, the document intimated that the government's objective was to double Japan's defence spending within five years. An editorial in the *Mainichi Shinbun* argued that the amendments to the original draft were directly 'due to pressure from Abe as well as other ruling party figures' (*The Mainichi* 2022b). The lack of a target year for achieving fiscal discipline in the guidelines was also apparently due to pressure from Abe and others in the LDP who opposed ruling out important policy options for fiscal reasons.

Kishida's falling into line with Abe and other conservatives' views on a five-year timeline for a doubling of defence spending was also motivated by party-political and factional considerations, particularly a desire not to alienate Abe's large cohort of factional members as well as other conservatives within the party. In general, however, Abe was dissatisfied with what he regarded as Kishida's failure to lead on defence.

On 9th June, the LDP's General Council finalised the draft of its July Upper House election pledges. It included making it the party's objective to increase Japan's defence spending to 'a necessary level in the five years from fiscal 2023 in view of NATO member countries'

commitment to defence spending equivalent to 2 per cent of their gross domestic product' (*Nippon.com* 2022b). The final manifesto announced on 16th June also listed defence and foreign policy as the top items in its election pledges under the heading 'Protecting Japan'. A key campaign pledge was: 'With the defense budget target of NATO countries as a percentage of GDP (2 per cent or more) in mind, we will build up the truly necessary defense-related expenditure and aim to achieve the budget level necessary to fundamentally strengthen defense capabilities within five years from the next fiscal year' (Jiminto 2022).

Kishida has also met with Abe to discuss the election campaign, with Kishida reporting that they discussed increasing the defence budget as well as other issues (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022d). The Prime Minister later told the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit that Japan would 'fundamentally reinforce Japan's defence capabilities within the next five years. ... [pledging to] "secure a substantial increase" in the country's defense budget to back this up, stressing that Japan has adopted a new type of "realism diplomacy for a new era"' (Suruga 2022). This followed earlier remarks by Kishida that Japan needed to become a realist nation.

Abe, however, continued to make 'aggressive remarks' about increasing the defence budget in addition to channelling pressure on the Kishida administration through his brother, Defence Minister Kishi, to retain the ministry's Administrative Vice-Minister, Kazuhisa Shimada, whom both strongly supported. Shimada had previously served as Abe's executive secretary for six and a half years, was close to Abe, and as MoD administrative vice-minister, advocated significantly expanding the defence budget in line with Abe's idea of increasing it to 2 per cent of GDP. Shimada had been leading efforts within the government to realise this goal and was reportedly the primary actor in Abe's manoeuvring to urge the government to set a goal of boosting the defence budget to 2 per cent of GDP in five years (*Friday Digital* 2022). The Ministry of Finance (MoF) did not support this, however, and wanted to oust Shimada from the discussions on the defence budget.

Abe also hoped Shimada would continue serve as a flag bearer within the government for strengthening defence capabilities (Goto 2022a). Both Abe and his brother wanted to retain him as an important channel of influence over the government's security policy, particularly in view of the fact that the updating of the three key security documents was due in December (Goto 2022b). Shimada had been expected to remain in his post because the MoD needed his expertise in revising these documents while Kishi particularly wanted to retain Shimada as a special adviser (*Friday Digital* 2022) and to have him directly involved in the updating of the security documents as his assistant.

Kishida had already yielded to pressure from Abe by changing the wording of the Basic Policy to say that Japan would 'drastically strengthen its defense capabilities in five years' (*Friday Digital* 2022). However, Kishida reportedly resented this and decided to retaliate by replacing Shimada with Atsuo Suzuki, Director-General of the Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency. Kishida was particularly annoyed at Abe's repeated attempts to meddle in his administration's policy planning and implementation and was keenly aware that he had to reject Abe's request for Shimada's reappointment in order to ensure that his administration

broke away from Abe's influence. The outcome was also negative for Kishi who was in line for replacement in the post-election cabinet reshuffle because Kishida overruled his proposal to retain Shimada (Goto 2022, 28 June).

