

**STRATEGIZING ASIA:
JAPAN'S VALUES-BASED DIPLOMACY AMID GREAT POWERS'
COMPETING VISIONS FOR BROADER ASIA**

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In November 2006, Japanese Foreign Minister Asō Tarō outlined an expansion of Japan's foreign policy, which he called the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity." Japan's foreign policy had long stood on two key pillars: the Security Alliance with the United States, and relations with neighboring states in East Asia. The "Arc," however, would form a new pillar of diplomacy for Tokyo in addition to the existing two pillars, and also become the most lucid case for values-based diplomacy elaborated by Tokyo in the post-war era. In his speech on the new pillar, Asō emphasized: "universal values' such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy."¹ He colorfully added:

many countries are now walking down the road to "peace and happiness through economic prosperity and democracy." And, as I am fond of saying, this is exactly the road that Japan herself walked down after the war.

As to Japan's role in these developments, Asō analogized that "Japan will serve as an 'escort runner' to support these countries that have just started into this truly never-ending marathon."

There is a double sense to this depiction of an Arc: first, it is a sanguine recasting of the expression, "Arc of Instability," frequently uttered by US diplomats in the first George W. Bush administration, but second, the new pillar to Japan's foreign policy would emphasize relations with states geographically spanning across Eurasia. Asō elaborated, "there are the successfully budding democracies that line the outer rim of the Eurasian continent, forming an arc."² He added:

¹ Asō Tarō, "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons," Speech, delivered at the Japan Institute of International Affairs, Tokyo, November 2006. Transcript available at www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/18/easo_1130.html (Japanese).

² *Ibid.*

take a look around the outer edge of Eurasia – just follow that line all the way around. This belt has seen great changes upon the end of the Cold War as the curtain was being drawn on the confrontation between East and West.

Throughout the speech, Asō listed an extensive range of regions included in the Arc: Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, continuing to include Turkey and all of Eastern Europe. Asō concluded his speech with the commitment, “[i]n assisting countries as they take these steps forward, Japan aims to usher in a world order that is tranquil and peaceful.”

A decade later, in January 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō reiterated Japan’s values-based diplomacy in a speech at the Shared Values and Democracy in Asia Symposium. Abe opened with “Asia is now poised to become a champion of democracy,” pointing out that “Asia’s democracy has a distinct mark engraved in it from ancient times, reflecting the values we have held dear for generations.”³ Abe outlined, “Asian democracy as uniquely imparting values such as ‘lovingkindness,’ ‘benevolence,’ and an ‘utmost priority on harmony,’” specifically citing the roots of these values from Asian religious traditions: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam.

The new pillar to Japan’s foreign policy is, indeed, a significant development from what was both a constrained and myopic foreign policy for a state of such global economic influence and substantial diplomatic potential. Asō’s pillar of an Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and Abe’s Asian Democracy speeches illustrate a significant widening of Japan’s foreign policy, which is an attempt to fortify Japan’s role in Asia. Systematically, this can be explained mainly by the developments of the great powers in the region. The Western-led world order has come into question, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis and the increase of populist challenges to liberalism within Western democracies, leaving Asian states to look elsewhere, and in particular, at their own developed

³ Abe Shinzō, “Address by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe at the ‘Shared Values and Democracy in Asia’ Symposium,” Speech, delivered at the Shared Values and Democracy in Asia Symposium, Tokyo, January 2016. Transcript available at www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sw/page3_001543.html (Japanese).

states as models instead.⁴ Meanwhile, Japan has been pressured by the US since the first Gulf War to take a more active role in diplomacy and collective security in Asia. Additionally, the rise of a non-democratic China encourages Japan to seek to strengthen relations with states along China's periphery, and democratic norms are a key strategy and useful narrative to counterbalance a rising China.

Many in Asia notably challenge the Western-led world order and the Western liberal democratic model and are struggling to reconcile modernization with their social milieu. Tokyo has taken note. Combined with this, in the aforementioned speeches, there is a view of Japanese exceptionalism in Asia illustrated, and the possibility of Tokyo leading Asian states (as "an 'escort runner'") towards the development of Asian democracies. In the early twentieth century, Japan was referred to as a model for "modernization without Westernization"; in the early twenty-first century, Japanese leaders are positioning themselves as a model in Asia for "*democratization* without Westernization." Combining this with the need for overseas export markets and energy imports, and responding to the rise of China, Japan has added the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity as a third pillar to its foreign policy. Japan is leveraging its identity to Asia to bolster economic security, thus tying normativity to material concerns.

Japan is undoubtedly not alone with a vision for Asia, and when Japan's vision is put into policy, strategy, and definitive action, it contends with visions, policies, strategies, and actions by great powers on the continent. This paper examines the visions for Asia in the twenty-first century. It examines the structural dynamics which Japan's vision of a values-based Arc has to contend with, but it also clarifies how this vision interacts with other visions by great powers in terms of how they compete in both ideational and material realms, and also where they may complement each other. The great powers who have their own visions for Asia, which interact most unmistakably with Japan's own vision, are China, Russia, and the US. Each of these powers has its own pronounced framework which encapsulates its vision: for China, it is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); for Russia, it is the neo-Eurasianist school of thought; for the US, it is the Pivot to Asia. Together with Japan's values-based diplomacy, initially labeled the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity by Asō Tarō

⁴ Bahadır Pehlivan Türk, "Turkey-Japan: Dialogue on Global Affairs," *Perceptions* 21/1 (2016), 3.

in 2006, four frameworks for Asia provide windows into each power's vision for the continent. BRI is more clearly enunciated as a development strategy; neo-Eurasianism is more akin to a prevailing purview held by many in the Kremlin; consistency on the Pivot to Asia is questionable in the transition from an Obama to Trump administration. Nonetheless, juxtaposing these four elucidates visions. How can Japan compete with these? What are its viable advantages and disadvantages?

This paper proceeds by briefly outlining the Chinese, Russian, and American visions for Asia, respectively, to contrast them with the aforementioned Japanese vision. The classical geopolitical framework for analysis is applied to tie visions to strategy, and thus, tie the ideational to material. This study then juxtaposes the visions, analyzing intertextual connections to Japan's values-based Arc. Through this juxtaposition, the dynamics of twenty-first century Asia are better understood, the ideational competition among great powers in Asia is revisited, and Tokyo's maneuverability within this milieu for strategy is clarified.

China: Belt and Road Initiative

Talk of China as a "rising power" is shortsighted; sure, it is rising after experiencing its "Century of Humiliation," but with the longest historical record of any modern state, these events were a blip in its historical record. Like the Westphalian system of nation-states and the Islamic *Ummah*, China has its own vision of world order from antiquity: the suzerainty – an order of concentric circles, with the Emperor of China at the center of civilization. China's order was both "hierarchical and theoretically universal."⁵ Moving out next is China proper, then the tributary states – smaller kingdoms which recognized the imperial authority and, in return for paying tribute, gained security. Outside of this system were the barbarians – those who did not recognize the Emperor's heavenly mandate. Along with China, many of the tributary kingdoms in this suzerain system also emerged into modern nation-states, namely the Koreans, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar.