Although Abe summoned Kishida to his office to lodge a protest, Kishida flatly replied that the decision had already been made. Moreover, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiji Kihara, who was a former MoF elite bureaucrat, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinichi Kuryu as well as MoF officials pushed for a Kantei decision to oust Shimada, with Kuryu flatly rejecting a MoD request to retain him. Kuryu acted in response to Kishida's intention to purge bureaucrats who were under Abe's influence (*Friday Digital* 2022) and his determination not to allow Abe to meddle further in the formulation of budget and security policies (Goto 2022, 28 June). Kihara was also at odds with Abe, disapproving of his 'hawkish' insistence on seeking a substantial increase in the defence budget regardless of the country's fiscal position (*Sentaku* 2022a).

Given the planned revision of the three national security policies, the media speculated that the issue could become a divisive issue between Abe and the Prime Minister (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022c). Indeed, the 'rift' between Kishida and Abe was highlighted by Shimada's decision to step down from his post. The Prime Minister's stated position was to maintain the customary two-year term for administrative vice-ministers, but Abe expressed his dissatisfaction with this given that Shimada was a trusted adviser and had been the standard-bearer for the defence budget increase. Rumours also circulated about the possibility of Kishi's being replaced by a member of the Kishida faction, Minoru Terada, in the post-election cabinet reshuffle (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022b).

The issue was finally resolved with a government plan to appoint Shimada as a policy counsellor and adviser to the defence minister (in line with Kishi's wish) to support the ministry's updating of the three key security documents by the end of the year. On 1st July, the MoD announced that it had appointed Shimada to these positions (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2022b). This was reportedly done in the light of his close ties with LDP politicians and his experience as prime minister Abe's secretary for six and a half years when he played a key role in discussions on increasing defence spending (*The Sankei News* 2022c).

The LDP on 16th June also published its election manifesto for the Upper House election, declaring that it would aim (*mezasu*) to achieve a necessary budget level for a fundamental strengthening of Japan's defence power within five years, with 2 per cent of GDP in mind. This manifesto was publicly released on 22nd June (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022b).

Overall, Abe's pressure was only partially successful in achieving his desired policy outcome on the defence spending issue. Kishida became increasingly wary that the debate over defence spending would devolve into a debate over financial resources and he sought to calm the debate by repeatedly saying, 'It's not about the numbers. ... If there is a number first, it will lead to a strange debate' (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022b). He also showed signs of frustration with repeatedly being asked about the scale of the increase in defence expenditure and the

source of funding. He mentioned that ‘the yardstick for defence spending is different from NATO’s¹⁸ [adding]. ... The government has never said that there is a numerical target’ (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022b). He also maintained his stance that ‘the nation’s defence spending must be discussed from the standpoint of its purpose, size, and financing’ (Yamada 2022).

In the debate amongst party leaders the day before campaigning started for the July Upper House election, Kishida mentioned no specific target for defence spending, making absolutely clear the difference between his stance and Abe’s who had stated that the target should be 2 per cent (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022b). Moreover, Kishida doubled down on the numerical target issue, asserting, ‘We never had talks with numerical targets in our minds. ... What I’ve been proposing is to build the necessary defense capability in five years. ... As we prepare to acquire what’s necessary, it will become clear how big a (defense) budget we need, and then, depending on the size of the budget, we will need to think about how to finance it’ (*Japan Today* 2022).

The escalation in tensions between Kishida and Abe over Shimada and defence spending had the potential to worsen as the government began the final stages of its work on revising Japan’s three key documents on national security policy towards the end of 2022. After Abe’s death, however, the mid-6 trillion yen range was pushed by LDP Secretary-General Motegi in late July during a speech to a symposium, while defence officials explained to an LDP meeting in early August that the ministry planned to seek over 5.5 trillion yen for national defence in fiscal 2023, the largest-ever defence budget, when it submitted its request to the MoF later in the month (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022a). In addition, the ministry was expected to ask for funding for 100-plus items with as yet unspecified costs, which could push the total amount to an unprecedented mid-6 trillion yen range and also raise the possibility that funding might come from government bonds (JGB) (*Arab News Japan* 2022).

In order to expedite a massive increase in defence spending, Abe had also called for the issuance of government bonds to underwrite the spending (Matsuyama, Nishio and Ogi 2022), arguing that ‘the defence budget enables us to hand down our homeland to future generations. What we must do now is to express the nation’s intention through the budget’.¹⁹ This was a proposal that the advisory panel to the Finance Minister, the MoF’s Fiscal System Council, rejected outright, arguing that such a policy might ‘destabilise the economy and finances and “lead to greater vulnerability in the event of a contingency”’. It called for the government either to increase the public burden or cut spending in other areas, thus checking the ongoing debate about raising defence spending in the light of a possible contingency involving Taiwan’.²⁰

Nevertheless, by late May, the government was actively considering stopgap bonds to achieve the necessary funding for defence spending, reasoning that using these bonds would

¹⁸ The Japan Coast Guard budget is not included in Japan’s defence spending, but it is included as defence spending under NATO standards.

¹⁹ *Sankei Shinbun*, 15 April, p. 5.

²⁰ *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 21 April 2022, p. 4.

help to alleviate public concern about a massive issuance of deficit-covering bonds (*Jiji Press* 2022d). Moreover, in early June, the Japan Innovation Party unveiled its manifesto for the July Upper House election, which proposed both an increase in defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP and also a promise that if it won government it would start discussions on ‘nuclear sharing’ with the United States (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022d).

The expanded framework of defence spending embodied in the government’s Basic Policy also reflected Abe’s aggressive fiscal stance of ‘calling for more government bond issues to cover any defense spending increases’ (*The Mainichi* 2022b). He frequently made remarks that downplayed the need for fiscal discipline saying, for example, ‘The government can print bank notes with the Bank of Japan’ even though the 1947 Finance Law bans the issue of debt-covering government bonds (*Asahi Shinbun Digital* 2022c).

The opinion that government bonds would be issued to fund the defence spending increase also spread within the LDP. During the campaign for the July Upper House election, Takaichi, for example, stated that the defence budget increase would be initially financed by the issuance of new government bonds (Nakamura 2022). Ishiba also joined the debate about the issuance of government bonds as a means to procure funds to finance a defence budget increase, arguing that it could be a measure to ‘pass a peaceful Japan onto future generations. ... If we fail to discuss funding sources now, that would be irresponsible for the next generation’ (*The Japan Times* 2022). Conservative LDP members in general continued to insist on the issuance of government bonds to cover the additional defence spending in line with Abe’s justification that ‘Defense spending is a budget to pass the nation on to the next generation, so it’s fine to have it covered by government bonds’ (*The Japan News* 2022b). Ironically, this was also later raised by Kihara as one option to finance the increase in defence spending.²¹

However, despite the calls from Abe and others underlining the need to issue government bonds to finance a planned substantial increase in the defence budget, Kishida remained extremely cautious about undermining fiscal discipline (Goto 2022, 28 June). At the same time, the 2022 Defence White Paper made positive statements on increasing the defence budget (*Asahi Shinbun Digital* 2022a) and after Abe perished at the hands of a crazed killer on 8th June, conservative LDP Diet politicians pushed for policies including increasing the defence budget with the rationale that it would be ‘in line with Abe’s wishes’. Indeed, former defence minister Tomomi Inada (2016–17) told the press that she would like to push for constitutional reform and history issues to fulfill Abe’s wishes (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022b).²² Kōichi Haguida as the new LDP PARC chairman also sought to allocate a large sum in the budget for defence in order to fulfill the will of Abe to strengthen Japan’s defence capabilities in short order. Nevertheless, the issue of which funding sources would be tapped to finance a large increase in defence spending remained unresolved.

²¹ *Asahi Shinbun*, 13 September, 2022, p. 4.

²² See also below.

In early August, Shimada resigned from his post as policy adviser to the defence minister following Kishida's decision not to reappoint Kishi to the post and in light of new Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada's decision not to reappoint him. Concerns were expressed about 'a possible shift away from the Abe line' (*The Japan News*, 2022a), although Kishida appointed Kishi as his special adviser on national security²³ providing the former defence minister with an opportunity still to channel Abe's influence. He continued to do this by arguing strongly for Japan to acquire counterattack capabilities, for drastic increases in defence spending over the next five years and for funding potentially to come from the issuance of government bonds and tax increases.