This is consistent with China's worldview during the empire and today, even though China's worldview has gone through substantial transformations in the twentieth century. "China today is consolidating land

⁵ Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), x.

borders and beginning to turn outward.”⁶ While the Emperor is no longer part of the system, Beijing is at the center, politically, and the concentric circles remain, exemplified in policy initiatives such as the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the first island chain and second island chain military doctrine – a two-step Monroe Doctrine of the Western Pacific. Beijing, and to an extent, Han China, is now at the center of the system. Next is “greater China,” which includes the minority populations mostly found in peripheral provinces, special administrative regions, and autonomous regions – all peoples and territories within the modern nation-state. Then, the modern version of tributary states – those bandwagoning with the rising China, and thus, those adhering to this new (revived) order. Here is where BRI comes into play. China is attempting to (re)construct an order in Asia with it at the center based on its long-held model of a suzerainty. It is no coincidence that China, in Chinese, is the “middle country” – in the middle of this system of concentric – *Sinocentric* circles. The vision is embedded directly within the name.

How is China reviving its suzerain system in a twenty-first century Asia of Westphalian nation-states in which many have concerns over development, poverty, energy resources, nuclear proliferation, and religion-inspired violence? Indeed, it is a very different Asia since China slipped from its powerful role in the nineteenth century. BRI came about in late 2013, during the first few months of Xi Jinping’s presidency. In September 2013, Xi first mentioned a “Silk Road Economic Belt” while on a visit to Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayev University. The idea was to develop transportation infrastructure projects which would facilitate an “economic belt” to link China to Central Asia, Russia, and on to Iran, Turkey, and ultimately Germany and the Netherlands.⁷ The *one road* component was elicited a month later in Indonesia: a maritime linkage of southeast China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and by great extension, Africa and Europe. Both ideas were presented in vague terms – especially the “Maritime Silk Road.” Was the Road merely a desire to strengthen trade

⁶ Robert Kaplan, “The Geography of Chinese Power: How Far Will China Reach on Land and at Sea?,” *Foreign Affairs* 89/3 (2010), 22.

⁷ Peter Ferdinand, “Westward Ho – the China Dream and ‘One Belt, One Road’: Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping,” *International Affairs* 92/4 (2016), 949–950.

logistics through maritime channels in the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, and elsewhere?

There is some indication that these two policy initiatives were not initially intended to be combined, and were, in fact, competing directions for the Asia strategy being deliberated among political elites in Beijing.⁸ Details on both the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road emerged gradually throughout 2014, and by early 2015 they were merged into a broader framework. The name, “Belt and Road,” or “One Belt, One Road,” comes from the Chinese, “*yīdài yīlù*” (一帶一路), an expression fashioned as a traditional Chinese four-character idiom (*chéngyǔ*), which first appeared in 2015 to discuss the two initiatives in tandem.⁹

In its first five years, the term has unquestionably maintained its currency.¹⁰ The framework is broad, however, and necessitates a great amount of commitment and risk for Beijing. Indeed, the risk involved in BRI is characteristic of Xi’s foreign policy, and how it differs from his more risk-averse predecessor, Hu Jintao.¹¹ Moreover, BRI has tremendous implications for Asia, China, the CCP, and Xi. Ferdinand points out it “potentially involves over 60 countries with a combined population of over 4 billion people, whose markets currently account for about one-third of global GDP.”¹² Some have called BRI a Chinese Marshall Plan. The desire to analogize is tempting, but the economic scale and geographic expanse of BRI truly dwarf the Marshall Plan.¹³ Yet, China is still a middle-income country, which differs considerably from the US in the late 1940s. It is also not motivated by an ideological objective. Unequivocally, there are normative interests in BRI, but the Marshall Plan was motivated by the need for quick action to stabilize the economies of Western Europe and prevent Soviet communist expansion into the region. Objectives were

⁸ Tim Summers, “China’s ‘New Silk Roads’: Sub-National Regions and Networks of Global Political Economy,” *Third World Quarterly* 37/9 (2015), 1629.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1630.

¹⁰ Albeit, why the “road” is the maritime linkage and not the overland route can be baffling for English readers.

¹¹ Ferdinand, “Westward Ho – the China Dream and ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 942.

¹² *Ibid.*, 950.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 951.

clearer, as it involved war-torn countries, and again, while large, encompassed a much smaller scope of nations with a smaller array of challenges.

Is China equipped for BRI? Can it spearhead an array of infrastructure projects – the likes of which have never been seen – spanning across Asia, Europe, and Africa, while GDP per capita at home still hovers around \$10,000 – lower than the global average, and economic growth has been slowing for years? The leadership readily admits, as Xi did in 2013, “China remains the world’s largest developing country, and it faces many difficulties and challenges on its road to progress.”¹⁴ Here the Chinese government, itself, explains BRI:

aims to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multitiered and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries.¹⁵

Xi Jinping was quoted as saying, “China welcomes all countries along the routes and in Asia, as well as our friends and partners around the world to take an active part in these endeavors.”¹⁶ The language used by Chinese political leadership as well as official documents present a vision with objectives and a geographic scope, which is so broad it is boundless.

BRI started with Beijing committing to invest around \$1 trillion in infrastructural and transportation development spanning Western China –

¹⁴ Issac Stonefish, “Is China Still a ‘Developing’ Country?” *Foreign Policy*, September 25, 2014 (accessed May 12, 2020, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/25/is-china-still-a-developing-country/>).

¹⁵ “Full Text: Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative,” *The State Council, The People’s Republic of China*, March 30, 2015 (accessed May 12, 2020, http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm).

¹⁶ “China Unveils Action Plan on Belt and Road Initiative,” *The State Council, The People’s Republic of China*, March 28, 2015 (accessed May 12, 2020, http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2015/03/28/content_281475079055789.htm).

the first plank to the “belt” in BRI.¹⁷ The largest set of completed projects thus far is the \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which connects western China to Pakistan’s Gwadar Port on the Indian Ocean.¹⁸ According to the *Council on Foreign Relations*, as of early 2019, China had already spent an estimated \$200 billion on BRI projects.¹⁹ Also significant is China’s critical role in setting up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB): a financial institution Beijing created seemingly with the intention to circumvent constraints of the existing financial order in Asia provided by the Japan-US-controlled Asian Development Bank (ADB) and exert more influence across the region. By the end of 2019, China had committed \$30 billion for AIIB, and coupled with additional commitments made outside AIIB to the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road totaling tens-of-billions of dollars, Beijing is demonstrating it is willing to make a colossal financial commitment to modifying order in Asia.²⁰ Shambaugh points out that “even during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union did not spend anywhere near as much as China is spending today.”²¹

BRI and all that has come with it has at its heart a deeply rooted Sinocentric view of Asia. Chinese discuss the period from 1839 to 1949 as the “Century of Humiliation.” China was an empire at the center of a universal suzerainty, yet powers that came from outside the suzerain system destroyed that order. A country that viewed itself at the center of universal order was weakened, occupied, and plundered by “barbarians.” BRI is a

¹⁷ Ferdinand, “Westward Ho – the China Dream and ‘One Belt, One Road,’” 950.

¹⁸ Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 172.

¹⁹ Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, “China’s Massive Belt and Road Initiative,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 21, 2019 (accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>).

²⁰ “Members and Prospective Members of the Bank,” *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank*, December 31, 2019 (accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>).

²¹ David Shambaugh, “China’s Soft-Power Push – The Search for Respect,” *Foreign Affairs* 94/4 (2015) (accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/china-s-soft-power-push>).

restoration of that universal order held for millennia. Beijing's vision of Asia is much like it was long ago – with Beijing at the center. BRI is a strategic resuscitation of what is just.

Mardell argues that “Beijing imagines a continent built by China over the course of decades, setting the stage for China to become a, if not *the*, great power by 2049.”²² In scope and ambition, this is correct. No other vision for Asia comes close to BRI, and because of this, it sets the bar for others who want to compete. Regardless of the competition, BRI is considerably audacious for a country still struggling with its own domestic development issues. Yet, is it poised to lead the way with development and integration across the eastern hemisphere? Chinese officials have admitted off the record that they expect to lose 30 percent on their investments in Central Asia and as much as 80 percent in Pakistan!²³ It is no exaggeration to state the CCP is gambling its own existence on the outcomes of BRI.

Russia: Neo-Eurasianism

While not nearly as longstanding as China's Sinocentric conceptualization of Asia, Russia's neo-Eurasianism also has deep roots that have persisted in Russian thought. Like Latin Americanism, Europeanism, or Asianism, it is a geographic ideology – a *Weltanschauung*, or, more precisely, a “*Eurasienschauung*.” Naturally, as a transcontinental state with more territory in Europe than any other European country and more territory in Asia than any other Asian country, Russia is at the center of this conceptualization. Russia is not simply in the middle between Europe and Asia; rather, it is at the center of Eurasia.

Russian Eurasianist thought originated in the late nineteenth century with a movement among Slavophiles to reject European identity.²⁴ Was the Russian Empire to be “a European state with Asian colonies, or was it a special Eurasian state?”²⁵ These Orientalizers (*vostochniki*) were

²² Jacob Mardell, “One Belt, One Road, and One Big Competition,” *The Diplomat*, December 15, 2017 (accessed May 12, 2020, <https://the-diplomat.com/2017/12/one-belt-one-road-and-one-big-competition/>).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Charles Clover, “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland – The Reemergence of Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs* 78/2 (1999), 9.

²⁵ Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 3.

the first to grapple with redefining Russian identity beyond a Slavic identity, as Russia had expanded its territories into the Caucasus and across Central Asia and Siberia, while at the same time falling behind an industrialized Western Europe. A more detailed manifestation of the concept would not emerge, however, until the 1920s. At this time, the Soviets gave up on an imminent worldwide proletariat revolution subsequent to the Bolshevik Revolution, turning their discourses to Soviet distinctiveness – a notion that appealed to many in the Communist Party as well as dissidents in exile.²⁶ The Eurasianists tied Russian people to the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia, whom they claimed originated in ancient Persia, and followed a more collectivist political and economic model that contrasted with European individualism, which the Soviets could appreciate.²⁷ Where the two notably differed was on religion: the Eurasianists emphasized the positive role Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism played in Eurasia, and in Russia, specifically.

Eurasianism, as a paradigm, is ideologically murky, but interestingly, it has allowed the permanency of geography to drive ideology: “the Eurasianists suggested that Russia should unlearn the West and perceive itself *geographically*: History, they argued, is the mode in which Europe expresses its identity; geography is Russia’s.”²⁸ Russia is thus defined by its location, its size, and its land-based power: “An interest in geopolitics is therefore inherent in Eurasianism; geography is a *scientific* means of restoring *political* power.”²⁹

Over the course of the mid-twentieth century, Eurasianists developed a large body of literature, but it was the writing of one Eurasianist, Lev Gumilev, which was most favored when the paradigm was revived by neo-Eurasianists in the 1990s. Gumilev’s works of the 1960s to 1980s were received mainly with suspicion, if not banned altogether at times by the Soviets. *Glasnost* allowed for more public access to Gumilev’s work and coincided with rising ethno-nationalism across the Soviet Union. Bassin argues, “[i]t is difficult to overestimate Gumilev’s importance for

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁷ “What the Kremlin is Thinking,” *Foreign Affairs* 93/4 (2014) (accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-06-16/what-kremlin-thinking>).

²⁸ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 31.

²⁹ Ibid., 34.

the late- and post-Soviet revival of Eurasianism.”³⁰ Since his death in 1992, Gumilev has reached cult status with “his words...perceived as dogmas that are above criticism.”³¹

Gumilev’s work, as well as the work of other scholars, such as Aleksander Andreevich Prokhanov, contributed to a revival of Eurasianism, or “neo-Eurasianism,” which calls for Russia “to fulfill the crucial mission of connecting – and pacifying” both the East and West.³² Japanese writer Sawabe Yūji describes neo-Eurasian thought: “Russia is considered a ‘hyper-nation-state,’ consisting not only of Slavic peoples, but also Turkic, Iranian, Mongol, and several other peoples, and it is destined to become an inevitable empire.”³³ The ideology was soon picked up among the political elites in the early 1990s and came to dominate thought in Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁴ In the late 1990s, former Foreign Affairs Minister and Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov emphasized Russian relations in Asia and implemented several neo-Eurasianist ideas into Russia’s foreign policy.³⁵ Today, neo-Eurasianist thought is evident in the legislature, the Defense Ministry, and even the “military elite have also caught Eurasian fever.”³⁶

The currency (neo-)Eurasianist thought has attained among both the post-Soviet intelligentsia and the contemporary political elites is historically unmatched. Prominent advocates today include veteran nationalist politician and LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovski, and political scientist and author Aleksandr Dugin.³⁷ In the twenty-first century, neo-Eurasianist thought has conspicuously made its impact upon Russian grand strategy. In 2001, Putin stated, “Russia has always felt herself to be a

³⁰ Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 212.

³¹ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 10.

³² Simona E. Merati, *Muslims in Putin’s Russia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 32.

³³ Sawabe Yūji, *Zukai: ichiban yasashii chiseigaku no hon* [Diagrams: The Most Comprehensible Book on Geopolitics] (Tokyo: Saizusha, 2017), 91.

³⁴ Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, 218.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Clover, “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland,” 9.

³⁷ Dugin’s work is discussed in greater detail later in this study.

Eurasian country. Never have we forgotten that the greatest part of Russian territory is in Asia.”³⁸ Neo-Eurasianists applauded when in 2005, Putin acknowledged that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century. Putin has also publicly praised the work of Gumilev. On a visit to Kazakhstan in 2000, Putin commented:

His scholarly works are a brilliant contribution not only to thinking about history but also to the assertion of the centuries-old community and interrelation between the peoples who inhabit the vast expanses of Eurasia, from the Baltics and the Carpathians to the Pacific Ocean. The instructive potential of Eurasianism is especially significant today.³⁹

Neo-Eurasianism is not inevitably a hard-lined purview involving Russian ethno-nationalism and geopolitical expansionism. The school of thought has come in various incarnations from writers occasionally contradicting one another, in particular regarding Russia’s role, and it can be interpreted in softer forms. Some formulate it with a rightwing, Orthodox Christian worldview, while others have observed ties developing between this rightwing movement and political Islam in Russia as a moral-based coalition.⁴⁰ Consistent in all forms of neo-Eurasianism is the desire “to build a larger geopolitical axis of allies – such as Germany, Iran, and Japan – to resist the American influences.”⁴¹ Mainstream political elites are more attentive to this basic principle of neo-Eurasianism than to the more radical ancillary points. Within this principle, however, lie the policies that can be seen over the last two decades in the form of Eurasian integration.

Eurasian integration is not an attempt by neo-Eurasianists to revive the Soviet Union, but it is a way to ensure that a multipolar world exists, and Eurasia can integrate, develop, and prosper like the EU or US, but

³⁸ As cited in Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁰ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*; Stefan Wiederkehr, *Die Eurasische Bewegung* [The Eurasian Movement] (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau Verlag, 2007); and Merati, *Muslims in Putin’s Russia*.

⁴¹ Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2013), 64.