Constitutional revision

Amending the Japanese constitution was Abe's 'signature policy', which he and his supporters in the LDP had hoped to pursue following the LDP landslide in the July Upper House election (Samejima 2022). Moreover, despite Kishida's much touted 'dovish' policy stance, the Japanese public was rapidly catching up with Abe given Japan's deteriorating security environment. Public opinion polls showed that constitutional reform had majority support, with some polls showing 60 per cent in favour (*The Japan News* 2022i). This matched the same proportion of respondents in other surveys who were expressing support for the idea of boosting Japan's defence capabilities (Yamada 2022).

Abe continued to push for discussions on constitutional reform, something that he had originally aimed to achieve by 2020 (Szechenyi 2017). At a rally of about 1100 supporters in his constituency in Yamaguchi Prefecture in April 2022, he referred to revising the constitution, stating that 'it was time to "do what needed to be done," especially with language regarding the Self-Defense forces. "It's the responsibility of politicians to put an end to the debate over the unconstitutionality of the Self-Defense Forces"' (Johnston 2022). In his interview with the *Sankei Shinbun* in the same month, he stated 'I am pleased to see that discussions on constitutional revision are underway in the constitutional review boards of both houses of the Diet. The situation in Ukraine provides an excellent opportunity for a thorough debate on Article Nine, one of the LDP's four proposed constitutional amendments' (Ogawa 2022).

A month or so later on Constitution Day national holiday in early May, the Prime Minister himself emphasised his willingness to push ahead with constitutional revisions such as clarifying the status of the SDF in the nation's supreme law to a meeting of a pro-constitutional revision group within the LDP. He said, 'They are all very much issues of today and need to be realized as soon as possible' (*The Japan News* 2022h). This was something of an about-face given his earlier caution about speaking out on constitutional revision when he took office in October 2021. Later in the leadup to the July Upper House election, Kishida stated that 'he intended to continue pushing for revisions, saying he hoped the election would give the coalition a "stable base so that we can move the debate forward"'

²³ *Sankei Shinbun*, 11 August 2022, p. 2.

(Iwamoto 2022). His objective was a revision that would include spelling out the legal existence of the SDF in the Constitution (*Asahi Shinbun* 2022a).

The LDP's draft revision of the constitution compiled in 2018 stated that a new clause should be added to Article 9 stating the grounds for possessing the SDF while retaining the rest of the article, which renounces war and forbids the possession of war potential (*The Japan News* 2022h). The LDP's election manifesto released on 16th June clearly stated the party's desire to amend the Constitution at an early date, placing clear emphasis on this as well as strengthening defence capabilities (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022d). The campaign platform included 'clarifying the legal status of the Self-Defense Forces' (Johnson and Fee 2022) with Secretary-General Motegi stating that the aim was to submit a constitutional amendment proposal to the public as soon as possible after the election (*Jiji Press* 2022a). A survey revealed that 86 per cent of LDP candidates in the election supported 'stipulating the legal grounds for the SDF and the retention of armed forces for self-defense' and 96 per cent of LDP candidates said that Article 9 should be revised (*The Japan News* 2022d). Another survey — this time of a cross-section of candidates — showed that 52 per cent wanted a revision of Article 9 to legitimise the SDF, while 63 per cent called for an increase in Japan's defence budget, with 41 per cent of them saying that the defence budget should be increased to about 2 per cent of the nation's GDP.²⁴ Moreover, prior to the election, commissions on the Constitution in both houses actively discussed constitutional issues (*The Japan News* 2022f).

Pre-election, Abe continued to socialise with party leadership figures such as LDP Vice-President Taro Aso and Secretary-General Motegi as well as former prime minister Yoshihide Suga and former Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai. This manoeuvring was an attempt to influence the personnel reshuffles in the cabinet and party that would take place post-election, with Abe telling his political confidantes that he wanted 'posts commensurate with our [his faction's] strength' including an increase in the number of cabinet posts in addition to a key leadership post in the party — such as secretary-general, political affairs chief or chairperson of the General Council — given his concern that Kishida might seek to remove his influence (Sawada 2022).

During the election campaign, Abe also focussed on what he called 'unfinished business' from his own period in power, with a clear emphasis on realising his long-held goal of revising the Constitution. He argued publicly that recent international events had clearly showed that change was needed in Japan and that Article 9 should be amended as soon as possible to end the debate about whether the SDF was a constitutional violation. He also called for discussions in the Lower House commission on the Constitution to focus on Article 9 (Narazaki 2022). Speaking in Kyoto in June, Abe said that he hoped the election would deliver the coalition a 'stable political base so we can move the debate forward' (Iwamoto 2022).