“morally” and “justly” so. Conceptualizations of Eurasian integration started immediately in the ashes of the Soviet Union with the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and continued with the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), which gave way to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2015. Deepening and widening the integration of the EAEU is a stated goal from the Kremlin, but thus far, it is only considered open to post-Soviet republics (and self-declared independent territories within said republics, such as South Ossetia). Sawabe calls the EAEU the “embodiment” of the neo-Eurasianists’ vision of a new form of Russian Empire.⁴² CIS and EEC illustrate that Moscow’s conceptualization of neo-Eurasianism is the foremost integration of the “lost” territories – the former Soviet republics. Like the EU with NATO, EAEU is complemented with a security institution – the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). While currently limited to post-Soviet republics, the CSTO has expressed willingness to allow other Eurasian states, such as Iran, to apply for membership.

Neo-Eurasianism has a two-tiered conceptualization of Eurasia: there are the former Soviet republics which must be reintegrated first, then a broader Eurasia inclusive of Turkey, Iran, India, China, and Japan. The difficulty in exerting Russian influence beyond its “near abroad” is seen in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO includes four former Soviet republics in Central Asia, Russia, China, and since 2017, India and Pakistan. Several other Asian states are being considered for admission. SCO is certainly a formidable organization that now represents a significant portion of the world’s population, the global economy, and Asia’s landmass, but therein lies the problem for the hardline neo-Eurasianists: Russia’s sway is overwhelmed by the inclusion of a more populous and economically robust China, as well as the more populous states, India and Pakistan. It could be interpreted as a forum colluding to keep American influence out of Central Asia, and in that regard, it has been a success. The US applied for observer status to SCO in 2005, yet was swiftly rejected.⁴³

If Russia is content with a Eurasia where Moscow exerts political influence over the former Soviet republics, yet Asia beyond the near abroad aligns policies with Moscow to ensure a multipolar order in Asia, then this

⁴² Sawabe, *Zukai*, 91.

⁴³ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 190.

vision of Asia is more palpable than Moscow exerting political influence across the vast continent. In greater Asia, Russia must cooperate with other powers, namely China, to ensure the multipolar order it envisages. Yet, as Kotkin remarks, “China has openly and vigorously been building its own Greater Eurasia, from the South China Sea through inner Asia to Europe, at Russia’s expense and with its cooperation.”⁴⁴ This contestation inevitably becomes more intense in Central Asia because it is within both the Kremlin’s near abroad and the first line of China’s Silk Road Economic Belt outside of its own borders. Russia and China can agree to limit the US influence in Asia, but Central Asia is a pivotal overlapping zone of influence for Russia and China.

The United States: Pivot to Asia

In late 2011, the Obama Administration announced a “pivot” in US grand strategy toward Asia.⁴⁵ It was soon followed up with plans to increase the marine presence in Australia, a slight increase in the number of US troops in South Korea, the basing of more military hardware in Singapore, and enhancing the defense alignment with the Philippines. The US also increased defense cooperation discussions with Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia, and has increased the number of Malabar naval exercises together with Japan and India.⁴⁶ In economics, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would deepen interdependence among the US and states across the Asian-Pacific region.

⁴⁴ Stephen Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics – Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern,” *Foreign Affairs* 95/3 (2016), 2.

⁴⁵ After 2011, Obama administration officials chose to rebrand the new grand strategy as “realignment” rather than “pivot.” It was suggested that “pivot” was “both inaccurate and misleading” (see Wu Xinbo, “Cooperation, Competition and Shaping the Outlook,” *International Affairs* 92/4 [2016]: 849), but in actuality, it is more accurate and revealing of the underlying vision which drove the announcement. “Realignment” is evasive of directions and intentions: “pivot” is clearer. It provides an honest window into the underlying strategy, and the attempt to rebrand it as a “realignment” was too little too late (the attempt to rebrand was revealing).

⁴⁶ Evan Resnik, “The Obama Rebalance and US Policy towards China,” in *United States Engagement in the Asia Pacific: Perspectives from Asia*, eds. Yoichiro Sato and Tan See Seng (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2015), 13.

There are a number of issues with the Pivot strategy, many of which were unforeseen at the time. Firstly, a pivot motion necessitates shifting the direction faced while maintaining one's point on the ground. This is consistent with the US having maintained its focus on the greater Middle East for the better part of four decades. After the British declared they would pull out all military forces east of the Suez in 1971, the US retreat from Vietnam in 1973, the subsequent oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, and the Iranian hostage crisis, the 1980 Carter Doctrine was a de facto "pivot to the Middle East," and away from East Asia. Subsequent military actions in Libya, Lebanon, and Syria, and full-scale wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iraq, again, solidified and justified this pivot, as did the threats from religious terrorism originating from this region. From Washington's perspective, this is a pivot from its east to its west – a pivot from an Atlantic view of Eurasia to a Pacific view. Part of the 2011 Pivot announcements included the plan to shift naval distribution from 50:50 capabilities in the Atlantic and Pacific to 60 percent in the Pacific and 40 percent in the Atlantic by the end of the decade.⁴⁷

With any pivot, one is turning his or her head from what had garnered attention before. Did the Middle East lose its significance, or did Asia simply become more pressing? Both are plausible, given shifts in American geostrategic interests. Candidates Obama in 2008 and Trump in 2016 both committed to ending combat operations in the region. Moreover, relevant to the long-term strategic goals of the Carter Doctrine, the shale energy revolution of the 2010s has resulted in the US becoming one of the world's largest producers of crude oil and natural gas, meaning Persian Gulf fossil fuel supplies as less significant to Americans. US allies remain dependent, but how long are Americans willing to continue securing the supply of oil from the Persian Gulf? Conflict remains in the Middle East, as do concerns over Islamist terrorism, but Middle East war fatigue has settled deep with Americans, and without seeing a direct benefit to securing energy supplies from the Persian Gulf, Washington is looking to loosen commitments, which was evident in January 2020 when Trump called for NATO to burden share regional stability. A pivot always results in one's previous focal point now becoming either in the peripheral vision, or a blind spot altogether, and this is now manifesting in US policy.

⁴⁷ Resnik, "The Obama Rebalance and US Policy towards China," 13.

The second problem with the Pivot is that there is unmistakably a *panda in the room*: Beijing cannot help but sense that Washington's Pivot is a grand strategy precisely aimed at taking advantage of China's geopolitical insecurities. To Beijing, the Pivot is "a constraint on China's growing power in the region."⁴⁸ This may have been entirely the point. To be sure, the Obama administration continued to reiterate that the Pivot was "a key initiative to ensure sustainable growth and development for countries in the Asia Pacific region."⁴⁹ Yet, the subsequent policy announcements under the purview of the Pivot were by and large military-based. Moreover, the progress being made is among states along China's periphery, many of which have longstanding territorial disputes and security concerns regarding a rising China, such as Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and India. If indeed the Pivot were for the purposes of supporting sustainable economic growth, economic cooperation between Washington and Beijing would be the focus, and in fact, the point of departure for the grand strategy. Washington would also put itself in the diplomatic position to intermeditate a reconciliation between China and Japan, and between China and India. However, outside of defense policy, in economics, the only evidence of a Pivot was the failed TPP and some slapdash attempts to counter BRI investment opportunities, which segues to the third problem.

How has the Pivot to Asia sustained from one presidential administration to the next? While in 2011 it did garner wide bipartisan support, it was the brainchild of the Obama administration. By withdrawing the US from TPP, Trump withdrew from the only significant development under the Pivot, which actually related to sustainable economic growth. If the only key facets of the Pivot are defense policies, these do not directly relate to sustainable economic growth. Yet, was sustainable economic growth ever the true objective? Was it Obama's objective? Is it Trump's objective? Trump has never openly renounced the Pivot; rather, his administration has embraced it, albeit with a modified conceptualization. The December 2017 "National Security Strategy" and January 2018 "National Defense Strategy" both express a priority to deepen and widen

⁴⁸ Li Mingjiang and Shoon Ming Hui, "China's Changing Responses to US Regional Policy in Asia Pacific," in *United States Engagement in the Asia Pacific: Perspectives from Asia*, eds. Yoichiro Sato and Tan See Seng (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2015), 44.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

US alliances and partnerships in Asia (or the “Indo-Pacific”) over other regions.⁵⁰

Assuming the Pivot is foremost a defense pivot, there are problems in this strategy. Namely, the most promising partners in the Indo-Pacific regions for strengthening defense cooperation with the US are not so durable. This was evident in the Philippines in 2016 when President Benigno Aquino, who maintained close ties with the US, stepped down and was replaced by Rodrigo Duterte, who announced his plan to “separate” the Philippines from the US both militarily and economically in favor of China. Many allies such as Australia and South Korea will inevitably find themselves in a difficult position in choosing between their overwhelmingly greatest trading partner, China, and their security arrangements with the US.

If Washington cannot back its commitments to, first, sustainable economic growth in Asia, and, second, its defense assurances across the littoral of states along China’s periphery, it will find it difficult to advance its interests in the region. Moreover, Washington’s strategy has compelled a counterstrategy out of Beijing by necessity:

the US factor has worked to shape China’s neighborhood diplomacy in prompting Beijing to attach more significance to relations with its neighbors and to attempt to strengthen economic, security and diplomatic ties with them.⁵¹

Thus, a race to woo the Asian littoral has inadvertently commenced, *a la* Beijing’s BRI, except Washington has shown little interest in matching the financial offers presented in BRI.

If the Pivot is truly about containment of China, it is destined to fail. The Obama administration and policymakers in the State Department repeatedly denied the Pivot was a containment strategy, but the military cooperation commitments the US is making along China’s eastern and

⁵⁰ “National Security Strategy,” *US White House*, December 2017, 46–47, and “National Defense Strategy,” *US Department of Defense*, January 2018, 9.

⁵¹ Wu Xinbo, “Cooperation, Competition and Shaping the Outlook: The United States and China’s Neighborhood Diplomacy,” *International Affairs* 92/4 (2016), 850.

southern periphery, under both the Obama and Trump administrations, can serve as evidence for a sound argument that it is, indeed, a containment strategy. In January 2019, while speaking at the Pentagon, the acting Defense Secretary reminded everyone their priority was, “China, China, China.”⁵² The same can be deduced from Trump’s trade war policies with Beijing. If the Pivot is a containment strategy, it can damage not only the declared objective of sustained economic growth but also the global economy. Nevertheless, if the underlying strategy behind the Pivot is, indeed, sustained economic growth, using the defense sector as the primary actor to initiate the policy into action is a grave mistake. Zbigniew Brzezinski, whose work, *The Grand Chessboard* (1997), conceivably inspired the Pivot strategy, recognized this:

U.S. efforts to buttress Asian stability could prove self-defeating, propelling Washington into a costly repeat of its recent wars, potentially even resulting in a replay of the tragic events of Europe in the twentieth century.⁵³

The Obama administration made the defense sector its primary agent in initiating the Pivot, regardless of underlying intentions; when Trump withdrew the US from TPP in January 2017, it removed the US from the only meaningful institution under the framework of the Pivot in which US-led sustainable economic development in Asia could possibly be attained. Moreover, when Trump began applying new import tariffs on Chinese products in early 2018, ultimately spiraling into a trade war, this negatively affected integrated economies throughout the region. Supporters of these tariffs could argue that in the long-term, this approach could benefit sustainable economic development in Asia by leveling US-China trade balance and forcing China to adhere to conventional trade and investment rules. US allies, Japan and South Korea have expressed the same concerns regarding China’s trade practices, yet they were never consulted about new

⁵² “Remember: ‘China, China, China’ New Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Says,” *Reuters*, January 2, 2019 (accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-military-china/remember-china-china-china-new-acting-u-s-defense-secretary-says-idUSL1N1Z20JA>).

⁵³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Balancing the East, Upgrading the West – U.S. Grand Strategy in an Age of Upheaval,” *Foreign Affairs* 91/1 (2012), 97.

import tariffs. On the contrary, the new steel and aluminum tariffs implemented in March 2018 included Japanese and South Korean exports to the US as well as Chinese. Such economic pressure regimes leave these states to question Washington's commitment to their alliances and likely drift farther into Beijing's camp.

Competing and Complementary Grand Strategies

Among the four aforementioned visions for Asia, including Tokyo's values-based Arc, the geographic scope of the visions varies as much as the ideational components to each. Russia's neo-Eurasianism has a two-tiered approach to Asia (although, for their intents and purposes, Eurasia). First is Russia's near abroad: the idea is to (re)integrate the former Soviet republics, not as a resurrection of the Soviet Union, per se, but as a regional bloc not dissimilar to the EU, but with Russia at the fulcrum. Second, is to integrate a broader Eurasia, inclusive of partners such as Iran, Syria, and Serbia. China is included inasmuch as objectives are aligned, and those objectives tend to coalesce at multipolarity to counter American power preponderance in Asia. Beijing and Moscow have a developing symbiotic trade relationship based on the import of Russia's vast resources into China. This was cemented with a 30-year, \$400 billion energy deal, which commenced operations in December 2019 when the 3,000-kilometer "Power of Siberia" pipeline began supplying China with natural gas. With European natural gas consumers reluctant to sustain their dependency on Russian gas, Russia and China both see a newfound benefit in economic integration, and indeed, Russia's energy exports are *pivoting* to the east.

Beijing's vision of Asia is long embedded in its strategic thinking – long before the US or even the Russian Empire was formed. The suzerain system is the Sinocentric system, and it inescapably undergirds BRI. What is to be the modern tributary state, however, is much broader than it was before. It is inclusive of "new partners" as far afield as Kenya and Hungary. What is Beijing's Asia? Overtly, it is whoever wants to be on board with BRI; it is an initiative to develop and prosper together, but it is conspicuously focused on infrastructure and development, and also clearly focused on the less developed economies of Asia (and Africa) for its investment projects. In a sense, it is China championing itself as a leader of the developing world and declaring it has the deep pockets to finance a mutually coinciding rise in prosperity. It is worth noting that the Chinese-led AIIB, which can be interpreted as Beijing's counter to ADB led by Tokyo and Washington, is open to Japanese and American membership.

While the UK, Germany, Canada, Russia, South Korea, and Australia have all joined, Japan and the US remain noticeably indifferent to AIIB. Mogi argues that Tokyo and Washington are both “suspecting China’s bubble economy will collapse in the future,” and thus, the ADB remains the more pragmatic option for both investors and borrowers.⁵⁴ It is telling of who is more accommodating of the Sinocentric order in Asia, and who is not.

It is evident the US cannot consider a geostrategic pivot without considering the defense sector as the primary actor in implementation. Among Russia’s neo-Eurasianism, China’s BRI, and the US’s Pivot, the American vision is the most obfuscating. Pivot to Asia means *what Asia?* After all, the pre-Pivot focus was the Middle East, yet Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan *are* Asia (also known as “Southwest Asia”), and this is understood in neo-Eurasianism, BRI, and even Tokyo’s Arc. The Pivot is a re-*Oriented* vision for Asia. Moscow has been conceptualizing Asia for a very long time. Beijing has been conceptualizing it much longer. The American vision is confused and not clear regarding its objectives, or how to achieve them. The Pivot is interpreting Asia as the allies along the Indo-Pacific regions, including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia, and nascent partners such as India, Indonesia, and Vietnam. It is mindful of China, if not being the sole purpose for the Pivot, but it is understood as part of Asia, nonetheless. Thus, there is a *good* Asia and a *bad* Asia embedded in the vision of the Pivot.