²⁴ *Mainichi Shinbun*, 5 July, p. 1.

A week before the election on 10th July, pro-amendment parties, including the LDP and its coalition partner Komeito focussed on revisions that would clarify and legitimise the existence of Japan's armed forces. The LDP's objective was to create an Article 9–2 to stipulate the existence of the SDF, thus clarifying its status, while still keeping the first paragraph of Article 9, which renounces war as well as 'the second paragraph, which prohibits the possession of military forces and denies the right of belligerency' (*Nippon.com* 2022a). This stance was based on Abe's proposal for constitutional reform made in 2017 during his prime ministership and would have ended discussions about whether or not the SDF was constitutional (*Nippon.com* 2022a). The Japan Innovation Party supported this proposal with the Democratic Party for the People also pro-amendment.

Prime Minister Kishida, having indicated his intention to make constitutional revision a reality prior to the election (*The Japan News* 2022d) reaffirmed it after the election, which delivered a two-thirds majority for parties supporting constitutional amendment, matching their two-thirds Lower House majority. After Abe's assassination Kishida also pledged to 'pursue difficult goals that Abe did not live to see accomplished' (Iwamoto 2022). such as constitutional reform.

Conclusion

Kishida, as a self-proclaimed 'foreign policy expert' able to draw on his 50-month tenure and expertise as a former foreign minister (*Asahi Shinbun Digital* 2022d) forged his own path in foreign and national security policy as Japan's new leader. At the same time, in order to help stabilise his new administration, he also drew on the work and achievements that Abe had accomplished in this policy sector during his own administration and on the policy proposals and advice on defence, security and foreign policy that Abe continued to provide from the sidelines. In fact, Kishida found that he could not ignore Abe's voice. The 'kingmaker of 2022' was influential in both domestic and foreign policy, particularly in leading the debate on increasing defence spending, supporting Taiwan against China and nuclear-sharing amongst a range of defence-related issues. In sum, far from receding from the policy scene, Abe's presence only increased. Such was his influence over defence policy that there was effectively a 'dual structure of power' in this policy sector (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2022c).

Moreover, despite his professed 'dovish' stance, Kishida went further with Abe-style hawkish policies for politically strategic reasons rather than purely pursuing policy options that he genuinely supported. In short, Abe continued directly to influence government defence policies with Kishida acting as a conduit. This was because Kishida wanted to send a political message to Abe that he was basically doing what the latter wished in order to strengthen Japan's security. Thus, he went further than he might have done in adopting policies relating to defence spending increases and establishing counterattack capabilities and in considering the option of nuclear sharing. Moreover, because the prime minister feared losing the support of conservatives in the Upper House election, he 'showed willing' to heed Abe's advice on the defence budget and on Taiwan as well as the government's 'big-boned' policy. Abe not only led the largest faction in the party and had many right-wing supporters,

Kishida remained concerned that if he were ‘weak’ on defence, this large group might vote for a party other than the LDP in the Upper House election, particularly the Japan Innovation Party, or simply abstain from voting. Hence the need to reassure this large group that he would follow through on policy initiatives supported by Abe. However, because Abe still doubted whether a dovish Kishida would fully implement his hawkish security policies, he used public statements to encourage Kishida in the ‘right direction’.

Abe’s death may now make it more difficult for the ruling party to forge a consensus on key policy issues such as constitutional revision (*Sankei Shinbun* 2022c), defence spending and fiscal policy because he had previously played such an influential role in shaping the direction of the ruling party’s policy on these divisive agenda items. The demise of the party’s ‘driving force’ may have a lasting impact in this respect, raising the risk of a leadership ‘vacuum’ in the critical defence sector. Kishida’s policy calculations may also change. With the potential for his strong victory to usher in ‘three golden years’, he may be able to follow his own policy directions. The question, then, will be whether a ‘dovish Kishida’ will simply pursue his own policy course or whether he will implement Abe’s hawkish security policies, and if so, how far and how fast (Ogawa 2022b). The most important driver will be Japan’s security environment, which is currently facing its greatest post-war crisis owing to the strengthening military power of China, Russia and North Korea.

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