Tokyo’s Arc complements and competes with all three visions. It most obviously complements the American Pivot. In fact, with the largest overseas American military force on its territory and a longstanding security alliance, Japan is a linchpin to the Pivot. This view was bolstered in 2014 when Obama clarified the US acknowledges Japan’s claim to the Senkaku/Daiyou Islands and that they are covered by the US-Japan Security Treaty – a commitment Trump reiterated in 2017. Moreover, the rise of China’s military is Tokyo’s self-proclaimed top security threat, and, indeed, what keeps it close to the US.⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that US officials in

⁵⁴ Mogi Makoto, *Manga de wakarū chiseigaku* [Geopolitics Understood Through Illustrations] (Tokyo: Ikeda Shoten, 2017), 84.

⁵⁵ Tim Kelly, “Japan Lists China as Bigger Threat than Nuclear-Armed North Korea,” *Reuters*, September 27, 2019 (accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-defence/japan-lists-china-as-bigger-threat-than-nuclear-armed-north-korea-idUSKBN1WC051>).

the Trump administration have, since late 2017, adopted the strategic concept, a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” in speeches, which Abe began using in 2012. For the Americans, this expression illustrates the aforementioned notions of *good* Asia and *bad* Asia embedded in the Pivot vision. For the Japanese, it is the Arc, repackaged.

Insomuch as the Arc and the Pivot are to counter a Sinocentric Asia, the visions are aligned. Washington will continue to nudge Tokyo to remilitarize, seeing it as a proxy for its own interests in Asia, but as appealing as “equal partners” sounds to Tokyo, remilitarization is very unpopular domestically. If the Pivot is indeed focused on sustained economic growth in Asia, Tokyo’s Arc is also nicely aligned with this objective as well. If we take the Pivot at face value, both visions seek economic development and prosperity across Asia, and both countries believe they have an important role in this vision. From both countries’ perspectives, they see that over the last three decades, the two of them have overwhelmingly provided the most official development assistance (ODA) across Asia, as they commit the most capital for ADB, and their companies also provide by far the most FDI into China, as well as considerable FDI across Asia for the last three decades. Interestingly, there is rarely a sense of competition between the two for their own perceived roles within their own visions of Asia; rather, their visions of Asia are complementary and assuming mutual participation.

Tokyo’s Arc is not necessarily in total competition with Beijing’s BRI, either. On the one hand, there are statements and actions which can be interpreted as competitive. For example, since 2015, Abe has made it a cornerstone of his development assistance policy to promote the idea that infrastructure investments and loans provided by Japan together with the ADB result in “quality infrastructure,” which is an indirect jab at the perception of Chinese-led projects. ADB and AIIB appear to be in competition, but it is important to note that China retains a sizable share in ADB, as the third-largest investor *and* the largest borrower. If it were a direct Sino-Japanese competition, Beijing would have pulled out from ADB investments long ago. Yet, symbolically, the competition of the two banks is revealing of Beijing and Tokyo’s visions for Asia. In the article “Two Asia’s: AIIB v ADB,” Malcolm Cook argues that they:

exemplify the very different understandings of Asia held in Beijing and Tokyo and the very different views of

Japan's place within Asia expressed by the ADB and China's place in Asia expressed by the AIIB.⁵⁶

He adds the geopolitical framing by the two while alluding to Japan's Arc conceptualization:

modern Japan, as an archipelagic power on the North Pacific periphery of the Eurasian landmass, has a North-South maritime understanding of Asia. China, as a vast land power with an inland capital, has an East-West continental understanding of Asia...Post-war Japan's Pacific nature and close relationship with the US have led Japan to pay particular heed to the United States' interest and place in Asia.

With ADB and AIIB, the compatibilities of Beijing and Tokyo's visions for Asia are also evident. Both the Arc and BRI seek out development across a wide swath of the Asian continent, inclusive of Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. In Central Asia, for example, it has been observed that Tokyo and Beijing can serve symbiotic roles. Badykova argues that "China helps generating cash from oil and gas, while Japan helps them invest it in projects that can secure an industrial base for Central Asian economies."⁵⁷ Through BRI, China offers flexible financial means to attain development, while through the Arc, Japan provides the rules framework that can maximize the societal gains from these projects. Tokyo's activity in the region also "fosters regionalism and industrialization, while China promotes diversification of Central Asian exports and globalization."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Malcolm Cook, "Two Asia's: AIIB v ADB," *The Straits Times* [Singapore], June 5, 2015 (accessed May 15, 2020, www.straitstimes.com/opinion/two-asias-aiib-v-adb).

⁵⁷ Najia Badykova, "Japan's and China's Different Functions in Asia," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, January 16, 2016 (accessed May 15, 2020, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13319-japan-and-chinas-different-functions-in-asia.html>).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

It is in both China's and Japan's interest to seek development and stability in Asia, yet where they differ is the Sinocentric order in Asia. In particular, Tokyo's values-based Arc did not include China, and Tokyo had differentiated itself by making the Arc a values-based pillar of foreign policy, which is predicated upon democratization in Asia. Whether Tokyo has pressed this value at all is questionable, but its inclusion in the policy outline and the consistent reiteration of this value makes Tokyo's Arc not only distinct from Beijing's BRI but also exclusive of China, as a non-democratic state. China's growing predominance in Asia and global economic competition has made the carrot and stick approach of democratization-measures-for-development-aid unfashionable in the twenty-first century. If Tokyo is not serious about encouraging democratization measures by using the purse, at least the language of democratization embedded in the Arc is enough to make it a vision of Asia exclusive of China.

It would be shortsighted to think, however, that Japan is unequivocally determined to create its vision of Asia exclusive of China. China has been a significant recipient of Japanese ODA and a major destination for Japanese FDI for over four decades, and Sino-Japanese trade relations are the deepest between any two Asian states today.⁵⁹ Aside from historical animosity, territorial disputes, and general distrust, the two countries are deeply interconnected with each other's economies. Hosoya Yuichi describes Japan's Asia policy as two disjointed policies.⁶⁰ One is the values-based Arc, but the other is the East Asian Community (EAC) elucidated by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō four years prior to the Arc. Like the Arc, Koizumi's EAC emphasized cooperation with countries sharing the values of democracy, but he made it a point to include China in this vision. While there are similarities between EAC and the Arc, and indeed the EAC can be seen as a nebulous precursor to the Arc, the geographic visions are considerably different. The EAC was specifically delineated as the integration of Japan, South Korea, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members, Australia, and New Zealand, but also China. It used the ASEAN+3 framework for its geographical scope,

⁵⁹ China is scheduled to "graduate" from Japan's ODA programs in fiscal 2021.

⁶⁰ Hosoya Yuichi, "Japan's Two Strategies for East Asia: The Evolution of Japan's Diplomatic Strategy," *Asia-Pacific Review* 20/2 (2014), 154.

and thus, is more of a reaffirmation of Japan's second pillar to its foreign policy (relations with neighbors in East Asia) than the new third pillar. In his EAC speech, Koizumi made clear:

I would like to highly praise the active role China is willing to play in regional cooperation. With its wealth of human resources and huge economic potential, China will surely make an enormous contribution to regional development (2002).⁶¹

The Arc spans like a belt, from Southeast Asia to Turkey and Eastern Europe, but it is not inclusive of China. Koizumi's vision of Asia, inclusive of China, differs from his successors and fellow Liberal Democratic Party elites, who have tended to emphasize Tokyo's alliance with Washington over cooperation with Beijing. The main opposition party until 2016, the Democratic Party of Japan, showed much more overt overtures towards Beijing, notably former Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, who served less than a year but was clear in his intention to *pivot* Tokyo's foreign policy from the US alliance to strengthening its partnership with Beijing. Since stepping down in June 2010, Hatoyama has continued to advocate for strengthening relations with Beijing and even acquiescing to a Sinocentric order in Asia. Hatoyama has personally issued an apology for Japanese war crimes in Nanjing, recommended Tokyo recognize the existence of a territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Daioyu Islands, and to the chagrin of many of his compatriots, he sits on the international advisory committee for the AIIB. It has been pointed out that "[b]y appointing a former Japanese prime minister as an advisor to the AIIB, China may be attempting to weaken the collaboration between Japan and the United States."⁶² It also serves to destigmatize AIIB among Japanese.

Hatoyama may not represent the broad interests of the Japanese populace, the political elites, or even his own party, but his approach of

⁶¹ Koizumi Junichirō, "Japan and ASEAN in East Asia – A Sincere and Open Partnership," Speech, delivered in Singapore on January 14, 2002. Transcript available at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/koizumispeech/2002/01/14speech_e.html (English).

⁶² "Former Japanese Leader Hatoyama to Buck Precedent, Join Advisory Panel of China-Led AIIB," *The Japan Times*, June 26, 2016.

acquiescing to Sinocentric order in Asia does represent a long-persevering approach to China in Japan. While broadly speaking, China is perceived as the greatest state-level threat to Japan and surveys often demonstrate a general distrust between the Chinese and Japanese, there is a strand of thought which perseveres in Japan from pre-modern times that hitching itself to China is ultimately in Japan's best interest:

the Japanese, in distant history, have gone through periods where they deferred to the Chinese, and it is possible they will one day do so again, especially if they perceive China as a rising state and their nation as a declining one.⁶³

Currently, this is a view held mostly among those on the political left, such as Hatoyama, but it can easily change on account of signals of weakening durability of Washington's commitments to Japan and the region writ large. It is often noted in modern Japanese history:

If there is one lesson above all others that Japan learned from the twentieth century, it was that alliance with the global superpower – Great Britain in the first two decades of that century, and the US for the last five – offered the best assurance of stability and prosperity.⁶⁴

Indeed, such a pragmatist approach to statecraft could eventually dictate that between Washington and Beijing, the latter is possibly interpreted as more committed to stability in Asia. There was evidence of this possible shift in 2018 and 2019 when Abe visited China, and both sides spoke of a “new era,” amid the US pull out of TPP negotiations, the warming of relations between Trump and Kim Jong-Un, and the new US import tariffs impacting economies of both China and Japan. Also, China is more economically interconnected throughout the region than the US, and increasingly so. In November 2019, Beijing, Tokyo, and 14 other Asian-

⁶³ Gordon G. Chang, “Will Japan Become a Chinese Colony?” *Forbes*, September 4, 2009 (accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/2009/09/03/japan-china-yukio-hatoyama-opinions-columnists-gordon-chang.html>).

⁶⁴ Gavan McCormack, *Client State: Japan in the American Embrace* (New York: Verso, 2007), 55.

Pacific countries concluded an agreement on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. While the free trade agreement is less ambitious than CPTPP, it excludes the US and is symbolic of geopolitical shifts in the region. Thus, acquiescence to Sinocentric order in Asia may be Tokyo's best bet for survival. The onus is on Washington to prove that is not the case.

Aleksandr Dugin and his works are well known in Russia, and a discussion of neo-Eurasianism is remiss without mention of Dugin's thought and his influence on neo-Eurasianist doctrine. The direct influence Dugin has on the Kremlin is unclear, but the pervasion of his thought through lectures, books, and television appearances, and his role as advisor to members of the State Duma, the United Russia Party, unofficial advisor to Putin, and the military means his ideas must permeate to a significant degree.⁶⁵ Dugin bases his philosophy of geopolitics on Halford Mackinder's heartland thesis and places Russia at the "pivot" of the world system.⁶⁶

It is in Dugin's work where neo-Eurasianism directly relates to Japan. Dugin advocates for Russia to seek out strategic alliances with key powers along its periphery. In Europe, it is Germany with which Russia must ally; in the Muslim world, it is Iran; and in East Asia, it is Japan, to which he credits its early twentieth-century pan-Asianist ideology.⁶⁷ Thus, Dugin advocates for a quadruple alliance of Russia-Germany-Japan-Iran to dominate the Eurasian space and defend against American intervention. There is a hierarchy in this proposed alliance, however, as Dugin theorizes Russia as the superpower, and Germany, Japan, and Iran are regional allies needed to support Russia in this structure.⁶⁸ To this end, Dugin has proposed the Kremlin return the disputed Kurile Islands to Japan, and

⁶⁵ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 107–108.

⁶⁶ Aleksandr Dugin, *Geopolitika postmoderna. Vremena novych imperii; ocherki geopolitiki XXI veka* [Geopolitics of Postmodernity. The Times of New Empires; Essays on the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century] (St. Petersburg: Amfora, 2007), and Aleksandr Dugin, "Geopolitics of Russia" Reading, delivered at the Institute of International Relations, Athens, Greece, April 16, 2013. Video available at <https://youtu.be/XU0SHO4hDgo>.

⁶⁷ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 117.

⁶⁸ At other times, however, he has omitted Iran from this alliance he envisages, calling for a restoration of "the mythical triangle between [*sic*] Germany, Russia, and Japan" (see Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 142).

Kaliningrad to Germany, in exchange for their alignment with Russia and severing ties with the US.⁶⁹

Dugin's neo-Eurasianist vision is at odds, particularly with Beijing. He views Russia's sphere of influence not constrained to the borders of the former Soviet Union, but rather, inclusive of (Inner) Manchuria, East Turkestan (Xinjiang), Tibet, and Mongolia – both the republic and China's autonomous region. This is consistent with Sawabe's thesis, that neo-Eurasianism, in general, represents an easterly shift for Russia to balance with China.⁷⁰ Dugin makes clear he considers China a threat to Russia's interests in Asia, along with the US in the Americas, the UK in Europe, and Turkey in the Muslim world.⁷¹

To this end, indeed, the Kuriles are key to a possible coalescing of neo-Eurasianism and Tokyo's Arc. Dugin's thought is not to be confused with Kremlin policy, but his approach to Japan regarding the Kuriles is an option that it appears Putin has considered. In recent summits with Abe, the two have based their negotiations on a 1956 joint declaration to split the disputed islands, while Putin is also insisting on Tokyo to curtail the presence of American forces in Japan. Palatable for Putin would be a deal on the Kurile Islands dispute in exchange for Tokyo weakening its security alliance with Washington, or, at best, removal of American troops from Japanese soil altogether. Russo-Japanese cooperation is certainly plausible, and there is undoubtedly room for deepening relations. Both visions emphasize stability in post-socialist spaces in Asia, for example. Despite the ongoing island dispute, Japan was the first G7 member state to invite Putin for a bilateral summit after the Crimean Crisis. While Tokyo did join with Washington and other Western allies in condemning Moscow's actions, and also joined in the sanctions on Russia, domestically, there was debate in Japan whether intense condemnation against Moscow over the Crimean Peninsula could be turned right around in negotiations over a solution to the Kurile Islands dispute. In any case, the Kremlin has shown interest in settling the territorial dispute with Japan, which is not characteristic of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 241.

⁷⁰ Sawabe, *Zukai*, 88.

⁷¹ Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki: geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii* [The Fundamentals of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia] (Moscow: Aktogeia, 1997), 247.

Russia when considering territorial disputes with Ukraine and Georgia, for instance.

Both Moscow and Tokyo have Beijing in mind; both are seeking leverage if, by chance, relations with a rising China sour, and neither is comfortable being, at best, a junior partner with Beijing, and at worst, a bandwagoning “tributary” state to the Sinocentric order of Asia. Furthermore, Russia is looking for the inroad to weaken the US-Japan alliance, and Japan is looking for an insurance policy, in the case the US decides to pull back from commitments in Asia. Nevertheless, Moscow and Tokyo are continuing a slow-dance entente, in which exogenous factors in the shape of China and the US are bringing them closer together.

Conclusion

Japan’s vision of Asia in the twenty-first century takes shape on account of both domestic drivers as well as opportunities and constraints in the international system. This paper focuses on the latter, outlining how Japan’s vision of Asia interacts with visions of Asia coming from Russia, China, and the US. Additional research could extend this discussion further by including other regional powers and their visions for Asia, such as India’s “Look East Policy,” proclaimed in the 1990s, and South Korea’s more recent “New Southern Policy,” both of which have visions of Asia which are interacting with Japan’s.

The four visions for Asia examined in this paper are conceptualizations with differing overlays over the eastern hemisphere (see Table 1). BRI includes parts of Europe and Africa, neo-Eurasianism includes all of Asia and fades into western Europe. The American Pivot to Asia is mostly formulated by observing across oceans. And, the Arc, as the name suggests, spans a wide swath of countries from Southeast Asia to Eastern Europe. All of these, however, have notable omissions. BRI does not explicitly incorporate Japan, and the Arc does not mention China. Neo-Eurasianism marks Japan as a regional linchpin but is contradictory regarding China. The Pivot to Asia is predicated on the American alliance with Japan and a rekindling of the San Francisco System, as it appears deliberately intent on containing China. All exemplify an exceptionalism of Self, and the security of Self undergirds all four visions.

	Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)	Neo-Eurasianism	Pivot to Asia	Arc of Freedom and Prosperity
geographical focus	Asia, Europe, Indian Ocean, and Africa	(1) near abroad (2) all of Asia and eastern Europe	Indo-Pacific regions (includes Japan, Australia, Indonesia, India)	Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, and Eastern Europe
notable exclusions/inclusions	excludes Japan, US; includes Russia	Japan, Germany, and Iran are regional linchpins; divided on China	China is a driving motivation; Russia is excluded	China and Russia excluded, but other former Soviet republics are vital
inception	2013	reemergence in 1990s	2011	2006
declared driving facets	infrastructure, development	multi-polarity, to link (and pacify) East and West	sustainable economic development	infrastructure, development, democratization
possible underlying driving facets	restoration of Sinocentric system (justice)	restoration of Russian power (justice)	Chinese containment (order), burden sharing (justice)	countering Chinese dominance (order), economic stability (order)

Table 1. Competing Visions for Asia

The four visions for Asia and the strategies which undergird each one can be framed in the *order* versus *justice* dichotomy, as presented by Hedley Bull in *The Anarchical Society* (1977). More than the other three, for Tokyo, it has remained a vision for *order*, and from this order, Japan's national security is bolstered. Bull explains the "proponent of order takes up his position partly because the existing order is, from his point of view, morally satisfactory, or not so unsatisfactory as to warrant its

disturbance.”⁷² For Russia and China, it is a strategy for *justice*. Russia’s vision is to remedy “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century”; for China, it is to restore the Sinocentric system interrupted by the Century of Humiliation and subsequent US intervening with China’s rise. Both are seeking in their respective approaches to restore an order which currently does not exist due to “immoral” causes but did once in the historical imagination: “[I]deas about justice belong to the class of moral ideas, ideas which treat human actions as right in themselves and not merely as a means to an end.”⁷³ The order in these historical imaginations is right because it is *just*. As for an outcome, Bull argues:

When then, demands for justice are put forward in the absence of a consensus within international society as to what justice involves, the prospect is opened up that the consensus which does exist about order or minimum coexistence will be undone. The question then has to be faced whether order or justice should have priority.⁷⁴

Interestingly, the American Pivot is not only a geographical pivot, but it has also manifested from one administration to the next as a pivot from *order* to *justice*. Trump’s emphasis on burden sharing defense costs with Japan, South Korea, and others, and Trump’s utilizing of import tariffs are all in the interest of justice, and not order in Asia. As Japan now stands alone among the four with a vision emphasizing order, the other three also exemplify “power” in Asia with traditional means – military power, a nuclear arsenal, and security alignments/alliances, coupled with their distinguishable economic enticements.

Few would consider Japan is exuding the scope of power seen from the former three in the twenty-first century, but in the absence of military-based hard power, Japan projects attraction across Asia for its counter-model to this. Countries across Asia are drawn to its ability to exert influence, particularly through economics and culture, despite lacking military power and engagements across Asia. Indeed, in international

⁷² Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 93.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

favorability surveys, Japan tends to consistently enjoy a higher favorability rating than the US, China, or Russia across broader Asia (although certainly not among its neighbors in China and South Korea). It separates itself from the US by not leading its engagements in Asia with its military sector, and also unlike the US, *it is* Asia – proselytizing *Asian* democracy, *Asian* values, and an *Asian* economic model. It has more credibility than the US to argue that what is in Japan’s best interest is also in all of Asia’s best interest, and it has not contorted its vision from one administration to the next to the degree which the US has done. It separates itself from Russia by lacking natural resources and not wielding them as strategic tools for geopolitical objectives of power expansion. It separates itself from China by the perceived threat that comes with its sheer size and proximity in Asia, the risks associated with its loans and investments, and a widely-shared perception of Japan’s superior industrial quality. Currently, Japan’s vision also stands alone among the four in emphasizing order over justice.

Insofar as these visions for Asia are undergirded by security of state, it is a manifestation of post-cold war globalization and strengthening of regional security complexes (RSCs) across Asia into not a security constellation, but a single, massive security complex. In 2003, Buzan and Waever argued that Southeast Asia has “merged with Northeast Asia into a larger East Asian RSC,” but they then predict this RSC will be “potentially including in the future also South Asia in a huge Asian RSC.”⁷⁵ If the America Pivot to Asia turns out to be a Pivot *out of* Asia or if Americans simply lose interest, it would have tremendous ramifications in Asia. “[I]t would strengthen the possibility that the Asian super complex would evolve into a full Asian RSC.” Buzan and Waever add, “it would expand the engagement of the Eurasian great powers with the Middle East.”⁷⁶ This intensification is already seen, as Moscow’s neo-Eurasianism, Beijing’s BRI, and Tokyo’s Arc all view the Middle East as a cornerstone to their visions. The unspoken part in the American Pivot, however, is its turn *away from* the Middle East.

This analysis reveals maneuverability in the international milieu. Visions of Asia are conceptualized and interact with other visions in both the ideations and material forms. Tokyo reacts to notions and concepts

⁷⁵ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 477.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 459.

expressed in Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, and vice versa. What is uncharacteristic is that Japan is left *leading* the effort to sustain order in Asia and spread democracy, human rights, and rule of law. While the US under Trump has pulled out of trade agreements in Asia, initiated a trade war with China, and smoothed over tensions with North Korea in spite of human rights abuses and ongoing missile tests, it is left to Japan – who by default leads the truncated TPP, seeks to strengthen trade relations with China, and remains wary regarding North Korea – to champion these causes with its values-based diplomacy.